

Not Quite a Valentine Xena and Gabrielle

The characters are of course borrowed. I apologise for this fact. I only borrowed them for an evening. I also apologise to the ghost of St. Valentine.

“Xena?”

“Hmm?”

“Do you ever think about romance?”

“Hmm. Let me think about it. Do I ever think of romance? No.”

“Never?”

“Gabrielle, you have a choice: I can make love to you or I can answer stupid questions. Ask yourself: what is wanted here?”

The sensation of Xena’s tongue sliding gently over her breasts, down her stomach, down further and reaching Gabrielle’s cunt silenced the bard for the time being. But no great warrior is ever entirely free of curiosity, and Xena left off her journey to ask, “So? What did you decide? Sex or questions?”

It surprised Gabrielle more than she had expected to have to think hard about her preferences. The Gods knew, she was enjoying their quiet evening in a pleasant and unremarkable inn, and she would never have wanted to give up – for any length of time – experiencing the warmth of Xena’s tongue and Xena’s insidious fingers, which were stroking the mouth of Gabrielle’s cunt and making her wetter by the second, so she said, “Don’t stop.” Xena smiled and continued and Gabrielle threw herself into the moment – no mean feat – but later, lying pressed against Xena, her own arm pillowing her head, Gabrielle came back to the same question. “Seriously, Xena. I mean... I know that what we have between us is brilliant – wild sex, no holds barred, orgasms – but don’t you ever want to bring any romance into our love life?”

Xena’s eyes were closed; she had been on the very edge of sleep. A couple more minutes and she would have tumbled over. Being pulled back was unpleasant; she felt as if she had just tried to jump over a wall only to land bang-slap against it. She said, “Romance? Gabrielle, if you don’t let me get some sleep right now you won’t have to worry about the lack of romance in our sex life: there won’t be any sex life to have some romance *in*. Capisce? Now sleep.” A pause and then she added, “Romance isn’t something you can fit into a couple of saddle-bags, Gabrielle.”

Minutes later, with Xena sleeping soundly, and snoring ever so slightly, Gabrielle got out of bed and walked over to the window. The moon was rising high and white, and to the bard it looked more than ever like a face. A face that looked down and saw... What did it see? Two quasi-Amazons grabbing a quiet night in a village inn because they'd been travelling a little too long, and needed a few creature comforts before going back into the countryside, and whatever adventure came next. There always would be another adventure; Gabrielle knew that for a certainty. Life was never dull when you hung out with the Warrior Princess. Never dull, never dispassionate, never predictable, never...

Never *romantic*.

What the fuck had put the idea into her head? It had been such a nice night in so many ways; a menu of wild sex that began with Xena standing at the foot of the bed and tugging Gabrielle down toward her by the ankles, so that Xena could go down on the bard at leisure and in comfort. A little later Gabrielle got to return the favour, even if she did skip the tugging-Xena-down-the-bed part of the equation: it's hard to feel true abandonment if you've just put your back out. And the sex was as wild as ever; even though there were times when Gabrielle had the sense of being not so much embraced as controlled. She thought harder on the subject and came to a conclusion that bothered her: whatever limits there were to their sexual relationship were dictated – much as all other aspects of their life – by Xena.

Oh, it wasn't a tyrannous relationship; Gabrielle wouldn't have *changed* it for the world. Oh, alright, she might modify a few bits, just smooth down the rough edges that she kept grazing herself on. After all, it wasn't as if she couldn't have talked to Xena about the little things that bothered her, was it?

On the other hand, Xena had threatened Gabrielle with a break in the happy trip to orgasm when she'd first brought up the subject of romance. The second time that Gabrielle had touched on the issue, Xena had been irritable and the conversation had gone nowhere.

Well, thought Gabrielle, you call yourself a bard. You're supposed to communicate best when you're putting down details in print. Imagine it's light enough to write by and put down on a scroll what's bothering you. It'd be a catharsis of sorts; you might even feel better afterwards.

Gabrielle returned to the bed – it wasn't warm outside and in any case she missed the security of Xena's arms around her – visualised a scroll, seized an imaginary quill and began writing. The mental image was so clear and bright that Gabrielle's hand twitched, as if reaching for an inkwell.

What, first of all, was the definition of romance? Gabrielle scowled, fine lines appearing between her eyebrows. A look that Xena found very fetching. She had been known to kiss her there, before wandering lower, making Gabrielle go weak at the knees. Then all sensible thought would evaporate like morning mist meeting the hot Greek sunshine. Nice try, the bard told herself. Next time don't be so easily distracted. *Concentrate.*

Going weak at the knees. It wasn't what one might call a particularly *romantic* image, was it? Kiss me and watch what happens: my eyes roll up, my pulse goes into overtime and my knees go weak. Give me another moment and I'll fall face-down into the grass. Give me a chance: I'll kiss you back once I've gotten the soil out from between my teeth...

