

Soul Mates 1

Quentin Travers replaced the phone into its cradle slowly, stunned at the news he had just heard. He couldn't believe that she was dead, she had somehow seemed so invincible, outliving most slayers by years. She had aggravated him beyond belief but he knew her worth, and knew the world was poorer and certainly less safe with her passage. He wasn't even sure if another slayer would be called. There was no precedence for a slayer dying twice. If one wasn't called, that only left Faith, locked up in a Los Angeles prison, still potentially a rogue. Who would defend against the Hellmouth now?

Quentin thought about Buffy. God, she'd been a piece of work. He recalled his last visit to Sunnydale, and how she had completely turned the tables on him. Even through his humiliation, he could see how magnificent she was and he had begun to understand on that day why Rupert had fallen under her spell. His eyebrows rose at the thought that between the two of them and the rest of their ragtag team, they had killed a god. He grudgingly had to admit that Rupert and Buffy had probably been the best slayer/watcher team on record. He might not have liked the way they both threw convention to the wind, and completely disregarded centuries of dogma, but he was not blind to their ultimate effectiveness.

He wondered how much of that had been Buffy, and how much of it had been Rupert. If there were a new slayer, would Rupert be able to repeat history and help create another unbeatable slayer? Would it be fair to ask it of him? He knew Rupert was hurting; he had not been able to find words to comfort the man. In spite of his concern for Rupert, it was overshadowed by his concern for the world. He repeated the thought, who would protect the world against the Hellmouth, now that Buffy was gone?

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Giles had never felt so weary. He didn't know a person could be this weary and still be alive. A part of him wished he wasn't. A part of him felt that he should have died with her, or in her place. The world needed her alive, he needed her alive. Without her, he was empty and useless. They had buried her yesterday. He had been saddened by how few people were there, considering she had laid herself open to death countless of times for every person in Sunnydale, every person in the world, for that matter. And yet, so few had come to grieve. Those that were there had been inconsolable. There was nothing they could say to each other to make it better, to make any of it all right. The depth of her loss left a galaxy sized hole in their hearts, their minds, and their future. They had all quietly left after the coffin was lowered

into the ground. Giles had been unable, still, to contact Hank Summers and felt his confusion once again as to what to do with Dawn. He had sent her home with Tara and Willow at her request. He felt he owed it to Buffy to take care of her, he was aware she might still be in danger. He wasn't sure if all the Byzantium Knights had been killed, or if there were more who might still come after her. He knew he had no legal rights to her, and he could imagine the reaction if he simply took her home to live with him. She'd be taken away in no time, and put in foster care, and the thought of Dawn dealing with that was unacceptable.

He had taken care of all the funeral arrangements, locking himself away behind the chores and decision-making that had to be done. Now the tasks were through, including the call to the Watcher's Council, and as he sat on the couch he felt empty, barren, his eyes hot and dry. God, he wanted her back. He wanted her back so badly he ached in every bone in his body. There was a knock on his door, and his heart cruelly leaped at the thought that it might be her. He drew in a rasping breath and went to answer it. Spike stood there, his eyes reddened, looking paler than he usually did. Giles invited him in without hesitation. He didn't care if Spike was planning on killing him, a part of him would welcome it. Spike came in and threw himself on the opposite end of the couch from Giles, closing his eyes.

The minutes passed, the two of them taking an odd comfort from the other's presence. Spike opened his eyes, "We have to get her back." Giles turned his head to look at Spike, too weary to respond. Spike continued, "We have to find a resurrection spell, or something to bring her back. We can do the one Dawn tried."

Giles spoke, "There isn't one, not one that would bring her back whole."

"How do you know? Have you even looked?"

Giles gestured to his apartment, and Spike took a look around for the first time since he had arrived. There were books everywhere. Not a single book was still on the shelf. They lay in haphazard piles across the living room, in piles, the table littered with open tomes.

"How about the books at the Shop?" Spike spoke in insistent tones.

Giles shook his head wearily. "Nothing."

"How about Angel, have you asked him?"

Giles didn't respond. He had thought about calling Angel but just the thought made him sick to his stomach. He knew it wasn't rational, nothing he was

feeling was rational, but he thought he would rather have Buffy be dead than be alive thanks to Angel. Losing Buffy had destroyed his ability to lock any of his feelings away. Just the thought that Angel had slept with her, kissed her, touched her body, and been the recipient of such love from her made him want to put a stake through Angel's heart. He hated that it made him feel that Buffy had somehow been more Angel's than his.

Spike watched Giles, watching the emotions playing over his face. Touched against his will, he stayed silent, guessing the answer. He had spent too much time hating Angel himself to not see it clearly in Giles' face.

"Do you want me to patrol?"

Giles looked at Spike, nodding, "Please." He spoke softly. He had no idea how long they might depend on Spike with Buffy gone, but he knew that Spike was their best bet to keep the demon population under control, Buffy's death now a glowing neon light of welcome to the creatures of the night, lured by the Hellmouth. Spike nodded in response, got up and left.

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After he found out, Angel had immediately left, needing to be alone. He and Buffy had been apart for a long time now, but he had never stopped loving her, and based on her kiss, the evening of her mother's funeral, he believed she still had longed for him as he still longed for her. He had known, in his mind, that he could never touch her again, because of his curse. He was realizing now that somehow, a piece of him had always thought that they would find a way to be together. To know now that he never would be able to touch her again ripped him in half, taking away his hope for any future happiness. Part of him recognized that having that dream had kept him moving forward, had kept him alive, putting one foot in front of the other, when his burden felt too heavy to bear.

He had briefly thought about calling Giles. He missed, still, the friendship they had developed before Angelus had returned. Angel knew that he had relinquished all rights to that friendship when the demon inside him had come fully alive, relishing in the dark torture of Giles and all that he held dear. Giles had tolerated him being around, barely, when he returned, soul intact, for Buffy's sake, but the friendship had been lost. Angel respected Giles more than anyone he knew. Even Angelus respected him. Angel hated him a little too, that he had gotten to be a part of Buffy's life, when he, Angel, could not. He couldn't believe she was dead. If Willow hadn't come down herself, and if he hadn't seen her face, he would not believe it. But, Willow could not be that cruel, to make a jest like that. There had to be a way.....he pushed the forbidden thought away. It came back, haunting him. There had to be a way

to bring her back. He stood in the night, thinking hard, letting thoughts and ideas run through his head, dismissing most of them immediately. He looked up, a determined look on his face and he started to stride to the karaoke bar, wanting to talk with The Host.

He pushed the door to the bar open, looking for and then locating his green friend. He was up front, watching a very buxom blond belt out Hello Dolly from the stage. Angel walked up to him, The Host saw him, and gestured him to take a seat, shushing him with a finger over his lips. Angel impatiently sat there waiting for the song to be over. The woman came up to The Host and he spoke with her for a few minutes, a look of intense concentration on her face as she took in his words. She nodded her head contemplatively and swung off. The Host turned his attention to Angel.

"I heard, I'm sorry."

"How the hell did you hear it already? I just found out."

"News like that travels fast."

"How do I get her back?" Angel asked quickly, before he could think better of the words he spoke. The Host raised his eyebrows, staring at Angel.

"Go sing. Let me see what I see."

Angel sighed, reaching for the song list. He picked a Barry Manilow song, and went up on stage to sing it, badly. The Host winced, both at the painful tones wafting his way and at what he saw and would need to say. Angel put the microphone away and walked back to the table demanding an answer.

"You can't bring her back." Angel's mouth tightened, and he started to speak. The Host spoke first. "Wait, I didn't say she couldn't come back, I said, you, can't bring her back."

"I don't understand."

The Host paused. "I saw a possible future, one with the slayer back, but someone else brought her back, not you."

"Who."

"I'm not sure. I just saw images. I saw a lot of books, green eyes and glasses. I saw red roses." He stopped, looking perplexed, "and I saw the Tower of London. Does that mean something to you?"

Angel closed his eyes. "Yes."

"But, I'm guessing this isn't a good thing?"

"No, it's not that, he was her Watcher. It's just....." Angel didn't complete his sentence, sick at heart, his eyes filled with the vision of Buffy back alive, thanking Giles, being grateful to Giles, wanting to show just how grateful she was. Angel shook his head, banishing the vision from his head. "I have to think."

"What's to think about? Call him, have him come down, have him sing for me." Without responding Angel stood up quickly, knocking his chair down and sped from the bar. He needed to feel the night air around him.

The Host watched him leave, knowing full well what Angel was thinking. Honestly, he liked the guy, but could he be more of a drama queen? He wondered if Angel would call this Watcher. He figured Angel would get around to it after some serious brooding. He wasn't a bad guy. He felt back to what he had seen while Angel had been singing. He felt a tug, a connection with this Watcher that made no sense. He knew that the Watcher had to be told. He was already running out of time. He reached for his cell phone and started to make a few calls.

