

Standing True 1

Giles had the store to himself for the morning and he was glad of it. He couldn't keep a smile off his face. Anya would be on to him the second she saw him if he couldn't get himself under control, but he couldn't help it. He couldn't believe it had all happened. Buffy loved him. How had his life changed so completely from one day to the next? He could still feel Buffy's lips on his, her legs wrapped around him. Giles was growing hard just thinking about it.

He grinned again. She was his, completely, in every way. His life was so full now. And he hadn't even known how empty it was. Not until Paul and Roger pushed their way into his life, and not until he'd heard Buffy tell him that she loved him. And now, he was so full his heart almost ached with it.

Giles decided to make himself some tea, hoping it would calm him, as Anya would be here any moment. Or maybe Anya would be so intent on sharing her own anniversary stories that she wouldn't pay any attention to him as long as he made the appropriate noises at the appropriate times. Once his tea was made he sat at the table and flipped through a book. None of it connected with his brain. Giles didn't care. He just sat there grinning.

Paul, Roger and Anya all arrived at the same time. Giles looked up as the bell rang announcing visitors. He tried to stop grinning and knew he was only being marginally successful.

Anya had learned to tolerate the brothers. She almost liked them. If they ever actually bought anything she might really like them. But at least Roger kept his hands off of the merchandise now and she couldn't deny that they put Giles in a good mood. There was certainly no denying that he looked happy now.

Anya moved behind the cash register, and then she looked at Giles again. Her eyes narrowed and she gasped. "You had sex last night."

Paul and Roger's eyes widened and they settled back to watch yet another confounding conversation between Giles and Anya.

Giles let out a breath. "Anya..."

She interrupted him. "You had orgasms. It's written all over your face. Who, who was it?" She looked at Paul and Roger.

Paul put up his hands. "It wasn't us."

Anya looked back at Giles. "Some complete stranger? Did you go to a bar and pick somebody up?" Anya grinned at that thought but then she frowned. "Did you practice safe sex? I don't want a boss with diseases. You might die and that would be sad. Unless of course you leave the store to me, in which case it would still be sad but at least I'd have money."

Giles rubbed his hand over his face. "Anya..."

"So, who was she? Hey, come on, I tell you everything."

Giles let out an exasperated groan. "Anya, I know you do. But I have no intention of repaying the favor. I'm going to lunch and I may be a while."

Anya humphed, opened the till by forcefully hitting one of the buttons to demonstrate her displeasure, and started counting money. She immediately began to feel better.

Giles turned to Roger and Paul and spoke quietly, almost desperately. "You are here for lunch, right?"

They both grinned. Paul spoke. "Lunch and an interrogation."

Giles pinched his nose under his glasses. "Still better than Anya."

Anya glared at him. "I heard that." She yelled at him as he was leaving the shop. "I'm telling Buffy."

Giles let out a half laugh as the door shut behind him. Paul and Roger were both laughing. Roger pointed at Giles, a taunting look on his face. "We already know who you had sex with last night."

Giles rolled his eyes but he could feel the warmth of a serious blush on his face.

Paul smacked Roger. "Hey, stop that, you're making him blush." Paul and Roger both started laughing so hard they had to stop walking. At the look on Giles' face, Paul tried to explain. "I'm sorry, I think I'm still a little out of it. You see, I've had a couple of really, really odd days." With that comment they both were off again, tears streaming down their faces.

Giles was unable to keep a grin off his face, their laughter infectious, even if it was partly directed at him. "Can you two walk long enough to get to Frank's or should I go get him to deliver your beers here?"

Roger took a couple of long deep breaths. "Oh God. Sorry." He began

laughing again but he grabbed Paul's arm and they followed Giles to Frank's. Sliding into their usual booth, Roger took another deep breath. He looked at Giles and shook his head.

Giles looked at him, his brow furrowed. "What?"

"You. I mean, here you are, still the same Rupert Giles we've known for what, six months? But, somehow, you're completely different now."

Giles shook his head. "No, I'm not."

Paul saw this funny look on Giles' face and he hastened to reassure him. "Not like that. Not in any way that makes us feel any differently about you. It's just all this time we knew you had secrets, we knew you weren't telling us things but..." His voice trailed off.

Roger shook his head, looking at Giles with a look of incredulity in his eyes, finishing off Paul's thought. "Let's just say ...holy shit, and leave it at that."

Giles sighed. "I imagine it is a bit hard to believe. Vampires and demons have been a part of my life since I was a child; I hardly think about what I do as being odd anymore. Not unless I have to talk about it, or have to try not to talk about it, in this case, with people who don't know anything about it." He smiled at them both. "It's one of the reasons I..." He softly laughed. "It doesn't matter now."

Paul leaned towards him. "It's one of the reasons you tried so hard to avoid us, isn't it?"

"Yes it is. I couldn't imagine how I could keep the charade of having a normal life going for any length of time. It certainly is one of the reasons I was sure you would end up avoiding me. I know I'm not a very good liar. I know every answer I gave you was full of holes."

Paul nodded in a self satisfied way. "But you didn't bargain on pure Irish bullheadedness, did you?"

Giles grinned at them both. "No, I didn't. And now I find myself feeling very grateful to that Irish bullheadedness, and that's not an easy thing for an Englishman to say."

Frank showed up with three beers. Roger smiled at him and then his eyebrows rose as he thought of something. "Frank, sit down."

Frank looked around the bar and seeing that no one seemed to need him he

sat next to Giles. "What's up?"

Roger tapped the table with his index finger. "We're spilling secrets today. Time for you to spill yours."

Frank looked at Giles with some alarm. Then he looked back at Roger. "What secret?"

Roger rolled his eyes. "What secret? That secret. The one that look was about. The one you've been keeping ever since we've known you."

Frank just stared at them, mute, and finally Giles took pity on him. "It's all right, Frank, they know about vampires, they know I kill them."

Frank looked even more nervous. "Jesus, that thing really was a vampire? I thought it might have been, but..."

Roger looked exasperated, wanting the facts. "What happened?"

Giles answered his question. "Frank got attacked by a vampire. I happened to be there and I staked it. End of story."

Frank snorted. "He saved my life. Then he brushes himself off, cool as a cucumber, and tells me to be more careful when I go out at night. Then he walks away, like he was the Lone Ranger or something."

Paul shook his head. "So, all this time while we've been trying to figure out who the heck Giles is, while you've been watching us try to figure out Giles, you had actually seen a vampire, and watched Giles stake one, and didn't tell us? Man."

"It's not the sort of thing you just tell anybody." Frank gestured at Giles. "I tried to talk about it with him, to at least thank him, but he didn't ever want to." He glanced at Giles. "I figured if you didn't even want to talk to me about it, then you probably didn't want me to talk to anyone about it, so I just kept my mouth shut."

Giles smiled at him. "Thank you for that. I had hoped you'd keep it quiet."

