

Humanity 1

Spike sauntered through the graveyard looking for some action. He took a final drag on his cigarette and threw it to the ground. A grin formed on his face as he caught some movement up ahead. A man stepped out of the darkness in front of him. "Spike, I've been looking for you."

Spike figured if the guy knew who he was that he was probably a demon. He lashed out with a punch and almost fell to the ground as his fist, followed by the rest of him went right through the man. Spike caught himself and backed up a few steps. "Who the friggin' hell are you? And why can't I hit you?"

"Name's Whistler. And I'm not really here." He looked down at himself. "I'm just sort of a projection. I had too many places to be right now so this is the best I could do."

Spike's eyebrows rose. "So what the hell do you want with me?"

Whistler grinned. "Still grouchy, aren't you? Even if you can't kill humans anymore."

Spike scowled and moved in a threatening manner towards Whistler then stopped as he realized the uselessness of it. He scowled again. "That's it? Just came all this way to poke fun at me, you bloody wanker?"

Whistler began to walk and motioned Spike to join him. After a moment Spike complied, curious despite himself. "See Spike, it's like this. There's supposed to be a balance between good and evil in the world. Certain people or demons play an important part in maintaining that balance, making sure that one doesn't win out completely over the other. The slayer and her watcher, for instance, they fight for good. Always have. Vampires, on the other hand, they fight for evil. That's the way it's supposed to be. A balance."

Spike rolled his eyes. "Lovely bedtime story, mate. Is there a point to all of this?"

Whistler grinned again. "The point is you. This chip you have. It's screwed things up. Everything's out of whack. I have to fix it."

Spike stopped walking. "You gonna take this chip out of my head?"

Whistler stopped too. "Not that easy. Fixing stuff is never that easy." He screwed his mouth up, first to one side and then to the other. Spike fought off the temptation to slug him again and just waited. Finally Whistler spoke again.

"See, the chip is only part of the problem. Even before you got the chip you helped the slayer save humans."

Spike's eyes widened. "When the hell did I do that?"

"When you helped the slayer beat Angelus."

"I did not help the bloody slayer. I was saving Dru's life."

"Yeah, I know. But you still saved a lot of people, the whole world actually. Got the attention of the Powers That Be. They've been keeping an eye on you ever since. And lately you've been doing a lot of fighting on the side of good and like I said, it's throwing everything out of whack."

"I can't bloody help it with this chip in my head, can I? I need to kill something." He got out a cigarette. "Get this chip out of my head and I'll be glad to kill any human you put in front of me. Hell, I'll work overtime setting things straight, don't you worry about that."

"So, if I got rid of the chip and put the slayer's kid sister here in front of you, you'd feed off of her?"

Spike grew very still. Then he pulled out his lighter and lit his cigarette. Taking a long drag on it he considered Whistler. After a few moments he spoke. "Why Dawn?"

Whistler shook his head. "See, this is what they're concerned about. A real vampire would have said sure. But you..." He shook his head again.

"I what? Look pal, I am a real vampire. I can kill with the best of them. I didn't get the name Spike for putting vodka in punch."

"So why the hesitation about killing Dawn? And how about the slayer? Would you kill her?"

Spike took another long drag. "Yes, I'd kill them both, right now. Just try me."

Whistler rolled his eyes. "No you wouldn't. Not the way you are now. You care too much. There's a lot of good in you now, and like I said..."

"Yeah, yeah, it's throwing everything out of whack." Spike took a last drag and flicked his cigarette away. Both of them watched the ember burning in the grass. "Right, so what's the plan then? Seeing as you're so sure I wouldn't kill the slayer or the little one." He glared at Whistler. "Which is not true by the way. I'd kill them both in a minute."

Whistler pursed his lips. "Right." He itched his nose. "Okay, this is the plan. You get to choose. Good or evil. But not the evil you are now. I mean through and through evil, the kind of evil where you don't give a hoot about anything or anybody except yourself, the kind where you would kill the slayer and her kid sister without a thought, or if you did have thoughts they would be happy evil thoughts." Whistler moved forward to step on the cigarette, extinguishing it. "Or you can choose good, and the Powers That Be will make you human."

Spike's jaw dropped. "That's the plan, to choose between being evil or being human? Jesus, that's easy. I choose evil."

