

Black Cats 1

Cordelia let out a scream and Wes and Angel came running. Angel held her while she moaned, holding her head with both of her hands. Finally the vision stopped and she rested against Angel, gasping for breath. Wes spoke.

"Cordy, what did you see?"

She pushed away and sent a look of anguish to Angel. "It's Giles, something was attacking him and Buffy couldn't kill it."

Angel stepped closer to her, a look of severe consternation on his face. "What was it, what was attacking him?"

Cordy shook her head. "I didn't recognize it. It was black, had a muzzle thing, pointed ears, like a cat, but it was big. Bigger than Buffy."

This was ringing an uncomfortable bell with Wesley. He began to pull some books off the shelves. Angel was pacing. "Where was she? Where is this happening?"

Cordy looked frustrated. "I don't know. I saw a bed, but it wasn't Buffy's bedroom. I don't know." She looked up at Angel, an apology on her face for the dearth of information.

Angel put his hand on her shoulder. "It's okay, Cordy. You can't control the visions." He looked at Wes. "We have to go, now."

Wes looked outside at the brightly shining sun. He gestured outside. "Perhaps we should wait."

Angel shook his head. "If we leave now it will be dark by the time we get to Sunnydale. I don't want to waste any time, not if Buffy's in trouble." He was already trying to call Buffy. He reached a recording that said the number had been changed. He quickly dialled that number and the phone rang and rang without a response. Angel slammed the phone down. "Damn it. Why isn't her answering machine working?" He handed the phone to Cordelia. "Here, try Giles." He raced downstairs to get some weapons.

Cordy looked up Giles' number and called it. She reached a recording that said the number had been changed. After writing it down she called the new number. After twenty rings she hung up. Cordy looked at Wes, a puzzled expression on his face. "No answering machine at either place. That's sort of weird."

Wes just grunted at her as he frantically made a pile of books he wanted to take with him. He knew he'd read a prophecy about something that happened at this time of year. He looked up as Angel raced back up the stairs. They all headed for the garage, Cordy picking up a blanket to cover Angel with as they swept out of the office.

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Kevin had apologized for about the hundredth time for knocking the answering machine off the counter when Buffy finally couldn't stand it anymore. She attacked him and punished him with tickling until he was begging for mercy. Finally Buffy relented. "There, you break it again, I'll tickle you twice as long. Besides, anybody who might have called us is gonna be here tonight."

Kevin grinned at her. Paul had been right. Once Kevin found out what Buffy could do he was totally enamoured of her and her skills. He struggled to a sitting position. "Will you bend another knife for me?"

Giles answered for her, sending a mock glare at both Kevin and Buffy. "No she will not. We are rapidly running out of silverware."

Buffy grinned at Kevin. "There, Giles has spoken." As pleased as she was that Kevin had decided he liked her she occasionally felt like a circus sideshow. "You'll just have to wait until an evil demon or something comes along and you can just watch me..." She heard Giles clear his throat. Without even looking she could feel him glaring at her so she quickly amended her sentence, "...which will never happen again and even if it did, which it won't, you can't watch." She leaned down and tickled Kevin again. "See how much trouble you get me in, you little monkey."

She stood and leaning down she scooped up the remains of the answering machine and threw it in the trash. Kevin got up and went to stand by Giles. Giles was looking through one of his books trying to find something about black cats. He closed the book keeping his place with one of his fingers. As he was about to speak to Kevin they all heard the door slam next door.

Kevin's eyes lit up. "Mom and Roger are home." He flashed a grin at Giles and was out the door. Giles let out a deep breath and slumped back in his chair.

Buffy came over and sat in his lap. She kissed him and laying his book down he wrapped his arms around her enjoying this opportunity to be alone with her. Kevin had been staying with them for the last three days and as much as

Giles loved Kevin, having him underfoot non-stop had been a tad overwhelming and he was delighted Roger and Linda were home from their weekend away.

The kiss grew more passionate and Giles longed to take Buffy upstairs and make love to her but he knew Roger would be over in a few minutes. Along with everybody else. Giles reluctantly pulled back from the kiss. He grinned as Buffy made a whining noise and he kissed her on the end of her nose. "As much as I hate to put a stop to this we have quite a few people due to arrive shortly on our doorstep."

Buffy looked behind her at the clock on the wall and let out a cry. She leaped off of Giles lap looking down at herself. "I'll never be ready in time." She leant down and kissed him quickly. "I have to go take a shower." And in a flash she was gone.

Giles grinned as he watched her run up the stairs. He kept the grin on his face as he heard Roger's footsteps and he turned to the door. When Roger saw him he grinned back. Giles got up and slapped Roger on the arm. "Good to have you back."

Roger grinned even wider. "Why, was he that terrible?"

Giles let out a soft chuckle. "No, he was fine." He looked at Roger. "It's just good to have you back."

Roger shot Giles an affectionate look. "Thanks. It's good to be back." He helped himself to a beer out of the refrigerator. He offered one to Giles but Giles shook his head. Roger took in all the books. "Are you sleuthing something in particular or just keeping in shape?"

Giles frowned. "Buffy saw quite a few black cats while she was out on patrol." He shook his head. "I don't know if it means anything or not. I suppose a lot of people could just own black cats and they were all out at the same time but it got Buffy's senses tingling. I seem to remember reading something about black cats but I can't put my finger on it." He looked at Roger. "What did Linda decide?"

Roger grinned. "She's staying."

Giles smiled back, thrilled for his friend, and for himself. "I'm glad for you."

"Me too. I was sure she would decide to leave. Not that I could have blamed her especially after that whole vampire thing two weeks ago."

Giles grimaced. He still didn't understand why there had been so many, and why they'd come to the house. If it hadn't been for Buffy and Spike, they would have been in serious trouble. They'd all been in the back yard enjoying a barbecue dinner courtesy of Roger's grill when they'd been attacked by at least a dozen vampires.

Giles and Paul had run inside for weapons while Buffy had started attacking, allowing everyone the opportunity to get inside. Spike had run for Kevin who had been farthest from the house. Dodging vampires he had raced him back to the house and practically thrown him at Roger. Then he had gone to stand at Buffy's side to fight.

Paul had gotten stakes to Buffy and Spike and then stood back with the others as Buffy and Spike started staking vampires and Giles began to behead them with his sword. Within a few minutes, they were all gone and the three of them were wiping dust off their clothing.

There was the usual assortment of scrapes and bruises and Linda had helped Roger patch everyone up. Giles had been impressed with how calm she had been. Linda had heard the stories, she had seen Giles materialize in front of her eyes, she knew a demon had attacked Kevin, but this was the first time she had seen something like this, watched a full fledged attack, up close and personal.

Roger had been petrified that she would leave right then, that night or the next day, but she hadn't. However, it was clear she was working it through, trying to figure out what was right for her, for Kevin, for their future. She and Roger had taken this weekend to talk and to decide.

Giles looked up and smiled as Linda walked in. She smiled back. "Did Roger tell you?"

Giles nodded. "I'm delighted." He shot a mischievous look at Roger. "I'm not sure I understand why you'd choose to stay." He shook his head. "I still haven't figured out why Roger and Paul stay."

Linda walked over to him and placed a kiss on Giles' cheek. She touched him gently on the arm. "I know why they stay." She walked back to Roger and rested her back against his chest, pulling Roger's arms around her. "And I know why I'm staying."

She looked at Kevin running around in the back yard. "I keep thinking that Buffy was only four years older than him when she became the slayer. I can't even conceive of that." She shook her head. "If I had my way I'd have never wanted Kevin to know about any of this. About demons and magic, what a

slayer is, or why there needs to be one. But he does know, and I don't know how to make his life normal again."

She pulled up one of Roger's hands to place a kiss upon it. Roger kissed the top of her head. "So, if he can't have a normal life, the next best thing is to let him have all of you. I can't imagine him having better men in his life, or more loving friends, or stronger protectors, or wiser teachers." She sent Giles a loving look. "He'd already be dead if it wasn't for you."

Giles felt honored by her words and he moved over to her. Roger let Linda go and Giles embraced her, holding her tightly just for a moment.

Buffy chose that moment to walk back into the kitchen. "Hey, you trying to steal my guy?"

Linda laughed and pulled back, grinning at Buffy. "Like I'd have a chance." She leaned back into Roger. "Besides I already have a guy."

Buffy's eyes lit up. "You're staying?" Linda nodded, grinning. Buffy went and stood next to Giles, sighing as he put his arm around her and pulled her up close. Buffy took them all in with a glance. "Yay for us."

They heard a yell and looking out the front window saw Paul and Kevin wrestling in the grass. Roger and Giles exchanged a grin and Giles headed out to get the food that Paul had set off to the side. Linda and Buffy began pulling out plates and cups. Roger went off to his house to get some extra silverware.

Willow and Tara chose that moment to arrive and they helped Giles carry in the food. Paul came in carrying Kevin upside down. He dumped him unceremoniously on the living room carpet. Paul walked over and slapped Giles on the back and then he took in everyone's grins. He grabbed Linda and pulling her in he gave her a big hug. He grinned at her. "I take it you're staying?" She nodded. He hugged her again and then groaned. "God, does that mean Kevin has to stay too?" He grunted as Kevin bulldozed into him. Paul just picked him up, turned him in his arms until he was upside down again and dumped him back on the carpet. Kevin lay there giggling.

Buffy started counting heads. "Who are we missing?"

Giles answered her. "Anya and Xander. They should be here shortly as soon as she closes up."

Kevin piped in. "And Spike." He loved Spike.

Giles rolled his eyes. "Oh, yes, and Spike. We mustn't forget about him." He looked at Kevin. "He won't be here until after dark." Giles gestured to Kevin to assist him. The two of them began to move the books off the kitchen table and re-stack them on the coffee table.

Buffy noticed the activity. "Hey, any kitty news?"

Giles frowned. "Nothing yet." He looked at his books, tempted by them.

Buffy knew that look too well. She walked over to him and pulled him away. "After dinner, Giles. The books aren't going anywhere."

Roger entered the kitchen. He felt something brush against his ankle and he looked down. Whatever it was raced by him and into the house. He frowned and looked at Giles. "Did you guys get a cat while we were gone?"

Giles' eyebrows rose. "No, why do you ask?"

Roger shook his head. "Well, maybe I'm imagining it but I could have sworn a cat just ran by me and into your house."

Buffy started to look nervous. "A black cat?"

Roger nodded. "Yeah, a black cat."

Buffy turned to Giles and gestured to the books. "I think I'm changing my mind." Giles nodded, agreeing, and headed for the couch. Buffy looked at everyone else. "Stay here." She motioned to Paul with her head and she called out. "Here, kitty, kitty." Paul joined her and the two of them started walking through the house.

Tara and Willow joined Giles. "What are we looking for?"

Giles handed each of them a book. "Anything about black cats." As they started looking through their assigned books Linda and Roger started bringing them plates of food.

##

It was just dark by the time Angel, Wes, and Cordy reached Sunnydale. They went to Giles' home first as his was closest. Angel was leaping from the car before Wes even brought it to a complete stop. He rapped on Giles' door. When there was no answer he knocked harder using the flat of his hand. He turned away frustrated. Wes and Cordy had just gotten to the door and he

motioned them back to the car. "Let's go to Buffy's."

Wes drove them over to Buffy's. They didn't even get out of the car. The house was empty; that was clear even from the street. They all looked at the For Sale sign on her lawn, and the Sold sign on top of that. Angel shot a look of confusion at his two companions. "Where are they? I can't believe she'd leave and not tell me."

Cordelia had no idea. According to her vision both Buffy and Giles were still alive, or at least had been until a short time ago. Wes started driving again. "We'll go to his shop. Maybe someone will be there." Angel sat back in his seat, his anxiety growing by the minute.

##

Paul and Buffy searched the whole house but saw no trace of the cat. Buffy threw herself down on the couch next to Giles. "I don't get it. It just up and vanished."

Roger smiled a little sheepishly. "Maybe I imagined it."

Buffy shook her head. "No, I feel...something. Something's not right."

Giles tossed down the book he was looking at onto the coffee table. "I know I'm missing it. It's right here in front of me and I can't for the life of me remember." He took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. Buffy snuggled up next to him and Giles put his arm around her.

Willow finished with the book she had been looking at. "Maybe it got out." She put the book on the coffee table and picked up another one. "Or maybe it's some weird sort of Hellmouth Halloween thing. You know, black cats in the house, vampires in the back yard." She looked up to find everyone staring at her. She blushed. "Well it is Halloween Wednesday." She looked at Giles. "I know you always say that Halloween is generally a demon free time but every Halloween for the past few years has been pretty shiver worthy."

