



Thànatos

Chapter 1

The Ritual

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The fresh night and the starry sky could not induce Gabrielle to sleep, and while she was turning towards the woman she loved, she tried to introduce a little conversation. When Xena was so silent, she felt as if she was traveling back in time, when words seemed to be an annoying exception for the warrior and her quiet nature.

“Xena, are you asleep?”

“No, Gab”.

“Neither do I...”

“I’m afraid of what awaits us, I would have wanted a little bit of peace...”

“The great Warrior Princess afraid and speaking of peace?”

“I feel so tired, Gabrielle...”

The fire next to the pallet was about to expire, but Gabrielle could still see Xena’s face, that was alarming indeed.

She sweetly caressed her face, then she moved to her shoulders, but Xena seemed bothered.

She liquidated the girl turning on the other side.

“Good night, Gab...”

“Night, Xena...”

The two women, on their steeds, were very quiet; Gabrielle wanted to speak to Xena, but something was broken between them after the return from Mogador (**Who’s Gurkhan?**). She was still shocked by the whole thing happened with Gurkhan, while Xena was bringing on herself the physical and inner signs of the endured tortures.

Despite all of this, the warrior was searching the girl’s glance with the corner of her eye, and she was often turning towards her.

“How are you feeling about seeing the Amazons again?” Xena was a little ironic.

“I feel so far from that world...if I ever belonged there”.

“Don’t you feel like an Amazon warrior?”

“I don’t feel like an Amazon...and maybe not even as a warrior, after all”.

Xena understood it was not the case to go on.

“However, we’re almost there”.

Gabrielle did not answer, if not with a weak sigh, inaudible for Xena.



They arrived near the Amazon village, that however seemed different since the last time the two warriors were there: a thick fog that was not making even grass visible, its acrid smell, like the smell of death.

Xena got off her horse, so as Gabrielle.

They were looking around, but it was as if nothing was around them; Xena made sign to the girl to remain silent, trying to hear the smallest noise that could lead her back to a human life. Gabrielle, trying to not make any sound, stumbled on a root, but Xena promptly stopped her fall bending over and getting down towards the girl, grabbing her.

It was in that exact moment when she heard a weak woman voice, singing a dirge.

Next to the root where Gabrielle was falling, there was a giant old tree, and behind it there was a human figure, kneeling, dressed in black and having a coat covering shoulders and head.

They could not realize who this mystical figure could be, until she didn't turn towards them, uncovering a well-known face: a woman with long blonde hair with a scar on her face: Najara. She was praying.

Xena couldn't believe her eyes and immediately burst out.

"You...you cannot be..."

"...Alive? The Djinn never abandoned me..."

Xena unsheathed her sword, but Gabrielle promptly interposed with her Sais between her and Najara.

"...Gabrielle...again? Are you still trying to protect her? After all we've been through because of her?"

"Xena...no..."

"Gabrielle, get out of the way or this time..."



The sentence was interrupted by an arm that was strongly pushed against Xena's throat, from behind.

"I cannot let you do that, Xena!".

Xena lowered her sword, then she turned towards the warrior who had just threatened her.

“Varia...you ask for help and then...”

“I will need your help for other things...and now...if you would let the **priestess** pray...”

“Excuse me...? Priestess...?” Gabrielle was shocked by what she had just heard, while Xena was glancing at her, pitying her with disgust.

“Come with me”. Varia was leading the way, while Xena hit Gabrielle with her shoulder.

“So, what happened to the Amazon village?” Xena was still looking around her, not believing what she was seeing, walking slowly and carefully.

“About a luster ago, some of my sisters disappeared, only to be found quartered and hanging by their feet in the forest”.

Varia was narrating all of that with the typical coldness of who wanted to keep her self-control.

“Couldn’t be again some other mad one who’s hating the Amazons...?” Gabrielle was immediately interrupted by Varia, who went on with the explanations.

“No, we have reasons to think that is someone within our community, even if the murders decreased a lot since the priestess arrived”.

“The priestess...” Xena smiled sarcastically.

“She was of great help” the Queen continued “she gave us strength, precious advices and...”

“Enough, please stop it! I know that woman, and she’s not what she wants you to believe!”

“Why all this hate? She also knows you, and she used very beautiful words for you and Gabrielle”.

