

~ The Holiday of Giving ~

by Red Hope

Disclaimers:

Violence: Tiny bit of violence but very emotional.

Subtext: Certainly subtext or rather maintext.

Copyright: Repeat after me, Universal/MCA owns Xena and Gabrielle, however I own the story idea and the boy.

Note: This story comes from the *heart* to the *heart*. I hope each person takes something from this story. It holds very much underlining meaning. Please enjoy and learn from the story. Christmas should be for everybody on everyday. Merry Christmas Everybody!

Time Frame: Sixth season based.

Email for Feedback: redhope@redhope.net

If you would like the how/why of this story, please go to the [Creation of The Holiday of Giving](#).

This story has proudly recieved a [Lunacy Review](#).

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Series: **Other**

Section One

~*Part 1*~

Gabrielle strolled out of the stable. She waited out in the freezing cold for her partner to join her. She breathed deeply and a whitish cloud arose from her lips and disappeared in the cold air. She pulled her cloak close against her body and crossed her arms.

It would be Solstice Eve tonight and the soulmates decided to spend the eve and morning at an inn. Have plenty of time alone and time to rest.

The warrior-bard rocked on the soles of her feet, hoping the movement would create heat. She stood there watching the market bustle with people bartering. She tilted her head a little and spotted a small boy among the crowd.

He looked to be around five maybe six with sandy brown hair. He mingled through the people and looked fairly scruffy. It was easy to say he was a homeless child. The boy went up to a young couple and tugged on their cloak.

The couple turned around and saw him. They quickly hurried off from him.

The boy blinked, but continued mingle through the crowd of people. Everybody went past him or didn't take note of him, except for Gabrielle.

Xena came out of the stable and came beside her lover. "Ready?"

Gabrielle gazed up then back to the boy. She pointed briefly.

The warrior followed the direction and spotted the small boy.

The boy came over to a baker's store.

The baker at the bottom of the steps was handing out slices of bread and wishing the people a happy Solstice.

The boy came up and held his hand out with a pleading look.

The baker gazed over him and continued handing bread out to passing people.

The boy tried still; holding his hand out but received nothing, not even a look of acknowledgement. He dropped his hand and head, he walked away. As soon as he did, he bumped into another boy, who was better dressed and older.

The older boy grabbed the small homeless boy and pushed him.

Xena was about to move but Gabrielle stopped her with a hand. "Gabrielle-"

"Hold on, I want to see if anybody helps him before we do," whispered the warrior-bard.

"Nobody will," uttered back the warrior in a low tone.

"I have a little hope left," stated Gabrielle as she lowered her hand.

The boy saw the older boy coming towards him. He just held his hands up and shook his head. The older boy pushed him by the shoulders again and he fell down. The older boy laughed and walked off.

The homeless child stood back up and soon as he was up, a man bumped into him. The man shook his head and continued on his way to finish his Solstice shopping.

The little boy dropped his shoulders and turned in a full circle. He tried to take in this place of good looking bustling people. He then came to a stop and stared across at two female warriors.

Gabrielle smiled softly at him.

The boy tilted his head, not believing somebody saw him.

The short warrior knelt down and kept her smile.

Slowly, the boy wriggled out of the crowd, coming towards Gabrielle.

The Amazon Queen's smile only grew with every step he took.

The boy stopped in front of the women and studied them both.

Gabrielle held a hand out as if this was a lost puppy. "Its okay," she whispered.

The boy smiled faintly and came closer. He came right up to Gabrielle. "Hi," he whispered.

The warrior-bard laced her hands together while resting her elbows on her knees. "Hi, what's your name, sweetie?"

"Russell." The boy looked away then back at Gabrielle. "What's your name?"

"I'm Gabrielle."

"G-gabrielle?"

The small warrior nodded and peered up to her lover. "This is Xena." She held out a hand.

The Warrior Princess knelt down too. She smiled warmly at the boy. "Hi there."

Russell held out a hand to Xena. "Hi... Xena."

The warrior chuckled a little and reached out. She shook the small cold hand.

That's when Gabrielle's heart went even farther out to the homeless boy.

Russell released the much larger hand and focused back on Gabrielle. "Are you both warriors?"

"Yes we are," answered Gabrielle.

"Wow, I've never seen two women warriors before."

