

Journey's End 1

"I've thought this over and over and I believe it's the right thing to do."

Buffy's body was tight with anger. "You're wrong."

They stayed there for a moment, Giles sitting, his body and face a combination of misery and determination. Buffy standing, angry and sullen. She turned, as if to storm out but before she moved very far there was a flash in the room. Buffy and Giles both put a hand up to shield their eyes from the light.

When the light resolved Giles' eyes grew wide and he stood. It was the Shaman. He was dressed in his dark robes, with nothing but his eyes showing. Turning to Giles he spoke. "Rupert Giles, you must come with me."

Buffy took a step towards him. "Excuse me, but you're interrupting." She was in no mood to even pretend to be polite. She gestured angrily at Giles. "He was in the middle of ripping my heart out and stomping on it and I don't think he was quite done."

Giles sent her an admonishing look. "Buffy."

Buffy had the grace to look somewhat ashamed at her outburst but she was so angry it didn't last long. "Well, who the hell is he, and why do you have to go with him?" She looked at the Shaman again, a longer look. "Hey, aren't you the guy who pretended to take Angel's...?"

Her question died off at Giles' nod. Giles turned to the Shaman. "What's the matter? This really isn't the best time. Can it wait?"

The Shaman shook his head. "No, we must speak now. Are you ready?"

Buffy darted forward, her hostility clear. "What do you mean is he ready? He's not going anywhere." The Shaman sent a piercing glance her way. "I am sorry for your pain but the choice is not up to you." He glanced at Giles. "Rupert, are you ready?"

Giles nodded, and he took a deep breath. The Shaman lifted his hands and another flash of light appeared, momentarily blinding Buffy. When she could see again, the Shaman and Giles were both gone. "Shit." Buffy punched the wall. In her anger she didn't pull back on her strength and her fist went through the plasterboard. "Shit." She wrestled her arm out and went in search of answers.

##

Giles found himself walking next to the Shaman in a deep wood. The trees were dense and the ground was soft with fallen pine needles. Occasional rays of sunlight broke through the overhead canopy. Giles smiled and turned to the Shaman. "You brought me here?"

"It is your sanctuary, your secret garden."

Giles let out a soft humming sound of satisfaction. "Yes, it is. I love it here."

"You do not come here enough."

Giles' lips tightened. "No, I don't." He stopped walking for a minute. "Why have you brought me here?"

"Rupert, you have been in great distress. Even with your Slayer returned to you, you continue to be in pain."

The thought of Buffy broke another wave of sadness over Giles. "I'm leaving. I'm going back to England."

The Shaman pulled down his hood, revealing his face. "You have insufficient information with which to make this decision."

Giles looked momentarily annoyed. "How do you know that?"

The Shaman touched Giles' temple with a long nailed finger. "I know your thoughts, Rupert. You yourself allowed me access to them and you have never rescinded that invitation. Do you wish to do so now?"

Giles shook his head. "No. I apologize. You know how I value your assistance. I would be stark raving mad by now if it wasn't for you."

"You have suffered much these past few years Rupert. It has been my honor to assist you."

Giles looked at the Shaman, affection clear in his eyes. He spoke softly. "Why am I here?" His eyes darted back in the direction he thought they had come from. "I'm worried about Buffy."

"She is why you are here." The Shaman started to walk again and Giles moved to his side. "I know your heart, Rupert. I know you mean to do what's best." He looked around him. "Why have you not come here for your answers

in this situation?"

Giles looked around as well. He took a deep breath, enjoying the rich smells assaulting his nose. "I don't know. I've been busy."

"Have you consulted with your spirit guides? With your other teachers?"

Giles let out a breath. "You know I haven't. You always know when I'm here."

"And yet, you think yourself prepared to make this decision. A decision that will affect you and your Slayer for the rest of this lifetime and beyond."

"I'm doing what I think I need to do."

"And what is driving this decision of yours? What emotion?"

Giles thought for a few minutes, walking in silence, occasionally kicking a pine cone away with his foot. Finally he spoke. "I'm afraid. I'm afraid that I make Buffy weak. I'm afraid that she will never be what she can be if I stay." He let out a sigh. "And I suppose to be honest that I'm also afraid of what I'll become if I stay. Someone who cleans up her messes, who bails her out of trouble, someone who will, in time, become a mockery of a Watcher."

The Shaman stopped. "So, it is fear that makes you choose to leave her."

Giles sighed. "I am afraid of so many things right now."

The Shaman let out his own sigh. "Humans. I will never understand why, in times of highest emotional distress, they rush into decisions, unprepared, turning away from that which might center them and aid them as they choose their path."

Giles leaned against a tree. "Message received. And deserved." He ran his hand down a branch, feeling the pine needles sharp against his palm. "Even after all this time, after studying with you for so many years, I still seem to get lost so easily sometimes."

"Rupert, on even the simplest paths it is easy to be swept away by the challenges life puts before us. You have chosen a most difficult path. Do not waste your time in regret, simply turn back to what you know to be true, to where you know your wisdom lies."

"Have I made the wrong decision then, about Buffy?"

"That is not for me to say. What I do know is that the spirits have come to me

and they are disturbed. They see shadows in the future, shadows that are causing them unrest. They tell me that you, Rupert Giles, have the power to make or unmake this future."

Giles pushed off from the tree and moved closer to his teacher. "What must I do?"

"You must journey. It will not be an easy one. Are you willing to do this?"

"Of course."

The Shaman smiled. "Rupert, I believe in you. You must believe in yourself as well." He shifted his head, as if to sniff the air. "I can feel your Slayer's anger from here. She is searching for us, for me."

"How do you know that?"

"I can feel her through you. The bond between you is fragile, but it is enough for me to see her."

Giles didn't like the sound of that. "Our bond is fragile?" He'd always thought the link between him and Buffy to be strong.

The Shaman looked at him seriously. "It is a dangerous time for the two of you. Your bond has been tested too much of late and it grows tenuous." The Shaman raised his eyebrows. "She is full of so much anger."

Giles grew sad. "It seems to be all she can feel these days." He looked at the Shaman. "Will you let her find you?"

The Shaman nodded. "Yes, this concerns her as well. She also has much to learn." A kind smile appeared on his face. "Rupert, she is angry, but she is also full of love for you. The anger is easier for her, she thinks it protects her, she thinks it makes her stronger."

"I wish I knew what she needed. I wish I knew how to help her."

The Shaman rested his palm on Giles' chest. "You do. All your answers lie within. You must seek your answers there, always."

"Will you help her when she comes?"

"Your Slayer's answers lie within her as well. I can merely show her the way. It will be her choice, and yours, to heed what you find, and to trust what your heart tells you. Decisions made from anger and fear are often less than wise."

He started walking again. "There are always lessons to be learned, no matter what decisions we make, but our lessons are often more painful when we choose unwisely."

Giles didn't respond. This place, his place, was working its magic. He could feel his body and his mind start to unwind. He felt safe here, loved. For the first time in days, his thoughts about Buffy seemed less laden with heavy, painful emotions. His plea for her was clear. He wanted to help; he wanted to make her path easier. And he realized that he truly had no idea how to do that. He looked up at the soft sound of the Shaman's laughter.

The Shaman smiled at Giles. "That is the place to start. Not knowing. It is there that you can most easily be taught." He listened acutely again, as if to a faraway sound.

Giles recognized the look this time. "Buffy?"

"She is sure you are in danger." He smiled again. "She is most determined."

"Yes, that's a good word for her."

"Rupert, she will have questions. She will want to know about our journey together. Do I have your leave to share with her as I see fit?"

Giles nodded. "I trust you, more than anyone, or anything. I trust that you will tell Buffy what she needs to hear, and I would not want to get in the way of that."

They came to the end of the woods and before them lay a field of wildflowers, a riotous panorama of color that quite took the breath away. The Shaman smiled. "I like your secret garden Rupert. You have made it a beautiful place."

"I like flowers." He gestured back to the woods. "And woods." He grinned back. "That's the fun of it, isn't it? That it can be anything you want?" He shook his head. "How can I forget to come here?"

"As long as you know that it is always here when you do remember."

Giles nodded. "Yes, I do know that." He saw some familiar figures in the distance and his heart grew full.

The Shaman saw them too. "Go, your guides await you." He touched Giles on the shoulder, lightly. "Take care, my friend. The spirits tell me that this will be difficult for you. Remember all I have taught you."

Giles slowly breathed through the tension the Shaman's words had evoked in him. "I will. And thank you. Again."

Squeezing his shoulder gently, the Shaman shook his head. "I do not require your thanks. Your friendship is sufficient."

Giles placed his hand over the one on his shoulder. "You shall always have that." He smiled. "And my thanks, whether you require it or not."

"Then I leave you to your journey. Blessings on you." As Giles watched, the Shaman slowly faded away. When he was gone, Giles turned and headed down to his next destination.

##

Buffy slammed the phone down. She let out a frustrated cry. "Angel doesn't know anything either. How can no one know anything?" She glared at Willow and Xander. "You were there. You saw him. Who the hell is he?"

Xander shrugged his shoulders. "You were there too, Buffy. All we saw was what you saw. We know he knew Giles. We know he's a good actor because he fooled the Mayor and Faith. We know Giles introduced him to his wife. We know he can be really cool and just disappear." He grimaced at the look on Buffy's face. "Sorry."

Willow closed the book she had been looking through. "I can't seem to find him in any of these books. Of course, I don't know his name or if he's a demon or anything." She sighed. She felt like she had so much to make up for to Buffy and she was annoyed that she was currently feeling so useless.

Buffy snapped her head up. "Magic. Willow can you do magic and help me find him?" She pointed to the training room. "He was in there. Can you sense him or something?"

Willow frowned. "Maybe."

Buffy grabbed Willow's arm and pulled her out of the chair. "Good enough. Let's go."

##

An hour later Willow was trying to mix together some herbs to cast a locating spell. Buffy was pacing, still angry enough that everyone else was just trying to stay out of her way. As Willow lifted her head up to check the ingredient list in the spell book, her eyes widened. Buffy spun around just in time to see the

Shaman materialize right in front of her. She reached out to grab him but while he appeared solid, he was insubstantial to her touch and her hand went right through him.

"What the hell are you and where is Giles?"

"Rupert is safe for the moment. He is preparing himself."

"Preparing himself for what?"

"For the journey he must make." "He is so not making a journey. Give him back. I want him back here, now." Buffy's tone was dark and hostile.

The Shaman smiled softly at her. "It is not your place to choose his journeys for him. He must do what is right for him, what his heart is calling for him to do. As must you."

"Yeah, well, my heart hasn't been speaking very loudly these past few days."

"In that you are wrong. Your heart is screaming. It is crying for its path."

"The only thing screaming here is me, and I want my Watcher back."

"You may not interfere. The only path you can choose right now is yours. I would assist you in that if you would let me."

"Excuse me? You kidnap my Watcher and now I'm supposed to trust you? Are you on drugs?"

"Slayer. You are in pain. Do you choose to remain this way?"

"I didn't choose to be this way. It was chosen for me, oh, Mr. I Can Only Choose My Own Path. Someone chose this path for me with magic." The words were spit out bitterly. Xander and Willow both winced.

"Where you are now is simply what is in front of you. It has no meaning except what you make of it. It is your choice alone as to the lessons you will learn, and the direction you will now take. But understand that you are a being of great power, and the choices you make now will affect everyone around you as if you were a large stone being thrown in a small pond. The ripples will be strong and lasting."

Buffy let out a disgusted sound. "Great, another cryptic guy. Look, just take me to Giles."

"I cannot. He must be alone right now. But I can take you to where you will find him when he completes his journey."

Buffy was tired of this game. "Fine, whatever. It just better lead me to him."

End of Part 1

Journey's End 2

The Shaman nodded and he raised his hands. Buffy felt a sensation of wind and a sense of things moving by her very quickly. Then the sensation stopped and she was standing in the middle of a courtyard with a fountain. It looked like a grotto, with a statue of a Madonna, or a goddess at its top. There were lotuses floating in the water. Buffy was drawn to it and she moved to sit on the edge. She trailed her fingers in the water, feeling an inexplicable moment of peace.

The Shaman watched her, not wanting to disturb this quiet moment. He could feel when the anger returned and he moved to sit next to her. She looked up at him, her eyes guarded, the moment's peace making her feel vulnerable and suspicious. "What is this place?"

"It is my home."

"I thought you said..."

He interrupted her. "Rupert Giles lived here for a while. He visits on occasion, when he is troubled and in need of direction."

"When is Giles in trouble? All he needs is a cup of tea and a book and he's fine."

"You do him a disservice. He has suffered much in your service."

Buffy snorted. "Yeah, right. He's suffered." Buffy stood and kicked a stone away. She looked at the Shaman, her eyes bright with unshed tears. "He's leaving me. He doesn't understand what I've been through, what I'm going through."

"Tell me. Tell me what he doesn't understand."

Buffy took a deep breath and the words just tumbled out of her. "How it feels to lose the right to choose the life you want, what it's like to live in fear, to know that killing is all you are, all you'll ever do. To slowly lose all the people

you love, to know that this is the way it will be until you die. To know how it feels to kill someone you love more than life itself. And then to die, and go to heaven, and get ripped out of it and sent back to this hell to live in."

The Shaman moved next to Buffy and gently put a hand to her forehead. He closed his eyes and Buffy's head was suddenly filled with images. Images of Giles' life, his emotions superimposed on them. They raced by her; individual images flickering by so fast it was hard to differentiate one from the other. But the themes were clear. His own anger at his calling, the repercussions when he tried to steal his life back, his sense of defeat when he realized that there was no way out for him, that he was trapped in a life not of his choosing.

She felt his fear, mind-numbing amounts of fear that he felt every night waiting for her to return from patrol, every time he sent her out to kill. She could feel his fear in battle, him knowing that he had no super strength to protect him yet his love for her helping him find the courage to battle by her side. She saw him, night after night, long after she was at the Bronze, or giggling with her friends, researching, desperate to find that one piece of information that would keep her alive, keep them all alive, his battle never ending. She felt his weariness, his longing for a different life, a carefree one, coupled with the knowledge that it would never end, that he was as locked within his destiny as she was in hers.

She saw him at too many funerals. Too many to bear, his parents, other family members, friends, Randall, Jenny's, Joyce's and finally, her own. She saw the scene over and over, as if it played non-stop in Giles' head, her falling to her death, her falling to her death, and again, her falling to her death. Giles' heart shattering into a million pieces, at her loss and at his belief that he had killed her, finally sent her against an evil she couldn't escape from and live.

Then she saw him home in England. Spending time with friends, smiling gently at their jokes, despite his ongoing pain at her death. She felt a sense of stillness growing in him as each day took him farther away from the pain of being a Watcher, from living on the Hellmouth, from the daily wear and tear of facing death as a matter of course. Buffy watched him stutter his way through a chance meeting with a woman, him feeling charmed by her despite his inner reluctance to expose his heart to anyone. And then the phone call and the return to Sunnydale, to a Slayer angry and withdrawn, to a bewildering re-enactment of a life he had thought done. And the growing concern that perhaps he was harming her by staying, and the acute pain associated with the thought of leaving her. She could see though, that he would stay, without a moment's pause, and pick that painful life back up again, if he thought it best for her.

Through it all, Buffy had seen, no she had felt through to her inner most being, that it had always been about her, his love for her, his longing to help her, his need to protect her. All of it, for her. And none of it begrudged. None of it.

The Shaman took his hand away and repeated himself. "He has suffered much for you. He does not deserve your anger."

Buffy crumpled to the ground, weeping. "How can he leave me? How do I make him stay? I can't do this without him. I can't." She knew this, as well, to her inner most being, that if he left, he took any hope of her heart returning to her away.

The Shaman crouched down next to her. "In this I will assist you. For I believe you are right, that he must not leave. His place is at your side. It always has been."

Buffy moved to sit up, her legs drawn up tight against her chest. She wiped the tears away, still hiccuping from her crying. "How can you help?"

"Rupert will soon undertake a journey that will speak of his future, of the future he creates if he returns to England. It will be difficult for him but I believe he has the strength to see it through and understand what he must do." He moved to sit at her side. "But you also must take a journey."

Buffy hiccupped again. "What for?"

"You must learn why you want him to stay."

"I already know why I want him to stay. I need him. I need his help."

"You are full of fear and anger. You are fearful of living without him, and yet you are angry when he gives you direction. You are angry that he is leaving you and yet you fear his staying. You are confused and wounded, and yet the decisions that lay ahead of you will impact those around you and most especially Rupert, if he chooses to stay. I would have you be clearer as you move forward." In response Buffy let out an exhausted breath. She rolled her shoulders, feeling the tension there. The Shaman stood. "Come, you need to rest. And my wife would like to meet you, the Slayer of Rupert Giles. She has heard much of you over the years."

Buffy shot to her feet. "The wife, your wife, the one he introduced you to?"

The Shaman nodded. "Yes, the very same." He took down his hood, and Buffy found him to be smiling at her.

She couldn't help but smile back. "So how did you guys meet anyway?"

"That is a story best told with a meal. My wife is an excellent cook. And I am an excellent eater. Which is why Rupert introduced us. But, I get ahead of myself. First, you must meet Lindsey."

Buffy smiled. "Your wife's name is Lindsey?"

"This is amusing?"

Buffy blushed. "No, I just look at you and I don't see a Lindsey somehow. Never mind." She gestured with her hand as if to direct him to lead the way. He nodded graciously at her and together they headed up to his home.

##

Giles let out a sigh of contentment. He was still in his field of wildflowers, four of his spirit guides with him. He was resting against the flanks of one of them. A water buffalo, his hide dark, his horns white and sharp. Giles had one side of his face resting on its flank, feeling it breathe, feeling its immense strength resting beneath him. By his side lay a tiger, belly up, in a very undignified pose. Giles laughed and rubbed his belly. "Even like this, you're a handsome fellow. But you know that, don't you?" The fur was thick and soft.

Bear was roaming, his snout turning over rocks and sticks, ever curious. Hare was sitting on her haunches. Her nose was quivering and her ears shifted constantly, listening, always listening. Her bright eyes rested on Giles. They didn't speak to him in words as such. Sometimes they did but usually they spoke to him in images, and emotions, and spurts of wisdom. And they loved him. They were a part of him. The Water Buffalo was his wisdom, Tiger his courage, Bear his enthusiasm and Hare was his vigilance.

When Giles had first started journeying and meeting his spirit guides he had been unsure what they were and where they existed. Despite his daily interaction with things supernatural it had been hard for him to believe that, while journeying, lying in his bed, or on the floor, that he was actually traveling someplace where he would meet with beings for guidance and instruction. He had decided that his secret garden was merely a visual construct created by his mind, filled with all the landscapes in the world that spoke to his soul. And the beings he met were simply internal parts of himself. Establishing a relationship with his wisdom, and his courage and the other noble parts of himself was a good and useful thing. It was a way to more easily access those parts, to really believe that those traits lay within him. At one time, when he had first come to the Shaman, he had lost touch with all of it and had

thought these parts of himself to be forever gone.

Over time, he decided it didn't matter what they were or where they were. This place felt real to him, and they felt real to him, and they had never let him down. None of his guides or teachers ever had. He had never come here and not left renewed, stronger, clearer. And he was feeling that way now. It was here that he felt loved like nowhere else in his life. His body resonated with it, as if his atoms were vibrating with the emotion.

It was here that he came when he was hurting; it was here that he came when he was confused about Buffy. About what to say to her, how to help her, as a man, and as a friend. There were no answers here as to how to fight the latest evil the Hellmouth was spitting out. Instead he found the answers on how to fight his internal demons, his and Buffy's. And in doing so, they were both better prepared to fight against the physical ones.

Giles knew it would be time to go soon. He sighed. Bear came over and lowering his body to the ground he leaned against Giles. His weight immediately pushed Giles down and he found himself with a face full of Tiger fur. Tiger snarled, and with claws unsheathed he lashed out at Bear. Bear just snorted, unconcerned, and he lay down, easing his body down next to Giles'. Giles turned until he was on his back, his head still resting on Tiger's belly. Hare hopped onto Giles' stomach. He ran the fingers of one hand through Bear's fur. The other scratched Hare's ears. He spoke. "Are any of you able to come with me?"

Tiger purred underneath him. Giles saw an image of him walking with Tiger at his side. Giles smiled. "Thank you. I didn't really want to go on my own." He felt the love from all of them and he smiled again. "I know, you're always with me." He sat up. "Is there anything I need to know before I go?" Water Buffalo turned his head and breathed on Giles. Giles closed his eyes and listened with his heart.

