

Changes 1

"Damn it, Giles. Wake up." Roger kept applying pressure to the bleeding wound on Giles' forehead. It just didn't seem to want to stop. He looked around their cell and sighed. They hadn't even gotten completely out of the car before they'd been attacked. All he'd felt was a hand over his face, and the smell of chloroform and the next he knew he and Giles were here. Wherever here was.

Roger looked back down at Giles. He had Giles' head resting on his thigh. Clearly the attack had been meant for Giles, or at least the message was directed at him. While Roger had simply been rendered unconscious, Giles had been beaten. And he had not regained consciousness. It had been long enough that Roger was starting to feel nervous. His pupils looked all right and his pulse was strong, but still. It had been too long. Roger realized that part of his anxiety was due to the fact that he just wanted Giles awake. He wanted Giles to be figuring out what had happened and how to get them out of here.

Giles had several bruises on his torso. One eye was black, and he had been cut on his forehead. Roger imagined he'd been hit other places as well but he didn't want to strip Giles down to find out where, and Roger knew that the body was capable of taking hits without bruising at all. Roger felt a surge of anger. Beating a man when he was unconscious seemed to be an unforgivable act but the fact that it was Giles made Roger want to hit someone himself.

It was a futile effort but he checked all their pockets for a cell phone again. He kept hoping that maybe he'd missed one on his several previous searches, but they had obviously been taken, along with his pager and his palm pilot. Between them they had their wallets and one pen. Not exactly the stuff of daring rescues. He didn't think even MacGyver could make good his escape with those supplies.

There were two transom windows, high on one of the walls. The door was heavy and bolted shut from the outside. There was a steel urinal and a sink. That was it. Both Roger and Giles were on the floor and a concrete floor at that. Clearly, their comfort was not an issue.

Roger figured this had to do with the appointment they were supposed to have today. Giles had finally secured a meeting with Quentin Travers. He was even coming from England to LA to meet with Giles, and with Roger. Giles had insisted on that. He had wanted Roger there to help explain the medical side of things in case questions arose that Giles couldn't answer.

Roger wondered if the Council had ever intended to meet with them at all, or if this had been the plan all along. Had Giles frightened them so much with the changes he had proposed? Roger shifted his body trying to get a little more comfortable. He lifted his hand from Giles' forehead to see if the bleeding had finally stopped. Yes....no. He put his hand back in place. He closed his eyes remembering the conversation when Giles had told him what he'd been planning.

##

"So, all the tests show that Buffy should be able to get pregnant?"

Roger nodded. "Yes, if she stops slaying." Roger grinned. "Have you guys picked a date yet, for the wedding?" Roger signaled for the waitress and ordered another round.

Giles rolled his eyes. "I'm doing my best to stay out of it. I'm hoping Buffy will just tell me where I'm supposed to be and what she wants me to wear and that will be the extent of my involvement in the whole thing."

"Well, hopefully the after wedding activities will keep you more interested." Roger sent a mischievous grin Giles' way.

Giles couldn't help but grin back. He decided to change the subject. "I...I actually do have one chore I need to take care of." He coughed a little, nervous for some inexplicable reason. Roger lifted an inquiring eyebrow. "Would you...will you be my best man at the wedding?"

Roger gave Giles an enormous grin. "Are you kidding? I'd be crushed if you didn't ask." He frowned. "What about Paul?"

Giles grinned. "Buffy's going to ask him to walk her down the aisle. Don't say anything to him."

Roger's grin grew. "Who'd have guessed when we met you at this bar that we'd be a part of your wedding less than a year later?"

"Certainly not me. I'd have laughed at you." Giles sent an affectionate gaze Roger's way. He knew that he owed his relationship with Buffy to this man, and to Paul. And it had been Roger's wise- ass matchmaking comments that had started the whole thing for him. Made him think of Buffy that way. It might have happened anyway but Roger had spent a little over one hour with him and Buffy before he realized they were meant for each other but just didn't know it yet. And by the end of the evening he'd been proven right. He and

Buffy had fallen in love that night and woken up in each other's arms. Giles smiled, just thinking about it.

Roger interrupted Giles' silent reverie. "I'd be honored to be your best man." He looked nervous. "Oh, God, does that mean I have to do things?"

Giles laughed. "We'll ask Buffy to make you a list, or better yet, we'll ask her to give it to Linda."

Roger nodded. "Good idea." He took a swallow of his beer. "Okay, let's talk about the rest of it. I want to know what you've been thinking about so hard. What you need me for."

Giles took a swallow of his beer too. "All right." He let out a deep breath. "I keep wondering what happens when a Slayer is called. What changes in her body, from one moment to the next, that gives her the enhanced senses and strength? We know who's likely to be called, although Buffy was unexpected, but we don't know exactly who it will be or what exactly happens when the transition occurs. All we know is that when a Slayer dies, that the next one is called. I want you to try and figure that out."

"I'd be glad to but how am I supposed to do that?"

"Well, it will require the cooperation of the Council, a conversation I am not particularly looking forward to. But I need access to two things." His face grew guarded and Roger watched him closely, not saying anything. After a few moments Giles spoke again. "Remember when I told you and Paul about Buffy's 18th birthday?"

Roger spoke carefully. "Yes, when you gave her those injections and her power went away?" His face lit up with comprehension. "You want me to study it?"

"Yes. I was told, and it was what I told Buffy, that it was a mixture of muscle relaxants and adrenal suppressants, but I know it's more than that. It made all of her powers go away, and no muscle relaxants can do that. I want to give it to her again, obviously in safer circumstances, and let you test her, see what it does, how her body changes because of it."

"Okay, that's one. You said we needed two things from the Council."

Giles nodded. "I need access to one of the Slayers-in-training. We need to see how they differ from Buffy. And if they both differ from someone who will never be called, like Willow or Tara."

Roger ran a hand over his face. "Assuming you can get me these two things, I can certainly run tests, and Linda can do pathology studies. But, where are you going with this? What's your overall goal?"

"I need to know if the call, when it comes, is physical, or mystical in nature. If we can figure it out maybe we can duplicate it. The world needs more Slayers. Maybe at one time one Slayer made sense, when so much of the world's population was more centrally located but now, there is so much evil in the world going unchecked."

Giles was just getting warmed up. "If we could activate Slayers they could be all over the world. They could work in teams, protect each other, and extend their life spans. With enough of them, Slayers could retire. They could put in their five years and get a gold watch. Go on and fall in love and get married and have a family, if that's what they want. Or pursue a career, travel. Live life like a normal person, having done their duty. It's inhuman, the way it is now. I can't abide it."

"Will the Council agree to this?"

"I don't know. They tend to be a bit on the conservative side. Buffy and I have always been a bit on the edge as far as they're concerned."

"And yet here she is, almost seven years later. She takes a licking and keeps on ticking."

"Excuse me?"

"Advertisement, Timex watches." Roger waved a hand. "Never mind. Have you spoken to Buffy about this?"

"Yes."

"And...?"

"She's a bit apprehensive about contacting the Council. She hasn't had the best experience with them. But, she likes the idea. Actually she loves the idea. She is and I quote: 'way ready to retire', end quote."

"So, are you going to call them?"

"I wanted to make sure you were willing to help first."

Roger grinned. "Giles, I'm your best man, remember?"

Giles lifted his beer in salute and he grinned back.

##

Roger looked down at Giles again and spoke. "Come on, Giles, wake up."

##

Willow put her hands up as if to protect her eyes. "Help, your ring, it's blinding me."

Buffy grinned and pretended to attack her with it. Then she held her engagement ring up, admiring it, and sighed. "Isn't it beautiful?"

Willow nodded. "It's gorgeous. It took you long enough to pick one out."

Buffy pouted. "I wanted it to be perfect. It's the only one I'm planning on getting."

Paul reached for her hand. "How much did this lovely little bauble set Giles back?"

Buffy laughed. "I wouldn't advise you to ask him that unless you have a CPR team standing by."

Linda smacked Paul on the arm. "Giles would have spent twice that if it made Buffy happy."

Paul grinned. "I thought it was the thought that counted."

Buffy shook her head. "Not with engagement rings."

Paul pursed his lips. "Ah." He locked eyes with Kevin and rolled his eyes. Kevin was perfectly happy to roll his eyes right back.

Willow got a dreamy look on her face. "I still can't believe you're getting married."

Buffy shared the dreamy look. "I know."

Linda took over the salad making duties, seeing that Buffy wasn't getting very far. She looked at the clock. "Shouldn't we have heard from Roger and Giles by now?"

Paul looked up at the clock as well. "Probably. Hopefully this just means that

the meeting is going well."

Buffy scowled. "Meetings with the Council never go well. I wish he'd taken me with him."

Paul agreed. "Or me, or both of us for that matter." He was trying to set the table but as usual, there wasn't enough silverware. "Roger must have loaned you guys the silverware again. I'm just gonna run over and get it."

Buffy nodded. "Okay, the dishes in the dishwasher are clean if they're in there."

As Paul headed out Linda smiled. "Roger and I have decided we're buying you lots and lots of silverware for a wedding present."

Buffy laughed at that. She grinned at Kevin. Kevin had ruined quite a few pieces trying his best to bend them the way Buffy could.

Willow spoke up. "Hey, me and Tara were talking about having your bridal shower. We need to pick a date." She frowned. "Have you guys picked a date for the wedding yet?"

Buffy whined a little. "No. I just know that whenever I set a date that the next big and evil will be standing by to schedule the new and improved apocalypse for that weekend."

Linda munched on a carrot. She looked at Willow. "I understand you're going to be the Maid of Honor."

Willow almost bounced in her seat. "I know, I'm so excited." She gestured at Linda. "Buffy wanted you and Tara and Anya to be her bridesmaids but..."

Linda laughed and finished Willow's sentence. "But by the time she had the entire wedding party organized she realized that everyone she knew would be in the wedding..."

Buffy chimed in. "And no one would be sitting and watching."

Willow nodded. "Sort of like having a play without an audience."

Linda sighed. "I love weddings." She glanced at Buffy. "Yours will be especially nice because I know it will work out. So many people get married and even at the wedding people are wondering how long it will last." She grinned. "Giles is completely head over heels in love with you."

Buffy sighed. "Yeah, it's great, isn't it? He's so great." She reached for a carrot as well. "Isn't it weird though? I mean, I've known him so long. Who would have guessed that we'd fall in love and get married? Sometimes it just seems so strange."

Willow laughed. "That's true for almost all of us. I don't think any of our lives quite worked out as planned."

Buffy looked at her, nervous. "But that's a good thing, right?"

Willow touched her hand. "That's a totally good thing."

Buffy let out a sigh of relief. "Good."

Linda's lips tightened as she turned back to the salad. She couldn't believe how much these young adults had already suffered through in their lives. It took her breath away sometimes. Especially in light of the fact that they were still so full of joy and the capacity to love. She felt honored to know them all. She took a deep breath and turned back to Buffy. "So, have you decided what you plan to wear? And what you're going to inflict on Willow?"

Buffy got an evil grin on her face.

##

Paul let himself in and began hunting for Roger's silverware. When he decided he had recovered most of it the phone rang. He deliberated for a moment and then he decided to answer it. "Giles' residence."

The voice on the other end was annoyed. "This is Quentin Travers. Is Rupert Giles there?"

Paul started to get a knot in his stomach. "Quentin Travers?"

"Yes. Is Rupert there?"

"No, he went to meet with you. He left hours ago. Weren't you supposed to meet at 1:00?" Paul hoped it was just a scheduling snafu.

"Yes, we waited for three hours and he never showed up. We've gone back to the hotel."

"He wanted to meet with you badly. He wouldn't have just not shown up."

"Then where is he?"

"I don't know." Paul's mind was racing, his heart clenching at all the negative possibilities. "Let me have your number." Travers gave it to him. Paul took a deep breath. "Mr. Travers, who knew you were coming to see Giles?"

"The entire Board did. I would never have agreed to meet with him to talk about possible changes of this magnitude without their backing."

"Were there people on the board who were opposed to Giles' suggestions?"

Travers let out a short laugh. "Most of them, including me."

"Why did you agree to meet with him then?"

"Just because I don't agree, doesn't mean I'm blind, boy. I could see the merits of his plan even if I understand that it would set the entire Council on its ears and create chaos. Mistakes happen when there's chaos. Dangerous mistakes." Travers suddenly realized he had no idea to whom he was speaking. "Who is this?"

"Paul Erikson."

"Ah, the policeman."

"Chief of Police, yes." Paul was beginning to see why Giles and Buffy weren't inordinately fond of this man. There was something innately patronizing about him. Paul continued, needing more information. "Would anyone have opposed Giles enough to stop this meeting from happening?"

There was a moment's hesitation. "Yes, I suppose that is a possibility."

"A remote possibility?"

Travers let out a breath. "No."

Paul got angry. "Why didn't you think of this before? If we'd known Giles might be in danger we could have set up something safer. Damn it, Giles and Roger could be..." He stopped, unable to finish that sentence. He just prayed it wasn't true.

"I'm not responsible for Giles' safety. Nor am I responsible for actions taken by other Board members. I will wait until tomorrow. If I haven't heard from Giles by early evening, I will be returning to England."

Paul wanted to reach through the phone and throttle the man. "Well, I'll be

sure to pass your message along to the Slayer. I'm sure she'll find your viewpoint an interesting one."

Travers swallowed and his face tightened. He didn't understand how that snip of a girl fostered such loyalty. All she did was aggravate him, with her insolence and disobedience. One of the reason's Giles' plan appealed to Travers was the thought of more malleable Slayers at his beck and call. "Yes, I've no doubt she'll be quite vocal about it. Perhaps she might want to spend her time more wisely looking for her Watcher." Travers hung up. He turned to his two companions and smiled. "She'll be coming soon. Get ready."

End of Part 1

Changes 2

Paul slowly hung up the phone. He punched in the number to the precinct. Once connected he asked them to do a search for both Giles and Roger for accidents or hospital admissions. Then he punched in another number. He tapped his fingers impatiently waiting for her to pick up. "Angel Investigations."

"Cordelia, it's Paul."

"Paul! This is a pleasant surprise." Paul could hear the pleasure in her voice and he grinned. Then he remembered why he was calling.

"Well, not really."

"Why, are you breaking up with me already? We've only gone out on one date. It couldn't have been that bad."

Paul let out a short laugh. "Cordy, it was a wonderful date. This is just more along the lines of a business call. I think Giles and Roger are in trouble."

"Oh. That kind of call." There was a pause. "You thought it was a wonderful date?" She pulled it together. "Sorry, you want to talk to Angel or Wes?"

"Wes." There was a short pause and then another British voice got on the phone.

"Paul, it's Wes. What seems to be the trouble?"

