

Magic 1

When Giles awoke he was alone. His head was pounding and he felt sick to his stomach. Trying to remember what had happened, he lay there, searching his memories, needing to know what the monster had done this time.

Giles couldn't understand why his mind felt so sluggish. He slowly sat, fighting the urge to throw up. He looked around at the unfamiliar room. Taking deep breaths, he moved to the edge of the bed. The urge to vomit grew stronger. He had seen the attached bathroom. Getting up on shaky legs he just made it to the toilet before retching.

When he was done Giles flushed the toilet but stayed on the bathroom floor nearby. His stomach still felt shaky. He drew his knees up and rested his head on his arms, feeling confused.

The Council had his room monitored, multiple cameras hidden so as to not be discernible. When he had awakened an alert had gone out. As Giles sat there on the cold bathroom floor he heard the door to the outer room open. He raised his head too weary to even think about fighting.

Mary Posten walked in carrying a tray. She placed it on the table by the bed and she stood in the doorway to the bathroom. As Giles saw her all his memories came back like a flood. His eyes flew open as he realized that he was free. Free of the monster, free of the running. His relief overcame him and he lay his head back down, his body trembling. Mary came in and perched against the counter of the sink wanting to comfort him but feeling too reserved to do so. She simply lent him her presence hoping that she was right and that he wouldn't want to be alone.

As his shoulders stopped shaking she wet a washcloth and had it ready to give to him. He lifted his head up and with a rueful smile took the cloth and ran it over his face and neck. He held on to the washcloth, rubbing it between his hands. He looked up at Mary. "Thank you."

Mary had to look away for a second to compose herself. She took a deep breath and looked back. "You're welcome. How do you feel?"

A silent laugh shook his shoulders. He gestured at the toilet. "I'm not at my best."

A small grin appeared on her lips. "I brought you some soda water and crackers to help settle your stomach."

He nodded and attempted to rise. She did move forward this time and assisted him. Once up he was able to walk into the other room unassisted. "I don't suppose you brought some aspirin?" Mary reached into her pocket and brought out two small packets. He took them, a look of gratitude on his face.

"They said that when you awoke that you'd be sick to your stomach and have a sinful headache so I came prepared."

Giles took the pills with a small sip of soda water. He started to eat a cracker. He sat on the bed, leaning back against the headboard. He closed his eyes resting for a moment. Mary took the time to pull up a chair and she sat down waiting. They sat like that for a few minutes, with Giles occasionally taking a sip of soda water and nibbling on a cracker. Finally he opened his eyes and looked at her. "How long have I been asleep?"

"About a day and a half."

Giles eyebrows rose. He looked around. "Am I in the basement?" He had never been here, wherever it was. There was one high window in the room, bars over it. From his vantage point on the bed he could see a couple of trees, their branches bare.

Mary nodded. It's the only place with walls thick enough for the Council to be comfortable having you so close." She tightened her lips, embarrassed at having to say that.

Giles shook his head. "They're right to be cautious." At Mary's continued chagrin he spoke again. "Mary, you have no idea what I was capable of." He closed his eyes against the memories.

"It wasn't you. It wasn't your fault."

He shook his head again. "I know. But the memories are in my head and in this body." He held up his hands in front of him. "In these hands." His eyes filled with shadows and he clenched his hands into fists and lowered them to the bed. After a few moments he spoke again. "Willow and Xander. Are they all right?" His heart ached, longing for their presence, wishing they were here, sitting close.

Mary nodded. "As well as can be expected. Neither of them was happy that we took you."

Giles looked at her. "The council expelled her?" Giles was hoping that Mary heard the unspoken question.

She had. "Yes, she is only to be expelled." Giles lay his head back again, relieved.

He lifted it again and spoke softly. "I imagine I have you to thank for that as well."

Mary smiled but didn't respond. She stood and walked over to the bed. She put out her hand and he lifted his in response. She enclosed his hand with both of hers, closing his fingers over a piece of paper she pressed there. He kept his fingers closed, in fact fisted both hands so as to not give anything away. She spoke. "I have to go. I'm only allowed to stay for a few minutes. You need to rest, the testing will start soon." She softly touched his cheek. He silently looked at her and she turned around and left. He heard the door lock behind her and he lay there feeling the piece of paper in his hand.

He assumed that he was being monitored however he didn't know how thoroughly. He slowly let out his magic to try and damper what equipment was in the room. It was a skill he had learned as the monster. The monster had taught him all sorts of applications for his magic. The thought of some of them made his skin crawl. Instead of a small trickle of magic however, it all blasted out of him. Every surveillance camera in the Council Building shorted out with an explosion. Giles could hear several go in his room, and he could hear the few close to him in the hallway go as well. As he felt the magic swell he jumped up terrified of himself. He tried to rein it back in. He fell to his knees relieved beyond measure when he found he could. He took a deep breath and quickly scanned the note. He barked out a laugh when he saw that the note warned him about the surveillance. To be careful of what he said or did. He flushed the note down the toilet and sat back in the bed, waiting for them to come.

The testing had started immediately. By the end of it the conclusion of the Council was that there was significant residual damage. His magic was out of control. Giles could control it as to whether he used it or not. But once he used it, it was all or nothing. And the all was frighteningly powerful. More power than anyone had ever seen, more power than had ever been recorded. He had hurt several people without meaning to. He had destroyed equipment and furniture, even blown out a few walls. No matter how they tried to get him to channel his magic as soon as it was released it would swell out of control. It would do what he wanted it to but to an excessive and dangerous degree.

No one knew what to do with him. He never tried to escape although everyone knew he could easily. He never objected to the experiments on him, the blood draws, the painful shock treatments, only one of the multiple treatments they tried to use to harness his magic. They brought sorcerers in to try and bind him but without even trying to he effortlessly broke through all

the spells. He terrified them; he mystified them. They were pretty sure they should kill him but they didn't. After all, he was a watcher. They weren't sure what to do with him. So they treated him like they treated so many of their mysterious and powerful artifacts. They kept him locked up in the basement, out of sight, out of mind.

##

Giles welcomed the quiet at first. They had tested him for weeks and then treated him for weeks more. He had suffered people around him almost 24 hours a day. He knew their conclusions. He saw what he did, what he was. He knew he couldn't control the magic. He wouldn't have blamed them for killing him and he expected it. But the days passed by and he stayed alive. He slowly watched the trees outside his window bloom with their new green growth.

##

As the days of solitude turned into weeks he began to suspect. Mary had come to visit him. She often did. After they had finished eating he turned to her. "They don't know what to do with me, do they?" Mary tightened her lips and shook her head. Giles breathed out a rueful laugh. "They're never going to let me out. I'm going to spend the rest of my life right here." He swept the room with his head. He turned to her, pinning her with his gaze. "Aren't I?"

She sat there, sadness on her face. She slowly nodded. "Yes, unless you try to escape. Then they'll kill you."

Giles pinched the bridge of his nose. He shook his head. "If I use my magic to escape I could hurt a lot of people. You know I won't do that."

Mary nodded her face even sadder. "I know you won't." She looked around the room, now his prison. "Rupert, I'm sorry. They won't listen to me. They don't think they can dare loose you on the world. They don't know you like I do."

Giles put his hand up to reassure her. "Maybe they're right. I'm not sure I wouldn't make the same decision." He looked despairingly around the room. It was feeling smaller already. He longed for the sun, for the open air. His one small window felt so inadequate a conduit to bring the outside in to him.

Mary's eyes filled with tears. "Are you still glad I brought you here alive?"

Giles' lips tightened. "I'm not sure anymore." He looked down at the remains of his dinner.

She nodded and stood, uncertain of her reception. "Shall I come back tomorrow?" He nodded and she felt relieved. "I'll see you then." She walked to the door and left.

##

Giles was lonelier than he could ever remember being. He'd been alone a lot in his life and he'd gotten pretty used to it. But not like this. He craved companionship. The Council had started assigning projects to Mary that often took her out of town. She had protested at first but Giles had convinced her not to put herself at further risk for him. So, she went and when she was gone he didn't see anybody. Even his food was passed to him through a slot. He knew he made people nervous. He wished he could make them understand that he would not hurt them. He had lived without magic for many years by choice and he could do it again now.

He missed Xander and Willow. He even missed Spike. Thoughts of them kept him going. He missed Willow especially. He missed her more than he had thought possible. He had asked for a computer in hopes of being able to start e-mailing her. They had provided one to him but they had refused to give him phone access. The thought of Giles having access to the world, even a digital one, made them nervous.

Instead they had given him piles of CD-Rom games and books. The games had confused him at first and appalled him. But, his boredom was so intense that he finally tried them in earnest. Once he figured out the rules he became quite adept at them. But games could only occupy him for so long. Even the CD-Rom books failed to hold his attention after a while. He spent a good deal of his time watching the trees. Watching as the leaves turned from green to gold to brown until they slipped off the tree and floated slowly to the ground.

##

It had been a month since he'd seen anyone. The window had drawn him again. The bottom of it was level with the ground. He stared out the small window looking up at his trees. They were bare again, dried brown leaves around their trunks, some lying against the windowpane. He traced their patterns with his finger. He knew he could blast these walls and be out in the sunshine with just a thought. He was tempted but he resisted the urge. He knew they would kill him if he tried but he wasn't sure whether that was sufficient motivation to stop him anymore. More important was his concern that someone could get caught in the blast and that was unacceptable to him. His freedom wasn't worth any more deaths. He had already been responsible for too many people dying.

He looked at the door in surprise as it started to open and he smiled when he

saw Mary enter. He moved away from the window and walked over to greet her.

"Mary, it's good to see you."

"I'm sorry I've been away so long."

"It's all right. I'm not going anywhere." He gave her a rueful smile.

She laughed softly, loving him for his attempts at humor to make her feel better. They both sat down and he offered her a drink of water.

She took a sip and smiled at him. "I spoke with Willow."

Giles' eyes widened. "How is she?" His heart was desperate for news of her.

Mary laughed, a short laugh. "She is never satisfied with what I tell her. She always wants to talk with you. She wants to come and see you. She misses you. She says to say she loves you."

Giles lowered his gaze swallowing painfully against the lump in his throat. He turned and looked out the window for a moment trying to hide the tears in his eyes, lips tightened, fingers over his mouth.

Mary continued. "She sent greetings from Xander as well. I could hear him in the background yelling at me."

He turned back to her. "Yelling at you?"

She smiled sadly. "He's not very happy either that you're still here, that he can't talk with you." She looked at Giles. "You've got quite a fan club there, Rupert."

"They're family. They've been my family for a long time." He hated to put her in the middle again but he had to ask. "Mary, can you ask again? May I at least write them a letter and receive mail in return? Why do they refuse this?"

Mary shook her head. "If you receive mail, they have to remember you're here. They will have to deal with a momentary twinge of conscience that they have locked you away and are keeping you from those you love."

Giles looked nervously up at the surveillance cameras that were back in place. He sent her a glance that suggested she watch her words. She shook her head in anger. "I don't care what they hear. It's wrong what they're doing. I wish I could stop it."

"If you keep saying these things they won't let you visit me at all and then..." He didn't finish his sentence, the thought of an endless solitude not even broken up by Mary's infrequent visits too frightening for him to think about.

She tightened her lips. She knew he was right but her anger grew every week at the way they were treating him. She had promised Willow that she would see that he was well cared for and she was failing in that task. Miserably. She had never felt so useless in her life. The Council was intractable. They wanted to forget him and wouldn't even give him the dignity of death.

She opened the bag at her feet and pulled out a tin of cookies. She hesitated and then handed them to him. "I brought you a Christmas gift. I know these are your favorites." He reached to take them and she held on to them. "Maybe they'll help if things get bad enough." He took the cookies and didn't open them. He had known Mary long enough to guess what was in the tin.

He looked at her and spoke. "Thank you. You have always been a good friend."

She smiled and shook her head. "Not good enough, I'm afraid."

"Don't ever think that. No matter what happens, don't ever think that."

It was her turn to look at the floor while she fought against her tears. He stood up and went back to the window watching his trees again. After a minute she stood. She crossed over to him and looked out his window with him. She looked at the small patch of yard and it's two trees that were all of the world Giles would ever see. It made her so sad that she couldn't bear it. She spoke, her voice thick with emotion. "I can't stay. They're already sending me out again."

He nodded. He had seen how hard the Council was working to keep her away. He knew at some point that she'd stop coming at all. He looked at her and saw the sadness in her eyes. He knew she knew it too. He tried to smile at her. "I'll be here, when you can stop by." She bit back a sob, turned quickly and left.

He stood by the window until the sun went down and all he could see was darkness, the cloudy skies obscuring any moonlight.

##

After her conversation with Mary, Willow slammed down the phone. She paced back and forth in her small apartment, seething with anger. Xander

watched her, feeling much the same. She looked at Xander. "Every phone call is worse than the one before. I know he's not okay."

She paced some more. She let out a frustrated scream.

Xander spoke. "What did she say?"

"It's what she doesn't say." Xander just looked at her, his eyebrows raised. "She doesn't say how he's feeling. She doesn't say if he's happy. She doesn't say what he's doing. She doesn't say when he'll be able to come home." She wished Spike were here. He had offered to be a punching bag for her and she had taken him up on it a couple of times. He teased her that her punches were like a fly brushing up against him.

"What does she say?"

"That he's healthy. That he sends his love. That the Council is still watching and waiting." She blew out a frustrated breath. "The same thing, different variations, but always the same thing." She looked at Xander. "She's his friend. Why doesn't she know more?" She tightened her lips. "Or why doesn't she say more? It feels like a party line, it makes me feel that she's lying." She was sick of these phone calls but not getting them would be worse. She went and sat down next to Xander. "At least I know he's still alive."

Xander put his arm around her. "Yeah, but what kind of alive?" Xander's eyes were bleak as he remembered how they had sedated Giles just to take him back. He was afraid for Giles, afraid that life had perhaps not gotten any kinder for him.

Willow shook her head and laid it down on Xander's shoulder. She covered her face with her hands and fought back more tears. She wanted Giles to be here with them so badly. She wanted to be holding him and comforting him. She wanted him to be holding her. That one brief day when he'd been here had not been enough. She wished now that she had convinced him to wait a few days before he had called the Council, so she could have spent more time with him.

She stood up again, her anger making it impossible for her to sit for long. She began pacing again and Xander just watched her.

##

He had been in his prison for fifteen months. Over the last three months he had seen Mary twice. Both times she had brought him a message from Willow. Word of her was the only thing that sparked his heart into momentarily

beating and caring again. The rest of the time he just existed. His ability to do even that was waning.

The bathroom wasn't monitored. Mary had at least been able to insist on that when the new cameras had been installed. He had taken the cookie tin in there a couple of months ago, knowing that if he chose to use what was inside that he would need privacy, although he wasn't sure they would stop him. He watched the light die again outside his window. He felt another piece of his heart die with it. He walked into the bathroom and shut the door.

Inside the cookie tin, in addition to the cookies he liked so much was a prescription bottle filled with pills. He held the bottle in his hand and squeezed tightly. He never thought he would ever take his own life. Giles laughed, a short bitter laugh. The Council had already taken his life. He would simply be cleaning up. He reached for a glass and poured some water out of the tap. He opened the bottle and putting a couple of the pills in his mouth he began. When the bottle was empty he slowly went back into the bedroom and lay down. His last thoughts before the darkness pulled him away were of Willow.

End of Part 1

Magic 2

The next morning Giles opened his eyes. He lay there for a minute trying to orient himself. His eyes opened wide when he realized that he was still alive. He jumped up. He felt fine. He wasn't even drowsy. He was familiar with the drug he had taken. A fourth of those pills should have done the trick. There was no reason he should still be alive. He walked into the bathroom and picked up the empty pill container. He read it again. He didn't understand.

He faced the mirror, hands leaning on the counter. He looked at himself in the mirror. He felt no relief at still being alive. He looked at his face. He looked as if he were twenty-five again. The same age he was when he summoned Eyghon. He supposed there was a certain rhyme and reason to the magic bringing him back to this age. He had certainly been at his magical peak then. He turned his head slowly. His hair had continued to grow; it was past his shoulders now. There was no gray left.

As he looked at himself he realized that even in the year he'd been here that he hadn't aged at all. He snickered. He spoke out loud. "Figures I've found the fountain of youth now when all I want to do is die." Suddenly he felt a surge of panic. He wondered again why the pills hadn't worked, afraid that he knew the answer. He stared for another minute in the mirror hating his youthful appearance. He wanted his old face back; he wanted his life back.

He punched his fist into the mirror, into his reflection. He watched as his face fragmented, pieces distorting his appearance.

He pried a jagged piece of mirror loose. He gritted his teeth and he jammed it into his wrist. When he finally bit in deep enough the blood began to spurt. He laid his wrist in the sink laughing at himself and his need for cleanliness. He watched himself bleed, he watched himself bleed for a long time until finally it stopped. He didn't feel faint; he didn't feel anything at all. He looked down at his wrist and he could hardly see where he had cut himself when a few minutes ago his wrist had been badly lacerated.

His heart was racing. He looked at himself in the broken mirror again. He spoke his fear. "The magic won't let me die." He repeated the sentence over and over again. "The magic won't let me die." He walked back into the main room. He looked around. He would be here forever. He fell to his knees, pounding the floor, screaming out his frustration and terror.

He stopped eating that day. He took the food but then just threw it away. His body didn't care. The magic fed him. He went without eating for a month and it didn't affect him at all. He spent half of his days pacing up and down in the small room, the other half staring out the window. He had moments when he lost his hold on his sanity. He started seeing Willow.

The first time he saw her she was standing underneath one of the trees. He called out to her. "Willow, I'm here." When she didn't respond he grew agitated. "Willow, Willow, it's me, it's Giles, I'm over here." He pushed his hands between the bars and hammered at the glass. He hit it over and over until it finally shattered. He broke off the pieces until the window frame was clear of glass. He called again to her, he yelled at her, he threatened her but she wouldn't come to him. His sense of abandonment when even Willow ignored him was so complete he could feel his heart shattering into a thousand pieces just like the glass. He fell to the floor, weeping.

He woke the next morning still on the floor. He couldn't remember at first why he was there. When he did he sprang up and looked outside but Willow was no longer there. As he stood under the shower he realized that he was going mad. He knew he had to be killed. If he couldn't control his mind, the magic would. He dried himself off and got dressed. He walked back into the main room and spoke to the camera. "You need to come and kill me. I'll be dangerous soon." Throughout the rest of the day he repeated some variation of his message on a regular basis. He waited for someone to come but no one did. He wondered if after all this time they had just shut his cameras off. Out of sight, out of mind.

The door opened. His heart leapt. "Willow?" He saw her as she walked in.

Her red hair was brilliant in the light of the lamp. He moved to her.

He felt her hand on his face. "No, Rupert, it's Mary." He shook his head, confused. "Rupert, it's Mary." She spoke louder this time. She held his face and looked at his eyes.

They slowly cleared and she could see him recognize her. His eyes closed. "Mary, I'm sorry." He turned to her and motioned for her to sit down. He sat down across from her. He spoke, capturing her eyes. "The cookies didn't do the trick." As her eyes widened he continued. "Nothing has. Do you understand me?"

She nodded, frightened. "What else..?" She didn't want to speak it out loud.

Giles laughed bitterly. "I don't think they watch anymore." He looked out the window again from his seat. Then he turned back. "I cut my wrist, I watched myself bleed and then I watched myself heal. I haven't eaten in a month." He gestured down to his body. "In a month, nothing. Look at me." He jumped up. "I have more energy than I've ever had." He kicked his chair across the room. He held his hand up towards Mary, wanting to reassure her. "I'm okay. It's just a bloody nightmare. I have never wanted to die so much and the magic won't let me."

He started pacing the room. "I have stood in this room and begged them to come and kill me. I've told them that I'm losing my mind. I've warned them how dangerous I'll be if I'm not sane. No one has come." He looked at her. "I'll need to make them kill me soon. I've tried to hang on but I'm slipping. I'm hallucinating, more and more."

She just watched him, her mind racing. He turned back to her from the pacing he was doing. "Look at me. I'm almost fifty years old and look at me." He gestured at his face. "I'm twenty-five again. I'm not aging." He clenched his fists. He went back to the window and rested his head against the bars, feeling a few drops from the softly falling rain.

She stood up and went to stand by him. "Rupert, what do you need me to do?" She put her hand on his arm.

It was the first time someone had touched him in months. He had to fight back the tears at how lonely it made him feel. He wanted Willow here with him so much so he could just hold her and feel like he was human again. He turned to look at her. "Make them kill me." She shook her head, more with pain than in denial. He misunderstood. "Please Mary, I can't live like this. Don't make me." Her eyes filled with tears.

"I'll go talk to them."

"If they won't listen..." He didn't finish her sentence.

She bowed her head and spoke softly. "I'll take care of it, one way or the other."

He nodded and let out the breath he was holding. He swung his head to look out the window again. There was nothing left to say. Mary tightened her hand on his arm for a moment and she left.

Giles saw Willow again outside his window. He called to her.

##

Willow was at the Magic Shop researching. The slayer and watcher had come up against a new demon and they were all trying to figure out what it was. She heard Giles call her. She spoke without thinking. "Yes, Giles, what is it?" Her eyebrows furrowed as she heard the words come out of her mouth. She gasped and looked around. Everyone was staring at her. "Did you guys hear that?" They all looked at her confused. "I heard Giles call me." She stood up and started to walk around. She heard him again. "There, there it is." She looked at them all. "You didn't hear that?" She couldn't believe it when they said no.

Xander walked over to her. "Willow, are you going loopy on us?"

She stamped her foot and shook her head. "I heard him. He sounds so upset." Her eyes were unhappy. Xander watched her concerned. She heard Giles call again, wanting to know why she wasn't listening to him. She spoke out loud. "I am listening, I'm right here." She could hear the pain in his voice. She looked at Xander. "I'm not going crazy, I can hear him." Her eyes begged him to believe her.

He wanted to believe her. "What is he saying?"

"He just keeps calling my name. He keeps asking why I'm ignoring him, why I'm not listening." Her eyes were filling with tears. "He can't hear me." She couldn't stand that he couldn't hear her, that he would think she wouldn't answer.

The watcher looked nervous. "Is she talking about Rupert Giles?" Xander nodded. "Isn't he in England?" Xander nodded again. They had never told the watcher that Giles had spent a day in Sunnydale, they were afraid he would have a stroke. The watcher had simply gotten an official Council memo

stating that the rogue watcher had been apprehended. He looked confused. "How can she be hearing him?"

Xander shook his head. "I don't know. But if she says she is, then she is."

The watcher looked concerned. "Perhaps we should report this." Xander shot a glare at the watcher. The watcher recoiled. "Then again, maybe not." Xander bit off a grin. For some reason that he certainly did not understand this watcher had always been a little intimidated by Xander. Xander found it to be a source of never ending amusement. He shook his head.

He wandered over to Willow and spoke softly to her. "Iks-nay on the Iles-gay. Watcher at ten o'clock." Willow looked up at Xander and nodded. She shut her mouth. She picked up her book bag and smiling apologies she swept out of the store. She drove home and ran inside her apartment. She hoped that the silence would help Giles hear her. She dropped off her book bag and spoke out loud. "Giles, it's Willow." She listened and heard nothing. She stood there listening intently. When the phone rang she jumped a foot. Panting for breath and hand over her heart she picked up the phone.

"Hello?"

"Willow?"

"Mary?"

"Yes."

Willow's heart constricted at the silence that followed. "Mary, what is it?" Mary still didn't speak. Willow's knees gave out and she slowly dropped to the floor. "Is he...?" She couldn't even finish the sentence.

Willow heard Mary take a deep breath. "Willow. How much do you love Rupert?"

"What do you mean? I love him. I'll do anything for him. Mary, what's going on?"

"Will you really do anything?"

Willow held the phone tighter. "Mary, what's wrong?" Willow could still feel Mary's reluctance to talk. Willow prompted her. "You called me. Now talk to me."

"You need to come here. You need to get to Rupert. He wants to die. I don't

know how long I can keep it from happening. You're the only thing he cares about. Maybe you can make a difference."

"You know I'll come." Willow was confused. She didn't understand why Mary seemed to feel this was a big deal. This seemed like such a simple request.

"You don't understand. I can't take you to him. I'm out of the country. I can't guarantee your safety. I can't promise you that you'll get home. I don't know that Rupert will be glad to see you. I just know I have to try this one thing before I give up on him." Mary paused. "I have no resources left to help you. My friendship with Rupert has eliminated them all. I need you to understand that you'd be on your own."

Willow closed her eyes and reviewed Mary's words. "They're not letting him go are they?"

"No, they're not."

"You want me to come and what? Steal him away?"

Mary didn't know what she wanted. She made a frustrated noise. "I want you to come and make him want to live, whatever that takes. You just need to understand that it isn't at the invitation of the Council."

Willow didn't hesitate. "I'll be there."

"I'm probably sending you to die."

"Then I'll die. I can't not go." Willow paused. "I heard him calling to me today."

Mary gasped. "You heard him?"

"Yes."

"They tell me that he sits in his room for hours sometimes calling for you."

Willow's eyes filled with tears. "Mary, why haven't you told me this before?"

"I kept hoping...I kept believing that they'd change their minds, that they'd let him out. I don't believe that anymore. They'll keep him locked up in that room forever."

Willow bit back a sob. "What did they do to him?"

"Nothing. They just locked him up and threw away the key." Mary took a deep

breath. "Willow, I need to tell you something else."

Willow braced herself. "Go ahead."

"He can't control his magic. None of us have ever seen anything like it. He's so strong."

"Is it evil?"

"No, it's just strong. When he uses it he can't control it. He has been very careful not to use it at all."

Willow knew she wasn't saying everything. "Mary, finish what you're trying to say."

"His mind is going. He's losing his grip on reality. He's afraid he'll hurt someone. He's asking for them to kill him."

Willow didn't really want to ask but she had to. "Why don't they?"