##

As they walked into his house, Buffy brushed against the Shaman. She stopped. "Hey, you're real here."

He smiled. "I'm real wherever I am."

"No, I mean, I can touch you here. I couldn't touch you in the Magic Box."

"That was merely a projection I sent to retrieve you. I was waiting here for you when you arrived."

"To retrieve me, huh? I feel like a Springer Spaniel, or maybe like a duck." She stopped as a woman entered the room, a smile on her face. Buffy didn't know what she was expecting, but it wasn't this. This woman could have been her mom. Not the way she looked because Lindsey was dark, Indian dark, from India Indian. But the rest of it, the loving look in her eyes, her age, she just looked so normal. Buffy liked her immediately.

Lindsey moved to her and took her hands. She looked at her husband. "Is this she? Is this the girl Rupert's been telling us about for the last few years?"

Buffy nodded. "She is me. I mean, I'm the Slayer. Buffy."

Lindsey let out a sigh of satisfaction. "Buffy. You are as beautiful as he said you were. I cannot tell you how nice it is to finally meet you. I feel as if you've been a part of our family for ages." "Giles said I was beautiful?"

Lindsey laughed at her expression. "He raves about you whenever he's here. Your beauty, your courage, your skills. I don't imagine he has anyone else he can really brag about you to."

Buffy smiled sadly. "I'm sure he doesn't only brag about me."

Lindsey laughed again. "No, you're right. He grouses about you too." Her smile grew a little pained. "And there are times when he is silent." She took Buffy's arm in hers. "But, we are always joyful when Rupert comes to visit. We both love him so."

Buffy allowed herself to be pulled into a stunning living room, with colorful and textured fabrics decorating the walls and ceilings. Buffy sat on a couch and looked at both the Shaman and his wife. "I didn't even know this place existed. I didn't even know he came here."

The Shaman nodded. "I believe there is much you do not know about Rupert."

Buffy pouted. "Well, it's not all my fault. He's not exactly share guy."

Lindsey touched her on the arm. "He would be, if you wanted him to be. He's not a secretive man by nature." She turned to her husband. "Sometimes we can't get him to shut up." She laughed and then sobered. "Although it doesn't happen very often, I'll grant you that. More often than not when he is here, he needs to heal."

Buffy's eyebrows furrowed. "Heal from what?" She flashed a look at the Shaman. "I mean, when has he come here, you know, not to visit but to

heal?"

The Shaman spoke. "It is usually after I have gone to..." He smiled at Buffy, "I retrieve him, because his thoughts have been especially troubled and I have felt his pain. Even when things are darkest for him, he is generally worried about you and what you need and he forgets that he is just a man, and his needs must also be attended to."

"So, when have you ...retrieved him?" Buffy braced herself for his answer.

"The first time was when Eyghon reappeared. That affected Rupert in ways you cannot know, and it was necessary that he come here for healing and instruction. I brought him here after Jenny Calendar died, and during that summer that you were gone. He chose to come here to work through his feelings and fears when Angel returned. When he was fired as your Watcher, after your eighteenth birthday he spent some time with us. There were a few other times as well. He was last here right after you died. That was a very difficult time for him."

Buffy felt sadness overwhelm her. The Shaman shook his head. "Your sorrow is unnecessary. Rupert has never felt that any of this was either your fault or your responsibility."

Buffy shook her head. "I know. He wouldn't. But, all those times, I didn't even wonder how he was. I mean, I felt bad for him, but I never called him or..."

The Shaman placed a hand on her shoulder. "All of these difficult times for him were difficult times for you as well. Rupert understood that you were in tremendous pain and it was never his expectation or desire that you take his burdens on top of your own." At the look on Buffy's face, he continued. "It was not your time to comfort him. That duty and honor belonged to us. Rejoice that he had access to the help he needed so he could continue to offer you the support you needed."

Buffy leaned back against her chair, sighing. "Rejoice, huh?" She looked at the Shaman. "So, how'd you guys meet anyway? And how come in the library that day you made it sound as if you never expected to see him again?" She spoke in dramatic tones. "My debt to you is now repaid, do not call on me again..." her tone lightened, "...or whatever it was you said."

"Rupert chose that script, not I. You will need to ask him why he requested those words."

A chime rang out and Lindsey stood. "That means that our dinner is ready and awaits us." She smiled at Buffy. "I hope you're hungry."

Buffy put a hand to her stomach. "You know what? I think I am." The three of them headed for the dining room. There were beautifully embroidered pillows on the floor, a banquet spread before them on a low table. Buffy's eyes widened. "All of this is just for us?"

Lindsey laughed. "My husband eats a lot. We'll be lucky to get a few scraps before he consumes it all." She sent a loving gaze his way as she spoke and he smiled back and assisted her down to her pillow.

After seeing that Buffy was seated, he took his own seat. He waited while Buffy and Lindsey served themselves before spooning food onto his own plate. While he waited he spoke. "I will answer your question as to how Rupert and I met, just as I have answered your questions about his coming here since he became your Watcher. But I must have you understand something." Buffy turned to him and waited. He spoke again. "Rupert has given me permission to speak of these things to you. I would not tell them to you otherwise. But I share them with you trusting that you will hold them close and consider them a confidence. You must understand that in telling you these things that I give you power that you can use to hurt Rupert if you so chose, and I would not wish for that to happen."

Buffy nodded. "I won't say anything."

The Shaman smiled. "It does not mean you cannot discuss these things with Rupert. He knows I am telling you. He is the one choosing to give you this knowledge, this piece of himself. Just make sure you use it wisely and with love."

"Gotcha." Buffy frowned as she realized that her answer didn't quite match the solemnity of the moment. She tried again. "I...I don't ever want to hurt him. I love him. I ♡ " Buffy felt so inadequate to put what she was feeling into words.

The Shaman understood. "That is sufficient. To know that you will do your best, and that you understand that this is a gift." Buffy just nodded, her eyes full of his words, her longing to do right by Giles evident in her eyes. The Shaman nodded, satisfied.

The Shaman was silent for a few minutes as they began to eat. Everything tasted wonderful and Buffy cleaned her plate quickly and helped herself to some more. Lindsey grinned, pleased. While the Shaman was refilling his own plate he began. "You know that Rupert used to conjure demons?"

Buffy nodded. "Yeah, that was how all that trouble with Eyghon started."

"Eyghon was not the only demon he conjured. He'd been conjuring for quite some time before he tempted fate so sorely." He paused and then smiled. "He conjured me one day, quite by accident. I had sent out a projection to communicate with a student and Rupert's magic pulled me in." Buffy's eyes grew wide but she made a motion for him to continue. "We spoke, for some time. Even back then, despite his attempts to run from his destiny, Rupert was a very bright young man, with a quick wit, and an amusing, if somewhat sarcastic, view of the world."

"We often spoke after that, although without the necessity of Rupert conjuring me. He would issue a polite invitation with his magic and if I was free, I would come to him." His gaze grew pensive. "I worried about him. I could see that he was heading into treacherous waters, his desire for magic and power far outstripping his common sense. He was surrounded by acquaintances who delighted in his power and took every opportunity to coerce him into more dangerous schemes."

"If Rupert were an unscrupulous man, he'd have probably emerged from this experience unscathed, much as his friend Ethan did. But he is not. He is a good man, and a good man who exposes himself to evil, over time, begins to unravel. And unravel he did. By the time I got to him, when I realized he was in danger, he was almost insane."

Buffy choked on some food. "You mean, like...?"

"Yes, he came so close to losing himself. Even I didn't know if I could help him. He had torn himself apart; the dissonance of who he was and how he was living his life unbalanced him completely. He couldn't distinguish reality from delusion, he was suspicious of everyone, he was malnourished and dehydrated and I suspect he hadn't slept for days. He'd been abandoned by all of his friends, and I found him sitting near the decomposing body of his friend, Randall. He was like an animal, wild and dangerous."

"What did you do?" Buffy was fascinated and horrified. She couldn't imagine Giles being like this, although in her mind she could remember the state he'd been in after Jenny, still possessed by Eyghon, had jumped out of the window. Giles had been on the floor by his couch, his eyes wild and filled with pain. She remembered how hard it had been to get through to him, to get him to finally concentrate on her, to get him to speak of Eyghon. Her heart constricted and she refocused on the Shaman's words.

"I brought him here, much as I brought you here. And I watched over him. I talked to him for hours every day, and I made sure there was always food and drink. This is a restful place and I hoped it would soothe him and in time it did,

though it took many weeks. He regained his sanity and when he did, he asked for my help."

"But you were already helping him."

"I was merely keeping his body alive, and allowing his mind time to heal. Rupert knew, as did I, that the real work ahead of him was healing his soul, his spirit. That was still fractured, the soul sickness within him profound. So I began to teach him and he has been my student since then, although there is much I have learned from him over the years." He smiled at Buffy. "Your Watcher is a remarkable man."

Buffy smiled proudly. Of that she was sure. Then she cocked her head to the side. "What did you teach him?"

"I taught him to create a secret garden, a sanctuary, a place of respite, where he can relax and nurture his soul. A place of beauty and tranquility. Then I taught him how to journey. How to achieve a trance state and send himself out, to the Shamanic lowerworld to find his spirit guides and to the Shamanic upperworld to find his spirit teachers. He now has the skill to journey when he needs answers and when his path is unclear. Guides and teachers that have chosen to walk his path with him surround him. They make him strong and wise."

"So that's what he's doing now? Going on that kind of journey?"

"Yes, although this one is different than ones he has gone on before. This journey will take him to the future. I have foreseen that it is a dark place for him and I fear that the journey will be painful for him."

"So why are you making him do it? I thought the point of all of this was to take away the pain."

"No, the point of all of this is to recognize that there will always be pain, suffering never goes away. But we can change our response to it, we can choose to acknowledge it and learn from it, without allowing it to control us." He paused as if considering what to say. He nodded, as if to himself and he spoke again.

"When Angel came back it was a challenging time for Rupert. He had been misused by Angelus, as you well know. Rupert came here because he refused to be controlled by his fear and his anger. He knew it would achieve nothing and most likely alienate you and make him less effective as your Watcher. He worked through the pain, until he could be around Angel, and talk about him and work with him without having to suffer while he was doing

it. The source of the suffering didn't go away, Rupert's relationship to it changed. And because of it, he is stronger and wiser, and your relationship survived."

The Shaman let out a breath. "Your being ripped out of heaven, that is a significant cause of suffering. However, the pain you feel won't make it go away, or undo what's been done. So, regardless of how valid your feelings, they achieve nothing except adding to your misery. You distance yourself from those that love you, you block yourself from embracing your life, and you believe yourself incapable of experiencing joy and peace. And in that belief you create your own reality where those things are true. And if you continue down this path, you will never experience joy and peace, and you will drive everyone away except those who see the possible gain for them in your misery."

Buffy threw down her fork. "So, just like that, I snap my fingers and I start doing a happy dance that I'm alive again, that I get to kill again, that I have to die again?"

"No, not just like that. It is the most difficult process imaginable, letting go of suffering. But, it always must start with a single step. And your first step is at least a glimmer of belief that you can be whole again. For without that belief you will not even attempt the journey."

End of Part 2

Journey's End 3

Buffy sat there in silence, looking at the Shaman, at Lindsey, at her surroundings. She thought of Giles and what he must have gone through with Eyghon, and for the first time, really thought about how wonderful he had been about Angel. Buffy had approached Giles with some trepidation the first couple of times when she had needed to discuss Angel, fully expecting Giles to go ballistic. But he hadn't. He'd been kind, and other than being realistically concerned, had never stopped being loving and supportive of Buffy and her relationship with Angel.

She looked up again at the Shaman. "I would have lost him if he hadn't come here after Angel came back, wouldn't I?"

"If Rupert hadn't chosen to face his pain and make a conscious choice to find a path of love through it, yes, I believe he would have left once he was fired and your new Watcher arrived."

Buffy's heart was beating faster just at the thought. How many other times had he done this for her? How many times had he thought of leaving? How many times had he stayed when all he wanted to do was go? Probably as many times as she had wanted to run. Too many times to count. Her voice was shaky. "I can't do this without him. I don't know how. I feel so lost and he's the only thing that makes sense to me."

The Shaman nodded. "Are you able to take that first step?"

"Will it keep him here?"

"It is why he is leaving. He believes that he is keeping you from finding your inner strength. He believes he is making it harder for you to take that first step."

Buffy's eyes filled with tears. "But he's not."

"Are you able to take that first step and believe? If not, he may be right."

Buffy got a determined look on her face. "Will you help me?"

The Shaman nodded. "Yes. We will talk further. Now let us finish our meal." Buffy nodded in relief, grateful for the distraction. Her mind was reeling from everything she'd heard and she just sat there in silence as the Shaman and Lindsey spoke quietly, hopping from topic to topic, allowing her the time to think things through.

##

When Water Buffalo had finished communicating to him, Giles stood. Tiger rolled over and stood as well, sinuously stretching. He moved to stand by Giles' side. Giles looked back at his three remaining guides and sending them thoughts of gratitude and love he headed off.

Allowing Tiger to direct him, Giles tried to review what he'd been told. There was a real danger to him during this journey. This had never been the case. He had never been in danger, the purpose of his previous journeys merely to instruct or to renew. It was a testament to his faith in the Shaman that it never crossed his mind not to go. But it didn't stop the nervous tendrils in his gut. He had been told that he could get lost, that his fear and remorse could make him stray off the path. And once off the path, there was a chance that he might not find it again. He was told, and this he must remember at all times, that what he was seeing was not real, but rather the shadows of a future that would likely come to pass if current choices remained unchanged.

Giles shook his head. He wasn't sure why he needed to do this. Clearly his teacher thought he was making a mistake by leaving. If the Shaman told him to stay and not return to England, he would do it. But that was not his way, it never had been. Giles would be presented with the information he needed, so he could make his own decision, a decision that came from within. So, he would go, and he would do his best to not get lost.

He felt a fierce declaration from Tiger. "I know, you won't let me get lost." He was very glad that he was being accompanied. Giles rested his hand on Tiger's head as they approached the end of the field of wildflowers. Giles' lips pursed. Usually the field sloped off into sandy dunes, which in turn became the sea. Today, there was a shimmering wall in front of him that occluded whatever lay behind it. It extended as far as the eye could see from left to right and from the ground skywards. He looked down at Tiger. "Ready?" Tiger's response was to ready himself for a leap, muscles bunching. As one they leaped through the wall.

Giles saw himself sitting on a plane. He knew he was heading home for England. He could feel his own emotions slamming through him, his fears for Buffy, his anger that she hadn't even shown up to say goodbye, his hope that he was making the right decision, and coupled with shame was a sense of relief that he was leaving it all behind.

A moment later and he was standing in front of Buffy. He could feel her emotions and hear her thoughts. She had one hand shielding her eyes from the sunlight as she watched a plane fly overhead. She didn't know if it was Giles' plane but as it flew over her it took her hope with it. Anger swept through her at his abandonment and she allowed it to consume her, for to feel any other emotion was too painful. She watched the plane until it was out of sight and she let the anger swallow her alive.

When she finally turned to head for home it was dark and Giles and Tiger followed her. Giles felt buffeted by her anger. It was coming off of her in waves, its presence almost a palpable entity. Once home she walked into the kitchen. Grabbing an apple she slammed herself into a chair. Willow and Dawn were there. She glared at them, itching for a fight.

Dawn was unknowingly willing to oblige. "Giles was really sad you didn't come to say goodbye." She already felt his absence keenly. He had that reassuring feel of a grown-up and now she felt adrift. Plus, his leaving frightened her because he had been the only one who seemed to make Buffy believe that she could do this, that she could live again.

Buffy snorted. "I don't give a shit if I made him mad. He obviously doesn't give a shit about me."

That annoyed Dawn. "Well if he doesn't it's only because of the way you treat him."

Willow intervened. "Wait a minute. Buffy didn't do anything wrong to Giles." She turned to Buffy. "And how can you even say that? Of course Giles cares about you."

"Yeah, well, he sure has a funny way of showing it."

Willow frowned. "He's only doing what he thinks is best for you."

Buffy stood, knocking her chair back. "Well, you know what? I'm sick of people trying to do what's best for me. Because none of you know what I need, and all you do is screw my life up."

Willow winced. "Buffy, I know we hurt you when we brought you back, and I'm sorry. I don't know how to..."

Buffy interrupted. "Right, you're sorry, Tara's sorry. Xander's sorry. Giles' is sorry. You're all sorry. That makes me feel so much better."

Dawn figured it was time to get out now before things got worse. "Well, I'm going over to Jessica's."

Buffy let out a half laugh. "No, you're not."

"Why not?"

"Because I said so."

"You can't just keep me here."

"Oh, yes I can. As long as I'm paying the mortgage I get to pretty much say and do whatever the hell I want."

Dawn spit out her response. "Well, since it's actually Giles who's paying the mortgage, for the next couple of years, maybe I should just call him and ask him."

Buffy's eyes narrowed. "Look, he gave that money to me so that means I make the house payment, I pay the bills. And he probably gave it to me as a payoff. Here Buffy, here's some money, take it please, because I can't be bothered to actually be with you anymore."

Willow came to Giles' defense. "You know that's not why he gave it to you."

"Do I Will, do I?"

"You're not being fair to him."

"Strangely enough, I really don't care. As far as I'm concerned Giles is no longer a part of my life, or this family. His name is officially off limits."

Willow's eyes flashed. "You can't tell us not to talk about Giles."

Buffy started to prowl around the kitchen. "You sure about that? Remember me? Mortgage girl? I don't exactly see you or Tara slapping any money down on the table. And why are you defending him anyway? I heard you that night. I heard you arguing. What did he call you?" Buffy put her hand to her jaw as if she needed to think. "Oh I remember. He called you a rank arrogant amateur. And do you remember what you said to him?"

Willow did. She glanced quickly at Dawn. "Buffy, I don't think..."

"Here, let me refresh your memory. You threatened him. You told him that you were very powerful and he would be wise not to piss you off. You threatened him, threatened to use magic against him, right here, in this kitchen. So where do you get off telling me how to treat Giles?"

Willow lost it. "That might be a warning worth listening to."

Buffy shook her head in disbelief, all her anger at what Willow had done to her growing like poison ivy inside of her. "Are you threatening me little witch girl? Me?" She got up into Willow's face. "I dare you."

Dawn couldn't take anymore. She threw herself in between them, tears running down her face. "Stop it, just stop it."

Buffy picked up her fallen chair and turned to face Willow. "I want you out of this house by tomorrow morning. You are no longer welcome here."

Willow's eyes widened. "Buffy, you don't mean that."

"Oh yes, I do. You think you can threaten me in my own home?" She took a step closer. "Get out."

Willow looked bewildered. "Where are we supposed to go? You need to give us some time to find a place to live."

"I don't have to give you anything. You're the oh so powerful witch. Wave your magic wand and build yourself a little bungalow for two. Just get out of my house, and out of my sight."

Willow fought back her anger and was unsuccessful. "Fine, if that's the way you want it. Chase us away, just like you chased Giles away, and Riley and everyone else you say you care about. You're a selfish bitch, Buffy, and you've always been too busy wallowing in your own self pity to ever see what anyone else might need." Her voice grew angrier, full of derision. "Poor little Buffy, poor little Slayer. Well, you know what? Your life sucks because you make it that way. You make one stupid decision after another and then wonder why things don't work out for you."

Buffy's voice was very quiet. "I didn't decide to rip myself out of heaven. You did that, you and my other so-called friends. Now get out of this room before I hurt you."

Willow felt the dark magic rise within her. Only the presence of Dawn kept her from using it. She sent Buffy a look filled with venom and after taking her time to get a glass of water, as if to taunt Buffy, she finally left.

Dawn turned to Buffy, her voice shrill and desperate. "How could you do that? How could you tell her to leave? Are you going to make everyone I love go away?"

Buffy grabbed Dawn's arm hard enough to hurt. "Dawn, listen to me. The sooner you learn that it's just you and me the better off you'll be. Ever since mom died, we've been alone. And it's better to be alone than to be with people who pretend to be your friends. All you've got is me. Don't be a fool like I was and think that anyone else will ever be there when you need them." Buffy headed for the door. "Don't leave the house. I have to patrol."

When she left, Dawn crumpled to the floor in tears, her cries filling the kitchen, the sound full of despair.

