

"Hmm. And was it instructive?"

"Very."

"Oh." Around the edges of her mind a few stray tendrils of dream image clung, but they resisted as she reached for them...and then it flooded back. Xena reaching...for her...for Gabrielle and the pure rush of warmth and caring and love...deep, abiding...intimate. But that was nothing they hadn't surmised from the scrolls. "Just wishful thinking."

"Jan--"

"Don't worry. I'm not going to talk about it. I'm used to that. Wouldn't want to offend those sweet, southern sensibilities. You're safe with me."

"I...know that."

She heard Mel swallow.

"Can we get some sleep?"

"The woman wakes me up...and more...and then expects me to be able to go back to sleep."

"Fine. Next time I'll just put the pillow over my head."

"Hear no evil."

Mel rolled over and faced the wall. Jan sat there in the cool bath of lunar luminescence and a tear, a single traitor of her heart took a sinuous path down her burning cheek as she watched the dark-haired woman sleep.

"Hey, I thought you would wake me up." Mel made her way down the muddy incline. It had rained sometime near dawn.

At least, Jan noted as she glanced up from her work, she was wearing sensible shoes today... and, "Where'd you get the threads?"

"Daddy's."

"Suits you."

"Thank you...I think."

"Sure. Dress against type. Works on you. You look more feminine than ever. Put a dress on me, though, and you'd...live to regret it."

"I love a challenge."

Jan smiled. "You'd lose."

"Don't bet on it."

They worked in the most companionable silence Jan had ever experienced. There was a feeling of completeness about the way they complimented each other. She felt so good she caught herself humming at one point--that insidious Dietrich song. She stopped abruptly, knowing it wasn't lost on her companion.

Companion...she turned the word over in her mind as she would turn an artifact in hand. One word--shades of meaning--try it this way and there's a life-long friendship, turn it around and you have...what? Your heart's desire? Or more complications than you care to contemplate. Why risk it? Again she saw Gabrielle's arms, her arms reaching for Xena.

"Jan?"

"Hmmm...?"

"Where were you? Just now?"

It was Jan's face that reddened for a change. "Nowhere."

"Utopia?"

"Close. Thousands of miles away."

"Or years."

"Yeah."

"You had that look on your face...such longing. You wish you could go back."

"Doesn't every archeologist?"

"Is that why?"