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Giles had not moved from the couch. He didn't even make the effort to drink; he knew there wasn't enough liquor in the world to make a difference. The phone rang, and he ignored it. It rang six times and then the answering machine took over. A voice he didn't recognize spoke, "Watcher, I need to speak with you. I...", there was a pause, "this is a hard message to leave on an answering machine, where the hell are you?" Another pause ensued, and the answering machine thinking its job was done clicked off. The phone started to ring again, the answering machine once again picking up after the sixth ring. "It's about the slayer, there might be a chance, probably extremely remote, that there may be a way to fix this. Well, call me at..." Giles didn't know he could move so fast. He picked the phone up, "Hello, I'm here, what do you mean, fix this?"

"Ah, you are there. Allow me to introduce myself, I am The Host...."

"Never mind that, what did you mean?"

"I can't tell you if you don't let me speak."

"I'm sorry," Giles clenched his teeth so tightly he was surprised he didn't

break a tooth. "Pray continue."

"Thank you." There was a pause. Giles sat there, holding the phone so tightly his hand hurt, wanting to reach inside the receiver and throttle his caller. He remained silent. "Yes, well, again, I am The Host. I run a karaoke bar in Los Angeles, it is a club for members only, with a mostly demon clientèle. Perhaps Angel has mentioned it?"

"No."

"Have you heard from Angel recently?"

"No."

"Sounds like you know Angel well, you both have a gift for witty repartee." The Host sighed, guessing his humor was falling on deaf ears. "He came in earlier after he had received the news about the Slayer. He didn't take it well. What was her name, by the way?"

"Buffy."

"Yes, well, as much as I hate to talk about myself..." the Host grinned at that, god, he broke himself up. "I do a certain kind of fortune telling in my line of business. You get up and sing, and I can tell your future, or part of it, or one of several."

Giles was in torment waiting for this pillock to get to his point. He couldn't resist prompting, "And...?"

"So, I saw something tonight, a possible future that contained Buffy, back from the grave, so to speak." He continued in a droll tone, "Angel wasn't exactly thrilled to find out that you were the one, in that possible future who brought her back."

"I.....I brought....I was able to bring her back? How.....what did I do....?" Giles stammered, overcome at the mere possibility, his body energized beyond belief.

"So, I figure I'd give you a call." The Host continued, ignoring Giles' stuttered questions. "I'm thinking Angel will call you sooner or later but time is running out. A person's essence starts to deteriorate within days. I can't tell you anything else unless you come down here and sing for me."

Giles had a bizarre thought that this was some cruel practical joke. Even in the midst of his surreal existence, the thought of singing in a karaoke bar in

an attempt to bring Buffy back from beyond the grave seemed too much to believe. He sat there holding the phone.

The Host looked at the phone tapping it, "Hello? Anybody there?"

That got a reaction. Giles needed so desperately to believe in something, even something as bizarre as this. "Where are you? Can I come now?"

"No, we're closed now, I just finally tracked you down. Believe it or not, you're a hard man to find. I had to pull in a lot of favors tonight."

"Why did you call? Not that I'm not grateful, but why did you bother? What does any of this have to do with you?"

"Well, the truth of it is that I'm just a big softie, and I love happy endings."

Giles had no response to that. He smiled a small smile, and then his face hardened when he realized that Angel hadn't called him to tell him that there was a chance to bring Buffy back. He wondered if their places had been reversed if he would have called Angel. He pushed that thought away for the moment. "When do you open tomorrow?"

"8:00 PM."

"How do I get there?"

Giles wrote down the instructions. "I'll be there." He hung up the phone. He knew he shouldn't hope too much but he couldn't help it. He realized he was hungry and he moved into the kitchen to make himself a sandwich. He couldn't remember the last real meal he'd eaten. He deliberated whether he should tell the rest of the gang about this possibility, however remote, and decided that he must. They had a right to be a part of this. Besides, he wanted them with him when he found out. He reached for the phone and in between mouthfuls he called Willow and Xander, asking them to meet at his apartment at 6:00 PM tomorrow. Giles wondered if he could get a message to Spike and decided he would leave a message for him on his door the next evening. He stepped lightly up the stairs, and despite the adrenaline racing through his body, fell quickly and deeply asleep for the first time since Buffy had died.

End Part 1

The gang assembled at Giles' apartment, the level of excitement escalating with the arrival of each party. They had all slept well, just the thought of doing something bringing a needed direction. Dawn walked over to Giles and wrapped her arms around him and started to cry. He hugged her in return, patting her back, just letting her cry. "Is it possible?" She struggled to speak between her sobbing breaths. "Can we really get her back? Will she be normal?"

"I don't know, Dawn. I don't know anything except what I have told you. That is why we have to go down to Los Angeles, to see if there is anything we can do, and what the risks are."

Xander spoke up, "I don't care what the risks are; I'll do anything it takes to get Buffy back." He glared defiantly at the group.

Giles smiled at him, "I know you would, we all would. I didn't mean risks to us. I meant risks to Buffy. She wouldn't want to come back if it meant she were less than whole, or less than human. We need more information, and I haven't found anything in my books. I need to talk with this Host person."

The gang looked around his apartment, noticing, as Spike had last night, that it looked like a hurricane had gone through it. They realized that he must have been researching non-stop since Buffy died to have gone through all those books. They all turned to look at Giles. Willow walked over to him, and kissed him on the cheek. "Buffy was...we all are, so lucky to have you as a part of our lives." She looked at him lovingly. He looked down, not trusting to speak, knowing his voice would betray the rush of emotion her words had evoked in him. He shifted his feet, and then looked up, flashing her a smile, sharing it with them all.

"Let's go." They were taking Xander's van, as Giles' car wouldn't accommodate them all. Giles taped a message for Spike on the door in case he came by and they left.

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They followed the directions and found the bar. They walked to the entrance, entering. They let their eyes adjust to the low light, and all of them raised their eyebrows at the assorted customers ranged around the seats and tables. Demons of every size and shape, interspersed with a few humans were talking, eating, drinking, and even more amazingly, not fighting. Giles led them to an empty table half way up to the stage. He wasn't sure what to do now; he realized he had no idea who he was looking for. A waiter came over and took their drink order. He started to leave to get their drinks. Giles

motioned him back. "Where can I find The Host?" he inquired.

The waiter looked around and pointed at a man with his back towards them in a white suit. "That's him." Waiting to see if anything more was required he looked at Giles. Giles thanked him, and he left.

Giles wanted a drink before he spoke with The Host. He actually felt like he wanted to throw up. Now that they were here he was deathly afraid that they would find that there was no way to get Buffy back, and that this whole trip, and the hope he had been experiencing had been for nothing. Suddenly, he saw Willow and Tara's eyes widen, looking at something over his shoulder. "Welcome, I'm your Host. Always glad to welcome a new face, especially if you're in the mood to spend money."

Giles looked over his shoulder and saw a green demon, with red eyes and horns, wearing a gleaming white suit. He couldn't stop the grin that formed on his face. The Host looked at Giles, and saw the green eyes he had seen in the vision. The two of them looked at each other for a moment. "You're the Watcher, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"I didn't realize you would be bringing your family, couldn't get a babysitter?"

Giles swept all the young people sitting with him at the table with his eyes, and looked back at The Host. "They belong here, with me, with Buffy."

The Host heard the finality in the statement and accepted it. "Let me get a song menu for you." He left the table and headed over to the stage. He returned in a moment and handed it to Giles. "The song you choose is important. It needs to be a song you like, that means something to you. It doesn't have to have anything to do with why you're here." Giles nodded, wondering if he would know anything on the list. The Host spoke up again, addressing the entire table, "Someone get your drink orders already, everybody happy?" The five young people at the table all nodded their heads, like puppets on a string. He grinned, "Yes, well good. I'll be back to check on you later."

Giles started running his eyes down the list. He relaxed when he realized there were multiple songs he recognized. He would be perfectly happy singing several of them. Xander finally spoke up, "So, what song are you going to inflict on us, G-man?"

"Don't call me that, please."

"Sorry, c'mon, give it up, what song?"

"I haven't quite decided."

"Let me see the list." Giles handed it over to him. Their drinks arrived, and they all had a sip of their beverage. Xander made an unpleasant noise as he reviewed the list. "Sheesh, what a list. Don't they have real music? This stuff is so old."

Giles rolled his eyes at his comment. The Host came by and snagged the list out of Xander's hands. "Tut, tut, tut, that list is not for you." He handed it back to Giles. "Have you decided?" Giles pointed to one of the songs. "Are you ready?" The Host asked, pointing to the empty stage. Giles felt anything but ready, but he stood, looking at the assorted people at the table. They really were his family.

Xander quipped, "Hey, Giles, go break a leg." Giles smiled and headed for the stage.

