

Rogue Watcher 1

They had been crabby all week. They had quarreled and snapped at each other until they could hardly stand to be in the same room. Unfortunately they were in deep research mode so they had to be together. The mood would come and go, at times ebbing completely and they all experienced a brief moment of peace coupled with confusion as to where the enmity had come from. Then it would rise and they'd be at it again. Xander would have suspected Spike was up to something if he had been around. But he hadn't been.

They were at it again now. No one later would be able to recall what the argument had been about this time. The only thing that made it different from the last few days is that Giles got in the thick of it, lashing out.

"That's enough!" Giles yelled at Xander. Xander's eyes opened wide. Giles never yelled, not like that. He opened his mouth to respond and he felt something he couldn't see pressing him against his chair, squeezing him painfully, making it hard for him to breathe. He moved his eyes to look at Willow to see if she was doing this and saw that her eyes were wide open staring at Giles. Suddenly the pressure went away and he almost fell out of his chair. Giles turned away slamming the book in his hands hard on the counter.

"God damn it." He paced. Willow followed him with her eyes. She could feel the magic circling him, running through him. She could feel its immense power, had felt him use it against Xander. Her heart was hammering in her chest, trying to understand what was happening.

Giles looked around the store, a look of desperation in his eyes. He shook his head; he shook it again. Willow saw the magic shimmer. She instinctively reached out to grab onto the table. The entire store shook. Items began to fall off the shelves shattering on the floor. Her panic started to rise. The magic was overwhelming. She watched Giles struggle to bring it under control. Finally the shaking stopped. Giles took a deep breath. Without saying a word he picked up his suit jacket shrugging it on, and left the shop.

Around the table, Xander, Willow, and Buffy stared at each other. They looked around the store. Xander stood up a little shakily. "What in the hell was that?" He looked at Willow.

Anya looked at all the damage. "Well, I certainly don't want to hear anything more from Giles about what happened to his store while he was in England."

Buffy looked at Willow. "Did you do that?" Willow shook her head, a look of confusion in her eyes. "No, Giles did." They all looked at her dumbfounded. She nodded. "I've never felt his magic so strong before. He used it against Xander." Her voice was filled with a sorrowful wonder. "It was as if it was out of control, I could feel him fighting it." She looked at Buffy. "I don't understand. He's never been like that. He's never done anything like that to any of us."

Buffy's eyes fell to the floor. Willow noticed it. "Buffy, do you know something? Is something going on?" Buffy got very still, not responding. Xander noticed it now.

"Yeah, Buff, spill. What's up with the big guy?" He felt a little queasy from whatever Giles had done to him. He walked around hoping it would pass. "I mean, wow, Giles pissed off, okay, but that...that was different, way different." He did an exaggerated shiver. "I am officially freaked."

Buffy continued looking at the floor. Willow leaned over, touching her arm. "What's the matter? Do you know something?"

Buffy finally looked up, her eyes sad. She spoke quickly. "Giles and I had sex."

Xander's jaw dropped, and Willow's eyes almost fell out of her head. Anya just snorted. They both spoke at the same time. "What?"

Buffy nodded, "It was just once, about a week ago, but I think it totally wiggled him out. He hasn't been the same since."

Xander snapped his jaw shut and spoke. "How did that happen?" Anya snorted again.

Buffy sighed. "I was lonely and in need of smoochies. He was drunk and well...drunk." Before they even responded she raised her hands up as if to forestall any comments. "I know, I know, big mistake."

Xander rubbed his face with his hand. He moved to start picking up the few items that weren't broken, replacing them on the shelves. "Man, you sure know how to put a whammy on a guy. Remind me never to sleep with you, okay?" Anya shot Xander a dirty look.

Buffy looked at him sharply, hurt in her eyes, "What do you mean by that?"

"Well, c'mon you gotta admit your track record sucks. You have sex with Angel, he loses his soul, you have sex with Parker, he turns into the ultimate poophead. Riley goes bonkers and ends up letting himself become a human

pincushion and hightails it to South America, and now Giles has become all grrr with a snarly magic thing going on."

Buffy just glared at him.

Willow looked back and forth between the two of them. "Xander, you can't blame Buffy for what happened to them, it was just bad luck." She made a face. "Well...a lot of bad luck." She turned to Buffy, "You'll find someone who stays normal after you....you know." She smiled reassuringly at Buffy. Buffy just looked down at her hands, playing with one of her rings.

Anya watched Buffy. "What you need is a good vengeance spell to start getting back at these men."

Xander looked over at Anya. "What did they do? Why is this their fault?"

Anya looked down her nose at Xander. "It's always the man's fault, always."

Xander rolled his eyes at her statement. He thought about Buffy and her bad luck with men. It seemed like an awful coincidence that everyone she slept with went wacko one way or another. Suddenly he had a bad thought, one that freaked him out even worse than he already was. He needed to talk to Giles, bad magic attitude notwithstanding. "I'll see you guys later, I gotta go do something." He pressed a kiss to Anya's cheek and left the shop.

Giles had scared him back at the store but Xander had to ask him something. He was feeling more afraid of what he was thinking than of facing Giles. Besides he knew Giles would never really hurt him. He drove over to Giles and walking to his front door, knocked. He knocked again, harder. Giles opened the door scowling when he saw who it was. "What the hell do you want?"

Xander swallowed, wondering if he needed to reevaluate the Giles would never hurt me thought. Giles looked angrier than he ever remembered seeing him. His fear drove him to persistence. "I need to talk."

Giles sighed, stepped back, and let Xander in. Xander looked around Giles' apartment, stunned. The place was a wreck. Even some of his books were torn, pages ripped out. Somehow that frightened Xander more than anything. He knew that something was really, really wrong. He turned to Giles, swallowing again. "What happened? Were you attacked? Are you okay?"

Giles didn't answer, turning his angry eyes to Xander again. "What do you need?"

Xander just headed for the couch. He sat, after pushing some of the mess aside. Giles shook his head, the way he had shaken it in the store, as if he was trying to dislodge something. Xander watched him. Giles took a couple of deep breaths. Then he looked up and Xander saw that the anger was gone and the regular Giles' look of exasperation was there instead, the look Giles had on a regular basis when he looked at Xander. Xander felt more relaxed seeing that look. Then he saw the books again and his stomach tightened.

He focused. He ran his hand through his hair, not sure how to ask what he wanted to ask so he just blurted it out. "Giles, is it bad news to sleep with a slayer?" He saw the surprised expression appear on Giles' face. "Yeah, Buffy told us." In response to the heated look in Giles' eyes he held his hand up. "She only told cuz we were worried about you, you were acting all snarly and well, Hellmouthy."

Xander asked again. "So is it? You know, bad news?" Giles sat back, stunned and suddenly frightened. He had known something was happening to him but he hadn't been able to figure it out. He had been battling for control for days, and as he sat there, thinking back, he realized it had started that next night. The night after he had slept with Buffy. That was the night he had destroyed his books. He had come back to awareness from wherever he'd been to find himself in the middle of ripping pages out of one of his own journals, ripping the pages into tiny shreds, beyond repair.

He realized Xander was still talking. "I mean, you know, I slept with Faith. I remember how I felt after that. I was angry, and everyone made me so mad, even Willow made me mad." He snorted at the thought of that. "I could hardly stand being with any of you. I figured it was all the stress. I mean a bad time was being had by all. But now that I think about it, maybe that's not what it was. Maybe Faith did something to me. Granted I don't feel like I need to run off to South America but I did fall in love with an ex-demon." He looked at Giles. "Did Faith do something to me? Am I going to be okay? Do I sound as crazy as I think I do for even saying this?"

Giles stood, starting to pace. "No, Xander, unfortunately, it's not a crazy idea. I can't believe I didn't realize it sooner." At the scared look in Xander's eyes he hastened to reassure him. "I don't think you have anything to worry about. You and Faith, well...it was quite a while ago. I imagine you're safe now." He couldn't resist adding, "But, do let me know if you find yourself at a travel agency." He smiled a tight smile at Xander. Xander grinned back.

Then Xander looked at the books again, saw the pieces of shredded paper. He turned worried eyes to Giles. "How 'bout you big guy? You gonna be okay?"

Giles had followed his eyes, looking at the books. He sighed. "I'm not sure. I need to do some research. Please don't talk to Buffy about this until I know something more definitive."

Xander grimaced. "Too late. I already did. I mean not because I knew anything but just because I was, you know, spouting off." He stood, jamming his hands in his pockets.

Giles walked over to the door opening it. "I need some time alone, I need to do some research." Xander nodded his head.

"You need some help?"

"You need to leave now. Please." Xander looked closely at Giles, looking at his eyes. He didn't like what he saw brewing there. He felt completely freaked again. He didn't like feeling afraid of Giles. He was thinking maybe Giles was in serious trouble.

"Maybe I should stay, maybe I can be scotch tape man." He looked at Giles.

Giles face started to darken. Xander put his hands up. "Okay, okay, I'm leaving." He walked out and the door was quickly shut behind him. He stared at the door for a minute, conflicted. He finally shrugged his shoulders. Giles was, after all, super research guy. He turned and walked away.

Giles stood by the window, hidden from sight, watching Xander until he got in his car and drove away. He felt like he was about to jump out of his skin. He could feel it rising again. It was why he had all but thrown Xander out. He shook his head again, hard. It seemed to help. It was true he needed to research but the information he needed wasn't in any of his books. As far as he knew it wasn't in any book. He reflected back on his training. He couldn't believe he had forgotten.

They were given so many rules. So many rules about slayer and watcher behavior. All the dos and don'ts. It had been one of a thousand mantras preached to him, to them all, as they'd gone through watcher training. Reasons why were seldom given. The Council had worked just fine for centuries and they were committed to the way it had always been. No arguing, no asking for explanations. They just commanded, expecting to be obeyed. Just one of the rules: no slayer sex, of any kind. Including no slayer/watcher sex. Giles had assumed it was because it would distract the slayer, or it would divide her loyalties. Watchers being forbidden to have sex with their slayers had always made sense to him. He saw it in a similar fashion as to why it was also forbidden for counselors to have sex with their patients. It was a breach of trust; a question of ethics.

He laughed, harshly, thinking of Buffy. One day after meeting her he had thrown away the handbook, literally and figuratively. He had realized right away that she was different from every other slayer that had ever been. She'd been raised outside of watcher influence. She already had friends, had interests; she was willing to fight for the right to have a life, to fall in love. And he couldn't deny her. He could hardly deny her anything. So, he had thrown that rule out along with all the others and never given it a thought. Until now. And now his gut was churning with fear, wondering if this had been one rule he should have paid attention to. He had commiserated with Buffy about her lack of luck with men. Even then he hadn't put it together. He was ashamed that something so clear had escaped his notice but there had seemed to be reasons for the behavior, other events obscuring the truth.

He thought about that night with Buffy. It had been another anniversary of Jenny's death and the level of grief he had felt had surprised him, the sorrow swallowing him up. So, he had started drinking and gotten himself stumbling, foggy-headed drunk. Buffy had shown up, depressed as well, about her mom, about her life, feeling lonely. She'd sat next to him on the couch, her head on his shoulder. His drunken body had responded to her touch and he'd acted on instinct. The next thing he knew they were kissing and they'd ended up in bed. He'd woken up the next morning to find her gone. He had wondered for a minute if he'd imagined the whole thing but he could feel a relief in his body that he hadn't felt for a long time, and he could still smell her scent. He'd been appalled at his actions, guiltily relieved she had not been there, not sure he could face her that soon.

That night it had started. The magic in him started to grow, started to leak. He had felt so angry, so filled with hate. He began to lose track of time, long moments of unawareness. He could feel his magic affecting the people around him and had found himself finding a malicious glee in his ability to create such havoc. He had watched it affect the group all week and had done nothing to stop it. Today his magic had wrenched out of his control and he had used it against Xander, helpless to stop himself, and then he'd almost shaken the shop apart. It had taken all his strength to fight it and bring it back under his control.

He needed information so he called the only person he thought might have it. Mary Posten had been a watcher for a long time. She had never been assigned to a slayer but she was one of those people who just knew things. People told her things, they confided in her. He told her things. He now listened impatiently as the phone rang. He took a deep calming breath. It didn't help. He was about to slam the phone down in its cradle when he heard her voice.

"Hello?"

"Mary? It's Rupert, Rupert Giles."

"Rupert? How wonderful to hear from you." He could hear the pleasure in her voice. It momentarily warmed him. She always seemed to be delighted to hear from him, no matter what time of day he called.

He paused, not sure what to ask.

"What's wrong? Something challenging going on with that slayer of yours?" He smiled. She also always knew when something was wrong.