Giles stared at Willow. "It's Halloween next week?"

Buffy smiled at Giles, shaking her head. "Hello? Where have you been?" She gestured to the Halloween decorations she and Kevin had spent a good deal of the day putting up.

Giles nodded absently at her. He was too busy thinking. Removing his arm from around Buffy he sat there, lost in thought. No one interrupted him. Giles

snapped his fingers, stood, and raced up the stairs. Buffy grinned at Willow. "Super research guy to the rescue." The grin came off her face and it was replaced by a look of intense concentration, her hand up to keep anyone from talking. She was off the couch and halfway up the stairs before anyone else registered Giles' cry of pain.

Buffy followed the sounds of the struggle to one of the spare bedrooms. She found Giles trying to fight off a demon, one hand attempting to keep snapping teeth away from his face, the other trying to protect himself from flailing claws. It was almost as large as Giles was, black, like a cross between a cat and a large ape. Buffy barreled into the room and leapt at the demon, her momentum taking it off of Giles.

Paul got to the bedroom next and watched as Giles rolled away and tried to get up. Paul ran to assist him. Giles opened up the closet and pulled out a sword. Paul yelled as the demon tore loose of Buffy and headed for Giles again. Buffy tackled it to the floor yelling. "It wants you Giles, get out of here." Giles had no intention of leaving Buffy alone. The beast shook free again and was almost on top of Giles before he even got the sword up. He plunged the sword into the demon's chest but it didn't even faze it.

It kept coming and only Paul shoving Giles out of the way kept him from being mauled. The demon took Paul down accidentally. It ignored Paul and headed for Giles again. Buffy blind-sided it and she and the demon both slammed into the wall. This time Buffy yelled at Paul. "Paul, get him out of here." Paul grabbed Giles and shoved him through the doorway slamming the door shut behind Giles and locking it. Paul leaped out of the way as the beast tried to break down the door. He pulled his gun out of his holster and while the demon was clawing at the door he raised it and fired the gun at its head.

The beast exploded. Both Buffy and Paul shielded themselves expecting to be covered with its remains. After a few moments they realized that nothing was hitting them at all. It was just gone, without a trace. Buffy stood up and looked at Paul and then at the gun in his hand. She grinned. "Cool."

Paul grinned back and then he grimaced as he heard Giles yelling and slamming on the door. "He's gonna be pissed."

Buffy snorted. "Too bad." She stalked over to the door and opened it. As Giles opened his mouth Buffy started in on him. "Don't even start. It wanted to kill you. It wasn't interested in Paul or me. It didn't even try to hurt us. We couldn't kill it while we were having to protect you." She finished her speech by reaching up and giving him a hard kiss and then she wrapped her arms around him pulling him close.

Giles could feel her trembling. Giles lowered his head to whisper in her ear. "I'm all right, Buffy, really, I'm fine. I'm sorry, I was just afraid for you."

She pulled back and started checking him over. He was badly scratched and there seemed to be a lot of blood. She yelled for Roger only to realize that he was already there. She looked up and saw the rest of them spread out on the staircase. Buffy moved so Roger could start checking out Giles' wounds.

Giles looked at Paul and glared at him. Paul held up his hands, one hand still holding the gun. Giles just rolled his eyes and waved with one of his hands to get Paul to put his own hands down. He looked at the gun and his eyebrows rose. "Were you able to kill it with that?"

Buffy stood next to Paul. "I think he earned his Boy Scout slayer badge today." She grinned up at Paul and Paul grinned back. He returned his gun to his holster.

He shrugged and turned to Giles. "I figured it was worth a try."

Buffy turned to Giles as well. "It just exploded and disappeared. No demon goo or anything." She moved over to Roger. "Is he okay?"

Roger nodded. "The only bad ones are on his arm." He indicated the two deep puncture wounds and the one-inch gashes that continued down from them.

Buffy made a face. "Ouch."

Giles looked down at his arm, puzzled. "It was quite odd. When he first attacked me he just held down that arm and made that wound. When I pulled it away from him he kept trying for that arm again." He looked at Roger. "I think I'd like to sit down now."

Roger started helping him down the stairs and Buffy moved to support his other side. They sat him at the kitchen table and Roger began to clean all the cuts. Kevin was hovering close by and Giles pulled him close so he could sit on his knee while he was being looked after. Kevin leaned back and rested against Giles' chest.

Buffy perched on the table thinking out loud. "Was that the cat? Did it change into that bigger mutant cat thing? Why couldn't Paul and I find it?"

Giles nodded. He ran his free hand through Kevin's hair. "Yes, I imagine it was. I don't know how it managed to hide from you."

Paul spoke up. "Why did it only want you?"

"I don't know that either." He looked at Willow. "Willow, there are some watcher diaries upstairs in the back bedroom. That's where I was heading. They're still in a box. Will you find them and bring them down?" He looked at Paul. "Maybe you should go with her." Paul nodded and he and Willow headed upstairs.

End Part 1

Black Cats 2

Xander hung up the phone. Anya was about to turn the lock when Angel, Wes and Cordy walked through the door. Angel wasted no time in pleasantries. "Where's Buffy?"

Xander blew out a breath. "Hey Angel, long time no see, fine thanks, and you?"

Angel wasn't in the mood. "She could be in danger, where is she?"

"She's home. I just got off the phone with her. She's fine."

"We just went by her home, she isn't living there anymore."

"She's at her new home."

"Why did she move?"

Xander didn't answer for a minute. He realized that Angel had no idea that Giles and Buffy were together now, that they were living together. He didn't intend to be the one who told him. He liked his head where it was. "Bad memories."

Angel thought of Buffy's mom and nodded. "You're sure she's safe? Where's Giles?"

"Giles is there with her. They all are. She said he just got attacked but they're all okay. He asked me to bring him a few books." He motioned to Anya. "We were heading over to Buffy's anyway, for dinner." Xander nodded to Wes and Cordy. "Hey guys."

They both greeted him back. Anya wasn't terribly pleased to see Cordelia.

She moved next to Xander and stood very close to him. Xander smiled at her and squeezed her hand. He spoke to her. "Let me grab those books and we can head on over there." He took in Angel, Wes and Cordy. "I guess you guys should come too, to explain why you're here, why you thought Buffy was in danger." He hoped Giles didn't knock him into tomorrow for bringing Angel over. "Maybe I should call Buffy and let her know."

Cordy shook her head. "No, it will be more fun to surprise her."

Xander silently snorted to himself, speaking softly so only Anya could hear. "Oh, yeah. Lots of fun." He had to admit he wanted to see Angel's face when he caught on to Buffy and Giles. Xander knew it was an evil thought but he couldn't help it. He didn't like Angel, never had, never would.

##

Cordy let out a whistle as they pulled up outside of what was supposedly Buffy's new home. "Jeez, check out the digs. How did she afford this?" Once they saw Xander and Anya getting out of Xander's car, the three of them got out too. Angel followed Xander up to the door. Cordy and Wes started pulling out the books that Wes had stuffed in the trunk.

Giles was just beginning to go through the books that Willow and Paul had brought down, Kevin still on his knee. He looked up at the brief knock and smiled as Xander and Anya breezed through the door. Giles pulled a few more volumes out, checking for dates.

Xander pasted a smile on his face and in a false cheery voice he gestured back to the door. "Look guys, company."

Buffy looked up and her jaw dropped. "Angel?"

Giles went quite still as Buffy spoke his name. Roger and Paul's heads snapped up. Giles knew it was Angel and not Angelus, or Xander wouldn't have entered so casually but he couldn't stop his heart from speeding up or the way his jaw clenched. Giles stood, sliding Kevin off his knee. He instinctively pushed Kevin behind him. Without consciously thinking about it both Roger and Paul got up and moved until they stood on each side of Giles.

Buffy swung her head to Giles. She saw how pale he had gotten, and how tense he was. Buffy was ashamed that it was the first time she had ever really paid attention to the affect Angel had on Giles. Watching Roger and Paul she knew that before Angel got anywhere near Giles that he'd have to go through both of them first. She felt a surge of love for each of them. They

were watching Angel and watching her, waiting to see what she would do.

Buffy looked back at Angel and he was still looking at her, clearly waiting for an invitation. He spoke softly. "Buffy, will you invite me in?"

Just then, Spike sauntered into the living room. He'd entered through the kitchen. He saw Kevin standing behind Giles and he snuck up on him and grabbed him. Kevin let out a yelp and Giles jumped. He turned quickly and when he saw Spike he let out a breath. "Spike, you scared the living daylights out of me."

Spike grinned, unrepentant. "Sorry mate. What's everyone so tense for anyway?" He looked up and saw Angel. He scowled. "Oh bugger, it's you." He turned his back on Angel and continued his harassment of Kevin. Kevin giggled, trying to fight back.

Angel's eyes could hardly hide his dismay at the fact that Spike clearly had free access to Buffy's home. Angel had seen Giles push the young boy behind him when Giles had seen him at the door. But right now, Giles was completely ignoring Spike and the same boy, clearly unconcerned that Spike might hurt him.

Angel looked again at Buffy and she saw the hurt in his eyes. She glanced quickly at Giles and then back at Angel. Buffy hated to do it because she knew it would hurt his feelings terribly and possibly make him feel as if she was betraying him. But she had no choice; it was clear what she had to do. It had been clear since she'd seen him at the door.

Buffy turned to Giles and waited until he was looking at her. Then with the smallest of nods and a smile, she left the choice up to him. Giles saw the gift she was giving him and he softly smiled at her. He turned back to Angel and spoke. "Angel, please, come on in."

As Angel stepped across the threshold, Wes showed up, holding Cordy tightly against him. "Angel, she had another vision."

Angel lifted Cordy up in his arms and carried her over to the couch. He looked up and caught Willow's eye. "Can you get me a wet cloth?"

Willow nodded and headed for the kitchen. Both Giles and Buffy walked over to the couch. Giles sat on the arm of the couch, Buffy standing by his side. They both watched Cordy as she lay on the couch, pale and clearly in pain.

Wes had gone back out to get the books. As he walked in he looked behind him, a puzzled expression on his face. He glanced over at Buffy. "Do you

own cats?"

Buffy looked alarmed. "No, why?"

Wes pointed outside with his chin. "Well, there are quite a few black cats on your front lawn." He let out a little yelp as he felt something down by his feet. "Oh, there's one now."

Buffy yelled at Spike. "Spike, stop that cat." She turned and gestured to Wes. "Shut the door, now."

Spike lunged for the cat and caught him by the scruff of its neck. He held it up looking at Buffy. "What am I doing with this?"

Buffy walked over to it, looking at it carefully. It looked just like a house cat. She flashed a confused look at Giles. Giles approached it a bit more gingerly. Buffy made sure that she stayed between Giles and the cat. Paul had one hand on his gun. As Giles came closer the cat began to hiss and yowl and it tried to scratch Spike to get free. Spike just held on tighter. Spike looked at Giles. "Jesus, watcher, what did you do, steal its litter box?"

Cordy had sat up by now and she, Angel and Wes were watching the cat as it continued to hiss at Giles. Buffy turned to them. "One of these cats got in the house a little while ago and turned into a big cat thingy that attacked Giles."

Cordy nodded. "I saw that in my vision, down in LA. How did you stop it? In my vision you couldn't."

Buffy indicated Paul with her chin. "He shot it."

Cordy looked at Paul, saw the hand on his gun. She realized she didn't know him, actually didn't know several of the people in the room. "Who's he?"

Buffy shook her head. "We'll do introductions in a minute. What do we do with Felix here?"

Giles scrunched his face up. He wasn't really sure. "I guess just put him outside for now. If there are several of them out there, killing the one doesn't seem as if it will do much good." He gestured at the cat and as his hand moved closer the cat extended a paw, claws extended. It swiped at Giles. Buffy grabbed Giles' arm out of harm's way. Giles crossed his arms over his chest. He finished the thought he had intended to go with his gesture. "Plus, despite its clear animosity for me, it looks just like a regular cat." He didn't feel that comfortable just killing a cat.

Buffy wasn't sure she liked Giles' suggestion but she didn't have one of her own. She looked at the group. "Okay, Xander, open the door when I say so. Everyone, stay sharp in case any more try and get in. Spike, go stand by the door." She looked at Paul and flashed him a quick grin. "Ready, Boy Scout?" Paul grinned back and pulled his gun out, ready to use it if it should prove necessary.

Cordelia watched Paul, wondering who the hell he was. Her eyes wandered over him, taking in his stance, his gun, the determination in his eyes. She couldn't help letting out a small sigh.

