

# Amazon Nation

*SG-X, part 1*

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An SG team finds a planet where any men are attacked on sight. A special all-female team consisting of Major Carter, Doctor Fraiser and the Lieutenants Satterfield and Hailey is formed and sent to investigate. It quickly becomes obvious that there are many questions to answer. Who are these people? Why do they look like they do? What kind of creature is their goddess? And, above all, what will Sam do when it looks like Janet is about to marry the Amazon queen?

**Featured fandoms:** Stargate: SG1, Xena: Warrior Princess

**Featured pairings:** Sam/Janet, Sam/Janet/Gabrielle

**A.S.S Story codes:** ff,fff

**Story rating:** NC17

## Meeting Strangers

"It's an alien infection," Dr Janet Frasier said. "She must have picked it up on the last planet they went to."

Sam was looking up at her colleagues from an infirmary bed. She didn't feel particularly ill, just a bit flushed and warm.

"Is it serious, Doctor?" General Hammond said.

"Not yet, General," Janet said. "But it might become serious if I don't start treatments immediately."

"I understand," Hammond said. "Is there anything you need?"

"I will need complete isolation for me and the patient, and a total shutdown of all electrical and electronic equipment," Janet said. "That, and time."

"It will be done."

Suddenly, the room was dark and all the people gone. Only a few candles lit up Sam's bed, which had also been decorated with roses. A white curtain surrounded the bed. Steps came from outside it, and Janet made her way inside.

"Hi," she said. "How is my favourite patient doing?"

"Kind of hot," Sam said.

Janet smiled at her.

"Don't I know it," she said. She smiled down at Sam and started unbuttoning her lab coat.

"This treatment is kind of experimental," Janet said. "But I think you'll like it."

The lab coat started sliding down her shoulders, revealing nothing but bare skin beneath. Sam followed it with her eyes, eagerly taking in every square inch of disrobed Janet. The coat was just coming down to the beautiful doctor's breasts, when...

...Sam woke up, abruptly sitting up straight and gasping, in her own bed in her own house.

God, she had such a love-hate response to that dream. It'd stay in her mind all day, distracting her from whatever she was doing. She'd be walking around the SGC as a half-zombie, hoping to see Janet and at the same time hoping not to. Wanting to be close to her, and wanting to stay away. Seeing without touching drove her nuts, but seeing was better than nothing.

She glanced at the alarm clock. Just after four in the morning. Almost an hour before she had to get up. Well, at least that gave her time to take care of the most immediate frustration.

Sam laid down again, closed her eyes, reached down under the blanket and tried to pretend that her hand was smaller, softer and not hers.

A few hours later, Sam walked into the SGC briefing room and, to her surprise, did not find SG-1 there. Instead of Jack, Daniel and Teal'c around the conference table, there were Dr Fraiser, Lt Hailey and Lt Satterfield.

"Hi," she said as she sat down in her usual chair. "What's going on?"

"Search me," Janet said. "I only know that General Hammond asked me to be here."

She gestured to the two young women on the other side of the table.

"This is..." she began to say.

"We've met," Sam interrupted. She turned to the pair of lieutenants.

"I didn't know you guys had been posted to SGC yet," she said.

"We kinda haven't," Hailey said. "We've just been training and reading reports for the last few months, until they got us here in a terrible hurry last night."

Sam leaned back. "Well, that's the military for you," she said. "Hurry up and wait."

"Ladies," General Hammond said some time later, after he'd dropped a stack of thin folders on the table and sat down. "You probably wonder why you're here."

Nobody protested.

"Two days ago," he said, "SG-8 encountered indigenous population on P5X-8859. Despite some initial friction, they managed to establish friendly communication with them."

Hammond paused briefly after that, as if to leave a space for somebody to make a smart-arse comment. Since none seemed to be forthcoming, he went on.

"To every outward appearance, the natives seem to be a primitive people. They dress mostly in skins, they display no weapons more advanced than crossbows and they have a basically agrarian economy. However, there are some anomalies."

He pointed the remote control at the video setup in the corner of the room and pressed play. The monitor came to life.

On the screen, two athletic young women dressed in what looked quite a lot like leather bondage gear obsessively decorated with fur and feathers were running towards the edge of a thick forest. They were running very fast, but apparently with little effort. When they reached the trees, they both kept running up a tree trunk. Having reached the lower branches, they rapidly disappeared into the greenery jumping from branch to branch.

"Neat," Lt Satterfield said.

"That's not possible," Lt Hailey said. "Nobody can run up a tree like that."

"Are they human?" Sam asked.

"We don't know, Major," Hammond said. "They look human enough, but there is some reason to believe that's not the case. And one of those reasons is why you are here now."

He looked at the four serious faces around the table.

"There are no men on P5X-8859," he said. "Only women. They know well enough what men are, and threatened violence if the male members of SG-8 did not immediately gate home. Furthermore, they claim to have been living there for more than a century, and Lt Summers saw one woman who appeared to be about five months pregnant."

"And you want to know how that is possible," Janet said.

Hammond smiled.

"That I do, Doctor," he said. "There clearly seems to be some kind of advanced biological technology at work here, and even if that's not something we can get our hands on these people could be valuable allies."

He handed out the folders that had been stacked in front of him to the four women.

"These are the reports from lieutenants Summers and Rosenberg of SG-8. We have approval from the people of P5X-8859 to send a team of four women as a diplomatic delegation. Since we have no all-female SG team, this one has been formed specifically for this mission. Your temporary assignment is SG-X, and Major Carter is in command. You leave for P5X-8859 in two hours, and you will stay there for one week. Your mission is to try to figure out as much as possible about them, while retaining friendly relations. Any questions?"

"No, sir!" chorused from around the table.

The first thing that struck Sam after she stepped through the gate to P5X-8859 was the heat. The second was the smells.

Unlike the temperate climate of most Gate sites, this one was clearly subtropical. The air was not noticeably cooler than her skin, and while the landscape was still predominantly green the vegetation was of a distinctly different kind than the usual pine-dominated forest. This was the frantic variety of a place where things grew easily and the only way to compete was hyperspecialisation into a particular ecological niche. Just from where she stood at the steps to the Gate she could see dozens of different kinds of plants. She had no doubt that once they got off the plain and into the forest they'd find hundreds or thousands more.

Behind her, the Gate closed.

"This is another planet?" Satterfield said. "It kinda looks like New Zealand, except it's a lot warmer."

"Most Gates are on terrestrial-type planets," Sam said. "And this one is more exotic than most, actually. Usually they all look more or less like southern Canada."

"Or Egypt," Janet said.

"Or Egypt," Sam agreed.

"The village is supposed to be five miles north of here, right?" Hailey said. "Better get going if we want to get there before dark."

"The day here is 25 hours," Sam said. "But you're right. Let's be off. I'll take point. Janet, after me. Satterfield next, then Hailey."

The four of them set off north at a brisk pace.

As Sam had thought, the variety in plant life was even greater once they got into the woods. Surprisingly enough, the insect life was almost absent. Not that she was complaining. Bugs were usually the most annoying kind of life on any planet. So far, this one would've made a more than decent vacation resort. Even the gravity was a little lighter than back home, giving them all a nicely light feeling.

"Major?" Hailey's voice was only barely loud enough for her to make out.

"Yes?" she said.

"There's somebody up in the trees, following us."

As soon as she'd got the words out, women started falling from the trees. In a few moments they were entirely surrounded by leather-clad young women pointing swords at them. They all wore large masks that covered all of their heads and most of their necks.

Sam held her hands well away from her body.

"We come as friends," she said. "We were given permission to enter your lands."

One of the women came a couple of steps closer.

"Are you the ones from the stone ring?" she said.

She was quite impressively muscular, Sam saw. Not in a bulky bodybuilder fashion, but in the less obvious athlete fashion. Sam knew that she herself was in very good shape, but she still got a feeling that she didn't want to end up arm wrestling this one.

"We are," she said.

The woman took off her mask. Behind it, she had long dark hair and a good-looking, friendly face.

"Then I bid you welcome to the Amazon Nation," she said. "My name is Varia, and I am regent while our queen is absent."

From behind, Sam heard Janet make a strange half-strangled noise.

"I am Major Samantha Carter," Sam said, for the moment ignoring Janet's odd reaction. "These are my companions, Doctor Janet Fraiser, Lieutenant Maria Satterfield and Lieutenant Jennifer Hailey. It is an honor to meet you."

She held out her hand towards Varia, who responded in kind. Sam managed to quickly readjust from a normal Earth-style handshake to the wrist-grabbing variant that Varia was aiming for. The Amazon's muscles felt hard as rock under her hand.

"Come," Varia said. "We will guide you to our village. Tonight, we will hold a feast in your honor. Tomorrow, the queen will be back and the diplomacy can begin."

"Excuse me," Janet said from behind Sam. "A question, if I may?"

"Of course," Varia said.

"What is your queen's name?" Janet asked. "Just so we know how to address her politely, when we meet her."

"My apologies," Varia said. "I forget you are not from this world, and so has not heard of our most glorious queen. Her name is Gabrielle, queen of all the Amazon nations."

This time the strange little sound came from Hailey. Sam chose to ignore it.

"We're looking forward to meeting her," Sam said.

"I know she is eager to meet you as well," Varia said. "But come, let's be off. The feast awaits!"

The village was larger than Sam had expected. It was almost a small city, even if it had no buildings with more than a single story and they were all built out of wood. The general layout was of a large circle with radial streets, the many huts forming a border between the forest and the large clear circle in the center. That circle was obviously where the feast would take place, and the four Earth women were taken directly there. They were shown to a low platform, completely covered with thick soft furs and large pillows, where they were bid to sit down and rest. More leather-clad young women brought wine, fruit and honey-based sweets, and then they were left more or less alone. There was still a lot of activity in the town square before them. Benches were being set up, as was low tables. A huge fire burned in the center, and entire small animals were being roasted on spits over it.

Satterfield leaned back on the pillows and drank deeply from a silver cup set with red stones.

"I could get used to this," she said. "This wine isn't half bad."

"Enjoy it while it lasts," Sam said, also lounging among the furs and pillows. "This far into a jump, it's much more common that we're running for our lives while taking fire from Jaffa."

"Sam," Janet said. She'd sat down next to Sam and looked a bit tense. "There's something really strange going on here."

Sam put her hand on her P90. "What?" she said.

"I don't know if it's a problem," Janet said. "But at least Varia is a fictional character."

Sam tensed. "You think she's a Goa'uld pretending to be a god or a hero? I didn't sense anything when I shook her hand."

Hailey snorted derisively. "Only if the Goa'uld have been watching Xena," she said. "And even then they'd more likely have gone for the gods there."

"Xena?" Sam said, confused.

"The TV series," Janet said. "Varia looks exactly like the character from the show, except maybe for being a bit more muscular. The vegetation, the village, them calling themselves the Amazon Nation, the way they dress, having a queen called Gabrielle, it all fits."

"But that's not possible," Sam said.

"I don't know," Janet said. "Maybe they're something like the Nox. Maybe they picked all this out of the mind of someone in SG-8 and are projecting the appearance to put us at ease. Maybe something else."

"Well," Sam said. "We'll just have to be wary. Try to see if they show any signs of turning hostile. Keep an eye on them."

"That will *not* be a hardship," Hailey mumbled.

They sat still and silent for a little while, watching the frantic activity in the square. Over by one side, a bunch of Amazons were setting up drums and other instruments. In the middle, another group were busy pouring sauces over the roasting meat.

"So you watch Xena," Sam said towards Janet, unable to keep the question in any longer.

"Hah, *watch* it," Hailey said. "I saw her at a Xena convention in Colorado Springs, wearing a long blonde wig and dressed up as Callisto."

Slowly but surely a blush spread across Janet's face.

"Really?" Sam said. "Tell me, what does this Callisto dress like?"

Hailey looked thoughtful for a moment. "Kind of like a black leather and iron studs version of the girls here," she said.

Sam tried to imagine Janet dressed like that and failed utterly. It was just too far from the prim white lab coat Janet she usually saw. She turned to Hailey.

"Got any pictures?" she said.

"Sam!" Janet said.

Sam laughed.

"Don't worry," she said. "I'm just kidding."

Janet looked away. "Good," she said, and for a moment Sam thought that she looked disappointed.

"All right," Sam said, deliberately reverting the topic of discussion. "So this place seems to be patterned after a recent Earth TV series. But we haven't seen anything threatening, and nothing that looks remotely like typical Goa'uld behavior. All we've really seen so far is a large bunch of scantily clad young warrior women setting up for a party. So we keep to our orders. We stay, we observe, and we join in the festivities enough to be polite but *not* enough to get intoxicated. Everyone clear on that?"

It seemed that everyone was.

The sun rose bright and early the next day. Sam noticed this very clearly, since she was still lying on the honored guests' platform and sunshine stabbed her brutally in the face. She groaned and covered her eyes with her hand.

In spite of the fact that she herself had done almost nothing, it had been an interesting night. She'd followed her own orders and not drunk very much wine, but she suspected that some of the things they'd been offered to eat had contained various psychoactive substances.

Or maybe it was just the experience of having a group of half-naked beautiful young women hand-feeding her delicacies that had made her head swim.

She closed her eyes, removed the hand from in front of them and tried to shake her head clear. When she felt like she could think somewhat, she raised herself on her elbows and opened her eyes.

The square looked less like a disaster area than she had expected. Of course, in this place there would be no empty beer cans or crumpled-up wrappers covering the ground. That helped a lot. Much of the eating had been done without serious use of utensils as well, with many things wrapped in bread or eaten directly from fingers -- one's own or someone else's. Sam had a vague memory of having eaten a grape directly from an Amazon's navel. She hoped intensely that that was no more than wishful thinking or a dream, or she'd never be able to look Janet in the eyes again. Not that she really thought that her friend would take it badly, but if she was to come out to her she wanted to do it with a whole lot more dignity. And planning. And decades into the future. Or centuries.

The platform itself looked much as it had when they'd first seen it. Which, granted, was like a large flat wooden space covered with heaps of furs, so it was kind of hard to mess up. Now, there were a few large serving bowls with leftover scraps of food here and there, and quite a few more or less empty wine skins and goblets. There were also three Earth soldiers, two of which slept.