Mary made a disgusted noise. "They don't believe him, they're frightened of him, no one wants to go near him, who knows." She sighed. "He asked me to do it."

Willow gasped. "Are you going to?" Her heart was racing.

"If you won't come, or if you are unsuccessful, then yes, I will kill him. I'll try to anyway. I don't know if I would be able to."

"What do you mean?"

"His magic is protecting him. He's tried to kill himself three times and each time the magic has saved him."

Willow shook her head, the pain in her heart almost killing her. She couldn't stand that he had lost the will to live, that he had tried to end his life. She gritted out the words through her pain and her tears. "I'll be there, if I have to swim. Nothing will keep me away. I promise you."

"I'll be back in a week. If I can help then, I will."

"Can you tell me where he is?"

"He's in the basement. He has a window at ground level that looks out on the back of the complex. There are two trees there. Next to the trees is a small

green shed." She paused. "Willow, they'll have security. His window is barred. I don't know how to tell you to get in."

"I'll figure out something." Willow's mind was already racing, matching the pace of her heartbeat.

Mary could almost hear Willow's mind work. She softly smiled. "Good luck." When she heard no response she slowly hung up.

Willow looked at her watch. It was mid afternoon and she had a lot to do. She pulled her laptop to her and flipped it open. Before the Council sent the team to kill Giles and take all his belongings away Willow had hacked into his bank accounts and taken his money. She had set it up into a private account wanting to keep it safe for him should he return. It had been a lot of money but she had never touched a penny of it. She was planning to touch it now. She started searching for private planes to charter.

After she'd made plane arrangements she headed off to the bank. After that she had one more errand to run. She needed to find Spike. There was an hour left before sunset so she headed to the cemetery, to the crypt he still called home.

She pushed open the door and ran inside calling his name. He slowly sat up looking at her, a puzzled smile on his lips. He was in a good mood; he had fed well last night. Willow and he had worked out a compromise. She wouldn't stay friends with him if he killed humans. He refused to go back to drinking animal blood. So, he'd learned to snack on humans. He'd found humans who would pay to be bitten, people like Riley. Every now and then he'd leave town and go on a feeding frenzy but he saw no need to tell Willow that. Her friendship was important to him. So, he just looked at her, waiting for her to speak.

She threw a bag down on the ground. "We need to go rescue Giles. I need you to go with me."

That got Spike's attention. "Excuse me?"

"Mary just called me. She said I have to come and get him now, or he'll be dead soon."

Spike's eyes darkened. Ever since he had helped to rescue Giles last year he had felt responsible for him. Giles was yet another spot in his soft vampire underbelly. He couldn't help it. He had tried to resist it, but it was there in his head, and in his heart, like his feelings for Willow. He had listened to Willow rant about Mary's calls for months now. Spike had suggested going and

getting Giles a dozen times and Willow had always stayed his hand, unable to believe that the Council wouldn't eventually do right by him. Spike had known better. She looked at him. "You were right. We should have gone and gotten him. They've locked him away. He doesn't get to see anybody. He's tried to kill himself three times." She started to cry and he moved to her and took her in his arms.

In a few minutes she lifted her head. "Spike, we have to break him out. We could get killed. And Spike..." He looked at her. "He still has all his magic." Spike swallowed. Nothing had ever frightened him like Giles had when he'd been possessed by the magic.

Spike let out a breath. He lit a cigarette and took a long drag. He grinned at Willow. "Sounds like fun. When do we leave?"

Faking a cough and waving her hand through the smoke from his cigarette, Willow hugged him. "I chartered a private plane so we could keep you safe. It will be ready before dawn."

"Do we need supplies?"

Willow looked at him. "I don't know. I never paid much attention to the security while I was there. I didn't imagine I'd ever have to break in."

"Good thing you're already expelled because this would really throw them over the edge if you weren't." Spike took another drag and grinned at her. He was ready to go now.

Willow let out a short laugh. "No kidding." She looked at Spike severely. "And hey, no killing." She realized how unrealistic that might be. She frowned. "Unless absolutely necessary." Spike grinned again.

"Sounds like even more fun now."

Willow smacked him on the arm. She stopped suddenly and cocked her head. Spike looked at her. She was listening to something. She took a deep breath. "He's calling me, I've been hearing him all afternoon." She looked at Spike waiting for him to scoff at her.

Spike stood up and flicked his cigarette away. "If he's calling for you, let's get you there."

She smiled at him, her gratitude bright in her eyes. They sat down and started to plan. When it grew dark Spike began to escort Willow to her car. As they left the crypt she handed him the bag she had carried in with her. "Here, you

can be in charge of this. It makes me nervous."

He looked in the bag and his eyebrows rose. "Bloody hell. How much is in here?"

She grimaced. "Only ten thousand. I hope it's enough. That's all they'd let me withdraw at one time."

He looked at her. "Can you get more?"

She nodded. "A lot more. Just not today." They made plans to meet early in the morning and he walked her to her car.

When she got home she called Xander. She had promised never to leave him out of the loop again.

"Xander, it's Willow."

"Still hearing Giles?"

"Yes. And Mary called again."

She could hear the anger in Xander's voice. "What the hell did she say this time?"

"She said to come and get him. Spike and I are leaving tonight."

"They're letting him out?"

"No."

"I don't understand."

"We're going and breaking him out."

"What?"

"She said to come and get him. So I am."

"You're going to go kidnap Giles from the Watcher's Council."

"Yes."

"You and Spike."

"Yes."

"And then what?"

"What do you mean?"

"Then what are you going to do? You can't bring him back here. Are you going to drop him off somewhere in some godforsaken corner of the globe?" Willow hadn't thought that far. She didn't know what to say to Xander. He spoke again. "Let me come."

She shook her head. "No."

"Shit, Willow, don't do this to me."

"Xander, Anya is due to have her babies any day. Mary warned me that it could be dangerous. I won't let you take the chance of not coming back."

"But I'm supposed to take the chance that you might not come back?"

"I need you here. I might need you to figure stuff out for us. I might need you to wire us money. I need you here."

"That's bullshit and you know it."

"Look, I have my magic and Spike has his...vapiryness." She winced at the word. "We can sneak in, get him and sneak out. I'll call you when we get to safety and you can join us. That way I'll know you'll be safe but you can see Giles. Okay?"

Xander looked at Anya as she struggled to get off the couch in the living room. She flashed him a smile and he sent her one back through tightened lips. He knew Willow was right; he couldn't leave Anya now. "Okay. I don't like it but okay. Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Just keep your cell phone charged and near you all the time. Oh, and come up with a good reason why I'm gone."

"That I can do."

"I love you Xander."

"I love you too. Please be careful. Tell Spike I'll stake him if something happens to you."

"I'll call you as soon as we're safe."

Xander felt his stomach start to churn. "See that you do. In fact, call me either way would ya?"

Willow laughed despite her worries. "Okay, no matter what I'll call."

"Good. I'll be waiting for your call. If you need anything, call. If you think of a good joke, call."

"I will. Hey, just in case, kiss the babies for me." Anya was expecting twins.

"No, you can kiss the babies for yourself." She fought back tears. Xander spoke again, his voice sharp. "Do you hear me Willow? You can kiss the babies when you get back."

"I heard you." She heard his shaky indrawn breath and she slowly hung up.

She packed a small suitcase and tried to get a few hours of sleep. Spike shook her awake, waking her from a nightmare. She laid there, her breath coming out in frightened pants. She covered her face with her hands. "What are we doing?" She looked at him. "What am I doing?"

Spike just looked back at her. "You're helping out a friend."

She closed her eyes. "Helping out a friend." She nodded and took a deep breath. "Helping out a friend. Okay. I can do that."

She shoed him out of her bedroom and got dressed. Ensuring she had everything she locked up the apartment behind them. She gasped as they started down the hallway. She looked at Spike. "Do you have a passport?"

Spike laughed. "No, luv. Can't take a photograph, remember?"

She looked at him in dismay. "What will we do?"

He held up her bag. "Hope the pilot needs some extra cash." Willow grimaced, her stomach in knots. There were so many things that could go wrong she couldn't even begin to list them. Willow had arranged for a cab and it was waiting for them down on the street. They got in and headed off to the airport.

End of Part 2

The pilot did want some extra cash. He landed them in a private airstrip and even arranged a car for them. Once it was dark Willow and Spike left the plane, the pilot happy to be sleeping the night away in his chair, his pockets full of money.

They parked a few blocks away from the Council building. Willow felt like she was having a heart attack. She could hardly walk. Spike laughed at her. "Come on Red. Pull it together. You won't get very far like this." He shook his head. "We're supposed to be rescuing Giles, not the other way around."

She made him stop walking. She rested her head against his arm. "I'm so afraid of what we'll find." She looked up at Spike. "Suppose we're too late? What if he's already dead? What if he doesn't recognize me? What if he hates me for taking so long? What if..."

Spike put his hand over her mouth to stop her words. "Either we go and get it done or we get back on the plane and go home." He looked towards the Council. "Whatever's happened has happened. Standing here won't tell us a thing."

She nodded, clearly unhappy. She stood tall and took a deep breath. "Okay, okay." She pointed at her face. "Resolve face." She nodded again. "I'm ready, let's go." She headed off at a fast clip.

Spike grabbed her arm and spun her around. "This way, Red." He pushed her in the opposite direction. Walking to the edge of the property behind the Council building Spike listened for guards and heard nothing. They slowly started looking for the landmarks that Mary had given to Willow.

##

Giles had his eyes closed, his face leaning on the bars on his window. Every now and then a breeze would brush against his face. He heard some whispering. His brow furrowed. He raised his head and looked out. He saw her. Willow was back. She was standing in front of one of his trees, staring at the building.

He called out as he always did. "Willow." She ignored him, a frown upon her face. He called louder. "Willow." Her eyes widened and she walked closer. His heart started beating faster. She never walked closer. He watched her as she approached.

She knew she had heard him that time. She looked for him. "Giles?" She

softly spoke his name.

He spoke her name again. "Willow." She looked down and saw him. She gasped and looked again. He looked so different. She watched him for a minute. She had forgotten how young he had gotten; he looked not much older than she. She almost didn't recognize him. Then she saw his eyes and her heart recognized him. She threw herself down on the ground and reached through the bars on the window. He jerked back, frightened suddenly. She never did this. She never reached for him.

Spike started to approach Willow and she turned to him, her eyes worried, shaking her head. She pointed to the wall with her chin. Spike nodded and rested against it, out of Giles' sight.

She spoke softly. "Giles, it's me, Willow. I'm here." He paced the room, talking to himself. He glanced up at her every now and then. She spoke again. "Giles, it's me. I've come for you."

He looked at her. "You've come to kill me?"

She shook her head, her eyes filling with tears. "No, Giles, it's Willow, I'd never hurt you." She wanted to get to him so badly it was making her crazy. She tried to inch closer, trying to be as close to him as she could.

Giles took a couple of steps towards the window. She was talking to him. He didn't understand. This was not the way it was supposed to go. He spun away again, pacing the length of the room.

She kept talking, speaking softly. "Giles, you're safe now. I won't hurt you. It's me, Willow. Come to me. Let me show you."

He stood and looked at her. She was as beautiful as always. He wanted to touch her hair and her soft skin. He took another step towards the window; his mind filled with the pain of what seeing her always did to him. She put her hand out slowly, reaching for him. He moved in closer, and he slowly put out his hand to touch hers.

When his fingers touched hers he let out a gasp. His startled eyes flew up to hers. "Willow?"

She nodded, tears running down her face. "Yes, it's me. I'm really here."

He grabbed her hand and put it to his face. He held it there and closed his eyes. He took a long shuddering breath. He held her hand even more tightly. He stood there for the longest time, just feeling her hand on his face. Finally he opened his eyes. He still was afraid to believe. Willow watched him and

fought hard to hold back her sobs. She would never forgive herself for waiting so long. She spoke to him again. "Giles, I'm really here."

He walked the rest of the way and rested his cheek against the bars. She reached in with her other arm. She ran one hand through his hair and kept the other on his face. She twisted herself until her cheek lay next to his. She continued to speak gently to him as if calming a wounded animal. "I'm sorry it took me so long. But, I'm here now. I'll never let them take you away from me again. You're safe now."

He pulled back and slowly lifted one of his hands and he softly touched her cheek through the bars. He looked at her in wonder. "You're really here?" She nodded. "It's really you?" She nodded again. He moaned. "Oh God." He took her hands in his and brought them up to his face. He covered his face with them, breathing deeply, needing to smell her scent. His shoulders started to shake and she could feel his tears on her palms.

She started to cry then too. "Oh Giles, I wish I could hold you." She looked at Spike. He motioned for her to step away. She nodded and turned back to Giles. "Giles, go stand over by your bed for a minute." She tried to pull her hands away.

He held them tightly and lifted his face. "Are you leaving?" His voice was filled with panic.

She shook her head. "No, no, I'm not leaving. I want to come in there with you." He looked at her confused. She spoke again. "I brought Spike with me. He'll try and rip these bars out."

Giles let go of her hands. "Spike's here?" That, more than anything Willow had said, made him begin to believe that she really was there. He pressed up to the window again. "Where is he? Let me see him."

Willow moved out of the way and Spike squatted down by the window, grabbing a hold of a couple of the bars and giving them a shake. He raised his chin in greeting. "Hey Giles." Spike waited to see what Giles' reaction to him would be. Giles reached forward and gently taking one of Spike's hands, he pulled it through the bars and rested it on his cheek, closing his eyes. Spike had to look away, Giles' gentle touch almost undoing him.

Willow wiggled in beside Spike and smiled at Giles. "Spike's been wanting to come get you for months." She smiled sadly up at Spike, wishing now that she had listened to him. "Ever since he rescued you last year he thinks he owns a part of you."

Giles opened his eyes and looked at them both. Then he looked at Spike. "He does. He does own a part of me." He looked back at Willow. "You both do." He released Spike's hand and moved across the room, out of harm's way. Spike stood up for a moment standing with his back to the window. He felt exposed and vulnerable. He watched the night sky taking a moment to find his composure.

He ran his hand over his face and turned. "Right. Let's get you out then." He lay on his side, one foot resting against the bars. He began to kick, hard. It took him several kicks but all of a sudden the window jam loosened and the whole window frame shot into the room. Spike stood. Giles moved over to the window and put his hands up as Willow had wasted no time in starting to climb through the open hole in the wall. She wanted to get to Giles. She couldn't wait another second. She was frantic to hold him.

He put his hands on her waist and lifted her down. She turned and moved into his arms, wrapping hers around him. Nothing had ever felt so good to her. She started to cry again, her emotions overcoming her. He felt as if he was reborn when she held him. He could feel his heart respond to her touch, he could feel his heart start to beat again. His hands convulsively clutched the back of her jacket.

He heard a noise and opening his eyes he saw Spike trying to climb in. He gently moved Willow away from the window, keeping his arms around her. Spike easily jumped to the floor and he looked at the two of them. "Not to break short the reunion but shouldn't we be taking Giles and leaving? Maybe have this party somewhere else?" He jerked his thumb to the window.

They both ignored him. Giles just rested his head on Willow's hair. A part of him still believed that he'd wake up and this would all be gone. Willow just never wanted to let go of him. Spike started getting nervous. "Really, I think we should go, now." He knew that sooner or later they'd figure out that someone had breached the building. He'd just as soon not still be here.

He got annoyed that they were still ignoring him. He walked over and tapped Giles on the shoulder. "Look mate, this is a break out, that means we go out." He motioned to the window with both his hands in a swinging gesture. "Out."

Giles pulled back from Willow and just looked at her. He lifted one of his hands and laid the backs of his fingers against one of her cheeks. He brushed his fingers up and down, feeling the softness beneath them. He smiled at her, his eyes full of love. His eyes still full, he looked at Spike. Giles reached out and put his hand on Spike's shoulder and gently squeezed. Giles spoke. "Thank you both. Thank you for coming." He backed away from them a little bit. "But you can't stay with me. You won't be safe." He cocked his

head, listening. "They're probably on their way now."

Spike rolled his eyes. "No kidding. Which is why we have to leave, now."

Giles shook his head. "If you're found with me, you could get hurt. They won't care."

Spike grabbed Giles' arm. "God, you are a selfless bastard aren't you? You're not telling us anything we don't know. We don't care." He pulled. "Let's go."

Giles pulled his arm back. "Well, I care. I don't want either of you hurt on my account. Don't ask me to be all right with that because I can't be."

Spike swung around in a circle frustrated. "Fuck this." He turned to Giles and his fist shot out in a blur, connecting with Giles' chin. Giles' head snapped back but he stayed standing. Spike looked at his still fisted hand in amazement. Spike threw another punch and Giles, as if in slow motion, simply lifted a hand and stopped it. Spike's eyes widened.

Giles sadly shook his head. "I appreciate what you're doing Spike, but you can't hurt me. The magic won't allow it."

Spike's head snapped up and he looked at the door. In a few seconds they could all hear it, the sound of running feet. Giles looked at Willow and Spike. "You can still get away, but you must leave now." He looked at Willow a look of desperation on his face. "Please Willow, go."

Willow shook her head, even though there was fear on her face. Spike stepped in front of her, ready to face whatever came through the door.

The running footsteps got louder as they approached the door. Spike, Giles and Willow waited for the door to open but it didn't. They could hear muted whispering going on outside the door, several voices participating. It went on for quite some time. Giles ran his hand through his hair and bit back a grin. He put his hand on Spike's shoulder. "Can you hear what they're saying?"

Spike snorted. "It seems as if you have quite a reputation." He turned and grinned at Giles. "I think they're drawing straws to see who has to come in first."

Giles barked out a laugh. He looked at the floor shaking his head. He turned to Willow. "Go stand over there." He pointed to the corner of the room. She started to shake her head and he spoke again. "Go." He wasn't going to argue with her. She moved as far away from the door as possible. Giles stood shoulder to shoulder with Spike, their backs to Willow, as they waited for the

argument outside the door to finish.

Spike turned his head a little to the side to Giles. "Want me to just kick it down?"

Giles grinned but shook his head. "Someone might get hurt."

Spike rolled his eyes. "They're probably here to kill you."

"I know."

"Shit."

They could hear more footsteps coming towards the door. One set, unhurried. Giles listened as a key was put in the door. The key turned and the door swung open. Men poured into the room. Giles and Spike backed up until they stood right in front of Willow. The men were armed with either guns or crossbows. The crossbows were all aimed at Spike. Spike shot a nervous look at Giles.

Giles grimaced at Spike. "The room has surveillance cameras."

Spike looked incredulously at Giles. "And this wasn't something you thought you should mention? Do you know how far we could be right now if we'd left?" He shot a disgusted look at Giles and turned back to face the intruders.

A man walked in carrying no weapon. He was dressed in an expensive charcoal gray suit. His dark brown hair was peppered with gray, as was his short beard. His eyes were hard. He looked at Giles. "Rupert Giles."

Giles looked at the man but said nothing. The man continued. "You have uninvited guests." He looked behind Giles. "Willow Rosenberg." He looked at Spike. "William the Bloody." He pursed his lips.

He walked further into the room. He looked up at the hole in the wall and then at the remains of the window lying on the floor. He looked back at Giles. "You have become an unacceptable risk." He started to move back to the door. He turned to one of the men. "Shoot them."

End of Part 3

Magic 4

As the guns and crossbows were being aimed Giles spoke. "If you hurt them,

I will kill you."

The man paused and looked back. "Not if you're dead." He looked at one of the armed guards. "Shoot him first."

The guard lifted his gun and aimed it at Giles. Willow let out a horrified cry. Spike tried to move in front of Giles but Giles wouldn't let him. Giles took a few steps, stood in front of both Spike and Willow and waited.

Willow cried out. "Giles, don't." She grabbed Spike's arm. "Do something." Spike was doing something. He was watching. He trusted that Giles knew what he was doing. If Giles was killed, they would be too.

The guard pulled the trigger and a bullet left the chamber. It flew at Giles and he reached up his hand and he caught it. More bullets flew, more than Giles could catch. They simply stopped when they got to within an inch of him and fell harmlessly to the floor. Giles saw the man at the door make a gesture. Guns and crossbows were lifted and aimed around Giles at Spike and Willow. Giles' eyes darkened. He raised a hand up. Spike plastered himself over Willow trying to protect her as several guns and crossbows were fired simultaneously.

They never reached them. They never got past Giles. Spike watched as the bolts and bullets hit a barrier and rolled down it to the floor. The floor began to be littered with them. Spike stood up straight and began to smirk. He rocked back and forth on his feet.

Giles looked at the man in the charcoal suit. "You cannot kill me. You waited too long." He shook his head. "I've been asking you to kill me for months and you have ignored my requests." He pointed at Spike and Willow. "They are my guests. They are under my protection and they will remain unharmed. If anyone tries to hurt them..." He didn't finish that sentence. He took a step closer to his failed executioner. Giles was gratified to see some fear at last showing in those flat dark eyes. "I don't want to hurt anybody. I never have. But, if you attack what is mine, there will be a price to pay and that will be on your head. With a thought I can kill everyone in this building." He took a step closer. The man retreated a step. "Do you believe me?" The man hesitated. Giles smiled. "Would you like a demonstration?" The man slowly shook his head.

Giles turned around and headed back to Willow and Spike. The man motioned again and several guns were fired at Giles' back. Giles ignored them. He reached Spike and Willow and turned around standing in front of them. He held his hands up palms facing the guards and the man in the suit. He spoke softly. "You have until the count of ten to leave this room." He

started counting softly. "One, two, three..." The guards started looking nervously at each other. The man's lips tightened. "Four, five, six..." The guards started inching their way to the door, fear on their faces as the man continued to stand there without calling them off. "Seven, eight..." The man gestured with his head and the guards ran from the room. "Nine..."

Giles watched as the room was vacated and the door closed. "Ten." He took a deep breath and let down his hands. He turned to Spike and Willow and asked. "Are you both all right?"

Willow just threw herself into his arms and she hugged him tightly. Spike grinned at him. "Remind me to always stand on this side of you."

Giles laughed and he squeezed Willow and let her go. Willow looked at the door. "What were you going to do?" Giles could still see fear in her eyes.

He looked sadly at her. "Do I frighten you, Willow?"

She touched his face. "No, no, Giles, you don't. They frightened me. They were just going to kill us." She looked at him again. "What were you going to do?"

Giles squinched his face up. "I was mostly just hoping I wouldn't have to do anything."

Spike looked appalled. "You mean you couldn't do anything to them?"

Giles shook his head. "That's the problem. I do too much. I was afraid I'd blow up half the building, and perhaps hurt you as well." He let out a shaky laugh. He remembered too much of what he'd been capable of when the monster was angry.

Spike frowned. "But, if push came to shove...?"

Giles looked at him. "They'd be dead." Spike nodded, satisfied.

Willow looked at Giles. "When you were protecting us your magic didn't go all screwy." Giles pursed his lips thinking about that. He shook his head. "That's true." He ran his hand through his hair.

Willow reached out and played with a curl for a minute. "Your hair is so long." It felt silky beneath her fingers.

Giles smiled. "Well, no one wanted to give me a haircut." He chuckled as he continued. "Or scissors."

Spike thought about the man who had ordered their deaths. "Who was that wanker?"

Giles shook his head. "I have no idea. I've never seen him before."

He walked over to what used to be his window and rested his chin on the opening. Giles spoke softly. "You should have gone while you had the chance." His voice was filled with sadness.

Willow walked over to him and rested her forehead on his back. "I'm not leaving you again."

Spike walked over as well. "Let's just go. They can't keep us here."

Giles tentatively reached a hand out and touched the ground. He stretched as far as he could and picked up some dirt, running it through his fingers. Giles spoke softly. "I can't go, I'm not allowed to leave." He lifted himself up with his hands and stuck his head out the opening. He let himself back down. "I haven't been outside since..." He thought for a minute, trying to remember months and dates. He shook his head and looked at Spike. "Since they put me in here."

Spike tightened his lips. He wanted to kill the Council. He gestured to the window. "They can't stop you, you know."

Giles looked at him, not understanding. Willow could see that he was confused again. She touched his arm. He looked at her. "Willow?"

She smiled. "Yes, it's me. Me and Spike." Giles looked at her and then at Spike. Giles took a deep breath.

"I'm sorry. I keep...I can't believe you're really here."

Willow spoke softly. "We're really here." She looked outside. "Why don't we go for a walk?"

"A walk." Giles breathed the words as if they were a prayer. He looked at Willow. "We'll come back here when we're done?"

Willow hesitated and then nodded. "Yes, we'll come back here when we're done." Spike shot her a look and she gestured sharply with her hand, lips tightened. Spike rolled his eyes and paced around the room.

Giles thought for a minute. He nodded. "I'd like that." He looked back up at

the window, wondering if he'd fit through the opening.

Spike followed his eyes and grinned. "Don't worry, I'll get you out."

Spike lifted Willow up and she wiggled her way out the window. Giles brought a chair over and stood on it. He looked down at his broad shoulders and looked at the opening. He frowned. Spike tapped him on the leg. "Didn't say it wouldn't hurt." Giles rolled his eyes. He pulled himself up and got his head and one arm and shoulder through. Willow grabbed his arm and started pulling.

"Ow! Hold on Willow." Willow let go and looked at Giles apologetically. He smiled at her. "Wait until Spike starts pushing." Spike stood on the chair with Giles and looked at him frowning. He reached up and started shoving on Giles' shoulder, hard. Giles wiggled his body and between Willow pulling and Spike shoving, his shoulders finally were both through. Spike lifted up Giles feet and helped him the rest of the way through, Giles walking forward on his hands until he could get purchase with his feet.

Spike easily pulled himself up and through, following Giles out. Giles stood, standing quietly. His heart began to race and he felt dizzy. He had to lean against the building for a minute until the dizziness passed. Willow and Spike watched him, concern in Willow's eyes, impatience in Spike's. Finally Giles stood up and began walking. He stopped at his trees. He put both hands out and rested them on the bark of one of them. He softly caressed it. He smiled. He opened his eyes and saw Willow looking at him. He laughed, feeling a little self-conscious. "These trees kept me company. They feel like old friends."

