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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 hatred leads her into blindness.

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Started: April 25, 2007

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

To Take What is Mine

by Red Hope

Chapter 8

"We'll be there in two days, my liege," Borias reminded.

The Conqueror was clenching the ends of a table, and she was bent over the table. She stared down at a detailed map of the Macedonia Providence. She studied the borders of the Amazon Nation, which was located just south of the border to the Illyrians. "And where does Tracker believe Draco and his army is located?"

Borias came to the right side of the table. He carefully studied the map then pointed at a valley several

Roman miles from the Amazon Nation. "Here."

The Conqueror studied the distance between the warlord and the Amazons. She figured that it had to be at least a quarter of a day's ride between the enemies.

"The Centaurs are on the east side of the Amazon Nation." Borias traced his fingertip over the map and stopped on the east side about the same Roman miles from the Nation as the warlord was located.

"Interesting," Xena muttered. "The Amazons are sandwiched between Draco and the Centaurs."

Borias straightened up and folded his arms. "If Draco wins the Centaurs then the Amazons have little hope."

"Mmm." Xena straightened up and placed her hands on her hips. She tried to gauge the best tactic for them once they arrived.

"Are we putting ourselves between the Amazons and Centaurs?"

The ruler pulled away from her thoughts and focused on Borias. It was only she and Borias in her tent for the late night discussion about their plans. "No." She tilted her head and stared back at the map. "Our concern is Draco... what becomes of the Amazon and Centaur relations does not matter to us."

"Tomorrow your message to Queen Melosa will go out," Borias offhandedly mentioned. "I hear Melosa takes little assistance."

"A typical Amazon," the Conqueror agreed, "High on pride and low on cunningness." She peered up at her old friend. "Where do you think the battle will take place between the Amazons and Draco?"

"If Draco is smart, he'll stay away from the forest." The stratègos bent over the map again. "It'll be here... south... closer to Aegae."

"It'll certainly leave the Amazons trapped," Xena agreed. "There's a deep river here that runs south then east along the Amazon's northern borders until it connects with the Axius River."

"It completely blocks any northern escape." Borias chuckled and shook his head. "The Amazons picked a bad spot to build their Nation."

"They don't have to worry about invasion from the north," Xena thoughtfully considered aloud. She then lifted her head to Borias and grinned.

Borias knew that look, and he mimicked it. "And Draco would assume the same for him."

The Conqueror now had her plan building. "We'll split the army apart tomorrow. You'll take half of the army around Draco's camp to the west side and wait there. I'll keep him distracted from noticing your position. When he moves south to take on the Amazons and me, then you'll need to come up behind him."

"He may try to escape west from there," Borias considered.

"Yes," Xena agreed, "except he'll find a slight problem." She pointed at the western direction, which depicted a heavily forested area. "The timbers will be ripe for burning."

The stratègos grunted and remarked, "The vincentes will easily set the forest ablaze if set in the right location."

"And they will be... let's just pray the winds are in our favor." The ruler smirked at her stratègos. "See

to the army tonight. As soon as contact is made with Queen Melosa then Draco will know of our presence."

"Let's hope he doesn't already," Borias argued. He stepped towards the tent flap. "I'll report back tonight."

The Conqueror nodded once then watched him go. She turned back to the map, and she wondered exactly how Queen Melosa would react to the letter she needed to prepare tonight. Xena had already setup alliances with several other Amazon Nations in southern Greece, but each Nation was different. Xena didn't even want to consider how the Thrace Amazon Nation would react to her arrival when time came for her to conquer eastern Greece.

Xena set aside her thoughts, and she went to her small desk. She pulled out a blank scroll and worked out a brief yet very forthcoming message to Queen Melosa. She offered assistance to the Amazon Nation in stopping Draco and whether the Amazons took it or not, she planned to stop Draco. She then would start her campaign by taking Macedonia.

The Conqueror signed the message then she picked up the purple, burning candle to her left. She carefully tilted the candle in a habitual fashion. She watched the purple wax fall and pool beside her signature. She set the candlestick aside then picked up her stone stamp that held her signet. She carefully pressed the stamp into the warm wax and pulled back the stone stamp, which revealed her signet of a lion's head.

Soon the Conqueror rolled up her message and tied it with one of her official, purple thongs. She tightly clutched it and marched to the tent flap where her two guards stood. "Deliver this," she ordered.