Whistler shook his head. "Nah, it's not that easy. I told ya, fixing stuff like this is never easy. Always involves a sacrifice."

"What kind of sacrifice?"

"You have to choose someone to kill or not to kill as the case may be."

Spike looked at Whistler uneasily. "What do you mean, choose someone?" He had an uneasy vision of Dawn running through his head.

Whistler waved his hand at Spike. "Don't worry, can't be the kid, wouldn't be quite fair to her, would it? Can't be the slayer either. Has to be someone you can kill. But not someone you've been wanting to kill either."

Spike rolled his eyes and abandoned the idea of Xander. "If there are so many bloody rules about it why don't you just choose?"

"Can't. Doesn't work that way. You need to choose. Has to be an adult. Has to be someone you know. Has to be human. Has to be someone you might choose to be friends with if things were different."

"I don't know anyone I'd want to be bloody friends with." Spike sneered at the thought.

"Yes, you do. I see him in your head. Name him."

Spike shook his head, unwilling to participate. "What will you do with him?" Spike hated to care, but he did.

Whistler grinned at Spike. "Why do you care, Mr. I choose to be evil?" He perched on top of a tombstone. "I put the two of you together. Once you're with him, the chip will be gone. You have until sunrise to decide."

"Decide what?"

"By sunrise you either kill him, and become truly evil, or you choose to not kill him and you become human."

Spike shook his head. "I'm not bloody choosing anybody. You're crazy." He started to back away.

Whistler shook his head. "Sorry Spike. Can't argue with the Powers That Be. Besides you don't really have to say his name for this to work. It just makes it more dramatic." He looked at Spike. "You chose already. The test starts at midnight." He jumped off the tombstone and started to walk away. He turned back one more time and smiled. "By the way...good choice."

Spike looked at his watch and swore when he saw what time it was. He began to run.

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Buffy sat back and watched Giles as he ran his hand through his hair, wincing as he came in contact with the bruise on his temple. Buffy winced in sympathy. "Sorry about that."

Giles smiled at her. "Buffy, no need to be sorry. I let my guard down. I should know better than that." They had just finished a late training session and Buffy had nailed Giles' temple with a punch he had neglected to block.

"I know but...I'm still sorry."

"You pulled it enough at the last-minute." He grinned, a little embarrassed. "It didn't even knock me out."

Buffy wrinkled her nose at him. "You complaining?"

Giles let out one of his silent brief chuckles. "Heaven's no. I know what one of your punches can do."

Buffy stood. "Well, I better go. I still have to patrol."

Giles stood as well. "You'll be careful, yes? I have a funny feeling about tonight. Maybe I should go with you."

They both heard running outside, running up to the door. Buffy took up a defensive stance in front of Giles as the door burst open. Spike knew he was too late. Not that he knew what he could have done about it even if he'd

gotten here earlier. He watched as Giles started to flicker and he yelled out his name. "Giles!"

Buffy looked behind her and her jaw dropped when she saw Giles vanishing. She reached for him but in an instant he was gone. She whirled back to Spike. "What happened to him? What the hell did you do?"

Spike shook his head and glanced down at himself as he too began to flicker. He looked up, eyes sad, at Buffy. "Slayer, I'm sorry. I never meant..." Then he was gone as well.

When Whistler arrived the door was still open and Buffy was just standing there in disbelief. He grimaced when he saw her. "What are you doing here? You're not supposed to be here."

Buffy looked at Whistler and asked him the same question. "What are you doing here?"

"Just came to make sure the package was picked up."

"What package?" Her eyes narrowed. "Giles? Giles was the package?" She reached for Whistler, planning to pummel him, but her hands went right through him.

"I know you'd feel better if you could beat me up but I'm not really here."

Buffy didn't really care. "What the hell did you do to Giles? Where is he?"

Whistler shook his head. "They didn't tell me you'd be here." He frowned. "I hate it when they don't tell me these things. I don't really have time to tell you about it."

Buffy took a deep breath, trying to rein in her temper. "Listen, the last time I saw you, it was practically the worst day of my life. So, I'm not really in the mood for guessing games. Where is Giles?"

"He's with Spike."