Xena gave a small grin.

"Have you ever heard of the Amazons?" asked the Amazon Queen.

The boy shook his head.

"Well, those are all women and warriors," told Gabrielle.

"That's neat." The boy's face was in awe. "Have you ever seen one?"

"Tons." Gabrielle grinned. "I'm actually one of their Queens."

Russell went bug-eyed. "Gods, that's amazing." He smiled shyly. "I can't believe this, I got to meet an Amazon Queen."

"You know what else?" The warrior-bard leaned towards Xena. "This is the Warrior Princess."

The Warrior Princess groaned inwardly.

The homeless child looked at Xena again and his mouth gaped. "You're... you're that Xenaaa?"

The dark warrior nodded.

Russell couldn't say anything else in all of his amazement and surprise.

Gabrielle reached out with both hands, and took the small boy's hands. "Bit cold out, isn't it?"

The boy gazed back at Gabrielle and nodded. "It has been for months now." He sighed with his breath developing in the air. "I've been so cold and hoping for a warm day." He shivered against the cold and even the thought. His clothes would have been perfect for summer but weren't made for winter months.

The Amazon Queen rubbed the tiny iced hands. "Your hands are very cold." That's when she really noticed how a blueness tainted the boy's lips.

"My whole body is," muttered the small boy. "But after awhile, you just don't notice." He tilted his head. "Almost like I can't feel it after awhile, it doesn't bother me."

Xena now spoke up. "Russell, do you have a father?"

"No." He shook his head. "I don't have a father, wish I did."

Gabrielle's heart was dropping with each passing word this boy said. "How about a mother, sweetie?" inquired the warrior-bard.

Russell smiled but it didn't last long. "I do but she's very ill. I came out of our... home to find some food for us. She was sleeping hard and I didn't want to wake her."

Xena looked at her partner.

The small warrior licked her lips and didn't say anything or look at her lover.

The Warrior Princess reached out and grasped the boy's sides. "How about you take us to your momma huh?" She stood up and lifted him into her arms.

"Sure," agreed the tiny boy.

Gabrielle stood up silently and watched her soulmate hold the boy in her arms.

Russell snuggled in close to Xena's body and wrapped an arm behind her neck. He dropped his head on the warrior's warm chest. "You can sure see a lot from up here."

The Amazon Queen laughed quietly. "Nice view isn't it, Russell?"

The boy nodded as he felt Xena's cloak come around him. He already felt his world warming.

"Where's your momma?" asked Xena again. "Tell us where."

Russell pointed towards the marketplace of shoppers. "Go that way."

The warriors started walking and received a combination of glares and disgusted shocked looks from the people in the town. But they simply ignored the looks and slipped past the people.

"We live in that barn," mentioned the boy. He pointed again before snuggling back against the warrior.

They headed to the barn and went in. Inside was a pen of pigs and the stench lingered in the air. The boards of the side of the barn were cracked with openings, letting in the cold wind. Over in the left corner was a fairly young woman around Gabrielle's age.

The soulmates came over to her with their hopes dropping in each step they took.

Xena studied the woman lying down curled up in a thin blanket.

Gabrielle took a deep breath, and bent down. She reached out to touch the woman's face. Her skin was cold as the wind blowing. A lump entered her throat. She breathed shakily and moved her fingertips. Her fingertips pressed into the woman's icy cold neck.

"Momma is still sleeping," whispered the boy. "She's trying to recover from the illness... she's still sick."

The warrior-bard choked up and nodded. "Yeah, she's still sleeping, sweetie." She rose back up and faced her partner and the boy. "She needs to sleep."

Xena looked down at the woman then at her partner. She saw how Gabrielle's eyes were sad and gleaming. Gabrielle was just holding back her tears, the warrior looked up and closed her eyes. She tried to relax and calm her saddened emotions. She lowered her head and hefted the boy a little. She forced a smile on her lips. "How about we let your momma sleep, and we'll get you something to eat. How's that sound?"

Russell smiled but lost it when he looked down at his dead mother. "How about momma? I know she is hungry." He peered up at Xena.

"She needs her sleep," said Gabrielle. "She'll... be fine." Her voice quivered a little.

The boy agreed with a nod. "I hope she wakes up soon." He studied his mother. "She's been asleep for so long."

