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Violence: There is violence in this story.

Subtext: Any subtext becomes main text here.

Summary: The sequel to [The Loudest Silence](#). Xena and Gabrielle are headed to the Amazons for a visit, but visited by an unwelcomed guest, Hope. With the death of the Olympian gods, Dahak has been freed and Hope is reborn, but this time she awakens with new eyes. Dahak orders Hope to capture Gabrielle so that Gabrielle may be infected again. However Hope refuses and instead pursues the bard and Warrior Princess to protect them from Dahak. Can Hope truly earn the heroes' trust and protect her mother?

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Series 6: **Thick as Blood**, Story #2

Fight for Hope

by Red Hope

Chapter 4

Hope tightly held to the ledge and below her the flames surged up to her feet. She fruitlessly lifted her body but there was some pull that stopped her. Hope struggled and fought against the pull then she felt the heat coming closer to her feet.

"You have no will!" yelled a dark voice.

The demi-god screamed for help. Nobody answered her cry. The muscles in her arms strained and started to give out.

The flames suddenly soared up around her and snaked around her body. They locked around her waist then with incredibly force, the fire ripped her off the ledge.

Hope screamed in terror, and she was taken down into the fire pit. Her right hand stretched out to the receding top. Then before her world went black, she caught sight of her mother's hopeless face at the top.

Hope screamed again and shot up in the bedroll. She gasped for air then there were tender hands touching her and a soothing voice that called her name. She bent forward and pushed the furs back that made her feel too hot.

"It's okay... it was a dream. You're safe."

The demi-god brushed back her soaked bangs then peered up into concern green eyes. Her memories flooded her again, and she whispered, "Where are we?"

Gabrielle noticed the moisture that coated Hope thanks to the nearby campfire. She pulled her hands away and set them in her lap. She rested on her knees beside the demi-god's bedroll. "We're about half an hour from the temple. You've been out for a few hours."

Hope noted that it was nighttime and the only source of light was the campfire. She recalled her earliest memories, which caused her to survey Gabrielle's body. "Were you hurt?"

Gabrielle had a sad smile at the concern. "I just sprained my ankle... nothing serious."

"What about Xena?"

The bard glanced over at her partner's horizontal form in the mess of furs. "She took a nasty blow to her head, but she has a thick head."

"I heard that," called a deep voice from the jumble of furs.

Hope slightly grinned but lost it after a thought. "I can heal-"

"No," Gabrielle stopped. "We're fine. You need to rest." She pulled the furs back over the demi-god's body. "How do you feel?"

Hope quickly inventoried her body then replied, "I feel really sore."

The bard could sympathize. "You have a few bruises and cuts, I already cleaned them." She paused then gently added, "I'm going to give you some tea that has an herb in it. It'll help you sleep." She caught the slight fear in Hope's eyes. "Trust me, the herb will knock you out, and you won't dream." After Hope nodded, she carefully stood up and limped over to the campfire.

Hope felt a lot calmer now that she knew it was just a nightmare. She looked at her hands and counted the few scratches that trailed over her hands and up her arms. Then a thought occurred to her, but she waited until Gabrielle returned.

The bard sat down beside the bedroll and held out a steaming mug.

Hope received the warm mug, yet she didn't drink from it. Her face was dimmed by concern. "What happened to the lamb? I thought I..."

Gabrielle revealed an upturned smile. "Its in the saddlebags."

Hope nodded and didn't comment further. She tried the tea, which was sweet again.

"I'm surprised you've had it all this time," the bard mentioned.

Hope stared into the dark mug, and her response was quiet. "It was the only thing I had to remember you by." She locked her eyes with Gabrielle's. "I've kept it hidden in the temple... mostly."

Gabrielle moved her head in surprise, but she ordered, "Drink the tea."

The demi-god didn't argue and finished off the tea fairly quickly. She had to admit she was tired, and the tea seemed to be working.

"Get some rest." Gabrielle pushed Hope's closest shoulder after she took the mug. "We'll see how you feel in the morning."

"I should be... fine," the demi-god murmured.

"Go to sleep." Gabrielle carefully worked to get back on her feet, but Hope stopped her. She came back down and tilted her head.

Hope rested on her back and had her head turned to the bard. "Thank you, Gabrielle."

The bard searched Hope's eyes for a long moment. She understood that Hope thanked her for the trust and the new chance. But what ached against Gabrielle's heart was that Hope called her by her name. She bent over the demi-god then whispered, "Thank you... for fighting and proving me wrong." She brushed Hope's furthest cheek and smiled.