Frank nodded, satisfied, glad he'd repaid Giles in at least this small way. He noticed someone up at the bar. "Gotta go." He stood up and glanced at Roger and Paul. "How'd you guys find out?" Waving his hand at them. "Never mind. You can tell me later." Frank headed towards the bar, and then turned back. "You guys need Kathleen? You having lunch?"

They all nodded and Frank headed off. Roger grinned at Giles. "Poor Kathleen. All her hopes dashed in one night."

Giles glared at Roger. "Please shut up." Roger kept grinning, unrepentant.

Paul was staring at Giles, almost studying him. "How often does that go on? You just happening along and saving someone's life."

"Not very often. It happens to Buffy all the time, of course. But Buffy can move much more quickly than I can. Usually by the time you see someone being attacked by a vampire it's already too late. Frank was lucky."

Roger glanced up at the bar. "I can't believe he kept that a secret."

Giles shrugged. "Even if he'd chosen to talk, who could he have told who would have believed him? Would you have believed him?" He glanced at them, and they both reluctantly shook their heads. He continued. "The people in this town are blind. They ignore what's in front of them, they have for years."

Paul blew out his breath and leaned against the seat. "I swear there's something in the air. I had to fight hard to see it, to keep seeing it, to see all the people dying and how they were dying."

Roger poked him. "And then you go and arrest the Slayer."

Paul rolled his eyes. "How was I supposed to know?" He pointed to Frank with his chin. "Can we tell him how we know, what we know?"

Giles looked over at the bar, considering Frank for a second. "I suppose, if you can be discreet about it. At least I know he'll keep it to himself."

Paul looked at Giles and shook his head. "I still can hardly believe it's all true." He gestured in a way to include himself and Roger. "Okay, we have about 200,000 questions to ask you. You all right with that?"

Giles grinned. "I don't think we can cover all of those at one lunch but I'll do my best."

"And I don't want to hear the words 'that's complicated' once, unless it's followed by a long explanation."

Giles sat back in his chair. "Go ahead. Again, I'll do my best."

Paul grinned at Roger. "He's actually going to answer our questions. I think I

might pass out from the excitement."

Giles rolled his eyes. "Ha bloody ha. You'd better hurry, I might change my mind."

Roger decided to begin. "Let's start with what you said before. Vampires and demons since you were a child?"

"My father was a Watcher and my grandmother before him. Slayers were always around when I was growing up and where there are Slayers and Watchers there are vampires and demons."

He stopped talking as Kathleen showed up. As she started pouring on the charm for Giles, Paul shook his head at her. "Sorry, darling. He's a taken man, now."

Kathleen's eyes opened wide and she sent Giles a look of dismay. Giles was blushing which made her eyes narrow. "You going around my back, sugar?"

Giles' eyes widened in alarm. "I...you...we..." He took off his glasses and covered his face with his hands.

Paul reached out and took one of Kathleen's hands in his. "I'm afraid he found the love of his life last night and he's off the market. But I'm available if you need a shoulder to cry on."

Kathleen shook off his hand and glared at him, and then she glared at them all. Squaring her shoulders she took out her order pad. All business, she snapped at them. "What do you want?"

They all gave her their orders, and after writing it down she snapped the pad shut and walked away.

Giles groaned and glared at Paul. "You had to do that, didn't you? She'll probably poison our food."

Paul winced at the thought and called to Frank. Frank walked over to the booth. "What?"

Paul motioned him to lean down and then he spoke. "We just broke the news to Kathleen that Giles is unavailable. Would you please make sure she doesn't poison us?"

Frank grinned. "I'll go remind her that you're the Chief of Police and just itching to arrest somebody."

Roger snorted. "Tell Kathleen she's lucky she isn't a small blond." He let out a yelp of pain as Paul elbowed him in the side. At Frank's puzzled look he laughed. "I'll explain later." Frank stared at all three of them for a second and then headed for the kitchen. Roger turned to Paul. "That hurt."

Paul looked smug. "It was supposed to. How was I supposed to know that Buffy was one of the good guys? Every time I saw dead bodies she was always around." He looked at Giles, the smug expression gone. "I really am sorry about that."

Giles waved off his concern. "No harm done. In fact, quite a bit of good has come of it, so in a certain light, I should be thanking you."

Paul grinned and then he turned to Roger. "So there. Please keep your snide comments to yourself."

Roger ignored him and got back to business. "Is being a Watcher handed down? Like a family business?"

"It was for me. But it isn't always. One has to have some skills. A gift for languages, for fighting, for teaching." He smiled a rueful smile. "For obedience. Just because one of your parents is a Watcher doesn't mean that you will be chosen. And there are those who should never have been allowed to become a Watcher. There are many at the Council who believe I never should have become a Watcher, or should be one now."

"The Council?"

"The Council of Watchers. Its fundamental purpose has always been to protect and support the Slayer. It selects and trains Watchers."

Paul frowned. "Why would anyone ever think you shouldn't be a Watcher? You know plenty of languages and I have no doubt you'd be an excellent teacher. Can you fight?"

"Oh yes, I can fight." He smiled a lopsided smile at them. "I just never did very well with the obedient part. Remember, I was fired as Buffy's Watcher for disobedience. The Council doesn't tolerate that very well."

"But, you're her Watcher now, aren't you?"

"Yes, they reinstated me, kicking and screaming, the Council that is, not me, and only because they wanted Buffy back." He smiled. "And she wouldn't come back unless they made me her Watcher again." He shook his head.

"You should have seen her that day. She was magnificent." He sighed and then looked up to find them grinning at him. Giles rolled his eyes. "Next question."

"Can all Watchers do magic?"

"No. Most of them can't. I took..." Giles made a face. "I took a bit of a detour from my Watcher training. I left and started keeping company with some people of disreputable character and began to study magic. It's not a time of my life I'm particularly proud of and not one I like to talk about. To cut a long story short it all ended very, very badly and I went back to Watcher training."

Paul and Roger exchanged a look. As it had last night, the stories Giles was choosing to edit from their conversation, considering what he had told them, made them both extremely nervous. Paul pressed on. "But the magic's come in handy, hasn't it? I mean, you saved Willow last night."

"Yes, I suppose it has. I had sworn never to do magic again but shortly after I met Buffy I had to reverse a spell that had been done to her. I broke my vow, and did a casting to save her life." Giles tightened his lips. "It taught me that I could do magic without losing control, so I use it now when it's needed."

The brothers let that thought settle and then Paul let out a short laugh. Giles sent him a puzzled glance. Paul snorted. "Do you do magic tricks. Remember? I asked you that the day we first went out to lunch. You said that magic was an interest of yours and I asked you if you did magic tricks." He started to laugh. "I'm surprised you didn't choke on your food."

Giles grimaced. "I hated lying to you all the time." Then he grinned. "Not that you would have believed me if I'd spoken the truth that day. I can just imagine your face if I'd told you the sorts of magic tricks I can do."

Roger had a thought. "Speaking of Willow, how is she?"

"I called her this morning. She seems to be suffering no ill effects from the spell she did." Giles shook his head. "She's lucky."