Willow and Tara grinned at each other. They loved to listen to Giles' voice and they were looking forward to it, despite the macabre circumstances. Xander was preparing himself for deep cringing and Dawn looked ready to cry. Willow reached over and took her hand, and Dawn squeezed tightly. The music started and Giles started to sing, he closed his eyes, putting all his heart into the song. It was an old Beatles' song, Something in the Way She Moves. He had always loved it, it had in fact, often made him think of Buffy, and his mind was full of her as he sang. Conversation died away in the bar as his voice filled the darkness. Even Xander had to admit he was pretty good. The song came to an end, and Giles pulled the microphone away from his face. The bar erupted into applause and a nervous grin flashed across his face. He made as if to leave the stage when The Host came up and motioned him to stay.

"Not so fast, here....sing this one." He gave a number to the DJ, and moved away. Giles watched to see what was coming up. It was Yesterday, again by the Beatles. He had to fight away the tears and push past the lump in his throat to start singing. When he was done, all his friends were in tears. Giles moved again to leave, but The Host had another song starting. Giles looked at the Host, who gestured at the box. Giles looked at the lyrics and started to sing again. He was actually starting to enjoy himself. He loved to sing, and rarely got the opportunity. The Host had him sing 3 more songs before he let him get off the stage. His last song was met with thunderous applause, especially from his table.

Giles went and sat down, Willow and Tara both looking at him dreamily. Xander looked at them and snorted, reaching over to swat Giles' arm. "Good

job G-man." At a look from Giles, "Yeah, I know, don't call you that." He grinned, and Giles grinned back.

The Host came up to the table and everyone nervously sat up straight, panicked that he might dash their hopes. He sat down with them, staring at Giles, not saying anything at first. Finally, "Hmmmm..."

Giles leaned towards him, asking him, "What did you see?"

"I'm thinking."

"Why did you have me sing so many songs?"

"Honestly? Because you have a nice voice and it kept people who don't off the stage." He looked at Giles and saw the hardening in his eyes. "Kidding.... does no one have a sense of humor anymore?"

Giles didn't look appeased. "All right, I just kept getting flashes, and I was hoping that with more singing I could get enough of them to put a picture together that made sense."

"And did you?"

"Something's still missing." The Host looked around the table, taking his time, looking at them all, assessing them. His eyes finally rested on Dawn. She stared back, her eyes wide, feeling nervous at his scrutiny. Giles cleared his throat. The Host looked back at Giles. "She has something to do with it, but I don't know what. The two of you need to do a duet." Dawn gasped, petrified at the thought. She stared at Giles, begging him to come up with a different solution.

Xander laughed, "C'mon Dawn, what happened to the 'I'll do anything to get Buffy back' oath we all took back at Giles' house?"

Dawn looked sheepish and spoke softly, "What should we sing? Can you pick something where you do most of the singing?" Her eyes were pleading.

Giles picked up the song list again looking for duets, something that would be easy for Dawn to sing. He started to grin, and held the list out to Dawn, showing her a selection from My Fair Lady. She grinned back and nodded her head. Giles, Buffy and Dawn had spent an evening watching My Fair Lady a couple of weeks before Buffy died. Buffy had wanted to give Dawn a normal night. They'd all had more fun than anticipated. The three of them had sung along with all the songs but for this one song Dawn and Buffy had gotten quite silly, throwing grapes in their mouths and trying to sing along with

Audrey Hepburn, who sang part of the song with her mouth full of marbles.

Giles took her hand and walked with her up to the stage. The music started and the two of them started singing *The Rain in Spain*, Dawn laughing as she couldn't keep up with the monitor, still tightly clasping Giles hand. After the song ended, they both took a theatrical bow, and smiled at each other. Suddenly, Giles gasped; he held her hand more tightly and raised it chest level. He stared at their hands clasped, as if looking for the answers to the universe there. Dawn held her breath, watching him, trusting him. Giles looked down at Dawn, "It's you." He looked for The Host, and catching his eyes, said, "It's her, isn't it?"

The Host nodded his head and added, "And it's you as well. The two of you."

Giles smiled at Dawn, still holding her hand, his eyes bright. He looked down at The Host again. "There's a way this can happen, isn't there?"

The Host nodded again, "Yes, I think there is." Giles escorted Dawn back to the table and waited for The Host to join them.

Once seated, he motioned for a waiter and ordered a drink. Everyone at the table shifted impatiently. He so enjoyed the limelight. He grinned, savoring the moment, and then began speaking. "Okay, I don't have the full picture, but I may have enough pieces for you to figure out the rest. One, Buffy saying that they made..." he looked at Dawn, "Dawn, right?" She nodded. He continued, "Dawn out of her, that she was a part of her. Two, Dawn, I don't want to know the details, please, but you once weren't there, but now you are, made flesh. Three, I saw a guy with cheese, not sure what that was about, but it might be important. Four," he looked at Willow and Tara, "two spells, a symbol that looks like this." He drew it on a napkin and handed it to Willow. He didn't release it yet. "Witches?" Willow and Tara both nodded. He released the napkin. "Five, the Powers That Be will want a sacrifice, you'll need to have a chat with them. I kept seeing bottles of peroxide, and bad poetry." At their glances he stated, "Hey, I just call them as I see them. Six," he looked at Giles, "I saw you, in a tuxedo, standing next to Buffy, in a wedding dress, getting married, then holding a small child. Congratulations. Have a cigar, it's a boy." He reached into his inside jacket pocket and actually pulled out a cigar, handing it to Giles. He laughed at the completely confused look on Giles' face, and continued, "Seven," he looked at Xander and Anya, "The Watcher was right, you all do belong here. The two of you are anchors, you'll need to be present to keep Dawn and the Watcher safe."

He paused for a moment. "I'll be honest with you. I saw several possible futures. She doesn't come back in most of them; the odds are against you. You..." he looked straight at Giles, "died in a few. But it could happen, if

everything goes just right."

Anya spoke up, looking at The Host, "How can she come back? Her body is buried in the ground. I don't understand."

The Host nodded his head, "Good question, and normally my response would be that I have no earthly idea. But you see that girl over there?" He pointed his chin in Dawn's direction, and Anya nodded her head. "A piece of her is right there." He swung his head to look at Giles, "and a big piece of her is in him. All of you have pieces of her in you but these two are the key." He stood. "Boy, that wore me out, I hate working this hard so early in the evening." He smiled to take the sting out of his words. "Hey, Watcher, sing me one more song?"

Giles smiled, willing to do anything for this demon that had called him for no reason, offering his heart back to him. "It's Giles. Call me Giles. And I'll sing you any song you want."

##

The drive back to Sunnydale was quiet as everyone thought about the inscrutable information they had been given. Finally Xander spoke, "So, I'm guessing major research mode, right?"

"Quite." Giles responded. "Willow, Tara, did that symbol he drew look familiar to you? It seemed to ring a bell but I can't bring it to mind." Willow and Tara shook their heads. They pulled up to Giles' place and saw Spike standing there. They poured out of the car and they all swept into Giles' apartment. "Xander, maybe you can fill Spike in, while the girls and I start pouring through these books." Xander assented and sat Spike down to fill him in on the evening's events. Giles and the four girls began a systematic search through Giles' private library.

"A sacrifice? What do you mean a bloody sacrifice?" Spike turned towards Giles. "What did he mean by that? Bleeding peroxide bottles, he means me, right? And what did he mean by the bad poetry crack?"

Giles shifted closer to Spike, looking at him. "Yes, I assume he did mean you. I don't know why you, or what he meant by sacrifice. Somehow you have to contact the Powers That Be and ask them."

"Bloody perfect. How the hell am I supposed to do that?"

"I don't know. We have a lot to research and that is only one piece of the puzzle."

Spike turned to Xander, "Well, go ahead, and tell me the rest of this bleeding fairy tale." Xander resumed his synopsis of the night's events. Once he was finished, the group was silent, feeling the enormity of their task.

"Willow," Giles asked, "can you get on line and put that symbol in and see what comes up?" Willow nodded her head. Giles noted the time, nodding towards the door. "We should call it a night. Dawn you have school tomorrow, right?" Dawn nodded. "Do you want to stay with Willow and Tara again?"

Dawn swallowed, "Can I stay here with you?"

He smiled, "Tell you what, let me pack a few things, and I'll come stay at your house, all right? That way you can sleep in your own room." Dawn nodded.

Anya reached for Xander's hand. "C'mon, let's go home, now that you're happy again, I want to have sex." Xander blushed, rolling his eyes, but stood quickly, taking her hand, pushing her out the door.

Tara and Willow smiled and got up to leave as well. Willow went over to Giles and gave him a hug. She looked up at him, a wicked twinkle in her eye, "Mr. and Mrs. Giles, hmmm? Can I be bridesmaid?"

