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Violence: There is violence in this story.

Subtext: Any subtext becomes main text here.

Summary: The sequel to [To Find What was Mine](#). It's been almost three years, Xena is now the ruler of southern Greece, and she sets her sights on northern Greece. Gabrielle now discovers herself at a crossroad when the Conqueror, her lost friend, begins her march north and closer to her Nation. Just when Gabrielle decides to seek out Xena, a warlord surfaces near the Macedonia Amazon Nation and threatens to spoil the subtle peace between the Amazons and Centaurs. Meanwhile the Conqueror must keep the Romans at bay before they breach the Greek borders, and her old anger leads her into blindness.

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Series 9: **Destiny of Mine** – Story #2

To Take What is Mine

by Red Hope

Chapter 3

Gabrielle adjusted the saddlebag over her right shoulder. She stood in front of the tavern's door, and she mentally prepared to enter the tavern. She inhaled deeply and grabbed the handle. She pushed the door open and started through the doorway.

Faolan followed behind and weaved through the tables much like his human friend.

"Hello?" Gabrielle called out. She scanned around the empty tavern for any life. She noted the fireplace was lit so that was a good sign. She then stopped when the kitchen door opened.

"I'm sorry, I'm clo..." Cyrene hesitated once she came around the low bar and spotted the newcomer.

"Gabrielle?" She smiled happily.

"Hello, Cyrene." The Amazon returned the warm smile and waited in her spot.

Cyrene quickly dashed for the young woman.

Gabrielle tossed her saddlebags onto the table near her then she caught Cyrene in her arms. She tightly hugged the aged woman and felt her world settle down again.

Cyrene closely held the young woman, who'd become another daughter to her. She pulled back but rested her hands on the Amazon's leather hips. She smiled and stated, "Let me look at you."

Gabrielle laughed and blushed while Cyrene fussed over her.

Cyrene placed a hand on the bard's cheek and shook her head. She sighed contently and softly stated, "You become more beautiful each time I see you. How do you do it?"

The princess laughed, and the blush grew brighter. "I think the Amazons feed me something."

The tavern owner grinned and leaned in for a kiss to the bard's cheek. She took a step back and asked, "How have you been?"

"I've been... well... and very busy," Gabrielle admitted.

"I thought as much by what you wrote in your letters," Cyrene agreed. "I didn't know you were coming."

Gabrielle crinkled up her nose and teased, "Surprise."

Cyrene laughed and nodded a few times. "It is that... a pleasant one." She then lowered her gaze to the watching wolf, and she smiled at him. "How are you, Faolan?"

The wolf twisted his head to the right then replied, "Rrrrr."

"What was that?" Cyrene teased, "You want lamb tonight?" She heard Gabrielle's chuckle while she bent closer to the white wolf. "I happen to have some on hand."

Faolan had bright eyes, and he thumped his tail against the floorboards.

Cyrene hadn't lost her smile, and she gingerly petted the wolf on the head. She smiled at how well she and the wolf got along these days. The wolf had been shy around her at the start, but her cooking had won him out in the end. She knew that a way to a person or animal's heart was through their stomach. She straightened up slowly.

"How have you been, Cyrene?" Gabrielle didn't get an instant response, but she did get a scold. She knew she was being too formal. "How have you been, mom?" she tried again.

Cyrene lost her scold and replied, "I've been well too." She grinned and mentioned, "Now that I am a grandmother two times over."

Gabrielle giggled at the grandmother's happiness. "That's what I hear." She was very happy for Cyrene because she knew it helped Cyrene stay on track these days. "A boy and a girl now. I would say that Toris has his hands full."

Cyrene laughed since it was indeed true. "You have no idea."

"I bet though that you plan to tell me," the bard goaded.

"Count on it." Cyrene's grey eyes lit up with excitement to tell some of the stories. "Did you come with anybody?" When the bard shook her head, she was slightly surprised because Gabrielle wasn't allowed to travel alone. She knew the bard was also the Amazon Princess of the Macedonia Amazon Nation. "Melosa let you travel alone? How did you manage that?"