Spike moved right next to the door. Xander had his hand on the doorknob. At Buffy's signal he opened the door. Spike threw the cat outside and Xander slammed the door shut. Xander walked over to the window and looked outside. "Jesus." He let the curtain fall back. He sent Buffy a very alarmed look.

She walked over to join him by the window and took a look. "Oh God. Giles." Giles moved to stand next to Buffy. Then everyone went to the windows and looked out. There were cats everywhere, surrounding the house. Buffy couldn't look away. She saw Giles' death in each one of them. She spoke to them all. "No one opens a door or a window until we figure out what's going on."

Linda pulled away and walked over to Roger. "You know what this reminds me of?" He shook his head. She continued. "Remember last Halloween? You wanted to get me all scared so you told me that ghost story your dad had told you. It was all about black cats turning into demons, how they attacked that guy and how the girl tried to save him." Linda was trying to remember. "Oh, what was her name, Colleen, or Collette?"

Paul turned to Roger. "God, she's right. It is just like that story dad told us." He turned to Giles. "When dad's mind started to go he began to tell us the most amazing stories. We weren't sure why, but they scared the bejeezus out of us and we loved them. I remember this one particularly because everyone died in it. They didn't all end badly, in fact, in most of them, that girl, and I think her name was Colleen, saved the day. Her and her friend Patrick."

Giles let out a gasp and he walked quickly across the room to the box of diaries. He searched for a certain one and once he found it he started flipping through the pages. He looked at Paul. "Was your father a police officer?" Paul nodded. "In Ireland?"

Paul nodded again. "Yes, he was a policeman in Ireland before he moved to the United States and met mom."

Giles shook his head in disbelief. "What was his name?"

Paul walked over to Giles. "Shaun Erikson. Why?"

Giles handed the diary to Paul. He looked over at Roger and then back at Paul. "I can't believe I didn't make the connection before. Your father worked with a slayer. Her name was Colleen and her watcher's name was Patrick."

Paul's jaw dropped and he looked down at the book in his hand. A slow grin started to form on his face. "Dad worked with a slayer?" He sat down. "Man, all those stories he told. They must have been slayer and watcher stories." He looked up at Giles. "There was so much about his life in Ireland he'd never tell us."

Roger walked over to join Paul. He looked at Giles too. "After mom died, he started to, I don't know, fade, I guess. He would tell us these stories. Some days when we were visiting with him he'd talk for hours, one story after another. Each one more fantastic and unbelievable than the last." He barked out a laugh. "And here we are, living it."

Wes walked over. "I hate to interrupt but perhaps we should find out what Cordy's last vision was, and perhaps attempt to figure out what's going on."

Giles shook his head. "Of course, Wes. You're quite right." He walked back over to Cordy, who was sitting on the couch. "Cordelia, are you feeling better? Are you able to tell us what you saw?"

Cordy nodded, still massaging her temples with her index fingers. She gestured outside with one of her thumbs. "It seems a bit unnecessary now. It was another attack by the same sort of cat thing. It left a mark on your arm. And there were lots of black cats." She held the curtain open for a moment and everyone was momentarily transfixed by the glitter of cat eyes outside.

Wes was looking through the box of diaries. He turned to Cordy. "What kind of mark?"

Cordy made a swoop on her forearm. "Kind of like the letter 'C'."

Wes nodded and pursed his lips, thinking. "The letter 'C'." Both he and Giles looked at each other at the same time, twin looks of alarm on their faces. They both spoke. "The mark of the crescent moon."

They both headed for the couch, Giles to his books on the coffee table, Wes to the pile of books he had brought that were on the floor nearby. Cordy got out of the way. Paul smiled as Giles switched into research mode. He loved to watch him like this. He had never known anyone with the ability to concentrate the way Giles did. It was as if the outside world ceased to exist and he alone was privy to a private universe that was so clear to him in the books before him. Buffy was one of the few things with the ability to distract him.

Paul noticed the pretty brunette as she stayed next to the couch and looked out the window. He was wondering who she was as well, and how she fit in with this group. He peered around the room looking for Angel and found him trying to talk to Buffy. Paul watched him, attempting to not just hate him on sight for everything he had done to the people he considered his family at this point. He casually moved a little closer.

Angel touched Buffy on the arm. "Buffy."

Buffy turned and smiled. "Angel. It's good to see you."

Angel smiled at that, then he furrowed his brow. "Why was Giles able to invite me in? I thought you lived here."

Cordy had walked over and joined the conversation. "Yeah, and how'd you afford a place like this?" She looked around. "This is pretty nice."

Buffy grinned and pointed at Roger who had looked up at the same moment. He headed over her way at the gesture. "You can thank the real estate guru here for that."

"What are you thanking me for?"

"This house. The deal you got Giles."

Roger laughed. Angel frowned. "I thought this was your place."

Buffy nodded. "It is but Giles bought it."

Angel's eyebrows rose. "Giles bought you a house?"

Buffy shook her head. "He bought us a house. We both live here." She took in the house with a gesture. "We needed a bigger place, for all his books, for me to train. To fit everyone in." She grinned at Roger and Paul at that.

Cordy moved closer. "Which brings me back to my first question. Who are

you guys?"

Buffy pointed at Roger. "Roger Erikson." She pointed at Paul. "Paul Erikson. Brothers, friends of Giles', and now family." She swung her chin back to Roger. "He's a doctor and now he takes of us too. And Paul..." She held her hand out to him and he came in close sneaking his arm around her waist. "He's the Chief of Police here in Sunnydale. I had the privilege of meeting him one night when he arrested me and threw me into a cell."

Paul rolled his eyes. "You had to tell them that."

Buffy grinned impishly. "It's my favourite story." He pinched her side and she let out a shriek. "Stop that." He just pinched her again.

Both Cordy and Angel watched the two of them play. Angel's eyes darkened and Cordy felt a stab of disappointment. Buffy linked her arm through Paul's and gestured to Cordy. "Cordelia Chase. She went to high school with us and now works with Angel and Wes in LA. They're sort of in the demon PI business, Angel Investigations. Cordy gets these visions of people who need help and they help." Buffy turned her eyes to Angel. "And this is Angel."

Angel nodded to both Roger and Paul and they nodded back. Angel and Paul sized each other up. Buffy continued with the introductions, oblivious. She pointed at Linda. "That's Linda, she's Roger's sweetie, also a doctor, and Kevin..." She looked for him. "Ah, and Kevin, who is currently being massacred by Spike, is her son. The three of them live next door."

Paul looked over at Giles to see that he was in a heated discussion with Wes. Neither of them looked very happy. He gave Buffy a gentle squeeze and he headed over to Giles.

Angel followed him with his eyes and then turned back to Buffy. "Where does he live?"

"Who?"

"Paul."

"At his house."

"He doesn't mind that you live here with Giles?"

Buffy looked confused. "Why would he care about that?" She was also distracted by the discussion going on at the couch. She headed over that way. Wes had gotten up to retrieve the box of watcher diaries and both he

and Giles were pulling them all out, looking for specific dates. She went and sat next to Giles. "What's up?"

Giles hesitated then he reached for a book that was lying open on the coffee table. "We found a prophecy."

End Part 2

Black Cats 3

Buffy let out a small groan. "I hate prophecies." She looked at Giles, her face prepared for bad news. "Is it a bad one?"

"Yes, well, it is rather bad."

Wes picked up the story. "It appears to be a recurring prophecy. It states that it occurs every half cycle. The last time that we know of was in Ireland when your father was there." He made a gesture to Paul and Roger.

Buffy looked nervously at Paul and Roger and then back at Giles. "Paul said that everyone died. Did everyone die?"

Giles nodded. "Not everyone died, clearly, but both the slayer and the watcher did."

Xander pointed at the book. "So what's the prophecy big guy? You gonna share?"

Giles nodded. Everyone had gathered around by this time, including Spike. Giles looked around for Kevin and saw that he was curled up fast asleep in one of the chairs in the family room, Spike having worn him out. Speaking softly, he read the prophecy.

Every half cycle she rises
Every half cycle she feeds
First to come will be the vampyr to mark the site
Then the hordes descend
To mark the one who watches with the sign of the crescent moon
Making way for the Sakmet demon
On All Hallow's Eve
The one who watches will fade
She who slays will take his strength, destroying him
Then Sakmet will feast on her strength
Once fed Sakmet will return to her world

Until she rises to feed once again

Giles put the book back down and sat back on the couch. The room was silent. Spike turned the book around so he could reread it. He pursed his lips. "Well, that explains the vampires."

Angel looked at Spike. "What do you mean?"

Xander answered him. "A couple of weeks ago, a bunch of vampires showed up here, in the back yard. None of us could figure out why." He looked confused. "It still doesn't make sense. Why would they send so many? And how were they planning to 'mark the site'?"

Tara answered. "Maybe because there were so many of us there?" She did the math. "There are eleven of us now."

Xander looked to Buffy for confirmation and Buffy just grimaced. "Don't look at me. Do you think I'm knowledge girl about ultra weird vampire activity?" She pointed at Giles. "That's his job, he's knowledge guy." She prodded Giles.

Giles looked at her. "Yes, and thank you. But unfortunately I have no idea."

Xander gestured outside. "So are we thinking that the cats are the hordes?"

Wes nodded. "So it would appear."

Buffy reached for Giles' arm and turned his forearm showing the gashes. "Is that what that cat thing was trying to do to you? Mark you?" She caught Giles' eyes. "But they didn't, right? I mean, this isn't a crescent moon. We killed it before it could mark you."

Xander looked at Giles' arm. "Yeah, it's more of a cuh moon, you know, without the escent part."

Giles just stared at Xander for a moment and then he nodded. "It does appear that he or it was unsuccessful." He pointed outside with his chin. "However, there seem to be no shortage of volunteers to try again."

Buffy was still holding his arm. "But, if we keep them away from you, if they can't mark you, maybe this can't come true. You won't die and I won't become kitty chow."

Before Giles could answer Willow spoke up. "Me and Tara have been talking about that. We could put up wards to keep them out. That way we can use

the doors without having to worry about letting any of them in."

Buffy looked at her. "Do it." Willow nodded and she and Tara put their heads together to determine what they would need. Buffy turned back to Giles. "What did that mean about me destroying you? I really didn't like that part."

Paul answered that question. "According to what my dad told us, the watcher, or Patrick started to grow weak, and as he grew weaker, she kept getting stronger, as if somehow she was siphoning his life force away. He died and she went out to kill the demon in charge and they just found her body the next day." He flipped through the diary that spoke of his father. Paul grimaced as he read the last words. He held it up. "My dad made the last couple of entries. I recognize his writing." He looked at the writing with a furrowed brow. "It's odd though, it cuts off in mid-sentence." He looked at Buffy, worry and apology in his eyes. "I don't know if that's what really happened. I haven't read it, other than this last bit."

Giles took his glasses off and threw them on the coffee table. "If I recall, that's a pretty accurate rendition." He looked at Wes who had just made a small noise of discovery. "Did you find another one?"

Wes was holding a couple of books in his hand. "Yes, apparently the half cycle must mean every 50 years. There are diaries here from 100 and 150 years ago. Fascinating really, clearly the same event was taking place and yet told from such different perspectives and times in history I don't know that I would have guessed it was the same demon."

Buffy rolled her eyes. "Skip the history lesson, what happened?"

Wes winced. "Well, they all died too, in essentially the same way. Or at least that's what it looks like. With the exception of that one..." He pointed to the book in Paul's hands, "...they cut off rather suddenly, you know, when the watcher..." His voice tapered off.

Buffy moaned and buried her face in Giles' chest. He wrapped his arms around her and kissed the top of her head. Angel glanced at Paul to see how he felt about the way Giles was holding Buffy. Angel knew he didn't like it. Paul had started pacing. "Okay, so other than the marking business, this is all supposed to happen on Halloween?" He let out a long breath at Wes' nod. "So that gives us three days to figure this out." He threw himself down next to Cordelia. "I hate it when it's vague like this. I like it when I can just shoot something."

She bit back a grin, he sounded so much like Buffy. She motioned to the couch, curious. "That doesn't bother you?"

He followed her gesture to where Giles and Buffy were sitting. "Hell, yeah, it bothers me."

"Why don't you do something about it?"

"Like what? That's Giles' job. I just wait for him to tell me what to do."

"It's his job to play kissyface with your girlfriend?"

Paul shook his head. "I'm sorry. I lost the plot somewhere. What are you talking about?"

"Buffy."

