

kid, have a secret stash--some things forbidden, or precious to you?"

"You mean like a...time capsule?"

"I...hadn't thought of that..." her voice trailed off, musing. "But...yeah, kinda...or just under your pillow."

"Oh," the dark haired beauty kissed her shoulder, "a favorite french novel...tucked away from prying eyes."

"Yeah? Ya read it to me some time?" the blonde turned her head with a charming impish grin.

"That would be my decided pleasure," each warm palm covered a soft young breast.

"But...for right now...even though I really don't want you to move--would you look for a passage in a particular scroll for me? I think I may know where to look for whatever...that leads to." She pointed to the parchment tacked to their bedroom wall.

She lay on her side, staring into the flame. She seemed entranced or deeply meditative. Curling into the warm inviting hollow of her lover's body, she buoyed her spirit on the pure, blinding emotion that produced and concentrated on the feeling so hard and focused that she thought her eyes would burst. Her raven haired lover moaned in her sleep and tightened her clasp around the smaller woman.

"Can you 'hear' me?" she wondered with a smile. She knew somehow that the sheer intensity of this union could transcend anything...time itself...a small matter... insignificant. She thought of a door opening...from life to...what? Death? Is that all it is? Crossing over...from light to darkness--or the other way round? She sighed...they'd both been there and back.

"I love you, Xena," she whispered and closed her eyes to join her lover in a dream.

Something woke her up. Mel took a breath and waited. There it was again. Eyes still closed she reached across the bed to find Jan--already up apparently and probably responsible for that--

"What are you doing?" Mel mumbled sleepily.

"Honey...go back to sleep."

"Has dawn even cracked yet?"

"Uh...not really, no."

"Come back to bed."

"In a minute. Do you know where I put my atlas?"

"Look in the locker under the bed." She heard Jan shift and felt the mattress jarred by the woman reaching underneath. Mel wearily opened one lid and saw the tousled blonde head inches from her own. It was still dark in the room and Jan had been using a flashlight.

The younger woman chortled in triumph as her hand closed on the quested item and sat back on her heels, glancing up momentarily and catching Mel's eye. "Sorry I woke you up. But, thanks, sweetheart." Her fingers riffled through the pages in the back of the book. "Got it."

"Good. Now can it wait till morning--" Jan opened her mouth. "Daylight," Mel amended and added in a seductive voice, "you come back to bed right now, I'll make it worth your while."

"You will?" Jan leaned in to plant a light kiss.

"Very," Mel's voice became thrillingly husky.

"I think you're bluffing," Jan challenged playfully.

"Try me."

"I never thought I'd hear myself say this-- but...can I have a raincheck on that? This can't wait till daylight unfortunately. My sincerest apologies, darling." She planted a determined kiss on Mel's lips, then stood. "Where's your red scarf?"

"Did you explain to me what we're doing out here in the middle of the night? I might've missed that part." Mel pulled Jan's aviator jacket more tightly around her shoulders and spoke in a still drowsy monotone. We're right on the desert here, she thought to herself, you'd think it