Three? Sam frowned and looked around. Lt Hailey was nowhere to be seen. And now that she thought about it, another dim memory from the night was of the young lieutenant asking for permission to go off with a bunch of Amazons to "gain their confidence and gather information".

Yeah, right, Sam thought. I know what 'information' she was after, and it's not the kind Hammond was thinking of when he sent us here. Although Jack and Daniel would probably love to hear *all* the details...

She sighed. She really couldn't blame the girl. If Sam herself had ended up at a party like this when she was that young and angry, she'd have been in hog heaven too. These days she was less young, less angry and her tastes were... narrower. She looked down to where Janet's sleeping head was resting on her thigh. She'd known Janet long enough and heard enough about her ex-husband and old boyfriends to know that nothing would ever happen, but she still couldn't get rid of the empty longing that filled her every time she saw the doctor's beautiful face.

Well, if nothing else the years had taught her how to push her feelings aside and let her rational mind make the decisions. Most of her life was way better than she'd ever dared imagine. So what if her love life sucked?

A groan and some movement came from the fur-covered lump that by deduction must be Lt Satterfield.

"Good morning, lieutenant," Sam said. "Sleep well?"

The furs moved and a black-haired head appeared.

"Morning, Major," Satterfield mumbled. "Damn, but these chicks know how to party, don't they?"

"I guess they do," Sam said.

"I mean, those *drums*," Satterfield said. "I danced until I thought my legs would fall off."

"Yeah," Sam said. "You were quite popular down there, as far as I could see from here."

"Oh. Yeah. That was a little strange," Satterfield said. "I mean, *everybody* but me was totally lesbian and they sure didn't hesitate to show it."

"I know how you feel," Sam said. Only I've felt like that every single time I've been to a party, *except* this one.

"So, what do we do today then?" Satterfield said.

"Mill about, I guess," Sam said. "Try to be as nosy as we can get away with. Wait for this queen of theirs to return and want to see us."

"Right," Satterfield said. Groaning and grunting, she made her way out from under the furs. "I'll go find the latrine," she said once she'd finished.

Sam nodded. "Just keep your radio on so I can reach you," she said.

"I can't believe I fell asleep at the party," Janet said. "I haven't done that since med school."

She and Sam were walking around the village, just looking at things and getting looked at by the Amazons.

"Well, you did," Sam said. "As did I and Satterfield."

Janet slowly shook her head and smiled.

"Must've been the marijuana cookies," she said. "I'm not used to that stuff any more."

Sam's eyebrows rose. "Marijuana cookies?" she said.

"Yes," Janet said. "You know, the little round ones. You were eating them like popcorn."

"So that's what they were. No wonder I was feeling dizzy!"

Janet looked at her with an expression somewhere in between amusement and exasperation.

"Samantha Carter," she said, "for such a terribly intelligent woman you really are adorably naive."

And you, my dear doctor, have a real talent for taking a stick to the anthill of my emotions, Sam thought as irritation at being called naive mixed with elation at being called adorable.

"Let's hope they don't decide to do a drug test on us when we return," she said out loud.

"If they do, we can always blame the aliens. That seems to work for those SG-1 people every time they do something they shouldn't," Janet said.

"Yes," Sam agreed. "Those rascals!"

They walked in silence for a time. Sam's emotions settled back to normal, although much more slowly than usual. Being surrounded by lots of women who had no inhibitions about displaying more than just friendly physical affection for each other made it a lot harder for Sam to ignore her own feelings.

"Have you noticed something?" Janet said after a while.

"What?" Sam said.

"Nobody here seems to be older than their mid-twenties. And pregnant women seem to come in pairs."

"I can explain the second one," a voice said from behind them.

At first, Sam didn't recognize the woman behind them. She was short, probably slightly under five feet. Her hair was blonde, and like everyone else in the village she looked well trained. Also like everyone else, she was dressed in a mixture of leather, feathers, wooden ornaments and body paint.

"Lieutenant Hailey?" Sam asked, still not sure that she was seeing what she thought she was seeing.

"Yes, sir," Lt Hailey said from under her war paint.

"That's not regulation uniform," Sam said.

"No, sir," Hailey said. "Following orders required changing to unorthodox dress, sir."

"What?"

Hailey grinned.

"Making friends with the natives, sir. I'm being taken into a kind of lodge for young Amazon warriors," she said. "I managed to impress them with my kickboxing skills last night. They dressed me up like this for the initiation ceremony tonight."

"Kickboxing?" Sam said, amazed. "You were practicing *kickboxing* with the Amazons last night?"

"Among other things, sir," Hailey explained.

"Ah," Sam said. "And being in this lodge won't conflict with your position as a US Air Force officer?"

"No, sir," Hailey said. "The Daughters of Aphrodite is a cross-tribe lodge, and it's taken for granted that loyalty to one's tribe always comes first."

"Tribe?" Sam said.

"The Daughters of Aphrodite?" Janet said.

"That'd be the SGC, sir," Hailey said. "And it's not what it sounds like. Or, well, it *is* what it sounds like, but not *only* that, if you see what I mean, doctor."

"We'll trust your judgment, lieutenant," Sam said.

"You said you could explain the pregnancies?" Janet said.

"Right. Apparently, when two Amazons are very much in love and want to have children, they go to the temple of Aphrodite and make the proper sacrifices at the altar. Aphrodite judges their love for each other, and if she finds it strong and pure, a golden glow surrounds them for a minute or so, and then they're both pregnant. I got the impression that the kids will have traits from both mothers, so I guess the glow does some kind of melding of their genetic material."

"A goddess taking care of their reproduction?" Sam said. "Ok, now I don't like this any more. What kind of offerings does she want?"

"Jewelry, candy or pornography, sir."

Both Sam and Janet stared at Hailey.

"What?" Sam said after a little while.

"Jewelry, candy or porn, sir. And I was also told that if you leave fish you might get struck by lightning on your way home."

"That does not sound like any Goa'uld I've ever heard of," Janet said.

"No," Sam agreed.

"Also," Hailey said, "they claimed that Queen Gabrielle is a sometime lover of Aphrodite's. So maybe you can get some sense of what this goddess is like from talking to the queen."

"Yes, maybe we can," Sam said. "Lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Good work. Keep it up. Good luck with your initiation."

Queen Gabrielle received the Earth delegation after dinner, in her own house. Which, unlike all other buildings they'd seen in the Amazon village, actually qualified as a house rather than a hut. It had more than one room, it had windows covered with thin oiled skins to let in light and it had a raised floor. The room right inside the front door was obviously a reception room. There were several low armchairs, covered with the ubiquitous thick furs. There were oil lamps, low tables, incense burners and, in the back facing the front door, a highly decorated and rather comfortable-looking wooden throne.

"I was told there were four of you?" was the first thing the Queen of the Amazon Nations said to the diplomatic delegation from the planet Earth.

The queen was standing in front of her throne. She was not very tall, just a couple of inches taller than Janet. Her hair was blonde with a reddish tint, and her skin was pale. She wore dark red knee-high soft leather boots, a short leather skirt and a leather top in matching colors. At the sides of her boots two three-pronged knife-like weapons were sheathed, and at her hip a vicious-looking metal ring hung.

"One of my people was offered to join a group called the Daughters of Aphrodite," Sam said. "I gave her leave to attend an initiation tonight. I hope I have not caused any offense, your majesty."

"Of course not," the queen said. "Please sit. And call me Gabrielle."

As they sat down and Gabrielle told an attendant to bring wine and fruit, Sam took the opportunity to lean close to Janet.

"Does she look like her TV counterpart?" she whispered.

"Exactly," Janet whispered back. "Down to the hair style!"

"Maybe I should start watching that series," Sam mumbled as she leaned away from Janet again. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the doctor give her a long, questioning look.

"So," Gabrielle said when they were all comfortably seated and the refreshments had arrived. "What can I do for you?"

"Well," Sam began, wishing that Daniel could've been there to take care of the diplomatic stuff. It really was not her strong point. "We have come through the stone ring, which we call a Stargate, from another world."

Gabrielle nodded. "I know what it does," she said.

Sam stared at her. "Excuse me?" she said.

"I know what the Stargate is," Gabrielle repeated. "I have even used it occasionally. So you can skip that part and jump directly to who you people are and what you want from us."

"You...*how*?"

"Aphrodite told me," Gabrielle said. "And provided the coordinates."

"Right," Sam said. "Of course."

She took a deep breath and tried to gather her scattered thoughts.

"We come from a planet we call Earth," she said. "After we found our Stargate and figured out how to use it, we started exploring. In the course of that exploration, we came into conflict with the aliens known as the Goa'uld. Since then, we also seek help in that struggle, in the form of allies or technologies."

It was probably a lot more straightforward and honest than Daniel would've put it, but it'd have to do. If nothing else, it seemed kind of risky to try to be less than honest with Gabrielle. There was simply no way of knowing how much the woman knew.

"I see," Gabrielle said. "And is there anything in particular you think you can get from us?"

"No, not really," Sam said. "We only came here in the hope that there might be something. Remember, our original mission was simply to explore. To meet new peoples and get to know them as friends. Simply being on speaking terms with your people would count as a successful mission for us. Anything else would be a bonus."

"Well," Gabrielle said, giving them a warm smile, "I don't think that'll a problem. You seem to fit in quite well here, so far."

"Yes," Sam said. "It's a very nice village you have, and your people have been very friendly."

And hot, she added to herself. I've never seen so many attractive women gathered in the same place before. Which is kind of strange, actually.

"I'm glad to hear that," Gabrielle said. She leaned forward on her throne, resting her elbows on her knees and looking intently at Sam.

"It hasn't happened in a long time that we have encountered any new Amazon tribes," she said. "But there are old traditions for what to do when it happens. As queen, I have to obey those traditions, or my Amazons will stop following me."

"All right," Sam said. "What do the traditions say?"

"Do you have the right to make binding agreements for your own queen?" Gabrielle asked.

The images of either the President or General Hammond as queens were not really ones Sam wanted in her mind. She did her best to push them out.

"Yes," she said, "I have. As long as you do not ask too much from us, that is."

Gabrielle raised an eyebrow.

"Is there anything we might want from you?"

"Well, I don't know," Sam said. "Medicine perhaps? Technical knowledge?"

"We don't fall ill," Gabrielle said. "And we have all the technical knowledge we want."

"What do you mean you don't fall ill?" Janet said.

"Just what it sounds like. We don't fall ill."

"Ever?"

Janet sounded incredulous.

"Ever. And we heal very quickly from injuries."

Janet looked like she was about to protest when Sam interrupted.

"I guess trade will not be a problem then," she said. "Which means that we're well inside my authority to make agreements. If that's what those traditions of yours say to do."

Gabrielle leaned back and smiled.

"The traditions give two options," she said. "One is that the two tribes fight, and the losing tribe becomes part of the winning one."

"I don't much like that sound of that," Sam said. "We're not here to fight. Besides, at the moment there are a lot more of you than of us."

"There need not be out-and-out war," Gabrielle said. "Single combat to the death between the queens or their chosen champions is quite acceptable."

Sam tried to smile. She didn't particularly like the thought of fighting Gabrielle, to the death or otherwise. The memory of the tape with the two Amazon women effortlessly running at way over Olympic-winning speeds across the field played for her inner vision.

"What's the other option?" she said.

"The tribes chose to join together as partners, to help and protect each other to the best of their abilities."

"And that is done by...?"

Gabrielle smiled. "The two queens, or their chosen champions, go through a marriage ritual on behalf of their tribes."

Sam sat stunned. Well, it *was* the logical opposite of a fight to the death, as far as she could see.

"I guess this would involve everything that a normal marriage would?" Janet asked, her voice sounding unusually husky and emotional.

Sam almost twisted her neck, so fast did she turn her head to look at her friend. Janet's cheeks were flushed. Her gaze was intently focused on the Amazon queen.

"Oh yes," Gabrielle said in reply to Janet's question. "Everything."

"I volunteer to be your champion in this matter, Major," Janet said.

"What?!" Sam said.

Janet looked up at her. "Please?" she said.

Sam felt like she'd suddenly fallen into an alternate universe. *Janet* was volunteering to have sex with another woman? Eagerly? Almost *begging* to? Without warning, what Sam had thought was solid and unchangeable reality had changed, and now it was as if someone had stuck her thoughts and feelings into a blender and set it to 'obliterate'.

"Sure," she heard herself saying. "If you're sure you don't mind."

Janet turned back to look at Gabrielle. She even licked her lips as she did so.

"Oh, I'm sure," she said.

Gabrielle stood up.

"Excellent," she said. "The ceremonies proper will start tomorrow at sunset. The priestesses will come to fetch your champion at dawn, for the purifications and preparations."

The Amazon queen grinned at them.

"I so prefer this way to war," she said. "If you'll excuse me, I have things to set in motion. The guards will see you to your hut. I gather you never actually made it there last night..."

The hut was built for six people. There were six narrow beds, spread evenly along three quarters of a circle, with the head ends closest to the fireplace in the middle. The remaining quarter of the circle was a common area between the fire and the door. Its earthen floor was generously covered with thick furs. On the wooden walls and under the thatch roof, many small decorative objects made out of leather, feathers, wood and many-colored beads hung. Most of them were axes, knives, bows or other primitive weapons.

On the furs, near the fireplace, lay four standard issue US Air Force backpacks. Next to the backpacks stood four pairs of standard issue US Air Force combat boots. In the fireplace, a fire happily burned in spite of the warm night outside.

None of them had said a word on the way back from the queen's hut. Or, at least, Sam thought none of them had said anything on the way back. She had to admit to herself that as preoccupied as she was with the possible revelation she'd just had, she would only have had a fifty-fifty chance of noticing Armageddon.

"I'm going to bed," she distantly heard Janet say. "Got an early morning tomorrow."

"Yeah, I guess you do," Sam heard herself say. It felt as if her mouth was operating on autopilot. Luckily, the autopilot in question seemed to be connected to her diplomatic self rather than her honest self.

"I'm, er, going, er, out," Satterfield said.

Sam looked up at her. The poor girl looked completely lost. Probably had no idea what had happened to her two superior officers, and suddenly felt very alone and a really long way from home.

"Fine," Sam said. "You, er, keep an eye on things."

"Sure," Satterfield said. She vanished out the door with an obvious look of relief on her face.

