

Willow lay trembling in her bed, Tara's arms tight around her. The echo of Buffy's scream was still reverberating through the house. It was a scream that was filled with horror and pain and Willow felt it to her marrow. For a week Buffy had been screaming. For seven nights Buffy had woken them all up as her dreams manifested themselves as bloodcurdling cries that kept them all awake, cringing in their beds.

The first night Willow had run in to comfort Buffy. It had taken Willow so long to wake her up. When Buffy had finally opened her eyes and seen Willow next to her she had recoiled from her, as if she was the cause of the dream. She had pushed Willow away, yelling at her to leave her alone, to leave her in peace. Willow could see, for whatever reason, that she was making Buffy even more upset by her presence, so she had finally and reluctantly left. And that pattern had repeated itself over and over again all week.

Tara had fared no better. Buffy had wanted nothing to do with either of them. The only person Buffy would let near her at night was Dawn. So Dawn had stayed, holding Buffy for the rest of the night, trying to wake her when the dreams consumed her again. Dawn had gotten little sleep. And now, after so many nights, Dawn was of little help to Buffy. Terrified of the screams, haunted by whatever visage was plaguing Buffy, suffering from no sleep, Dawn had depleted her teenage internal resources and she had nothing left to offer Buffy.

Buffy had told no one what her dreams were about. Her eyes would get huge and fill with tears and she would shake her head and turn away. Every morning she would come down and have breakfast with everyone. She would be pleasant to Willow and Tara, and loving to Dawn, but every night, the dreams returned, and with the dreams, the screaming.

Even Spike had tried. He had heard her cries from outside the house and when they had gone on too long without ceasing he had come in and entered her bedroom. But he had overplayed his hand and tried to get too physically close to her. Buffy had left the bed and gone to sit in the chair by the window, refusing to sleep again until he left. He had paced outside every night since, angry with himself, angry with Buffy, and furious with Willow, with all four of them, for what they had done.

Willow let go with a sob. She raised herself up on one elbow and looked at Tara. "Why is she like this? Why won't she get better?" Her voice was filled with misery.

Tara just shook her head, her lips tight. She had no answers to give Willow. And the advice she had tried to give to her had been firmly rebuffed, several times.

Willow pulled herself into a sitting position covering her face with her hands as she cried. "I...oh God, oh God...Tara...did I...?" Willow shook her head, still feeling so unable to speak of the fear in her heart, the fear that Giles had been right. That Buffy was damaged. That Willow had done this to her.

Tara reached out and pulled her in tightly, trying one more time. "Willow, you know what you have to do. Why are you still fighting so hard? This isn't about you anymore, it can't be. It has to be about Buffy." She ran her hands comfortingly up and down Willow's back. "He gets back today. You have to tell him."

Willow shook her head. "You didn't hear what he said to me. He called me...he thinks..." Her voice grew more defiant. "He wasn't there, he didn't see. I didn't do anything wrong."

Tara pulled back from the hug and began to wipe the tears off of Willow's face. "It doesn't matter. He'll see that something's wrong. He'll see that Buffy's not okay. Dawn will tell him. Dawn's wanted to call him for days. It will go better if you tell him, if you ask him."

Willow curled into a fetal position. "Oh God, I can't. I can't. What if he was right? What if I did this to her?" Willow let out a keening wail, almost as heartbreaking as Buffy's cries. Tara fought to keep her own tears away.

After seeing for himself that Buffy was alive Giles had gone back to England to make arrangements to move back here permanently again. Willow had conveniently lost Giles' number mid week, not wanting Dawn to tell him anything was wrong. Giles had called twice but each time it had been Buffy who answered and it had been Buffy who told him she was fine and that he just needed to get his business taken care of so he could come home, as quickly as possible. Willow had been so sure it would get better before he got back, that he would never even need to find out anything about this. But her

time was up and his plane was due to arrive early the next afternoon.

Willow knew that Tara was right. He would see that something was wrong as soon as he saw Buffy and Dawn. As soon as he saw them all. None of them had been sleeping. All of them had been affected by the screams, as if the pain in them had mixed in with the air they breathed, making their chests tight and their hearts race.

Giles and Willow had not had much of a chance to talk before he had left again. She had been on her best behavior and Giles had been painstakingly polite to her, with none of his usual warmth. Willow had been relieved when he left and once he was gone she had found herself feeling angry with him and with his attitude towards her. But this week had been unexpected and it had started to erode her confidence. And that had made her even angrier. And the one person she least wanted to go to for help was Giles. As if it would be acknowledging that he knew more than she did, that he was more powerful than she was, and, the most painful somehow, that he knew Buffy better than Willow did.

Willow just lay there and cried, all her defenses slowly crumbling as Buffy let out another scream. Tara's tears began to fall as well as she ran her hand through her lover's hair.

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They had managed to survive the night. Tara was cooking breakfast and there was little talking as she flipped pancakes. Everyone looked beat. Dawn was practically falling asleep at the table. Buffy got up to get some juice and she poured herself a glass. Her eyes lit on the calendar lying on the counter next to the refrigerator. She stared at it as if trying to understand it. She finally shook her head and looked up. "What day is it?"

Tara moved over to her and put her finger on the square for today's date. Written in ink and circled were the words 'Giles home'. Tara smiled at Buffy, seeing the first glimpse of happiness she had seen in Buffy's eyes for days. "He'll be back today."

Buffy could hardly believe it. She didn't think a week had ever taken so long

to pass. "Today? It's finally today?" Tara nodded and then she moved back to her pancakes.

Dawn looked up at that. "Giles comes home today? Really?" Dawn could barely contain the enormous sense of relief she felt. She needed a grown up around her so desperately, someone who would take care of things. And somehow she knew that things would be better with Giles here. They had to be. Buffy had to get better. She had to. Dawn looked down at the pancakes Tara had just put in front of her. Just the thought of Giles coming back gave her some appetite and she dug in, eating her first real meal in days.

Willow spoke up for the first time. "I'll go get him." She tried to make it sound like a good thing. That she was looking forward to it.

Buffy frowned, something in Willow's voice making her nervous. "You'll bring him here, right? I mean, you'll go get him and then you'll come right back here."

Tara gently touched Buffy's arm. "He'll be staying here, Buffy. He still doesn't have a place to live. Willow will bring him here."

Willow nodded. "I...I just..." She gave up and fibbed a little. "I'll bring him right back, I promise." After she spoke with him. After he yelled at her. After he ripped her heart out and broke it into little Willow pieces all over the terminal, or the coffee shop, or wherever they had their talk. She felt like she was going to her own funeral. Willow decided to skip breakfast and head off to school early. She was afraid she'd just throw it back up. She kissed Tara quickly on the cheek and left the house.

Buffy ate her breakfast too. It would help pass the time. She looked at the clock fifteen times before she was through.

##

Giles was apprehensive. He didn't even know why. He was jumpy, and unable to sleep, and couldn't get Buffy off his mind. Giles could still hardly believe she was alive. Every time he thought about it his heart would clench in his chest and his breath would catch. And right now, all he wanted to do was see her and hold her tight until he believed it again.

He had cut short his plans by almost a week, responding to something he had heard in Buffy's voice. Despite her assurances to the contrary he could tell that something was wrong. He had learned to read Buffy quite well over the years. He didn't always know what he was reading, but he knew when it was important, and when it shouldn't be ignored. So he had lied, and told her he'd gotten everything done and that he was coming home. And he'd heard the relief in her voice and known he'd made the right decision. Prosaic business like homes and jobs and money matters could keep. He had a miracle to attend to.

His eyes swept over Los Angeles as the plane started to make its descent. He couldn't wait to get off the plane. The seats were too small for his legs and he desperately needed to stretch them. Giles wondered if someone would come for him. And who that someone might be. He knew who he didn't want it to be.

Giles hadn't yet worked through his feelings about what Willow had done. He wasn't quite sure how to handle it. He certainly didn't feel he'd done an especially fine job of it in the kitchen that night. All he'd done was make her angry and make her touch that darkness inside of her. That darkness that would now always be a part of her, a part she would have to resist, or be torn apart by. He knew she didn't understand and he had yet to think of a way to show her. And his love for her made him long for her to learn her lesson without the pain it took to teach him his.

Giles let out a sigh and when the seatbelt sign went off he stood and retrieved his bag from the overhead compartment. He waited impatiently as the passengers in front of him seemed to take forever to start exiting. As he hit the jetway he slung his bag over his shoulder and enjoyed the sensation of walking, unimpeded by narrow aisles, food and beverage carts, and flight attendants hawking duty-free products.

He saw her the minute he walked through the gateway and he bit back a frustrated bark of laughter. Somehow he wasn't surprised. Somehow he'd known it would be her. Giles caught Willow's eyes and he saw that she was no happier about this than he was. In fact, she looked miserable and somehow that triggered a rush of compassion in him for her. She was so young. And there was no one else who could possibly teach her but him. She was his charge, as were they all. As they all had been for years. Her power and her arrogance didn't make it any less true.

Giles walked up to her, put down his bag and pulled Willow in for a hug. The hug was so unexpected Willow let out a gasp. And then she started to cry, holding on to Giles for dear life. He held her, rocking her gently back and forth, letting her cry, allowing all the other passengers to brush by them.

When it seemed as if she might never stop, Giles started to move them both, moving over to a gate currently not in use, with dozens of empty chairs and privacy. He sat Willow down and continued to hold her as she cried some more. Giles pulled out his handkerchief, ready to offer it to Willow as soon as her tears turned to sniffles.

Through her tears and her misery, the main emotion pulsing through Willow was relief. Relief that Giles still loved her. He was speaking softly to her, telling her everything would be all right, that she'd be all right, that he was here now. And she believed him. It frightened her how far away she'd gone, how willing she'd been to push him away, to keep him away. She could feel things healing inside of her and she found the courage to finally lift her head up and look him in the eyes.

