



Fanfic cover by Silvermoonlight.

Another Way

by maggielassie

Genre: *Xena: Warrior Princess* alternative fan-fiction; Post-FIN; Xena/Gabrielle and Gabrielle/Aphrodite femslash.

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

Timeline: This story takes place after the events of *Friend in Need*.

Violence: just a couple of scenes involve some violence, nothing too harsh though.

Subtext/main text: Yes, some, between consenting adult women. This story contains themes of loving relationships between women. If this offends you, please refrain from reading. **This is only PG-13 though, for this one.**

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Feedback: See Feedback page.

“Xena?” Gabrielle whispered to the female presence she had just noticed lying next to her, in the dark of the amazon queen’s hut. Moonlight lit the room. The woman had her back turned away from her on the bed. Gabrielle could hear some breathing — that sounded like Xena’s breathing. The sensual female form and long dark hair of the woman she loved seemed to be close to her now. She placed her hand on the shoulder of the woman lying next to her. Suddenly, she could hear some painful moans coming from that woman.

“Xena?” Gabrielle asked again as she started getting closer to the presence while slightly tightening her grip on the woman’s shoulder. The woman turned around, pressured by the grip. It was really Xena. Her beautiful blue eyes were filled with tears.

“I’m so sorry, Gabrielle, I should have known there was another way.” Xena’s facial expression was so pained.

“Xena, please don’t cry! I’m so glad you’re here with me.” Gabrielle smiled at her, both reassured and reassuring. Xena’s face became less pained as Gabrielle started drying Xena’s tears with her thumb.

“I should have known, you know?” Xena looked at Gabrielle with her deep blue eyes.

“What?” Gabrielle asked her, amazed.

Xena’s presence then started vanishing in front of her. Gabrielle could see Xena gradually becoming transparent until the bard found herself staring into the empty space on the bed next to her.

“Xena! Where are you?” Gabrielle whimpered. Her lover so close to her again, this had not lasted long. Gabrielle sat up and her hands felt around on the bed. “Xena?!” Her right hand suddenly felt something steely and wet under the blanket. She got it out from underneath and looked at it. It was the chakram, covered in blood — just like the way she’d found it on that battlefield in Jappa. Distress rushed through her.

“No!” Gabrielle woke up in a sudden jump, sweaty. She looked around in the queen’s hut. It was late morning. The sun shined through the planks and the entrance. *What an overwhelming dream*, she thought. She lay back down onto her bed for a minute, staring at the ceiling.

“My queen?” someone called. Gabrielle turned her head. Varia stood by the entrance, looking at her worryingly.

“I’m sorry, Varia. I slept in again.” Gabrielle said with a vanquished look on her face.

“It’s alright, Gabrielle.” said Varia “It’s understandable after what you’ve gone through... I heard you scream ‘No!’ What was it?”

“Did I?... Hmm, it’s okay, Varia. I just had a bad dream, that’s all... Can you please ask for some warm water to get prepared for me in the bath hut, Varia? I’ll be over there in a few moments.”

“Alright, Queen Gabrielle,” said Varia, with a reassured smile.

“Thank you, Varia.”

Varia bowed her head and left the room. Gabrielle got up from her bed and put on just some light clothing for going to the bath hut. She reached for the water that was in the Egyptian vase on a table, put some on her forehead, temples and cheeks, and drank a little.

She had brought back that vase from the Land of the Pharaohs six months ago. Goodness, how time went fast. She had met a group of nomads there who needed a girl with a chakram to help them defeat an attacking army. Great job, but so much harder without Xena by her side. She was now a very skilled fighter, equalling the strength of Xena's, but her sense of well-being felt incomplete without her soulmate.

She looked into the mirror by the table. She looked depressed. Her hair had grown back a little, though it was still short. She looked at the chakram she'd left on the table the night before. It was clean and dry, not bloody like in the reminiscent dream she'd just had. Good. She went out, and walked toward the bath hut.

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She had asked to be left alone while she was bathing. Her amazon sisters understood that she needed a lot of time for herself. It had been so many months since she'd lost her lover and best friend, and she was still mourning. Amazons recognized her as their queen again as soon as she'd come back living with them. She sometimes asked for some queen's duties that involved watching out for the tribe and its food supply to be under Varia's responsibility, when she could not always go outside during her times of mourning. Gabrielle still always participated in fights whenever there occasionally was a nearby danger. She would be there to defend her tribe.

Gabrielle still did not think she was doing enough as a queen to be with her tribe. She could not always be with them during meals and dances in the moments she needed to retreat to her hut to mourn. She could not stop thinking about Xena.

As she lay in the hot tub, Gabrielle could not stop bringing to her mind all the amazing sensual moments which she'd had while bathing with Xena. Then came to her mind all the good times they'd had spent hugging, kissing, cuddling, bathing together, sleeping together and making love. Her soulmate, now dead.

While she'd been on the deck next to her at the time of leaving Jappa, Xena had implied that she would be her 'spiritual sidekick' from now on. However, Gabrielle had only felt the presence of Xena's spirit near her only a couple of times ever since.

Gabrielle remembered one time when she was on the ship during the exhaustingly long trip from Jappa to Egypt. She had been lying down to sleep while feeling so lonely, and suddenly she'd felt a hand stroking her short, golden hair. When she'd looked up, she could see Xena's ghost smiling at her, "It's me. I'm here for you, Gabrielle." Such a lovely presence, watching over her while she'd gone to sleep.

Then another time, while she had been walking with the nomads going to battle in Egypt, she'd spotted Xena in the distance watching out for her.

"Why doesn't it happen more often?" Gabrielle whispered to herself "She'd said she'd be at my side." Where was Xena? Did she go into an afterlife? Did she go to the Elysian Fields? Gabrielle felt clueless.

*I should have known there was another way.*

She remembered the dream she'd just had this morning. Did that mean anything? What was Xena trying to say? What other way? She sighed. Perhaps it was just a dream and it meant nothing, just like all the other nightmares she'd been having every single month since her lover's death.

She rubbed the soap onto herself. While soaked into the warm water from the bath she was lying in, a painful –but necessary– thought came over her: Xena would probably never come back to her, and maybe she should be starting moving on now?

She could not stop thinking about Xena, and it was distancing her so much from reality, stopping her from forming relationships with others. As the new warrior princess, she felt like an emotional wreck. Xena was the most

important person she'd ever known: her soulmate, but she was not ever going to be with her anymore. So what could she do to get ready to move on?

Maybe she should quit the warrior lifestyle just for a little while –the time she would need to recover– like taking a vacation of some sort? She was a brilliant warrior princess, but fighting reminded her too much of the times she'd been with Xena, in a way that was hard to cope at the moment. She had to learn how to fight without emotionally missing Xena. She had to learn how to use her memory of Xena solely to give her more courage to fight in the future.

She had what was left of the Amazon Nation to help her fight, and she would come back to them eventually. Maybe now she could decide to go to a friend's place, or to her family's –somewhere calm, away from violence for a little while. Then later she could come back to her amazon tribe, rested and ready to fight even more, and more committed to take part in amazon gatherings again. Whose place could she go to, to help her move on?

She had already visited her sister Lila in Potidaea once since she'd come back to Greece. She had only been able to go there for a weekend, as Lila was now busy with local Poteidians building a new tavern, a business Lila was going to own –her faithful sister therefore was not home often. “Maybe come back to visit me in the winter,” Lila had said “and we'll have more time to spend together.” It was only summer now. Going to Lila's was not an option. Who else could help her?

What about Aphrodite? The Goddess of Love was a loyal friend and she could summon her anytime. Gabrielle remembered that when she'd gotten off the boat from Egypt, Aphrodite had been there to welcome her back to Greece. The Goddess of Love had hugged her as she was crying over the loss of Xena and the fact that, for the first time, she was back from a long trip without Xena by her side. “Call me anytime you need me, pumpkin. Also, my temple door is open if you ever need a place where to rest,” Aphrodite had said as they were parting while Gabrielle was heading to her amazon village.

Ending her absorption in thoughts, Gabrielle got out of the bath and grabbed a piece of fabric to dry herself with. She had brought her red velvet outfit, which she put on. Standing alone in the middle of the bath hut, she summoned the Goddess of Love, hoping Aphrodite would have time to hear her right now.

“Aphrodite?” Gabrielle called and waited a few moments.

“Yes, sweetheart?” In a golden shimmer, the Goddess of Love, with a cute smirk on her face, appeared before her.

“Aphrodite, I'm gonna need to ask for your help... Would you let me come to your temple and spend some time there? I need a vacation from fighting, just for a moment.”

