

XENNA

WARRIOR PRINCESS

A Solstice Carol

BY
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Season 2
Episode #10

Prod. #V0209

XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS

"A Solstice Carol"

Written by
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Revised Pages: 1, 2, 6, 10-13, 15, 17, 20, 22-23A, 26-31, 33,
36, 38-41, 43

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SHOOTING DRAFT
July 01, 1996
Rev. July 15, 1996 - Pink

XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS

"A Solstice Carol"

CAST LIST

XENA
GABRIELLE

KING SILVUS

SENTICLES

(SEN-ti-cleez)

MELANA

(me-LAH-na)

LYNAL

(LIE-nal)

ORPHAN #1

ORPHAN #2

ORPHAN #3

DONKEY OWNER

HEAD GUARD

BEARDED GUARD

GUARD #1

MAN

WIFE

TOBIAS, the donkey

(ta-BY-us)

XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS

"A Solstice Carol"

SET LIST

INTERIORS:

CASTLE - THRONE ROOM
 KING'S BEDCHAMBER
 SECRET SOLSTICE ROOM
ORPHANAGE MAIN ROOM
INDOOR BAZAAR
SENTICLES' TOY SHOP

EXTERIORS:

GLOOMY CASTLE - ESTABLISHING
 SOLSTICE ROOM
ORPHANAGE
STREET NEAR ORPHANAGE
BAZAAR
CROSSROAD

Prod. #V0209

XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS

"A Solstice Carol"

CHRONOLOGY

DAY 1
NIGHT 1

SCENES # 1 - 4
SCENES # 5 - 35

DAY 2

SCENE #36

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XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS

"A Solstice Carol"

TEASER

FADE IN:

1 EXT. ESTABLISHING A GLOOMY CASTLE - LATE AFTERNOON 1

OVER which we HEAR the pinched, acid tones of:

KING SILVUS (V.O.)

On the charge of evading your taxes, I
find you both guilty.

A GAVEL BANGS, and we:

CUT TO:

2 INT. CASTLE - THRONE ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON 2

KING SILVUS, a hardhearted skinflint, sits on his throne,
a gavel clenched in his hand as he glowers from his dais.

KING SILVUS

...And I sentence you to ten years hard
labor.

Immediately WIDEN to include SENTICLES, the King's clerk, a
heavy but timid man, perched on a high stool behind a desk
piled with parchments. Reacting, he shoots a veiled but
sympathetic look at...

THE PRISONERS

A frightened elderly couple bewildered by the proceeding.

KING SILVUS (O.S.)

If you won't pay what you owe then,
by Hades, you'll work it off. *

BACK TO SCENE

KING SILVUS

As to the charge of celebrating the
Winter Solstice...

(eyes hardening; face grim)

I find you guilty of singing carols,
and decorating a tree. Twelve more
months.

(BANGS gavel)

Take 'em away.

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED:

2

The King's HEAD GUARD, a by-the-books soldier blindly obedient to the King, springs to obey.

HEAD GUARD

Yes, Sire.

(to his men)

You heard King Silvus. Remove the prisoners.

Responding, the Guards haul the elderly couple out as Senticles sighs and records the sentence when, suddenly:

KING SILVUS

(calls; sharply)

Senticles?

Reacting, the clerk nearly falls off his stool as he cranes to look up at the King, nervous.

SENTICLES

Y-Y-Yes, Your Majesty?

KING SILVUS

Have you prepared the eviction list for today?

SENTICLES

(thrown)

Today? But, Sire, today is Sol--

He stops, looking fearful. King Silvus eyes him narrowly.

KING SILVUS

Yeesss...?

SENTICLES

(mental wheels whirling)

Today is Sol...

(inspired)

...late! So late. Yes.

(indicating window)

It's nearly dark.

KING SILVUS

Then I suggest you hurry...

(a threat)

...unless you'd like to add your name to that parchment?

Seeing the genuine fear in Senticles' face, King Silvus eyes him contemptuously as he raises his gavel, announcing:

KING SILVUS

Court's adjourned.

ON the GAVEL'S descending BANG:

CUT TO:

3 INT. INDOOR BAZAAR - LATE AFTERNOON

3

ON A MEAT CLEAVER hitting a chopping block as a butcher portions some meat while we PULL BACK and WIDEN to see...

...numerous stalls, stands, and booths displaying a wide range of merchandise -- all of which is very practical -- no toys, no luxuries, no frivolous items of any kind.

As shoppers bustle through this mythological equivalent of a shopping mall, CAMERA FINDS XENA and GABRIELLE eyeing the place from a spot near the entrance. Gabrielle's bright, excited eyes speak volumes while the lack of enthusiasm in Xena's eyes is equally eloquent.

GABRIELLE

Okay, now, remember: no spying. If one of us sees the other shopping at a stall, she turns and walks away, agreed?

A savvy street kid of 15, LYNAL, begins covertly sidling up behind them as Gabrielle continues.

GABRIELLE

...And no peeking in sacks and boxes that don't belong to you, either. I mean, after all, being surprised is part of the fun, right?

As Lynal surreptitiously angles for Xena's chakram, Xena watches him out of the corner of her eye, fully aware of what he's up to, but curious enough not to interfere.

GABRIELLE

Oh, and don't forget: no gift can cost more than five dinars.

XENA

Then why can't I just give you the five dinars so you can go out and buy whatever you want?

GABRIELLE

(stating the obvious)

Because then it wouldn't be a gift.

But before she can continue, Lynal deftly takes the chakram, knocking into Gabrielle as he runs off.

GABRIELLE

(recovering)

Hey! What was that about?

(CONTINUED)

3 CONTINUED:

3

XENA

(unperturbed)

My chakram. He took it. Meet me round
the back.

And she's gone.

As Lynal throws a quick glance over his shoulder, he reacts to see... Xena coming after him! Galvanized, Lynal shifts into high gear for:

THE CHASE THROUGH THE BAZAAR

Leaping a roll of carpet carried into his path, Lynal dodges an oncoming peddler's cart... slides under a produce counter... ducks a plank workmen are hoisting... all the while intermittently looking back to see...

...Xena gaining ground as she pursues him.

Adrenalized, Lynal continues bobbing and weaving through the crowd... skidding around corners... hurtling into a scarf stand and emerging streaming utilitarian scarves... snagging the scarves on hooks from a fishing pole stall... until a look behind him reveals...

...Xena is gone!

Shocked, Lynal slows and looks around. No Xena. Thinking he gave her the slip, Lynal produces the chakram, polishing it on his ragged coat as he breezes by a booth where...

...Xena stands watching him pass. Beyond him, she sees -- Gabrielle, outside the bazaar, ready to jump him.

Motioning Gabrielle to wait, Xena joins her, and they follow the boy off, as we:

CUT TO:

4 INT. ORPHANAGE - MAIN ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

4

HIGH ANGLE on the DOOR as it opens, admitting Xena and Gabrielle who react as we PULL BACK to reveal...