The right guard received the scroll. He clapped his bronze chest then hurried off. The guard soon made it to the messenger that'd been selected to ride off with the message at first light.

The messenger retrieved the scroll from the hoplite and thanked him. The scroll held tightly in the messenger's hand, but it soon was tucked away into a saddlebag for several candlemarks. At dawn, the scroll came back out of the saddlebag and was transferred into a leather pouch. The gold tip of the scroll poked out of the pouch, and soon wind was brushing against the exposed end of the scroll. The scroll stayed tucked in the pouch despite the seeming endless bouncy ride into a more cooler climate.

The sun eventually set and the scroll's golden end could only be seen from a campfire's flames. It still remained in the same pouch, but the pouch was no longer slung over the messenger's body. Instead the pouch rested against a set of saddlebags for many candlemarks until Helios awoke again. Once more, the pouch was picked up and slung over the the messenger's head.

The scroll continued its ride north and only found the ride easier once the messenger slowed for some reason in a forest. The scroll sparkled now and again under the sunlight that pierced through the tree's leaves.

Soon, the sealed scroll was extracted from its home and fully exposed to the sunlight. Its one end remained in the messenger's hand while the free end was soon covered by a small, warm hand that was also callused. The messenger released the scroll and let it be taken by its formal receiver.

Commander Kaylee peered over the queen's shoulder and carefully watched. Her eyes flickered to the Conqueror's messenger then back to the scroll when the queen untied the thong.

Queen Gabrielle felt her heartbeat accelerate, and her hands trembled. She licked her lips once she had the thong free. She was very grateful her mask was still over her face or else the messenger and

stratègos would have seen her nervousness. She carefully unrolled the scroll then a familiar handwriting became visible to her.

Gabrielle first noticed that the opening of the message was for Queen Melosa. So it was obvious the Conqueror knew nothing of Gabrielle's takeover of the Amazon Nation. The letter offered friendly assistance to stopping the warlord Draco, which surprised the bard. She hadn't expected Xena to be this close or the message to be about any help, but she thought it'd be more about formal alliances. Gabrielle quickly realized that the Conqueror, her old friend, would soon arrive near the Nation.

"My queen," the stratègos called. She could tell the bard was caught off guard somehow, and Kaylee didn't know why. "Perhaps we should offer a guest hut to Vasilis until you can prepare a response."

The Conqueror's messenger, Vasilis, kept his hands behind his back and waited. Beside him was his steed and saddlebags on the horse. "I would be grateful, Queen Melosa."

The stratègos prepared to correct the messenger, but the queen stopped her.

"Commander, could you show our guest to a hut?" Queen Gabrielle turned to the stratègos, who had her mask back. She then curtly added, "Please."

Commander Kaylee hesitated and briefly showed her confusion. She cleared her throat then nodded. "Of course, my queen." She turned to the messenger and ordered, "Follow me, Vasilis. We'll stable your horse first." She escorted the Conqueror's messenger away from the queen and wolf.

Gabrielle remained in the middle of the village where she and the stratègos had met up with the messenger. The bard had been riding back from the Centaur village when she quickly heard of the messenger's arrival. She felt her head spinning, and she wasn't sure what to do now that Xena was on her way.

"Let's go back to the hut, boy." The queen pushed her mask back finally. On her way to the hut, she passed Solari and asked Solari if she could send Ephiny to her hut. Solari promised she'd track Ephiny down right away.

Gabrielle finally entered her quiet hut, and she propped her staff against the wall. She came over to her desk and set the official message down on it. She then pulled out her chair and slumped in it quickly.

Faolan sat down next to his friend, and he rested his chin on Gabrielle's closest knee.

"I can't believe this, Fao." The queen dropped her back and closed her eyes. "A warlord, the Conqueror, an automaton, the Centaurs, and maybe Hercules will be here shortly. What's next? The Romans in our backyard?"

Faolan whined and shifted his chin around.

"Yakut was right," the queen muttered, "the Fates are going to collide." She opened her eyes and stared at the thatch ceiling over her head. She raised her head up and reached to her neck. She carefully lifted up the quill necklace that she'd worn every since her mother returned it to her. She stared at the quill that protruded from her fingertips. "Xena," she whispered, "what are you planning?"

Gabrielle broke from her thoughts when there was a rap at the door. She straightened up and called, "Enter."