Giles smiled softly at her, his gaze worried, but not angry, not condemning. "I'm thinking we have things to talk about, yes?"

Willow nodded, hiccupping, her breath still catching. Giles handed her his handkerchief and she took it with a shaky smile. "Giles to the rescue." She blew her nose and then using the other end of it she wiped her tears away. The kindness in his gaze undid her and she started to cry again. Giles shifted in the chair until he was a bit more comfortable and he settled in to wait.

Finally her tears came to an end. She found a dry end of the handkerchief and tried to mop her tears up again. She let out a long sigh. She hated to speak, so afraid that Giles would get that look in his eyes again, that angry condemning how dare you mess with my slayer look. But she didn't think he'd go for 'the everything is fine' routine at this point. So she went for the truth. "There's something wrong with Buffy." Another sob tore loose and the strength of it leaving her body hurt her. She laid both her hands on her chest. "Ow."

Giles' eyes grew anxious. "What's wrong with Buffy? Is she all right? Do we need to go?"

Willow shook her head. "No, she's fine right now." Another sob and another spate of tears. Giles pursed his lips and telling Willow he'd be right back he went to the gift shop and bought some tissues. When he returned he handed them to her. Willow let out a giggle. "I'm sorry, Giles."

Giles cocked his head at her. "What exactly are you sorry for, Willow?"

Willow let the word out on a wail. "Everything." More tears. Giles stretched his legs out in front of him, waiting. "You...you were right. I don't think she came back right. Maybe I did something wrong. But I...I didn't mean to...I never..." Willow started crying again in earnest and buried her head in Giles' shoulder. He patted her on the back, feeling a little less patient now, needing to know what was wrong with Buffy.

"Willow, what's the matter with her?"

Giles struggled to understand Willow as she spoke into his shoulder. "She's having nightmares. Bad nightmares. Every night, all night. She screams and screams. We can't get her to stop." Willow pulled back again and lifted her red puffy eyes to Giles. "She won't let anyone near her at night except for Dawn, and it's too much for her. Dawn's freaking out, Buffy won't tell us what's going on, and...and I don't know what to do." Willow's eyes began to plead. "Please don't hate me Giles. I can't stand it for you to hate me. Please tell me you'll help me. I don't want her to be like this. I never thought..." Tears began to roll down her face again.

"Oh Willow, I never hated you. I don't think I could ever hate you. I was frightened for you, frightened at what you might be becoming, frightened at your appalling lack of judgment, your blind faith in magic, with so little understanding of the consequences of what you'd done, what you'd invoked." He put a reassuring hand on Willow's shoulder. "Of course I'll help you. I'll do everything I can to help Buffy, to help you both. I...I don't want anything to happen to any of you." He pulled out a few more tissues and handed them to her. "I need to know the exact spell you did. I need to know everything about it." He felt Willow's body tighten and watched as she pulled away from him. He tightened the grip on her shoulder. "I can't help if you don't tell me. And if you're that reluctant to tell me, that should tell you something."

"What do you mean?"

Giles let out a breath. "If you're reluctant to tell me about the spell I imagine that there are parts of the spell that you feel badly about, that the wiser voice inside of yourself knows wasn't right to do, to participate in." His eyes were kind as they looked at her, but she could see the pain in them. "And that's all right. It's done, and you can't undo it. All you can do from here is learn from it, and listen to that voice inside you, the one I trust, the one you need to trust."

She hesitated still. "I haven't told anyone, not even Tara."

"I won't tell anyone either, I promise. But you have to tell me, or I can't help."

Willow let out a long breath. And then she told him. Giles tried to keep the horror off his face, but he felt it inside of him, ripping through him like a hurricane. It was all he could do not to shake her and tell her what an amazing fool she was. But instead, he closed his eyes and focused on her words, not wanting to miss anything, anything that might be a clue as to what was wrong with Buffy. At least this time Willow's voice wasn't filled with pride. Instead it was filled with shame and fear and Giles clung to that with hope. Hope that Willow hadn't damaged herself irreparably along with Buffy.

When Willow was done she sat there and waited for Giles' reaction. Despite his attempts to keep his face clear of emotions, she had seen several of them flit across his face and none of them had been good. She felt so vulnerable, raw to the touch. Willow waited until he finally opened his eyes. He looked at her. "Oh Willow." He reached out a hand and held her chin, looking carefully at her, searching her eyes. "Are you all right?"

Willow knew what Giles was asking and it frightened her. She nodded. "I think so." Her eyes started getting teary again. "Why? What's going to happen to me?" Her voice sounded so young and fearful.

Giles rubbed one hand over his lower face. "I...I don't know Willow. But, you have opened doors within yourself that can do you some harm." He smiled tightly at her. "I may be able to help, if you'll let me." Willow just nodded, her eyes wide. Giles stood and reached out a hand to Willow. "Let's go see Buffy." Willow took his hand and let him pull her up. He slung his bag over his shoulder again and the two of them headed out.

Buffy was pacing. Willow should have brought Giles home by now. She looked at the clock again, resisting the urge to rip it off the wall and stomp on it until it was nothing but scrap. Dawn watched her pace, and had to resist her own urge to hit Buffy.

They both heard the car pull up and Dawn let out a huge sigh of relief. Giles had just gotten out of the car when Buffy appeared and threw herself into his arms. He folded his arms around her and pulled her in close. He rested his cheek on the top of her head, allowing the sensation of her being alive to slowly seep its way back into his heart. He spoke softly to her. "I still can't believe it."

Buffy laughed softly into his chest. "Me neither." She hugged him so tightly he grunted. She pulled back just the smallest amount. "I'm so glad you're home."

Giles heard a noise and he looked up to see Dawn. He opened up one of his arms inviting her in for a hug as well. She needed no urging and moved in, needing to sense his presence. She felt protected for the first time in days. Protected from the sort of things even a slayer sister couldn't protect her from. Fear and anxiety, loneliness and the terror of a future that might not ever get better.

Eventually Giles shepherded them into the house. He sat on the couch and they each sat on either side of him, his arms around them both, keeping them close. He felt like he was home, that he was back with his family. And he knew he was right where he belonged.

Dawn started to cry and Willow handed Giles a box of tissues, a grin on her face. He rolled his eyes, removed his arm from around Dawn's shoulders and took the box. Giles handed Dawn a couple of tissues. He looked down at Buffy and realized that she had fallen asleep. Giles softly kissed the top of her head and turned his attention to Dawn. "Shh, Dawn, it's all right. Everything will be all right. I promise."

Dawn just nodded and moved closer to him. She rested her head in the crook of his shoulder, still drawing shaky breaths. Giles ran his hand down her hair, soothing her. In time her crying stopped and when he looked down at her she was fast asleep as well.

Willow had gone to make Giles some tea and she walked back into the living room with it only to find Giles smiling down at the two sleeping girls. He sent Willow an appreciative smile for the tea but wasn't sure how to extricate an arm so as to drink it. Willow moved forward to help. She coaxed Dawn to lie down, her head on a pillow by Giles' thigh. One arm still around Buffy, Giles now had one hand free to drink his tea. Willow handed it to him and they sat there quietly. When Giles looked up next, it was to find that Willow had fallen asleep as well, curled up in the chair she'd been sitting on.

That's how Tara found them. She walked in and saw Giles, and then took in the company he was keeping. Giles grinned at her. "I seem to be surrounded by sleeping beauties."

Tara grinned back. "It's the first time anyone's slept well for a week." Her eyes were lit with relief and affection. "I'm so glad you're back."

Giles looked down at Buffy, then at Dawn, and then at Willow. He looked up at Tara again. "I am too."

Tara sat down on the coffee table across from Giles, keeping her voice low. She gestured at Willow. "Did you talk?"

Giles nodded. "Yes, for quite some time." His lips tightened. "I hope I can help."

Tara smiled softly at him. "You already have." She very briefly touched his knee. "You already have." She stood. "I'll go start getting dinner ready." Giles nodded, smiling back at her and then he rested his head back against the couch and closed his eyes as well.

End of Chapter 1

Love Heals All 2

There was an uncharacteristic silence in the car. Xander looked over at Anya

and sighed. Anya heard the sigh and glared at Xander. "I can't help it. I don't want to go over there, it's depressing."

"Anya, I already explained it to you. This is what friends do, they hang out even when it isn't...great."

"Why? I don't understand. What good does it do?"

"Look, it's just one of those things you'll have to take on faith. It's like when Tara got her brains sucked out. Willow didn't leave. She, you know, stuck. When you love someone, you stick. You let them know you care."

Anya sulked. "I don't see how it does any good. They're not any happier when we're there. We just act all gloomy like everyone else."

"Buffy's having a bad time now. I'm sure she'll get through it but right now it's important for her to know we're here for her."

"Right, so she can have a constant reminder of the people who brought her back wrong."

"She's not...wrong." Xander was tired of this conversation and his voice was sharp.

Anya was tired of it too. "Yes she is. All you have to do is look at her. She's unhappy. She's making everyone in that house unhappy. No one's sleeping. It's not getting better, it's getting worse. And all we do is go over there and we all look at each other and we lie. We pretend everything is okay when it's not. We pretend Buffy's okay when she's not. We pretend the spell went exactly the way it was supposed to when it didn't. Something is wrong and we never talk about it." She looked at Xander. "Why don't we talk about it? It doesn't make it go away, it doesn't make it less real. And I don't understand how not talking about it helps." Anya put her hand on his arm and when she spoke again her voice was thick with tears. "I don't understand why you won't at least talk to me about it. Why do you pretend with me? It makes me confused."