...THE CHAKRAM, tied with colorful ribbons, perched on the top of a partially decorated pine tree.

A WIDER ANGLE includes the room, festively decorated for the Solstice, and a group of clean, but threadbare, ORPHAN CHILDREN, (Lynal among them), who flock around a warm, matronly woman named MELANA. Calming the frightened children, she crosses to Xena and Gabrielle.

(CONTINUED)

4 CONTINUED:

4

MELANA

May I help you?

XENA

Yes.

(indicating chakram)

That's mine.

Reacting, Melana looks at Lynal, more disappointed than mad.

MELANA

Lynal...?

LYNAL

I just borrowed it for the tree. I was gonna give it back.

GABRIELLE

Funny how the ribbons bring out its shine.

XENA

(with a look)

It's not an ornament.

LYNAL

Flashy thing like that? What else could it be?

ORPHANS

(simultaneous)

Yeah, he's right./ What is it?/ What does it do?

Before Xena can answer, the DOOR BURSTS OPEN and THREE GUARDS enter, followed by Senticles who reads from a scroll.

SENTICLES

"Hear ye, hear ye. By order of King Silvus be it known that you have until midnight tonight to pay taxes in the amount of one thousand dinars... or face eviction."

As all react, a BEARDED GUARD looks around, takes in the holiday decorations, and frowns.

BEARDED GUARD

Why wait? Look around. They're violating the prohibition.

(drawing his sword)

I say arrest 'em now!

As the other two Guards draw their swords in agreement, and the orphans swarm Melana in alarm --

(CONTINUED)

4 CONTINUED: 2

4

Xena gives a sudden WAR CRY and somersaults high into the air. FLIPPING OVER THE TREE, she grabs the chakram as she goes, lands, and sends it sailing!

Ribbons streaming, the chakram flies past the Guards, ricochets off a corner, and sails past the Guards again, wrapping its ribbons tighter and tighter around the Guards as it banks off the walls 'til it whizzes back to Xena's hand, leaving...

...the Guards bound by ribbons like a human present.

As the others react, Gabrielle turns from guarding Senticles to tell Xena:

GABRIELLE

I didn't know you did gift wrapping.

XENA

(a look; then, to Melana)
What did he mean "violating the prohibition"? The children were just enjoying the Solstice.

MELANA

Yes, but here celebrating the Winter Solstice is a crime. And anyone who's caught can expect to pay a price.

As Melana comforts the frightened children, HOLD on Xena and Gabrielle's growing outrage.

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

7 CONTINUED:

7

XENA

Gabrielle, the eviction's set for midnight. If we don't stop it, those kids are out on the street.

GABRIELLE

I know. But we will. I'm sure the plan'll work.

XENA

And if it doesn't?

GABRIELLE

(not missing a beat)

Then we clobber 'em.

(then; imploring)

But please can't we try it my way, just this once... in honor of the Solstice?

*
*
*

Xena hesitates, still dubious. Then, unable to resist Gabrielle's beseeching face, she relents.

XENA

If it means that much to you...

(as Gabrielle beams gratefully)

But we're gonna need disguises, and access to the castle.

As if on cue, the front door slowly opens and Senticles cautiously backs out of the orphanage.

Clapping him on the shoulder, Xena smiles as Senticles whirls in alarm.

XENA

Just the man we were looking for.

OFF Senticles' apprehensive face...

CUT TO:

8 INT. INDOOR BAZAAR - NIGHT

8

Flanked by Senticles, Xena and Gabrielle pool their money.

GABRIELLE

(counting it)

...Thirty-three, thirty-four, thirty-five. That's it.

*
*
*

XENA

Stretch it as far as you can.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

8 CONTINUED:

8

XENA (cont'd)

We'll need everything on the list to make it work.

*

GABRIELLE

Trust me, Xena. If there's one thing I know, it's how to bargain. You just worry about getting to King Silvus...
(reminding her)

...without cracking any heads?

XENA

A deal's a deal.

Without even looking, she grabs Senticles, who was sneaking off, and pulls him up to join them.

XENA

...Right, Senticles?

SENTICLES

(forcing a nervous laugh)

Ho, ho, ho... I'll take you to the King, alright. It's just, no offense, but how do I know you're not an assassin?

*

*

*

XENA

(a statement of fact)

Easy. If I was, he'd already be dead.

SENTICLES

Works for me.

*

XENA

(with a look that shuts him up)

Good. Let's go.

(to Gabrielle)

Get those things and meet me back at the orphanage.

*

*

Xena and Senticles exit as Gabrielle heads into the bazaar.

TIME CUT TO:

9 INT. INDOOR BAZAAR - NIGHT

9

The shopping basket on her arm contains some items as Gabrielle stands at a hat booth, considering a babushka.

Trying it on, she checks the effect in a mirror. An O.S. BFAY says it all. Reacting, Gabrielle removes the hat, curious as she follows the sound and we:

CUT TO:

10 EXT. BAZAAR - NIGHT

10

A stubborn little DONKEY named TOBIAS BRAYS as he stands planted in defiance of...

...his OWNER, an equally stubborn man who strains against Tobias' halter as he tries to pull him up the path.

OWNER

C'mon, Tobias, you mangy, flea-bitten,
bag o' bones...

(straining hard)

Move!

Tobias BRAYS again, not budging. Then, ducking his head, he slips his halter off, sending his Owner sprawling to the ground! Tobias' HEE-HAW holds the hint of a snigger. Angry, his Owner rises, dusts himself off, and starts toward him when:

GABRIELLE (O.S.)

(calls)

Uh, excuse me -- Sir?

Turning, the Owner sees Gabrielle approaching.

GABRIELLE

That's quite an animal you've got
there.

OWNER

You want him? He's yours for fifty
dinars.

GABRIELLE

Fifty?!

OWNER

That's what the tannery'll give me for
his hide. *
*

GABRIELLE

(appalled)

You're taking him to be skinned?! *

Tobias' BRAY echoes her dismay. *

GABRIELLE

(to Owner)

Look, how 'bout I do you a favor and
take him off your hands for, say...

(hesitates; then removes an
item from her basket)

...twenty-five dinars?

OWNER

Twenty-five? That's half what he's
worth at the tannery.

(CONTINUED)

10 CONTINUED: 2

10

GABRIELLE

True. But first you have to get him there, right?

OWNER

(point taken)

Forty-five.

Gabrielle hesitates, then removes another item from her basket.

GABRIELLE

Thirty, and not a dinar more.

(eyeing donkey critically)

I mean, let's face it, I've seen healthier hides on a used couch.

(off Tobias' protesting

BRAY; to donkey)

Nothing personal.

(to Owner)

So, whaddaya say?

OWNER

Thirty-five, and we got a deal.

