

Ever write something that you read and go **did I write that** and don't really mean it in a good way... Well I have, and here it is. Disclaimer #1, I don't own Xena, Gabrielle or Argo. MCA/Universal does, but we all know that. Disclaimer #2 Xena doesn't really act in character and neither does the Gabster. They say things I don't think they'd say and do things I don't really think they'd do. Disclaimer #3 The Gabster gets smacked around a bit. If you can't hack it (she's got a smile on her face at the end though) then go away. Disclaimer #4 This has all sorts of same-sex sex running through it. Guys on guys (details excluded to protect the squeamish) women on women, Xena on Gabrielle among others etc... Disclaimer #5 There is bondage, strap-ons, whips, ropes, manacles, body piercings and a really nice broiled fish dinner in the first paragraph. Did I mention the strawberries and chocolate? That's later. Disclaimer #6- there isn't one. Disclaimer #7 Don't go looking for a plot, there isn't much of one to be found. I'm out of my element here, I don't know what I'm saying and suspect that this pretty much sucks (so to speak) I wrote this on a dare when I friend of mine whined (yes she **whined**) that there just weren't any "Xena With A Strap On" stories out there.

The Binds That Tie
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1997

"Kaltor, the answer is *no*."

"Xena, please!" Kaltor pleaded. I had to roll my eyes at that. Xena and King Kaltor had been going back and forth on this topic for a good hour and a half. Absently I nibbled at my broiled fish. The food was excellent, but I'd lost my appetite. I started to imagine pictures in my broccoli, as you would with passing clouds as I waited for Xena to capitulate. I knew she would, how could she not? She'd explained to me on our way here how Kaltor had been one of the few Kings in the old days to welcome the Warrior Princess and her army within the walls of his keep. She'd needed a place for her men to recover from a nasty battle and in exchange for two favors he'd opened his doors. Xena laughed as she remembered the favors. The first of which had been that she wouldn't overthrow him and the second— to keep a rival, King Lothar, from advancing on his territories as well. At the time Xena was so impressed that the king assumed she'd keep her word, she let him keep his kingdom.

"Then I should just hand over the keys to my main gate to Lothar," Kaltor continued, depressed.

I took another sip of my port as Xena shrugged, saying, "Even if I went to see Lothar, I find it hard to believe he'd still think I'm a warlord. I had trouble pulling that off with another warlord two years ago."

"But you know how isolated we are Xena," Kaltor countered. "And Lothar never looks past his walls, unless it's in the direction of my kingdom. I have to work hard at staying in touch with the outside world. He has his amusements and looks no farther than that." He shook his head sadly. "Xena, you know what goes on within those walls. I've opened my doors to many escaped slaves. Surely, you can't just sit there while..."

"Alright!" Xena snapped, which made me jump. "I'll go talk to him, see what I can do— but I'm not making any promises."

"No promises," Kaltor agreed, looking relieved. "I'll send some of my best soldiers to act as your..."

"No," Xena said, cutting him off. "I'll go alone, at first light."

"Now, wait a minute," I said, not appreciating where this conversation was headed.

"No, Gabrielle," Xena replied flatly, leaving little room for argument. "You're *not* going."

Kaltor looked puzzled at that but shrugged. "Perhaps I can get one of my servants to accompany you Xena, you won't be believable if you're unaccompanied."

Xena paused as if she was considering the offer then shook her head. "No, I'm going alone."

"Lothar will never buy it," Kaltor objected.

"I didn't have slaves in the old days," Xena countered

"But surely you made use of his," Kaltor replied. "Do you want to do that again, or take someone who can act the part?"

"What's going on here," I demanded. "You won't let me go, but you'll think about taking someone

you don't even *know*?" I turned away from her, angry. We'd traveled together long enough that I thought this sort of behavior was way behind us.

"Listen to me, Gabrielle," Xena said as she turned to me, her voice gentle. "Lothar's kingdom is no place for you. It wasn't even a place for me when I was a warlord."

"Sounds colorful," I allowed.

"It's twisted, Gabrielle. Lothar is a sick man and his ideas of proper conduct are deplorable. If I'm going to make him believe I'm still a warlord allied to Kaltor I'm going to have to... do things I'd rather you not see."

"But Xena," I insisted, "I'll *know* it's all an act. If this place is as rough as it sounds, you might need me at your back."

"She's right," Kaltor agreed. Xena shot him a look of pure venom but he shook it off. "The visits you paid him in the old days kept him off my borders these past six years. I hope a reminder will keep him out of my way for good. But if you're discredited not only will his army descend on my lands but you might find yourself wearing a collar at the end of a leash as well. I've seen Gabrielle fight. I was there for that incident in the market place, remember? If she can act as well as she can fight, you'll have no trouble convincing Lothar you're serious and then you'll be out of there. She's already entertained us with stories of your adventures. She was convincing as the Markessa at that beauty pageant. Surely you could..."

"You don't understand Kaltor," Xena growled. "I've no intention of using Gabrielle to prove anything to Lothar. You're *mistaken*."

I frowned at this. I wasn't exactly sure what she and Kaltor were talking about but the way she said the word *mistaken*, made him pale slightly. He looked at me, then back at her with an even more puzzled expression on his face. "But I thought," he stammered.

"Drop it," Xena demanded, and he did.

This was getting out of hand so I decided to step in and remedy the situation. "King Kaltor," I said, getting his attention, "you said that several former slaves work in your household." He nodded so I continued, "surely one of them can tell me what I need to know about functioning in Lothar's kingdom without raising suspicion."

"Forget it, Gabrielle," Xena warned.

"No, Xena," I shot back. "If you think for one second that I'm going to let my best friend go into a sick and twisted kingdom with out proper back up you're greatly mistaken. And if you're convinced that I'm too young or inexperienced to handle whatever it is this warlord expects— then I'm afraid you don't know me as well as you think you do. And I'm really sad to hear it." I think I got her attention with that last statement. She frowned at Kaltor one last time then looked back at me. There was something unreadable in her expression, something that made me nervous but I shook it off. She was not going to leave me behind this time.

She sighed. "Alright Gabrielle. Kaltor, have one of your servants tell Gabrielle what she knows of Lothar's kingdom." She turned to me, her piercing blue eyes strangely unguarded. "If you still want to accompany me after you hear what Kaltor's servant has to say, I'll take you. But I sincerely hope you'll reconsider." Her head snapped up to look at the King, her defenses once again impenetrable. "I'll select seven of your guard to ride with us, no more than that. Did you ever repair that old suit of armor I left here?"

The king nodded. "I'll have it brought to your room."

I spent the rest of the evening getting quite an education. At times I blushed or laughed out of sheer nervousness. The servant, Miriam, was patient and candid. She spoke honestly of her experiences in Lothar's palace. As it turned out she had been in his service when Xena visited there before.

"What was she like?" I found myself asking before I could stop myself.

"Powerful," she replied without pause. "Xena beat Lothar at dice. She'd already won several of his best horses and a good deal of money so he offered her my services as a marker. She accepted, for the night anyway, explaining to Lothar that she didn't have room for slaves in her army, that it was a unnecessary distraction."

"What happened?" I asked.

Miriam smiled sadly. “I was young and stupid. Very stupid. I was Lothar’s most prized servant and I resented being loaned for the night to a murderous warlord. Once we were alone, I was on my worst behavior. Xena found it amusing. I can’t really describe it Gabrielle. I was terrified, but excited at the same time. She didn’t treat me very well, but compared to Lothar she was a dream. By morning I wanted nothing more than to ride out with her- to join her army as a slave. After that every time she visited I hoped I’d be sent to her, but it never happened again. She was cold and ruthless... but there was something else there. Something primal and passionate.”