Giles moved to her, wanting to put his arms around her, wanting to console her. He found his way blocked by Tiger, the beast's eyes compassionate but firm. Giles backed away, willing himself to remember. It's not real. It's not really happening. He was appalled at what he had just witnessed. Buffy's anger at him was impenetrable. How had he not seen it? How could she have gotten so lost in it so quickly? As his thoughts became full of Buffy he found himself beside her as she swept into Spike's crypt.

Spike was lounging on his bed, as if he had been waiting for her. "Slayer, I was wondering when you'd want more of me."

Buffy glared at him. "Not now Spike."


"What's got your knickers in a twist?" He nodded. "Ah, the babysitter's gone."

Buffy gritted her teeth. "I don't want to talk about him."

"Fine with me." He patted the bed next to him. "Come here, pet."

Buffy ignored him, and she started pacing. "I kicked Willow out tonight."

Spike raised his eyebrows. "What did the little witch do now?"

"She threatened me, just like she threatened  " She waved her hand as if to exorcise even the thought of Giles. "She threatened me."

Giles prayed that Spike would make her see reason, that he would calm her down.

"Good for you, Slayer. You don't need her; you don't need anyone. Not when you've got me." He patted the bed again.

Buffy sent him an incredulous stare and laughed. "That's supposed to make me feel better?"

Spike stood and approached her. "Listen to me, Slayer. Giles is gone, Willow is gone, that means Tara is gone. Xander is tied to Anya's apron strings. Little bit probably hates you right now. So that leaves me." He moved even closer until his lips were just a couple of inches away from hers. "I'm all you've got, baby."

Giles spoke to Buffy, even though he knew she couldn't hear him. "Buffy, walk away, walk away from this place. He doesn't care about what you need, he just knows what he wants and he'll do or say anything to get it." He spoke her name again in despair as she closed the gap between her and Spike and began to kiss him. "Buffy." Giles could feel what she was feeling, and he wept for her. If she really wanted this, if having sex with Spike would really make her feel loved he wouldn't begrudge her this. But, she didn't expect it to. She thought that this was all she deserved, and as she allowed Spike to touch her, she was empty inside.

The sex was brutal, the coupling fast. Giles tried to leave but was not able to, so he had turned away so as not to watch. But he could hear and he could feel what Buffy was feeling. He could feel her eventual arousal, despite her emptiness and he could feel her release. And Giles could feel a small chink in

her armor, a brief moment of vulnerability. But that soft spot inside of her became suddenly overwhelmed with sadness, and her sense of unbearable loss at his leaving, and her disgust with herself for sleeping with Spike and it was all too much. She slammed the door shut and embraced her anger again. She got off the floor and pulled her clothes back on. Without a word to Spike she left the crypt.

Spike lay on the floor and he watched her go. He looked down at himself and shook his head. He also was having a rare moment of vulnerability. That hadn't gone quite how he'd pictured it. Then he got over it too. He stood and pulled his pants up. "Well, it's a start." He grinned and went over to turn the television on. Giles almost felt sorry for him as he left to follow Buffy.

##

Buffy was apprehensive but she obeyed the Shaman's command and closed her eyes. He spoke. "Now, think of a place that makes you feel safe, that makes you feel protected. Make it as real as you can in your mind, and then I will help you create it."

"Does it have to be a garden?"

"No, that is merely a phrase. It only needs to be someplace where you can find yourself." Buffy nodded and she found a place. The Shaman smiled. "This is where you choose?"

Buffy frowned, nervous. "Why? Did I do it wrong?"

The Shaman softly reassured her. "No, it is never wrong. Concentrate." She felt his hand on her forehead and felt a strong sensation of light. "Now, open your eyes."

She did and she gasped. She was standing in her old high school library. She looked down at herself. "Am I really here?"

"A part of you is here."

She ran a hand down the length of the table. "All I need is Giles now."

The Shaman softly touched her over her heart, just for a quick moment. "You have your Giles. He lives in here. You could create him here if you wanted to. He is one of your teachers, your most important one right now."

Buffy thought about that and then shook her head. "Nah, I'll stick with the original." She glanced shyly up at the Shaman. "Do I have any spirit guides?"

"If you choose to journey as a part of your spiritual path you will find many spirit guides. But, one has already chosen you and you have already met."

"We have? Who? Who have I met?" Her eyes widened then as a mountain lion entered the library. She pointed at it. "Is that the one that took me on my quest?"

"Yes, she chose to accompany you. Her name is Seeker, and she is yours."

Buffy's eyes filled with tears and she got down on her knees. The mountain lion walked up to her and rubbed her forehead against Buffy's. Buffy threw her arms around her and dug her fingers into her dense fur. Seeker's purr was making her whole body vibrate. Buffy smiled at the sensation. Over Seeker's body she looked at the Shaman. "She's really mine?"

The Shaman smiled. "She has offered herself to you as a guide. When you explore the unknown, both within and without, her strength and courage will go with you."

"Does she talk?"

"She communicates. It will be up to you to learn how to listen to her, and how to look for her messages."

Her arm still around Seeker, Buffy sat, and she looked around the library. "God, I loved it here. I know some bad stuff happened here, and we were always talking about the next ending of the world, but when I really needed something, I always found it here." She sighed and then giggled when Seeker licked her face, her enormous tongue bathing her from jaw to temple. She wiped her face off. She sent the Shaman an impish look. "Ooh, spiritual guidance and a facial scrub. Two for the price of one."

The Shaman gently smiled back. He just sat there quietly, wanting to allow her this time. A time to build her strength before her journey. Buffy couldn't believe how good she felt holding Seeker. She could feel waves of approval and love coming from the beast and it was like a healing balm to her heart. Giles was the only other person who could make her feel like this and it doubled her resolve to do whatever it took to keep him with her.

She glanced up again at the Shaman and was surprised to see a sad look on his face. "What's the matter?" The Shaman shook his head. Buffy knew somehow. "It's Giles, isn't it? Is he okay?"

"His journey has begun."

"Yeah, but is he okay?"

"He is in pain. I apologize. I did not mean for his journey to distract you from yours."

"What do you mean, he's in pain? What kind of pain?"

"This is not the time to speak of it. Much of his journey still lies ahead, as does yours."

"So, does that mean, that Giles' pain, that look I saw in your eyes, that his pain has just begun?"

"Buffy, you cannot take this pain from him, nor will knowing of it help him in any way. If you want to assist him you must take your own journey."

She grimaced. "I'd rather take his."

The Shaman nodded. "I understand. Fighting someone else's demons is always easier than fighting your own."

"Couldn't I just kill a couple of vampires instead?"

The Shaman stood. "Are you ready?"

Buffy suddenly didn't feel very ready at all. She stood though and smiled as Seeker wove her way around her. "I guess. What do I do?"

The Shaman pointed at Seeker. "She will lead you. You will be shown different futures, futures that will be based on the different choices you make. You must find your heart here. You must understand how different your path and the path of those who travel with you will be, based on whether you live with a heart filled with anger, or a heart filled with love. And then you must decide how you will use this opportunity of new life." He sent Buffy a piercing look. "Are you able to believe that you create your future? A future filled with fear and darkness, or a future filled with love and light? That it will spring forth from you?"

Buffy felt the first stirrings of hope within her breast. His words touched off a longing within her, a longing for peace and love, a longing to experience it again. The Shaman nodded, he could feel it within her. "This is sufficient." He pointed to the far wall of the library, which was now a shimmering wall. "Your journey begins there. Blessings to you."

Buffy squared her shoulders and with one hand on top of Seeker's head, she put out her other hand and began to push her way through.

End of Part 3

Journey's End 4

When Giles left the crypt he expected to find himself following Buffy. Instead he was back at the house, up in the master bedroom. Willow was sitting on the floor, surrounded by books. As he walked closer to see which ones they were, Tara walked in. Willow didn't notice. She was muttering under her breath. As Tara got closer to see what Willow was doing her face flushed with anger. "One day. You couldn't last one day without doing magic."

Willow looked up, emotions spilling across her face, surprise, guilt, annoyance. "You don't understand. Something's happened."

"All I know is that you promised. You promised to go a month without magic. I said one week. And you haven't even lasted a day. Willow, nothing makes this okay."

"You weren't there. It's Buffy. She's out of control. She threatened me... and Dawn. She's kicked us out. We have to be out of here by tomorrow. She's going to really hurt someone if something isn't done."

"So you think a spell's the answer? What are you going to do? Make her forget? Make her not care what she's going through? God, Willow. You can't smooth everything over with magic." Tara crouched down next to Willow and picked up one of the books. Her eyes widened in alarm. "Willow, these are revenge spells. What have you done?"

Willow grabbed the book out of Tara's hand. "Nothing, I didn't do anything. I was just looking, okay? Some people hit punching bags when they're angry, I was just imagining doing things. It was making me feel better."

Tara didn't believe her. She looked at Willow with such profound sadness in her eyes, shaking her head. "I don't even know you anymore. What happened to you? Was it the spell you did to bring Buffy back? Did it do something to you? Why haven't you ever told me what it was?"

"Look, you either trust me or you don't. It's still just me, same old Willow."

"No, it's not." Tara stood up and pulled down her suitcase. She started to pack up her clothes.

Willow went to join her. "Good idea. We have a lot of packing to do."

Tara put her hand out. "Willow, wherever we go tomorrow, it won't be together. I can't do this anymore."

The darkness almost swamped Willow again. Tara took a step back when she saw Willow's eyes change. Willow shook her head and they cleared. Tara just started packing faster. Willow grabbed her arm. "You can't leave me, Tara, you can't."

Tara looked up, fear in her eyes. "How will you make me stay? Will you do a spell? Program me like the buffybot with no will of my own?"

Willow recoiled from the look on her face. "I would never do that Tara."

"Yes, you would. That's why I have to leave." Tara found herself fighting down a sense of panic. She felt an urgent need to leave before Willow cast a spell and she found herself down in the kitchen cooking lasagne like nothing had happened. More of her life stolen away from her. She began ripping drawers open, trying to find her belongings. Finally her sense of self-preservation won and she slammed the suitcase shut, knowing she was leaving things behind. She looked up to see Willow casting. A look of horror came over her face and she ran for the door yanking it open and slamming it shut behind her. Willow finished her spell, a smug smile on her face. The door opened and Tara walked in. She smiled at Willow. "Hey baby, I missed you."

Willow kissed her. "I missed you too." Willow explained what happened with Buffy and the two of them began packing the rest of their belongings, making plans as to where they would go.

Giles dug his fingers into Tiger's fur to keep from yelling at Willow, knowing she wouldn't be able to hear him. Willow walked over to the bed and picked up one of the magic books. Tara looked over, frowning. "What are you doing?"

Willow smiled brightly at her. "Nothing. Nothing you need to worry about."

Tara smiled back. "Okay. You hungry? Should I go fix us some dinner?"

"Starved. That would be great." Willow walked over and kissed Tara on the cheek. "What would I do without you?"

"You never need to worry about that." With a final loving glance Tara headed downstairs.

Willow sat on the bed and opened the book. Giles moved to her side so he could see what she was looking at. His face grew even grimmer and he couldn't help exclaiming. "Willow, no." He reached for the book only to find himself on the ground, Tiger standing over him, growling. Giles sat up talking to Tiger. "It's okay, I'm okay." But he wasn't. He backed up until he was in the corner, his hands over his face as he heard Willow call out for Dawn.

Willow looked up as Dawn entered her room. Her face was red and blotchy from crying. Willow patted the bed next to her. "Dawn, I'm so sorry about what happened earlier. I'm sorry we have to leave."

Dawn started to cry again. "I can't believe this is happening."

Willow put her arm around her. "I'm sure it will all blow over and Buffy will be herself again. In the meantime, I found something that might help."

Dawn wiped her nose with her hand. "What is it?"

"It's a spell." At the look on Dawn's face Willow giggled. "No, not that kind of spell. It will just make things clearer for you. It will help you to know what to do to help. To give Buffy what she deserves."

"Really?"

Willow nodded. "And don't ever forget. If things don't work out here for any reason, you'll always have a home with me and Tara. We love you so much."

"I just want you to stay here. Buffy is kinda scaring me right now."

"I know she is. She's scaring me a little too. But things will get better, trust me. She won't scare you any more after this." She pulled the book around so Dawn could see the words. They were in Latin. "Now you need to say it, and I'll do the magic."

Giles put his hand over his ears. He couldn't bear to hear Dawn say the words Willow was prompting her to say. Giles groaned as, despite his efforts to the contrary, he heard Dawn's voice begin to speak, being assisted by Willow as she stumbled over the words, syllable by syllable until she was done.

A shadow passed her face and her eyes glowed red for an instant. Then she smiled at Willow. "Did I do it right?"

Willow hugged her. "Yes Dawnie, you did it exactly right." Willow slammed the

book shut and held out her hand. "Tara's cooking dinner, you want some?" Dawn nodded, and with a trusting look on her face she took Willow's hand and the two of them headed downstairs.

Giles stayed in the corner, knees drawn up tight. In the analytical part of his brain, Giles supposed that Willow thought this was a fitting revenge. She'd planted a seed. A seed that would grow in response to what it was fed. If Buffy treated Dawn with love and respect, she would get it tenfold back from Dawn. But if Buffy treated Dawn badly, Dawn would respond with hatred, a hatred that would grow and fester. And considering Buffy's state of mind right now... Giles' mind balked at the possible repercussions. He needed to stop this. He needed to stop this now.

He felt a warm breath on his face and he looked up to see Tiger standing there. Giles flung his arms around his neck and held on tightly, his heart raw. "Oh God. How can I just watch? It's too much." He drew a deep shuddering breath. "Take me somewhere else, please."

He sensed a breeze and when Giles opened his eyes again he was at Willy's. He looked around in some confusion, wondering why he was here, until he noticed Xander up at the bar. Giles knew Xander wouldn't be 21 for another couple of months but he also figured that Willy's was the one place Xander could order a drink and not have to worry about being carded.

Giles approached him and sat down on an empty stool next to him. Xander had clearly already had a few too many drinks and didn't seem to be slowing down. Willy's wasn't the sort of place that cared if you got drunk and drove. He was in the midst of a one-sided conversation with Willy.

"See, I just think I'm too young. I am way, way too young. And Anya, she is way too old. I don't even get what she sees in me. I'm nothing. I never have been. And I should know. My dad's told me that about a million times. But you know what, I'm beginning to think he may have been on to something. Who am I kidding? Me, a husband? With a family?" Xander snorted and lifted his drink to his mouth with a shaky hand. He let out a sigh. "And now Giles is gone."

Willy looked up at that. "Yeah, I heard he was leaving."

"He left. Today."

"Why'd he leave? Buffy's still around, ain't she?"

"Sort of."

A couple of the vampires at a back table looked up at that. Giles tried to shush Xander and then let out a frustrated noise when again he remembered that he wasn't really there. Willy was curious. "What do you mean, sort of?"

Xander made a circle with his index finger by his temple. "She's a little whacked. I mean she can still kick butt with the best of them, but she's not quite right. And you know what? I did that to her. Yup, me, her bestest friend. And I knew we shouldn't do that spell. I knew it. Not because of what we were doing to her, but because the whole thing scared the shit out of me. But did I stop it? No, of course not. Act like I have balls? No siree, not Alexander Harris." He took another sip. "No, siree."

"And now Giles is gone, and it's never gonna be okay." Xander wiped away some tears that appeared in his eyes. "Giles left, he just left us." He slammed his hand down on the bar. "How the hell are we supposed to do this without him? Who's gonna be best man at my wedding? Who's gonna tell me what to do with my life?" He wiped his eyes again.

Giles vacated his seat quickly when someone sat on him. The two vampires who had been sitting at the back table were now sitting on either side of Xander. One of them spoke. "So, what's this you're saying about the Slayer?"

Xander looked from one to the other, a sickly smile on his face. "Who me? Did I say something?"

One of the vampires grabbed him around the throat. Willy started protesting. "Hey, come on, I don't want any trouble in here."

The vampire with his hand around Xander's throat stood up, dragging Xander up with him. "Fine, we'll just take it outside then."

Willy tried again. "What do you want with him? He's just a kid. Besides he's one of the Slayer's best friends. You don't want to make her angry."

The other vampire grinned. "Why not?" He vamped out and glared at Willy. "Besides, how's she gonna know? You're the only one in here. She finds out it was us, we'll know it was you who told, and that just might make us angry."

Xander was sobering up quickly. He was searching his pockets for a stake. Giles was searching through his as well. He began frantically looking for a weapon in the bar as the vampires began to escort Xander outside. Tiger rarely spoke in words, but he spoke now, his voice deep and resonant in Giles' mind. "You must not interfere."

"They're going to kill Xander." He was surprised when he was actually able to

pick up a knife from behind the counter. Giles headed for the door only to find his way blocked by Tiger.

"My friend, listen to me. You must not interfere."

Giles tried to push by. He could see Xander; he could see the fear in his eyes. And Giles could see the pain on his face as the first vampire held him upright by the throat and the second vampire hit him over and over again. "Let me through. You have to let me through."

"You must remember. This is not real. But take warning. If you become real, if you become real enough to interfere, it will become real. This will become the present. The fact that you could pick up that knife shows that you are becoming real. You must remember."

Giles let out a heart-wrenching cry as the vampires started to feed. He beat on the glass, still trying to push his way past Tiger. Tiger tried again. "The only way to save the boy is to do nothing. You must not interfere."

Giles sank to the floor as he watched Xander's lifeless body fall to the ground, the vampires done with their feed. The knife fell out of his hand. It vanished and reappeared back under the counter. He started to sob, his heart breaking as he listened to the vampires laughing as they walked away. He cried for Xander, he cried for them all, and he cried for Buffy. Because Giles knew that some of these events he was being shown were happening simultaneously. And he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that as Xander was being killed by vampires, that Buffy was having sex with one, and that she would never forgive herself.

Tiger moved as close to Giles as he could, offering him his warmth and his strength as Giles lay sobbing on the floor. His eyes were compassionate and worried as he sent soothing and loving thoughts towards his friend. For he knew that there was much worse to come.

##

Buffy found herself in the back seat of Giles' BMW. He was sitting in the front seat, his fingers tapping impatiently on the steering wheel. Buffy looked around. They were at the high school. Giles must be picking Dawn up. She looked at the clock on the dashboard. 6 PM. What was Dawn doing here so late? It was already dark. Buffy looked around again, this time uneasily. Giles had obviously reached the end of his endurance as well as he got out of the car and headed up towards the main school building.

Buffy could sense the vampires before Giles did. She tried to warn him but

she was invisible to him. He was almost to the school when they called out to him. There were five of them, and they had Dawn. "Watcher."

Giles looked up, his eyes fearful as he saw Dawn. "Dawn!" He made as if to go to her. Buffy realized she could sense his thoughts and his feelings, both his and Dawn's.

One of the vampires jerked her arm up even higher behind her and she let out a cry. "Stay right there unless you want me to break her arm."

Giles stopped. "What do you want?"

"We want to make a trade. You give us the Slayer, and we'll give you back her sister."

Giles thought fast. These vampires must be new to town or they wouldn't be asking for Buffy. All he knew is that it was up to him to save Dawn. "All right." He held up both hands as he walked a little closer. "But why not take me instead? Let the girl go."

"Why would we want to do that?"

"Because I'm her Watcher. I'll be a more important hostage. Plus, if she doesn't come I have much more blood than this little girl does."

"Maybe we'll just take both of you." The vampires liked that idea.

Giles shook his head. "Then who'll deliver the message?"

That triggered a harsh debate. Dawn was glaring at Giles, shaking her head. Giles was ignoring her. Whatever happened, he'd make sure Dawn lived through this. The vampires moved closer to Giles. "Hold your hands up."

Giles complied. One of the vampires ran to him and yanked one of his arms down and behind his back, lifting it high. Giles winced. "Now let her go." The vampire did let her go and she ran to him. Giles embraced her quickly with his other arm and then he handed her the car keys. She didn't have her license yet but he had been giving her driving lessons and knew she could drive. "She's at the Magic Box. Go get her there."

Dawn's eyes widened and then she nodded. She knew Buffy wasn't there, but maybe Xander was, or somebody who could help them. She paused, reluctant to leave Giles. He prodded her. "Dawn, go." Dawn finally found her nerve and she flew to the car. With one last look at Giles she drove away.