Knowing thirty-five dinars is all she has, Gabrielle looks from the last item in her basket to Tobias who gives a plaintive BRAY as we:

CUT TO:

11 EXT. ESTABLISHING GLOOMY CASTLE - NIGHT

11

12 INT. CASTLE - KING'S BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

12

A few solitary candles illuminate King Silvus snoring in his bed. There is a beat. Then the candles sputter -- nearly going out -- before resuming their steady flames as we PULL BACK and WIDEN to see...

...Xena observing the King from the door. Certain he's asleep, Xena bars the door with a strong iron candle holder, then crosses to the window, looking out to see:

XENA'S POV - A SHEER DROP OF FORTY FEET

down the tower to the ground below.

RESUME SCENE

Turning back into the room, Xena fingers the drapery cord appraisingly. Then, satisfied, she crosses to stare down at King Silvus.

(CONTINUED)

12 CONTINUED:

12

XENA

(softly)
You're a lucky man, Silvus. Now
surprise me. Be smart, too.
(then; kicking bed; louder)
Wake up.

Jolted awake, King Silvus sees her and screams.

KING SILVUS

Ahhh! Who are you? How did you get in
here? What do you want?

XENA

My name is Xena. We need to talk.

KING SILVUS

Look, whatever you want, take it:
money, jewels, anything! Just have
mercy on an old man.

XENA

The same kind of mercy you showed the
orphanage you're closing?

KING SILVUS

(blank)
Orphanage?

XENA

Don't play dumb. You issued the order
yourself.

KING SILVUS

Maybe so, but I issue so many.
(off Xena's frown; quick
excuse)
...Times being what they are.

XENA

And whose fault is that? Did you ever
think that, maybe, if you eased up on
your people -- let 'em celebrate the
Solstice, say -- the times would ease
up, too?

King Silvus eyes her narrowly, sitting up in bed as he
realizes:

KING SILVUS

You're one of those Solstice lovers,
aren't you?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

12 CONTINUED: 2

12

KING SILVUS (cont'd)
One of those rebels who thinks that
everything and everybody should
stop once a year just so they can raise
a glass, eat a goose, open gifts.
Well, you know what I say to that?

XENA
Bet I can guess.

KING SILVUS
(shouting)
Guards! Guards -- quick!

XENA
You petty tyrants are so predictable.
(moving to window)
But I'm warning you, Silvus. Change
your ways, or suffer the consequences.

KING SILVUS
(anguished fury)
No! Analia's gone for good...
(grimly resolved)
...and so's the Solstice.

As Xena reacts to the pain that fuels his anger, a troop of
Guards arrives O.S. and BANGS at the door. *

HEAD GUARD (O.S.)
It's barred! Break it down! *

As the O.S. Guards RAM THE DOOR, Xena turns to the King.

XENA
This isn't over, Silvus. Truth is,
it's just begun.

And as the GUARDS BURST THROUGH THE DOOR -- Xena seizes the
drapery cord and leaps out the window!

CUT TO:

13 INT. CASTLE - SECRET SOLSTICE ROOM - NIGHT

13

The WOODEN SHUTTERS of a window SMASH under the impact of --
-- Xena's booted feet as she CRASHES through, swinging in
on the drapery cord! Releasing it, she lands nimbly on the
floor and peers around the moonlit room. *

Spotting a candle, she produces her flint and stone,
ignites the candle, and raises it, illuminating... *

(CONTINUED)

13 CONTINUED:

13

...a room of ghostly beauty, white with thirty years of dust and cobwebs that cover it like spun sugar -- a room completely decked out to celebrate the Winter Solstice!

Exquisite ornaments hang from skeletal branches of a once-beautiful and majestic pine tree... boughs of holly deck the walls, withered and brown with age... stockings droop by the chimney... beautifully wrapped presents crowd the foot of the tree... Every Solstice tradition we saw earlier at the Orphanage is reflected here in an opulent style that bespeaks wealth and royalty.

ON Xena's astonished reaction...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

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ACT TWO

FADE IN:

14 INT. CASTLE - SECRET SOLSTICE ROOM - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS) 14

Xena uses the candle to light the others in a candelabra. Holding it up, she surveys the room, CAMERA PANNING with her gaze past...

...the tall, brown pine whose ornaments dangle from dry branches... a large wardrobe whose open doors reveal costumes, plain and fancy, complete with masks, wigs, hats, and scarves... a withered wreath hung over the mantelpiece... gaily wrapped gifts... until CAMERA HOLDS on the most prominent feature of all:

A LARGE WEDDING PORTRAIT of a young King Silvus and his wife, Queen Analia, who wears a distinctive jeweled pendant, though her veil shows little else except her blue eyes and blonde hair.

As Xena gazes up at it thoughtfully, HOLD on the Queen's half-concealed face, as we...

DISSOLVE TO:

15 INT. ORPHANAGE - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT 15

CLOSE ON GABRIELLE who sweeps her blonde hair from her blue eyes, looking earnest.

GABRIELLE

I'm sorry. I tried. But it's no use.
(reluctant)

I'm afraid you're going to have to leave.

(off an O.S. SIGH)

I know. It's not fair. Especially on Solstice Eve. But what can I do?

PULL BACK and WIDEN to reveal she's talking to... Tobias, whose mournful face stares back as he BRAYS his objection.

GABRIELLE

I know. But Melana says you can't stay inside, and the place is hers...

(worried frown)

...at least until midnight.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

15 CONTINUED:

15

GABRIELLE (cont'd)

(then; back to Tobias)

So, I guess you're bunking under the stars.

(rising)

C'mon, I'll stay with you so you won't be lonely.

She starts for the door, but Tobias stays put. Gabrielle stops and turns.

GABRIELLE

Tobias, believe me, I know how you feel.

(Tobias SNORTS)

Alright, so maybe I don't. But Melana says out, so out it is. Now, let's go.

Again, she starts off. Again, he stays. She stops and turns, a little testy.

GABRIELLE

You know, I'm beginning to understand your former owner.

(crosses to take him by halter)

Alright, come on...

She moves; he doesn't. She stops, impatient.

GABRIELLE

Tobias, let's go!

The donkey BRAYS, immobile.

GABRIELLE

(exasperated; pulling halter)

What does it take to make you move?

As she strains one way, and Tobias strains the other:

LYNAL (O.S.)

(calls out)

Okay, you rug rats, in line for wash-up. Look smart.

He gives a SHRILL WHISTLE. Hearing it, Tobias' ears prick up and he moves forward -- causing Gabrielle to fall flat on her face as the rope slackens.

GABRIELLE

Hey...! What is it with you?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

15 CONTINUED: 3

15

GABRIELLE (cont'd)
(rises; eyeing him
speculatively)
Don't tell me you're trained...

She WHISTLES. Responding, Tobias moves forward again.

GABRIELLE
Well, I'll be...

She tries a different WHISTLE. Responding, Tobias backs up.

GABRIELLE
(grins)
Just like Argo!
(scratching Tobias' ears)
Wonder what Xena'll say to this.