I was confused. This hardly sounded like the woman I’d grown to love, the friend I’d grown to treasure above all others. The Xena I knew was powerful, certainly but she was also warm and loving too. While I couldn’t fathom what she would be like in the bedroom, I’d never suspected she’d been an animal with Hercules or Marcus. Miriam pulled her blouse to the side, exposing an oval scar on her left shoulder. Looking closely at it, I noticed it was from a bite mark, a human bite. “Xena did that,” Miriam explained. “It’s the worst insult draw blood from another person’s slave. But Xena marked me anyway, she knew I wouldn’t tell. I found out later that during her occasional visits to Lothar’s kingdom, she had marked a total of eleven slaves. None of us told.”

“Why?” I asked, my voice barely a whisper.

She shrugged, her right hand touching the scar almost reverently. “Because I didn’t want to share her with anyone,” She said quietly.

The next morning I woke up early. I’d slept unusually well, considering the disturbing tales I’d heard about Lothar’s kingdom. I had drifted off trying to imagine my friend as a dominating warlord. On the one hand, I’d seen Xena’s discipline and anger on more than one occasion and based on that I’d pieced together images of what she must have been like before. But Miriam’s account added a whole new dimension. I’d never really thought of Xena as a sexual predator. I mean, I knew that under certain circumstances she fairly radiated sexual energy, and it could be downright unsettling, but Miriam’s recollection was quite detailed. I blushed just remembering it. Still, Xena was my best friend and I was not about to let her walk into danger alone just because of my prudish inhibitions. Philosophically I decided that exposure to the seedier side of life would be good for me, might broaden my horizons. Regardless of what Xena might have to say or do, to my very core I trusted her and knew she’d never really hurt me. I got dressed and put on the sandals Miriam had loaned me. She explained that slaves didn’t wear boots and I did need to look the part. She’d given me some other items as well. I carried those in a sack as I went to find Xena. She’d have to help me with the rest.

I knocked on her door which was across the hall from mine. “Come in,” came the dejected response from the other side. I pushed the heavy door open and stepped inside. The first thing I noticed was that Xena’s bed was made, it didn’t look like she’d slept in it. Her familiar brown armor was laid out on the bed, instead she was dressed in black armor that I’d never seen before. She was adjusting an arm band as I entered the room.

“Hi,” I said quietly, “can I help?”

She smiled briefly and extended her arm. I ducked under her arm and adjusted the straps from behind her. I could feel the blush creep to my cheeks already and I didn’t want her to see it. “I hope you’ve decided not to go,” she said conversationally.

I shook my head. “After my talk with Miriam, I’m more determined to go now than before.”

“Miriam?” Xena wondered aloud.

“She was a slave of Lothar’s- you won her for the night in a dice game,” I supplied matter-of-factly. Xena’s eyes widened, remembering. A look of haunted embarrassment clouded those expressive blue eyes.

“Then I’m surprised you’re speaking to me, much less going with me,” she remarked.

“Xena,” I said seriously, my hand resting on her back, “you need someone in there who you can trust, who trusts you. How many times have I told you that who you were doesn’t matter to me. Look, I know you don’t want to help Kaltor, but you have to. You gave him your word years ago, and that still means something to you. I can’t argue with that. While this might not be the most pleasant adventure we’ve ever shared, I’m not turning my back on you just because things get a little dicey.”

She turned her head to search my face with her expressive eyes. When I finished with her bracer she

faced me. “Gabrielle, I don’t deserve a friend like you, I never have. I want to apologize now for anything...” I silenced her mouth with my fingers.

“Xena, I understand that whatever happens, it isn’t you. There is no need to apologize for anything. Lets just get it over with, okay?”

She nodded and I went to the bed to pick up the sack. “Miriam gave me these, but I’m not sure how they’re worn.” I dumped the contents on the bed, noting the slight narrowing of her eyes at the sight. Xena picked up the first metal cuff and looked back at me.

“You’re *sure* you want to go through with this? I can gaurntee it will be pretty degrading,” she asked.

I smiled masking my nervousness. “I’m a *bard*, remember? Embarrassment and degradation come with the territory. While I’ve never had rotten fruit thrown at me personally, it’s something we all have to be prepared for.”

“You’ve never had fruit thrown at you because you’re such a good bard,” Xena said with a smile.

“That,” I agreed, “and my best friend is a little on the intimidating side.”

She smiled and nodded to the bed. “Okay, have a seat. Let’s get you dressed.” I sat on the edge of the bed and she knelt down on the floor. Reaching for my ankle, she fastened the first metal bracer around it. The band was about three fingers wide and lined with soft deerskin. A large metal ring was attached to the outside. Xena locked the band in place and put a matching one on my other ankle. I could see why slaves wore sandals instead of boots. Still, while the bands around my ankles felt unusual, they weren’t uncomfortable.

Next, she attached similar bands to my wrists. They were metal, lined with deerskin and fit snugly. My fingers rested on Xena’s wrist as she worked and I was a little surprised by the heat coming off her hands. As she turned her arm to lock the band in place my fingertips brushed across a frantically racing pulse. “Xena,” I asked, “are you alright?”

“I’m fine,” she replied, without looking at me. “Here, you’ll need to move your hair.” She had picked up the final collar which was a little narrower but bigger in diameter. It had four rings equidistant around the outside. With a swallow, I realized it was for my throat. An odd sensation came over me as I stood, holding my hair out of the way as Xena attached the collar. Her body felt so warm behind me- as least I thought so since I assumed the shiver that ran through me was from a sudden chill. There were only two more items from the bag laying on the bed. Two small gold rings, but Xena stopped me when I reached for them.

“That won’t be necessary,” she said as she tucked the key to my bindings into her cleavage.

“But I think we should be as realistic as possible,” I replied.

“But I’m not going to loan you to anyone, Gabrielle,” she assured. “Unless you want to have your nipples pierced?” she asked.

I looked at the rings in horror then down at my green top. “You’re kidding,” I breathed.

“Not at all Gabrielle, when you loan a slave to someone they tend to be more combative. The rings are a quick way to get their attention.”

“I’ll say,” I agreed. “I think we can let it pass.”

“I take that to mean you’ll be on your best behavior?” she teased, picking up the small gold ring and bending it. She did the same to the other ring.

I chuckled, “I’ll try.” Then I thought about it a minute. “Just how bossy are you going to be?” I asked.

She looked at me, her face was serious but her eyes sparkled with mirth. “Pretty bossy— but I promise not to enjoy it.” She handed me the two gold rings with a smile. “Keep these with you. If you find yourself in a situation where your clothes are off, like the baths, slip these on. I’ve pried them apart, they shouldn’t hurt, but will look okay.”

“Just remember Warrior Princess,” I growled, tucking the small open circles in my cleavage, “paybacks are hell. I understand bossiness for appearances sake— but you start enjoying it and you’re going to pay.”

“I can hardly wait,” she chuckled as she packed up her things.

The ride to Lothar’s kingdom was relatively uneventful. It was unusual for me in that the ride was so

much different with Xena in her old armor. She wore two swords at her waist, and a soft cape draped across her back. Normally when I rode behind her I had nothing to rest my head on save a hard scabbard and a sword. Now the only thing separating Xena and myself was a thin soft cape, the ride was very comfortable. I think at one point, leaning against her warm back I dozed off. I woke as Argo sailed over a small ditch. I might have fallen off but Xena had clasped a hand over mine, keeping the arms encircling her waist secure. "Thanks," I muttered into the mane of long black hair.

"I thought you got a good nights sleep?" she asked.

"I did," I replied, "this is just too comfortable."

She laughed and patted my hand affectionately. "I hope you keep that in mind should Argo jump a big ditch and send you flying."

"Nah," I disagreed, "you'll keep anything bad from happening to me." She didn't reply, but I think I felt her smile.

We got to Lothar's kingdom just past noon. Xena gave the men posing as her personal guard several instructions. They tightened up their formation and we rode through the main gate of the fortress as a single entity. Through the thin fabric of the cape I could feel her muscles tighten. Xena was in full warrior mode. Just inside the gate we were met by a thin wiry man dressed in black leather. He had a thick spiked collar around his neck and his clothes were held together with unusual fasteners. As I suspected, this was Hedge, Lothar's lapdog. Xena gracefully dismounted and walked over to the man.