“Hmm... the new warrior princess, Amazon Queen Gabrielle, already needs a break from fighting? What could this be about?”

Gabrielle slightly lowered her head and briefly bit her lip, sad-looking.

“Xena, huh?” said Aphrodite. “Oh, pumpkin, come here.” Aphrodite opened her arms to welcome the bard in her embrace.

“Oh, Aphrodite!” A tear came down Gabrielle's eye as she wrapped her arms to firmly grip Aphrodite's back and put her head near the Goddess' shoulder. They slightly broke the hug to look at each other.

“Aphrodite,” Gabrielle explained: “it's just that I now need to spend some time away from violence for a little while, so that I can better manage my feelings over my memories of her.”

It's been so many months now and I have decided to start coming to terms with it, before it eats me up alive. I've been mourning for a while now. I can't stop missing her, but it's taking too much of my life. I have to learn how to deal with it. Then, when I'll come back to Amazon territory, I'll use her courage she taught me and that remained in my heart to be able to fight again, without her... So, is that okay for me to come spend some time with you? I need a friend, a non-warrior one at the moment."

"Of course, Gabrielle, it's alright." Aphrodite smiled.

"I'm gonna have to go pack my things and we could walk to your temple; it's a nice day."

"Gabrielle, you still have the ashes, don't you?"

"Yes, they're in my hut, put away in the same corner as the Xena Scrolls... my 'mourning corner' that has a drawing of Xena Joxer had made."

"Have you thought of pouring the ashes somewhere? It might be a way of starting coming to terms with it?"

"There's a little river near Amphipolis. Maybe, Aphrodite, you could come with me as I go pour the ashes there."

"When you'll be ready, we'll go there, pumpkin."

"I'm ready today, actually. We could go there as we're on our way to your temple."

"Huh? You sure, Gabrielle?" They looked right into each other's eyes.

"I have to let her go, Aphrodite. That would be a start, I guess." Gabrielle said in a solemn expression.

"Okay, honey. Just go pack your things. Say goodbye to your tribe. I'll be waiting for you outside."

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"Okay, Varia, now you're queen again for the time being... until I come back." Gabrielle had just explained it all – regarding why she needed to go away for a while – to her amazon sisters.

"Take care of yourself. We'll all be waiting for your return, warrior princess." said Varia. They both hugged.

"Goodbye, Gabrielle. We'll hopefully see you again sometime soon, sister." said Cyane.

"You will, Cyane." Gabrielle interlocked her wrist with hers in an amazon way of saying 'stay strong'.

The Amazon Nation praised the warrior princess, Gabrielle, as she got on her horse, Argo II, to leave for her vacation. On Argo's back, she slowly rode towards the gates of Amazon Land. Aphrodite was standing there, waiting for her on the way out.

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Gabrielle rode to the river near Amphipolis, with Aphrodite walking by her and Argo's side. As they arrived near the edge of the river, Gabrielle got off her horse. "You wait here, Argo. Good girl!" Gabrielle got Xena's ashes out of one of the sacks that was on Argo's back. She walked closer to the river.

Gabrielle knelt in front of the water. She held the urn firmly with both her hands. Aphrodite stood near, watching Gabrielle quietly. It was a warm day, and the sun shined onto the river.

“Xena,” Gabrielle spoke to the silent sky above her, still holding the urn, “you have been my whole life so far. I don’t believe I’ll ever meet anyone like you again. The fact is I will most likely never see you again.” Tears started running down Gabrielle’s cheeks; she quickly dried them and sniffed. Aphrodite had a pained expression on her face while looking at Gabs by the river.

“I will never feel your touch on my skin ever again...” Gabrielle continued. “We will never hug each other tightly ever again... And we will never kiss or make love ever again... You left me. I understand you had to. Now I seriously have to come to terms with it. I have to find another way... my own way to be able to live now as the new warrior princess. I will never forget you, Xena. You were my best friend, my lover, my soulmate, my family...” Gabrielle looked down at the urn and took off its lid. “We’ll be together again, Xena... one day.”

Solemn and self-assured, Gabrielle poured the ashes into the river. “Here is the closest river to Amphipolis, Xena — your home.” She kept a quiet expression on her face as she watched the sun-glittered water engulf Xena’s ashes until the urn was fully emptied. “Goodbye, Xena. I will now use the memory of your strength and courage to help me survive.” Gabrielle closed the lid, put the empty urn onto the grass, and left it there. She walked back to Aphrodite and Argo.

“Let’s go to your temple now, Aphrodite.” They all walked away.

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It was two months later. Gabrielle was still staying in Aphrodite’s temple. She had prolonged her vacation. She felt she needed to spend more time with Aphrodite. Her great friendship with the Goddess of Love had initially prevented her from feeling empty inside after she’d said goodbye to Xena’s ashes. But now the friendship she had with Dite was getting even stronger. The Goddess was always lively and cheerful about spending time with Gabrielle.

Within her temple, the furniture, the marble floors, stairs and pillars were all of an absolute beauty. It was a spacious and elegant place. There was a beautiful garden just outside, with lots of flowers, and there was a stable for Argo at the back. Because Aphrodite was an immortal, she didn’t need food. Gabrielle could only find food there when people brought gifts to the goddess. Thus, Gabby often had to walk to Athens to go buy food for herself.

Apart from that, everything needed was there for the bard, especially the charm and liveliness of her immortal friend. They had fun together everyday, sometimes playing dice or checkers, other times going outside for walks, to see the sun, the trees and the flowers. Occasionally, Aphrodite had to go to towns on a Love mission to spread love amongst mortals; Gabrielle would come with her and witness the wonderful Love that her friend was spreading around Greece.

They found so many ways of having fun together and enjoying themselves, be it in the temple or outside. Now this evening, they were both sitting on a couch talking to one other, just after Gabrielle had had her dinner.

“So you like it here, pumpkin?” Aphrodite grinned.

“Hmm... this is the best vacation I’ve ever had in my life...” Gabrielle smiled but her tone then became slightly saddened: “... ever since my girlfriend passed away.” She smiled again: “Thank you so much, Aphrodite, for letting me stay.”

“You’re very welcome, honey. How are you feeling now?”

“A lot better. I’m starting to be able to live again, little by little.”

“Any more nightmares?” asked Dite.

“None since I’m here,” replied Gabby.

“You must be feeling very comfortable in the bedroom I gave you, no?”

“Yes, it’s very nice. Great view. Thanks.”

“That’s no problem, Gabrielle. Do you want me to go get you some wine?” inquired Aphrodite.

“I’m fine.” Gabrielle smiled at her.

Aphrodite smiled back. She put her hand onto Gabrielle’s, which was loose on the couch. The bard noticed the Goddess’ hand gently caress hers. Gabrielle reciprocated and their hands interlocked. They exchanged a friendly and smiling look at each other. Gabrielle suddenly looked deeply into Aphrodite’s eyes. Her friend had been doing everything to cheer her up ever since she’d got here, including godly tricks that suddenly made flowers or rabbits magically appear. Aphrodite had been so funny and loyal to her. And now holding her hand tightly and looking so deeply into her eyes, the goddess seemed to be having a crush on her.

Gabrielle could barely resist the charm. She brought her lips closer to the goddess’ to see if that was the next move Dite expected. They kissed. It was just a gentle, short kiss on the lips. Gabrielle breathed, thoughtful a minute, and resumed kissing her friend. This time it was a much deeper kiss. Gabrielle remembered when she’d backed away from Dite’s kiss while they’d been in Rome many moons ago, while Caligula was ruling. She would certainly not back away, not now. It was so powerful kissing the Goddess of Love. She felt butterflies going through her head. Happiness.

Why had she backed away the first time anyway?... Xena, she suddenly thought. Gabrielle immediately broke the kiss. She lowered her head, feeling confused. “I can’t. I’m sorry...” She whispered. She then briefly looked at Dite. “... Not just now.”

Gabrielle stood up and walked away quickly, toward her room upstairs in the temple. Aphrodite watched her go, feeling slightly disconcerted, but she understood. It’s a shame gods can’t sleep, she thought. She would also feel better retreating to her own bedroom now. She would have to be satisfied simply lying onto her bed then. Gods can rest, but they can’t sleep.