Gabrielle let out a deep laugh and mentioned, "I used my persuasive words to convince her."

"I can imagine," Cyrene teased. She then went more serious. "Well I was about to make an early dinner, but now that you're here then I'll change it around." She tilted her head and mentioned, "Are you in need of a bath?"

Gabrielle's eyes lit up at the prospect of a nice, warm bath.

The tavern owner knew that look so she chuckled. "I think you'll have enough time for one while I make dinner."

"Are you sure, mom? I can help...?"

Cyrene shook her head, turned, and headed for the kitchen. She then called, "You know how I feel about having somebody else in my kitchen."

The bard giggled because she knew that Cyrene preferred to cook alone. To Cyrene, cooking was like an art, and if somebody toyed with her tools or food then it could get very ugly. Gabrielle always offered, but her offer had yet to ever be accepted.

Gabrielle gathered her saddlebags then made her way to the steps.

Cyrene paused by the door to the kitchen. She gazed over at the young woman, who did look travel worn. "You're welcome to stay..." She left her pending words in the air.

Gabrielle paused by the steps, slightly turned, and met Cyrene's concerned gaze. "Thanks, Cyrene but... I just don't feel comfortable in there." She caught Cyrene's brisk nod then she turned and ascended the steps.

Faolan followed after Gabrielle.

Cyrene watched Gabrielle briefly then sighed. She went into the kitchen. She had a lot to do tonight and not just make dinner. Tonight would required an emotional talk with the Amazon Princess.

The bard made it upstairs, and she hesitated by Xena's old room. The door was closed, and Gabrielle didn't dare open the door. She couldn't open those memories. Instead, she continued down the hallway and went into what use to be Toris's room. She always found the room bare now that Toris had moved out, but she liked that about it. All there was a simple bed and a chest of drawers plus a small nightstand.

Gabrielle put her saddlebags on top of the dresser then prepared for her bath. She knew Faolan would follow her to the washroom down at the other end of the hallway. She didn't mind at all because he was her protector no matter where or when.

The Amazon took a long bath and let her muscles untense. She felt soothed from the water and the fragrant soap she used. She always loved the soaps that Cyrene chose because they were herbal or flowery yet not overbearing.

A candlemark later, Gabrielle found herself in front of a very large dinner. She laughed when Cyrene set a plate down for Faolan. The wolf wasn't taught any proper dinner manners so he dove into his lamb

meat. He also never planned to learn any manners. Gabrielle and Cyrene slowly ate the wonderful meal and idly chatted about life in Amphipolis or in the Amazon Nation. Cyrene caught up on all the latest news in the Nation as she liked to hear of it. She was always fascinated by the Amazons and secretly wished to see them some day. Finally, the only thing left at the meal was the flatbread, which Cyrene and the bard slowly polished off and with Faolan's help.

Gabrielle tore a piece of fresh flatbread free and popped it in her mouth. She nodded at Cyrene's question and replied, "It's been a bit ugly lately. We've kept the peace most of these seasons but just lately its been getting harder. I think patiences are getting thin."

"And they expect you to handle all this?" Cyrene was slightly appalled that the Nation would put such pressure on Gabrielle.

"Well it's my duty," the bard reminded. "I'm the princess, and I've also be trained by Ambassador Majorie to handle this type of thing."

"That is still a lot of stress, Gabrielle." Cyrene frowned and leaned against the table. "A war could break out between the Centaurs and Amazons if you say or do the wrong thing."

The bard expelled a deep breath and muttered, "You don't have to tell me."

Cyrene reached over and touched the bard's hand. "I'm sorry. I'm just concerned about the pressure you must be feeling."

Gabrielle shrugged and mentioned, "I do enjoy it in someways. I've learned a lot about personalities."