"I'm here to see the King," she stated flatly without preamble.

Hedge bowed deeply and spoke, his eyes cast down. "King Lothar sends his greetings, Warrior Princess and hopes you will join him for the evening meal. The facilities are at your disposal, please make yourself at home. His Majesty has several guests at present who will be equally pleased at your arrival. If there is any... assistance I can provide?" he asked.

Without looking in my direction, Xena uttered the single word, "down," and I knew it was directed at me. I quickly dismounted Argo and moved to her side. "Not necessary Hedge," she told the thin man, "I've all the assistance I need. See to it that my men and my horse are tended to." She drew up the man's face to her own and glared at him. "I trust the King is as honorable a man as ever? Because the rest of my army is patiently waiting near by. They've got explicit instructions should these men not report back at precise intervals with the proper messages." Xena looked away, as if she'd just banished the man from her presence and strode off toward one of the buildings. "Don't bother showing me to the baths," she commented as she walked off, "I know where they are."

The bath building was much as Miriam had described. She had explained that visitors to Lothar's palace were expected to bathe before being admitted to the dining hall. It had something to do with Lothar's aversion to dust and horse sweat. Unfortunately the bathing area was not deserted. While the building had separate facilities for men and women to bathe, both genders were present. Three women were lounging in the large steaming pool, two were attended to by men, the third by a woman. Xena strode over to a vacant bench and sat down, looking rather bored. She caught my attention with her eyes and looked pointedly at her armor. I quickly began to remove it. One woman called over from the pool. "Xena? Why it is you! My, but it's been a long time."

"Arleia," Xena replied smoothly with a nod. I didn't get a chance to look at the woman, I was too focused on removing Xena's armor quickly and efficiently. As I removed each piece I set them in a neat pile on the bench, placing the pieces I'd need first to re-arm my friend on top.

"I see you've developed quite the eye for slaves," Arleia commented, "her fingers look quite nimble."

I saw Xena's sensual smile as she crossed her leg, offering me her boot. "You could say that," she agreed. "Nimble, agile, coordinated. All fitting descriptions."

"Wherever did you get her?" another woman in the pool asked.

"Poteidaia," Xena replied, "as payment for not sacking the town. Which I naturally sacked anyway."

I frowned at that in spite of myself and jerked the boot from her foot. She pretended not to notice. She shifted her legs, offering me the other boot. I was distracted a bit by the powerful thigh muscles that

bunched and relaxed so gracefully as she moved.

“She seems to have gotten over it.” Arleia commented.

“She has her moments,” Xena observed. I finished with her other boot and stood to move behind her and loosen the laces of her leathers. She absently drew her finger up my thigh. “We’ve come to an understanding,” she commented as if discussing the weather.

“What brings you to Lothar’s court?” Arleia asked.

Xena shrugged out of her leathers. “I’ve been visiting King Kaltor and I’m concerned about what I’ve heard. I’m sure it’s all a misunderstanding, but I’d thought I’d drop by for a visit to check. Besides, I’ve always found a stay within King Lothar’s walls... diverting.” She walked, naked, to the pool, radiating confidence and power with every step. She turned her head slightly in my direction. “Take your clothes off, get the soap and come here,” she said indifferently. I took a moment to glance at the other slaves. One of the men was completely clothed, kneeling on a shallow step massaging the shoulders of his mistress. Another was completely out of the water washing the hair of his owner, he was naked. The female slave sat on the edge of the pool with her legs in the water, plaiting her mistress’ hair. She wore only a short skirt. I noticed that the nude man had a small hoop pierced through each of his nipples, as did the female. Only she additionally had a thin chain suspended from one breast to the other linking the two rings. I unlaced my boots, furious with Xena for insisting I join her until I realized that this was Xena’s only way of securing a bath for me too. She was standing farther out, the steaming water lapping against her breasts. Steeling myself against the embarrassment of disrobing so publically, I took my clothes off. I turned around to get the soap from my bag and casually slipped a gold ring over each of my nipples. I winced at the pain, they pinched a little, but it quickly passed. Reasonably sure they wouldn’t fall off I headed for the pool. Not knowing why, I paused at the edge. Xena smiled and glanced at the other three women. “No objections?” she asked.

The three looked at each other shaking their heads. “Go right ahead,” Arleia continued, “she looks healthy enough. A nice piece of work.” At that Xena nodded and I stepped into the delicious water. I strode out to where Xena stood, the water was up to my shoulders. Casually moving to where I’d have better footing, Xena offered me her back to wash. Without hesitation I complied. Out of the corner of my eye I could see the female slave watching me with open contempt, the men kept their eyes averted.

“Very well behaved,” one of the women said to Xena, “much less feisty than yours, Arleia.” So, Arleia was the one with the female slave.

“I like mine feisty Frena, they’re better in bed that way.”

“It doesn’t look like Xena has any complaints, and hers is quiet as a lamb.”

“There is a time and place for feistiness,” Xena commented as she ducked under the water, rinsing the soap from her hair. “It took awhile to break Gabrielle in, but I’ve had her for some time now. I’ve no complaints.” The last she said with such sensuality in her voice I blushed.

“Gabrielle, what a pretty name,” Frena cooed.

“Thank you,” Xena replied with a smile, taking full credit for naming me. I made myself a mental note to be annoyed about that later. “I like the way it sounds.”

“Funny,” the third woman quipped, “you never had slaves before. But visits here tend to rub off on people. Perhaps you’d loan her to Arleia to see just how good she is.”

“Perhaps,” Xena agreed, “are you sure you don’t want to try her out yourself, Ione?”

Arleia and Frena shared a laugh at that. “No, Xena,” Ione replied, smiling at her friends laughter, “Arleia is the only one of us who adopted your appetite for female slaves. You see, we don’t have the opportunity to order men around all day, so for us it’s quite a novelty.”

“Besides,” Frena added, “there are just some things men can do that women can’t.”

Xena smirked at the comment, “that’s not been my experience— unless of course you’re trying to get pregnant.” She moved to the shallower end of the pool to join the women on the steps. “Get cleaned up, Gabrielle,” she said with a glance back towards me.

Not wasting any time I washed my body and my hair, well aware that I had an audience of three. I heard one woman, Frena, murmur something to her slave and he quickly dropped into the water. He took two steps towards her and ducked below the surface. It didn’t take long to see where he was going. In moments his face was pressed to the juncture of his owner’s legs as a contented expression eased across her

features. I rinsed my hair and headed for the steps, I couldn't get out of that water fast enough. Xena and the two other women did their best to ignore what was going on, as if it was a common occurrence. Then I realized, remembering what Miriam had told me that it was indeed a common occurrence. The young man came up for air every minute or so then returned to his task. Frena noises of delight were thankfully unobtrusive but the expression on her face as she climaxed was unmistakable. I tried not to blush but met with limited success. The others continued talking as if nothing happened. Xena shifted her body and motioned for me to sit on the side of the pool. Leaning against my legs she twitched her shoulders once. I couldn't help but be irritated at the almost too subtle command.

"Shoulders, princess?" I asked sweetly.

She nodded once, her body language showing slight annoyance. "For now," she replied and relaxed against my legs as I massaged her shoulders. I let my mind wander a little as I worked. Miriam had warned me against responding to the conversations I might overhear in any way. I was supposed to be as intimate as a piece of furniture, focused on nothing except the task at hand. That part was easy enough. I'd always found Xena's body fascinating. She'd honed her body the same way she honed the edge of her sword or chakram. All three were deadly weapons. Still, as my fingers pushed against the muscles of her shoulders and neck, they became pliant, liquid under my touch. I cast occasional glances to the other slaves as I'd worked. The two men paid very little attention to me. A few curious glances at most. The woman was a different story though. She glared at me with open hostility. I was surprised she didn't actually growl. Even one of the other women noticed.