"Well, yes, actually." He hesitated. She stayed silent, allowing him time to marshal his thoughts. "Well, truthfully, there seems to be something wrong with me." He paused again, embarrassed with the topic matter. He plunged in, needing to get it over with. "I slept with her."

She gasped, "Rupert!"

He felt a shiver down his back at the way she said his name. "Mary, what's happening to me?"

He could almost hear her thinking. Her lack of response frightened him. He asked again, "What's happening to me?"

She was silent for a while longer. "You understand how watchers are chosen?"

He trusted her enough to answer her question although he didn't understand its connection. "Yes, well, I understand how I was chosen. It's a family tradition. My father was a watcher, and my grandmother before him. All the watchers I know have a family history with the Council."

"Well, there's some truth to that, certainly. But the reason runs deeper, the reason why families are chosen in the first place. The Council looks for power. They choose families with power. They choose the most powerful among them to be assigned to a slayer. Your family is strong, three generations in a row of watchers in one family assigned to slayers is almost unheard of."

Giles listened, waiting for the rest. She continued. "You are unusually strong. Your extracurricular activities made you stronger yet." He snorted at her turn of phrase, her polite euphemism for his stint as a practitioner of the black arts.

She wasn't done. "The slayer takes in part of the demon, part of the evil, when she kills. She pulls some of her strength from that. It is a constant ebb and flow. She discharges a part of it with her next kill. There are some records, kept locked away, chronicling the events of what happened when a slayer had sex. The evil appeared to get discharged into her partners. The results were often disastrous. What seems to be known is that the damage done was in direct proportion to the power of her partner. For those less powerful the effect was minimal, transient. But for those of power, especially great power, like yours, the effects were dangerous beyond belief and were never able to be undone."

He thought about Angel. He had never told her about that. Now he wished he had. He'd have known this much sooner, in time to prevent what was happening to him, what had happened to Riley. He told her now. When he had finished he paused. "We were able to give him his soul back. How was that possible? Angel is a very powerful demon. Why wasn't the damage permanent?"

"I don't know. Perhaps the gypsy curse affected it all somehow. Maybe vampires are affected differently. There aren't any records at all that I know of that speak of slayers and vampires falling in love, or of watchers that allow their slayers to have sex with a vampire." He felt the gentle chiding in her voice. His jaw tightened. She spoke on. "All I can speak of is what happens when humans sleep with a slayer. And I can tell you is that the watchers were beyond repair. They went rogue. They had to be..." she searched for a term better than the one that came to mind. Unable to come up with one she spoke finishing the sentence this time. "They had to be put down."

Giles was silent, his mind racing, refusing to believe that there was nothing to be done. "What did they try? There has to be something they missed."

"According to the records they tried everything. I can find them, Rupert. Let me send them to you. See if they missed something. Have your wiccan friends try the soul restoration spell on you."

"Why has this been kept a secret? Why aren't these documents common knowledge?" He spoke with venom in his voice.

"Because the Council Tribunal has always been composed of sexually repressed old men who felt that those documents were distasteful. They passed the empirical lesson along as teachings and it has worked. Slayers have been raised according to the rules; they've had watchers who obeyed the rules. No one thought of the danger, including me, that Buffy had been raised so differently, that she had friends, might have lovers. I'm so sorry, Rupert. I should have thought of it, and warned you. No one will make that

mistake again, I promise you."

"How exact are the records? Do they indicate how long I have before I lose all control?"

"When did you sleep with her?"

"Six nights ago."

She had to know. "What happened? How could you let that happen?"

"I was drunk, she was starved for companionship; it was a fatal combination. Sheer stupidity. I have no excuse for my behavior." He asked again. "Mary, how long do I have?"

"According to the records you probably have another two weeks, at the most. At that point the evil will become too strong for you to control. You will be capable of extraordinary violence, your magic is so strong." Her voice caught. "I have to tell them. You'll be too dangerous."

"I know."

"They'll come for you, they'll kill you." There was no response. "I'll give you those two weeks, to see if you can come up with something. But then I'll have to let them know." He heard her voice break on a sob. "Rupert, I'm so sorry." He listened to her softly crying for a few moments and then hung up the receiver.

He called Willow. He asked her to get everyone together at the Magic Shop. He asked her to bring the Orb of Thessala. She gasped at his request but he refused to answer her questions. He told her curtly just to bring it, and he hung up. He despaired at himself, at how quick he was to anger and impatience. He didn't think he had two weeks. He wasn't even sure he had one.

End Chapter 1

Rogue Watcher 2

When he arrived they were all there. Looking at them he could feel the magic swell, feeling an irrational anger build, anger at having to ask them for help. He wanted to lash out at them all. He groaned, falling to his knees. They raced over to him. He held up his hands, desperation in his voice. "Keep away, don't touch me, don't come near me." Buffy ignored him, grabbing his

arm. His magic responded; it exploded out of him protecting him. She flew across the store, slamming into the back wall. He groaned again. He turned anguished eyes to Willow gasping out her name. "Willow, bind my magic, do it now, quickly, before it gets stronger."

She shook her head. "I don't know how, I don't know how to do that." Her voice had risen, her panic seeping through.

He groaned again, wrapping his arms around himself. "Upstairs." He gritted the words out. "Get the Book of Shadows, the blue one with the gilt edges." He groaned again. "Hurry."

She ran upstairs, her panic increasing as she sensed Giles' magic rising. She could feel the taint on it. She found the book and raced back down. She started flipping through the pages, tearing some in her frenzied haste. Tara looked over her shoulder lending her eyes to the task. Her eyes found it first. She put her hand down on the page to stop Willow from turning any more. "Here, this is it." Buffy approached the table rubbing her side.

"What's wrong, what's wrong with him?" Her eyes were wide and frightened. She looked at Giles, now curled up in a ball on the floor, groans still coming from his mouth, animal sounds that terrified her.

Buffy's question unanswered Willow grabbed Tara's hand, catching her eye. Tara nodded at her look and they both turned to Giles and started chanting. They finished the incantation and watched Giles as he slowly uncurled himself. He inched his way back to the counter, leaning against it still on the floor. He was sweating and panting as if he'd come back from a long run. They watched him, no one daring to come near him, not after what he'd done to Buffy.

He closed his eyes, needing a moment. He could feel the magic, could feel it was still there, but for the moment it was tucked away, out of his reach. A part of him snarled at the loss, felt hatred for the witches that had done this to him, swearing revenge. He shook his head, shook it hard enough that he had to put a hand out to balance himself. He opened his eyes. He looked at Willow and Tara and forced a smile on his face.

"Thank you."

They just nodded at him. Buffy came over again. She stopped a couple of feet away, careful not to touch him. She crouched down. "What happened? What's going on? Why did you do that?" She was not able to keep the hurt out of her voice.

He rose shakily and moved to the table, eschewing her offered assistance. His whole body ached. He wasn't sure how long the binding would last. He could feel a part of him looking for weaknesses, probing. He asked Anya to get the information that he knew would be on the fax machine, the information Mary had promised to send. He asked Anya to read it out loud.

He watched Buffy's face turn white, saw Xander flinch at the descriptions of what happened to those watchers Giles now shared such a dubious bond with. Buffy stared at him. "I did this to you?" She wanted to throw up. "I did this to all of them?"

"It's not your fault Buffy. You didn't know. I didn't know. If there's any fault at all it's with the Council for withholding this information."

Her eyes filled with tears as she looked at him. "Giles." Her voice broke. "Oh God Giles." She started to cry. He didn't look at her. He knew he didn't have the strength to comfort her now. He was barely hanging on.

Willow had taken the fax from Anya and was reviewing it. She looked at Giles. "Is this why you had me bring the Orb? Because it worked for Angel? Do you think your soul is gone?" Her mind grasped on to that hope.

"I don't know, Willow. I don't believe so but I thought it might be worthwhile to give it a try, if you're willing. I know it took a lot out of you the last time."

She rolled her eyes, annoyed that he would even think she might hesitate. "Giles, I'll do anything if it will help." She started moving around the store pulling the things she would need to do the spell and she began. The last time she had done this a power had taken over her and it had been frightening and exhausting. She waited for that to happen again. She felt a power rise but it was from Giles. She stopped, the words cut off as she looked at him. She saw he had broken free of the binding; she saw the hate in his eyes. He struck with his magic and the Orb exploded, showering them with fragments, cutting them. They all screamed and moved away, brushing at themselves. Giles sat there, untouched by the fragments. They had moved around him and lay in a circle on the floor. He sat there smiling at their discomfort. Buffy, seeing his expression grew angry. She went over to him. "How dare you? Someone could have been hurt."

He turned his eyes on her and she took an involuntary step back at the expression on his face. "One can only hope." He smiled again. Her face tightened. She moved forwards again and backhanded him across the face. The blow took him out of his seat and across the floor. He lay there for a minute stunned. He shook his head. He pounded his fist on the floor. He shook his head again. He looked up, the fight for control clear on his face,

emotions changing like quicksilver, sorrow, hatred, fear, anger. He stood, backing away. "I can't be near you." He backed away more. "Willow, I only have a few days. I don't even know if I can hang on that long. Look for me. See if there's something they missed." She nodded.

He swept them all with a glance. "You all need to understand. I'll have to go. They'll come for me. They'll come to kill me." His eyes went feral for a moment and the magic flared. Willow winced, both at the glint in his eye and at the feel of his magic. The rest of them saw her movement and braced themselves. But Giles was able to get control again. "The Council already knows. I called them. I needed information." He looked at Anya. "Burn those papers. I need to protect the person who sent them to me." Anya nodded and he continued, turning to Buffy, capturing her eyes. "They won't come for two weeks but then they'll send a team for me and they'll send a new watcher for you. Whether I'm here and they kill me, or whether I've run, either way I'm dead to you. You cannot come after me. I'll kill you if you do. I won't be able to help myself."

She couldn't believe this was happening. "Giles, I can't just let them kill you. I can't just let you go."

He had to leave soon. "Buffy, this isn't your fault, you have to believe that."

She just shook her head. He looked at them all. "No one gets in touch with me except Willow." Buffy's eyes darkened at that. He tried to explain, his voice impatient. "She can feel my magic. She'll know when I'm losing control. She's the only one who has any chance to protect herself."

Buffy opened her mouth to speak and he gestured angrily at her. "Buffy, this isn't open for discussion. I'll leave now if you won't agree." He turned to Willow. "You have to agree as well."

"Agree to what?"

"If I tell you to leave, you go, no questions. If you feel my magic grow, you leave. If I start to frighten you or hurt you, you leave, you do what it takes to protect yourself, even if it hurts me. Agreed?"

She nodded, not trusting her voice. He could see the fear in her eyes. He cursed under his breath, sure that she would be more fearful in the days ahead.

He turned to Anya. "Do you want this shop?"

She gaped at him. He asked again, sharply. "Do you want this shop?" She

nodded her head, her face showing her confusion, her fear. He nodded. "I'll try and take care of it before...." He didn't finish his sentence. Anya went to stand by Xander, needing to feel him near. He looked at Willow again. "Come by in the morning. If ever you come by over the next few days and I'm not there assume I'm gone." He swept his eyes over them all. "My belongings will get taken by the Council, so take what you want before they get there. Be prepared for them, they will question you. They will make your lives uncomfortable for a while."

He could see them all bleeding from countless cuts from the Orb. He closed his eyes at the pain that caused him. He took his glasses off and ran his hand over his face. He put them back on and looked at them all. He knew he hadn't said enough, he knew he hadn't reassured Buffy at all. He believed it would be the last time he would see most of them. He ached with the thought of that loss. His eyes misted over as he looked at them. "I'll miss you. I'll miss you all." He turned to Buffy. "You are the best slayer that's ever been. It's been a privilege to serve you." He fought the tears but some spilled over. He turned and left.

They sat there hearing the door slam shut behind him. Willow started to cry. Anya held Xander tightly, feeling him shake in her arms as his tears claimed him as well. Buffy just sat there, shocked, too many emotions running through for one to claim her. They huddled there for a long time. No words were spoken. There was nothing to say, no words adequate to express their loss and disbelief. In time, they rose. They all went to Buffy's to sleep, needing to be together.

Buffy snuck out of the house in the middle of the night. She had to see Giles. She let herself in and let her eyes get accustomed to the darkness. She saw him sitting. He just watched her, saying nothing. She walked over to him stubborn in her need for him. She spoke his name. "Giles?" He said nothing. She was still angry, could still feel the bruises where she had hit the wall from his blow. She snapped his name out. "Giles."