Xena was talking in her sleep. The fact that she did so was amusing and unexpected. Gabrielle bit her lip to stop herself from giggling. For a second she had the giggles under control. Then Xena said, "Argo? If you don't give me a share of the blankets I'll send you back to the stables." A delicate fit of snoring followed.

Oh, that was too much. A desire to giggle was overwhelmed by an immediate *need* to giggle. If Xena had been irritable earlier, how would she react when Gabrielle started rolling about on the floor, tears in her eyes?

Gabrielle seized her giggling and her cloak and was out of the room as soundlessly and immediately as she could manage. She coped with the stairs, the front door – it was on a latch only – and fell outside into the night, and laughed until she cried.

At last she calmed down, wiped the tears from her eyes and found that she was unexpectedly sad. Gods, what a night for mood swings! Although that might explain why Xena was so irritable. Gabrielle walked over to the tall tree that stood on one side of the inn. Somebody had suspended two swing seats from a broad branch. Gabrielle sat down and began to swing, her legs pushing back hard, her arms tensing nicely as she moved. The slightly abrasive quality of the rope against the palms of her hands was not displeasing. Gabrielle forced the swing higher still. She glanced to her side and saw that she was no longer alone.

Hard to imagine Pallas Athena on a swing. Gabrielle decided that she was definitely dreaming. Athena gripped the ropes, the moonlight shining on the virgin clarity of her bracelets and light armour, and swung easily to and fro. After a few minutes she said, "It doesn't surprise me that you might find a difficulties in some areas of expressed emotion. Oh, and please don't break in with a diatribe on Xena's many virtues, Gabrielle. I know all about them. I'm just saying that she's not what you would term a... romantic.

“I suspect that Xena sees the area of romance as a potential weak spot. She’s changed greatly but she is still very wary of letting down her guard.

“With the risk being that if she does not lower her defences even a little, she might eventually lose out. Who knows? She might even lose you.” Gabrielle turned as prickly as a hedgehog, and Athena raised a peaceable hand to ward off the response. “I know that you are very happy at present, and I know that Xena is very fond of you. I know also that you are an intelligent and articulate young woman and that you will not want to live out your whole life in Xena’s shadow. Is that not correct?”

The truth wasn’t always painful, but Athena’s last sentence came into Gabrielle’s world equipped with teeth and claws.

“Athena, have you never wished to...” Gabrielle wasn’t sure how to complete her question without causing offence. She ran her hands through her short blonde hair until she looked quite distracted. “Have you ever wondered...”

“I don’t feel as if I have missed out on the world of physical love, if that is what you mean. Sometimes I have thought that life is easier for me as a result.”

“Oh. Right. No, of course not.”

“Celibacy has its benefits.”

“I can imagine that.” Gabrielle’s response was heart-felt and emphatic, and it made Athena smile. “It’s not always easy being so... ruled by one’s body.”

“Quite.”

“And sometimes it can be hard to...” Gabrielle was beginning to think that the remainder of their conversation was likely to be carried on in a ‘fill in the blanks’ fashion. Athena decided to help her out.

“You have difficulty in separating intellect from physical pleasure. You want to discuss with Xena some aspect of your shared life, and rather than replying in words, she employs a touch so erotic that the words disappear. And while at the time you are happily consumed by passion, when the passion is done with, the questions remain unanswered.”

Gabrielle stared at her. “Sorry.” Athena studied her feet, bound as they were in nicely-silvered sandals. “I thought it might make this conversation easier if we cut to the chase.”

“I think we’ve just done that.”

“Yes.” Athena swung higher, the wind blowing back her hair. “It’s never easy. Mortals are so bound by invisible chains that every step must be an extraordinary effort for you.”

“It’s not that bad,” said Gabrielle, tartly. “Besides, I seem to remember a great many stories about the Gods that are hardly an advertisement for the concept of happily ever afterwards.” Athena stared at her. “Sorry,” said Gabrielle.

“Don’t apologise; you’re quite right..”

“If only...” Gabrielle had stopped swinging. She felt tired and out of sorts, and annoyed with herself for beating about the bush. She took a deep breath and said, “I have always understood that life with Xena – should I join her and remain her companion – would be far from easy. That I can accept. And I can cope with the battles, the endless bizarre situations in which we find ourselves. Gods help me, I like the madness! Life is never ever dull. And sometimes we get to take a little time out, and there are things I’d like to talk about and things I wish Xena did, but I don’t know where to begin and even if I did begin, what conclusion would I be hoping for?”