Faolan lifted his chin from Gabrielle's knee and twisted his head. He stuck out his tongue when Ephiny entered.

"Hi," Ephiny greeted, "Solari said you were looking for me." She shut the door and came over to her friend.

"Read this." Gabrielle picked up the message and handed it to her friend.

The Amazon gingerly took it and noticed how official it was by the untied thong. She opened it and read over the message, but she held her breath briefly when she saw the signature at the end. "Sweet Artemis." She peered over the top of the scroll and gazed at Gabrielle.

"I know," the bard murmured. "Do you notice one thing about the message?"

"Besides the fact we're about to have the Conqueror bearing down on the Nation? No." Ephiny rolled up the scroll. "What else?"

"It's addressed to Melosa," Gabrielle informed and tilted her head.

Ephiny set the scroll down then shrugged. "She's somewhat misinformed about your reign."

The bard dipped her head and remained quiet for a beat.

Ephiny slightly narrowed her eyes and wondered what was on the bard's mind. She slightly worried when Gabrielle's emotional eyes lifted to her.

"I don't think she needs to know I am the queen."

"What?" Ephiny barked.

Faolan slightly jumped at Ephiny's tone. He twisted his head and stared up at the loud Amazon.

"Just wait, Ephiny." The Amazon Queen paused until her friend was visibly calm, then she explained, "You, Solari, Melosa, Andra, and Eponin are the only ones that know of my brand. If word spreads that I am the queen then the slavers may put two and two together."

"Gabrielle," Ephiny argued, "I don't think you'll have to fear the slavers coming after you."

"Ephiny," Gabrielle shot back, "look at Draco? He's here because of me. He wants me so he can have leverage over Xena." She shook her head. "Why wouldn't the slavers be any different? Xena has already been fighting them, and if they find out who I am to her then they'll seek me out. The fact that I am the Amazon Queen is an extra incentive."

"It is impossible for your name not to spread when you are the queen."

Gabrielle gave a challenging look back. "Who says the queen's name is Gabrielle?" She saw Ephiny's perplexed face so she picked up the scroll. "Xena thinks Melosa is the queen. Why not keep it that way?"

"Wait, wait." Ephiny held up her hands. "You want to return the queen's mask to Melosa?"

"No," Gabrielle replied, "I'm saying we can portray her as the queen."

Ephiny lifted her right hand and massaged her forehead. "Melosa would have to agree." She shook her head then asked, "How long do you expect you can keep up such a charade, Gabrielle?"

"Just long enough until we get out of this mess," the bard answered.

"And the slavers?" the Amazon argued.

Gabrielle shook her head then reminded, "They won't matter anymore once Xena takes over Greece."

"She'll abolish the slave market," Ephiny softly agreed. "Hopefully your brand will become null too."

"That's what I pray for too," the queen murmured.

"What if Xena comes here... into the village? She may seek an alliance."

Gabrielle shrugged and answered, "That's fine. I'll have Melosa handle it."

"And what will you do?" Ephiny narrowed her eyes and already knew the answer so she chided, "Hide in your hut?"

The bard shrugged and replied, "Most likely." She sighed and shook her head. "If Xena knows I am here then word will get out."

"You do realize how dangerous this game is?" Ephiny carefully watched the bard's face. "Xena has the potential to be the ruler of Greece. If she finds out you were the queen and hiding from her... Gabrielle..."

"I know," the worried bard murmured. "If she forms an alliance with the Nation and later finds out I am the true queen... she may void the alliance."

"And declare us an enemy," Ephiny added. "She won't trust you or the Nation." She squatted down and became eye level with her friend. "This is incredibly dangerous, Gabrielle. I think you need to bite the arrowhead on this one."

Gabrielle dipped her head and whispered, "Ephiny, I can't endanger the Nation because of my brand."

"You can't endanger the Nation because of your fears," Ephiny argued.

"I'm not... I'm thinking of the Nation's safety."

Ephiny sighed and lowered her head for a beat. She lifted it and carefully studied the already set determination in the bard's eyes. "I think you're making a mistake."

"I know I'm making a mistake," Gabrielle relented, "but it'll save the the Nation. If any alliance is formed with Xena and becomes endangered because of me, I can always step down and hand the mask back to Melosa. Then it'll only be my personal relationship with Xena that'll be severed."

Ephiny patted the bard's knee then stood up. "You're too stubborn, Gabrielle." She then offered, "You'll have to get Melosa's consent."