The tavern owner laughed at this remark. "I can imagine." She tilted her head then mentioned, "I'm surprised Melosa let you do this since she seems to have a certain agenda against the Centaurs."

The princess agreed with Cyrene's thought process but explained, "The queen knows that lately not many Amazons want to go to war. Originally the majority wanted to fight them, but I guess the older Amazons tire of it and the younger ones seem more peaceful."

"I think they listen to you," Cyrene argued. She watched the young woman shrug. "Gabrielle, you have a way with words and demonstrate a good example. I think you have more influence over those Amazons than you may think."

"I don't know," the bard murmured.

Cyrene squeezed the bard's hand then let go. "Well I do know, and you know that I'm always right about things."

Gabrielle laughed and rested back in her chair. She settled down then ate the last of her bread. She placed her laced hands on her fully stomach. "That was a wonderful dinner, Cyrene. Thank you."

The tavern owner smiled tenderly and replied, "You're welcome. It's nice to feed somebody other than myself." She then sipped on her mug of water, but she noticed the weariness under Gabrielle's eyes. She could tell Gabrielle hadn't slept well in many nights. Something was plaguing the young woman, and she suspected what it was.

"How about we clear these dishes, and I think I have some dessert," Cyrene mentioned. She climbed to her feet and took Gabrielle's assistance to clean up the table.

Faolan idly watched the women go back and forth from the table and take the dishes away. He then smelled something quite good when Cyrene came back with loaf of seeming bread on a plate.

Gabrielle had just taken her chair again. She beamed when she spotted the nutbread.

"I just made it this morning for tomorrow when I open." Cyrene chuckled at the bard's excitement. "Help yourself, Gabrielle."

"Thank you, mom." Gabrielle took the knife from the plate, cut a piece, and handed the knife to Cyrene. "It's been so long since I've had any." She easily gobbled up the amazing bread.

Cyrene was spellbound by how much the Amazon could eat, especially because the nutbread was fairly heavy in one's stomach. She was sure Gabrielle would polish off the loaf by the time their dinner ended.

Finally, Cyrene concluded to bring up the topic her and Gabrielle had been skipping past. She mentally prepared for what may be an emotionally hard conversation, not just for her but for Gabrielle too. She first drank some water then cleared her throat. She started with something easy. "Have you heard the latest news in Greece?"

Gabrielle had brushed the crumbs from her fingers but paused and peered over at Cyrene. She sighed when she knew where this conversation would go. She nibbled on her lower lip and replied, "When I was in Potidaea I heard the talk in the marketplace." She sat back in her chair. "They say she'll be marching north soon from Tricca."

"They seem to think she'll start in the Epirus Providence... that her northern campaign will begin there."

The Amazon nodded then mentioned, "I can't believe the reconstruction of the south went so quickly. I didn't think it'd be so easy for her."

"Well," Cyrene started, "once she sets her mind to do something, it typically gets done and quickly."

Gabrielle grunted and folded her arms over her stomach. She shook her head and slightly bowed it. "Have you seen her yet, Cyrene?"

The tavern owner shook her head then quietly mentioned, "She still goes to Lyceus's tomb... twice a year. I can never seem to catch her though." She released a deep sigh. "I'll go to see him and one day there'll be a white rose on his sarcophagus... I can't imagine where she finds them." She studied how Gabrielle listened to each detail so she dared to ask, "Have you thought anymore about going to see her?"

Gabrielle turned her head away and after a beat she gazed back at Cyrene. "I don't... think I can, Cyrene." She swallowed and rasped, "I'm afraid of who I'll meet." There were many times that people pushed Gabrielle to go, but Gabrielle absolutely refused.

Cyrene dipped her head and caught Gabrielle's eyes. "You know, Gabrielle as she marches north she'll come upon your Nation."

The bard licked her lips because she knew it was true. She'd heard that many Amazon Nations had agreed to alliances, and she wondered how Queen Melosa would feel about it. "I know, Cyrene... but that doesn't mean she'll see me."