Tobias responds with a confident HEE-HAW.

CUT TO:

16 INT. CASTLE - THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

16

Senticles sits all alone, quill in hand, working on a piece of parchment at his cluttered desk.

INSERT - PARCHMENT

on which Senticles carefully modifies a word.

XENA (O.S.)
Nice work.

BACK TO SCENE

as Senticles jumps to find Xena looking over his shoulder.

XENA
You've just saved someone years in prison, changing the sentence like that.

SENTICLES
(very nervous)
What're you doing here? I thought we had a deal.

XENA
We do. I'm just proposing we extend it, that's all.

(CONTINUED)

16 CONTINUED:

16

SENTICLES

(nervous laugh)

Ho, ho, ho... You been hitting the holiday punch?! Look, maybe you haven't noticed, but when it comes to being heroic, I'm not.

*
*

XENA

No?

(re: parchments)

Then what's all this?

SENTICLES

Nothing! I change a word here, a number there, hoping to do a little good. But believe me, it's nothing.

XENA

So's your part in my plan. It's nothing. All you have to do is --

SENTICLES

-- No! I won't risk being arrested. I can't! I'd die, locked up in a cell, closed in like that. I couldn't face going to prison.

XENA

But don't you see? You face it every day.

SENTICLES

What do you mean?

XENA

Those changes you make to the King's orders, what do you think would happen if he found out about them?

SENTICLES

(appalled)

Found out? But, surely, you wouldn't... you couldn't...

XENA

No, of course not. But the point is, if he did find out, you'd be thrown in prison anyway.

*
*

(as Senticles digests this)

You're braver than you give yourself credit for. So don't deny your courage... or the children.

As Xena eyes him levelly, HOLD on Senticles' indecision.

CUT TO:

17 INT. ORPHANAGE - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

17

Gabrielle concludes telling a story as CAMERA PANS the rapt
FACES of the ORPHANS...

GABRIELLE

...And from that day on, we've honored
and celebrated it...

CAMERA LINGERS on LYNAL, absorbed despite the streetsmart
attitude he affects.

GABRIELLE (O.S.)

...as a time of rebirth for our hopes
and our wishes...

CAMERA MOVES to a little girl's soulful face, her eyes fixed
on Gabrielle who continues:

GABRIELLE (O.S.)

...a time for coming together in joy
and peace...

CAMERA PANS the others, each face sweeter than the last, as:

GABRIELLE (O.S.)

...a time of miracles, and goodwill
toward all living creatures.

CAMERA HOLDS on... Tobias, who appears as attentive as the
rest. Then CAMERA RESUMES:

GABRIELLE

And that's why the Winter Solstice
means so much, and touches us all so
deeply.

ORPHAN #1

I have a Solstice wish.

ORPHANS

(simultaneous)

Me, too!/ So do I!/ I've got a good
one!/ Listen to mine!

GABRIELLE

(smiles) defend

Alright, let's hear ~~the~~ them.

ORPHAN #1

I wish we could have a big Solstice
dinner, with all the trimmings.

ORPHAN #2

I wish we could each have a Solstice
present of our very own.

(CONTINUED)

17 CONTINUED:

17

ORPHAN #3

I wish everyone in the world could be
as happy as we are right now.

Touched, Gabrielle shares a look with Melana, as we...

RACK FOCUS to reveal Xena has entered, flanked by Senticles,
both of whom have overheard the Orphans, and look moved.

MELANA

(seeing them; rises)

Those are all fine wishes. Now, why
don't we go get our stockings to hang
by the fireplace.

(herding kids)

Come on, let's go...

Lynal helps Melana get the kids off as Xena and Senticles
cross to Gabrielle and Tobias.

XENA

Better hope this plan works. 'Cause if
it doesn't, I'll do whatever it takes
to keep those kids from getting hurt.

GABRIELLE

(to Tobias)

She's a very physical person.

(to Xena)

But I totally agree. The plan fails,
we punch faces. Until then, we do
it peacefully, in the spirit of
Solstice Eve.

Tobias BRAYS his agreement.

XENA

Who's your friend?

GABRIELLE

(looking guilty)

Oh, yeah... Uh, Xena meet Tobias.

(eagerly)

Isn't he sweet? And he's trained just
like Argo! Thing is...

(hesitates; then, defensive)

He cost me all our money. But I
couldn't let him go to the tannery.
Not on Solstice Eve. So, I thought
instead of buying what we need --

XENA

It's alright. I've found everything
we need at the castle.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

17 CONTINUED: 2

17

XENA (cont'd)

All we have to do now is work out the details...

(wry look)

...then hope I can restrain myself long enough to pull it off.

CUT TO:

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18 INT. CASTLE - KING'S BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

18

ON KING SILVUS asleep in his bed as he's illuminated by an O.S. glow of light.

XENA (O.S.)
 (calling; mysterious)
 Silvus, wake up...
 (as he shifts)
 Silvus, open your eyes...
 (as he tosses)
 Silvus, arise...
 (then; impatient)
 Silvus -- snap to and look sharp!

Responding, the King wakes, looking groggy until he sees...

Xena disguised as Clotho (youngest of the three Fates) in a half-mask and flowing white costume, holding a blazing candelabra.

KING SILVUS
 (half-scared;
 half-exasperated)
 What is this, the town square? Who
 are you? What do you want?

XENA
 Mankind calls me Clotho, first of the
 Fates, whose province is the past.

KING SILVUS
 Nonsense. You're probably a dream
 brought on by indigestion. A fatty
 piece of beef, a bit of grissel. Get
 out, and let me sleep.

But as he snuggles deeper in the bed, Xena seizes the covers and yanks them back, exposing the King in his long nightshirt.

XENA
 Your commands hold no sway with me.
 Rather I command you to rise and
 walk by my side.

But though he's afraid, King Silvus eyes her narrowly.

KING SILVUS
 How do I know you're really a Fate?
 For all I can tell, you could be a
 thief, or another one of those
 Solstice cranks.

(CONTINUED)

18 CONTINUED:

18

XENA

Perhaps this will convince you that
time is mine to rule as I will.

Extending her candelabra, Xena illuminates a large
hourglass on a table in front of a heavily draped window.

(CONTINUED)

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18 CONTINUED:

18

As King Silvus watches, the hourglass begins to rise, turning end-over-end, the sand inside running back and forth between its two compartments, as we --

ANGLE - BEHIND THE WINDOW DRAPES

where Senticles hides, manipulating the hourglass with a stick attached to its narrow neck. Clenched in his mouth is a double-barreled pea shooter, loaded and ready for action.

RESUME SCENE

As the hourglass suddenly stops, midair.

ANGLE - SENTICLES

Cheeks puffed out, he blows hard on the pea shooter.

RESUME SCENE

As the HOURGLASS SHATTERS, sending glass and sand flying!

KING SILVUS

(reacting; alarmed)

Alright -- I believe you!