"Well, Giles and Roger left earlier today to meet with Quentin Travers and a

couple of his cronies to discuss the research they want to do and they never showed up. I just got off the phone with Travers and he said there was quite a lot of opposition. I was wondering if you could do any ferreting around, see if there is some sort of plot brewing. And I was hoping you could check out the place where the meeting was to have taken place."

"Hmmm. Yes, quite. I'll certainly see what I can find out, although I don't have the connections I once did. I'll send Angel out to the location. It's dark now so he'll be the only one who could find anything, assuming there's something to find. What car were they driving?"

"Giles' BMW." Paul gave Wes the location of the meeting. "I'll be coming down, I'm sure Buffy will too."

"Of course, we'll arrange some rooms for you."

"Great, and thanks, Wes." Wes was muttering to himself. Paul grinned and hung up. Wes couldn't quite rival Giles for research mode but he ran a close second. Paul let out a breath looking at the house next door. He wasn't looking forward to telling either Buffy or Linda that something might have happened to Giles and Roger. He checked the phone to make sure there were no messages. When he saw that there weren't he headed back over to Roger's, the forgotten silverware sitting on the counter.

##

Lights flashing and sirens blaring Paul and Buffy passed the sign welcoming them to Los Angeles. Buffy couldn't believe how fast they had gotten there. Her stomach was in knots wondering if Angel or Wes had found out anything. She began to direct Paul to the Hyperion. Paul pulled right up to the front, and parked in a no parking zone. He threw his police parking identification up on the dashboard.

Buffy hadn't said a word the entire trip down once she'd gotten past the initial questions.

##

After Paul had dropped the bombshell about Travers' call, Buffy stood and immediately started pacing. "How long has he...have they been missing?" She sent a small worried smile over to Linda.

"Travers said they never showed up. They were due down there to meet with him at 1:00. It's 5:00 now, so four hours at the least."

"Could they have gotten in an accident?"

"I'm having that checked now."

"We need to call Angel."

"Already done. I spoke with Wes. He's sending Angel to go look for Giles' car."

"We need to go down there."

"I know. Wes is making room arrangements."

Buffy walked over to Paul and gave him a brief but rib-cracking hug. "Thank you." She looked up at him. "We'll find them."

Paul smiled at her, worry clear in his eyes. "I know." Paul looked over at Linda. "I'll call you as soon as I know anything."

Linda was trying to keep her tears from falling, not wanting to appear too upset in front of Kevin. "I'll be here."

Willow walked over to Buffy. "Can I do anything?"

"Just stick close and have your laptop handy, just in case."

Willow nodded. "Be careful." She gave Buffy a hug. "He's all right. I know he is, they both are."

Buffy had a look of grim determination on her face. "They're fine." It was clear to all the adults in the room that if they weren't, that there'd be hell to pay.

Paul looked at Buffy. "Go get ready." Then he looked at Linda. "Do you have that picture of the three of us, me, Roger and Giles?"

Linda nodded and went to retrieve it off the refrigerator. "Here. Why do you need it?"

"Is your fax working?" It had been broken.

"Yes. Willow fixed it."

Paul grinned at that. He turned to Willow. "Go scan this in and set it up as a file, would you? I'll send it to the station and have them put out APBs on Giles and Roger. It won't hurt to have extra sets of eyes." Willow went into the office

and got to work. Paul followed her in a few minutes and sent the file off to the station with instructions.

Within 15 minutes he and Buffy had been out the door.

##

And she hadn't said a word since. All she'd done is play with her engagement ring and look out the window. Paul couldn't even imagine Buffy without Giles at her side. Paul couldn't imagine his own life without Giles at his side, let alone his brother. As he and Buffy approached the door he put a hand on her shoulder. "We'll find them, Buffy."

Buffy looked up at him. "I know." But Paul saw the doubt in her eyes and knew it was mirrored in his own.

Cordelia met them at the door. "Hey guys." She stood back and let them enter. Wes was sitting behind the counter. He stood and walked around it to greet the two of them.

Buffy went directly to the point. "Have you heard anything yet?"

Wes shook his head. "No, it's the middle of the night in England, unfortunately. I've tried a couple of people but I haven't had much luck as most of the numbers I have are business numbers."

Buffy pointed towards the phone. "Call Willow. She can get home numbers for you." As he headed over to the phone she stopped him. "Has Angel called in?"

"No, but I don't imagine he will unless he finds something. He'll just come back. He should be here shortly." Buffy nodded, not satisfied, and she began pacing around the lobby.

Cordy walked over to Paul. "Hey, are you all right?"

Paul shook his head. "No, I'm not." He looked down at Cordy. "But I am glad to see you." He smiled at her.

"Me too. I'm sorry it's for such a sucky reason though."

His answering laugh was bitter. "No shit." Paul looked over at Buffy, watched her frustrated pacing. "Maybe we should go find Angel."

"No need, I'm back." Angel hurried into the room. He nodded to Paul and then

walked over to Buffy. Paul and Cordy headed over to join them.

Buffy could barely stand to ask. "What did you find?"

"I found his car. There was definitely a struggle. The doors were still open. I found these." He reached into his inner pocket and pulled out Giles' glasses. Buffy let out a soft cry and took them from him. Angel hesitated but Paul could tell there was more.

"Angel, what else did you find?"

Angel's lips tightened. "There was blood. At least one of them was hurt. I don't know who though."

Buffy's face got very still and her eyes filled with tears. She brought Giles' glasses up to her breast, as if to hold them over her heart. Angel tried to give her a hug but she put up her hand. Her voice was tight. "Do we have any idea who it was? Could you tell? Were they human?"

"There were several of them but the ground was so scuffed it was hard to figure much more out than that. I'm sorry, Buffy. I wish I had more to tell you." Once again he tried to reach for Buffy but she started pacing again.

Paul's eyebrows furrowed as he watched Angel. Cordy put a finger up to touch his forehead. "What's this for?"

"He still loves her, doesn't he?"

Cordy followed his eyes to Angel. She frowned too. "Yes, I think he'll always love her." She looked back at Paul. "Why do you care?"

Paul shook his head. "I don't know. The guy just makes me nervous."

"Angel makes you nervous?" Cordy's voice was incredulous.

Paul shot her an exasperated glare. "He's a vampire."

"So, Spike's a vampire and you seem majorly buddy buddy with him."

"Spike's different."

"How?"

"He hasn't done..." Paul shook his head. "Never mind." He didn't think he could explain how protective of Giles he felt whenever Angel got brought up

or was around.

Cordy put her hand on his chest. "No, I get it. He hurt your friends. But, he's fine now. He'd never do that, he has his soul back."

Paul looked down at Cordy, his face serious. "He could lose it again. And he'd come after them again. He'd come after you. Can you honestly tell me you don't think about it? That it never worries you?" Cordy scowled. Paul pressed her. "You don't ever wonder if it could happen again?"

Cordy scowled again. "Well, all right, I think about it. But, I think about getting hit by a car when I cross the street too. I trust him, Paul."

"I know you do. They trusted him too. Buffy trusted him completely. Look what happened."

"But, now he knows he can't do that. He won't put us at risk like that."

Paul cupped her cheek with one of his hands. "I hope you're right." Shifting his hand he brushed her cheek with the back of his fingers. "I don't want anything bad to happen to you."

Cordy grinned. "Too late." Paul grinned back at her impish tone. He turned as he heard more people enter. It was a young black man and a young woman with long brown hair and glasses.

"Paul and Buffy, this is Gunn and Fred." Cordelia did the introductions. She pointed at Fred and Gunn again. "They work here too."

Fred was looking at Buffy closely, a nervous look in her eyes. "You're Buffy?"

Buffy nodded distractedly. She looked up at Paul. "I need to talk to Travers."

Gunn spoke up. "I've been checking on him. He's at the Piermont. There are at least two guys on lookout, one at both entrances. I couldn't ID anyone in the lobby but there could be more."

Buffy looked up at that. "When Travers came to Sunnydale, this last time, he brought a whole gang with him. He likes to feel important."

Cordelia grimaced. "He came to Sunnydale again?" That first time, at Buffy's birthday, hadn't gone so well.

Buffy grimaced back. "Yes, another test for my 21st birthday. If I didn't cooperate they said they'd take Giles' green card away and deport him."

Paul walked over to Buffy. "What? Can they do that?"

"Giles said they could. He said that the Council could kill you with a pen. That paperwork and messing with the system was what they did best."

Cordy saw it then. She let out a squeal. "Oh my God, is that an engagement ring?"

Despite the seriousness of the situation Buffy couldn't keep a grin off her face. She held up her hand. "Yup, he bought it for me yesterday." Her eyes filled with tears.

Fred picked up her hand and looked at the ring. "You're getting married?" She looked at Angel. "But not to Angel, right? You're not marrying Angel?"

Paul saw the flash of desolation that passed over Angel's face but then it was gone. Paul spoke up. "No, she's marrying Giles. One of the men who's missing."

Wes slammed down the phone and all eyes were on him. "The Council has just informed me that they haven't sent anyone to meet with Giles. They say an official decision hasn't even been made yet."

Buffy's eyes grew very hard. "So it is Travers. Travers did this, he took Giles and Roger." She looked at Paul. "Let's go."

Angel stopped her. "Buffy, don't you think that's what he wants? This is a trap of some sort."

"I don't care. He has Giles."

Wes spoke up. "Buffy, Angel's right. We need a plan."

"I don't have time for a plan. One of them is hurt. Maybe both of them. I need to find them."

Cordy snickered. "Well, you haven't changed much. Getting captured yourself is so not going to help either of them."

Buffy let out a long breath. "Fine. You have ten minutes to come up with a plan. Then, I'm out of here." She looked at her watch and then looked pointedly at Paul. "Ten minutes." Paul nodded.

##

Giles was finally starting to come around. He wasn't completely awake yet but he'd started moaning and shifting a little and Roger knew that was a good sign. He put a hand on Giles' shoulder and gently shook it.

"Giles, wake up."

Giles' eyes snapped open and he tried to sit up. He didn't make it very far and he would have fallen back if Roger hadn't caught him. He helped Giles scoot back to lean against the wall. Giles tried to get comfortable but his injuries hurt too much. "What happened?" He reached up to touch his face and winced at the pain.

"I don't know. We were jumped and knocked out. They left me alone but they beat you up. We're locked in, and no one's been around to check on us."

Giles put both hands to his head again, to his temples, to try and massage his headache away. "Do we know where we are?"

Roger shook his head. "No, but when you feel better I can boost you up and you can look out the window. I'm not tall enough on my own."

Giles nodded but made no effort to stand. "Give me a minute."

"Take your time." Roger flashed him a sardonic grin. "I don't think we're going anywhere." He felt better now that Giles was awake. "I'm sorry I don't have anything to give you for the pain."

Giles shook his head and then grimaced. "That's all right. I'll be all right." He looked up at the window. "Can you guess what time it is?"

"It didn't get dark that long ago. I'd guess around 6:30?"

Giles tried to stand and Roger rushed to help him. He limped over to the window. "Maybe I should boost you up. I feel pretty stiff to be doing any kind of balancing act."

Roger agreed and Giles made a step with his hands and braced them on his knee. He grunted when Roger put his weight on him but he stayed steady. Roger cleaned the window off with his sleeve. Giles called up. "Can you see anything?"

"Looks like we're in an old business district, pretty run down. I see some neon lights but nothing recognizable that would tell me where we are."

"How high up are we?"

"About twenty floors or so."

"Will the window open?"

Roger tried to get it open. It was painted shut. "Not without a lot of work." Roger could feel Giles giving out and he quickly stepped down. He assisted Giles back over to the wall and Giles thankfully slid down it and sat.

Roger stayed standing and went to try the door again. No give in it at all. He turned back to Giles. "Can you do any magic to get us out of here?"

Giles rolled his head from one side and then to the other. "I could probably put up wards, maybe keep anyone from coming in but that's about it. And someone coming in may be our only way out so I don't think that's a good idea."

"Can you send a message to Buffy somehow?"

Giles considered this. "I don't know. I've never tried it before." He glanced up at Roger. "I guess it's worth a try." He held his hand up. "Give me another minute. I probably ought to see what's outside the window so I can send that to her. I need to rest first though." His breathing was labored.

Roger walked over to him, concerned. "Is it hard to breathe? Or is it just that you hurt?"

Giles put a hand on his chest. "It is a little hard to breathe, but I think it's maybe just a broken rib or two."

"You can take a full breath then? Do it, let me see."

Giles took his time because it did hurt but he breathed deeply in and out enough to minimally satisfy Roger that his lungs weren't damaged. Roger sat down next to him and waited until Giles felt ready. When Giles tried to stand again, Roger again assisted him.

Giles wasn't looking forward to this. He looked down at Roger's laced fingers with some trepidation. Roger sent him a small smile. "I'll try and do most of the work, just get your foot up here."

Giles slowly lifted his leg, trying not to jostle his broken ribs. When he had his foot resting on Roger's hands he blew out a breath. "Ready?" Roger nodded. "One, two, three." Giles pushed off from the ground, not being able to avoid the groan that left his lips. He was gasping from the pain as he hung onto the

window ledge. Roger moved beneath him and tried to take as much of his weight as he could, letting Giles practically sit on his shoulder. Giles had one hand on Roger's head and one on the ledge as he tried to fill his mind with any possible landmark that would pinpoint their location. After a minute he nodded. "Okay."

Roger frowned. "Okay. I'm not quite sure how to let you down. Wait..." Roger slowly started to lower his body, using one hand on the wall to help balance himself and the other to hang onto Giles. The last couple of inches he went down pretty fast and he grunted as his knees made contact with the concrete.

Giles was able to just stand at that point. He flashed Roger a grateful look and a grin. "Well, if I ever lose the shop we can start our own tumbling act."

Roger grinned back. He stood and rubbed his knees. "Only if we buy a heavily padded mat to practice on." Giles went to sit down again. Roger watched him. "Do you need me to do anything?"

Giles shook his head. "No, I'll just...I guess I'll just try and send Buffy a message." He shrugged his shoulders. "Like I said, it's worth a try." He stretched out his neck again. "Although I have to admit I feel pretty silly trying."

Roger sat down next to him. "Don't. If any two people could connect this way it would be you and Buffy." He let out a gasp. "Or you and Kevin."

Giles considered that. There was no doubt that Kevin seemed to be unusually tuned into Giles. Especially now that Giles was working with him to determine the strength and capabilities of Kevin's magic. Kevin seemed to know where Giles was, when he'd be home, when he was calling on the phone. "I hate to get him involved."

Roger rolled his eyes. "Giles, he'll be fine. Not much rattles that kid. You know that. Plus, he'd do anything for you. He worships you. He'll be thrilled to think he was helping. And Buffy would slay you alive if she found out you didn't try and something bad happened to you."