"Gabrielle, you can't keep hiding from her." The tavern owner couldn't understand why the bard refused to find her. She knew this was hard on Gabrielle, but she believed fate would bring these two together again.

"Yes, I can," Gabrielle argued in a defiant voice.

"Be realistic, Gabrielle." Cyrene shook her head and reminded, "If Melosa has selected you to handle the affairs to deal with the Centaurs then she'll send you."

"I can always refuse Melosa." The princess tried to dodge every possibility so that fate would be delayed. She didn't want to face that day.

Cyrene quickly got up from her chair, which caught Faolan's attention. She came around the table and took the seat next to the bard. She gathered the bard's hands into hers. "What is it, Gabrielle?" She leaned closer to the distraught bard. "I understand why you're afraid, but I can't understand how you became afraid."

Gabrielle stared down at her hands that were locked with Cyrene's. She choked on her rising tears. "I don't want my childhood memories of Xena and I to be destroyed." She lifted her head and held Cyrene's eyes. "They will be as soon as I meet this woman." She felt her tears slip free, and she muttered, "This woman isn't the Xena I knew, Cyrene.... she's not the Xena you knew either."

"And are you the Gabrielle that Xena once knew?" Cyrene waited a beat then continued her debate. "You've changed a great deal yourself, Gabrielle and none of it has been for the worse."

"Cyrene, she just tore through southern Greece like it was some... sandbox!" Gabrielle threw up her free hand and slammed it on the table. "Xena never once talked about conquering Greece when we were younger."

The mother raised an eyebrow much like what Xena would have done in such a conversation. "And did you exactly talk about ruling an Amazon Nation, Gabrielle?"

Gabrielle sighed and looked away from the older woman.

"What is it, Gabrielle?" Cyrene tried to push the bard because she knew something else much deeper was going on inside of Gabrielle. She truly knew how much Gabrielle cherished Xena, especially back in the younger days.

Gabrielle bit her lower lip, and her tears came back. She wouldn't look at Xena's mother, but she called on her inner strength from all these built up moons. "I'm scared, Cyrene." She turned back to Cyrene and whispered, "What if we meet and... and Xena and I don't connect again?" She gritted her teeth, yet managed to add, "I can't take losing her all over again... especially if she rejects me." She dipped her head and tearfully murmured, "Its so much easier pretending she doesn't exist."

And Gabrielle really tried to pretend Xena didn't exist anymore in this world. Yet she always heard news about the Conqueror. She heard about the reconstruction of the south, and how southern Greece now flourished under Xena's rein. Then the next wave of news sprung into the air about the Conqueror coming north to takeover the rest of Greece. Although the Conqueror did keep fairly busy with the Romans anymore.

Cyrene brushed away the bard's tears. She waited a few beats until Gabrielle controlled herself better then she tried again. "I wish I had the chance to see her again, Gabrielle." She found curious green eyes on her. "I want to tell her how sorry I am." She lifted her chin to try and keep her pride despite things. "It took me a long time to realize Lyceus's death wasn't her fault. She never meant for it to happen, and I don't think she meant for the rest to happen."

Gabrielle shook her head and whispered, "I really miss her, Cyrene... I'm just scared what I'll find in her... or not find."

The mother placed her fingertips under the bard's chin and lifted her head up. She carefully studied

Gabrielle's deep emeralds and whispered, "I think you're really scared of what she'll think of you."

The bard dropped her eye contact when Cyrene hit the Roman nail on the head. She took Cyrene's hand from her chin and held it tightly. "I'm a slave, Cyrene." She licked her lips. "A slave's status is not worth much." She swallowed.

"And yet Xena has been slowly choking the slave market," Cyrene reminded. Gabrielle shook her head, but Cyrene suggested, "I think that says she's still bitter about what happened to you." She tilted her head and considered her daughter from what she knew. "Xena never spoke ill or good about slavery until you were taken. Every since that day, she really looked down upon people who owned slaves. She even made me promise her that I would never own a slave."

