

"In the back," he growled, "by the hour."

"How--"

"Occupied," he spat.

Xena prodded her in the back, leaned down to whisper in her ear, "You can downsize that to a pheasant's egg, Gabrielle."

The bard's breath caught in her throat. Xena's arm snaked around her bare midriff, tracing the henna dyed tatoos with her fingertips. Tickling. Arousing. Warning. She kept walking hurriedly down the town's main thoroughfare, Xena hot on her tail.

"Give me a minute," she begged, beginning to lose her resolve.

"Oh, it takes a little longer than that, but not by much. There's a nice, dark alley over there--"

Gabrielle pressed Xena's hand into the curve of her waist to still the increasingly insistent fingers--for the moment. She stopped a relatively stable looking individual and asked if the woman knew of any place...within fifty feet...please. Gabrielle must have looked positively feverish. She could feel the telltale trickle of sweat between her breasts. When she dared to look behind her and meet Xena's eyes... "Pigeon," was all she said.

"If you're not...well, young woman," she cast a dubious eye at the lurking darkly attired figure behind this seemingly nice young lady, "you could accompany me home and take a nice lie-down."

"Is it nearby?" Gabrielle inquired, growing desperation apparent in her eyes and stress strained voice.

"Right over there." Gabrielle dared to let a sigh of relief begin its journey from her lungs. "But your...friend there," she looked askance at the intense weapon bedecked warrior hovering over the girl, "will have to find other arrangements."

A laugh of frustration strangled itself as Gabrielle's throat closed.

"Hummingbird," Xena whispered above and behind her head. And her heart fluttered just like the fleeting little bird.

"There." Somehow she broke away and ran towards the barn where they had boarded Argo. The proprietor was closing shop for his afternoon meal. "Sir!" He was about to latch the door and was anxious to be on his way.

"I'll be back in an hour."

"Why not two?" Gabrielle suggested. "We'll be happy to hold the fort, won't we?" She tentatively nudged Xena with her elbow. Xena's expression must've made him consider the offer. "We...uh.. need to see our horse...she's not feeling well...a little colic...we've gathered some medicine... wild...uh birds eggs...makes he perfect poultrice-- you can lock us in, feel free...we'll see nothing is disturbed."

He grudgingly decided to trust her and as soon as the barn door shut behind them Gabrielle found herself flung over Xena's shoulder as the Warrior Princess climbed the ladder, two rungs at a time, to the hayloft. She heard Argo whinny a welcome, completely ignored by Xena for a change, and then she was on her back in the soft golden bedding and Xena's hands worked frantically to remove all their clothing.

Her warrior could be surprisingly gentle and romantic when the mood allowed--but not today. Today was going to be a workout, an exercise drill to make up for any they might be missing. Xena was all business despite the wicked gleam in her eye. This moment was about the quickest route to bliss, Xena's expert fingers and inflamed body demanded it of them both. Twisting, writhing, possessed by each other, by the spirit of Desire. Both of them focused entirely on their fingers gliding, working hard and fast, watching intently, racing toward the climax, reaching for it, as flesh covered bone vanished into lava mouths and reappeared covered with the freshly drawn essence of the eternal wellspring, constantly renewed, begging for the release, for the moment the waves would begin to leap, spray spume, cymbal crash against the hardness of the welcoming shore.