Xander pulled over to the side of the road. He put the car in park, turned to

face Anya, and pulled her into his arms. "I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. I don't mean to confuse you. I forget sometimes that there are situations that are still new to you." Xander pulled back from the hug and ran a hand through his hair and continued. "And you're right, I shouldn't pretend with you. So, here goes. Okay." He worked up his nerve. "You're right. There is something wrong." He blew out a breath, feeling an unexpected relief that he had finally said it out loud.

Anya pulled her shoulders back, her chin high. "I knew it. See, I knew it." Then a puzzled look crossed her face again. "So why do we have to pretend everything's okay?"

Xander shook his head. "An, I don't know. I guess because we're scared to tell the truth. Telling the truth means we screwed up big time. And we don't know how to fix it. And it means that maybe we did something really bad to Buffy and no one wants to face it. Sometimes pretending is just easier." His lips tightened in a small smile.

Anya stared at him for a moment, considering his words. Then she pulled him in for another hug. "Okay. We can pretend a little longer. Just don't pretend with me. All right? Just tell me the truth."

Xander hugged her back tightly. "I promise. No more pretending between us."

"Right, just between us and our friends."

"Right, we'll just pretend with our friends." Feeling relieved and anxious, both at the same time, Xander put the car in gear and finished driving to Buffy's. As they headed up to the front door they both noted how quiet the house seemed. Before Xander could knock Tara opened the door with a finger over her lips to get them to be silent. Xander and Anya both nodded and followed her finger as she pointed to the living room. Xander grinned at the sight before him. Giles, Buffy, Dawn and Willow were fast asleep. Xander and Anya tiptoed after Tara into the kitchen.

Xander looked puzzled. "How come Giles is back so soon? I thought he was spending at least another week in England. I mean not that this isn't a good...isn't a great thing, but..." He broke off his sentence and waved his hand as if to say that it really didn't matter.

Anya looked relieved. "So that means we can stop pretending, right?"

Tara looked confused. "Pretending about what?"

"That everything's okay. Now we can talk about it because Giles is back."

Tara looked back and forth between Anya and Xander. Xander tried to clarify. "Anya and me...we were sort of talking about how...not okay Buffy seems to be. She's thinking that maybe Giles will notice and do something about it."

At that moment Willow walked into the kitchen, yawning, and rubbing the sleep out of her eyes. Tara met her halfway and they exchanged a brief kiss. Tara smiled. "Did you have a nice nap?"

Willow nodded, grinning. "Yeah, I can't believe I zonked out like that." She pointed over her shoulder with her thumb, aiming towards the living room. "They look so cute like that. You know, all cuddled together." Willow couldn't believe how much better she felt now that she had told Giles what she had done. It had been an overwhelming secret to keep to herself and she felt pounds lighter having shared it. "Ooh, spaghetti." Her eyes lit up.

Tara watched her, her heart lighter as well. She didn't know what magic Giles had done to make such a difference in her mate but she could have kissed him for it. It was like Willow was back, her Willow.

Even Xander noticed. "Well, we all seem to be in a pretty chipper mood."

Willow grinned. "Giles is back."

Xander nodded. "So, it's unanimous. We're all glad Giles is back."

Dawn walked in at the end of Xander's statement. "I know I am." She looked at the clock on the wall. "She's been sleeping for an hour and she hasn't screamed once." She sent a warning look at everyone. "No one wakes them up." No one had any intention of arguing with her. Tara put the spaghetti in the boiling water and stirred it to keep it from clumping. Then, the phone rang. In the mass confusion to get to it quickly they sabotaged each other and it

wasn't until the second ring that Dawn finally picked up the phone.

Buffy jerked awake when the phone rang. She looked around disoriented for a moment. The phone stopped ringing. She let out a small grunt and dropped her head back down on Giles' chest. Buffy wrapped her arm tighter across his middle, getting as close as she could to him. Her shifting woke Giles up from a sound sleep into a groggy one. In response to her movements he turned his body towards Buffy and wrapped his arms more tightly around her as well. He let out a satisfied sigh and laid his head on the top of hers.

Buffy thought she'd just fall back asleep again but instead she found herself wanting to stay awake. Wanting to enjoy the sensation of actually feeling safe. Enjoying the sound of Giles' heartbeat and the warmth of his body. She'd been miserable without him all week. And now that he was back, this was where she wanted to stay. Protected, loved, embraced. She heard someone softly walk into the living room. Buffy's body grew tense, but she closed her eyes and pretended to still be asleep. In a few moments whoever it was walked softly away, back into the kitchen. Her body slowly relaxed.

Giles spoke in a low murmur. "Are you all right?" He had woken fully when he'd felt her body tense. He tried to sit up but she let out a complaining moan and held him still. Giles brushed some of her hair away, to keep it out of his mouth. "Buffy?"

"I'm okay. Just don't...just don't move."

Giles smiled. "Ever? That might prove difficult."

He felt Buffy shake her head. "I don't care."

Giles let out a soft chuckle. He pulled an arm up to cover his mouth as he yawned. He took off his glasses, tossed them on the coffee table and then rubbed his eyes. Giles hesitated for a second but then wrapped his arm back around Buffy. If he could figure out a way to hold her like this forever, to keep her safe, he would.

It was Buffy's turn to let out a satisfied sigh. They both closed their eyes but neither of them fell back asleep. After several minutes Buffy let out a moan. Giles brushed back her hair again so he could talk. "What's the matter?"

She moaned again. "I have to pee."

Giles laughed softly again. "Ah, our first major obstacle to the forever plan."

"You could come with me."

"No, I think not. I'm afraid this is one fight you'll have to tackle on your own."

She stayed put for a few more minutes, and then, finally, "Shit." She reluctantly sat up, pulling away from Giles. It felt awful to leave her haven. She looked down at her bladder, frowning. "Traitor."

Giles yawned again and then stood. He reached a hand to Buffy and helped her up. Lifting his head he sniffed. "Smells like dinner's ready." He was starving. The airplane food had been unappetizing at best. He smiled down at Buffy. "Go...pee." He grimaced at the word. "We'll rendezvous in the kitchen when you're done." Giles watched Buffy as her eyes darkened. He gently touched the side of her face. "Buffy. What...?"

She shook her head and flashed him that self-mocking smile of hers. "I'm fine. Really." She leaned her head towards him and spoke in a dramatic whisper. "How will I know it's you?"

He looked at her seriously. "I'll be the one standing next to you."

Buffy gave him a shaky smile and slowly turned, heading towards the bathroom. Giles watched her go, concerned. As his stomach growled he sniffed again and walked towards the kitchen. Five heads looked up when he entered. Dawn groaned. "You're awake."

Giles' eyebrows rose. "I'm sorry. Was I supposed to stay asleep?"

Dawn grinned. "No, we were just hoping you'd both get to sleep more."

"So does that mean I have your permission to have some supper? Or must I

away to the couch again?"

Dawn rolled her eyes and he took that as permission. Giles looked at the table and noted that the two empty seats were the end seats, opposite each other. He looked down at Dawn. "Would you mind terribly if I asked you to move? I think she'd..." He didn't finish his sentence but Dawn got it.

Dawn stood picking up her plate. "No, I...I like sitting at the end."

Xander grinned. "That's right. It lets you be the boss." Everyone helped shift Dawn's utensils and napkin down to her.

Tara got up, speaking to Giles. "Why don't you sit down. I'll serve you up a plate."

Giles looked over at her. "Thank you, Tara. Why don't you make that two plates. I'll just go and get Buffy." He headed out of the kitchen and down the hallway, leaning against the wall a few feet away from the bathroom door. When a few minutes had passed he walked to the door and knocked gently on it. "Buffy?"

The door opened. In the harsh light of the bathroom Giles got his first real look at Buffy. She looked...beaten and discarded. His heart ached for her. Opening his arms he pulled her in to his chest. "Whatever it is, whatever's troubling you, I'll face it with you. I promise." He heard her let out a long breath and then he felt her nod. He rubbed her back for a few moments. "Think you can handle some dinner?" He felt her nod again. "Come on then." Keeping his arm around her he headed them both to the kitchen. He sat her down at the end seat and took his seat next to her. She sent a tentative smile to everyone and picked up her fork.

She looked at Dawn. "Who was that on the phone?"

"It was Jennifer." With that Dawn launched into her latest friend dilemma at school and as if a dam had been breached the conversation around the table grew quite animated and chatty. Even Buffy tried to get into the spirit of it although most of her answers were short. She would often look up at Giles, as if to reassure herself that he was really there, and more often than not, she would meet his gaze and realize that he had been watching her. Instead of

wigging her out, like it did when everyone else was always watching her, it made her feel special and cared for.

When everyone was done, Willow and Tara started clearing away the dishes. Buffy looked outside, saw that it was dark. Glancing at the clock, her lips tightened. She glanced up at Giles. "I guess I better go patrol."

Giles' brow furrowed. "Do you think that's wise? You seem so tired."

"Does it matter? It's what I do. It's what I have to do."

Giles winced at the weariness of her words. "Well, perhaps you could not do it tonight."

Buffy shook her head. "It keeps me focused. It makes me tired so I can fall asleep."

"Do you want me to go with you?"

Buffy shook her head again. "No. Spike's been going with me." She smiled tiredly at Giles. "It will give you some time to get settled in."

Giles looked at her for a long moment and then he nodded. "All right. But Buffy, make it a short one tonight. Please."

Buffy nodded and stood. Giles listened to her run upstairs and then back down. He pursed his lips as he heard the front door open and then close behind her. Giles sat there for a minute, his legs stretched out before him, his hands clasped over his stomach. He looked at the floor, his thoughts full of Buffy. Looking up all of a sudden he was somewhat taken aback to find five sets of eyes staring at him. He pinched the bridge of his nose under his glasses and sighed. "So, tell me about these dreams Buffy's having."