Sam turned her head and looked towards the fire. On the other side of it, between the two centermost beds, Janet was preparing for bed. She'd unbuttoned her pants, and as Sam watched she pushed them down. All the way down. Revealing the luscious curves of her firm behind, her smoothly toned thighs, her pretty knees, her adorable calves...

"I'll be right outside," Sam blurted out and fled through the door.

Sam remained outside the hut for quite some time, sitting in the grass next to the path leading up to it. There was a solitary tree there, which she could sit under and lean against. Above it, the sky was clear and full of stars. The constellations were unfamiliar. It was tempting to try to figure out which star she could see that was closest to Earth. Old Sol itself was too small and dim to be seen from this distance, but some of the local giants should be visible. Canopus, almost certainly. Maybe Sirius. Too bad she'd need a spectrograph to identify them.

Too bad there were no spectrographs for people's thoughts and feelings. Life would be so much easier if she could just point an instrument at them and know what they were like. None of this observing and guessing and figuring out. Most of all, none of this horrible getting it *wrong*.

Four and a half years. For four and a half *years* she had been dead certain that Janet Fraiser was straight as an arrow. Air Force officer. Divorced. Perfectly normal. No reason to believe that she held any secrets.

Except that when she put it into words like that she got a nagging suspicion that exactly the same thing could be said about Samantha Carter, if one replaced the divorce with a couple of ex-boyfriends. It wasn't like she hit a perfect six point zero on the Kinsey scale, after all.

"Major?"

Sam looked up. Lt Hailey was standing in front of her. Many of her feathers and ornaments were ajar, crushed or missing entirely. Her war paint had got smudged in quite a few places, most of them kind of suggestive.

"Oh," Sam said. "Hi. I thought you'd be gone all night."

"So did I," Hailey said. "But they're taking me on a trial hunt a bit before dawn, so they sent me back here to catch some sleep. On the theory that if I stayed at the lodge house I wouldn't get any. Which is fair."

A happy grin swept like a flash of lightning across Hailey's face before it returned to its usual dour expression.

Sam couldn't help smiling with her.

"Better get some, then," she said. "Wouldn't want you to shame us at the hunt."

"Nah, that should be no problem," Hailey said. "I was top of my class in sharp shooting."

Sam raised an eyebrow.

"They're letting you use your P90 to hunt with?"

"Yeah. Weapon of choice and all that. So how did the diplomacy go?"

"Well, I think," Sam said. "Our tribe is symbolically marrying theirs. Tomorrow Queen Gabrielle and Dr Fraiser will perform the marriage ceremonies."

Hailey's jaw dropped. "Doc Fraiser is getting in the sack with *Gabrielle*? Holy fuck, and here I was thinking that *I* had got lucky!"

The grin returned to her face, and stayed there this time.

"It's going to be pure murder not to be able to talk about this at the next con," she added.

Sam tilted her head a little and looked inquisitively up at the lieutenant.

"This would be a big deal there?"

"Yeah, kinda!"

Hailey fell silent for a few moments, searching for words.

"Many fans think that Gabrielle is insanely hot," she tried. "To the point where the actress who plays her has some *straight* women drooling over her. So getting to shag the actual real Gabby? Yeah, that'd sort of be a huge deal."

"I see," Sam said. "You'd better get that sleep, Lieutenant. You won't be shooting very well if you're too tired to see."

"Yes, sir," Hailey said. "Good night, sir."

Sam sat under the tree for hours, doing her best not to think. In that particular case, her best turned out not to be very good at all. The thoughts just kept coming. She laid down in the grass and looked up at the leaves. They slowly moved back and forth in the soft night breeze. The Amazon village had gone to sleep, and the human sounds had faded. In their place came the sounds of a living land. Leaves rustling. Cicadas chirping. Some large predator roaring in the distance. Birds whistling. Unidentified things going bump in the night. Lt Satterfield swallowing a curse in mid-word when she banged her foot against the door while trying to sneak into the hut unnoticed.

So, according to Hailey, there still was a chance that Janet was straight. Mostly, at least. Since she'd obviously been interested in Gabrielle, there was certainly *some* interest in women there. Which left an opening for Sam.

All she had to do was be as attractive as a sexual fantasy come to life.

She closed her eyes and groaned. It just wasn't fair! Hailey's comment had made it seem quite possible that Janet *was* straight after all, but for some reason that didn't make it as easy to push away her feelings as it'd been for the past four and a half years. It felt as if her libido had been wakened like some ancient dragon, that now refused to go back to sleep.

It had been stupid to believe anything other than that Janet was straight. After all, she knew enough about her friend to know that she was. Yes, she herself might have had a couple of boyfriends, but none of those relationships had lasted very long or went very far. Janet had been married, and she knew that that had only ended because of the husband's philandering.

Sam's eyes flew open.

*Did* she know that?

She trawled through her memory for that late night in the mess hall. It had been after some near-disaster or another, and they had all been high on too many hours of no sleep and elation at having survived. They'd got to talking relationships. Daniel had asked Janet how her marriage ended. Janet had said something, and before anybody had had a chance to ask her to elaborate Jack had went off on a loud, ranting tangent. But what was it she'd said, exactly? Sam knew it was in there in her memory. She had that sort of mind. Things just stuck there, like mosquitos in amber. Particularly things that interested her. And Janet had always interested her a lot.

"So, Doctor," she heard Daniel say in that long-past time. "What killed your happily married life? Something less dramatic than a Goa'uld possessing your mate, I hope?"

"Oh," Janet had said, "there was another woman."

"Isn't that just like 'em!" Jack had interrupted before she could go on. "There's always another damn woman! Present company excepted, of course."

Janet's old sentence echoed through Sam's mind. *There was another woman*. Only that. No more, no less. No "Oh, I found my husband with another woman" or "Oh, my husband ran off with another woman". There just plain *was* another woman.

Slowly, a thought snuck into Sam's mind.

This, she could actually ask Janet about.

Asking if she liked to screw women? *Definitely* not possible. Asking about the role another woman had in breaking up her marriage? Quite possible. Kind of scary, but possible.

Sam got up from the ground. Through the door to the hut she could see the bed of smoldering coals that used to be the fire.

She drew a deep breath. Right. This was it. As silently as she could, she entered the hut. She undressed as much as she ever did in the field, and carefully laid down on her bed. Every small creak from the wooden frame sounded like an ear-splitting cry from Hell in the silence. Once down, Sam made sure to lie very still for some time, to give the others a chance to get back to sleep. And, also, trying to make up her ambivalent mind about if she *wanted* Janet to be awake or not.

"Janet?" Sam eventually said, very softly.

"Yes?" came the reply from the bed next to hers.

"You used to be married," Sam said, still very softly.

"I did," Janet confirmed.

"You once told me it ended because of another woman," Sam said.

"It did."

"I kind of assumed that meant your husband cheated on you."

"Most people assume that," Janet said.

"But it's not what happened, is it?" Sam said.

"No."

"*You* cheated on *him*."

"Yes."

"With another woman."

"Yes."

"Just checking," Sam said, even more softly than before.

And then the hut was silent.

"Varia?"

The dark-haired Amazon looked up from her breakfast.

"Samantha," she said when she saw who had spoken to her. "Sit down. Have some porridge."

Sam sat down across the table from her. The table itself was very long, with outwards-slanting legs that supported a bench on each side. At the moment, it was still very early and most of the village hadn't yet arrived, so there was plenty of room.

"Can I ask you a few questions?" Sam said.

"Only if you eat something," Varia said. "You won't be thinking clearly if you haven't eaten. This porridge is very good with honey and crushed nuts on it."

Rather than argue, Sam grabbed a bowl from the stack at the center of the table and put a ladle of porridge in it.

"This marriage ceremony," she said.

Varia raised a silencing finger at her.

"*After* you have eaten something," she said. "The honey and nuts are over there."

Sam sighed. She didn't feel at all hungry, but eating seemed to be the sacrifice she had to make in order to get something out of the Amazon. She drizzled a generous amount of honey on her porridge, spread some crushed nuts over it and dug in.

It was much tastier than she had expected. The porridge seemed to be made out of several different kinds of grains, and it had herbs and dried fruit in it. The honey had a distinctly flowery taste that the nuts complemented nicely.

"Hey, this is good," she said.

Varia smiled. "Of course it's good," she said. "What do you think we are, barbarians who don't know how to live well?"

She looked on while Sam put in another few spoonfuls.

"All right," she finally said. "Now you can talk."

Sam swallowed what she already had in her mouth.

"What happens during the marriage ceremony?" she said. "And before? I mean, if it starts at dawn and goes on all night, there must be quite a few things happening."

Varia thoughtfully took another spoonful of her own porridge.

"Are you sure you want to know?" she said.

Sam nodded. "I have to," she said.

Varia raised a questioning eyebrow.

"Whatever is going to happen, what my imagination dreams up is worse," Sam explained.

Varia nodded in understanding.

"All right," she said. "The first thing that happens is that both brides are fetched from their homes by priestesses dressed in the masks of Darkness Maidens. That part you should already have seen."

"I did," Sam agreed. "It felt strange having people bowing to me."

Varia tilted her head. "You *are* a visiting queen," she said. "No matter your own traditions, this means something to us."

"I didn't say it was wrong or that I didn't like it, just that it felt strange."

"Fair enough. From their homes, they're taken to the hot baths for the ritual cleansing."

This time it was Sam's eyebrows that rose. "Hot baths?" she said.

"There are hot springs near the temple. We've built baths around them. If you're going to keep interrupting this will take all day."

"Sorry," Sam said. "Although maybe that might be just as well," she added under her voice.

"Right," Varia said, pretending that she hadn't heard the last part. "They're taken to the baths. Which have two separate halves just for these kind of things, so the brides can be kept separate. They spend some time in the warm pools, and a lot more time in the herb-scented steam chambers."

Varia glanced up at the sun.

"In fact," she said, "that's almost certainly where they are now. They'll stay there for a few more hours, until the heat and the herbs have them nicely relaxed and calm."

Sam couldn't help interrupting, distracted as she was by the thought of Janet in a steam room. "The herbs have them relaxed?" she said.

"There aren't only sweet-smelling ones," Varia said. "Some are relaxants and aphrodisiacs."

"You *drug* them?!"

"They are there voluntarily," Varia said. "Unless you forced your champion?"

"No, of course not!"

"So, given that they're going to be intimate with someone they don't really know, they get every aid we can give to make the experience as pleasurable as possible. We believe that the marriage ritual predicts how pleasant the alliance will be."

Sam swallowed. "Ok," she said. "That makes sense, I guess."

"After the herbal steam baths," Varia went on, "they lunch on a variety of well-chosen dishes. They remain in the bath houses, so they don't have to dress or move around very much."

Sam's mental image of a naked Janet in a steam bath immediately switched to a naked Janet lounging on a divan being fed morsels of food by just as naked young Amazons. She swallowed heavily.

"After that, the dressing starts. Their hair will be carefully arranged. They will be massaged with scented oils, some of which contain more of the herbs from the steam rooms. Their bodies will be decorated with henna. Finally, they will be dressed in clothes designed to reveal and entice more than to hide and protect. There will be seamstresses present to adapt the clothes to the bodies of the brides, so that everything fits perfectly. Minor things may also be done to cover, for example, scars that the bride in question aren't proud of."

Sam's imagination was running amok. She could feel her face burning, and other parts of her were also getting hot and bothered.

"All this must be finished before the sun sets," Varia said. "Because when the sun's disk touches the horizon, the brides are escorted from the bath houses up to the temple by honor guards dressed in the masks of the Maidens of Light. One bride is led to the temple's eastern door, the other to the western one. They both go inside alone, while the guards spread out around the temple to make sure that they won't be disturbed. Once inside, the brides meet each other, and spend the

night consummating the union under the watchful eye of the goddess Aphrodite. If everything goes well, they emerge together through the main entrance at dawn. If not, Aphrodite tosses them out during the night through the same doors they came in."

"If all goes well?" Sam said.

"Aphrodite has *some* standards," Varia said. "If the brides haven't got it on at all by midnight, she tends to get bored and pissed off."

Varia patted Sam's hand, which was holding a forgotten spoon in a white-knuckled grip.

"That almost never happens," she said. "Don't worry. Oh, and you may see your champion while she's having lunch, if you wish."

It turned out not to be a divan, of course. Even now, Sam felt she really should've known the Amazons better than to think that. She'd seen enough to learn that when it came to comfortable furniture, their taste went to huge piles of pillows.

Which was exactly what Janet was spread out over, in a most enticing way. Fortunately for Sam's precarious peace of mind, she was dressed in a thin robe. Which didn't really hide any of Janet's shape, but at least it kept the details out of view.

The bit about being hand-fed morsels of food by half-naked young Amazons *was* exactly like Sam had imagined it.

"Sam!" Janet exclaimed. "Come here! Sit down, have something to eat! The food is *excellent*."

She approached and sat down, carefully outside arm's reach of Janet. The Amazons put the food bowls and wine pitchers in between them, and then faded out of hearing range.

"So, are you still all right with this?" Sam asked.

"Are you kidding?" Janet said. She sounded slightly drunk. "Getting a ten thousand dollar spa treatment, lots of gourmet food and sex with someone I've masturbated to I don't know how many times?"

Janet laughed, a pearly and wonderful little laugh.

"After this," she went on, "I can go another six years without a date."

Sam blinked.

"You haven't had a date in *six years*?"

Janet shook her head. "Not since the divorce," she said. "Too much work, too much Cassie and it's not very easy for a gay woman who doesn't like clubbing to find dates even when she *doesn't* have to keep it secret from the Air Force."

Even though Janet had as much as admitted it during the night, it still sent a shiver through Sam's body hearing her describe herself as gay.

"What about the woman who led to the divorce?" Sam said. "Didn't you keep dating her?"

Janet shook her head.

"I only went out with her a couple of times even before," she said. "Looking back, she was no more than a 'get out of marriage' card to me. I really should look her up and apologize."

Sam nibbled on a strip of spiced meat. It was remarkably tasty.

"I still find it hard to believe that someone as pretty as you would have a hard time finding dates, even given all those things," she said.

Janet leaned back into the pillows and drank deeply from her wine cup.

"Flatterer," she said. "Although to be honest I didn't try very hard after I ended up with the SGC. Felt kind of pointless looking for others then, after I fell in love with you."

