

Xena's fingers, trapping them momentarily in the intensity of the undertow in which Xena would happily drown.

As Gabrielle spasmed around her fingers, Xena thrust harder, deeper and rode that wave of blinding white light with her lover. Xena had just experienced an orgasm as intense as any she'd ever had, just by touching Gabrielle, by giving her this same intensity, this inner fire. They felt joined. As one. Xena could remove her fingers now, but nothing would ever sever their bond.

Xena found her chakram sticking out of a crossbeam--just below the loft. Grinning, she swung out and under to retrieve it. All dressed now. Back in one piece. She handed Gabrielle her skirt as the young woman lingered over redressing herself.

"Here. Let me." Xena offered with a wistful sigh. A few bits of sky blue cloth fell from a pocket. "What's this?"

Gabrielle bent to rescue the handful of fine satin ribbon. "Thought I'd use them to mark my...more personal scrolls. Wouldn't want to be giving a reading and whip open a tale that's not at all suitable for a general audience."

"Must be thinking of writing quite a few."

"Mm. That depends. Doesn't it?" Gabrielle teased.

"On what?" Xena teased right back.

"On how many eggs need poaching or boiling or--"

"That's where you disappeared to."

"Had to find just the right color."

"Oh?"

Gabrielle held a strip of cloth up next to Xena's eyes. "I think I did quite well. From memory." The blueness of her lover's eyes sparkled for a memorable moment with sea mist and salt water.

"She was a visionary. And no pun intended."

"I like her more all the time with every scroll I translate. Like you...and not alike." Mel studied Gabrielle's 'puzzle'--if that's what it was. She'd tacked it to the wall. Could see it every morning when she woke up. Was, in fact, lying there now, twined happily round her own Gabrielle, this year's version, she smiled to herself and hugged the young woman in her arms. They both studied the design that became more intricate--and less penetrable.

"Oh, Gabrielle, why couldn't you just come out and say it?!" Jan pleaded through clenched teeth.

Mel sighed and settled her chin on Jan's shoulder. "Then it wouldn't be a proper conundrum at all. Would it?"

"What was she hiding? And why?"

"Maybe just idle love tokens--like kids carving their initials in a tree--leaving their mark."

"Nothing 'idle' about their love," she snuggled against the dark-haired woman moving her hips sensuously, "or ours."

"No," Mel agreed, smiling, staring at the paper on the wall as it rippled softly in the light breeze from the terrace, "This was something precious."

Continued on next page