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That night, Gabrielle kept tossing and turning in her bed, alone in the room Dite had given her when she’d arrived two months ago. Why had she so swiftly backed away from such a delicious kiss Aphrodite was giving her? She could never stop thinking about Xena, but was she not now trying to start a new life, as she’d planned? Her own attitude bothered her. If she really wanted to come to terms with the loss of her soulmate, she figured she should not prevent the beautiful goddess of love –whom she really was fond of– from giving her all the affection she’d terribly been missing lately. If she wanted to feel better, she felt that she’d better show others that she really was fine now, that she’d started turning the page.

Gabrielle got up from her bed in the middle of the night. She got out of her room and walked along the corridor towards Aphrodite’s suite. She knocked on the door.

“Come in.” Said Dite. Gabby opened the door. “Hey, sweetheart?” The goddess smiled. She lay comfortably onto her bed.

“I couldn’t sleep, Aphrodite.” said Gabrielle. “About earlier on... I’m very sorry. I shouldn’t have done that. I shouldn’t have walked away.” She gave the goddess an apologetic and embarrassed look.

“Oh, it’s okay. Come here.” Aphrodite sat up and opened her arms to Gabrielle. The bard walked towards her, sat on the bed and reciprocated the embrace. They hugged tightly for a minute, and then Aphrodite offered: “Do you wanna lie down on the bed next to me? You don’t have to if you don’t want to.”

“No, I want to.” Gabrielle nodded.

“You sure?” Aphrodite touched Gabs’ chin and looked into her eyes.

“I am.” Gabby nodded again, and proceeded to climb onto the goddess’ bed, and lay next to her.

“You wanna sleep here now? I’ll watch for you, make sure you fall asleep comfortably.” Dite wrapped her arms around Gabby.

“Sure....” Gabs said, her arms around her friend too. “Aphrodite?”

“Yes, Gabrielle.” She gently stroked the bard’s golden hair.

“I think I’m ready.” She looked up at Dite, with a peaceful, relieved expression.

“Really?” inquired the goddess.

“I have to move on with my own life. I need affection, Aphrodite. You’re such a warm and loyal friend. I’m really fond of you. You’re so beautiful.”

“I’m fond of you too, honey. You’re very gorgeous too.”

Gabrielle sat up, put her hand on the goddess’ cheek and kissed her. Aphrodite kissed back. This time it was much better. The kiss was never interrupted and became very passionate. It felt so good kissing the Goddess of Love, Gabby thought. Once again, butterflies flew inside her mind –probably the effect of kissing such an amazing deity.

“Aphrodite... there might be something I might not be quite ready for though. I might need a bit more time for this. You know what I’m trying to say?” said the bard once they finished kissing.

“Oh, pumpkin!” said Aphrodite, smiling. “It’s okay. I completely understand. We will just kiss and cuddle then, if you’re okay with that?”

“Absolutely, I love kissing and cuddling with you. I need it, so much. You’re my goddess, Aphrodite.” Gabs snuggled up to her. They kissed and sensually touched for a few moments, gently running each others’ hands onto the fully clad shapes of their bodies.

Aphrodite then hugged Gabrielle tightly. The bard, a few minutes later, fell asleep with her head lying onto the goddess’ breast. The new warrior princess felt cosy. Aphrodite was the only woman she would want to get this type of affectionate behaviour from these days.

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During the next two weeks, Gabrielle only wanted to sleep next to Aphrodite. They became really close to one another. Gabrielle now regarded the Goddess of Love as her new romantic interest. They were not intimate –or at least not yet– but so often they were kissing, cuddling, caressing each other’s bodies and sharing baths together. It was strange for Gabrielle having an immortal girlfriend, especially a goddess. She clearly had never gotten that close to someone like Dite before.

On a beautiful morning, Gabrielle was finishing her breakfast, sitting at a table and eating some fruits. Aphrodite walked to her; she held a green velvet bag in her hand. The goddess sat next to Gabby.

“Gabrielle, have you ever thought of what it would be like if you became immortal?”

Gabrielle looked up suddenly, concerned.

“What are you talking about, Aphrodite? I know I won’t live as long as you will, but I’m so happy spending some time with you right now.”

Aphrodite opened the bag she held. She took a round object out of it. It was a golden apple. She showed it to the bard.

“I got this from Odin. I’d momentarily teleported myself to the Norse while you were in town the other day. After some discussion, he gave it to me. I’d explained to him why I so much needed it... Gabrielle, I think I love you. I’ve never felt that way for someone –ever since Hephaestus and I got separated a couple of years ago. I’d love to have you here with me for eternity, with all your mightiness and beauty. What do you think?”

The bard felt utterly perplexed.

“I’ll... need to think about it. It’s an interesting offer. But, at the same time, I really feel alright the way I am, as a mortal. I wasn’t expecting this kind of offer; that’s all I can say right now. Just please give me some time to think about it, okay?”

“Of course, I understand, Gabrielle.”

Gabrielle took the golden apple into her hand, to touch its texture. It was so wonderfully smooth. She looked up at her new girlfriend.

“You know, pumpkin,” Dite spoke gently and seductively, “it might actually feel wonderful for you to become an immortal. Think about how many painful mortal feelings you could rid yourself of, huh? Like, for example, fear of death, what a horrible sort of feeling that must be?”

“Yeah, but maybe that’s the importance of feelings like these: making you feel human, bringing you back to reality... As the new warrior princess, I might need this sort of reality to motivate me for fighting,” answered Gabrielle.

“That doesn’t mean you wouldn’t feel any strong incentive to fight for yourself or your people in Amazon Land, Gabrielle, if you were immortal. Will you just think about it?” inquired Dite, quietly and nicely.

“Yes, I will. I promise.” Gabrielle handed back the apple to Dite. They smiled at each other and hugged.

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In the afternoon, Gabrielle needed to go to Athens to get herself a large supply of food. She left Argo in the stable, because she figured she’d rather walk than ride on horseback to Athens on such a seemingly peaceful and beautiful day.

She took a shortcut through the woods. She was dressed in her red velvet warrior outfit with her sais in her boots and her chakram hanging on the side of her waist, in case there might be trouble ahead. She was on her long vacation from fighting, but there could always be people wanting to mess with a warrior princess.

As she walked in the middle of the forest, she arrived to a clearing. She suddenly stopped walking, got the sais out of her boots, and held onto them firmly. She could hear noise, like barely discreet footsteps. She looked around her.

An ugly-looking, long-haired, chubby warlord who was loosely holding a sword walked out from one of the bushes on the right. He was shortly followed by his mates, who then stood behind him. They were all armed. But there were only three of them, as far as she could tell.

“Gabrielle!” said the chief warlord, sniggering with his ugly teeth. “The new warrior princess!”

“What do you want from me? I’m on my vacation for the time being.” Gabrielle kept her eyes focused on the three warlords, her pointed sais held in front of her in self-defence.

“Well, since you’re the new warrior princess,” said the main warlord “somebody has to kill you and therefore be proud to become the man who killed Gabrielle. Me and my friends here, we could make plenty of dinars, just on your head.” The warlord brandished his sword in attack. “Do you think we care about your vacation? Prepare to die!” the warlord bellowed.

He lunged at her, while the other two men were still standing some space behind. All her movements now had to be swift and effective. Gabrielle skilfully stopped the blade of the first warlord attacking her –catching it into one of her sais. She then quickly moved forward, pushed him and his weapon back away from her with all her might, and she subsequently kicked his chest with an outstretched leg, throwing him backwards. He hit his back against a tree and moaned in pain. His sword fell on the ground beside him.

Next, the two other warlords started coming at her. Gabrielle dropped one sai onto the grass in order to quickly seize her chakram. She flung the circular object around. Flying in the air, it struck both the warlords’ weapons, chopping off the top of their swords. Gabrielle caught her chakram back. The warlords dropped their disabled swords and ran towards her in a fury, wanting to kill her with their bare hands.

She plunged her other sai into the thigh of one of them, and quickly got it out. The man screamed. Blood ran from his fresh wound. He collapsed. She immediately stretched her leg forth and fiercely kicked the head of the other man, breaking his neck. His body fell down to the ground.

“You bitch!” shouted the man with the wounded thigh, lying on the ground in pain.

“Shut up!” Gabrielle retorted. “Just get a bit of cloth and firmly place it around your wound to stop the bleeding. You’ll be fine.”

Gabrielle looked at the chief warlord, who had his back against the bottom of a tree. As she walked closer, it looked like he had no broken limbs. He slowly started standing up and brandished his sword again.

“You killed one of my mates. I’ll kill you.” said the warlord, as he was walking towards her, step by step.

“Yes, I killed him. When attacked, a warrior has to act quickly. And there can be people being killed in the process.” said the new warrior princess, sharply.