It took a couple of seconds before Sam's brain registered what Janet had just said. Once it did, it felt like she'd been hit over the head with a tree trunk. Her mouth went dry, her palms started sweating and for a moment her vision faded to black. She stared at Janet, who looked back without any indication that she understood what she'd just said. Her pupils were a little larger than the light would account for.

She's stoned, Sam thought. She doesn't realize what she's saying. She's probably going to regret it bitterly tomorrow. And I should get out of here before she blurts out any more revelations.

"Well, I'm glad to see you're all right," Sam said. "I should get out of here and leave you to it."

Janet turned over onto her side, facing Sam more directly. Her robe fell open, revealing a large part of smoothly pale chest and most of a marvelously rounded breast. With a Herculean effort of will, Sam managed not to stare.

"I'm more than all right," Janet said. "Don't worry about me. I'll see you tomorrow morning."

She smiled mischievously.

"I'll give you a blow-by-blow recount of all that happens, if you like," she said.

If someone had been taking an EKG on her, Sam thought, it would've spelled out SOS in Morse code.

"I'll think about it," she said. Which was true. It'd probably be impossible for her to think of anything *but* that.

She got up from the pillows. "Good luck," she said, looking down on her stretched-out friend. "Have a great time."

"Oh, I will," Janet said, her voice heavy with emotion.

Sam walked out of there on legs that would hardly hold her up.

The temple of Aphrodite sat on the top of a hill above the Amazon village. It was built out of pale wood, and fires constantly burned near its four corners. It looked like most of it was a single large central space covered by a dome, with smaller wings stretching out from it. A well-trodden path led from the village up to its main entrance, and almost invisible path branched off from the main one. Towards the side entrances that Varia had mentioned, Sam guessed.

She was sitting under a tree again. Not the one outside their hut this time, but one that had a view of the approaches to the temple. She didn't really want to know when Janet would go in there, but she found herself unable to stay away.

Janet's words wouldn't leave her. *After I fell in love with you.* The thought that they had been hiding the same sort of feelings from each other for several years was enough to make her cry. At the same time, she almost wished that Janet hadn't said it. Unrequited love might suck mightily, but at least it was a whole lot less complicated than actual love. Even more so when the love in question was more or less forbidden.

Then there was, of course, the possibility that Janet was just plain stoned and what she said bore no relation to reality. But Sam couldn't bring herself to believe that any more.

On the path below the tree, a dozen Amazons in white and gold masks passed by on their way to the bath houses. One of them was noticeably shorter than the others and carried a P90 rifle rather than sword and bow. Sam frowned. Hailey sure had got into Amazon life quickly. Granted, making friends was what they were here to do, but there had to be limits. They weren't here to go native. At this rate, Hailey would have readjustment problems when they returned home.

But that would have to be a problem for another time.

Sam watched as the Amazon honor guard vanished out of her sight, and as the sun slowly crept down the sky.

"Major?"

The voice came from behind and off to the side. Sam turned towards it and saw Lt Satterfield looking concerned.

"Yes?" Sam said.

"Um, it's about half an hour to our scheduled call-in," Satterfield said. "Shouldn't we be, um, getting ready to receive it?"

"You take care of it," Sam said. She didn't feel like talking to Hammond or O'Neil at the moment. "The radio's in our hut. Tell them that the mission is proceeding smoothly, and that Dr Fraiser and I are busy closing a deal with the Amazon Queen."

The Amazons came into view again. They were divided into two groups, one walking behind the other with maybe twenty steps between them. There were seven people in each, with six of them forming a rough circle around one in the middle. The six outer ones wore the white and gold masks. Sam couldn't quite see what the ones in the middle were wearing, but it seemed to be something in the vein of the sports bra and indecently short skirt that Gabrielle usually wore. Sam stood up to get a better view.

"Major?" Satterfield said. "Is everything all right?"

"Perfectly," Sam said. "You have your orders, lieutenant. Go get that call."

Sam's gaze followed the Amazons intently until they'd reached their separate sides of the temple and she'd seen the two brides enter it, not really caring if Satterfield did as she was told or not.

She tried not to think about what was going on inside the temple, but found it impossible. Quite against her wishes, her mind kept imagining how the two women met. How they took each other into their arms and kissed. How Janet's soft, caring hands would move over Gabrielle's skin. How Gabrielle's lips would kiss their way down Janet's fair-skinned neck into the valley between her breasts.

As one movement Sam started walking up towards the temple and moved her assault rifle from its free-hanging position to the semi-ready position of being cradled in her arm.

She had to put a stop to this. She'd been wrong when she let Janet take her place in the marriage ceremony. Absolutely and terribly wrong. She didn't care any more if she messed up the whole alliance thing and they'd have to fight their way to the Stargate. She just could not stand the thought of what Gabrielle might be doing to Janet's defenseless and drugged body. Even if Janet had volunteered, even if she would have wanted this when sober, it was wrong. It was abuse, and Sam had to stop it.

If for no other reason so because there was no other way she'd ever be able to go on living with herself.

"Major Carter?"

Sam looked up. Lost in thoughts, she'd almost reached the west entrance to the temple, and a small Amazon guard was pointing a P90 at her. She was standing directly in front of the large, ornately carved door. Her mask was made of some very pale, almost pure white, wood and was inlaid with a starburst-pattern in gold. Other than the mask, she was wearing something that most of all looked like a fur bikini top and the world record holder in skimpy skirts.

"I need to get in, Hailey," she said. "Right now."

"Can't let you do that, sir," Hailey said. "Tonight, only the brides are allowed in the temple."

Sam flipped the selector on her own P90 from safe to autofire.

"I thought your primary loyalty would still be to the Air Force," she said.

The muzzle of Hailey's weapon wavered a little. "It is, sir," she said.

"Then why aren't you obeying orders, lieutenant?"

Hailey lowered her rifle. Sam kept hers at nearly ready.

"You'll break the deal if you go in, sir," Hailey said. "They are really, really serious about this. There would be war, and after seeing these chicks hunt I *really* don't think we want that."

"Just stand aside and let me in."

With obvious reluctance, Hailey moved aside from the door. Sam hurried up to it and pushed down the latch that held it closed.

"This is a mistake, sir," Hailey said from behind her as she walked through the door.

"Close the door behind me," Sam said. "Don't let anyone else in. If possible, don't let anyone else know I entered."

"Yes, sir," she heard Hailey say, and then the door closed.

She was standing in an anteroom larger than her own living room. There were large torches set into the walls, but none of them were lit. The room dark but for the flickering firelight coming through the large doorway into the temple proper. Through it, she could hear soft, almost whispering, voices. A comment in Janet's voice, too low for Sam to catch what was said, was followed by a throaty laugh from Gabrielle.

Sam felt adrenaline flow into her blood. She walked rapidly but quietly through the opening and into the temple hall.

Janet and Gabrielle were sitting on a large, low bed some twenty steps away. Janet was leaning backwards supporting herself on her arms, her legs were stretched out in front of her and slightly spread. Gabrielle sat facing her. The Amazon Queen's top was gone, leaving her beautiful bosom hanging free. She, too, was leaning back, but she was only supporting herself on one hand. The other one was stroking the inside of Janet's thigh, slowly moving up under the doctor's short skirt.

Pain lanced through Sam when she saw the scene, pain born from a raw, undiluted jealousy that she'd never suspected herself even capable of.

"Get your hands off her, you *bitch*," she growled.

Both women's heads spun towards her, but at the moment Sam only had eyes for the object of her immediate hate.

With a movement grown smooth and quick from long practice and experience, she lifted the rifle to her shoulder, aimed at Gabrielle, and fired.

## Wedding Night

"Chevron seven locked!"

The technician's voice boomed through the SGC's PA system.

"Wormhole established. Receiving MALP telemetry."

General Hammond, Colonel O'Neil, Doctor Jackson and Teal'c were standing in the gate control room, watching the empty gate room below.

"Radio is ready to use, sir," the technician said.

General Hammond held down the transmit button on the microphone in front of him.

"This is General Hammond," he said. "SG-X, do you read?"

"Um, yeah, General, we read you," a young-sounding voice came back through the speakers.

Hammond frowned. "Lt Satterfield, is that you?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, it is."

The left-behind members of SG-1 looked at each other, trying their macho best not to appear concerned.

"Where is Major Carter?" Hammond said.

"She's busy, sir," Satterfield said. "As is Doctor Fraiser. The doctor is going through a ritual to form an alliance between the Amazons and Earth, and Major Carter is..."

There was a noticeable pause.

"... keeping an eye on it," Satterfield continued. "So she asked me to take the call, sir."

Again, there were looks between the men.

"An alliance?" the General said. "So there is no problem then?"

"No, sir," Satterfield said. "The weather is nice. The food is good. The Amazons are all very friendly. Very, very friendly... I had to punch one who wouldn't take no for answer, but her friends seemed to think she deserved it, so they helped me rather than her."

This time the looks that flew through the room were more confused and less worried. Hammond let up the microphone button.

"What do you think, gentlemen?" he said.

"She hasn't used the code word for being under duress," Jack said. "So I guess she's at least speaking her own mind. I would prefer to talk to Carter, but I have no problem believing that she got too preoccupied observing something to take a call from us."

Hammond pressed the radio button again.

"Lt Satterfield," he said. "Have you seen any sign of a Goa'uld presence?"

"None, sir," Satterfield said. "They do worship a goddess who does seem to make a concrete difference in their lives, but this goddess really does not behave like any Goa'uld we've heard of."

Daniel leaned forward towards the microphone.

"Does she pose as an old Earth goddess?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," Satterfield said. "As Aphrodite."

"Is there any chance she could be an Asgard?"

"Major Carter didn't think so, sir. In fact, she laughed at the idea when I suggested it."

"Laughed? Why?"

"Apparently her favorite sacrifices are jewelry, sweets and erotic writings, sir."

There was a silence in the control room while this sank in.

"Excuse me," Daniel said into the mic, "did you say she likes pornography?"

"Yes, sir. Apparently the Amazons spend a lot of their winters writing it."

Hammond let up the talk button again.

"Doctor Jackson," he said, "does this sound like any kind of being we've encountered before?"

"No," Daniel said. "I'm fairly sure I would've remembered a god-like being who likes lesbian porn, had we met one."

"Lesbian porn?" Jack said. "How do you know it's lesbian porn?"

Teal'c turned his head towards Jack and raised an eyebrow.

"They are a planet with only women, O'Neill," he said.

"Yeah, well, but they could still *write*..." Jack tried.

"Very well," Hammond said. He pushed the button.

"Lt Satterfield," he said. "Thank you for..."

He was interrupted by a series of sharp reports coming through the speaker.

"Was that gunfire?" Daniel said.

"Lieutenant?" Hammond barked at the microphone. "What's happening?"

"It sounded like gunfire," Satterfield said. "I don't know what it was. May be Hailey, she was out hunting with a group of Amazons earlier."

"What the hell do you hunt with an assault rifle on autofire?" Jack said.

"Something quite dangerous," Teal'c said.

"Look into it, lieutenant," Hammond said. "We'll open the gate again every hour on the hour from now until I get some kind of report on this. And I would *really* like to talk to Major Carter or Doctor Fraiser. Is that understood?"

"Perfectly, sir. SG-X out."

Hammond released the mic button, leaned back in his chair and pushed the entire microphone away.

"Close the gate, sergeant," he said. "Colonel, round up every female soldier we have on this base and have them stand ready in case we need to mount a rescue operation."

Sam stared in disbelief.

Twenty steps in front of her, on the bed, Gabrielle crouched. Unhurt. In one hand she held one of her strange knives, the other was stretched out straight to the side. A single thought had time to form in Sam's mind before something making a whooshing sound hit her rifle from the side and knocked it out of her hands.

*She parried the bullets!*

Sam took a step back. She knew she'd hit her target. She was far too good a shot to miss at such a short distance. She'd felt the recoil, she'd heard the bang from the exploding gunpowder and the sharp crack from the supersonic bullet. And she'd heard the sound of *ricochets*.

"Sam!" Janet screamed. "What the hell are you *doing*?!"

The two halves of Sam's P90 hit the floor.

Somehow, Gabrielle had gone from sitting down fondling Janet to crouching with a drawn knife so fast that Sam hadn't even seen the movement.

And she'd *parried* the *bullets*. With the knife. Even from where she was standing, Sam could see the bright spots where the bullets had impacted on the knife's metal blade. No force field. No hi-tech cheating. Just the sound of bullets ricocheting off a metal blade and proceeding to hit the walls of the room.

The whooshing sound stopped, and Gabrielle's sharp metal ring appeared in her stretched-out hand.

Gabrielle looked at Sam. Her eyes looked like pools of frozen steel.

"Are you done?" she said.

Suddenly Sam was more afraid than she'd ever been before in her entire life. The way the woman looking at her had gone to battle-ready in an instant, the way she'd brushed off Sam's surprise attack with hardly any visible effort and, maybe most of all, her total calm. It spoke of a level of control that made Sam feel utterly helpless before it.

Janet was up from the bed and moving quickly towards Sam. If she hadn't been trying to keep both Sam and Gabrielle in view she probably would've been running.

"Stay still, both of you!" she shouted. "Stop fighting!"

Gabrielle nodded once, and her stance relaxed. It didn't make Sam feel any safer.

"Sam?" Janet said. Janet was standing right in front of her, and her look of fury had changed into one of concern.

Sam's legs gave out. She collapsed into sitting on the wooden floor in a much less than dignified manner. Janet tried to support her, but the surprise and their relative sizes made it more into a following Sam down than a keeping her up.

"She parried the *bullets*," Sam whispered.

"Yes," Janet said. "Luckily for you she did. Sam, what did you think you were doing?"

"Saving you," Sam said.

"What?" Janet said, surprised. "Saving me? From what?"

"From her," Sam said, weakly nodding towards Gabrielle. "From what she was doing to you."

A shadow passed across Janet's face.

"Sam," she said. "What she was doing to me was something that I like very much. I really hoped that you'd react better to it than *this*. I asked to do this, remember?"

"Not that!" Sam said. "God, definitely not that! But they *drugged* you. When I saw you at lunch, you were acting like you were high and your pupils were all..."

Her voice trailed off into a wordless wish for understanding. To her relief, she saw it dawn in Janet's face.

"Oh!" she said. "That. Sam, we were trying out the proper dosage for tonight. I'm not from this planet, so we thought we'd check. I was kind of spaced at lunch, because it turns out that even half their normal dose is rather too much for me."