##

When Buffy returned it was almost midnight. Giles had already made up the

couch and he was laying on it, still dressed, head propped up on multiple pillows, reading a book. He let out a quiet sigh of relief when he heard her come in. He called out. "Everything go all right?"

Buffy moved over to the couch and after he sat up she sat down next to him. "It was kind of crazy out there tonight. Lots of new vamps." She leaned back against the couch with a discouraged air. "Giles, what's the point? I patrol every night, and every night people get bitten and killed or turned into vampires. What good am I? What difference do I make?" She closed her eyes. "It just seems so pointless. Endless and pointless."

The sadness in Buffy's eyes almost broke Giles' heart. "Buffy..."

She interrupted him. "No, I mean it. What's the point? I don't know how to do this anymore."

Her tone, and her facial expression reminded him of their last conversation before Buffy had gone on to face Glory and die. His heart broke a little more. Giles wracked his brain for the right thing to say but the perfect phrase eluded him. He looked again at her face and the sadness there. Somehow he knew that words weren't the answer, or at least not the first answer, that his fine intellect wasn't what Buffy needed. Giles shifted on the couch until he was closer to her and he opened up his arms. "Come here."

Buffy needed no further urging than that and she was soon leaning against him, her face against his chest, her arms wrapped tightly around his middle. Giles ran a hand lightly down her hair. "Sure you don't need to pee first?" Giles was proud at how easily the word came out this time. Buffy giggled and shook her head. Giles smiled at the sound, and ran his hand down her hair again, and then again. He could feel her start to relax so he didn't stop.

Finally she spoke. "Talk to me Giles."

"What do you want me to say?"

"Tell me why it makes a difference. Tell me something to make me feel better."

He kissed the top of her head. "All right, I'll try." First he backed up, taking Buffy with him, until he was more comfortably leaning against the end of the couch. He thought for a moment. "There have certainly been times when the fate of the world has depended on you. On your courage and your strength. And each time, each apocalypse you've faced..."

He heard her mumble. "We've faced."

Giles smiled. "Yes, each apocalypse that we've faced, well, we've succeeded. The world has gone on to turn another day, the vast majority of the people completely ignorant of how close to death they came, and certainly ignorant of the debt they owe you. And sometimes the cost of winning those battles has been dear." He hugged her tightly. "Too dear."

Buffy responded only by letting out a long breath and holding him back more tightly in return.

Giles continued. "So in terms of human lives, the tally of those you've saved, over and over again, are beyond count, beyond measure. But, at the same time that's a difficult concept to wrap one's arms about, to take solace in. It's almost too large." Giles reached behind him to adjust a pillow. Then he clasped his hands behind Buffy's back. He paused for a moment after that to marshal his thoughts. "Do you know who Albert Schweitzer was?"

Again, a mumble. "No."

"Albert Schweitzer was an amazing man. He was a philosopher, a theologian, a missionary, a musician and a doctor. He spent his life serving his fellow man. Nothing was more important to him than this. In fact, he said that one could only be truly happy when one determined the way in which they could serve and then lived it. He worked for many years in Africa both as a missionary and as a physician. One time he was asked why he did it. He was asked why he continued in this capacity when the suffering was so immense, when what he accomplished was so insignificant in the big scheme of things. After all, there would always be suffering and nothing he did would ever make it go away. So why bother?"

He paused for a moment and Buffy shifted. "What did he say?"

"Well, the general gist of what he said was to bring the concept away from this huge sea of suffering and bring it back down to the suffering of each individual person, and the worth of each of those people. He knew that maybe he couldn't stem the tide of suffering globally. But he was very clear that he could perhaps end the suffering of the person in front of him, and then the next person, and the next. That each life he touched might be better through his love and service. And that was enough. And for those people he did help, it was enough."

Giles unclasped his hands and ran a hand through her hair. He gently worked his fingers through any tangles he encountered. "Buffy, you're right in one way. You will never be able to defeat all the evil. You will never be able to protect everyone. People will die, they always have. But every vampire you kill, every demon you stop, it makes a difference. The person that vampire might have killed, will live. And any people that vampire might have turned will survive. Ripples of life and love grow just as surely from the work you do, as ripples of death and destruction grow from the evil. It is here, I believe, that your service lies. Keeping the balance, protecting whom you can, saving one life at a time. Knowing that each life you save is an inestimable gift, both to that person, and to the people that love him or her, and also to the world."

Buffy didn't respond and Giles was out of words for the time being. He just sat there and held her, hoping that what he'd said was enough, that holding her would lend her his strength. He'd have done anything for her, anything to bring her some peace, to take that sadness out of her eyes.

At some point he realized that Buffy had fallen asleep. He grinned at the soft snores coming out of her. Trying not to jar her he shifted his hands until he got a firmer grip on her and he stood, holding her in his arms. He gently walked upstairs to her bedroom. Laying her down he slipped off her shoes and then covered her with her quilt. Giles brushed the hair off her face and then bent down to place a kiss on her forehead. Suppressing a desire to just stay with her he quickly left the room and headed back downstairs. He settled back down on the couch and picked up his book.

End Chapter 2

After her dreamless nap, everyone in the house was hoping that the dreams might not return. Giles was just getting ready to shut out the light when her first screams rent the air. He was up the stairs and opening the door to her room in seconds. Giles saw Dawn come out of her own room. She hesitated when she saw him. "I'll see to Buffy, Dawn. Go back to bed."

Dawn nodded. Buffy screamed again and Giles moved into the room, shutting the door behind him. He sat down on the bed and lifted Buffy up, pulling her into his arms, trying to wake her and comfort her at the same time. "Buffy, Buffy, wake up. You're dreaming." They had told him about the screams, but what he had imagined was nothing compared to the desperation he heard in her cries. It was almost inhuman, almost past bearing, the hearing of it.

Buffy awoke and when she felt arms around her she recoiled, pushing away. Her eyes opened and she saw it was Giles. She let out a gasp of relief and threw herself back in his arms. "Oh God, it's you. Don't leave me. Don't ever leave me."

Giles just held her as the adrenalin rush that had been released at hearing her scream started to fade and his heart gradually stopped trying to beat its way out of his chest. As his body started to calm down he began to realize that he was in pain. "Buffy, you have to let go a little. You're squeezing too hard."

Buffy let go a little. "Sorry."

"No, no, it's fine. Don't apologize." He made as if to pull away and Buffy moaned and held him tightly again. "I'm not leaving, I just need to sit differently. This will hurt my back before long."

Still barely releasing her grip, as if afraid that Giles would run if he got the chance, Buffy allowed him to shift his body until he was leaning against the headboard. She spoke, her voice shaky. "I'm sorry I woke you up. I can't seem to stop having them."

"Will you tell me about them? Are you willing to talk about it?" When she didn't answer he tried to prompt her. "Is it about waking up in your coffin?" He instinctively held her tighter, just the thought of what she had gone through sending a wave of empathetic fear through Giles, the thought of being buried alive a terrifying one. When there was still no response Giles just sat there,

wondering if she would fall back asleep, wondering if he should stay if she did.

After a few minutes Giles could tell that Buffy was not going to go to sleep any time soon. Her body had not relaxed and she was still hanging on to him for dear life. He tried again. "Buffy, tell me, please. It might help. It might make you feel better."

He heard Buffy let out a long breath. Finally she spoke. "If I tell you something, will you promise not to tell anyone else?" Before he could answer she qualified her request. "You can tell Spike, he already knows."

That surprised Giles. "Spike knows what you're dreaming about?"

She shook her head. "No, but he knows... he knows the thing I need to tell you." She tried to explain. "I had to tell someone, I had to. I couldn't tell...them. And Dawn, she didn't...I couldn't do that to her. And you...you weren't here."

"I won't tell anyone, I promise."

There was another long silence. Giles waited patiently. "When Willow decided to bring me back...she thought...they all thought I was in hell." As Giles waited for her to continue he realized that she had started to cry. She continued, although her words were now interspersed with little sobs. "Why did they think that? Why didn't they make sure first? I was so happy." She started to moan, moans of sadness and despair that tore at Giles' heart.

He thought about the few sentences she had spoken and gasped as he reached the inevitable conclusion. The emotions that tumbled through him almost took his breath away. Anger, sorrow, denial, guilt, fear. He didn't think he was spared one. This time he held on to Buffy for dear life. "Oh God, Buffy. I'm so sorry. Oh God." His own eyes filled with tears and he could feel them running down his face.

He struggled to rein his own emotions in, wanting to be available for Buffy. She was speaking again. "I'm trying so hard, but I hate it here. I mean I don't hate everything. I love Dawn and you. But, I'm so tired, and I've died too many times already. And now I have to do this until I die again. I heard what

you said downstairs about that guy and I want to feel that way but I don't know how. I'm filled with so much anger at them and I know I'm not being there for Dawn." She laughed, a short bitter one. "Spike's been the only one I could even talk to. You know my life's pretty pathetic when Spike feels like my best friend."

"I'm so sorry I left. I never would have gone if I'd known. I never would have left your side."

"I know. And I was going to tell you but by the time you got here there was so much other stuff going on, and then I wanted you to go, so you could come back and never leave again."

"Well, I'm back now, and I'm not going to leave again." He kissed the top of her head. "Buffy, what are the dreams about? Is it always the same one?"

"I'm there, in heaven or wherever I was, and something starts to tear me away. Sometimes it's Willow, or the others, sometimes it's vampires, or demons, sometimes it's my mom pushing me away, but each time I never want to go and no matter how hard I fight, I never win. I never get to stay. And then I'm in the coffin and I can't breath, and it's dark." She stopped abruptly and moved against Giles as if she wanted to burrow inside of him.