Buffy looked around frustrated. Where the hell was she? She searched Giles' mind for the answer and the answers she found made her back away in denial. She was in bed. She was there all the time now, unless someone carried her someplace else. She had slipped away a few weeks back. Her life too much to bear, her memories of heaven too powerful to move past. She had started losing periods of time, having found a place deep within her mind that was more peaceful than the life she found herself in. And over time, she had gone there more and more until one day she never come back.

Giles and Dawn cared for her, they bathed her, and changed her. They had hoped she might come back but neither of them believed it, not anymore. And now, they hoped for her death, for her release, so she could go back home and finally rest.

She would not be coming to rescue Giles tonight. She would never rescue anyone again. Buffy looked up in horror as she realized what Giles' plan was. He was going to try and escape, even though he knew the odds were against him. He wanted the vampires to be gone when Dawn got back, so he had to try and get away. Because she would be back, whether she found any help or not. And odds were, she'd come back without help. Help was far and few between these days. And then they'd just kill her too if they were still here. But if he tried to escape, even if he died in the trying, they'd leave, because they'd have no hostage. Plus he figured he could take a couple with him.

All of this raced through Giles' mind and before Buffy could even try and do anything Giles had already reached for the stake in his pocket and plunged it into the heart of the vampire in front of him. The vampire holding him jerked up his arm and Buffy heard the bone snap. Giles grunted in pain but he pushed past it and staked a second vampire.

He stepped back and for a brief shining moment he had hope, hope that maybe he could pull this off, and make his escape. But he hadn't seen the vampire sneaking up behind him, who grabbed him in anger and snapped his neck. Buffy screamed as Giles fell to the ground. One of the vampires smacked the one who killed Giles. "What the hell did you do that for?"

"The bastard killed my brother."

"Yeah, well now we don't have a hostage." The three remaining vampires stared down at Giles.

The one who killed Giles spoke again. "So, I say we stay and do the Slayer anyway."

The other two looked at him like he was crazy. "Without a hostage? I don't

think so. Not with only three of us."

"Well, shit."

"You got that right. You screwed this one up good."

"Well, he pissed me off." He shrugged his shoulders and the three of them, with one more look at Giles, walked off.

Buffy ran to Giles and crouched down next to him. His sightless eyes seemed to be staring right at her. She wished she could shut them, she wished she could touch him before he grew cold. Tears fell down her face, splashing onto his chest yet leaving no mark. She heard the squeal of tires. Dawn was back. And she was alone. She jumped out of the car brandishing a cross. Dawn looked around confused when she saw that no one was there, and then she saw the body. She screamed and ran for him.

Everything got hazy and vanished from Buffy's sight. She felt Seeker's presence and slowly a new scene materialized in front of her.

Buffy let out a huge sigh of relief when she saw Giles standing before a seemingly fully functioning Buffy. His face was severe. "Buffy, this is the fifth night in a row you've been out all night."

"Get off it, Giles. You're not my dad."

"I never suggested I was. However, Dawn is your sister and you might want to take an interest in her life."

Buffy patted Giles on the chest. "That's what I've got you for. You're so much better at that than I am. I do the slay stuff, and you do the Dawn stuff."

"I find it hard to believe you've been out slaying all night long, all week long. There aren't that many vampires in the world."

"Ha, ha, good one Giles." At his glare she tried to placate him. "Okay, look, I'll be home tonight, we'll do the family dinner thing. Will that make you happy?"

"This isn't about making me happy."

"Fine, fine. It'll make Dawn happy. What time is dinner?"

Giles' eyes widened. "Buffy."

"What, I have to cook too? Sheesh, I'll pick up some pizza." She rolled her

eyes and grabbing her purse she left.

Buffy stood there as she sorted through everyone's thoughts. She knew where this Buffy had been every night. She'd been having sex with Spike. Wild monkey sex. All night. She hadn't even patrolled most of those nights. All she wanted was to have sex with Spike. It was the only thing that made her feel alive. The rest of it was duty and obligation, and she hated it.

Buffy turned her attention to Giles. He had taken his glasses off and was pinching the bridge of his nose. After seeing him dead such a short time ago the familiar gesture caused her heart to clench. Then he looked up and she gasped. His eyes were so sad; she had never seen him look so sad. She flinched, tears coming to her eyes as she felt his overwhelming sorrow for how things had turned out.

He felt useless. He was an inadequate substitute father for Dawn, his Slayer was slipping more out of his grasp every day, and he felt his life had become a mere shadow of what he had been called to be. He felt as if he had failed everyone. Buffy, Dawn and himself. He wondered if he should just go home, he wondered why he hadn't gone home when he'd first thought of it earlier this year. He'd achieved nothing by staying and in fact, in retrospect, he believed he'd made it worse.

Giles put his glasses back on and he hardened his heart against the pain he felt at the thought of leaving Buffy. But he saw no other choice. Only if he were gone would she be forced to be available for Dawn and for her other obligations. As long as he was here, she'd turn to him to take care of it all. He picked up the phone and after looking up the number he called the airlines to make his reservation.

Again, Buffy felt Seeker's presence and the sensation that signified the transition from one future to the next. The room vanished from sight. She waited for the next future to appear with a heavy heart.

End Part 4

Journey's End 5

She was overlooking a graveyard. She saw someone standing in front of a tombstone and she started walking in that direction. As she got closer she realized it was Giles. The grave was fairly new. The outlines of the replaced grass were still visible. Giles was holding a bouquet of flowers and there were tears in his eyes. He knelt down and began to clear the old flowers away.

Her heart started to hammer in her chest as she got closer, terrified to see the name inscribed on the stone. She cried out when she saw the name. Dawn Summers. She looked at the dates and did the math. Sixteen, she died when she was sixteen. A little over a year from now. Buffy looked up and saw the Buffy of this future approaching. Giles put the new flowers in the vase and he looked up as he heard footsteps. His mouth tightened when he saw it was she and he looked away.

Buffy could hear the hurt in her voice. "How long are you going to stay mad at me?"

Giles turned angry eyes to Buffy. "She's dead, Buffy. Does that mean nothing to you?"

"Yes. It means she's staying dead. No get out of heaven free card for Dawn."

Giles clenched his fists. "Must it always be about you?"

"I'm talking about Dawn."

"No, you're talking about yourself. It's always about yourself."

Buffy's eyes sparked with her own anger. "I'm just wanting to make sure that she doesn't go through what I went through."

Giles had had enough. "God forbid. Because we all know that no one has suffered like you."

"You have no idea..."

"You think not? When all I've heard out of you, all any of us have heard out of you for the past year is a non-stop commentary about your suffering? I'm sick of it. How many lives must you destroy in your misery? Your friends have finally left, after months of being systematically beaten down by you with your guilt trips and smart-ass remarks. Even Spike has left town. And you ignored Dawn. You ignored her cries for help. You ignored my warnings, the school's warnings, and now she's dead. By her own hand."

Buffy said nothing, she just stood there. Giles wanted to smack that petulant look off of her face. "Can you not conceive of the fact that maybe she was suffering too? Perhaps even more than you were? She needed you and you weren't there. You were too busy making a living out of being unhappy."

"You don't understand."

Giles shook his head. "You're right. I don't understand. I don't understand you at all. There is nothing of the Buffy I knew left in you except your ability to kill." Giles spit the words out, glancing at Dawn's grave and then back at Buffy. "At that, you continue to excel."

Giles looked again at the tombstone and his face grew sad. "You ask me how long I plan to be angry with you. Well let me ask you something Buffy. Who is there inside of you for me to forgive? If you'd tried, if you'd even acted like you cared..." Giles sighed and he looked at Buffy. "There is no remorse in you, Buffy. And until there is, there is no forgiveness in me."

"You once told me that you didn't have to earn forgiveness, that it was an act of compassion."

"Yes, I did. And if I thought, for an instant, that my forgiving you would be an act of compassion, that it would awaken something inside of you, that it would melt that heart of stone that beats in your chest, I'd do it. But when you stand there, in front of your sister's grave, and the only feeling you have is annoyance because I'm still angry with you, I do believe there's little point." He scooped up the dead flowers.

"I can't help what happened to me. They brought me back this way. It's not my fault."

"I don't believe that. I believe it is your fault. Spike was more human than you are. You found a way to relinquish all responsibility; nothing could possibly be your fault. Everything could be so conveniently blamed on your resurrection. Every pain in your life, everything that went wrong, all of it, was always the fault of someone else. Your friends for bringing you back, my fault because I forced your unwanted duty on you, Dawn's fault because she forced unwanted obligations on you, even Spike's fault because he had the audacity to love you and try to make you feel something."

Buffy's face could have been made out of stone. "So that's it? You'll just hate me now?"

Giles walked up very close to her, looking into her eyes. "Do you care? Does it even matter to you?"

Buffy watched herself meet his gaze, her eyes empty, unflinching. And then she watched herself just turn and walk away. Turning to watch Giles Buffy felt all hope die within him. He fell to his knees and wept on Dawn's grave.

Everything began to grow hazy again and Buffy waited, hoping that she'd see a future where she was something to be proud of. She ran her fingers through

Seeker's fur, finding some solace there.

##

Eventually Giles' tears stopped. He laid there, his face pressed against Tiger's fur, drawing strength from him. Finally he stood. Through his grief he had heard Willy call the police. The ambulance was still out there, lights flashing. There was no need for a rushed trip to the hospital, not this time. He looked at his watch and a bitter laugh escaped him. All that he'd seen, all the lives destroyed, and his plane had yet to touch down in England.

He felt the breeze again and he knew he was being sent on. He braced himself for what he might see next. He let out a cry when he realized where he was. It was Xander's gravesite. His coffin was being lowered into the ground. There was a small crowd. Some people from Xander's construction firm, Willy, a few students from Sunnydale High, Xander's parents. And then...

His eyes found Anya. Tara was holding on to her. She looked defeated, confused, angry. Giles wasn't sure she'd recover from this, not and stay human. Willow stood next to Tara and Dawn next to her. Dawn and Willow were holding onto each other tightly.

Giles' eyes scanned for Buffy next. He found her. She was standing alone, apart from the others. He could pick up the memories of the arguments, the recriminations. They all blamed her. They didn't know she had been with Spike, she hadn't told them that, but they knew she hadn't been available to save Xander. She hadn't defended herself and her silence had been taken as an admission of guilt. Buffy had no friends here, not any more, not even her sister. Although Buffy didn't know that yet. But Giles could feel the hatred seething in Dawn as a consequence of Willow's spell.

Giles felt a rush of anger at all of them. Could they not see? Didn't they understand that Buffy loved Xander too, that his death was ripping her apart? Even if she'd been patrolling there was no guarantee that she'd have been there in time to save Xander. In fact, odds were she wouldn't have been, she seldom went to that neighborhood unless she needed information from Willy. And Xander was the one who had made a poor decision in judgment, going to Willy's at night, alone, where he was sure to attract vampire attention. And Giles knew that it was because of him, the fact that he had left, that had caused Xander to go there and get drunk in the first place. There was plenty of blame to share, and very little of it actually belonged to Buffy. His heart ached for her and he longed to comfort her and try and take some of the hurt away.

But there was no one there to do that for her. Giles realized that he, of all of

them, would have been the one to take that on. He would have softly spoken to them all, tried to pull them back together, tried to show Buffy that she wasn't responsible. But he wasn't there. He wondered if he even knew that Xander had died. Buffy wouldn't have called him, nor Willow. And Willow would have kept Tara and Dawn from calling, afraid that if Giles showed up that he would figure out what she was doing to them both. Anya was in no shape to think of anyone. He wondered how he'd find out, if he'd find out.

He sat down on the grass and just watched as the service continued and then as people started to move away. He watched as the grounds men began to shovel the dirt over Xander's coffin and replaced the sod, arranging the flowers around it. He watched Buffy, as she stood there for hours, alone, never moving, and he felt her heart slowly dying as the minutes ticked by.

Once it grew dark it was Spike who finally came to get her. He just brought her home and put her to bed, for once staying silent and simply doing what was needed. He walked back downstairs and visited with Dawn. As his eyes looked up the stairs time and time again, distracting him from their conversation, Dawn's eyes grew darker and darker with jealousy, her hatred for her sister growing ever stronger.

Giles watched as the days flew by. He'd find himself in different places, and sometimes days would go by from his last observation. Buffy spent most of her time with Spike now. Every conversation she had with Dawn escalated out of control and became so venomous that even attempting to fix things was wildly outside of Buffy's ability to cope. So she kept away and Dawn began to spend more and more time with Tara and Willow. She used the opportunity to speak badly of Buffy, cementing their resentment of her and eliminating any chance of reconciliation.

Anya was faring no better. Willow and Tara helped at the store but Anya wasn't taking care of things. Bills weren't getting paid, new inventory wasn't being ordered, and mail orders weren't being filled. Within a surprisingly little amount of time the store started falling apart. And yet Anya refused to call Giles, her pride still intact enough to be convinced that she just needed time. But time kept passing and Giles sadly realized that this was probably how he'd find out about Xander, when he was notified that his store was going bankrupt.

He was back at Buffy's home. Dawn still lived there but it was no consolation to Buffy. Dawn was just one more reminder of how badly her life was going. They rarely spoke. Dawn was finishing her homework when she saw Buffy get ready to go out. Dawn sniggered. "Going to screw Spike?"

Buffy took a deep breath. "No, I'm going out to patrol." Giles saw in her mind

that she had indeed been planning to go see Spike.

"Yeah, right. You're not fooling anyone. Everyone knows you two are doing it." Dawn leaned back in her chair, victory close at hand with her next verbal strike. "And I wonder why that is? Oh yeah, he's a vampire. Of course you'd be screwing him."

Buffy had to fight the urge to smack Dawn across the face. She picked up her weapons bag. "I'm going out to patrol. Don't let anyone in." Without another word she left.

Dawn waited until the door shut and then she sprang into action. She had asked Willow for a spell to make a guy want her. Willow, all impulse control gone when it came to magic, was more than willing to assist her. Dawn had all the ingredients including a personal belonging to the guy in question. Dawn grinned unpleasantly. She figured that Buffy, after that conversation, probably would patrol, which meant she wouldn't be dropping by Spike's until later. And that was exactly what Dawn wanted.

As the fire from the spell burned brighter, Dawn picked up the T-shirt she'd stolen from Spike and placed it in the bowl. As it began to catch fire she spoke the incantation. Her heart was full of the need for revenge. Revenge against Buffy, and revenge against Spike, because he had chosen Buffy over her and that just wasn't right.

Spell complete, Dawn wrote a note for Buffy, in case she came home first, letting her know she had gone to visit Spike. Then she headed out. Giles was already waiting by the time she arrived. When she walked into Spike's crypt, Spike looked genuinely pleased to see her. Then, Giles watched a look of alarm spread across Spike's face as the spell began to hit, a brief moment when he knew what was happening but helpless to do anything about it. Then it was too late. A predatory smile crossed his face. "Hello, love." He reached for Dawn, and Dawn, who'd had a crush on Spike for as long as she could remember, smiled.

Giles had kept out of the way, hiding in a corner, not wanting to witness Dawn having sex with Spike. The whole thing horrified him on so many levels he couldn't bear it. And now, Giles wished he could keep Buffy out, distract her, do something to keep her from walking in here and finding Dawn and Spike together. But he knew that there was nothing he could do so he sat there, his head bowed as he sensed her return.

Dawn hadn't intended for things to go this far but it was hard to deter an amorous vampire. Besides, anticipating the look on Buffy's face made it worth it. And when Buffy walked in and saw them together the look was almost

enough, it almost satisfied the need in Dawn to make her sister suffer. But she decided to take it a step further. She decided she could get some revenge on Spike as well, for daring to love Buffy more than her. Dawn started beating on Spike, pretending to cry. "Stop it, stop it." She pretended to just notice Buffy. "Buffy, get him off of me." She screamed. "Buffy."

Buffy just reacted. This was her little sister, and Spike was a vampire. Giles lunged to try and stop her but she had a stake out and was plunging it into Spike's back, right into his heart, in seconds. Spike exploded into a spray of dust. Dawn screamed again, frantically brushing his remains off. She leaped off the bed, yelling. "You staked him. I can't believe you staked him." Dawn hadn't expected that. She had expected tears, hurt feelings, and tantrums, a good beating up for Spike.

"He was raping you."

"I was only kidding." She looked at the bed. "I can't believe you staked him."

Buffy's voice was like rock. "What do you mean you were only kidding?"

"Just what I said. We were fooling around, that's all. Then when you came in I thought I'd have a little fun."

"A little fun?" Buffy's voice got louder and louder. "A little fun? You call that a little fun?" She fell to her knees. "Oh God, oh God." Her voice got very soft. "Spike." Buffy's eyes began to fill with tears and her lips trembled. She fought for control and she spoke to Dawn without looking at her. "Get out of my sight. Now."

Dawn snorted. "Gladly." She started to get dressed. After she threw her jacket on she moved towards the door. She looked back at Buffy, who was still on her knees. "I'll be with Willow and Tara if you need me." When there was no response she shrugged and left.

Giles moved over next to Buffy and tried to put his arms around her. He was unable to, of course, but he had to try. How much could she bear? This was asking too much. To have her destroy the only thing she felt had been hers, the only being with any love for her at all. Buffy crawled onto Spike's bed, lying on his dust, and she curled into a ball, her eyes open, staring at nothing. Giles lay down next to her and pretended to hold her the rest of the night.

The days began to fly by again. Giles watched as Buffy resumed her life, or what was left of it. She lived in her house by herself. Dawn had moved out, her belongings gone by the time Buffy had come home the next morning. Buffy slept all day, and patrolled all night. That's all she did. That's all she had

left. And her body, as if to spite her, was in peak condition, and despite the desperate longing she had to find her death, she emerged from every fight the victor, unable to not fight her best.

Willow had fulfilled Tara's worst nightmare. Every time Tara began to show any will of her own Willow simply cast a spell. In time she began to do it to Dawn as well when Dawn's teenage temperament became too annoying. Willow created the perfect little Stepford family for herself. She loved it.

Anya just disappeared one day. And in the course of a few weeks the creditors found Giles. And it was to this that Giles watched himself return to Sunnydale.

End Part 5

Journey's End 6

Buffy was standing in the front yard of her house. She tensed as she heard Dawn yell, but then when she heard what she yelled she just became confused. Dawn yelled again. "Dad, come on, we're gonna be late."

Buffy shook her head. Out of all the possible futures she could imagine, somehow she never figured her dad would be in any of them. She moved forwards and found herself in the living room.

Dawn was standing at the bottom of the stairs, one foot tapping impatiently. Buffy's eyes widened as Giles came running down the stairs. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I couldn't figure out what tie to wear." It still wasn't tied, hanging loosely around his neck.

Dawn couldn't help grinning at him. "See what happens when mom isn't here to dress you?" Buffy's eyes opened even wider.

"Ha, ha, very funny." Giles picked up his suit jacket and shrugged into it. He began to knot his tie. Dawn slapped his hands away and began to tie it for him. Giles watched her and when she was done he put his hands on her shoulders. "You have turned into such a beautiful young woman, and I am so proud of you." Dawn blushed. Giles wasn't finished. "Buffy would be proud of you too."

Dawn's eyes grew bright. "I wish she was here."

Giles' eyes were also bright. "I do too." A horn honked outside, interrupting their solemn moment.

Dawn began to tug on his arm. "Come on, she's gonna leave without us."

Giles looked at her again. "Do you have your robe?"

"It's in the car, come on." Taking his hand she tugged him again. This time Giles went. They ran laughing out the front door towards the car, Giles getting into the front seat passenger side, and Dawn getting into the back. Buffy found herself in the back section of the mini-van.

The woman driving was looking at them both with an exasperated expression on her face. "Dawn Summers-Giles, they're going to call your name and we'll still be stuck in traffic."

Dawn let out a snort. "It's dad's fault. I was ready."

Giles looked at the woman sitting next to him. "Quite true, I'm afraid. Dawn thinks it's because I don't know how to dress myself anymore."

The woman gave up and started to laugh. She checked in the rearview mirror. "Seat belts on? Dawn, Heidi?"

Two yes mom's came from the back. She put the car in gear and started to drive, one hand reaching for one of Giles'. He clasped it between both of his and smiled at her. He looked into the back seat and smiled at his two girls.

Buffy was completely confused. Looking at the girl next to Dawn, she would guess that she was about sixteen. She tried to still her thoughts and concentrate on what these people were thinking and feeling so she could get a better sense of what was going on. Immediately images began to come to her and her jaw dropped. The girl next to Dawn was a Slayer. And Giles was her Watcher. And she was dead.