Sam blinked.

"You knew?" she said.

"Of course I knew," Janet said. "The Amazons really are good people."

Sam looked away. "I really messed up, huh?" she said. "I thought they'd tricked you, were going to abuse you in some way."

Janet reached out and stroked the side of Sam's face.

"You really came to save me," she said. "Even though you must've known that you'd never make it out again."

Sam nodded.

"Why?" Janet asked. "I'm not important enough to die for."

"You are to me," Sam said before her brain could stop her.

Janet's hand on Sam's face stopped moving. Sam put her own hand on it, wanting the touch to continue.

"I love you," Sam whispered. "It was hard enough knowing what she'd be doing to you at first, when you volunteered. When I thought they were forcing you it got unbearable."

"Ah," Gabrielle said. She was still on the bed, but had changed to a more normal sitting position. "Now this starts to make sense."

She stepped off the bed and stood next to it, still topless.

"Dite?" she said, quite loudly. "Is this your doing?"

"Fraid not, tootsie-pop," a voice said out of nowhere.

What looked sort of like a tentacled brilliant white light faded into being over the bed, and then rapidly coalesced into a normal-looking woman standing next to Gabrielle. She was quite curvy, with long blonde hair and blue eyes. She was dressed in pink frilly bra and panties, over which she had a pink negligee so thin it hid absolutely nothing.

"Little Miss Repressed over there did it all by her lonesome," she said.

"Aphrodite," Janet whispered. Sam slid her arms around Janet's bare waist. She needed the warmth and contact.

"So you had nothing to do with it at all?" Gabrielle asked. She looked dubious. "She just went nuts by herself."

Aphrodite smiled, and somehow she managed to do it with her entire body at once.

"Yeah," she said. "Isn't it *adorable*?"

"Adorable," Gabrielle said. It wasn't quite a question.

"Mmm-hmm," Aphrodite said. "All that passion, bottled up for years and years and years until it finally gets that final little nudge and then... Boom! Volcano time!"

"Your adorable volcano tried to *kill* me," Gabrielle said.

Aphrodite waved her hand in Gabrielle's direction.

"Eh," she said. "You could handle it, sweetie. You haven't lived this long only to get shot by some jealous girlfriend."

Aphrodite turned away from Gabrielle and walked closer to Sam and Janet. In spite of feeling wrung out and terrified, Aphrodite's mere walking managed to turn Sam on.

"Hi there," Aphrodite said, looking down at Sam. "Samantha, isn't it?"

She knelt and leaned a little forward, giving both Sam and Janet clear views straight down her ample cleavage. She smiled at Sam.

"How would you like to be a priestess of the Goddess of Love?" she said.

Suddenly Janet placed herself between Sam and Aphrodite.

"No!" she said. "She's mine! You can't have her!"

Aphrodite stood up straight and squealed in delight.

"Oh you're both so *sweet*!" she trilled.

Gabrielle sighed. "All right, 'Dite," she said. "I only wanted to ask you a question, not invite you to the party. We're in the middle of a marriage here, you know."

Aphrodite spun around to face the queen.

"Which got interrupted," she said.

"Not very badly," Gabrielle said.

"I still get to pass judgment," Aphrodite said. "It's my temple."

"It is," Gabrielle agreed. "So what's the verdict? Is the ceremony off?"

Aphrodite turned around for a moment and looked at Sam and Janet, then looked back at Gabrielle.

"Only brides may enter," she said.

Gabrielle sighed. "That's the rule," she said. "I guess we..."

"So you all have to be brides, then," Aphrodite interrupted. "Don't you?"

She dissolved into a cloud of golden sparkling light, which transformed back into the painfully bright octopus of light.

"Have a nice night, girls," they heard Aphrodite's voice say moments before the light faded away.

The three women looked at each other. For a while nobody said anything.

"Well," Gabrielle finally said. "For some reason I suspect the big challenge tonight will be to get the two of you to pay me any attention at all."

Outside the temple, the night was dark. Lt Satterfield hadn't heard any more gunfire after the first brief salvo, but that didn't necessarily mean that the trouble had ended. Or at least that it hadn't ended well for the firer. Doing her best not to make any noise, she stalked through the woods towards the temple. After the way the Amazons had ambushed them when they arrived she had few illusions that she'd actually manage to avoid them if they were looking, but she would at least try.

To her own surprise, she got up to the temple without being accosted. The forest was thick and dark until it gave way to the cleared space around the temple building, which was lit up by torches and fires. Satterfield kept to the trees while she stalked around the place, looking for something that might be a possible point of entrance for her. There didn't seem to be any. All the doors were guarded, and there were enough guards spread around the temple that climbing the wall between two doors would be impossible without getting noticed. She was about to give up when she noticed that the guard at one door was carrying a P90.

"Hailey?" she said, still hidden in the trees. The guard spun around and pointed her rifle straight at Satterfield.

"It's me, Satterfield!" she blurted out.

The guard lowered her weapon and raised her white and gold mask, revealing herself to indeed be Lt Hailey.

"What are you doing here?" Hailey said.

Satterfield stepped out into the light.

"I heard gunfire," she said. "Is there a problem?"

"I don't know," Hailey said. She looked tense. "Major Carter forced me to let her into the temple, and after a minute or so there was gunfire inside."

Satterfield looked at the door. "Should we go inside and look?" she said.

"I already tried," Hailey said. "The door doesn't open."

"The Major locked it?"

"It doesn't *have* a lock. It just won't open."

"Maybe we can hear something," Satterfield said. She knelt down and pressed her ear to the door. Hailey did the same next to her.

"Voices," Hailey said.

"Yeah," Satterfield agreed. "That's Doctor Fraiser, I think."

"Can't hear what she's saying..."

"Doesn't sound too upset, though. Who's that?"

"Gabrielle," Hailey said. "And that's Major Carter."

"They don't sound very upset either."

Hailey stood up. "I guess things are more or less under control, then," she said.

Satterfield stood up as well.

"I'd better get down to the radio," she said.

Hailey looked questioningly at her.

"The shots came while I was talking to General Hammond," Satterfield said. "He got a bit worried."

"Ah," Hailey said. "I guess you'd better report in, then. We wouldn't want some kind of rescue to mess things up."

"Yeah," Satterfield said. "I only wish I could tell him when he can talk to Major Carter or Doctor Fraiser."

"After sunrise," a voice said from behind the lieutenants. They both spun around and raised their weapons at the Amazon standing there.

Varia smiled at them. "Tense, are we?" she asked.

"Um, sorry," Satterfield said and lowered her rifle. Hailey kept hers ready.

"I just came to tell you not to worry," Varia said. "Your leaders are unharmed and well, but they'll both have to stay in the temple for the night."

"Why?" Hailey said.

"Because Aphrodite says so," Varia said. "As I said, don't worry. They're safe and comfortable in there with the Queen, and the marriage ceremony between the three is proceeding, even if not quite as planned. The temple doors will open at sunrise, and then your people are free to do as they wish."

"Three?" Satterfield said. "There's a three-way marriage now?"

Varia grinned. "Or four, if Aphrodite decides to join in."

Hailey lowered her rifle. "I should get back to my post," she said.

Satterfield shook her head. "This place is way too kinky for me," she mumbled.

"I recommend you leave that part out when you talk to the General," Hailey said. She put her mask back on. "See you at breakfast."

Sam felt tired and numb. The past day, since their audience with Gabrielle, had been too much of an emotional roller-coaster for her, and she most of all felt like curling up into a ball and pretending the world didn't exist.

Unfortunately, that didn't seem to be an option.

She sat on the floor, in the same spot where she'd collapsed after her stupid rescue attempt. She had her knees drawn up and her forehead resting on them, and her arms wrapped around her lower legs.

"Hey."

An arm wrapped around her shoulders and a soft body snuggled up next to her. She looked up.

"You look terrible," Janet said, smiling at her.

"Gee, thanks," Sam said. "That was just what I wanted to hear."

Janet kissed her on the cheek.

"You also look adorable," she said. "My knight in shining cammo."

Sam made a sound that not even she herself could tell if it was a laugh or a sob.

"When we talked at lunch," Janet said. "Did I tell you something then? I don't quite remember. I was kind of fuzzy in the head."

Sam tried to force a smile.

"Nothing you'd have to be ashamed of," she said. "So don't worry about it."

"I don't," Janet said. "And I'd never be ashamed of saying that I love you."

Sam stared at her.

"I was teasing you a little," Janet said, looking sheepish. "Sorry about that. You really aren't in the mood for it, are you?"

Sam shook her head. "It's been a long day, and I didn't sleep very much last night."

Gabrielle sat down at the side of Sam that wasn't already occupied by Janet.

"I think you need a bath, some food, some drink and some rest," she said.

Sam turned to look at her. "You're not angry at me for trying to kill you?" she said.

Gabrielle shrugged. "I've been ruling my Amazons for well over a century," she said. "I'm used to overly emotional warrior women."

She looked Sam in the eyes. "And it's not like you're planning to try again, is it?" she said, with a clear edge to her voice.

Sam shook her head, suddenly feeling again a little of the fear she'd felt earlier.

"I thought we couldn't go back to the bath houses?" Janet said.

Gabrielle stood and reached out her hands to help the other two rise.

"We can't," she said while she pulled them both up at the same time. "But this place is meant to spend entire nights in, and you can get pretty grungy after a few hours if you work at it. So there's a small bath in the back. It won't be nearly as nice as the bath houses and it's only plain hot water, but I think it'll do."

"Sounds lovely," Sam said. She was feeling a bit more relaxed, and with that tiredness, hunger and thirst followed.

"There's just one thing we have to fix first," Gabrielle said. Both Sam and Janet looked questioningly at her.

"You're *way* overdressed," the Queen of the Amazons said, shaking her head.

"So you're saying that they're all right?"

General Hammond sat in front of the microphone, looking through the control room window down at the active Stargate.

"As far as we can tell, yes, sir," Lt Satterfield said through the radio speakers.

"They're still locked up in the temple with the queen, but we could hear them talk normally and even laugh. Varia said that they're fine and that they'll come out after the sun rises."

Hammond thought for a moment. "This Varia," he said, "do you think she's trustworthy?"

"She's their ruler in the queen's absence, sir. Since these people put great store in honor and stuff, I'd say she can at least be trusted to keep her word. And Lt Hailey is part of the honor guard around the temple, so if something happens there we'll know about it."

"Very well," Hammond said. "We'll accept the situation for the time being, and take no action unless something new happens that warrants it. We'll go down to contacting you every three hours, unless you feel more often is necessary, lieutenant?"

"No, sir. Every three hours will be fine."

"When is local sunrise, lieutenant?"

"In about ten hours, sir."

"When you see her, tell Major Carter that if she's not there for me to talk to when we contact you twelve hours from now, I will send through troops to find her."

"Yes, sir."

"Talk to you in three hours then, lieutenant. Keep up the good work."

"Thank you, sir. SG-X out."

Hammond leaned back and gestured to the technician to close down the gate.

"What do you think, gentlemen?" he said to the three men waiting behind him.

"There appears to be no immediate danger," Teal'c said.

"Not much to go on, sir," Jack said.

"If the shooting happened in the temple as the lieutenant said, it may have been part of the ritual," Daniel said. "Displays of martial prowess were not unknown in ancient religious rituals, nor were things calculated to seriously frighten the applicant. Although usually not with firearms..."

Hammond got up from his chair.

"So none of you see any reason to take action right now?" he said.

Daniel shook his head.

"No, sir," Jack said.

"Indeed not," Teal'c finished.

The hot water lapped gently at Sam's shoulders. She felt warm and relaxed, and some food and wine had certainly done wonders for her mood. Her main problem now was that she was fast heading from merely tired into falling-down sleepy. She did her best to stifle a yawn, but didn't entirely succeed.

"Sleepy?" Janet said. She was sitting behind Sam, right by the edge of the small pool sunk into the floor of the temple's bath room. Her thigh was just behind Sam's head, perfectly placed for her to lean back on. Which was not exactly a coincidence. She was dressed in a short leather skirt, a top resembling a leather sports bra and nothing else.

"A bit," Sam said. "No worry, I can stay awake if needed."

Janet handed her a large goblet of dark, almost black, wine.

"No need," Gabrielle said. She was lying on her side by the pool's side, looking at the other two women. She had on a skirt much like Janet's but red and her knee-high soft boots. Her breasts were still bare, and Sam repeatedly found her gaze drawn to them.

"There's time for you to catch a couple of hours sleep, if you want," Gabrielle said. "As long as all of us climax by the action of another at least once before dawn, 'Dite will consider the marriage valid, and the alliance will be a fact."

Sam drank deeply from the goblet. The wine was strong, both in taste and potency. Its taste made her think of forests and blood. She passed the goblet on to Gabrielle.

"Maybe I should," she said.

"I think so," Janet said. "It wouldn't be much fun if you were fighting to stay awake the first time I got to have my wicked way with your delicious body."

Sam's mind instantly filled with tantalizing imagery.

"I really don't think I'd have any problems staying awake for that," she said as her body raced to react to the thoughts. "And why are the two of you not as tired as I am anyway?"

"We've been lounging around and taking it easy," Gabrielle said. "Instead of worrying ourselves sick. Plus, we've had a small amount of stimulant herbs."

"Why can't I have some of those?"

"Because we don't have any here," Gabrielle said. She handed the wine goblet on to Janet.

Sam stifled another yawn.

"Maybe some sleep wouldn't be such a bad idea, after all," she mumbled.

Janet's fingers moved slowly through her hair.

"Where would be a good place for her to sleep?" Janet asked.

"There's a really big bed out in the main chamber," Gabrielle said.

"Can I talk to her alone for a moment?" Janet said.

Gabrielle shrugged, as well as she could while lying propped up on her elbow.

"Sure," she said. "I'll be in the bed."

She got up from the floor with such an effortless and graceful movement that it left both Earth women staring after her as she walked out.

"She's really something, isn't she?" Sam said.

"Most certainly," Janet said. "And while she looks exactly like the TV version, she behaves differently. Which may simply be because she's a lot older."

"Yeah, about that. How old *is* she? She said she's been queen here for more than a hundred years."

There was a sound behind her head of something soft falling to the floor. She turned her head to see what was going on, and unexpectedly found herself looking at a naked Janet.