Buffy relaxed and then she got nervous again. "What does that mean?"

Whistler looked a little sadly at Buffy, and that made her even more nervous. "Look, don't blame me. It was the Powers That Be and they always want a sacrifice. Whichever way it goes, it will be over by sunrise. Either he'll come back then or he won't." Whistler started to flicker too.

"What does that mean, a sacrifice? What do you mean he might not come back?" She was yelling, angry and afraid.

Whistler held up his hands in apology. "Sorry, I just didn't know you'd be here or I'd have arranged more time. I have to g...."

Buffy watched him vanish too. In her frustration she kicked the door shut hard enough to make some plaster fall from the ceiling. She shook the flakes out of her hair. Taking a deep breath she tried to calm herself, trying to think. Opening the door back up she let herself out and racing into the darkness, began to hunt.

End Part 1

Humanity 2

It was a square room with no windows and no door to the outside. There was an attached bathroom with a toilet and a sink. They had both beaten on the walls for an hour looking for any weakness, for a way out of their prison. It appeared that they were here for as long as whoever had put them here, wanted them here.

Giles was leaning on one of the walls, one knee bent, the flat of his foot against the wall, hands in his pockets. He watched Spike pace. He'd been watching him pace for thirty minutes and been spectacularly unsuccessful at prying any information out of him. He tried again. "Why are we here?" No response. Giles sighed. Sliding down the wall he sat, Indian style, on the floor. He rested his head back and closed his eyes.

Spike only saw three possibilities. Two of them Whistler had already outlined for him. But Spike had thought of a third. He could turn Giles. He wasn't sure what the Powers That Be would think of that option but he was guessing it would put him firmly on the side of evil. But at least he wouldn't really be killing Giles. Not according to Spike's definition, anyway. Buffy probably wouldn't agree but sometimes there was no pleasing the slayer. Spike kicked one of the walls. And then he rested his forehead on it, feeling truly confused and trapped.

The cessation of Spike's relentless pacing made Giles open his eyes again. He saw Spike leaning against the wall. Giles stood and walked over to him. "Spike, tell me what's going on." A brief pause. "Please."

Spike turned and faced Giles. He spoke. "Do you ever think about what it

would be like to be a vampire?"

The question took Giles by surprise. He thought for a moment wanting to answer honestly. "Yes, actually. I think about it a lot."

"Did you ever want to be one?"

"Sometimes. There are some things about it that are appealing."

"Like what?"

"The strength, the immortality." Giles paused. "I guess the immortality appeals the most. I'd love to live for hundreds of years, watch the history of humanity play itself out."

"So why don't you?"

"Become a vampire?"

"Yeah."

"If I could do it without harming anyone I'd consider it, but that's too high a price to pay." He paused for a minute. "Do you ever regret becoming a vampire?"

Spike thought for a minute. "Sometimes." He made a sound as if he was going to elaborate but instead he just repeated himself. "Sometimes."

Giles moved to the wall and leaned his side into it, facing Spike. "What's going on?"

Spike's lips tightened. "I could feed on you now if I wanted to."

"What do you mean?"

"Chip's not working anymore."

Giles backed away. He instinctively looked around even though he knew there were no weapons around. There was nothing in the room at all, no furniture, nothing. If Spike wanted to feed on him, there was nothing he could do about it. He looked at Spike. "Why aren't you feeding on me then?"

"Not sure exactly." Spike listened to the sound of Giles' blood pounding through his body. "Are you afraid of dying?"

Giles rubbed his jaw. "Not the being dead part. I don't fear actually being dead." He glanced at Spike. "That's dead dead you understand, not vampire dead. I very much fear being a vampire, the damage I would do." He paused, thinking. "I suppose the dying part gives one pause. Will it be painful? Will it be fast or slow? Will I waste away from some disease? Will I face it with dignity? Will my dying have meant something? It's hard not to be afraid of those things sometimes."

"I don't want to die."

"No, well, I don't especially want to either. Please keep that in mind."

A small grin showed up on Spike's face. It didn't stay there long. "Why doesn't it scare you to be dead? What do you think happens after you die?"

"It doesn't really matter what I think. Except that I'm reasonably sure that I won't care. Either I'll be dead with no awareness at all, or I'll be moving on to what comes next."