Giles looked down at her experiencing an odd mixture of joy and despair, and closed his eyes. "Behave and go home." She looked at him, closely, and wondered why it had never occurred to her before, him and Buffy. Now that the thought was in her head, she couldn't imagine either of them with anyone else. She held out her hand to Tara and the two of them left.

Spike looked at Dawn, "Hey Niblet, give us a moment, would you?" Dawn moved away, moving into the kitchen to find a snack. Giles looked at Spike, waiting to see what he wanted.

"Giles, I know I talk all bad, but..." He paused, and Giles' eyes softened as he realized where Spike was going. Spike continued, "I'll do whatever it takes." He looked up briefly to see Giles' response.

Giles smiled at him. "Spike, I never doubted it. I know you loved her."

Spike bowed his head, feeling the warmth and affirmation of Giles' words flow over him. "Yeah, well, just so you know." He spoke gruffly to hide his feelings. "I'll see you tomorrow night then."

"Yes, tomorrow night. Goodnight Spike." He watched Spike leave the apartment. "Dawn, I'm just going to pack a few things."

"All right," or at least a close approximation of that came from the young girl, her mouth full of crackers. He grinned and ran up the stairs.

End Part 2

Soul Mates 3

By noon, they were all frustrated. They were no closer to figuring out what spell would work. Willow's Internet search had provided them with too much information. The symbol was ubiquitous. It crossed cultures, religions, had multiple definitions, some seemingly contradictory to others.

Giles leaned back in his chair feeling defeated. Xander sprang up out of his chair, "Okay, granted the spell search hasn't gone well, but maybe we could start somewhere else." The group looked at him. He swallowed, "Okay, me and my big mouth. Well, what else did green and horny say?"

Willow started to recap. "Well, the monks made Dawn out of Buffy, right? So, that's where The Host was going, right? We make Buffy out of Dawn somehow." Everyone looked at her. She blushed, "Oh, I guess we knew that.....looking for a spell, I get it."

Xander tried again, "I get the Dawn part, I mean, not get it, but I can follow along. I get the spell part and where you two fit in." He nodded at Tara and Willow. "I don't even want to think about the cheese." He shivered at the thought. He, Giles and Willow exchanged glances. "So, that leaves Spike, hopefully falling on a stake somewhere at the request of the Powers That Be, and you." He stopped, turning to Giles. "Explain that to me, please. What was with the wedding, and the cigar? That part I don't get at all, except the part that I get, which I don't want to get, because that can't be what he meant, right?"

Giles looked darkly at Xander, but didn't respond. How could he? The thought of having his secret longings for Buffy brought into the light of day made him feel naked and exposed. He had hidden those feelings away so deeply, never in his wildest dreams expecting them to come true. Being taunted, upon her death, at the possibility was like pouring alcohol on a raw wound. He was afraid if he spoke of it that all his friends would see the truth, see his need, his desires. He didn't understand what the vision meant, just that he wanted it to come true with a vengeance.

Anya looked at Xander, exasperated; annoyed that he still carried a thing for

Buffy. Well, not a real thing, like he had for her, but still a thing. "That's the easiest to figure out." Everyone turned to her, waiting to hear her explanation. "I mean, come on, why would Buffy want to come back? Her life totally sucked." At the amazed glances she received from her comments, she continued, warming to her subject, "Well, it did. She had no love life, the only guy in love with her was a neutered blood-sucking vampire, her mom just died, she had a make-believe sister who should be in juvenile hall, her life was stressing her out so much she got catatonic, and had the two of you..." motioning to Giles, "fighting like cats and dogs. She'd been the slayer for six years and was pretty sick of it. She felt like everything she loved was taken away from her, and I can't even remember the last time she smiled. She was actually getting to be quite a party pooper." She grinned, her smile inappropriate to the subject matter. But she liked that phrase and was pleased to have had the opportunity to use it in a sentence. She softly mouthed it to herself, "party pooper, party pooper."

Giles sat back in his chair, stunned. He hadn't even thought as to whether Buffy would want to come back. She had been miserable. This whole thing with Dawn, and Glory, coming after Riley and her mother's death, had been overwhelming for her. She had looked so peaceful lying there, after her fall. She had looked more peaceful than she had looked in months, other than that one silly night at her house watching videos. Was this the right thing to do? Would she welcome the opportunity to come back, or be angry that he had imposed on her well-deserved rest? He ran his hand through his hair, uncomfortable with his thoughts.

Xander finally spoke, "Thanks for sharing, An, but you haven't clarified the whole Giles-Buffy getting married and having a baby thing. I thought that's where you were going.

" Anya lifted her chin, "It's so obvious. She wouldn't come back for the life she left, but she'd come back for more. She'd come back if she thought it was for love, and a family. She'd come back if she knew that was going to happen, because she wanted it so much."

Giles stared at her again. "If that's the case, why couldn't Angel bring her back, she...."

"Oh please, why would she come back for him? Mr I-love-you-but-I-can't-have-sex-with-you-so-let's-be-together-and-make-us-and-everyone-around-us-miserable? Don't be ridiculous." Giles jaw tightened. When Anya spoke to him in that tone of voice it always annoyed him. He took a deep breath letting the sensation pass.

Xander spoke again, "An, again, why Giles? I mean, they weren't ever...." His

mouth dropped and he turned his head to look at Giles, "I mean, you weren't, were you?"

Giles shook his head no. Xander relaxed. "So, An? Spill?"

Anya looked at Giles. Despite their ongoing clashing, she had developed a strong affection for him, and wasn't sure how to proceed. She found thoughtfulness akin to walking through a prickly minefield. She sighed. "The two of them belong together, they always have. Giles and Buffy, I mean." She looked at Giles wondering, "I never did understand why you weren't having sex."

Giles looked back at her, astounded. "What...?"

"C'mon Giles, you guys were like butter and toast, pancakes and syrup, meat and potatoes, the earth and the moon." She was still for a moment, looking for more examples.

"Honey, focus please."

She looked at Xander, momentarily annoyed, and frowned. "Fine, my point is that you share that whole destiny thing, neither of you will ever find anyone else. I can see your wife being so okay with you having to dash off to hang with Buffy every time she calls, and Buffy, well, she obviously can't hang on to a man.... any kind of man. You already live for her, everything you do concerns her welfare and well-being. You both already have that 'til death do us part' thing down pat. Who else could she trust to take care of her and her children? Who could possibly do a better job than you? She trusts you more than all of us put together. She relied on you, looked to you." Anya stopped, out of words.

Giles felt momentarily paralyzed. Every eye was on him, once Anya stopped talking. He took his glasses off, pulling out his handkerchief to clean them, needing a focus. His mind was in chaos. He replaced his glasses and looked at the group. "Buffy never expressed or showed any feelings of.... a romantic nature towards me. Why would you think she would want to share those things with me?" The fact that he didn't dispute how he might feel was not lost on the group. No one knew quite how to respond, knowing that Giles never felt comfortable discussing any of his feelings in public, let alone ones like this.

Willow got up, and walked over to him, pulling up a chair to sit right next to him. "Giles? Are you...were you in love with Buffy?" Giles' eyes flickered up to hers, and then back down. He took his glasses off and threw them on the table and covered his face with his hands trying to hide the tears that had

formed in his eyes at her question. "Giles, I would never ask this, but I think it's important. We need to understand what the vision means." Her voice was filled with compassion for the man. She was pretty sure she knew what the answer was and her sorrow for the depth of his loss shook her. Giles took his hands away, and looked at Willow, and then at all of them in turn. They were all taken aback at the look in his eyes, at the unshed tears there, and they saw the answer clearly written on his face.

"Yes, I was in love with her. I have been, for a long time. I..." he couldn't say anymore. Unbidden, a sob tore loose. He stood and walked into the back of the shop, needing to pull himself together.

The remainder of the group looked at each other, unshed tears in their own eyes. They all had felt Giles' grief, like a whirlpool, and it had affected them all. Xander took a shaky breath. "Well, I didn't think this could suck anymore than it already does, but I guess I was wrong."

Willow, angry, spoke his name sharply. "Xander."

He looked up and saw the anger in her eyes. "No, Will, I don't mean the Buffy and Giles part, I mean the I'm tired of hurting part. I'm way ready for that to be over. I'm actually strangely okay with the Giles and Buffy part. Although it is mostly just a Giles part unless I missed something."

Giles walked back in, feeling more in control. He overheard the last part of Xander's musings. "No, I don't think you missed something, I don't believe that Buffy had those sorts of feelings for me. At least, I never saw them." He looked at Anya. "I understand the gist of your reasoning Anya, and I know those things were important to Buffy, but I don't believe she ever thought to, or would come back from the grave, to share them with me." He smiled briefly. "Maybe the vision was meant to be more generic. Perhaps it was meant as a symbol that she would fall in love and have the opportunity to have children."