"Lucky she knows you."

"It's only because she knows me that she got into magic at all. So to a certain extent, I'm to blame."

Roger cocked his head to the side, taking Giles in with a knowing expression. "Do you blame yourself for everything?"

Giles raised his eyebrows and then he let out a soft chuckle. "Yes, I suppose I do have a tendency to do just that." He shook his head. "It's difficult not to. I've done so many foolish things, it seems as if I ought to be able to prevent others from making the same mistakes."

Roger shook his head at Giles. "Well, you won't be doing that when we're around, taking the blame, that is, carte blanche. My guess is there's lots of blame to go around." He grinned. "Don't worry, when you do something stupid we'll be sure to blame you, just in case you're afraid you might go into blame withdrawal."

Giles rolled his eyes. "Thank you so much."

"Hey, that's what friends are for."

Frank showed up with their meals. At the raised eyebrows he explained. "She's in the bathroom, crying."

Giles let out an exasperated sound. "Good Lord. How can she possibly be that upset? I never did anything to let her think I was remotely interested."

Paul just looked at the food. Frank grinned. "It's safe. She dropped the order off and left the kitchen. Carlos made it." With that he headed back to the bar.

Paul heaved a sigh of relief and dug in. Noticing that Giles was still looking concerned Paul gestured him towards his food. "Eat, she'll get over it."

Giles protested again. "There was nothing for her to get over."

Roger grinned at him. "It's that magical aura of yours."

Giles glared at Roger. "Ha, ha."

Paul redirected the conversation back to the issue at hand. "Okay, next question. Explain Anya."

Giles barked out a laugh. "Explain Anya." He shook his head.

Paul leaned in towards Giles. "You told me she was a part of the team. What does she do?"

Giles put his fork down. "It's not so much what she does as what she is and, because of that, what she knows." He smiled. "You said you had 200,000 questions. The problem is that with every question I answer, you'll have 10

new ones the answer generates."

Roger grinned. "That's becoming abundantly clear. Don't worry. We have lots of time to ask all our questions. I mean, not at this lunch necessarily, but we have a lifetime of them ahead of us." Roger didn't miss the shadow that passed over Giles' face. Roger grimaced. "Assuming..."

Giles smiled gently. "You have to assume that we'll survive, that we have a lifetime ahead of us. It would be impossible to get through the day otherwise. But some days it's harder to believe than others. And I never forget the fact that Buffy has already outlived most Slayers and is living on borrowed time." Giles blew out a breath and ran his hand through his hair.

Roger could see this was a difficult topic for Giles but he had to ask. "How long do they usually live?"

"Half of them are dead before they reach their 18th birthday."

"I don't understand. If so many of them die, why would they test those that are still alive and put them at risk? Wouldn't the fact that they are still alive be proof enough of their skill?"

Giles shrugged. "You would think that would be a reasonable assumption. I personally believe that the test was started not so much as a way to make sure the Slayer was strong enough, but rather to ensure that she was still strong. That way they could weed out the weak ones and allow a younger, stronger Slayer to be called."

Roger looked confused. "What sense does that make? Wouldn't her years of experience make her more valuable than a brand new Slayer?"

Giles shook his head. "You need to understand. The Council has looked to its Watchers to bear the burden of experience. The Slayers have been looked at as an instrument of death, her strength and fighting skills being all she needed to bring to the table. It's pretty bloodless, the whole affair. One Slayer dies, the next one is called. One after the other, replaceable fighting machines, that one never makes the mistake of getting attached to."

"Is that how you were trained?"

"Oh, yes. And everything I learned went out the window the second I met Buffy." He grinned at them. "That's why I was fired as her Watcher, because I cared for her too much. I didn't want her to risk losing her, I didn't want her to undergo the test."

"What would have happened if you hadn't started the test?"

"I'd have just been fired sooner and a new Watcher would have been chosen and he would have given it to her, without any remorse. And if I'd told her about the test in order to prevent her from getting tested at all, I still would have been fired. It doesn't make me feel any better but I knew I was good and stuck. In retrospect I suppose I could have confided in Buffy and asked her to play along. We might have got away with it, except Buffy is so stubborn sometimes, she just as well might have refused." He smiled a sad smile. "Fortunately for me, Buffy is an excellent Slayer, and she passed the test and even more amazingly, she forgave me."

Roger took a swallow of his food. "I still say that she's the fortunate one that she ended up with you as her Watcher, and before you get all huffy with me, I happen to know for a fact, that Buffy agrees with me." Giles just smiled but he didn't respond. Roger waved his fork in the air. "Okay, enough of this sad stuff. Let's get back to Anya."

Giles grinned. "Okay. You want me to explain Anya, well, get ready. Anya used to be a demon. A vengeance demon, and has been avenging scorned women for centuries. She's been alive for almost 1200 years. She became human again when Buffy was a senior in high school and she's been learning to act like a human ever since. She hasn't quite got the hang of it." Still grinning, Giles went back to his lunch.

Paul and Roger were speechless. They watched Giles eat as they sent several astonished glances to one another. Paul threw his fork down on his plate and sat back, crossing his arms over his chest. "What?"

Giles started to laugh. "Would you rather have me tell you that it's complicated?"

Roger shook his head in amazement. "It's always going to be like this, isn't it?"

Giles was still laughing. "Like what?"

"Like I'm in some Twilight Zone episode."

Giles' eyes were lit with amusement. "No, you'll get used to it for the most part. Although even after all this time we still run across some very odd things."

Paul grinned. "All in this very, very odd town of Sunnydale." He shook his head. "Jesus." He uncrossed his arms. "Okay, so how did she become

human?"

"Well, she had an amulet that she wore and her power was stored in it. It was destroyed and she became human again. D'Hoffryn, the demon who turned her into a vengeance demon, refused to take her back." Giles' eyebrows rose. "He did offer the job to Willow once, but fortunately she turned him down."

Roger let out a long breath. "I am so on overload. Okay, let's get back to something I can understand. There's you and Buffy, Anya, Willow and Tara. Who else is on the team?"

"There's Xander. Xander went to high school with Willow and Buffy and the three of them have been best friends for a long time. Xander and Anya are involved, a fact which you will soon find impossible to ignore." Giles grimaced at that comment.

Roger raised his eyebrows. "What do you mean?"

"One thing Anya hasn't learned yet is the difference between what should be said in private, and what should be said in public. She's quite vocal about her sex life."

Roger started to laugh. "Is that what she meant when she said that she tells you everything?"

Giles nodded his head. "Yes. And trust me, she means everything."

Paul shook his head. "So what does Xander do? What weird thing does he do?"

Giles let out a laugh. "The oddest thing about Xander is that he is completely normal. He has no magical skills to speak of, and yet he has chosen to support Buffy, putting himself in danger for no other reason than that he loves her." There was pride in Giles' voice as he spoke of Xander. He grinned. "And he buys the donuts."