"What do you mean?"

Giles shrugged. "A new reincarnation, or a new way of being, or heaven, or the company of those I love that have died. There are dozens of theories, philosophies. In any case, whatever happens, once I'm dead I'll be past the cares of this life. The hardest part of death is always for those left behind, the ones still living."

"Buffy'd be unhappy about it."

"Yes, I imagine she would." Giles leaned against the wall again. "Do you think that's likely tonight? Me dying, that is?" Giles was trying to grasp the thread of meaning behind this conversation.

Spike ignored that question. "I don't imagine she'd give a rat's ass if I just disappeared."

"Well, if it coincides with my death I imagine she'll think you killed me and then left town. If that's what happens I wouldn't advise you to come back."

"Shit." Spike reached for a cigarette and lit it. "I don't know why I care about her so much."

"Buffy?"

"She can be a right bitch."

"Yes, she can." Giles let out a short breathy laugh. "She really does mean well. She just never really had the chance to learn the niceties of human behavior. I do believe she's getting better. I think Dawn's been good for her."

"She's treated you like shit."

"I suppose it looks that way but she doesn't do it on purpose. I learned long ago not to take it personally. I imagine it's hard for her not to lump me in with all the things she hates about being the slayer. I know she loves me, but she hates me too. And that's all right."

"Are you trying to tell me that none of it bothers you?"

"Good heaven's no. I am human. Of course it bothers me. But, I can understand and in that understanding I can forgive her. She needs a safe place for her anger and I'm willing to be that for her. She knows I won't leave her. She knows she can't push me away. As long as she needs me I would always choose to stay with her." He let out a soft sigh. "She doesn't ever mean to be hateful. She's young, her life is difficult without measure."

"Have you ever wanted to shag her?"

Giles was shocked at first by the question. Then he shook his head, smiling wryly. "Are you asking for my last confession Spike?" Before Spike could answer he continued. "I'd be lying to say the thought hasn't crossed my mind. She's a beautiful woman. But I've never wanted it enough to try and do anything about it. She's too important to me to just have sex with, and I don't think we'd really suit for anything long term. I want someone to love, someone who'll love me back. I want someone who loves art and literature and has an appreciation for the pursuit of knowledge."

Giles rolled his shoulders. "Don't misunderstand me, I love Buffy, dearly. But, she's just too young and cares nothing for too many things I care deeply about." He chuckled again. "I'm sure she'd say the same about me, except that I was too old. And I am, for her."

"Do you think she'd like me if I was human?"

"That's an odd question. Does it matter?"

Spike didn't answer, sighing instead. After a few minutes he spoke again. "She hates me. I don't know why I put up with her crap."

"Why do you? Do you really believe yourself to be in love with her? Do you

really believe she could love you?"

"She loved Angel."

"I know you hate Angel, Spike, but even you should be able to understand the difference between the two of you, and why Buffy could at least rationalize falling in love with him." Giles pushed away from the wall and walked a few paces away. He needed to get away from Spike's cigarette smoke. "How could you possibly expect her to find her way clear to love a demon who, especially now that your chip is no longer working, kills those she's sworn to protect? She'll never be all right with that. Never. And you're a fool if you ever think she would be."

"So, do you think she'd like me if I was human?"

Giles thought for a moment. "I have no idea. I am the last person to understand what Buffy finds attractive in a man. She certainly hasn't done a very good job in choosing them so far." He cocked his head to the side. "Do you think about being human?"

Spike answered that question with another question. "Do you know why I allowed myself to get turned?"

"No."

"I was a complete failure as a man. I'd fallen in love with this woman and that night, the night it happened, I told her that I loved her. She told me that I was beneath her, that she couldn't possibly allow me to court her." Spike covered his face with his hands, amazed that the memory still had the power to hurt. He repeated himself, his voice raw. "I was beneath her." He blew out a long sigh. "I left the house and saw Dru. She talked to me, made promises to me of a better life and I took it."

"And has it been a better life?"

"I used to think so." Spike started to pace again. "Do you know that Buffy told me the exact same thing?" Spike laughed a small bitter laugh. "One hundred and twenty years later, the woman I love now, tells me the exact same bleeding thing. That it would never be me she'd want, that I was beneath her."