Xander shook his head, "Nope, big guy, I don't buy that. Why would Buffy come back for that? She already had the big hope and it didn't bring her any jollies. Are you sure she didn't drop a few lustful hints your way?"

Giles smiled briefly. "The last conversation Buffy and I had, she threatened to kill me." His eyes closed at the painful memory. He hated that their last moments together had been so hostile. He felt so tired, the joy he had felt last night draining away.

They all sat there, slumped back in their chairs. Anya had gotten up to ring up a sale and moved back to the table rolling her eyes at the sight. "You're not

giving up already are you? Humans have no stamina."

Xander looked at her. "An, you're human now, remember?"

Anya looked disgruntled at this, "Well, parts of me still feel demon-y."

Tara looked up at Anya, "Anya, did any of your revenge spells ever result in people coming back from the dead?"

Heads lifted at that question, and Anya looked thoughtful for a moment, searching back through her years as a vengeance demon. Her face brightened, "Yes, as a matter of fact, about 300 years ago. A woman wanted to bring back her husband's mother, to punish him. He had cheated on her and...."

Tara bravely interrupted, "Do you remember how that was done? Do you know how you did it.?"

Anya frowned in concentration. The group held their breath watching her, willing her to remember. They could see when the light bulb lit. "It was a restoration spell!"

Willow spoke. "You mean like what I did to get Angel's soul back?"

"Yes," Anya replied, "but with a different focus. That spell put a soul back in a living body. This spell puts a living soul back in a dead body, and in that case her body was available. She had just died and hadn't been buried yet. Buffy's body, well....not so available."

Willow suddenly shot out of her chair and ran up the stairs to the loft. She started pulling books off the shelves in a frenzy. Giles went to the foot of the stairs to watch her. She squealed when she found the book she was looking for and headed back down. When Giles saw what she had his brows furrowed. "Willow, how do you even know I have that book?"

Willow blushed. "I saw it when I was looking for...well, another book I'm not supposed to know you have. I was looking for a spell to use on Glory when she hurt Tara." Giles gestured her back to the table and she started flipping through the pages. When she had arrived at her destination she lifted the book up and handed it to Giles. Giles looked down and started reading the spell.

He spoke "Willow." He closed the book, his finger keeping his place, to look at the cover. "Willow, wasn't one of the many definitions of that symbol from the Celtic tradition?"

Willow started looking through all the pages she had printed off when she had done her search. "Yes, according to the Celtic tradition, that symbol means Anam Cara, or soul mate." She looked at him, the answer sliding into place. "Giles, that's you, you must be Buffy's soul mate. That's what it has to mean. Only a soul mate can do this spell. If it's true, and you really are, Buffy will come back, to you, for you."

Anya knocked on the table, getting everyone's attention. "Don't we still need a body?"

Xander grabbed her hand. "You, with the body thing again. I think that's what we have Dawn for. I mean, they made Dawn out of Buffy, so somehow, we just have to figure out how to make Buffy out of Dawn, simple, right?" He shut up.

"No, Xander, you're right." Giles had opened up the spell book again. "Not the simple part, of course, but Dawn is the key." He looked up and saw them gaping at him. "Sorry, no pun intended." He read some more. "Willow, do you still have the Orb of Thessala you used to restore Angel's soul?"

"Yes, I do, I thought I better keep it, well, you know, just in case." She scowled at the thought of Angelus ever being on the loose again.

"You might want to go get it."

She nodded, then looked at Giles, "Do I need to get anything else?....Giles?"

Giles didn't respond. She smiled, seeing he was deep in research mode. She decided to leave him there, relieved to see the pain momentarily off his face. She knew that hadn't been easy for him. She had a pretty good idea that what was coming wouldn't be easy for him either. She remembered The Host's comments about the possible futures where Giles died. She wondered if he died of a broken heart because Buffy was unable to or chose not to respond to his summons. He would be laying his own soul on the line for this one. She quietly got up and motioned to Tara. Tara got up and moved over to her and Willow took her hand. She needed to feel Tara, needed to feel her presence. The two of them left, hand in hand, to retrieve the orb.

Xander looked at Giles, slowly shaking his head. Buffy and Giles.....man, could two people be asked to suffer more? He didn't get it. Their whole lives had been about saving the world and neither of them could catch a break. He thought about what The Host said about him and Anya. He had said that they were the anchors. What the hell did that mean? Until someone explained it to him, he was going to assume it meant that he was getting-food-guy, and he

went over to the phone to order them all some pizza.

Giles looked up from his book looking for Anya. "Anya?" She appeared around the corner. "Would you look at this ingredient list and see if we have everything?"

"Why do I have to do that?"

"Because I am assuming you want to keep your job."

"Oh, well, then let me see that." She walked over and took the book out of his hands. She took it over to the counter, muttering under her breath.

Giles stood up and went back up the stairs, knowing that they still needed a second spell, one that would involve using Dawn. One that wouldn't put her at risk. He sat down Indian style in front of the shelves pulling books off, looking for the right one. He was having a hard time concentrating. His palms were sweaty. He alternated between a sense of ecstasy that if this worked that Buffy could be his, and terror that it wouldn't work, and the universe would simply mock him and his hopes. He wasn't sure he could live with the rejection, not if he put himself out there the way the spell called for. He looked back down at the books in front of him, willing himself to concentrate.

End of Part 3

Soul Mates 4

Spike lay in his crypt. He thought about Buffy, thought about the robot, what it had felt like to pretend to be shagging her. He knew that Buffy had been right, that it hadn't been real, but it had felt pretty damn good. He also knew that he'd never have the real thing, and he was actually okay with that. Buffy had been pretty decent to him there at the end, and that meant more to him than, well, anything had ever meant to him. He would have settled for a friendship, with her and with Niblet, even with Giles. He liked Giles, respected him too. Lots of surprises there. More to him than meets the eye. He liked that in a person. After being alive so long most people didn't surprise him at all. But Giles did and so did Buffy. And Dawn, well, she was like a kid sister to him. He sat up, frustrated at the inaction being forced on him by the sunlight outside.

He wondered what the Powers That Be would want from him. He hoped he could do it. He didn't want to die, but he thought he could do it for Buffy. He almost did already, when Glory had kidnapped him to get information about

the key. He figured he could do it again. He laughed at himself. How the mighty have fallen. Willing to die for a slayer. He lay down again, impatiently waiting for night to fall. Soon he fell into a restless sleep.

Spike suddenly woke up. He sat up, disoriented, not seeing anything familiar around him. "What the hell...?" He slowly stood up, trying to see through the haze that surrounded him. His mother suddenly appeared out of the mist. "Mum?" Spike couldn't believe his eyes. She'd been dead for 150 years at least. She smiled at him. Spike's nostrils flared as she approached him. She smelled just like he remembered her. Like lemon, and sugar, like all the ingredients she used to cook with. He remembered her most in the kitchen. She had used food as the ultimate healing balm for all wounds. He missed her cooking still. When he had been turned he had felt no desire to go after his family, like Angelus did. He just left. They weren't a part of who he was anymore. He had always been able to choose not to hurt people. He wasn't sure why, but he had never lost the ability to love.

She spoke to him, "William, do you know why I am here?"

He gazed at her, nodding, "I'm guessing this is about the slayer." He knew his real mom was worm food.

She nodded and smiled at his thought. "Worm food, yes, I suppose I am at that. But, enough of me is still here to love you." Spike's eyes filled with tears, he brushed them away, angry at his softness, at his longing for his mother's embrace. She held out her arms to him, and he couldn't resist and ran to her, holding her, crying as she held him. "Oh William, I missed you so much. I never stopped hoping you'd come home."

"I didn't want to hurt you, it seemed safer for you if I just left."

She pushed him back, to see his face, wiping away his tears. He stepped away, embarrassed now at showing this much emotion. He turned away, trying to pull himself together. He was both angry beyond belief and equally grateful to the Powers That Be. He was grateful that he was having a chance to see his mum again and angry that they would have chosen her as the vehicle to use him. He turned back to her, the conflict clear on his face.

She smiled lovingly at him. "Don't be angry at them. This part of you that responds to me, that is the part they need to speak with, the part of you that still burns with love. You are very special, you need to understand that."

He shook his head, "You don't know the things I've done, the things I would still do if I had this sodding chip out of my head."

"I know everything you've done, I've seen what the demon inside you is capable of. I also have seen that you have the ability to choose to do good, to choose to love. I felt your emotions earlier. You love this Slayer and her sister and her Watcher. You would choose to protect them, be willing to die to protect them. William, I believe that you would choose the same even without the chip."

Spike stood quietly, listening to her words. He listened to his heart. He softly spoke, "Yes, I would, for the three of them, I would choose to protect them."