"Buffy what?" Paul's eyes widened as he figured it out and he put his hand up to stop her. "Are you thinking that Buffy is my...?" He pointed to his chest.

"She's not?"

Paul shook his head and pointed at Buffy and Giles. "Look at them."

Cordelia looked at Buffy and Giles, really looked. She saw the way they were touching, the way they were softly talking to each other. Her jaw dropped. "Buffy and Giles?" Paul nodded. She looked at Paul. "So you're not...?" Paul shook his head. She continued. "Not with anyone?" He shook his head again. She grinned at him. "Oh." He grinned back.

Buffy finally got up and went into the kitchen to make tea for Giles. Angel followed her in and Xander eavesdropped. It was clear that Angel obviously couldn't see what was staring him in the face. Angel watched as Buffy started putting water in the kettle. Angel spoke. "Does he treat you well?"

She flashed him a puzzled look. "Does who treat me well?"

"Paul."

She sent him another puzzled look. "Yeah, I guess." She pulled out some mugs. She stopped and turning around, she leaned against the counter. "Why?"

"I just want to make sure you're happy."

Buffy grinned and then she frowned. "Well, apart from the prophecy thing I've never been happier." She smiled a little sadly at Angel. "Really, Angel, I'm

fine. You don't need to worry about me."

Angel wasn't convinced. "How long have you known him?"

"Are we back to Paul again?" At his puzzled nod she thought for a minute.

"Well, Giles has known him and Roger for about nine months and I've known them for a little over two." She double-checked her math and then nodded.

"Yeah, that's about right."

"That doesn't seem like a very long time."

"For what?"

"For you to be so sure."

Buffy scrunched her face up. "Are we having the same conversation? Because I'm kinda lost." Outside the door Xander grinned. He decided it was time for him to help. He walked into the kitchen.

Xander nodded at Angel and Buffy. "So, Buffy, seeing as how everyone's stuck here until we can safely open the doors how do you want to handle sleeping arrangements?"

Buffy bit her lip. "How long will it take Willow and Tara to set up those ward thingies?"

"They've already started but it will take them several hours." Xander hesitated, his face scrunched up. "Are you willing for us to try and open the doors once? That way we can get half of us over to Roger's. You know, Roger, Linda, Kevin, Paul."

Buffy shook her head, determined. "No, no open doors of any kind. Besides, you know Paul won't go."

Angel spoke up. "Because of you?"

She shook her head again. "No, because of Giles."

Angel's eyebrows rose. "Because of Giles?"

Buffy held up one hand, her index and middle finger crossed. "Paul and Giles are like this. I mean, Roger is too, but when there's any trouble, anything that might be threatening to Giles, Paul sticks to him like glue."

Angel frowned. "He doesn't try and protect you?"

Buffy shook her head. "Giles protects me, Paul protects Giles." She flashed him a tight-lipped smile. "Trust me, it's a good system. And wherever Paul is, usually Spike's there too, and if he's not he's with Kevin."

Angel's eyes darkened. "You don't worry about Spike?"

Buffy considered his words. "No, actually, we don't. He's kind of grown on us, and we've sort of grown on him. He majorly saved Giles' life a couple of months ago and Kevin's a couple of weeks ago." She turned to Xander and repeated herself. "No open doors. There's too many of them out there. And all it would take is one. I'll just have to get out a bunch of blankets and pillows."

Xander nodded. It was time to drop a major hint. He started musing about sleeping arrangements. "So, you guys have your bedroom, Roger, Linda, and Kevin can have one of the spare rooms. We could put Cordy in the last one. Then that leaves 2 couches and floor space for me and Anya, Spike, Wes, and..." Xander looked at Angel to make sure he was listening, "...and Paul."

Angel shook his head. There was one unaccounted for. "Doesn't Paul..." He stopped, not really wanting to verbalize that thought. "Where does Giles sleep? Where's his room?"

Buffy was distracted making Giles' tea and just threw it out, offhandedly. "He sleeps with me." She frowned and looked at Xander. "I don't imagine Giles will sleep though. He'll probably be researching all night. So, I could stay with him on the couch and you and Anya could have our bedroom, or we could put Roger, Linda and Kevin in there." She shrugged and tapped Xander on the shoulder with a spatula. "I dub thee room man. I'm putting you in charge of sleeping arrangements." With that she picked up Giles' tea and headed out of the kitchen.

Xander bit off a grin as he watched the facts sink in. When Xander saw Angel sort of sag against the counter he left the kitchen too, in search of blankets and pillows.

Angel couldn't believe it. In fact, he didn't believe it. He walked out of the kitchen and back into the living room, standing out of sight, watching Buffy and Giles.

Buffy sat down and called Giles' name. He ignored her, lost in his research. She put down his tea and kissed his cheek, and then blew in his ear. He absent-mindedly raised a hand to brush the sensation away and found his

hand touching her face. He lifted his eyes away from his book and turned his head to face hers. He softly smiled at her, brushing a strand of hair off her face and tucking it behind her ear. He leaned forwards and pressed a quick kiss to her lips. "Hey."

She smiled at him. "Hey back." She gestured to the tea. "I brought you some tea."

He followed her gesture and his eyes lit up. "Lovely." He reached for it and took a sip. He sat back and she rested her head on his shoulder. He wrapped an arm around her pulling her in close while he took a moment to drink his tea. Wes chose that moment to lift his head up from his book. He did a double take when he saw Buffy and Giles together. The hug earlier had been understandable. They had just been told about their potential deaths. But this... Giles turned his head to Wes. "Find anything new?" His eyes dared Wes to say something.

Wes' eyes widened and he quickly shook his head. "No, no, nothing, nothing yet." Giles nodded his head and took one last sip of his tea. He put his cup down and picked up the book he had been looking at. Buffy settled in, making herself more comfortable and once she stopped shifting Giles began reading once again.

Angel sighed. Everything about the tension in the air regarding his arrival was starting to make a little more sense, and he didn't like it. Without him even being aware of what was going on Buffy had made her allegiance plain. He really needed to be alone for a while. Walking back into the kitchen he made as if to open the door to leave. Spike was there before he even got the knob turned. "Don't open that door."

Angel scowled at Spike. "I won't let any of the cats in."

"I don't care. Buffy said no one opens a door, so no one opens a door and that includes you." He grinned at Angel. "There's a basement if you need to go find some place dark to lick your wounds."

Angel scowled again. Nothing much ever did get past Spike. He gestured towards the living room with his hand. "How long...?"

Spike thought for a minute. "A couple of months."

"Is he good to her?"

Spike rolled his eyes. "Not that it's any of your bloody business, but yes, he's better to her than you ever were, mate."

Anger momentarily lit Angel's eyes and then he just sighed again. "Where's the basement?"

Spike grinned and pointed to the door kitty corner from the kitchen. "Down there." Angel simply turned and headed downstairs, closing the door behind him. Spike gave the door the finger and then continued his prowling around the house, making sure no one forgot and tried to open a door. He didn't fancy chasing any more bad tempered cats down.

##

It took them several hours but finally Willow and Tara completed placing the wards up in the house. The next step was to see if it worked. Spike woke up Buffy who had fallen asleep, her head on Giles' thigh. "Buffy, we need to see if the wards worked. Stay sharp over your watcher, just in case..." Buffy rubbed the sleep out of her eyes and nodded.

She looked at Giles, who had fallen asleep, his head against the back of the couch. Buffy smiled at him lovingly. She slipped the book he had been reading out of his hands and moved forward to lay him down, lifting his legs up. She slipped a pillow under his head and then heard Spike warning her that he was opening the door. Paul had woken up as well and he moved to stand in front of Giles as well.

Spike opened the door and the cats charged, a dozen of them running for the door. Spike braced to catch them but they hit an invisible barrier and were unable to enter. They tried over and over again, yowling and hissing with frustration. Buffy grimaced at their unbridled efforts to gain entry. She looked at Willow. "How long will the wards last?"

"They should last as long as we need them. Certainly through Wednesday." Willow looked at Giles sleeping on the couch and smiled. "It shouldn't matter after that, right?"

Buffy nodded defiantly. "Right." The cats were making her nervous and she gestured at Spike to shut the door. Spike was more than happy to oblige. She looked back at Willow. "And no one can mess with the wards?"

Willow wrinkled her nose. "They can't get in unless someone invites them in and no one here is going to do that. It's kind of like an uninvite spell."

Buffy looked around at the group. "Okay. So we should be all right." She looked at Paul. "Maybe you could take people over to Roger's so they can

actually sleep on beds and couches instead of crashing on the floor."

Paul stood and nodded. He frowned at Buffy. "Though I'm coming back here."

Buffy smiled. "I know you are." Paul smiled back and he rounded up Wes, Willow, and Tara. Stepping their way through cats that completely ignored them, he led them over to his brother's house. Spike would have accompanied them but Buffy called him over. She was standing at one of the windows in the living room, staring out at an ocean of black cats. The front yard was undulating with them. Spike stood next to her. Buffy spoke without looking up at him. "You have to help me watch him. You have to make sure he doesn't leave the house. He's not always good at noticing stuff. He could forget and be out a door faster than I can stop him." She did look up at him then, fear on her face.

Angel had come upstairs, curious when he had heard the door open for the second time. He watched Spike and Buffy by the window. Spike put a hand on her shoulder. "I'll be here, slayer. I'll help you watch him. We all will." Buffy smiled at him and they stood like that at the window for a minute.

In time Buffy moved away and sat on the couch. She ran her fingers lightly down Giles' face, drinking him in, trying to push away the fear of losing him. She lay down on her side and nestled her back into his chest. Even in his sleep his arm moved around her, pulling her in closer. She closed her eyes and tried to sleep.

Spike watched them both for a minute and then reaching for one of the blankets on the floor he covered them both with it. He shook his head at his own softness. Turning to head into the kitchen he saw Angel standing there. He brushed past him and continued his way towards the kitchen. Angel followed him. Angel watched while Spike opened the refrigerator reaching down into the crisper. He pulled out a bag of blood. Holding it up he looked at Angel. "Hungry?"

Angel's eyebrows rose. "They let you keep blood here?"

Spike grinned. "Giles keeps it for me. He's quite the host."

Angel's eyebrows remained high. "Giles gets blood for you?"

Spike shook his head. "Roger gets it from the hospital."

"He steals blood for you?" Angel's voice was high in disbelief.

"No." He held the bag up for Angel's inspection. "It's expired. They just give it to him. He told them he's doing experiments with it." He bit into the bag and poured it into a mug, then put it in the microwave. "It tastes a bit stale, but it does the trick. And it's a hell of a lot better than pork blood." When the microwave dinged he pulled the cup out and stuck his finger in it. Spike made a happy sigh. "Perfect." He took a drink and looked at Angel. "Sure you don't want some?" He knew the fact that he was so accepted here was grating on Angel and Spike was enjoying himself tremendously.

Angel leaned against the counter. "Things have changed here a lot lately."

Spike took another healthy swallow. "That they have, mate, that they have."

Angel stood up and headed for the door. "Tell Buffy I'll be back tomorrow night. I want to check around, see what's going on." He pointed outside, trying to dig at Spike. "That's where we can both be doing the most good. We ought to be out there, trying to help."

Spike just grinned, unrepentant. "Well, you go on and make yourself useful. Buffy just asked me to stick close and help her keep an eye on Giles. Seems as if she wants someone around she can trust." He drained his cup and walked to the sink to rinse it out and put it in the dishwasher. When he turned around again Angel was gone. Spike pursed his lips and grinned, heading back into the living room. He pulled a chair into the corner where the sunlight wouldn't reach come daylight and he sat down where he could watch Giles and Buffy.

End Part 3

Black Cats 4

The day passed uneventfully. More books were brought to the house from the Magic Box and Wes and Giles poured through them all, looking for anything that might help. Giles made Willow, Tara and Buffy go to classes and finally Buffy agreed but only because Spike was staying and Paul promised to drop by whenever he could. During the day many of the cats had vanished as if they knew that their appearance would not go unnoticed by others in daylight. But now that it was dark again they were back in full numbers. The cats continued their relentless efforts to reach Giles. Whenever anyone left the house they had to wade through masses of them.

Giles breathed a sigh of relief. It was finally quiet again. He, Spike and Paul were alone for the moment. Everyone else was at Roger's cooking dinner.

Giles had kicked them all out when the noise level was distracting even him from his research. He reached for another book when he heard the knock at the door. Giles frowned wondering who would be knocking. Everyone usually just barrelled their way in without bothering to knock.