Giles couldn't help wincing on Spike's behalf even if he could understand why Buffy might have said that. He wasn't sure how to respond.

Spike pressed on. "How do you do it?"

"Do what?"

There was a pause. "How do...how do humans deal with the pain?"

Giles shook his head, a crooked smile on his face. "Spike, just because you're a vampire doesn't mean you aren't in pain. I can hear it in your voice. We deal with it the same way you do."

"But I have my hate, and I can kill, and I have time."

Giles got a sad look on his face. "Humans, all too often, choose to hate and kill as well to deal with their pain. And even for us, time does bring healing. We do recover and move on." He paused for a minute. "Ultimately it is the fact that we are human that allows us to recover."

Spike shook his head. "I don't follow."

Giles paced the length of the room thinking of what words to say. "Love is what helps us heal for the most part, our ability to love someone new, our ability to be loved and be supported by people that we love." Giles shook his head and looked at Spike. "That's something that's confused me about you. How do you do it?"

It was Spike's turn to be confused. "How I do what?"

"How can you be a vampire and love so much? Why do you choose to help those you should hate? I mean, I can understand why you might be sexually attracted to Buffy, there is so much tension between you I can see how it might turn into something different. But you care about her; you care about Dawn. You've saved all of us numerous times. Why?"

Spike threw the cigarette on the floor, grinding it out with his foot. "I don't know. I don't know what happened to me." He pulled out another cigarette, needing something to do with his hands. "At first it was just the chip. I figured I needed you guys to stay alive. But then..." He didn't complete his sentence but instead asked another question. "Do you think she'd still feel that way if I was human? That I was beneath her?"

Giles' eyebrows rose. "You really want to have this conversation don't you?"

"Yes."

"All right. I'll do my best to answer you." Giles thought for a minute, one hand holding his jaw, trying to see Spike through Buffy's eyes. "Well, you're good looking enough, I guess. I know that's important to her."

"You think I'm good looking?"

"Oh, please, Spike. It's hard enough trying to think like Buffy without listening to your wise-ass comments."

"Sorry." Spike gestured to Giles to continue.

"You know that she's a slayer. You understand what her life is like." Giles continued to think it through. "You wouldn't be able to kill her or anyone she loved. I would imagine that would count for something. Of course you wouldn't have a job, or any money, or any direction. Plus you'd..."

"I'd what?"

"Well, you'd lose your strength. I never was sure how big a factor that was in her treatment of Riley. Things seemed to be going so well until he lost his enhanced fighting skills. I'm not sure if that affected Buffy or it affected Riley, but things were certainly never the same."

"You're not exactly filling me with confidence."

"Well, Spike, I'm sorry. If it helps, I often don't have any idea how Buffy thinks about things. She's quite unpredictable." Giles laughed silently at that understatement. "What I do know is that she's hated you for a long time. I don't know if she could get past that. I don't know if she could suddenly see you as someone worthwhile, someone she could care about."

"What do you think?"

"About your chances with Buffy if somehow you were magically turned into a human being?"

"Yes."

"I honestly don't know. Some of that would depend on the type of human you chose to be. How you chose to live your life. There are a lot of not very nice people out there. I think I know Buffy well enough that she doesn't have much tolerance for mean and unkind people."

"How do you learn that stuff, how to be..." His face almost contorted at the word but he spit it out, "...good? How to be human, you know, in a good way."

Giles let out a short laugh. "You should be having that conversation with Anya. She's been struggling with that for a while now." At Spike's silence he continued. "How do you learn to be good person, a decent human being?"

Giles smiled tightly. "Mostly it's trial and error. You act a certain way and you see how it affects the world around you. How it affects your own life and the people that you love. There is no manual; everyone finds his or her own path. It helps if you can be with people who live their life well, in a way you can respect, watch what they do and try and emulate them."

"Someone like you, you mean?"

"Excuse me?"

"Someone like you. You care about the people around you, you fight hard for the world, you keep getting knocked down and you keep getting back up. I respect that."

Giles was stunned that Spike would feel that way, let alone say it. "Someone like me?" At Spike's nod he spoke reflectively. "There are certainly many better men than me out there, but I suppose, many worse ones as well. I just try and do my best, it's all any of us can do."