Giles' face blanched white in the darkness. He knew he was holding her too tightly, but he trusted to Buffy's slayer strength that she could withstand his grip. He felt so helpless, knowing there was nothing he could do, nothing he could say that would make this all right. All he wanted to do was curl up in a ball and cry. But now was not the time. So, he just held her, rocking her gently. Buffy spoke one last time. "I'm so glad you're here. It feels...it feels like maybe I can stand it, as long as you're here."

"Well, I am here. However you want me, however you need me. I'm here and I'm not going anywhere." He had one more thing he needed to say. "If I could, I'd set the clock back, and I'd keep Willow from doing her spell. But I can't. But I can tell you, and I know it's selfish of me, that I am so glad to have you back. I don't know if it helps you to know that, but having you back means so much to me. I love you so damn much and I'll do anything I can to help you rebuild your life."

For the first time since he had come upstairs and pulled Buffy into his arms

he felt her start to relax. She pulled back from his arms and looked at his face. It was a full moon and it shone brightly through the window. She reached up and touched his face, his tears reflecting the light and looking like streaks of diamonds running down his face. He reached his own hand up and tried to brush them away but she stopped him and did it herself. Buffy smiled at him, her lips trembling. "It helps. It helps to know that. Thank you."

"Oh Buffy." Giles pressed his cheek against hers tightly. The tightness in his chest grew painful. He told Buffy a small lie. "I need to use the bathroom and shut off the lights downstairs. I'll be back in a few minutes."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

Buffy let him go and he stood. He looked at her for another moment and then he left the room. Giles walked downstairs and headed for the back door, quietly opening it and moving to sit on the porch steps. Then, he allowed himself the luxury of grief. He buried his face in his hands and he wept.

Spike watched him from the shadows. When Giles lifted his head again and began to wipe the tears from his face he approached. "She told you?"

Giles started at Spike's voice but then he nodded. He felt completely drained. Giles lifted weary eyes to Spike. "Spike, thank you."

Spike's eyebrows rose. "For what?"

"For being here for her. I think you were the only thing keeping her sane."

Spike scowled. "Well, it wasn't right what they did."

Giles rubbed his eyes again. "No, it wasn't."

"So what are you going to do about it?"

Giles looked up at Spike. "What do you mean?"

"How are you going to make it better?"

"Take care of Buffy first. Then deal with the rest." He blew out a breath.

"Maybe I'll take her away for a few days. Get her away from here." He glanced up at the house, up towards Buffy's bedroom. "I need to get back to her." He stood.

"Where will you take her?"

Giles shook his head. "I don't know yet. Someplace peaceful. Someplace she doesn't have to think, or do anything unless she wants to. Someplace she can start to find some pleasure in life again." He started to turn the knob to go back in the house. He looked back at Spike one more time. "I'll need your help. If I take her away, will you watch over things until we get back?"

Spike nodded. "I'll watch over things, and I'll keep an eye out for Dawn."

Giles nodded and slipped back inside. He shut off the lights and walked upstairs. It felt odd to be heading back into Buffy's bedroom. He hesitated at the door once he had it open.

Buffy turned on the bed and spoke. "What took you so long?"

"Sorry."

"Come here."

Giles walked over to the bed. She reached up and took his hand, pulling on it. He sat gingerly on the bed. She spoke. "You'll still stay with me, right?"

Giles watched her in the moonlight. It accentuated the angles on her face, deepening the shadows under her eyes. He felt a surge of love and compassion for her. Giles softly brushed her cheek. "Whatever you need. I meant that."

She patted the pillow next to her and Giles lay down, feeling unaccountably shy. Buffy seemed to have no such hesitancy as she simply grabbed his arm and pulled it around her until he was spooned behind her. She pressed against him until she felt completely cocooned by him. Reaching for the covers she drew them up over the two of them. Giles lay there, attuned to her, aware of her body relaxing and her breathing slowing down and becoming more regular. He never thought he'd fall asleep, not this close to her, not in this position, but he did and they lay there together the rest of the night, in a dreamless sleep.

##

When Willow opened her eyes again the sun was shining through the window. She gasped and sat up. Tara opened a sleepy eye. "What?" Her voice sounded grumpy.

Willow's voice was filled with amazement. "It's morning, the sun's up."

"So?"

"She slept all night. She just had that one dream and then she slept all night. We slept all night." Willow couldn't believe how great she felt. She bounded out of bed and headed into the hallway. The door to Buffy's bedroom was still closed. Quietly she turned the knob and poked her head in. Her eyes softened as she saw the tableau in front of her. Buffy and Giles were still fast asleep, arms tight around each other. Willow felt a presence behind her and turning her head slightly she saw it was Tara. Tara was grinning. Then Willow saw Tara put her fingers to her lips as if to shush somebody and suddenly Dawn was poking her head in. Dawn grinned too. Willow closed the door and they stood in the hallway all grinning at each other.

Tara motioned to the door. "It's like he's the ultimate security blanket."

Willow was almost bouncing. "They look so cute together."

Dawn rolled her eyes. "Eeww. They had all their clothes on. Get your mind out of the gutter."

Willow would not be denied. "I know, but it's...it's so romantic. He flies in from across the ocean and rescues her." She let out a sigh. They all grinned again and headed downstairs to a quiet breakfast.

##

It was almost noon and the house quiet when Buffy fully woke up. She had woken up multiple times throughout the night. She'd had no more dreams since that first one that had brought Giles up to her. The potential for the dreams had been there but every time one began Giles had been there. He'd been there in her dreams, holding her, keeping her fears at bay, making her feel loved. Each time she'd jerked awake as if fearful to find it only a dream, and each time, he'd been there in real life too. Large and strong and warm, lying next to her.

He tossed and turned a lot and that woke her too. But he'd never stopped touching her. Granted it was a small bed and touching was to a certain extent unavoidable. Yet each time he'd repositioned himself he'd then pulled her to him, or searched for her hand, or thrown an arm over her body. It was as if while sleeping he was able to ignore his usual reserved manner around her and instead claim his right to be this close to her.

He'd woken once and risen. When she heard the door open she had snapped awake, fearful he was leaving. But she'd heard him pad down the hall to the bathroom and then in a minute heard the toilet flush. Then he'd returned. Buffy smiled when she thought of the conversation they had had.

Giles had thrown himself in the bed with a grunt. Buffy let out a spontaneous gasp as his heavy weight flopping down almost flipped her out of the bed. He lifted sleep filled eyes to her and mumbled. "Sorry."

Buffy let out a nervous giggle. "It's all right."

Giles grunted again. "We need a bigger bed."

That statement startled Buffy. "What?"

His voice was groggy but still clear enough. "We need a bigger bed. This one isn't big enough for both of us." With that he turned over on his stomach and after laying an arm across her middle, right under her breasts, he started lightly snoring.

Buffy stared at him. She couldn't believe the casual way he had said that, as if it was his intention to always sleep with her. Which was fine with her, the sleeping part anyway. And she had to admit she was really liking the touching part so far. Even if it had all just been hugging stuff. Then she started feeling nervous. She wondered. "Giles." She got no response. She poked him a little and spoke his name louder. "Giles." He grunted. "Who am I?" She suddenly started to wonder if he thought he was with someone else.

Giles let that question slowly settle in his brain. He knew it could be excused because of jet lag and a couple of days with no sleep but he didn't like that his thoughts were so muddled. For the life of him Buffy's question made no sense. He tried to come up with a witty response but it was beyond him. Instead he growled. "Just go back to sleep, Buffy."

Buffy let out a relieved breath. She smiled. "Okay." Buffy secured the arm across her stomach with both her hands and did as instructed and they had both drifted off to sleep again.

Giles was on his side now, facing away from her. But one of her arms was around him, and her hand was clasped in one of his, tucked under his chin. She rose up and looked down at him. Buffy had to admit she felt better. Not great, not the hills are alive great, but better. She figured that bad dreams and no sleep for weeks probably hadn't been helping much with the attitude. One good night's sleep had helped, almost as much as the man lying beside her had.

Then her thoughts started to intrude. Thoughts of her friends, of what they'd done, thoughts of slaying, of dying. Giles' voice interrupted her reverie. "Stop that."

"Huh?"

"Whatever you're thinking. Stop it." His voice was thick from sleep.

Buffy's eyebrows rose. "How did you...?"

He turned to face her. "I can feel it in your body. You got so tense all of a sudden." He looked past her to the clock and his eyes widened as he took in the time. "Good Lord, is it really noon?"

Buffy nodded, a grin on her face, grateful for his distraction. "When's the last time you slept this good?"

Giles thought about it for a moment. He shook his head and let out a short laugh on exhalation. "I don't...I haven't the foggiest idea. Years, I expect."

"Like maybe since a certain fifteen year old walked into your library?"

Giles laughed again. "Yes, that sounds about right." Giles yawned and rolled out of bed. "I'll be right back." Again Buffy listened to him pad down the hall, she listened to the toilet flush, to him brushing his teeth, and then his footsteps back to the bedroom.

She met him at the door. "My turn." She pointed back to the bed. "Be there when I get back." Buffy didn't wait for an answer. Giles yawned again and decided not to argue. He crawled back into bed and was actually dozing off again when Buffy crawled in next to him. She lay on her side facing him. "I have a new forever plan."

"Hmmm?" When she didn't speak any more he opened his eyes and looked at her. Her face was so serious. "What? What's your new plan?"

"We stay here forever. With occasional trips to the bathroom. Dawn can bring us our meals."

Giles snorted. He rolled over until he was on his back. "This bed's not big enough."

"I know. You said that already."

Giles rolled back on his side. "Excuse me?"

"Early this morning. You told me we had to buy a bigger bed. That this one wasn't big enough for both of us."

Giles' eyebrows rose at her words and he could feel himself blushing. He opened his mouth to try and make what he'd said somehow sound more proper and then he just let out his breath and gave it up. "Well, it's not."