Giles tightened his lips on a grin. She would at that. "All right, I'll try." He rested his head against the wall and focusing all his concentration he sent out to Kevin.

End Part 2

Angel had to subdue his irritation. It was one thing to have Buffy defer to Giles, because at least he was her Watcher, but the relationship between Paul and Buffy was grating on him. Anything he suggested Buffy would look at Paul to see if he agreed or disagreed. Not that the guy didn't know what he was doing, but this was his town, and Buffy should be listening to him.

Angel unclenched his fists. He pointed to an area on the map. "I think we should stay together and go after Travers."

Paul disagreed. "We should split up. Some of us should be looking for Giles and Roger. Once Travers sees us coming he could order them killed. We need to start looking for them now. They are the priority."

"He can still hurt Buffy."

"But right now, Giles and Roger are the ones in danger."

"And how do you propose to find them? It's a big city."

Paul blew out an exasperated breath. "I don't know." He looked at Buffy. "We should have brought Willow. She could have tried a locator spell."

Wes shook his head. "Locator spells seldom work in a city this size. Too much interference."

Gunn spoke up. "Well, we could start looking around the hotel. Don't you think Travers would have them somewhere nearby?"

"All the more reason to stick together."

Paul disagreed again. "Look, we already know it's a trap. If we all go together, we could all get taken. We need to split up." He turned to Gunn. "But, that's a good suggestion. We can start there."

Buffy nodded and Angel scowled. But then she looked at him. "Angel, you and I will go after Travers." She looked up at Paul. "You find Giles and Roger and you get them out." She fought back some tears. "You have to find them."

Paul looked at Buffy. "Buffy, if it's a trap, it's meant for you. Maybe I should go find Travers with Angel, and you should try and find Giles." Not that he wanted to be with Angel himself, but he didn't want to answer to Giles if Buffy got taken too.

Buffy's lips tightened and she put her hand on Paul's arm. "If it's a trap, I need

to know why. Because if we don't stop it now, it will just happen again. I need to know what he's up to. Besides the trap could be set around Giles as easily as it could around Travers. He probably has people at both places looking for me"

Paul scowled at that. She was probably right. His cell phone began to ring. He flipped it open. "Paul Erikson." His eyes began to widen. "Holy shit." He looked at Buffy. "It's Linda. She says Giles is contacting Kevin somehow. He's trying to tell Kevin what's outside his window. "Hold on Linda, I'm putting Angel on the phone. He knows this city better than I do." Paul handed the phone to Angel.

Angel started to pace as he listened, asking questions for clarification. Buffy moved over to him. "Is he all right?" Her heart was already soaring just with the knowledge that Giles was alive. "Is Roger okay?"

Angel nodded that he heard her and finally he asked. "Are they all right? Buffy wants to know."

After a moment, he nodded. "Yes. Giles got a little roughed up but neither one of them is hurt badly." He handed the phone to Buffy. "Linda wants to talk to you."

Buffy took the phone. "Linda?"

"Hey, Buffy. Kevin says that Giles wants you to know that he loves you."

Buffy had to push past the lump in her throat. "Are they really okay? Both of them?"

"Yes. They both seem to be okay."

"How badly is Giles hurt?"

"Kevin can't really tell. I'm sure Giles is keeping that from him. But he's obviously well enough to do this, whatever it is."

"Tell him that we're coming to get him. Tell him to hold on."

Angel spoke to Buffy. "Ask Kevin if he can think of anything else. No, let me talk to him."

Kevin got on the phone with Angel and they spoke for a few minutes, Angel firing off questions, trying to get a clearer picture in his own head of what Giles had seen out the window. When he was satisfied he had gotten all there

was he hung up.

Paul approached him. "Do you know where they are?"

"I think Gunn's right. I think they're by the hotel. But I need to go there to be sure, see if I can find the landmarks he's given me." Angel glanced at Buffy.

She was thinking. Buffy looked up at Paul. "Can you arrest Travers?"

Paul shook his head. "I can try. But, my guess is he's got some sort of diplomatic immunity."

"Even if he's not here on official Council business?"

Wes spoke up. "The Council tends to look after its own business, Buffy. If there's a problem with Travers, the Council won't want the American legal system to get involved."

Buffy scowled. "I cannot tell you how much I hate the Council." All of a sudden all she wanted to do was hold Giles. "Let's get Giles. We'll deal with Travers after I know he and Roger are safe. And as much as I'd like to I can't kill him and if I saw him right now I'd be too tempted." She looked at Wes again. "Does the Council know Travers is here, that he's up to something?"

"They do now."

"Are they planning on doing anything about it?"

"I don't know. I can keep checking but I doubt anyone I know would have that information or choose to share it with me. I'm sure it would be classified as high security."

Buffy let out a groan of frustration. "I hate it when the bad guys are humans." She shook her head. "I just want to get Giles and Roger and then we'll figure out what to do." She looked at Angel and Paul. "We should go in teams but stick close. As soon as Angel thinks he knows where it is the first team will go in. Second team will be backup in case something goes wrong. Okay?"

They organized themselves into two teams. Buffy, Angel, and Wes would be the first team in. Paul, Cordy, and Gunn would be backup. Fred was staying behind in case somehow Giles and Roger got free and tried to call. They took two cars, Angel and Paul's. Once they got near to the hotel they parked and began to scout on foot, looking for the landmarks.

Buffy was about to scream in frustration when Angel let out a satisfied noise.

"Ah ha."

Buffy turned to him. "What?"

Angel started pointing out neon signs and buildings. "If this is all they could see, with that neon light being dead ahead..." He looked behind him at an abandoned office building. "I'd say they're probably in that building."

They could all see the hotel Travers was staying in two blocks down the street. Gunn shook his head. "They gotta know we're here." He looked up at the building. "And that's gonna take us all night to figure out which room they're in."

##

Giles was having a hard time staying awake. Roger figured that the communication thing might have taken a toll, considering the shape Giles was in, but he couldn't imagine it affecting Giles this much. Giles' breathing was getting more labored and his pulse was erratic. With his doctor's intuition, which he felt like cursing right now, he was afraid if he didn't get Giles to a hospital soon that he might not make it much longer.

Roger got up and began to pace. He looked up at the windows. Longing for a big rock he looked around. His hush puppies would be useless. Roger's eyes lit on Giles' shoes. They had a hard heel. He walked back over to Giles and slipped one of his shoes off. Knowing there was nothing he could do about sufficient leverage with the window being so high he still began to beat on it. Hoping it might break. Hoping someone might notice.

##

Angel put his hand up to stop everyone from talking. He looked up at the building. Buffy looked too. Buffy saw it and heard it. "What is that?" A shadow passed by the window. "There it is again."

Paul had Buffy show him which window. He couldn't see it. He figured it took vampire or Slayer senses to see whatever they were seeing. He began to count floors, and count windows, determining exactly where that room might be. "Eighteenth floor, five windows in from the corner. Go, check it out."

Buffy needed no other urging. She, Angel and Wes ran for the building, Angel kicking the door open when they found it was locked. Paul kept a close eye out for any visitors. Suddenly the glass from the window shattered. Paul looked up, safely out of range from falling glass. He yelled. "Roger? Giles?"

He heard Roger's voice. "Paul, is that you?"

Paul almost wept with relief. "Yes, Buffy's on..."

Roger interrupted him, yelling down. "Call for an ambulance. Now." Paul started running for his car.

Paul shouted to Cordy. "Figure out what street this is." Cordy and Gunn looked for street signs. She had to run a block down before she found one.

She hollered back. "Mission Street."

Gunn looked at the number on the building. He ran over to Paul. "4516 Mission Street."

Paul barked the address into his radio and then he put his police lights on. "That'll keep the goons away. I don't want to mess with anyone if Giles is hurt." It was only a minute before he could hear the sirens approaching..

Gunn looked at him impressed. "They never come like that when I call."

Paul let out a short laugh. "It helps when you're the police."

Gunn looked at Cordy. "You're right. He does come in handy." Cordy grinned and she moved closer to Paul as they waited for the ambulance.

Paul wanted to go into the building but he knew he'd be of more use making sure things were being taken care of as fast as possible out here. He turned to Gunn. "Why don't you go in? See if they need help."

Gunn nodded and took off across the street. At the look of frustration on Paul's face Cordy put her hand on his arm. "I'm sure he's okay. I've seen him hurt lots of times. He's practically indestructible."

Paul put his arm around Cordy and pulled her close but he didn't respond.

##

Buffy and Angel raced up the stairs. Wes rapidly lagged behind. He gasped. "You two go on ahead. I'll be right there." They left him.

Buffy counted floors. "Eighteen." It was locked. They kicked it together and it flew backwards. She ran to the right and yelled. "Giles?"

Roger answered. "Buffy? We're in here." Roger pounded on the door.

In a second Buffy was there. "Roger? Is this the room?"

"Yes."

"Stand back, way back."

Roger moved away from the door and crouched down by Giles, covering him. The door flew into the room and crashed against the opposite wall. Roger looked up to see Buffy and Angel standing there. Buffy flew into the room to Giles' side. She smiled briefly at Roger but then put all her attention on Giles. Roger moved out of her way to talk to Angel. She called him. "Giles?"

Giles struggled to open his eyes. "Buffy?" She was blurry, even more blurry than usual without his glasses. He closed his eyes again. She looked up at Roger. "What's the matter with him?"

Roger shook his head as he and Angel drew close. "I don't know. I need to get him to a hospital. Paul's called for an ambulance." He listened for a second, the sirens sounded close. "They're coming. We have to get him downstairs. I don't want to wait for them to get up here. I don't know how much..." He didn't finish his sentence but Buffy's heart was thumping in her chest.

Wes staggered in the door, Gunn right behind him. Gunn could still speak. "Everyone okay?" He saw Giles. "Ambulance is outside. They're on their way up."

Angel and Roger were trying to carefully lift Giles. Roger spoke. "I'm pretty sure he has a couple broken ribs, try and keep him steady."

Angel nodded as he lifted Giles' upper body. He gestured to Gunn. "Get one of his legs, Roger can lift the other. We should be able to carry him that way."

Even in his weakened state Giles let out a groan when they lifted him. Buffy's eyes were bright with tears and she was biting her lip. She took one of Giles' hands in hers and walked beside them. Wes, finally getting his breath back followed along behind them.

They met the ambulance team on the eighth floor. Once he was strapped in the gurney four of them were able to carry him and they got him down quickly. Buffy and Roger got in the ambulance with him and after telling Paul and Angel which hospital they were heading to, the doors slammed shut and the ambulance took off.

Buffy sat by Giles' side, trying not to be in the way, holding his hand tightly.

Once the ambulance staff realized they had an emergency room physician with them they began to work as a team. An IV got started, O2 sats were checked, and leads were put on his chest to check out his heart. Roger put an oxygen mask over Giles' face when he saw how low his oxygen levels were.

Buffy kept her gaze on Giles except for occasional looks at Roger. What she saw on Roger's face scared her so she stopped looking and just held on tighter. She whispered softly to Giles. "Come on Giles, hang on. Don't you die on me, don't you dare die on me." Tears were running down her face.

##

They were all in the waiting room, except for Roger. He was allowed to be with Giles while he was being stabilized in the emergency room. Every now and then a police officer would show up and Paul would go and talk to them. But right now he was sitting next to Buffy and he had his arm around her. He had called Linda to tell her that Roger was fine and that as soon as he was free he would call her. He'd also filled her in on what was going on with Giles. Of which they knew little. Paul looked down at Buffy to see her still playing with her engagement ring. He kissed the top of her head and thought back on a conversation they'd had a couple of weeks ago.

##

Paul looked up at the knock on the door to his office. He smiled. "Buffy, what brings you down here?"

Buffy flashed him a nervous grin. "I wanted to talk to you about something."

Paul frowned. "Everything okay? Giles, he's okay?"

Buffy rolled her eyes. "Yes, everybody's fine. This isn't a crisis call."

Paul sat back and gestured Buffy to the empty seat to the side of the desk. "So sit, tell me what's on your mind."

Buffy blew out a breath blowing her bangs off her forehead. "Okay, well you know I'm getting married."

Paul laughed. "Yeah. I figured that out." Paul had been the first one she'd told that next morning. She'd flown down the stairs colliding with him, practically knocking him to the floor. She'd been so excited she'd just blurted it out. Paul had given her the biggest hug, thrilled for the both of them and then watched as she'd raced back upstairs.

Buffy blushed. "Fine, make fun of me. I've never done this before."

Paul was mystified. "Buffy, it's just me here, relax."

Buffy squared her shoulders. "Right, relax." She moved to the edge of her seat. "You know my dad's kind of a not too much around kind of guy, right?"

Paul nodded. "Yeah. You want me to track him down for you?"

Buffy shook her head. "No, well maybe, but no. I was wondering if you'd...if you'd walk me down the aisle." She looked at him, this hopeful look on her face.

Paul was stunned. "Me. You want me to walk you down the aisle?" Buffy nodded. "You want me to give you away to Giles?" Buffy nodded again. Paul had to fight to keep the tears away. He rubbed his eyes but they were still suspiciously bright. He stood up and pulled Buffy up, giving her a hug. "I can't think of anything that I'd be more honored to do."

Buffy hugged him back in relief. "Really, you'll do it?"

Paul pulled back and looked down at her. "Did you think I'd say no? I love you guys. I can't believe you asked me." He looked down at Buffy. "Are you sure you don't want me to track your dad down? I'm sure he'd be sad he missed the opportunity."

Buffy smiled at Paul. "If you find him, I'll send him an invitation. But even if he was standing right here, I'd still ask you. I mean, I know you're not my dad, but you take care of us, you take care of me." Buffy's voice got a little shaky and her eyes got teary. She laughed a little. "Sorry, I don't mean to get all weepy on you."

Paul hugged her again. "I don't mind. I'm feeling a little weepy myself." He tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear. "How can he be such a fool?"

"Who?"

"Your father." Paul let out a breath. "Well, his loss, my gain." He looked down at Buffy. "Thank you for asking."

She smiled up at him. "Thank you for saying yes."

Paul looked at his watch. "Do you have time for lunch?"

She grinned. "Yup, and I'm starving."

Paul grabbed his coat. "A perfect combination. Let's go."

##

Paul kissed the top of Buffy's head again, and he looked up in time to see the look Angel shot him. Paul ignored it. He patted Buffy on the arm to get her attention when he saw that Roger was coming. Buffy met Roger half way. "Is he...?" She couldn't even ask.