(rising and donning his robe)

What now?

Turning, Xena exits, King Silvus in tow. A BEAT. Then Senticles emerges from behind the drapes and rushes out.

CUT TO:

19 INT. CASTLE - SECRET SOLSTICE ROOM - NIGHT

19

Xena and King Silvus enter. But as Xena shuts the door, King Silvus moves beyond her, staring incredulously at...

GABRIELLE -- veiled and costumed to look like the King's wife from the wedding portrait -- FLOATING IN MIDAIR before a curtained window.

GABRIELLE

(spectral tone)

Silvus, dear husband...

KING SILVUS

(stunned)

...Analia?!

Dazed, he starts toward her. But fearing he'll see the rope that suspends her, Gabrielle quickly forestalls him.

(CONTINUED)

19 CONTINUED:

19

GABRIELLE

Stop! Come no closer.

(as he halts)

I am but a shadow from your past sent
to beg you to turn from your narrow,
greedy path before it's too late.

KING SILVUS

(apprehensive)

Too late...? Great Zeus...

Seeing he's shaken, Xena quickly grabs a large goblet of wine she had ready, and hands it to the King.

XENA

Here -- drink this.

As he turns to drink, Xena nods approvingly to Gabrielle who hangs suspended by the ROPE on which we HOLD, as we:

MATCH CUT TO:

20 EXT. CASTLE - OUTSIDE SECRET SOLSTICE ROOM - NIGHT

20

ON THE ROPE whose other end is tied around Tobias' neck as he and Senticles stand hiding in some bushes. Suddenly, TWO GUARDS approach on patrol.

GUARD #1

(looking toward bushes)

Hey... check it out.

As Senticles shrinks back, certain they've been caught... A CURVACEOUS REDHEAD passes by going the other way, clearly the object of their attention.

But Senticles' relief is short-lived as... Guard #1 gives the Redhead a low, admiring WHISTLE which... Tobias hears and starts to obey!

CUT TO:

21 INT. CASTLE - SECRET SOLSTICE ROOM - NIGHT

21

King Silvus downs the last of his wine as Xena looks behind him at Gabrielle... who suddenly drops like a stone!

As the women react, King Silvus finishes his wine and starts to turn around!

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

22 INT. CASTLE - SECRET SOLSTICE ROOM - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

22

King Silvus turns back toward Gabrielle who's sprawled on the floor, dress hitched up, veil half-cocked when suddenly --

-- Xena gives a PIERCING WHISTLE that makes King Silvus wince and turn away again as --

-- Gabrielle goes shooting back into the air as, off-screen, Tobias responds to Xena's command. Dangling, Gabrielle struggles to compose herself while Xena turns to the rattled King.

XENA

(thinking fast; re: whistle)

A warning your time here is nearly up.

KING SILVUS

No! Not yet!

(turning to Gabrielle;
imploring)

Don't leave me, Analia. Please! Not again...

Surprised by his genuine emotion, Gabrielle is moved.

GABRIELLE

I'm sorry, Silvus. But you've grieved long enough. It's time to move on. You must forget my death on that Solstice Eve so long ago.

*
*
*
*

KING SILVUS

(frowns; confused)

Death? What do you mean? You didn't die; you walked out on me.

(blinks; getting hazy)

I don't understand...

Neither do Xena and Gabrielle from the looks they trade.

GABRIELLE

(vamping)

Uh... Well, I, uh... I was speaking metaphorically, of course. We shadows from the past tend to do that.

KING SILVUS

Metaphor-- ?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

22 CONTINUED:

22

KING SILVUS (cont'd)
(growing suspicious; but
even hazier)

Wait, what's going on here? What's --
happening? Who... are...

He passes out -- falling directly into Xena's waiting arms.

GABRIELLE

Is he alright?

XENA

(checks)

Fine. But the sleeping herb I put in
his wine won't last long. So we'd
better get moving.

GABRIELLE

I thought Senticles said the Queen was
dead.

XENA

He also said he'd handle Tobias.
(hoisting Silvus in her
arms)

I'll start Phase Two. You get changed,
and see what happened. We'll meet at
the orphanage.

As Xena exits with the King, Gabrielle turns toward the
window and gives a WHISTLE. O.S., Tobias responds and
Gabrielle DROPS OUT OF FRAME.

CUT TO:

23 EXT. CASTLE - OUTSIDE SECRET SOLSTICE ROOM - NIGHT

23

Gabrielle POPS UP INTO FRAME, searching the bushes.

GABRIELLE

(calling softly)

Senticles...? Senticles, where are
you?

A RUSTLING NOISE sounds nearby. Gabrielle moves toward it,
cautiously peering into the foliage.

GABRIELLE

Senticles... is that you?

Suddenly, a hairy face emerges, coming straight at her, and
Gabrielle jumps before recognizing:

(CONTINUED)

23 CONTINUED:

23

GABRIELLE

Tobias!

The donkey BRAYS a welcome as Gabrielle joins him, quickly untying the rope around his neck.

GABRIELLE

Good job, boy. But where's Senticles?

(CONTINUED)

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23 CONTINUED: 2

23

The donkey SNORTS and paws the ground.

GABRIELLE

(hazarding)

What? You trying to tell me something?

Tobias nods his head.

GABRIELLE

You know where Senticles is?

Again, the donkey nods.

GABRIELLE

Well, c'mon then. Let's go!

And as the donkey opens his mouth to HEE-HAW:

MATCH CUT TO:

24 INT. CASTLE - KING'S BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

24

ON the KING, openmouthed in mid-snore, as he lies sleeping in bed.

XENA (O.S.)

(sternly)

...I said, let's go!

The King's eyes open -- then pop wide as something is thrown on him and he sits up, turning to see...

...Xena, disguised in a concealing scarf and simple outfit. She's tossed some clothes on his bed, and looks impatient.

KING SILVUS

(still groggy)

Am I to understand that you are...?

XENA

Lachesis, second of the Fates, here to show you your present. Now, rise and dress.

KING SILVUS

(fingering clothes
distastefully)

Put on these? But I'm the King. Why should I wear something common as this?

(CONTINUED)

24 CONTINUED:

24

XENA

Because tonight we walk among your subjects -- as anonymous to them as they are to you -- the better to see how your cruel laws and harsh rules affect them.

KING SILVUS

(snorts)

To what point? In hopes of changing my life?

XENA

(with a look)

In hopes of changing theirs.
(a not-so-veiled threat)
...Unless you'd rather I find a more 'forceful' way to persuade you...?

Alarmed, the King grabs the clothes and springs up to dress.

CUT TO:

25 INT. SENTICLES' TOY SHOP - NIGHT

25

CLOSE ON an old-fashioned Jack-in-the-box as it's cranked open, releasing a bouncing puppet caricature of King Silvus. *

PULL BACK to see... Senticles holding the toy which he eyes in abject misery when an O.S. KNOCK at the door makes him jump. *

GABRIELLE (O.S.)