Gabrielle was slightly grim, but she mumbled, "I doubt that'll be hard." She turned her eyes to the rolled up message from the Conqueror.

The message scroll remained on the table for a few candlemarks then near sunset, it was lifted by that same warm, small hand and carried for awhile. It was handed off to another woman, who unrolled it and viewed it. The scroll then was set down on another desk and placed next to a blank scroll.

Carefully and slowly, the blank scroll started to fill up with words that answered back to the first message. Once the scroll held the proper response, there came a final signature then a wax seal by the signature. Next, the response scroll was rolled up gingerly and tied with an official thong. The response message was picked up by a warm, large hand and carried out of some hut then through the Amazon village.

Vasilis was just prepared to go to bed after he'd had a meal in the mess hut. He straightened out his back when he took in the queen's face for the first time. He bowed his head and greeted, "Good evening, Queen Melosa."

Melosa brushed back her curly, dark hair and remained formal. "Good evening, Vasilis. I have a message for the Conqueror." She held up the scroll.

Vasilis paused when he felt like the queen had grown slightly taller and her voice deeper. He shook it off and accepted the scroll. "It is good word?"

"Yes," Melosa replied, "I look forward to meeting her."

Vasilis slightly smiled. "Of course. Thank you for your hospitality tonight."

"It was our pleasure." The Amazon bowed and offered, "Have a good night, Vasilis." She straightened up and started on her trek back.

"You as well, Queen Melosa," the messenger called back. He briefly watched her go, then he reentered his hut. He quickly stowed the response message into his pouch.

The response scroll also had a tip sticking out of the pouch like the prior message. It's bronze top reflected the firelight coming from the fireplace then it disappeared into the late night. By Helios's awakening, the response scroll found itself on a bouncy ride in a wooded terrain. The scroll spent another night in the pouch, but by the early morning it founds itself carried through a bustling camp and into a large, firm hand.

The Conqueror thanked the messenger, and she stepped away from several of her hoplites. She freed the thong, unrolled the scroll, and took in the words of appreciation. She grinned at finding out she was welcomed onto Amazonian soil if she wished it. She raised an eyebrow at Queen Melosa's signature then the signet of a bird's eye.

The ruler rolled up the scroll and slowly strolled through the busy camp. She studied how her hoplites quickly prepared to travel for today. She suspected they'd make it to Aegae today, then they would continue the rest of the way tomorrow.

Xena held the scroll in her right hand and tucked it behind her back and held her hand in place with her left hand. She was making her way to the temporary corral where Argo waited for her. She expected her army to be prepared sooner than normal since she only had half of the hoplites. Although the cavalry could be slower at times, but she wasn't planning on it today.

The Conqueror approached her golden mare, who was tacked and ready to go. She went to the saddlebags and tucked the scroll away. She then efficiently mounted her horse and took the reins into her hands.

"My liege," an chiliarchèses greeted. He stood off to the right in his regal hoplite wear. His hands were free so he tucked them between his cape and back. "The army is almost prepared. What are your orders?"

The ruler studied the chiliarchèses, who was a commander under the stratègos. She briefly considered his request then replied, "I'll deal with the cavalry. See that the hoplites are in formation in half of a candlemark."

The commanding hoplite bowed to his leader. "Right away, my liege." He turned and marched off with his armor echoing his steps.

The Conqueror's thinned army of thousand five hundred hoplites quickly started to form. The cavalry or rather hippeis was five hundred strong and led by two hipparchis. She planned to have them take up the rear of the army this time instead of the normal front.

First, Xena spoke with the two hipparchis and instructed them to lead the hippeis behind the army. She then caught up with the chiliarchèses, who stood before the hoplite army. He'd already commanded to the army to get into phalanx formation as the Conqueror favored the formation mostly. He bowed to his leader on the golden mare, then he took orders to begin the march.

The Conqueror remained at the head of her army and guided them north towards the small town of Aegae. She had every intent to take the town with whatever means if they did not annex to her polis. Aegae was considered a small city, but it was the beating heart of the Macedonia Providence. A candlemark before sundown, the Conqueror ordered her army to break in a large and mostly open valley. She waited until the army was mostly organized and began to prepare the temporary camp. She had her two wing commanders, or ilarchès, handle the camp building. She and the chiliarchèses along with fifty hippeis took a ride to Aegae.