Paul got up to answer it and once open he stepped back so Giles could see it was Angel. Angel tried to get in but he was unable to. He turned a confused look to Giles, trying to hide his dismay at the thought that he'd been uninvited. Giles looked equally confused. Spike had an uneasy feeling about the whole situation and he started to warn Giles not to let him in at the same time Giles issued another invitation.

Over at Roger's house, Cordy grabbed her head and let out a moan. Everyone looked at her waiting for the pain to pass so she could tell them what she was seeing. Willow went to get a cool cloth.

When Angel stepped across the threshold, the wards came down. Allowing one demon to pass allowed them all. Cats swarmed into the living room all heading towards Giles. Several of them started changing into their demon shape. Paul pulled his gun out and started firing. He started aiming at their heads when he realized that bullets landing elsewhere seemed to have no affect. Spike tried to get to Giles, kicking cats out of his way, sending the larger demons Paul's way. Angel slammed the door shut and started fighting his way in too, trying to stay out of Paul's way as he fired at the demons.

Cordy snapped her head up and looked at Buffy. She pointed to the house next door. "Go." She gasped it out. "Go, Giles is in trouble." Then they heard the gunshots.

Giles let out a cry as the cats swarmed in. Paul kept shooting but there were too many of them. There were several of them on Giles now and they were holding him down. The remainder of the cats started to fight against Giles' protectors, trying to keep them from reaching him.

Spike ignored the cat scratches, shoving them away, growing more and more alarmed as he realized he could hardly see Giles' body. Paul rammed another clip into his gun and started firing again. His heart was hammering in his chest as he watched more and more of the cats turn into demons.

Buffy ran into the house and more cats raced in. Everyone was behind her except for Linda, Kevin and Cordy. Buffy screamed in anger when she saw what was happening and she started fighting her way towards Giles, ignoring the pain as the cats began to fight her in earnest to keep her away.

The whole thing seemed to last forever but from the time Angel walked across

the threshold less than a minute had passed, not much more than thirty seconds. One of the demons on the couch raised its head and let out a shrill cry. Paul shot it. As it exploded and vanished, all the cats vanished at the same time.

The suddenness of their disappearance startled everyone. Then all eyes snapped to Giles and Buffy let out a cry. She ran to him, falling to her knees beside him. Everywhere he had skin showing there were multiple scratch wounds. And there on his forearm, bleeding profusely, was the mark of the crescent moon.

Mindless of the blood Buffy moved to sit on the couch cradling Giles' head in her lap. Roger pressed his hand tightly against the wound on Giles' forearm in an attempt to stop the bleeding. With his other hand he felt for a pulse. He nodded to Buffy and she felt light-headed with relief. Roger snapped out some orders to anyone listening to get his medical kit, some water and towels. Xander and Willow got up and ran.

Giles began to stir. His eyes snapped open and he began to fight. Buffy held him still speaking to him. "Giles, it's all right. It's just me and Roger. They're gone." Giles let out a relieved gasp and relaxed. Buffy looked up at Spike. "What happened? How did they get in?"

Spike scowled but Angel answered. "It was me." At Buffy's stunned look he put up his hands. "I didn't know it would happen, I swear."

Giles tried to sit up and Buffy held him down again. Giles didn't fight her. He shook his head. "No, it's my fault. I didn't even question why Angel couldn't get in. I should have realized that the wards were keeping Angel out and that by inviting him in that I would remove them." He looked at Angel. "It's not your fault." Angel didn't look like that made him feel any better.

Paul shot Buffy a helpless look. "There were too many of them. We all tried." He included Spike and Angel in a gesture. "But we couldn't kill them all. They were on him so fast." He looked down at Giles and at the mark on his arm and cursed.

Xander had returned with the requested supplies. Giles winced as Roger removed his hand from his forearm. Roger began to clean the wound to try and get a better look at it. Giles lifted his head to look at his arm and he grimaced when he saw the mark. He dropped his head back down into Buffy's lap and closed his eyes. Buffy softly ran her hand through his hair.

Roger put a pressure bandage on Giles' forearm and began to clean off all the other wounds. Willow was assisting him and was handing him wet gauze.

Paul moved to the window and pushed the curtain aside. He stared out at the empty front yard. All the cats were gone.

Cordy had recovered from the effects of her vision and she walked into Buffy and Giles' home. She made her way to the couch. When she saw the bandage on Giles' arm she looked at Buffy. "The moon mark?" Buffy nodded, tears in her eyes. Cordy sat on the coffee table after pushing some books aside. "Well that sucks." Paul wholeheartedly agreed with her.

Buffy frowned down at Giles. He was being entirely too quiet for her tastes. "Giles, are you okay?"

She had to ask again before he even tried to open his eyes. It seemed a struggle for him to even speak. His words were a little slurry. "Fine, I'm fine. Just a bit tired." His eyes closed again.

Buffy looked at Roger. "Is that okay? Should he be so tired? He usually sort of bounces back after getting injured."

Roger shook his head. "I don't know. He didn't get sleepy the last time he was attacked so I don't think there was any sort of chemical in their claws." He looked at Buffy. "Plus you have several scratches and you're not sleepy."

Buffy considered this. "No, I'm not. In fact I'm feeling quite wired." She could barely stand to stay sitting. She felt like she was jumping out of her skin.

Roger frowned. "How wired?"

She frowned back. "Way wired." Suddenly her eyes widened and she looked at Roger and then at Wes with some alarm. "Is it happening already? Am I taking his strength, like in the prophecy?"

Roger's lips tightened. "Well, it certainly would explain why he's like this."

Wes chimed in. "And the prophecy wasn't very clear as to when the process would start. I think we were all assuming it would happen on Halloween but I suppose it would make sense for the transfer to start as soon as the watcher was marked." He looked at Giles and then up at Buffy. "Or maybe it's because you and he are so close, linked as it were. Maybe it makes the transfer easier."

Buffy made a nervous sound. She looked at Giles too, an expression of profound unhappiness on her face. "It said I would destroy him."

Paul turned from the window. "You need to stop Sakmet. Now. Before Halloween. Before you take all his energy, before she can feed from you." His eyes shared her unhappiness. "Otherwise, you'll both die." Buffy and Paul stared at each other for a few moments and then she nodded. Paul looked at Roger. "Are you on call?" Roger shook his head. "Let me have your phone." Roger unclipped it and handed it to Paul. Paul handed it to Buffy. "Call if you need back up. I can get officers to help search if you need more people. It's also possible she can be shot seeing as her helpers could. If that's the case, let's shoot her, and not risk her getting her hands on you."

Buffy nodded and looked up. Both Spike and Angel were poised to go with her. She kissed Giles on the forehead and then carefully slid out, placing his head on a pillow. With one last look at Giles the three of them headed out. Paul started looking through the books surrounding Cordy. When he found the diary that spoke of his father's involvement in the last incident he picked it up. He hoped that somewhere in there, especially in his father's entries, that he might find something that Giles and Wes had missed.

Between Roger and Xander they managed to get Giles upstairs when he woke again. He fell asleep immediately once they got him into bed. Roger pulled up a chair and made himself comfortable. Xander watched Giles for a moment and then he looked at Roger. He sighed. "This isn't looking good, is it?"

Roger shook his head. "No, it isn't." He snapped his fingers suddenly. "Damn." He looked up at Xander. "Will you go tell Linda what's going on?"

Xander nodded. "I'm on it." He smiled a tight smile and left the room.

##

Buffy couldn't get her brain to shut up. Thoughts were whizzing around her mind at about a thousand miles an hour. Right now she was thinking about children. Since she had first brought up the subject to Giles the night that Kevin and Linda had come home she had tried to discuss it with him a couple more times. Each time he had smiled at her with that wonderful smile of his and then he had fully distracted her in a very yummy fashion. Her brain went there for a while. She hadn't even noticed that Spike had stopped and she walked right into him.

Spike turned to her with a scowl on his face. "What is the matter with you? That's the third time you've done that in the last half hour."

Buffy looked at him, her face scrunched up. "I'm sorry. I'm having a hard

time thinking."

Spike snorted. "Thinking has never been your strong suit, slayer. But you're not usually clumsy."

Buffy whacked him on the arm. Then she looked around. "Where are we anyway?"

Spike rolled his eyes. Angel answered. "North end of town." He held up the piece of paper they had generated at Willy's. "Third on the list." The three of them had gone to Willy's and had bribed, threatened, and, if necessary, pummelled every patron there to try and get some information that would lead them to Sakmet. All they'd walked away with was a list of places their unwilling informants could recall having seen a black cat in the last two days. They all knew it was probably a wild goose chase but it was all they had.

Buffy made a nervous sound and looked up at both of the vampires. "It's like I'm a Christmas cactus."

Both Angel and Spike looked at her, acutely confused looks on their faces. It almost made Buffy laugh. Spike snorted again and glanced at Angel. "She's gone loopy."

Buffy shook her head. "No, no. My mom used to have this Christmas cactus. Whenever she wanted it to bloom, you know, so she could have little baby Christmas cactuses..." She frowned, "...or is it cacti?" She waved a hand in the air. "Whatever. Anyway, when she wanted it to have babies she would put it in the closet and ..." She held up both hands and made quotation mark signs with her index and middle fingers of both hands, "...stress it." She let out a breath. "Well, consider me stressed. I'm feeling very closety."

Angel shook his head. "I'm not following you Buffy."

Spike just cocked his head to the side and looked at Buffy, his lips pursed. "She's thinking babies." He grinned and gestured at a nearby building. "Okay, I'm game. I'm sure we can find some place cozy. Let's give it a go." He stepped back, laughing, before she could hit him again.

She glared at him. "Eeww. Not you. Giles. Besides you can't, you know..." She started to blush furiously and groaned. "Forget it."

Spike started walking again and Buffy and Angel followed. Spike shook his head. "I'm thinking that Giles isn't up to any baby making activities right now."

Buffy stopped again, making another nervous sound. "I know, that's what I

mean. Suppose we missed it. Suppose he dies and then I have nothing, nothing that reminds me of him. Suppose these two months were all we had and we wasted them." She sent anguished looks at both of them. "Suddenly my biological clock which I barely knew I had has gone from travel clock alarm size to like Big Ben."

Spike walked next to her and grabbed her shoulders. "First of all, neither of you are going to die. Second of all..." He almost spoke but then decided not to. He kicked a rock away, hard. "Never mind, let's just stick with option one."

Buffy twisted her lips, considering him. "What were you going to say?"

Spike just shook his head. He looked at Angel and the list. "Where are we going?" Angel pointed towards a building at the end of the street. Spike started walking there.

Buffy didn't move. She was thinking about condoms. When they had moved last month she had discovered a box of condoms in Giles' bedside table. The box was more than half empty, which had disgruntled her no end, but had at least resulted in many loving words from Giles and another evening of yummy distractions. But, they had never used any. In fact, they'd never used any kind of birth control. Now, while she could certainly believe that the thought of birth control could slip her mind, in fact it had, this was the first time she'd given it a thought, she couldn't believe that Giles wouldn't think about it. Not responsible guy.

She looked up and realized that Angel and Spike were now standing about 50 feet ahead of her, stopped, waiting for her. She walked up to them both. "Have you guys ever heard of a slayer getting pregnant?"

Angel and Spike looked at each other. Spike spoke first. "You need to have this conversation with Giles, not us."

Buffy frowned. "Why?" She saw a shadow move and she took after it running. Spike and Angel both let out a sigh of relief and took off after her.

##

Paul threw down the diary when he finished it. He hadn't found a thing. He sat there, his hand tapping nervously on the arm of the chair. He glanced up and saw Cordelia sleeping on the sofa. Paul's eyes wandered over her for a minute resting finally on her face. There was no doubt that she was a beautiful woman.

He pulled his thoughts back to the problem at hand. Pushing himself out of his chair he began pacing, thinking about his dad. Suddenly he stopped and then he raced upstairs to talk with Roger.

Paul burst into the room and Roger looked up, startled. "What, what is it?"

"Didn't dad keep a diary?"

"Yeah, he always had one going. Why?"

"When he died, what happened to them? Do you remember?"

Roger nodded his head. "I kept them. I...well...it felt like I'd be throwing part of dad away. I have them in storage. A couple of boxes of them."

"Did you ever read them?"

Roger shook his head. "No, I always meant to but..." His eyes widened. "Do you think he wrote about this stuff? That maybe there's something that might help?"

Paul's lips tightened. "It's worth a shot." He gestured at Giles, who was still sleeping. "With the main research guy out of the picture for the time being I'm willing to try anything."