Paul let out a laugh. "Well, in my book that makes him damn near indispensable. Anyone else we need to know about?"

Giles grimaced. "Well, you probably ought to know about Spike."

Both Paul and Roger raised their eyebrows and spoke at the same time. "Spike?"

Giles nodded. "Spike." Giles took a deep breath. "Spike is a vampire who

helps us out on occasion."

Paul looked nervous. "Like Angel?"

Giles shook his head, his eyes wide. "No, not like Angel. Spike doesn't have a soul, so he can't lose it. Instead he has a chip." At their confused looks Giles grinned. "It's complicated."

Paul gave Giles a dry smile. "Ha ha. Nice try."

Giles thought for a minute. "All right, condensed version. There was a military group here in town called the Initiative. They were capturing and experimenting on demons and vampires. They captured Spike and put a chip in his head that prevents him from hurting humans. But he can kill demons. So, in exchange for money he started helping us out now and then. Giving us information. Helping us fight. After a while he...well...he sort of stuck."

Paul looked at him. "He sort of stuck?"

Giles made a face. "Well, he'd never admit it but I know he really likes Buffy, and he and I have started getting along for the most part. He helps out now most of the time without us paying him. He's sort of a part of the team." Giles got a serious look on his face. "Don't get me wrong. You can't really trust him, he is a demon, but he's saved our lives quite a few times and he's...I don't know...he's taught me that vampires can really care about people." Giles shrugged. "He really is complicated. Just know that you can't trust him completely. If his chip failed he might just try to kill us all, but I feel better having him around. And if you can make sense out of all that please explain it to me because I don't understand it at all."

Roger's eyes gleamed. "Do you think he'd let me examine him?"

Giles grinned. "If you paid him enough money, he'd let you do just about anything to him."

Roger frowned. "And his name's Spike? Do they all have names like that?"

Giles shook his head. "His real name is William. He picked up the name Spike along the way because of what he did to his victims."

Roger closed his eyes. "Which was?" He braced himself for the unpleasant answer.

"He liked to drive railroad spikes through his victims for fun. But he always reassures me that it was when he was young and didn't mind wasting the

time to be artistic with a kill." Giles sighed. "He's killed two Slayers and he came here intending to kill Buffy. It would have made him the only known vampire to have killed three Slayers." Giles let out a short silent laugh. "Now, he's helping to keep her alive. It grates on him sometimes."

"Do you really think he'd try to kill you if he lost his chip?"

Giles looked thoughtful for a minute. "I don't know. He says he would, but he likes to brag about his evilness. It makes him feel better about actually fighting on the side of good these days. If he tried, if he killed any of us and left Buffy alive, he knows she'd come after him. He knows if he did anything to Buffy that I'd come after him." He repeated himself. "I don't know. I think about it sometimes and I'd like to think he'd just leave town. That's certainly what I've told him to do if it ever happens."

"What about Angel?"

Giles' eyes grew cautious as he looked at Paul. "What do you mean?"

"Do you think about him losing his soul again?" Paul realized what he'd just asked and he swore. "I'm sorry Giles, that was a thoughtless and stupid question."

Giles put his hand up. "No, it was a fair question. Yes, I do think about him losing his soul again. The thought of that frightens me much more than the thought of Spike losing his chip. If Spike became a fully functioning vampire again he might try to kill us, but he'd be straightforward about it and none of it would be personal. He'd be in it for the kill, for the feed, or to rid himself of an inconvenience. But Angel, or should I say Angelus..." Giles shook his head.

Paul tried again. "You don't need to talk about it, I'm sorry I even mentioned him."

"No, you should know. If he ever found out how important you are to me, you'd be at risk." He looked at the two of them. "You both would be. With Angelus it's all about being personal. He exists solely for revenge and torture and cruelty. Nothing is ever simple, it all involves long drawn out plans as he slowly tightens the noose around your neck while he paralyzes you with terror, stripping you bit by bit of everything you hold dear and thought safe." His voice was captivating and horrifying, and the look in his eyes sent chills down Paul and Roger's spines.

Giles took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. "After he killed Jenny I went after him. I was ...well ...I wasn't quite myself. All I wanted to do was kill him. And I didn't care if I died in the process."

Roger asked him softly, "What happened?"

"Buffy came after me. She knew Angelus would kill me. She knew I wasn't a match for him, not in the state I was in, not alone." He smiled a little. "Spike was there and he just watched as I went after Angelus. Spike hated him. He still hates him, Angelus and Angel. I think he would have applauded me if I'd managed to kill him."

"What happened when Buffy got there?" Again the question was asked softly.

"She started fighting him, protecting me. I got knocked out after setting the place on fire. I believe she would have killed him but she had to rescue me. She told me later that the fire was getting close to where I was lying. She dragged me outside. I tried to go back in, we fought."

Giles was lost in his memories. After a minute Roger touched his arm and Giles looked up. "Sorry." He shook his head as if to clear the memories away and he touched his jaw. "She punched me, knocked me right down. And then she held me and wouldn't let me go. I cried in her arms for a long time as the building burned down in front of us." Paul and Roger fought against the sting of tears.

Giles continued. "You don't know how many times I wanted to stake Angel, once he came back. Just to make sure he never turned into Angelus again, so he could never come back to threaten the people I love." He put his glasses back on. "Only the fact that Buffy would never have forgiven me if she ever found out kept me from doing it. And he is doing good down in LA. He is trying to atone for his sins." Giles shook his head. "I can't imagine what it's like for him. The things he's done, having to live with it. I still haven't forgiven him, not completely, and I'm one man, one man out of thousands that he's wronged through the centuries. And to many of those he did much worse things."

Paul asked another question, not sure what he'd do if he got a positive answer. "Do he and Buffy talk much?"

Giles shook his head. "No. Since he's left they've only seen each other a few times. The last time he was here was when Buffy's mother died and that was almost a year ago." Giles could feel how much easier it was to talk of Buffy and Angel after last night. His fears that she might still love him were gone. She'd made that undeniably clear.

Paul let out a breath. He was very relieved by Giles' answer. Although, after last night, even if Buffy had been speaking to Angel on a regular basis, Paul

bet it would now be stopping. He asked another question. "Can he lose his soul again? Or I guess the better question is can he only lose his soul if he has sex?"

"I don't know. The curse simply says that a moment of true happiness could take his soul away." Giles shook his head, disgusted. "Let me just go on record and say that whoever dreamed up that curse must have been drunk at the time. Why go to all that trouble to give a vampire back his soul and then throw a caveat like that in there? I've never understood it, and Angelus killed off the only two gypsies I knew who might have been able to explain it. One of whom was Jenny."

Paul's lips tightened. "Giles, Roger and I knew about Jenny."

Giles looked at Paul, surprised. Then he nodded his head in understanding. "The police records, I suppose."

Paul nodded. "I know it was none of my business and I hadn't planned on looking but that night at your house, when you..."

Giles smiled ruefully at him. "When I so rudely kicked you out?"

