

EVOE

Gabrielle kept thinking about what Xena had said to her. It made her smile. And then blush. For some reason. Yes, we share a bond, closer than blood, it's true. And I told Lila that Xena could never fill the role of sister for me. And that's certainly also true. It's not a sister thing. Not at all.

Then what? She was still trying to figure it out. She and the warrior had grown closer with every passing day. And when they lay down, often side by side at the end of the day...sometimes Gabrielle felt a certain...or uncertain sensation, hovering somewhere deep inside, a small, dark tremulous fluttering in the pit of her stomach and it caused an almost embarrassing flush of emotion and excitement. She could feel it, tingling, lower, there... Sometimes she'd lie awake, gazing at the tall, dark woman in the firelight...and when they bathed together... No, it was definitely not a sister thing.

It troubled her...a little. She wondered if Xena knew...and what she would think if she did.

"Dinar for your thoughts," Xena prompted, she was sewing a busted seam in a saddle bag.

"Oh...nothing...in particular...you'd be interested in...I don't think..."

"Try me."

"Oh, no, that's ok. It doesn't matter."

"Gabrielle, whatever you have to say matters to me."

Gabrielle melted again. No one had ever taken her so...seriously before. She had craved attention and when Xena turned hers upon the young woman, full-force, undivided, it was sunshine illuminating a grecian valley and Gabrielle basked in it. "I luh..." she nearly blurted it out, then thought better of the connotations and caught herself, saying, "I like being with you, Xena."

The warrior rewarded her with a warm smile. "I'm glad. I can't remember anymore how lonely I must've been without you."

"And I...like you, Xena."

"I...like you too, Gabrielle. Glad we got that out of the way, huh?"

'She's humoring me,' Gabrielle thought and became suddenly shy again. She was looking down at her hands when Xena was beside her, placing one of hers, warm and surprisingly soft, on Gabrielle's.

"I'm sorry. Maybe you were trying to tell me something? I can be awfully insensitive sometimes."

"Now, you know, Xena, I really haven't found that at all. It surprised me at first. But then I got to know you..."

"Yeah. I think...maybe you're the only one who has ever really gotten to know me...this well...I mean, as I really am." Gabrielle's palm was sweaty and she was having a little trouble with her swallow reflex. "I never let anyone get quite so close before you, you know." Xena gently placed a strand of red-gold hair behind Gabrielle's ear.

"Xena," it was a hoarse whisper. "I don't know if what I'm feeling is right...or not."

"And...what are you feeling?"

"Well...it's hard to describe."

"Try."

"I guess, yeah, well, I am a bard, aren't I? An aspiring bard. You'd think I could put it into words. Wouldn't you?"

"Maybe it's...just a lack of experience, Gabrielle." The warrior's tone was so warm and filled with understanding. She was taking pity on her young friend.

Gabrielle swallowed hard, shyly met Xena's piercing blue gaze. "Could you...teach me?" she asked hopefully as she took Xena's hand, brought it to her cheek.