Roger reached into his pocket and pulled out his keys. He took one off the ring and handed it to Paul. "The number's on the key. It's that storage place on Springhill Road, do you know which one I'm talking about?"

Paul nodded and took the key. "Yes."

Roger thought for a minute. "There are a lot of boxes in there, I'm not sure where they are."

Paul waved a hand in Roger's direction. "I'll find them." He looked at Giles. "You just take care of him." Roger sent Paul a sad smile, and Paul headed back downstairs.

Cordelia was awake. She watched him as he put on his coat. "Where are you going?"

"To get some diaries of my dad's. Maybe there'll be something..." He shrugged his shoulders.

"Want some help?" She looked at him hopefully. Everyone seemed to have

assigned chores except for her.

He smiled. "Sure, come on." He headed for the door. She grabbed her coat and purse. Then she stopped, looking in her bag for a minute. Paul watched her for a moment. "What are you looking for?"

"A stake. I could have sworn I put a stake in here."

He reached into his coat pocket. "Here, you can have one of mine."

Cordelia flashed him a brilliant smile. "Yeah? Thanks." She walked over to him and took it out of his hand putting it in her purse. Paul shook his head and laughed as they headed out to his car. Cordy glanced at him. "What's so funny?"

"This town, all of you. I can't even imagine what growing up here was like."

Cordy flashed him a rueful smile. "Well, let's just say that once you start hanging around Buffy that your life doesn't go exactly as planned."

Paul opened the door for her. "Why? What was your plan?"

Cordy laughed. "To be a famous movie star, with lots of money and people adoring me." She got in the car shaking her head. She looked back at the house. "God, I thought they were all such a bunch of losers."

Paul followed her look. "Buffy and Giles?"

"And Xander and Willow." She snorted. "And now here I am, seeing visions, working with a vampire and an ex-watcher doing the same thing."

"Do you mind it that much?"

She shook her head. "No, well, sometimes. But, at least I feel useful. I don't think I ever really felt useful before." She grinned at Paul. "I mean, winning every popularity contest there is doesn't do a whole lot of making the world a better place, or a safer one."

He grinned back. "No, I suppose it doesn't." He started up the car.

"Where are we going anyway?"

"Storage place up on Springhill."

"Won't it be closed?"

Paul nodded and reached for his radio mike. He called into dispatch and told them to have the owner meet them there. Paul reached behind him and pulled the police bubble out and put it on his car, turning it on. He grinned at Cordy. "There are advantages to being a cop."

She grinned back as he started speeding down the street. "This is so cool." Cordy shook her head. "We had a cop working with us, sort of. But it wasn't always a good thing. Mostly because it got her fired."

"She got fired?"

"Yeah, her boss thought she was nuts." She pursed her lips. "But, I guess if you're the boss, you don't need to worry about that." Paul just grinned. She sat back, looking out the window. "How'd you meet Giles anyway? Don't get me wrong, I like Giles, he's great, but I just don't see him taking the time to strike up some friendships with non-slayer kinds of people. Especially ones that arrest his slayer."

Paul barked out a laugh. He slowed as he got to a red light, then seeing no cars, he cruised through it. "We were friends with Giles first, thank God. I hate to think what might have happened if we hadn't been friends. If he hadn't trusted me enough to tell me what was going on. As far as him allowing us to be his friends, well, I think he wanted something non-slayery in his life. And Roger and I just got lucky. We had no idea what his real life was like. We knew him for seven months before we met Buffy and never had any idea, not until I arrested her."

Cordelia snorted. "Clueless much?"

Paul barked out a laugh. "About as clueless as you can get. In retrospect, there were a lot of clues, but how on earth would we have ever guessed?" He shook his head. "And my dad..."

Cordelia touched his arm briefly. "I know, that's totally weird. Like father like son. What are the odds against that?"

"I wouldn't even take odds on that. I was never a big believer in fate before but the longer I know Giles and Buffy, the more I'm beginning to." He pulled into the storage area and saw that the gate was already open. He stopped and spoke briefly to the owner and then drove to Roger's storage unit.

Cordelia looked at him with amusement in her eyes. "God, when I think of how useful you would have been when we were stealing stuff from the military." Her eyes widened and she covered her mouth. "Oops. I probably

shouldn't have said that."

Paul rolled his eyes. "Too late. Besides I've already seen Giles and Buffy's personal rocket launcher."

Cordy held her head up proudly. "I helped Xander steal that."

Paul groaned. "Now that I didn't need to know." He tried to resist it but he couldn't. He had to ask. "How exactly did you help?"

She grinned. "I pretended to be some stupid girl that Xander wanted to get lucky with. Some soldier just turned a blind eye and let us in." Her grin turned a little embarrassed. "Stupid girl wasn't much of a stretch for me those days." Then she frowned. "And I swear, men are so easy. All they think about is sex."

Paul had no response to that except for another grin. This time Cordy rolled her eyes and when Paul brought the car to a stop she got out. Paul used the key to open the door and he switched on a light. The place was packed with boxes. Cordy looked around and frowned. "Great." She looked at Paul. "What are we looking for?"

Paul gestured at the piles of boxes. "Diaries. Roger said there were a couple of boxes of them." He gestured to one end. "I'll start at this end, you can start at that end." Cordy nodded and they both dug in.

End Part 4

Black Cats 5

Roger was sitting with Giles when Tara and Willow came in, an excited look on their faces. He raised his eyebrows, waiting for them to speak.

Willow started. "I think we found a spell. It should protect Giles from losing any more of his life force. Sort of puts a magic wall around him."

Roger stood, excited. "Really? That's great." Then he frowned and held up his hand. "First though, let me be Giles, seeing as he's down for the count and can't speak for himself. How dangerous is it? Is it in one of those books you're not supposed to go near?"

Willow stuck her tongue out at him. "No. Tara and I have both done lots of spells out of this book. In fact, Giles gave it to me for Christmas."

"Okay, okay. I had to ask." He ran a hand through his hair. "Can you do it now? Do you need anything?"

Tara and Willow both shook their heads. Willow held up her bag. "Nope, we have everything we need. We can do it right now." Willow began placing candles then she stopped, turning to Roger. "Help me move the bed out from the wall. That way we can make a better circle." Roger nodded and they pulled the bed more to the center of the room. Giles didn't stir. Willow finished placing candles in a circle around the bed. Tara began to pour a white powder on the ground, walking clockwise to make another circle around the bed, inside the candles. Willow followed her sprinkling a mixture of herbs inside the circle of powder.

Tara and Willow stepped inside the circle and holding hands began to chant. Roger could feel the hairs on his arms rise in response. He watched as the candle flames grew as their voices got louder. Then there was a noise like a spark of electricity. Willow and Tara stopped their chanting and walked back outside the circle. Willow looked at Roger. "There, it's done. He has to stay on the bed, though. It's kind of an area spell."

Roger's eyes widened and he frowned. "So, I'm guessing Buffy can't go in there with him?"

Willow grimaced. "No, if she goes in there she'll affect the area and it will start again."

Roger gave Willow a pained smile. "She's gonna love that." At Willow's concerned look he shook his head. "No, she's going to be very grateful to you for stopping it, assuming it worked. She's just not going to like that she can't be near him, can't touch him."

Willow sighed. "I know. But it was the only one we could find."

Roger put his arm around Willow and hugged her shoulders tightly. "You did great. Thank you." They all stood there, watching Giles, wishing he would wake up.

##

Buffy, Angel and Spike were almost through the list. They had found nothing. Buffy threw herself down on a bench. "How can there be nothing? How can no one have seen it, her, whatever it is? I don't get it. Usually there's always someone who knows."

Angel shook his head. He scuffed one boot on the side of the bench. "Maybe she doesn't show until Halloween. Maybe it's just the vampires and hordes that show up first and then she shows at the last minute."

Buffy blew out a disgusted breath and slumped back. Spike narrowed his eyes looking at her. "Slayer, you don't seem as wired as you've been. You were practically shooting off sparks an hour ago."

Buffy ran her hands down her arms. It was true. She didn't feel as wired. She still had plenty of energy but it was as if... She gasped and yanked Roger's phone out of her purse. She sent an anguished look Spike and Angel's way. She chanted as the phone rang. "Oh God, oh God, oh God." Roger answered. Buffy interrupted his greeting. "Is Giles okay? Tell me he's not dead."

Roger spoke quickly. "He's fine. Willow and Tara did a spell to try and keep any more of his energy from leaking to you. Did you feel something? It must be working." She could hear the satisfaction in his voice.

Buffy let out a huge sigh of relief. "Spike noticed it, that I wasn't as wired." She looked up at Angel and Spike. "Willow did a spell." Spike and Angel nodded. She spoke to Roger again. "Has he woken up?"

"No, not yet. But I keep checking. I don't know how much energy he lost already, or whether it will...regenerate, or whatever life forces do. This was yet another topic not covered in my medical training."

Buffy giggled at that. Then she grew sad. "Roger?"

"Go ahead."

"If he wakes up, will you tell him I love him?"

"I will."

Buffy nodded and hung up.

##

They were both working their way through cartons. Suddenly Paul let out a cry of success. "Found one."

Cordy moved over to where he was. "Then the second one's probably around here too." She started opening boxes close by and found the second

box of diaries with her first try. "Here it is." She dragged it over to one of the chairs. Then she looked at Paul. "Are we looking at them here, or taking them back to Giles'?"

"Let's look at them here, at least for a while. I can't bear to wait." He started digging in the box looking like a kid at Christmas. Cordy grinned at him and then she started digging in her own box.

"So what dates are we looking for?" She grimaced as she flipped through one of the diaries. "Your father wasn't great with the dates, was he?"

Paul grimaced back after looking through the diary he had selected. "Shit. No most of these entries just say the day of the week. We'll have to look through them all. You can ignore any that talk about being in America, though. That would be too late."

Cordy nodded and started slowly turning pages, looking for some indication of the time of year. "Ah ha." Paul looked up at her. "Christmas time." She put the book down and picked up another one. Over time the pile of discarded books grew. After an hour had passed she let out another gasp. "Paul." He stopped his reading. "No, it's not about Sakmet but it talks about your dad meeting the watcher, meeting Patrick." She made a face. "God, it says they met in some bar. Go figure."

Paul grinned. "Get out of town. It says that?" She handed him the book wondering at his grin. He read the first few entries and then looked up at her. "We met Giles in a bar."

Cordy's jaw dropped. "You met Giles in a bar? I didn't think Giles knew what a bar was."

Paul snorted. "Trust me, he can drink almost anybody under the table."

She made a face. "And this is a good thing?"

"It's what made me and Roger like him so much at first. It's not everyone who can give us a run for our money like that."

"So, you're all a bunch of drunks?"

He laughed. "No, of course not. It's..." At her look, he stopped mid sentence. "Never mind."

She grinned at him. "No, I get it. It's a manly thing. Right?" Her voice was teasing.

He grinned back. "Right." He read a few more pages. "This is so unbelievable. There are so many similarities between what happened to him and what happened to us."

Cordy prodded his foot with the toe of her shoe. "Hey, back on track copper. We have a demon to foil." Paul put the book down reluctantly, making a new pile down at his feet. He reached for a book out of Cordelia's carton. She shot him a look. "Hey, this is my box. Go look through your own."

He rolled his eyes. "I'm hoping all the slayer diaries will be together. Besides they're all my dad's diaries. I'm really sharing with you." He grinned impishly at her.

She flashed him a crooked smile. "Well, all right, since you put it that way." They stared at each other for a minute, both aware that they were enjoying each other's company. Then Paul broke eye contact and began looking through the pages of another diary.

##

Willow was on stair duty. Since they had done the spell, someone was sitting on the stairs so they could stop Buffy before she ran up to be with Giles. Wes had just called to say they were having no luck with their research at the Magic Box. Willow sighed then lifted her head when the door opened and Buffy, Angel and Spike came in. Buffy pointed upstairs as she started to climb. "Is he up there?"

Willow nodded but put up her hand to stop Buffy's ascent. "Buffy, you can't...you can't get too close to him."

"Why?" Buffy started to look nervous. "What's happened?"

Willow shook her head. "No, things are okay. But, the spell we did, he has to stay inside of the protective circle, and you have to stay outside of it." Willow stood. "Come on, I'll show you what I mean."

Buffy shot a look at the two vampires and then followed Willow upstairs. Angel looked at Spike. "Want to go look around some more?" Spike nodded and the two of them headed out back into the night.