He went for her throat. She was on her back before she knew it, fighting for her life. She pulled fully on her strength, never imagining she would ever need it to fight Giles. She shoved him away, scrambling to her feet. She kicked out connecting with his chest and he flew over backwards. He lay there, not moving. She headed over to him, cautiously.

He slowly got to his feet. He smiled at her. He used his magic, pulling her towards him. She resisted but he was stronger. When she was in front of him he backhanded her across the face, the same way she had hit him. He did it again. This time he had the magic let go of her and she slammed into the wall by the door. She got to her knees and then staggered to her feet. He terrified

her. He was too strong. She reached for the door, flinging it open and she fled.

Willow headed out early in the morning without waking anyone. When she got to Giles' home she knocked. No one answered and her heart started to ache. She knocked again and then tried the door. It was unlocked. She walked in, her heart in her throat.

After Buffy had left Giles had slowly gotten control again. He walked out to his terrace. He leaned against the wall, slowly lowering himself down to the ground. He looked at his hand, the one he had hit her with. He started to cry, jerking sobs that hurt his chest. He lay on the ground curling his body up tight.

As Willow walked through the apartment she saw that the terrace door was open. She saw him there, curled on the ground. She ran to him. "Giles?" He didn't respond. Fearful of touching him she called louder. "Giles." His eyes opened. He slowly sat up running his hands over his face and felt his tears. He looked surprised for a minute, looking at the moisture on his hands. Then he remembered. His eyes filled with pain. "Willow, I have to leave, now."

She shook her head, her heart starting to pound. "You can't. You can't leave. It's too soon. I haven't even looked yet."

"Buffy came over last night. I tried to kill her." Willow gasped at his words. He looked at his hands and looked at Willow. "I tried to strangle her, I would have killed her if she hadn't left." He shook his head, his face a picture of despair. "I'm not safe anymore. It's getting harder and harder to control. I'm going to be a danger to everyone soon. I can't risk it."

Willow started to cry. "Giles, if you go, you'll never get better, I'll never see you again." That thought was unbearable to her.

"If I stay, I'll put you all in danger. I should have you call the Council now, have them come and get me." She shook her head. He knew she would refuse. He didn't have the power to call. He knew he'd lose control if he tried. He watched her cry. He put his hand on her shoulder. "Willow, thank you for being willing to help, but we're out of time. There's nothing you can do." She just started crying harder. He got up moving into the house. He went upstairs and started throwing things into a bag. She slowly followed. She stood close to him.

"Will you stay in touch?"

"No, Willow, you won't want me to."

"Yes, I will. I'll never not want to talk with you."

"Willow, it won't be me. It will be someone you shouldn't have in your life. Someone who can only do you harm."

She shook her head, mutinous. She looked for a scrap of paper, wrote something on it. She thrust it at him. "Here's my e-mail address. I'll keep looking. I'll never give up. If I find something I have to be able to contact you."

He took the piece of paper shoving it in his bag. Willow started to cry again. She wrapped her arms around him, not even believing he was about to walk out of her life, out of their lives. "It's not fair. There has to be a way. Don't go yet."

He hugged her back tightly. "I have to. I couldn't bear it if I hurt you, if I hurt any of you." He pushed her away, picking up his bag.

"How will we survive without you?"

"You'll do fine. You'll have a new watcher to research with soon."

"Giles, it won't be you."

He smiled sadly at her. "Willow, you'll be fine. Forget all about me, be happy, grow old."

She shook her head, tears still running down her face. She whispered, "I'll never forget you. I'll never stop looking for a way to bring you back."

Giles took her chin in his hand. "Willow, you need to understand, when this thing takes over, I won't want to go back to the way I was. If I think you've found a way, I'll try to kill you to stop you. I'll be too dangerous for you to know me, for me to know you."

"I don't care. Please, Giles. I have to know you're okay."

He just nodded, knowing he couldn't make her understand. He walked down the stairs. She followed, holding on to his arm. He pressed his keys into her hand after taking off the car key. He gently pulled his arm free, kissed her cheek and walked out the door.

Willow wanted to run after him. She watched from the door as he got in his car and drove away. She couldn't process that he was gone. She stood there waiting for him to drive back, to hop out of his car, eyes alight, saying he'd

remembered the spell, that there was nothing to worry about.

She waited for a long time, and then she fell to her knees inside the door and cried until she felt sick and nauseated, hardly able to see through her swollen eyes. She got up and washed her face. She knew she had to go tell the others but she couldn't bear to leave. Leaving felt too final, as if she would be admitting that he wouldn't be back. She walked through his apartment, touching his belongings, opening his closet, smelling his clothes. She overcame her small feeling of guilt and took one of his sweaters. She took one for Xander too.

She walked back downstairs and looked through his books making a pile of the ones she wanted, the ones that hadn't been destroyed, knowing she could return them if he came back, knowing he wouldn't mind. She made a couple of trips out to her car, putting them in the trunk. Feeling that she had taken at least a small piece of him with her she finally locked up and drove away, back to Buffy's.

Buffy was sitting with the rest of them, pale and deathly still. She looked up as Willow entered. She took in the look on Willow's face, her swollen eyes. Her heart clenched in her chest.

"He's already left, hasn't he?"

Willow nodded. Buffy had been so afraid of Giles last night. She could still feel the fear and it sickened her. There was even a part of her that was relieved he was gone. Even though she knew, rationally, that he hadn't been in his right mind she felt his betrayal keen and deep within her. Worst of all was the knowledge that she had done this. She was responsible. She had, on a fairly frequent basis over the past years, hated being a slayer, but never worse than now. She felt like an abomination.

From that day on Buffy just stopped caring. She forced herself not to care; it hurt too much. When the two weeks had elapsed and her new watcher appeared she didn't say a negative word. Buffy just focused on the slaying. She dropped out of school. She patrolled on her own, refusing her friends' company. She didn't have the strength to be responsible for their safety anymore. She withdrew more and more and her friends didn't know how to pull her back.

The new watcher had been informed of the unusual situation in Sunnydale, of the group of people that assisted the slayer. She set strict limits on their participation and without Buffy to fight on their behalf their hands were tied. The watcher welcomed their occasional assistance in researching, welcomed the ready access to the supplies in the store, and utilized the training room

with Buffy.

Willow watched Buffy drift away, felt the waning of their friendship. The loss of two of the most important people in her life made her feel lost and alone. She checked her e-mail every night, desperate to hear from Giles. Desperate to hear he was okay and coming home and that he'd fix everything and put it back the way it was. She'd needed to talk to him so badly she had started to write to him, started to keep a journal so she could remember everything that had happened, so that he wouldn't have missed anything when he returned. She didn't have anywhere to send it so she just opened a file and saved it.

She told him about the shop, amusing stories about Anya's selling techniques and Xander's resulting increasing diplomatic skills. She told him that Xander had quit his job and worked at the shop full time with Anya. Told him how brave she thought Xander was for doing this. She told him about the new watcher, the changes she had made. She wrote about the team that had come looking for him, about how they had searched all their homes, questioned them all, even looked through Willow's files on her laptop. She had been glad then that he hadn't e-mailed her. She told him the smart-alecky things Xander had said to them, hoping it would make Giles smile as he read it.

She thought about how she'd felt when the team had suddenly one day just up and left. She had been so fearful for Giles, sure that they had tracked him down and had left to go get him, or that he was already dead. She had gone to his apartment that day and they had taken everything, everything. Even the curtains. It had made it all seem too horrifyingly real and permanent. She felt then for the first time that Giles would never be back. She had sobbed in a corner of the room, her cries echoing back to her in the emptiness.

She still checked her e-mail. Hope was not something Willow easily relinquished. She needed it, as much as she needed to breathe in and out to stay alive. She continued her entries as well, although not daily. It felt like a sort of therapy, a catharsis at the end of each week, a way to capture the passing moments as a still photograph. She told him about her classes. She bragged about her grades, Giles being the only one in her life that would have been thrilled on her behalf and proud of her. She wrote about how she would be graduating a year early because she had doubled up on classes.

The only thing she didn't write about was Buffy. She knew that Giles would want to know about her more than anything else but it was too painful to write. Buffy had continued to withdraw. She rarely went out with them anymore; Willow couldn't even remember the last time they had all been to the Bronze. She and Buffy never had girl talk, what was there for Buffy to talk about? What could Willow say to her? Talk about her love life? Talk about her

petty problems? Willow had no words to console her, to pull her back. She couldn't even imagine how Buffy felt, knowing she could never risk falling in love, to lose even the hope of touching someone again.

Spike also watched Buffy. Willow had told Spike what had happened. She had asked him to watch over Buffy and while he had loudly complained she had known that he would, and he had. Spike recalled the night Buffy had asked about the two slayers he had killed. He had told her that they had wanted it, that they had embraced their death. He had told Buffy that night that she had strong ties keeping her alive. He knew those ties were breaking fast. First her mom had died. She'd been all right, though, because she'd still had Giles. But then he'd gone, because of her.

Spike had warned Willow about Buffy. He could see it in the emptiness in her eyes. Spike tried to get her to talk but was unsuccessful. The minute he pushed her buttons and she started to show some emotion she'd stop speaking, her expression going flat and she'd turn and walk away. He tried everything he could to provoke her, to force her to scream at him, in hopes of snapping her out of her self-induced emotionless state but she wouldn't rise to the bait. She saw no point. There was no better life waiting for her. She started to evade him on patrol. Spike tried his best but even he could only cover so much ground in a night.

He found her body one night. He picked her up and held her to his chest screaming out into the night. It had been vampires, several of them judging by the bites on her. They hadn't even bothered trying to turn her. Just killed her and left her lying there. He held her for a long time, bereft; feeling such a sense of loss it shook him to his core. He finally took her body to her watcher. He had laid her on the couch and left to go find Willow. He held Willow tightly as if he could find some solace there but there was none to be found, not this night. He had left as dawn had approached.

A new watcher and slayer had appeared shortly after Buffy's death. The need to guard the active Hellmouth was still a clear priority to the Council. The team continued to offer the same resources but they kept their distance this time. None of them could bear to take the risk of befriending another slayer. Not like they had with Buffy.

End Chapter 2

Rogue Watcher 3

Willow had finally started to give up hope of ever hearing from Giles. It had been a little over a year without a word. She had no idea if Giles was even

still alive. She had asked the new watcher but either he hadn't known or he'd been unwilling to tell her.

She had made a decision about her life and was sorrowful that Giles couldn't be here with her to see her follow in his footsteps. She had applied to become a watcher. Part of her was still angry with the Council, still blaming them for what had happened to Giles. But she knew he had hoped this for her. She knew she could best fight the evil in the world in this capacity. That was important to her. Even without Buffy and Giles she couldn't just walk away, pretend it wasn't there.

Normally, unsolicited applications like hers were immediately disposed of but Willow was well known to the Council. She had fought with a slayer for years, on the Hellmouth. Even more importantly she was powerful. Her connection to Giles worked for her and against her. A certain horror accompanied the mention of his name these days and the fact that she had known him, watched him as he turned rogue made some Council members nervous. But, he had been a watcher, one of their own, for a long time. He had spoken highly of her in his reports, recommending her as a watcher. Some Council members remembered that and remembered what an extraordinary watcher Giles had been before...well, just before. No one liked to speak of it.

Willow knew nothing of the debate her application had sparked. She just waited and in time got a simple letter of acceptance with instructions as to when and where to report to start her training. She started to prepare to leave Sunnydale for the first time in her life. She and Tara had started to drift apart and this seemed the right time to end their relationship. They parted as friends. Willow would be leaving for England in two weeks and she spent all of her free time with Xander and with Spike.

Spike had turned to Willow after Buffy's death, needing a friend for the first time in his life and she hadn't been able to refuse. Spike had been drifting since Buffy's death. He wasn't ready to leave but the new watcher didn't welcome his assistance. Not that he'd had any intention of offering but the new bloody slayer just kept trying to stake him, not even letting a fellow talk. It infuriated him. It was during one of these attempted stakings that he realized that the chip was starting to fail. He got in a couple of punches without being blindsided by the pain.

The pain came and went but it finally went away for good and he'd fed again, on warm human blood, and that had been a real good day. He wasn't completely back to his old self. He knew he was still soft and he mocked himself about it. He couldn't bring himself to hurt any of the old team. He couldn't even bring himself to kill the slayer. He continued to protect them, still killing his own kind in defense of them. He got some satisfaction from the

irony of knowing that after saving their lives that he'd then go kill and feed. Keeping them alive seemed like something he could give the slayer that had come to mean so much to him.