"For how long, sweetie?" asked the warrior-bard.

Russell thought. "Um... a day and half."

Gabrielle bit her lower lip; she could say nothing.

Xena reached up and ruffled the boy's sandy hair. "She'll be fine huh? Your momma is having happy dreams, promise."

Russell smiled at that. "I hope so, she would like happy dreams."

"Yeah," whispered the warrior. "Let's go get you something to eat huh?"

The Amazon Queen folded her arms. "Xena, I'm going to go see the constable then I'll join you both."

The Warrior Princess nodded at that idea. "Ill go get a room and we'll wait for you."

Gabrielle nodded and grasped her lover's arm. She gave a squeeze.

Xena nodded and headed out of the barn after her soulmate released her arm.

The warrior-bard turned back to the mother. She knelt back down and lifted the woman's head. She reached around and unhooked a small necklace. Gabrielle settled the woman's head back down and slipped the necklace onto the side of her boot in a small slip. Kissing her fingertips, she pressed it against the mother's forehead. "He'll be safe and happy... I promise." She then lifted the blanket and pulled it over the woman's head.

The short warrior exited the barn then walked to the Constable's office. She came up the steps and knocked on the door between the wreath.

"Come in," called a warm voice.

The small woman entered in.

The older man behind the desk smiled warmly. "Happy Solstice," he greeted.

Gabrielle tried to smile yet she couldn't. "Happy Solstice," she whispered back and neared the man's desk.

"How can I help you?"

The warrior-bard folded her arms. "Um..." She breathed heavily and finally said, "There is a woman over in a barn that has passed away." Her gaze fell then came back up. "She was a homeless with a little boy."

The Constable didn't say anything at first. "Where is the boy?" he asked with concern.

"He's with a friend of mine, we're... taking care of him right now."

The older man nodded. "We'll have her buried properly. Thank you for letting me know."

Gabrielle nodded. She went back to the door and grasped the knob.

"By the way, what will you do with the boy?"

The Amazon Queen peered back. "I... don't know yet." She opened the door and left.

The Constable watched the quiet woman leave and he sighed sadly.

The short warrior made her way towards the marketplace. There she bought some warm clothes for Russell.

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Xena opened the door and saw her partner come in. "Hey." She gave a warm smile in hopes it would confront her friend.

Gabrielle smiled faintly. In her arms she held the clothes. "Got these for Russell."

"Good idea." The warrior folded her arms; she stood in the middle of the room. "What did the Constable say?"

"He thanked me," uttered the warrior-bard.

The Warrior Princess's face fell into disgust but she didn't say a word.

"He'll give her a proper burial." The small woman looked up at her soulmate. "Where is Russell?"

"In the bathroom, taking a warm bath." The warrior walked over to the table and sat down in a chair.

The younger warrior went to the bathroom and peered in. She smiled at the sight of the boy taking a bath. "Hey Russell, I have some new clothes for you." After placing them on a chair with a towel, she glanced back at the boy. "How's the bath?"

"Wonderful." Russell smiled back.

"Take your time, sweetie." Gabrielle walked out and sat on the foot of the bed. Turning her head, she studied her soulmate. "I can't believe this."

"I know," whispered the warrior.

The small woman huffed, shook her head, and stared at the floor. "I just can't believe it." She closed her eyes and tried relaxing her emotions. "It's cruel," she whispered.

"He'll be fine," reassured the Warrior Princess.

Gabrielle opened her eyes and nodded. "You realize, he would have died?" She turned her head.

Xena licked her lips then laced her hands together. "But he won't." She stood up now and came before her lover. She knelt down and clasped her hands with her soulmate's. "He'll be fine," she repeated and leaned in. Her kiss was soft and gentle, which helped Gabrielle feel better.

The Amazon Queen smiled sadly. "Thank you," she whispered.

"Things will work out," promised the warrior. She squeezed her lover's hands before standing up and sitting back down.

Russell came out of the bathroom with his new clothes on. He straightened out his shirt a little. He stood in front of the two women in seeming judgement and smiled at both. "Do I look like everybody else?" he asked quietly.

Gabrielle closed her eyes and clamped her jaw down. A tear on either side of her cheek rolled down and fell to her lap.