Athena simply nodded but said nothing. Gabrielle’s thoughts had been restrained too long: she had a sympathetic listener and a grievance. That was all it took.

“We have passion and wild sex, and we have a passionate and wild life. One brings the other into being. But just for once I would like us to change the mood. I don’t want Xena to feel constrained... I just want for her to take time out of the other life that she’s been leading for so long, and be... romantic.”

Athena shrugged her shoulders. “Good luck,” she said. “I think you should talk to her about this, see what can be done. However...”

“Yes?”

“Figure out your game plan before you start talking is my advice.”

“My game plan? What’s that?”

“I have no idea. I just liked the way it sounded. Good night, Gabrielle. And good luck.”

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Gabrielle walked up the stairs and stepped into their room again. Xena was awake, sitting up in bed, hugging her knees and looking out into the night. “I heard voices,” she said. “Thought you might be outside, cruising the dryads.”

“Very funny.”

“Gabrielle, I was thinking about what you said earlier. I need to talk to you about it.” Gabrielle looked at Xena, whose face was mostly hidden by the deep shadows of the room. “Come here, will you?”

Gabrielle crossed the room. Xena slid over so that she was sitting on the edge of the bed. She gently pulled Gabrielle toward her.

“There are times when I don’t want to just *grab* you. I’m sorry. That came out all wrong.” Gabrielle could sense Xena’s nicely rueful smile. “Gods know, I *always* want to grab you.” She grinned. “I like the way you feel and I love the way you taste.” Gabrielle smiled. “Grab you and touch you and taste you. And I love you – you know that – and you know that I’m not very good at showing it. No, don’t interrupt –” Gabrielle had opened her mouth to speak. “I need you to stay quiet or I can’t say all this.” Xena took a deep breath. “I guess that to some extent I still equate... tenderness... with weakness. I’m sorry: I just can’t help myself. I know I must launch myself at you – into you – as if you were a force to be subdued. But that’s how I am. One night we could be as wild as you like: and when I’ve got you in my arms I don’t ever want to be anywhere else. But then we’ll get into a fight or a war, or an enchantment, or it’ll be Ares screwing us both around, and I’ve got to be ready for that.”

“And if you – ”

“Shush.” Xena reached out and touched a forefinger to Gabrielle’s lips. “Wait until I’ve finished, love, or I never will. It’s not easy, talking like this.”

“I’m sorry. I won’t interrupt you again.” Gabrielle settled herself on the bed beside Xena and draped a blanket round her shoulders. The night had turned chilly and she was glad that they were both indoors.

“Gabrielle, if we were to go about the world hand-in-hand, stopping to kiss on every corner, stars in our eyes, our life expectancy would be about half an hour. I’ve got enemies: you know that. And Callisto hates us both. And the Gods aren’t exactly uninvolved with our lives...”

Gabrielle thought about the evening and decided to say nothing. She turned to the table that stood by the bedside. There was some wine left from their earlier meal. She poured a little into each of the two wooden cups and handed one to Xena, who downed it in two swallows. Talking about emotional issues always left Xena dry-mouthed. She could feel, too, a hectic blush that was beginning

to ascend, but she was a warrior princess and she wasn't going to let a little embarrassment triumph over her.

Xena stroked the skin of Gabrielle's left hand where it rested on the bed. Gabrielle said, "I'm sorry... It isn't practical and you're quite right. But kissing on corners. That did sound rather nice."

"To me, too. But while we kissed, we'd become one slowing-moving target."

Silence. Gabrielle considered practicalities, acknowledged truths, and with a sigh decided to turn her back on the whole issue of romance. Xena had a point: it wasn't safe for either them. She couldn't bear the thought of Xena hurt because of her.

"Of course," Xena's voice broke in on the bard's considerations, "if one was to concentrate the romantic elements, to save the flowers, the chocolates, the sensual backrub that might lead to a sensual front rub that might lead on to a whatever-else-feels-nice rub, to a specific time and place, we might find an answer."

"Less geography, please, and more detail. And what in the name of the Gods are chocolates?"

Xena cheerfully ignored the bard. "If we had a single day when you could have all the romance you want, would you feel so neglected if the rest of the time we concentrated on enjoying good old fashioned sex, with a little grand passion thrown in, whenever the opportunity is there?"

Gabrielle scowled. "The warrior princess wouldn't feel a little coerced?"

"Gods, no! Gabrielle, I love the idea. It's just that on the one hand, I don't think I can sustain romance for longer than a day, and on the other hand, I think that if I was to get to feast on you without rest for more than a single day, I'd probably wear myself out before I hit thirty."