Roger nodded. "He's okay. I still don't know what the hell is going on. None of his injuries should have caused him to get this sick, but he's stable now and he's not getting any worse and he's here, where anything that comes up can get handled." He gave Buffy a hug. "Really, I think he's going to be fine." Buffy just started to cry and Roger held on to her.

Paul reached around Buffy to grab Roger's shoulder. "I'm glad you're okay too. You had us all worried for a while."

Roger grinned. "Don't worry. I was worrying right along with you." He cocked his head to the side. "Do you know what's going on? Who took us?"

"Travers."

"The guy we were supposed to meet?"

"According to the Council no official envoy was sent. Travers was doing this all on his own."

"Why?"

"We haven't figured that one out yet. We wanted to make sure Giles was okay."

Buffy had gotten herself together by then and pulled back. "He's really going to be okay?"

Roger nodded. "I'll stay close. I'll take care of him, I promise."

Buffy gave him a watery grin. "I know you will. Can I see him?"

"Yes, but just for a minute." Roger put his arm around Buffy and escorted her through the hallways back to the emergency room.

End Part 3

Changes 4

As they approached Giles' cubicle Buffy spoke. "Why can't I just stay with him?"

"Buffy, hospitals have stupid rules. Don't ask me why. You're only getting to see him at all while he's still here in the ER because I insisted and I promised you wouldn't get all hysterical." He looked down at her and grinned. "Once he's up in his room you can stay with him. I'll work it out."

She nodded and hesitated at the edge of the curtain. Buffy took a deep breath and walked around it. She let her breath out in relief. He still looked like Giles. No major tubes or other horrible hospital things. Buffy looked up at Roger again. "Is he conscious?"

Giles answered. "Yes, he is."

Buffy ran to him and looked down at him on the bed. She wasn't sure she should touch him. "Are you all right?"

Giles lifted a hand and she took it in both of hers. "Yes, just a little achy."

Buffy caught Roger's eyes and rolled her own. "Right. The master of understatement strikes again. Why didn't you tell Kevin you were so sick?"

Giles let out a short laugh but then winced at the movement. "What good would that have done if you couldn't find us?" He smiled at Buffy. "But you did. I knew you would."

"I love you so much."

"I love you too."

Giles closed his eyes, the conversation having worn him out. Another doctor walked in and he frowned at Buffy. Buffy leaned down and gave Giles a quick kiss on the lips. "I'll be right in the waiting room until they let me back in to see you." Giles nodded, a small smile on his face.

Buffy let out a sigh and turned to Roger. "I wish I could stay."

"They'll get him upstairs as soon as they can. They need to discharge someone to make room for him. The hospital's packed, apparently."

Roger escorted her to the waiting room and then he left to go back to Giles. Everyone looked up wanting a report. Buffy smiled wanly at them. "He's awake and he seems okay. He's glad we found him." She looked at them all. "Thank you all for helping." She cleared her throat as her voice had gotten thick with unshed tears.

Cordy stood up and patted Buffy on the arm. "Sure, that's what we're here for. To help the needy."

Gunn waved a hand at her. "No problem. Are we gonna do anything about this Travers guy?"

Buffy's eyes got angry. "Yeah, I think I may go pay him a visit."

Paul grew alarmed and he saw Angel sit up a little straighter. "Not by yourself."

She looked up at him and over at Angel. "No, not by myself."

Paul touched her arm. "You promise?"

Buffy nodded. "I promise." She frowned. "But we have to go soon. He'll leave as soon as he knows Giles is gone."

Paul looked up as another officer came in. "Let me talk to this guy and we'll go."

Buffy nodded and sat down next to Angel. He took her hand. "How are you doing?"

She shook her head. "I don't want to think about it. Too many close calls. It makes me sick to my stomach." She leaned back in the chair. "Just once I'd like a month to pass without something bad happening." Her eyes got angry again. "And it's one thing when it's demons but when it's someone from the Council." She looked up at Angel. "Why? Why is he doing this? I don't get it."

Angel put his arm around her. "I don't know. But we'll find out. What's important is that you're safe."

Buffy shook her head. "No, what's important is that Giles is safe." She stood. At the look in Angel's eyes she grinned. "I'm just going to the rest room. Relax."

He sat back and watched her as she headed down the hallway. Cordy got up to get a drink. She was fumbling in her purse for the exact change when she saw a man approach Buffy on her return from the bathroom. Cordy watched Buffy out of the corner of her eye as she started loading the machine with change. Cordy could tell that Buffy was getting angry. Cordy leaned down to pick up her soda. And when she looked up Buffy and the man were gone.

Cordy ran to where Buffy had been standing and she saw Buffy heading out the door. She yelled. "Buffy."

Buffy turned around and the look in her eyes made Cordy's heart lodge in her throat. There was nothing good about that look. It was angry and frightened. Cordy yelled again. "Paul, Angel." And she headed for the door.

Paul and Angel both came running, along with the other officer. Cordy yelled at them. "They're taking Buffy." They all sprinted for the door. They hit the sidewalk just in time to see Buffy being shoved in a car across the street. Paul and Angel ran for the car. It began to pull away. Angel leaped on the back hood but there was nothing to hang on to. He began forcing his fingers through the fiberglass but the driver took a sharp right and Angel got thrown off.

Paul ran for his car while the fellow officer ran for his. Angel and Cordy jumped in the back seat. Paul peeled out of his spot and took off after the car. He hit the steering wheel hard with his hand. "Fuck a damn duck." Cordy held on to Angel as the car felt as if it lifted up on two wheels as Paul went around the corner. They all listened to the report on the radio as an APB went out on the car they were chasing.

Cordy shook her head. "I don't get it. She wasn't even fighting them. She just went with the guy. What's up with that?"

Paul could barely see the car. He swerved in to the left lane, dodging oncoming traffic. Cordy just managed to keep from screaming. As an afterthought Paul flipped his siren on. He glanced back at Angel. "Did you see his license plate number?"

Angel thought for a second. "The first part of it."

"Good enough." Paul reached for his radio. "What is it?" Paul called in the information and asked them to start a search. He answered Cordy's question. "They must have threatened to hurt Giles. It's the only thing that makes sense. Roger said he couldn't figure out why he got so sick. They must have done something to him and threatened to do it again."

Paul took a hard left, still keeping the car in sight. He hit the steering wheel again. "God damn it. Right in front of me. How could I be so stupid?"

Cordy leaned over the seat. "Paul, it happened right in front of all of us."

"Yeah, but it's what I do for a living."

"It's what we do for a living too. It's nobody's fault. They could have gotten to her anytime."

Paul blew out a frustrated breath. His eyes narrowed. He couldn't see the car anymore. "Angel, do you see it?" Between Angel and reports on the radio they had been doing a pretty good job keeping track of it.

Angel shook his head. "No. It was right there but now I don't see it."

Paul slowed and they looked down every street and alley they passed. There was no sign of the car. Paul heard the helicopter overhead and he got on the radio. "Do you see it?"

All reports were negative. The car had vanished. A police car pulled up behind them. Paul got out. He and the officer spoke for a couple of minutes and then Paul got back in the car. As he started to drive away Angel leaned over the seat. "Where are you going? She has to be around here somewhere."

"I agree. They're going to call in several units and thoroughly search this area. I think our time could be better spent paying a call to Quentin Travers." Angel couldn't argue with that so he sat back and brooded.

##

Buffy watched as Angel fell to the ground and she saw Paul running for his car. As they turned the corner another car, identical to the one she was in pulled out ahead of them. Her car took a sharp left and pulled into a garage while the other car raced down the street. A door closed behind them. The driver got out and opened the back door. Buffy had gotten over being frightened and was mostly just angry. "When do I see Travers?"

The man sitting next to her shook his head. "I don't know nobody by that name. I was hired to give you a message and if you decided to come with me to bring you to an address."

"Is this the address?"

"No, but I needed to lose the tail."

"So, tell me this message again."

"I was told to tell you that they gave a little something extra to your friend. That it wouldn't kill him, unless they gave him some more. Which they could easily do because they got people working in the hospital. You come easy, no one gets hurt. Your choice."

"Who wants to see me?"

"I don't know. I don't ask questions like that. In this line of business, the more questions you ask the deader you get." He gestured her towards the open door. "Come on. We'll be late."

Buffy shot him a disgusted glance. "Like I so care."

"You want me to call them and tell them you don't want to go?"

Buffy glared at him. "No."

"Then come on."

Buffy slid out of the car. She was sure she could take them both down and get back to Giles before anything could happen to him but she'd never know what this was all about. And she needed to find out. They'd all been played. If Giles hadn't found a way out, she'd probably have gotten some ransom call, demanding her presence for his safe return. Except that he wouldn't have been returned safely. He'd have died. If Giles hadn't been able to contact Kevin, he'd have died up in that room.

But they'd been prepared for plan B. Or at least they'd rallied quickly. And as long as they were using Giles to get to her, she needed to figure out what was going on and stop it. She put on the coat the man handed her and walked out to the street and got in the back seat of another car. It pulled out and headed towards its destination.

##

Paul pulled up in front of the Piermont Hotel and the three of them jumped out. He walked up to the front desk and pulled out his badge. "Do you have a Quentin Travers staying here?"

The clerk peered at the badge and then looked up the name on the computer.

"He's checked out." She looked at Paul. "Are you Rupert Giles?"

Paul decided if she couldn't be bothered to read the name on his badge that it was her own damn fault. "Yes."

She reached behind her and retrieved an envelope. "He left this for you."

Paul ripped the envelope open and with Angel and Cordelia reading over his shoulders they read the note.

Rupert,

You may feel that you have copious amounts of time to waste; I however do not. I don't appreciate coming all this way for you not to show up. I have decided to catch the 7:00 flight back to England tonight.

Don't expect me to make this effort again.

Q

Cordy gasped. "He's totally trying to bluff."

Paul looked at his watch. "Damn, it's already 8:00. He'll have left by now."

Cordy tapped the paper. "How does he think he can get away with this?"

Paul growled. "He can get away with it."

"What do you mean?"

"No one saw him. Roger and Paul have no idea who grabbed them. He called Giles' home when Giles didn't show. And he'd already left town before they grabbed Buffy. We can't prove any of it."

"But the Council said they didn't send anyone officially."

"Right, so Quentin says he came because he and Giles go way back. He wanted to talk to Giles personally and bring more information to the Council. He ends up being a good guy." Paul turned back to the clerk. "Can I see his room? Is it still empty?"

She looked and nodded. "I'll call housekeeping to let you in."

Paul turned away, nodding. Cordy was still stuck on Travers. "So, he just gets away with it?"

"Unless Buffy finds something out." He pulled out his cell phone.

"Who are you calling?"

"The airlines. Maybe his flight was delayed." Paul walked away from Angel and Cordy to complete his call.

Cordy looked up at Angel. "She'll be okay. She's Buffy, she's tough."

Angel scowled but didn't respond. Paul walked over to join them. "Angel, call Wes. Tell him to call someone he trusts at the Council, let them know what our suspicions are. Maybe they can figure out what he's up to." Angel scowled again but he nodded. Paul made as if to give him his phone to use but Angel pulled out his own cell phone.

Cordy went to stand by Paul while Angel and Wes spoke. At the look on his face Cordy stormed over to the desk and spoke sharply to the clerk. "Where are they? Could you please call them again? We're on police business here."

Wide-eyed, the clerk lifted the phone up. Cordy walked back over to Paul. He reached for her hand and smiled at her. "Can I hire you?"

Cordy shook her head. "Nope, consider this a professional courtesy."

"One crime buster to another?"

She nodded. "Yup."

He squeezed her hand. "Thanks." His eyes lit with relief when someone from housekeeping finally showed up. Paul's phone rang as they headed for the elevator. He had a disgruntled look on his face when he hung up. "The plane took off on time and he was on it."

Cordy looked disgusted. "Figures. Probably the only flight this year that takes off on time and it has to be his."

Housekeeping opened the door and then they left. The three of them scoured it for anything that might give them a clue as to what was going on. They found nothing.

##

When they finally arrived, Buffy was escorted into a small building, some sort of day-stay surgery center. It had a look of a place that has gone out of

business, abandoned but with a certain amount of clutter, thrown around in a nobody cares sort of way. Buffy's eyebrows furrowed as she tried to figure out what was going on. The man who had approached her in the hospital rapped on one of the doors past the appointment desk. The door opened and Buffy was prodded to enter.

She looked around. There was a treatment table, a medium sized carton resting on the floor, a tray filled with some IV supplies, a series of empty blood tubes, a tourniquet and a multitude of alcohol pads, and there was a man sitting on a rolling stool wearing surgical scrubs and a surgical mask. His hair was peppered with gray and his eyes were hard to see behind his glasses. He stood. "Ah, our guest has arrived." He turned to the two men who had escorted Buffy in. "Thank you gentlemen, I'll take it from here." Without a word they turned and left.

Buffy let out a disgusted noise. "Do you have any idea who I am?"

"No, it doesn't matter. I have my orders." He gestured towards the treatment bed. "Please."

"I am so not getting on that bed. Are you out of your mind?" She took a step closer to him.

He held his finger up as if to politely ask her to stop. Then he walked over to the counter and picked up the phone. He spoke a single word. "Activate." He hung up and turned back to Buffy. "I just gave the word that tells my companion to prepare to administer some unprescribed medicine to your friend at the hospital. If I don't call back within five minutes they'll give it to him."

Buffy grabbed him by his collar and pulled him up close. "Call them back, now."

"No, I suggest you get on the bed. All I need is some blood samples."

"And all I need to do is break all your fingers and you won't be drawing any blood."

"Yes, but then your friend will die."

Buffy pinned one of his arms behind him and lifted it high. She marched him over to the phone. "Call."

"No."

Buffy picked up the phone and pushed the same button he had. She put the phone to the side of his head and twisted his arm. "Tell them to stop."

The man grunted. He spoke in the phone. "Give it."

Buffy broke his arm and she grabbed the other one. "I'll break it. I'll break every bone in your body if I have to."

The man's glasses had gone askew and she was able to see his eyes for the first time. They were very bright and not completely sane. He looked excited. "Go ahead. Break it. Kill your friend. Or get on the bed."

Buffy could hear the voice on the other end of the line. "So should I give it or not?"

The man looked at Buffy. "Your choice." Buffy let go of his arm. The man grabbed the phone. "Hold on for a minute. If I don't get back on the phone, give it." He laid the phone down, turned and looked at Buffy, his eyes glancing at the bed.

Her eyes filled with tears of frustration. "Why are you doing this?"

"I'm getting paid an inordinate amount of money."

"No, this. Why are they doing this at all?"