“Argh... I’ll kill you!” the warlord bawled. He started walking quicker, his sword in hand. Gabrielle leaped forward –she did a very high front flip that sent her flying above the enemy, with all the beauty, strength and suppleness of her body. She landed on her feet, behind the warlord, turned to him and kicked the sword off from his hand as he moved around to face her again.

The warlord stared at her, unarmed, and tried to attack again. She punched him in the face with such a force that it discouraged him from attacking again. He was severely weakened.

“Now you all just get the Hades out of here!” Gabrielle said. The wounded and exhausted men walked away from the scene, carrying the body of their dead mate.

Gabrielle crouched down and put her sais back into the sides of her boots. As she stood up again and was ready to go, she heard a masculine voice behind her: “Well-done, Gabrielle.” Gabrielle turned around, bug-eyed, as she saw Ares standing a few feet away from her with a slight smile on his face. He looked just as hauntingly suave and malicious as ever.

“Ares? What are you doing here?” Gabrielle froze.

“First of all, I’m here to admire my new warrior princess. The way you beat those three guys was absolutely awesome and stunning. I had to come here and watch this.” The God of War walked towards Gabrielle and softly caressed the side of her face. He then gently lifted her chin with the tips of his fingers, forcing her to look at him deeply. “You should be proud of yourself. You’re pretty much just as skilled as Xena now.”

Gabrielle pushed his hand away.

“Stop it!” she uttered. “I’m on vacation, Ares.”

“Hmm... you fight pretty well during your vacation. That surely arouses me,” said the God of War, lecherously gazing at the shape of her body from head to foot.

“They were attacking me. I had to fight back,” Gabrielle replied angrily. “Look, it was Xena you wanted to own as a warrior queen. Now she’s dead. Leave me alone.”

Ares sighed.

“That she’s dead is a terrible fact to me. She did not deserve to die.” The God of War now looked dismayed at that thought.

“For once, here’s something you and I agree on,” remarked Gabrielle.

“Look, Gabrielle, you’re important to me. Your amazing skills appeal to me.”

“So is that what you’re here for? You now want me to become your warrior queen to fulfil all your sick and lascivious needs?” Gabrielle looked at him suspiciously.

“Well, very tempting but... Not exactly,” replied the dark deity.

“Good! I’m with Aphrodite now anyway.” Gabrielle smirked. “Now please get out of my way.”

“Gabrielle, wait, I have something important to tell you.” Ares placed his hands onto the bard’s shoulders, gripping her smooth skin. He never wasted an opportunity to touch a beautiful woman.

“What is it?” Gabrielle wanted to move away from him but she felt she was somehow being under his godly influence right now. She remained standing in an upright position, facing the God of War while looking up at him.

“Look, I know Aphrodite has just made you an offer to become an immortal.” said Ares. “I’ve been watching you this morning, inside her temple. I can make myself invisible and watch in a corner, you know.”

“What exactly do you want from me?” asked Gabrielle. A feeling of unease climbed up her spine.

“I’ll let you know soon enough. First, I have to tell you about something.... Xena’s soul, Gabrielle, do you know why she disappeared away from you?”

“Xena’s soul?... Why?”

“She’s trapped in hell, Gabrielle. She died unfairly, an untimely demise,” Ares explained as Gabrielle listened to him attentively. “It wasn’t her time. The souls were freed. She did not have to stay dead. Somebody, Akemi perhaps, withheld or distorted information. Had you dumped Xena’s ashes in the water on Mt. Fuji, Gabrielle, those forty thousand souls would have been just as freed and Xena just as redeemed. You just didn’t know there was another way.”

“Are you sure?... How do you know all this, Ares?” asked Gabby, in a shocked bewilderment.

“I’m a God, little girl. I’ve got my own contacts in the netherworld.” He tightened his grip upon her. “I saw her soul being trapped in hell, Gabrielle. That place is worse than our Greek Tartarus. I could not intervene; it was outside the realm of my duty as the Greek God of War. She is there because she’s been cursed. First, she died unfairly. Then, dark ghostly Japanese forces from the netherworld seized her spirit, in an attempt to avenge their Lord Yodoshi, and they took her to hell.”

“Last time I saw Xena’s spirit, I was in Egypt, on a mission,” said the bard. “I saw her in the desert.”

“They seized her not long afterwards. I had confirmation of that, Gabrielle,” said Ares.

“Is this why she never came back to see me?” Gabrielle put her hands onto the strongly muscled arms that were grasping her shoulders. Profoundly disconcerted, she needed to hold onto something right now.

“That’s right,” said Ares. Gabrielle looked at him.

“Still, what do you want me to do? What can I possibly do?” The bard was sad and confused.

“As an immortal, you could help release Xena’s soul from hell. Only someone like you can free her, Gabrielle,” said the God of War.

“How?” Gabrielle did not understand.

“Look, let me take you to a place somewhere just for a few moments, will you? Just the time for me to explain a deal I want to make with you and why, and then I’ll teleport you back here, all right?”

“Okay.” Gabrielle accepted. She would do anything to help free Xena from her unfortunate situation.

The God of War held Gabrielle tightly and they both vanished together in a flash of light.

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In another burst of light, Ares and Gabrielle appeared inside a dark place. The bard looked around her. The God of War stood by her side.

“Where are we? Where did you take me?” Gabrielle was confused.

“Don’t you recognize this place, little girl?” asked the dark deity.

Gabrielle scrutinized the dark room. It was a vacant and gloomy temple. On the floor, a few feet ahead, the few remnants of an extremely sabotaged loom lay. Its threads were gradually turning to dust. A feeling of déjà vu came over the bard.

“The loom?... We’re in the Temple of the Fates,” said Gabrielle, bedazzled by the bleak spot before her.

“That’s right, Gabrielle... Or, more exactly, what is left of the Temple of the Fates. You destroyed their loom, remember?” asked Ares.

“But that’s not possible.” Gabrielle shook her head, even more puzzled. “When I destroyed it, it was in an alternate life, when I was trying to save Xena.”

“Yes, but, Gabrielle, please consider that under Olympian Law, no Greek sacred place can completely disappear. Deities, without mortals knowing about it, can still access different lives and different universes.”

“And exactly how, Ares? How did you find out about the loom?”

“I’ve always been watching all Xena’s paths very closely, including alternate lives. Gods can only watch those alternate lives though; we cannot intervene. So, anyway, in the process of watching Xena’s, I came across many of her lover’s paths too; as your destiny and hers are always so intrinsically linked together, Gabrielle. I’ve got to admit I’m jealous,” he conceded, sounding unsatisfied.

“You’re so obsessed with Xena that you’ve been doing this? Nothing surprising here... Still, can you please explain to me how come this place exists here and now despite the fact that I’d destroyed it in another world?” she asked.

“Well, it doesn’t, as a matter of facts. It doesn’t really exist. I just took you to that alternate universe here, at some point in time not too long after you destroyed the loom. I know this may sound strange, Gabrielle, but digging deep enough into the various schemes of things, I was somehow able to access this place, this paradox. I’ll take you back to reality soon enough, you’ll see.”

Gabrielle did not have any time to waste on asking the God of War for more details. In the real world, Xena had died in Jappa. Cruel Japanese ghost judges of the netherworld had abducted her soul and taken her to hell.

“Okay.” she said. Now having a better understanding of where she was, she spoke more firmly: “Now let’s get straight to the point, shall we? Why did you take me here, Ares? What is this about? How am I supposed to release Xena’s soul?”

“Follow me.” Ares walked towards the left wall of the shadowy place they were in. Gabrielle walked with him. He lit one of the torches hanging on the wall with his godly powers.

Gabrielle looked at the newly lit stone wall Ares was showing her. An engraving had been carved into it. It said:

*“To the mortal who destroyed our loom:*

*Thou hast not completely tare it asunder,*

*so to speak. In whatever life thou shalt have,*

*shouldst thou become an immortal and then*

*drink the sacred Water of Aganippe, thou shalt*

*be granted the ultimate power over all*

*destiny. Our reign as Fates has disappeared,*

*and this is our legacy to thee."*

*~ The Fates.*

"By the gods..." said Gabrielle, as she was starting to come to realize what this was all about. "You said earlier on that I was the only one who would be able to free Xena's spirit from hell, Ares. And you also said that you knew about the offer Aphrodite made me. What exactly do you want from me? What is the deal you were talking about?"