Paul grinned, just a little. "Yes, when you kicked us out, I needed to know. I needed to make sure that..." Paul tried again. "I mean, if I was going to hang out with you I needed ..." He looked at Giles, clearly embarrassed.

Giles looked at him, encouraging him to finish. "What? It's all right."

"Well, I needed to make sure you weren't doing anything illegal. That you weren't selling drugs or ...or worse. So, I checked to see if you had any kind of past record."

Giles sighed. "I almost lost you both that night, didn't I?"

Paul just looked at Giles. "Well, you certainly would have if you'd been engaged in something illegal. I just didn't understand. I didn't understand why you were keeping so much from us, and who this Buffy was, and why you were so skittish. It's why I didn't ever tell you what I really did for a living."

Giles gave him a wry smile. "That was probably a good thing. If I'd known you were the Chief of Police when I'd first met you I'd have never gone back to that bar."

"Why?"

"Let's just say that Buffy's had some bad experiences with the police in this town and she'd have never understood me being friends with one."

Paul sighed. "Well, now she's had one more bad experience."

Giles smiled at him. "I think you've been completely forgiven. I wouldn't worry about it too much."

Paul shook his head. "Giles, you are without a doubt the most remarkable person I have ever met." Roger nodded his head in agreement.

Giles cocked his head to the side. "Why do you say that? I'm no different from any other man once you get past what I do."

"That's not true. The things you've gone through, the suffering you've lived through, the lives you've been responsible for, years of it and yet here you are. You're not bitter. In fact, you're the most forgiving man I think I've ever known. You're smart, dedicated, you have an amazingly wicked sense of humor, and you speak of the most frightening things I can imagine with courage and a determination that humbles me. I don't know how you do it but I admire you, more than I can say."

Giles took a sip of his beer to hide the emotions Paul's words had engendered in him. He had no idea how to respond. Finally he just gave Paul a small smile. "Thank you."

Paul grinned. "You're welcome."

Frank arrived with three more beers. After he left again, Paul asked another question. "So Buffy has a mean left hook?"

Giles touched his jaw, looking chagrined. "That's not the only time she's hit me. I mean, she hits me almost every day when we train but she doesn't mean to hurt me. She's just so much stronger than I am that even when she holds back I end up getting bruised somehow."

"How strong is she?"

"Very strong."

"Yeah, but how strong? Like superman strong?"

Giles chuckled. "No, she's not impervious. But she could kill me, any of us, in seconds if she chose to. I can't imagine there's a human on earth who could hold his or her own with her for any amount of time. And she's taken on at

least 10 vampires at a time and come out of it without a scratch. She is amazing to watch. You've never seen anything like it."

Roger grinned. "I take it you're a fan?"

Giles laughed. "You should come and watch her train some day. She'll take your breath away."

"I'll do that."

Standing True 2

Paul wanted to back up the conversation. "You said that wasn't the only time she's hit you. When else did she hit you?"

Giles looked at his watch, hesitating before jumping off into an entirely new and equally complicated story. "Don't you two need to get back?"

Roger shook his head. "I'm off today." He looked at Paul.

Paul tapped himself on the chest. "I'm the Chief. I can do what I want." They both looked at Giles.

He grinned. "And I'm the boss." He laughed. "Although Anya would not agree that that means I can do as I please. I'm sure she's already watching the clock."

Paul waved his hand, dismissing Anya and her clock watching. "You told her you didn't know when you'd be back, so it seems to me that you're a free man for the afternoon."

Giles thought about it for a minute. "All right." He marshaled his thoughts and then decided to take a different tack. "Let me show you something." After paying Frank for their beers and lunch, Kathleen still not having made an appearance, the three of them headed outside. They got in Paul's car and Giles directed him to their destination. As they got out of the car, Giles gestured towards the empty field. "This is where the high school used to be. They left it standing for close to two years after it was destroyed, but the city finally decided it was a health hazard and they tore it down." He glanced at Paul. "Right before you moved here."

Paul looked at the field. "This was the one that was blown up?" Giles nodded. Paul closed his eyes tightly. "Giles?" He opened one eye, squinting apprehensively at Giles.

Giles looked at Paul, knowing what he wanted to ask. "Don't ask, if you don't want to hear the answer."

Paul couldn't help himself. "How did the school get blown up?"

Giles sighed. "I blew it up."

Paul let out a curse. "Damn it, I knew it. I mean, I didn't know it when you first told us but I knew that's what you were going to say right now. Why? Why did you blow up a high school?" He held up his hand. "I'm sure you had a good reason but..." He looked at the field. "Holy Christ."

Giles started to walk onto the field. "I can't take all the credit. But I was the one who pushed the plunger down. As soon as I saw that Buffy was safe I blew it up."

"Again I ask why?"

"Neither of you were living here at the time but have you heard anything about a Mayor Richard Wilkins?"

Paul nodded. "I read an article about him at the station house. He died ..." He glanced at Giles. "He died while he was giving a commencement address for a high school graduating class."

Giles was nodding. "The Mayor was trying to ascend, trying to become a demon. Anya was the one who had the information we needed to realize just how dangerous he'd be when he did ascend, and the devastation he would bring. She saw the last ascension about 800 years ago."

Giles had reached mid-field at this point and his foot scuffed in the dirt. "He transformed in the middle of his commencement speech, turning into this enormous snake demon. He planned to feed on the students and parents, on the entire town, actually." A sad look crossed Giles' face. "Despite our best efforts, too many people still died that day before we were able to stop him. According to the plans we'd made, Buffy goaded him into chasing her through the school. He followed her until he got to the library and then she threw herself out the window. We had mined the library with explosives and as soon as Buffy was free I blew it up." He crouched down and ran some dirt through his hand. "There was a certain poetic justice to it. Me blowing up the library." He stood. "I'd taken all the books out first, of course."

Paul snorted. "Of course you did." Then he sighed. "The Mayor turned into a snake?"

Giles nodded. "A very, very big demon snake."

Paul sighed again. "Jesus." He put his hands in the pockets of his pants. "Giles, if I went back to the police station and pulled out the unsolved crimes files, how many of them would you be familiar with?"

Giles glanced at Paul. "Quite a few of them. Buffy and I could certainly give you different explanations than the ones the police try desperately to come up with." He smiled. "You can't really blame them. How could they ever really know what was going on? And the ones that did know looked the other way, or they were being paid to be quiet."

Paul frowned. "What do you mean by that?"

"When Mayor Wilkins was here, many government officials were on his payroll, including the Chief of Police." He laughed. "You should see the cover stories they came up with." Giles shook his head. "Gangs on PCP, backed up sewers, wild animals escaping from the zoo, a never ending stream of lies."

"No wonder you would have run if you'd known about me."

"No more than you would have run if you'd known about me." They smiled at each other.

But, Paul still hadn't gotten his answer. "So, when else did Buffy hit you?"

Giles gestured towards the field. "Here, she hit me in the library. Knocked me out, cold."