Buffy stopped when she got to the bedroom door. She could see Giles on the bed; he lay so still. She watched his chest rise and fall with each breath, immeasurably relieved to see this sign of life. She realized Willow was talking

and she walked a little closer. Willow was pointing at the floor. "You need to stay outside of this line." She looked up at Buffy. "It's important. You'll start draining his energy again if you cross it."

Buffy smiled sadly at Willow. "I got it, Will. He stays there, I stay here." At the sad look on Willow's face Buffy put a hand on her arm. "Thanks Willow. Thanks for doing this." Willow nodded and left the room. Buffy backed up until she bumped into the chair she knew was there and she sat down. She spoke. "Giles, can you hear me? Are you awake?" She heard the tremor in her voice and cleared her throat. "Please, Giles. Wake up."

Buffy's voice started to penetrate the haze Giles felt he was floating in. Buffy thought she heard him make a small noise and she called his name again. "Giles?"

Giles tried to open his eyes. He also tried to move one of his arms but the effort proved too difficult. Giles heard Buffy call him. He shifted his head towards her voice and tried to open his eyes again. "Buffy?" His voice was rough and cracking.

She ached to go to him. "Yes, it's me. I'm right here."

Giles forced a hand to move and touched the bed next to him, as if he expected Buffy to be there. He slowly lifted his hand and tried to rub the crust out of his eyes. "What...?"

"It's the prophecy. You got marked with that moon symbol. Remember?" At his slight nod she continued. "I...you started..." She sighed and began again. "I started getting your energy right away. You've been pretty much out of it since." She gestured towards the floor even though he couldn't see what was there. "Willow did a spell to try and stop it."

Giles took a deep breath and tried to sit up. All he succeeded in doing was raising himself up on one elbow. He smiled at Buffy, a confused look on his face. "Why are you over there? Come here."

She shook her head, her lips trembling. "No, I can't. If I come in the circle I'll destroy you, just like the prophecy said."

Giles looked at her. "Oh Buffy, I'm sorry."

"Me too." A tear fell down her cheek.

Giles let out a groan, aching to hold her. He held her gaze. "I love you."

Another tear fell. "I love you too."

Giles ran out of strength and he lay back down, his head turned so he could still see Buffy. He hated to see her so sad and to not be able to do anything about it. "What time is it? What day?"

"It's still Tuesday, about ten at night." At the question in his eyes she told him the rest. "We haven't found her. We don't know anything." Her voice rose in frustration. "Nobody knows anything."

Giles closed his eyes, his fear for her growing. "Buffy..." He stopped. There really wasn't anything to say, any warning he could give her that would change what would happen. Either they would beat the prophecy or they wouldn't. The thought of her dying was unbearable to him. He tried to sit up again.

She blurted out the question that was on her mind. "Why don't we use birth control?"

Giles lay back down. The question was unexpected. "Wh..."

She interrupted him. "No really, I want to know." She flashed him a nervous grin. "You can't distract me this time by kissing me. So, tell me, can slayers get pregnant? Can you and I have children?" She looked at the floor. "Could we have had children?"

"Don't talk like that. We'll get through this, just like we always have."

She just nodded. She wasn't sure she believed that, not with Halloween two hours away. Buffy lifted her eyes to his again. "Could we?"

Giles let out a frustrated sigh. "Buffy, I can't...this isn't the time for this conversation."

"Why not?"

Giles tried to smile at her. "Because I'm too tired, and...and you're too far away from me."

"Giles, answer me."

Giles pulled on all the inner reserves he had and he forced himself up to a sitting position. He leaned against the headboard, panting for breath, the exertion of that simple movement having exhausted him. Buffy stood, desperate

to help him, to lend him her strength. She glanced up seeing movement out of the corner of her eye and saw Roger standing there, his eyebrows raised at the sight of Giles awake and sitting.

Giles' eyes were closed so he didn't see Roger. He answered Buffy's question. "You are a woman Buffy, with all of a woman's anatomy. As far as I know you are physically capable of bearing children."

"But...I hear a but coming."

He nodded, needing to take more breaths before talking anymore. He opened his eyes and saw Roger standing there. Darkness started to claim him again. He had done too much with what little energy he had. Giles threw out some final words. "Ask Roger. Ask..." He slumped over.

Buffy let out a cry and headed for him. Roger stopped her catching her around the waist. She put up a token resistance but then just turned in his arms and began to cry. Roger just embraced her and let her spend her emotions. She finally spoke in a shaky voice. "Is he okay?"

Roger nodded. "He's just asleep again." He pulled away from Buffy. "Let me go check though, okay?" She nodded and he walked into the circle and bent over Giles.

Buffy backed up again and sat in the chair watching him. After a couple of minutes she spoke. "Why did he say to ask you?"

Satisfied that Giles hadn't gotten any worse Roger moved over to sit next to Buffy. He ran his hand over his face and narrowed his eyes, trying to figure out where to start. "Giles told me that you asked about having children when Linda and Kevin came back."

Buffy looked surprised that Giles would have told Roger that. "Yeah, I did." She looked at Giles. "He's so great with Kevin. He'd be such a good dad." She brushed a few tears away angrily, annoyed with her emotional state. Buffy looked up at Roger. "I know this seems like a stupid thing to be worried about when we both could be dead tomorrow."

Roger shook his head. "No, the prospect of death very sensibly makes us think of survival. And it's a survival imperative, down to our cellular level, to leave something behind. It is a very powerful force. I don't think it's stupid at all."

"I never thought about it before. And I've almost died a bunch of times."

Roger smiled sadly at her. "I know you have." He pointed at Giles with his chin. "But, I'm guessing you really haven't had a life partner until now. One that you could fully trust, someone that you want to have children with, that made it a possibility."

Buffy's eyes rested on Giles again. She drew her knees up to her chest and wrapped her arms around them. Her lips tightened and she nodded. She looked again at Roger. "So, why ask you?"

Roger blew out a breath. "I have to get personal for a moment. Do you mind?" Buffy shook her head, encouraging him. Roger continued. "Giles already told me most of this but I want to ask you. Do you have periods?"

Buffy shook her head. "Hardly ever."

"But you had started your periods before you became a slayer?"

"Yeah, I had them for almost a year and then they stopped once I started slaying."

"Did your first watcher ever tell you why they stopped?"

"He said it was all the physical activity. He said that it's part of a woman's survival mechanism. That if the environment seems too life threatening because you're, well, having to be so physical to survive, that the body..." Buffy's eyes widened as she heard her own words.

Roger asked another question. "When have you gotten your period?"

Buffy thought about it for a minute. "It's only been a few times since I started slaying. Like the summers I went to stay with my dad." Buffy got a thoughtful look on her face. "When I stopped slaying."

Roger nodded. "When you stopped slaying."

Buffy laid her head on her knees for a second. Then she looked up confused. "So, why do you know this?"

"Giles came to talk to me after you first brought it up. He wanted to know if I could run some tests on you. See if it was because of your...well...physical lifestyle, so to speak, or if there was something else going on."

"You mean, like maybe it's because I'm the slayer and really, really can't have kids?" Roger nodded, stretching his legs out. He sent Buffy a compassionate

look. Buffy pursed her lips. "So, if it's cuz I'm physical all the time then I'd have to stop slaying completely, wait for my body to hopefully start having periods again, try and get pregnant, have a kid, and pray in the meantime that during all that time that no major evil comes to destroy the world?"

Roger barked out a laugh. "Yup, that's it, piece of cake."

Buffy blew out a breath. "Yeah, piece of cake." She sent Roger a wry smile. "So, when do we do these tests, oh doc o' mine, so we can be sure?"

Roger sighed and looked at Giles. "How about we talk some more about it the day after tomorrow?"

Buffy nodded, her eyes filled with tears again. She brushed them away. "Yeah, cuz I'm kind of busy tomorrow."

Roger reached for her and pulled her into his chest. "Oh Buffy." He fought his own tears away as he kissed the top of her head.

End Part 5

Black Cats 6

Xander looked up at the clock. It was 11:00. He slammed shut the book he was looking at and scowled. "This is a waste of time. Let's go. I want to be with Buffy and Giles by midnight, you know, just in case something happens."

Wes shut his book too. "Yes, this certainly doesn't seem to be giving us any more answers." He looked at the clock as well. "All right. Let's go." Anya shut off the lights and locked up behind them. The three of them got into Wes' car and drove back to the house.

##

Spike and Angel were running. They had found a drunken demon staggering down an alleyway, muttering about black cats. There was little that made sense about his ramblings but with some persuasion he had talked about a demon queen and how the night was hers at midnight. Spike looked at his watch. 11:30. Spike swore and looked at Angel. "Come on, we have to get there by midnight." His fear spurred him on. Angel pushed to keep up with him.

##

Paul let out a cry, staring in disbelief at what he had just read. "Holy Jesus." He looked at his watch and stood. "We gotta go. Come on!" He grabbed Cordelia's hand and pulled her up. The two of them ran out of the storage unit slamming the door shut behind them. As he started the car he unclipped his phone and hit a few buttons. Turning his police light on he muttered. "Answer, damn it, answer." The clock in the dashboard showed 11:45. He started to drive.

Spike had just raced in the door and was standing by the phone. He picked it up when no one seemed to be answering it. "Yeah?"

"Spike, it's Paul. Is Buffy still there?"

Spike looked around and saw Roger at the top of the stairs. He called up. "Is Buffy still here?" Roger nodded. Spike spoke into the phone. "Yeah, she's still here." Spike listened as he watched Wes, Xander, Anya, and Angel walk in.

"Do not let her leave. Under any circumstances. I found something in my dad's diary. I think we can kill this thing if we're all together, but Buffy will die if she faces it on her own."

"I'll make sure she stays put."

"Make sure you're all with her at midnight. Don't let her be alone, even in the house, not for a second."

"I won't. Count on it."

"And Spike, get everyone armed. I'm on my way. I'll be there as fast as I can." Paul hung up and turned his siren on. He turned to Cordelia. "Put your seat belt on." He hit the gas.

##

Buffy looked at the LCD readout on the alarm clock. 11:50. She stood. "Time to get this bitch." Buffy took another look at Giles and wished she could touch him before she left. The thought that she might never touch him again was so painful that she let out a moan. She almost ran from the room and ran smack into Spike. She looked up at him. "Watch him for me, Spike. I'm not convinced he's out of danger. I have to go find her."

Spike shook his head. "Wrong. You're staying here. Paul just called. He found something. He says come midnight that you can't be alone."

"Spike, I have to go. I have to get her before she does anything else to Giles."

Spike put his hand up. "You're not going anywhere."

"And how exactly are you going to stop me?"

"I'm not going to stop you. But he will." He pointed behind him with his thumb. Buffy looked up and saw Angel.

Xander walked up and stood next to Angel. "And I will."

Willow spoke up next. "We all will. Paul said we had to be with you. That together we could kill it. So, I'm afraid you're stuck with us."

Wes reached the landing and he started handing out weapons. Buffy stared at them all, stunned. They could hear the siren of Paul's car. In the distraction, Buffy made a run for it. Angel tackled her at the bottom of the stairs. He spoke softly to her. "What are you doing? Let us help you."

"I don't want her to come here. She might hurt Giles. She might hurt one of you."

Paul ran through the door, Cordelia behind him. He looked momentarily startled when he saw Angel lying on top of Buffy. When he realized that nobody seemed terribly concerned about it he let it go. He noticed the weapons everyone had and he grimaced. Slamming the book in Cordelia's hand he gave her a command. "Read it to them." He pointed to where she should start and then he raced back to his car. Buffy pushed Angel off of her and sat.

Cordelia started reading.

I hate the Council with a vengeance. They came and took everything away today, including Patrick's diary. Took it right out of my hands. I told them I hadn't finished, that I had important information and they ignored me. Told me it was none of my concern. That if I knew what was good for me that I'd leave immediately and keep my mouth shut. Those prats. I hope they all choke to death. As if they cared about Patrick and Colleen. As if they were the one who carried her body back to her home and laid her next to her watcher. As if they were the ones who had fought with them for the last three years and shared their friendship.

Cordy stopped and looked up as Paul raced back in with another gun and a rifle. He handed one gun to Xander. "You know how to shoot this right?" Xander nodded. Paul had remembered the soldier stories. "Anyone else know how to shoot a gun?"

Spike reached for it. "I do." Paul removed the gun from his holster and handed it to him, keeping the rifle for himself. He gestured to Cordelia to continue. Paul looked at the clock on the wall. 11:58.