"Xena. Didn't you already hit thirty?"

"As I was saying. And we'd have to fix a regular date, so that neither of us could forget it."

"As if."

It was Xena's turn to scowl. "What month are we in now?"

"Oh, is that in Grecian terms or with reference to the new Roman calendar? Forget it. Let's call it February. Alright?"

“Isn’t February something to do with a feast of purification? And the date?”

“Oh, please! Let’s say about a month before the Ides of March.”

“*Is* there an Ides of February? Oh, hang on, that’s the thirteenth. Alright, let’s put it slap bang between the Ides of February and the feast of purification. Gods! How I hate those Ides. Irritating little things.”

“They’re not my dream date either. So the fourteenth? That sounds nice. February fourteenth.”

“Then we’ll fix on today as being the day. Alright? We’re already in an inn, so we can hole up and feast on one another all day long. I’m sorry I don’t have you any flowers, but next year, I guarantee I’ll remember them.”

“February fourteenth.” Gabrielle nodded. “I can remember that.”

“Me too.” Gabrielle doubted that. “It’ll be like a battle,” said Xena, her eyes glowing. “Weapons sharpened and ready, provisions laid in. Precision timing, every avenue explored – ”

“I beg your pardon?!”

“A fully-planned invasion with appropriate tools: flowers, chocolates – ”

“And yet again I ask you, what the *fuck* are chocolates? Before you get too carried away, think about this: sometimes it might be me who gets to plan the campaign. I rather like the idea of seducing you for the whole of a day.”

“Soft music, candlelight...”

“*Is* there any other sort?”

“Red-silk sheets. And just so you can’t forget it, I’ll send you my heart – well, obviously it can’t be my own heart, but someone’s heart – so that you’ll know what it’s all about.”

Gabrielle looked at her. “You’re going to send me someone’s heart? I can’t *begin* to tell you how far from romantic that particular image is. Please!” She moved to stand up but Xena caught her, and pulled her lightly onto her lap.

“It *has* to be a heart. That’s where I hold you most dear and close to me, isn’t it?” Xena’s hands, which had first rested around Gabrielle’s waist, began to insinuate themselves beneath the blanket that the bard had still wrapped about her. “A bright red heart with an arrow through it, to show you just how

seriously I take you.” She ran her hands up Gabrielle’s stomach to the nice lower swell of the bard’s breasts. She slid her hands up so that she could feel Gabrielle’s nipples against the palms of her hands. “Like the heart that I can feel beating beneath my fingers right this minute.”

Gabrielle’s objections were slowing down as the movement of Xena’s hands accelerated. She felt one hand slide down toward her cunt. The hand brushed the soft curls there and moved on to tickle her thigh before returning. Her own pulse was beating hard and fast. It wouldn’t be long before Xena’s strong, slim fingers moved inside, and then Gabrielle knew she would be lost. She tried a last, light objection. “A heart, Xena? A heart with an arrow through it?”

“Alright, alright. If it makes you so uncomfortable, maybe a *picture* of a heart,” said Xena, pressing her lips to the back of Gabrielle’s neck, pushing aside the soft short hair to kiss the fine warm skin there. “With your name written across the top.” As Gabrielle inclined herself backwards so that Xena could kiss the pulse point in her throat. Xena then ran her tongue gently up to Gabrielle’s mouth. Gabrielle lost the plot for an instant, and did not regain it until the kiss was over.

“And with your name written at the bottom?”

“Hmm? What was that about bottoms?” Gabrielle tried to bite Xena, but got kissed by her instead. When Xena broke for air she shook her head gently. “Sorry. You distracted me. Of course not my name, Gabrielle. What do you take me for?”

“Oh, come on, Xena. I know that you’re not the most literary person I know but you can write your own –” Xena ran her tongue around Gabrielle’s ear until the bard shivered and giggled and fought in the inexorable grip.

“I... wouldn’t... put... a... name,” said Xena, slowly and drawing out the words, “Because that would detract from the mystery, from the... romance.”

“You’re going to send me a message with a picture of a heart on it run through with an arrow and you think that’s romantic?”

“Uh-huh. Very romantic.”

Gabrielle sighed, kissed Xena very hard before muttering, “One day of romance (and chocolates) in a year and pictures of hearts with arrows shot through them. Well, one day is better than none.” Xena cupped Gabrielle’s breasts again and kissed her throat. Gabrielle sighed and gave up.

Xena lifted her up and onto the bed and began lifting free the blanket to reach the soft flesh beneath it. Grinning. “You never know, Gabrielle. It might catch on.”

“As if.”

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