"As the Fates carved it on this wall before they disappeared after you destroyed their loom, they gave you the legacy of the power over destiny –probably because they wanted a possibility for the control over mortal destiny to never be lost, but that's another story." Ares continued: "There are, however, two prerequisites to your acquiring of the power over destiny. First, you must become an immortal. Second, you must drink some of the water from the spring of Aganippe, which is at the base of Mt. Helicon."

"The Fountain of Aganippe? The sacred place of the Muses? I've been there before while I used to write some of my scrolls. I thought it only was a place to give inspiration to writers and bards?" asked Gabby.

"That's right," answered Ares. "It is mostly a place to inspire mortal bards to write. Yet, according to the gift you received from the Fates, if you became immortal you could become some sort of powerful eternal being who could control destiny. Drinking the sacred Water of Aganippe hence would set your power in motion... I believe that if you then wrote on a scroll something related to the destiny of a mortal soul, living or dead, what you write would come true."

"So then I could write, for instance, something about Xena's soul escaping from hell and making it to heaven or the Elysian Fields, and it would come true?" A feeling of hope crossed Gabrielle's mind.

"Correct. You would have the power over the fate of Xena's spirit... Of course, more importantly, you could also write about Xena's soul being born into a new body like say, for example, the body of another beautiful woman –an option which I would prefer." Ares grinned. "When that beautiful woman would be grown, I could seduce her all over again."

"So, is this what it was all about?" asked Gabrielle, sternly. "You want me to bring Xena back to the living world so that you can one day attempt to possess her again? You're only driven by your own selfish needs, aren't you?" She looked at him with disgust.

"Selfish, me? I was the one who told you about all this. I helped you find out about this fortunate legacy from the Fates to you –a gift you could use to release Xena. You should be more grateful, little girl... Now, why would you care if I were to be with Xena?" The God of War sighed. "You've got your new partner, the Goddess of Love. As an immortal, you could be next to her for eternity. So it's not all that bad, is it?"

"Xena is my soulmate! I won't let you have her." said Gabrielle, scornfully. "Once I'm immortal and I drink from that spring, I will write about a destiny for Xena to go to heaven, and that will be it." She started turning away from him. He seized her arm, prompting her to face him again.

"Oh, no, it won't." Ares stared at her with an evil look on his face. "I have something that will inspire you to write the right thing."

"What are you talking about?" In a quick movement, Gabrielle freed her arm from his grasp. She kept looking at him.

“I knew you would be trying to pull one of your ‘goodie two-shoes’ plans here. So I took some precautions: I went to Poteidia and got your sister Lila abducted yesterday. She’s being guarded by some of my followers in my temple right now.” Ares sneered.

“You bastard!” Gabrielle screamed. “You vicious, conniving bastard! You’re trying to get me to bring Xena back only to satisfy you own perverse needs, and now you’re threatening my sister. I hate you!”

Ares gripped her shoulders in an attempt to calm her down. He did a godly trick while staring at her. Gabrielle froze. She looked up at him more quietly. She could feel his influence upon her now. *He’s trying to control me now*, she thought to herself; *I shouldn’t let him take over my sanity*.

“Gabrielle, listen,” said Ares. “Accept Aphrodite’s offer as soon as you get back to her temple. Become immortal tonight. Then come and meet me tomorrow morning near the Fountain of Aganippe. Come alone, with a scroll and a quill. Your sister will be there. She will not be harmed if you cooperate. We will free Xena’s soul from hell, you’ll see. Everything will be alright, for Xena, for your sister, for you and for me.”

“Especially for you, huh?” Gabrielle remarked. “I will have to lose my mortality so that you can have Xena. This is unfair.”

“So do we have a deal then?” asked Ares.

“Yes... I guess we have one,” said Gabrielle, reluctantly. “I’ll meet you at the base of Mt. Helicon tomorrow. And I want my sister to be there with you.”

“She will be. Shall I bring you back to the real world now?”

“Yes, please.”

With his grip on the bard, Ares teleported Gabrielle back into the woods, back to reality.

“One more thing,” said Ares before he left. “Don’t even think about going to that sacred spring by yourself during the night. I will be watching over that place closely.”

“I won’t do that,” said Gabrielle, unhappy. Ares disappeared in a flash of light.

What was she going to do now? She did not want to walk to Athens anymore after all this. With a couple of dinars, she would just be asking for food from someone nearby. It was still the afternoon, but she just wanted to go back to Aphrodite’s as soon as possible.

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Gabrielle walked back into the temple not too long after managing to get a little bit of food for the evening, from people in a neighbouring village. The Goddess of Love lay on one of the couches, reading one of the Xena scrolls Gabs has let her borrow.

“Hey, sweetheart! You’re home?” said Aphrodite, lifting her head from the reading. She smiled.

“Yes, I’m here now.” Gabrielle walked to Dite and gently kissed her on the lips, briefly.

“Hey? You don’t look so happy, Gabrielle,” said Dite. “Something happened while you were out?”

“Oh, no I’m alright. I just got attacked by some warlords.” Gabrielle had a quick bite on some food while she sat on a chair near the Goddess. She did not want to worry Aphrodite too much.

“Oh, really?” asked Dite.

“Yes, really... right in the middle of my vacation. I had to fight back. Annoying.” Gabrielle nodded.

“But you’re alright now?” asked Dite.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” answered the bard.

“I was just re-reading one of your scrolls. It’s excellent. It’s the one about Xena fighting the Persian army and saving you from a poison.” Aphrodite sounded excited about the story.

“Oh, it’s an old one, that one. I love it, one of the best I’ve ever written.” Gabrielle smiled.

“It is.” Aphrodite smiled back.

“Hmm... Aphrodite?” asked Gabrielle.

“Yes, honey?” The Goddess of Love glanced at her.

“I’ve been seriously thinking about the offer you made me, earlier on today...” Gabs took a deep breath.

“Yes?” said Dite, impatiently interested.

“... and I thought that, actually, it might definitely be okay for me to become an immortal. In other words, I think I’m ready, Aphrodite. I’m ready to join you.” Gabrielle looked at her in a serious way.

“Eh... Are you sure you wanna do this? I thought you said you would miss your mortal body, your mortal feelings?” Dite was curious.

“Yes, in a way, I guess...” said Gabby. “But I really wanna do this. I’ll be able to protect the Amazon Nation even more, and I’ll be by your side for eternity. I want to make you happy... Er... Aphrodite?”

“Yes, pumpkin?” asked the Goddess.

“Can you please go get that golden apple for me, now?” The bard briefly bit the bottom of her lip.

“You want it right now, already? Won’t this be a bit too quick for you? I thought you needed some more time to think about it?” Aphrodite looked slightly puzzled.

“I’ve had all afternoon thinking about it. It’s very tempting, and I’m ready. I know that as an immortal, I won’t become someone devoid of feelings,” affirmed Gabrielle.

“Not with such a good heart you have, you won’t... I’m so happy you’ve made that decision. I really want this to happen but, at the same time, I’m very surprised, as it isn’t like you at all to suddenly want to become immortal so quickly. But, if you insist...” Dite smiled.

The Goddess stood up and went to get the green velvet bag that contained the golden apple. A few seconds later, she handed the apple to Gabrielle: “There you go. Take your time.” Gabrielle took it in her hand and looked at it again.

Aphrodite sat back down and went back to reading the scroll she loved, while keeping an eye on Gabrielle sitting in the same room.

For a moment, the bard sat there, golden apple in her hand, and absorbed in her thoughts:

Could this all really be helpful to Xena? Once I get the power over all destiny –as a gift from the Fates– what could I possibly do to thwart Ares’ plan? He’s got Lila; I don’t want him to kill her. At the same time, I want to be able to free Xena’s soul without the possibility of Ares having her again someday. He would drive her back into her evil warlord ways and make her kill innocents again. I must find a loophole in Ares’ plan somehow. How could I possibly send Xena’s soul to heaven? Surely there must be another way... Bah! I’ll just take the apple. As an immortal, I might be able to beat Ares on a fair game.

Gabrielle brought the golden apple to her lips, holding it in front of her mouth for a minute. Aphrodite saw that and watched her.

“You’re really sure this is what you want?” Aphrodite now watched her with close attention.

“So be it.” Gabrielle nodded solemnly.

She placed her teeth around the golden flesh of the fruit and took her first bite of it. A rush of shimmering golden waves fluttered around her soul. She kept eating the apple, letting the powerful stream of immortality overwhelm her spirit.

Once she finished eating the godly fruit, she put the core down on a table and she looked at Aphrodite, who was sitting in front of her.

“How are you feeling now, Gabrielle?” asked the Goddess of Love.