She smiled at him. She spoke, also in soft tones, "William, the Watcher will do a spell, calling the Slayer, offering his heart to her. You know the vision that was shown to the Watcher as regards this?" Spike nodded, remembering what Xander had told him last night. "She would return for a true love, for a chance to have children. But why would she return if she couldn't have someone to protect her when she is most vulnerable. How could she bring children into the world just to see them hurt? Why would she take a risk like that?" She stopped, wanting him to go the rest of the way himself.

He let her words sink in. He protested, "I would never hurt Buffy, or Giles, or any mini versions of the same." She stood there, not responding, waiting. His eyes widened, "Oh God, you're not going to give me my soul back, are you?" He had visions of becoming a second Angel, all brood and angst. He'd rather be dead.

She laughed softly. "No, souls can be removed. We need something more permanent than that."

He shifted on the balls of his feet. "I don't know what you want from me, I already fight....fought with Buffy. I've already saved their lives a dozen times and become a laughing stock for all the other demons in town. I have been patrolling ever since she died protecting all the worthless lives that I would rather be eating, just to keep Giles happy. What the hell else do you want me to do?" He looked at her, begging for some clarity. She stayed silent. He looked down, kicking the ground with his feet, feeling five years old again. He muttered so softly that he wasn't sure she'd be able to hear it. "Whatever it is, I'll do it." He looked up to see if she had heard, and saw her there, smiling at him, love in her eyes.

"William, this is what is asked of you. We will remove the effects of the chip in your head, as you need to be at full fighting strength. We will bond you to the Slayer and her Watcher, and you will fight for the powers of good. You will not be allowed to kill for your pleasure, or for food. We will change you enough that real food will sustain you." She paused, looking through his thoughts. "Like those fried onion things you like. You'll still have the demon inside you,

and the lust for blood and violence cannot be removed. You must choose to love and to serve, always. But, this bond will make it easier and will make you more able to access that part of you that loves so strongly. This is the sacrifice, William, do you accept?"

He sat down, hard, on the cement floor of the crypt. He reached for a cigarette and lit it. He shook his head, amazed at this detour his life had taken. Two Slayers dead by his own hand. He'd always imagined Buffy being the third. He pictured himself over the last decades of his life, the lives he had taken, enjoyed taking, the rush of fresh warm blood going down his throat. He missed that sensation all the time; it was a pulsing pain in his body. He thought of Buffy, how she had kissed him, how she had invited him into her house. He thought of Giles, and Dawn, of the Scoobies. He thought of all the people in Sunnydale. Happy meals on legs he had called them. Mothers and children, sisters, and husbands. He thought of those onion things, God he loved those. He knew a lot of vampires lost their sense of taste but he never had, and he was grateful for that. He snorted and stood. He looked at his mother and spoke, "Yes." She smiled at him, moved forward and embraced him. He returned the embrace, breathing her in, wanting to remember.

He woke suddenly, still lying in his crypt. He sat up, looking around. He looked outside; it was dark. He swept out of the crypt, to find Giles.

They were still at the Magic Shop. Tara and Willow had returned with the Orb, which was now resting on the counter. The pizza had been consumed and Giles had still not emerged from upstairs. Anya had determined that all the necessary ingredients were available in the store and she, Tara and Willow were pulling them off of shelves and making a pile of them to the left of the cash register. Xander had gone to pick up Dawn. Giles suddenly made an appearance. He was blowing dust off of the book in his hands. He looked at his watch and started. "Good Lord, I have to go get Dawn."

Willow put her hand on his arm, "Xander already left to get her." Giles looked relieved. He saw the pizza boxes in the trash. "Is there any pizza left? I'm rather hungry." Willow looked rueful. "Sorry we ate it all, but I'll run next door and get you a sandwich, okay?" He nodded, thankful, and she picked up her wallet and dashed out the door.

Spike made an appearance from the back of the shop. "Watcher." Giles turned around. "I need to talk with you, alone." Giles looked puzzled but moved to comply. He accompanied Spike into the training room. Spike paced for a few minutes around the room, until Giles started feeling exasperated.

"Spike, thrilling as this is there are a few things begging my attention right now that I would rather be attending to than watching you pace."

Spike stopped, walking up to Giles. Suddenly he hauled back his arm and punched Giles in the stomach. Giles doubled over, falling to his knees, gasping for air. He looked up expecting Spike to be in similar pain. He was appalled when he saw that he wasn't. Spike had a bemused expression on his face as he realized that the pain was gone. Giles got a horrified look on his face and started inching back to the weapons wall trying to get to a stake or a crossbow without drawing Spike's attention. He hoped Xander wasn't back yet with Dawn.

Spike looked up and realized what Giles was doing. He figured that he had some fast explaining to do or he'd be vanishing in a puff of dust. "Giles, sorry about that, but I needed to know for sure."

Giles didn't stop his movement but he responded. "Know what for sure?"

Spike tapped his head with his finger, "Chip's gone."

Giles stood reaching for a crossbow. He spoke menacingly to Spike, "Get out of here, now, or you're dead." Dawn and Xander suddenly walked in to the room. Giles without taking his eyes off of Spike yelled, "Get out of here, the two of you, now!" Xander pushed Dawn behind him.

Spike put up his hand, "Wait, hear me out." He watched Xander reach for a stake. Great, he thought, now they'll stake me, when I'm actually on their side. "I talked with the Powers That Be." That got their attention.

Giles snarled at him, "Right, and they took your chip out. That's your sacrifice. Now why don't I believe you?"

Spike suddenly sat down, and then lay down. "Fine, then come and bleeding stake me. Get it over with. Don't bother listening to me." He laid there, arms stretched out at his side. Xander and Giles looked at each other and then at Spike. Dawn peaked around Xander. She giggled. Spike rolled up on his side, and grinned at her. He looked back at Giles. "Giles, I need to speak with you alone."

Xander shook his head, "I don't think so, Spike, not a good idea."

Spike sat up, drawing his knees into his chest. He looked at Giles, "Alone, or not at all." Giles looked at Spike, really looking at him. If Spike wanted him dead, he'd already be dead, not just winded from a punch in the stomach. He nodded, looking over at Xander.

"Take Dawn out front, I need to talk with Spike." Xander started to shake his

head but Giles just gestured him out again. Xander gathered up Dawn, glared at Spike, looked worriedly at Giles, and walked out to join the others.

"So, talk, Spike." Spike took a deep breath and told Giles what had happened, about his mum, what the Powers That Be had demanded, what he'd be called upon to do. He looked at Giles, grinning. "Sorry about the punch, I needed to know if it really happened or if I dreamed the whole bloody thing." He looked over at Giles, willing him to believe him. Giles was looking at the floor, crossbow forgotten at his side. Spike sat in silence. Giles looked up into Spike's face. He felt as if he was in a dream. None of the events of the last 24 hours seemed real. Could it be true? He so desperately wanted it to be. Another step towards bringing Buffy back, to believing that they truly were meant to be together. Spike just looked back at him.

Willow chose that moment to return, coming in the back door, and saw Giles with Spike. She walked into the room, smiling at them both and handed Giles his sandwich. "Here Giles, do you want some tea?"

He looked up at her, "Yes, that would be lovely, Willow, thanks." He looked down at his sandwich. He tore open the cellophane. He picked up half of his sandwich, hesitating. He looked at Spike and slowly handed the half sandwich towards him.

"Want half?" he asked.

Spike smiled and took it from him. "Thanks mate."

Giles smiled back, touched beyond belief that Spike would do this for him, for Buffy, for all of them. He spoke. "Spike, thank you. Sorry about the almost killing you."

Spike waved his hand, negating his words, mouth full of sandwich. "Just keep feeding me, and we'll call it even." Giles got up and extended a hand to Spike. Spike took it and rose. The two men looked at each other eye to eye, their clasped hands in front of them. Giles sensed the magic before it hit. It felt as if a bolt of energy flowed through them both; he could feel the hairs on his arms rise in response to it. He felt lightheaded and would have fallen if Spike hadn't reached forward to hold him up. Spike looked nervous. "What was that?"

"I think that was the bonding."

Spike looked uncomfortable. "What will that mean?"

Giles reached out a hand and put it on Spike's shoulder. He looked Spike in

the eyes and said, "It means we're stuck with each other."

Spike returned his look and grinned, "I can live with that. But, if you tell anyone else about this I'll punch you again."

Giles laughed, "Come on." He reached down for his sandwich and the two of them, side by side, walked out into the shop towards the others.

On their way in, they were almost knocked over by Willow and Tara, followed closely by Xander, Anya, and Dawn. Willow grabbed Giles, "What was that? Tara and I both felt some strong magic in here. Are you okay?" She looked suspiciously at Spike having now been informed of his chipless behavior by Xander. Giles kept moving, grabbing hold of Spike's arm to make sure he was able to follow without being stopped or staked by anyone. Once they were all assembled around the table Giles spoke up answering Willow's concerns.