Hope placed her hand over top of Gabrielle's and mirrored the smile.

"Get some sleep," the bard softly instructed. She picked up the mug again, although she didn't move. Instead, she locked eyes and the tenderness melted into her voice. "By the way, it's not Gabrielle... it's mother." She didn't wait for a response and stood up. She went to the campfire, set the mug down, and slowly made her way back to her shared bedroll.

Xena lifted the furs and welcomed her soul mate into the warmth. She drew Gabrielle in deep and brushed her lips over the bard's ear. "S'okay?"

Gabrielle curled up against her partner first. "Mmmmm." She tangled her legs with Xena's. "Xena?"

"Mmmm?"

"Don't wake me up tomorrow," the bard warned. She felt the silent laugh when Xena's chest shook against her body.

"Promise," the warrior agreed. She sighed contently then sleepily whispered, "Love you."

Gabrielle was almost halfway asleep, but she caught the words. She lazily smiled and murmured, "I love you too." Then she faded into her dreamscape. And it was hours after dawn before the bard woke up. When she did, she found Xena already moving about and Hope sat cross legged in front of the fire.

Xena straightened up after she placed the kettle over the fire. "Mornin', dear."

Gabrielle glowered at the joking endearment from her partner. She made no response and followed her usual routine. She shoved on her untied boots, passed Hope and Xena, and went into the woods.

Hope shook her head and muttered, "I'm glad I'm a morning person."

"That's because you require less sleep than Gabrielle," the warrior remarked. She stood away from the fire enough but poked the ashes with a live stick.

Hope thoughtfully considered this perspective. "Maybe."

Xena faintly grinned. She set the stick aside then knelt down by the mugs, tea leaf pouch, and other cooking supplies. "Do you want any tea, Hope?"

The demi-god played with her hair, yet she smiled at how the warrior was trying with her. "That'd be nice. Thank you."

The warrior briefly peered up with hooded eyes and continued to organize the mugs of tea. She soon had the steaming kettle and filled the mugs up. She then approached the demi-god and handed her a mug.

Hope smiled appreciatively as she took it. She then was surprised when Xena sat beside her, although there was plenty of space between them. She sipped the hot tea and tasted the sweetness in it. She couldn't hold her tongue anymore, so she asked, "What's sweet in here?"

Xena almost choked in her tea because she was taken aback by the question. She swallowed her tea then lowered the mug from her lips. "Honey."

"Honey?" the demi-god repeated then became bewildered.

The Warrior Princess slightly grinned when she realized Hope didn't have much knowledge about certain things in the world. And food happened to be one of those areas. "It's..." She couldn't find the words to describe what honey was; it just was in Xena's mind.

Gabrielle slowly entered the camp, and instantly she was bombarded by a question.

"Gabrielle, what's honey?"

The bard stopped halfway into the camp and stared at her soul mate like she was crazy. "What?"

The warrior sighed then signaled Hope and explained, "Hope doesn't know what honey is." She waved her freehand and ordered, "Do the bard thing."

Gabrielle shook her head at her partner then curtly replied, "Please?" She threw her damp towel at her partner.

Xena snatched it in midair without even thinking about it.

The bard limped over to the campfire and picked up her mug of tea. She also picked up the tiny jar that was currently lidless. She came over and sat on the other side of Hope. She handed the jar to Hope. "That's honey."

Hope peered into the jar and saw some gooey, yellow content in it.

"It's made by bees," the bard explained.

"Bees?" Hope shook her head then stared oddly at her mother.

Gabrielle's mouth hung open then her eyes flickered to her amused soul mate.

Xena shook from her silent laughter, and she just happily drank her tea in peace. She also enjoyed her partner's long winded explanation about what bees were, hives, and her idea about how bees made honey. Although Xena suspected that Hope didn't believe that bees somehow made honey from

flowers, but Gabrielle insisted it was true. Xena ended up leaning close to Hope and softly reminded Hope that her mother was a bard.

And Gabrielle shot a very dark look at her partner for the smart remark. She then snapped, "Well what's your theory, Plato?"

Xena held up her freehand. "Oh no, I'm still back working on how the stars in the night sky might actually be other earths like ours." She arched an eyebrow. "Or that latests theory about how there's some invisible force that makes things fall and if it wasn't here we'd all float around instead."