“I’m fine. Eating that apple was so wonderfully pleasant.” Gabrielle smiled. Next, she took one of her sais out from her right boot. “Just checking something,” she said.

Gabrielle stretched out her left forearm in front of her and, with her other hand, plunged the point of the sai deep into it. “Unbelievable,” she said, bewildered. The sai was buried deep into her arm, its tip coming out of it from underneath, and there was absolutely no blood visible and she did not feel any pain. She pulled the sai out of her left arm and, still, felt nothing. There was no hole, wound, blood or physical pain. These things were non-existent in an immortal’s life. Gabrielle put her weapon away.

A few moments later, she walked towards the Goddess of Love and sat next to her on the couch. They kissed and then they paused for a moment, looking into each other’s eyes.

“I’ve made it, Aphrodite,” said Gabrielle. “I’m with you now.”

“Thank you so much for doing this for me, my little darling.” Dite hugged her.

“It’s alright.” Gabrielle smiled and hugged back. They resumed kissing and cuddling each other closely. Gabrielle stayed with Aphrodite. This night would be a long one. She needed to relax.

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In the morning, an immortal Gabrielle walked through an easy path she knew, one which would lead her to the foot of Mt. Helicon. She had told Aphrodite that she just needed to go for a walk outside, for the first time, as an immortal fighter. She had put an empty scroll and a quill in a rucksack she carried. She also had a sheath placed onto

her back, with a sword inside it, sticking out. She wore her amazon outfit today –the one she'd been wearing when, with Xena and her amazon sisters, she'd been fighting the forces of Bellerophon, just outside a fortress on the nearby coast.

She arrived near Mt. Helicon. As she kept walking through a landscape filled with ample greenery such as grass, bushes, flowers and trees, she reached her destination: the Fountain of Aganippe. Ares was standing in front of it, a few feet ahead of her.

“Hello, Gabrielle,” he said. “Thanks for coming. I can feel the aura of your newly acquired immortality from here.” He looked at her right in the eyes and grinned.

Gabrielle looked around. They were standing in the middle of this beautiful Aganippe place she knew: lots of green spaces, a grass-covered ground, plants, bushes, and a few trees. Somewhere behind Ares, the spring of Aganippe was gushing from the centre of a large, rectangular and light blue marble pool. The morning sun glittered over the water. This was the magic Water of the Muses, which had the power of inspiring any writer who drank it –the very same water which would enable an immortal bard like her to be inspired and write something that would come true.

“Where is Lila, Ares?” asked Gabrielle angrily, while scrutinising the place around her.

“Kyros and Leonidas,” called Ares, “come out here! Bring the sister!”

A little distance away from the scene, two of Ares' warlords and loyal followers came out from one of the large green bushes on the right hand side. They held Lila between them by her arms. Her hands had been tied together with ropes, and she had been gagged with a piece of cloth. Lila's eyes stared into Gabrielle's, as soon as she saw her sister. One of the men held the blade of a dagger near Lila's throat. She looked terrified.

“You bastard!” shouted Gabrielle to Ares.

“Now stay where you are just now, Gabrielle,” said Ares, “One movement towards her and she dies, understand?”

Gabrielle remained where she was. She may be immortal but she was not a god yet. She could not help Lila from the place where she was standing. She looked at the water behind where the God of War was standing. Just one sip of it and that would be it, to give her the power over destiny of all souls.

“You want me to cooperate, Ares, right?” She sighed.

“That's right,” he said. “Did you bring a scroll and a quill?”

Gabrielle opened her rucksack and dropped the scroll and quill on the ground beside her to show Ares.

“Here they are,” she said. “You want me to write about Xena's soul being born into a new body, once I drink the water, alright? The body of someone who'll become a beautiful woman. Is that still what you want?” she asked, tensely.

“Yes.” Ares smugly sneered. “Except that you're not gonna be the one who gets to choose the body, Gabrielle. I get to choose it.” Ares glanced towards another one of the bushes, not too far away from Lila and her two captors.

“Theron! Galenos! Bring the other girl!” he yelled.

Gabrielle saw two other men come out of the bushes. They were carrying the body of someone. The woman looked unconscious, inert. The men walked to the middle of the scene, in between Ares and Gabrielle. In a thump, they dropped the body to the ground and walked back near the bushes.

Gabrielle looked at the woman's body lying on the ground. The woman looked dead. Gabrielle did not know her, but her features and shapes looked beautiful, just like Xena's. Although it was not Xena, it seemed to be the closest resemblance to the former warrior princess. Gabrielle was shocked.

"You found a woman who looked like Xena and you got her killed?" she asked Ares.

"That's right," replied Ares, "half an hour ago. She's only been strangled by one of my men. Her body is still fresh, beautiful and intact –perfect to welcome a new soul. I figured that once Xena's spirit enters it, the body will be revived and the bruises on her neck will heal shortly thereafter."

"Hold on, Ares," said Gabrielle, repulsed. She tried to make sense of what she was witnessing: "You won't accept Xena's soul to go into the body of a future newborn because you don't wanna wait until she grows up to seduce her... So, you want her right now, and you kill an innocent... And now you expect me to go drink that water and then write for Xena's spirit to take over the body of a woman who's been recently killed?"

"Correct." Ares gave Gabrielle an evil smile. "Moreover, Xena will probably only have a very vague memory of her past life once she enters her. She'll be easy to seduce again, for me."

"You are one sick son of a bacchae!" yelled Gabrielle, feeling squeamish. "And you think I'm gonna do this for you? You think I'm just gonna let that happen?" She gave him a scornful look.

"Oh, yes, you will! Especially if the life of your beloved sister is at stake," said the God of War.

Gabrielle looked towards Lila. One of her captors still threatened her with his blade. Her sister painfully uttered a muffled moan under her gag –Lila's eyes bulging as she saw the blade move slightly closer to her neck, intimidating her.

"Lila, I'm sorry," said Gabrielle, upset, "I did not think you would get involved in all of this." Gabrielle looked back at Ares. She was profoundly annoyed at what was going on.

"See, Gabrielle? She's in danger," said Ares, in an authoritarian voice, "Now, let's get down to business, shall we? Come drink the sacred water here, then walk back toward your scroll and write for Xena's soul to escape from hell and take over that woman's body in a few moments. Do that or Lila dies, get it?"

"Ares," Gabrielle shouted back, "that water is not only supposed to give me the power over someone else's fate. It is also supposed to give me some inspiration on how to write about that fate."

"Yes, but, Gabrielle," yelled Ares, "when someone holds a dagger to your sister's throat, let's just say that that your options for inspiration are limited, all right? Now please proceed with the job. I want my Xena back. I will treat her right, you can count on me."

"Ares, this is unfair," responded Gabrielle. "Can I please ask, as an immortal, that I get the chance to fight against you first? A fair fight? I'm very angry just now."

"I guess a God of War would never refuse a good fight," said Ares, "but what are you hoping to win in this?"

"The chance to beat you at your own game." replied Gabby. "If I win, I'll still write the story you wanna hear. But the woman comes with me, and not with you, when she stands up. And then her, Lila and I, we can all go home safe."

"And if I win?" asked Ares.

“Then I write the story you wanna hear and you can have the woman, I guess,” said Gabrielle, reluctantly. “But because the scroll will be my work, I want to at least get the chance of reaping the rewards, even if it’s not certain.”

“Alright,” said Ares, thoughtful. “I guess that either way the woman could still be mine, as I could always go after her again sometime if she goes with you. But... I doubt you will win anyway.” The God of War smirked.

He ordered Theron to remove the dead woman’s body from the middle of the scene. The follower obeyed, as Ares and Gabrielle were getting ready to confront each other.

While Ares’ warlords and Lila watched from their standpoint on the side, the God of War got his sword out of his sheath. Gabrielle did the same. Facing each other, they walked towards one another. Ares brandished his sword. As his blade was about to strike Gabrielle, she stopped it with her own sword.

Their weapons clashed several times, making raucous, clinking sounds. An immortal swordfight: they both would have to figure out what would strike the winning blow or bring the other to the ground.

In a swift move, Gabrielle’s sword penetrated the chest of the dark deity. She pulled it out. Although that hadn’t produced any physical effect, it angered Ares further. He moved forward, held his sword high in the air and lowered it to hit the new warrior princess. She blocked the blade with her sword in a defensive move, but as he kept his sword in position above hers, Ares hit Gabrielle’s head with his elbow. This did not hurt her, but it made her temporarily lose the control of the protective position of her sword.