Xena smiled with sadness in her eyes. "You look better than everybody else," she said in a small voice.

Russell smiled happily.

The Amazon Queen stood up, swallowed the lump down her throat, and held her hand out. "Let's get something to eat. What you say?"

The homeless boy beamed and took the larger hand. He nodded. "I'm starved."

"I'm sure," uttered the warrior-bard. "Ready Xen?"

The warrior nodded before standing up. She walked through the room, and opened the door. "Younger people first," she teased.

Gabrielle chuckled and led the boy out.

Russell peered up at Gabrielle. "You're younger than Xena?"

"Oh yeah she is," answered the warrior. "I'm far older than her."

The warrior-bard glared at her partner. She focused her attention back on Russell. "Only by three years."

"That's not much," stated the boy.

"I agree," responded the younger warrior. She stuck her tongue out at Xena.

The Warrior Princess shot a smug look. "You'll be sticking that tongue out for other reasons later," she joked.

Gabrielle snickered.

"What's that suppose mean?" asked the boy.

Gabrielle turned faintly red.

Xena let her friend take this question all on her own.

The small woman continued walking down the hall, seeing the main part of the tavern. "Nothing at all, Russell. Xena tries to be funny but it never works."

Russell giggled and grinned.

The older woman huffed and walked ahead. "Let's find a table." She stopped walking once in the tavern. She scanned around then signaled them to follow. She led them to a table in the corner and sat down.

Gabrielle released the small hand and sat down.

Russell sat between the two women. He pulled himself up into the chair and his eyes just peered over the table.

The small warrior chuckled and smiled. "Oh, sorry sweetie." She reached over and picked him up. She moved and sat in Russell's seat. The boy settled into her lap with a smile.

"Thank you," uttered the boy.

"You're welcome." Gabrielle smiled and wrapped her arms around his waist.

Russell could now see everything much better. So he began gazing around the tavern.

A barmaid came over and smiled at them. "Happy Solstice Eve." She said warmly.

"Hi," responded Russell; he waved.

The warrior-bard chuckled at that and peered down at him.

The barmaid smiled at the homeless child. "Hi there little one. What's your name?"

"Russell, ma'am. What's yours?"

The barmaid nodded. "Nice to meet you, Russell. My name is Mary." She looked up to the warriors. "Can I get you guys anything?"

"Yeah," drew out Xena contently, "How about some nice dinners?" She considered for a moment. "I could go for a little wine." She gazed at Gabrielle.

The smaller warrior glimpsed up from Russell. "Same for me." She peeked down at the boy. "What you want to drink, Russell?"

Russell looked at Mary. "Can I get milk?"

"You sure can." Mary lifted her eyes again. "I'll be right back."

Xena nodded and watched her go.

"Hey." Gabrielle bounced the boy on her lap gently. "Wanna sit on Xena's lap?"

"Can I?"

The small warrior lowered her head down to Russell's and whispered, "If you ask nicely she might let ya."

"Really?" he whispered back.

"Sure." Gabrielle grinned and she grinned at Xena. "Just smile at her, smiles always work."

The Warrior Princess rolled her eyes and slumped in her seat a bit.

"Okay," whispered back the homeless child. He smiled at Xena. "Xena, can I sit in your lap? Please?" His soft smile broadened.

The young warrior looked at her soulmate and corked an eyebrow. She now smiled with love. "Can Russell sit in your lap, Xen?" Her voice was warm and gentle.

Xena's shoulders dropped at the cute scene before her. She groaned inwardly. *I am soft*, she mused, *but this is... precious*. She chuckled. "Alright." She held her hands out.

Russell moved into the other warrior's lap with Xena's help.

Oh god, here goes my reputation, joked the warrior inwardly. After the boy settled into her lap, she encircled his waist. "How's that?"

"Perfect," responded the boy.

Gabrielle grinned.

Xena saw the grin and narrowed her eyes in warning.

The small warrior leaned towards Russell. "Russell, if she ever gives you a mean look, give her a mean look back. She's actually not that tough." She sat back and smirked at

her best friend.

The boy giggled.

The Warrior Princess just shook her head and looked around.

Sighing, Gabrielle sat back in her seat.

Mary came over with their drinks and distributed them. She watched Russell take his cup with his hands curling around the mug. "It's a little warm, Russell."