Hope bit her lower lip and leaned back so that she wasn't between the couple's debating space.

"Oh like your theory that the earth goes around the sun is really up there," Gabrielle shot back. "I'm surprised Apollo doesn't come down here himself."

Xena rolled her eyes and ignored the bard.

Hope held up her freehand between the soul mates then declared, "Now, children."

Gabrielle sighed when she caught Hope's smug features.

"She started it," the warrior muttered into her mug.

The bard calmed down then civilly asked, "So what's for breakfast?"

"You're drinking it," Xena replied.

"Xena," the bard warned as if a prewarning to her grumpy mood.

The warrior sighed then in a defeated voice, she offered, "I'll go hunt for some quail eggs." She finished off her tea then set the mug aside by the towel. "Are you hungry, Hope?"

"I'm fine, thanks." Hope offered a smile.

Xena stood up while she remarked, "Maybe I'll take you over your mother." She then hightailed it out of camp before Gabrielle chased after her.

Hope tilted her mug around so that the last of her tea swirled around in the mug. She quietly asked, "So what now?"

Gabrielle set her mug aside, next to the jar of honey. "Well, Xena and I were originally headed for the Amazons. So that's where we're going now." She leaned back until her hands met the ground behind her. "You're welcomed to come with us."

Hope toyed with the mug then decided it was better to set it down. "Is Xena okay with that?"

The bard grinned and answered, "Xena and I are kind of a two for one deal. We never disagree about anything."

Hope stared at her mother with dubious expression.

Gabrielle let the silence pass then she amended, "Okay so 'never' is a strong word, but we talked about

this already." She smiled and sat up again. "She's okay with it."

"So the Amazons huh?" Hope tilted her head and her spawning imagination was sparked. "Hmmm." She lifted her mug then slowly tilted it back against her lips.

"It'll give you the chance to meet Xena's daughter too," Gabrielle further mentioned.

Hope suddenly choked on her tea and bent forward when the warm liquid went down wrong.

Gabrielle hadn't expected the reaction. She quickly patted her daughter's back to help her. "Drink the rest of the tea, it'll help."

The demi-god did so and cleared her throat afterwards. Once she had the cough under control, she hoarsely questioned, "Daughter?" She had eyes wider than the sun when she focused on her mother.

"Mmmm." Gabrielle stretched out her legs. "Her name is Eve."

Hope silenced her rapid questions in her head then just asked, "She's an Amazon?"

"It's... complicated," the bard replied.

"You're an Amazon, right?" Hope tried.

Gabrielle slowly nodded then clarified it better. "I'm actually the queen of this particular tribe."

Hope grinned because she didn't know that about her mother. "You've done a lot."

The bard felt self-conscious about the comment. She scratched her nose for a distraction then rested her hand in her lap. "You could... say that, yeah."

"I meant to ask," Hope started, "what's happened to Callisto?" She felt slightly lost besides the fact that she knew the Olympian gods were dead and gone.

"Well..." Gabrielle wasn't sure where to start, and she tapped the rim of her mug. "It's a really long story." She slightly grinned and offered, "I'll tell you on the way to the nation... it'll help pass the time."

"Promise?" Hope mimicked her mother's grin.

"Definitely," the bard promised. She reached over and squeezed Hope's knee. "You feel better?"

"Almost a hundred percent," the demi-god answered. "Let me see your ankle."

Gabrielle shook her head then rebuked the offer.

Hope sighed then urged, "We can do this the hard way or the easy way."

The bard narrowed her eyes. "Is that a threat?" The glow in her eyes gave her away easily.

Hope smirked then replied, "It's a promise." She then sighed and fussed again. "Stop acting like a stubborn warrior. Let me see."

Gabrielle held her chin up. "You forgot please."

"Oh for gods' sakes." Hope went ahead and started to remove the untied boot.

Gabrielle just let her daughter go, and she couldn't resist her grin.

"Straighten your ankle out," Hope instructed. She then moved her hands down on either side of Gabrielle's ankle until she heard a faint hiss. She briefly glimpsed up at the painful look on her mother's face. She then focused back on her task.

Gabrielle clenched her teeth when that similar sharp pain like yesterday repeated. She let out a deep breath when it was over. Then she gave her ankle the test by testing the range of motion; nothing hurt.

Hope put the boot back on and grinned at her mother's happy expression.

"You know," Gabrielle mentioned, "I could get really use to that trick." She then smiled when her partner came back. From her seat by the fire, she counted five eggs. "Four for me and one for you?"