Xena slowed Argo when she came to the crest of the hill. She shifted in her saddle and listened to her hippeis and chiliarchèses take her sides. She carefully scanned over the small city of Aegae that filled the valley and spread out into the next valley.

The chiliarchèses adjusted the reins in his hands. "I would image that's the town office, my liege." He freed his right hand and pointed at the prestiges building.

The Conqueror tilted her head and studied the building she'd spotted earlier. "I believe so, Bastien."

The chiliarchèses, Bastien, reclaimed his reins and mentioned, "If Draco does not already know of our position, then he will once we have Aegae."

"Hmmm," the ruler softly agreed, "that's the plan."

Bastien didn't expect the response, but he should have known his leader's intent. He suddenly grinned.

Xena saw the smirk, yet she ordered everybody to ride down into Aegae. They would enter through the south gate and ride to the northern portion where the officials would be located in the town office.

Already in the city was a tall man, who was well-known among the people of Aegae and well-known throughout all of Greece. He'd spent the night in Aegae after his long travels to rush to Macedonia, and he now walked out of a stable with his horse in tow. He faintly smiled at his partner.

"You ready, Herc?"

"All set," Hercules promised. He patted his gelding then mounted the horse. He watched his friend, Iolaus, mount his horse with ease. Hercules glanced to his right when the last person from their small party joined them. He offered a smile to the Amazon.

Gryta slipped her boot into the stirrup then easily maneuvered into the saddle. "The ride to the Nation isn't far from here. We'll only take half a day."

Iolaus moved his horse around so that he was beside the Amazon. "It's north from here?"

"Yes," Gryta informed, "just north and slightly west."

"Let's get moving then," the demi-god urged. He tapped his horse's sides and started the journey through the bustling city.

Iolaus followed and the Amazon took up the rear. They headed north through the city and started for the northern gates that would take them to the only road that led anywhere near the Amazon Nation. It was a heavily traveled road for both the Amazons and the merchants of Aegae, who traded with the Nation.

Iolaus carefully maneuvered his horse through the crowds at the slow pace. Then about twenty hoplites on foot were quickly marching down the streets in a southern direction. He furrowed his eyebrows and glanced at Hercules.

Hercules watched the hoplites rush past them, and he looked to Gryta for some explanation.

The Amazon rarely saw the city's militants in operation. She became slightly concerned that maybe Draco had moved near Aegae for some reason. Gryta stopped her horse when another group of hoplites were coming past them.

Hercules halted his horse by the Amazon's. He neared the passing hoplites and called, "Excuse me."

The leader of the party halted the hoplites. "Yes, sir?"

Hercules was surprised the hoplites would stop, but he figured he better not waste their time. "Where is everybody headed?"

The hoplite noted the Amazon with the man, and he had problem divulging anything. The alliance between Aegae and the Macedonia Amazon Nation was quite old and strong. "The Conqueror has arrived."

Gryta was shocked and quickly demanded, "When?"

The hoplite turned to the Amazon and replied, "Just now." He hesitated then mentioned, "It would be wise to alert Queen Melosa of the Conqueror's arrival."

"I will," the Amazon softly agreed. "Thank you."

The hoplite nodded then turned back to his party. "Fall out." He continued the fast march south through the city.

Hercules watched them go, then he casted his gaze further through the city until he could just make out the south wall. His lips slowly thinned while he mulled over the Conqueror's surprising arrival in Aegae.

"We should go," Iolaus mentioned.

"Yes," Gryta agreed, "the queen must know of the Conqueror's arrival."

Hercules returned his focus to the group. "It would be nice to know why."

The Amazon shook her head and urged, "There is no time."

The demi-god sighed and nodded his head. He tapped his gelding's sides then continued north. He tried to figure out the Conqueror's unexpected arrival in Aegae. He'd heard that she'd go first to Epirus then continue her campaign from there. The fact that she was in Macedonia did not add up correctly.

Hercules had yet to meet the famous and powerful ruler of southern Greece. He's heard all the stories of her conquest and humanly impossible feats. He wondered if half of it wasn't blown out of proportion, but somehow he suspected not because there's never been a greater leader than Alexander the Great,

until now.