Willow fought back the tears, as she thought of Giles, alone for all this time, with nothing but two trees to keep him company. Willow stepped up behind him. She rested her hands lightly on his back. "I'm sorry. Can you ever forgive me for waiting this long? I should have come sooner."

Giles turned around and took her hands in his. "Willow, there is nothing to forgive. I'm just sorry I got you into this mess."

Spike had been listening for any unexpected company. He walked over to them both. "Great, you're both sorry. Can we get the hell out of here?"

##

The man in the charcoal suit watched them as they walked off Council property. He slammed his fist down on the table, feeling completely impotent. He hadn't been afraid of anything for a long time, but Rupert Giles terrified

him. The man had no idea how to eliminate someone who seemed to be unkillable. His eyes narrowed as he ran scenarios through his mind.

##

Spike started trying to herd them to the car. It was a slow process and he wanted to scream. It was as if Giles was walking outside for the first time. He stopped frequently, needing to touch everything. He strolled slowly, breathing deeply. Spike stayed close by, trying to keep his impatience under control, his vampire senses noting any noises or movements. Willow walked by Giles' side. After a while she snuck her hand in his and he smiled at her as he laced his fingers through hers. He still felt so touch deprived, the sensation of holding Willow's hand shot through him like a lightening bolt. He closed his eyes for a second, enjoying the sensation.

When they finally got to the car Spike unlocked it. Giles took a step back, fear in his eyes. "Are you leaving?"

Spike held up the car keys. "No, we are leaving. Get in."

Giles took another step back. Willow stopped him from retreating further with a hand on his back. "Giles, we need to go. We need to get you away from here. We have a plane waiting for us."

Giles shook his head. Spike slammed his hand down on the roof of the car. "What the hell is your problem? We came to get you. Now we have you. Now we take you home." He flashed a frustrated look at Giles, holding his hand out as if nothing could be clearer.

Giles squatted down on the ground, putting a hand out to balance himself. He needed desperately to think. There was too much going on. He could hardly bear it. Willow could see that he was trembling. She motioned to Spike to be still. She crouched low next to Giles. "Giles, we just want you to be safe. I don't want them to be able to hurt you anymore." She slowly reached a hand out to touch him, hoping it wouldn't frighten him. "Do you understand? We just want to take care of you."

Giles sat on the ground, pulling his legs up. He wrapped his arms around his legs and just rested his head on his knees. He closed his eyes. Willow watched him for a minute and then got up walking over to Spike.

Spike looked at Giles and back at Willow. "What's the matter with him? Why won't he come with us?"

Willow smiled sadly. "It's too much. It's too much for him to handle." She

looked at Spike. "For over a year he's been by himself. No conversation, no stimulus. Just nothing. We're overwhelming him."

"He seemed fine back there when we were being attacked."

"He was afraid for us. He'll be okay again. He just needs some time."

"I don't know if we have time. They could be coming for us." He looked at the sky. "Plus it will be dawn in a couple of hours. I'll need to get to safety." The last time he'd needed to take Giles away, he'd been able to knock him unconscious. It wouldn't work this time. Spike shook his head. "This has got to be the most bloody useless rescue attempt of all time." He looked at Giles again, waited as long as he could stand to, and then walked over and crouched down next to him. "Giles, we have to go. They will try and kill me and Willow if you don't."

Giles lifted his head and looked at Spike. Spike pointed to himself and then to Willow. "Remember me, remember Willow, the two people you don't want to be dead?" He raised his eyebrows at Giles.

Giles nodded wearily. Things were making more sense to him. "Spike, the only way you will be safe is if we don't go."

Spike's eyes widened. "What the hell are you talking about now?"

Giles continued. "Do you really think the Council will let us walk away?" He looked at Spike, nailing him with his gaze. "They'll be after us, no matter where we go. We can't go back to Sunnydale." He looked up briefly at Willow. "You won't ever be able to go back, not if we leave now."

Willow swallowed hard. She sat down next to Giles. "Why do you say that? They know they can't kill us."

Giles softly touched her cheek. "No Willow. They know they can't kill me. They can still kill you and Spike and they will. That man won't forgive us easily for making a fool of him."

"But you won't let them kill us."

Giles looked at her, his eyes full of worry. "I can only protect you if I'm with you. Do you want to live that way? Never more than a few feet away from me?" He shook his head. "I know you didn't exactly see them at their best in there, but the Council security and extermination teams are among the best in the world. I'm sure they're watching us now."

Spike laughed. "Number one, I'd know if they were watching us and number two, you evaded them for two years."

"Only because I was willing to kill anyone who got in my way, including any innocent bystanders, because I didn't care. Or it didn't care. I did, it almost destroyed me." He looked at the ground. He picked up a stick that was lying there. He felt its texture underneath his fingers. Looking at Spike he continued speaking. "I guarantee you that they're here, somewhere, watching us. If we leave here, we leave as fugitives. Always on the run, always hiding, no place to call home. I don't want to do it again. I wouldn't want you to ever have to do it." He looked at Willow. "They'll find us, and the only way we'll survive is if I kill again and keep on killing." Willow's eyes filled with tears as she saw his eyes fill with pain and shadows.

Spike pursed his lips and Willow looked away. Giles shook his head. "I meant what I said. You shouldn't have come." As Willow started to protest he put his fingers over her lips. "I understand why you did, and I'm grateful, but I would never have chosen my freedom in exchange for yours, never."

Spike stood up, walking a short distance in explosive fury. He turned around and faced Giles. "So, what? What are you saying? We all go back and give ourselves up? We all live as prisoners? You think that's a better solution than being on the run?" He held his hand up. "I vote for running. If they lock me up I'm as good as dead. I won't be able to feed."

Giles ran his hand over his face. He rubbed his eyes. His head was pounding. "I need to go back. I need to convince them to leave you alone. I'll let them do what they want with me."

Willow edged closer and threw her arms around him. "I'm not leaving you. I'm not letting them have you."

Spike watched the two of them his brain thinking furiously. He paced back and forth in front of them. He lashed out and kicked a nearby tree. "God, what a fucking joke. We're fucked if we stay and we're fucked if we go." He kicked the tree again. He turned to face Giles again. "I still say we go. I say we go to the plane and we leave."

Giles looked up at him. "The plane won't be there. They'll have already found it."

Willow's eyes widened. "What about the pilot?"

"Dead." He stood, pulling Willow up with him. He looked at Willow. "This is what it will be like. Everyone who tries to help will be a target. You'll cause

deaths everywhere you go." He looked at them both. "I'm sorry. I can't do it; I can't be responsible for more deaths of people who don't deserve to die. I can't." His eyes filled with tears. He covered his eyes, rubbing at them with the heels of his hands, letting out a groan.

Willow put her arms around him again, sending a panicked look to Spike. She didn't know what to do. She felt like she'd made everything worse. Spike just kept pacing. Willow pulled back and stood next to Giles. "Spike, you go. You can stay alive. I'll stay with Giles. He'll make sure nothing happens to me."

Spike sent her a furious look. Willow held her hand up, trying to placate him. "Spike, I can't leave Giles. I won't leave him. And he won't go. He's right anyway. I don't want to live like that. I don't want people's death on my conscience. And I can't ask him to take that on for me."

Spike was not placated. "This makes no sense. How can they keep you a prisoner when they can't control you, when they can't even keep you inside? What makes you think they'll let you live, that they'll let her live?"

Giles looked at Spike. "Détente. They'll get to keep their eyes on me. I will get to keep my eyes on them. We will all walk gingerly around each other and leave each other alone."

Spike thought for a moment. "And in the meantime we come up with a plan?"

Giles nodded his head. "In the meantime we come up with a plan."

Spike kicked the tree one more time. "Fuck. Let's go." He turned around to face Giles. "But when I need to feed, you turn your head."

Giles nodded. "I'll turn my head." Willow gasped and Giles reached for her hand squeezing it. She looked up and when she made as if to speak she saw Giles gently shake his head.

They slowly walked back in the direction of the Council. Spike spoke to Giles. "So, do you really think that nothing can kill you?"

Giles thought for a moment. "Well, I know I can't die of a drug overdose. I know I can't bleed to death, or starve to death."

Spike grinned at Giles. "My, my, you have been a busy boy."

Giles grinned back. "Yes, well, I had time on my hands." He squeezed Willow's hand again. "We know bullets and arrows can't kill me." He looked at Spike. "What else is there?"

Spike smiled. "Suffocation, decapitation, disembowelment, sudden impact, explosions..."

Willow reached over and smacked him. "Stop it." She shivered. "You know way too many ways to die." Spike just grinned at her.

Giles thought about Spike's list. "I suppose if you cut my head off, I'd probably die, but I don't know that a sword could get that close to me." He looked at Spike. "Do you have a knife with you?"

Spike nodded and reached into his coat. He looked at Giles, a little uncomfortable. "Do you just want me to stab you?" Willow grabbed Spike's arm. "No, you're not going to just stab him."

Giles gently touched her arm. "Willow, it's all right. I need to know." He pushed her away from him and looked at Spike. "Just try and stab me in the arm."

Spike frowned. He lifted the knife across his chest and slashed out with a backhand motion. The knife just bounced off of Giles almost cutting Spike. Spike's eyebrows lifted. He looked at the knife. At Giles' nod he tried again, aiming for Giles' stomach. Again, the knife bounced off. Spike let out a whistle. "Okay, now we know you can't be stabbed, or decapitated, or disemboweled." He grinned. "The list is getting shorter." Willow let out a disgusted sound. She reached for Giles' hand again. "Let's just walk. No more talk of killing. Not tonight." Giles closed his fingers on hers again and nodded. Suddenly Willow gasped. Giles looked at her concerned. "Oh my God, I have to call Xander." Giles grinned and headed them off in the direction of the nearest public phone.

Willow used her calling card and dialed Xander's number. After several rings Xander answered.

"Hello?"

"Xander?"

"Willow? Are you all right? Did you get Giles?" Willow smiled. Then she frowned. She didn't answer right away. Xander gritted his teeth. "Willow, talk to me."

"I'm here, I'm just not sure how to answer your question."

"Which one, the confusing 'are you all right' one or the real challenger 'did you

get Giles'? I'm thinking one word answers here, Will." She giggled and he nominally relaxed. "You're giggling, that's good. I guess that means they're not torturing you."

Giles took the phone from Willow. "Xander. It's me, Giles."

"Giles! It's good to hear your voice."

"It's good to hear yours as well."

"So, why is Willow so stumped by my questions?"

"Well, a few complications have developed but nothing serious." He turned away from Spike's disgusted expression.

"What kind of complications?"

"We'll just be staying here for a little while longer."

"I don't like the sound of this. Does someone have a gun to your head?" Giles let out a short laugh. "No. No. It's hard to explain right now. In fact I don't really know how to explain without making you worry and I don't believe you need to be."

Xander let that sentence run through his head. "Right. I feel much better now." He let out a long breath. "That's sarcasm. You heard that, right?"

Giles chuckled. "Yes, Xander, that came through loud and clear."

"At least you and Willow are okay, yes?"

"Yes, we're fine, and not in any immediate danger. We just can't come home right now."

"Well, you better get home soon. You've got a namesake here that's going to want to be meeting you in a few days."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Anya, she's expecting twins, a boy and a girl. We named them already. The boy is going to be William Giles after you and Will, and the girl is going to be Elizabeth Anya after Anya and..well..Buffy."

Giles had to fight the tears away. He rested his head on the telephone box, the surface feeling cool to his skin. He let out a shaky breath. "I..I don't know

what to say."

"Nothing to say big guy. Just come home, and bring Willow with you."

Giles pushed his fingers under his glasses and rubbed the moisture away. "I'll do everything I can to get us there." He paused. "Give Anya a hug for me."

"I'll do that." Xander bit the inside of his cheek. "Giles?"

"Yes, Xander."

"Are you sure you're okay?" At Giles hesitation Willow took the phone again.

"Hey, it's me Willow again. Did she have the babies?"

Xander allowed himself to be distracted. "No, but she's getting very crabby so I can only pray it will be any second or you may be coming home to demon mincemeat."

Willow giggled again. "Thanks Xander."

"For what?"

"For being there, so I could call you."

"You know, for someone who just engineered a successful prison break, and for someone who's just been broken out of prison, I am noting a distinct lack of major happies."

Willow sighed. "I'll call you again, as soon as I can."

"Okay, I am totally not liking this whole thing, but, once again, there's not much I can do about it. Tell Spike I'll still stake him if something happens to you or to Giles."

Willow giggled again. "Take care Xander."

"You too, Will."

Willow hung up the phone. She looked up at Giles and saw that his eyes were still bright. She smiled. "He told you about the babies?" Giles nodded. Her eyes grew bright too. She moved her head in a determined nod. "We'll go see them together." She looked up at Spike. "All of us." They stood there for a moment and then they turned away from the phone booth and headed back to the Council.

End of Part 4

Magic 5

As they approached Council grounds they could see three armed guards waiting for their return. The guards snapped to attention and one of them stepped forward and spoke. "Mr. Giles?"

Giles' forehead furrowed at the unexpected courtesy. He glanced at Spike and Willow and then moved forward. "Yes?"

The guard made a motion to something behind Giles. Spike and Willow turned and saw three more guards coming up behind them. Spike's eyes widened and Giles just sent him a look.

The guard in front of them spoke again. "Just glad to see you back safely, sir. We're responsible for your well-being."

Spike whispered. "Détente, indeed."

Giles just nodded and didn't respond to the guard. He started to head back to the window they had all crawled out of earlier.

The guard politely cut him off. "Excuse me, sir. Your quarters have been moved. Mr. Jensen thought perhaps you might like to use the front door."

At that Giles bit off a smile. He gestured to the guard to lead the way and with guards both in front and behind them they were escorted into the Council building and brought to a room down the end of a long corridor, on the first floor. The guard opened the door and after Giles, Spike and Willow were through it, he closed it behind them.

It was a small apartment, with three bedrooms, one a master suite. Spike whistled. "Not bad." He walked through all the rooms and when he went into the third bedroom he didn't come out for a minute.

Curious, Giles walked in to find him. One of the rooms had all the windows heavily shaded, to prevent any sunlight from entering. Giles looked around, impressed despite his desire not to be. Willow had followed Giles in. She took in the window treatment. "How did they get this done so fast?"

Giles smiled ruefully. "Getting things done is what they do best." He walked back out into the living room.

Willow was still confused. "How did they know you'd come back, that we'd all come back?"

Giles smiled at her. "This Mr. Jensen isn't a fool. He reasoned it out just as I did. He knew the only way I could keep you safe is to bring you here."

Willow's eyes hardened and she spoke angrily. "He is a fool. He left you to rot, and then he tried to kill you."

"Willow, don't mistake heartlessness for foolishness. I'm dangerous; he knows that. As far as he's concerned I'm a loose cannon, one that he has no control over."

Spike threw himself down on the couch and reached into his pocket for a cigarette. He ignored the looks that Giles and Willow sent him. "Don't even start with me." He lit one up and took a drag. He looked at the kitchen area. "Hey, Red, go see if there's something to nosh on."

Willow walked over to the kitchenette and opened the refrigerator. It was full of food. She opened the cupboards and they were too. "Yikes. There's tons of stuff. What do you want?" She looked at both Giles and Spike.

Giles walked over to join her and just stared into the open refrigerator. Willow saw that look in his eyes again. She moved over closer to him, smiling. "Weird to have choices again?"

Giles smiled at her. "It does feel strange." He reached out a hand to choose a drink and then pulled it back. He sent her a sheepish smile and reached again. He pulled out a bottle of root beer. He twisted off the cap and drank deeply. He let out a satisfied sigh.

Spike got off the couch and came over to join them, leaning across the counter from them. He asked Giles to grab him a beer. He took the proffered beer from Giles, opened it and took a swig. He took another and then headed back off to the couch. He picked up the remote and turned the television on.

Giles started at the noise and he swung around. When he saw that it was the television he laughed softly to himself. He saw Willow looking at him and he smiled at her. "I'm all right, Willow. It still occasionally feels like a dream. As if maybe I really have gone mad."

She put her hand on his arm. "Nope, not a dream. Just us."

Giles looked down at her and smiled tenderly at her, putting his hand briefly

over hers. "Better than a dream." He turned away and started putting some snacks on a tray. He carried the tray out to the living room and sat down with Spike. Giles watched the television with them for a few minutes and then got up. He moved over to the window. It would be dawn soon and he could just start to make out shapes. He stood there, motionless. Willow watched him, finally getting up to join him. "What are you looking at?"

He continued looking outside. "I miss my trees." Willow could feel her eyes prick with tears. She stood with him as the night started to wash away into light. Giles noticed Willow yawning. "Time for bed?"

She nodded and yawned again. "I'm tired." She stretched out her shoulders. "I didn't get much sleep last night." She frowned. "Or today, or whenever it was back in California." She shrugged and looked at Giles. "Aren't you sleepy?"

"Actually yes. I haven't been needing to sleep much anymore, but I have to admit the thought of a good night's, or day's, in this matter, sleep sounds quite appealing." He pointed to the master bedroom. "Why don't you take that room?"

She shook her head. "No, they set up one of the other rooms for me." She laughed at his confusion. "There's girl stuff in there." She blushed. "I mean, like girlie soaps and shampoos and make up and stuff." She wrinkled her nose. "You know, girl stuff." He laughed. "Indeed, girl stuff." He looked at both Willow and Spike. "I'll say goodnight then."

Spike raised his beer as a goodnight salute and went back to his show. Willow rose on her tiptoes and kissed his cheek. He raised his hand to touch where she had kissed him and smiled at her. He turned and walking into the master bedroom shut the door behind him.

Willow walked over to Spike and sat down next to him. She struggled to decide what to say. She put her hand on his arm to get his attention. "I'm sorry."

He continued to watch the television. "For what?"

She gestured to the room. "For getting you stuck here."

He blew a noise out through his lips. He glanced at her and saw how worried she was. He lifted the remote and shut off the television and turned to her. He chewed on his lip for a minute. "It's not all bad." He held out his beer. "Free beer and food." He let out a disgusted short laugh and shrugged.

Willow's smile was sad. "Was I wrong? Was it wrong for us to come?"

Spike shook his head. "If we hadn't come, Giles would still be stuck in that room going bonkers, having conversations with trees and eventually blowing England off the map." He pulled his legs up, sitting Indian style on the couch. "Besides, despite his worrying, he was glad to see you."

Willow cocked her head. "He was glad to see you too."

Spike looked down at his hands. He'd seen that. He'd seen how glad Giles had been to see him. It still surprised him. He looked back up at Willow. "One day at a time, luv." He turned to the window and his eyes narrowed. "I can feel the sun. I think I'll turn in as well." He touched Willow's knee. "Go get some sleep, you look done in." Willow nodded and rose when Spike did.

Giles took a long shower. As he washed his hair he felt its length. He wondered if he should ask Willow to cut it. He finally shut the water off and dried himself. He avoided his reflection. He slipped into some boxers and a T-shirt and sat on the bed. After the twin bed he'd been sleeping in for so long the king sized mattress looked huge to him.

He slowly lay down, feeling the softness of the comforter underneath him. He lay there welcoming the silence at first. After a while it began to feel oppressive. He had to keep opening his eyes to reassure himself that it hadn't been a dream. That he was in a new room, that Willow and Spike were close by. As any kind of restful sleep continued to elude him he finally got up and went to stand by the window, looking out.

Willow took a shower as well. When she got out she dressed in the oversized T-shirt that had been left on the bed. It covered her to her knees. She laughed at her reflection in the mirror and looked down at the shirt. It had the insignia for the Watcher's Council on it. She walked back into the bedroom and she opened up the closet curious to see if they had brought other clothes for her as well. Her eyes filled with tears as she saw what was resting inside. She slowly sat down and reached forward pulling her small suitcase out of the closet. The one she'd left on the plane. She held it tight to her chest and started to cry. She stood suddenly and threw the suitcase away from her. She opened her door and ran to Giles' room.

She gasped when she saw the bed was empty but then she heard him as he turned to see who had entered his room. She ran over to him by the window and fell against him crying. He held her tightly. "What's wrong? What's happened?"

She couldn't talk she was crying so hard. He just held her, running his hands

up and down her back to soothe her. Finally her sobs became less frequent. She looked up at him and he reached down and wiped her tears away. He asked again. "What's wrong?"

More tears fell down her face. "My suitcase. It's in my room." Giles shook his head, still not understanding the cause of her misery. She started to cry again. "It was on the plane, I left it on the plane. With the pilot." She started to sob again and Giles continued to hold her, his eyes darkening as he rested his head on hers.

"Willow, I'm so sorry."

She raised her head again. "Do you really think he's dead?"

Giles thought about lying for a moment. Then he realized she needed to know the truth. She needed to know what they were up against. "Yes, I do." He headed her to the bathroom. He wet a washcloth and started wiping off her face.

"Why did they have to kill him? I don't understand. Why did they bring me my suitcase?"

Giles tightened his lips and squeezed the washcloth tightly in his fist. "To send us a message. To show us that they have the upper hand here."

Willow looked up at Giles. "Do they?"

Giles hesitated and then he shrugged. "No, it's more like a stalemate." He wiped more tears off of Willow's face.

She held his arm and closed her eyes tightly. "I feel like I killed him."

Giles held her by her shoulders. "You didn't. They did. Remember that. You came back here with me because you chose not to kill." He paused. "If anyone of us is to blame, it's me. I kept you from going back to the plane. Maybe if I'd gone with you right away we'd have gotten to him in time."

Willow smiled sadly at him. "Thank you for trying to make me feel better but I don't believe you. Spike and I would probably just be dead too." She rested her head against her chest. "At least this way we're together and we're safe." Tears started to fall again. "At least the three of us are." She hadn't particularly liked the pilot but he hadn't deserved to die.

Giles spread his legs a little and leaned against the bathroom counter. He pulled Willow into his arms and held her as she started sobbing again. Giles

felt a moment of rage as he thought of the man who had ordered them killed. Giles had no doubt that he had orchestrated this. If he'd been standing in front of him Giles would have ripped out his heart for using Willow to deliver this message.

When Willow finally looked up Giles had the rage off his face. He smiled tenderly at Willow. "Better?" She nodded and sighed tiredly. He spoke again. "Think you can sleep now?"

She closed her eyes. She didn't want to go back to that room, back to the room where the suitcase was. She spoke in a small voice. "Can I stay here with you? I don't want to be alone."

He looked down at her, at her red rimmed exhausted eyes. He nodded. He wiped her face one more time. "Come on, let's get you tucked in."

She followed him out and watched as he pulled back the covers. She crawled in and curled onto her side. He walked to the other side of the bed and lay down on top of the covers. She wiggled over and laid her head on his chest resting her arm over his stomach. He worked one arm under her head and laid the other over her arm. She opened up her sleepy eyes. "You sure you don't mind?"

He patted her arm. "No, I like having you here. Believe it or not I was actually feeling lonely. I kept thinking I had dreamed it all, that I would wake up and you'd be gone. It will be nice to have you here to remind me that it's true, that I'm not alone anymore."

She lifted her head and looked at him fiercely. "I will never let you be alone again." She lay her head back down on his chest and he listened as her breathing grew deep and regular. He lay there for a long time before finally closing his eyes and allowing sleep to take him.

End Part 5

Magic 6

The three of them slept through the day. As night fell Spike woke up. He stretched and stepped out of his room. He poked his head into Willow's room and he frowned when he saw she wasn't there. He walked quickly to Giles' room, worried that perhaps they'd been taken. He opened the door and saw them both on the bed. All he could see was the top of Willow's hair peaking out. Giles was sprawled on his stomach, still on top of the covers, one arm thrown over Willow. Spike watched them for a minute, smirking. He backed

out of the room and quietly shut the door behind him. Walking over to the kitchen area he fixed himself a snack. He headed to the couch, flipped the television on and sat back, waiting for them to wake up.

Giles woke up first, the same way he'd woken up a dozen times during the day. His heart was pounding, fear clenched in his gut. Once again he turned his head to find Willow next to him. He slowly relaxed, slowly fought back the fear. He started to sit up and she stirred. He held still allowing her the chance to drop back off to sleep. She turned onto her back, started to stretch and as her arm stretched out her hand touched his arm. He watched her, watched as her brow started to furrow. Watched as she spread her fingers out and felt his arm again. Giles started to grin, watching her as her mind tried to figure out what was going on. Her eyes shot open and she started to sit up. When she saw him she let out a breath and flopped back down. Giles started to laugh at her and she made a face at him. Giles just grinned. "It's been a while since you've woken up with someone with hairy arms, hasn't it?"

Willow nodded and grinned, blushing a little. Giles grinned back. He stood reaching for his robe. Putting it on he sat back on the bed. He was feeling calm and peaceful sitting here with her. He wanted to prolong the moment, not ready to face what the day might bring. He spoke again. "What happened to Tara?"

Willow rolled on to her side facing him. "We broke up. She's dating someone else now. She seems happy."

"I'm sorry."

"No, don't be. It was a mutual thing."

"So you haven't found someone new?"

She reached out a hand and softly touched his face, just for a second. She pulled her hand back. She didn't answer him. After a minute he started to move off the bed. She spoke. "What time is it?"

Giles shook his head. "I don't know." He walked to the window, pulling the curtain aside. "But it's dark."

She rose up on her elbows. "We slept all day?"

Giles smiled. "Apparently." He came back and sat on the bed. "Do you feel rested?"

Willow nodded. She stretched her arms and legs again letting out a loud

yawn. She smiled at him. "Thanks for letting me stay in here with you."

Giles smiled and got up to go to the bathroom. He ran his fingers through his hair and brushed his teeth. He drew on the pants he had hung on the back of the door. When he came back out Willow was still lying in bed, staring at the ceiling.

He looked down at her. "Are you all right?"

She looked at him, a rueful smile on her lips. "Yes. I was just wondering what happens next." She pulled back the covers and sat on the edge of the bed. She looked down at herself and plucked at her T-shirt.