He hated that Willow was leaving. He had whined and complained about it until she had finally kicked him out and told him not to come back until he was in a better mood. Willow had come to mean a lot to him. He'd always liked her, but they'd grown closer, the loss of Buffy somehow lessened by this new companionship. He didn't want to let it go. He roamed the cemeteries, wanting to kill something, something that would fight back. Humans were too easy to kill for sport. Nothing had obliged him. He kicked over some headstones. He made the decision that night, to follow her, to go home to England. He booked passage on a ship and left the next day, not even saying goodbye. He figured he'd surprise her once she got there.

##

When Giles awoke, he could feel the monster burning within him, but it was momentarily quiescent. It happened on occasion, these brief moments when he felt his sanity return. Brief moments that allowed the horror of his life and what he'd become to overwhelm him with sorrow. He both welcomed and loathed these times.

His level of awareness varied. At times he was aware of what the monster was doing, helpless to intervene. At other times his consciousness would fade away only to return at a later time. When that happened he'd wake up at first disoriented, not knowing where he was, or what he'd been doing. He'd prowl his room looking for clues as to his whereabouts, his activities.

He'd been on the move constantly. That much he knew. The team that was tracking him was good, they always were. He'd already traveled half way around the world. His magic left a signature as clear as if he'd used a credit card. That meant moving on after performing any strong magic. He'd stay long enough to see the misery he'd caused. He had to see that; that was the point. The monster fed on fear, on suffering. He lived for it. He created it by his very presence. His touch was enough to send innocent bystanders to anger and to violence. He'd walk through a crowd purposefully brushing up against people, smiling as he watched them turn to their companions in anger.

Giles was able to fight for control on occasion. He'd only been successful a few times. More often than not he'd be snuffed back into oblivion back into the madness that possessed him. He'd prevented a rape once. He hadn't been able to wrest complete control but he'd created enough of a distraction for the

girl to run away. He'd awoken the next day to see the backlash of the monster's fury. He'd leveled an entire street. They were still pulling bodies out from the rubble when he'd gone outside.

He'd gone back for his bag and just walked away. He walked, not knowing where he was going, knowing that choosing was pointless, that soon he would lose control again and the choice of destination taken out of his hands. He would just walk away from populated areas; trying to protect what people he could for the brief period of time he had until he was lost again.

He had attempted to call the Council a couple of times, wanting to end this, knowing he had to be stopped. He never completed a call. The monster had always awakened. If sufficient contact had been made the monster just ran. Then he'd exact retribution. Giles stopped trying to call, the cost in lives too dear. After fighting with the monster Giles would find that he'd lose longer tracks of time. That frightened him. Giles refused to relinquish the right to exist. He couldn't step aside and allow the monster dominion. So, he learned to fight quietly, trying to avoid angering the monster, waiting for those brief moments of control to do what he could to protect those around him.

He would look at himself in the mirror sometimes, surprised at his appearance. Somehow he thought that the evil would be stamped on his face and that he would be fearful to look at. Instead, his face looked younger, more innocent, the lines on his face erasing themselves. It was as if the evil was stripping away the face he'd earned through wisdom and sacrifice and leaving one in its place untouched by humanity.

Giles lay there, again feeling the disorientation. He was sore. He looked at his knuckles and saw that they were cut. He healed quickly these days because of the magic but still not as quickly as a slayer. He'd obviously been fighting again. He hoped he hadn't hurt anyone badly. He hoped he hadn't killed anyone. He knew it was a vain hope. He knew he probably had.

He sat up on the edge of the bed, resting his sore hands on either side of him. He was still fully dressed down to his shoes. He looked out the window. He was grateful it was a large city. It was too easy to see what the monster had done in a small one. It was too painful to see the look of fear on peoples' faces as he walked by. Big cities offered him some anonymity, and the pain the monster caused was swallowed up by the everyday madness.

He left his room and began to move about the city. He had always loved to travel to new places but it brought him no pleasure today. There was no pleasure for him anymore in anything. He was suddenly seized by such loneliness and homesickness that it almost brought him to his knees. He longed for Sunnydale and his quiet apartment. He longed for his friends, for

his slayer. He longed for his books, and his tea, and his store. He longed to hear Xander annoy him, to listen to Buffy's awful music, and to see Willow's cheerful smile. He leaned back against a wall, needing support for his body as he was overcome with his yearning. He almost would have welcomed the monster back; the feelings were so strong, and too painful.

He looked around him and saw the sign in the window. His body responded before his mind even realized what he was doing. He walked in the store, looking at all the computers. He went to the front counter signaling to get the attention of the clerk.

"How do I use one of these? How do I send an e-mail?"

The clerk handed him a brochure. Giles didn't have the time or the patience. He pulled some money out of his wallet.

"Just show me. Quickly." Giles knew he shouldn't do this but his need overran his caution and common sense. He was desperate for some connection, some proof that he was still valued, still cared for, still missed. He had thrown away the paper with Willow's e-mail address on it months ago, but he had looked at it, and the address was in his memory.

The clerk had finished setting him up. He gave him some simple instructions and Giles nodded. He typed in Willow's e-mail address and then stared at the blank screen having no idea what to write. What could he say of his life, of the horror he'd become? He shook his head. Nothing. He almost got up to leave, but then the longing shook him again. It felt as if he would be walking away from them again and he couldn't do it. He started to type letting his heart lead his fingers as they moved slowly across the keyboard.

Willow had been in England for a week and she was homesick. She missed Xander. She was still angry at Spike. She couldn't believe he had just disappeared. Everything here was still too new. She had never made friends easily and she had yet to make any here. She could feel people looking at her, talking about her. Too many people knew who she was and it made her uncomfortable. Even her classes were odd. She knew more and had experienced more than most of her instructors. She sensed that they knew it and held it against her. She felt lonely and the years ahead seemed unwelcoming and forbidding.

She lay on her bed and reached for her laptop. Tara and Xander e-mailed her regularly and she had come to depend on their chatty messages from home to cheer her up. She powered up and logged in. She saw his name and her breath caught in her throat. She felt a thrill of fear shoot through her and even though she was alone she looked over her shoulder as if she would find an

angry Council standing behind her. She was momentarily afraid to open it. She got up and walked around her small room. She carried the laptop to her desk, needing a firmer surface beneath her, to lean on, both physically and emotionally.

She finally moved the cursor and clicked on his message. Her eyes filled with tears as she read his words, her heart aching for him.

Willow, I miss you. I miss you all. It has been so lonely without you, without a friendly face, without your smile. I hope you think of me sometimes, that I am still occasionally missed. I like to think that somewhere in the world there are still people who think well of me. I do not know how long I have so I will keep this short. But know that you are in my thoughts and in my heart. Give my love to everyone. -Giles

##

She leaned back in her chair, a hard lump in her throat. She rubbed her eyes to wipe away the moisture, and then rubbed her hands on her jeans. Her eye caught the time of his e-mail. He had just sent it. She took a chance and started to write back right away, in hopes he'd still be there.

Giles, we love you and we miss you all the time. You were and are still one of the most important people in my life. Don't ever think you are not loved, not for a moment, I won't allow it. You are the best man I have ever known. I love you.

She hit the send button and sat back again, waiting to see if he was still there, if he would respond.

Giles had sat there after he'd sent off the message. He still didn't want to leave. It was as if Willow was inside the computer and he couldn't bear to part from her. The computer chirped at him and he looked up at the screen. It indicated that he had received a message. His hand shook as he clicked on the icon. He read the message from Willow not even believing it possible. His eyes filled with emotion, Willow's brief words filling him with a sense of belonging he had thought forever lost to him. He hit the reply button and started to type again.

Thank you Willow. You do not know how much those words mean to me. You have saved a part of me that was lost. I do not know if I will be able to be in touch again. I am still not sure that I should. I am concerned for your safety. But I will treasure your words, and tuck them away so I can take them out and hold them in my heart when I am in need of comfort.

He hit the send button. And then he felt the monster stirring. He looked at the card the clerk had left him with his new e-mail address on it. He committed it to memory and then he got up and left quickly, throwing the card away on his way out. He didn't want the monster to awaken and have access to Willow. He got halfway down the block and he could feel his awareness fading.

Willow read his return e-mail and sent him another one quickly in return. She waited for a long time but he didn't respond again. She took her time then and started writing him a longer one. She opened all her journal entries she had made and edited them, culling them down. She picked out the cheeriest ones, the silliest ones, and started pasting them on the e-mail screen. She sent him pages of stories. She sent him updates on Xander and Anya, about Tara. She worried that he would notice the absence of news about Buffy but she couldn't tell yet. She didn't know if she would ever tell him. She also didn't tell him she was in England. She wasn't sure how'd he'd feel about that now and she wanted to only send him happy mail. Finally finished with her composition she hit the send button.

As much as she hated to do it she deleted all traces of his e-mail and her responses from her laptop. She wrote down his e-mail address and hid it. She knew she would be in so much trouble if anyone found out she had actually talked with Giles and didn't report it. She didn't even want to think about how much trouble she'd be in. She felt lonely again, wishing there was someone she could share this with. She thought about calling Xander but decided it was too risky. She didn't know who might overhear on his end and she wouldn't be surprised if the Council monitored phone calls.

It was still early. She decided to take a walk. She needed to walk off some energy. Her body was thrumming with excitement that he'd actually written, that he was still alive, that the part of him she loved so much still existed. She grabbed her raincoat and walked outside.

She wasn't paying attention and she knew better than that. It hadn't taken her long upon her arrival to England to realize that there were plenty of vampires around the area. She usually took a stake with her but in her excitement she had forgotten. He was on her before she knew it. She felt the cold hands on her, felt him start to turn her head to expose her neck. She pushed futilely at him. She screamed and then the scream got caught in her throat as she watched the vampire turn to dust.

"Hello luv. Miss me?"

Her eyes widened as she looked at Spike, grinning from ear to ear, stake still in his hand. Without thought she launched herself at him, hugging him hard. He hugged her back. She pulled out of the hug and stepped away just staring

at him. He had pursed his lips and was nodding his head, a satisfied look in his face. "Guess so."

Then she got angry. She whacked him on his chest, and then kept whacking him. "Where did you go? How could you just leave me without saying goodbye? What kind of jerk are you?"

"Hey, hey, that's enough of that." He held her arms so she couldn't whack him anymore. He smiled at her. "I wanted to surprise you." He grinned at her.

She couldn't keep the smile off her face, although she tried, hard. She finally gave in and hugged him again. "I really am glad to see you. Not to mention the saving my life part."

"Ah, don't mention it. It gave me the opportunity to make a bloody good entrance." He couldn't stop grinning. He was so glad to see her. He could sense the rapid beating of her heart, the excitement radiating off of her. He gave her a wicked grin. "What's got you all wound up? Maybe you've been missing me more than I thought, hmm?" He swaggered in her direction.

She whacked him again. "Spike, Giles e-mailed me tonight."

His jaw dropped. That was not what he had expected to hear, ever. "What?"

"Giles, he e-mailed me. Just out of the blue. He sounded so sad and lonely." Her eyes got misty thinking about it. Spike had no response. He just looked at her. She spoke again. "I e-mailed him back and he wrote again. He's alive, and at least part of him is sort of okay."

He rocked back and forth on his feet, his lips pursed again. "Are you gonna tell any of these wankers?"

She shook her head.

"They'll boot you out on your ear if they ever find out, that's if they don't just lock you up."

She nodded. "I know. But Spike, it's Giles." She shrugged, holding her hands out in a helpless gesture.

He nodded. Then he grinned. "Send him my love. That'll make his day."

She grinned back and the two of them set off together chatting, getting caught up, the student watcher and the vampire.

End of Chapter 3

Rogue Watcher 4

He had awakened to find himself in bed with a woman. He had ascertained that she was sleeping after a heart stopping moment when he thought that perhaps she was dead, that he had killed her. He had eased out of the bed, not wanting to wake her and had gotten dressed. It was clearly her home, feminine clothing and belongings strewn about. His bag was nowhere in sight so he figured he wasn't staying here. Which meant he had no idea where he was currently staying. It didn't really matter.

Giles quietly shut the door behind him and breathed a sigh of relief. He saw a newspaper box and walked over, bending down to read the paper. That's when he saw the date and realized how long it had been since he'd last been aware. It was November 3rd and he had written Willow in early September. He saw that he was back in the United States. The last time, back in September, he'd been in Europe.

He rested his head on the box, pulling himself together, trying to suppress the fear he felt. Fear made the monster rise, made him feel threatened. Giles took a couple of deep breaths. He was so close, too close. He was too close to the people he loved. Being in Europe had given him some small consolation that he was far from his loved ones, that they were safe from him. Now he was too close.