"Yes, I am fine, and so is Spike, for that matter." Giles raised his hand to stop any forthcoming comments. "The magic you felt was the acceptance of Spike's sacrifice by the Powers That Be. He is working with us full time now."

Tara looked up at Spike. Ever since Spike had punched her and helped her figure out she wasn't a demon, she had had a soft spot for him. "Are you still a vampire?"

Spike nodded, and then shook his head. "Sort of. Chip's gone so all my power is back." Everyone except Giles recoiled from him. "Relax, I'm not going to hurt you. I don't need to drink blood anymore. Still want to, just don't need to. Typical, as soon as I get rid of the bloody chip, I can't bloody feed on anyone." He flung himself in to a chair in disgust, and saw the pizza boxes. "Hey, is there any pizza left?" Xander eyed him distastefully and looked at Giles.

"We really need to put up with him all the time?"

Giles grinned, "Yes, Xander, he's a part of the team."

"Okay, big G, you're the boss, but I want to go on record that I don't like it. I'd like it even less if it were Angel, but I still don't like it."

Spike turned to Xander, "On that we agree. Bloody pouf. Hey, and I'm not crazy about working with you either."

Giles raised both of his hands this time to stop the argument before it got any more heated. "Could we please refocus? Spike's...." he searched for the right word, "contribution has just increased the likelihood that we will be successful, so let's press on." He looked at Spike and smiled at him.

Xander saw that smile, how genuine it was. He relaxed for the first time since he had seen Spike and Giles in the back room. He had known and trusted Giles for too long, and if Giles could smile that way at Spike, then it was okay. He stood up, "Well, I'm food boy, how's Chinese sound?" There was agreement all around and he left accompanied by Anya.

Willow and Tara reread the spell to make sure they had left nothing out. Giles started looking through the book he had brought down. Spike went over and sat by Dawn and the two of them started talking, punctuated by Dawn's giggles. She was thrilled with this turn of events. She had always liked Spike and had hated that she had had to turn away from him because of his weirdness towards Buffy. "So, you're not still, you know, in love with Buffy, are you?"

"Nope. I'm waiting for you to grow up." She giggled, infatuated.

Giles had found the second spell they needed. They actually had all the pieces of the puzzle; all that remained was putting it in place. And ripping his heart out of his chest and putting it out for the world to stomp on. And then waiting. He really had no idea how it would work, how she might come back, where she would end up. He hated doing such powerful magic with so little information. How could he control it? What if things went terribly wrong? How would he know how to fix it when he wasn't clear about what he was doing in the first place? He thought again of Anya's words earlier today. Would she be glad they brought her back? He didn't think he could stand it if they brought her back and all he saw was weariness in her eyes at the thought of lifting up this burden once again. He sighed, unsure, searching for the right thing to do. Wishing he could have a conversation with the Powers That Be and be told as clearly as Spike as to what his task would be, what sacrifice would be called for. He sat there, for the longest time, with his chin resting on the knuckles of one hand, lost in thought.

Finally he lifted his head up, catching Dawn's giggle. He looked over at her and saw she was with Spike. He smiled, relieved beyond words that he knew he could trust him, that there was no one better suited, in Buffy's absence, to protect her. And there were no fears that his soul could get sucked out. When the bond had flown through him he had seen Spike's heart. He knew it as well as he knew his own, just as Spike had seen his. The front bell jingled and he looked to see that Xander and Anya had returned with dinner. They pushed the books aside, and sat at the table eating, quietly talking among themselves. A sort of peace settled on them all, and they sat back in their chairs when they were done, content to be in each other's company.

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Angel stepped on the gas. He could feel his control slipping. He had wanted to kill The Host when he found out he had called Giles. He wanted to pound his face into a formless bloody mass; he could almost taste the blood on his hands. Buffy was his. She always had been, she always would be. He had left the bar before his hands did what his inner demon was craving for. He had no idea what Giles had been told. The Host had rules about that sort of stuff. Angel didn't want to waste the time beating it out of him. Who knew what Giles and the rest of the gang were planning. They could already be doing the ritual now, and Angel needed to be there. He needed to be there so if Buffy came back, she could choose him. She had always chosen him. She was his girl. Who would hold her and comfort her? Giles? Xander? What a joke. They didn't know her. They didn't love her like he did.

His hands tightened on the steering wheel, almost crushing it under his fingers. He forced himself to relax. I'll just go up there. I'll make them understand. I need to be there, Buffy needs me to be there. Maybe Giles brings her back, but then she'll need me. His thoughts kept spiraling, covering the same topics over and over again, like a mantra. He could feel his anger, his need growing. He would not be denied in this.

End Part 4

Soul Mates 5

They had the spells; they had the ingredients. They had a basic idea of what they were doing. All they needed now was the courage and the certainty that they were doing the right thing. The group waited on Giles to take the next step. He was still conflicted. He was concerned about Tara and Willow doing the level of spells that were required. He was concerned they might be seriously hurt. He truly had no idea of the risk to him or to Dawn as they called through blood and soul to Buffy to return. He still couldn't quite believe that Buffy would respond to him and he wondered if his doubt could adversely affect the spell. He was petrified they would bring her back and see in her eyes that she wished they hadn't. He paced the length of the store, knowing they watched him, waiting for him to move them forward. There was so much at stake. He needed more time, and that was the one thing he didn't have. They needed to do this now, tonight.

The door to the shop opened, Giles having forgotten to lock it as usual. Giles looked up and his stomach clenched at the sight of Angel walking through it. Angel cast his eyes over the group, his eyes narrowing when he saw Spike. His gaze returned to Giles.

"Giles."

"Angel."

"What did he tell you? Did you find a spell?" Angel's voice was full of accusation.

His tone raised Giles' hackles shattering his pretend calm. "Why are you asking?"

Angel moved very close to Giles. Spike started to rise to his feet. "Buffy would want me here."

Giles' lips tightened. "Why would you think that?" He tried to ignore the fear that maybe Angel was right, the possibility of that dark and painful.

"She loved me. She's always loved me. She belongs to me. She'll need to be with someone she loves." Giles looked at Angel, saw the demon lurking there. He cursed his racing heart, knowing that Angel would be able to sense his fear. He pushed through it.

"She will be with people she loves, and that love her back. You have no place here, not anymore."

"Yes, I do. She kissed me when I came up the night of her mother's funeral. She still wants me."

Giles ignored the jealous flash that shot through him. "Excuse me, are you trying to say that on the day of a young woman's mother's funeral, when she was feeling bereft and completely alone, that she kissed you and that feels like a victory to you?"

Angel's anger grew at the audacity of this man to doubt his and Buffy's relationship. He shoved him, hard, against the nearest shelves. Spike moved so fast he was a blur. He stepped between Angel and Giles. He shoved Angel back and moved in very close. "You touch him again I'll rip your bloody head off."

Angel laughed.

Spike spoke again. "I mean it. And that goes for everyone else in this room."

Angel laughed again. "Right, like they trust you anymore than they trust me."

Giles walked up to stand next to Spike. "I trust Spike with my life." Angel looked at them both, disbelieving, wondering what angle Spike was up to. Giles continued. "Spike has a place here with us, you do not."

"You mean you're letting Spike be a part of this, but not me?"

"Yes, that is exactly what I mean." Giles voice was getting softer and more dangerous by the minute.

Angel couldn't believe this. "He doesn't even have a soul!"

Giles looked at Angel. "Like you, you mean?"

Angel had the grace to look away, understanding his meaning.

Giles continued. "I trust Spike because he doesn't have a soul. He has conquered his demon in a way you never could. His battle is honest and real. You were swallowed up completely when you were turned, you lost the fight in an instant. You gave yourself up to it with a vengeance, finding a joy in torture and hatred. Only a curse kept you from destroying the entire world. I don't trust you at all, and I certainly don't trust you with Buffy. You are not welcome here, not anymore."

Angel spoke softly. "I only came to help."

Giles stepped closer, Spike right at his side. "No, you didn't. You came to take. That is all you ever did to Buffy. You took her virginity; you took her self-esteem and her self-respect. You took away people she loved, you took away her peaceful nights. You took her blood, and then you took her dreams. You will take no more from her."

"You can't keep her from seeing me."

"No, nor would I try to. But, I will make my wishes known to her, and I will insist that if she wants to see you she needs to go to LA. I don't believe she will go. You are not welcome here, in our lives, in our homes, in this town. If either Spike or I hear that you are in Sunnydale, without an express invitation, we will assume that Angelus has come to play, and we will find you and we will kill you. Am I making myself clear?"

Angel looked at Giles and Spike standing shoulder to shoulder. He knew he was more than a match for either of them alone, but not together. He knew he had lost this round, but they would see. Buffy would call, and Buffy would leave them and come down to be with him. He didn't doubt it for a minute. He turned around and left. Giles followed him to the door and locked it. He rested

his hands on the door, taking several deep breaths. Spike moved up behind him. "You all right, mate?"