“Especially for Gabrielle, I can imagine...” Xena’s sarcasm was even more evident, so Gabrielle decided to intervene in the conversation.

“Why all this fog?”

“I have no idea, Gab. This village has become a tomb...we cannot see the sun since a long time ago...”

The three women were in the center of the village, when Xena suddenly stopped: something was on her way.

“Damn, what...?”

The fog was so thick that was not leaving the chance to have a clear vision, not even at a few centimeters from the ground. She kneeled to check in what she had just bumped, and she realized that what she was touching was particularly cold, hard, and wet...

“For all Gods Xena, this is...” Gabrielle’s voice was trembling.

“...what is left of a skull” Xena ended the sentence, while Varia was looking around, unsheathing her sword.

“That was not happening for long time, I can’t understand...”

“There is very little to understand Varia, let’s get out of here!”

Xena took the remains of the corpse, putting them in a cloth, under Gabrielle’s disgusted eyes.



The two warriors were in the shed of the Amazon's guests, Xena was taking off her armor and clothes to lay in a warm, relaxing bath.

Gabrielle went closer, embracing her from behind.

"Xena..." whispered.

The woman didn't say a word, and with her hand she moved Gabrielle's hands away from her hips, then she continued to undress herself.

"Have you decided to not speak to me?"

"I have nothing to say to you, Gab".

"Yes, I can imagine. And I can also guess that Najara has nothing to do with your punitive silence".

"Gabrielle, I am tired. Tired to warn you about obvious things. How can I let myself go with you, with what serenity?"

"I was not defending Najara..."

Xena entered in the bathtub, filled with warm water and perfumes.

"That crazy exalted woman only brings troubles...and I thought we got rid of her forever..."

"It seems Najara is treated as a Goddess, here".

Gabrielle undressed herself as well, and she persuasively entered in the bathtub in front of Xena, that could not help but watching her with desire.

Xena lowered her eyes, massaging the soap on her arms.

"The power Najara exercises on the Amazons is relative, when we found out what she is aiming to, she is not going to be a problem anymore..."

Gabrielle bit her lips.

"Are you still jealous?"

"I was never jealous..." Xena's dry reply was weeping lies.

"I am jealous instead..." Gabrielle took Xena's left hand and gently brushed the sponge cloth among her fingers.

"...You know, I didn't like the way that Amazon who brought us here was looking at you..."



Gabrielle leaned closer, right in front of Xena, bringing her arms around her neck, while the warrior, inebriated by the woman's sensuality, was caressing her back.

"I missed you so much, Xena..."

Gabrielle set her glance on Xena's lips, to feel them on hers, soft and finally daring.

The kiss became deeper, until a dull thud first and a desperate scream then, interrupted it.

"For all Gods, Xena! What could have been?"

"Let's go to have a look!"

The two women immediately came out of the bathtub, dressing with sheets in all hurry, to open the shed door wide.

Xena was ahead of Gabrielle as a sign of protection, then the two women slowly tried to understand what has just happened, but the view was even less clear, they could barely see the Amazon village constructions, from which they were both walking away.

A little bit later, Xena's feet could feel something warm among their toes, touching their bare skin: it was blood.

Xena didn't say anything to Gabrielle, following the blood trail, that was becoming clearer and thicker.

Gabrielle was looking at her woman's shoulders, knowing that asking questions in that moment was not appropriate, until Xena turned towards her, making sign to stay silent: she had seen something.

In front of them, laying on the ground, there was the same young Amazon who brought them to their shed.

Her eyes were looking up and she was completely stiff: her fingers were folded, as if she tried to grab something.

"...is...is she dead, Xena?"

"No, she is still breathing...we must bring her back to the village and..."

Xena heard some noises, as if someone was hiding behind the forest trees and stepped on the deadwoods.

She took the sheet that was wrapped around her body and rolling it up skillfully it became a sort of whip, that was promptly wrapped around what seemed to be a shadow; she captured it by pulling it towards her.

"It was you, damned!"

“No, Xena, I am a victim as much as her, I swear...!”

“Victim? Don't make me laugh!”

Gabrielle didn't feel like intervening, this time.

“Xena, we must go away from her and try to save...”

Gabrielle could not finish speaking, as Varia and some Amazons arrived at the place, running.