Giles watched her hesitate. He spoke. "Do you want me to get your clothes from your room?"

She looked at him, her eyes huge. She nodded and then looked at the floor. He got up and left the room heading for hers. He saw Spike and greeted him. Spike nodded at him, his mouth full of crackers. Giles made his way to Willow's room and found her suitcase where she had thrown it. He opened it and pulled out her clothes. Holding them tucked under his arm he brought the suitcase into the living room. He placed it down in front of Spike.

Spike looked at it for a minute and Giles watched his eyes as he made the connection. Spike shook his head and lifted angry eyes to Giles. "Those fuckers." Spike couldn't care less about the pilot; he didn't like that they'd made their point through Willow.

Giles nodded, his eyes angry as well. He took a deep breath and headed back to the bedroom. He laid Willow's clothes on the bed. He smiled at her. "Take your time, feel free to take a shower, or whatever else you need." She looked at the clothes and tentatively touched them. "Willow?" She looked up at him. "You don't have to wear them. We can go buy you new things."

She shook her head. "No, it's all right. It just still makes me sad." She sent him a tight smile. Giles continued to look at her and she stood. "Really, it's all right. I'll be all right."

He nodded, not convinced. He pointed to the living room. "I'm right out here if you need something." At her nod, he left, closing the door behind him. When Giles got back to the suitcase he picked it up. He walked over to the door of the suite. He put out his hand and turned the knob. He was surprised when it turned all the way and he was able to open the door. A guard was outside the door. "Mr. Giles, what can I do for you?"

Giles handed out the suitcase. "Please take this to Mr. Jensen. Tell him we got the message. Tell him if he does something like that again, I'll kill him. Tell him I expect him to deal with me, not go through a young frightened girl." As the guard nodded, Giles shut the door in his face.

Spike watched Giles as he shut the door. He could see the anger in Giles' posture. He watched as Giles leaned against the door, arms extended.

Giles was struggling, trying to fight the anger he was feeling. It still frightened him to be angry. Even though he knew he was free of the monster's grip, if his emotions grew too strong they could still make the magic stir. It was stirring within him now. He wrestled with it, just the thought that he might lose control of it generating enough fear to make the effort futile.

Willow walked out of the bedroom and padded over to the couch on bare feet. Spike looked up and sent her a smile. "Hello, pet." She grinned at him and sat, pulling her legs up under her. She glanced over at Giles. Suddenly she sat up straight and looked nervous.

"Giles?" She could feel the magic. She needed to see Giles' face. She walked over to him and touched his arm.

He flinched away, and shook his head. "Not now, Willow." She stood there, not sure what to do. Giles briefly glanced at her and she saw in his eyes that it was still him, still Giles, despite the magic she sensed; the monster hadn't come back. She let out her breath. Giles lowered his arms and took a deep breath. He looked at her again. "I need to be alone for a while." He moved away from the door, walking around her and headed into the bedroom, shutting the door behind him.

She cast a nervous glance at Spike who had been watching the exchange. Spike spoke. "What's his problem?"

Willow walked back over to the couch and sat down again. "I could feel his magic."

"Like before?" Spike looked nervous.

She shook her head. "No. Well, sort of. Just the power part, not the evil part." She grimaced and glanced towards the bedroom door. "I think he was pretty wigged."

Spike rolled his eyes. "I don't know what he's worried about, he's not the one who's going to get flattened." He ran his palms tightly over each other, simulating pressing something tightly. At Willow's confused gaze Spike shook

his head. She hadn't seen what he'd seen. She hadn't seen what Giles had done to those demons. He looked at her. "We need to get out of here."

Willow's lips tightened. "I know. We need to figure out how to make the Council let Giles go."

"I wasn't talking about Giles, I meant you and me."

Willow's eyes opened wide. "What do you mean? We came to get him out."

Spike nodded and reaching for his cigarettes, tapped one out. "That's right. We did our part. He wouldn't go with us, remember?" He lit his cigarette and took a deep drag. "If he's gonna go crazy with the magic again I don't want to be on the same continent with him."

Willow was starting to get annoyed. "Spike, he's not going crazy." She crossed her arms over her breasts. "And I'm not leaving him." She shot him a pleading look. "I can't leave him."

Spike flicked some ash in a cup. "And then what, Willow? Are you just going to stay here the rest of your life? Rot in here with him? What good will that do?"

"I don't care. Besides Giles said they'll kill us if we leave." Spike shrugged. Willow's jaw dropped and she smacked him. "Easy for you to say, you're already dead." She scrunched her face up. "Or whatever."

Spike took a last drag and dropped the butt into the cup. "Look, if you want to stay, stay. But as soon as I can, I'm out of here."

"So, what's keeping you? Go, now." She fought back the tears so they didn't fall on her face but they still showed in her voice. "Don't you care Spike? Don't you care what happens to him?" She was desperate for him to say yes.

He saw her face and sprang off the couch. "Fuck." The problem was that he did care and that pissed him off as much as anything did. He moved over to the window and felt the night calling to him. He looked back at Willow, at her trembling body, her eyes bright with unshed tears. He glanced at the closed bedroom door. He hated the hold they both had on him. He shook his head, feeling trapped by the Council, by this room they were in, by his own weakness. He opened the window and jumped outside. He leaned back in. "I'll be back." He pursed his lips. "Unless they kill me. If I'm not back, you'll know to stick close to Giles." He spun around and walked off.

Willow watched Spike until he blended in with the darkness. She sat there not

knowing what she should do, how she could help. All she knew was that she couldn't leave Giles again. She had been orbiting him for years and now she was feeling his gravitational pull. She needed him; she needed to be near him, as elemental a thing as the need for food and water. She didn't know if it was the magic calling to her, or the friendship, or the attachment of a rescuer for the one rescued, or a combination of all three and more, but she felt the pull and she knew she couldn't leave.

Giles lay on the bed. The magic was quiet again. He had listened to Willow and Spike's voices. He couldn't hear what they were saying but he knew they were fighting. He was sure it was about him. He wished he'd made them go. As much as he wanted Willow here with him he wanted her safe more. The problem was that he didn't know if she was safer with him or away from him. He clenched his fists and hit the bed by his sides. He saw no way out for him. He felt like he was in a maze with no center. And if there was no way out for him, he didn't see a way out for Willow.

It was quiet out in the living room now. He knew that Willow would be worried about him. He got up and going into the bathroom splashed some cold water on his face. As he was drying his face with a washcloth he looked up in the mirror. With his hands on the washcloth covering the bottom half of his face he stared into his eyes, looking for answers. He reached over and turned off the light plunging the bathroom into darkness. He lowered the washcloth and threw it on the counter.

He walked out into the living area and saw Willow huddled on the couch. She looked up in relief when she saw him. He smiled a tight smile at her and walked to the kitchen to make some tea. He sent a questioning look her way holding up the teakettle. She nodded and watched him as he calmly went about making them tea. He picked up both mugs and walked over to the couch. He handed one to her and he slowly sat down being careful not to spill his. He took a sip and held the cup in his hands, the warmth of it comforting. He looked around. "Where's Spike?"

Willow looked away. "He left." She qualified her answer. "He'll be back."

Giles wondered about that but he didn't say anything. He looked at Willow. "I'm sorry I keep putting you in such danger."

Willow shook her head. She tried to grin. "That's me, danger girl." She wasn't very successful.

He looked at her with an affectionate gaze. "Still." He took another sip. He thought for a minute. "Eight years." She looked at him not understanding. "That's how long we've known each other."

"Feels like forever." She looked at him, her eyes wide, realizing how that sounded. "I mean that in a good way."

Giles smiled. "I know." He took another sip. "It does seem like forever."

They sat there in a companionable silence. Willow gazed out the window. She frowned. "Where do you suppose he's gone to?"

Giles looked at her, cocking his head to the side. "Willow."

Her lips tightened. She shook her head. "Nothing's going right."

His heart tightened in his chest at the pain in her voice. "I'm sorry."

She looked at him, shaking her head with a frustrated motion. "No, don't be sorry." She took a deep breath. "It's not your fault. It's me. I'm not danger girl at all, more like na?e girl. Somehow I thought we'd come and get you and bring you home and all live happily ever after. I'm so stupid." She held the still warm mug against her cheek and closed her eyes.

"Don't say that." She opened her eyes at the severe tone in his voice. "Don't ever say that about yourself. You aren't stupid. You're one of the bravest and smartest women I've ever known." He continued. "No one is ever prepared to go against the Council. They are too powerful, too..." He couldn't seem to think of the right word. He stretched the fingers out on one hand, trying to demonstrate what he was thinking.

"Too spider webby?"

Giles smiled and nodded. "Thank you. Exactly. Too spider webby."

She grinned to hear him use such a silly word. It made her feel better. She put her cup down. "Hungry?" At his nod she moved into the kitchen and started trying to figure out what they could have. He sat there for a moment finishing his tea and then rose to assist her.

They had just finished dinner when Spike came back. He looked quite pleased with himself. Willow winced at the look on his face. She hated to even think about what he'd been doing. Spike clapped his hands together, a sardonic grin on his face. "See, safe and sound, no stake through the heart, no friggin' swords flying at my head." He looked at Giles. "Tell her we can go."

Giles heart started to race. He couldn't bear the thought of Willow leaving. But he knew he couldn't keep her here. He took a deep breath but before he

could speak Willow did. She looked at both Spike and Giles. "I'm not leaving. I'm not leaving without Giles." She glared at Spike. "And don't even think about knocking me out because as soon as I'm awake I'll just come back. You can't keep me away."

Giles tried to speak again but she cut him off. "Don't say it. Don't even think about saying it." She turned furious eyes to Spike. "And you, if you really don't care what happens, just go, I don't want you here. But if you do care, then shut up about leaving." She started stacking plates, slamming them together. Giles winced expecting them to shatter.

He bit off a grin, knowing Willow would not be amused, and he shot a glance at Spike. Spike was just watching Willow, his eyes wide. He started to tap a cigarette out of his pack and shook his head. "How I get into these fucking situations is beyond me. Jesus H. Christ." He flicked his lighter and drawing hard he lit his cigarette. He walked over to the couch and threw himself down full length upon it.

Willow glanced at Giles and saw the amusement in his eyes. She swung to him still furious. "And you, Mr. I think this is so funny. Start thinking of a plan. Put that stupid brain of yours to work."

Giles knew an exit line when he saw one. He walked over to the living room area and sat in the chair across from Spike leaving Willow in the kitchen slamming the rest of the dishes and pots into the sink. He raised his eyes and he and Spike exchanged glances. Spike pursed his lips, a grin hovering on the edges of his lips.

Spike took a drag, turned his head to the ceiling and blew out some smoke. Giles watched as it danced in the air above his head and slowly dissipated. Spike pulled himself into a sitting position. He looked at Giles. "What will it take for them to let you walk out of here?"

Giles shook his head. He'd been over this so many times in his head and had gotten nowhere. "I don't know." He stood. "I just don't know." He ran a hand through his hair.

Spike looked at him. "What's up with the magic? How come you could control it last night?"

Giles shook his head again. "I don't know that either."

"When's the last time you really tried it?"

Giles thought for a moment. "I haven't used it for probably close to a year."

"Maybe you should try it again. It worked last night, maybe you can control it and just don't know it."

Giles looked nervous. Willow had been listening. Her curiosity overcame her anger at the two of them. She walked over to join them and encouraged him. "Go ahead, Giles. Try something small." She looked around the room. She noticed the door. "Try and open the door."

Giles ran his hand down his cheeks to his jaw as if feeling for beard growth. He walked over to the door and opened it. He poked his head outside and spoke to the guards. "Do me a favor, would you all just move away from the door for a minute?" He looked across the hall. "What's behind that wall?"

The guard looked behind him. "A store room."

"A store room for what?" Giles had a mental picture of ammunitions, barrels of gunpowder, the building going up in flames.

"Paper, office supplies."

Giles nodded. He motioned again. "Please, move away from the door." After they complied he looked at them. "Stay there please, I don't want anyone getting hurt."

He shut the door behind him and walked back over to the couch. Spike just looked at him. "Aren't you being just a bit paranoid?"

Giles shook his head. "No." He sat next to Willow.

She patted his knee. "Okay, now gently think about opening the door." Giles nodded and closed his eyes. He concentrated and allowed the tiniest crack of magic out. The door exploded off its hinges and flew back taking out the wall behind it. Papers and pencils cascaded into the air along with pieces of dry wall.

Giles ran out into the hall. "Anyone hurt?" He looked up and down the hall and ran to help a guard up. "Is everyone okay?" They all were nodding. "No one's missing?" Heads shook at him, everyone unconsciously backing away from him. Giles didn't blame them. He went back into the suite.

Spike and Willow were both sitting there, looking a little stunned. Spike spoke. "Okay." He nodded, pursing his lips. "That went well." Giles just sat on the couch and put his hands over his face.

Willow got up and went to the hallway. She went and surveyed the damage.

She told everyone to still stay out of the way. She came back in. "Giles." He looked up. "I have an idea. Try and put the door back. Try and close it." She called to Spike. "Just in case, we'll stand over here." Spike joined her outside their two bedrooms, well out of the way in the event the door came exploding back in.

Giles closed his eyes and allowed the magic out again. He found the door with his magic and thought about it being back in place. He opened his eyes in a moment and saw that the door was back. He hadn't heard a thing. He let out a surprised exclamation and the three of them went and examined it. Giles turned the knob after making sure Willow was out of the way in case the door fell. It swung open easily, hinges intact.

He looked across the hall. The wall still had a gaping hole in it. He checked to make sure no one had gotten hurt. Other than the guards looking quite nervous everyone seemed okay. He shut the door and looked at Willow. "I don't understand. How did you know this would work?"

Willow wasn't sure how to explain it. "I just kept thinking about how you protected us. It just seems like the magic you do that comes in your direction, you know the stuff that's aimed towards you, like keeping you safe, keeping us safe, closing us behind a door, that stuff you can do. It's the stuff that goes away from you..." She gestured outwards with her hands. "That's the stuff that goes kablooie." She mimed an explosion with her hands. She frowned. "Did that make sense?"

Giles paced around the room thinking. "Pieces of it." He let his body lean back hard against a wall. "I need to be someplace I can practice, where I can't hurt anyone." He gestured towards the door. "Or destroy private property. I'm sure the Council will be thrilled about that."

They sat there in silence for a minute and then Willow yawned widely. She looked at them apologetic. "Sorry. I know I just got up a couple of hours ago but I'm pooped again."

Giles nodded. "Well, I shouldn't wonder. Between jet lag and the events of the last two days it's a wonder you aren't dead on your feet. Why don't you go take a nap?"

Willow turned her head from side to side, thinking. She yawned again. "Okay." She got up and headed off to Giles' bedroom.

Giles watched her shut the door behind her. He turned to see Spike grinning at him. Spike spoke. "Looks like she's moved in, mate."

Giles frowned at him. "It's not like that."

Spike just nodded. "Right." He got up and retrieved another beer from the refrigerator. He offered one to Giles but Giles shook his head. Spike shut the refrigerator door and sat back down.

Giles took a deep breath. "Did you kill tonight?"

"What the hell business is that of yours?"

"Did you kill tonight?" Spike just took a swig of his beer. He reached for his pack of cigarettes. Giles put his hand out and stopped him. "Spike, do not kill anyone else. I won't allow it."

"How do you plan on stopping me?"

"I can keep you here. I can make it so you can't leave."

Spike jerked his hand out from Giles grip. "You said you'd turn your head when I needed to feed."

"And I meant it, but not the way you thought."

Spike's eyes turned angry. "How the hell did you mean it?"

Giles looked at Spike, meeting his angry eyes. "You can feed off of me."

Spike just stared at Giles. "What the fuck are you talking about?"

Giles repeated himself. "You can feed off of me. You can't kill me. I don't even think it will hurt me." Giles stood up, walking over to the window. "I know you don't want to be here. I know you think you're safe if you leave. And maybe you're right. But they're not going to turn a blind eye if you're killing people here, right under their noses." He turned to look at Spike. He walked back over and sat across from Spike again. "I promised you that I wouldn't kill you. And I meant it. But I won't stop someone else from killing you if it's to prevent you from taking innocent lives."

He stood up again, feeling restless. "I owe you Spike. I know that. That's why you can feed off of me. If you can't deal with that then you should go, because anything else is unacceptable to me." Giles used his trump card. "Willow won't want anything to happen to you either. And you know she doesn't like you killing to feed."

"And you think she'll be okay with me feeding off of you?"

"No, but that's what she'll need to deal with, to keep you alive, to keep you here. I know she wants you here. I know she cares about you." Spike scowled and looked away. Giles persisted. "So next time you need to feed, you tell me and I'll take care of it." Spike didn't agree, but he didn't argue anymore either. Giles was satisfied with that. Giles rose again going to the window. He couldn't even imagine how he'd stayed in one room for so long. This larger space seemed claustrophobically small. He had to get out.

Giles walked over to the kitchen counter and grabbing a pen and paper started writing. Spike watched him. "What are you doing?"

"Writing Willow a note in case she wakes up. I don't want her to worry that I'm not here."

Spike's eyebrows rose. "Where are you going?"

"Out."

"You can go out, but I can't?"

"I'm not planning on killing anybody." He thought for a moment. "At least, nothing human."

Spike looked at Giles. The possibility of more killing appealed to him. "Want some company?"

Giles considered him for a moment and nodded. He added another sentence to the note and left it out in plain sight. He and Spike both stepped out the window, jumping to the ground. Giles turned back to the room and held his hand up closing his eyes. He turned to Spike. "No one can get in now. She'll be safe." Spike nodded and the two of them strode off into the night.

End of Part 6

Magic 7

Spike lit a cigarette, the flame highlighting the angular planes of his face. He leaned against a tree and watched Giles fight. They had been walking for a while. Spike knew that Giles hadn't been looking for anything to kill but they had stumbled onto a group of vampires. The vampires had been having fun playing with their food, harassing a couple of young lovers who had chosen the wrong place to woo one another.

Spike had made quick work of several of them while Giles had made sure that the vampires' intended prey escaped. That left two vampires and Giles was fighting them both. Spike pursed his lips, fascinated. He wasn't sure if anyone who didn't know would even see it. It was difficult for him to see it and he knew Giles had magic that protected him. Giles used it so subtly. He never used it to attack. He used it to defend, to deflect, and to confuse. When he did attack it was with his fists and his feet.

Spike let Giles fight. He figured Giles could use a good fight, and it was clear that he didn't need to worry about Giles getting hurt. After a while Spike got up. Giles didn't have any weapons; he wouldn't actually be able to kill these vampires, not unless he used his magic or was planning on fighting them until sunrise. He called out to Giles and Giles turned to him. Spike watched as one of the vampires went for Giles' neck and ended up eating dirt on the ground, looking confused. Spike grinned. He tossed a stake to Giles. Giles caught it and as the vampire pulled himself up Giles staked him. When Giles turned to stake the last one it was to see him running away. Giles narrowed his eyes deciding if it was worth the chase. He waited too long and the vampire was gone from sight.

Giles turned to Spike and threw the stake back to him. "Thanks."

Spike caught it easily and put it back in his pocket. He nodded his head, throwing his cigarette butt on the ground, grinding it beneath his foot. Spike looked at Giles. He had thought of something while he had watched Giles fight. "You know Giles, there is one way the Council might let you go."

Giles looked at Spike, his eyebrows raised. "Yes? Enlighten me."

"You get back on their payroll."

Giles brow furrowed. "As a watcher?"

Spike barked out a laugh. "No, I'm afraid your mild mannered watcher days are over."

Giles wasn't in the mood for play. "Explain what you mean."

Spike pointed to where Giles had been fighting. "Doing that." Giles looked where Spike was pointing. "You're better than a slayer. You can't be killed, you can't even be hurt." When Giles stayed silent Spike asked a question. "Who does the Council use now when there's killing to be done?"

"For humans?"

Spike shook his head. "Demons."

"The slayer."

Spike kicked a stone. "She can only be in one place. How about the demons everywhere else? How does the Council keep it under control?"

"Security teams. Similar to what Riley went off to do. I'm sure if you traced his chain of command up to its origin that the Council would ultimately be behind it."

"I imagine these teams take quite a beating."

Giles nodded his head. "They die all the time." He tightened his lips. "As do the slayers. It's a war, casualties are high."

Spike started walking and Giles moved to his side, quickening his stride to stay apace of Spike. Spike went on. "So, what would the Council do to have someone like you? Someone who could go in, kill the demons, and get out. No casualties. No risk to humans, except maybe to you. And if you die, that's just a perk for the Council." Spike grinned. Giles stayed silent, listening. Spike continued. "Maybe the security teams handle the penny ante stuff. Maybe they do recon and figure out which problems you handle. Maybe they go with you and deal with rescuing any humans, administering first aid and the like."

Spike stopped talking. When Giles still didn't respond he shrugged. He reached for another cigarette. It was his last. He crumpled the pack and threw it on the ground. Giles absent-mindedly picked it up. Spike raised his eyebrows as he watched Giles throw the discarded pack into a nearby garbage can, without the smallest glare at Spike. Spike could see that Giles was miles away.

Spike needed more cigarettes. He started to turn heading back into town and Giles just turned with him. Spike found an all night market. He walked in, Giles behind him, and asked for two packs of cigarettes. The store clerk laid them on the counter. Spike turned to Giles and prodded him on the arm. Giles slowly turned his head to Spike. Spike pointed with his chin to the clerk. "Pay him. I haven't got any money."

Giles reached for his wallet and then he snapped out of his mental reverie. "I don't have any money. Why would I have money?" He looked at the cigarettes. "And why on earth would I buy you those? I can't abide them."

Spike rolled his eyes and dug into his pocket pulling out some loose bills. He grinned. It had been worth a try. He only had American money. He negotiated

with the clerk and after handing over a few bills he picked up his cigarettes and walked out. Giles looked at the clock on the wall as he followed Spike out. His eyebrows rose, he had no idea they'd been out this long. He hoped Willow was still sleeping. They headed back to the Council. As they neared Giles stopped and turned to Spike. "Please don't discuss this with Willow. Not yet."

Spike just looked at Giles. "You know I'm right, don't you?"

Giles' lips tightened. "I'm afraid you might be."

"So, what's the problem? Go make a deal. Your services for Willow's life. Go sign a contract, and let's get out of here."

Giles ran both his hands through his hair. "Spike, it's not that simple. I still don't know how to control most of my magic. I..." He took a deep breath and closed his eyes. Spike watched the emotions flicker across his face. Giles opened his eyes and they were full of pain. "I'm so tired of killing." He looked down at his hands. He looked back in the direction they had fought tonight. "An occasional vampire is one thing but to take this on, to make killing be what I do..." He tightened his lips and looked away.

Spike snorted. "It's what the Council's been asking slayers to do since time began. It's what you expected Buffy to do."

Giles lifted startled eyes to Spike. He remembered how Buffy had feared getting lost in the killing. Now he understood what she meant, what she had been afraid of. It made him ashamed. He was ashamed that he had essentially dismissed her concerns, that he'd tried to placate her with words. And he was ashamed that his own fears about it for himself were so strong.

Spike shook his head, his eyes glittering. He spoke in harsh tones. "Don't worry. I won't say anything to Willow. I wouldn't want to get her hopes up." He opened up one of his packs of cigarettes, throwing the wrapper on the ground, challenging Giles to do something about it. He shook his head again and began walking.

Giles slowly leaned down and picked up the wrapper. He balled it up tightly in his fist and slowly followed Spike. Neither he nor Spike acknowledged any of the guards that surrounded them and escorted them back to their quarters. Giles quietly opened the door and scanned the living room. There was no sign of Willow. He walked over to the counter; picked up the note he had left and threw it and the cigarette wrapper in the trash. He looked up to see Spike disappearing into his bedroom.

Giles started making himself some tea. The ritual helped soothe him. He carried his mug over to the couch and sat down. Slowly sipping he let his mind wander. He thought of Willow. He knew Spike was right. He knew he could probably go talk to Jensen tomorrow and have Willow and Spike on a plane back home tomorrow night. Even without him being able to control his magic. Jensen would probably see that as an acceptable risk. Giles had no illusions about the Council's willingness to accept the death of innocents in the fight against evil.

He sat there holding his mug until his tea grew cold. He thought of what his life would be like. He mostly thought of being without Willow. For the past three years, she had come to represent everything good in his life. Anything good that had happened to him, any positive emotions, any hope, any love, it had all come to him through Willow. He shook his head. He couldn't imagine anything that would be harder than putting her on a plane and sending her out of his life. The only thing harder would be seeing her dead. And to keep that from happening, he would send her away. And live the life he feared, and live his life alone.

He tasted his tea again and made a face as the cold liquid hit his lips. He walked over to the kitchen and poured it in the sink. Walking back over to the couch, he lay down, putting his arm over his eyes. It took a long time but eventually he fell asleep.

Willow gradually woke up. She glanced at the bed beside her but it was empty. Not that she had expected Giles to join her, but she would have been glad to have him nearby. She got up and used the bathroom. She ran Giles' brush through her hair and frowned at herself. Walking to the window she peered out. It was still dark but she guessed it was nearing dawn.

It was quiet. She opened the door and saw Giles sleeping on the couch. His arm had slipped off his face. She went over to the couch and stared down at him. He was astonishingly handsome. She had always found him attractive, in an older man sort of way. She had spent much of her high school years working through intermittent crushes on him. For the past two days his face had continually surprised her. Sometimes he seemed like such a stranger, his youthful appearance startling her. Other times she could see the Giles she remembered so clearly in his eyes, in his expressions, in his voice.

She slowly reached down and touched a curl of his hair. He stirred and turned a little, his back nestled into the back cushion of the couch. She slowly sat down in the curve of his body, being careful not to disturb him. She couldn't imagine what his life had been like. She thought back. It had been three and a half years since he had left Sunnydale. She shook her head. Three and a half years of hell. And five years before that, being a watcher, taking care of

them all.