Gabrielle curiously studied Cyrene because she'd never heard about this. She dipped her head and considered what'd happened to her last night when she arrived in Potidaea.

The tavern owner could tell Gabrielle had something on her mind, but she didn't press the bard.

Gabrielle took a deep breath first then told Cyrene what'd happened. "Last night when I arrived at the old house..." She shook her head. "I... I went into the house. I haven't been inside for so many moons." She licked her dry lips. "When I went back into Lila and I's room, I knelt beside my bed."

Cyrene narrowed her eyes some as she wondered where this story would go.

"There's this loose floorboard under my bed," the bard explained, "that Xena found when we were kids. I'm not sure if you ever knew but... well Xena bought a pair of matching daggers in Potidaea."

Cyrene sighed and shook her head. "No, I didn't, but it doesn't surprise me with my child."

Gabrielle softly chuckled, however, she continued the story. "Well, whenever Xena came to stay she would hide her daggers under this floorboard." She brushed a stray lock behind her ear. "Anyway, when I was there last night I pulled up the floorboard out of memory. I didn't think anything would be in there but I found one of the daggers."

Cyrene had a confused look, and she asked, "Did she leave it there when..."

The bard understood the question and shook her head. "No. Xena had both daggers when we were in the woods... just before the raid. She tucked them between her skirt's belt. I remember."

Cyrene understood the implications and breathed out, "She placed the dagger there later on. When did she?"

Gabrielle bit her lower lip then debated the answer because she wasn't sure herself. "I think pretty recently, mom." She brushed her bangs back first before she spoke again. "I found some straw up in the loft in the barn. I don't know how it could have gotten there without somebody putting it there."

"Was it fresh?"

The Amazon shook her head. "I don't think so." She slumped back in the chair. "She must have been there a few moons back. The dagger wasn't in the same sheath, and it was pretty well cared for."

"Xena had always been meticulous about her belongings," Cyrene agreed. She then realized another aspect that Gabrielle probably forgot. "If Xena returns to your house and finds the dagger missing then she'll know it was you that took it."

Gabrielle's eyes widened at this aspect that she hadn't thought out when she took the dagger. "Oh gods."

She touched her forehead, and her heart pounded. "What should I do?"

Cyrene tilted her head and thought out each angle and how her daughter may react if the dagger was missing. That was if Xena bothered to check on it or had the time to do so. "I wouldn't worry, Gabrielle. She left it there for you."

"But why?" Gabrielle sighed and tried to figure out the mystery. "I mean, she must be under the impression that I'm a slave somewhere, right?" After Cyrene's nod, she continued to theorize what may be going through Xena's head. "So either she placed the dagger there for me to actually find, but if that'd been the case I would think she'd left some message. Plus she would think, even if I am a slave, that somehow I would try to reach her especially now that she's the Conqueror." She sighed and rubbed her temple. "Or else she left it there as some kind of... token to me." She then lifted her eyes and held Cyrene's steady gaze. "A token like I'm dead." Gabrielle knew she'd won one of the ivy daggers back during the little competition between her and Xena. The bard figured Xena was keeping her promise in giving the dagger.

The mother kept silent while she thought out Gabrielle's idea, which was quite plausible. Xena's actions did mimic her actions with Lyceus's tomb. "It's a good possibility." She then lifted an arched eyebrow and further softly told Gabrielle, "It also means she's still thinking about you, Gabrielle."

The bard slumped in the chair and tried to absorb what this all meant. She also knew it could stir some trouble up if Xena found the dagger missing, and Gabrielle never contacted Xena. She truly debated whether to return the dagger, yet she knew she wouldn't do it. So, exactly what was Gabrielle going to do now that she had the dagger and the subconscious message that Xena did indeed still miss Gabrielle, but probably thought Gabrielle was dead? The huge question made Gabrielle's head ache, and her heartbeat made her feel more alive than ever.