He shook his head. "I have no idea." He lifted his eyebrows. "Tick-tock." Buffy looked at the phone and then at the bed. She slowly moved to it and sat down. He spoke to her. "Lie down." She hesitated and he just looked at the phone. He seemed indifferent to his broken arm hanging useless at his side. She slowly lay down. He walked around to the far side and laid her arm down. He snapped a thick metal cuff around her wrist. When she made as if to fight he pointed to the phone. She lay back down again and he secured her other wrist and her ankles. "There." He patted her on the leg. "Comfy?" He walked back over to the phone. "Yes, you can hold off for now. I'll be checking in every hour. If you don't hear from me, give it." After listening to the response he nodded and hung up.

He walked over and picked up the carton that was on the floor and rested it on the counter. He pulled out a wooden box, a little larger than one that might hold a pen and pencil set. Buffy's eyes grew wide when she saw it and she began to struggle. But the restraints were solid and had obviously been chosen with her strength in mind. He brought the box over to the table where she lay and he opened it. Inside, just like she remembered were a syringe and a vial filled with yellow fluid, identical to the one Giles had shown her

when he had finally confessed what he had done to her. "What are you doing with those?" She hated how fearful her voice felt.

"Don't worry. I'll just be giving you a few shots and taking some blood samples."

"That's what this is about? The testing Giles wanted to do? Why don't they just let him do it? I don't understand."

He ignored her and put the tourniquet on. His broken arm was not good for much but he was able to use it enough. He felt for a likely vein and then wiped it off with an alcohol pad. He inserted an IV set up, first drawing some blood and then capping it off. The man smiled at her, or at least his eyes crinkled as if he was smiling. She still couldn't see his face. "This way I won't have to stick you with so many needles." He took off the tourniquet and carefully labeled the blood tubes.

Buffy rolled her eyes. "That's supposed to make me feel better?" He uncapped one of the syringes and inserted it into the IV cap. He started to press the plunger. Buffy shook her head. "I don't think you're supposed to give it that way. Giles said he just gave it to me as a shot."

The man nodded. "Yes, I understand it's meant to be given as a subcutaneous injection. They seem to be feeling a bit pressed for time though, and thought it might work faster this way." He finished depressing the plunger and pulled out the syringe. He patted her arm. "We'll wait a few minutes and then we'll draw some more blood."

Buffy watched as he returned to the carton and began to lift out several of the wooden boxes. Buffy's eyes widened in alarm. "He only gave me one box worth. That's way too much."

The man shook his head. "Apparently they don't agree with you." He set a timer for fifteen minutes and started opening up drawers. She watched as he did what he could to splint his own arm.

Buffy felt a little dizzy. The timer went off. He stood and put the tourniquet on her other arm. Buffy frowned. "Hey, I thought you weren't gonna stick me with any more needles."

"That was just for the injections. I need to draw your blood out of a different vein otherwise the medicine will throw the test results off."

Buffy struggled against the restraints again. If she didn't get out soon she might not get out at all. She had no idea how long it would take for her to start

losing her strength. He glanced at her. "I'd suggest you stop that while I draw your blood. It will make me miss."

She glared at him but she stopped. He drew the blood and filled two of the test tubes. Again he carefully labeled them and then packed them away in the carton. He glanced down at Buffy. "Just relax. You don't get another injection for 45 minutes." He sat down and picked up a magazine.

She tried to reason with him. "Why are you doing this? I mean I know they're giving you money, but why? This isn't right. What kind of man are you?"

He answered her without looking up from the magazine. "A man with expensive habits."

"What kind of habits?" He ignored her. Buffy tried everything. She yelled at him, she pleaded with him, she even threatened him. He continued to ignore her. Except when the timer went off. Then he checked in on the phone, gave her more of the drug and then fifteen minutes later he drew some more blood. After the next round he left the room and came back a few minutes later rubbing his nose through his mask, his eyes even brighter than before.

End Part 4

Changes 5

Roger hung up the phone. He hoped Giles would just stay asleep. He'd been sleeping for hours and Roger wasn't ready for the conversation they'd have to have when he woke up. He didn't fancy the fight he'd have on his hands keeping Giles in a hospital bed when he discovered Buffy was missing. He shook his head. Could this day get any worse? Giles started to stir and Roger cursed. Yes, apparently it could.

They'd finally moved Giles up to a room. Roger had made sure it was a private one. He ran a hand through his short hair wishing he could take a shower. Giles spoke, his voice thick. "Buffy?"

"No, it's me, Roger."

"Where's Buffy?" Roger didn't answer him. "Roger?" Giles opened his eyes and asked again. "Where's Buffy?"

Roger squinched his face up. "We don't exactly know."

Giles tried to sit up. "What does that mean?"

Roger walked over to the bed and pushed the button on the bed rail to put the head of the bed up. "She's missing."

Giles' eyes opened wide. "For how long?"

Roger looked at his watch. "Six hours."

Giles got an angry look on his face. "And you just let me sleep?"

"No, I've been letting your body heal. You were in no shape to go gallivanting off like I knew you'd want to." Giles started to push his covers aside and Roger stopped him. "Everyone's out looking. Paul's got half the LAPD out looking too. You need to rest so when we figure out where she is, you'll be strong enough to go to her."

Giles yanked the covers out of Roger's hands and pushed them aside, wincing at his own movements. He ignored the pain and sat up, swinging his legs over the side of the bed. The room began to spin. He held on to the bed rail and shook his head. "What happened?"

"We don't know. Cordy saw her talking to some guy and when she looked up again, they were both gone. Cordy followed them and saw them leaving the hospital. She yelled for Paul and Angel and they chased after her but they lost her. Paul's pretty convinced that they must have threatened to hurt you if she didn't go with them, that the reason you got so sick is because they gave you something. I agree with him. Your injuries weren't severe enough to kill you but you still almost died." He glared at Giles. "Are you listening? I want to make sure I'm getting through to you. You almost died. And you're in no shape to go chasing after shadows when there are so many people already looking. You needed to sleep."

Giles glared right back. "I can't just sit here and do nothing." He looked down at his hospital gown. "At least let me get dressed."

"Nothing doing. You get dressed you're as good as out of here." He fished under the covers and came up with some scrubs he'd snatched. "Here, you can put these on." He turned around while Giles slowly put the scrubs on, occasionally grunting as different aches and pains made themselves known.

Giles sat back down. "Do we know anything?"

Roger let out a sigh. "No. They have half a license plate number. There's a team checking out all the possible matches. Cordy's been looking through

mug shots to see if she can identify the guy. The area where the car was last seen has been completely searched. They found the car but it wasn't the right car. Somewhere along the line they must have switched."

"They don't want us to find her."

Roger turned around at the sad tone in Giles' voice. "No, they don't. But we will. They found us." He sat down next to Giles.

Giles pinched the bridge of his nose while he nodded. "I don't suppose anyone found my glasses? I feel blind as a bat."

"Oh, they're here somewhere. Buffy gave them to me." Roger looked around the room and then he saw them on the bedside table. He picked them up and handed them to Giles. "Here." He hesitated. "Giles, I'm sorry. I..."

Giles shook his head to stop Roger. "It's not your fault she's missing. But you should have woken me up."

"To do what? You're still sick, not to mention black and blue." He could tell that Giles was still feeling like crap. Which wasn't necessarily a bad thing if it kept Giles in bed.

Giles ran his hand through his hair. He had to do something. Maybe... He looked at Roger. "Maybe I can reach her like I did with Kevin. Maybe it's possible."

"Are you sure you're up to that?"

Giles shot Roger a look and Roger put both hands up in surrender. "Right. What can I do?"

"Can you shut off the lights and make sure no one enters?"

Without speaking Roger just got up and shut the light off. He pulled up his chair and placed it in front of the door and sat in it. He spoke in the darkness. "You want me outside?"

"No, you can stay."

Roger nodded and settled back. Giles sat back in bed and closed his eyes. He took several long deep breaths ignoring the pain it caused him. He thought of Buffy and sent out to her. All he felt was fear, it was consuming him, but he couldn't tell if it was Buffy's or his own.

##

Buffy had lost all track of time. She could feel the poison working. She could feel it creeping through her body, leeching her strength away. It felt like it was leeching her life away. She knew she'd already gotten more than Giles had given her over a week. There were several empty wooden boxes lying on the floor. But she'd lost track of that too as she began slipping in and out of consciousness.

Her body was cramping and she couldn't move to stretch out her aching muscles. She groaned as one of her calves knotted up. The timer went off. The timer was the only thing that let Buffy know that time was passing. It had all just become one long nightmare that she was beginning to believe she'd never get out of. Tears began to run down her face again and she whispered his name. "Giles." As the man approached her again she turned her face away.

##

Giles had been trying to connect with Buffy for three hours without success but he refused to give up. He suspected he'd fallen asleep a few times and he was furious with himself. Despite Roger's cussing about it, he was sitting on the floor now, hoping the discomfort alone would keep him awake.

They'd been interrupted once when Giles' IV pump had started to beep. It had woken Giles up. Roger had called for the nurse. He used the opportunity to check on Giles. Roger hadn't been overly pleased at what he saw, the strain the whole thing was putting on Giles, but he didn't say a word. Just made Giles drink some water while the nurse changed the IV bag. And then once she'd gone Giles had insisted on getting on the floor. The fear in his voice had stopped Roger from arguing. She'd been gone for nine hours now and the ticking clock felt like a time bomb.

Giles focused again, feeling desperate to reach her. He heard her whisper his name. Without thinking he spoke. "Buffy?"

Roger's heart started to speed up. "Giles, what is it?"

"I don't know. I heard her call my name. I thought she was here."

There was excitement in Roger's voice. "Maybe it's working. Don't stop."

Giles immediately shut his eyes and reached out again.

##

Buffy felt his presence. "Giles?" She opened her eyes and turned expecting to see him by her side. When she saw the man standing there filling tubes with her blood she almost cried out loud with despair. She turned her head away again and closed her eyes, wishing Giles were with her, wishing for it harder than anything she'd ever wished for before.

##

Giles felt her sadness first and it almost overwhelmed him. He longed to wrap his arms around her and comfort her. He spoke in his mind. "Buffy, can you hear me?"

##

It felt as if he was holding her. Her longing for him intensified. Then she heard his voice, in her head. She let out a sob. "Giles?" She spoke his name out loud again. The man continued to ignore her.

"Yes, Buffy, it's me." He could hear her cry. He pushed his anger aside. There would be time later for him to be angry at whoever did this to her.

"Giles, where are you?" She opened her eyes, looking for him again. She didn't understand.

He could feel her confusion. "Buffy, be still. I'm in your mind. We're trying to find you. Can you tell me where you are?"

She was too confused. She just kept saying his name. "Giles?"

Giles realized he needed to calm her down. He sent his love to her. He pictured himself holding her, stroking her hair, telling her how much he loved her. He could feel it helping. He could feel her starting to relax. He tried again. "Buffy, where are you? Can you picture any of it in your mind?"

Buffy tried to think. Giles got disjointed pictures of a man in scrubs, needles, tubes of blood, and again he had to push his anger aside when he saw the wooden boxes. He knew what was in those. He took several long deep breaths so his thoughts would be calm. "What does the outside of the building look like? What part of town are you in?"

He only caught glimpses. It was too disjointed to make sense, too hard for Buffy to focus on any one thing long enough to give him clear direction. But Giles found it easy now to stay connected. He could feel her, like a burning ember inside his soul. And he knew that as long as he was feeling it that it

would lead him to her. He spoke to her in his mind. "Buffy, I'm coming to get you. Just hold on." He opened his eyes and spoke to Roger. "Call Paul. I think I can find her." Roger reached for the phone and dialed Paul's cell phone. Giles sat up again and ignoring the spinning, he stood.

Roger spoke tersely and then quickly hung up. Walking over to Giles he pushed him back down. He put his hand against Giles' chest when Giles tried to stand again. "Listen, if you fall and knock yourself out we've lost her. You're the only link to her. Don't be stupid. Let me get a wheelchair. Paul was already here, he's on his way up." He pointed at Giles as he started to back up. "You, stay." He dashed out of the room to find a wheelchair, hoping Giles would stay put for at least a minute.

Giles could feel Buffy's fear rise again and it distracted him from the wait. He used what energy he had to try and comfort her again. It was clear to him that she still didn't understand why she was hearing him but couldn't see him. She was still too confused. "Buffy, close your eyes. Just keep them closed. I love you and I'll be there soon." Roger appeared in the doorway with a wheelchair, an anxious nurse in tow. He was arguing with her. "Sorry, he's got to go. I'll bring him back as soon as I can." He let out a sigh of relief when he saw Paul running down the hall. As soon as Paul hit the door Roger filled him in. "He thinks he knows where she is."

Paul's eyebrows rose. "How?"

Roger just rapped one of his index fingers against one of his temples. "He's talking to her. Like he talked to Kevin."

Paul and Roger entered his room and stood in front of him. Giles' eyes were closed. Paul softly spoke his name. "Giles."

Giles opened his eyes. He was clearly distraught. "She's confused and she's..." He waved his words away impatiently. "We have to go."

Roger gestured towards the wheelchair. "Let's go." Paul assisted Giles up, turned him around and lowered him into the chair. Roger turned to Paul. "Get ready to flash your badge. I think that nurse was planning on calling security."

Paul rolled his eyes. "Great." He began to wheel Giles out of the room. He gave the chair to Roger to push as he saw security heading his way. He pulled out his badge and motioned them to walk with him. He explained the situation glossing over a few parts during the elevator ride.

The security guards weren't really sure what to do and Paul took full advantage of that. He suggested that they might want to call their supervisor

and while they were discussing it he and Roger quickly got Giles in his car and putting on his lights and siren, he took off. Giles closed his eyes and concentrated on Buffy again. He pointed and Paul drove.

##

The phone rang and it bothered Buffy. It distracted her from dreaming about Giles. The man answered it and she waited for him to speak, but he didn't. Instead he slammed the phone down. "I'm afraid our time together has to end a bit prematurely." Buffy opened her eyes trying to figure out what he was talking about. Even with her eyes open she could still feel Giles. Maybe she was still asleep. Maybe she hadn't woken up and Giles was waiting for her. She closed her eyes.

The man spoke again. "Your friend, he's gone." He looked around the room. Without another word he left taking only the carton with the blood samples with him.

His words slowly sank in. Fear began to consume her. She wanted to ask what he meant but she couldn't seem to put the words together. She opened her eyes to find the man but she was alone. The fear turned to panic. He'd left her. Not that she wanted him there, but the thought of being stuck here alone, strapped to this bed, was more than she could bear. She drew inside, screaming for Giles, her environment and physical sensations too much for her to deal with anymore.

Giles could feel her start to lose it. "Hurry!"