She was even more beautiful than Sam had imagined. Somehow, she'd imagined that the cute doctor would look soft and pale from always working in the infirmary. The woman who was standing in front of her was far from that. Pale, yes, but not as much so as in Sam's imagination. Soft, yes, but only in a deliciously feminine way. Under the softness, there was the healthy muscle tone she really should have expected from an Air Force officer.

"From what I've heard the Amazons say, Gabrielle must be at least two hundred years old," Janet said. "Do you like what you see?"

Not trusting her voice, Sam simply nodded.

Janet slid into the pool, facing Sam and straddling her thighs, so they ended up with their breasts touching. Sam's entire skin tingled, and all of a sudden she found it hard to breathe. She had no idea what to do. There were plenty of things she *wanted* to do, but without knowing what Janet wanted she hardly dared move a muscle for fear of upsetting her.

But at least she had no problem staying awake.

"Sam?" Janet said, and Sam could feel her breath when she spoke. "Touch me. Please. Anywhere you want, any way you want, any time you want."

Almost by themselves, Sam's arms reached out and wrapped themselves around the woman in front of her. She pulled her close, until their bodies were pressed firmly against each other and their lips met. She felt Janet's arms around her neck, a pair of small hands gripping her hair.

When Janet's tongue eagerly met hers, the final barrier that held almost five years of pent-up emotion inside Sam broke. Without warning or fanfare, tears poured down her face. She held on to Janet with near-desperate strength, as if her life de-

pended on it. She poured her life and soul into the kiss, as if it was the most precious thing that had ever graced the universe, until she finally had to break away to breathe.

Only a hand span in front of her, she saw Janet's expression change from desire to worry.

"You're crying," Janet said. "Are those happy tears or sad tears?"

"I don't know," Sam said, and not until she said the words did she realize that they were true. "I'm sorry."

"Hush, love," Janet said. "Just hold me and let them flow."

Sam did as she said. She wrapped her arms more solidly around Janet's body, rested her head on the doctor's shoulder and simply let the tears flow as they would. She wasn't really crying, her breath came easily, it was just tears.

If there's a tear for every time I've wished she was mine, Sam thought, this could go on for a long, long time.

"This has been a very strange trip," Janet said, speaking softly, her mouth right by Sam's ear. "First, I get an opportunity that's even wilder than my imagination's ever been. Then I find out that you want me. That you love me.

While she spoke, she kept gently stroking Sam's hair.

"In one way, I feel like I ought to wake up any moment now," she said. "Things like this just don't happen. In another way, I feel like a kid who suddenly found out that Christmas got moved to her birthday. It's too many good things at once, and I can't concentrate on both of them as much as I'd want to."

Just hearing Janet's voice, warm and friendly, was a balm for Sam's ragged nerves. Her arms loosened their grip somewhat, into more of a very firm hug than a drowning person clinging to a piece of driftwood.

"But here's the thing, Samantha Carter," Janet said. "In the morning, when this night is over, I'll still be there for you. And the morning after that, and the one after that, and, I hope, for hundreds or thousands of mornings more."

She leaned back a little so she could look Sam into the eyes.

"If you'll have me, that is," she said.

"Of course I will!"

A mischievous smile graced Janet's face.

"Are you sure?" she said. "I mean, you've only had to spend the occasional night in the field with me. You have no idea what unspeakable habits I may have at home."

Sam laughed, with tears still running.

"I've spent hundreds of nights in the field with Jack and Daniel without shooting them," she said. "You can't possibly be worse than them."

Janet smiled, warmly and lovingly.

"Good," she said. "Are you feeling a bit better?"

Sam nodded. She felt lighter inside, and the tears had stopped.

"Then I suggest we get out of the pool," Janet said, "and proceed to the bed. I hold you until you fall asleep, and while you sleep Gabrielle and I... entertain ourselves. When you wake up, you join us. How does that sound to you?"

"That sounds fine," Sam said. "But won't we get the bed all wet?"

Janet floated herself away from Sam a little bit.

"Well, if I get you *that* excited, I won't mind," she said, smiling.

Sam splashed water at her. "I meant from going directly from here to the bed!" she said.

Janet wiped the water from her face.

"I know," she said. "There are bath towels right up there. We can dry each other off."

She pointedly looked Sam's body up and down.

"As Gabrielle said, we have all night."

"Hailey!"

Satterfield's voice came from the bushes closest to the temple door, just like before.

"Yeah, what is it?" Hailey said, not even bothering to speak softly. "Why are you hiding over there anyway?"

Satterfield stood up. "Er," she said. "Habit?"

Hailey raised her mask and just looked. Satterfield looked sheepish.

"So, what's been happening?" she asked.

"Pretty much nothing out here," Hailey said.

"But inside?"

"I don't think you want to know."

Satterfield gave her a look.

"Look," she said. "I need to know so I can report to the general."

An odd kind of expression passed of Hailey's face.

"Ok," she said. "If you insist."

"I do."

"It seems that Doctor Fraiser is a bit of a screamer," Hailey said.

Satterfield looked confused.

"Screamer?"

"You know. When she comes."

Lt Satterfield's eyes widened.

"Oh," she said.

"And she seems to be having a good time, because I've heard her six times in about two hours now," Hailey went on. "Which doesn't surprise me, really, after what my lodge sisters told me about the queen."

"What was that?" Satterfield said, her face the very image of slightly revolted fascination.

"Well, to begin with, apparently *all* the women in the village have slept with her at some time or another," Hailey began. "And my sisters here says that she knows this technique which is kind of the opposite of martial arts pressure points. She'll touch you in a handful of precise spots in rapid succession, and all of a sudden you'll be so hot that you can hardly stand. Then she moves on up from there."

"*All* of them?" Satterfield said. "Really?"

Hailey grinned.

"Yeah," she said. "All. As far as I can tell, you're the only straight woman on the planet."

Satterfield looked clearly disturbed.

"What about Major Carter?" she said.

"Oh please," Hailey said. "Friend of mine says she's a regular at a gay club over in Cheyenne. Apparently she tries to get a dance with every short, slender brunette who happens by but never picks any of them up."

Satterfield looked away.

"I have to get back to the radio," she said in a less than convincing tone of voice.

"Sure," Hailey said. "Have a fun report."

Satterfield flinched.

"I'll just say that the ritual is proceeding well and that we have found no reason to worry," she said.

Hailey's laughter followed her all the way down to the village.

Sam woke up feeling warm and safe. Some time after she'd fallen asleep, someone had draped a fur over her. It was soft, heavy and warm.

A delighted moan nearby immediately brought back the memory of where she was and why. Slowly, she opened her eyes.

An arm's length away, Janet lay. She was on her back with her arms stretched out over her head. A pillow lay under her hips. Her face was turned toward Sam, her mouth slightly open and her eyes closed. Her legs were spread wide, and Gabrielle lay between them. Her eyes too were closed, and she seemed to be concentrating totally on what her mouth was doing to Janet's vulva.

Sam stayed still and looked at them, fascinated. She studied Janet's face as if it was the most exquisite work of art, and every twitch and moan sent little shivers of excitement down Sam's spine. She kept watching as Janet's shivers and groans grew more frequent and stronger, as the flush on her pale skin crept ever further down her breasts. She watched as, just before she was sure that Janet was about to explode into orgasm, Gabrielle reached up and gently put her fingers to a few places along Janet's hip bone. A frustrated whimper came from Janet, and she seemed to drop back to the level of arousal she'd been at when Sam woke up.

Between her legs, Gabrielle never stopped licking.

As silently as she could, Sam pushed the fur aside and moved closer to Janet. The anticipation of touch and the sheer joy of being able to was so intense that it made it difficult for her to breathe. She stretched out a hand to stroke one of Janet's gorgeous breasts, and was just about to touch when she noticed that Gabrielle was looking at her and discreetly shaking her head. She pulled her hand back and looked questioningly at Gabrielle, who briefly raised a hand in a waiting gesture.

So Sam waited. Again, Janet's arousal rose steadily, and Sam started to suspect that the fact that she hadn't been spotted when she moved had less to do with her own stealth skills and more to do with Janet's total obliviousness to the outside world. When it seemed like Janet was just about to again shoot for the stratosphere, Gabrielle gestured towards her chest rather than do the hip-touching thing. Sam smiled, wrapped her lips around Janet's nearest nipple and stroked it firmly with her tongue.

Janet's surprised gasp turned to a scream halfway through. Her back arched, her muscles tensed and she twisted and twitched enough that there was no way for Sam to keep sucking her nipple. She pulled back and just watched in amazement until Janet collapsed into an exhausted heap.

Gabrielle crawled up and lay down alongside Janet, propped up on an elbow.

"Satisfied?" she said.

"Sweet mercy, yes," Janet said. Her breath still came ragged. "But how..."

She opened her eyes and saw Sam.

"Ah," she said. "So that's where the second mouth suddenly came from."

"I hope you didn't mind me butting in," Sam said, smiling widely to show that the question wasn't serious.

"Horribly," Janet said. "Ruined it all. Now we'll have to do it all over again."

"All right," Gabrielle said and started moving down Janet's body again.

Janet grabbed hold of her and pulled her back.

"I was joking, woman!" she said. "God, another round like that would probably kill me!"

Gabrielle's smile indicated that she'd not been entirely serious either.

"I would've been a bit impressed if you'd really wanted more right after that," she said. "Or worried that I was losing my touch."

"Your touch is just fine," Janet said. "Very, very fine."

Sam stretched out on the other side of her from Gabrielle.

"So you don't want me to play with you right now?" she said.

Janet smiled. "Just wait a minute or two," she said.

Gabrielle swiftly moved over Janet, pushed Sam down on her back and ended up straddling her hips, facing her. She was heavier than Sam would've guessed.

"Or I could play a little with you," she said, moving her hips slightly, putting pressure in places that made Sam gasp. "Let Janet here watch for a while."

Sam glanced towards Janet. Janet was still smiling, so obviously she didn't resent the suggestion too badly.

"All right," Sam said.

Gabrielle smiled down at her.

"Good," she said. She lifted herself a little, reached down between her legs and brought her hand back with two fingers covered with moisture. She put the wet fingers to Sam's mouth. Sam let them in, sucked at them. They tasted of salt and musk, and something else she couldn't identify. Something sharp, kind of metallic.

"Good girl," Gabrielle said. She pulled her fingers out, bent down and kissed Sam deeply. She was, unsurprisingly, an exceptionally good kisser. It didn't take many moments before Sam was completely lost in the kiss, all her attention focused on the way Gabrielle moved her tongue and lips and body against hers. When Gabrielle broke contact between their mouths and proceeded to kiss her way down Sam's body, it left her gasping for air. It wasn't only the way Gabrielle touched her. There was more to her, a scent or a feeling that did things to Sam's mind that she couldn't quite understand.

"She's good, isn't she?" Janet whispered in her ear. "We should try to learn."

Sam tried to laugh, but it turned into a strangled gasp when Gabrielle stuck a tongue down her belly button at the same time.

"Do you think she gives lessons?" she managed to get out.

"If she does, we could never afford them," Janet said.

Gabrielle was breathing into Sam's pubic hair, spreading a soft, caressing warmth. Her hands were moving slowly up and down Sam's torso, lightly touching her nipples every time they passed.

It's like a swing, the annoying rational part of Sam's mind said. Push it once, and not much happens. Push it repeatedly, but at the wrong times, even less happens. Push it repeatedly at the *right* times, and you can reach the sky.

Slowly, teasingly, Gabrielle's mouth moved down between Sam's legs. Sam spread her legs as wide as she could, to give her all the room she might need. To invite her, entice her to touch harder, faster, more.

She felt Gabrielle's hands on her hips, and another hand cupping one of her breasts. She looked down and saw Janet's hand there. A hand that had touched her many times before, but not like this. Never like this. Janet's fingers gently pinched her nipple, and while her touch was not as supernaturally skillful as Gabrielle's, it felt as good to her simply because it was *Janet's*. She looked to the side, where Janet lay right next to her. Her face was serious, concentrated. Her pupils were dilated with desire. Sam moved to kiss her, and their lips met at the same moment as Gabrielle finally pushed her tongue between Sam's blood-engorged labia.

Sam felt her climax start. She felt the sudden involuntary tensing that immediately preceded the explosion -- and then it just stopped, leaving her panting and confused. She looked down and saw Gabrielle's hand leave the exact same spot along the hip bone where Sam had seen her touch Janet. So that's what it feels like, the rational fragment had time to think before it was drowned out by the massive pleasure sensation coming from her sex. Gabrielle's mouth was sucking at her clitoris at the same time as she was sliding her fingers in and out of her vagina, a combination that left thinking far behind and had Sam panting and begging for more in seconds.

Distantly, she felt Janet nibble at her ear lobe.

"Begging's no use," Janet whispered to her. "She can go on like this for *hours*."

Above the temple, the stars slowly moved their stately dance across the sky. The night birds sang, the insects rasped and the occasional small furry thing went crunch in the darkness.

Outside one of the temple's doors, a short Amazon stood guard. She had a P90 assault rifle hanging from a strap around her shoulder, a white and gold mask covering her face and a pointy stick in her hand.

She looked up when she heard another orgasmic wail from inside the temple. She tilted her head to the side and pondered for a moment. C or F?

She looked down at the ground by the large brazier, in which burned the fire that provided most of the light around the door. In the dust there, two vertical lines had been drawn, with a horizontal one drawn close to their top, forming a simple three-column table. One column was marked "C", one was marked "F" and one "U". There were a few more marks in the "F" column than the "C" one.

Hailey used the pointy stick to make a mark under "C". Then she frowned, unsure. It could have been the doctor. Perhaps it was. She scrubbed out the mark with the tip of her Amazon soft leather boot and made a mark under "F" instead. Then she sighed, rubbed out that mark as well and made one under "U".

As they got hoarser in there, it got harder to tell which one was screaming. If they didn't let up soon, all the marks would be under "U". Except when they were both howling at the same time, of course.

She sighed again. Over the past few hours, she'd got an entirely new understanding of why her lodge sisters had made so very sure to tell her that masturbating while on guard was a crime that might not only get her expelled from the lodge but also exiled from the tribe. Not that she was part of the tribe to begin with, but she understood the seriousness. And, after this, she also understood the need for the rule.