"Arleia, you got your slave from King Lothar, didn't you?" Ione asked.

"Yes, as a gift. Why?" Arleia replied.

"Well she seems rather put out by Xena's slave. Perhaps she was hoping to be loaned to the Warrior Princess for the night?" Ione said as she and Frena shared a laugh. Arleia's eyes narrowed. "I'm sure she'd heard stories from the other slaves," she continued. "I've even caught mine discussing the topic more than once."

Xena's shoulders shifted beneath my hands. Her body became foreign to me, the energy cascading off of her like that of a stranger. A slight smirk slid across her lips. Xena was enjoying this. "I hardly think that's the case Ione," Arleia countered. "She's high strung, I'll admit. But that's the breeding. She's from a hearty village, they resent weakness, it makes them angry."

"Are you calling my slave weak, Arleia?" Xena asked, danger threading through her voice.

Arleia smiled condescendingly, "well she is a little on the small side. It says nothing about your training dear, I'm sure she's well suited for her... duties."

Xena smiled and gave me a nudge. "Get up," she commanded. I complied as she stood. All eyes cast appreciative glances her way as the water cascaded off of Xena's well muscled body. Without being told, I hurried to the bench and picked up a towel. I returned to Xena and began to dry her off. "Perhaps you'd like a demonstration of this *small* slave's abilities?" Xena asked, a playful tone in her voice. I swallowed nervously. This was not like Xena. Rarely did she respond to this type of challenge—and never when a challenge was directed at me.

"Very well," Arleia agreed. "What did you have in mind?"

Xena walked over to a corner of the bath house where several mops rested in a bucket of water. She picked up two of the mops and tossed one to Arleia's slave who was standing about ten paces from me. She tossed the other mop to me, smiling as her back was turned to Arleia. "Lets see if yours can knock mine down," she offered.

Arleia shrugged, "not much sport, but very well." She looked at her slave. "Knock her down, but don't do any permanent damage."

Xena looked at me, her blue eyes burning into mine. "Defend yourself," she commanded quietly, "and dump her in the pool."

Frena and Ione squealed in delight, placing bets. Ione bet on me, Frena allied herself with Arleia. As the slave approached, she twirled the mop in easy circles around her body. That alone told me that she was familiar with the staff. The circles weren't graceful however, she was unused to the odd balance created by the wet mop head. Without warning, she lunged for me, the cloth end of the mop aiming for my stomach. I parried the strike and swung down towards her lower leg. She hopped over the mop handle, almost landing

on it. I stepped back quickly, that was too close. I'd almost been disarmed. She came at me again, but this time I was ready. I parried then struck out with several well aimed blows of my own, turning with the last to purposefully expose my back. As I'd hoped she went for it. Spinning with a reverse grip, the mop handle connected solidly with her middle, knocking the air from her lungs. She went down, but was on her feet in an instant. I backed up again, toward the pool this time. She approached more cautiously, giving me more time to think, and plan, between moves. That was her undoing. Three strategically placed blows later, she was disarmed and treading water in the pool.

I picked up the discarded mop and put it back in the corner bucket with mine. Now that the danger was over I had time to be angry. I'd just been used like a rooster in a cock fight. Reminding myself that Xena was acting the part of the warlord I returned to her side, my eyes down, submissive. "Well done, Gabrielle," she purred, gently stroking my cheek with the back of her hand.

"Clearly there is more to your girl than meets the eye," Ione said happily.

"Oh, didn't I mention?" Xena feigned innocence, "she's Amazon stock."

"What!" Arleia exploded.

I glared up at her at that remark. Now Xena was going too far.

"Not raised as one, of course," Xena explained as she lowered her eyes to mine. With only her eyes she dared me to defy her, this woman wasn't my Xena. I lowered my gaze and picked up her clothes from the bench. She continued to talk as I dressed her. "Sent to Poteidaia because of a birth defect. Had six toes on one foot, but I took care of that. Still with a bit of training, those instincts really kick in. After all, the conquest is sweetest after a decent battle." I tugged at her laces as hard as I could, not quite willing to give up all my anger.

"Interesting," Arleia admitted. "Everyone knows Amazons don't live long in captivity. I'm sure you've had offers to sell her?"

"A few," Xena agreed. "But she isn't for sale, at the moment anyway." With a laugh she reached over and fingered the ring that appeared to be pierced through my left nipple. I gasped in surprise, although I'm sure the other women thought it was something else. She smiled to herself, briefly meeting my eyes once again. "Get dressed," she said then turned back to the conversation with the other three women.

My mind reeled as I put my clothes on. I understood acting as much as the next bard, and the performance I was seeing from Xena was most definitely not acting. If it was, her talents were sorely wasted as a warrior. As I put my top on, I was painfully aware of the two rings pinching my now erect nipples, especially the left. With a growing sense of apprehension, I followed Xena from the bath house wondering what the rest of the evening would hold.

We passed through the main courtyard on our way to the dining hall. Xena checked on Argo and spoke briefly with the Captain of Kaltor's guard. We were about to leave when the snap of a whip caught my attention. A man dressed in the finery of a noble spoke in harsh tones to a naked man cowering at his feet. The whip came down again as the naked man cried out pressing his face to his master's boots. The sight made me sick and I flinched with each crack of the whip that assailed my ears. "Let's go," Xena said softly and led me away from the scene. We walked through an empty hall, the only sounds those of her boots and my sandals on the flagstone floor. "Are you okay?" she asked quietly, not looking at me.

"All things considered..." I replied. "You're not acting, are you Xena?" I asked, my voice barely a whisper.

She glanced at me then looked back down the hall. "Not much," she replied. "It's who I was. Look I'm sorry about..."

I nodded, there wasn't much I could say to that. "Already forgotten," I assured her, although it wasn't quite the truth.

We entered a huge dining hall, dominated at one end by a raised dias. Several long wooden tables were arranged in a square. The King sat in a throne centered at one side of the square. Nobles occupied places along the outside of the square and a juggler entertained from within the enclosure. There were several open places at the head table, and the King motioned Xena to one of them. Everyone seated on the dias was attended to by their own slave. Some nobles appeared to have two or three. The slaves sat on the floor next to their owners, some under the table, other next to their owner's chairs.

"It's been too long Xena," Lothar said in greeting as Xena took her seat. I knelt on the ground

next to her.

“Yes it has,” she agreed, “I’m sorry I have to visit under such troubling circumstances.”

“What circumstances might those be?” he asked as he fondled the female servant filling his wine glass. As Hedge sat at his side, head resting on the King’s thigh. Many of the slaves present attended to their duties nude. Others, like myself, were dressed. Several in outlandish costumes.

“You’re making Kaltor nervous your majesty,” Xena stated simply, as she sampled her wine. “Kaltor is a friend, and I hate it when my friends get nervous.”

“Well I hope you’re not here to overthrow me?” he asked jokingly.

“Oh, no,” Xena replied sweetly. “If I were, I’d be sitting in that chair,” she said with a nod to his throne. “I thought we might try to talk about it first.”

“Am I really to believe your army is prepared to strike?” he asked, his voice sounding a bit worried.

She shrugged. “Lord Malcom thought I was bluffing and look where it got him. Which reminds me, he was about your size. Interested in buying his wardrobe? Malcom won’t be needing it anymore.”

“Come, come, Xena,” Lothar chided as he mopped his now sweating brow with his napkin, “we can talk business after dinner.” He looked me up and down then smiled back to Xena. “I’m impressed Xena, I see you learned a thing or two in your visits here.” She smiled and took another sip of wine. “You, escort Xena’s property back to the kitchen.” He spoke harshly to the wine server and she hurried to my side.

I looked at Xena and she nodded in the direction of the kitchen. “go,” she said. Miriam had explained that slaves were responsible for the individual meals of their owners and ate food from the same plates. It was Lothar’s solution to several deaths due to poisoning.