Paul looked at his speedometer; he was pushing ninety in an unfamiliar area, already way too fast to stop if anything got in his way. He tightened his lips and sped up. "Just give me some warning if we need to make a turn or I'll flip the car over."

Giles didn't respond. He was too busy trying to send calming thoughts to Buffy, using their connection to find her, and communicating directions to Paul. Suddenly his sense of her grew overpoweringly strong. He pointed at a building a block down. "There."

Paul hit the breaks and skid into the drive. All three of them were out of the car and running for the door almost before the car came to a complete stop. Paul drew out his gun and held it before him, demanding that Roger and Giles stay behind him. His pace was fast enough that Giles didn't argue. The door was unlocked. They all raced in, Giles a step behind Paul, his need to be with Buffy, to find her, almost overwhelming.

All the inside doors seemed to be locked, the place abandoned. No one was gunning for them; Paul was pretty sure whoever had been here had left. He put his gun away. Giles made them stop moving and he concentrated. He moved unerringly to the second door and put his hands on it. "She's in here." He called her name. "Buffy?" He was about to ram himself into the door when Roger pulled him back.

"Don't even think about it." Roger looked at Paul. "Your turn for some bruises."

Paul tested the door. Moving a step back to give him some room he began to kick at the door, wishing just for a moment that Angel were here. The guy could certainly get a door open, no doubt about it. Finally the door crashed open with a loud splintering noise.

All three of them thought Buffy was dead for a second. She was lying so still, and was so pale. Giles ran to her. Even though he could still feel his connection to her he had to touch her to convince himself that she was alive. He pressed his cheek against hers, her restraints making it impossible to pull her to him the way he wanted to. She was warm and he could feel her breath and a sob of relief left him.

Giles pulled back and put his hands to her cheeks. He gently called to her. "Buffy. Buffy, can you hear me?" She didn't open her eyes. He looked at Roger, fear in his eyes.

Roger stepped to the other side of Buffy. He did a cursory exam. "She seems okay." Roger looked at the discarded wooden boxes. "How much of this stuff would a Slayer normally get for that test?"

Giles' eyes grew dark with remembered pain. "One box held sufficient serum for the necessary shots."

"And when you gave it to her she only lost her Slayer powers, right? I mean, she could still move around?"

Giles nodded and he looked at all the boxes too. He mentally counted them. Turning back to Buffy Giles gently ran his hand down her hair. He looked at Paul. "Can you get those restraints off of her?"

"I'm trying." Paul was looking for a release mechanism, gently inserting fingers around Buffy's ankles and wrists to try and determine how they worked.

In her head Buffy just wanted to stay with Giles. But sensations were forcing

her back to awareness. She was being touched in too many places. A different sort of fear seized her and with a gasp she opened her eyes. She saw Giles' scrubs and a sense of despair started to pull her under again. Giles could feel it. He softly ran his fingers down her cheek. "Buffy, it's me, Giles. I'm here. Whoever was hurting you is gone. No one will hurt you now."

Again Buffy felt movement around her ankles and she sent a frightened and confused look to the foot of the bed. It looked like Paul. And that meant...her eyes went back to the scrubs. This time her eyes followed the scrubs up until she found a different face. It wasn't the man's face. It was the face she had been longing to see. Giles saw the recognition in her eyes and he stroked her face. "Yes, baby, it's me. We'll get you out of here as soon as we can." Tears began to roll down her cheeks and Giles pulled up a chair so he could sit next to her, his cheek once again pressed to hers as he just softly murmured to her, ignoring his own discomfort from the aches in his body.

As Paul continued to investigate the table Roger walked up to Buffy and held her hand. "Buffy, can you move your fingers?" Both Giles and Roger watched her fingers. After a moment, they both saw the slightest of movements. Roger looked at Giles. "How long does this stuff take to wear off?"

Giles spoke softly, lacing his fingers with Buffy's. "A few days." He and Roger shared a look. A few days for one box of the drug. Giles had counted ten boxes. Giles shook his head, not wanting Roger to say anything else, not now. Roger just hoped that she'd burn this stuff off as fast as she had started burning off all the sedatives he'd given her after Riley had poisoned her.

Roger looked down at the tray by the bed. There were two blood tubes there with blood in them. Trying not to draw Giles' attention he picked them up. Checking the time on the tubes he looked at his watch. They'd just been drawn. The blood was still warm. He slipped the tubes in his pocket. Then he started checking the wooden boxes, making it look as if he was simply clearing them away. Roger was pretty sure that at this point in time that Giles would destroy any that was left, and certainly refuse for Buffy to undergo any testing. But, Giles' goals were important, they were important for Buffy. And Roger wasn't ready to not take advantage of this opportunity. He finally found one that had some of the compound still in it. Again, without drawing attention to himself, he slipped the remainder into his pocket.

Paul let out a frustrated noise. "How the hell..." He didn't get it. He didn't see a place for a key. He had yet to discover any kind of unlocking mechanism at all. He lay on the ground and ran his hand under the table. Working around Giles he made his way up to the head. His fingers found a groove. Following it he felt a seam in the bottom which when he followed it around felt like a square. He tried but couldn't pry it loose with his fingers. He called for Roger.

"Roger, see if you can find something like a knife or a screwdriver, something I can pry this thing open with."

Roger began opening up drawers and cabinet doors. He started calling out possibilities, none of them great. "A couple of tongue depressors, a paper clip..."

Paul let out a curse. "Oh God, never mind." He mentally castigated himself for his stupidity and dug in his pocket for his keys. Yanking them out and getting his hands under the table again he began to use one of the keys to open the trap. A couple of cut fingers later he finally pried it open. Feeling inside he felt a lever. Hoping he wasn't about to blow them up he snapped it to its opposite position. He let out his breath when he heard the metal move on the table above him.

Giles let out a gasp of relief and he sat on the side of the bed and carefully lifted Buffy up, holding her in his arms. Her head lolled and her arms fell back. Giles just carefully gathered her up and cradled her against his chest. "I've got you now." He rested his face against her neck and fought to keep his emotions in check. She was depending on their connection now. He could feel it. And she didn't need to know how he was feeling, his fear and his sorrow, his guilt that this was all his fault, that his ideas had put her in such danger, and the seething anger that was coiling in him, aching for a place to strike. He pushed it all away and tried to only allow her to sense his love for her, wanting her to feel safe.

It was finally starting to sink in. Buffy began to realize that she really was safe. That not only was Giles in her head, but he was also holding her. That he had found her, him, and Paul and Roger. Her body still felt like lead, but she almost didn't care. Except that she wanted to hold Giles back. Wanted to wrap her arms around him and never let him go.

End Part 5

Changes 6

Giles wanted to get Buffy out of there. He noticed Paul was still looking around. He got his attention. "Can we leave?"

Paul nodded. "Yeah. I'll notify the LAPD in the car. They can come and check the place out."

Giles carefully stood, making sure that Buffy was tucked safely in his arms.

Roger led the way, holding doors and helping maneuver Buffy's feet away from doorjambs and walls. He safeguarded Buffy's head as Giles got into the back seat of Paul's car. Then, Roger got in the front.

Paul turned around before starting the car. "Am I taking you back to the hospital?"

Giles looked down at Buffy. He knew if they went there that he and Buffy would be separated. Right now that was not acceptable to him. He glanced at Paul. "I know it's a lot to ask but will you just drive us home?" Before Paul had a chance to respond Giles looked at Roger. "Unless you think she has to go."

Roger pursed his lips. "No, I think she needs to be with you. And you do, of course, have your private physician in attendance." He grinned. "I can keep an eye on both of you. Remember, you're still not in the best of shape." He sent a warning glance at Giles.

Giles captured both of their gazes. "I feel as if I say this all the time, but thank you. Thank you for everything you've both done for me and Buffy." He did grin then. "I honestly don't know how we survived as long as we did without you. All you do is save our lives."

Roger grinned at his brother. "It does seem as if it's a full time job, doesn't it?"

Paul nodded. "I think we should get paid more."

Giles rolled his eyes and gestured to Paul with his chin. "Just drive."

Paul grinned and happily complied. As he headed up the street he asked them both. "Giles, where's your car?"

Roger looked at the street sign they were passing. "Actually, turn right up there."

Paul took the right and he saw Giles' car sitting in a restaurant parking lot. He pulled in. "Do we know where the keys are?" At their blank responses he got out to check. The car was locked. Paul got back in the car. "I'm guessing either Angel has the keys or they can be considered missing in action. When he found the car earlier he said the doors were still open but they're all locked now." Paul thought for a moment wondering if it made sense to see if Angel had the keys so Roger could drive Giles' car home. He watched in the rear view mirror as Giles just stroked Buffy's hair, softly talking to her. He started the car. He'd figure out a way to get Giles' car home later.

As they wound their way through the city heading towards the highway

entrance Paul called the LAPD informing them that Buffy had been found. He gave them the address where they found her and then told them that the crime scene had been a bit tampered with but it had been necessary. He was taking Buffy home because she was in no shape to answer any questions now. Before they started yelling at him he told them he'd be back tomorrow and would clear it all up then. Then he hung up. He looked at the dashboard clock. It was already tomorrow. Almost 6:00 in the morning. He'd catch a couple hours of sleep and then head back to LA. He called the Hyperion, figuring they'd all still be there.

Cordy answered, sounding irritated. "What?"

"Hey, it's me, Paul. We found her."

"Thank God. I can finally get some sleep." There was a pause. "That didn't come out the way I meant it to. I'm really glad you found her." There was another pause. "She's okay, isn't she?"

"Sort of. Yes. Sort of. It's complicated, I'll explain later."

"Are you coming back here to sleep?"

"No, I'm taking them home. They need some alone time." He glanced in the rear view mirror again. Giles still had all his attention on Buffy.

"So, when do I get to see you again?"

"Well, I have to come back tomorrow...well today. I need to calm down the police who will be mightily annoyed with me for tampering with the crime scene, absconding with the victim who also happens to be the main witness, and leaving town with her. Plus I have to figure out how to get Giles' car home, and then go to the hospital and explain to their security people as to why I stole one of their patients and then didn't bring him back." He sighed.

Cordelia barked out a laugh. "Wow. Want some company for all of that?"

Paul grinned. "I'd love some company for all of that. I might actually survive it with company."

"Call me when you leave Sunnydale so I have time to take a shower and make myself presentable."

"Will do. Will you let everyone know that she's safe, and thank them for me? Oh, and see if Angel has Giles' keys."

"Yeah, I'll let them know. You'll tell me all about it when you get here, right?"

"Yup, every thrilling detail." He couldn't wait to see her. "And Cordy?"

"Hmmm?"

"Thanks."

He could hear her smile. "Just make sure you call me. I won't let you in if you just show up and I'm still in bed."

Paul let that thought soak through his tired body and was amazed at how much more awake he felt. "I hope that won't always be the case." There was a short silence on Cordy's side. She sighed, a sigh Paul thought was a good sigh, at least he hoped it was a good sigh. Paul spoke again. "I'll call you." And he hung up.

He looked at Roger and Roger was grinning. "You like that girl, don't you?"

Paul grinned back. "Yes, I do."

Roger looked into the back seat, trying to discern any movement on Buffy's part, anything that might show that the drug was wearing off. She was not moving, but Giles wasn't either, for that matter. He glanced at Paul. "I think they're both asleep."

Paul softly snorted. "I'm not surprised. They'll both probably sleep for a week." Paul swung onto the highway. He glanced at Roger again. "Is she going to be okay?"

Roger's answer was definite. "Yes."

"Yes?"

"She has to be. They both have to be." Roger wasn't wearing his seat belt as he was turned around in his seat, keeping an eye on the two sleeping passengers in the back seat. He looked over at Paul. "I can't even imagine my life without the two of them in it anymore."

Paul looked in the rear view mirror again. "Me either." Paul put on his police lights and hit the gas.

##

Giles had let go of Buffy only long enough to give Kevin a quick hug, take a

shower and let Roger take a look at him. Linda had been waiting for them thanks to a phone call from Roger as they neared home. She had brought over his medical kit and turned down Buffy and Giles' bed. While Giles was with Roger she had given Buffy an exam, talking to her the whole time, explaining what she was doing. She could only imagine what it would feel like to not be able to move or talk while someone prodded at you.

Once Giles was back and Buffy was once again in his arms Roger had insisted on drawing some more blood. Roger was nervous she'd gotten so much of the compound and he wanted to do a complete blood panel on her to make sure that nothing was seriously out of whack. The blood he had in his pocket couldn't be used for basic blood tests. They were the wrong type of blood tubes for that.

Giles was unhappy about it but he knew Roger was right. He held Buffy closely, afraid that the needle would frighten her despite his verbal reassurances. Giles could feel her mental jump when the needle slid in even if her body was not yet able to respond. They were still connected emotionally and Giles used it to send her thoughts of safety and of love. Roger filled several blood tubes and then after making sure the phone was in ready reach, he and Linda went home, arms tight around each other.

Buffy had been drowsy when Linda had examined her. She had relaxed even further when Giles came back and crawled into bed with her and once safely in his arms again she had slipped even further into sleep. The needle stick had fully roused her. For one horrible second she had thought that her rescue had all been a dream, that the man was back sticking needles in her. But she had heard Giles and felt him. Both physically holding her and mentally supporting her. So once the pain had passed she had surrendered to her need for sleep and had drifted off.

As he sensed her deep sleep Giles finally let out all the emotions he'd been holding in check. He was deluged with anger. He was angry at Travers, angry at the Council for their blindness, and angry with himself that he had been so stupid and trusting. He knew what they were like and he had practically offered Buffy up to them like some sacrificial lamb. Giles could guess what Travers wanted, whether it was with the blessing of the Council or not. And even though the Council had told Wes that they hadn't sent Travers, it didn't mean it was true. Something like that was easy to deny.

Clearly someone had heard him and decided his ideas had merit. Someone wanted Slayers. But Giles knew that whoever was behind this had no intention of allowing Slayers to retire, had no desire to make their burdens lighter. No, they would simply start creating Slayers and would use them until they died, caring even less now than they had before because they could be

so easily replaced.

Something shriveled in Giles when he realized that because of him, not only had Buffy been treated like some animal in a lab experiment, but also he'd potentially given the Council the key to create a living hell for innumerable young girls who might now be called. Girls who might never have been called if not for him. Girls who might now become Slayers and be forced to fight until they dropped in their tracks, like overused oxen. Because of him. He was horrified, his blood congealing at the thought.

Giles realized he was clutching Buffy with a death grip. He forced himself to relax his hold on her, afraid he might hurt her. She had no super strength to protect her right now and he needed to remember that. He carefully let go of her and laid her down. Then he turned away from her on to his side and he lay there as tears ran down his face.