He peered into the mug after feeling it warm. He drank some and smiled. "That's really good." He felt it travel down his throat and warm his insides. He smiled contently.

The barmaid chuckled with the warriors. "Glad you like it." Mary smiled and added, "the dinners should be up soon."

"Thank you," retorted the Amazon Queen.

The barmaid nodded with her smile and left.

"She's nice," mentioned Russell.

"She sure is," agreed the warrior-bard. She grabbed her mug and drank a little of her rich wine.

Russell careful pushed his mug back onto the table. He then watched Xena drink some of her wine. He studied the much larger hand. After the large hand settled around him, he reached down and pulled her hand up.

Xena watched; intrigued.

Gabrielle smiled at the scene.

The boy pressed his right hand against Xena's left hand, palm against palm. He turned his head left and right, studying how much larger the other hand was. "Wow, you're hand is a lot bigger." He peeked up at the warrior.

The warrior grinned.

"She also has long fingers huh, Russell?"

Xena shot a glare instantly at her lover for the comment.

"That too," agreed the boy.

Gabrielle bit her lip and looked away. "The peanut gallery is official closed for the rest of the night," she muttered under her breath.

"Rrrright," chided the warrior.

"What's that?" Russell pointed at a small scar inside Xena's palm.

Xena peered down. "That's a scar."

"From one of the battles you've been in?" He gave an inquisitive expression.

The Warrior Princess sighed yet nodded. "Yup."

Russell placed the large hand back down and he felt it snake back around his waist. He dropped his head back against Xena's chest. He sighed while his eyes were half closed.

"Tired?" asked Gabrielle.

The boy just nodded.

"When was the last time you slept?" Xena brushed his hair back behind his ears.

Russell considered then said, "Its not that I don't try to sleep... but it's hard to sleep when you're body is shaking so much." He looked up and blinked at the older woman. "The cold won't let you sleep... well it'll let you sleep but I think you wouldn't wake back up." He shrugged and dropped his gaze to his lap.

The warriors fell silent briefly but Gabrielle spoke up. "Well tonight, you'll get a good nights rest."

"Can I sleep in too?"

"Of course," answered Xena. "Gabrielle likes to sleep in too. So you both can."

The younger warrior ran her tongue along her molars. "Right," she mumbled under her breath.

The barmaid came over with the plates of food. She put them on the table and warned, "They're a little hot, so be careful."

"Thank you," said Russell.

"You're welcome, little one." Mary walked over to Xena's side. She knelt down and smiled at the boy. "Where do you live?"

Russell pointed in the direction. "That way, in a barn." He paused. "How about you?"

"I live here with my husband."

The homeless child smiled briefly then said, "My momma couldn't come with us."

"No?" Why not?"

The warriors were silent the entire time.

"Momma is still sleeping." He studied his hands then looked up. "She's very tired."

"She must be, little one." The barmaid smile softly. "Its best to let her rest, I imagine."

Russell nodded. "Yeah, she's been ill." He sighed. "For a number of days."

"Is she going to be okay?" The barmaid asked in concern.

The boy brightened up. "Oh yeah, momma always gets sick and pulls through." He smiled but sighed sadly as the smile disappeared. "I just wish she was here so she could meet my new friends."

Mary patted the child's leg. "I'm sure you'll get to tell her all about your friends."

Russell nodded and was silent now.

"I'll let you all eat." The barmaid stood and strolled off.

The small group turned to their food and began eating.

~*~*~*~

Russell smiled happily and fell back against Xena. He stared at the second empty platter of food.

"I think you beat Gabrielle," joked the warrior.

Gabrielle's eyes widened and she sat back. "I think he did too."

The boy laughed a little. "It was good."

"It was," agreed Gabrielle. She smiled. "A good Solstice Eve dinner."

The boy beamed and nodded quickly. "I wish I could have this every night."

"Maybe you will, huh?" Xena peered down at him.

Russell pushed himself more into Xena's lap. "That would be so nice."

Mary came over and smiled at the scene. "Are we full?" she inquired the boy mainly.

The boy nodded. "Yes, ma'am... it was good."

"I see." The barmaid picked up the plates. "Anything else?" she asked.

"I think we're good," responded Gabrielle. "Thank you very much."