Willow slowly moved her body until she was sitting on the carpet. She folded her arms on the couch and rested her head on them. She continued to look at him, looking for familiar landmarks. His face was narrower, but the cheekbones were the same. She was tempted to wake him up but she didn't know how long he'd been sleeping. She wanted to see his eyes. Then she always knew it was him. As she watched his face shift from familiar to unfamiliar and back again her eyes started to get heavy. Laying her head down she drifted off to sleep.

Giles wasn't sure what woke him. He lay on the couch listening. He heard her shift before he felt her. He looked down in surprise and saw Willow sleeping. The sun shone on her hair. He watched as an extraordinary myriad of colors were reflected back. He couldn't see her face. He lay there feeling both content and bereft. Content that he had today with her, bereft that it would probably be his last.

Almost as if his contemplation wakened her, Willow opened her eyes and slowly lifted her head. She saw Giles watching her and she smiled. He smiled back, the smile not quite reaching his eyes. "Caught up on your sleep yet?"

She gave out a half laugh. "I hope so. I feel like all I've done is sleep." She cocked her head looking at him. "What time did you go to sleep?"

Giles shook his head. "I have no idea." At her concerned look he reminded her. "I'm fine. I don't really need to sleep. It's habit mostly."

She nodded and yawned, sitting up straight, stretching to get the kinks out. "Spike sleeping?"

Giles nodded and also moved to sit up. Giles smiled at Willow, determined to enjoy this day with her. "Would you like to go out for breakfast?"

She bestowed him with a bright smile. "I'd love to." She jumped up energized at the thought of food. She put a hand on her stomach. "I'm starving. Where should we go?"

Giles thought for a moment. "Well, I'm not sure it's still open but I had a favorite place I used to go to all the time. It's tiny, most tourists don't ever find it and if they do they would probably choose to pass it by. But it's wonderful."

She took in his wistful nostalgic look. She smiled, wanting to give him this. "That sounds perfect. I'd rather eat where the locals eat anyway."

They both headed off to their respective bathrooms to freshen up. A few minutes later Giles opened up the door and holding it open for Willow, escorted her out. The guards outside jumped to attention. One of them almost put a hand out to stop them. At a look from Giles he quickly put his hand down. "Sorry sir, you just surprised me. You...well...you haven't left this way before. You always seem to go out the window."

Giles bit back a smile. He supposed that was true. "Would you rather I..." He pointed back into the room.

The guard shook his head; he almost smiled. "No, that won't be necessary." He moved out of Giles way and Giles placed his hand on the small of Willow's back and gently directed her to start walking. Remembering something, Giles turned back to the guard. "Would you please let Mr. Jensen know that I need to speak with him later today?" As the guard nodded Giles started to walk again. Willow flashed him an uncertain smile. Giles just took her elbow and moved her along. He heard the guard make a call. Giles smiled sadly, ignoring the tightness in his chest.

The place was still open. It brought back the years, brought back the steady times, the times of learning, of being clear about his life and his destiny. As he pushed open the door he saw Sam. He hadn't consciously thought about it but one of the reasons he had liked this place was because of Sam. Sam was the owner, waiter and chef. He and Giles had struck up a friendship. Not one that extended outside of this restaurant but one that had been important to the two of them nonetheless.

Giles almost called out a greeting and then remembered that there was no way to explain his appearance, that it was extremely unlikely that he would even be recognized. So he stayed silent and simply directed Willow to one of the booths. He looked at the menu. One of the things he had liked best about eating here was that Sam had always known what he wanted. Sam had made it for him once, something that wasn't even on the menu, and Giles had eaten it every day after that. Giles planned to order off the menu today.

They were the only customers. It was a weekday and the early crowd had already come and gone. Sam walked over to them and pulled a tattered pad of paper out of his pocket. He glanced at Giles, and then glanced again. He chewed on his lip. "You remind me of someone."

Giles nodded. "People tell me that all the time."

Sam just stared, not satisfied. "Nope, you look like a guy who used to come in here all the time, although he'd be quite a bit older now." Sam caught the worried quick glance the young girl shot at her companion.

Giles lifted his eyes to Sam and couldn't resist a gentle smile, the old friendship tugging on him. Other than that he didn't respond to Sam's prodding. He looked at Willow. "Do you know what you'd like to order?"

Willow pursed her lips. "I'll take the breakfast special." She looked up at Sam. "And some tea, please." She smiled at him.

Sam looked at Giles. "I'll have the same, thanks." Giles placed the menus back behind the napkin holder. Sam gazed at him another moment before walking behind the counter to the grill.

Willow was about to speak when Sam started talking. He was facing the grill but Giles knew he was talking to him. He had always talked while he cooked. "You remind me of a watcher. A watcher I knew who went to America." Sam turned around, his gaze sharp as he looked at Giles. He turned around again, back to the grill. "I heard he got into some trouble. I heard they locked him away in the basement of the Council." Gossip was rife here in this town, despite all the secrets. He concentrated on cooking for a minute. Willow and Giles exchanged glances.

Sam continued. "Now, I thought that was wrong then, and I still think it's wrong." He shook his head as if amazed at the idiocy of the Council. "He was a good man, that watcher. One of the best I've known. I'd be glad to see that he was free, that he was all right. It would do my heart good."

He started sliding food onto plates. He walked around the counter again and slapped their plates down. Giles looked down at his plate and had to swallow against the tightness in his throat. Sam spoke again. "That's how you like it, isn't it?" Sam had not given him what he had ordered. Sam had made him the dish he had always enjoyed so much, in years past.

Giles looked up at Sam, his eyes bright. "Yes, Sam, that's how I like it." He laid a hesitant hand on Sam's arm. "Thank you."

Sam nodded, satisfied. He spoke gruffly. "I'll get you your tea." He turned away and walked around the counter again.

Giles looked up at Willow and saw that her eyes were bright too. He smiled at her and leaned down to smell his breakfast. He breathed out a happy sigh and reached for the salt and pepper. Willow frowned. "So, how come he didn't just make two of yours? It looks yummier than mine."

Giles laughed, feeling momentarily at peace with the world. "I'm sure he would if I asked him to."

Willow grinned. "Nah, we'll let you be special guy today." She looked at him, feeling proud of him, proud to be with him. Proud that he was the kind of man who could make such an impression on a breakfast cook, an impression strong enough to break through time and appearance.

Sam brought over their tea and chatted with them for a minute. They spoke of trivialities, and happenings around town. No reference was made to Giles' circumstances, past or present. Giles knew Sam would never talk about it unless Giles chose to bring it up. He also knew that Sam would never talk about it to anyone else. Another couple came in and Sam went to serve them.

Willow and Giles finished their breakfast, continuing the light conversation. Giles sat back, sated. He sipped at his tea and watched the people walking by. He looked at Willow. "What would you like to do today?"

"Do we need to stay in town?"

Giles nodded. "I think that would be best."

Willow thought for a moment. "Let's just walk around and see what we find."

That suited Giles fine. He reached for his wallet again and then looked at Willow mortified. "Willow, I don't have any money, I don't even have a wallet anymore."

Willow grinned. "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Likely story." She reached for her wallet.

Sam walked over. "On the house today." At Giles' frown Sam insisted. "My place, my choice." He looked at Giles. "Will you be back?"

A rueful smile crossed Giles face. "I don't know." He looked up at Sam. "But I promise you this. When I'm in town and free, if it's breakfast time, I'll be here."

Sam nodded. He cleared his throat. "It was good to see you."

Giles looked at Sam. "It was good to be seen." He watched as Sam turned away and walked into the back. Willow took Giles' arm and the two of them walked back outside.

When they got back it was late afternoon. The guard stopped Giles as he was entering the apartment. "He's waiting for you. He said to call when you got back."

Giles looked at Willow. "Willow, I..." He hesitated. "I'll be back in a little while."

Willow's face got worried. "Where are you going?" She recalled suddenly his request to the guard this morning. She had completely forgotten about it until now. "Why are you talking to him? What does he want?" She didn't like the look on Giles' face. She spoke once again, her voice insistent. "Let me come with you."

Giles could already felt the pain of losing her. He reached out and softly touched her hair, running a few strands of it through his fingers. He shook his head sadly. "No, I need to speak to him alone."

Willow started to feel frightened. "Giles, what are you going to do? What are you telling him?"

Giles could feel the guard shift impatiently next to him. He looked again at Willow. "I'll explain when I get back." Giles looked at the guard and the guard headed off, leading Giles to his destination. Willow tried to follow but another guard stopped her. She watched Giles with her eyes until he turned a corner. She put her hand to her stomach hoping to quell the nervous flutters. She moved back and the guard shut the door. She had to fight to keep the tears away. She went to sit on the couch pulling a pillow up tight against her chest. She sat there, the room slowly darkening as night fell.

End Part 7

Magic 8

As night fell, Spike woke up. He listened for a minute but the apartment was quiet. He walked out into the living room and then became aware of a heartbeat. He knew it was Willow. He walked over to her turning on the lamp by the couch. Her face flinched as the light hit her eyes. He looked at her, taking in her sad face.

"Where's Giles?"

Her lips tightened. "He went to talk with Mr. Jensen." She lifted worried eyes to Spike. "I'm worried about him."

Spike took a deep breath and sat down across from her. He pursed his lips. "He'll be all right. It's not like they can do anything to him."

Willow's eyes narrowed. "You know what he's doing, don't you?" She sat up straighter. "What's going on? Tell me."

Spike slunk down lower in the chair, legs extended in front of him. He steepled his fingers and tapped his lips. He shot up out of the chair and headed for the refrigerator. He looked back over at Willow. "Hungry?"

Willow glared at him. "Spike, what's going on? What is Giles doing?"
"He's making a deal."

Willow's heart started to beat faster. "What kind of deal?"

"To send us home. I'll let Giles fill in the details."

"So he'll be back?" Willow felt some of the tightness leave her chest.

Spike furrowed his brow looking at Willow in surprise. "How long has he been gone?"

"Over two hours." Spike's eyebrows rose. He leaned on the counter, pushing his beer between his two hands. Willow knew that this was unexpected news to Spike. "What's he done?" She looked at Spike her eyes filling with tears.
"Spike, what's he done?" Spike just shook his head, not sure anymore.

##

Giles looked out the window. He was on the top floor of the Council building. He had only been up here once before and he had been in a different office. He had been called up here to be assigned to a slayer, to Buffy. He looked down on the lights of the small city. He looked over at Jensen and then back again to the lights. He rested his forehead on the cool glass. Somehow this conversation hadn't gone as expected.

Giles had expected it to be easy. He had expected to come in here, offer his services, arrange for Willow and Spike to be sent home, and then return to his quarters. Instead, it had become another stalemate. He knew Jensen was intrigued. He knew Jensen saw the potential weapon Giles would be. What he hadn't counted on, and in retrospect he could see how foolish he had been not to think of this, was that Jensen didn't trust him.

Giles turned weary eyes to Jensen. "What will it take to convince you?"

Jensen didn't know the answer to that. The only thing he did know was that Willow Rosenberg was Giles' only weakness and he wasn't willing to relinquish his hold on that. His eyes gleamed at the idea of having a power like Rupert Giles to command. He wasn't willing to relinquish his hold on that either. He turned to Giles, swiveling his chair. Jensen knew that his control over Giles was negligible at best and Willow was essential to that control.

"Miss Rosenberg stays."

Giles let out an exasperated sigh. "I want her safe."

"She's safe with you. I cannot guarantee her safety otherwise."

Giles heard the implied threat. He sent an angry glance at Jensen. "If you kill her, you'll have no hold on me at all, you know that."

Jensen smiled. "That's not exactly true. There are other people you love. You have other friends in Sunnydale, friends here, Mary Posten, Sam Fraser." Giles' jaw almost dropped at the name of his friend he'd only seen this morning. He had to fight to keep the reaction off his face. He closed his eyes. Even he had forgotten how well the Council watched out for its own interests. He felt a surge of anger and without thinking he acted on it.

Jensen found himself being lifted off his chair by his jacket lapels. His first thought was amazement at how fast this man had moved. He hadn't even seen him leave the window. An absurd thrill went through him as he realized again what a killing machine he'd be.

Giles was speaking to him through clenched teeth. "If you've hurt any of them, if you ever hurt any of them, I will rip your bloody head off. Do you understand me?" He shook Jensen hard. Jensen fought against his fear, trying hard not to show it. Giles slowly released him.

Jensen, with a calm he certainly did not feel, slowly brushed off his jacket. He reached up and straightened his collar. "I understand you quite well." He sat back down. "I hope you understand me as well. Miss Rosenberg stays. I'll agree to transfer you to a safe facility where you can hone your skills." Jensen watched as Rupert Giles pulled himself back under control. It was an amazing experience, to be this close to something this dangerous. He found it exhilarating. As if someone had accidentally left a cage door open and allowed a wild beast to escape.

Giles turned to him. "Spike?"

"Spike is free to go. However, he is a vampire. I would suggest he not tarry as vampires are often hunted down and killed as part of our training exercises."

Giles shook his head, hearing again the covert truth under his words. Spike would be killed. Giles had dealt with several Directors of Security during his time as watcher but none had been as dangerous as this man sitting in front of him. Giles had been here for more than two hours and he'd achieved

nothing. He'd entwined Willow even tighter in his captivity. He shook his head at the truth of his situation. Giles might be physically invincible but Jensen knew his weakness. Giles knew that until everyone he loved was dead that Jensen held his leash.

He headed to the door. Jensen watched him. "Do you agree to my terms?"

Giles sent him a look filled with anger. Giles felt the magic start to stir. "You leave me little choice."

"Shall I arrange for your transfer?"

Giles hesitated and then nodded briefly. He almost used the magic on Jensen. Almost. He opened the door and left. Jensen watched the door slowly close, a small smile on his lips, having no idea how close he'd just come to being killed.

##

Giles headed back to the apartment. When he opened the door both Willow and Spike looked up. When Spike saw the look on his face he scowled. Willow's heart started to race. She watched him as he walked over to join them. "Giles, what's wrong? What happened? You look terrible."

Giles let out a small bitter laugh. "I'm what's wrong." He shook his head. "God, how I wished they'd killed me."

Willow gasped. She moved to him and wrapped her arms around him, his words breaking her heart. Spike pursed his lips, saying nothing. Giles didn't return her embrace. He reached down and took a hold of her arms, and pulled them away from him. "Willow, I'm sorry. I tried but they won't let you go." He looked at Spike. "They said you can go, but I guarantee you, you step one foot outside that window, you're as good as dead." He shook his head, filled with remorse. He looked at them both. "They'll be moving us. Sending us to another facility. One I can completely destroy if I continue to be as useless as I have been in controlling the magic." His voice was filled with self-loathing. "As useless as I've been in controlling anything." He lowered his gaze, not wanting to meet their eyes anymore. "I'm sorry." He turned around and shut himself behind his bedroom door. He slowly sank down to the floor and lowered his face to his hands.

Spike blew out a breath and ran his hand through his hair. He walked over to the window. Willow watched him, her eyes wide. "You're not leaving, are you?"

Spike shook his head. "No, I believe him." He flashed Willow a rueful smile. "Looks like I'm as stuck here as you."

Willow looked at him. "What happened? I don't understand."

Spike looked at Willow thinking. He walked back into the kitchen and pulled a beer out of the refrigerator. He offered one to Willow and was surprised when she took it. He opened another for himself and took a healthy swallow. Spike didn't often underestimate an adversary but he'd really underestimated this Jensen guy. He'd gone right for Giles' jugular. "Loving someone sometimes makes you strong. Sometimes it makes you weak." He started peeling off the label on his beer. "It can make you very weak when someone uses that love against you." He thought back to his days with Dru.

Willow looked down at her beer and when she looked back up she had tears in her eyes. "He tried to make a deal for us didn't he?"

Spike nodded. "He was going to give them something they would want as a way to send us...you home." Spike knew Giles had done this for Willow. His eyes darkened. "Instead I'm guessing from the look on his face that they intend to use you to just take it."

"What did he think they would want from him?"

Spike glanced at her, his eyes dark and unreadable. "To kill for them." At least they would now. Now that Giles had suggested it to them. All Spike knew was that Jensen better hope he never ran into Spike when he was alone. Spike would rip his fucking throat out.

Willow felt like she might throw up. She had made it worse. By coming here she had made it worse. She would end up forcing Giles to become the one thing he was most desperate to avoid. She swallowed the bile in her throat and lifted anguished eyes to Spike. "What will they have him kill?"

Spike wondered now. He supposed they could ask him to kill whatever they wanted. He just shook his head. Détente was over; the war had begun.

Willow walked over to the bedroom door and put her hand on it. She glanced briefly at Spike and then pushed against the door. Something was blocking it. She pushed harder and heard a muffled curse. She squeezed inside and found Giles sitting on the other side. He wouldn't even look at her. "Willow, leave me alone."

She shook her head and just sat down next to him. "No." She took one of his hands. "This isn't your fault." At his look she said it again. "I mean it, it's not

your fault. It's my fault. I'm the one who barged in here. I'm the one who didn't think, at all. I'm the one who did this to you." She reached out and with her hand on his cheek forced him to look at her. Tears were starting to fall down her face. She spoke softly. "I am so sorry. I never meant for this to happen."

Giles saw the love in her eyes. He saw that she really didn't blame him. He could hardly believe it. He reached for her and pulled her in close, needing the comfort of her embrace. She held him tightly, rocking him gently. She pulled away suddenly. Her eyes got angry. Giles watched her warily, wondering at her mood change. "And anyway, who the hell do you think you are, making a deal for me? I decide when I go. I decide if I leave. I already told you I wasn't leaving you and I meant it." As he started to shake his head she let out a frustrated groan and pushed against his chest, hard. He hit the door behind him, the blow unexpected. It didn't hurt; it just surprised him. His magic, not seeing Willow as any kind of threat, chose not to intervene. She pushed him again and he looked at her in amazement.

She was still angry. "Don't you ever do that again. Do you hear me? I'm. Not. Leaving. You. Again. Ever. You're stuck with me." She watched as he processed her words. She sighed. "Don't you understand? It would kill me. It would kill me to go home to Sunnydale and know you were here, that you were miserable, that I'd done it to you, that I couldn't do anything to help. Don't ask me to live like that." She leaned in and held his face with both her hands. "I'd rather be here with you, no matter what you're doing, no matter what you're going through, I'd rather be here with you."

He just stared at her. She reached for him, laying her head against his chest, listening to his rapid heartbeat. She wrapped her arms around him. He held her back tightly. They stayed that way for a long time. She ran her hands lightly up and down his back. She could feel his muscles, could feel his strength. His head was resting on her shoulder, his hair against her cheek. She could smell his shampoo. She started being very aware of her body. How it was pressed up against him. How his body felt under her hands. She felt a surge of desire lick through her lower body. Her eyes opened wide. She tried to calm her breathing, slow down her racing heart. She took a few slow breaths.

She pulled back and inched away from him, not touching him. She spoke. "Are you feeling better now?"

Giles smiled at her gently and nodded. "Yes, yes, I am. And Willow, it's not your fault either. Please don't think that; please don't think I think that. I don't. Even though in one way I still wish you'd never come, for you, for your safety, I have to admit that however selfish it is that I really am glad you're here. You do make it much more bearable somehow." He smiled again at her. "I think

perhaps I'll just take a long hot shower."

She nodded quickly. "A shower, that's a good idea. I might take one too." She rose and Giles rose with her. She smiled at him and picking up some of her clothes she left Giles' bedroom. She rolled her eyes at herself as she left wondering what on earth was wrong with her. She was thinking she should probably take a cold shower.

As she got out into the living room she felt an overwhelming urge to speak with Xander. She knew there wasn't a phone in the suite. She went to the door and yanked it open. She hated everyone who worked here as a matter of principle right now. She was tired of being messed with. She wasted no time on pleasantries. "I need a phone. Now." The guards hesitated. She jerked a thumb back into the room. "I'm with him, remember?" All three guards reached into their pockets and pulled out cell phones. She grabbed one and walking back into the apartment she slammed the door shut.

She even glared at Spike. "I'm calling Xander."

"Well don't expect me to get all excited."

She thought about going over and smacking him but she refrained. She walked to her bedroom. She hesitated for a minute but then went in. She saw that the suitcase was gone and she let out the breath she'd been holding. She dialed Xander's number and waited impatiently as it rang.

"It's your dime."

"Xander?"

"Willow! I've been wondering when you'd call again and fill my life with more happy news."

"Did Anya have the babies yet?"

"No." Xander put a lot into that no. Willow stifled a laugh. Xander sighed. "But, enough about me. How's the Alcatraz team?"

Willow let that giggle out. Then she sighed. "I miss you."

"I miss you too. When are you coming home?" Willow didn't say anything. Xander cursed. "See, this is the part I'm hating, the part where none of you are saying that you're coming home. What aren't you telling me? You're making me crazy."

She still hesitated. "Xander, I'm sorry. It's so complicated. Giles is afraid they'll kill us if we leave. So, right now we're staying. But we go out, Giles took me for a nice breakfast this morning." She tried to sound happy.

Xander snorted. "Uh huh. And then they shove a hot poker through your eye. Come on Will. Help me out, I need facts."

"I think I'm feeling attracted to Giles." Willow clapped a hand over her mouth. She hadn't meant to say that. There was a very long silence. Finally Xander spoke.

"You didn't think I had enough to worry about?" There was no response from Willow. "This is a test of some sort, right? To see what it will take to make me crack?" He waited for a giggle but got none. He tried again. "Is someone holding a gun to your head?"

She sighed. "I don't know what happened. One minute we were just holding each other and then..."

Xander interrupted. "Wait a minute, wait a minute, there's holding going on?" He let out a long breath. "Jesus Will, I just got used to the idea of you being gay. And that took me, what..." He counted. "Four...five years?"

"Xander..." He heard the confusion in her voice.

"Okay, okay. What does Giles think about this?"

Willow gasped. "I didn't tell him."

Xander sighed. "No, of course not. Why would you tell him? Much more sensible to tell me." He sighed again at her ongoing silence. "Sorry, Will, I know I'm not helping." He thought for a moment. "Why are you telling me?"

"I don't know what to do."

Xander lowered his head, lips pursed. He ran his free hand through his hair. "Do you think it's because you're sort of thrown together, you know, danger in the air, heat of the moment?"

Willow thought about that for a moment. "No."

"Yeah, you're right. Too easy." Xander made a few faces, thinking some more. "Okay, listen. You've known Giles for a long time. You love him. I do too." Willow listened and waited. Xander took a deep breath. "Maybe this is real. Maybe it makes sense. It would certainly make sense to me if this were Giles

telling me he was attracted to you." He let out another breath. "I guess it's the gay thing that's got me confused. What's up with that?"

"I don't know. I think that I just fell in love. And she just happened to be a woman. I loved her, I wanted to be with her."

"And now you want to be with Giles?"

"I don't know. Maybe it was just a...a...heat of the moment thing."

"Have you ever lusted after Giles before? I mean not your crush stuff but, and I cannot believe I am actually saying this, have you wanted him ...sexually? Xander cringed.

"No, never, not until tonight."

"I gotta tell ya, my brain had much more fun thinking about you and other women. It's not having so much fun now."

"Xander."

"All right. The truth is that there's nothing I can tell you. You need to give it some time. If it happens again you need to talk to Giles."

"You won't hate me?"

"You're not really seriously asking me that question are you?" When Willow didn't answer Xander spoke again. "Why would I hate you? Do you mean will I be totally wigged out? Are you asking if I'll make loud barfing noises if this turns into something?"

He finally got the giggle he'd been trying for. He smiled. "Willow, I love you. I want you to be happy. If this makes you happy then go for it. Just be careful, be careful of both of you. I don't want either of you to get hurt." He paused. "Giles has been through a lot. He way doesn't need his heart messed with on top of everything else."

Willow's voice was small. "I know."

"And I know that you know. I just had to say it." He rubbed his eyes, wiping away some unexpected tears. "There's no one who deserves you more than him."

Willow fought back tears of her own. Her voice was thick. "I miss you so much. I wish you were here."

"Beam me up Scotty."

She laughed, her throat still tight. "I wish it were that easy."

"Me too." He heard Anya call for him, loudly. Even Willow heard her.

"Yikes, I guess you better go."

"Do I have to?"

Anya yelled again. Willow winced. "Yes, you have to. I'll call you soon."

"You better."

"I will. I love you."

"Love you too."

Willow hung up and just sat there holding the phone in her hand.

Xander put the phone down and stood up. He listened to Anya yell again. He decided that now was not the time to tell her that his best friend had maybe decided she wasn't gay after all.

End Part 8

Magic 9

Willow sat on the bed, the phone still cradled in her hand. She wondered if she would ever get home. She thought of Giles and just the thought of him kindled a longing inside of her for him. She let herself fall back on the bed. She began to draw pictures in her mind by connecting the textured dots on the ceiling.

Spike had the television on but wasn't really watching it. He was thinking about dying. He didn't know what Jensen had told Giles but Spike had seen the truth of it in Giles' words. He knew that Jensen would have him killed. He sat there letting the noise from the television wash over him, realizing how much he didn't want to die.

Giles had taken his long hot shower. He was thinking about how Willow had pushed him. He thought about the magic and wondered how it decided what was a risk and what wasn't. He wondered if the magic relied on Giles' feelings

to decide. It worried him that if that was the case then anyone Giles cared about, or trusted could easily kill him. He lay on the bed, lying crosswise on it, pondering the magic.

Willow had almost drifted off to sleep when the phone rang. She shrieked and the phone flew across the room. It lay on the floor still ringing. She grinned sheepishly and went to answer it. "Hello?"

"Miss Rosenberg? I need to speak with Rupert Giles."

She knew it was Jensen. Her heart started pounding and she could barely stand to even hold the phone. She held it in front of her as if it might bite her and walked out of her room and, after knocking, into Giles'.

She just handed the phone to him and he took it, eyebrows raised. She sat down on the bed next to him. Spike poked his head in the door and then leaned against the doorjamb.

"This is Giles."