He saw a sign for a caf?and he headed that way, wanting some tea to help calm his nerves. He laughed when he got there when he saw what kind of caf?it was. He was amazed that he had never noticed how ubiquitous these things were. He slid into a booth, ordering his tea and then proceeded to log on. It was easier this time, both practically and emotionally. He logged on to his site and saw that there was a message. He clicked on it and read the pages that Willow had sent him, chuckling as he drank his tea. He felt normal for a moment, felt like any other man might feel reading a letter from a loved one. He cherished it, and knew that despite the risk he would never stop contacting her. Willow had given him something too essential to him to throw away and he didn't have the strength to deny himself.

He kept waiting to hear news about Buffy but there was nothing. The absence of news was too conspicuous to miss. He knew then that she was gone, either dead, or that she had run away again. He understood why Willow wouldn't have wanted to tell him, that she was trying to protect him, but he had to know.

Willow, thank you so much for your news. I have laughed with a light heart for the first time since I left. I apologize for the long delay in getting back to you but I have been unavailable. I must ask, and I'm sorry if this causes you pain, but what has become of Buffy? I pray that she simply left, perhaps to join Angel again now that they both share a similar fate. I fear though, that she is dead. Please, I have to know.

He sent off the e-mail and he finished his tea, rereading her e-mail, the stories warming him as much as his fears for Buffy chilled him. Tea finished he left the café. As the day waned he realized that he'd need to find a place to sleep. He'd never had this much time without interruption and it was odd to have to assume the responsibility for his meals and a roof over his head. He booked a room and had some dinner. Then he strolled back over to the Café and signed in again. She had written. He had known that she would. He knew she probably checked her laptop a dozen times a day on his account and the thought touched him.

##

Giles, I am so sorry. Buffy died not long after you left. Spike found her. She never really recovered from you leaving and her finding out what she did to you and to the rest of them, and knowing that she couldn't ever...well you know. The whole thing seems so cruel, the life of slayers I mean. They really can't have a life, can they? They really are just a tool. I guess I never really believed that because you didn't, and it seemed as if Buffy could maybe have a life. She was so lucky to have you as her watcher. She had so many things in her life that she wouldn't have had otherwise. We were all lucky to have you.

As long as I'm telling you things you probably don't want to hear I need to tell you something else. I am in England, at the Council. I started my watcher training this fall. I thought I could make a difference but as I read this e-mail I wonder what the cost will be. How can I take on a slayer now? How can I not just look at her and feel pity for her, and anger at the injustice of it all? I wish you were here with me now. How I would welcome your wisdom and comfort as I make my way in the world. I miss you every day, so much. Ooh, guess what? Spike is here, and he said to send his love!!

##

Giles wanted to respond while he still could, so he put his grieving on hold for a moment.

Willow. Thank you for telling me. She didn't deserve this, and you are right, it

is cruel. Too much is asked of them, these extraordinary young women. I do not think I could ever be a watcher again if the choice were mine to make. I respect your choice though and will support you regardless of your decision.

Please understand that I wouldn't change having been a watcher because without it I wouldn't have met all of you, and I wouldn't have had the opportunity to train and work with Buffy, who truly was the best. Being her watcher made me proud. Being your friend continues to make me proud. I would never choose to not have lived the life I lived if it meant losing that. Take care Willow and know that I miss you too. And please keep your guard up around Spike. I will write when next I can..

##

He signed off and went back to his room. He curled up on the bed and wept.

Over the next few weeks whenever he came to he would immediately find an Internet location and check in with Willow. He laughed at the irony that after fighting them for so long that computers and the web had become the focal point of his life. Willow had become his reason for living. She gave him something to look forward to and he clung to it like a drowning man to a piece of driftwood. He never told her where he was. He didn't want to put that burden on her. He wanted her to be able to honestly say she had no idea of his location if she was discovered.

Willow lived for his e-mails as well. She never knew when one would arrive. Sometimes in the middle of one he just stopped, right in the middle of the sentence, as if he'd hit the send button and then run away. He never told her why and she never asked. She was afraid she knew. She liked to pretend but she knew that despite the few minutes that they shared that nothing had changed. He was still possessed by his magic, evil, and lethal.

She could still remember how he had been, what she had felt inside of him those two awful days before he left. The memory still had the power to terrify her. She never spoke of it to him but she had continued looking for a spell to cure him. She had been determined before but now that he had gotten in touch with her she attacked the problem with single-minded diligence. She had found so many promising leads but she had been met with one discouraging dead end after another.

Spike was her only confidant. Without him, she would have gone crazy. She knew she'd have exploded by now if she hadn't been able to tell someone. She would have been so lonely without him, without him and Giles. She laughed silently at herself, at her companions, one a vampire, one a rogue watcher. The Council would have a heart attack if they only knew. No wonder she didn't feel like she was fitting in. She wanted to go home fiercely but she

was determined to give it at least a year, stubbornly refusing to give up this easily.

Spike was the one who found it, found the spell. He hadn't even been looking for it. There were a couple of bars that he frequented. They were good bars, they left you alone, and they didn't ask questions. Most of the clientele were regulars and he returned the favor and left them alone. He wanted to be able to come back. That night there was someone new sitting slumped over at the bar. Some old man, three sheets to the wind. Spike snorted and looked away. Then Spike noticed the ring on his finger, the same ring Giles had always worn, his watcher ring.

Spike's eyebrows rose. No watchers ever came in here. It wasn't that kind of bar. Spike decided to try and chat him up. Maybe this joker knew something about Giles, some news he could pass on to Willow. Spike sort of missed Giles. Not much, but some. In between Giles trying to kill him, or insult him, he'd almost been good company. Besides Willow wanted him back.

Spike sashayed over to the old man. "Hey, can I buy you a drink?" The old man slowly looked up at Spike, his eyes trying hard to focus. He looked back down at his empty cup. He nodded, his need for oblivion making him careless. Spike grabbed the man by his arm and escorted him to a quiet booth in the back.

He got him situated and got them both drinks, returning to the booth. Spike bit his lip wondering how to best take advantage of this situation. He always had done blunt best. "So, any news on the rogue watcher?"

The man shook his head. "They lost him again." He was too drunk to guard his tongue, and too sick at heart to care. "They tracked him yesterday to Las Vegas, and then they lost him."

"He's still in the states?" Spike was surprised. He figured Giles would have gotten farther than Nevada.

The man snorted. His words were slurred but clear enough. "He's been leading them a merry chase across the globe. He just got back to the states a few weeks ago. He's too smart for them, he's always been too smart for them." The man smiled tightly, a look of satisfaction on his face. Then it coalesced to sadness. He took another sip of his drink, then another.

"You knew Rupert then?"

The man nodded.

"Good friends, were you?" Only his vampire hearing allowed him to catch the reply. "Not any more."

Spike nodded. "Because he went rogue?"

The man shook his head. Spike waited but the man didn't say anything else.

"Well, I guess he got what he deserved, sleeping with his slayer and all." Spike watched the man carefully, watched him as he froze. Spike's eyes narrowed.

The man lifted his head up looking at Spike, a guarded look finally appearing in his eyes. "Who are you?"

Spike just pointed at the man's drink. "Want another one?"

The man's eyes teared up, and then he nodded. Spike rolled his eyes as he got up. This guy was a loser.

He returned with his drink half expecting the man to be gone but he was still there, staring off. Spike slid his drink in front of him. "Here ya go mate."

The man grasped the drink tightly, taking a large swallow, finishing off half the drink. Spike raised his eyebrows. "What are you tryin' to drown in there?" He waited for a response but got none. "If it's not because he's gone rogue, why aren't you and Rupert still the best of friends?"

Again Spike had to strain to hear. "I've betrayed him." The man shakily put his drink down and covered his face with his hands.

"How's that? What do you mean, betrayed him?"

"I knew, I knew and I didn't say anything."

Spike sat up straighter. "What exactly did you know?"

"The spell, the spell that would help him. I knew it and I kept silent, and I've killed him. His death is on my hands." He picked up his drink and finished it.

Spike wanted to kill this man. He held still for a moment fighting the blood lust down. "You knew the spell." He didn't ask it as a question.

The man nodded.

"You knew the spell and you didn't say a bloody thing." Again spoken as

statement.

The man nodded.

"Why?" He got no answer. He asked again, grabbing the man's wrist to get his attention. "Why?"

"They'd have wanted to know how I knew. I couldn't tell them, I'd have been fired. I'm too old to start over. I'm too old."

"How did you know?" Spike's grip got harder. "How did you know?"

"I slept with my slayer. I loved her. God, how I loved her." The man started to cry in earnest.

Spike fought hard to keep his human face on, he could feel the demon wanting to emerge. He struggled to be patient, needing more information. "Why didn't it affect you? How did you know what to do?"

"I had the chronicles that told of it. The journal had been in my family for generations. It's how I knew I could sleep with her, that I could love her. God, I miss her still."

"What is it?"

The man shook his head. Spike snapped his wrist. "What the bloody hell is it?"

The man let out a moan. He looked at Spike with a bewildered look in his eyes. Spike grabbed tighter. There was no mercy in him. "Tell me the spell." The man spit out four lines of verse. Spike let go. The man slumped back in the booth, holding his wrist. Spike looked at him.

"That's it? That's the spell? Four sodding lines? This is the mystery that has escaped every watcher other than you for centuries?"

The man wearily nodded his head. "They both need to say it. They need to say it together."

"His slayer's dead."

"Then someone with magic needs to say the spell with the watcher. It can still be broken."

"Write it down."

The man shook his head, holding up his broken wrist. Spike let out a frustrated noise. He reached over and going through the man's inside jacket pocket found a pen. He grabbed a napkin. "Say it again." He had the man repeat it several times. Spike folded the napkin and put it in his pocket. He looked at the man sitting across from him and couldn't remember hating anyone more. Buffy was dead because of him. For nothing, because of this weak, useless man. Spike stood. He walked over to the man, checked around and made sure no one was watching. He reached for him and snapped his neck. He let him drop back into the booth. He didn't want this man's blood. "Consider yourself fired."

Spike swept out of the bar, annoyed that he probably wouldn't be able to go back there. He had to find Willow. She was leaving tomorrow afternoon to go home to Sunnydale for the holidays. He knew it was a risk but he walked inside the Council doors, heading for her room. He had been there a couple of times, but always late at night, and always with her. He had to hide a couple of times to avoid being seen but made it to her room unscathed, rapping harshly on her door. "Willow, open up, it's me, Spike."

She opened it and looked at him, her eyes wide. "What's the matter? Why are you here?"

He reached into his pocket and pulled out the napkin. He handed it to her without a word. She read it, not understanding. He pointed at it. "That's the bloody spell. That's all someone had to do. Giles and Buffy just needed to say those four sodding lines and none of this would have happened."

Willow's knees gave out and she dropped to the floor. Spike paced up and down. Willow held the napkin tightly. "I don't understand, how did you find this?"

"Some drunken watcher having an attack of conscience. He needed to confess." Spike spoke sarcastically, wishing the man were here before him so he could beat the crap out of him. Willow looked at him, disbelief in her eyes. Spike spoke again. "This friggin' watcher shagged his slayer, he was in love." Spike spoke that word with derision. "It's a family spell apparently, not good enough for anyone else. He knew the whole time. He could have stopped it but he didn't. He was afraid he'd get fired." Spike kicked Willow's bed and the leg caved in and the bed crashed to the ground.

Willow got up and gingerly put the napkin on her desk. She picked a clean piece of paper and rewrote it. She wrote it several times on several pieces of paper. She was terrified she'd throw it away by accident. Once that task was done she hugged herself very tightly slowly sitting back on the floor, starting

to cry. Spike scowled. He bent down to try and fix the leg of the bed.

Willow raised teary eyes to him. "Spike, what do I do? What do I do now?"

"What do you mean what do you do now? You do the spell. The bastard said someone with magic could do it in place of the slayer. So tell Giles. Tell him you found the spell. He'll come home, you hand him one of those pieces of paper, you say the spell with him and it's done."

Willow shook her head. "He told me not to tell him. He told me that whatever he was turning into wouldn't want to change back. He said he'd come and kill me, that he'd kill us all. I can't fight him, he's too strong, Buffy couldn't even fight him." If it was just her, Willow wouldn't have hesitated, but Giles knew she was heading back to Sunnydale. If she told him he'd go there. She couldn't risk everybody.

Spike needed to kill something badly. "What the hell are you talking about? You've been looking for the damn spell for months. What were you going to do with it, frame it? You have to tell him. It's not fair not to tell him."