I spoke with a vampire tonight who saw what happened. He saw Colleen die. After he told me what he saw I staked him. I staked him for watching. For watching and doing nothing. He said that he'd been fighting with her when suddenly, at midnight (he'd heard the church bell ringing), this huge cat demon appeared, as if out of thin air. She put out her hand and Colleen was frozen, unable to move. And in a minute, Colleen had fallen to the ground, dead. She hadn't even gotten a punch in, no chance to defend herself at all. Then just as fast, the demon had disappeared.

If only I'd been there. If only someone had been there. We killed so many of its hordes. I believe this demon can be killed as well but no one is ever there when she appears. The slayers always fight alone, their one partner, their watcher, already dead. When Patrick died Colleen ran from the house so quickly I couldn't stop her. So even I couldn't be at her side. And so the demon won, again. I have tried to get this information to the Council on numerous occasions but they continue to rebuff me. What will happen the next time she rises? What slayer will die because of it? My heart grieves for her and for her watcher.

Paul looked at the clock. Thirty seconds. Paul cocked his rifle. Xander and Spike took off their safeties and Wes and Angel lifted their crossbows. Anya held a knife. Paul motioned them into a line. He had visions of them all shooting each other. He spoke to them all. "Aim at her head." They nodded their understanding. Willow and Tara were half way up the stairs ready to cast spells if the need arose and Roger was up on the landing, keeping an ear out for Giles in case somehow this affected him as well. Paul leaned towards Cordelia. "If she comes, and if she freezes Buffy, knock her down."

Cordy looked at him in dismay, her eyes wide. "The demon?"

Paul bit off a nervous laugh. "No, Buffy. I don't want her to get shot accidentally."

Cordy nodded. "Right, knock her down. I can do that." She bounced on the balls of her feet, ready to move.

Buffy had finally stood. She glared at Cordy. "You are so not knocking me down." She glanced up at the clock. The second hand hit the twelve.

Willow gasped. Sakmet was suddenly in the room, standing in front of Buffy. She was huge, her head almost hitting the ceiling. Circlets of gold adorned her neck, wrists and ankles. Her fur was black as night, and her cat eyes glittered. She ignored them all and raised an arm, directing a hand towards Buffy. Buffy had started to move towards her but suddenly she froze. Paul yelled out. "Now Cordelia." Cordelia tackled Buffy taking her down and they all fired at once, crossbow bolts and bullets slamming into the demon, a knife protruding from her neck. She let out a scream that was excruciatingly painful to hear and then she exploded into a thousand pieces which all vanished before they hit the ground.

Cordelia rolled Buffy over. "Buffy. Are you okay?"

Roger ran down the stairs and crouched down next to Buffy, feeling for a pulse. She opened her eyes and he helped her sit up. He asked as well. "Buffy, are you all right?"

She nodded. "Yes, I'm fine." A smile slowly formed on her face as she looked up at all her defenders. "I'm fine." She shook her head, hardly believing it. Then she looked up at Roger, she had felt the extra energy leave her. "How's Giles?"

He spoke for himself. "I'm fine Buffy." She looked up and saw him standing at the top of the stairs. She raced up the stairs and threw herself at him. He wrapped his arms tightly around her and they held each other close for a long time while everyone grinned at the sight. Paul was so relieved he leaned heavily against the door, his head lowered to his chest. Spike stood in front of him. "Hey." Paul looked up to see Spike grinning at him. "You did good, your daddy would be proud." Spike handed Paul back his gun and Paul slid it into his holster, grinning back.

"We all did good." Paul looked at Anya. "And nice knife throw."

Anya beamed. "Thank you."

Xander came over and gave her a big kiss. "Amazing knife throw, An. I had no idea you could do that."

Anya kept beaming. "Well, even a vengeance demon has to be able to protect herself." Paul started to laugh and then they all joined in, the fears of the last few days dispelling with the sound. They all moved into the living

room and fell into chairs, couches, and onto the floor, just relaxing for a few minutes.

Buffy lifted her head from Giles' chest and pulled Giles' head down for a kiss. He was happy to oblige. She started pressing kisses on his jaw and neck. "God, it feels so good to touch you." Giles just held her even tighter, relishing the feeling of her body, the fact that they were both still alive.

Giles felt a tap on his shoulder and he looked up in some surprise. Roger was standing there, a big grin on his face. "Sorry to intrude, but before my two favorite patients start engaging in any strenuous activities I'd like to make sure that they are both fully recovered." He pointed downstairs. "Plus, I think there's a few people down there who might like to see you."

Giles reluctantly let Buffy go and Buffy glared at Roger. "Spoil sport."

Giles bent down and whispered in her ear. "We have all night, love." Buffy sighed and moved to his side pulling his arm around her. With Roger walking behind them they headed downstairs.

Giles had to hear the whole story having missed most of it. He couldn't get over Shaun's diary. They had made room for them on the couch and Buffy was securely at his side, Giles' arm still around her. She couldn't get close enough to suit her. Kevin was on his other side, fast asleep, his head in Giles' lap. Roger had gone to get them both him and Linda. Kevin had only lasted a few minutes before he'd fallen asleep, a smile on his face as he leaned against Giles. Giles held up the diary. "You say there are more of these?"

Paul nodded. "A bunch more. I'll go get them tomorrow."

Giles shook his head. "Fascinating." His eyes darkened for a moment thinking of the Council and its pigheadedness, how because of them he and Buffy could have died so easily. He lifted his head and took in all the people around him. "Buffy and I would have both died without you, if you hadn't come, if you hadn't helped." He held the diary up to Paul. "Buffy would have died tonight facing Sakmet, just like your dad feared, if you hadn't found this." He smiled at Angel and Xander remembering a night long ago. "The prophecies never seem to account for friends and family, do they?" He looked at them all then, so much love in his eyes. "And that's what you are, all of you." He tightened his hold on Buffy, looking down at her. He looked at her, but he spoke to them. "I can never thank you enough." He brushed her

cheek with his hand.

Angel's heart clenched in his chest for a brief moment as he watched Giles' touch Buffy's cheek, as he watched the love between them. But it passed. He'd seen the look in Giles' eyes. He'd felt himself being included by Giles as part of this family. And he felt forgiven. He didn't think there was any price he wouldn't have been willing to pay to feel that, even if that price was losing Buffy's love. He let her go and felt a rare sensation of peace.

Buffy held Giles' gaze, loving him so much it made her heart ache. Then she looked at everyone in the room, each one in turn. She nodded her head firmly. "That's what we are. Family." She smiled at them. "One big and very weird family."

After that, Linda and Roger pulled some snacks and drinks together and they had an impromptu feast. Cordelia put down her glass and looked around, noticing that Paul was gone. She got up and started to look for him. She finally spotted him outside the kitchen window, standing in the back yard looking up at the stars. Cordy opened the back door. Paul turned at the noise and watched her as she came over to join him. She spoke softly. "Are you all right?"

He nodded. "Just wanted to take a minute and thank my dad." His voice broke just a little and he cleared his throat.

Cordy smiled at him. "Well, thank him for me too, okay?"

Paul nodded. He scuffed at the ground. "He was pretty great."

Cordy touched his arm. "Like I said. Like father like son."

He turned to face her. "I don't suppose you'd give me your number? I'd like..."

Before he finished his sentence Cordy had a card in her fingers. She grinned. "I thought you'd never ask." He grinned back at her and took it. She spoke again. "We're going back, probably tonight, while it's still dark. You know, because of Angel."

Paul nodded. "I'll call."

Cordy smiled. "You know what? I actually believe you." She kissed him on the cheek. "Oh, and by the way, I have a ghost for a room-mate."

Paul barked out a laugh. "Of course you do." He shook his head. "Somehow I'm not surprised by that at all." They stood there grinning at each other until by mutual consent they turned to go back inside.

##

Buffy and Giles lay in each other's arms, drowsy and sated. Roger had given them both a clean bill of health and they had taken full advantage of it. Buffy ran her hand through his chest hair. Giles stroked her hair, carefully working his way through any tangles caused by their lovemaking. He decided to bring the subject up rather than wait for her. "Roger told me you spoke to him." He felt Buffy nod. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Buffy lifted her head and rolled on to her side, head supported by her open hand, elbow on the bed. "Have any slayers had babies?"

Giles shook his head. "None that I know of." At her frown he put a hand out. "Wait, hear me out." He leaned towards her and gave her a quick kiss. He rolled on his side too, facing her, holding her free hand. "Think about it, Buffy. Most slayers haven't had any kind of social life whereby they could meet anyone. I'm sure other watchers have fallen in love with their slayers but they would never have put their slayers at risk like that. A pregnant slayer would be a dead slayer in fairly short order. And on the off-chance one did get pregnant she'd never be able to carry it to term. As you well know, slayers get punched, kicked, and generally assaulted on a nightly basis." He placed a hand on her lower stomach. "No foetus could survive that." He sighed. "The only real option would be for the slayer to stop slaying and her duty and her watcher's would have made that an unlikely scenario."

Buffy's eyes grew sad. "So, it's not possible? Why didn't you ever say anything about this before?"

"It never seemed the right time. Other than your brief engagement to Spike..." He warded off a smack, grinning, "...you were never with a partner who could either father children, or that I thought you might marry. I would have discussed it with you, when and if the time arose, if you fell in love with someone enough to consider it." He shuddered at the thought. "Thank God, that never happened." He grinned. "At least, not until now."

She smiled at him and asked her first question again. "But, is it possible?"

Giles nodded his head. "If Roger's tests show, as I believe they will, that your lack of a period stems from your slayer physical activity then I think it is possible. And I also think it's safe to say that while no slayer has been

known to have gotten pregnant, that it is also true that no slayer has ever had a family like we do. And it will take all of them to make this happen. We live on the Hellmouth; we both know that it cannot go unprotected." He lay back down, his lips pursed. "I have some ideas I've been working on. I need to talk to Roger and talk to the Council." As another frown started to form he held her hand tighter. "I'll tell you about it first and get your permission before I do anything but I'm not quite ready to discuss them. I need to think about it more." He brought her hand up to his lips. "Will you trust me on that?"

Buffy nodded. "Anything that involves you and thinking, I'm pretty willing to trust."

Giles silently chuckled. "Are you feeling the need to rush into this?"

Buffy shook her head. "No, not any more. The baby craziness, well, I still want to have children, with you, but that intense need for one right now, that seems to have gone away." She looked at him fiercely. "Just no more almost dying, okay?"

"I shall do everything in my power to stay quite alive."

"Good." She leaned over him and kissed him, a kiss that grew more and more heated.

Giles held her tightly and rolled them so he was lying over her. He pulled back from the kiss and laid his head on her shoulder, getting his breath and control back. He lifted his head and looked down at her. He smiled at the sight. "You are so beautiful." Giles shook his head. "I still can't believe you're mine sometimes."

She pulled him down for another kiss, hard and quick. "Well I am, all yours." She looked at him, claiming him with her eyes. "And you're mine."

He nodded. "Yes, I am." He ran his hand down her face. "It did occur to me that we are getting a bit ahead of ourselves."

Buffy's brow furrowed. "What do you mean?"

"Well, it seems to me that before we start even talking about having children that we missed a fairly essential step."

Buffy looked confused. "Like what?"

Giles grinned at her confusion. "Like getting married. Will you marry me Buffy? Make another part of my dream come true?"

Buffy's jaw dropped. "Oh my God, we're not married are we? I just feel so married somehow." She laughed and started raining kisses on his face. She punctuated each kiss with a word. "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. A kazillion yeses."

Giles grinned. "A kazillion yeses?"

She grinned back, her delight at the thought of marrying him so clear on her face. "And a kazillion more after that." She lifted her hand. "Can I get a ring? Can I have a big wedding? With a beautiful wedding dress?"

"You can have anything you want. And I will gladly leave all the planning to you. Just tell me where I need to be." Giles grinned at her delight.

Buffy sighed, happily. She looked at him and began to focus on the fact that he was lying on her, his body warm and strong. She pushed up against him. "Well, to start with, you need to be in me, making love to me."

Giles felt his body start to respond and he groaned, capturing her lips for a kiss. His hands touched her body, rejoicing in the feel of her, knowing that she was his for a lifetime. He nuzzled her ear. "God, I love you so much."

Buffy gasped at the sensations his hands and his words were eliciting from her. She would have sworn it was impossible but she loved him even more deeply than before. Loved him more than she ever thought she could love anyone. She felt places in her heart and her soul opening up to the light of his love and she gave it all to him, knowing it was safe, that he would keep it safe. Buffy didn't know how she would ever be able to show Giles what he meant to her. She caught his lips again in a searing kiss, trying to pour all her love for him into it. Giles felt it and returned it and as the world faded away, they were first lost, and then found, in their love for each other.

The End

October 13, 2001