Cyrene soon ended the conversation there because she could tell that Gabrielle's head was far too full. She hated that the bard had so much on her plate because it never seemed to settle down for her. Cyrene merely advised the bard to get some rest and that tomorrow the answers would come easier. Gabrielle could only hope so.

By the time the sun came over the eastern sky, Gabrielle had only received a few candlemarks of sleep. She'd laid in bed most of the night and thought deeply about Xena. She even talked to Faolan most of the night but felt bad she'd kept up the tired wolf. It was a couple of candlemarks after dawn that the bard rolled out of bed.

Gabrielle put on her leathers but decided to leave her weapons behind in the room. She knew how Cyrene felt about them or any weapon in general. And the princess knew she would be fine anyway because of her hand-to-hand combat that she'd been taught. Not that she exactly expected to be in a fight while in Amphipolis.

The Amazon wandered downstairs and entered the kitchen when she heard all the noise.

Cyrene paused in the middle of her breakfast making. "Good morning, dear."

Gabrielle came over and kissed the older woman on the cheek. "Morning."

"How did you sleep?" Cyrene returned to her cooking.

"Not too bad." The princess shrugged and tilted her head. "It took me awhile to get to sleep."

The mother understood, but she curiously asked, "Where's Faolan?"

Gabrielle chuckled at the question. "I think I wore him out last night. I talked his ears off." She stepped aside when Cyrene started to move about in the kitchen. "He'll be down as soon as you come out of the kitchen with the food."

The tavern owner had a wide grin. "I bet. Go sit down, Gabrielle. I shouldn't be much longer."

"Thanks, mom." Gabrielle ran her hand over the woman's clothed arm then she silently left the kitchen. Just when she came out, she spotted Faolan at the top of the steps. "Good morning, Fao."

The wolf twisted his head, yet he didn't wait another beat. He bounded down the steps and took his friend's usual side.

"You hungry, boy?" Gabrielle knelt beside the wolf and warmly greeted him.

Faolan sniffed the air and picked out the mix of food smells. He replied, "Rrrruh." He then back stepped when Gabrielle stood up again. He followed the bard over to a table, and he sat on the cool floor.

Soon enough the small family was eating a delicious, hot breakfast. Gabrielle swore sometimes it was tempting to leave the Amazons just so she could have such meals everyday. She enjoyed the meals in the Nation, but Cyrene's were far better.

After breakfast, Gabrielle mentioned that she was going to visit Lyceus then go to see Toris. Cyrene thought it was a great idea because she planned to be busy getting ready for her customers tonight. She then carefully inquired whether Gabrielle felt like telling a story tonight to the patrons. Gabrielle didn't refuse but didn't agree and promised she'd make her decision this afternoon.

The bard started on the leisurely stroll out of town and down the path to Lyceus's tomb. At her side followed Faolan, and he was investigating the surroundings constantly. Gabrielle's shoulders sunk when she spotted the tomb, but she was grateful that Lyceus had a place of peace now. The bard ducked under the overhang and entered the dark tomb.

Faolan stood in the doorway and let his eyes adjust to the darkness. He had no problem seeing in the darkness.

The Amazon felt around on the ground until she found the flint stones. She picked them up and placed them above the torch that was just above her head. She struck the stones and started the flames on the torch.

Gabrielle set the stones back then yanked the torch free from the iron ring. She then cautiously entered the round tomb and neared the location of the sarcophagus.

The room slowly glowed bright from the torch light. The sarcophagus slowly materialized out of the darkness of the tomb.

Faolan took a seat near the coffin, and he waited for his friend.

The bard stepped around the tall spears in the tunnel. She went over to the first fire plate. She lit the oil in there then went to the other fire plate on the other side. Once she had the fires going, she could see the sarcophagus much better. Then something caught Gabrielle's eye that rested on the sarcophagus.

Gabrielle hastily put the torch in the iron ring by the tunnel way. She then hastened to the sarcophagus and plucked the white rose off the head of the coffin. "By the gods," she breathed and held the rose up to her face.