She got that thought from Giles. Her death was never far from his thoughts. He still missed her terribly and she could tell that he never expected to not miss her. It was as if he'd lost an arm, or a leg. He'd learned to function without it, even found a way to be happy, but it was still gone and nothing could change that.

Buffy searched his mind for how she died. She flinched. Oh, God, poor Giles. It had been Dru. Dru had come back into town and found out that Spike had taken up with Buffy. Her retaliation for being scorned was fast and complete. Spike staked and Buffy's neck snapped. Then Dru had paid a visit to Giles to let him know where he could find Buffy's body. Buffy almost wept when she saw that Giles had found her, in her bed, with a broken neck, just like he'd

found Jenny. And again, he'd gone after the perpetrator. But this time he'd been successful, and Dru was dead.

Dawn had chosen to stay with Giles, even over the option of staying with Willow. Dawn wanted an adult, a grown-up, and she decided to adopt Giles. He'd been a little taken aback when she'd started calling him dad but he'd soon rallied and found that he actually enjoyed it, and he took to fatherhood like a fish to water.

Then unexpectedly, a Slayer was called. Giles, in fact, the entire Council had not thought it would happen, assuming the line now ran through Faith. But one of the young girls currently in training had been called and the Council sent her to Giles. Buffy had so thoroughly indoctrinated Giles that he was horrified to see this young girl, this thirteen year old, little more than an automaton. She had been raised to be a Slayer, privy to all the knowledge lying within the covers of the Slayer's handbook, and Giles couldn't stand it.

Giles had tracked down her mother and invited her to Sunnydale. He'd enrolled Heidi in school, and even encouraged her to try out for cheerleading. Buffy barked out a laugh at that. When the mother arrived, an unexpected bonus had occurred. Giles and she had fallen in love, and ended up getting married. All three of them, Giles, his new wife, Angela, and Dawn worked very hard at providing Heidi with a normal life between her Slayer duties.

At sixteen, while far from being the hellion that Buffy had been, Heidi was a far cry from the timid thirteen year old who had shown up on his doorstep. Buffy could feel the adoration this girl held for her Watcher father, and Buffy couldn't blame her in the least.

They had arrived at the High School. Buffy had figured it out that Dawn was graduating today. Dawn grabbed her robe and ran off to join the rest of the seniors. Giles looked up as someone yelled for him. Xander was frantically waving to him, indicating that he had saved seats for them.

Giles directed his family over to Xander. "Xander, thank you."

"Hey, I'm just glad you showed up. I was about to get beaten about the head and face by every person who wanted these seats."

Giles smiled and leaned over Xander to kiss Anya on the cheek. "Wisely staying seated, I see?"

Anya grinned, her hands over an enormous pregnant belly. "I can't get up by myself anymore."

Xander gave Heidi a hug and grinned at Angela. There was still an extra seat. Giles looked up at Xander who was still standing. "Is Willow coming?"

Xander nodded. "Yeah, she said she was." He looked down at Giles. "Man, does this bring back memories."

Giles nodded. "Yes, it does. Let us hope that Dawn's graduation is a bit tamer than yours was."

"And that the school is still standing when it's done." Xander spotted Willow. "There she is." He bellowed for her.

Willow made her way across the row, hugging everyone as she did so. She sat next to Giles. He looked at her. "Are you all right?"

Willow squeezed his hand. "I guess so. This just makes me think of her." She gave Giles a shaky smile.

Giles squeezed her hand back. "Yes, it does." Their eyes met and they allowed themselves a moment of sadness. Buffy wanted to put her arms around Giles to try and take the hurt away, but in a moment Giles pushed the sadness away himself. He wrapped his arm around Angela and grinned at Heidi who was admiring the ring he'd given to her for her sixteenth birthday last week.

The music started and all eyes were on the seniors. When Dawn walked across the stage Buffy felt Giles' heart almost burst with love and pride, and she grinned when Xander let out a whoop that embarrassed Dawn as much as it delighted her.

As the scene began to grow hazy Buffy wondered if this is what it would take to let Giles have the life he deserved. She wondered if it would take her dying. She held on tight to Seeker as she waited for the next possible future to appear before her.

Again she was on the front lawn but this time Buffy could hear that she was the one yelling. Buffy entered the house to see what she was yelling about. "Dawn!"

Dawn yelled from upstairs. "I'm coming, don't have a cow." The doorbell rang.

Buffy watched herself move to answer the door. She yelled up the stairs again. "Come on, Rick's here." Whoever Rick was, he was pretty good looking and Buffy grinned when she saw herself reach up to give him a thorough kiss.

Rick smiled at Buffy. "Sorry I'm late. Is Mr. Giles saving us seats?"

"It's Giles, Rick, just Giles."

"I feel funny calling him Giles. I've only known him a few months, give me some time, I'll get there."

Buffy grinned. "And then you can move up to Xander's level and start calling him Big G."

Rick shook his head. "It'll never happen."

Dawn finally came downstairs. "Hey Rick."

"Hey back. You look great. Are you excited?" Dawn rolled her eyes. "Please, it's high school."

Buffy and Rick smiled at each other. They knew she was excited. Buffy teased her. "Well, we could skip it. I hear there's a new movie down at the Ciniplex." She turned to Rick as if to see what he thought.

Dawn came over to her and smacked her on the arm. "Ha, ha, ha. Can we just go?"

Buffy found herself in the back seat of Rick's Jeep Cherokee. She could get used to this. Giles had sent Xander as lookout and Xander herded them all to the seats. Dawn left to go get in line. Buffy was relieved to see that Tara was still with Willow in this future, and she grinned when she saw that Anya was still as big as a house.

Buffy watched Giles as he watched over them all. He stayed mostly silent, enjoying their chatter, pleased they were having a moment's peace, a time to be happy together without some end of the world disaster looming. Buffy heard his mind as he cast his thoughts back to their graduation. He shook his head.

The Buffy of this time caught it. "What's the head shaking all about? Trying to knock something loose?"

Giles softly smiled at her. "I was just thinking about your graduation."

Buffy gave him one of her mocking smiles. "Fondly, no doubt. Feeling sorry that there's no big and evil to hunt down this time? I know it must make this seem really boring by comparison."

Giles rolled his eyes. "You know me so well. That's just what I was thinking, how boring this all was. I was fervently praying for a demon or two to liven it up."

Buffy reached for his hand and gently squeezed it. "Thank you."

Giles' eyes widened. "For what?"

"For all of this. I couldn't have done it without you." She gestured towards the stage. "She'd never have done it without you."

"Well, I hardly think that's the case, but you're welcome, nonetheless."

Buffy flashed him a brilliant smile, squeezed his hand one more time and then let go. Her attention turned towards the stage as the music started and the seniors began marching in.

After the graduation they all trooped to the gymnasium for refreshments. Buffy watched herself and her friends congratulate her sister, and commence to have a silly time, Rick sticking close, being clearly attentive.

After a while she realized that Giles was missing. She searched for him and found him, leaning against a wall, just watching them again. She didn't sense any sorrow or any loneliness. He was just apart. He was her Watcher; he was, indeed, a Watcher to all of them. What she sensed from him the most was this fierce gladness that they were alive, that they'd gotten this far, and an even fiercer determination to do everything in his power to keep it that way. It burned bright within him and it drew Buffy like a moth to a flame. She headed over to stand next to him when she felt Seeker's presence by her side again and the scene began to grow indistinct.

Watching herself be happy sent off a cascade of emotions in Buffy. She began to believe that it was possible. Her heart lighter than it had been since her return she peered through the haze, waiting to see what else might be possible.

She rolled her eyes when she found herself on the front lawn yet one more time. She looked down at Seeker who had yet to vanish as she did whenever Buffy reached her destination. "You couldn't just put me in the house?" Seeker chuffed at Buffy and slowly faded away. Buffy grinned and moved into the house.

Again Dawn was at the foot of the stairs. "Giles! Come on, we're going to be late."

Giles came down the stairs still tying his tie. "I'm not the one who's going to make you late." He grinned as his chin pointed back upstairs.

Dawn let out an exasperated sound. "Well, do something."

"She's your sister."

"Yeah, but she's your wife."

Buffy almost fell over. Dawn slapped Giles' hands away and she started to help him tie his tie. "What's her deal anyway? It's my graduation."

Giles barked out a laugh. "I may love her, and I may have married her, but do not ever expect me to be able to explain her."

"Hey, I heard that." Giles turned around at her voice and let out a happy sigh as Buffy came down the stairs.

"Well, it's sadly true. Your mind still continues to be one of the great mysteries of life." He pulled her in and kissed her soundly. "You look lovely."

Dawn pulled on his jacket sleeve. "How about me?"

With one arm firmly wrapped around Buffy he turned back to Dawn. "You look like a princess."

Buffy nodded. "You do. That dress is perfect."

Dawn blushed. "Too bad it'll be covered by a robe."

Buffy shrugged. "Just `til the party. Then you can let your little light shine."

Dawn rolled her eyes. "Can we please just go?"

Giles picked up his car keys and escorted them both out.

Buffy ended up in the back seat of the BMW with Dawn. She still was having a hard time getting her brain around the thought that she was married to Giles. How the hell had that happened? She watched herself and Giles in the front seat. She could feel the love blazing between the two of them. She couldn't ever remember feeling that way, even before she had died. And Giles. Giles was happy, delirious even. Through and through, down to his bones.

She decided to pick through both their brains, looking for memories, the how it happened memories. And what she found was that it had snuck up on them, surprising them both.

After Tara had left, Willow had gone a little nuts, and Buffy had asked Giles to ask her to leave. Buffy had been a little afraid of Willow and she figured Giles was at least bigger than Willow and could beat her up if he had to. Giles had grouched about it but he had done it, just like he'd done everything she'd asked him to. He had permanently moved in at Buffy's request and had, as he had expected, been given most of the responsibility for Dawn. He had been surprised when he found that he actually enjoyed it. And he and Dawn had taken to each other, to the extent that Buffy often felt excluded, and she didn't like it.

Buffy thought he was letting his parent duties get in the way of his Watcher duties and she made a point of telling him that. They'd had a huge fight and Buffy had threatened to kick him out. When Dawn threatened to go with him, Buffy backed down, but she slipped into serious pout mode. She took up with Spike, brandishing him about like a boy toy in front of Giles and Giles just stoically bore it, just like he bore everything she did, throwing out the occasional barbed comment when the situation warranted.

Dawn tried to set Giles up on some dates and Buffy went ballistic. He didn't have time for dating; he already had his hands full. Besides, he was Giles. Please. As if.

Tensions began to ride high in the house. There was an unspoken competition between Dawn and Buffy for Giles' attention. Giles felt as if he was breaking up catfights on a regular basis. He tried to pay more attention to both of them and that just seemed to make it worse. He could understand Dawn's feelings. She'd always felt somewhat overshadowed by her Slayer sister. But he was bewildered as to what was going on with Buffy. Flattered, but bewildered.

One night, expecting to be spending the evening with Dawn, he came home to find Buffy home alone. She had invited Dawn to spend the night at a friend's house and she had cooked dinner, which made Giles nervous. He began to wonder what she wanted, what favor she was hoping to worm out of him. But they'd had a lovely dinner and then had moved to the couch to watch the video Dawn had asked him to pick up for the evening.

They both sat on the couch, a foot or so between them, shoes kicked off, both relaxed. Giles just watched Buffy as she played with all the remote controls trying to figure out the magic arrangements of buttons that had to be pushed in order to actually view a VCR tape. Giles' head tilted to the side.

Buffy could feel him watching her. She turned to him. "What?"

Giles smiled. "It's just hard to believe we've known each other for seven years."

Buffy returned his smile with a crooked one. "You forgot to say, seven long and painful years."

Giles shook his head. "I don't feel that way."

Buffy grinned shyly at him. "You don't?"

Giles shook his head again, his eyes curious. "No. Why would you think I would feel that way?"

Buffy shrugged her shoulders. "Parts of it have been pretty bad."

"Yes, parts of it have been truly horrendous. But you haven't been." He didn't know what possessed him but he took her hand. "Fighting the evil has made for seven long and painful years. But, you, you've been one of the greatest joys of my life."

His comment floored Buffy. "Really?"

He squeezed her hand and then let it go. Buffy had to resist the urge to grab it again. "Really." He pointed at the remote controls. "Would you like a hand with those?"

She handed them to him with a flourish. "It's a sad day for Slayer's everywhere when my technophobe Watcher can figure out how to run a VCR when I can't."

"Ha, bloody, ha." Within moments Giles had the tape playing. He sent Buffy a superior look. "What's Spike doing tonight?"

Buffy shrugged. "I don't know. I...I don't see him much anymore."

Giles raised his eyebrows but made no comment. Now that he thought about it he realized that Buffy had stopped parading Spike through the house and through their lives a few weeks ago. He glanced at her. "I'm sorry. Are you all right?"

Buffy nodded. "Oh yeah." She put her feet up on the coffee table. "What are we watching anyway?"

"Some idiotic love story, I'm sure. That seems to be the only type of movie Dawn watches. That and Keanu Reeves' movies."

"You know who Keanu Reeves is?"

"I consider myself to be something of an expert on him after all the movies she's subjected me to."

Buffy snuggled down on the couch, making herself comfortable, and she grinned at him. "Cool. Well, hit the play button. I'm ready for a good love story."

Giles smiled back at her and he settled back as well. The story was quite entertaining, actually. And then about half way through the movie the sex started, and it kept happening. A lot of it. Buffy was embarrassed. She tried to chatter her way through it. She reached for the cover of the videotape. "Yikes, you were gonna let Dawn watch this?"

"Let us thank God for small favors that Dawn neglected to be here tonight."

"I'll say." Buffy fiddled with the cover some more as a couple more scenes played out. "So, is it getting hot in here?"

Giles snorted. He looked at Buffy. "Do you want to shut it off? We don't have to watch it."

"No, no. It's fine. I wanna see how it ends."

"We could fast forward it through the sex scenes if they embarrass you."

"Who said they embarrassed me?" She risked a quick glance at Giles. He looked remarkably unrattled. "You're not embarrassed?"

Giles rolled his eyes and waved a hand at the TV. "It's sex Buffy. You've had it, I've had it." He pursed his lips. "Actually, it's quite good sex. They make it look so real."

Buffy was staring at Giles. "You've had sex?"

Giles let out an annoyed breath and paused the tape. "Excuse me?"

Buffy blushed. "Sorry. I didn't mean it that way. I mean, of course you've had sex. You know, Giles sex."

Giles sat up straight. "What the hell does that mean?"

"Nothing. Let's just watch, okay?" She grabbed the remote control out of Giles' hands, feeling unaccountably nervous when her hand brushed against his. She turned the tape back on. Buffy had no idea why the idea of Giles having sex made her so jumpy but it did. The tape started right in with the groaning.

Giles muttered something under his breath but he leaned back again, putting his feet up on the coffee table as well. Buffy found her eyes drawn to his length of leg and her eyes roamed up his body. They got stuck at his crotch and she blushed furiously, putting her eyes back on the TV at once. She'd never really thought about Giles having a body. A guy's body, with guy parts. Her eyes flickered to him again, taking in his chest, and his arms and finally his face, something shifting irrevocably inside of her. Giles had taken off his glasses and he seemed completely focused on the TV. So, she just stared at him. And what she saw made her horny. And the groaning coming from the TV wasn't helping.

Giles looked up briefly, feeling her gaze on him, and he was caught by the look he saw in her eyes. Desire. It stunned him, taking him completely by surprise, but he felt his body start to respond to it. The air grew thick around them as they stared at one another. Buffy moved first but Giles met her halfway and she was lying on the couch with him on top of her in just moments, the passion igniting between them, setting them both on fire.

Their tongues were mating. Giles had one hand fisted in her hair, his other hand running up and down her body. All Buffy knew was that she'd never wanted anybody this badly before. Buffy was thrilled and she was terrified. She pulled back from Giles' lips, looking at him. "What's happening?"

Giles shook his head. "I don't know." He was panting. "I just want you so much." Sanity reared its head for a second. "Do you want me to stop?"

Buffy clutched at him. "Don't you dare."

Giles grinned and he claimed her mouth again.

The car stopped. They'd arrived. Buffy continued to pick their brains, fast-forwarding to find the ending. They'd rutted like bunnies all night. And six months later they'd gotten married. As Buffy saw them making love she felt a flush go through her and liquid heat pooled between her legs. She saw Giles grab his wife's hand and a flicker of jealousy went through her. She couldn't believe how much she wanted Giles to be hers. Not the future Buffy, but this Buffy, the real one. She patted herself on the chest. Me. She glared at

herself. And then let out a yelp as it all started going hazy.

She latched onto Seeker. "I want this one. I want this life." Seeker just butted her forehead against Buffy's and purred. Buffy decided it sounded like a very approving purr.

End Part 6

Journey's End 7

Giles watched himself getting more and more confused. The only person he had seen was Willow. Willow worked at the shop with him for two days, helping him box up the supplies he wanted to keep, separating those things out from the supplies that could be returned, or used to offset the staggering losses that had accumulated.

Giles was partly numb because of the news of Xander's death. And he was worried sick that he hadn't been able to connect with Buffy. Willow said that Tara and Dawn were both sick with something contagious, and Anya, of course, was gone. Willow was a veritable fountain of information that rocked Giles to his core. Buffy was shunning them all, Buffy had staked Spike in a fit of jealous rage, Buffy had kicked Dawn out and hadn't once asked after her. Buffy didn't talk to them, or have them go on patrols anymore. She wouldn't answer her door or her phone. Willow hadn't talked with her for weeks. All of this accompanied by appropriate tears of concern, facial moue's of dismay, all seemingly authentic.

As Giles watched, he willed himself to not believe what Willow was saying, to have faith in Buffy. His anger towards Willow was reaching explosive heights. He could feel his counterpart's confusion grow and he honed in on his thoughts. His other self didn't believe all that Willow was saying, but he believed enough to throw his world out of kilter. He knew something was wrong, he just couldn't figure out what it was. He knew Willow was lying, he just didn't know which parts were truth. What he did know was that he had to find Buffy.

He had gone to the house several times both yesterday and today, knocking loudly, trying the doors, trying to decide if he should just break in. He had chosen not to, although his resolve on that was weakening.

He still couldn't believe Xander was dead, he didn't think it had quite sunk in yet. He finally made some excuse to Willow and returned to his hotel room. Giles watched himself sit in the darkness, grief and tears eventually overcoming him and he felt his own eyes well up in response as they both

mourned the passing of the young man he had come to love so dearly. Once his tears were spent, Giles watched himself get up, feeling his determination to find Buffy and not let another night go by without talking with her. Placing weapons about his person he headed out into the night. Giles stood to follow but the next step he took placed him in the cemetery, in front of Buffy.

##

Buffy found herself back in the library, arms tight around Seeker's neck. Looking around she was shocked at the intensity of her longing for Giles. Somehow this place made her miss him more than she thought possible. Coupled with that was the excitement she felt at the thought of seeing him again. She could barely keep a grin off her face.

Suddenly the Shaman was there, standing before her. She looked up at him. She just blurted out the first thing that came to her. "I can be happy."

He smiled. "Yes, you can."

"I can be glad I'm alive, gladder than I was before."

He nodded. "Yes. You have learned much on this journey."

Before he could speak again Buffy had caught him in a powerful hug. "Thank you."

"My child, I merely provided the way. You did all the work."

Buffy just hugged him tighter. He held her until she moved away from him. She needed to know. "Can I choose which future I want?"

"The futures you saw were simply possibilities. What they showed you was what could be depending on the choices you make. You must now create your own future."

"So I have to make Giles fall in love with me, marry me?"

The Shaman smiled. "Have you fallen in love with him?"

She threw her hands up. "Completely. Like from zero to sixty miles an hour in 10 seconds." She screwed up her face in a nervous expression. "Will he fall in love with me? Do you know?"

"No, child, I do not `know'. But I do know how much of himself he has already given to you. Do you think it would be a large step for him to take to give you

the rest?"

Buffy thought for a minute and then grinned. "Not according to that future Giles." Then she pursed her lips. "So, you think he just needs a nudge? My Giles?"

"You alone must choose the path that will open his heart to you."

She rolled her eyes. "Yes, Obiwon-kenobe." Her eyes widened as she grew concerned he might think she was being disrespectful but he laughed and she smiled back in relief. "Where is he? Can I see him?"

"He is still on his journey."

"Is he okay?"

"Yes. He is nearing the end."

"So, can I see him? I just want to see him for a minute."