Ares plunged his weapon underneath Gabrielle’s right collarbone. For an instant, the blade protruded from the top her back. Gabrielle quickly jumped backwards, backing away from Ares’ sword. There was no blood, no mess, no nothing. She sent a proud smile to the God of War, who was facing her –proud that she was immortal and physically unscathed.

She dropped her sword on the grass and threw her chakram around. In its circular flight, it broke Ares’ sword. He dropped what was left of it to the ground.

Gabrielle caught the chakram back and uttered a Xena-like war cry while running toward Ares. She performed a back flip while climbing up his body with her boots –once again totally Xena-style. This somersault landed her on her feet, near the pool. Ares looked at her closely and he started walking around her, distancing himself a few feet away from her while still staring at her in the eyes as she also carefully watched his every move.

“So, you think you’re Xena, now?” Ares hissed. He kept walking around Gabrielle until he was facing her from a small distance as she was now standing in front of the spring, her back to the fountain.

“No,” retorted the blond, short-haired, woman, “I just think that I have now learned how to master all the wonderful strength and fighting techniques I learned from her.”

“Alright, little girl, very impressive but I don’t have an eternity for this,” said Ares. “As we’re immortal, this could go on forever, and I just won’t let that happen.”

Ares immediately lifted his right arm and a shining ball of godly power appeared in the palm of his hand. Gabrielle froze. With his godly skills, he quickly magnified the flash of light –throwing it towards her. The godly forward lightning hit her and sent her straight into the pool behind her.

This was not painful at all, thanks to her immortality. As she fell into the water, Gabrielle let the liquid engulf her whole being. She let her body sink to the bottom, even though the pool was not deep.

Underwater, with her eyes closed, she relaxed as she felt she could hear the Muses’ beautiful chants around her. She felt she could also make out the faint voice from one of the Fates inside her mind –perhaps the Crone:

*In whatever life thou shalt have, shouldst thou become an immortal and then drink the sacred Water of Aganippe, thou shalt be granted the ultimate power over all destiny...*

*All destiny: past, present and future. The fate of all beings, living or dead, will be under your control, one at a time, or in a series of consequences.*

The second part of the statement hadn't been carved on the engraving she'd seen, but she felt it must be true. From another sphere of existence, one of the Fates was letting her know about the possibilities of her power.

She thus opened her eyes, swam back to the surface of the pool and gulped some of the Water of Aganippe as she came out.

Drenched, she stood up in the sacred water—which was still surrounding her at mid thigh-height. Ares was waiting for her outside the pool, with an irritating grin.

"I'm afraid you lost the fight, Gabrielle," he said.

"That's because you don't accept fair fights, Ares!" she angrily retorted. "You always have to use your godly powers somehow, huh?"

"Look, this could have been going on forever," said the God of War. "We have things to attend to here. I'm glad you drank the water. Thank you for your cooperation," he said smugly.

Gabrielle felt a powerful wave of inspiration rush through her. Suddenly, it came to her that all she wanted to do was writing—writing about Xena. She figured this sort of feeling meant that drinking that water clearly had the intended effect. It was working.

"Come on now," Ares said, "come out of the water."

Gabrielle climbed out of the pool. Ares ordered one of his men to get Gabrielle something to dry herself with. Next, Galenos threw a piece of thick fabric towards her. She caught it and started drying her face, arms and hands.

A few feet in front of where she was standing, Ares picked up the scroll and the quill she'd brought. He looked at her.

"So? Shall we get down to business now?" inquired Ares. "You have to free Xena's soul from hell, remember? You don't want her to stay there forever, Gabrielle, do you?"

"No, but I couldn't send her to heaven if I wanted, could I?" said Gabrielle, with a sad expression on her face.

"That's right. You couldn't do that." said Ares. "Not when your sister has a knife being held near her throat."

Gabrielle looked at Lila. Her dear sister was still bound and gagged, and surrounded by her evil captors. Although immortal, Gabrielle could still sense a very strong feeling of urgency. She felt a number of thoughts coming through her mind:

*But I could not write something about Lila for her to get freed right now, could I? I can only take care of one soul's fate at a time, unless it happens in a series of consequences. The water I drank tells me that my inspiration should, first and foremost, be on Xena. I've got the feeling that I can do something that way.*

Theron brought the freshly killed woman's body back to the centre of the place. Ares walked towards Gabrielle and handed her the empty scroll and the quill, which she took.

“Shall we, huh?” Ares, facing her, looked into her eyes. “And, please, don’t even think about writing something on your sister being freed,” he said, ruling out the option. “I’ll be able to tell, I’m a god. If I see that you’re cheating, I’ll be slicing all the limbs of your body, and you’ll be spending the rest of your eternity in pieces. You’re not quite a god yet, you know?”

Gabrielle felt intimidated. For sure, the Lila option was out. She would have to save her sister some other way.

“Gabrielle,” Ares continued, “seriously think about it: Xena has the right to live again, in a brand-new body. That’s not so bad, is it?”

“So you’re gonna stand next to me when I’m writing and try to force me to comply with what you wanna hear?” asked Gabby. “I don’t think you can do that.” Gabs shook her head.

“Not exactly...” replied Ares. “I cannot really intervene on that. Your newly found power is outside my realm in that respect. It won’t really work if someone watches you writing. The Fates themselves needed not to be observed when working on their threads.”

“So then back away a little,” said Gabrielle, insisting. “Please.” She briefly glared at him.

Ares walked back towards the dead body. He crouched down to observe the beauty of the woman as that of an object he yearned. Gabrielle looked at him. He looked back.

“But Gabrielle,” said Ares, “I can still make sure that you will write the story I wanna hear. If I don’t see the body here coming to life with Xena’s soul inside it, your sister will die and I will separate your limbs so viciously, you won’t even be able to write anymore. So don’t even think about sending Xena to heaven. Now please, don’t waste any more time and write for Xena’s soul to wake up right here, in front of me.”

Ares looked at Gabs, impatient, and with an evil look on his face. Gabrielle looked at the empty scroll she carried, her quill in her other hand. She resumed her thinking:

*I have to write something about the destiny of Xena’s soul, but I can’t send her to heaven. What can I do?... I’ll have to cooperate somehow, or at least pretend to... I must find a loophole somehow... Another way.*

Still feeling the wave of inspiration inside her, the bard was absorbed in some more thinking and, a few minutes later, she lowered her quill onto the scroll and wrote –just a few sentences. She then looked at Ares.

“Done,” said the bard, nodding, with a firm expression on her face. She suppressed a smile. What she wrote was going to come true in a few moments.

“Thank you,” said the God of War. “Now let’s see it happen.”

Smugly pleased, he observed the body of the woman on the ground –expecting it to get up at any minute now. When it did not, a few seconds later, Ares stood up, walked quickly towards Gabrielle and seized the scroll off from the bard’s hands.

“What have you been writing, Gabrielle?” He looked at the scroll. What he read on it made him contort his features in anger and puzzlement. “But... that’s not possible... What is this about?” He looked at Gabrielle. “You little bitch!” he yelled.

Gabrielle smirked at him.

“Gotcha, God of War!” she said, pleased.

As Ares was angrily lunging towards Gabrielle, the world stopped and events started going backwards.

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She would have the ultimate power over all destiny: past, present and future, thus she would be given the full power of the Fates' loom –but Ares hadn't known that part; he hadn't heard what the Fate had said to her when she was underwater. Gabrielle had fooled Ares so perfectly. The fate of any being, living or dead, would be under her control, the Fates had decided. The water had given her the inspiration to dig into Xena's past, and to know what would be the final, the good, the right thing to do. She had gotten the inspiration to find another way, a better way. Hence what she had written on that scroll about Xena was very simple:

“After burning Akemi's body, Xena successfully managed to take her ashes to the sacred shrine in Higuchi without the townsfolk hearing about the fact that she had those ashes or attacking her –thus restoring the honour of Yodoshi's daughter. No one died in a fire. Yodoshi was taken to the underworld and never became a soul-eater.”

The way she had taken care of that particular moment in Xena's life changed the destiny of many souls, many beings, one by one, in a series of consequences. Thirty-five years after those events, she would not have to go to Jappa or be separated from her soulmate.

Gabrielle found herself caught inside the middle of a huge vortex of destiny. She was suspended in the air –gently swirling around. While she was looking at what was going on around her, she could see the latest events in her life – and other people's– going backwards, one at a time.

She saw herself walk backwards to Aphrodite's, like what she'd done this morning, but reversed. She suddenly felt her immortality being drained from her body, as the golden apple from last night was gradually being restored before her eyes until it was intact. She could see yesterday's events going backwards. As she got her mortal body back, she felt profoundly human once again, and got really excited at the idea of all that had happened lately going further backwards.