(calling uncertainly)

Hello? Senticles -- are you in there?

(KNOCKS again)

It's me -- Gabrielle.

Senticles hesitates. Then, against his better judgment, he crosses to unlock and open the door, admitting Gabrielle. But as he starts to shut the door, a loud, "HEE-HAW" stops him, and Senticles reacts as... Tobias trots into the room. *

GABRIELLE

Senticles, what happened?! You were supposed to stay with Tobias. Xena and I were nearly caught!

(CONTINUED)

25 CONTINUED:

25

SENTICLES

So was I! Two guards came by and, if I hadn't run, I don't know what would've happened.

GABRIELLE

(stares in shock)

You ran away?

SENTICLES

(defensive)

What else could I do? You didn't expect me to stay and get caught, did you?

GABRIELLE

(still stunned)

Well, no... But what about us, what about Tobias?

SENTICLES

You forget, I've seen your warrior friend in action. I knew you'd be okay. As for the donkey...

(shrugs)

What're they gonna do to a donkey? Whereas me they'd throw in prison for life. And it's like I told your partner, I can't do that. I can't. Shut up in a small space, I'd die.

(upset)

Look, I'm sorry if I let you down. But I warned you. I'm no hero. So just go, alright? Leave me alone. Go!

Humiliated, he averts his face. But as Gabrielle reacts and turns to leave, she suddenly stops, her attention caught by:

TOYS... hundreds of them -- dolls, soldiers, animals, puppets, etc. -- all handmade, filling the shelves behind her. *

GABRIELLE

(staring in wonder)

What's all this? *

Senticles turns to see she's gazing at his creations. Quickly grabbing a large sack, he crosses and starts putting the toys inside it. *

SENTICLES

Nothing. I shouldn't have left them out. *

(CONTINUED)

25 CONTINUED: 2

25

GABRIELLE

(joining him)

Are you crazy? They're wonderful.

(picking up a doll)

Look -- her eyes actually open and close!

(CONTINUED)

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25 CONTINUED: 3

25

SENTICLES

(mumbling modestly)

Yes, well, that's because I used a little hinge to --

GABRIELLE

(displaying wooden lamb)

And look at this! It's almost exactly like the one I had growing up. Remember? I told you what it meant to me.

(looking around)

And all these toys, they'd mean a lot to the orphans, too, don't you think? Every kid could have one of his own.

SENTICLES

(nervous laugh)

Ho, ho, ho... that would be true, if they were legal, which they're not.

GABRIELLE

Trust me, Senticles. By the time we get through with King Silvus, he'll be handing them out himself. But just in case...

She starts helping him put the toys in the sack.

GABRIELLE

We can use this to carry the toys to the orphanage. And don't worry. I'll disguise you so that even if we're stopped, the guards won't know you.

SENTICLES

No. I won't risk going to prison.

Gabrielle stops and turns to Senticles, eyeing him levelly.

GABRIELLE

You say you're afraid of small spaces. But that's how you live your whole life right now -- in a small space -- locked in by your fear of standing up for yourself, or anyone else.

(then; more gently)

Don't you see? The thing you're most afraid will happen, already has. Question is, what're you gonna do about it?

As she awaits his answer, HOLD on Senticles' stricken face.

CUT TO:

26 INT. ORPHANAGE - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

26

Lynal crosses to answer a KNOCK at the door, opening it to reveal... Xena and King Silvus though Lynal does not recognize them disguised as commoners.

KING SILVUS

(grumbling)

I know it's late. So slam the door if you want, won't surprise me a bit.

LYNAL

Slam the door? On Solstice Eve?!

That's a good one. Come in.

(as they enter)

How can I help you?

Surprised by Lynal's hospitality, King Silvus is flustered.

KING SILVUS

Uh... Well, we're, uh... we're...

XENA

(prompting; sotto)

Strangers.

KING SILVUS

Right! We're strangers who've been traveling all day and... uh... and...

LYNAL

Need a bit of food and drink? Well, we don't have much. But you're welcome to share what we've got.

XENA

(nods her thanks)

The charity of your King and country is famous.

LYNAL

(grins)

Our King? Charitable?! You really are strangers here.

KING SILVUS

(frowns)

What's that supposed to mean?

LYNAL

(a statement of fact)

Just that King Silvus is the meanest, most tightfisted ruler this side of the Aegean.

KING SILVUS

Is that so?

(CONTINUED)

26 CONTINUED:

26

LYNAL

Absolutely. You've heard of Midas, right? Greediest man in the world 'til Hercules helped him. Well, our King makes him look like Lady Bountiful.

XENA

You must be exaggerating.

LYNAL

I wish. This is an orphanage. And 'cause we can't pay our taxes, King Silvus is kicking us outta here at midnight.

(level look)

What kind of King does that to kids on Solstice Eve?

XENA

(eyeing the King)

Good question.

As the King shifts uncomfortably...

CUT TO:

27 EXT. STREET NEAR ORPHANAGE - NIGHT

27

Moonlight illuminates the street which seems deserted until:

Senticles, wearing a white beard and a concealing coat, peers around a corner, followed by... Gabrielle peering out just above him, followed by... Tobias peering out above her. *

Together, their heads swivel left, then right, checking to see if the coast is clear. Then:

GABRIELLE

Okay, we're almost there. Let's move.

Rounding the corner, the three start up the street: a bulky man with a white beard, a puckish girl, and a donkey loaded down with a bulging bag of toys. *

Suddenly, all three halt, freezing as...

A TROOP OF ARMED GUARDS quick marches up behind them, separates around them, and continues on -- led by the Head Guard from the castle who falls out, calling to his men:

HEAD GUARD

Remember the King's command: any resistance, we storm in full force.

(CONTINUED)

27 CONTINUED:

27

Falling back in formation, he exits with the rest of his men, leaving our trio alone.

SENTICLES

(pointing)

Look! They're headed straight for the orphanage.

GABRIELLE

Come on! We've got to warn Melana.

SENTICLES

How? They'll be guarding the doors.

GABRIELLE

Then we'll have to find some other way inside. Now, come on!

Pulling Tobias, Gabrielle quickly exits. For a BEAT, Senticles hesitates, gripped by fear. Then forcing himself past it, he takes a deep breath and hurries after Gabrielle.

CUT TO:

28 INT. ORPHANAGE - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

28

We HEAR the SOUND of a Solstice CAROL being sung by the children as Xena and King Silvus listen, lost in thought, the food Lynal's given them forgotten on their plates.

The CAROL ENDS... and so do their reveries.

KING SILVUS

(rising)

Take me home. I've seen... and heard... enough.

XENA

Enough to stop their eviction? Enough to bring back Winter Solstice?

KING SILVUS

(angry)

Enough! I won't be lectured, especially when it's all your fault.

XENA

My fault?