"You're welcome." Mary nodded then mentioned, "I'll be right back with the amount." She disappeared off with the dirty dishes and utensils. Within a few minutes she returned and smiled warmly. "Don't worry about the price... its on me."

Gabrielle sat up. "Hold on-"

"It's okay." The barmaid held a hand up. "Its Solstice Eve... please." She smiled warmly.

The warrior-bard sighed and nodded. "Thank you, Mary."

"It was my pleasure."

"Thank you."

Mary glanced at the warrior. "You're welcome."

Russell now piped in, "Thank you, Mary."

The barmaid smiled at the boy. "Of course, little one." She came over again and bent down. "You know, you're like the boy my husband and I have always wanted."

The homeless child tilted his head. "Why don't you?"

"It's hard to explain." Mary sighed with sorrow. "We're just not allowed to have children."

"That's wrong," he whispered. "You should be allowed to have children."

"I think so too but I can't." The barmaid grasped the small knee and gave it a squeeze. "Just remember to always love your momma. She'll always be with you and she loves you forever no matter what."

Russell nodded. "I do love her."

"Good, little one." Mary stood up.

"Thank you again." Xena smiled. "We appreciate that."

"I'm happy to do it." The barmaid's eyes flickered over to Gabrielle. "Have a Happy Solstice."

"We will," responded Gabrielle. "You do the same."

Mary smiled. "Thank you, goodnight." She went back to the rest of the tavern.

Xena combed the boy's hair. "Russell, why don't you go to the room and get ready for bed. I want to talk to Gabrielle alone."

"Okay."

The warrior lifted the boy and placed him on the floor. "Be careful and don't talk to anybody. Okay?"

The homeless child nodded. "I'll be careful." He walked through the tables.

The Warrior Princess stood and watched him.

Everybody in the tavern watched the boy pass by but they also saw Xena keep an eye on him. Once he was down the hall to the rooms; she sat.

"You're thinking the same thing I am, right?" asked Gabrielle.

Xena nodded. "Mary," she stated. "We should give Russell to her and her husband."

Gabrielle smiled softly at that. "Yeah." She nodded and looked at her lover again. "How about you go settle him into bed and I'll talk to Mary."

"Sounds like a plan." The older woman stood followed by Gabrielle.

Gabrielle went to the bar while Xena went to the room.

Mary looked up when Gabrielle neared.

"Hi," the warrior-bard greeted. "May I talk to you for a moment?"

"Please." The barmaid held a hand out to a stool.

"Thank you." The small woman sat. "I'm sorry, I'm Gabrielle and my friend was Xena."

Mary gave a look of surprise. "The legendary Xena and Gabrielle?"

"The same," retorted the warrior. She sighed and said, "The boy is not ours of course." She paused and rested her hands on the table. "His mother died a day ago or so."

The barmaid put her hands on the bar. "By the gods, how?"

"She was ill, Xena and I imagine between that and cold it killed her." Gabrielle folded her hands together. "He's homeless and no family."

Mary was stunned. "That's a shame... on Solstice?"

The Amazon Queen nodded. "Afraid so." She breathed deeply. "My friend and I were wondering if you could take him in... adopt him. We would love to keep him but our lifestyle just wouldn't be right."

Mary nodded and smiled. "I would love to take him... I'd be honored. Thank you very much, that's the best Solstice gift my husband and I could receive."

Gabrielle smiled and her eyes lit up with love.

~*Part 2*~

That night, Russell slept between the soulmates and found it incredibly warm and comfortable. He couldn't remember when he had been this happy. Maybe he had never been this happy before until now. His life had been touched for the first time.

By that late morning, the soulmates took him back into the tavern. They all had warm meals on the Solstice morning. Then at the end of the meal, Xena, Gabrielle, and Mary sat down with him to talk.

"Russell." Gabrielle collected the boy's small hands. "Xena and I have to go."

Russell looked between her and Xena. "Where?"

"Well..." drew out the warrior-bard, "Xena and I do a lot of traveling and we would love to bring you with us but we can't. It is not safe enough for you. So you're going to stay here with Mary."

Russell's face washed over with a number of emotions; happiness, sadness, hopefulness, and upset.

"If that's okay with you," added Xena.