Xena arched an eyebrow and turned her right hand over so that three eggs faced the ground. "What was that, dear?" She pretended that she was going to drop the eggs.

Gabrielle glanced at Hope then back at her partner. "I wouldn't."

The warrior's eyes flickered to Hope then back to Gabrielle. She wagered whether or not Hope would use her powers to catch the eggs.

Hope's lips thinned as she considered her position of power between the couple. She then innocently asked, "What do I get if I do or don't catch the eggs?"

"I carried you here," Xena mentioned, "while your mother rode the horse."

Gabrielle's mouth hung open. "You told me to!"

The Warrior Princess smirked then she decided to end the debate before it grew ugly. She swiftly moved her right foot, flipped the frying pan up into the air, and her hands blurred. Within a few heartbeats, she had the eggs cracked open, in the pan, and the pan in her left hand.

"Scrambled," Gabrielle mentioned smugly.

Xena smirked and went to work. She and Gabrielle then shared the eggs. After the breakfast, the group slowly broke camp. They weren't in any real rush either. Gabrielle midway pulled out the empty waterskins except for one full. She went to Hope and asked, "Can you fill these at the lake?"

The demi-god took the three skins. She carried them by the leather straps and went down to the lake. She was a bit slow with her task because she'd never dealt with a waterskin before. It wasn't alchemy, but she figured it out after a few extra minutes.

Hope corked the last skin when it was finished. She then took a moment to stare at her reflection in the water. She would never understand why Dahak had her reborn in the exact form as her mother. She sometimes wondered if it wasn't to bother her more than Gabrielle or Xena. Anytime she saw her reflection, she automatically thought of her mother. Where as previously it made her ache, but now she couldn't help a smile. Despite she looked exactly as her mother, she knew she was anything like her mother and her past history saw to that.

Hope couldn't imagine being happier now that she felt free from Dahak. She felt more alive than past times and certainly more in control of her words, movements, and even her thoughts. Best of all, she had her mother again; the one person that truly loved her. She smiled at that notion. Just then, Hope furrowed her eyebrows when her mother's face shined in the water next to hers.

"I was wondering what happened to you." Gabrielle folded her arms over her chest.

"Just daydreaming, I guess." Hope stood up with the waterskins, which hanged from her right hand.

Gabrielle retrieved them and mentioned, "About anything in particular?"

Hope's head moved up and down several times. "Just how good it feels to be here... and to have you."

The mother stepped closer to her child and touched her child's cheek. "I don't know... I think it's me that finally has you."

Hope weighed it then shook her head. "We've always had each other... we just had Dahak between us."

Gabrielle sadly smiled then lowered her hand. "I think you're right."

Hope then noticed the instant shifted in her mother.

The bard quickly turned to her left then called, "Okay Aphrodite, you can stop hiding."

The demi-god was bewildered, but then she faintly stepped back when a cloud of pink sparkles appeared then shaped into human form.

Aphrodite wiped a tear away and declared, "That was a touching mother, daughter moment."

"You really do have some timing, Aphrodite," the bard chided.

The goddess smirked then thoroughly teased, "As if! I could pick way more inopportune times like when you're totally straddling the warrior babe."

Gabrielle instantly blushed then hissed, "Aphroditeee!"

Aphrodite covered her mouth then muttered, "I forgot... the child is around now." She held up her hands and acted innocent. "My bad."

The bard rolled her eyes then reminded, "Hope is a little older than that."

Aphrodite grinned at the demi-god beside her mother. "Fer shur." She scanned up and down Hope's entire frame. "Bitchin'." She shook her curly locks. "You take that meaning 'like mother, like daughter' to a whole new level."

Gabrielle groaned but turned to her child. "I'm sorry, Hope. This is Aphrodite." She held out her hand to the pink, frilly goddess. She then introduced, "Aphrodite, this is my daughter."

The goddess beamed and sashayed forward. She gingerly held out her hand. "Aphrodite the Goddess of Love and Virgin Termination."

Hope blinked and wasn't sure what to do or say, but she politely shook hands. She was surprised to feel

some strange, power surge from Aphrodite when they touched.

Aphrodite stepped back and waved a hand at Hope and gushed to Gabrielle, "She's speechless... who'd thought since she's your daughter."

Gabrielle rolled her eyes then informed Hope, "You get use to her after awhile."

Hope nodded and still kept quiet.