"God, I hate him."

"Join the club."

"I hope he comes back."

Spike grinned at him. "I hope he does too."

They both walked back to the rest of the group who had watched the whole interplay with fascination and dread. Their relief at Angel's departure was palpable. Xander spoke, "Wow, Giles, feeling suicidal much?" Giles sent him a glare.

Spike grinned, "I'm just glad it wasn't me hearing the 'stay away from Buffy' speech. Been there, didn't like it." Giles sent him a glare too, but Spike sent him an unrepentant grin in return. Spike was very glad not to be on the receiving end of Giles' threats. It was not a comfortable place to be. God, he loved seeing Angel squirm. It was worth giving up the killing just to see that. He really hoped Angel was foolish enough to come for a visit.

Giles nodded at all the ritual accoutrements gathered. "Let's get started." He hadn't resolved all his conflicts, but facing down Angel had given him a boost of courage. They all knew their roles. They had been over it more times than they could count. He looked at Dawn, walking over to her putting his arm around her. "You ready? You feel up to this?"

She looked up at him, trembling a little, "I feel like I'm gonna barf."

Giles squeezed her tighter and whispered in her ear. "Me too."

She smiled at that. She had been very relieved to hear that both she and Giles would be together in the circle. She felt that he would protect her. It didn't make her less scared, but it made her more willing. Besides she wanted her sister back. Badly. She felt homeless and lonely. She was tired of feeling fearful about her future. She wanted Buffy back and she wanted her with Giles. She would feel safe and secure with the two of them looking out for her. She smiled at him. "Okay, I'm ready." He took her hand and they walked to the circle. They entered it and going down on their knees, sat back on their feet, facing each other, hands clasped.

Tara closed the circle and started lighting the candles. Anya and Xander took their places across from each other, one behind Dawn, one behind Giles.

The spells were relatively simple, but dangerous. Dawn and Giles would do a calling, projecting themselves out, sending it to Buffy. Anya and Xander were to focus on them both, providing a metaphysical lifeline to guide them back to their bodies. Tara and Willow would be summoning the magic required to support them all. Giles nodded to Willow, and she and Tara both began to chant in unison, starting the ritual.

"Blood calls to blood."

"Soul calls to soul."

They chanted together, they chanted in strength, they chanted with all the love they had for Buffy in their hearts. Dawn sent her longing out in her thoughts. She held in her hand, clasped in Giles larger one, a piece of cloth with a few drops of her blood on it. She held it up as if in offering. She remembered Buffy's words. We have the same blood. It's Summers' blood. She sent out that thought, taking strength in Giles' hands holding hers, knowing he was searching with her.

Giles allowed himself the vision of him and Buffy. He channeled every drop of his love for her and visualized it as a bright light that he sent out, calling for her, calling for her to love him, and return to him. Calling to her with the promise of everlasting love, a family, the protection of loved ones, his heart, his soul. He poured everything he was into the calling.

Spike paced softly in the corners of the shop, not wanting to disturb, but prepared to protect. He could feel the magic in the room, and was impressed by it, awed by it. He felt his commitment to these people grow, respectful of their courage and their strength. He knew if anyone could bring Buffy back, it was this group.

It seemed to last for hours. They knew it could take a long time. They knew they had to keep going, taking no rest until it was finished one way or the other. Weariness was starting to creep in but the resolve was still strong. No one faltered.

Suddenly the candles began to glow very brightly. In seconds the whole room was awash with light. There was a gust of wind, it centered itself between Giles and Dawn, spinning frantically, whirling like a tornado. Dawn screamed. "What's happening?" She was afraid to open her eyes.

Giles yelled back, trying to make himself heard over the moaning of the wind. "Dawn, hold on!" It twisted faster, buffeting them both, the noise, like a freight train, growing stronger and stronger to almost unbearable levels. He couldn't

open his eyes, the pressure from the wind too hard against his face. He felt a body close to him. "Dawn, don't move, stay still."

"That's not me, I haven't moved, what is it?" Her voice was shrill, fearful. She couldn't get it out of her head that somehow it was Glory, come back for her. She felt herself on the verge of panic.

Then just as suddenly, the wind was gone, and the candles extinguished. They were all left in darkness, their senses reeling from the silence. The sudden lack of noise felt invasive. Giles tried to pull himself together; he needed to ensure that everyone was safe. His senses started to return, and as they did he felt her. He opened his eyes. She was there, lying against him, her eyes closed, not moving. He tightened his hold on Dawn's hands to get her attention, and then dropped them to place them on Buffy. He moved one hand up to her neck to feel for a pulse. He felt it, beating strongly. He watched her and saw her chest move. No one said a word, the room felt like a sacred place.

Finally Giles whispered her name, "Buffy?" He rubbed her arms, trying to bring her around. She moaned, moving a little. Again, "Buffy?" She opened her eyes. Closed them again, opened them. They sat, watching her, waiting, allowing her to slowly emerge. Spike moved closer, softly, and crouched down, watching and waiting as well.

She sat up, holding herself up with her arms, shaking her head as if to clear cobwebs away. Giles looked at Willow. "Can you light a couple of candles?" He was concerned too much light might be painful for Buffy right now. Willow complied and light softly brightened the circle. Giles asked one more time, "Buffy?"

She turned her head towards him, gave a soft cry and threw herself in his arms. "Giles? Oh God, Giles." She started to softly cry.

He held her, stroking her hair, her back, willing his love and strength to her. She stayed like that for some minutes. Dawn started to shift impatiently, feeling her legs cramping from holding her position for so long. Giles nodded at her and she gratefully sank down, accidentally jarring Buffy. "Oops, sorry."

Buffy sat up again, looking around, seeing Dawn. Her face lit up, awash with joy. She held her arms out, calling to her. "Oh Dawn, I've missed you so much. I felt you calling to me." Dawn let out a cry and fell on her, holding her tightly enough to hurt anyone but her Slayer sister. Giles watched, sitting back as well, tears in his eyes. Buffy released Dawn and looked around the circle. Willow walked over, opening up the circle with a sweep of her hands. She looked at Buffy and Buffy looked back. Willow didn't think she had ever seen

Buffy look so peaceful, so content. Her face was open, filled with love and life. Willow reached for her and they embraced. They all came forward, one by one, except Spike and Giles. Spike figured some explaining was called for before he started hugging on Buffy. Didn't feel like getting staked quite so soon. Giles wanted her to have this time, or so he told himself but he was afraid, even with her here, having felt her in his arms, he was afraid. Afraid she wouldn't love him, afraid she would reject what he had offered to her.

Buffy felt his absence. She broke off her embrace with Xander and turned to Giles. She sat there, looking at him, drinking him in. She had felt his call. Dawn had provided the way, but Giles had been the reason. She walked over to him and knelt in front of him. Her eyes full of love she captured his face with her hands. She moved her face towards his and placed her lips on his. He started but she held him firm, and increased the pressure. He kissed her back, his arms going around her, pulling her into his lap. They held each other, communicating all their love through that kiss, until, by mutual consent they pulled apart. Giles looked at her, his face full of love and wonder, and then looked up to find the whole group grinning at them, tears running down their faces. He grinned back, holding Buffy to him tightly, showing her he was never going to let go. She hugged him back. She had no intention of letting him let her go.

She shifted her head, looking at Spike. Giles noted her movement and said softly to him, "Take his hand."

Buffy looked at him questioningly, but did as instructed. She reached out and Spike clasped her hand. She felt the bolt of magic flow through her, saw what he had done, what he had given up for her. She saw into his heart and saw the love and commitment there, and the demon firmly leashed. While never pulling completely away from Giles, she reached over to give him a hug, whispering softly in his ear, "Spike, thank you." He smiled at her, hugging her back, then released her back to Giles. She turned around, leaning with her back against Giles, his arms around her, resting underneath her breasts. She felt his warmth and snuggled deeper against him. He smiled resting his head against hers. She took in all the people in the room, loving them all so dearly, moved beyond words that they were hers, and she was theirs, feeling their love for her like a living song. She smiled at them and spoke. "So, what's the sitch?" They laughed, and proceeded to answer her question, the group whole, once again.

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Quentin Travers replaced the phone in its cradle and started to laugh. Jesus, he thought, trust the two of them to throw convention even in death's face. He shook his head at the thought. Unbelievable. The whole thing was terrifying in

one respect, but he was a practical man. The Hellmouth had a Slayer again. He might not approve of what they did, wouldn't have allowed it if he'd been asked. He snorted at the likelihood of that ever happening, them asking or of them listening. But, the world had a Slayer again, and he was grateful. He would sleep better tonight knowing. The world was again in good hands.

The End
July 2001