The kitchen was well stocked and bustling with activity. Lothar’s servant showed me around, speaking in soft tones. Several heads lifted as we passed, then went back to their tasks. Not certain how to respond to the servant, I kept my comments to a minimum. I was surprised at how vulnerable I felt without Xena’s presence. I thanked the slave for her assistance then set to work. Following the lead of several slaves I selected a pheasant, put it on a spit to cook. I selected some seasonings, and began cutting up vegetables. With preparations well in hand, I chose a wine skin, tasting the vintage from a cup I’d been given, then headed out to the main room to refill Xena’s goblet. She didn’t even pause in her conversation with Lothar as I filled the cup and retreated to the kitchen.

It didn’t take very long to settle into the pace of the dining ritual. When her meal was prepared I kneeled at her side as she ate. Most of the other slaves did the same. Every few bites the owners either tossed scraps on to the floor for the slaves consumption or passed the food to them on plates. I was a little startled when Xena lowered her hand, holding a bit of pheasant. I made eye contact with her as I reached for it and she shook her head slightly. Leaning forward I took the morsel with my teeth. She nodded giving me a slight smile. I had mixed feelings about the gesture, but decided it was better than eating off the floor.

I refilled Xena’s goblet often, and was surprised at the amount of wine she was consuming. I’d never seen her drunk, and she didn’t appear so now, but I was worried. Occasionally she handed me her goblet to wash down my food. As with the pheasant, I leaned forward, not using my hands, letting her hold the goblet while I drank, her eyes intently watching me. With growing frequency my lips brushed Xena’s fingertips as I ate, which I think was from being handed smaller and smaller bites. If Xena was aware of this, she didn’t show it. From time to time I felt her hand on my back or shoulders, caressing me gently as she continued to talk to the King.

A grunt at the table opposite us caught my attention. A noble had positioned his slave under the table, and I averted my eyes when I saw what was going on. Xena handed me the goblet, a small bit of wine spilling on my chest as I drank. My head was starting to swim, it might have been the drink, or the surreal quality of the dining hall, but I wanted out. With growing frequency my eyes landed on sexual acts taking place through out the dining hall. Male and female slaves were positing themselves in between the legs of their seated owners, servicing them. “Dessert princess?” I asked quietly after Xena handed me her final piece of pheasant.

Her piercing blue eyes scanned the dining room, taking note of the various activities taking place. “Something to eat, for now,” she replied suggestively. I headed to the kitchen as quickly as I could.

Several slaves were preparing desserts ranging from pastries to bowls of fruit. I overheard a couple talking about the entertainment to come. “It’s the slaves at on the dias that have it the worst,” one slave was

saying to the other.

“Yeah,” the other agreed, “when it comes time to mix and match, they always get it first.”

“What are you talking about?” I asked as I rinsed some strawberries in cold water.

“Who owns you?” the first speaker asked. He was tall, and thin, dressed in a harness and a loin cloth.

“Xena,” I replied.

His companion whistled appreciatively. “Then you’ll get it for sure,” he said.

“Get what?”

“Picked,” he explained. “They pick various slaves and make them do things to each other in that area inside the tables on the dias. Or worse, other owners do things to you.”

“What’s taking so long!” Someone bellowed into the kitchen. Several slaves hurried with their preparations and scurried out. The two slaves I was talking to quickly disappeared. I hurried with the strawberries, carefully dipping each one in chocolate sauce. It was one of Xena’s favorites, and after what I’d just heard, I didn’t want her in a bad mood.

Returning to the table with the bowl, I placed it in front of Xena and was about to kneel when she stopped me. “Stand behind me,” she said quietly. “Serve me.”

I moved behind her and she leaned back a little. Not enough to really put her weight against me, but enough that I could feel the heat radiating through her armor. She traced a lazy finger up the outside of my arm as I selected a strawberry and held it for her. She bit into it, her straight teeth cleanly cutting it in two. Going for the second bite her lips brushed my finger tips, the warm wetness sending shivers up my spine.

Lothar called for entertainment, and as the slaves in the kitchen predicted, two owners at the King’s table offered the services of their property. A low block like table was carried into the center of the square. One man was fastened to it by short ropes that went through he rings on his bindings. Another man proceeded to do things to him that, well, I’d never considered before. Xena was right, I was witnessing humiliation and degradation like I’d never seen it before. Still, the participants enthusiastically went to their appointed tasks, the owners shouting instructions, to the applause of the rest. Oddly I was mesmerized. I’d never witnessed one man being so subservient to another before. I found it unsettling, and intriguing.

The feel of Xena’s tongue curling around my finger tip brought my attention back to the table. Lothar was watching Xena intently as she casually licked the chocolate sauce from my fingertips. “Perhaps you would offer your’s for some entertainment this evening?” Lothar asked hopefully.

Xena drew two of my fingers into her mouth as she finished another strawberry and sucked on them for several intimate seconds. The feel of her tongue was so warm and soft. I could feel my pulse quicken in response. “No,” she answered simply when she released my hand.

“Oh come now Xena, you’ve never been shy about this before,” Lothar urged.

“I’m not shy,” Xena countered with a smile, “just greedy.”

I couldn’t take much more of that conversation, or the constant moans coming from just beyond the table so I picked up Xena’s dishes and headed back to the kitchen. To my supreme disappointment, Arleia’s slave was there as well. I’d noticed her earlier and done my best to avoid her.

“Well if it isn’t Xena’s Amazon,” she sneered. “Grettle, wasn’t it? Or was it Laribell?”

I put the dishes in the sink, taking note of a broom laying on the floor. “It’s Gabrielle,” I said as I eased my foot under the broom handle, “but I admit that might have too many letters for you.”

The woman screeched and lunged at me as I quickly lifted the broom with my foot. She tripped and went sailing past me knocking over a bucket of dinner scraps.

“What is the meaning of this?” A cold voice said from behind me.

I turned around and saw Arleia standing in the doorway to the kitchen. “Mistress, Xena’s slave attacked me,” the refuse doused woman said as she hurried to her mistresses feet.

“She tripped,” I corrected.

“You accuse my slave of lying?” Arleia demanded as she advanced on me.

“No mistress,” I replied respectfully, “but she *is* mistaken.”

“We shall see about that,” Arleia spat as she motioned for two nearby slaves to grab me. I struggled but it was of little use. I think I caused a few bruises but in the end I was dragged toward a support pole in the center of the kitchen. I tried to scream, but an apple had been shoved in my mouth, then tied with a

dishtowel. My arms were secured above my head by a chain that looped through the rings on my wrist bands and attached to a hook in the support beam for that purpose. Similarly my legs were chained to hooks in the floor. My heart began to pound furiously as I felt the support beam at my back, terrified by what might happen next.

Arleia stood in front of me, a thin smile on her face as she slowly uncoiled a whip. Had I not be tied up I'm sure I would have fainted from terror. "Lets talk about respect," Arleia said as she unfurled the whip. I closed my eyes reflectively at the first feel of leather biting into my skin I panicked. I screamed, although the sound was muffled, and struggled for all I was worth. "And discipline," Arleia continued with another lash of the whip. She continued to strike, the whip hitting harder with each blow. By the third blow I gave up struggling, there was simply no where to go and moving just exposed more of my body to the stinging leather. Tears falling freely from my eyes, I was simply waiting for it to end. "You might belong to Xena, but you're no different than any other slave," Arleia sneered.

"I disagree with that," Xena growled from the doorway. I sighed with relief at the sound of Xena's voice.

"What's going on here?" King Lothar asked from behind Xena.

"This slag attacked my slave, Your Majesty," Arleia explained, "I was reprimanding her." Xena stormed into the kitchen stood between Arleia and me.

"So you drew blood?" Xena asked, as she inspected my abdomen, gently touching one of the welts.

"I didn't realize her skin was so thin," Arleia offered lamely.

I filled my eyes with the comforting view of Xena's black leather and armor as she reached up and unhooked the chain that held my arms aloft. Supporting my limbs as she gently lowered them to my side, she searched my face with her eyes before kneeling to unhook my feet. "Her skin is thin because she'd never been touched by a whip before," Xena said, her tone full of warning. "Unscarred Amazon stock, and you took it upon yourself to whip her until she bled."

