

rose to some empyrean height and then subsided gradually, came down, tried to slow her breathing and her beating heart. She was sure even Xena could hear it beating.

Xena's head still moved between her legs, licking the swollen labia, bathing her face in the scent and taste of the juices dripping from the overflowing honeycomb. Xena didn't think she'd ever be able to get enough. Finally, a still quivering Gabrielle urged her lover's head from her sensitized flesh and Xena reluctantly rose to meet her eyes. "Everything still alright?" she queried.

"Do you have to ask?" Gabrielle could still barely breathe.

Xena smiled rather shyly and lay atop her, stroked her hair, whispered in her ear. "We don't ever have to do this again, if you don't want. No, don't answer me now. Sleep on it. The morning light changes...perspectives... sometimes."

"Will you change?"

"Never. But if this night were all you were willing to give me it would last a lifetime in my heart. I wanted you to be as sure as you could be. But if you'd asked me to stop...it would've been the hardest thing I'd ever done--all my battles would be nothing compared to that. I have wanted you...so much...so much. More than anything I've ever wanted. Gabrielle... Gabrielle..." Xena kept repeating her name, whispering it, chanting it until it became a passionate mantra. Gabrielle, shy but eager, allowed her hands to wander, across the warrior's strong shoulders, down the smooth lovely curve of her back and waist, hips and...she wanted to explore.

"You don't have to," Xena sighed.

"I want to."

"Aren't you exhausted?"

"Are you?"

Xena rolled onto her back and took Gabrielle's hand, how she loved these small, gentle hands, and she brought it to her lips, meditated for a moment on what the young bard could do to her with this one small hand and, sighing again, she placed it on her breast. Gabrielle was so sweet, she was shivering, but Xena could feel how warm she was. She would look away, averting her eyes, then dare to meet Xena's with a sudden surge of desire that took the breath away. For both of them. And continuing to explore with that delicate touch, that sweet small hand. To have another woman's breast under her palm, to feel the heart beating, fluttering like a little bird, this was magic.

Gabrielle took the nipple of Xena's other breast in her mouth, astounded at the gasp this evoked from the woman under her playful tongue. What a revelation this was, all of it, not just to her bard's heart, though it opened a whole new realm of sensation to put into words, but as a woman, becoming a woman only now, knowing she could give the same pleasure she'd received. And the sense of trust, of acceptance.

Xena's body was so...perfect, so beautiful. She could spend an eternity rhapsodizing over it. The woman could have anyone...'but she chose me.' It was humbling. She would try to live up to. Time to take the plunge. To commune with the goddess in this secret rite.

I sing a song of Xena
her tenderness
her passion
The gift of herself, her soul
she entrusted to my care
The discovery of myself
she allowed me to reveal
through her love
as I explore this delicate
soft terrain