Gabrielle decided to fill in the gap. "So did you come by just to torment us?"

"Like, oh me! As if. I came to see how my two favorite blondies are doing." Aphrodite smiled brightly and put her hands on her hips. "I was thinkin' we should seriously start a club." She stuck out her chin then bobbed her head a few times. "Blonds Anonymous."

Gabrielle grunted then said to Hope, "Let's go." She grabbed her daughter's wrist and tried to get around the goddess.

Aphrodite sidestepped in front of the bard. "Come on, bardie." She pouted. "I came to see you and your daughter."

The bard dramatically sighed then released Hope. "Well we're fine, we stopped Dahak, and the sun is still going around the earth."

Aphrodite narrowed her eyes at the bard then mentioned, "Um, hello? The earth goes around the sun, Gabs. Duh!" She laughed at the bard then teased, "What planet have you been living on?" She then smirked at the bard's irate features then she turned to the silent demi-god. "So, do you talk?"

Hope exchanged looks with her mother but finally answered, "When my mother lets me."

Aphrodite just hooted with laughter and bent forward to cover her stomach.

"That's it!" Gabrielle threw up her hands, along with the skins, and took off for the camp. "Official pick on the bard day."

Aphrodite turned then chased after the bard.

Hope hadn't lost her smug look but she quickly focused her powers on her mother. She developed a wicked grin when Gabrielle's feet lifted off the ground.

Gabrielle kept walking despite she was going nowhere then it occurred to her. "Hope!" She then suddenly stumbled when Hope dropped her to the ground.

Aphrodite had wide eyes when she figured out what'd happened. She grinned at the demi-god and praised, "Nice one!" She beamed and crinkled up her nose. "I totally love your daughter, Gabs."

Hope approached the pair rather casually. She rested her hands on her leather belt.

Gabrielle sighed then muttered, "Well isn't that super."

"So what other..." Aphrodite waved her hands at the demi-god. "Things can you do?"

"A few other tricks," Hope joked.

"Biiitchin'!" The goddess head bobbed up and down. "Can you transport?"

Gabrielle blew air up at her bangs then sighed. "No, she can't, Aphrodite... we all can't travel by pink sprinkles."

"Way harsh, Gabs." Aphrodite wagged a finger at her friend. "And like I think your daughter has her own mouth piece."

Gabrielle clenched her jaw and mentally counted to ten then repeated the process a few times and even counted backwards just to be safe.

"Anyway." The Goddess of Love smiled at the demi-god. "So how's it feel to be livin' the mortal life?"

Hope chuckled and shrugged. "I'm happy."

The goddess couldn't lose her smile, and she gushed, "I totally love happy endings." She turned to the bard and mentioned, "I'm happy for you, Gabs. I know this is what you've always wanted."

Gabrielle felt slightly open when the goddess said that, but it was true. She nodded then emotionally replied, "It is." She swallowed her emotions down so that she wouldn't get upset. "Thank you, Aphrodite for your help."

Hope carefully listened to the conversation.

The bard turned to her daughter and explained, "Aphrodite broke Dahak's control he had over you."

"No," the goddess cut in, "I freed her heart and soul, Gabs." She placed her hands back on her hips. "That's all I did... it was up to Hope to break Dahak's control." She then frowned and further mentioned, "It's not easy breaking away from a god's control. I've seen it before and only a few have done it."

Gabrielle felt a newer sense of pride in her child. "And Hope is one of the few huh?"

"Fer shur!" the goddess beamed.

Hope was slightly red around her cheeks because of the admiration. "I had help," she admitted then took her mother's hand.

Gabrielle shook her head then argued, "You did it on-"

"No," Hope cut off, "I had help or else I wouldn't be here." She squeezed her mother's hand. She would have given up if she felt her mother didn't love her anymore. Yet the entire time she sensed the buried love in Gabrielle through their bond. She now knew that Gabrielle greatly struggled between what her heart wanted and what her fears told her.

The Goddess of Love sighed quite happily and came between the women. She threw her arms around both the equally short women's shoulders. She jerked them close and guided them towards the camp. "So you're a two blond family now, huh Gabs?"

The bard chuckled and replied, "Yup."

"Thank me huh? You don't have to put up with those brunettes by yourself."

Hope suspected the goddess may have meant Xena's daughter, Eve. She listened carefully again for more information since she had a lot of catching up to do.