Roger's eyes opened wide. "Why?"

"To keep me from going on a suicide mission."

"Was this after the whole Angel thing?"

"No, it was when she was sixteen." Giles looked around to orient himself and then he walked over to a large brown patch on the ground. Grass was growing everywhere else except where he now stood. "I'm quite certain this is where the library was."

Paul looked at the ground. "Is this from the explosives?" He was also looking at the lack of grass.

Giles crouched and put his hands on the ground. "No, I don't think so. This is where the Hellmouth is. It was under the library. I'm guessing there's a bit of a

leak that prevents anything from growing here." He looked down at the brown patch. "No wonder everyone stayed away from the library."

Paul crouched too. "Are you trying to tell me that that portal thing, the portal between realities that lets all the evil in is right here, I mean, right here, under this dirt?" He looked shaken. "I need another drink."

Giles shook his head. "There's been nothing to indicate that it's opening, so I imagine it must always leak a bit. Nothing to be unduly worried about unless something tries to come and open it again." He looked around. "I do wonder what they plan to do with this area. They rebuilt the school across town."

Roger saw a sign on the edge of the field. Walking over he took a look at it. Turning it around he spoke. "Wonder no longer."

Giles took off his glasses. "Future home of Pet Universe." He sighed. "Well it's better than a day care center, I suppose. I wish they'd just put a parking lot or a...well, I'm not sure what, but something that wouldn't have a lot of people around." He stood. "Well, it will take them a while to get that built, so we'll worry about it later."

Roger turned the sign back around and walked back over to Paul and Giles. "I can't believe you all managed to survive with this thing underneath you."

Giles picked up a few rocks and began to throw them across the field. "We didn't all survive. Too many people died."

"I know, I'm sorry. I guess I meant you and Buffy."

"She died too."

Roger's eyebrows almost rose off his face. "What do you mean?"

"She died. This vampire known as the Master killed her, he drowned her. That's the night she punched me and knocked me out. I'd read a prophecy saying that she would face the Master and die. She found out about it, and, needless to say, got quite upset and said she was just going to quit, that she was too young to die. She broke my heart." Giles pulled out his handkerchief and began to clean his glasses. "She asked me if I'd get the next Slayer, if I would train her. I didn't know what to say to her. All I knew was that I couldn't bear the thought of having a different Slayer, that this one, that Buffy, without me even being aware it, had planted herself quite firmly into my heart."

Giles put his glasses back on and continued. "So, that night I decided to go in her place. We argued about it and she told me she wouldn't let me." He

mimicked a fist hitting his jaw. "She most definitively wouldn't let me. Laid me out flat."

"So, what happened? How is she alive if he drowned her?"

"Xander happened. Angel and he found her. Xander did CPR, and brought her back. But, she was dead long enough for another Slayer to be called, and that's why there's two of them now."

Paul recalled her name from the stories Giles had told them last night. "Kendra?" He had wondered why there seemed to be two Slayers.

Giles nodded. "Who, as I told you, was killed. When she died, Faith, who is currently residing in prison down in LA, was called." Saddened at the thought of Faith, Giles walked a few steps away, staring at the ground, lost in thought. Paul and Roger just watched him. Finally Giles turned around. "Any more questions?"

Roger blurted one out before he could think better of it. "Does anything fun ever happen to you guys?"

Giles' eyes widened in surprise at the question. He gave it some serious thought. That in and of itself answered Roger's question. Roger exchanged a look with Paul, and Giles glanced up in time to catch it. He tried to find a way to answer Roger's question. "We have our moments. And I suppose that's what they are, moments. Things that are silly, jokes that get told, the warmth of friendship, the thrill of winning another victory against insurmountable odds. But for the most part, no, there hasn't been much fun." He smiled shyly at Paul and Roger. "Until you two came along I think I'd almost forgotten what it felt like, having fun, relaxing. It had been a long time."

Paul smiled back at Giles and then he got a wicked glint in his eye. "Well, until we met you we'd forgotten how it felt to be scared shitless, so I'd say we're even." He glanced at Roger, looking for confirmation.

Roger nodded his head. "Oh, yeah, I'd say that was a fair exchange."

Giles started to laugh. "I think I've laughed more with you two in the last six months than I have in the last ten years."

Roger and Paul grinned at each other, pleased to have this role in Giles' life. Paul rocked back on his heels. "You take care of the staking and just leave the jokes to us."

Not wanting to lose this happier momentum Roger decided to ask about the

one subject he knew Giles was happy about right now. "So, let's talk about Buffy."

Giles looked at Roger with narrowed eyes, mocking suspicion. "What about Buffy?"

"Be honest. When was the first time you felt really attracted to her?"

Giles let out a laugh. "You won't believe me, but it was last night."

Roger snorted. "You're right, I don't believe you."

"It's true. I mean, certainly, I've noticed her. She's very beautiful." He shot Roger a look. "What was the phrase you used last night?"

"Quite the hottie?"

"Yes, quite the hottie." Giles glared at Roger. "And please, try and refrain from referring to her in those terms again."

Roger grinned. "Jealous?"

"No, appalled at the never-ending butchering of the English language that surrounds me. Hottie." Giles snorted and shook his head. "There are so many wonderfully descriptive words available to wax poetic about a woman's beauty without resorting to such unattractive slang."

Paul rolled his eyes. "Give a man a Ph.D. in languages and ancient artifacts and he turns into a complete snob."

Roger agreed. "And I haven't even shown him all the cheap artifact knock offs I keep stashed in my closet."

"Don't tell him. He'll probably start pretending he doesn't know you."

Giles let out a long-suffering breath. "Fine, I'm a snob. Could you at least call me an elitist? It sounds like something to be proud of."

Paul nodded. "Got it." He turned to Roger. "Make a note. If you're going to insult Giles you need to use a word that has at least three syllables."

Roger let out a sigh. "Man, I'm gonna have to get a thesaurus."

Giles glared at them both. "Do shut up now."

Roger laughed. "Okay, so you're aware of the fact that Buffy is a hot..." He glanced at Giles and changed direction, grinning. "...thing of beauty, a work of fine art, a Venus, a Helena." He backed up as Giles took a threatening step in his direction and finished his thought. "But you never put two and two together?"

Giles let out a half laugh. "No, I knew she was beautiful, but I was her Watcher. I was responsible for her; she looked to me for guidance. Not to mention the fact that she was sixteen when I met her and having those kinds of thoughts can get you a one-way ticket back to England, or a jail sentence."

Paul pursed his lips. "That's true enough. So, you just never went there?"

Giles shook his head. "And I guess I spent so long making sure I never went there that it became automatic not to. I tried to never think of her that way."

Roger looked with amazement at Giles. "Sorry, Giles, but you are so clueless. I was with you guys for less than an hour and I could tell something was going on between the two of you. You don't fall in love with someone in the space of an hour unless you're most of the way there already."

Giles stared at him and then he softly laughed. "I don't know what happened. I've loved her for so long but it never seemed romantic in nature. I just loved her. But last night...everything was different."

