

'There,' Xena smiled proudly. 'Something to write home about. Well...maybe not. Her father would kill me.'

Coming down from the Olympian heights, Gabrielle molded herself against Xena's side, one leg over the sinewy thigh and tangled between Xena's legs as sweat cooled their overheated bodies in the night air.

"What uh, do you plan to do with that...those?" Xena's head nodded toward the scroll.

Gabrielle sighed, "Don't worry. I'll think of something. We wouldn't want it to 'fall into the wrong hands' now would we?"

Xena took a deep breath... "I mean...what if...if...Joxer for instance--"

"Oh, no...don't even think something like that." Gabrielle shuddered. "Even thinking it could set certain...karmic wheels into motion...and it could come back to haunt us in some thoroughly nasty and unexpected way."

Xena gazed at her thoughtfully. "You're not entirely joking are you?"

"Not 'entirely', no."

"You've been thinking about India again."

"Maybe." Gabrielle's eyes left her for a moment, travelled far away.

"Come back to me," Xena chided gently, running a finger down the unclasped necklace of bone, counting the chakras of Gabrielle's spine.

The young woman stirred, released a contented sound and nestled closer into Xena's embrace.

"You know I'll never leave you. We both know that--now. Don't we?" She rested peacefully, appeared to nod off momentarily in Xena's arms and then suddenly, eyes wide, she awoke with a start, snapping her head back, meeting Xena's questioning eyes.

"Are you alright?" the warrior asked.

"Fine. I'm fine. Really fine. I think...I just had a wild idea...I--"

Xena smiled sensuously, indulging her young friend. "Thought you'd be exhausted after--"

"No. It wasn't about...that." Gabrielle could still appear so shyly charming at times. "Not 'entirely' anyway."

"An idea for a story?"

"Something like that." Gabrielle's eyes sparkled, rivaled the starlight. It domed above their heads, an occasional errant stray shot madly across the heavens like a shaft loosed from Cupid's bow.

"It's a puzzle--or a riddle. Gabrielle was good at those. A rebus perhaps. Pictograms."

"Instead of words? Unlike her." Mel studied the rubbing closely yet again.

"This was...special." Jan crossed her arms with conviction.

"Coded. Why...I think there are even some modified Chinese characters interspersed."

"She used whatever she knew."

"Could it be...a 'clue' or...a map...does it lead somewhere?"

"Oh," Jan thrilled at the suggestion. "Wouldn't that be...the living end?"

Mel giggled, "You sound like a bobbysoxer."

Jan gave her The Look, patented and bristly with warning flags. Mel broke down completely and laughed out loud. "I must be losing my touch."

"It's not that, darling," Mel put down the magnifying glass and pulled the smaller woman into her long, willowy arms. "It won't work on me. Now that I know you. I know just what utter mush you are at heart. And when you're bluffing."

"Don't tell anyone."

"Our little secret."

Where the flaming eyes of Cerberus was Gabrielle?! 'Leave her out of my sight for five minutes. And--'