"You're being moved tonight. Please be ready in an hour." When Giles realized it was Jensen he swung up into a sitting position.

"Tonight? Why?"

"Do you have plans for the evening that we are interrupting?"

Willow could feel Giles' muscles tensing. "Jesus, you are a smug bastard." Willow could feel the magic stir. She put her hand on Giles' arm and gently rubbed up and down.

"I don't believe in wasting time."

Giles closed his eyes and just felt Willow trying to calm him. He took a deep breath. "Fine, we'll be ready."

##

Jensen hung up, smiling. He could have had a dozen people make that phone call for him but he thought it was important for Giles to clearly understand who was pulling his strings. He sat back in his chair and swiveled it around until he was looking out over the city.

##

Giles turned to Spike and Willow. "We leave in an hour." He handed the phone back to Willow. "Where did that come from?"

She pointed out to the front door. "One of the guards. I wanted to call Xander."

"And did you?"

She nodded and smiled. "No babies yet. Anya was doing a lot of yelling."

Giles winced. He could only imagine Anya pregnant, her hormones loosed on the world. He grinned. Willow furrowed her brow. "What's so funny?"

Giles shook his head and Willow nudged him with her hand. "I was just wishing I could sic her on Jensen." Willow burst out laughing and Giles softly laughed along with her.

Spike reached into his pocket and pulled out his cigarettes. Giles glared at him. "If you even think about lighting up that cigarette here in my bedroom I will personally shove it down your throat."

Spike's eyebrows rose and he put his hand up in self-defense. "Don't get your knickers in a twist. I was just getting one out."

Willow looked at Giles. "Do we need to pack anything, or do anything?"

Giles ran his hand over his face. "Only if you want to take something with you. Otherwise I imagine they'll provide us with everything we need." He looked at Spike. "I take it that you'll be going with us."

Spike snorted. "I don't have much of a bloody choice, do I?"

Willow just smiled wistfully at him. "I know you wanted to leave, but I'm glad you're staying." Spike looked at her and sent her a small smile.

It turned more sardonic as he glanced at Giles. Giles held his gaze and laughed, a short rueful laugh. "I hope I don't regret saying this, but I'm glad you're staying too."

Spike pursed his lips letting Giles' words sink in. He nodded. "Right then. I'm taking the beer. Anybody else want anything?" As both Willow and Giles shook their heads Spike left the bedroom. They could hear him clinking glass bottles in the kitchen.

Giles let out a breath and lay back down. He rolled over so he was resting on

his stomach. He crossed his arms and lay his head down on them his face turned to Willow. He watched her as she sat on the bed, a couple feet away. "Penny for your thoughts?"

Willow looked up and saw him gazing at her. She gave him a small grin. "I can't keep one in my head long enough to even think about selling it to you. My brain just keeps whizzing around." She sighed. She hated that she was feeling the confusion of this attraction to him. Just yesterday she would have lain down next to him and sought his nearness for comfort. Today it was all too complicated.

Giles could feel her distance. He kept gazing at her. "Willow, are you all right? Have I done something to distress you?" He let out a short laugh at that. "I mean, besides the obvious."

She shook her head. She was aching to touch him and she was afraid that she would if she stayed any longer. She stood and under the guise of wanting to pack a few things she left. Giles watched her leave, his eyes puzzled.

They were taken by limousine. Spike was impressed, although he tried to hide it. Willow sat across the seat from Giles and she could feel his gaze on her from time to time. She just looked out the window. The windows were darkly tinted and could not be operated from the back. Giles tried to determine where they might be heading but he lost track after a while.

The building they were taken to looked like barracks, or some austere retreat center. There was one long corridor with multiple rooms coming off of it. A room had been prepared for each of the three of them, and for the six guards who would be staying there as well. There was a communal living area and kitchen. Each bedroom had its own bathroom. Giles, Willow and Spike were directed to their rooms. Willow and Spike entered their rooms and shut their doors behind them. Giles entered more slowly first saying good night to the guards. A couple of them were polite enough to say good night in return.

Giles lay in his bed, still clothed. He felt restless. He was concerned about Willow. He knew something was bothering her, something new. He got up and went to stand by the window. There wasn't much to see. The building was on a huge tract of land, with little vegetation. He tried to open the window but it was sealed shut. He wanted to be out. Giles left his room barely noticing a guard following him as he walked down the corridor and out the front door. He walked to the back of the building and stood a few yards away from it. The guard watched, standing at the corner of the building.

Spike heard the footsteps and he looked out the window seeing Giles standing there. He was curious and he too walked outside. He passed the

guard and walked along the building until he was level with Giles. Then he leaned back against the wall and lit a cigarette. Giles could tell Spike was there but he ignored him.

Giles crouched down and touched a small plant at his foot. He could see scraggly plants all over the yard. He ran his hand down its stem. He could feel its potential. Without even thinking about it he reached for his magic, still touching the plant. Under his hand the plant grew, shooting off tendrils of new growth, unfurling new leaves. Giles smiled. He touched another plant near him and he watched as it did the same.

Giles had never used his magic this way and he sensed something coming to life in it. He could feel its love, its compassion. He stood and surrendered himself to it. He held out his hands and the field started transforming itself. Every plant, every seed with the capacity for growth responded to his call. Giles spread his feet wider apart, grounding himself as he let the magic flow. He felt it shoot through him, cleansing him, and he laughed for the joy of it.

Spike and the guard stood up straight in surprise as the field let forth its bounty. The wave of magic hit them both. It brought the guard to his knees, tears streaming down his face, his heart full of a joy so rich he thought his body might shake apart with it. The growth continued. The plants grew taller and lusher.

Spike had never felt power like this. Spike felt the magic flow through him. He felt it call him. He started walking towards Giles. The magic grew stronger the closer he got. It almost knocked him down, and it might have except that at the same time it supported him. It surrounded him, loving him. It also stripped him of his pretensions, and his anger.

He reached Giles and Giles turned around and smiled at him. Spike had never seen such a look, ever. Giles face was full of joy and full of love, for everything, and also just for him. Giles watched Spike and as he watched he came to know him. He saw his heart and he saw his demon. He watched as Spike struggled to figure out what was happening to him, watched as Spike's bloodlust grew, the demon within him instinctively responding to being exposed to something it craved.

Giles reached out a hand to Spike and brought him closer. He pulled his hair away from his neck and turned his head to the side, inviting Spike to feed. Spike looked at Giles. Enough of him was aware that if he fed, if he fed on Giles that nothing would ever be the same again. The magic called to him. He groaned and closed his eyes. He answered the invitation and sunk his fangs into Giles' neck.

Everyone in the building was affected. They all dreamed of people they loved, of joyful times, of prayers being answered. Willow dreamed of being with Buffy. They were walking down a beach, hand in hand, rejoicing in being alive and being friends. Then Willow turned her head and saw Giles. He beckoned to her and laughing she ran up a dune to be with him. He reached out his hand to her and she woke up.

She could feel the magic. It didn't scare her. It caressed her; it made her brave, and joyous. She got out of bed and walked to the window. She saw the field and gasped. She knew that field had been empty and barren when she fell asleep. Now it was full and rich with life. She saw Giles and Spike. At first she thought they were kissing and her heart seized in her chest. This feeling she had for Giles was so young but a part of her grieved at the thought of losing it all before it had ever even begun. Then she realized that Spike was feeding.

This time, despite the beauty of the magic, she was consumed by fear. She tried to open the window but was unable to. She pounded her fists against the glass. Then she stopped as she watched Giles raise his hand and slowly run it through Spike's hair. He did it again, softly like a lover might, or as a mother runs her hand through her infant's hair as it feeds at her breast. Willow stopped, hands flat upon the glass, captivated by the love in the gesture.

Spike groaned at the touch. It was undoing him, he knew it, he could feel it. He could taste the magic in Giles' blood; he could feel it all around his body. He had never been loved as he fed. He'd never been so accepted. Something broke inside of him, breaking free his humanity. Feelings flooded him, feelings that he had thought gone forever, love and loyalty, longing and compassion. It washed through him in a rhythm that echoed Giles' hand slowly stroking his head.

Spike kept feeding until he thought he might die from the pleasure of it. Finally, he licked Giles' neck, releasing coagulants. He pulled away, swaying. He looked at Giles' face. Giles smiled at him. Holding onto Spike, to keep him from falling, Giles listened to the new growth. He could feel its need for moisture. He steadied Spike and then he lifted both his hands up and called again. Spike watched the clouds appear, as if by trick photography. He felt the air change and then felt the first drops of rain on his face. He looked at Giles, saw Giles smile as he turned his face up and let the raindrops fall on him. The rain started to fall in earnest and Giles laughed. He looked again at Spike and the look of love and caring there broke through the last reserve.

Spike fell to his knees at Giles' feet and started to sob. The only time he had ever cried like this was when he had drawn Buffy's lifeless body to his chest. Now, the crying swept him clean. Giles squatted down and he reached out,

pulled Spike into his arms, and just held him.

In time the rain stopped and Spike sat back, rubbing his eyes with the heels of his hands. He pulled up his knees and rested his head on them. Giles just watched him. He strained to hear when Spike finally spoke. "Watcher, what did you do to me?"

Giles softly smiled. "I didn't mean to do anything. It was the magic. It changed everything." There was a wonder in his voice. He reached out and touched a leaf near him. He could feel it trying to grow for him. He soothed it with his fingers. There had been enough growing tonight. More rapid growth would only do it harm. Nature could take care of the rest.

Spike was exhausted. He could still feel the magic in the air but it was fading. He didn't think it would ever completely go away, not from this field, and not from Giles' presence. Spike heard footsteps and looked up to see Willow approaching them. He ran his hand quickly over his face to eradicate any trace of tears. Giles turned to her and smiled.

She was gawking at the field. She reached out and touched some of the plants. She crouched down and looked at Giles. "What happened? The magic woke me up. Did it go all goofy again?"

Giles shook his head. "No, I wanted to do this. And this." He lifted his head up and felt the still occasional drop of rain.

"You did this?" Willow was stunned.

Spike turned to Giles and sent him a rueful grin. "You may have wanted this to happen." He indicated the new growth. "But I still think there were a few unexpected side effects."

Willow looked at Spike. She frowned, thinking. "Like all the good things I was feeling, all happy and peaceful and stuff?" She looked at Giles, her eyes wide. "You did that?"

Giles shook his head. "The magic did that."

Spike looked at him. "You are the magic, Giles. You're one and the same. You need to stop treating it like it's an alien inhabiting your body."

Willow moved closer to Giles. She turned his neck and gasped. There were no marks there. She stared at him. "I saw Spike feeding." She turned worried eyes to Spike. "Why were you feeding?"

Giles lightly touched her arm. "I told him to. Don't worry Willow, he won't hurt me." He looked at Spike and Spike looked back. Giles knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that the words he spoke were true on every level. Willow saw that look and was ashamed that she felt a flicker of jealousy shoot through her. She sighed, annoyed at herself. Giles tilted his head to the side and looked at her. Her skin looked like porcelain in the moonlight. She just sent him a small smile.

Giles stood and reached out both of his hands, one to Willow and one to Spike. They both reached up taking his hands and he helped pull them up. He looked down at his soaked clothing. He laughed as he took in all of their soaked clothing. "I think showers all around might be just the thing."

Willow hesitated. "I just want to talk to Spike for a moment." Giles looked at her and then nodded. He turned and headed back into the house. He passed the guard as he swung around the corner. The guard was looking at him with adoration in his eyes. Giles briefly touched his shoulder and then walked past him into the building.

Willow looked at the field. She turned amazed eyes to Spike. "I can't believe he did this. How did he do this?" Spike shook his head. He had seen it and felt it and he could still hardly believe it. Willow spoke again. "I can't even...I can't..." She paused. "He is so strong, stronger than anything I can imagine. He says he can only control a small part of his magic." She looked at Spike. "What is he? What will he be when he can control it all?" She wasn't frightened of it; she just wanted to know.

Spike just shook his head. Willow looked at his face. She saw something there. "Spike?" Spike lifted his face to hers and waited. "If Mr. Jensen were here and he said you could go and he meant it, would you leave?"

Spike looked at her, his eyes dark and glittering in the moonlight. He shook his head. "No."

She nodded and looked up at the moon. "I dreamt about Buffy." She looked at Spike. "She was so happy." Willow started to cry and Spike moved closer to her to hold her to his chest. He wrapped his arms tightly around her, his head resting on hers, his eyes open watching the new living growth all around him.

End of Part 9

Magic 10

Spike stayed in the garden all night. He walked through it, running his hands

over the tops of the plants. Willow had sat there watching him for a long time until she got too tired and she returned to her room. Spike willed the sun to stay hidden but in time he felt its approach and he too went inside.

Willow was awakened by the sound of laughter. She smiled as she listened and eventually rolled over so she could peak out the window. She grinned when she saw Giles. He was laughing at the guards. They were staring at him, not sure where their duty lay, as he filled their arms with bounty from the garden. They were struggling to keep tomatoes and zucchini, onions and carrots from falling through their fingers.

Willow threw on some clothes and ran out to join them, first running by the kitchen to get a big bowl. She tried not to laugh at their look of gratitude as they started heaping their loads into the bowl. Giles looked at her excitedly.

"Willow, I can't even imagine all the different plants that must have been grown here over time. There's such an extraordinary assortment." He noticed the guards' hands were empty. He started filling them with flowers. He bit off a grin at the new dismay in their eyes. Then he started laughing again. He slapped them both on the back. "Don't worry, I'll make it worth your while. I'm cooking everyone omelets as soon as we get back inside."

They all followed him. Willow watched the guards exchange repeated looks. They had all woken up in inexplicably good moods. The guard from last night had wasted no time in telling them what had transpired while the rest of them had been sleeping. The other guards hadn't believed him until they had all stumbled off the step, eyes filled with amazement. He had told them about the magic, and they had heard the awe in his voice. He believed that their mood this morning was the lingering effects of the magic. They would have scoffed at him if they hadn't been looking at a field of green that used to be brown, had been brown for years.

The two guards on duty now were beyond perplexed. They had been warned about Giles. They had been told he was lethal, and a possible enemy and for them not to let down their guard down for a minute.

They looked at the man walking a few steps ahead of them, the young woman at his side. She certainly had no fear of him. She teased him, and poked him, and chatted with the ease of long familiarity. He was laughing, he had made a dead field grow, and now he was planning on cooking them breakfast. Whatever they had been expecting when they had been given this assignment, it had not been this. Willow saw yet another glance shoot between the two of them. She stepped towards them and gestured them in as if to take them into her confidence. "Don't worry." Her eyes sparkled. "He makes wonderful omelets." She laughed and then turned around. She caught

up with Giles and tucked her arm through his, the bowl of vegetables under her other arm.

When Willow started to plead starvation Giles headed in. Willow began arranging all the flowers in assorted containers while Giles started chopping up vegetables for the omelets. As the food started cooking two more guards made their way into the kitchen, sniffing appreciably. Giles asked about the last two and he was told they were sleeping. Giles nodded and returned to his cooking. Once the guards and Willow were eating he excused himself for a moment.

He quietly let himself into Spike's room. "Spike?" He heard Spike shift in the bed and sit up. "Do you want to join us? I'm making omelets. I could close all the curtains so you would be safe."

Spike considered the offer. He blew out a deep breath. He still felt raw. If it had just been Giles and Willow he would have accepted but he guessed that 'us' meant the guards as well. He wasn't ready for that yet, certainly not in daylight. "No, thanks. Not quite in the mood for company." Giles nodded, understanding. He turned to open the door and was leaving when Spike called to him. "Giles?"

"Yes?"

"I wouldn't mind it if you brought one to me." Giles grinned, nodded and closed the door behind him.

Giles walked back into the kitchen. He started making Spike an omelet. After bringing it to Spike he returned to the kitchen and fixed his own. He sat down across from Willow and dug in. One of the guards pushed his plate away and leaned back. He looked at Giles. "That was the best omelet I've ever had. Thank you." Giles grinned in delight, blushing, as the other three guards and Willow all nodded their heads in agreement.

Willow watched the guards all exchange another look. They were all also hoping that Jensen was not choosing this particular moment to be listening in. They knew he probably was, he didn't miss much. He wouldn't be thrilled that they were consorting with their prisoner. But they also knew that Jensen, despite being the biggest son of a bitch that they had ever worked for, appreciated honesty. If being around Giles changed their behavior they had learned through experience that Jensen would rather see it out in the open than have them hide it. Jensen sometimes forgave errors if they were honest ones. He never forgave them if they were coupled with lies.

Willow looked at Giles. "So, what's the plan for today?"

"Hmm?" Giles had been putting all his energy into feeling peaceful. It had been a long time since he had felt this good.

"Today, what's the plan? Do we start working on your magic?"

He laughed and gestured towards the back. "That wasn't enough for you?"

She shook her head. "Not that magic. You know, the other magic, the stuff you don't do so well." Her words tapered off in volume and enthusiasm as she saw the effect they were having on him. The joy was off his face, and he looked guarded all of a sudden. She reached out a hand and laid it atop one of his. "I'm sorry Giles. I didn't mean to make your good mood go away."

Giles shook his head and gently smiled at her. "It's all right. I suppose it is why we're here." He pushed his fork around on his plate. "I'm not sure where to start."

Willow watched him, thinking for a minute. "We need to figure out why sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't." She pursed her lips, twisting them from side to side.

Giles started stacking plates. One of the guards began assisting him. When the table was cleaned off, Giles just leaned against the counter looking at the linoleum. One of the guards cleared his throat. Giles looked over at him. The guard spoke. "What are you trying to figure out?"

Giles watched him for a second. The guard who had spoken had been one of his vegetable bearers this morning. The thought brought a grin to Giles' lips. He recalled his name. "Aaron, right?" Aaron nodded.

Giles took a deep breath, not sure how to explain. Willow was almost jumping off her seat and drew his attention. "Yes Willow?"

"Want me to explain?" Giles nodded gratefully. Willow turned to the guards. Willow just let it all out in a whoosh. "Okay, Giles slept with his slayer which was a big no-no but no one had ever told them why. So, what we found out after the fact was that it would make Giles evil, which it did. This evil took over his magic, cuz Giles is a sorcerer, but it made him super strong. So for two years Giles went rogue and went all over the world doing pretty terrible things, while the Council was trying to send people to kill him. Then Spike..." She pointed in his general direction. "found the spell to cure him and knocked him unconscious and brought him to me, cuz I'm a witch. So, Giles and I did the spell together and broke the curse that he'd gotten by sleeping with his slayer."

Willow paused for a breath. Giles watched her with a look that was both amused and horrified. "Then the Council came and took him, after sedating him..." She looked at them and shook her head in dismay as if that part of the story appalled her more than the rest of it. "...then they locked him up for sixteen months, when he wasn't even evil anymore. Just locked him up and ignored him. The magic was still there and really strong but it wasn't bad any more. But it kept growing until now it's super, super strong. That's why no one can kill him. Giles can only control a part of it. The other part keeps going kaboom." She again mimicked an explosion with her hands. "So, Spike and I came to rescue him and ended up having to stay and now here we are to try and help Giles learn how to not keep messing things up when he uses the magic."

She looked at Giles, and saw that his eyes were open wide. He bit his lip, looking at her. "Did that tea have caffeine in it?"

Willow looked down at her tea mug and then back at him, wrinkling her nose. "Why, am I hyper girl?"

Giles barked out a laugh. "Just a little." He looked at Aaron. "Please take her cup away." Aaron reached out and took it and placed it in front of him.

He looked up at Giles. "Is all that true?"

Giles considered it for a moment. "Well, despite the appalling lack of tact and discretion, yes, essentially it's true."

"So what exactly happens when you use your magic? I mean I saw what you did out back. Is that an example of it going wrong? Because it seems okay to me."

Giles smiled. "No, I meant to do that. Well, not all of it, not the dreams, and the magic affecting everyone's moods, but the plants and the rain, I meant to do that." He paused, frowning. "Most of the time, other than last night or when I'm protecting myself or my friends, things, well, things tend to explode a lot."

One of the guards nodded. He had been there when the door had exploded. "How'd you put that door back on?" Before Giles could answer he tapped himself on the chest. "I'm Mike, by the way."

Giles acknowledged the introduction and then in response to the question tightened his lips. "I have no idea. That's the problem, I don't understand why I can do some things or how I am able to control the magic in certain ways, but then seem to have no control in other areas."

"So you're here to practice?"

"Yes."

Mike got up and walked over to one of the cabinets. He started pulling out some canned food. When he had about eight cans in his arms he looked at Giles. "Let's go have you blow up some cans." At Giles' look he grinned. "You can blow up cans, can't you?"

Giles scrunched his face up, leery. "Yes, I have no doubt that I can blow up cans. It's what else I'll blow up that concerns me."

Mike dismissed his concerns and headed out to the front. The front was still a barren field. Mike walked about 100 feet in front of the house and put a can down. He walked back. He grinned again. "Okay, pardner, draw."

Giles rolled his eyes. He made sure that everyone was standing well behind him. Giles reached for the magic, and concentrated on the can. There was a massive explosion. Huge clods of dirt went flying into the air. Giles threw up his hand erecting a barrier around the six of them and the dirt just hit it and slithered down to the ground. When the dirt stopped flying and the dust settled there was an enormous hole in the ground, around fifty feet across.

Mike let out a whistle. "Nice shootin' Tex."

Giles glared at him. "You have been watching entirely too many American westerns."

Mike grinned. "I lived in Texas for about six years." Giles tried to keep glaring but the young man's infectious grin was hard to resist. It helped ease the fear in his gut.

Aaron walked out to the crater. He looked around and then turned back to the group. "Can's gone." He started to laugh. He didn't know why it seemed so funny to him when they'd all almost been blown up but it did. He couldn't stop laughing. Finally, he stood there, hands on his thighs drawing deep breaths. He walked a little closer to the house and signaled to Mike. "Throw me another one." He caught the can and walked to the side of the hole and placed it down. He walked back to the front step. He gestured to Giles.

Giles frowned. Willow moved up to stand next to him. "Try something different, like instead of exploding it try and flick it away." She flicked her middle finger against her palm. "You know, knock it over." Giles frowned again. He rubbed his chin. He reached for the magic again and flicked. The

can took off, like a projectile. It continued flying though the air until their eyes couldn't follow it anymore.

Mike had his arms up in the air signaling a field goal. "And it's good." He imitated a roaring crowd. Aaron and the other two guards were trying very hard not to laugh.

Giles growled. "I'm so glad you all find this so amusing." He glanced at Willow to find her biting her lips, hard. He supposed this was a vast improvement over the dozens of sober faced technicians who had worked with him when he'd first been brought back to the Council. He watched as Aaron put another can out. He could feel the fear growing stronger. It always grew, like a darkness inside him, when he did this sort of magic. He tried to ignore it, to push through it.

They all thought for a minute. Willow had another suggestion. "How about squashing it?"

Giles put his hand over hers to stop her demonstration. "Thank you Willow, I do know what squashing means." He waited until Aaron was behind him and he sent out his magic once again. This time the earth moved. Then it started to shake. They all reached out to hold on as the steps beneath them trembled. Some shingles slid off the roof. They could hear crashes in the kitchen as breakable items slid out of the cabinets and off the counters. It only lasted for about six seconds but it seemed longer than that. One of the guards ran inside to reassure the two guards trying, albeit probably unsuccessfully, to rest.

The rest of them all still had their hands out, holding on. After ascertaining that no one was hurt Giles slowly sat down. Mike released his death grip on the railing and spoke. "Holy fucking moly."

Giles put his face in his hands. "I quite agree." He was amazed at how calm his voice sounded. His stomach was churning.

They all sat down except Willow who moved up behind Giles. She put her hands on his shoulders. "Giles, do it one more time. Let me see if I can feel what you're doing." He rolled his shoulders under his hand, her touch making him feel the tension that had been building with each additional attempt. She started to massage him. He closed his eyes.

At her words, Aaron had gone out to place another can and to investigate the other can. He looked thoughtfully at the ground. The can was flat and the earth was pushed in all around it about six feet into the ground. He nodded and looked up. "Can is definitely squashed." He put the fourth can down a

few feet away. He quickly moved back to the steps getting behind Giles.

When Giles stood, Willow, stepping up a step, lay her hands again on Giles' shoulders. She closed her eyes and started sensing for his magic. She spoke. "Okay. I'm ready."

Giles took a deep breath and then realized he didn't know what he was doing. He turned his head to catch her attention. "What am I doing to this can?" He grimaced, as if in sympathy.

Willow bit her upper lip, thinking. "Just move it. From there to there." She punctuated her words with a point. She massaged him for another moment; she couldn't believe how tense he was. "Relax, Giles."

Giles nodded. He stretched his head out to one side and then the other. They had discovered this too, that the more he tried his magic, the worse he felt. They had pushed him and pushed him one day until he was doubled over on the floor, retching his guts up.

Willow stilled her hands on his shoulders and spoke. "Now, Giles."

Giles reached one more time and he began to let the magic loose. Willow felt the magic rise, she felt Giles start to release it, and she felt what Giles was feeling. His feelings pummeled her. He was filled with fear, fear of himself, fear of what the magic could do, fear of what the magic had done. She felt his self-hatred, his rage at how the monster had used him, how terrified he was that the monster might still exist, that using the magic might prod it awake. The emotions were excruciatingly strong and raw, pulsing around her and through her.

Giles heard her cry and out of fear for her he was able to stop and draw the magic back in. He caught her as she fell. He sat down holding her gently, deathly afraid that he had damaged her somehow. "Willow?" He softly called her again. "Willow."

She opened her eyes and he could see the tears in them. She took a tremulous breath. "Oh God, is that what you feel every time you do the magic?" At his confused look she put her hand out and putting it over his heart she projected back to him what she had felt. He could feel it through his magic. At his nod she looked at him so sadly. She could still feel it so strongly in her. "How do you stand it?" She started to cry and he held her tightly.