Buffy nodded. "So, what do you think of my plan? We could probably order a new bed over the phone and have it delivered."

Giles sat up, one leg drawn up, one hanging off the side of the bed. He cocked his head to the side and looked at Buffy, shaking his head. At the chagrined look on Buffy's face he hastened to explain. "No, I have a better plan."

"You have a plan? When did you come up with a plan?"

"Last night. Do you want to hear it or not?"

"I'm all ears." Suddenly Giles felt shy again. He plucked at the bedspread, hesitant. Buffy reached out and with a finger under his chin, lifted his face. "Come on, spill."

"Well, I was wondering, and you're certainly under no obligation to want to, but I was thinking that maybe you and I could go away for a few days. Away from here, away from everyone."

"Away from here?" Buffy's voice was tinged with hope. "Just you and me?"

Giles reached for one of her hands. "Yes, just you and me. Someplace where you can rest and not have any responsibilities except growing stronger and finding your place again."

Giles watched as Buffy's eyes went from hope-filled to cautious again. "How about patrolling?"

"Spike said he'd take care of it."

At that, Buffy's eyebrows rose. "You were quite the busy boy last night, weren't you?"

Giles ignored that. "Well, yes or no?"

"Where would we go?"

"Anywhere you want. We could find someplace beautiful. The mountains, perhaps, or the ocean. Someplace where the brochures say that it's a little bit like heaven."

Buffy smiled, her eyes filling with tears. "You'd take me someplace like that?"

"I'll take you anywhere. And if you're not sure, we can go to a travel agency and see what's available." He touched her cheek softly. "But surely there's some place you always wanted to go."

"It might be expensive."

Giles waved his hand as if to negate her concerns. "I'm not without resources." He frowned. "Within reason."

The word almost left her mouth without her volition. "Hawaii."

Giles smiled. "Hawaii it is." He looked at the clock again. "I better get up so I can start making arrangements."

Buffy smiled back. "Can I go with you? Maybe we could go and get some breakfast first."

"You feel up to it?"

"You know what? I feel pretty good."

"You don't know how glad I am to hear it." He leaned forward and kissed her forehead. Giles leaned back and the two of them just looked at each other, each getting caught in the affection in the other's eyes. The moment stretched on until it almost became unbearable, a fork clearly being reached, one branch of which Giles was not yet ready to take. He broke eye contact and stood. "I'll just go and get dressed." Buffy nodded, not saying a word, her own feelings a little jumbled, both relieved and disappointed that Giles had gotten up and moved away.

End Chapter 3

Love Heals All 4

They'd been here now for four days. They had a small house on a beach in Maui, surrounded by huge bushes with flowers the size of dinner plates that gave them a wonderful sense of privacy and made them feel as if they had the entire island to themselves. The wonderful sound of the surf was only yards from both their bedroom window and the living room. Giles couldn't ever remember being this rested in his life. Ever.

They'd made their escape with a minimum of fuss. Giles decided that everyone had been too busy looking forward to an entire week without Buffy's dreams to make a fuss about them leaving. The only tricky part had been letting Willow know that Spike knew how to get a hold of them if an emergency arose. Willow thought that she ought to have their number but Giles was adamant about it. He didn't want Buffy to answer the phone and have it be Willow, or any of the four of them. Not that he'd told Willow that, of course. He promised that they would call and check on Dawn. And he had. He'd called every night from a pay phone and made excuses as to why Buffy was unavailable.

And to a certain extent she was unavailable. Buffy had withdrawn. Not to an unhappy or despondent place. But rather, or so Giles thought, to a healing place. A place where she could start to find herself again and begin rebuilding. She'd sit on the beach for hours. She'd eat when food was placed in front of her and walk hand-in-hand with Giles down the beach or through the resorts. Buffy continued to crave his touch and that alone kept him

reassured. If she had pulled away from him he might have feared for her. But instead, he trusted, and he just stayed beside her. And often hours would go by with only a few words being spoken.

They slept together every night after a brief futile effort on Giles' part of suggesting separate beds. The sleeping arrangement was still platonic in nature but there were more moments, moments thick with potential and need. But each time Giles pulled back and Buffy let him.

They were sitting out on their little beach now. Buffy looked down at Giles from her chair. He was lying on a lounge chair, wearing shorts and a t-shirt. He'd gotten a tan so quickly. The tropical breeze was ruffling his hair and he was lost in a book. A fiction book. Some detective thriller by the look of it. She watched him and loved him. She couldn't believe how much she loved him. And she couldn't believe that she was starting to feel alive again, and glad to be alive. She tried hard not to think of home. Home still felt bad. She spoke. "I have a new forever plan."

She'd spoken so rarely today that her words actually penetrated his concentration. Giles turned to look up at her. "What?"

"A new forever plan. We stay here. Forever."

Giles nodded. "All right."

Buffy leaned back in her chair. "Good, that's settled."

Giles bit back a smile. "Should we send for Dawn?"

Buffy shook her head. "No, not yet."

Giles watched as her eyes grew dark and pensive. He sat up and swung his legs around so he was facing her. "Buffy, are you ready to talk yet?"

Her eyes grew anxious. "About what?"

"About what Willow did, what the four of them did. How you plan to deal with

that. It won't go away. It will still be there when we get back."

"I thought we weren't going back." Giles sent her one of his looks. She got off her chair and knelt in front of him. "Can we just pretend a little bit longer?" He opened his knees up so she could move in close enough to rest her head on his chest. "I know we need to talk, but not yet."

Giles ran his hand down her hair. "All right. We'll pretend a little longer." For some reason the fates were working in their favor. Spike had told them that the Hellmouth was relatively quiet. Not so quiet so as to make Spike nervous, but quiet enough that he felt more than equal to the task. And Dawn seemed fine. Giles was in no hurry to get back. He loved this time with Buffy. He loved sleeping with her and waking up with her, and engaging in the intimacies of sharing a house with her. Giles wanted to pass one thought on to her. "Just remember that you're not required to live with them, with Willow and Tara. We...you can ask them to leave, or you can sell the house and buy something smaller, for...for you and Dawn."

Buffy lifted her head smiling softly at his stuttering. At the words he wasn't saying. She said it instead. "For me and Dawn and you."

Giles laid the back of his fingers against one of her cheeks. He had to clear his throat. "If you'd like."

Their eyes caught again. Giles grew very still as Buffy lifted a hand and ran it through his hair. The sensation elicited a small moan from him and at the sound he jerked back a little as if to once again break the moment. Buffy shook her head. "Don't." She ran her hand through his hair again. Giles closed his eyes, surrendering to the sensation. His own hand moved to her neck, and he could feel her pulse beating rapidly under his fingers. He knew his own heartbeat could match hers. He opened his eyes again. Together they bridged the distance between them and their lips met.

At first it was inquisitive, a testing kiss, an opportunity to taste each other and see how they fit together. But it rapidly escalated to something that was so much more. A staking of territory, a physical claiming of what had already happened in their hearts and minds. Their tongues mated as their bodies moved closer together. Giles pressed fevered kisses down her face and neck eventually making his way back up and claiming her lips again.

Giles pulled Buffy up onto the lounge chair with him. They both reveled in the sensation of their bodies pressing fully together. They had been this way countless times over the past few days but now their skin was on fire, the sensation so different from what it had been. The safe haven had been replaced by a passion so rich it stunned them both.

They couldn't touch each other enough. Their pace was frantic as if they'd been enduring days of foreplay only to finally now quench their desire. Soon the lounge chair became too restrictive. As one, lips still welded together, they moved towards the house, divesting each other of clothes until they fell into bed naked. Giles' hands ran down the length of Buffy's body before returning to her breasts. His mouth soon followed the path his hands had made. Buffy arched, gasping, her breath leaving her body in fevered pants as he first took one breast and then the other in his mouth.

Buffy held his head to her breast with one hand while the other raked down his back. She reached between them to feel his erection that had been teasing her with its hardness against her thighs. Giles let out a cry of pleasure when her hand found her target. Giles moved up her body to recapture her lips. He couldn't control the movement of his hips thrusting as her hand moved slowly up and down the length of him. Giles went to nibble on an ear and his warm and rapid breathing sent shivers of desire down Buffy's spine.

Her legs opened under him and she guided him with her hand to her core. There was nothing she wanted more right now than to feel him inside of her. When he thrust into her for the first time Buffy began to cry, her emotions overpowering, as she felt truly alive for the first time since her resurrection. Giles kissed the tears off her face, one look at her reassuring him that they were good tears, healing tears.

Now that he was in her, now that they were truly joined, the frantic need began to recede. Giles watched Buffy, watched the passion and love on her face as he slowly pulled out and then entered her again. She grinned at him, at his teasing, at the joy she felt at feeling alive again. He grinned back at her. Giles kept on teasing her with his lovemaking until Buffy couldn't stand it any more. Using her strength she flipped them over.

She giggled at the surprised look on Giles' face but then watched as he began to take full advantage of this new vantage point by lifting his head up and suckling on her breasts again. Now she began to tease him, eliciting moans from him every time she plunged back down. Giles' hands moved up

and down her back, down to her bottom, and then to her hips. He began to guide her movements, speeding her up, setting a steady pace. She leaned down and started kissing him again, their tongues mating in time with their bodies.

Giles felt her stiffen as she started to climax. He swallowed her cries with his kisses and then he flipped them over again. Buffy wrapped her legs around him as he continued the pace he had set and found his own release. They continued kissing, even as Giles rolled them until they were resting on their sides, facing each other. Their lips and tongues were far from sated and the exploration continued. Giles' lips trailed down her jaw and to her neck. He gently bit her and then softly laughed. Buffy pulled her head back so she could see his face. "What?"

"I was just thinking what a good thing it is that I'm not a vampire."