She saw Lila –tied up– walk backwards in the direction of her home in Potidaea with the men who had abducted her. In backward motions, it looked as if the men were removing the ropes on arrival, untying Lila, and leaving –leaving her in peace at her home in Potidaea. Also, the other woman that had been abducted had not been strangled by Theron or slain. She saw her too returned to her home, alive and well.

Further backwards, she saw her recent romantic involvement with Aphrodite being erased bit by bit. She saw herself walk backwards from the temple with the Goddess. Sometime after that, she saw Xena's ashes get out of the water to get back into the urn she'd held –herself then riding backwards from the Amphipolis river towards Amazon Land. Backwards, it looked as if Aphrodite was leaving her there.

Further backwards, she could see the latest months in her life being undone: she had not been returning to her Amazon village; she had not travelled to Egypt; she had not spent huge moments of her existence alone on a boat from Jappa.

The vortex of time finally reached the events of Jappa, during the last time she'd been with Xena. She saw Xena's ghost re-appear beside her on Mt. Fuji.

Most importantly, she saw Xena's last breathing moments going in backward motions: Xena's head got back onto her shoulders, her neck was intact. The arrows removed themselves from Xena's body one by one, as if thrown backwards. While the blood quickly went back into Xena's body, her wounds closed miraculously, her body was intact. Morimoto's army retreated, or so it looked when seen backwards. Later, Gabrielle and her soulmate travelled away from Jappa back to Greece, in backward motions.

Backward motions could look so wonderful when seen that way, Gabrielle observed. A huge feeling of utter happiness overwhelmed her. It was unbelievably exhilarating to know that none of those horrible things in Jappa had ever happened to her soulmate.

It was absolute euphoria to Gabrielle. She was going to be with her lover again in a few moments. Both the threads of their destinies were so interlocked together within the weave of life that the Fates had miraculously given her the gift of mending what had happened, re-uniting them both, finally.

She was never going to have to force herself to recover from Xena's demise or to try to find another way to live. Her path –as the inspiration in her heart taught her to restore– was with Xena, as always.

She figured that since –according to the story she'd just written on the scroll– Xena had not done anything wrong in Jappa, thirty-five years later the monk Kenji would never come to Greece to bother them while they both were camping under the stars. This is where it had all started.

Gabrielle suddenly passed out inside the vortex she was in. Everything happened precisely as it should –precisely. As if all this had been a dream, she woke up in the past –which was now the present– just before the very last moment that was not going to be changed by what she had written: the last time she'd been having a quiet and peaceful conversation with Xena.

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Gabrielle woke up next to Xena on a bedroll, in a jump. It was six years after they'd met –without counting the twenty five years they'd spent together in hibernation.

“Are you okay, sweetheart?” asked the beautiful dark-haired, blue-eyed woman who was just sitting up to look at her. Both were on the same bedroll.

“Xena!” Sat up, Gabrielle turned towards her lover and hugged her tightly for a long while.

“Hey, Gabrielle,” asked Xena, “what's happening? You look like you've not seen me in a long while, and you just fell asleep a few minutes ago?”

“Did I?” asked Gabrielle, bewildered, and looked around. She then looked back at Xena, smiled and said: “I'm so glad you're here with me, my darling.” They hugged again.

“It's all right, honey,” said Xena while hugging the bard, “I ain't going away, never ever.” Xena smiled and gently ended the hug to look at Gabrielle. Gabrielle also looked at Xena right in the eyes. They kissed –a long, loving, deep and passionate kiss.

“Gotta put some more wood in the fire,” said Xena after they had finished kissing.

While Xena went to take care of the fire, Gabrielle reached for one of their rucksacks to search carefully amongst her scrolls. Had this all been a dream? She could not find the *'Friend in Need'* scroll. It was as if it had never existed, as if it had never been written. Next, if things worked well, the monk Kenji would not be turning up tonight. The bard sighed and put her scrolls away.

A few moments later, Xena was lying on the bedroll again, next to her. Gabrielle was observing the night sky. Relaxed, she started talking.

“Looking out at the cosmos makes you think... about where we are, where we've been, where we're going now.” Gabrielle said this, smiling –this gave her a strange feeling of déjà vu.

“Yeah... and like the bigger now,” replied Xena. “I mean, Gabrielle, what are we gonna do? Wander around Greece our whole lives looking for trouble? Why don’t we go away? Far away? Whaddya say?”

Gabrielle looked at Xena. She changed her reply this time:

“I think that maybe we should stay around here, in Greece, for a few weeks. Is that okay to go visit the amazons tomorrow? Not much’s been happening to them there since Bellerophon had attacked them. I need a little rest in their currently peaceful village. Then we could perhaps go to the Land of the Pharaohs a little later. Okay, Xena?”

“I was just thinking about the Land of the Pharaohs right now.” said the warrior princess. “It’s very strange that you mention it. The Amazon village, you sure you wanna go there now?”

“Yes... Please?” asked Gabrielle nicely.

“Okay, okay, then,” replied Xena. “We’ll just stay in Greece for a while then. Tomorrow we’ll visit your amazon sisters. We could always travel to the Land of the Pharaohs next month, I guess.”

“Thank you, my darling,” said Gabrielle, smiling at Xena.

“No problem,” said Xena.

Next, the bard turned her head to look towards the dark woods. She could not see anyone out there, no monk Kenji, no one stalking them. Kenji had probably stayed in Jappa this time, as there was no need for him to come to Greece –no Yodoshi. He probably had never even seen him. Gabrielle sighed in relief.

Gabrielle looked at Xena’s chakram, which was lying near the bedroll. Did she still know how to use it?

“Hey Xena,” she asked, “can I just show you something? Would you please let me hold your chakram for a minute?”

“Sure,” replied Xena, curious at what Gabby was talking about.

Gabrielle took the chakram and stood up. Xena watched her, sitting up on the bedroll. Gabrielle noticed a few branches that were protruding irregularly from the top of one of the green bushes nearby. She threw the chakram around. In a marvellous circular flight, it trimmed the top of the bush she’d aimed at –severing those few irregular branches. As it was flying back towards her, Gabrielle caught the circular object back. She turned to Xena: “Now, catch,” and flung the chakram around towards her –to give it back. In a swift move, Xena caught it in her hand.

“Wow, Gabrielle!” said Xena, bug-eyed. The warrior princess looked at the bard in admiration. Her jaw dropped. “How did you learn how to do that?”

“I saw it in a dream... I guess,” said Gabrielle, feeling a little awkward. She went to lie back down on the bedroll next to Xena.

“Well,” Xena said, still bedazzled by the bard’s amazing chakram throw, “I guess I could always let you use my chakram now and again from now on.” Xena smiled while looking at Gabrielle next to her, giving her a charmingly deep look. “I’m sure that, down south in the land of the Pharaohs, they might be in need of two girls with a chakram, two warrior princesses.” Xena winked.

“Yeah, I’m sure they would need us. Thank you so much.” Gabrielle smiled back. “I love you, Xena.”

“I love you, Gabrielle,” Xena replied.

Xena and Gabrielle kissed and cuddled up to each other on the bedroll. As their mouths interlocked and their tongues intertwined sensually, they both felt around each other's body. Once they finished kissing, Gabrielle looked at Xena.

"I want you," said the blond woman, "right now." She looked at her lover with desire burning in her eyes.

"And I want you too," said the brunette, reciprocating the yearning look.

Within the thrill of erotic passion, they sensually took each other's clothes off. Then they gently grabbed the most arousing shapes of each other's bodies –one lover sliding her hands over the other's body simultaneously as the other one was touching her in the same fashion.

They thus proceeded to make love –pleasuring one another in turns, then at the same time– while affectionately declaring their devotions to each other. Each woman moaned in pleasure and felt her body squirming with joy at the other one's touch.

They both enjoyed the way they so voluptuously connected to one another. They loved each other and, in the middle such a mentally and physically pleasurable moment, they felt they were forming a powerful unity as soulmates.

Moments later, a rapturous orgasm filled both their beings as the two lovers loudly screamed each other's names. An intensely gratifying sensation flooded both their bodies and minds.

Exhausted, they both fell asleep in the arms of one another, snuggling up to each other. Now lying in the bedroll next to Xena, Gabrielle felt the ultimate bliss of having gotten her soulmate back. This was to be forever –she would make sure of that.

The next morning, Gabrielle and Xena got up and packed their bags and, with Argo II, they headed towards Amazon Land.

**THE END**