The Shaman considered for a moment and then nodded his head. He put his hand on her forehead and Buffy was back in her body, back in the room she started in. She rose and followed the Shaman deeper into the house. He unlocked a door and motioned for Buffy to enter. It was a bedroom, a huge canopied bed in the middle of it. Giles lay on the bed, looking like he was merely sleeping.

Buffy tiptoed in and sat in a chair by the side of the bed. She just drank him in. And as if he were a medicinal draught, parts of her began to heal and awaken inside of her. The Shaman chose not to disturb her and he quietly left.

##

There were too many of them. Buffy fought with a vengeance but with almost a giddy sense of relief she realized that it would at last be over. She would be done tonight. The last battle finally fought.

Giles and Tiger watched her, still a thing of beauty as she spun and flipped, kicking and staking, refusing to give up. They watched as she began to be overpowered. Giles stood up, knowing he mustn't get involved and yet unable to just watch his Slayer die without intervening.

Buffy was being held firmly by two vampires while a third began to turn her head to bare her neck. Giles tried to get to her but Tiger kept getting in his

way, growling menacingly. Turning his head at the sound of footsteps Giles sighed in relief when he saw himself approaching at full speed.

He yelled her name. "Buffy!" And then he struck, one after another, his stake killing the two vampires holding her. Now free, she had no recourse but to start to fight again and in time the remaining vampires were dead or had run away.

She turned to him, exploding in fury. "Why are you here? Why did you stop them?"

He stepped back, her mood and words unexpected. "Buffy, they would have killed you." "I wanted them too. Finally, it was over. I was going to be free, I was going home."

"You can't mean that."

She laughed, a hollow, bitter sound. "You had no right to stop this."

Giles could read his own thoughts, he knew what his next response would be and he knew it was the wrong one. But, helpless to change it he watched himself say it anyway. "I had every right to stop this."

"Why? You left. You left me here."

"It was for your own good."

Buffy raised her stake as if she would thrust it in him and he took an involuntary step back. "My own good. My own good." She lowered her stake. "You don't know what I need."

After watching everything Buffy had gone through Giles did know what she needed but he knew the Giles standing in front of her did not know, could not possibly know. Giles tried to project his thoughts, mentally screaming at himself. "Tell her you love her. Hold her. Make her feel human again."

But instead he heard words that he knew would just drive Buffy farther away. "Buffy, I know it may not seem like it, but it was for the best. I had to go." Seeing the anger grow in her eyes he tried again. "But, I'm back now. Tell me what you need me to do, tell me how I can help."

Buffy opened her arms up wide. "Kill me. That's what I need. That's what I want. To be dead."

He shook his head, his eyes wide with dismay. "No, Buffy. How can you say

that?" He reached for her. "Come home with me. You shouldn't be out here."

She moved away. "Don't touch me. Don't come near me. Just go away. They'll come back eventually if you leave, and hopefully they'll win."

He shook his head again. "I cannot allow that."

"It's not up to you, not anymore."

"Buffy, I'm still your Watcher."

Buffy was in front of him in an instant and her hands slammed into his chest knocking him back a few feet. He barely kept his balance. "You are not my Watcher. I have no Watcher. I hate you."

He approached her again, his heart not believing her words. She hit him in the chest again and he fell this time. She stood over him, all her rage, all her frustration, centered on him, with a single-minded focus that was devastating in its intent.

Giles could see that she was almost gone, that her last tenuous connection with her humanity was fraying at a terrifying rate. And he knew that she would never recover if she hurt him, she'd never crawl out of that black abyss. This would kill her as surely as the vampires would. And Giles couldn't stand by and watch it. His need to protect Buffy, any Buffy, was too entrenched, too instinctual.

He yelled at himself. "It's not too late, get up, tell her you're sorry, wrap your arms around her and don't let go." But he knew his words could not be heard. Reaching down deep inside of himself he caught hold of a part of his spirit and he threw it, projecting it out, in hopes that the other Giles might sense it, might understand what needed to be done. Tiger knew he was doing something and he threw himself on Giles, knocking him flat, but it was too late, the body underneath him lying too still. Tiger could feel reality start to shift. Tiger spoke to Giles, trying to reach him, trying to get him to return, trying to remind him that he was making it real by doing this, but it had no impact. And he felt reality shift again.

Giles dragged himself to his feet, facing Buffy, his hands up to try and stave her off, still not believing that she could be attacking him. "Buffy."

In her mind, he had become her enemy. She backhanded him across the face.

Buffy had moved to the edge of the bed, wanting to be nearer to Giles. She frowned as she felt a funny tingly sensation on the back of her hand. Giles grunted and his head jerked to the side, his cheek reddening. The Giles under Tiger also jerked and in a panic Tiger, with a roar of anguish, sent for the Shaman.

##

Buffy backhanded him again, harder.

##

Buffy's hand tingled again. Giles' head jerked to the other side and some blood flew out of his mouth. Buffy gasped. In the pit of her stomach, a part of her that was filling with dread, she knew that wherever Giles was, that she was hitting him, she was hurting him.

The Shaman flew into the room. Buffy looked up, frantic. "What's happening to him? Why am I hurting him?" Giles' torso moved as if he'd been kicked in the stomach. He groaned. Buffy let out a cry. "Make it stop."

The Shaman put his hand to Giles' forehead, trying to sense him, sense where he was. "He is in grave danger. He has left his path."

Giles grunted again as a bruise began to blossom on his cheek. Buffy's hand burned. For no reason she began to feel angry.

The Shaman turned to her. "His actions are changing reality. If he continues, the future he is in will become the present. I must go to him. You must call him."

She was frantic and confused. "Call him what?"

"Talk to him. Tell him it isn't real. Tell him to come home to you." He pointed at Giles, commanding her. "Do it, now."

She moved even closer to Giles and as the Shaman began to disappear from sight she began yelling at Giles.

##

He was on the ground, barely conscious, his arms wrapped around himself in a futile effort to ward off her blows. Giles was trying to connect but the mind he found himself in was too scattered, in too much pain, too distraught for

reason. Giles felt the emotions begin to claim him as well but he fought them. Giles tried to force the mouth of this body to speak, still determined to protect Buffy from the repercussions of this deadly act.

Giles was not even aware when the Shaman appeared. The Shaman and Tiger instantly communicated and then they both began to speak to Giles. He ignored them, his concentration still on Buffy, although the physical and emotional pains were starting to take a stronger hold. And as it drew him in, Giles, despite his understanding of what had driven Buffy to this, couldn't fight the sense of betrayal that grew within his breast, a part of him weeping that after all this time, after all their time together, after all they'd been through, that his death would be by Buffy's hand.

##

With tears streaming down her face Buffy pleaded with Giles. She let out a scream of dismay when she could almost feel her foot connecting with his body. The force of it flipped him practically to his stomach. Her rage continued to grow and she found herself getting more and more angry with Giles. She used it. She flipped him onto his back and she sat on him, straddling his waist. Buffy grabbed his shoulders and shook him, screaming at him. "Giles, you have to come home. You have to come home to me." She slapped him across the face.

As her rage grew Buffy began to feel a sensation of being pulled, no one was physically touching her but it felt as if there was. She felt as if someone was reaching inside of her and yanking something out. Unaware, her body fell, falling on top of Giles', and Buffy found herself thrust into a scene of chaos. She saw herself, killing Giles, brutally. Or she was killing one Giles. Another Giles was lying underneath a huge tiger that was loudly growling out his unhappiness. To its side stood the Shaman, his eyes closed, his hands reaching out as, here as well, he mentally sought out Giles. His eyes shot open when he sensed her presence.

"Buffy, you cannot be here. You must not interfere."

Buffy was in tears. "I didn't mean to come here. Something pulled me here. Where am I? What's happening?" There was panic in her voice. She looked at herself again, at what she was doing to Giles. Buffy's face was tight with horror. "I'm killing him. Why am I killing him?" Against her wishes she felt herself drawn to the other Buffy, drawn to her rage, and she took a step in her direction.

The Shaman stopped her. "Reality is shifting, she is pulling you in. You will not be able to resist if you stay, you are not strong enough here. Even I will be

unable to assist you. You must return to your body, you must continue to call for him."

Buffy shook her head. "I don't know how. I don't even know how I got here." She looked at the Shaman, pointing at the other Buffy. "You have to stop me." Her anger was starting to crowd her mind and her voice was shrill with fear and confusion.

The Shaman put his hand on her forehead and closed his eyes. "No, I cannot. I must send you back."

Buffy looked at herself again and then at Giles lying on the ground, battered almost beyond recognition. Buffy screamed, her heart near bursting with all the pain she was feeling. "Giles! Giles!"

Giles, somehow, through the maelstrom of pain and emotions, heard Buffy cry out for him. He heard the distress in her voice. He tried to look at her but the body he was currently in was dying, unable to lift its head, its spine snapped. He needed to see her; he had to see her. In his disembodied and unreasoning state he was unable to discern that there were two Buffys. All he knew was that Buffy was crying for him and it was imperative he get to her. And with that thought, with that simple desire, he snapped back into his body, only to find himself being squashed by Tiger.

As the Shaman sent Buffy back to her body Giles began pummeling Tiger. "Get off of me, you hairy fur ball."

Tiger jumped off of him, startled yet delighted at his return. He licked Giles from his jaw to his hairline. Giles spit out Tiger saliva. He looked up at the Shaman about to ask where Buffy was, when he heard her.

Giles slowly turned his head to look, dreading what he would see. Buffy was kneeling at his side, sitting at the side of his now dead body, the heels of her hands pressing hard against her eyes. She was rocking, screaming in agony, the sounds inhuman. The Shaman looked sadly at Giles. "You must finish this."

Giles nodded, feeling an exhaustion in his spirit that sapped all his strength. "I know." He looked at Tiger. "I'm sorry. I couldn't..." Tiger butted him with his huge head. Giles knew that no apologies were necessary. The Shaman spoke for them both. "She is a part of you, Rupert. You are meant to protect her. I'm only sorry this has been so difficult for you, that you have had to watch her suffer so much."

Giles' lips tightened. He knew it had been necessary. He looked up at the

Shaman. "I'm all right." The Shaman knew he wasn't, but he had faith that he would be. In time. The Shaman sat on one side of Giles while Tiger pressed hard against him on his other. Giles could feel when Buffy just gave up, her valiant spirit losing the will to live, to fight. He watched as the vampires returned and grabbed her, yanking her away from his body. And he watched as they took turns feeding on her. His heart felt as if it was being ripped from his body. His hands were clenched so tightly he knew he was drawing blood with his fingernails.

When they had finished and after they had discarded her body Giles stood and walked towards her. He heard a warning growl from Tiger and he looked back. He smiled sadly, saying again, "I'm all right." Giles fell to his knees beside her, taking in the multiple bite wounds. They had all wanted to taste Slayer blood, his Buffy's blood. He knew they'd be boasting about it for the rest of their undead lives and he longed to stake them all before they could utter a word. He was unable to touch her but he got as close to her as he could and he whispered in her ear. "I'll not leave you, Buffy. I swear. I'll never leave you." He looked back at his guide and his teacher and he nodded. He was done here.

End of Part 7

Journey's End 8

Buffy was still sitting on him, feeling disoriented. The rage had completely disappeared and she watched his face as the bruises began to vanish. She didn't understand what had happened, or what was happening now. She couldn't get past the vision of herself standing over Giles, kicking him over and over again, bones snapping, blood flying. What she was pretty sure about was that she had somehow gotten sucked into Giles' journey, and it hadn't been pretty.

Giles' eyes suddenly flew open and he took in a deep breath, as if he'd been under water too long and had to fill his lungs completely. When he saw Buffy he sat up and, almost in shock, he put his hands on her face. "You're alive." He searched her eyes, dropping his hands to her shoulders so he could look at her face. "Are you all right?" His hands went back to her face. "You're alive. Oh, God." His eyes filled with tears, and laying his head on her breast, he began to weep.

Buffy held him tightly, stunned that after what she had seen herself do to him that he would be concerned for her welfare. Granted it had been a different her, but still. He should hate her. He amazed her, and she loved him, and all she wanted to do was protect him. Her arms held him even more tightly, as if

to not only console him, but to keep him from harm.

As if sensing that perhaps he was distressing her, Giles pulled himself together. He gently pushed Buffy off his lap and he wiped the tears off of his face. Without looking at her he apologized. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to lose control of myself like that."

Buffy could feel him withdrawing and she didn't want him to. She moved herself into his line of vision and shook her head. "Giles. I'm the one who's sorry. I saw what I was doing to you. I would never do that, I would never hurt you."

If he had been less tired, he could have hidden his reaction. But he was tired and he couldn't control what appeared on his face. Buffy gasped when she saw the guarded expression on his face. All Giles' knew right then was that she had. She had killed him, and the sorrow of that still lay heavy on his heart. And that thought was in his eyes for her to see and it broke her heart. She reached out to touch his face, and Giles, too tired to stop this reaction either, flinched. Buffy drew her hand back as if she had touched a hot stove, holding it against her heart, as if to ease the pain as she realized that Giles had been afraid she might hit him.

Giles saw the expression on her face and he ached that he was causing her pain, but he was too tired to do anything about it. He couldn't ever remember being more tired. He knew his physical body had done nothing more than lie on this bed for the past few hours but to him, in his mind, it had been weeks, weeks of no sleep, weeks of horror and pain, weeks of watching the people he loved suffer while he could do nothing to help, and experiencing his own death, every blow, until his body had been screaming in agony.

His body demanded sleep and despite the fact that he knew Buffy was upset he lay back, sleep overtaking him, sucking him under. Buffy panicked, afraid that he'd been pulled back to that place she had seen, that his fear of her had somehow started it up again. She shook him, calling his name, but he did not respond.

As if responding to her fear the Shaman entered the room. She cried out in relief. "He's gone again. I think I did it. Get him out. Bring him back."

The Shaman smiled softly at her. "You did nothing to him. He is simply sleeping. He will most likely sleep for some time. Do not be concerned. He will not go back. That journey is complete. He was able to find the strength to take it to its end."

Buffy's eyes filled with tears. "Me killing him, you mean?" That vision was still

seared on her brain.

He shook his head. "No. It did not end there for him."

Buffy's voice was shaky. "Why did I do that? Why was I killing him? Why did he have to go through that?"

"It was necessary for him to learn what he needed to learn. Just as all the pieces of your journey were necessary for you."

"What did he have to learn? Why did he have to learn it like that?"

The Shaman held out his hand and pulled her up off the bed. "I am sorry you got pulled in. That was regrettable. I do not have Rupert's leave to talk about this journey with you, so I cannot. You will need to ask him when he awakens." He escorted her to the door and shut it behind them. "Come, my wife is asking after you."

Buffy was silent as they walked to the kitchen, only to find Lindsey in the process of scooping out ice cream. Buffy rolled her eyes. "What, do I have a sign on my forehead that says 'if found upset, please feed ice cream'?"

Lindsey grinned. "It's what Rupert always wants, I just assumed you — " Her voice trailed off as she looked at Buffy uncertainly. "If you don't want any..."

Buffy grabbed a bowl. "Are you kidding?" She dug in, her eyes closing in ecstasy as she tasted the flavor in her bowl. "God, what is this?"

Lindsey grinned again. "It's Rupert's favorite. I always have some made when he is here. It's a little bit of this and a little bit of that."

Buffy looked down at her bowl. "This is Giles' favorite?" She frowned. "I didn't know he ate ice cream when he was upset." That disturbed her. "It seems like I should know that."

Lindsey put a gentle hand on Buffy's arm. "You will, you will come to know all these things, and more." She smiled at her husband. "It is a great adventure, coming to know someone fully."

Suddenly her husband put down his bowl of ice cream and stood. He looked at his wife and left the room rapidly. Buffy looked at Lindsey, her eyes questioning. "What was that all about?"

Lindsey was sorting through the projection her husband had sent her. "He has gone to meditate. He wishes to erect a spiritual ward around Rupert."

Buffy looked alarmed and she stood also, her need to protect Giles still strong within her. "Why? What's wrong?"

Lindsey shook her head. "He is in no physical danger. He is having nightmares."

"Nightmares. He rushes off like that for nightmares?"

Lindsey paused. "Bad nightmares. My husband wishes him to rest, and he will not if he continues dreaming this way."

Buffy swallowed hard. She was pretty sure she knew what he was dreaming about. She didn't know how to protect Giles from that. She remembered how Giles had flinched when she had moved to touch him. For a moment, he had been afraid of her. Of her. Buffy. Her eyes filled with tears again. "Maybe he's not safe with me. Maybe he should go away. What if I go crazy or something and I do attack him?"

Lindsey laid a hand on Buffy's face. "Buffy, what he saw, whatever he saw, it wasn't real. Do not fear it. Simply love him, and give him time. He will heal. He is very strong and he has great love for you."

"Suppose I do something wrong?"

Lindsey laughed. "Then the next time he comes here he will complain about you and then somehow find some explanation for how it really wasn't your fault after all, and then he will return to you, your transgressions fully forgiven." She gestured to Buffy's bowl. "Eat your ice cream, and don't borrow trouble. There is always plenty waiting for us and it is foolish to meet it with our hands already full of trouble we have manufactured out of our own fears."

Buffy sighed. "I wish I could be with him."

"I know you do. But I think he needs to be on his own, allowed to rest fully. He will come looking for you as soon as he wakes."

"Are you sure? Maybe he'll just run in the other direction."

"Buffy, have faith in him."

Buffy sighed again, and then just held her bowl up, asking for another scoop.

##

He did come looking for her. He had slept for almost twenty hours but when Giles awoke, all he wanted was to reassure himself that Buffy was all right. He found her in the kitchen, having just finished another one of Lindsey's fabulous lunches.

Buffy looked up when Giles entered. Their eyes connected and he gave her that relieved smile of his whenever she had gotten back from patrol, or back from whatever evil he had sent her out to fight. She wanted to go to him and hug him but he looked... she tried to find a way to describe it... he looked as if he was made of glass, that if she touched him the wrong way he might break apart into a thousand pieces. So, she stayed where she was.

Lindsey walked in and saw him and, based on the look on her face, she was seeing the same thing. She, however, approached him and laid a hand lightly on his arm. "Ah, Rupert, you finally have decided to join us."

He gave her a small smile. "Hello, Lindsey."

"What shall I fix you to eat?"

"Just tea, please."

Lindsey shook her head. "No, not good enough. You need to eat." Giles glared at her and Buffy flinched from where she was sitting. It was one of Giles' industrial strength glares. To Buffy's surprise, Lindsey just laughed. "Oh, please. You know I'm glare proof. It's why you came to love me so much."

And again to Buffy's surprise, Giles laughed back, one of his silent chuckles. He sent Lindsey a look of great affection. "You could always see right through me, couldn't you?"

Lindsey pulled him into a hug and he hugged her back tightly. "Yes, I could. Now, what do you want to eat?"

"I'll have one of your wonderful breakfasts, then, if you're going to insist on feeding me."

Lindsey grinned. "I am. One wonderful breakfast coming right up."

As she left, Giles sat down across from Buffy. He looked her over. "Are you all right?"

Buffy nodded. "Yeah, I'm fine. How about you? How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine."

Buffy frowned. "No, you're not."

Giles shot her a surprised look and then gave her a small, sad smile. "No, no I'm not. But I will be. You don't need to worry about me."

Buffy frowned again but then Lindsey walked back in with his tea. Giles took a small sip and a pleased smile formed on his face. "I don't know how but you can even make tea taste better, Lindsey."

Buffy tried to suppress the flash of jealousy she felt. She looked at them both. "So, how long have you guys known each other?"

Lindsey and Giles looked at each other, trying to figure it out. Lindsey spoke first. "Well, it was after I opened my restaurant, and that was in 1977."

Giles was nodding his head. "Probably about twenty-two years."

Lindsey grinned shaking her head. "Wow, it seems so much longer than that."

Giles threw a bunched up napkin at her. "Ha, ha."

Buffy's heart sank. They'd known each other longer than she'd been alive. She felt so young and inexperienced. Somehow the nudging of Giles was feeling not so easy right now. "And how long have you been married to..." She paused for a second, and then continued, "...your husband. And what's his name anyway?"

Lindsey laughed at her question although her eyes were teasing Giles. "Ask Rupert. He can almost say it."

Giles glared at her again. "I can say it as well as you can."

"Yes, but I can think it so much better than you."

"Only because you throw all that sex stuff in there that gets him all worked up."