Spike grunted but didn't respond. Giles watched Spike as he seemed to withdraw into himself, the conversation, at least for the moment, over.

End Part 2

Humanity 3

Two more hours had passed. Giles had tried to engage Spike in another conversation, still convinced that the vampire knew what they were doing there, but Spike wouldn't respond to any of his questions. As time passed Giles began to feel more and more nervous. He wasn't sure why he knew this, but he was sure that Spike was trying to decide whether to kill him or not. Every time Spike would stop his pacing and look his way, Giles' heart would start racing, and his breath would catch.

Spike stopped pacing again and looked at Giles. Spike could hear Giles' increased heart rate. He knew Giles was afraid of him, of what he might do. Spike decided it was useless to put it off any longer. He moved over to Giles and crouched down in front of him. Giles ran his hand nervously through his hair and cleared his throat. "Have you decided then?" He was relieved that at least his voice was steady.

"Decided what, mate?"

"To kill me. Are you going to kill me now?"

Spike shook his head. "Well now, that's the problem. I'm having a bit of a dilemma here. You see, I actually like you watcher, I don't really want to kill you."

Giles let out a shaky breath. "Then don't." He locked eyes with the vampire and still saw his death there. "Spike, please, tell me what's going on. I don't understand."

"I know you don't and I'm sorry I got you into this. But my hands are tied, not much of a choice." Giles shrank against the wall, putting a hand down, trying to stand. Spike held him still pressing both his hands down on Giles' shoulders. "But, don't worry. I've decided not to kill you." He grinned.

Giles felt a frisson of fear shoot down his spine. "Please don't. Please." He shook his head. "I don't ...I can't even imagine the kind of vampire I'd be."

"Pretty deadly, I expect." Spike morphed into his vampire face. He licked his lips smelling Giles' blood, hearing it thrum through the vessels. It had been so long since he'd fed off a human. Desire for the taste and the warmth of it pulsed through Spike. He leaned towards Giles.

Giles tried to push him away but Spike was too strong. He felt the puncture as Spike bit him. He struggled again. He spoke, forcing his words through the sensation of his blood being drawn from his body. "Please, Spike, I'm begging you. Don't do this. The first thing I'll do is kill Buffy. I'd be able to, I trained her, I know her moves, I know all her weaknesses. Please."

Spike growled and pulled his head up. He flung himself away from Giles in a fury. Giles could hear him snarling and the sound was as frightening as anything he'd ever heard. Spike slammed his hand into a wall. "God damn it." After a long while Spike asked a question. "You'd rather die than be turned?" "Yes. I'd rather die than ever hurt someone I care about. Especially Buffy."

"Because that's your choice, watcher. Die or be turned."

Giles let out a deep breath. "Then I'll die." Giles closed his eyes. He felt dizzy and a little sick to his stomach. He concentrated on his breath, trying to calm himself. If dying meant he could save Buffy, it was a death he could accept. And so accept it he would.

Spike slammed his hand against the wall again. He swung around to face Giles again and Giles met his eyes. Spike saw the acceptance in them. Spike shook his head, confused again. "How can that be okay with you? How can

dying be all right?"

"It's not my choice to die, Spike. You're forcing that on me. And that's not particularly okay with me. What makes it all right is that by choosing death I can protect Buffy. And that matters more to me than anything."

Spike shook his head and walked over to Giles again. Giles closed his eyes as Spike reached out and turned his head to the side. Giles waited for the bite. Instead Spike let go and sat down across from Giles. Giles opened his eyes. Spike was back in his human guise. He pointed at Giles' neck. "Just making sure it wasn't bleeding."

Giles barked out an incredulous laugh. "Excuse me? You just tried to kill me and now you're concerned about me bleeding?" At Spike's shrug he let out another shaky laugh. "Then would you get me a cup of water?"

Spike got up. "Sure." He walked to the sink and filled one of the paper cups with water and brought it back to Giles.

Giles drank it and then he lifted the empty cup to Spike. "Thanks." He watched Spike nod and sit down again across from him. He was exhausted now. "Spike, what do you want? Are we going to play this all night? If you really are going to kill me, I think I'd rather have you just do it and get it over with."