Despite his exhaustion Giles couldn't sleep. His brain continued to pummel him unmercifully with thoughts of the dangerous chain reaction he had, however unknowingly, potentially set off. He finally got out of bed and just stood by the window, his forehead resting against the glass. Giles knew Buffy would never blame him, but he felt as if he had betrayed her. Betrayed her and every other Slayer yet to be called.

"Stop that." Buffy's words were slurred but perfectly clear. Giles spun in response.

He walked back over to the bed and sat by her side. He ignored her words and instead observed her carefully. "How do you feel?" Buffy cleared her throat and slowly brought a hand up to rest on the side of his face. Giles' face lit with joy at her movement. He closed his eyes just for a moment. He asked again. "How do you feel?"

She gave him one of her sideways grins. "Like I really, really need to pee." She made a face. "And like I really need to brush my teeth." She tried to sit up but Giles had to help her. "God, I feel like a baby again."

Without thought, despite his protesting ribs, Giles scooped Buffy up in his arms and took her to the bathroom. Once that chore was done Giles rested her on the bathroom counter while he fixed a toothbrush for her. After a few tries on Buffy's part he took over for her and did his best to brush her teeth, leaning her over the sink so she could spit. Buffy rolled her eyes. "I need a drool cup."

Giles pulled her to him and held her close. "Buffy, I am so sorry."

Her words were muffled with her face against his chest. "I told you to stop that."

He pushed her away just far enough to see her face. "I can't help it. You were strapped to a bed and injected with...with poison because of me. Your powers may be gone, because of me."

She shook her head, her movements still slow. "You and Roger almost died because of me. I let you go." She laid her head back down on his chest. "If you hadn't gotten a hold of Kevin, you'd be dead now. I never should have let you out of my sight."

"Buffy, it was all my idea. My stupid idea to involve the Council, to think that they might have an altruistic thought for once." His anger and guilt swamped him again.

Buffy frowned. "Stop that." She looked up at him. "You're still in my head. Why are you still in my head?" Guilt for making her have to deal with his emotions washed through him. Buffy rolled her eyes. "Listen...no first, take me back to bed." She held her arms up. Giles picked her up and walked to the bed with her. Laying her down carefully he sat down next to her on the edge of the bed. She shook her head and patted the bed on her other side. "Lay down with me."

Giles could hardly refuse so he crawled over her and lay down. Buffy started again. "We'll have more of this conversation later when I don't feel like my mouth is full of Novocain but I want you to listen. We both knew we were taking a risk. But it was a worthwhile risk because what we, what you, were hoping to accomplish was so wonderful that it was worth it. You are the most wonderful, loving, caring man I've ever met. I love you. I don't blame you for this anymore than you blame me. The blame belongs to Travers, or the Council or whoever did this stuff. Not you."

She rested a hand on his chest. "Now, I can feel that you don't believe me, but I want you to stop all that thinking of yours and just feel what I'm feeling." She caught his gaze as she sent to him all the love he had been sending to her. It captivated him and surrounded him. It brought fresh tears to his eyes. She could feel it wash away his more negative emotions. Not all of them, but it was a start. She grinned at him. "I kind of like this. You can't be all stoic guy on me any more."

Giles smiled ruefully at her. "I always told you how I felt if it was important."

Buffy shot him an incredulous look. "And what you were feeling while you were standing at the window or in the bathroom wasn't important? God, Giles,

it was tearing you apart. And you would have kept it all inside of you and never told me how you were feeling."

"I would have worked it through." He still felt badly that she was being subjected to his painful feelings.

"Stop it. This isn't a bad thing. I want to know how you feel. I want to help." She tapped on his temple. "Deal with it Giles. For as long as it lasts you're not alone in there anymore." She put her hand to his side and tried to pull him in closer but she didn't have the strength to budge him. "Now come closer and hold me and let's get some sleep."

Giles scooted next to her and wrapped his arm across her middle. He focused on her, on what she was feeling and nestled in her thoughts of love he finally fell asleep.

##

When Giles woke up it was hours later and he felt almost human. He quietly got out of bed and walked downstairs. Picking up the phone he called Wes. He was relieved when Wes actually answered the phone. Despite his gratitude for Angel's assistance his feelings for the vampire were still complicated and he didn't want to deal with it now.

"Angel Investigations."

"Wes, it's Giles."

"Giles, how are you? How's Buffy?"

"She's better. She's regaining her strength. I imagine it will take some time. Thank you for your help. I appreciate all your efforts on our behalf."

"We were glad to help." There was a pause. "Not that we did all that much. Those friends of yours, they're quite a pair."

Giles let out a half laugh. "That they are. Buffy and I owe our lives to them a dozen times over." His heart filled with his affection for his two friends, so grateful that they had become a part of his life.

"Paul's been here most of the day taking care of things and calming everybody down. He's quite good at it." Another pause. "Cordy seems quite taken with him."

"I know. It appears to be mutual." This time Giles paused. "Wes, have you

spoken to anyone at the Council?"

"Yes, a couple of people. I told them our suspicions about Travers, about what happened to Buffy."

"And the reaction?"

"Appropriate sounds of distress, reassurances of getting to the bottom of things, appreciation that I'd called." Wes sounded disgusted.

Giles wasn't surprised. He hadn't expected anything more, but he had hoped for it. "Well, I suppose it was foolish to hope for more."

Wes heard the sadness in the older man's voice. "Giles, this was a good thing you were trying to do. And they are the fools if they can't see it. And they should be damned if they were behind what happened to Buffy."

Giles was touched by Wes's vehement support. "I quite agree." He let out a long breath. "I just wish I knew. I just wish I knew if Buffy was still in danger or if this was a one-time threat."

"I'll keep trying, Giles, but I'm afraid that I'm not your best resource at the moment."

"Wes, you're a friend, and right now that matters more than anything."

It was Wes's turn to be touched and it fanned a core of resolve in him. "I'll do my best to find out what I can. I promise."

"I know. Thank you."

"Give my regards to Buffy."

"I will." Giles hung up. Painful emotions began to wash over him again and he rested he rested his head against the staircase banister.

End Part 6

Changes 7

Roger watched Giles through the glass window of the kitchen door. His heart clenched in his chest at the sadness he saw in his posture. If Travers had been there in front of him Roger would have cheerfully strangled him. He

hesitated to intrude but his need to check on the two of them was too strong to ignore so he made a noisy entrance giving Giles a moment to pull himself together.

Giles stood up and squared his shoulders before turning to Roger. He flashed Roger a grin. "Linda give you an appropriate hero's welcome?"

Roger grinned back. "That she did." He glanced upstairs. "How is she?" He knew she must be all right or Giles wouldn't be downstairs.

"She's sleeping. She's getting her strength back. She can move now, slowly, but she can move." He began to climb the stairs, Roger right behind him. "The lab work was fine?"

"Well, a few things were off, but nothing that I didn't think sleep and time wouldn't take care of. If she's not a whole lot better in my estimation when I see her, I'll draw some more, just to be on the safe side." They had gotten to the bedroom. Buffy was just coming out of the bathroom. Roger grinned. "Okay, she's a whole lot better."

She was almost moving naturally. There was a slight hesitation to her walk but if you weren't looking for it, Giles didn't think it would be noticeable. He walked quickly to her side. "I'm sorry I wasn't here when you woke up."

Buffy smiled. "I could tell you were close." She tapped her head. "I can still feel you. Like a humming noise." She reached up on her toes and gave him a kiss. "I like it." She almost lost her balance and grabbed on to him. "Oops, not quite ready to go dancing."

Roger had her sit on a chair and he tested her reflexes. They were all present and accounted for. Next he tested her grip. He got his fingers back, unscathed. As glad as he was to not be in pain he'd have willingly undergone some serious finger crunching if it meant her powers were coming back. "You'll be up and dancing in no time." He cocked his head to the side. "Can you feel any of your powers?"

Buffy got a funny look on her face. "I'm not sure. I mean I can tell I'm not strong right now but I can feel my Slayer-ness if that makes any sense. I still feel like the Slayer." She looked up at Giles. "I think my powers will come back, Giles. I just think it may take a while." She wrinkled her nose. "You need to tell Spike, he'll need to patrol." Her stomach growled. "And I'm hungry."

Roger laughed. "Definitely better. Come over to the house. Kevin is dying to see you both and dinner's almost ready."

Buffy grinned. "Yum. We'll be over in a second. I need to change, big time." Roger nodded and headed off. Buffy reached for Giles. "Hey, guy o' mine. Sit with me." She moved over and Giles sat down next to her. He took up most of the seat so she just got in his lap. She kissed him and while the kiss was unexpected he quickly rallied and kissed her back. After a minute she pulled back with a happy sigh. "I love you so much."

Giles rubbed her cheek against his own. He could feel how much she loved him and he felt humbled by it. "I love you too."

"Then listen to me some more. The worst-case scenario here is that I don't get my powers back. And if I don't, well, I'll just get to retire faster. And maybe we get to start working on a family faster. This doesn't have to be a bad thing."

He wished it were that simple. "No, Buffy, the worst-case scenario is that they'll want to do more testing and they'll come for you again."

Buffy grimaced. "Okay, you're right, that's a worst-case scenario. But, now that we seem to be connected at least we know they can't hide me from you. So, that's a good thing. Besides, we'll be on alert now." She looked down for a moment, her voice hesitant. "Would it be such a bad thing, being married to just a plain old Buffy?"

Giles' jaw almost dropped. "What? How can you even ask that? You being the Slayer brought us together but it isn't what keeps us together now. I'll love you no matter what happens to you." He lifted her chin and caught her gaze. "You're not really worried about that are you?"

She wasn't anymore. She could feel the truth behind his words. "I could really get used to this." At Giles questioning look she tapped first her temple and then his.

Giles sent her a wry look. "Wait until I'm annoyed at you for something. You might not like it so much then."

Buffy's eyes opened innocently wide. "When have I ever annoyed you?" At the look on his face she burst out laughing. "That works both ways, buster." She lay against his chest. "Do you think it will last?"

"I don't know."

"Do you mind it?"

She could feel him shake his head. "No, it will just take some getting used to."

But I do feel better knowing that I could find you if I needed to, and it's nice just to feel you there, in the back of my mind, like a candle flame."

Buffy liked that image and she sighed again. They sat there for a few minutes, enjoying the physical and mental embrace. Giles finally patted her on the back. "We told him we'd be right over. You'd better go change."

She let out a little moan. "I don't want to move. Call them and tell them we changed our minds."

"I thought you were hungry."

Buffy was silent for a moment. "I am." She got up. "But we're eating and then we're blowing out of there, cuz I am in the mood for some major cuddling with my guy."

Giles stood and he gave her a quick kiss. "Your wish is my command."

"Yeah? Well can you feel this wish?"

Giles could feel his body respond to the feelings she sent his way. "Keep that up and you'll go hungry."

"I just wanted you to be clear on what I meant by major cuddling." She looked concerned for a second. "Unless you hurt too much."

"I'm feeling quite clear about it and I'm feeling much better. You have 10 seconds to get dressed or I will start getting undressed."

Buffy laughed delightedly. She sat on the bed and reached for the phone. Punching in a number she waited while it rang. She sat back in a provocative pose. "Roger? We're gonna take a rain check." She let out another giggle as Giles started unbuttoning his shirt, heading her way. The phone fell out of her hands as he reached for her.

Roger hung up the phone, grinning. Linda looked at him. "Who was that?"

"Buffy. It seems she and Giles have found something else to do right now."

Linda raised her eyebrows. "She must be feeling a lot better."

Roger just laughed and ruffled Kevin's hair. "Sorry buddy, you'll have to wait until later to see Giles. He's busy right now."

Kevin wasn't a complete idiot. He grimaced and let out a disgusted noise.

"Sheesh, are they kissing again?"

Roger grabbed Linda and did a little kissing of his own, ignoring Kevin's noises. Kevin buried his face in his hands and when it became clear that it wasn't going to stop anytime soon he took his dinner to the living room and happily settled down in front of the television set.

##

Every day she got a little stronger. After a week she was nowhere near her full strength but she was getting stronger and Giles estimated that she was almost as strong as he was right now. Both Giles and Roger were feeling quite hopeful that in time all her strength would come back.

A detective from the LAPD had come up and questioned Buffy, Giles and Roger at length and, satisfied, he had left. They had turned up very little in their investigations, a fact that didn't surprise Giles at all. No word had been heard from the Council.

It was a late Saturday afternoon, and Giles, Buffy, Roger, Linda, Kevin and Paul were sitting in Roger and Linda's back yard enjoying each other's company. Buffy was harassing Paul. "You and Cordelia? Why didn't I know this?" She glared at Giles. "Did you know this?"

Giles looked guilty. "I did. I'm sorry, I thought you knew."

"Knew that Paul liked Cordelia? How could I know that if you didn't tell me? How could I ever, in a million years, guess that?" This time she glared at Paul. "How long has this been going on?"

Paul grinned. "Since Halloween."

"So, why didn't you tell me?"

Paul rolled his eyes. "Buffy, there's not that much to tell. In the last month we've had exactly one date. Besides I didn't know I was required to keep you informed with up to the minute reports on my love life."

Buffy had the grace to look sheepish. "Sorry, I don't mean to be so nosy but you and Cordelia? That I need to know." She grinned at him. "That's like major gossip."

"Yeah, well, as long as she's living in LA there won't be a whole lot of material being created for the gossip mill."

Buffy flashed him a nervous look. "You aren't thinking about moving down there, are you?"

Paul looked around at the people surrounding him, ending with Giles. He smiled at Buffy and shook his head. "I'm not going anywhere."

##

John Drinan held up his hand to stop the two men who were walking towards him. After there had been no response at Rupert Giles' home he had heard the laughter coming from the house next door. Peering over the fence he had seen Rupert sitting amongst friends, a young woman sharing his seat, practically sitting in his lap. John had looked at the woman carefully and had almost dropped his jaw when he realized it was the Slayer. The picture he had of her was a couple of years old but it was clearly she, and it was also clear that she and Rupert were an item. That put an interesting spin on things.

So, he held his hand up to give himself a minute to think. If Rupert and the Slayer, he mentally corrected himself, if Rupert and Buffy were involved, he could understand why Rupert wanted so many changes. It also gave a whole new depth to the seriousness of the events of the week past and it's impact on both Rupert and Buffy. John wouldn't be surprised if Rupert just tried to take his head off. And the thought of what Buffy might do to him didn't even bear thinking about.

John wondered if Travers had known about the two of them. He snorted as he shook his head. It was doubtful. The man was like an idiot savant. There was no questioning his genius in some areas but he was also a fool. An extraordinary fool. He couldn't have mismanaged this more if he'd tried.