The white rose was only slightly wilted, which meant it'd been there for about a day or two. The white shade was pearly and soft but the thorns remained on the stem.

Gabrielle couldn't believe it. She gingerly set the rose back down in the same spot and tried not to get emotional. She was here to see Lyceus and remember him.

The princess cleared her mind of Xena and placed her hands on the coffin's edges. She remained slightly bent over the sarcophagus, and her eyes studied the familiar pattern on the coffin.

Faolan bent his head and listened to Gabrielle's low whispers. He'd been in this tomb a few times before, but he didn't know why his friend came here when it upset her so much.

The wolf busied himself by stretching out his neck. He carefully sniffed the moist air, and he naturally smelled Gabrielle. He also faintly detected another human's scent. He was fairly sure it was the same scent he'd caught on the dagger. Yet it was hard for him to be sure.

Gabrielle finished her conversation with Lyceus. She leaned over and kissed the head of the coffin, just above the white rose. She then ran her fingertips over the rose and Xena's young face flashed through her mind.

Faolan stood up when his friend was ready to leave. He quietly followed behind and about halfway down the short tunnel, he gazed back at the dim room. He sighed and hurried after his human friend.

Gabrielle brushed her hair back and tried to stop her thoughts about Xena. She had reeling thoughts in every direction. She and Xena never crossed paths like this, and now they were missing each other by mere days. Were the Fates just trying to toy with her?

The bard stepped off the side of the road. She took a seat on the large stone she'd always noticed during her trip to Lyceus's tomb. She found Faolan seated in front of her so she ran her fingers through his thick coat.

Faolan hung out tongue and mostly because he was panting.

"What you think, Faolan?" Gabrielle looked to the wolf for answers. "Do you think I should find her?"

Faolan's ears moved forward, and he dropped his head onto Gabrielle's lap.

"If this turns out bad, I don't know if I can handle it," Gabrielle softly admitted. "But... I don't think I can live with myself if I don't try." She lowered her head closer to Faolan's. "Xena tried so hard to find me... now it's my turn." She kissed the wolf's head.

The white wolf tilted his head back some and licked the bard's cheek.

Gabrielle smiled and scratched the wolf's ear. "I'm glad you're here, Fao."

Faolan released a low rumble from his chest then he lowered his chin back down.

The bard let more time pass then she finally climbed to her feet. She brushed off some of Faolan's fur from her leathers. She started the journey back to town. Then as she neared the east gates, she spotted three odd but familiarly dressed woman.

Faolan twisted his head when he saw the three Amazons too.

"Sweet Artemis," Gabrielle muttered, "What's happened?" she broke into a run towards the Amazons, who just noticed her.

Faolan ran along side his friend but came to a stop once near the Amazons.

"My princess," Medora greeted.

Gabrielle shook her head when she accounted for the Amazons; it was Medora, Solari, and Jocasta. "What's happened?"

Jocasta and Medora exchanged looks when the princess obviously figured out something was wrong.

Solari stepped forward and explained, "The queen has requested you return to the Nation immediately." She paused and swallowed her nervousness down when she say Gabrielle's greater concern. "A warlord has surfaced near the Nation and is encouraging the Centaurs to join him."

The bard shook her head as distraught and fear swept over her. "Who's the warlord?"

"He goes by the name of Draco," Jocasta piped up.

Solari touched the princess's shoulder and softly informed, "Draco wants the centaurs to join him so he can attack the Nation."

Gabrielle touched her forehead when she realized all her relations with the Centaurs may just be washed away into nothing. "Why is Draco targeting the Nation?"

Solari dropped her hand then shook her head. "We don't know why."

"We must return to the Nation right away, princess." Medora shifted closer to the pair.

Gabrielle glanced at Medora then back at Solari. She could tell by Solari's face that this was very serious and a lot was at stake. The entire Nation was most likely at stake. Why couldn't Gabrielle ever find any peace in this lifetime?

To be continued.