Lindsey was giggling so hard she could hardly talk. "Well, you could try that, I suppose. It might get him all excited. I mean, you know, the three of us..." She wiggled her eyebrows at Giles suggestively.

Giles sighed a long-suffering sigh. "I know you've always wanted me, Lindsey, but honestly, how many times do I have to turn you down before you finally

get " He didn't finish his sentence because Lindsey had jumped him and was tickling him.

Buffy watched them, her mouth hanging open as they wrestled, rocking the table with their antics. Lindsey scowled at him. "Me wanting you? Me wanting you?"

"Yes, you wanting me. Ah, stop that. Okay, I wanted you too, but only for your cooking." He let out another yelp as she poked him hard again. "Uncle, uncle." They both leaned on the table, laughing. Suddenly Giles saw Buffy and he blushed, almost as if he'd forgotten she was there. He turned to Lindsey and gave her a quick kiss on her cheek. "Thanks, I needed that."

Lindsey smiled at him, putting a hand to his cheek. Then she turned back to Buffy. "My husband's name is essentially unpronounceable. He is called Shaman by all his students, and I call him husband or I call him in my mind." Giles sent her a look and she laughed. She winked at Buffy and Buffy couldn't help but smile back. She was jealous of their closeness and she was jealous that Lindsey seemed to know just what to do to make Giles feel better when she'd had no idea, but she couldn't help liking her.

Lindsey continued. "And Rupert introduced us, oh, back in 1985 I think, and we were married a year later." She sighed. "It was a lovely wedding." Suddenly her eyes got a look of concentration and she glanced at Giles. "Did you hear that?"

Giles nodded. "He wants to speak with me."

Buffy looked at them both. "He can talk to both of you guys, in your heads? Is he gonna do that to me too?"

Lindsey smiled. "It is the way of his people. Speaking out loud is sort of a second language to him. He can mentally speak to me and to Rupert because we have both given him permission to enter our minds. It's how he and I predominantly communicate and it's how he manages to keep such a close eye on our Rupert here and keep him out of trouble. He would never presume to do that to you or to anyone who hadn't given their permission."

Giles grinned at her. "Nicely said. Now, if you can keep your hands off of me long enough to actually feed me, I will go off and meet with him."

Lindsey stuck her tongue out at him and went back into the kitchen. Giles looked at Buffy. "I've never forgiven him for that, for taking her and her cooking away. When they got married she closed down her restaurant and moved here."

Buffy looked around her. "I've been meaning to ask. Where is here, exactly?"

"We're in Sri Lanka. It's an island off the southern tip of India."

"Get out of town. Really? Can we do some sightseeing?"

Giles kind of scrunched up his face. "No, I mean, that would be nice, but we're not really here."

"What does that mean?"

"Well, we're sort of between spots. If you left this property you'd find yourself back where you started."

"You mean, back in the Magic Box?" Giles nodded. Buffy continued. "So, no one can actually get to this place on foot?"

"Well, it's possible, but you really have to know what you're looking for."

"Sort of like Platform nine and $\frac{3}{4}$?"

"I'm sorry?"

"Never mind." She tried again. "So, sort of like Brigadoon?"

Giles smiled. "Yes, except it's here all the time."

"Except the doors are invisible."

"Quite. Ah." Giles smelled appreciably at the food Lindsey put before him and he dug in immediately. Lindsey and Buffy just chatted as he ate. When he had soaked up the last of his omelet with his last piece of toast he sighed a happy sigh. "Another masterpiece." He put his hand over one of Lindsey's. "Are you sure I can't woo you away?"

Lindsey laughed merrily. "Quite sure, my love. Although I appreciate the sentiment."

"Well, I'm off to find your husband."

"Did you see where he was?"

Giles nodded. "Yes." He glanced at Buffy, who had stood at his words.

She smiled uncertainly. "Can I walk with you?"

"Of course." Giles held the door open for her, and after one last smile at Lindsey he closed the door behind them.

They walked in silence for a minute. Buffy again, felt out of her depth. He had been so silly with Lindsey that she had hoped that maybe he was fine. But now that they were alone, he had gotten so quiet again, so withdrawn. She didn't know what to say to him. She finally blurted out the one thing that was concerning her most. "Did you and Lindsey, you know, were you ever...an item?"

Giles shot her a startled look. "No."

"So that whole 'I want you' stuff in the kitchen...?"

Giles grinned. "A long standing joke between us. She's more like a sister than anything. She always has been." Giles brought the next subject up. "Buffy." He sighed.

"What?" She felt unaccountably nervous at what he might say.

"I...I just wanted to let you know that I've changed my mind. I've decided not to go back to England."

The relief Buffy felt almost knocked her down. She gave Giles a huge smile. "Really? You're staying?" She wanted to hug him but, once again, there was a look in his eyes that kept her where she was.

"Yes, I'm staying."

Buffy did stop walking, though, and she took a good long look at Giles. He didn't meet her eyes. His eyes were taking in the landscape around her, the color of the sky, almost anything but her. She couldn't believe she was asking this but she had to. "Why? Why are you staying?"

Giles shook his head. "It doesn't matter."

"It does matter. Because you don't seem too thrilled with the idea." Buffy could feel the gap between them widening even more. She wanted him to stay because she loved him and she wanted him. He was staying, but he really didn't really want to at all. She repeated herself. "It does. I want to know why. What did you see? Why was I hurting you?"

Giles shook his head again. "Buffy, I don't — I'm not sure how you saw what

you saw, how you got in there, but it doesn't matter. I'm sorry you had to see any of that." He did glance at her then, his eyes filled with pain.

Buffy touched his arm. "The Shaman told me that the other Buffy, the one that was hurting you, that she pulled me in, that it was becoming real. When I was sitting with you, up in your bedroom, I could feel myself hitting you; I could feel myself getting so angry with you. Why? Why would I do that? I need you to tell me."

"Buffy, I can't. Not now. Maybe not ever. I'm sorry."

But Buffy was on a roll. "Who was that tiger? Why was he sitting on you?" Then her voice got sad. "I'm sorry I couldn't help. All I could do was yell your name, like some lost little kid."

Giles looked down at her, her comment surprising him. "That was you? You called for me?"

"Yeah." She mimicked herself. "Giles, Giles." She grimaced. "Original, huh?"

Suddenly she found herself being hugged. "Then it was you who saved me."

"What?" She hugged him back tightly, so glad to be touching him, so glad that he was touching her.

He pulled back and she stifled a moan of disappointment but then she got swept up in Giles' words. "I was so lost in there, all I could think about was saving you. I knew that if you killed me that it would destroy you, but you were too strong..." He pulled himself back from the memory. "I was in that body towards the end, trying to get it speak to you, but it was too wounded. And at that point, I didn't...I couldn't see what I was doing, the harm I was doing by trying to get involved. But then, I heard you call me, I heard your voice, and you needed me and so I got out and got back in my own body so I could help. But by the time I got that big hairy fur ball of me you were gone and I didn't even know you'd been there." He smiled at Buffy, his head shaking with wonder.

She smiled back. "So, I did help?"

He gently touched her cheek with the backs of his fingers. "More than you'll ever know."

Suddenly she had a dreadful thought. "Is that why you're staying? To keep me from doing that, from becoming that?" She so didn't want that to be the reason. He didn't answer but started to walk again, and that was answer

enough. Tears filled her eyes. "If you leave, I'll kill you?" She started to back away from him. "Why? Why would I do that?" She couldn't even begin to deal with herself like that.

Giles shook his head, walking towards her. "Buffy, it doesn't matter now."

Tears started to roll down her face. "Yes it does. I need to understand. I need to know I won't do that to you."

"Buffy, you would never..."

"But, I did. I saw myself. I felt it. And when you first woke up and I tried to touch you, you...you flinched. You were scared of me." She was crying now.

"Buffy, I was tired. I'm not frightened of you now. And it will never happen, never, I promise you."

"How can you know that?"

"Because I'll be there this time."

She needed to know more but the Shaman chose that moment to show up. Giles knew that the Shaman had a reason for choosing to appear at that time, in the midst of this discussion. Giles and the Shaman looked at each other. Buffy could tell that they were having a mental conversation and she grew uncomfortable when Giles' face got sad again. He finally nodded and then looked at Buffy. "I'll speak with you later, Buffy." With that, he turned around and headed off, continuing in the direction they had been walking.

End of Part 8

Journey's End 9

Buffy watched him walk away and almost without missing a beat just turned to the Shaman and continued her tirade. "What happened there, in his journey? Why did I kill him? I don't understand." She started pacing. The Shaman just patiently watched her. "Now he says he's staying. Is it just to keep me from turning into a monster? Am I that close to being a monster that just him leaving tips me over into the dark side? What's wrong with me?"

She was still crying. "And I can tell he doesn't really want to stay. How can I make him love me if he doesn't even want to be with me? If his staying keeps me from being this homicidal crazed bitch why isn't he jumping for joy that he can keep that from happening? Why won't he tell me what happened?" Buffy

sat on the ground, completely miserable, and just continued to cry. The Shaman sat down next to her, still remaining silent.

Finally, her tears spent, she looked at the Shaman. Wiping the tears off her face she drew a deep breath. "Okay, I'm better now."

The Shaman smiled. "I'm glad."

Buffy put out a hand to lightly touch his sleeve. "But, I'm not really, you know that, right?"

He nodded. "Yes, I know that."

Buffy drew another deep breath. "So, when you were having that little silent conversation with Giles did he by any chance give you permission to tell me what happened on that journey of his?"

"No, not really." Buffy blew out a frustrated breath but before she could explode again the Shaman asked her a question. "Why was Rupert leaving?"

"What?"

"Why was he leaving? What reason did he give you for returning to England?"

Buffy thought for a moment. "He said that I wouldn't learn to fend for myself as long as he was here...there...wherever. That he was holding me back."

"And do you agree with that?"

"You know I don't...didn't, still don't."

"Do you feel differently now, about yourself, than you did when you arrived?"

"Yeah, completely different. I can feel again, I can hope again. I am hoping." She scowled in the direction that Giles had walked away in.

The Shaman bit back a smile. He liked this Slayer of Rupert's. He could see why Rupert had become such an avid champion. She still had much to learn, though. "In your journey, did things go badly in any of the futures you were shown?"

Buffy grimaced. "God, yes. The first four sucked big time, at least for me. Giles died in the first one, in the second one, even though he had decided to stay, he ended up leaving anyway, in the third one, Dawn killed herself, and in the fourth one, I died." She looked up at the Shaman. "You know who Dawn

is?"

He nodded. "Yes." He thought for a moment. "In those lives, what went wrong, what was the theme that ran through all of them?"

"They were all so different and bad things happened to different people in each one."

"No, they were merely variations on a theme. What was that theme?"

Buffy whined. "Oh, God, I feel like I'm back in school."

The Shaman did grin at that. "Think it through Buffy. What was the decision you made that created those futures?"

Buffy sat there, her legs drawn up, arms resting on her knees, jaw resting on her arms, and she thought. And then she thought some more. Finally a look of comprehension and sadness came over her face. She lifted her head. "It was me. I didn't care. I made stupid choices because I didn't care. I hated my life."

"And will those same choices be made by you now?"

"God, no."

"And how can you be so sure?"

"Because I know now. Because I don't feel that way anymore."

The Shaman nodded. "This I can share with you. You asked Rupert how he knows you won't kill him. How he can be sure. The answer is the same. He knows now. He knows that he must stay, that his staying ensures that particular future will never come to pass."

"So why isn't he happier about it?"

The Shaman tucked his hands in his sleeves as he looked at her. "Tell me again why Rupert was leaving?"

Buffy sighed, almost exasperated. "That he would hold me back. That he would end up taking care of too much for me."

"And in those four lives, did Rupert stay in all of them?"

She nodded and then she gasped. "He stayed, and everything still went bad."

"Why?"

"Oh God." Buffy's eyes were wide open. "Because he was right. I never took responsibility. I made all those stupid choices; I left Dawn to him. And I didn't care because I didn't need to, because he was there."

The Shaman let that sink in for a moment. "So, why might Rupert not be entirely happy with his decision to stay?"

Buffy's head almost hurt as the mental bombshells continued to drop. "Because he still thinks he'll hurt me by staying. I mean, he knows now that to leave will be worse, but he doesn't think he's doing me any big favors by staying." Buffy's eyes brightened with tears. "He's worried about me." Her chin lifted in determination. "But, I'm different now."

The Shaman nodded. "Yes, you are. But, think about your conversation. What was he seeing, what was he hearing?"

Buffy reviewed her conversation with Giles, her brows furrowed in concentration. She glanced up at the Shaman. "I suppose you want the theme." She grinned at him.

He grinned back. "Yes, what was the underlying theme?"

In a painful rush of honesty, Buffy blurted out her answer. "I wanted him to take care of me. I wanted him to fix the problem. Just like I've been doing."

"You have an interesting situation in your hands Buffy. Your relationship with Rupert has always been, predominantly, about you taking, and him giving. Not in the love and affection you have had for each other, but rather, in the roles you have played in each other's lives. And that has been all right, in fact, it has been necessary. It is the nature of Slayers and Watchers, and Rupert has, up until this time, loved that role he played in your life. Now, for the first time, he sees that role as being disadvantageous to you. And yet, that is the only way he knows to be with you. And that is the only way you have known to be with him."

The Shaman opened both hands. "Now, you have been given an extraordinary gift. You have been shown a new way to be with him. A way of being equals, not in the fight against evil, but equals as man and woman, husband and wife, sharing life, both the joys and the burdens." He closed one hand. "Rupert hasn't seen that. He can't even envision it. All he sees is the life he's given to you, his life, will potentially do you harm."

Buffy looked at him anxiously, glancing down at his two hands, one open and one closed. "You couldn't send him on another journey? Let him see it that way, like I did?"

"He is not strong enough to journey right now. He needs time to recover, he needs to spend time in his secret garden and he needs to spend time with those he loves and who love him."

Buffy reached forward and touched his closed hand. "What am I supposed to do about that? How do I get him to see?"

The Shaman looked at her kindly. "Buffy, if you hope to be a partner for Rupert, if you hope to walk by his side, you must learn that for yourself. And then you must show him a new path for the two of you to walk together, side by side. When you first arrived, I told you that up until now, his burdens, his troubles, were the duty and the honor of my wife and I to attend to. Now you must decide if it is time for them to belong to you as well. We will always be here and there will be times when he will need to come here, as may you. But it is a partner's privilege to stand by his or her lover's side and help shoulder a burden to make it lighter."

Buffy had to swallow against the lump in her throat and she felt an intense need to lighten the moment. "Wow, you do couple's counseling too?"

The Shaman softly smiled at her. "There is nothing in life that cannot be improved with increased wisdom and an increased clarity about the inner workings of our heart and mind. In fact, the less we know about ourselves, the more difficult our journeys are." He stood. "I must go see Rupert. Do you know how to get back to the house?"

Buffy nodded. "Can I just wander around?"

He nodded. "Yes, just be quiet when you are around buildings as classes or meditation may be going on."

"So no bursting into song?"

He caught the impish look in her eyes. "Only unless it is completely unavoidable. If you must, then, we will, of course, understand." With that, he headed off, following the direction Rupert had taken, leaving a grinning Buffy behind him.

##

Buffy lost track of time. She was thinking harder than she had in a long time.

Every now and then she'd sit for a while, and then she'd feel compelled to walk again. Thinking back on that future she'd seen when she and Giles had made love she remembered what it had felt like to realize that he was a man. She was experiencing something similar now. Except instead of coming to grips with Giles as a sexual being, now she was coming to grips with the idea of him being an emotional one. A guy with needs, and hurts, and wants, just like her.

She knew that he'd had rough times, and she'd certainly done her best to be caring when confronted with that side of him, on those rare occasions when he'd let her see him like that. But, for the first time, she could see that he had made it so easy for her, in so many ways. Despite what he'd been going through, fighting at her side, he had never, ever, expected her to address that part of himself, in fact, he'd almost made it a point to make sure she didn't. Because that wasn't her role. Because it could get in her way, distract her. Always, for him, it was about her. Because that was his role.

That she had working in her favor. He'd nudge eventually, just because she wanted him to. But, she didn't want him that way anymore. So, all she had to do was convince him that she had found a reason to live, that she'd be better for his staying. Then she needed to convince him that emotionally opening up to her wouldn't distract her, that it would in fact make her stronger, knowing he was fully there behind her. And then she needed to make him believe that she loved him and that he loved her too. That's all. Oh, and that they should get married.

Buffy lay down on the grass and blew a raspberry at the sky. "Oh, for a vampire to kill." She rolled over onto her stomach and rested her head on her arms and she thought some more.

##

When she failed to appear for dinner Giles got a little nervous. The Shaman assured her that she was fine, and Giles knew that no harm could befall her while she was here but he couldn't help the anxiety he was feeling. The Shaman stared at him for a moment. "Why don't you go and get her."

"Do you know where she is?"

He closed his eyes for a moment. "She is down by the Zen Garden."

Giles stood. "Then, perhaps I will. It will be dark soon." He smiled at them both and headed out.

Lindsey looked at her husband and swatted him on the arm. "You are such an

incurable romantic."

He grinned sheepishly at her. "I know. No matter how I try, I cannot rid myself of this attachment. I find it immensely satisfying when people find their true mates. Besides..." He gazed at her.

She leaned forwards and kissed him. "I know. I love him too."

##

Buffy had fallen asleep. Giles' heart turned over in his chest when he saw her lying on the ground and he ran to her, falling to his knees by her side. "Buffy?"

She jerked her head up. "Huh?" She looked up at him, hearing the tension in his voice. "What? What's wrong?"

Giles sat back on his heels, relief coursing through him. "Nothing. I thought you were hurt." Then he smiled at her.

Buffy knew that smile. "What now? Do I have grass all over my face?" She put a hand to her face and discovered that she did. She brushed it away. "I'd like to see you take a nap here and not own some of mother nature." She looked up at him. "Did I get it all?"

Giles put a hesitant hand out and brushed some dirt off her cheek, and pulled a couple of twigs out of her hair, taking some time to untangle one of them. Buffy thought her heart might stop and she closed her eyes at the sensation of him touching her.

When he pulled his hand away her eyes were still closed. He called her name, concerned. "Buffy?"

Her eyes opened, and for a second, Giles saw something in her eyes, he'd almost swear it was a flash of desire, but it was gone so quickly he dismissed it, shaking his head. He had something he wanted to discuss. "Buffy, I'm sorry we argued earlier."

Buffy sat across from him, her knees almost touching his. "It's all right." She smiled. "This Shaman guy, he's pretty smart."

Giles smiled back. "Yes, he is. I've learned so much from him."

"He told me that he's learned a lot from you too."

Giles couldn't help but look pleased at that but he didn't respond. Instead he

made an offer to Buffy. "If you want me to, I'll tell you about my journey."

Buffy shook her head. "No. I only want you to tell me if you want to tell me. What I want is to tell you about mine, and tell you what I learned. Is that okay?" At his nod, she continued. "I get why you wanted to leave. I get why you wanted to go back to England."

He interrupted her. "I never wanted to go."

She put a finger over his lips. "I know. You were leaving because I didn't care about anything. I saw no purpose to my life; I saw no reason for living. And you believed that staying would only make it worse. Because you would live my life for me, take care of everything that might force me to snap out of it. I get that." She slowly pulled her finger off his lips, slightly pulling down his lower lip. She heard his breath catch but she couldn't tell if it was desire or confusion.

"I get it because I saw what happened when you stayed. For four possible futures, just what you thought might happen, happened, and it wasn't good. I gave up, or I made bad decisions, or I pulled back and people got hurt, and in one, you ended up leaving anyway. But, the point is that you were right. You staying, it wasn't good for me. And you knew that. And you knew what you had to do, and I'm sorry I was so angry with you. You didn't deserve it."

Giles shook his head but she put a hand on his knee to stop him. The next thing she had to say felt like the hardest thing she'd ever had to say. "I need to let you know that I'm okay now. And if you want to go home, you can. I'll be all right. I won't turn into that thing that kills you. I'll go home and I'll take care of Dawn, and I'll be okay. Not as okay as I would be if you stay, but I'll be okay." By the time she had finished her head had dropped and she was looking at the ground, terrified that he might take her up on it, that he might agree. Mostly she was terrified that she'd see a look of relief on his face.

Giles reached out and lifted her head with his finger under her chin. He stared at her for the longest time. He could see a newborn strength there, that proud determination that had been missing since her rebirth. Giles stared at her in amazement. "How...?"