Willow shook her head. "He'll kill Xander and Anya, and Tara. He'll kill the new slayer and her watcher. He'll kill us all. You didn't see him; you didn't see what he was like. I need to think. If I tell him I don't know if it will be Giles that shows up. I need to figure out a way to meet with him alone just in case, so I don't get everybody killed."

Spike shook his head. He knew he was taking a gamble. "I can fight him."

Willow looked at him. "Spike, he's still human. You can't hurt him."

Spike just looked at her. "I can." He watched her as his meaning sank in. She cowered away from him on the floor. He rolled his eyes. "Willow, the chip failed right after Buffy died. Have I hurt you?" She shook her head. "Have I hurt any of you?" She shook her head again. "That's right, and I won't, so get the hurt bunny look out of your eyes. I can help you here."

"He almost killed Buffy."

"Buffy didn't go against him knowing what to expect. He was her watcher; she let her guard down. He won't be expecting me to be able to hurt him."

"I don't want you to get hurt."

"Do you want him back or not?"

"Not if I exchange yours or their lives for his. Not if I let him hurt someone, hurt me, and then make him have to live with that. How can I do that to him?"

"Do you want him back or not?"

"Of course I do, how can you even ask that? But it's too soon and it's not that simple."

Spike thought it was. "I know where he was yesterday. I can go find him. I can knock him out and keep him unconscious and bring him to you. When he wakes up, you do the spell. Simple."

Willow shook his head. "Or he wakes up, kills me, kills you, and destroys Sunnydale. Spike, I need some time. I need to figure out the best way to do it."

Spike walked to the door. "Will you be at home, at your parent's house?"

She nodded. "Not that they'll be there. They're off on some research thing." He could see the hurt in her eyes.

"I'll see you there then. Get everything ready." He walked out the door. She was up in a flash.

"No, Spike!" She ran out the door but he was running and going around the corner at the end of the hall already. Her heart was pounding; she felt sick to her stomach. She would never catch him. She stood there immobilized with fear. Then she snapped out of it and started pulling books off her shelves. She started looking for spells, spells for protection, spells for binding, spells for repelling, and she began to read.

End Chapter 4

Rogue Watcher 5

The monster loved Las Vegas. He had led the Council team a pretty chase and he knew they were on their way thinking he was heading for Canada. He laughed, they'd been so easy to dupe. He wanted to stay here. Everyone here was on the edge. Already infected by the lust for money, for the quick win, seduced by the glamour and glitz. It was so easy to push their buttons. He'd prowl the casino floors looking for the presence of anger already, the repressed rage. Then he'd brush against them and then walk away, find a good viewing spot and lean back, a drink in hand, to watch the show. It was almost too easy.

He found more challenging prey fighting the local demons. They were coming after him now that he'd killed a few. They were discovered by their own eviscerated, decapitated or beaten to a bloody pulp. And that had been when he had just used his hands or a knife. They'd started coming after him in groups and that was when he utilized his magic.

Spike had found him quickly. The second he'd gotten to Las Vegas and started hunting, checking in, he had found that Giles was all anyone was talking about. Spike watched him from the alley as Giles emerged from the casino. There was a satisfied smile on Giles' face. He headed down the alley and Spike ducked behind the dumpster out of sight. It was too soon to grab him. He watched as four demons jumped at him and Spike wondered if he'd have to go assist him. He stopped as he realized that none of them touched him. They slid right off of him. Giles smiled and Spike watched in horror as the demons started to scream and to bleed. They fell to the ground writhing in pain, their bodies being flattened as if by an invisible steamroller. He watched Giles laugh, flip the destroyed bodies the finger and walk out of the alley.

Spike pressed hard against the wall. He was afraid and he hadn't been afraid in a very long time. He began to understand why Willow had been so fearful. Then his anger kicked in. Anger that he was feeling afraid, anger at Giles for making him feel that way. He stood up, resolved again, and took off after Giles.

##

Xander met Willow at the airport. She hugged him so tightly he squeaked. He just hugged her back. He had missed her so much. He looked at her face. She looked so tired. He reached for her backpack and almost dropped it.

"Jeez, Will, what's in here, bricks?"

"Books. I have a lot of studying to do." She pointed at her face and pouted. "See, study girl, not play girl."

Xander didn't care, he was just glad she was home at least for a while. They walked arm in arm down to the baggage carousel to get her luggage. It took both his arms and a braced foot to wrestle the suitcase off the carousel and onto the floor. He looked at Willow rolling his eyes.

"You got any clothes in here?"

She shook her head. "Not very many, I figured I'd wear what I have here."

"Okay, well here I go being all manly. Please try and look impressed as I pull out my back." He started pulling her suitcase, making theatrical groaning noises as he did so.

Willow smiled for the first time since she had arrived, Xander lightening her heart with his antics. "God, Xander, I missed you so much. Will you come back to England with me?"

"No room for me in the suitcase." He grinned at her and she grinned back.

She got settled in her house after having lunch with Xander. She needed to be home after sunset. She needed to be there in case Spike showed up. And she needed to keep everyone away. She was almost as nervous about having to lie to Xander and everybody else as she was about dealing with Giles. She felt unsuited to either task. So, she took the offensive and when Xander dropped her off she made lunch plans with him for the next day. When she got in she called Tara and made plans to see her as well. She told them both she was working on a big school project in hopes that it would keep them from dropping by. It was only a little lie. It wasn't a school project but it was certainly a watcher project.

She was now relieved that her parents were gone. She started pushing furniture aside and rolled up the carpet. She opened her suitcase and started pulling books out, stacking them on the living room table. She found the one she was looking for and flipping it open started drawing the symbols shown there on the floor, large enough for a man to lie in. She flipped open several other books and drew other symbols around the first one. She placed candles and herbs in specified locations. She chanted spells of protection, put up wards around the house. They would alert her if anyone approached. She hesitated a minute and then did a general invite spell so vampires could enter uninvited. She hoped that it wouldn't backfire on her but she couldn't remember if she had invited Spike in and she needed to know Spike could enter if she wasn't there.

She crawled into bed, a stake in one hand, another lying next to the holy water on the bedside table. She fell into a restless sleep. In the morning she got up and checking all her preparations again she headed out. She went by the Magic Shop planning to spend the day with Xander and Anya. Xander watched Willow. He knew something was wrong but he couldn't figure out what it was. He'd tried to coax it out of her at lunch but she'd gotten this weird panicky look in her eyes and he'd stopped. He figured he had some time. She would be home for a month. It had been like a part of him was gone when she was in England. He hated that she would leave again. As dusk approached she got up to leave saying she had to work on her project. She promised to be back in the morning. Xander nodded, knowing she was hiding something.

Anya called him and he turned his attention to his girlfriend.

Willow spent the evening jumping at shadows. She had no idea how long Spike might be. She had no idea how he was getting back here. Did he take a boat? That could take days. How would he find Giles? She wished he'd call. She checked her laptop but there were no messages from Giles. She watched a little TV but she couldn't concentrate. She'd be a basket case if Spike took too long. She knew Xander already was on to her. He'd always been able to tell when something was wrong. She didn't want him involved. She'd never be able to live with herself if something happened to him. She prayed for him to stay away.

The next two days passed agonizingly slowly. She did have a lovely lunch with Tara, glad for her that she'd found someone new. She spent most of the day at the shop enjoying the distraction her friends provided. Xander tried again to pry and she just kept saying she was worried about the project, that it was a big one. That it was important to her future. None of them really lies, in fact they were all too true, frighteningly so. Xander didn't buy it for a minute. He figured if was a big school project that she'd be getting help from the watcher, but instead she avoided him other than polite conversation. He was going to give it until the end of the week but then he'd have it out of her.

##

Spike knew he'd have one chance. Just one. He was counting on the fact that this Giles would remember him. And that he would think that Spike couldn't hurt him. That would give Spike one chance. Because if he failed that first time, he knew he'd never get another. He thought again about those demons and swallowed.

He followed Giles. He needed him alone and he needed him someplace no one would see or care if he knocked him out and then carried him to the car he had borrowed. He had figured out where Giles was staying and his car was parked around the corner. There was an alley that ran the length of the building and it suited Spike. He waited.

The monster had had a good night. The demons never learned. After the death of the last four they just kept coming. He had used his magic in ways he hadn't even thought possible. It thrilled him; it aroused him. He had gone to a whorehouse and had chosen a couple of whores, whores he knew who liked it hard and painful. He occasionally liked to be in the hands of professionals. Not as ultimately satisfying as feeling the fear of a woman he was taking by force, but he had to admit that clean up was easier. No bodies to remove, no police to evade. Plus whenever he tried to satisfy himself that way, he could feel the soul still inhabiting this body start to fight him.

He got angry just thinking about it. No matter how he tried he hadn't been able to get rid of him. The hatred filled him and his magic shimmered. He threw his hands out and let it loose. He watched the huge marquis sign explode then start to fall. He watched as people started to scream and scatter. He watched as it fell capturing those too slow or too unaware to have moved to safety. He rolled his shoulders and then his neck, stretching tense muscles. He grinned. He felt better.

He headed for home. As he walked past the alley he heard the sound of a match being struck and he stopped, watching as a man in the shadows lit a cigarette. He made as if to move on.

"Rupert."

The monster stopped, surprised to hear that name. He moved into the alley, wanting to see who had spoken. The man moved out of the shadows allowing the light to fall across his face. The monster sifted through the memories in his head. He laughed. "Spike."

Spike nodded, pursing his lips. "I see that you've been having some fun. Leave anything for me?"

The monster laughed again. "Plenty of demon activity. They thrive here."

Spike relaxed a small bit, Giles' words reassuring him that he still thought that he could only kill demons. "Want to get a drink?"

The monster laughed again, this would be good for a few laughs. Then he'd kill him. "Sure, why the hell not."

He turned to lead them both out of the alley and that's when Spike struck. He hit him on the head with all of his strength and Giles fell hard to the ground. Spike felt for a pulse, hoping he hadn't killed him. When he felt it he heaved Giles up on his shoulder and carried him to his car. He'd have to keep hitting him; he couldn't let him regain full consciousness. Spike started to drive. He focused on Giles' heartbeat, ignoring the blood lust it brought forth. Whenever his heartbeat changed, started to speed up, Spike would hit him again.

Spike pulled into Sunnydale a couple of hours before dawn. He drove to Willow's. Willow's eyes snapped open as she felt the wards set off a tingle on her skin, signaling an approach to the house. She jumped out of bed, her heart racing, almost painfully so. She looked out the window and saw Spike taking a body out of the back seat of his car. She thought she was going to have a heart attack. She fought the urge to throw up. She swallowed her bile

down. She heard him knock on the door and she headed downstairs throwing it open.

She pointed to the symbol on the floor and Spike tossed Giles down. Willow looked at him and then back at Spike. "Are you okay?"

"Just fix him. We're all dead if you don't." He saw the fear in her face that his words generated. "You were right, I can't fight him. He's too powerful. He scares the shit out of me. I saw him...." He swallowed, remembering. He saw her face and chose not to finish the sentence. "Do you want me just to kill him?"

Her eyes widened and she looked at Giles, unconscious on the floor. He looked so young, so peaceful lying there. She wanted this to be a dream, she wanted to wake up and have it be two years ago, for none of this to have happened.

Spike spoke again. "Can you do this? Tell me now, because if you can't I'll kill him. You can leave and I'll take care of it."

"I can't Spike, it's Giles."

"Can you do it?" He asked again. He looked at the symbols on the floor, the herbs, the candles. "Is this enough?"

"I don't know. It's what I could find."

Spike shook his head. "I have to go for a few minutes." The blood lust was pounding through his body; he had to feed now, he felt weak, it had been too long. He'd be no use to Willow until he did. "He should be out for a while still, I just hit him again. I'll be back before he comes to. Get a crossbow. I'll hold it while you do your mojo. If he starts acting up I'll put a bolt through his chest."

Willow was too stunned to respond; his words had barely registered. As the door shut behind him she realized he was gone. He'd left her alone with Giles. Her heart started to race again and she put her hand on her breast feeling her heartbeat thrum under her fingers. She took a deep breath and tried to remember what Spike had said. She remembered. She ran up to her room and got her crossbow. Giles had gotten one for each of them one year as Christmas gifts. She hoped it wouldn't be the death of him now.

She put one of the pieces of paper with the spell on it outside of the markings on the floor surrounding him but close enough where he could read it. She looked at his face again. He wasn't wearing his glasses. He looked so much younger. All his lines on his face, the lines she had loved so much, were

gone. There was no gray in his hair. It was long, down to his shoulders and so curly. She ached to touch him, to touch his hair. She spoke the words of the spell out loud just in case it would work with just her saying it. He lay there, not moving. She bit her lip. She sat back, waiting for Spike.