"I want to talk some more. I want to talk about death. I don't understand. How can people live with that hanging over them? Your lives are so short."

"Spike, I really don't want to talk anymore."

"Watcher, I need to know."

Giles heard the entreaty in Spike's voice. He tiredly nodded his head, thinking about Spike's question. After a moment he spoke. "Most of us pretend it's not there. We pretend we'll live forever. But, the wise ones, they pay attention to it. It becomes a constant companion. Not in a dark way, but as a light to show that life is to be lived now, fully. That there are no guarantees except that we will all die. It teaches us that if it is worth doing it should be done now, while life still beats within you. So, that as you lay dying, when your time comes, that you can say that you loved and served the best you could, that you made the best decisions you were capable of, that you have the fewest regrets."

"Do you have any regrets?"

"Oh yes, many of them. That kind of wisdom generally only comes after many

years of making foolish decisions. The wisdom is gained because you see how the choices you made turned out, how they have left you with regret, that if you could live those times over that you'd choose a different path. So, you grow wiser out of the pain and sadness, and you choose more wisely from then on. When death walks with you life is richer, more precious, the worth of those you love more inestimable. It becomes a gift, a reminder not to take any of it for granted."

"How do you stand to be alone?"

"Why are you asking all these questions? Why does it matter?"

"Just answer. How can you stand to be alone?"

"You mean, without a partner, a lover?"

"Yes. You seem to be alone so much."

"I think about it a lot. I want to be with someone. I always imagined I would be." He ran his hand over his face, wincing as his fingertips grazed the side of his neck. "Buffy has always come first, she must. She always will as long as she's alive. Relationships are hard enough without having one in the sort of circumstances I live in right now." Giles cleared his throat again. Spike went and got him some more water and Giles drank it, thanking him again.

He continued. "I don't ever like to think about Buffy dying. I can't imagine anything that would be more painful for me. But at the same time, there is a small part of me that thinks that after I've grieved, that I would go back home and pick my life back up, the one I left in England, and maybe find someone, someone I could love and who would love me back." A rueful smile passed his lips. "We don't always get the things we want. That's part of being human too. Part of existing." He gestured towards Spike. "I don't imagine you've always gotten what you wanted, being a vampire. And I think you know what it's like to be alone."

Spike drew his knees up and wrapped his arms around them. He sat there for a long time. They both did. Finally he moved and Giles' heart started racing. But Spike stood up and he began to pace again. Giles watched him, the sound of Spike's footsteps hypnotic. All he wanted to do was sleep, just for a few minutes. He glanced at his watch; they'd been here almost all night. Spike's voice intruded into his thoughts. "Answer me another question."

Giles indicated his permission. Spike continued. "You already told me that Buffy probably wouldn't give me the time of day if I was a human. How about you? What kind of human do you think I would be?"

"Spike, I don't understand why you keep asking these questions. Why does it matter to you? Why are you so consumed with the thought of being human? If I understood I could perhaps answer your questions more easily."

"Never mind why. Just answer my question. What do you think?"

Giles thought for quite a while. He thought about all the contradictions that existed in this being sitting across from him. Giles touched his neck again, still hardly believing that Spike had stopped when he'd asked him to. Spike watched him as emotions flickered across Giles' face. He sat down again and waited for Giles to answer. Finally Giles looked up at him and smiled. "I have always known vampires to be evil and cruel. The demon inside of them makes them incapable of caring about the welfare of someone they would consider prey. You alone, of all the vampires I've known, seem to be able to think past your own pleasures and deem a human's concerns and fears as important as your own. I find that amazing, truly. That you have such a capacity, as a demon, to care as much as you do."

Giles reached across the space between them and touched Spike on the arm. "What kind of human do I think you'd be? I'd think you'd be an extraordinary one. I think you would, in time, become the most loving of men, and once you found your place in the world, that you would become one of its champions, and I think I would be proud to know you."

Spike sat there stunned at Giles' words. He put the heels of his hands up to his eyes, alarmed at the moisture he felt there. He sat there, his hands over his face. Giles watched him for a minute and then he closed his eyes wondering what would happen next.

"Watcher."

Giles opened weary eyes to Spike. "What?"

"The Powers That Be sent us here. This is a test. For me."