He glanced back at the two men and nodded. One of them picked up the box he'd set down. John unlatched the gate and followed by the two men he walked into Roger's back yard. John coughed to get their attention.

Giles knew immediately that they were from the Council. He scrambled up out of his chair and stood in front of Buffy. From his reaction Roger and Paul put two and two together and quickly moved to stand in front of Giles. John looked at the two men standing in front of Giles and knew that one must be the doctor and one must be the Chief of Police. He envied Giles their loyalty.

John took a few steps closer until he noticed one of the men make a small movement, a casual flicking of his jacket that let John know that he had a gun. This then was the policeman. John stopped. Unlike Travers, John was not a fool, and there was little he missed.

Most of the people who worked at the Council had no idea what John did. The only person who gave him orders was the Director, and sometimes, when it was necessary, John gave orders to him. John's primary job was cleaning up messes, whatever it took. When he'd been given this assignment a few days ago, when he'd reached his conclusions, it had been one of those times when he'd given orders to the Director. And those orders were trickling down the organizational chart even as he stood here in this back yard.

This was how he cleaned up messes. Quietly, in people's living rooms and backyards, playing a round of golf, or over a beer at the local pub. There were always ways to fix things, always. And as far as he was concerned there was only one way to fix this. The Council needed to eat crow, big time.

John put his hands up and opened his jacket so Paul could see he was unarmed. He began. "My name is John Drinan. These are my associates Aaron Babson, and James Mixler. As you suspect, I am here representing the Council. I've come to talk with Rupert Giles." He locked gazes with Giles and saw the anger in his eyes. "May I speak with you privately?"

Buffy had stood by this time and she, Paul and Roger all spoke at the same time. "No." Giles didn't argue with them.

John nodded. He hadn't expected a positive response to that question. He continued but he addressed himself to Giles. "Fine. That is your choice. First let me say that the Council owes you an apology. Second let me say that I am not naïve enough to think that you are in a mood to have any sort of conversation with me right now. I know you're angry and you have every right to be. You all do. So, all I want to do is simply tell you a few things and then I'll go. I'm at the Sunnydale Hilton and I will be staying there until you come and see me and you either tell me to stay so we can talk, or you tell me to leave. I will respect either decision."

He had their attention. He had Giles' attention. His eyes caught Buffy's ring but the surprise he felt did not show on his face. But it made him even more hopeful that he would be asked to stay. This Watcher would do anything to keep his Slayer alive.

John gestured towards the man behind him holding the box, telling him to put it down. Paul took a warning step but again John put up his hand and pulled off the lid of the box to show Paul. It was full of papers. He put the lid back on. "Shall I begin?" His eyes were only on Giles. Giles gave him a small nod.

"A certain ex-Watcher by the name of Wesley Wyndam-Pryce has been making a pest of himself, lodging fairly significant complaints against another

Watcher, Quentin Travers. I was called in to investigate the calls and handle the situation, presumably to make Mr. Wyndam-Pryce cease his incessant calls. Instead I chose to probe a little into Mr. Travers' latest activities."

Giles and Roger decided to sit back down. Buffy moved to stand behind Giles, her hands on his shoulders. Paul stayed standing. John didn't move. "Mr. Giles, I cannot prove it to you, but I am telling you that what Mr. Travers was doing was not in any way condoned by the Council. And what he did here to you and to Miss Summers was only a part of the lengths he went to in order to fulfill his twisted need for power. He kidnapped two of the potential Slayers and was performing experiments on them as well." He watched as Giles turned slightly in his chair and looked up at Buffy. Giles pulled Buffy around the chair and sat her down beside him, his arm tightly around her.

John continued. "We are still interrogating him, but suffice it to say that he had a very different vision than the one that you proposed, Mr. Giles. And it is a vision, despite our shortcomings, that the Council does not share. Let me assure you that Mr. Travers will not be bothering any of you, anymore."

"The vision that the Council has decided to embrace is yours, Mr. Giles. If the changes you propose are possible and if a way can be found to make them a reality. The Council would like to put you in charge of this project. You and Miss Summers and Dr. Erikson and anyone else you want." John glanced quickly at Roger and at the box on the ground. "Here is all the research we confiscated from Mr. Travers. It includes the results of the testing on Miss Summers, as well as the testing on the potential slayers. Information regarding the compound given Miss Summers is also included. The Council will, of course, fund the project and supply you with any equipment or personnel that you need."

John took in all their faces, seeing differing levels of trust and hope, tinged with suspicion. It was mostly hope he saw in Giles' eyes. John was almost done. "If what you suggest is possible it will change everything. It will change the Council, the Slayers, the Watchers, and the world. It is no small thing you are proposing, but it is a worthy one. I understand that you are leery. I understand that trust must be rebuilt. I would expect nothing less at this point."

He took a step back and turned as if to leave. Before he left he spoke one more time. "I'll be at the Hilton, Mr. Giles. When you are ready come and see me. Bring with you whomever you would like. If you want to take on this charge we will start the planning of it. If you want me to leave then you merely need to tell me and we will return to England and hope in time that you can forgive us for failing to see the danger to you and to your Slayer from one of our own." With that John did turn and with Aaron and James in tow he left the

backyard, latching the gate behind him.

Once out of the yard John flashed Aaron and James a grin. He wanted this to happen, he wanted it badly, and he was pretty sure it would. The Director had wanted to sweep it all under the rug and maintain the status quo, of course, after Travers had been dealt with. John had refused. John had seen the worth of Giles' plan. He knew he was seeing it a little differently than Giles, but their end goals coincided.

Giles clearly had the Slayers in mind, and now John understood why, or at least he understood his primary motivation. John had the Council in mind. This would infuse it with new life; it would shake out the cobwebs and ferret out the intractability. Like a fire can renew a forest this revolution would renew the Council, renew its purpose. John had been watching it wither away for too long. And he and Rupert Giles could work together, and maybe together, they would bring about the changes they desired. John grinned again. He had a feeling he was going to like working with Rupert Giles. Even though he'd never laid eyes on him before today he just felt a kinship with the man. He figured Giles would be knocking on his door first thing tomorrow morning.

End Part 7

Changes 8

They all just watched him leave. No one said a word. Giles sat back in his seat, his mind a whirl. Buffy watched him as he sat there thinking. She could feel his emotions, his excitement, his wariness, his longing to be a part of something he believed in so much. She put her hands on his face and made him look at her. Slowly his eyes focused on her and he raised his eyebrows. She smiled. "Have I told you today how much I love you?" Giles smiled and shook his head. Buffy's smile grew. "Well I do." She kissed him softly on the lips. "I am so proud to be your...well, your..."

Giles took her hands off his face and held them in his. "To be my everything?"

Buffy's eyes shone. "Yes."

Giles pulled her back against him and she settled in his lap, her back against his chest. He glanced at the rest of them, and his eyes took in the box John had left behind.

Kevin broached the subject fearlessly, directing a question towards Giles. "So, are you gonna make more Slayers?"

Giles let out a short laugh. "I don't know, Kevin." He brushed some of Buffy's hair away from his mouth. "I'd like to try."

Linda had pulled the box over to her and she was starting to look through some of the papers. "Do you think they'd build us a lab?" She had already started doing some work with the blood and compound that Roger had given her. Both had astounded her and she couldn't wait to delve more deeply into the whole thing.

Roger sat down beside her. "I think they'd give us anything we want right now." He couldn't suppress the excitement he felt and glancing at Giles, he saw a gleam of excitement in his eyes as well.

Paul sat down in his chair. "This is the Council that is offering this to you. The same Council that I have heard nothing good about since I met you. You do remember that, right?"

Giles flashed him a rueful smile. "I know. It's just..." He shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe I should go talk with him."

Paul rolled his eyes. "Jesus, can't you play just a little hard to get?" He saw the gleam in Giles' eyes too. He sighed and looked at Buffy. "Buffy?"

Buffy sat up. "I know it sounds crazy to trust them. But the truth of it is that the Council in my head has always been Travers. He's been the bug up my butt since I became a Slayer. And now he's gone. Giles' ideas, they're good ones. You know that. We all know that. I don't completely trust them but as long as Giles is in charge of this project, and Roger and Linda are the only two doctors coming near me with a needle, I'm okay." She pointed over her shoulder with her thumb, pointing at Giles. "Besides, you should feel what he's feeling. No way I'm saying no to that." She turned around and smiled at Giles. She turned back to Paul. "He liked that guy."

Paul scowled, running a hand through his hair. "I did too." He had liked John. He seemed like a regular guy. He glanced at Giles. "You don't want to think about this for a while?" At the look in Giles' eyes he stood. "Well, then come on. Maybe we can beat him back to his hotel. Who's going?"

Buffy and Roger both stood and Paul began shooing them and Giles out to his car. Roger kissed Linda quickly but she was absorbed in her reading material. Kevin noticed that it was getting dark. He hoped that Spike would show up soon.

##

Paul slapped on his lights and he took off. It would be close but Paul thought he could beat John back to the hotel. Somehow it made him feel it would get him one up on the guy. Giles and Buffy had gotten in the back seat. Buffy snuggled up close to him and Giles wrapped his arms around her. "It would seem I owe Wes an enormous debt."

Buffy grinned. "Hard to imagine Wes making a nuisance out of himself."

Giles tried to stifle a laugh. "Buffy..."

Buffy squeezed him. "I'm kidding. He goes on the big Christmas present list."

Roger turned around and frowned. "Hey, I better be on that list."

Buffy grinned. "Nah, you and Paul are on the biggest Christmas present list."

Roger nodded. "All right, then."

She glanced at the front seat. "Hey Paul, I saw you doing that Clint Eastwood 'make my day' thing with that Council guy."

Paul grinned at Buffy. "I cannot tell you how much I was hoping he'd try something."

Giles started to laugh. "I pity the Council. They truly have no idea what they're letting themselves in for."

Paul scowled again. "Serves them right." At Giles' raised eyebrows he laughed. "Okay, I know I'm being a grump."

Buffy grinned. "Cordy's beginning to rub off on you."

Paul made a face at Buffy as he carefully made his way through a red light. "But you've got to admit that my first introduction to the Council wasn't exactly a hands across the sea sort of experience." He looked in his rear view mirror and caught Giles' affectionate gaze. "I'll behave. I promise."

##

When John walked into the lobby it was to find Giles, Buffy, Roger and Paul standing there, waiting for him. John liked being wrong when it came with surprises like this. They'd come to talk; he could see it on Giles' face. He started to smile and he walked over to Giles holding out his hand. When Giles clasped his hand John spoke. "Rupert Giles, you don't know how glad I am to

meet you." He grinned at them all. "How does that line go?" He thought for a second and then looked at Giles again. "Ah yes. Mr. Giles, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

Giles grinned back. "Mr. Drinan, are you ready to make some changes?"

John barked out a laugh. "I thought you'd never ask."

##

Buffy and Giles lay in bed later that night. They were side by side and Giles was gently blowing on her face and breasts to help cool her off after their lovemaking. He began to grin. She looked at him. "What? What are you grinning at?"

"You're definitely starting to get your strength back."

Buffy grinned sheepishly. "Yeah, sorry about that."

"Oh, well, nothing really wounded except my pride and dignity."

"I really didn't mean to push you off the bed."

He laughed. "I know you didn't. Like I said, you're getting your strength back and you still can't always tell how much force to use." He grinned again. "Though I would suggest you avoid kittens and other small animals for the next few days."

She smacked him and he winced. Buffy gasped. "Oh God, I'm sorry."

Giles rubbed his arm and smiled at her. "Buffy, really, it's okay. I can stand a little bruising while you recover. When we're training regularly, I'm always bruised, one place or another."

"I know but it seems like you shouldn't have to worry about that here, you know, when we're..." Buffy blushed.

"I'm not worrying about it. I'm simply teasing you. And my delight at your recovery far outweighs any black and blue marks you might give me. They are a very small price to pay to know that you are getting better."

Buffy sighed and laid her head on his chest. "So, do you think we can do this? Figure out what makes a Slayer a Slayer?"

"I don't know." He ran a hand through her hair, working out the tangles

brought on by their amorous activities. "I don't know what we'll find out."

"I sort of like that guy."

"Yes, I do too." He reached for his glasses so he could see Buffy better. "You amaze me."

"What do you mean?"

"After what you went through, after what Travers had done to you. I can't believe you're willing to trust the Council."

Buffy sat up by his side. "I don't trust the Council."

"So why are letting me go through with this?"

"Because I trust you." She ran a hand down his chest, loving the feel of his chest hair. "I trust you with my life, I trust you with everything I am. You won't let them do anything bad to me."

Giles looked sad for a moment. "I couldn't stop them when they took you last week."

Buffy shook her head. "That was different. Giles, our lives are always going to be about danger and we can't predict that or protect ourselves against it, no matter how much we try. But this thing, this thing with the Council, you'll keep an eye on it. You'll make sure it stays on track. Plus, now we have that connection thing." She frowned. "It sort of seems as if it's fading." But then Buffy sent him an impish grin. "Although it seems pretty strong when we're ...you know."

Giles sat up too and kissed her gently. "When we're making love?"

"Yeah, it seems pretty strong then." She let out a happy sigh. "I like it. It lets me know when I'm doing something to you that you really, really like."

Giles nipped her neck. "I like everything you do to me."

"Yeah, but there are some things you like more than others." She reached up and gently nibbled on Giles' ear. She grinned when he moaned. "See what I mean?" She rested her head against his chest. "Do you think it will go away completely?"

"No, I think it will be there when we need it, when either of us is in pain, or in danger." Giles let out a sigh. "I wish I could always keep you out of danger."

"I know. I feel the same way about you. That's why this is important. That's why we have to do it. So that maybe someday we won't have to live our lives this way."

Giles pulled her back down to lie at his side. He didn't respond but instead just held her tightly.

Buffy started playing with his chest hair again. "Giles?"

"Yes, love."

"I want to get married soon, like right away."

He raised his eyebrows. "Why? I mean, it's fine with me, but why the rush?"

Buffy's lips tightened. "Too many close calls. I don't want to wait. I want to be your wife and have you be my husband. I want it now."

Buffy's statement sent a surge of longing through Giles. He felt his body start to respond, echoing the longing in his heart to make Buffy his. "I'll marry you tomorrow if you want."

"We don't have to do it that fast. But in the next couple of months, okay?"

Giles kissed her, a kiss that stirred the passion in both of them. He shifted to lay half on top of her and he held her face with his hands. He breathed out the words. "Your husband." It still seemed inconceivable to him. "Yes, I think we should hurry." He captured her lips and he moved again until he lay fully on top of her. Buffy shifted to give him entry.

Once they were joined, they both moved slowly, staring at each other's faces. There was no need for words. The connection was back and they were surrounded, both inside and out, by their love.

The End