Xena remained casually leaning against a tree. She had her arms folded over her chest, Argo's reins tangled in her hand, and the mare huffed impatiently. Xena glanced at the horse and silently agreed.

"Like sorry about that," Aphrodite offered the warrior, "we were having our first, secret club meeting."

Gabrielle rolled her eyes, which made Xena grin.

"Let me guess," Xena taunted, "Blonds Anonymous?"

The Goddess of Love's jaw dropped. "How'd she..."

Gabrielle chuckled and patted the goddess's arm over her shoulder. "She has many skills." Then she slipped away and went to Argo. She worked to get the skins stowed away.

Aphrodite released the demi-god then approached the warrior. "So how's it shakin', warrior babe?"

"Bitchin'," Xena replied.

The goddess laughed and brushed her curly locks back. "You mortal types are so funny." She glanced back at Hope and teased, "Its a good thing you're half god."

Gabrielle looked over at her daughter, lifted her right hand, and did a circling motion at her temple then pointed at the Goddess of Love.

Hope grew perplexed by her mother's signal.

The bard sighed because she realized Hope wouldn't understand that at all.

"So, what's that nasty mark, Xena?" Aphrodite stepped closer, leaned forward, and squinted at the wound. "It looks like you got hit by a tree."

The warrior clicked her tongue.

Gabrielle snickered and because she couldn't imagine what her soul mate would do.

Aphrodite leaned in closer then lifted her right hand. She pointed at the wound and mentioned, "Totally! I see the ringlet design now." She rocked back on her feet and smirked. "Well at least it matches your armor design, warrior babe."

"That's it!" Xena jumped for the goddess.

And Gabrielle jumped of her partner in no time. She grabbed the warrior by the waist and held her. "Xena."

Aphrodite chuckled and mimicked Gabrielle by mouthing, "Xena."

The Warrior Princess growled at the goddess.

Gabrielle caught Aphrodite's joke so she released her partner. "Go for it."

"Okay!" The goddess held up her hands in defeat. "I won't make fun of the ringlet wound that matches Xena's armor."

Xena's eyes darkened another shade, and she bared her teeth.

"Wait!" Aphrodite stretched out her right hand and waved her palm past the warrior's face. She smiled when she saw the instant change.

Gabrielle peered up and smiled crookedly at Xena's healed forehead. Then it occurred to her so she asked, "I thought you couldn't heal without Athena's blessing?"

The Goddess of Love laughed. "As if. I can heal now that bitchy goddess is dead." She then smiled at the warrior. "Truce now?"

Xena eyed the goddess then nodded. "Truce."

Gabrielle sighed then mentioned, "Now, we'd like to get moving, Aphrodite. We have a long trip to the Amazons."

The goddess briefly sulked but nodded. "Well tell Eve I said what's up."

Gabrielle stepped forward and pulled her friend into a hug. "Thanks, Aphrodite."

Aphrodite tightly squeezed back and promised, "Anytime, bardie." She let go then grinned at the warrior. "I'll see you on the flip side, warrior tree."

The warrior snarled and stepped towards the goddess.

Aphrodite squealed and corrected, "My bad, warrior babe!" She turned then went to Hope, who stayed back and intently watched the entire exchange. "I'll sprinkle by for another visit, Hope." She winked and teased, "We totally need to girl talk soon."

Hope glanced at her mother for support then sorta smiled at the goddess. "Um, okay."

"Awe, she's so cute, Gabs." The goddess smiled at the mother then quickly gave the small demi-god a hug.

Hope was taken by surprise, yet she returned the hug then watched the goddess fade into sparkles.

"Take it easy, gal pals," called Aphrodite's fading voice.

Xena released a deep breath then asked in an irritated tone, "Can we leave now?"

Gabrielle grabbed the mare's reins that Xena had let go of earlier. "Yes." She shoved the reins into her partner's hands. "Come on, warrior tree."

"Gabrielle!"

The bard squealed and took off at a run for the road.

The Warrior Princess stood there seething and clenched hands.

Hope approached the warrior and cleared her throat. "I can offer some help on getting her back."

The warrior suddenly smirked and placed her freehand on the demi-god's shoulders. "I can already think of some things you can do, Hope." She gave Hope a gentle shove towards the road. "I think we may just find a common purpose together."

Hope softly laughed and couldn't hide her smile. Just ahead, she spotted her smirking mother waiting for them on the road. And for the first time, Hope experienced a smile that actually touched into her heart and her soul.

The End.