KING SILVUS

If you Fates hadn't separated Analia and me, I'd have been a different man, a better King. But you did.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

28 CONTINUED:

28

KING SILVUS (cont'd)
You let her leave. She walked out on
me the same way I'm walking out on you
right now.
(bitter smile)
Happy Solstice.

He strides to the door and exits. Reacting, Xena follows.

CUT TO:

29 EXT. ORPHANAGE - NIGHT

29

Emerging from the building, King Silvus and Xena stare to
see... the Troop of Armed Guards surrounding the place.

HEAD GUARD
(calling to them)
Halt! You're under arrest by order of
the King.

KING SILVUS
(testy)
Don't be absurd. I am the King.

HEAD GUARD
Right. And I'm the Queen of the
Amazons.
(ordering Guards)
Seize them!

As Xena and King Silvus react, the Guards start toward them.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

30 EXT. ORPHANAGE - NIGHT

30

The Guards have nearly reached the King and Xena when:

XENA

Hold it, boys. Where's your holiday spirit?

As the Guards stop, nonplussed:

HEAD GUARD

(shouts)

What are you waiting for? Arrest them!

And as the Guards rush toward them, Xena springs into action. Mindful of her promise to Gabrielle, she quickly split-kicks the two poles holding up the building's wooden awning, then grabs the King and pulls him back into the orphanage, as --

The Guards CRASH headlong into the downed awning.

CUT TO:

31 INT. ORPHANAGE - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

31

Xena bolts the door as King Silvus gasps, very shaken.

KING SILVUS

By the gods! Did you see that? They attacked me. Me! Their King!! They... they...

Overcome, he passes out, collapsing against Xena as Lynal rushes up.

LYNAL

Quick, there's trouble! You and your friend better go.

Supporting the King, Xena tears off her disguise, asserting:

XENA

I'm not going anywhere.

LYNAL

Xena! Thank the gods. The guards in the basement have escaped!

(CONTINUED)

31 CONTINUED:

31

XENA

Trust me, Lynal, that's the least of our worries.

LYNAL

What do you mean?

Before she can answer:

HEAD GUARD (O.S.)

(shouts from out front)

Attention everyone in the building!
Either you come out voluntarily, or we're coming in to get you. But either way, you're gone. So, what'll it be?

As King Silvus moans, HOLD on Xena and Lynal, then:

TIME CUT TO:

32 INT. ORPHANAGE - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

32

IN A BACK ALCOVE, Xena and Lynal lay the unconscious King on a pallet as Melana, wearing a cowled shawl against the cold, sets up a tall screen that makes the place dark and quiet.

MELANA

(anxious)

Are you sure he'll be alright?

XENA

His pulse and heartbeat are strong. Once the shock wears off, he should be fine.

MELANA

Dear gods... I hope so.

Surprised by her emotion, Xena glances up as Melana bends to check the King... the movement freeing a distinctive jeweled pendant that swings out from under her blouse.

Seeing the pendant, Xena stares, a look of startled realization on her face. Then, just as quickly, it's gone as Xena rises and turns to Melana.

XENA

On second thought, I think it's best if you stay with him -- you know, in case something develops.

(CONTINUED)

32 CONTINUED:

32

MELANA

(clearly uncomfortable)

But I can't! I mean... what about the children?

XENA

Lynal can look out for them.

(turning to him)

Right?

LYNAL

Well, sure. But if I do, who's gonna help you?

A LOUD O.S. CRASH precludes an answer.

CUT TO:

33 INT. ORPHANAGE - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

33

Flanked by Lynal, Xena hurries from the alcove to see...

...Senticles lying sprawled on the hearth. Without his coat, we see he's disguised as a white-bearded peddler in a red, soot-covered suit with a black belt and boots. His bulging sack of toys lies inside the fireplace where --

-- Gabrielle, also looking sooty, comes tumbling down to land on the sack, splitting it open, and spilling toys out into the room.

Reacting, Xena turns to Lynal.

XENA

Go see to the kids.

(re: Senticles and Gabrielle)

The reinforcements have arrived.

Though clearly dubious, Lynal obeys, exiting as Senticles and Gabrielle pick themselves up.

SENTICLES

(dazed; surprised to realize)

I did it... The gods be praised, I did it! That chimney was dark and narrow as a grave, but I just grabbed my sack of toys and -- ho, ho, ho -- down I came. And you know what?

(beaming at Gabrielle)

I liked it! I did! It was fun! By Zeus, I'm gonna do it every Solstice Eve, just see if I don't!

(CONTINUED)

33 CONTINUED:

33

GABRIELLE

Great. That's great, Senticles. But right now, we've got a problem, remember?

(rushing to Xena)

Xena, there's an entire troop of guards outside ready to attack unless we give up the building.

But Xena just nods as she stares toward the toy sack, an idea dawning.

XENA

Yes... I know.

GABRIELLE

(oblivious; disheartened)

Guess my plan didn't work after all. But thanks for giving it a try. It meant a lot.

(sighs)

Now, I guess it's back to business as usual, right?

But Xena, plan in place, simply smiles.

CUT TO:

34 EXT. ORPHANAGE - NIGHT

34

The Head Guard frowns impatiently, as he watches his men remove the wooden awning blocking the door. Then:

*
*

HEAD GUARD

Alright, we gave 'em a chance. Now, in the name of King Silvus...

(screaming it)

Attack!!

As the Guards charge the door:

*

CUT TO:

35 INT. ORPHANAGE - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

35

CLOSE ON XENA who hears the Guards and turns to the others:

XENA

Let the games begin!

THE DOOR BURSTS OPEN and the GUARDS RUSH IN, charging at:

Xena, Gabrielle, and Senticles stationed across the room by the sack of toys.

(CONTINUED)

35 CONTINUED: 2

35

But as the Guards cross the floor, they begin flailing wildly, slipping and falling as their feet encounter a veritable "carpet" of marbles from Senticles' toy bag.

As the Guards go sprawling, our trio mounts a second line of defense, arming themselves with several Jack-in-the-boxes that they spring, launching Solstice tree ornaments at the Guards like incoming missiles.

As the Guards get pelted, Gabrielle grabs a flute from the bag, stuffs a candy cane in it and, plugging the air holes, blows it like a dart gun -- sending the candy cane flying at the Guards, then quickly reloading while --

Xena hefts a large ball, takes aim on a phalanx of Guards, then rolls it at them, bowling them over for a strike!

As the fight continues:

ANGLE - INSIDE BACK ALCOVE

where King Silvus comes to, blinking groggily in the dim light only to stare as he sees... A DARK, HOODED FIGURE beside him.

KING SILVUS

Gods defend me..! You're the third one, the Fate of the Future... am I right?

The Figure is silent.

KING SILVUS

You're Atropos, come to show me my...

He trails off, looking around the enclosed alcove in growing dread.

KING SILVUS

What is it? What is this place? Tell me. Why am I here? It's dark and cold as the --

(stops; horrified to realize)

...grave!