Hercules and Iolaus had trekked down into southern Greece during the reconstruction period. They'd gone to Athens first and then later to Corinth. It'd been in Corinth that Hercules and his friend became shocked by the dramatic changes. The last time either of them had been in Corinth there'd been heavy poverty thanks to the king's lack of care. Corinth was another city and dramatically changed into a clean city that had happy citizens.

Originally, Hercules had never heard of the Warrior Princess. Word never reached him until she conquered Sparta and the later the Peloponnese Providence. He expected this Xena to be like the rest of the warlords so he and Iolaus packed up supplies and planned to stop her. Yet as their southern ride brought them closer to the providence the reports were nothing but praising songs. The demi-god halted his pursuit when he'd entered Corinth and listened to the woes of the people under the tyrannical king. For the first time, Hercules prayed that a warlord would defeat the Greek city-states.

There was some reason why the Conqueror and Hercules had never met, but it seemed that the Fates would bring them together soon. Hercules planned to assess this ruler from head to toe and determine whether she was truly honorable enough to ruler Greece. Hercules could not let Greeks fall under her reign if she as anything less.

While Gryta guided Hercules and Iolaus north, the city of Aegae remained busy with the Conqueror's arrival. The Conqueror and her small band were escorted into the city by forty militants and brought to the official building. Xena commanded her hippeis to dismount and wait for her. She and Bastien were then welcomed into the administration building for the city where they were greeted by several officials.

The twelve officials of the city escorted the Conqueror and chiliarchèses into a large meeting room. There they exchanged wine cups and began to talk about current affairs. The head official, Kratos, was proud to have the Conqueror in his city. He'd heard of her pending arrival but hadn't expected her here for many moons.

"I hear there's a warlord north of here," Xena mentioned to Kratos.

Kratos shifted on his sandals and drank some wine first. "Yes, we've been on guard in case he plans to attack the city."

"You have any dealings with him?"

Kratos shook his head. "Nothing as of yet. He seems to be focused on the Amazons."

The Conqueror found that of interest, and she asked, "Any news from the Amazons?"

"None actually," Kratos admitted, "which is truly strange." He moved to his right and set his wine cup down on a nearby table. "For as long as I can remember we've always had close relations with the Amazons. Our trade relations are very strong with them." He paused and carefully thought back over his memories. "I recall when the previous queen helped Aegae stop a warlord." He peered up at the taller ruler. "They have yet to ask for assistance in stopping this warlord."

"Do you know why?"

Kratos huffed and replied, "I suspect it's their queen."

"Melosa," Xena supplied.

"Yes, she's rather stubborn and headstrong." Kratos picked up his wine cup when it was refilled by the passing server. "Queen Melosa has serious problems too. I suspect the relations with the Centaurs will go sour."

The Conqueror filed this away for later. She then offhandedly questioned, "Do you know who their princess is?"

Kratos peered into his wine cup as if it had the answer. He mulled it over then shook his head. "I know they have a princess, but I can't recall her name." He furrowed his eyebrows then mentioned, "I don't believe I've ever met her." He gazed up at the ruler again. "I met the previous princess... she was Queen Melosa's younger sister." He brightened when he recalled that princess's name. "Terreis was her name. She was very nice... nothing like her sister. They were like night and day."

"What happened to her?"

"She was killed... by the Centaurs."

The Conqueror quickly pieced together why the Amazons and Centaurs had rocky relations. She imagined that Queen Melosa wanted nothing but vengeance for her sister's death. "What do you know of Draco?"

Kratos sipped on his wine then replied, "Not much, I'm afraid. He just randomly surfaced near the Amazon Nation." He opened his mouth to say something else, but he faltered briefly.

Xena sensed it so she tried to encourage the official. "If Draco defeats the Amazons... there won't be much to stop him from coming here, Kratos."

Kratos bowed his head then peered back up. There was some conviction in his eyes when he proclaimed, "Besides you, Conqueror."

The Conqueror held back her smirk, yet she declared, "I am Greece's guardian."

Kratos smiled at the ruler's prose. "And Aegae would be in favor of such a guardian."

The Warrior Princess had grown to the politics that all politicians used around her. She mirrored Kratos's knowing smile. "Perhaps an accord is required then?"

"With the honorable Conqueror? I don't need to be an oracle to know what prosperity you bring, Conqueror." He held out his hand in pre-agreement. "To future relations, my liege?"

Xena smiled when Kratos hooked her title. She collapsed the official's hand in a strong shake. "To future relations."

To be continued.