Buffy's eyes widened. "Why? I mean, besides the obvious reasons."

"Because if I were, I'd be biting you and drinking you down because I cannot get enough of you. It's as if you were a drug."

Buffy smiled. "We can stay here until you've had all the Buffy goodness you can stand."

Giles grinned. "A new version of the forever plan?"

Buffy nodded. "Well, we had a staying in bed forever plan, remember?" At his nod she continued. "But you said the bed was too small."

Giles looked at the bed they were on now. "Yes, but now we seem to have quite a respectably sized bed. We'll need to get one at least this big."

"We will, huh?"

"Yes, for our house, for our bedroom, which, by the way, will be very far away from Dawn's bedroom." He kissed her again for a long time and then he lay his head down on a pillow just looking at her. One hand was playing with one

of her breasts, watching her skin pucker as he ran a finger lightly over her nipple. Giles shook his head, letting out a small silent chuckle.

Buffy got a crooked smile on her face. "What now?"

"I can't believe this happened." He shook his head again. "I can't believe you're alive, I can't believe you're lying here naked with me, I can't believe I just made love to you, I can't believe how much I love you." He laid a hand on his chest. "I mean, I've always loved you, but this, what I feel in here..." He shook his head one more time, words actually failing him.

Buffy's eyes grew bright. She cupped one of his cheeks with her hand. "Thank you, thank you for loving me so much. Thank you for showing me that I could love again, that I could want to live again." A single tear fell down her face. She whispered softly. "You saved me from a scary place, a place I didn't know how to get out of. But in you came, with all your love and you lit the place up so I could find my way out. To this, to us, to a reason to be alive."

At her words Giles moved to hold her tightly to him. Buffy returned the hug but then pulled back when she felt his body vibrate with another small laugh. She rolled her eyes. "What is it with you and the laughing?"

Giles bit his lip. "Just happy, I guess."

Buffy shook her head. "Nope, you were having another thought. I can tell."

Giles grinned. "It just seems fitting somehow. I've spent the last six years of my life doing everything I can to keep you alive and now..."

"And now you get to do it in a whole new way." Giles nodded and ran a hand down her body again, his eyes following, admiring her curves, and the softness of her skin. Buffy grinned. "Sort of gives a whole new meaning to the job of Watcher."

Giles let out a satisfied sigh. "I can't ever remember liking my job more."

Buffy giggled. "I hope you're going to do more than watch, though."

His eyes grew mischievous as he leaned over to kiss her again. "I've always believed that a Watcher should know his Slayer as intimately as possible."

Buffy smiled coyly at him. "So, lots of intimacy is recommended?"

Giles flicked his tongue over her lips. "Oh yes. I'm sure it's in the Slayer Handbook. Chapter six, I believe."

Buffy pulled him even closer. She smiled against his lips. "Well, you know what an obedient Slayer I am."

Giles snorted. But instead of answering her he just kissed her.

End of Part 4

Love Heals All 5

Buffy came into the living room, her hair still wet from a shower. She watched as Giles slowly hung up the phone, a pensive look on his face. Buffy frowned. "What's the matter? You have a look on your face."

Giles took off his glasses. "Yes, well, that was the leasing agent. I'm afraid there's been a serious hitch in the..." He thought for a moment, "...well, in one of the forever plans." He grinned. "I'm afraid I've lost track."

Buffy walked across the room and sat next to him. "I thought we had this place as long as we wanted it."

"I thought so too, but apparently that was only because she didn't have any other clients. But now she has and they arrive on Saturday."

Buffy let out a worried sound. "But that's only four days from now."

"Actually three. We need to be out on Friday."

Buffy whined. "I don't want to leave." She sent a pleading look Giles' way. "Can't we just find another place?"

"Yes, I suppose we could but..." Giles put his glasses back on. "We've been here nine days already. The last five of which have been the best of my life, but perhaps it's time to think about going home."

"What, you didn't like the first four days?"

Giles rolled his eyes. "No, until I started having sex with you I couldn't stand you. I'm surprised it's taken you this long to figure that out."

Buffy stuck her tongue out at him. Then she just looked depressed. The past five days had been the best of her life too. She leaned into Giles and rested her head in the crook of his shoulder. Buffy let out a long sigh.

Giles' lips tightened. "Buffy, I want to ask you a question and I want you to just answer it as quickly as you can, without thinking about it too much. All right?" Buffy nodded. "What's the main reason you don't want to go home? Answer quickly now."

"Will..." Buffy stopped the rest of the word from leaving her lips, old habits of protecting her best friend still taking over.

Giles held her shoulders and gently pushed her away from him so he could see her face. "Willow? And the other three?" Buffy couldn't look at him but she nodded.

Giles spoke gently, almost fearing her answer to his next question. "Is it still so horrible to be alive again?"

Buffy did raise her eyes to his then, concern for him on her face. "No, no, it's not that. Giles, I'm glad I'm alive. You need to believe me."

Giles gently smiled. "I'm relieved to hear you say that." He pursed his lips.

"Why then? Why is it still so hard for you to face them...her?"

Buffy thought for a moment, trying to sort out what she was feeling. "That they did it for themselves. That they didn't even think that maybe I could be in heaven. That once I was back, no one even tried to figure it out, just kept waiting for me to be so grateful." She touched Giles' cheek. "I mean, I guess things have worked out, but I don't know how to be with them anymore. They were my best friends and now everything's a lie."

"I think you may be judging them too harshly."

Buffy snorted. "This from the man who ripped Willow a new one."

"I...I yelled at Willow for the magic she did. It was dangerous and foolhardy. But, Buffy, I don't believe they only did it for themselves. There was reason to believe that you had been sucked into a demon dimension, similar to Angel being sucked into the vortex that Acatlha created. A demon did create the rift you threw yourself into. I believe they honestly thought they were delivering you from eternal torment. And they also brought you back because they love you, and they were miserable and lost without you."

"Weren't you miserable and lost?"

Giles kissed her quickly on the lips. "As miserable and lost as I could be."

"But you didn't do a spell to bring me back."

"No, I didn't. But I thought of it. I was tempted for a few moments. But I am a bit wiser about magic than Willow at this stage of my life, and a bit wiser about the fact that I understand that we sometimes lose people we love. And we generally can't get them back."

"But, couldn't they have done some sort of seance thing first, tried to talk to me, see how I was doing?"

Giles bit back a smile. "I doubt they'd have been successful. And you and I both know that once Willow makes up her mind to do something there isn't

much that will deter her."

"So you're saying this is one whole big love thing."

"No, it's not quite that simple. It was certainly born of love, with a dash of stubbornness and arrogance and youth thrown in. And some selfishness as well. But none of them would have purposefully hurt you, nor if they'd known, would have taken you from your well deserved rest."

"Can I ask you something?"

"Of course."

"Why did you leave? I mean, didn't you think they'd need you? How did you think they'd survive on the Hellmouth without you? I don't get that."

Giles let out a long breath. "That's a fair question. Although I think you overrate my usefulness."

"You kept me alive."

"Yes, but you were the Slayer. I was trained to keep you alive. We were a team, you and I. Spike and Willow are almost as formidable a team. Spike with his vampire strength and Willow with her powers. They were bailing me out of danger more often than not." Giles' eyes grew sad. "I knew Willow and Tara could protect Dawn better than I could, until they reached your father. Anya couldn't get rid of me fast enough." Giles grinned a little at that, and then he lost the grin. "I don't know why I left, Buffy. I...I was lost without you. Rudderless. I was tired." He grinned again, but Buffy could see the pain there. "I was trying to bond with your...with the Buffybot. It all got to be too much. I lost my perspective. I wanted to be home, my home, my homeland. I really believed they'd be all right without me." He barked out a laugh. "Then the day I leave they bring you back. Perfect bloody timing."

"So, you're not feeling tired and rudderless now?"

Giles cupped her cheek with his hand. "I've never been less tired or more

clear about what I'm doing in my entire life."

"Ready to go back and be my Watcher, help me slay the bad guys?"

"I'd do that forever, as long as you need me."

Buffy's lips trembled a little. "I need you now more than ever." Giles captured her lips in a kiss and they embraced. Her voice was muffled against his neck when she spoke again. "You know I'll probably die again." She pulled back, her eyes dark and serious. "You know that right? Can you go through that again?"

Giles' eyes closed in pain at the thought. "No. I can't. When next you die, it will be my time too."

Buffy's voice was nervous. "What does that mean?"

"You know exactly what that means."

Buffy did know what he meant. "But, you'd be really, really sure I was dead before you did anything, right?"

Giles barked out another laugh. "Yes, I'd be really, really sure you were dead, including a thorough interrogation of Willow. I have no desire to enact our own adaptation of Romeo and Juliet."

"Okay, so a new and grisly version of the forever plan." She grimaced at the thought. "I guess it would be best if I just don't die again."

Giles looked at her with all the love in his heart. "Yes, that would be best." He cocked his head to the side. "But, back to Willow. You have a couple of choices ahead of you."

"You mean to tell or not to tell?"

Giles smiled. "Succinctly put."

"I was succinct? Cool." She frowned. "What do you think I should do?"

"You need to make your own decision about it, but I can tell you that I don't believe the friendships will survive if you keep this hidden. Friendships seldom survive painful secrets of this magnitude."

"Won't Willow, like, totally freak out?"

"Yes, I believe she will, as you say, freak out. But I think that may be a good thing. It may really teach her that none of this is a game. That the truth is seldom clear, that great harm can be caused by the use of such powerful magic. This may convince her more than anything I could ever say." Giles smiled at Buffy. "It will, I think, be easier for her to hear it now, when you seem happier, and can perhaps...well..." Giles hesitated.