Paul spoke. "It started the night before for Buffy. When I went to her house, she started crying and she cried for the longest time. Let me tell you, going from arresting her to mopping up her tears in the space of a couple of hours was a bit odd."

Giles' brow was furrowed. "Why was she crying?"

"About you, about how she'd treated you. I think that she was finally getting it, everything you'd done for her, everything you'd sacrificed for her. She figured it out." He watched Giles' eyes start to grow dark. "And before you get defensive on Buffy's behalf I'm not accusing her of anything. She was young while all these horrible things were going on, and as you pointed out last night, she's had little opportunity for enormous amounts of self-introspection. But she has gotten older and apparently wiser. It only makes sense that she'd wake up at some point and see the worth of what she has."

Paul pointed at Giles and continued. "And that's you. You walked into that last night, her waking up, her realizing what you mean to her. I don't think anything would have ever happened if Buffy hadn't opened her eyes." He grinned. "But when she did...wham. You were right there."

Giles let out a soft laugh. "Yes, I was, wasn't I?"

Paul gestured towards Roger with his thumb. "And then of course, it didn't help that Roger here decided to do a little matchmaking."

Roger shrugged. "I had to. You guys were pitiful."

Giles glared at Roger. "Thank you so much."

Roger grinned. "Don't mention it."

Giles still couldn't quite believe the whole thing had happened. "You could tell that quickly?" At Roger's grinning nod, Giles shook his head. "I really was blind."

"Did it bother you when Buffy had boyfriends?"

Giles snorted. "Only because she made such bad choices and ended up getting hurt so badly. I hated that." At Roger's look, Giles thought about it some more. "All right. I didn't like it when she dated, but only because she usually ended up ignoring me, ignoring my advice, and putting herself in even more danger than usual."

Roger shook his head kindly at Giles. "Clueless."

Giles decided it wasn't worth his effort to fight, especially as Roger was right. "Fine, I confess, I was clueless."

Paul decided he was tired of standing over the Hellmouth, especially if it was leaking, so he started them walking. "Where's Buffy's dad in all of this?"

"Good question. He's been a fairly absentee father."

"Does he know about Buffy?"

Giles shook his head. "No. He doesn't know anything about her at this point. She hasn't spoken to him for over a year. When Buffy's mum died we tried to find him, but he was off on some international trip with his secretary and he never returned our calls. Buffy had to go through all of that without any help from him."

"She had you."

"It doesn't excuse his absence."

"No, it doesn't." Paul paused. "What was Buffy's mom like? Did she know Buffy was the Slayer?"

Giles raised his eyebrows, thinking about Joyce. "She was...strong minded. She didn't find out about Buffy until, well, when Angelus had me." Giles shook his head. "She didn't take the news well and that all contributed to Buffy running away that summer. I went to speak with Joyce to console her about Buffy, and Joyce blamed me for her running away." He glanced up at Paul and Roger. "That was not a particularly good time for me, that summer."

Paul would have kicked Joyce if she'd been standing there. "She blamed you?"

"You can't really fault her for it. How would you feel if you suddenly found out that your only daughter was the Slayer, and faced possible death every night? She resented my hold on Buffy, she resented the fact that I had known this about Buffy and had kept it from her. Joyce desperately needed someone to blame for what was happening to her daughter and I was a convenient scapegoat." Giles brushed a few rocks off the sidewalk. "And there were, well, additional complications later on that made things even more difficult between us. But over the years we made a sort of peace with each other. Her death was unexpected, and very hard on Buffy."

Paul considered Giles for a minute, finding himself amazed anew at the strength of the man standing in front of him, his capacity for forgiveness. "Do you have any family, I mean, by birth, blood family?"

Giles shook his head. "No, my parents are dead, and I was an only child. I've lost touch with the few cousins I had." He smiled. "My family is here, now."

Roger pointed to himself and Paul. "We claim brother spots." He grinned at Giles. "That gives us the right to constantly harass you." He emphasized the word constantly.

Giles rolled his eyes. "It never stopped you before."

"Well, best friends get to harass you constantly too. This just gives us non-stop coverage."

"I'm touched beyond belief by your thoughtfulness."

Paul grinned at Roger. Then he looked at Giles. "Hey, Giles, that first day I met you at Frank's, when you had bruises all over your face, what happened to you?"

Giles tried to think back but then he shook his head. "I have no idea."

"What do you mean you have no idea? How can you not remember something like that? Your face was completely chewed up. I asked you if the other guy looked worse and you said yes."

Giles remembered the conversation and he chuckled. "Yes, he did. If I remember correctly, he was a vampire, and he was a small pile of dust when you and I had that conversation."

"So, a vampire did that to you?"

"Probably, or a demon."

"You don't remember?"

"I get hurt all the time, Paul. I can't remember the specifics of each time."

Paul scrunched his face up. "What do you mean you get hurt all the time? That's the only time I saw your face beat up like that."

Giles glanced at Roger. "You haven't looked at my hospital chart?"

Roger shook his head. "I will now, now that I'm your official doctor. Until you told us about Angelus last night it never would have crossed my mind to see if you had one."

Giles smiled ruefully at Roger. "I'm actually amazed our paths haven't crossed, both before I met you, and since. I'm a fairly frequent visitor there, either because I'm hurt or because I'm bringing one of the others in."

Roger's brow furrowed. "I remember you giving me a weird look when I first told you I was an ER doctor."

"I couldn't believe I hadn't met you. I thought I knew all the doctors there."

Paul was growing more concerned. "How do you get hurt?"

Giles pursed his lips. "I seem to get knocked out a lot. Cordelia, another friend of Buffy's you haven't met yet, used to warn me that I'd wake up in a coma if I wasn't careful." Giles smiled at the memory.

"How do you end up getting knocked out? I thought Buffy did the fighting."

"Buffy does do most of the fighting, but sometimes I find myself in the thick of it. I do accompany her on patrol on a fairly regular basis, and while she does her best to protect me she can't always keep me out of harm's way."

"So, why do you go with her?"

"I am responsible for her training. I need to see how she's fighting, if she's picking up any bad habits. There's only so much I can see while she's training. Her strength and other heightened abilities come with Buffy being the Slayer, but her actual fighting skills have to be learned and honed. It also lets me keep my fighting skills up as well. And, truthfully, she appreciates the company. Before her mother died it was often the only time she and I had the opportunity to talk. We all go out with her every now and then, although I certainly go out with her these days more than anyone else." He glanced at Paul. "You asked her last night if you could go one night, and I think you should. Patrol is different every night. Some nights there is nothing to see at all, and some nights things go badly so quickly it's hard to keep your head above water."

"And you get hurt?" Paul was having a hard time getting past this point.

"I don't just get hurt on patrol. We've been visited at the shop several times by creatures intending us harm, and I've been attacked at my home as well. Fortunately, Buffy regularly shows up just at the right time."

Paul frowned. "And if she didn't?"