I didn't have the strength to turn my head to look at Arleia. I simply rested my face against Xena's chest but I could well imagine her terrified expression as she stammered, "it was an accident."

"Xena, I am truly sorry for the deplorable behavior of one of my subjects," King Lothar said in a soothing tone. "By all means, you're entitled to whatever retribution you feel you deserve." Xena pushed me back gently and I caught a glimpse of the rage in her face as she moved around me to face Lothar. She pointed to the slave at Arleia's feet.

"You damaged my property, I'll damage yours. Have her tied to the table," she demanded of the King who signaled two of his slaves to take the whimpering woman. Turning away from them she barked to another slave standing near by, "get me whip salve, *now!*"

"Xena, I'm fine," I whispered as she covered the welts across my stomach with the cooling salve.

"Oh, yeah?" she said as she showed me her fingers. "They were bloodied, covered with my blood." Until now I'd avoided looking down at the damage. Five long welts rose across my skin, two of them bleeding slightly. It hurt a lot worse than it looked.

"Please don't hurt that slave," I whispered.

"Oh, I'm not going to hurt her, Gabrielle, I'm going to ruin her." Startled by the harsh words I searched Xena's face for any sign of the woman I knew. This woman was a stranger, a terrifying stranger. I trembled as she soothed the salve across my skin. The fire of the whip stings meeting the cooling gel. While the Xena that stood before me was terrifying in her rage, she was also gentle in her ministrations.

She followed me from the kitchen back to the dias and told me to sit in her chair. I complied, fearful of her every movement. It wasn't until I glanced up that I noticed the position of Arleia's slave. She had been tied to the low table her arms away from her sides and her ankles near the floor by the legs of the table. It didn't look very comfortable.

"What is your name slave?" Xena asked harshly as she circled the bound woman. She did not reply. "I see," Xena continued, tracing down the woman's left arm with her fingertip. She stopped then casually took off her sword belt, placing the weapons on the table, near me. Then she removed her cape. "Don't feel like talking? No matter," Xena said with a shrug, "it isn't your conversational skills that interest me."

"You could call her Gabrielle," Frena suggested from a side table. Xena nodded smiling her eyes wandering from the trapped slave, to Frena to me then back to the slave.

“Yes, yes I could. Very well then, Gabrielle,” I shivered at the sound of my name rolling off Xena’s tongue the way it always did, like a caress. “Your owner ruined my property so I’m going to ruin hers. Do you know how I intend to do that?” she asked absently running her hands over the woman’s body. “I’m about to see to it that you never look at your owner, or anyone else the same way again. When Arleia demands your services in the night you’ll wish it was me. Every touch you feel, every sensation you experience- you’ll wish it could be me. When you look at her, it will be my face you see in your mind’s eye, and she won’t be able to do a thing about it.”

I had to remind myself to blink. There was something so hypnotic about Xena’s voice, and something terrifying. Try as I might I couldn’t separate the words she uttered from how she was saying them. I heard my name and it was as if she was talking to me. I could almost feel the sensations of her touching that slave. I was aroused by what I saw and it scared me.

Efficiently and without comment, she stripped the clothes from the prone woman. She commanded the woman to look at her and when she refused, she tugged on the chain linking the two nipple rings. That got her attention, the slave’s head snapped back around. Forcefully Xena clamped her mouth to the slave. At first I saw hands and feet struggling against the bonds that held them, then it stopped. After one deep forceful kiss Arleia’s slave had surrendered. Using her hands and her mouth Xena toyed with the woman for an eternity. I could feel a tingling all over my body and a pooling of moisture between my legs. I couldn’t imagine how the slave endured it. Slowly Xena drew her finger through the folds at the woman’s center. The slave moaned audibly and her hips jerked. “You’re ready now, aren’t you?” Xena asked as she slipped her finger in her mouth. I don’t know if it was the residual burning from the welts or the heat generated before my eyes but I felt like I was on fire. “Too bad I’m not,” she teased running her fingers again through the slave’s wet flesh. “Maybe you’d like to encourage me?”

The slave’s hips jerked again and I heard her say something, but I couldn’t make out the words. “Sorry,” Xena continued, “I didn’t quite catch that.”

“Please,” the slave said clearly, “finish it. I’m yours.”

“Really?” Xena purred, “I thought you belonged to Arleia?”

“Please,” the woman pleaded again.

I wanted to scream. I don’t know what was hurting me more, watching Xena play with the woman like a sadistic cat with a mouse or wishing it was me strapped to that table. My entire body hummed, the burning of my abdomen making me aware of every inch of my skin. Xena leaned down and fished something out of a basket that sat next to the table. She extracted a leather instrument that had a couple of belts hanging from it. She positioned it on her thigh. I stared wide eyed as I realized what it was. A rigid piece of leather had been fashioned to resemble the male member. It was affixed to a wide strap that went around Xena’s thigh, buckling in the back. The leather was black and shined as if it had been oiled. Positioning herself on the low table Xena positioned the tip of the leather at the woman’s opening. Very slowly she pressed her thigh down on to the slave who tried frantically to thrust her hips up. It was no use, Xena’s hands held her firm, there was nothing she could do but endure the Warrior Princess’ attentions.

The slave let out a cry that was half a moan as Xena withdrew the leather. “You like that don’t you, Gabrielle?” She asked.

“Yes!” the slave panted.

“You want more?”

“Gods, yes please,” she panted.

Movement at my side distracted me from the act of total domination taking place before my eyes. Lothar had positioned Hedge between his legs. I averted my eyes as the slave began to do the King’s bidding. It was of little help though. As my eyes watched Xena slowly thrusting the leather into the slave then just as slowly withdrawing, the wet slurping sounds emanating from the space next to me only added to my torture. It seemed to go on endlessly, Xena slowly building her pace with the leather then stopping until the slave begged for more. Finally she leaned over and took the slave’s nipple ring in her teeth as she thrust forcefully with her thigh. The King groaned as the slave cried out, both climaxing at the same time. It was finally over. Xena removed the leather thing from her thigh, unceremoniously dropping it back into the basket. She walked back to the table and glanced briefly at me as she picked up her wine goblet.

“That was exquisite,” the King commented as Xena took a long drink. She just shrugged, reaching

for her cape.

“I think we were going to discuss Kaltor’s territories?” She asked as she put her sword belt back on.

“Of course, of course,” Lothar said hurriedly. “Stay tonight, your usual room is ready for you and I’ll have a new treaty drawn up by morning. One thing can be said about you Xena, you mean what you say. I do believe you’ve ruined Gabrielle for anyone else.”

“The next person to lay a hand, whip or anything else on my property, dies.” She said ominously, her voice loud enough to carry through the room. “Now if you’ll excuse me your Majesty, I’d like to retire for the evening.”

“But Xena,” he pleaded, “the evening is just getting started.”

“Yes, well were I not required to make some repairs to my property maybe I’d stay. As it is, I’ve had enough.”

She nodded for me to stand. I complied wincing in spite of myself at the pain. As I’d sat motionless the gel had hardened and the movement of standing had caused it to painfully crack. Xena walked around to my side of the table and lifted me into her arms. As she walked from the hall she stopped to glare at Arleia who couldn’t meet her eyes. “If this scars,” she said looking pointedly at my abdomen, “I’m going to come back and settle accounts with you. That,” she continued nodding to where the slave was being released from the table, “was for the insult. We’ve not begun to settle for the damage.” Xena’s words carried through the hall which was strangely quiet. As we climbed the stairs though the sounds slowly picked up as the revelers readied for more twisted entertainment.