“What's happening here? We heard screams...I can't believe it...another dead body...”

Gab quickly replied:

“No Varia, she's still alive, we can save her!”

“Antiope and Mira, take Selene away! The priestess could surely help us...”

Xena, hearing again the name Varia was giving to Najara, could not help but challenge.

“What are you saying? She's not a priestess! And I'm sure all of this is her fault!”

Varia went closer to Xena, watching her from head to toes, smiling mischievously: she was completely naked in front of her.

“I've already told you that the priestess is very important for us, you will realize that by yourself.”

She took the sheet imprisoning Najara and placed it on her chest, brushing her.



“Now, cover yourself. As beautiful as what I see, it's freezing in here...”

Gabrielle watched Varia first and then Xena, with total surprise and disappointment.

“Have I heard well?”

“Yeah”.

“Is this all you can say?”

Xena was quickly covering herself, ignoring what just happened.

“So...?”

“Gab, this is not the right moment for asking stupid things...let’s go!”

Gabrielle was opening her mouth, as if she wanted to add something else, but in the end she sighed, bothered, and followed Xena.

Xena and Gabrielle were dressing, soon they would have been in front of Varia and the old Amazons to talk about the last things happened.

“Ready?” Xena was opening the door as to hurry Gabrielle, but she seemed taking her time.

“No, please go alone”.

“Excuse me? What do you want to do? Sleep? You’re kidding me, I hope!”

Xena put her hands on her hips, then she went closer to the girl, sitting beside her.

“What’s in your head?”

“You seemed pleased by what Varia told you, and I know things between us are not the same as before” when Gabrielle spoke the last sentence, her voice was chocking.

“Do you realize this is not the right moment or the right place to talk about it, do you?”

“It never is, Xena! We are always in the middle of something else, always with other things to worry about, than us both!”

Gab’s words were full of frustration.

“Do what you want, Gabrielle. See you later”.

Xena walked away, slamming the door behind her, while Gabrielle placed her hands on her temples.

The only time the two women became deeply far from each other was for Solan’s death, but no woman has stepped between them.



Xena arrived in the center of the village, precisely where the Amazons were used to make dances and initiations; Varia and her loyal warriors were waiting for her.

In front of the entire group of women, there was a stone altar on which was laying the young Selene, with her body positioned as a cross with her head turned to the East, circled of small fires, while beside the girl there was Najara, this time dressed completely in white.

The priestess leaned on the Amazon with a plate full of wine on fire, adding resin and perfumed oil, and she placed it in one of the girl's hands, then she enacted a prayer, collapsing on the ground:

*"Hear me, O Death [Thanatos], whose empire unconfined,
extends to mortal tribes of every kind.
On thee, the portion of our time depends,
whose absence lengthens life, whose presence ends.*

*Thy sleep perpetual bursts the vivid folds,
by which the soul, attracting body holds:
Common to all of every sex and age,
for nought escapes thy all-destructive rage;*

*Not youth itself thy clemency can gain,
vigorous and strong, by thee untimely slain.
In thee, the end of nature's works is known,
in thee, all judgment is absolved alone:*

*No suppliant arts thy dreadful rage controul,
no vows revoke the purpose of thy soul;
O blessed power regard my ardent prayer,
and human life to age abundant spare."*

There was absolute silence.

Xena looked at Varia doubtfully and suspicious as always, but she didn't say a word. Moments later, Selene started screaming desperately, and in the same moment Varia held Xena back, who clearly wanted to run towards the Amazon, who got up on the altar on her feet with her eyes wide open, to fall back immediately. After this terrible vision, Xena broke free from Varia, walking to Selene: she was dead.

"Najara! You could be damned! You killed her! YOU killed her!"

Varia, understanding that Xena was totally out of control, with a sign ordered her warriors to stop her.

Najara, still collapsed on the ground, tried to get up without much success, and she spoke to Xena with a weak voice.

"Selene was possessed, our village would have been in danger, but I haven't killed her..."

"Nothing's yours here, Najara! How can you say it was not your fault? We all saw you!" Xena was furious.

"Take Xena away!" Varia ordered to the Amazon warriors.

"You have no idea of the mistake you are making, Varia...!"

The warriors took Xena to the private shed of the Amazon Queen.