Before Spike returned Giles started to stir. Willow's eyes widened and she thought she really would throw up this time. Giles raised himself up on his arms, putting one hand behind his head, feeling all the lumps there. He saw the markings on the ground. He moved into a sitting position being careful not to disturb the markings. He looked around him trying to figure out where he was when he saw Willow. He smiled.

Willow reared back as if he had struck her. His smile terrified her. This wasn't her Giles. She could see her death in his eyes.

Giles looked down again at the markings on the floor. He shook his head. "Willow, Willow, Willow. Do you really think this will hold me?"

She didn't answer, her voice and her courage fled.

He laughed. "What's the matter Willow, scared of your old friend Giles?" He laughed again. She could feel him start to probe the spells surrounding him, binding him.

She finally found her voice. "Giles, I found the spell. I found the spell that will bring you back." She pointed her finger at the piece of paper lying just outside the symbols on the floor. His eyes lifted to hers, full of madness.

"I'm almost sorry I have to kill you. You're hardly worth my time. But, you know I have to, don't you?" The casual tone of his voice as he spoke of killing her made her stomach clench. Her palms started to sweat. He had already broken through one of the spells. She watched him smile as he recognized his success. He looked at her. "Willow, I'm disappointed. I expected better from you. Is this all you have to protect yourself?" He swept his hand around indicating the floor, taking in the rest of the room. Seeing no response from her he just shook his head, making a tsk tsk sound.

He looked around. "Parents gone, Willow? No one here to hear your screams?" He watched her face, wanting to see fear there. He wasn't disappointed. "Xander in town? Anya?" He kept watching her face. "I'll have to make sure to drop by. Maybe I can bring them a piece of you. Do you think they'd like that?" He broke through another spell. "By the way, how did I get here?" He thought for a moment. "Ah, yes, dear Spike. Well, I'll get to repay him too then, won't I?" He grinned at the thought.

She felt her failure; it was a living presence sitting on her heart. She had failed them all. She knew he would break free soon and then he would kill her. Then he would go kill the rest of them and it would all be her fault. She picked up the crossbow and pointed it at him. It shook in her hands. She thought of Giles, her Giles, memories sluicing through her. His face was in her heart and she saw it on the face of the man sitting across from her. She didn't have the strength. She put the crossbow down and saw him smile and shake his head at her. "Oh, Willow. Your feelings were always your greatest weakness." He broke through another spell. He was almost free.

She put her face in her hands, her mind filled with the images of the deaths that would occur because of her. She started rocking back and forth, keening with pain. Her cries filled the room, anguished sounds, creating their own power of sorrow, pain, and loss. The monster looked up, his concentration momentarily broken. He watched Willow, watched her rock back and forth, listening to the sounds she was making. He soaked it in, basking in her agony. He closed his eyes, his face rapturous.

Then he felt it, the stirring deep within himself. The look of rapture vanished from his face to be replaced with anger, then with fear. The soul within him was fighting hard, harder than he'd fought before. Two great wills fought for the right to be in control. Willow continued to rock herself, her hands over her face, her emotions riding her.

Suddenly Giles gasped out. "Willow, do the spell now, hurry." She couldn't hear, still too consumed by her fear and helplessness. "Willow, Willow, listen to me." Still nothing. "WILLOW!"

She looked up to find Giles looking at her. Her Giles. His eyes filled with pain. She saw his body, every muscle tightly contorted, veins distended. He spoke through tightly compressed lips. "Willow, do the spell now, right away, I can't last much longer." Still she hesitated, wondering if this was a trick. She watched him, saw a spasm of pain flash across his face. "Willow, now, please."

She pointed to the paper in front of him. "We have to say it together."

He nodded, the movement causing him pain. "Hurry!"

She started and heard his voice joining hers. His words came out stilted, halting, every word a battle. But the chant was short and they completed it. He sank back, exhausted. She watched him, breathless. Suddenly he started to convulse, his whole body shaking. Blood trickled out of his nose. He howled, thrashing back and forth as the evil inside him still fought denying its defeat.

Spike was running up the sidewalk to the house when the windows all exploded. The shattered glass shot from the house, raining all over him and the lawn around him, extending out to the street. His heart in his throat he ran for the door. "Willow!"

He ran in the house and saw her sitting there. She was looking at Giles. Giles lay completely still. She searched frantically with her eyes for signs that he was still living. Then she saw his chest rise in a breath and she sat back, relieved he was alive but still unsure as to what he'd be, how he'd be when he awoke. She looked up at Spike, shot him a shaky grin and then she started to cry. Spike sat down next to her and took her in his arms holding her until she cried herself out.

She pulled away finally and rubbed her face. Spike looked over at Giles.

"What happened? Is he okay?"

"I think so. He came back for a moment, Giles did, I mean. He came back and we said the words. Then, well...that happened." She pointed at the windows. She looked at Spike, saw that he was covered with glass. "I guess you saw that." She grimaced. He looked down at himself and started to brush himself off. Willow shook out her own sweater to rid herself of the pieces of glass she'd gotten from Spike when he had held her.

She finally got up and after retrieving a few items she went to the symbols on the floor and created an opening. She knew she was being potentially foolish but she had to believe that Giles was back, that he would be okay. She eased a pillow under his head, and threw a blanket over his body. She wiped his face, removing the blood. She closed the symbols back up. It was an empty gesture as Giles had already broken through most of them, but it made her feel better, just in case.

She and Spike sat there, watching him. It was almost dawn and with the windows gone the house would be awash in sunlight. Willow turned to him. "Go Spike, I'll be okay. If I'm not, none of us will be." Spike shook his head not wanting to leave. She pushed at him. "Spike, go. I can't let anything happen to you. If you stay, you'll either have to hide in a closet or go up in flames, either way you can't help." Spike nodded. He retrieved the crossbow and laid it in her lap. She held it tight. She stood up and gave Spike a hug. "Thank you. Thank you for bringing him back." She hugged him again.

"Hold your thanks until you see what's he like when he wakes up. It's a little soon to see if I did you a favor or not." Despite his words he smiled at her, glad he had pleased her. He swept out the door and was gone.

End Chapter 5

Rogue Watcher 6

Willow sat on the couch, waiting for him to wake up. She saw him start to move and her heart started to pound again. She watched him as he slowly moved into a sitting position. He sat there, head in his hands. Finally he lifted his head and saw her sitting on the couch. His eyes captured hers and at the look in them she ran to him. She crouched down outside the symbols and looked into his eyes. She saw the Giles she remembered, saw the eyes she loved so much. She had to look away for a moment, her eyes filling with tears at the pain in his.

He spoke first. "It's me, Willow." His voice was soft and filled with sadness.

"Oh, Giles." She erased a section of the symbols surrounding him, and she moved in to hold him. They both knelt there holding on to each other, neither believing that this had finally happened, that he was free, that she had freed him. He never wanted to let go of her. She didn't either. As reality began to seep in, Giles started to sob and she held him tighter, the tears running down her own face. She sat down, taking him with her, holding him to her as he cried. She ran her hands down his back, through his hair, murmuring to him.

After a while, his emotions spent, he raised his head. He took her face in his hands and rested his forehead on hers. "Willow, how can I ever thank you?"

She stood, reaching for his hand. He took it and she helped him up and they went to sit on the couch. She took both of his hands in her small ones. "I wish I could take the credit, but most of it belongs to Spike."

His eyes widened. He took one of his hands and felt the back of his head, remembering again. He fingered the lumps. "How many times did he hit me?" He smiled ruefully at Willow.

She choked out a laugh. "I don't know. I don't even know where he found you. He just knew he had to keep you unconscious. Whatever he saw you do, you know, the other you, whatever it was it scared him pretty badly."

He nodded. She continued. "He found the spell too. There I was in England, the whole of the Council library at my fingertips and he finds out in some bar." She knew it was wrong of her but that annoyed her, that she hadn't found it.

Giles shook his head. "He only found it, I'm sure, because he knew you

wanted it. I find it hard to believe he'd have found it just for me."

Willow smiled, feeling a little better. Giles took her hands this time. "Despite who found the spell or who brought me here, it was you who got through to me, you gave me the courage to fight. You kept me going all this time, through your e-mails, your love, your kindness. I will never forget that." He looked at her, all the love in his heart shining out at her. She leaned forwards and hugged him again. She couldn't get enough of him. She could hardly believe he was here. She was afraid she'd wake up and he'd be gone.

She pulled back. "Giles, there's nothing to thank me for, I had no choice. I mean, it was you. You would never have given up on any of us, ever."

He shook his head. "Willow, you had a choice. You put yourself at tremendous risk, both from me and from the Council. I am humbled by it, and very, very grateful."

Her eyes filled with tears again, every difficult second, every moment of confusion, of wondering whether she was doing the right thing, it had all been worth it. She leaned over and hugged him tight. "I'm so glad you're back."

They sat there like that for a long time. He finally spoke again. "You need to call the Council, let them know I'm here."

She pulled back, stunned. "No, Giles, I can't, they'll come and kill you. You're fine now, they don't need to know."

He shook his head. "I can't stay here. The watcher here will be required to report me. I can't start my life back up. I can't do anything that would alert them to my presence. There's no life for me anywhere. Willow, I can't live that way. They're still after me. I'll be on the run. Alone, hunted, no companionship, no home. They won't ever give up until they kill me."

She shook her head looking at him. "I won't call them, Giles, I won't. I didn't go through all of this just to see you die. It's too much. You have no right to ask that of me."

He looked back at her, his eyes sad. "I know. It is too much to ask." He reached over her and picked up the phone. She gasped and tried to take it from him. He held her hands still. "Willow, I'll call a friend. There might be a way to keep them from simply coming and killing me." He watched her face, saw the sadness and then the acceptance cross her features. He dialed a number.

"Hello?"

"Mary, it's Rupert."

She gasped. "Rupert. Where are you?"

"I'll tell you in a minute. I need to tell you something first."

"I'm listening."

He looked at Willow, apology in his eyes, his eyebrows up. She nodded, knowing what he had to say next. He smiled tightly at her. "Willow found the spell, she and a...a friend, they found a way to break the curse."

There was silence. "She's been in touch with you all this time?"

"Only for the last few months."

"You came to her willingly when she told you?"

"She didn't tell me. Spike came after me when they found it." He had spoken to Mary of Spike. "He's been in England, keeping an eye on Willow. He found me and brought me here."

"Spike? As in Spike, the vampire? That's the friend?" She paused, and then continued her voice higher. "Spike just found you? Our team has been searching for you for almost two years and Spike just finds you?" Giles had no response to that, other than a small smile that Mary couldn't see. There was a long pause as Mary thought. "Rupert, I need to think for a minute. I need to make a few calls. Give me your number, I'll call you back." He did as requested Willow softly whispering the numbers to him. He hit the off dial and handed the phone to Willow. She took it and then looked at him.

"Can I call Xander? He still misses you so much."

He hesitated, wondering if it would be more of an unkindness to involve Xander at this point. But he longed to see him as well. He nodded. Willow punched in Xander's number and when he answered she simply told him tersely to come over to her house, right away, and alone, that she had something to tell him. He was relieved she was about to finally fill him in on what had been bothering her. Despite how early it was he agreed to come.

He was there in less than fifteen minutes. Nervously looking at all the glass on the lawn, he knocked on the door. Giles answered. Xander stood, stunned, looking at Giles. He looked beyond him to see Willow, seeing the big smile on her face. He looked back at Giles. Giles almost staggered as Xander threw

himself at him. He was lifted off the floor as Xander squeezed him. Then Xander started to cry. Giles just held him until the storm passed, loving him, so glad to have had this moment regardless of what his future held.

Finally, Xander released him, his eyes red, his cheeks covered with tears, but his face showing a happiness he hadn't felt in a long time. He looked at Giles, looked at Willow. "How...?"

Giles led him over to the couch. Willow sat on one side, Xander on the other. They both sat close. Willow told the story, reaching across Giles to touch Xander, wanting him not to be angry that she had kept so much from him. Xander figured he could be angry later. He didn't want to be angry now. The three of them sat there, warmed by each other's presence, when the phone rang. Giles reached across Willow to answer it. They both watched him as he listened, watched his eyes get sad, watched as he closed them. He spoke softly. "Yes, I'll agree. I'll do as you say, and Mary...thank you." They watched him listen to her response and he hung up.

"They're coming for me, they'll be here tonight." They both shook their heads at his words. He continued. "Mary has been put in charge of the retrieval. They aren't coming to kill me. They plan to take me back to England, back to the Council. They will place me in quarantine so they can observe me and determine if I am a danger or not." He smiled ruefully. "It's more than I hoped for actually."