He kissed the top of her head and gently rocked her until her crying slowly abated. Eventually she opened her eyes again. She reached up a hand and gently touched his face. "Why did you let us keep making you do stuff? Why

didn't you stop us?" Giles briefly looked up at the guards who were looking down at the two of them, concern on their faces.

He shook his head. "I need to learn to control it."

"How can you control it when it makes you feel that way?" He didn't answer. "Did you feel that way last night?"

He shook his head again. "No, no, that felt completely different, it was wonderful." She could see the change in his face, how much it lightened just at the thought of the magic he had loosed last night.

She dropped her hand off his face and lay forward putting her face on his chest, listening to his heartbeat. He just sat there with her quietly. Her heart was still racing. He started rubbing her back, sending thoughts of comfort out to her. Without even being aware of it he used his magic. She felt it move through her, filling her with peace, calming her fears, making her smile. He looked down at her. "Better?"

She nodded, her head still against her chest. She slowly sat up and he was surprised at how empty it made his arms feel. She looked at him, trying to work through the differences in his magic. Mike crouched down beside both of them. "Are you okay?" He looked at them both. They both hesitantly smiled at him and nodded. He spoke again. "What happened?"

Giles tightened his lips. "When I do magic like this." He pointed at the devastated field. "It's rather painful for me." He looked at Willow. "I guess I've grown somewhat accustomed to it. I had no idea she would feel it so strongly."

"How is it painful?"

Giles thought for a moment. "When I..." He closed his eyes. "When the magic in me was evil..." He paused and Mike swallowed at the look of pain on his face. "I did so many horrible things...too many to count. I killed so many innocent people, destroyed so many lives." He opened his eyes and all of the guards were affected by the sadness there. "When I do this kind of magic it brings it all back. It brings back the memories."

He turned to Willow as he felt her arm on his. "Giles, it wasn't you. You didn't do those things."

Giles smiled sadly at her. He tucked her hair behind her ear. "You know, I never forgave Angel. I never forgave him for killing Jenny or for torturing me for hours, or for bringing all of you such pain and terror. All these years and I

still don't think I could look at him, even now, without seeing what he did while he was Angelus. I imagine that all the family members of all the people I hurt and killed will never be able to forgive me either."

Willow's heart was breaking listening to him. She didn't know how to take his pain away, couldn't even imagine what it was doing to him. She leaned towards him, holding his face in her hands. "Giles, you are the best man I have ever known, and I love you, and I am so glad you are a part of my life."

Giles felt his eyes grow damp. He put his own hands over hers. "Oh Willow." He took a deep breath. "Knowing that has been the only thing that has made my life worthwhile for the these past few years." He leaned towards her and gently kissed her cheek. He pulled her hands away from his face and stood. He looked down at her. "I'll be back in a while." He turned and started walking away.

The guards watched him turn the corner and then they all snapped to as they realized that they were just watching him leave. Two of them leapt off the steps and ran around the corner to catch up. Both Mike and Aaron sat down next to Willow. Mike spoke softly, repeating himself. "Holy fucking moly."

Willow just nodded. "What you said." Mike just nodded back.

##

Giles went to his garden. He walked through it letting it comfort him. Once through he kept on walking and the guards, allowing him his solitude, followed at a respectful distance.

End Part 10

Magic 11

Giles kept walking. After a couple of hours had passed he could hear the guards falling behind. He turned to them at one point. "You don't need to keep up. I'll be back. I'll find you." He didn't wait for their answer, just walked a little faster until the sound of them trying to follow him receded into the distance.

When dark fell, Spike awoke. He walked out into the living room to find four of the guards and Willow sitting there. One of the guards, the guard who had watched Giles grow his garden was pacing, occasionally going to the window and looking out. One of the guards spoke to him. "Jim, will you sit down, you're making us all crazy."

Jim ignored him, continuing his pacing. He gestured outside. "Why isn't he back?" They heard the worry in his voice. They knew his allegiance had shifted. He knew it too. Somehow he had gone from protecting the world from Giles, to protecting him. They all felt that shift, not only in Jim but also in themselves. They'd been with him one day and he'd changed something fundamental within them all. Here was a man, their hearts cried, worth keeping alive.

Spike spoke. "Who's missing?" He looked around the room and his eyes narrowed. "Where's Giles?"

Willow jumped when he spoke; she hadn't even heard him come in. She started telling him what had happened, explaining about the cans, about the magic, what she'd felt inside of Giles. She told Spike what Giles had said about Angel and that then he'd left, saying he'd be back in a while.

Spike looked at the guards. "Did someone go with him?"

Aaron nodded. "Todd and Peter."

"They're not back yet either?" All five of them shook their heads at him. As Spike's demeanor got angrier a couple of the guards swallowed. They weren't particularly comfortable being in the same room with an angry vampire, not without Giles there at any rate. Spike looked at Willow. "How long has he been gone?" At Willow's grimace Spike asked again, even angrier. "How bloody long?"

Willow glanced at the clock on the wall. "About eight hours."

Spike glared at her. "Eight hours? He's been gone eight hours?" He went back to his room and threw on his leather duster. He came back out and headed for the door.

Willow spoke. "Can I go with you? He might be hurt."

Spike looked back at her. "He won't be hurt, not that way. And if you come with me you'll just slow me down." Spike looked at the guards. "Don't bother to follow, you can't keep up. If he's out there, I'll find him." He glared at them all. "Fucking eight hours? Why haven't any of you gone after him?"

Willow answered trying to calm him. "It never occurred to us he might not come back. He left with two guards. By the time we got worried we knew we'd never find him, not if he didn't want to be found." She tightened her lips. "I know he's coming back, I know he wouldn't just leave us."

Spike looked back at her. "No, he wouldn't. Don't worry, I'll find him."

Mike looked at Spike. "Todd and Peter?"

"If they don't slow me down looking for Giles, I'll find them too." He swept out the door.

##

Jensen had watched the whole exchange. He'd seen Spike leave. He rested his hands on his desk wondering how the hell everything had fallen apart so quickly. He'd hand picked these men; they were the best. He saw the effect Giles was having on them. He knew there was no point in replacing them. The same thing would probably just happen again.

As he sat there and thought about it he could only come to two conclusions. Either Giles was far more dangerous than he had previously thought and he could use his magic to bend people's wills, or Giles was simply a man who engendered loyalty. Which to Jensen's point of view didn't make him any less dangerous, it simply meant a different strategy was called for. He sat there, deep in thought, absently watching the monitor, watching as they waited for Giles to return.

##

Giles had no idea how much time had gone by until it had started getting dark. The usual urges that indicate the passage of time didn't pull on him. He didn't need to rest, he didn't get thirsty or hungry, and he was unconcerned about getting lost. He just knew he was alone and free, for the first time in as long as he could remember.

His thoughts were dark at first. The negative feelings the magic provoked in him took a while to disperse. But as he walked and eventually found forest he allowed himself to be distracted by the beauty around him. He intermittently used his magic. He bolstered a tree here or there, he left a bonanza of nuts for the squirrels to find, he sent out calming thoughts to the occasional wild animal he saw so he could pass them without causing them fear. This new side of his magic that he'd discovered last night was like a healing balm for his battered heart. He thirsted for it and it drew him on as he walked further and further. As the light began to dim he realized with a start that he must have been gone for hours. He turned and looked back from where he came. He just stood there for a while, knowing he should head back but feeling reluctant. Finally thoughts of Willow motivated him and with a sigh he began to head back.

Spike could sense Giles' magic as if it were a beacon. He moved quickly in

the darkness unerringly sure of his direction. So keen was he on following Giles that he might have passed the guards by if he hadn't heard one of them talk to the other. He still considered passing by but he allowed himself a brief deviation and he found them. They looked up startled when he burst into the clearing, one of the guards in a defensive posture over the other. When Todd saw it was Spike he wasn't sure whether to relax or not. Spike looked at the man on the ground. "What happened to him?"

Peter grimaced. He was disgusted with himself. "I think I broke my ankle."

At Spike's raised eyebrows Todd chimed in. "He walked on it for about two miles before he went down. I didn't even know he'd hurt it that badly. He said he'd just pulled it." He sat Peter a scathing look.

Peter defended himself. "Hey, I thought I did. I figured I'd walk it out." Todd rolled his eyes.

Spike looked at Todd. "Why didn't you go get help?"

Todd shook his head. "I didn't want to leave him or go back without Giles. I figured he'd be back this way sooner or later." He looked at his watch and made a face. "I did figure he'd back a little sooner than this." He made the connection. "You chasing him down?" At Spike's nod he settled down next to Peter. "Go, we'll be here." Spike nodded again and he took off.

An hour passed. The magic grew stronger and Spike didn't even need to follow it. It began to call to him again. He knew Giles was close. Then he saw him. Spike's relief at seeing him and seeing that he was fine rapidly coalesced into anger. He walked up behind Giles. "Where the bloody hell have you been?"

Giles smiled at him and put his finger over his lips, shushing Spike. "Shh, look." He pointed and then made a disappointed noise as the owl he'd been watching lifted its wings and took flight. Giles followed it with his eyes until it was lost in the trees. Giles had been crouching as he watched and now he stood. He leaned back against a tree and looked at Spike.

Spike just looked right back. He could feel Giles' magic and he could see the light of it in Giles' eyes. Spike wasn't fooled. After last night he understood Giles. Despite the light, the shadows there ran deep. He knew suddenly why Giles had been gone so long. "Have you been pretending that you could actually run away?"

Giles looked at the ground. "I suppose I have. Silly isn't it?"

Spike shook his head. "No. As long as you know it's just pretend."

Giles tightened his lips and the sadness increased in his eyes. "I do." He slowly eased himself to the ground, sitting with his back against the tree. "I do know."

Spike lowered himself down to the ground as well. He sat Indian style across from Giles. He was in no hurry to get back now that he had found Giles. Giles looked up at him. "Have I made everyone worry?"

Spike shrugged. "They'll get over it." Giles sighed. He looked at the ground and picked up a leaf lying there. He ran his fingers over it. Spike wanted to talk. "Willow told me what you said about Angel."

Giles stilled and then after a moment he shifted, uncomfortable, and sighed. "Why did she tell you that?"

"She thought it might explain why you left, why you hadn't come back."

Giles shook his head. "I never really understood." He looked down at himself, raised a hand and turned it, looking at it. "I never understood how a being could let their body do something and not somehow be able to control it." He sent Spike a rueful look. "You made it even harder to forgive him."

Spike's eyes opened wide and he pointed at himself. "Me, what the bloody hell did I have to do with it?"

Giles softly laughed. "Because I saw you control it. I saw you choose not to kill, I saw you love Buffy. I saw you choose to help." He shook his head. "It just made me despise him more, for choosing to kill."

"The only thing that stopped me from killing was that chip. I'd have continued to try and kill you all if it hadn't been for that sodding chip."

Giles shook his head. "You don't have the chip now. You haven't had it for a while, and you still chose to be friends with Willow, to keep her and Xander safe, to save my life, to come here and rescue me. You make decisions all the time to not give in to the demon inside you."

Spike let Giles' words run through him. "Do you somehow think that I'm better than you because of that, because I choose not to kill? Because you think I can control what's inside me where you couldn't?" At Giles' silence Spike stood up in anger. "Jesus, Giles, how could you possibly think that?" Spike laughed bitterly, the concept bringing him no enjoyment.

He paced as he spoke angrily. "I am a vampire. I'm not much more than a bloody animal." When Giles started to protest Spike ignored him and pushed on. "I spent over 150 years relishing in it. I killed who I wanted to, when I wanted to. I destroyed families, villages, I killed two slayers, and I didn't regret any of it, still don't. I don't regret anything I've done. As far as I'm concerned they all fucking deserved to die. Until I got that chip in my head I didn't care about anything or anyone except for Dru and me." He paused and let out a short laugh, thinking of Dru. "And we all know how well that worked out."

Giles raised his eyebrows, his head nodding in agreement with Spike.

Spike continued, voice tense, needing to make Giles understand. "You have spent most of your life fighting evil, trying to make the world a safer place. Fighting demons like me, demons who don't care about humanity, who don't give a fuck who lives or dies." He paused, standing over Giles. "This thing that happened with you and the magic. That was a detour. It was an infection, something that pulled you off course. But it's not who you are." He crouched down in front of Giles. "I saw you. I saw what you could do and how strong you were. I've never seen anything stronger or anything more evil." He poked Giles in the chest. "But you fought it and you won. You fought it at the end because it was going to kill Willow. You conquered it. If you hadn't we'd all be dead and Sunnydale wouldn't even be a spot on the map." Spike reached for a cigarette, lighting one.

"You tried to forgive Angel, and you treated him decent, just like you treat me decent, and that makes you better than most." He pointed off into the darkness, his cigarette in hand. "I think if Angel were to walk in here right now and ask you to forgive him, that you would." He picked up a piece of bark and he snapped it. "You'd forgive him because you understand now. There was no way you could forgive him without understanding what it meant to have something possess you so thoroughly."

"Buffy forgave him."

Spike let out a short laugh. "No she didn't. But she wanted to be with him so she found a way to live with it. She made it all her fault. Her fault that she slept with him, her fault that she didn't kill him so he could kill Jenny. Her fault that he tortured you. She just shifted the blame, but there was never any forgiveness."

Giles ran his hands over his face. He pulled his knees up and wrapped his arms around them. Spike wasn't finished. "Giles, these people who haunt you. Let them go. I know you feel guilty, but it won't change anything. They'll end up crippling you. They'll never understand that whatever that was that hurt them, that it wasn't you. Don't let them destroy you." Spike captured

Giles eyes. "And me? Don't ever think I'm better than you. When I got that chip it was in my best interest to cultivate all of you, to act as if we were friends." He shook his head. "Even after the chip failed, I still just did what I wanted to. I still fed and killed. I still did it without remorse. The caring, the choosing not to kill, that's the detour for me. But it's not who I am." He stopped and waited.

Giles watched him for a minute and then finally spoke. "I don't believe that. I don't believe it's just a detour."

Spike turned his head away and then met Giles' eyes again. "No, I don't suppose it is anymore." He looked away again, his emotions strong. He took a deep breath. "I don't know what the hell you did to me last night but you changed me." He looked again at Giles. "You saw me last night. You saw who I was, you saw the demon in me, and you..." Spike swallowed, the memories still rich and powerful. He hesitated saying the word but it was the truth so he faced it. "...and you loved me. And now, because of it, I don't know who I am or where I belong." Spike ran his hands through his hair.

Giles gazed at him tenderly. "You belong here with me."

Spike nodded slowly, letting out a slow breath. "I'm still a demon."

Giles smiled softly at Spike. "I know. And I'm still a man who gets too easily lost in his past. I need you and Willow to remind me that there's a life to be lived, a life worth living."

Spike pursed his lips, nodding. He'd said what he'd needed to say. He stood and reached down a hand to Giles and pulled him up. He gestured with his head, back in the direction of their quarters "One of the guards is hurt. I found them on the way here."

Giles gasped. "Why didn't you say something?"

Spike rose too. "I just did. You came first."

Giles put his hand on Spike's shoulder and squeezed. "Show me where they are." Spike nodded and the two of them sped off back the way they'd come.

Todd's head turned as he heard them approach. He grinned in relief when he saw Giles. Giles walked over to them and crouched down. "I'm sorry. I had no idea." He looked at Peter. "What happened?"

Peter winced. The pain had been growing worse. "I put my foot in a hole. Stupid, stupid, stupid." He shook his head.

Todd stood up. "Between the three of us we should be able to carry him back."

Giles shook his head. "I don't believe that's necessary." He put his hands out, looking at Peter for permission. At Peter's nod he gently laid his hands on Peter's ankle. Giles closed his eyes. He reached out and sent his magic into Peter. Just as he'd asked the plants to grow, he asked the bone to knit. He used some of his magic to lessen the pain. They all felt the magic and both Spike and Todd let it flow through them. Peter just stared at Giles, awestruck as he watched Giles heal him and as he felt the healing magic flow through his body.

Giles frowned as he slowly reassured himself that everything was as it should be. He nodded and opened his eyes. He smiled at Peter. He stood and put out his hand to him. Peter slowly reached up and allowed Giles to pull him to his feet. He gingerly took a step and then another. He shook his head and looked at Giles. "How...?" He grinned. "I guess if you can grow a jungle, a broken bone would be a piece of cake."

Giles grinned back. "It should be perfectly fine now." He looked at them both. "We still have a ways to go. Do you feel up to it?" They both nodded. The magic had energized them beyond belief. Giles indicated for them to go and the four of them moved out, the bright moonlight making it easier for the guards to find their footing in the dark.

It had been over three hours since Spike had left. They were all sitting in essentially the same spots. Once Spike was gone, the four guards had started asking Willow questions about Giles. She had answered them all, waxing enthusiastic about her favorite subject. She had given away more than she realized regarding her feelings for the man. She had also increased their respect for Giles, and for Spike. None of them had quite figured out how Spike fit in. They still didn't for the most part but there was no doubt that protecting Giles seemed to be a regular pastime for Spike and that made him all right in their eyes. Jensen had listened too, his lips pursed as he learned about Giles through the eyes of someone who loved him.

So, now they all waited for Giles to return. Jim had stopped pacing and just stood at the window. Suddenly he moved to the door. "He's back, they're all back." He sped out the door. Willow was right behind him.

Jim stopped as he got up to them but Willow didn't. She just kept going and threw herself at Giles. He wrapped his arms around her. "I'm sorry Willow. I didn't mean to be gone so long."

Her answer was muffled. "I'm just glad you're back." She pulled back and looked at him. "Are you okay?"

He smiled gently down at her, his arms still tight around her. He looked over at Spike and then back down at her. He nodded. "Yes, I am." She smiled at him and moving to his side, her arm still around him, she walked with him into the building.

End Part 11

Magic 12

None of them were remotely sleepy despite the late hour. They all had gotten something to eat and then moved back to the living room. Giles had selected to sit in one of the chairs. Short of sitting in his lap Willow couldn't see anyway to be near him so she reluctantly sat on the couch. After she had sat down she glanced up to find Spike smirking at her. She stuck her tongue out at him and then blushed. She looked down at her hands.

Peter was going on and on about how Giles had fixed his broken ankle. Todd was agreeing with everything he said. Spike and Jim sat in the chairs on either side of Giles, content just to have him there. Giles absently responded to the guards' queries while he pondered Willow and her amazing interest in her cuticles.

Aaron had a crease on his forehead as he frowned, listening to Peter describe how amazing the magic had felt. He looked at Giles. "Why is it so different? What makes that..." He pointed at Peter's ankle. "...so different from that?" He pointed outside to the front field.

Giles shook his head. They all started throwing out suggestions. Willow started arguing with them and Giles watched them as if from a distance, smiling as Willow started demonstrating his magic with her hands. He just let them talk.

Spike stared at them all. He couldn't believe how blind they all were. He couldn't believe that he, a vampire, could see so clearly what the difference was while none of the rest of them, including Giles, were able to. He spoke softly. "It's about love."

No one except Giles heard him clearly. But they all saw Giles turn his head to Spike quickly when he spoke. Aaron asked. "It's about what?"

Spike cleared his throat. "His magic, the magic he does right, the plants, the

protection, the ankle, it's all about love, keeping things safe, making things right, making things better."

Willow frowned. "How about the door?"

"He was fixing it. Putting it back the way it was supposed to be."

"Why didn't the wall get fixed?"

"You just asked him to think about the door. He could have done it, he could have fixed the wall just as easily."

Aaron pointed to the front again. "What about that? What's that about then?"

Spike answered Aaron but he looked at Giles. "He thinks it's about hate. It makes him afraid. It gets in his way and messes the magic up." Giles looked stunned and Spike continued, this time addressing Giles directly. "You think you can't attack or destroy without it being about hating. But it's not about hating. It's about taking a stand and using all that you are to get the job done."

Willow stared at Spike, amazed at his insight. She thought about every time Giles had used his magic over the past few days and she knew Spike was right.

Spike spoke again. "Listen, when Jensen starts to send you out, you can avoid being hurt, and probably keep the rest of us from being hurt, but you won't be much use unless you use your power to kill." He grinned. "I don't think many demons die from plant overgrowth." Giles rolled his eyes.

Mike looked confused. "What do you mean, when Jensen sends you out?"

Spike ignored the question and continued to talk to Giles. "The magic isn't separate from you. It can't control you, not anymore. It is you. You'll use it to do what's right because you'll choose to do what's right."

Giles got up and walked to the window looking over the front field. In the dark he could barely make out the terrain changes he'd created out there today. He needed to think and he still wasn't used to thinking around so many people. He reached for the doorknob and turned to them. "I just want to check on the garden. I'll be back in a little while."

Willow stood up protesting. "That's what you said earlier."

Giles let out a soft chuckle. "Yes, I suppose it is." He amended his words. "I

won't go past the garden, I promise." He glanced quickly at them all and stepped outside. Willow walked to the window overlooking the back and watched as Giles walked to the garden and stepped into it.

Mike asked again, looking at Spike. "What did you mean about Jensen sending him out?"

Spike looked over at Mike. "That's what this is all about. Seeing if Giles can use his magic to kill so Jensen can use him."

Mike looked at Spike. "You mean like an assassin?" Spike just looked at Mike but didn't respond.

Willow spoke up, still looking out the window. "That's what Giles is afraid of."

The guards exchanged looks with each other. They wondered what Jensen would ask of Giles, and what the toll might be. Spike rose and went to stand next to Willow, looking outside as well. Giles was further back now but still in clear sight. Reassured Spike returned to his seat.

Willow continued to watch Giles. She wanted to be out there with him so much. She leaned her forehead against one of the panes of glass.

Spike turned in his chair and faced her. "If you don't go out there, I will."

Willow's jaw dropped as she stared at Spike. She thought about Spike and Giles last night and how she had thought they had been kissing. Then she thought about how jealous she'd been when the three of them had been talking and how Spike had probably seen it. He had always been able to read her so clearly. Her eyes narrowed and he grinned at her and then he laughed. "Don't get all worked up. I like my eyes right where they are. I'd just as soon you not claw them out." He ducked as she came over to smack him. He stood and evaded her again. "I'll just have a snack every now and then and leave the rest of him for you." She was about to hit him again when she realized that she had a very interested audience. She blushed and covered her face with her hands.

They all started to laugh and Mike got up and opened the door. He turned Willow around. "Go get 'im, tiger." He gently pushed her outside and shut the door behind her.

Willow thought about throwing herself in the one of the craters Giles had created. Her face felt like it might explode. She sighed and fanned herself. She sighed again, braced her shoulders and walked to the back. She didn't see him at first but then she realized he was crouching down at the edge of

the garden, his hands in the dirt. She walked over to him. "What are you doing?"

He looked up and smiled at her. "Checking for moisture."

"Is it okay?"

He nodded and stood. "Yes, it's fine. We won't need any rain tonight."

She looked at the garden. "Will it survive once we leave here?"

He looked over it as well, his face sad. "No, I don't suppose it will."

She let out a sad noise when she saw the expression on his face. She touched his arm. "I'm sorry, that was a thoughtless question."

He put his arm around her and gently squeezed, then quickly let go. "It's all right. Do you think Jensen might oblige me and send a gardener?" He laughed softly as he watched Willow try and answer him without disappointing him. He chuckled her under her chin. "That was a joke, Willow."

She smiled at him, rolling her eyes. She strolled next to him, her hands clasped behind her back. She watched his profile, watched his lips as he spoke and his hands as he gestured. Heat began to pool again in her lower belly. She sighed. He turned to her. She pulled her gaze from his face and kept walking. He reached out and swung her around to face him. "What's bothering you? Why won't you tell me?"

She blushed and she was grateful for the cover of darkness. She just didn't know what to say. She felt like calling Xander again. Maybe she could have Xander tell him. She glanced back at the house. Maybe she could have all of them tell him. She glanced up at him and saw the concern in his eyes. She took a deep breath. "Can you use your magic to know what I'm feeling?"

He shook his head confused. "What do you mean?"

"Try it. Try and use your magic and see what I'm feeling." At his frown, she touched his arm. "You did it earlier, I sent it to you and you felt it. Just do it again. I don't know how to say it, I don't know what words to use." She put her hand on his chest. "Just listen with the magic."

He placed his hand over hers and closed his eyes. She sent him her love, and her desire for him. It swept through him like a firestorm. He took a step back and opened his eyes wide. He felt like he was out of breath. He searched her eyes, not believing what he had felt from her. He shook his

head. "I don't understand."

She smiled softly at him. "Is it that hard to understand?" She gently touched his cheek.

He looked down at her. He looked at this woman he loved more than life itself. He softly laughed. It was such a small step from that love to lowering his head and capturing her lips in his. An infinitely small step, so he took it. His lips gently touched hers and he answered her. "No." He felt her teeth against his lips and he looked down at her to find her grinning. He grinned back. She glanced back at the house and holding his hand she led him towards the back of the garden, out of sight.

He took her there, in his garden. He laid her down and he loved her. The magic trickled out and in it they found each other's passion and discovered how and where to touch. When he thrust into her and spilled his seed the magic burst out. It surrounded them like thousands of fireflies, touching every cell of their bodies until they were vibrating with it. It was pure sensation, stronger than their orgasms had been and they held each other as it rushed through them like a waterfall and then slowly faded away.

After a minute he lifted his head and looked down at Willow. She looked at him in amazement. "Oh my God, is that going to happen every time?"

Giles laughed and she could feel his cock move in her. She pushed up against him. He pushed a strand of hair off her face and ran his tongue over the outline of her lips. She groaned and pushed against him again. He could feel himself growing hard again. He grinned at Willow. "I have just discovered a major advantage to being young again." She grinned back and placing her hands behind his head, she pulled his lips back to hers. It happened again when Giles found his release. They rode it out in ecstasy. When it had passed she looked at Giles. "Wow, that's quite a bonus." Giles laughed and held her tightly.

He pulled off to her side and looked at her. He ran his hand down her face and then down her body, ending at her hip. He shook his head. "When...?"