The homeless child looked between Gabrielle and Xena, debating whether he was okay with the idea. "As... as long as you both come back."

"Of course we will," promised Gabrielle. "We'd love to come and visit. I'm sure Xena and I will pass by here often."

Russell's face brightened up. "And I really do get to stay with Mary?"

"Definitely, little one." Mary smiled.

Then it dawned on the child. "What about momma?"

The soulmates forgot about that part. Gabrielle tried to come up with something but was failing.

Xena answered, "You're momma has to sleep, Russell." She rested her hand on the boy's thigh.

"When we'll I be able to see her again?" asked the boy.

"Someday soon," promised Mary. "You'll see her again, Russell."

He studied the women. "Will she be okay?"

"Yes, sweetie." Gabrielle smiled. "Your momma is happy right now."

Russell accepted the answer. "But... but will she miss me or need me?"

"Oh she will, sweetie." The small warrior squeezed the small hands. "She'll miss you a lot but she'll be okay on her own. Just remember that she loves you dearly, okay?"

The boy smiled and nodded. "I will because I can feel her inside of me."

"Exactly," said Xena with a strong smile. "So, would you like to stay with Mary?"

Russell became excited. "Yes, I would love to."

Mary eased a smile onto her lips. "I'm so happy you want to, little one."

The boy cheered up and sprung out of his chair and into Mary's lap.

The barmaid pulled the child in and held him tightly. A few tears rolled down her cheeks.

The soulmates watched the scene then stood up.

Xena encircled her lover's waist. "Are you ready?"

"I think so," whispered Gabrielle.

The Warrior Princess nodded.

The soulmates said goodbye to Russell. The boy clinging to them tightly and thanked them. He also whispered words of love. Mary thanked the warriors as well and gave hugs with words of a Happy Solstice. Xena and Gabrielle returned all the words and gave smiles even though their eyes held sorrow.

Gabrielle had bent down and reached into the slip on the side of her boot. She kept her hand closed and reached out to Mary.

Mary opened her hand and felt the metal necklace fall into her hand.

The warrior-bard moved closer and leaned towards Mary. She whispered, "It was his mother's. Give it to him when he is ready."

"Thank you," uttered Mary. She reached down and took Russell's hand. She walked with the boy to the door of the tavern.

The soulmates opened the door and went out with their things.

Russell waved when the two women stepped out into the snowy day. "Bye Xena and Gabrielle."

The warriors looked back and waved. "Bye Russell," called Gabrielle. "Take care."

"I will... you too."

"We will," retorted Xena. She smiled while saying, "We'll come visit." She winked.

Russell gave a huge smile. "I can't wait." He watched the women head to the stables.

They soon came back out with their horses and mounting them.

"Wow, they really are warriors." He looked up at Mary.

Mary smiled down at the boy. "Yes they are, very loving ones." She opened her free hand and studied the small necklace. She closed her hand. *He's safe now*, she prayed to his mother.

"Bye!" yelled Russell and he waved at Xena and Gabrielle.

The Warrior Princess gave the warmest smile and waved back. "Bye, Russell. Take care." She gave a click for Argo to go.

Gabrielle grasped her horse's reins and waved. "Bye, sweetie. We'll see you soon. Happy Solstice." She kicked her horse and was off.

Russell dropped his arm and leaned his head against Mary's hand. "I'll miss them."

"They'll miss you."

~*~*~*~

Xena glanced at her partner. "You're smiling."

Gabrielle looked at her lover while bobbing up and down on her bay. "Yeah." She nodded and kept the smile. "Yeah," she repeated contently. "It turned out okay."

The warrior smiled now. "It did."

The warrior-bard nodded with her endless smile. She turned her head to Xena. "Happy Solstice, Xena."

Xena nudged Argo over and pulled her to a stop.

The smaller woman did too with her horse.

Xena reached over, pulled Gabrielle closer, and kissed her gently on the lips. She pulled back slowly with her rich sapphire eyes. "Happy Solstice, Gabrielle." She kissed Gabrielle again with love. "I love you," she whispered at the end of the kiss.

"I love you, Xena," replied Gabrielle.

The bright white snow continued to drift down on them and blanket them. Solstice, the time of giving as much as receiving and not forgetting the people around. A day that should be everyday for everybody.

The End