"Will they ever let you out?" Willow asked, a worried crease on her forehead.

"I don't know. You know how watchers get when they're studying something." He let out a soft laugh.

"Will I be able to come and visit you?"

"You mean, because you're a student there?" She nodded. "Willow, you know you'll be expelled for this? You understand that?" She lay her head on his shoulder, nodding. "So, somehow I doubt they'll let you in." He laughed again, softly.

Xander spoke. "Why would they expel her? They should be giving her some sort of award." His voice was angry.

Giles pulled his arm up, laying his arm around Xander's shoulder, pulling him close too. "Trust me, I couldn't agree more. But in essence she's been aiding and abetting someone they considered a criminal who was extremely dangerous and who was earmarked for termination. All watchers and students were honor bound to turn in any information about my

whereabouts."

Xander was just glad Giles was back. He looked at Giles and grinned. "Anya is so going to kill me for not calling her and including her." At the look of alarm on Giles' face he reassured him. "Don't worry, I won't. But, this is gonna cost me."

Giles smiled. "I don't want to create strife between you and Anya. I've already created enough problems in Willow's life."

Xander shook his head. "I'm sticking here big guy. I'm not letting you out of my sight until....well, until they get here." He looked at the floor, unhappy at the thought of Giles leaving again.

"I'm grateful for that." Giles looked at Xander and let Xander see, truly, the love he had in his heart for the young man. Xander saw the love there and his own eyes filled with tears in response.

"God, I'm being such a crybaby." He shook his head at himself.

"It's been an emotional day." Xander snorted at the understatement. Giles looked at Willow after speaking. "Shall we have a little something to eat? I think I'm rather hungry. I don't think I've eaten in a while."

They all moved into the kitchen. Despite being so early in the day Xander helped himself to a beer. He offered one to Giles. He shook his head. "I don't ever plan to drink again. It's what got me in all this trouble in the first place." His eyes got sad, and Willow started to make some tea. She knew he was thinking about Buffy.

"Giles, it wasn't your fault. There was nothing you could have done."

"I could have not slept with her." His voice was bitter.

Willow touched his arm. "You never blamed Buffy for sleeping with Angel, you never blamed her for what Angelus did after that. How can you blame yourself? You couldn't have known. You said that to Buffy, that the blame only rests with the Council."

Xander picked up the conversation, speaking earnestly. "Giles, it was gonna blow one way or the other. She was gonna sleep with someone else eventually. It could have been even worse. Someone who didn't leave; someone who killed us all. She could have slept with Spike." He made a face at that.

"It just seems like such a price to pay for a moment of indiscretion."

Xander shook his head, insistent. "Buffy had to find out. She couldn't just keep having sex and placing the whammy on all those poor unsuspecting guys." He made sure he had Giles' attention. "I'll tell you what killed her. She was all torn up about you, no doubt about it. But what killed her was knowing she could never, ever, have the kind of life she dreamed about. And that's not your fault. But that's why she died. Even if you hadn't slept with her, you would have figured it out sooner or later, and it still would have killed her when she found out. You'd have just had to watch her die."

At the sadness in Giles' eyes, Xander held his arm tightly. "At least you figured it out. At least you had friends to help. Although Willow and I will be having a conversation about why she never clued me in to this escapade." He glared at her.

Giles caught his eye. "I suspect she was trying to keep you safe. And I understand what you are saying, and I appreciate your words, but Buffy's death just seems so wasteful and knowing it could have been so easily avoided makes it hard to bear." They watched as he fought back the tears. Her death still felt like a raw wound within him. Giles doubted he'd ever really stop grieving.

Willow made a tray up with some snacks and they moved back into the living room. Giles and Willow sat on the couch, Willow resting her head on his shoulder, wrapping her left arm around him across his chest. Xander sat on the floor, resting his head on Giles' knee. His arm snaked around Giles' shin, and he hung on as if for dear life. Giles sat there soaking them both in, one hand resting on Willow's arm and the other hand running through Xander's hair, as if to comfort a small child. They sat there talking about the past, talking about Buffy, Xander and Willow speaking of their lives over the last two years. They occasionally closed their eyes, catching a few moments rest before waking again, none of them wanting to waste their time together.

As soon as the sun fell Spike came by. He walked in and saw them all sitting together. He felt a tug of satisfaction inside him that he kept off his face.

"Red, you need to lock your door."

Willow rolled her eyes and gestured at all the blown out windows. Giles smiled. He stood up and walked over to Spike, holding out his hand. "I understand I owe you some thanks."

Spike slowly raised his own hand and clasped Giles'. Giles held Spike's hand, covering it with his other one. "I mean it, Spike, I owe you." He let his hands

drop.

Spike rocked back on his feet. "So, does this mean you're not going to stake me even though my chip's not working?" Xander's eyes widened, somehow he had missed making that connection.

Giles nodded his head. "As long as you don't threaten me and what's mine." He turned to look at Xander and Willow. "Other than that, you have nothing to fear from me. You have saved more people today than you can even imagine."

Spike snorted. "I think I can imagine it. I saw what you did to those demons."

Giles' eyes darkened, filling with pain. He spoke softly. "I never thought I'd get out. I thought I'd spend the rest of my life like that. I mean it Spike, I owe you, you and Willow, more than I can ever repay."

Spike tried to keep his face impassive but Giles saw the effect his words had on the vampire. He returned to the couch. Willow and Xander both resumed their positions, touching him, needing to be near for what little time they had.

Xander spoke up, looking at Spike. "Hey, when did you lose the chip?"

Spike thought. "Soon after the new slayer arrived."

Xander thought about that. His eyes widened again. "So all that time you were still helping us out you could have killed us?"

Spike nodded.

Xander wasn't done. "But, you're still feeding on people?"

Spike nodded again.

Xander looked up at Giles. "And this is okay with you?"

Giles looked at Xander. "I owe him my life. I owe him yours and Willow's and over time, the lives of thousands of people. And no, him killing people is not all right, nor will it ever be. But I won't kill him." He looked at Spike. "Although, I would suggest you leave town, because there is still a slayer here, and it will only be a matter of time before she runs across you feeding, and you do not have my permission to kill her, or her watcher."

Spike scowled. "Yeah, well, you better give me a list of everyone I can't kill so I can keep track." His voice was rich with sarcasm. "Some bloody thanks this

is." He looked at Willow. "Besides I'm gonna go back with Willow, back to England."

Willow shook her head. "I won't be going back. Giles is pretty sure that I'm going to be kicked out." She laughed. "Besides I hated it anyway. I never did quite fit the mode. I mean, I was there to learn how to fight evil and my two closest friends besides Xander were a vampire and a rogue watcher." She smiled ruefully. "I guess I'll be staying right here." She looked at Spike. "And I want you to stay, I just don't want you to kill anybody."

Spike gaped at her and then rolled his eyes, letting out an exasperated breath. "Sure thing, luv. Anything for this group." He grimaced as the thought raced through his head that that statement was truer than he wished it was. "I'll be on my way, then." He looked at Giles and Giles looked back. Spike just nodded his head, turned and left.

Xander turned to Giles. "Can I stake him?"

Giles just laughed and ruffled Xander's hair. Xander sighed, guessing the answer.

Giles knew that Mary and the team would soon be there. He had words he had to say. "I just want you both to know how much I love you. I never said that to any of you, and I'm sorry. You both have always meant so much to me, and you both made my days richer with your laughter and friendship. I have been proud to know both of you and to have been a part of your lives."

Willow lifted her head. "Stop talking like you're going to be dead soon. I hate it. Oh, Giles...." She started to cry again and put her head back on his shoulder. Xander tightened his grip on Giles' leg, too overcome with the power of Giles' words and his own grief to respond. He didn't need to say anything. Giles knew how he felt, how they both felt.

The door opened. Willow still hadn't locked it. Mary stood there holding a briefcase. She looked at Giles. She moved out of the way and four men flowed around her and took up a defensive position in the room. Mary walked over to the couch, standing in front of Giles. She smiled tightly.

"Rupert, it's good to see you. I wish the circumstances were different."

He nodded. "It's good to see you too. I appreciate you intervening on my behalf." He noted the briefcase. He touched Xander's head. "Xander, she needs to sit next to me for a minute, would you mind moving?"

Xander rose, nervous. He walked around one of the men and stood behind

the couch, placing his hands on Giles' shoulders. Giles reached back and patted one of Xander's hands, his presence behind him reassuring. Willow sat back a little, not sure of what was going to happen. She watched Mary as she sat down and opened up her briefcase removing a small box. When she opened the box Willow flinched. Xander spoke up. "What the hell are you doing with that?" It was a syringe and a vial of fluid.

Giles started to roll up his sleeve. "Xander, I agreed to this. Please don't interfere."

"What is it?"

"It's a sedative. They don't want me conscious while they transport me."

Willow protested. "But you're fine." She looked at Mary. "Can't you feel it? Can't you tell he's fine?" She glared at the other woman.

Mary looked back at her, sadness on her face. "Willow, it's the only way they'd let me bring him in alive."

Giles patted Willow's knee. "It's all right." She sat there, angry on his behalf, hating the Council now more than ever.

Mary slipped the needle into Giles' vein. Xander tightened his grip on Giles' shoulders. He held on tight until he felt Giles start to slump. He helped Willow lay him down. Two of the men left returning with a stretcher. Xander helped them move Giles.

Willow and Xander stood side by side as the men carried Giles out to the van. Xander put his arm around Willow pulling her close, her arm reaching around to hold him as well. Tears were falling down both of their faces. Willow stopped Mary before she left. "Mary, will you let me know how he is?"

Mary stopped, letting the men know she needed five minutes.

"Willow, I understand that Giles was important to you, but your behavior was inexcusable."

Willow's face tightened. "I don't agree. I love him. If I hadn't kept in touch with him, he'd still be out there. Instead he's back and he's okay. You shouldn't even be taking him. He belongs here with us."

Mary shook her head. "We don't know that he's okay. There could be a relapse; there could be residual damage. We have to be sure. You potentially brought a great evil to this place, putting everyone at risk."

Willow knew that was true but she shook her head. "I'd do it again, in a heartbeat, for Giles, for anyone I loved."

Xander spoke. "Why are you giving her a hard time? She figured it out. She broke the curse. She brought Giles back. She..." he gestured with his thumb at Willow. "She, a student, figured it out, with help from a vampire. None of you guys figured it out. She did." His anger slammed into Mary.

"I understand that Willow found out something important. It's why she is only to be expelled." She looked at Willow. "You understand that the Council, if it chose, could have found a harsher retribution for your betrayal?"

Willow nodded. Xander moved as if to speak again and Willow shook her head at him. He frowned but stayed silent. Mary moved as if to leave. She thought of one last thing. "Willow, may I have the spell?"

Willow moved out of the shelter of Xander's arm and walked over to the coffee table. She picked up the piece of paper and handed it to Mary. Mary looked at it and her eyes widened. "This, this is the spell?"

Willow nodded. "After sex the slayer and her partner just need to say that. That's all. If the slayer is dead someone with magic can speak on her behalf. I said it with Giles." Willow's voice caught, sadness washing over her anew at all the wasted lives.

"How did you find it? Who had it?"

Anger filled Willow. She got very close to Mary. "Spike got it. He got it from one of your own watchers." Willow watched as a look of horror crossed Mary's face.

"Who?"

"Spike didn't tell me. I didn't ask."

Mary thought of the news she had been brought a few days ago. A watcher found dead in a bar, his neck snapped. Sadness swept through her, this betrayal feeling like the worst she'd ever known. Willow saw the pain in Mary's eyes. Willow spoke softly. "Just so you understand. Even if you weren't kicking me out, I'd never go back."

Mary nodded. Willow repeated her question from a few minutes ago. "Will you let me know how he is?"

Mary looked at her for a while. She looked down at the floor and then back up at Willow. "I will, but understand I do it for Rupert, out of his friendship for you, because he would wish it. I do not do for you. You have no right to ask anything of a watcher anymore." She smiled to soften her harsh words. "That needed to be said, I had to be able to say I spoke those words. Now understand this as well, I'm grateful to you Willow Rosenberg. More grateful than I can say, and I am sorry to the bottom of my heart. Please believe me when I say I will make sure he is cared for."

Willow's eyes glistened with tears again, her breath catching on a sob. Xander put his arm around her again and she moved in closely. They watched as Mary walked out to the van. They watched the van as it turned and started on its journey to return Giles to his homeland, back to the halls that had made him a watcher, and that had helped shape the man they had grown to love so much. They watched as the Council, who years ago had sent him to them, had sent him to be a part of their lives, they watched as it took him back.

The End