She sighed for a third time. If nothing else, after this night she'd got a whole new level of respect for the Amazon Queen.

I'll kill her, Sam thought as climax began to swell within her again. If she stops it and starts over again this time too, I'll honest to goodness kill her. Or die trying.

She had no idea how many times Gabrielle had repeated the cycle. Every time it seemed like the pleasure grew faster and reached higher, and the frustration at being brought down again grew sharper. Her senses seemed to grow sharper, more acute, at the same time as her mind lost its grip on past and future. All that remained was an intense *now* of sensation. Gabrielle was still between her legs, doing amazing things to her with tongue and lips. The queenly hands roamed up and down Sam's body as far as they'd reach, down her legs and up her torso, touching spots that Sam had had no idea could feel so good.

Less searingly intense, Janet was lying next to her. One arm under Sam's shoulders, the other gently caressing her breasts. Her lips kissing her. Nibbling her ear lobe. Leaving searing hot trails over Sam's skin. Engulfing nipples in lovely wet warmth.

Gabrielle's hand didn't move up to Sam's hip to touch the magic places. Instead, finger slid inside her oh-so-wet vagina and touched just as magic places there.

For some moments, her brain shut down. There was only incredible pleasure, warmth and love. It was searingly intense, burning away the whole world outside.

When the world returned again, leaving her panting and exhausted in Janet's arms, she couldn't even guess how long it had lasted. Her throat felt sore from screaming, so it must've been a little while.

"My god," she whispered. She blinked and slowly felt things fall into place again. The thick, soft furs under her. Janet's arm under her shoulders. The smell, a mix of incense and aroused woman.

"You all right?" Janet whispered next to her ear. On the other side, she felt the bed move as Gabrielle laid down next to her.

"I'm not sure yet," Sam said. "There might be some burned-out nerves."

Janet kissed her on the cheek. "You're all right," she said.

Gabrielle ran her hand along Sam's torso, from just above her pubic hair up between her breasts and slowly back down again.

"You're beautiful," she said. "Both of you."

Sam looked at her. "Not as much as most of your Amazons," she said. "And don't try to tell us otherwise. You have a whole lot of *gorgeous* women here."

Gabrielle smiled. "Pleasure is beauty," she said. "And you enjoy it more, because you expect it less. So you are more beautiful."

She still wasn't sure what to make of the Amazon queen. There was just... *too much* of her. Too knowing. Too physically excellent. Too wise. Too pretty. As if all the strong parts a whole group of fantastic women had been distilled down to one supernaturally amazing woman.

"It must be our turn now," Janet said. "You said all of us has to come during the night for the marriage to be valid."

"So I did," Gabrielle said. "So how do you want me?"

"Panting and moaning in ecstasy, if we can manage it," Janet said. "Until then, just lie down between us."

Gabrielle got up on hands and knees and climbed over Sam, who moved to the side to make room.

"I'm sure you'll manage that marvelously," Gabrielle said. She laid down between the two Earth women, and stretched out her arms to the sides, under Sam's and Janet's necks. Sam laid her head down on Gabrielle's arm, and marveled briefly at the solidity of the muscle in it. Even relaxed, it felt harder than Sam's own when she was exerting herself. Curious, Sam reached out and touched Gabrielle's thigh. The skin as warm, smooth and soft, but underneath lay a muscle like iron. A lean, well shaped muscle that smoothly joined with a delicious buttock at the high point. Having started to feel her up, Sam found no reason or desire to stop. With her hand, she explored the Amazon queen's body. Carefully, at first, staying away from all the obviously erogenous places. She looked towards Janet, and saw that she was doing pretty much the same to the other side of Gabrielle's body. The queen herself had her eyes closed and seemed to simply be enjoying the sensation.

Inch by inch, Sam let her caresses grow bolder. She ran her fingertips slowly up along the inside of Gabrielle's thigh, causing the legs to spread further apart. She kissed the sides and bottoms of her breast, avoiding the areola and nipple. She ran her fingers through the soft curly hair over Gabrielle's sex, and there her hand met Janet's. She looked up, and their eyes met. Janet was smiling. She winked at Sam, nodded towards where their hands were touching and by gently taking hold of Sam's hand asked her to follow her lead.

As one, they bent down and started more roughly licking Gabrielle's breasts. As one, their fingers moved downwards and slid in between Gabrielle's labia. The queen gasped. She spread her legs even further apart, and her hips moved to meet the probing hands. Sam moved her hand with the trembling hips. She spread slick fluid over every part of Gabrielle's sex she could reach, occasionally touching the clenching opening to get more. Her mouth was busy sucking and nibbling at a hard nipple, and a sideways gaze showed her that Janet was doing the same. Gabrielle was audibly moaning now, and her hips were moving with the rhythm of the touching hands. Sam let the nipple slip out of her mouth, inched herself upwards a bit. She stuck her tongue out and licked along Gabrielle's lower lip. Before she got halfway from one end to the other, Gabrielle had turned her head and caught Sam's lips in a passionate kiss.

Warm breath touched her face from the side. Sam broke the kiss. Janet moved in and took it over. Their fingers still moved in unison among the folds of Gabrielle's vulva, steadily inching the queen closer to ecstasy. While Janet was occupying Gabrielle's mouth, Sam licked her ear lobe. She was pressing her entire body as close as she could against Gabrielle, wanting to touch all of her at once. Her and Janet both, if possible. Janet's face moved slightly away from Gabrielle's, and following an impulse Sam dove in and kissed her instead of the queen. Right over Gabrielle's now-open eyes, their mouths met and joined. Down between her legs, Sam's and Janet's fingers both moved to the bottom of the vulva at the same time, and as if they'd planned it in advance they both slid their fingers inside Gabrielle's vagina side by side. Feeling the slick velvet walls against her finger on one side of her finger and Janet's skin on the other was an amazingly *intimate* sensation. Moving as one, her and Janet sliding their fingers in and out and Gabrielle meeting their moves with her hips, it gave her an intense sense of being connected to them. Of nearly being one.

"Harder," she heard Gabrielle whisper. Her breath had grown ragged, and when Sam stopped kissing Janet for a moment she saw that her eyes were half-closed.

Without taking her finger out of Gabrielle's vagina, she moved her thumb up and pressed it down on the hard little clitoris. Side by side with her, Janet's thumb did the same. All their mouths met in a sloppy, ineffectual but necessary three-way kiss. Sam's and Janet's hands kept moving. Faster and faster, harder and harder, as Gabrielle's hips moved faster and harder and she began to mumble urgent nonsense at them. Sam kept caressing, probing, kissing. Again, time became all but meaningless, drowned out by sensation. She could not have said if it was a moment or an eternity the lay like that before Gabrielle's entire body arced and she climaxed with a long, soundless gasp. Her vaginal muscles clenched Sam's and Janet's fingers so hard that they couldn't move them, and it almost hurt.

The moments of stillness passed, and Gabrielle relaxed onto the bed again. Sam pulled her finger out, just after Janet, their effortless coordination no longer there. Gabrielle smiled at them.

"So..." she said, and at that exact moment a sparkly golden light passed over the three of them.

"..., now we're all married," Gabrielle finished her sentence.

Sam lay her head down. She was feeling sleepy again.

"Your marriage rites are more fun than ours," she heard Janet say.

"Tell me about it tomorrow, wife of mine," Gabrielle said. "Believe it or not, but even Amazon queens get tired after a night of sex. I want to sleep."

"Wouldn't mind some myself," Janet mumbled, and that was the last Sam heard before she slipped into darkness.

"Samantha."

Sam woke with a start. She was still lying in the large temple bed. She was still naked.

"Good morning," Gabrielle said. "Here, drink this."

Sam sat up. Gabrielle was holding out a large cup to her, and for lack of a better option she took it. She looked around and saw Janet sleeping next to her.

"What time is it?" she asked.

Gabrielle went to a side cupboard and took out another cup.

"Just before sunrise," she said. "The doors will open soon."

Gabrielle walked up to the side of the bed closest to Janet and touched her gently on the shoulder.

"Janet," she said. Janet sat bolt upright.

"Hm?" she said. "What's happening?"

"Morning," Gabrielle said. "Here, drink this."

"What is it?" Sam asked. She looked into her cup. It was liquid, transparent and brown. It looked rather a lot like iced tea without the ice.

"A restorative," Gabrielle said. "Since we only planned for two brides, there are only two cups. You two need them more than I do."

Sam tasted it. It was slightly bitter, minty and just a little bit sweet. Overall, quite tasty.

"Hey, it's good," she said.

Janet drank from hers as well.

"Maybe you explained all this to Janet yesterday so she already knows," Sam said. "But I wasn't there for all the preparation, so... Do we dress before we go out? Or is this some kind of ritual showing off thing to prove that we did what we did?"

"I'm going to dress," Gabrielle said. "You do as you wish. You're certainly both good-looking enough that nobody will mind if you don't."

"I think I will, thank you," Sam said. She climbed out of the bed and headed for the back room with the pool, which was the last place she remembered seeing her clothes.

"Gabrielle," she heard Janet say. "There's one thing I'm wondering about."

"What?"

"What's the status between me and Sam, in the eyes of Amazon law? You said we are all married now, so are the two of us married separately too? Or are we only wives when all three of us are present, in some way?"

Sam stopped like she'd hit a wall. Now *that* was a question. She turned around. Gabrielle was looking at her with a very impish grin on her face.

"You are married all by yourselves as well," she said. "Just as if it had been only you here last night."

"Oh," Janet said.

"Do you dislike it?" Gabrielle said. "We have divorce rituals as well, if not. Although that *would* be considered a bit of a bad omen for the alliance between our peoples."

"No," Janet said. "No, that's fine. I rather like it. Even if it would've been fun to propose to Sam some day, I can live without that."

Sam let out a breath she hadn't known she was holding. Being married, even in a way not anywhere close to recognized on Earth, was a lot more a lot faster than she would've chosen -- but it still would've hurt her a lot if Janet had wanted a divorce at once.

She dressed quickly and returned to the main room before any further momentous revelations could be made.

Janet and Gabrielle had both dressed while she was away. Not that they had a lot to put on in the first place, but at least it covered their more interesting bits.

"Shall we go out?" Gabrielle said. "I'm told that your superiors back home are getting rather worried and are threatening to send in warriors to rescue you if they don't get to talk to you within an hour and a half."

She headed for the main door, which swung open the moment she started walking towards it.

"*Who* told her that?" Sam whispered.

"Aphrodite, I guess," Janet whispered back. "And I wish she wouldn't walk so fast, I feel like I've run a marathon!"

Sam pulled herself up to her full height.

"Well, dear wife," she said. "Shall we go out and meet the masses of our followers?"

"Why not?" Janet said. "I'm pretty sure both of them will be waiting impatiently for us."

Hand in hand, they walked out of the temple.

## Aftermath

The briefing room was unusually crowded. In addition to the members of the temporary SG-X, the remaining members of SG-1 had also insisted on being present. They sat along one side of the table, looking at the women: Jack with ill-concealed suspicion, Daniel with open curiosity and Teal'c as usual with no discernible emotion whatsoever.

On the other side sat the four women of SG-X. Major Carter and Doctor Fraiser looked a bit tense, for no apparent reason. Lt Satterfield looked relieved to be home, which had been fairly obvious ever since she stepped through the gate. Lt Hailey was dressed according to regulation, but her face was painted in an intricate pattern of ochre and black lines.

At the top of the table, as usual, sat General Hammond.

They all sat there, silent and waiting. A few minutes passed before someone knocked on the door.

"Enter," General Hammond said.

A tall woman in uniform entered and saluted.

"Here is the box set you requested, sir," she said and held out a small garishly colored box to the general.

"Thank you, sergeant," he said as he took it. "You'll get it back after this debriefing. Dismissed."

"Please be careful with it," the sergeant said. "It's signed by Hudson Leick, sir."

Hammond slowly turned and looked up at her.

"Dismissed, sergeant," he said.

"Yes, sir," she said and beat a hasty retreat out of the room.

Hammond looked at the box.

"Xena the Warrior Princess, Season Six" he read.

"What?!" Lt Hailey said in a low voice. "Hudson wasn't even *in* that season!"

"Major Carter?" Hammond said. "Can you please explain to me why I am holding this object?"

"Yes, sir," Sam said.

She got up and took the box from the general. She opened it, took out a DVD and slotted it into a player in the corner of the room. She pushed a few buttons. The room lights darkened, the screen covering the window to the Gate Room lowered and moving pictures began to play. On them, an athletic young woman with short blonde hair was stalking through a forest. She was dressed in a very short red skirt, and a matching sports-bra-like top. She had knee-high soft leather boots, and she was holding an odd three-pronged knife.

Sam froze the image.

"This is the character Gabrielle from the TV series 'Xena the Warrior Princess'," Sam said. "She's played by the actress Renée O'Connor."

She pushed more button, and another still image came into view next to the first one. It was nearly identical to the first one, except for a slight variation in the woman's stance and the appearance of the vegetation around her.

"This is the ruler of the people we met on P5X-8859," Sam said. "As you can see, the resemblance is quite uncanny. Nor does it end at the physical likeness. She has the same name, Gabrielle, and appears to have the memories the TV series character should have. Nor is she the only one. All in all, during our week on P5X-8859 we encountered three more characters from the TV show."

"So somebody set up a copy of this show there?" Jack said.

"We don't think so," Sam said. "The Amazons claim to have come to P5X-8859 about a hundred and twenty years ago, through the Stargate. According to them, they were led there by Gabrielle and their goddess Aphrodite. We did find physical evidence suggesting that they have been living in their village for at least a hundred years."

"Led from where?" Daniel asked.

"We don't know," Sam said.

"Aphrodite," Jack said. "This is the goddess who's into lesbian porn?"

"Yes, sir," Sam said. "She's also one of the four TV characters we met. Although the bit about the pornography is never mentioned there. Her aversion to fish, however, is. We also believe that she is the key to this entire mystery."

"How so?" Hammond said.

"From the look of it when she arrived and left, she's an Ascended. A being of the same order as Oma Desala or Orlin."

"So what we have here," Hammond said, "is a very powerful being who has set up a small culture on a distant world, that then somehow happens to closely resemble an Earth TV show? This does not make a whole lot of sense to me."

"It may be that the implication goes the other way, sir. It may be that the TV show came to resemble this society."

"How could that be?"