"I saw myself happy. And I saw myself glad to be alive. And it made me believe I could feel that way. And once I believed it, I felt it. It's back, inside of me. The hope. I care again."

Giles cupped her cheek with his hand, astonished by her. Without conscious thought he reached out and pulled her to him in a ferocious hug. She threw herself into it wholeheartedly. They held each other for the longest time.

Finally he pulled back, returning his hand to her cheek. "I'm so glad Buffy, you have no idea how glad I am." He dropped his hand.

Buffy took a deep breath. "So, do you want to go home? Do you want to go home to Bath and get a regular job and make some friends your own age, and maybe fall in love?" Now she held her breath.

"Do you want me to stay?"

Buffy shook her head. "I want you to decide. I don't want you to stay because I want you to stay. I want you to stay because that's what you want to do."

Giles cocked his head to the side and just stared at her. "When did you become so...?"

Buffy smiled that self-mocking smile of her. "Grown-up?" Giles nodded. Buffy gestured around her. "This afternoon." She pressed on. "Do you want to go home? Does that sound appealing to you?"

Giles tightened his lips around a small smile. "Well, I suppose it does, to a certain extent. I miss some of those things. I have for a long time. But, another part of me feels that I belong at your side."

"As my Watcher?"

"As your Watcher."

"What do you miss the most?"

"Out of my old life?" Buffy nodded. "I suppose having friends to share my day with, over a cup of tea or a drink at the end of the day, maybe...having someone to love, having someone to wake up to." He blushed. Giles wasn't used to this sort of conversation with Buffy.

She caught the blush. "Hey, this is whole new terrain here. Conversation between an adult Giles and a grown-up Buffy. No Watcher stuffiness allowed here." Giles glared at her and she just grinned back. "See, and I'm growing impervious to your glares. Now that I've seen someone survive one with no evident bleeding I'm beginning to believe they're not as deadly as I thought they were."

Giles just rolled his eyes and flashed her a quick grin and then he flashed her a bigger one as he realized how comfortingly familiar their banter was, the way it had always been between them, all of Buffy's spark back in place. Giles felt something relax inside of him; something he hadn't even realized

was so out of kilter until just now. He was about to speak when Buffy started up again.

"I mean, if you want to stay because you're my Watcher, I won't argue. But..."

Giles prompted her. "But...?"

"My next life, the next future I got shown after those four shitty ones, which I'll tell you all about in all their gory detail later, the next future was pretty good. I had me a gorgeous boyfriend, who seemed to know all about the slaying. Dawn was graduating from high school. And you stayed in this life too. You stayed in all six, but in the last two, it was a good thing. You can stay and it can be a good thing."

He prompted her again, curious now. "What happened in this future?"

"Well, you had gotten to the graduation ahead of us and had saved us seats. Xander was lurking towards the back to show us where they were. Anya was way pregnant, Willow was with Tara, and we were all there, so excited for Dawn, thinking back to our graduation. I teased you about it; you teased me back. And I thanked you."

"For what?"

"For being there. For everything you'd done. That I'd never have made it this far without you, that certainly Dawn never would have." Giles didn't respond. "But then, the weirdest thing happened. We were all in the gym, doing the party thing and I was watching me with the new guy, whose name was Rick by the way, and he was paying all sorts of attention to me, which is only right."

She sent an impish look Giles' way and he rolled his eyes and gestured for her to continue. "Okay, so, oh and I forgot to tell you, I can tell what everyone's feeling during this thing. So, I'm hanging with the gang and suddenly I realize you're missing. Not the me in the future, but me, me." She patted herself on the chest. "I look around for you and you're still there but sort of near the back, just leaning against a wall, watching us. Like you did all the time when we were in high school. Just watching us. But this time I could feel what you were feeling."

"What was it? What was I feeling?" He couldn't imagine.

"It was like this bright light inside of you. This amazing joy, of being glad that I was alive, that we all were alive, that we were all together, celebrating together. And you were so determined to keep it that way, no matter what it took." She looked at him intently, noting the look of recognition on his face. "How often did you feel that way?"

He smiled shyly. "All the time. Every night you came back from patrol, every time we vanquished the next evil, every time you were all together, safe and whole."

"Well, that was the weird thing. Because when I felt that, when I saw that light there inside of you, I couldn't have cared less for Rick, or for any of them. I just wanted to be with you. Next to you. Soaking that in, that feeling. It was like being in sunshine. So, I started walking towards you..."

Giles was captivated. "And then..."

"Then it all got hazy and I got sent to the next future."

"Oh." Giles didn't quite understand why but he felt disappointed. "So what was that life like? The next one?"

End of Part 9

Journey's End 10

Buffy blew out a big breath and tried to get past the butterflies going crazy in her stomach. Giles saw the nervousness on her face. "Buffy, you don't have to tell me."

"No, I want to tell you. I'm just a little...remember that new terrain thing I was telling you about?" Giles nodded. "Okay, just keep that in mind. Like I said, you stayed for this one too and it was rough at first but eventually we all got happy. I broke up with Spike." She looked up at Giles expecting to see an incredulous look but instead she found him looking at her with such sadness and compassion. She figured it out right away. "I got together with him in your journey too, didn't I?"

Giles nodded. "It's all right, Buffy. I understand how it could have happened, why you were...potentially are... drawn to him."

"Were. The word is definitely were." Buffy shivered. She had gotten so lost so quickly. It frightened her still to think about it, to think about what might have happened.

"Buffy, are you all right?"

"Yeah, just thinking about what ifs, kind of a spooky place." She looked at Giles. "But I'm thinking you know that."

Giles nodded again. "Yes, a very, as you say, spooky place."

"Okay, so I broke up with Spike, you and Dawn were doing the father daughter thing big time. You, by the way, wonderful dad." That did get a surprised look from Giles and Buffy grinned. "So, anyway, I let Dawn spend the night at a friend's house and I cooked dinner." That got another surprised look and Buffy smacked him lightly on the knee. "Hey, I can cook. I cooked us Thanksgiving dinner, didn't I?"

"Yes, you did. I humbly apologize. One meal in four years. How could I be so unkind as to mock you?"

"Okay, I can tell you're feeling better when you pull the big sarcasm guns out. Can I get back to my story?"

Giles grinned but he wanted to hear the rest. "Buffy, please, go on. You were cooking me dinner...?"

"Yes, I cooked us dinner and you kept waiting for me to ask you for some big favor. Again, I could tell what you were thinking. Not the me in the future."

"Right, you, I got it. So, what was the favor?"

"No favor. I was just cooking dinner." As an expression of disbelief showed up on Giles' face Buffy made a face back at him. Then she continued. "So, after dinner we went into the living room, oh, and you were living there, in the house. So we went into the living room to watch the video Dawn asked you to pick up, which by the way, nice job, total smut."

"I picked up a movie like that for Dawn?" Giles was horrified.

"Well, in your defense, you had no idea. You'd just gotten what she asked for. So anyway..." Buffy's voice was getting faster. "All this sex stuff comes on and we're just sitting there and you're teasing me for getting embarrassed and then you got mad at me when I sounded like I didn't think you'd ever had sex."

"What?"

"See, that's exactly what you said to me then, too. You said, 'Buffy, it's just sex, you've had it, I've had it'. And I said, 'you've had sex?'" She gestured to Giles. "And you got all annoyed and said 'What?' in that oh-so-annoyed-with-Buffy voice you have."

"Well, you can hardly blame me." He shook his head at Buffy. "Honestly Buffy. I know you've always thought I was one step away from an old folk's home..."

"Yeah, I know, sorry about that. Well, just to make it worse I said something like, well of course you've had sex, you know, Giles' sex. Which at the time made sense to me, like any sex you might have had took place in a Giles' universe, far, far away from me."

"Tell me again why were you shown this? Where on earth is this all leading to?"

Buffy flashed him a nervous grin. "I'm getting there. So, you got even more annoyed, big surprise I know, but I just put the movie back on. And we watched some more sex. Which you seemed particularly interested in. You kept saying how real it looked." Buffy blew out another nervous breath. "Then, while you were so preoccupied by the TV I started looking at you, and you know what I saw?"

"I'm afraid to even hazard a guess."

"I'll tell you then. A gorgeous sexy guy. Right there in front of me, both of me's. You changed from Giles, book guy, to Giles, hunk." She snapped her fingers. "Just that fast." At Giles' stunned look she continued. "Well, you happened to look up and you saw something in my eyes and we just stared at each other. Then the next thing I knew we were both kissing, and then we were shagging like bunnies, and six months later we were married. And both of us were so happy, happier than either of us ever imagined we could be. You and me."

Giles' eyes were sort of glazed over and Buffy stood. "Boy, I missed dinner didn't I? Come on; let's go back. Think Lindsey would reheat something for me?" When he didn't answer she reached down and pulled him up. "Giles, do you think she would reheat something for me?"

Giles tried to focus. "What? Oh, yes, I'm sure she would." He ran a hand through his hair and Buffy grinned at the still dazed look on his face. She began to pull him back to the house. This had been as far as she'd gotten on her strategy. Tell him, and then let it stew. Let him take the next step. Surely she didn't need to do it all.

Giles allowed Buffy to pull him back to the house. He occasionally tripped over something but Buffy's strength kept him from falling. The ending of that future had knocked his socks off. He couldn't seem to get past it. Him and Buffy. Him and Buffy having sex. Him and Buffy married. Him and Buffy happy. Really happy. Giles tried to pull himself together when they arrived

back at the house. Both Lindsey and the Shaman were sitting there, much as Giles had left them.

They both looked up as Buffy and Giles arrived. And they both bit back smiles at the look on Giles' face, and the nervous grin on Buffy's. Lindsey looked at Buffy. "Would you like me to heat you up some supper, Buffy?"

"I was hoping you'd ask me that."

The Shaman took another look at Rupert and just headed for the freezer, pulling out some ice cream. He filled a bowl and slid it in front of Giles, handing him a spoon. Barely acknowledging the Shaman, Giles took the spoon and began to eat. The Shaman looked up at Buffy. "I see that he found you. He was worried about you."

She nodded. "He found me. We talked. I told him that he could go home to England if he wanted to. That I'd be okay now without him."

"Ah, and what did Rupert decide?"

Buffy frowned. "He hasn't told me yet." She leaned towards the Shaman and touched her temple a couple of times with her index finger. "Can you see inside his head and tell me what he's thinking? He could be lost in there for days. I've seen it happen."

The Shaman let out a laugh. "I can see, but I will not tell you what he's thinking. I will tell you that you might want to ask him again."

Buffy's eyes lit up. "Yeah?" The Shaman nodded. Lindsey hurried in, obviously called by her husband not to miss this. "Okay." Buffy turned to Giles and patted him on the arm to get his attention. When that didn't work she took his ice cream away.

Giles looked at her, spoon poised mid air. He looked down at his ice cream bowl, now resting in front of her. "Why did you take my ice cream away?"

Buffy almost giggled at the little boy expression on his face. "I'll give it right back, I just need to ask you a question."

"What? What's the question?"

"Are you going home to England?"

Giles put the spoon in his mouth and unhurriedly licked off the ice cream as he looked at Buffy. He reached his hand out and slowly retrieved his bowl of

ice cream. Giles watched Buffy watch him, seemingly mesmerized by his movements. He smiled and shook his head. "No, I don't think so. I think I'm going to stay."

He was rewarded by one of Buffy's brilliant smiles. "Really? You're really staying?" At Giles' nod she turned her head to Lindsey and the Shaman. "He's staying." Her eyes filled with tears and she turned back to Giles. "You're staying with me." This time it was she who pulled him in for a hug, squeezing hard enough to get a grunt out of him. She started to cry.

Giles grew concerned. "Buffy, I'm sorry..."

She interrupted him. "No, no, this is me being happy. I'm happy." She continued to sob into his shirtfront. Giles looked up at his two friends and shrugged his shoulders. They both just grinned at him and he grinned back, his arms tight around Buffy.

Lindsey went and retrieved Buffy's dinner and the smell of the food finally encouraged her tears to stop. Shiny eyed and red nosed, she pulled back and sniffed the air appreciably, looking at Lindsey. "God, I'm going to miss your food." She hiccupped and blushed.

Lindsey just smiled at Buffy. "You can come and visit any time you'd like."

Buffy grinned. "Really? I can come visit whenever I want?"

Lindsey nodded. "Rupert never visits as often as we'd like him to. Maybe you can get him to come here more often."

Buffy frowned looking at Giles. "Why don't you come here more often? Man, I'd be coming here all the time. Great food, great scenery, painful life lessons." She sent a mischievous smile to the Shaman. "You know I think that part was pretty great, right?"

He smiled back. "Yes, I know."

"I mean, not that I want to do that every time I come. That could get old."

"Indeed."

"Every now and then might not be too bad. I could probably use it every now and then." She looked at Giles. "So, why don't you come here all the time?"

Giles rolled his eyes. "Well, let me see. It might have something to do with a certain Slayer for whom I have responsibility."

She poked him on the arm. "Yeah, but if I'm here with you, you won't need to worry about what I'm doing." He could hardly argue with that. Giles just kept eating his ice cream. Suddenly Buffy put down her fork and looked at him again. "I know what I keep forgetting to ask you. That big hairy fur ball. That tiger. Is he one of your spirit guides?"

Giles grinned, nodding. "Yes, he is."

"Did you know I have one too? A spirit guide of my very own?" Giles shook his head, amusement in his eyes at Buffy's excitement. Buffy continued. "Remember that mountain lion, the one in the desert?"

"Yes, the one you referred to as the nice kitty cat?"

"Yeah, that one. Anyway, that's her. She's my spirit guide. Her name's Seeker." Buffy waved her fork in the air. "And you know where my secret garden is?"

Giles shook his head again.

"The library, the library at the high school." She sighed. "I loved that place."

Giles smiled at her. "So did I. We met there, you and I."

Buffy grinned. "Who'd have guessed when you threw that Vampyr book at me that three years later we'd blow the place up, and two years after that we'd be here, in Brigadoon?" Buffy pushed her now empty plate away and sent a plaintive look towards the Shaman and the ice cream container. He immediately filled a bowl for her, and then put the container away.

Giles smiled at Buffy and in a Scottish brogue, he spoke to her. "Will ye go gather some wild heather on the morrow then, lassie?"

Buffy sent him a delighted look. "Only if you go with me."

Giles nodded. "That I will." He reached forward and tucked a strand of her hair behind one of her ears. Then he frowned. "And I hardly threw that book at you, Buffy."

Buffy just laughed and dug into her ice cream.

##

Giles escorted Buffy back to her room. He followed in behind her at Buffy's

invitation because every one of the guest suites here at his friend's estate was a work of art, and he'd never been in this one. At least that's what he told himself. Giles walked around the suite, admiring the antiques and the tranquil aesthetics and he did everything he could to avoid eye contact with the bed.

Giles ended up standing by the window, which faced an inner courtyard. Buffy moved to stand by his side. She pressed her face close to the glass. "So, are there like parts of that Sri Lanka place right under us? Are there people shopping and eating, and you know, doing Indian stuff, right here? But we can't see them and they can't see us?"

Giles watched as the moonlight reflected on her hair and he reached up a hand to touch it, to run his fingers through it but he pulled back at the last second. He focused on her question. "I'm not completely sure. I believe that we are in a time-space bubble, sort of a temporal displacement."

Buffy turned to look at him, her face scrunched up. "What? A whatty what?"

He tried again. "It's as if once you walk in the door that you actually get taken away to someplace different, someplace not truly here. It's sort of a physics conundrum, rather difficult to explain."

Buffy didn't understand anything he was saying but she took a step closer to him and started to grin. "I love it when you do that."

Giles looked at her, a bit confused. "When I do what?"

She took another step closer, until only inches separated them. "Talk all smart. It's so..." She blushed and turned her head away, her momentary courage, her plans to kiss him, fleeing in a rush of shyness.

Giles reached out and caught her chin, turning her face back to his. "It's so...what?" She shook her head, blushing again, her eyes not meeting his. Giles stared down at her, pulling on all his Buffy reading skills to try and interpret her behavior. He was finding it a challenge to find the level playing field on this, as she had put it, new terrain they suddenly seemed to be in. He decided to take a gamble. "In this future of yours, the one where you and I..."

She looked up at him then and he caught the quick expression of relief on her face. He understood then. It was his turn. She schooled her face into one of interest. "Yes?"

Giles bit back a grin. "You said you could tell what I was feeling and thinking." Buffy nodded; Giles continued. "You said that I looked up and saw something in your eyes. What was I thinking right then? What was I feeling?"

Buffy thought back to that life, to that brief moment when the future Buffy and Giles had stared at one another before they had started kissing. She looked at Giles, tried to imagine him as the one in that future but she couldn't. He was so real, so...so right in front of her. He was standing close to her and she could feel the heat radiating off his body. The butterflies came back with a vengeance. She shook her head. "I don't know. It all happened so fast. I..." She just stared at his face, the wonderful crinkles around his eyes, his nose, his chin, his lips.

Giles didn't need her to tell him. He could see the look in her eyes, and he could feel what was happening to him. "Shall I try then, shall I try and tell you what I was thinking?" Buffy nodded. Giles took a step backwards and sat on the edge of the bed. He pulled Buffy down next to him. Reaching up he ran his hand lightly down the side of her face. Buffy instinctively leaned into it, like a cat, looking for more.

Giles closed his eyes for a second as desire for her swept through him. "I think that he saw your face, and he saw that you wanted him, and he couldn't imagine that anything more wonderful had ever happened to him. I think that he looked at you and all he could think about was how beautiful you were..."

Buffy leaned in to kiss him but Giles met her halfway and in moments Giles had laid her back on the bed and he was lying half on top of her, their mouths fused in a passionate kiss. One of his hands was fisted in her hair; the other was pulling her as close to him as he could, needing to feel her pressed against him.

Buffy moaned and as she touched her tongue to his, so many emotions were running through her. Rampant relief that it was actually happening, deep satisfaction that this time, it was real, it was her, a coiling possessiveness that made her want to brand him for all time as hers, and a glorious sensual response to his touch that made her crave for more. She pulled away for a second and held his face with her hands. "It's happening just like last time, you laying me down, you lying on me."

Giles turned his head and kissed one of her palms. "I can't believe how much I want you." He could hardly breath. Sanity reared its head for a second. "Should I stop? Am I moving too fast?"

Buffy clutched at him. "Don't you dare stop. And don't worry about moving too fast. We were married. A part of me remembers having sex with you, a lot."

Giles responded by kissing her again. Then he started thinking again. He pulled his head back. "Are you sure you want this Buffy?"

"Shut up, Giles." She started trying to pull his sweater off.

Giles put out a hand to stop her, wanting to look at her face again. He stared at her for a moment and shook his head, amazed. "You really do want this, don't you?"

She managed to get his sweater off. "Ever since I saw us together, ever since I saw us kissing, ever since I saw us making love, spending our lives together, it's all I've wanted. All of it. You." She ran her hand through his chest hair, her eyes raking his body and then she looked back up at Giles. Buffy grinned. "That's the look. Right now, that look on your face. That's the one the future you had. What are you thinking?"

"That this really is the most wonderful thing that's ever happened to me. And that I love you."

Buffy let out a long and happy sigh. "I remember you telling me that in the future, but it's much better this way." She giggled.

"What?"

"I was jealous of me."

"Jealous...?"

Buffy nodded. "I was jealous cause she had you, cause you took her hand. I wanted to claw my eyes out." Giles laughed, softly. He reached down and took both of her hands in his larger ones and he brought them to his lips. She looked up at him with shining eyes and let out another sigh. "I love you too."

Giles drank her in. He thought about the journey he'd been on, how painful it had been, and yet, it had led him here to her, to his heart, and to a future he'd never even allowed himself to believe in. Giles felt a blinding flash of gratitude that shook him in its intensity. He bowed his head for a moment and sent out a prayer of gratefulness to all his spirit guides and teachers, thanking them for every lesson, every moment of guidance that had brought him to this moment.

Buffy watched him, and waited until he lifted his eyes again. "Are you all right?"

Giles smiled. "Yes. Just so damn grateful that everything...that my journey, both inside", he tapped himself on his chest, "...and outside, that it all led me here."

Buffy nodded. "Right here to me." Buffy got lost for a second thinking about her own journey. She shook her head and decided she could wax philosophical tomorrow. She captured his gaze again. "Hey, you gonna kiss me now?"

Giles grinned. "Yes." And taking her in his arms he claimed her as his and together they started building their own future.

The End

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