(turning to Figure; desperate)

Is that it? Is this my tomb?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

35 CONTINUED: 3

35

KING SILVUS (cont'd)
(re: sounds from the O.S.
fight)

And that noise, like souls crying out
in pain. Is this my future? *

The Figure hesitates, then starts to turn away.

KING SILVUS

No, don't leave me here! Just tell
me: *

(as Figure turns back)

Does it have to be -- this place, my
death -- can I change it if I change my
life? *

(breaking down)

Please, I don't want to die alone. *

I've lived that way for thirty years. *

And I can change. I know I can. *

Moved, the hooded Figure reaches out. But seeing the hand
stretched toward him, King Silvus misunderstands and
shrinks away. *

KING SILVUS

No! I won't go with you. Not yet! *

(struggles up)

You'll see. I'll show you! I'll
prove I'm not the man I was. I'm not! *

Pushing past the Figure, he rushes round the screen into:

THE MAIN ROOM

where the TOY FIGHT is still underway. As King Silvus
stares in amazement...

Senticles grabs a child's miniature crossbow and shoots!
CAMERA TRACKS with the ARROW whose suction-cup tip hits a
Guard on the forehead and sticks. More arrows follow,
adhering to other Guards.

Meanwhile, Gabrielle mans a set of HAND BELLS on which she
plays a Solstice song as she uses them to knock out some
Guards while --

AT THE FIREPLACE, Xena pours a bowl of chestnuts into a
couple of stockings, creating impromptu blackjacks.

XENA

Great stocking stuffers!

(CONTINUED)

35 CONTINUED: 3

35

Wielding them, she advances into the Guards, sending them flying left and right.

For a moment, King Silvus eyes both sides. Then, crossing to the toy sack, he seizes a large stuffed bear and joins the fray, beating his Guards over their heads until the toy rips, sending a flurry of feathers into the air like snow.

Senticles joins him, seizing a stuffed toy whose feathers soon mingle with the bear's. And when Xena and Gabrielle grab stuffed toys, too, the place becomes a blizzard of feathers during which the Guards retreat, rushing out of the building in defeat.

As our group grins and WHOOPS in triumph, no one's happier than King Silvus who turns to Xena, beaming.

KING SILVUS

Did you see them run? Like rabbits!
Yessir -- there'll be no evictions
here. Not tonight -- not ever!

But as Xena returns his grin, she looks beyond him, smile fading. Noting it, King Silvus turns, reacting to see...

...the hooded Figure moving toward him.

Afraid, but unflinching, the King stands his ground as the Figure approaches, halts, then pulls back the hood (now exposed as a shawl), revealing it's... Melana.

As the two lock eyes, Gabrielle introduces them.

GABRIELLE

Your Majesty, this is the woman who
runs the orphanage. Her name is --

KING SILVUS

(incredulous)
...Analia?

Reacting, Gabrielle starts to correct him when:

MELANA

(nods)
Yes...

Thrown, Gabrielle stares in surprise as King Silvus reaches for his wife's hands, his eyes never leaving her face.

KING SILVUS

My dearest wife... Can you ever
forgive me for closing my heart to you
and our people?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

35. CONTINUED: 5

35

KING SILVUS (cont'd)
For wasting thirty precious years
consumed by greed and hate? I know I
don't deserve it but, please... say
you'll try.

MELANA
(returning his gaze warmly)
Oh, Silvus, I heard what you said.
And I forgive you... with all my
heart.

*
*

She moves into his arms and they embrace. Amazed, Gabrielle
shoots a surprised look to Xena, only to see...

Xena's satisfied smile suggests it's no surprise to her.

DISSOLVE TO:

36 EXT. A CROSSROADS - DAY

36

CLOSE ON XENA AND GABRIELLE walking beside each other.

XENA
Guess you got that happy ending you
wanted.

GABRIELLE
(grins; agreeing)
And then some.

WIDEN to include Argo being led by Xena while Gabrielle is
leading... Tobias who gives a happy BRAY. Suddenly:

MAN (O.S.)
(calls)
Excuse me, please...

Turning, the women see a MAN trudging into the crossroads
with his young WIFE who's holding their newborn BABY. The
little family looks exhausted.

MAN
Could you tell us which is the road
going west?

XENA
You're on it.
(noting their fatigue)
But there's a town just south of here
if you're looking for food and shelter.
We'd be happy to help you get there.

(CONTINUED)

36 CONTINUED:

36

MAN

(declining)

You're very kind. But we're in a hurry.

(to Wife)

Come, Mary, the caravan won't wait.

WIFE

Yes, Joseph...

(shifting Baby wearily)

...we're coming.

But as the tired little family starts away:

GABRIELLE

Wait --!

(as they turn back; with difficulty)

If you're in a hurry, wouldn't it be faster if your wife and child rode the distance?

MAN

Yes, of course. But we don't have the means to --

GABRIELLE

(pre-empting him)

You do now.

Steeling herself, she takes Tobias' rope and extends it to the Man who eyes her incredulously.

MAN

For us? But it's too much. We can't accept it.

GABRIELLE

Sure you can, long as you can whistle to make him go, and you promise to take good care of him.

(turning to Wife)

Call it a Solstice present for...
What's the baby's name?

WIFE

Jesus.

GABRIELLE

(smiling down at Baby)

Happy Solstice, Jesus.

Then, taking a steadying breath, she hands the Man the rope.

(CONTINUED)

36 CONTINUED: 2

36

MAN

May God smile on you always for your kindness.

GABRIELLE

Thank you.

(to Tobias; with difficulty)

Now, you take care of these people, Tobias, okay? Make sure they get where they're going safely. And no being stubborn.

The donkey BRAYS, sounding as wistful as Gabrielle feels.

GABRIELLE

(softly)

Yeah... I'll miss you, too.

Scratching between his ears, she gives Tobias a quick kiss, then moves off as the Man settles his family on the donkey, gives him a get-along WHISTLE, and exits.

XENA

(after a beat)

That was a nice thing you did.

GABRIELLE

(gruffly; trying to hide her emotions)

What would I do with a silly old donkey anyway?

XENA

(not buying it for a moment)

Uh-huh.

GABRIELLE

Besides, they really needed him, and they seemed nice, didn't they? And after all, it is the Solstice.

XENA

(reminded)

That's right...

Reaching into Argo's saddlebag, she withdraws a small, wrapped present, and hands it to Gabrielle.

XENA

Happy Solstice.

Taken totally by surprise, Gabrielle unwraps it, tears welling as she sees it's a little wooden lamb (like the one she'd had as a child). Overwhelmed, she looks at Xena.

(CONTINUED)

36 CONTINUED: 3

36

GABRIELLE

But I don't have a gift for you.

KENA

(eyes her warmly)

Gabrielle, you are a gift to me.

And, as distant BELLS RING in the Solstice, the two friends embrace...

FADE OUT.

THE END

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