"When we talked to Gabrielle, she displayed a markedly greater knowledge of the world outside P5X-8859 than anyone else. She also mentioned that she has on occasion used the Stargate. We know from the experience with Orlin that the Ascended know far more about the Stargates than we do. With some help from Aphrodite, which would not be hard for Gabrielle to get, she may have come to Earth through the Antarctic gate before we found it. She may somehow and for some reason have set up the TV show to resemble her own world."

The General rubbed his forehead.

"Enough about their history for the moment, I think," he said. "Let's get to the current situation. Apparently we are allied with them?"

"Yes, sir," Sam said. "According to their customs, the only possible choices were war or alliance. I chose alliance."

"What does this obligate us to?"

"Not much, sir. Basically no more than we might give anyway as humanitarian aid."

"All right. Does it get us anything? I mean, even if they were founded by an Ascended, they are a primitive society using pre-gunpowder weapons. What could they offer us?"

"They are not as primitive as they look, sir. Janet?"

"Right," Janet said. She leaned forward and looked at her papers.

"After we finalized the alliance," she said. "I studied as many Amazons as I could. The results of that makes me hesitate to call them human. Their ancestors were, without a doubt. But something has since changed them."

She leaned back in her chair.

"To begin with, they don't fall ill. At all. Gabrielle was the only one there who even understood the concept of illness. They heal extremely fast. When one of them suffered a broken ulna during weapons practice, the bone was perfectly healed the next morning--without having even been set. On top of this, they are faster, stronger and more coordinated than we are."

"In short, sir, as long we can explain things to them in a way that appeals to them, the possibility exists to use Amazon volunteers as quite impressive special operations troops."

"They use bows and arrows!" Jack said.

"Their arrows turn," Hailey said.

Jack looked at her.

"What do you mean turn?" he said.

"I mean they turn in flight. I've seen an Amazon shoot around a tree to hit a boar behind it."

"Lieutenant Hailey touches on another thing we discovered," Sam said. "Their weaponry is *not* primitive."

She took a cloth-wrapped bundle from a side table and unwrapped it, revealing the two halves of her P90.

"At one point, Gabrielle and I had a... misunderstanding," she said. "I fired on her. Using her strange knife -- a sai, I believe it's called -- she parried the bullets. She then disarmed me by throwing what looked like a sharp metal circle on my weapon. This is the result."

She handed the broken weapon around. It passed from hand to hand, so everybody got a look.

"The break seems awfully smooth," Daniel said after he'd had a chance to look at it.

"It is," Sam said. "It's much too smooth. There is no material missing, and there is no deformation of the material that is there. It's just split apart. Our current physics can't even explain why this might be possible, much less how it could be done."

"She parried bullets?" Jack said, his voice heavy with disbelief.

"Yes, sir," Sam said.

"We both witnessed it, Colonel," Janet said. "We also went back later and retrieved some of the bullets, to eliminate the possibility that it was some kind of illusion. The fact is that Gabrielle was fast enough to parry a salvo from an automatic weapon at a distance of less than ten yards."

"As I said, sir," Sam said. "Quite impressive special forces troops, if we can get them to help us."

"So can we do that?" Daniel said. "What's their culture like? Are they likely to want to help us fight the Goa'uld?"

Sam and Janet looked at each other for a moment.

"As far as we can tell," Sam said, "their culture is fairly static. As far as we could tell, there is almost no expansion or exploration. What little there is consists of founding a new village every decade or so, when an old one grows uncomfortably large."

"Uncomfortably large?" Daniel asked.

"When it takes a noticeable amount of work to gather food for it," Sam explained. "Normally, they get all their food by hunting and gathering in the area close to the village."

"Ok, now that I *know* is primitive," Jack said. "Isn't it?"

"The hunting might be, if not for the advanced weapons Lt Hailey mentioned," Janet said. "The gathering itself can also be seen as primitive, but what they gather is not. A large number of the plants they pick have been genetically modified to be better sources of food and chemicals. All in all, their diet is considerably healthier and tastier than ours."

"So if they don't explore and it doesn't take them much time to gather food, what *do* they do?" Daniel asked.

"They hunt," Sam said. "The villages fight each other, sometimes."

"They party," Hailey interrupted. "A lot. And hard."

There was a brief silence.

"That's it?" Jack said. "That's what they do? They eat, fight and party?"

"More or less, yes," Janet said. "For a certain kind of person, it's pretty close to a functioning Utopia."

"You can't be serious!" Jack said, obviously upset. "They're just degenerates!"

Suddenly almost everybody was talking at once. Hailey and Janet were vigorously defending the Amazons, Jack was slamming them while Sam and Daniel tried to inject some reason into the argument. Satterfield looked frightened, Teal'c was impassive and Hammond's expression was fast heading for annoyance.

"Ladies, gentlemen," Hammond shouted after a while. "This is obviously too much for us to absorb in one sitting. I suggest we break for lunch. Be back here at thirteen hundred hours and we'll keep going through the details. As *adults*, if possible."

Sam's lab looked just like it always did. Right then and right there, that familiarity was something Sam needed far more than she needed food. Instead of going to the mess hall, she dug out an old energy bar from a drawer and poured herself a glass of water to go with it. She sat down in her own office chair, put up her boots on the desk and tried to relax.

"I thought I'd find you here," Janet said from the door.

Sam looked up and smiled at her.

"Come in and lock the door behind you," she said.

"Pity about the security camera," Janet said. "I have this powerful desire to kiss you silly."

"This is *my* lab," Sam said. "And there's been enough times when it's been a life-saver not to be observed."

She reached in under the desk and nudged a button she'd normally have pushed with her knee.

"The camera will now experience a brief technical problem," she said. "When it comes back in 30 seconds time, it'll show a recording of my empty lab."

Janet locked the door behind her and walked into the room.

"Very naughty," she said.

"Even if someone discovers it, I can get away with it," Sam said.

She tilted her head backwards, and was rewarded with a long, passionate kiss from Janet.

"All the years we wasted," Sam said.

"Hush," Janet said. "Bygones. Think forward. We have each other now."

She ran her hands downwards from Sam's shoulders, briefly fondling her breasts.

"I also have test results," she said.

Sam frowned, either at the interrupted groping or the news. Or both.

"Are they good or bad?" she said.

"That depends on how you look at it," Janet said. "I can't make up my mind if we should tell the General or not."

"Let's hear it," Sam said.

"Both of us are infected with nanocytes," Janet said. "Satterfield and Hailey aren't. All of the Amazons I tested are."

Sam frowned. "Why us and not the lieutenants?"

"I have a theory," Janet said.

"Yeah?"

"There's one thing you, I and all the Amazons have done that neither of the lieutenants have," she said.

"And that is?"

"We've had sex with Gabrielle."

Sam looked doubtful. "All the Amazons?"

Janet nodded. "Initiation rite into the tribe. Everybody has to go through it, or leave."

Sam considered it. "Do you think she knows?" she said.

"I'm sure of it," Janet said. "Do you remember that thing she did with her fingers? Before she went down on us?"

Sam groaned. "Her own fluids. She was making sure that we got infected. So what do these little buggers do? Are we infectious? Not that I'm planning to bed anyone but you any time soon, but there may be other vectors."

"They do tissue repair," Janet said. "And were not infectious. The nanocytes seem to be tied to our individual DNA sequences. Which I suppose means that Gabrielle carries some kind of mother-strain that can infect anybody, which I guess she got from Aphrodite."

"Tissue repair."

Janet nodded. "Since the marriage ceremony, have you had a single scratch? Or bruise? Anything?"

"Not that I can remember, no."

"With all the running around in forests and... other things we did during the latter half of the week, do you really think it's reasonable that neither of us got *anything*? Not as much as a small bruise from lying down hard on a pebble?"

"All right," Sam said, convinced. "Why wouldn't we want to tell the General?"

"There's one more thing," she said. She took a printout from her lab coat pocket and handed it to Sam.

The printout was a picture from a high-powered microscope, and it showed two cells with something small and roughly cylindrical between them. No, wait, that wasn't two cells. That was one cell in a late stage of mitosis, shortly before it'd split into two new cells.

"The cylinder is a nanocyte, I guess?" Sam said.

Janet nodded.

"What's it doing?"

"As far as I can tell, fixing misreplications during cell division."

Sam frowned. "It prevents cancer?"

"That too, but I don't think that's the primary purpose. Remember how we wondered why none of the Amazons seemed to be older than their mid-twenties? Including Gabrielle, who we're reasonably sure is closer to ten times that old?"

For a moment, Sam felt dizzy at the implication.

"Jesus Christ," she said. "A cure for *aging*."

"If NID or someone else like that found out, we'd be lab animals for the rest of our lives," Janet said. "And with these in our blood, I can't even guess how long that might be."

Sam shook her head. "We're not telling anybody about this. Destroy all your data and hope nobody saw it."

Janet nodded. "I will," she said. "That's what we get for not practicing safe sex, huh?"

"Perfect health and possible immortality," Sam said. "I'd say we came off quite a bit better than most people who catch something from a one night stand."

Janet's face lit up. "And we may have stumbled onto the answer to another mystery," she said.

"And what would that be?"

"Why the Amazon marriage ceremony had no bit about until death do us part," Janet said.

Sam groaned. "Oh, that's so bad!"

"I still don't want to leave you for as long as I live," she added.

"You say that now," Janet said. "But just you wait and see how it feels in six or seven centuries!"

They both started laughing, but the laughter died out as the realization sank in that they might really be there to see how it felt six or seven hundred years into the future.

"This is going to take some getting used to," Sam said.

"I'll say," Janet said.

"To sum up," General Hammond said. He looked tired. It had been a very long debriefing, and not much of it made much sense.

"We are allied with an alien people. They look primitive, but aren't. Like the Nox. We probably can't get at their technology directly, but we may get some use of it if we can get volunteers from them. We have a possibility of semi-reliable contact with an Ascended. We have seeds to food crops that are far superior to any we currently possess."

He looked around the table.

"Does that about cover it?" he said.

"I think so, sir," Sam said.

"Good," Hammond said. "Then that is that. I do not want to hear any more about their culture or lack of it. I will consider this mission a significant success, in that we have initiated good relations with a possibly powerful alien culture, and we have acquired some advanced alien technology. It may not be weapons, but food is every bit as important to a military force. Major Carter?"

"Yes, sir?"

"If I understand it correctly, achieving this alliance required you and Doctor Fraiser to take some actions that lie well outside what the US Air Force would ask of you?"

Sam frowned. "What...?" she said. Then she saw Janet blush.

"Oh!" she said. "Right. Yes, sir, it did."

"I will put in a recommendation that the two of you receive commendations for diligence and achievement above and beyond the call of duty," Hammond said. "SG-X is put on hold until such time as it is needed again. Following one week's leave, Major Carter and Doctor Fraiser will return to their normal duties while Lieutenants Hailey and Satterfield are assigned to SG-18. Due to our new alliance with the Amazon Nations, Lt Hailey will be allowed to carry her Amazon war paint as long as it does not interfere with her duties. And with that, ladies and gentlemen, I bid you good day. Dismissed."

In the general chaos of people getting up, getting out, collecting papers, wrapping up displayed items, re-packaging Xena DVDs and all that sort of thing, Sam approached Hammond.

"General?" she said.

He turned to her.

"Yes, Major, what can I do for you?"

"About this leave, sir. Janet and I would like to travel a little, but on this short notice plane tickets will cost a fortune. Do you think we could get a military transport permission? It'd be so much more convenient just to be able to jump onto the first military transport with the capacity to spare."

Hammond smiled.

"Of course, Sam," he said. "You'll have it as soon as I can print it out."

"Thank you, sir!" she said.

She turned away, and saw Janet looking at her from the other side of the room. She smiled and nodded to her. In reply, she got a smile that made her insides melt.

"I still don't get it," Jack said. "If she's an Ascended, she's not even got a body. What's she going to need porn for, lesbian or... not lesbian?"

He, Daniel, Teal'c and Hammond were sitting in the mess hall. They'd just finished a late dinner and were having coffee. And some discussion of the kind that Jack didn't feel was appropriate while women were present and Daniel didn't think was appropriate at all. Hammond and Teal'c kept their thoughts to themselves.

"She affects the personality of a female obsessed with love and sex," Daniel said. "If she's done it long enough it may even be her core personality. She'll think of herself as having a body, with all the needs and wants that comes with it."

"But she doesn't actually *have* a body."

In the distance, a siren began to warble. All four men looked up.

"Who's going out now?" Daniel asked.

"Nobody," Hammond said. He got up from his seat and ran for the control room. The other three looked at each other for a split second, then ran after him.

They got to the control room just as the event horizon dissolved in the gate. Hammond looked daggers at the technician sitting at the gate control terminal.

"What happened, sergeant?" he said.

"Nothing, General," the technician said. "I opened a connection as instructed by Major Carter, she and Doctor Fraiser went through and the gate closed. Perfectly normal, sir."

"Excuse me?!" Jack said. "Since when does Carter have the authority to open gate connections on her own?"

"She had a transport permission from the general, sir. And the gate counts as a military transport device, officially. Experimental and secret, but still transport. She showed me the passage in the regulations."

"Oooh," Daniel said. "Clever girl!"

"A bit too clever, sometimes," Hammond said. "Where did they go, son?"

"P5X-8859," the technician and Daniel said in chorus.

Hammond, O'Neill and Teal'c all looked at Daniel.

"Come on," Daniel said. "Where else would they want to go? They're on leave!"

"They're on leave?" Jack said. "So that just naturally means that they went to this..."

For a moment, words failed him.

"...this paradise for warrior lesbians?" he finished.

Teal'c raised an eyebrow.

"I believe my coffee is getting cold," he said, and then he left.

"Yeah," Daniel said, also turning away and leaving. "I'm with the big guy."

"Sergeant," Hammond said. "Make a note to open the gate to P5X-8859 again in exactly one week. If Major Carter and Doctor Fraiser do not come through at that time, post them as being AWOL."

"Yes, sir," the technician said.

"What?" Jack said as Hammond also headed for the door. "Is that all you're going to do?"

Hammond stopped in the doorway. He turned around and looked back at O'Neill.

"Colonel," he said. "I'm going to do what I suggest that you do as well."

He smiled.

"I'm going to not ask, and not tell," he said. "Come now. The coffee is getting cold."