She smiled. "When did I start feeling this way?" At his nod she thought back. "I've loved you for so long, no one has been more important to me than you, not for a long time. This part, though, it was after you talked to Jensen, when we were in your bedroom." She laughed. "It was why I called Xander."

Giles' eyebrows rose. "Xander knows?"

Willow scrunched her face up. "It sort of wiggled me out." She leaned over

and kissed him.

He put a hand on her breast, feeling the shape and weight of it. He touched her nipple watching it as it pebbled and grew tight. He ran his tongue over it. He looked at her. "Still wig you out?" She shook her head and laughed. He pulled away from her so he could do the same with her other breast. "And what sage advice did Xander give you?"

She pushed him to roll back and he obliged her until she was lying astride him. "He told me that I should tell you."

Giles nodded and then groaned as Willow started making her way down his body. "Remind me to thank him next time I see him." He groaned again and his hips bucked as she engulfed him.

Eventually they made it back into the house. They lay on his bed, her head on his chest. She made little circles playing with his chest hair. They were relaxed but still wide-awake. She laughed. "Boy, you're better than a good night's sleep." Suddenly she yawned and he laughed at her.

She lifted her head and looked down at him. "Can we talk about the magic for a minute?" She grinned. "And I don't mean the sex magic."

He laughed. "Sex magic?" He looked at her, serious again. "Yes, we can talk about it."

"Are you feeling better about any of it?" He thought about it for a minute without answering so she pressed on. "Did you ever think badly about Buffy because she killed demons?"

Giles looked at her in amazement. "Of course not."

"So you don't feel bad about the idea of demons being dead?"

He shook his head. He knew where she was heading. "No, I don't have any ethical dilemma regarding the killing of demons." He ran his fingers through her hair. She stayed silent, giving him the opportunity to say more. "It helped tonight. Speaking with Spike earlier and then when we got back. Why the magic was going wrong, it helps to understand that." He smiled ruefully. "I guess the bottom line is that I'm afraid that it will come back. That if I use my magic in a way that the monster would find attractive, that it will come back."

He lifted his head and quickly kissed her. He put his head back down. She ran her fingers over his eyebrows. She shook her head. "It won't happen. But even if it did, if you ever felt it, we'd just say the spell again."

"You won't always be there."

She frowned. "Yes I will. I'm not going anywhere."

He tilted his head, his eyebrows furrowed. "Willow, you won't be able to come with me when I get sent out on assignment."

Her eyes narrowed at him. "Why not? You let me fight with you and Buffy for years, even when I wasn't a witch. Now I am, and stronger than ever, and you are so strong it takes my breath away. You can make sure nothing bad happens to me and still have plenty of magic to spare to kill all the bad guys. And then I'll be there if something goes wrong. Which it won't."

He shook his head and she raised her chin. "Giles, stop. You're stuck with me, and with Spike. The three of us, we're a team." As he opened his mouth to speak again she put her fingers on his lips. "And I would suggest, for your well being, that you not even think about having this conversation with Spike."

Giles gave up for the time being. He just held her tightly and enjoyed the sensation of her presence. She snuggled against him and yawned again. As the sun rose, they both finally drifted off to sleep.

End Part 12

Magic 13

When Willow woke up she felt funny. She wasn't sure how to describe it, just that she felt different. She looked down at Giles, watching him sleep, loving him so much it almost brought her to tears. She decided that maybe she had to pee. She got up and padded into the bathroom. When that didn't help she decided that maybe she was hungry. She got dressed and headed to the kitchen. Aaron and Mike were sitting in there. She blushed when she saw them and they grinned. She was grateful when they refrained from making any comments. She reached for the tea and Aaron got up and took the box away from her. "No caffeine, remember?" He hunted through the cabinet and found some herbal tea for her. She grabbed it and wrinkled her nose at him.

She looked around. "Where is everyone?"

"Sleeping."

She nodded. She rolled back her shoulders a couple of times. She still couldn't figure out what was making her feel weird. She stared at the kettle

and wished it would boil faster. She felt the now familiar presence of Giles' magic and with a smile she turned around expecting him to be there. He wasn't. She turned around confused and the kettle started whistling.

Aaron looked up. "Boy, that was fast." He looked at her and saw that her jaw had dropped. "Willow, what's the matter?"

She just yelled for Giles. He was out there immediately, just taking long enough to throw on some jeans. "What, what is it?" She just pointed at the kettle, her eyes wide. He walked up to it confused. "Willow, what are you pointing at?"

She finally found her voice. "Do you still have your magic?"

Giles eyes opened wide at her question. "Of course." He turned his head to the side looking at her. "Why are you asking that?"

She pointed again at the teakettle, which was now whistling painfully loud. Giles reached past Willow to shut off the burner and move the kettle. "I made the water boil. I just wished it and it boiled. I felt your magic but it wasn't you. I think you gave some of it to me."

Giles stared at her and leaned against the counter. Willow stood in front of him and put her hand on his chest. She looked horrified. "God, will the magic do everything I think? That's kind of creepy. Suppose I think something stupid or wish for something bad to happen to somebody."

Giles put his hand on hers and shook his head, reassuring her. "It doesn't work that way. You've always done well working with the elements. I imagine my magic has simply enhanced yours."

Mike looked at the two of them. "She's got your magic now? How did that...?" He stopped when he saw them glance at one another and start to blush. Mike grinned. "Oh." He looked at Aaron and they grinned at each other. He knew it would embarrass Giles but he had to ask. "Do you think that would happen with anyone you had sex with or just her?"

Giles blushed again, mortified at the question. Mike raised his hand to clarify, laughing. "Sorry, I'm not personally interested. I just know Jensen would want to know. I figured you'd rather have me ask."

Willow's eyes narrowed. "Why would he even know about this?"

Mike pursed his lips. "Trust me, he'll know. The guy knows everything." He turned to Giles. "You know, the two of you would work well together. You'd

make a good team. Once you got past the part of him being a complete asshole." Mike sent a grin up to one of the corners that he had determined a camera was placed. He actually kind of liked Jensen. Jensen did a good job at keeping them alive.

Giles grinned. "Well, he certainly is that." He thought about Mike's question. He was embarrassed to answer it but he knew Mike was right. It was something Jensen would want to know. "I don't really know. I rather think because it was...you know...that sort of magic that we felt..." He pointed out back to where the garden was. "...that it would only work with someone I loved." He looked at Willow and smiled at her. He touched her cheek. "Do you feel all right?"

She nodded. "Yeah, just different." She grinned, gasping a little. "Oh, see, now you have no reason not to let me come with you. I can protect myself."

He rolled his eyes. "Just because you can boil water quickly doesn't mean your magic is strong enough to protect you."

Aaron looked at him. "What is she talking about?"

Giles frowned. "She's got it in her head that when Jensen sends me out that she'll be coming with me." He frowned at Willow and she just smiled sweetly at him. He got up and began to make him and Willow a cup of tea, making sure hers was non-caffeinated.

Mike leaned back in his chair thinking about what Giles had just said. It made him start thinking of a plan. He bit the inside of his cheek as he sat there working it out.

##

Jensen was watching when Mike made his comment. He laughed, despite his annoyance. He muttered to himself. "God that boy has cheek." He pursed his lips, thinking about what had occurred between Giles and Willow. That was a good question that Mike had asked. It eliminated the risk, or the possibility, of using Giles to...well, spread his magic on a wider scale. Jensen shook his head and stood up.

He was reluctantly finding that he actually liked Giles. Once he stopped threatening to kill you he was a decent sort of fellow. And there was no denying his power. Mike had been right about that too. He and Giles would make a good team. With his information and resources and Giles' power they could perhaps really make a difference in protecting this world from the evil that infested it. He found it interesting that Willow wanted to participate. He

wondered how strong she was.

##

Giles also wanted to know how strong Willow was. After they ate he took her outside. Peter and Todd were still sleeping. The other four guards walked outside to watch.

Giles had been right about his assumptions. Willow couldn't do the scope of magic that he could, nor was she anywhere near as strong but she had a remarkably increased talent and accuracy when it came to working with the elements. She could move massive amounts of earth and was able to put the field back the way it had been before Giles had terraformed it yesterday. She was able to summon significant windstorms and create fire. And she made it rain. Willow was delighted.

As Willow's insistence Giles tried out his own magic again. The guards had been spread around the field watching Willow as she used her magic. When they realized Giles was going to experiment again they all moved quickly behind him up on the step. He frowned at them. "Your faith is overwhelming."

Mike just grinned at him. "I always try and stay on the right side of trouble." He motioned with his chin into the building. "Want me to get some more cans?"

Giles just looked at him for a moment but then shook his head. "No." He looked back out at the field. He closed his eyes and imagined demons. He used his years of experience of fighting demons to picture the field peppered with the worst sorts of them. All coming this way, all coming after people he cared about.

He opened his eyes and threw out his hands. First one then three then a dozen, then two-dozen explosions hit the field. Flames shot high as the earth flew. Willow and the guards instinctively ducked at first even though they knew Giles would let no harm come to them. Then they realized that nothing was coming at them anyway. They saw his face, and realized that whatever Giles was doing out there, it was what he intended to do. They turned as one and watched the field, witnessing his awesome power.

He drew back his magic and felt it within him, restless and powerful, like a geyser or a blacksmith's fire. He felt its rightness and he sensed within him who and what he could be. He felt no fear this time. The guards and Willow just watched him, almost afraid to speak, seeing the enormous power still sizzling in his eyes, still resonating in his body.

In time, he turned to them. Mike spoke up, breaking the silence. "Wow." The rest of them nodded, as if Mike had captured their reactions quite eloquently. Giles grinned at them.

Willow moved next to him and wrapped her arms around him. "Very wow." She looked up at him, love and pride on her face. "Did you get all the bad guys?"

He looked down at her and then over at the guards. "Was it that obvious?"

Mike laughed. He reached over Willow and clapped Giles on the shoulder. "Yup, I would say that that was a successful clean sweep." He gestured at the field. He followed his gesture with his eyes, shaking his head with amazement at the measured and careful destruction before him. He looked at Giles. "Man, you are something else."

They spent the rest of the afternoon practicing their magics. As daylight started waning they all moved in to begin dinner preparations. Peter and Todd joined them. Giles felt the unexpected gift of their friendship. It amazed him that he had grown so fond of them all so quickly. It also made him sad because he expected he would lose them soon. He knew Jensen would reassign them once Giles began to work for him.

They ate and then they stayed at the table, laughing and enjoying each other's company. Their noise woke Spike. And when he woke he needed to feed. As he entered the kitchen his eyes swept the room for Giles. When Giles saw his eyes he could feel the bloodlust in Spike calling to him. He nodded and stood up, walking over to Spike. He turned to Willow and included the guards when he spoke. "We'll be back in a little while."

Willow frowned and pushed her chair back as if to stand and accompany them. Giles pulled her close and kissed her forehead. "Willow, I'll be back. I need to be with Spike right now." She looked frustrated and sent a glare at Spike before she could stop herself. Even with what had transpired between her and Giles Willow was still feeling threatened by whatever was going on between Giles and Spike. It made her feel less important somehow and the fact that she was even feeling this way made her feel immature and full of doubts. She turned her face away from Spike's knowing grin.

Giles could follow her emotions on her face and longed to stay and reassure her. But he could not ignore Spike's call. He knew this would be hard for her at first, this closeness between him and Spike, but she needed to grow accustomed to it. He would make her feel loved and remove her doubts later when they were alone. So after cupping her cheek with his hand and smiling at her tenderly, he simply left and Spike followed him out.

Peter looked puzzled. "Where are they going?"

Jim had guessed. He had seen Spike feed the other night. "Spike needs to feed." He turned to Willow. "Right?" She nodded tersely.

Peter was still confused. "I don't get it. What does Giles have to do with that?"

Jim looked at him. "He'll feed off of Giles."

Peter jumped to his feet alarmed, as if to run after them and stop them. Jim put out his hand. "It's okay. He did it the other night, after Giles grew the garden. Giles was fine. He was fine after it."

Mike looked a little pale at the thought but he was able to be pragmatic. "Well, if it really doesn't hurt him I guess I'd rather have it be him than one of us." No one could argue with that.

Spike and Giles walked some ways away from the building. They stopped and stood there a little awkwardly, not quite sure how to proceed. Finally Spike grinned and spoke. "Jesus, I feel like a sodding virgin." Giles grinned in return. Giles finally just sat down and Spike sat next to him. Spike leaned towards Giles and with one of his hands he reached around Giles' neck and pulled his hair out of the way. He captured Giles' eyes for a moment and then holding Giles' head still with his hand on the back of Giles' neck, he bent down, plunged his fangs in and began to drink. Giles reached for the magic and surrounded them both with it.

Spike felt the blood coursing down his throat as the magic pounded through his body. He felt his body start to become aroused in response to the sensual onslaught. He knew Giles would let him take him. Not because Giles was particularly desirous to do so, but because when they were bonded like this, he knew Giles would deny him nothing. Only Spike's feelings for Willow stopped him. He knew she was not ready for this. For now, at least, he would allow her the right to own that part of Giles. For now, but not forever.

When Spike was done he just rested his head on Giles' shoulder for a few minutes. Giles helped hold him there with a hand on his back. Finally Spike sat up. Giles lay back on the ground, looking up at the sky. Spike watched him feeling the connection between them flow like lava. They both were silent as the residual aftermath of Giles' magic slowly receded.

Giles looked up at Spike. "I found it today, my power." Spike watched Giles' eyes. He saw that the shadows that had been so prevalent there only last night had faded. Giles continued. "I figured it out, what you meant. What I

am." He sat up, facing Spike. "I want..." He broke off his sentence and just softly smiled at Spike. "Thank you."

Spike didn't reply, just barely nodded his head. Then he did speak. "You know Jensen will call for you soon." It wasn't a question. Giles nodded, his jaw tightening just a little. Spike spoke again. "I'll be going with you." Again, not a question.

Giles leaned back, resting on his elbows. He looked at Spike. He knew there were reasons to argue. He knew Jensen wouldn't like it. But he just nodded. "I know."

Spike leaned back too. "Right, then. That's settled." He grinned at Giles. Giles grinned back and the two of them sat there in the darkness for quite some time.

End Part 13

Magic 14

When they got back inside everyone tried to act very nonchalantly as if nothing unusual had happened. Spike just grinned. He didn't join them at the table, but rather leaned against the counter lighting up a cigarette. He listened to them all speak as he flicked his ashes into the sink.

Mike glanced up at Spike every now and then. Spike was the only part of his plan that he wasn't thrilled about. But it was pretty clear that where Giles went, Spike went, so Mike would just deal with that. He watched as Giles sat down next to Willow and reached for her hand, squeezing it while he gave her a smile. She smiled back. He waited until they all got settled. "Giles?"

Giles looked up at Mike. "Hmm?"

"We..." He gestured to all the guards. "...have a proposition to make." Giles just waited. Mike spoke again. "You know that Jensen will want to start using you soon?"

Giles shot a glance at Spike. "Yes, in fact Spike and I were just talking about that."

Mike glanced up at Spike and pursed his lips. He looked back at Giles. "You'll probably be working with security teams when you go in to remove demons. You'll need a team to check things out, and make contacts, and arrange equipment." He looked up to see Giles quietly watching him. He continued.

"So, we were thinking that we'd like to be the team that works with you. That way you'd have a set team instead of having to work with new people every time. We've all talked about it and assuming it's okay with Jensen and with you we'd like to volunteer."

Spike took a drag off his cigarette and rolled his eyes. "Yes, and we all know how eager Jensen has been to meet all of Giles' demands."

Mike's lips tightened. "This is different, Giles will need a team."

Spike started to look annoyed. "He has a team."

Mike felt a little nervous. "Right, I know. We want to be the team that assists him and his 'team'. You and Willow."

Now that he knew Mike was clear Spike just shrugged and took another drag off his cigarette blowing out the smoke in Mike's direction.

Mike waved the smoke away glaring at Spike and Spike just grinned. Mike looked at Giles. "What do you think?"

Giles was initially too stunned to answer. This time Willow squeezed his hand. He looked down at her and smiled. He looked at Mike and the rest of the guards. "I'm honored. I never expected..." He scrunched his face up and shook his head. "I can't believe that Jensen would allow this."

Mike waved his hand. "Don't worry about Jensen." He seemed very sure of himself.

Spike snorted. "Well then, as long as we're dreaming, how about asking for a helicopter and a pilot to fly it."

Todd got a gleam in his eye. "I can fly a helicopter, I can fly anything."

Spike rolled his eyes again. He threw his cigarette butt in the sink. "Wonderful."

Willow was starting to get excited. "Maybe we could have a plane, you know, our own plane that takes us wherever we need to go so we don't have to worry about reservations or passports or sunlight." She was worried about Spike.

Spike walked to the refrigerator and got himself a beer. "Willow, don't stop there, let's have Jensen get us all diplomatic immunity. I'm sure he can arrange that." His voice was dripping with sarcasm.

Willow just stared at Spike as if he was a genius. "That's perfect." She kept thinking and then she looked up and was practically bouncing in her seat. "Oh, oh, and he can put a big computer system in it so we can do our research there and set up a library that can travel with us." She thought for another minute. "And I think he should pay us, me and Spike."

Mike had to bite his lips at that one to keep from barking out a laugh. This had gotten a tad out of hand. He knew Jensen would be shitting a brick at that particular demand, in fact probably most of them. He didn't really care which demands Jensen met as long as they ended up being assigned to Giles. That's all they cared about. All six of them, they were very clear on that.

Giles just watched them in amazement. He was gratified that the guards wanted to stay with him. He was warmed by their loyalty. He listened to all their ideas, intrigued but skeptical. He remembered Jensen's threats and he didn't feel free of them. As he looked around the room he felt more trapped by the threats than ever. More people to love, more people to lose. He looked at Mike. "Why would Jensen do any of this for me?"

Mike hesitated. He hoped he wouldn't get fired for this. "Because I've seen what you can do, and he needs you. Jensen may be a horse's ass, but he cares about this world. He'd do anything to keep it safe. And that means keeping you happy."

Giles didn't necessarily believe that but he felt the hope rise in him and as much as he tried to quell it, it was like a cork in water and no matter how hard he pushed it down it kept rising back to the surface. He just sat there listening to them all trying to ignore the hope and worry that warred within him.

##

Jensen flicked the monitor off in disgust after Mike's last comment. He shook his head. He was going to have to speak to his sister about her oldest son. There was only so much crap an uncle should have to take from a nephew. He shook his head again and reached for his phone.

##

It was the next day when they got the call. It was the first time a phone had rung since they had been there and it startled everyone. It was Mike's phone. Mike answered it and listened. His face tightened for a moment, he nodded and disconnected. He looked at Giles. "Jensen's on his way." Giles felt a flicker of fear run through him. He rose and went to the window.

They all sat there waiting. They saw a limousine drive up but no one got out.

Then they heard the helicopter. They all walked outside and held their hands up to protect their faces from the wind and dust raised by the helicopter blades. The blades slowly came to a stop. Jensen stepped out holding an envelope and a small bag. He reached up to the pilot and the pilot handed him something. The guards all snapped to attention.

Giles stood there slightly in front of Willow, ready to use his magic if he needed to protect her, to protect them all. Jensen saw the look in his eyes and remembered how dangerous Giles could be. He silently took a deep breath and walked over to him. He stood in front of Giles. "Mr. Giles."

Giles just waited. Jensen gestured to the helicopter. "Here's your helicopter." He turned briefly and catching Todd's eyes he threw the keys to him. Todd caught them, fighting to keep the delight off his face. Jensen turned back to Giles. Giles tried to recover quickly but Jensen saw the look of shock in his eyes and smiled inwardly to himself, enjoying the victory, small as it was. He continued. "Your plane is waiting for you." He turned back to Todd. "The coordinates are loaded in the GPS system." Todd nodded.

Jensen opened the bag he'd been holding. He pulled out a pager and a cell phone and handed them to Giles. Giles looked at them distastefully but he took them. Jensen handed him the books to go with them and the bag with assorted chargers and cables. "Learn how to use these." Giles held the books and the equipment in his hands, still staggered by the turn of events.

Jensen walked over to Mike. He shook his head and tried to restrain himself but couldn't. He cuffed him on the side of the head. Giles stepped forward to intervene until he saw that Mike was trying hard not to laugh even as he grabbed the side of his head.

"Ow." His eyes widened. "Sir."

Jensen just glared at him. Then he spoke. "You have new orders. You and your team will be assigned to assist Mr. Giles and his..." He looked at Willow. "...team." He handed Mike a large manila envelope. He turned back to Giles. "Assuming that meets with your satisfaction." He waited still enjoying the look on Giles' face. Giles just nodded, feeling incapable of speech. Jensen spoke again. "Any questions?" Giles held his hands out in front of him, still full of paraphernalia, as if to intimate that he wouldn't even know where to begin. And then looking at Jensen, he just smiled.

Jensen graced him with a small smile and a nod. He gestured to the pilot and the pilot stepped out of the helicopter. They both got into the limousine. As the limousine turned and headed down the drive, Jensen looked back at the eight of them. He frowned; the whole bloody thing was costing the Council a

fortune. He was determined that it would be money well spent. He would make sure it was, very sure. But he had drawn the line at paying Willow Rosenberg and the vampire a salary. He wanted to see them in action first, then he'd determine what they were worth, if anything at all. He turned around again and picking up a phone, began to check his messages.

Behind him Mike let out a whoop. Giles turned around to look at him, the smile still on his face. Willow let out a shriek and wrapped her arms around Giles hugging him tight enough to make him grunt. He handed all the electronic gizmos to her.

Mike opened the envelope. He quickly scanned the pages. He looked up at Giles. "We have..." He looked at his watch. "...10 days before we need to report." He looked at Giles. "I guess that means you too."

Willow just looked up at Giles, rewrapping her arms around him. "Let's go home."

Giles looked down at her and couldn't have agreed more. He ran his hand down her face and nodded. "Let's go home."

She grinned. "I have to call Xander." Giles grinned back. She borrowed a phone and found a quiet spot to call. Giles spoke to Mike for a minute and then went in to tell Spike the news. They would leave after dark.

Willow waited impatiently for Xander to answer. He finally did. "Hello?"

"Xander. It's Willow."

"Willow!" He paused. "You sound happy. Is everything okay?"

She giggled. "Everything's wonderful." Xander breathed out a sigh of relief. Willow spoke again. "Did Anya have the babies?"

Xander spoke proudly. "Yes, and I have the bruises to prove it."

She sighed. "Everything went okay? Anya's fine?"

"Everyone's fine. Anya's decided she's never having sex with me again so she won't get pregnant and have to do that again. But other than that, everything's fine."

Willow giggled again. Xander spoke again. "The babies want to see you."

Willow smiled. "I'll see them soon."

"Will you really?"

"Yes, in a couple of days."

"For real?"

"For real."

"Giles too?"

"Giles too. Even Spike."

"You were doing so well up to that point." He didn't really care. He'd be glad to see Spike if it meant he'd get to see Willow and Giles too. His joy was sharp within his chest and Xander took a deep breath to try and relieve it. "When will you be here?"

"I'm not sure." At Xander's indrawn breath she hurried to clarify. "No, nothing like that. I'm just not sure about time zones and connections and all that stuff but it should be soon." She bit her bottom lip. "Xander, I have so much to tell you, I can't wait to see you."

"Just tell me it's happy news. It is, isn't it?" He was still feeling a little gun shy. She just laughed and the sound of it reassured him. "So, what's with the Giles weirdness?"

She sighed. "Oh Xander."

"Is that a happy oh Xander?"

"Yes." There was silence. "Are you okay with that?"

He grunted. "Well, mostly. But if you're coming home it means I have to tell Anya and she might hurt me." He thought for a minute. "Could you act gay when you get home? Would you mind?"

Willow giggled again. "I can't believe you're a dad."

Xander snorted. "Me either." Then he sighed. "Willow, it's the most amazing thing that's ever happened to me. When I held them..." He stopped talking.

She heard the tremor in his voice and her eyes filled up in response to his emotion. She pushed past the lump in her throat. "They are so lucky to have you. You'll be the best dad."

"Get home soon, Will, I miss you."

Willow looked up as Giles walked in. He asked for the phone. She nodded and spoke one last time. "Xander, Giles wants to talk with you." She handed the phone to Giles.

"Xander?"

"Giles! Willow says you're both coming home."

"Yes, we should be there tomorrow."

"Are you sure you can't leave Spike there?"

Giles chuckled softly. "No, no, I'm afraid I can't do that."

"Can I stake him yet?"

"No, I'm afraid you can't do that either."

Giles smiled at Xander's sigh and looked down at Willow. "I understand I owe you some thanks."

"Yeah? What for?"

"For advising Willow to actually talk to me."

"Ah, that. Well, it's worked for me in the past. Well, actually that's not true. In fact it usually resulted in me getting laughed at and generally ridiculed but seeing as it wasn't me this time I took a chance."

Giles chuckled again. "Willow's tugging on me and saying something about babies. I assume the babies have made their appearance?"

"Yup. Now I fearfully walk through the valley of fatherhood."

"Xander, I believe you will be an excellent father."

Xander swallowed hard. "Thanks Giles." He paused. "I notice you didn't say anything about Anya being a good mom."

"I'm sure she will be. At any rate it will be interesting to watch."

Xander barked out a laugh. "Well, life with Anya has always been interesting."

He paused. "Will you really be home tomorrow?"

Giles smiled. "Yes."

"Do you want me to come pick you up?"

"No, that won't be necessary. I believe all our travel arrangements are being taken care of."

"But you'll come over as soon as you get in town?"

"It's the first thing we'll do. It will be good to see you."

"Same here big guy. Same here."

As Xander hung up he smiled. He couldn't wait to go to the Magic Shop tomorrow and tell the watcher that Giles was coming home. He laughed out loud at the thought. He looked down at his children. He wiggled his son's toe. "Yes, your Uncle Giles and Auntie Willow are coming home tomorrow. Yes they are." He leaned back and wiped a tear off his face. "Yes they are."

The End

August 30, 2001