She carried me down a long hall past the sounds of the party below. Several slaves quickly got out of her way. She stopped one of them with a glare as she kicked open the door to her room. “Bring me wine, whip salve, water and some bandages.” The slave hurried off and she carried me inside. The bed was the largest I’d ever seen and it dominated the room. Four great posts rose from each corner of the bed and had a variety of round rings hammered into their surface. Tapestries were hung on all four walls, possibly for insulation and I guessed, possibly for soundproofing as well. The room was lit by several lamps and candles which illuminated the dark with an orange glow. Hues of purple, black and crimson danced in the lamplight. Xena set me down gently on the bed than began an inspection of the room. I didn’t know why, but I got the impression she was trying to avoid me.

When the slave returned she took the wine, and other items from him and set them down on an ornate dresser, catching a glimpse of herself in the mirror. She stood there a moment, staring at herself as if seeing an estranged family member after many years. After shaking her head she poured herself a goblet of wine and drank deeply.

“Xena?” I asked, wanting to get her attention, but not knowing quite what to say.

“Yes, Gabrielle,” she replied. Her back was to me, she’d began to open the drawers of the dresser, inspecting the contents I guessed. Her voice was low, husky I found it comforting as well as something else.

“Xena, please. Look at me.”

She drained her wine goblet then refilled it before she turned around. Her eyes roamed over me. Taking note of my body, my abdomen, pausing briefly at my breasts before settling on my face. Despite the pain, I leaned forward and brushed my hand against her forearm. She flinched back as if burned. “Don’t touch me, Gabrielle. Not right now.”

“What’s wrong?” I asked, although I was beginning to suspect the answer.

She took another long pull from her goblet. “We can talk about it later, when we’re well away from here.” With effort she shook her head and refocused her thoughts. “Those wounds need to be cleaned.” She turned back to the dresser and poured some water into a bowl and dipped one of the bandages.

“I’m thirsty,” I said as she moved to the side of the bed.

She handed me her wine goblet watching my mouth as I drank. I put the goblet on the stand by the side of the bed and laid back, waiting for her to remove the caked salve. At the first touch of the cold water to my burning skin I jumped and grabbed her arm reflexively. She flinched back again, an angry expression to her face this time. “Gabrielle, I’m not kidding. Don’t touch me. It isn’t safe.”

“But it hurts,” I protested.

“You’re going to hurt a lot worse if you keep touching me,” she murmured. I don’t think she realized she’d spoken out loud. Maybe it was the effect of all the alcohol she’d consumed.

“So tie me down,” I said, my voice barely above a whisper. Her eyes snapped over to mine, fairly burning me with their intense gaze. I shrugged. “You have to clean it, it hurts, I can’t keep from flinching and you won’t let me touch you.”

“Gabrielle,” she said, her voice nearly dripping with seduction, “you don’t know what you’re…”

“I know *exactly* what I’m suggesting Xena. My question is what will you do about it?” This time it was me who spoke without thinking. She turned away from me and walked to the dresser. She stood motionless for a few moments then opened the top dresser drawer, extracting a long length of rope. It was white, finely woven and didn’t have the coarse frayed look of work rope. She didn’t say a word as she moved to the foot of the bed, looking at my legs for long moments before reaching for my left ankle. She measured a length of rope then extracted her breast dagger to cut it.

“What…what are you doing?” I blurted as she looped the rope through the ring on my ankle cuff then attached it securely with a knot.

“I’m giving you what you want, Gabrielle,” she replied without even looking at me. “And what I want. After all, it was *your* suggestion.”

I felt like a fish out of water. I wanted Xena painfully. The images of her and Arleia’s slave still flashed through my mind, but as she moved to tie down my other leg, I had second thoughts. “Xena, I’m scared,” I whispered.

She glanced at me as she finished with the knot. “You should be.”

The way my legs were tied, I had some room to bend at the knee, but not much. Certainly I couldn’t get up. A length of rope secured each leg to it’s post at the corner of the bed. I felt exposed and very vulnerable.

Walking around to the right side of the bed she looked at me for a moment before reaching for more rope. “Take that off,” she said with a nod to my top. “You won’t be needing it.” Nervous now and scared as tarterus I complied. With a shaking hand I passed her the garment. She brought it to her face, inhaled deeply, then tossed it onto a chair by the door. She picked up my wrist and holding it firm, slipped rope through he metal ring. She tied a secure knot then tested it before wrapping some rope around my wrist and hand. It felt smooth and cool to the touch but confining as well. When she was satisfied she passed the end of the rope through a ring in the post by the corner of the bed. My arm was pulled out to my side and slightly above my head. With the rope secured, I had limited movement of my arm. She came around to the other side of the bed and repeated her actions with my other arm. When she finished she moved back to the dresser.

With her back turned towards me she removed her sword belt and chakram, setting them on a trunk at the foot of the bed. Next she removed her cape, followed by her claw like shoulder guards then finally the wire armor itself. She put her foot on the bed and I was again mesmerized by the graceful movent of muscle as she removed her greves and boots. Lastly she removed the bracers from her arms and with sleek movements came back to the bed. Like a stalking panther intent on her prey, she moved towards me and straddled my hips. I gasped as the tips of her leather skirt brushed against the welts of my abdomen. I relaxed a little when I relaxed that the caked salve protected me from any painful sensations. Xena leaned forward and as she did I leaned up as far as my arms would allow and nuzzled my face into the leather just below her breasts. My mind filled with the heady aromas of leather and arousal. Xena drew a slow hand up my bare back, stopping at the collar around my neck. She looped another section of rope through the ring at the back then attached it to a similar ring set into the headboard of the bed. Careful not to put any weight on me she leaned back. I tried to move with her, to stay near the fragrant warmth but I was stopped by the collar. With a defeated sigh I laid back down.

Xena got off the bed and stepped back to the dresser, picking up the bowl with the soaked bandage. Sitting on the edge of the bed she slowly washed the welts, removing the crusted salve, cleaning the wounds. I hissed a couple of times, the cool water didn’t really hurt, but the sensation made my muscles tremble. After reapplying the healing ointment, Xena wrapped the cloth bandage around my middle, covering the welts completely. She finished and sat there her gaze fixed on my middle. “Xena,” I whispered. She looked over at me. “What are you going to do?”

She smiled as she brushed gentle fingers across my cheek. “Everything,” she whispered back. Looking back down at my body she teased a finger beneath the band of my skirt. I twitched slightly but

tried to stay still. With one quick tug she unfastened it and unwrapped it from my waist. I was completely naked now, feeling apprehensive and excited at the same time. Xena slowly traced the outline of my legs with her fingertips. Not really teasing, just exploring with her hands. She caressed my breasts, briefly pinching at the rings that wrapped around my nipples. I gasped at the sensation, not quite believing what was happening to me.

“You are so beautiful, Gabrielle,” she whispered fiercely, her breath warm against the side of my face. “Bringing you here was a mistake,” she continued softly, as she gently touched the planes of my face. “I’ve wanted you for so long, I knew that restraint with you here would be next to impossible.” She searched my face with her intense gaze her eyes focusing on my mouth. “Your lips are so soft, feeding you tonight was wonderful.”

“So kiss me,” I whispered against the fingertips resting against my lips. Slowly, painfully slow she lowered her lips to mine. I strained against my restraints to meet her mouth and she moved slower still. Finally I felt the lightest brush of her lips against mine. It was bliss. Warm, soft, confident... loving. This was not the kiss of command that she had used on Arleia’s slave. It was a kiss of seduction. That kiss told me that I would beg, every bit as much as the slave did, but not because I was a kingdom to be conquered. I would beg because I already owned Xena heart and soul and she needed me to need her as much as she needed me. Slowly, deliciously the pressure of her lips against mine increased and I felt adrift in the delightful sensation. Her tongue brushed against my mouth, requesting entry which I instantly granted. The feel of her filling me, moving against me, searching out my depths was positively glorious. I wanted more, to hold her against me but the tug of my restraints kept me from my prize. Xena pulled back a little, inviting my tongue into the warmth of her mouth. It was wonderful. Everything about her was strong and soft at the same time. Regretfully she broke the kiss, leaving me hungry and out of breath.