"A test for what?"

"To see what lies stronger in me, the evil, or..." He scowled.

Giles smiled. "Or the love?" Spike nodded. Giles pursed his lips. "So what happens if you don't kill me? What happens to you?"

Spike's lips tightened. "I become human."

Giles' eyes widened. "Human?" He rested his head back, thinking back on the conversations they'd been having, the thread suddenly clear. He shook his head. "How...? Why...?" He let out a breath. He couldn't seem to wrap his mind around a question to ask.

Spike let out a sharp laugh. "Apparently I'm a bit of an aberration. Not quite evil enough to suit the Powers That Be. So, by sunrise I either kill you and become evil, according to the approved demon blueprint, or I don't and I become human." He reached for a cigarette and lit it blowing the smoke above his head. "I have to admit, I'm not crazy about killing you but the whole idea of being human again terrifies me. What would I have? According to you I certainly wouldn't have Buffy, I wouldn't have a job, or a home, nothing."

Giles moved to his knees and reached out a hand, resting it on Spike's shoulder. "I'd be lying if I said it would be easy. But I can tell you what you would have. You'd have my gratitude and the others once they came around. And you'd have my friendship. That I would freely give to you."

Spike shook his head. "I wouldn't be able to fight with Buffy anymore. I'd lose my strength."

"You have amazing amounts of knowledge. You can help in other ways. We can work together to keep her safe, to keep the world safe."

Spike closed his eyes. Giles sat back, watching him, waiting, hoping. Finally Spike opened his eyes. "What time is it?"

Giles looked at his watch. "Six."

Spike lifted his head as if listening for something. "Sunrise is in a few minutes." He moved to sit next to Giles, his back against the wall as well. He gave Giles a tight smile, shaking his head as if amazed he was doing what he was doing. "How about we wait for it together."

Giles smiled softly at him. "I'd like that."

Spike frowned. "Just don't piss me off in the next couple of minutes."

Giles bit back a grin. "I won't say a word."

They sat there in silence and then Spike suddenly drew in a big breath and began to cough. When the coughing subsided he turned to Giles, his eyes wide. Spike grabbed Giles' hand and put it over his heart. Giles gasped in turn. "You have a heart beat. Oh my God, you're human. You did it." He turned amazed eyes to Spike. "You did it." He started to smile.

Spike felt his body start to warm and he listened to his heart beating. He let out an amazed laugh. "I did it." Suddenly his face grew alarmed. "Oh Jesus, I'm human again." He put both of his hands over his face. "Oh God."

Giles laughed. "Come on Spike. I'll be right beside you. I'll help you figure it out. We'll do it together. It'll be all right." He stood and reached out a hand to Spike. Spike took it and Giles pulled him up. "I could use something to eat. Then I could use a good sleep." He looked at Spike. "Let's go get some breakfast, and then I have a couch with your name written all over it."

"You paying?"

Giles laughed again. "Yes, I'm paying." He smiled at Spike. "It would be my honor." He put both his hands on Spike's shoulders. "A great honor." As he finished speaking Whistler showed up, opening the door that had suddenly appeared in one of the walls.

Whistler grinned at them both and then he turned to Spike. "Told you that you made a good choice. Welcome to the human race." He turned back to Giles. "You have an unhappy slayer waiting at your home who I think will be very glad to see you."

Giles turned to Spike. "First we swing home to see Buffy. Then breakfast, all right?"

Spike blew out an anxious breath. He turned his face towards the exit. "Right then. Let's do it." As he walked by Whistler he tried to punch him again. There was nothing there. He glared at him. "Are you ever really here?"

Whistler grinned. "You'll get a chance someday, I promise you."

Spike just scowled and headed for the door. The sunlight stopped him. Giles walked up behind him, prodding him. "Spike, you're human. The sun can't hurt you."

Spike took a cautious step outside and bit back a nervous gasp when the first rays of sun that he had felt in 120 years touched him. He held out his hands as if to grasp it. "I'd forgotten how warm it was." He lifted his face, enjoying the sensation.

Giles laughed, patting him on the back. "Come on, let's go see Buffy." Spike nodded and squaring his shoulders he waited until Giles was standing next to him. Then together, side-by-side, they headed for home.

The End

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