Buffy picked up his sentence. "Can perhaps tell Willow that I'm glad she brought me back, that I'm glad I have another chance?" At Giles' shy nod she moved to straddle him. "That if she hadn't done the spell that I would have never figured out how wonderful you are and how great a lover you are?" She rubbed herself against him and grinned as he groaned. "Maybe tell her that without her I'd never have fallen in love with you or you with me, that I'd have missed out on this forever love of ours?"

Giles was nibbling on one of her breasts through her shirt. "Yes, something like that."

"Don't you think she'll be crowing like a rooster if I tell her all of that?"

Giles pulled back from his nibbling. "Hmmm. Perhaps you're right. Best tone it down a bit." He resumed his new favorite pastime. Buffy laughed and stood. Giles looked like someone had taken his toys away.

She reached out a hand. "Come on. I think it's bedtime." Giles grinned and taking her hand he rose and they headed for the bedroom.

When they got to the bedroom, Buffy hesitated. She was frowning. He looked at her, a puzzled expression on his face. "What's the matter?"

"What did you mean when you said you'd made a new acquaintance?"

Giles' eyebrows rose. "Excuse me?"

"When you first got back, you said you'd made a new acquaintance, which was statistically impossible, or something like that. It was a woman, wasn't it?"

Giles' eyes widened. "You can't possibly be jealous." He started to grin.

Buffy started to pout. "Was she pretty?"

Giles laughed and he pulled her in close. "Oh Buffy. I don't even remember her name. How could I, with you here next to me?"

"You sure?" Giles laughed again and proceeded to show her just how sure he was.

End Chapter 5

Love heals All 6

They'd had another wonderful day. They had gone out and spent the day sightseeing. They'd gone whale watching and strolled through Lahaina, shopping and eating. Every time someone mistook them for newly-weds Buffy and Giles had just grinned at each other.

Now they were back in their house, lying on the couch, the sliding glass door open as they listened to the surf. Buffy let out a sad little moan. "Only two more days." She turned to face him. "Will you promise me something?"

"Anything."

"Promise me that at least once a year that we do something like this. Just the two of us. That we get away."

"I promise. I can't promise we can do it for this long. That rather depends on whether Spike chooses to stay around."

"Why wouldn't he stay around?"

Giles rolled his eyes at her. "Buffy, he's not going to be thrilled that you and I are together. I wouldn't be surprised if he left as soon as he found out."

Buffy sighed. "Well, we'll at least be able to take some long weekends, right?"

"Absolutely."

"I mean it."

"I do too, Buffy. We'll find the time, we'll figure something out." At the sure tone in his voice Buffy relaxed, satisfied. They lay there in silence, enjoying each other's presence, listening to the ocean, watching the moonlight as it reflected on the water like a million sparkling diamonds.

The phone suddenly rang and without thinking about it Buffy answered it. "Maui's House of Bliss."

There was a moment's silence on the other end. "Buffy?"

"Spike?" Buffy looked at Giles. "It's Spike."

Giles rolled his eyes again. "Lovely."

Spike spoke cautiously. "You sound good."

"I am good, I'm better than good. I'm perfect." She let out a happy sigh.

Spike was confused. "Uh, great. Is your Watcher there?" He wondered if

Giles had been giving her drugs.

"He's right here." She handed the phone to Giles and then started working her way down his body, kissing him.

Giles' voice was strained when he spoke. "Yes, Spike." He put a hand over the mouthpiece and whispered sharply to Buffy. "Buffy, stop that." When she continued her journey south he let out an involuntary groan.

Spike didn't miss any of it with his enhanced hearing. "You're shagging her, aren't you?"

Giles started to blush. "I...we..." Giles pulled himself together. "I don't believe that's any of your affair."

Buffy looked up at Giles, wondering what Spike had asked him. She grabbed the phone. "What did you just ask Giles?"

Spike's voice was harsh. "I asked him if the two of you were shagging."

Buffy grinned. "Like bunnies."

Giles grabbed the phone from her. "Spike, why did you call?" Buffy pouted but at the look on Giles' face she just sat back and watched the conversation.

"Did you take her there so you could shag her?"

"No, I did not bring her here so I could shag her. Spike, you know what she was like. You know why I took her away."

"So, how long did it take? When did this all start?"

"A few days ago. Not, as I've already said, that it is any of your concern."

"Jesus, if I'd thought that would fix her, I'd have had a go at her myself." Giles

grew tense and Spike could feel Giles' glare from across the Pacific Ocean. An uncomfortable silence stretched between them. Finally Spike sighed. "Don't get your knickers in a twist, I'm just razzin' you."

Giles tried to relax. "Yes, well, ha ha. Why did you say you were calling? Is there a problem?"

"So, you two, you're all couply now?"

Giles rubbed a hand over his face. "Spike, why did you call?"

"She's really okay?" Giles could hear the concern in the vampire's face.

"Yes, I believe she is."

"Are you coming home anytime soon?"

"I booked the tickets today. We'll be home in two days."

"And she's ready to have a go at being the Slayer again?"

"So it appears. Will she be able to count on your assistance?"

"You don't play fair, Watcher."

"When it comes to Buffy's life, I can't afford to play fair. She'll stay alive longer with your help. We all will."

There was a long pause. "Well, it's not like I have a lot of options with this bloody chip in my head." Another pause. "But, if you ever hurt her..."

Giles interrupted him. "You know I never will."

"It's the only reason I'm not going to rip your bloody throat out."

Giles put a hand on his throat, wincing. Buffy got a dangerous look in her eye. "Is he threatening you?"

Giles shook his head. He spoke into the phone again. "So, I'm sure this wasn't intended as a social call. What's going on?"

"I just wanted to call and warn Buffy."

"Warn her about what?"

Spike hesitated. "I sort of let the cat out of the bag."

"And which cat would this be, exactly?"

"The heaven one."

"Ah." He looked at Buffy. "Willow knows."

Buffy knew exactly what Giles was talking about. She took the phone away from Giles. "How did that happen?"

Spike started getting agitated. "She's been in a snit ever since Giles gave me your number instead of giving it to her. She was going on and on about it tonight, all high and mighty about how she brought you back, and how you wouldn't even be there in Hawaii if it wasn't for her, and who did I think I was not giving her the number and..."

Buffy interrupted him. "I get it. It's all right. I was going to tell her when I got home anyway. Actually, I kind of owe you a thank you. I wasn't really looking forward to telling her...them." Her face scrunched up. "How is she?"

"A bloody basket case."

Buffy's face grew nervous. "You don't think she'll do anything, do you?"

Spike shook his head. "Nah, she's too busy crying her eyes out." Spike paused. "This thing, this thing with Giles. Is it serious? Or are you just having a poke?"

"It's way serious." Buffy lifted her eyes to look at Giles. She shifted back into his arms. "Spike, I'm sorry. I didn't..."

"Don't say it Slayer. Just get home so you can pick up the bloody pieces."

"I'll call Willow tonight."

There was a long silence. When Spike spoke again, his voice was tight. "I'll watch your back, Slayer. Yours and Dawn's, and your bloody Watcher's."

Buffy's eyes grew moist. "Thank you."

"Just don't expect me to be doing a damn jig when I see the two of you together."

"I won't. No jig expectations."

"Damn straight." Buffy heard him light a cigarette. "Two days?"

"Two days."

"Good. Right then." Another pause. "Well, I'm off."

"Okay, bye Spike." He was gone. Her face was thoughtful as she hung up on her end. She looked up at Giles.

He smiled softly at her. "I do believe he really loves you."

She smiled her crooked smile again. "Does that wig you out?"

Giles shook his head. "No. It might if I didn't think you could beat him to a bloody pulp if he tried anything." He wrapped his arms tightly around her. "Are you all right?"

"Yeah. It sounds like Willow's not, though."

"Do you want to call her?"

Buffy grimaced. "Yeah, as surprised as I am to say this, I really don't want her to be freaking out. I mean, I wanted her to feel a little bad but now that Spike's done that for me all I want to do is make her feel better. Now I can lay it on a little thicker about the fact that it wasn't such a bad thing. You know, like a good cop, bad cop thing."

"With Spike being the bad cop?"

"Exactly. And now I can be the good cop."

"Do you want some privacy?"

"Hell no. I want you right here with me, mister."

He squeezed her more tightly. "Then here I'll stay."

Buffy sighed and snuggled happily into Giles' chest. "Just call me Al Swizzer."

Giles was lost. "I'm sorry?"

"You know, that Al guy you told me about. The one at a time guy, the it's enough guy."

"Ah, Albert Schweitzer."

"Yeah, him."

"And why should I be calling you that?"

"Cuz I get it now. It really is all a big love thing. Me, you, Willow, Xander, Anya, Tara, Dawn, even Spike. Like you said, or like he said. It's about love, and it's about taking care of each other. One person at a time. Doing the best you can."

"It's all we can ever do." Giles shifted his body so he was facing her. "From the moment I met you, I have been astonished by you. And never more so than right now."

Buffy kissed his lips. "I miss my family. Would you mind if we went home tomorrow?"

Giles shook his head. "I'll call the airline as soon as you've called Willow."

"You don't mind?"

"I don't mind at all. As long as I'm with you, I don't care where we are." He frowned. "I will miss our nice big bed."

Buffy grinned. "That will be the first step in the new forever plan." Giles shook his head, not sure he was following her. Buffy clarified. "No matter where we are, no matter what we're doing, it'll be you and me, together, forever."

Giles felt moisture prick his eyelids at her words. He reached up a hand to rub them away. Buffy lifted herself up and kissed his eyelids. She pressed her cheek against his. "I take it you like that plan?" Giles just nodded. Buffy flipped around again until she was once more nestled with her back against his chest. "Good, that's settled." She sighed happily and then picked up the phone to call her home, anxious to speak with her sister and their friends, secure in Giles' arms, and secure in her own ability to love again.

The End

November 10, 2001