“You are so sweet,” Xena commented as she drew her fingers up the underside of my arm.

“Please, Xena,” I gasped. “More.”

“What is it you desire, Gabrielle,” she asked, her eyes burning into mine. “I will do anything you want.”

“The slave,” I whispered, not able to meet her eyes. “What you did to her.”

With a gentle finger she drew my chin up to look at her. “I will do much more for you than that my love,” she purred.

Standing a short distance from the bed she loosed the laces of her leathers, shrugging the garment down her body and off her perfect hips. She stepped out of it and faced me. I’d seen Xena unclothed on numerous occasions, but never like this. Her body practically rippled with power. She climbed back on the bed and kissed me again, this time like a hungry warrior. I relaxed against the force of her mouth, denying her nothing encouraging her abandon. Gliding her fingers over my skin she moved down to kiss my collar bones, then the hollow of my throat, then finally my breasts. I gasped with delight as her tongue toyed with the rings that were still clasped to my nipples. It hurt a little as my excitement engorged the pinched area. Still the pain was overshadowed by the pleasure of it and I thrust upward as much as I could, offering myself to the commanding warlord.

She eased a teasing hand down my side to the juncture of my legs and slowly drew her fingers through my sopping wetness. She looked at me in surprise, a thin smile slowly spreading across her face. “You’re soaked, Gabrielle,” she said matter-of-factly.

“Yes,” I gasped.

She slipped the finger into her mouth, sighing in contentment. “You taste good.” She gazed at me for a moment, then ran another finger over my center. “I want more,” she said.

“Then take it,” I groaned. “Anything you want...”

“You won’t be a virgin when I’m done, Gabrielle”

“Xena, *please!*” I begged as I struggled against my restraints disregarding the pain in my abdomen.

She teased her fingers along my thigh then brought them to my center, teasing the folds of my labia apart. My body twitched and spasmed completely out of my control. I thought I’d crawl out of my skin. She lowered her mouth to me and I cried out in my bliss. “Gods Xena, yessssss,” I moaned as she slowly began to move her tongue against my flesh. Everything about her was powerful, commanding. She moved against me with such skill; probing the recesses of my depths one moment, casually lapping at my surface

the next. Her hands held my hips firm against her face as she sent me higher sending swirls of light moving across my field of vision as her tongue swirled through my wetness. I don't know exactly what she did, but I'd never experienced anything like it in my life. My nerves began to tremble, passion building, the sounds of Xena feasting filling my ears. With a cry my body shuddered, exploding with emotion and sensation. I sobbed uncontrollably at the intensity of my climax.

"Gods, you're good," Xena said when she removed her mouth from my folds. "I could do that all night."

I swallowed, slightly dizzy at the implication. I doubted I'd survive a night like that. But what a way to die. She backed off the bed and returned to the dresser, opening the top drawer once again. This time she extracted a leather piece, similar to the one she'd used on the slave. My body shuddered at the sight. It looked pretty big, I began to get nervous. "Xena, um... will it hurt?" I asked.

"It's only pain, Gabrielle," she replied with a smile. "I don't think you'll mind too much. But I'll stop if I have to." She laughed a little. "But I don't think you're going to want me to stop." She held it near my bound hand. "Touch it," she said.

I held out my fingers and she moved the leather piece back and forth. It was smooth but oddly soft. Rigid and pliant. Xena sat on the bed and leaned against one of the posts. "It doesn't hurt," she explained as she slowly inserted it into herself. I stared, my eyes riveted to the leather disappearing into Xena's body. She extracted it then pushed it in again, a sensuous smile easing across her face. With a sigh she pulled it all the way out, "see," she said with a grin. The black leather glistened with her moisture as she strapped it to her thigh. "It's better when it's wet," she explained moving toward's me.

Supporting her weight with one hand, she eased her other hand to my opening, probing gently with her fingers. I twitched, at first from nervousness, then from hunger. She was skillfully teasing me, getting me close to the brink again, then backing off. She moved her thigh between my legs and eased the leather close, teasing my opening with the tip. I tried to push myself down but didn't have that much room to move. I'd have to wait until she gave me what I desired. Never taking her eyes from mine she slowly pushed forward, just a little way then pulled back. I could feel my body warring against the slight discomfort of the object and the wonderful sensations it caused. Patiently, almost too patiently, Xena teased me until I thought I'd lose my mind. Leaning in for a fierce kiss she finally pushed forward all the way. I cried out against her mouth as I felt something inside me snap, then moaned as she drew back and pushed forward again, smoothly this time. I was getting close, really close when she pulled the leather from me completely. "Nooooo," I moaned as she moved away from me.

"Relax," she said. "I'm not done yet." She picked up the key to my bindings from the floor and released the shackles at my ankles. She untied my arms but wouldn't let me touch her. Next she unhooked the collar around my neck then repositioned the ropes on a different ring by the headboard posts. Now I was on my knees holding the ropes that bound my wrists for support. She eased her head below me, tasting me once again, murmuring in contentment as her tongue swirled through my very being. When I was close again, she moved her mouth and repositioned the leather below me. This time I had some degree of control as I lowered myself. I groaned happily as it easily slipped through my wetness, gazing down into the most beautiful eyes and face I'd ever seen. Xena smiled up at me, watching me ride her; enjoying herself. Strong hands reached up and teased my nipples as I began to cry out. With a powerful thrust I exploded again as my muscles gripped the leather, wringing every sensation from it's hardness as I was wrung dry. I slumped against my bindings, barely able to stay upright.

Xena leaned up and unlocked the manacles at my wrists as I collapsed against her. Strong arms held me as I sobbed, unable to control the wave of emotion crashing through me. When my sobs finally stopped I pulled back a little to take in Xena's face. "You own me," I whispered as placed a soft kiss against her lips.

She shook her head. "No, Gabrielle, I love you."

I nodded and smiled. "I love you, Xena," I said, leaning my head against her shoulder once again. I felt saited, content and utterly spent. She held my body close with one arm as she shifted and pulled down the covers to the bed with the other. She eased us both under the blankets, never letting me go. It was a perfect night, spent entirely within the warmth of her embrace.

The next morning I was convinced Xena had been completely drunk. I woke up first. Still pressed against her naked body I pulled back a little in order to get a look at my lover. She was sleeping soundly. My

abdomen ached a little, but it could have been pulled muscles from the night of passion as much as whip welts. Curious I ran my fingers over her skin, taking delight in the warm softness. I touched her nipple and smiled as it instantly contracted, standing firm and erect. I stilled my hand as Xena's eyes fluttered then opened. "Gabrielle?" she said groggily, blinking a couple of times.

"Yes princess?" I asked sweetly.

Instantly her eyes flashed from my naked body to the furnishings of the bedroom, to the posts of the bed to her own nakedness then back to me. "Gods,...I...I" she stammered.

"Verrrrrry well," I purred, watching her cheeks turn bright red.

"Gabrielle," she said in a rush, "I'm so sorry... I never would have..."

"What?" I demanded indignant, "made love to me if you weren't drunk. Is that what you're saying? You only did it because you had too much to drink?" I was on the verge of tears and ready to bolt from the room. She tightened her arms around me, almost tight enough to hurt.

"No!" she insisted, looking at me intently. "I never would have tied you up for your first time had I not been completely drunk. Gabrielle, of all the times I've imagined making love to you- all the different ways I pictured it. You tied to the bed was not one of them. Gods! I could have hurt you!"

I smiled mollified. She did indeed love me. "You would never hurt me Xena. No matter how drunk or warlord like you are at the time. As for my first time being like this," I smiled at her as lovingly as I could, "I've no complaints. Now," I added with a devilish grin, "why don't we finish your business in this creepy little kingdom and go somewhere nice and secluded where I can tie *you* up."

She chuckled, stroking my cheek with the back of her hand. "I'm all for getting out of here, but I do *not* get tied up— *ever!*"

"We shall see, princess," I replied thoughtfully. "We shall see."

The end...