"I imagine I'd be dead quite a few times over."

"Dead?"

Giles took a deep breath. "Paul, this is real. The evil is real and it doesn't care if I die, or if any of us die. In fact, it does what it can to kill anything that might get in its way."

Paul scowled. "I know, you keep saying that, but I guess it hasn't quite sunk in yet. I just don't like the idea of you getting hurt, or Buffy, for that matter." He looked Giles over. "Are you hurt now?"

Giles hesitated, thinking about it, but then shook his head. "Not really, a few bruises here and there."

"Well, how do I help you not get hurt anymore?"

Giles looked up and saw the determined glint in Paul's eyes. "You can't, Paul."

I'll get hurt, and you can't stop it. The truth of the matter is that you will get hurt too, you both will. It's why I cautioned you about getting involved, it's why I said I'd understand if you walked away." He smiled at them softly. "I'd still understand."

Paul frowned at Giles. "You need to stop that. I'm not going anywhere."

Roger agreed. "Me either."

Giles smiled softly at them. "I just don't want either of you to get hurt."

Paul cocked his head to the side at Giles. "Why do you stay?"

"I'm sorry?"

"Why have you stayed so long? You keep getting hurt, physically and emotionally, and yet you stay. Why?"

Giles looked at Paul. "It's important and it's my duty."

Paul shook his head. "That's crap. Maybe it was about duty at first, but that's not why you stay. You were fired and you stayed. Why?"

Giles put his hands in his pockets. "Because of Buffy. Because I love her."

Paul nodded. "That's right. And that's why we're staying. Because it's important, and because of you. So, I don't want to hear any more about us leaving or not being a part of this, okay?"

Giles pursed his lips as he considered Paul and Roger and then he smiled. "Okay."

"Good." Paul looked at his watch and in silent agreement the three of them started heading back to his car. Paul glanced at Giles. "So, what's on the agenda for tonight?"

Giles let out a soft laugh. "I've been ordered to go to Buffy's, quite peremptorily, I might add."

Paul and Roger both flashed him a grin. Roger couldn't help teasing Giles some more. "She is a bossy bit of goods, isn't she?"

Giles frowned at Roger. "She's not bossy, she's ..." His comment trailed off as he took in Roger's grin. Giles rolled his eyes. The truth was, Buffy was bossy, but he loved it. God save him from weak-willed females. At the thought of

being with Buffy, of holding her, Giles let out a happy sigh. "I still don't quite believe it."

Roger raised his eyebrows. "What?"

"Buffy. That things have changed so much so quickly." Giles let out a soft chuckle and he looked at Paul and Roger. "Although, I shouldn't be surprised. It took me months to believe in the two of you, that you ...well ...that you considered me ...that is ..."

Roger slapped him on the back. "Spit it out, Giles. You still can't say it, can you? Friends, say it with me, friends." Roger exaggerated the word as if he were teaching Giles how to pronounce it. Roger grinned at the disgruntled expression on Giles' face. "Ooh, this one's even harder. Girlfriend. Can you say that one?" Roger put his hands up to ward off Giles' glare, his grin unrepentant.

Paul laughed at his brother but then sent Giles a teasing look. "Giles, you might need a new dictionary, one with short words in it like fun, and friends, and love and sex. Can you say those words in fifteen languages?"

Giles gave up and started to laugh. "Not in fifteen, but I'll wager I can say them in more languages than you two can."

Paul snorted. "No contest with that one, language guy."

Roger agreed. "Yeah, really, what sort of fair challenge is that? You might as well dare to take me at a game of darts."

Paul rolled his eyes. "You are so going down one day." He made a noise as his hand mimicked a missile heading for the ground, ending with an explosion. "Going down." He glanced at Giles. "You need to practice."

Giles put a hand on his chest. "Me? Suddenly I'm the weak link here?"

Roger sent Giles a sorrowful look. "I'm afraid Buffy and the rest of them may look to you for the answers to everything, but when it comes to darts, you have much to learn, grasshopper."

Giles barked out a laugh. "I'm sure if you asked Buffy and the rest of them, they'd say I have much to learn about everything. They consider me frightfully ignorant of the things they talk about and deem important."

Paul slapped him on the arm. "Giles, you are the least ignorant person I have ever met. The stuff you don't know, it's not important." He grinned. "And I'll bet

Buffy wouldn't tolerate you berating yourself about anything today."

Roger grinned at Paul's words. "And she asked us to, how did she put it? Ah, yes, to hit her upside the head if she's mean to you, so you just stick with us and we'll make sure she treats you right."

Giles frowned at them both. "She ..."

Paul interrupted him. "We know, she can do no wrong in your eyes, and woe to anyone who might hurt her in anyway, or think ill of her. We get it. But, you need to deal with the fact that we will tease her, and tease you about her, so just get used to it and lose the glare."

Giles just stared at them both and then he laughed softly again. "I'm sorry. I do tend to be a bit protective of her."

Paul raised his eyebrows. "A bit?" He snorted. "Jesus, Giles, you're ..." He looked at Roger. "Help me here. You're the doctor. Come up with some great psychiatric diagnosis."

Roger grinned, and spoke in a deep serious voice. "I'm afraid he's got an incurable obsessive compulsive disorder that requires him to instantaneously defend blond hotties when they are impugned in some fashion."

Paul nodded at Roger. "Thank you, that is exactly what I was looking for." He held his hands up to Giles as if to indicate that Roger's comments explained everything.

Giles let out a long suffering sigh, glancing at Roger. "You've no idea how the thought of you actually being my physician fills me with terror."

Roger grinned. "Hey, I got plenty more diagnoses where that one came from."

"No doubt."

"I went to a good medical school, even if it did leave out a few items here and there such as spells gone awry, or curses that make your intestines fall out on the ground. But I'll pick it up as I go along."

Paul nodded as he unlocked his car. "And the police academy definitely left out staking and beheading in their classes on hand-to-hand fighting tactics, but I'm betting they offer it as a continuing education class."

Roger pursed his lips as he looked at his brother. "Good idea. I should probably check on line, I'm sure there are some classes I could take that deal

with the medical complications of living on a Hellmouth. Maybe I could teach one. I could probably write some articles about it."

"I'm sure the New England Journal of Medicine would snap those right up."

"I think so."

Giles started to grin as he listened to the two of them carry on. Shaking his head he got into the back seat, watching Paul and Roger get into the front. He felt something loosen inside of himself as he realized that with these two he could truly relax his guard, just as he could now with Buffy, in a way he never had before. No need to watch his back, they'd be standing there every time he turned around, teasing and harassing him, no doubt, but nonetheless, standing true.

Giles allowed the quips that were flying fast and furious in the front seat to fade away as he again assessed his life, assessed how full it had become, and how much he suddenly had to be thankful for. Paul and Roger, noting how quiet he was being, glanced towards the back and they saw Giles, his eyes closed, smiling. Grinning at each other they picked up where they left off.

The End

April 4, 2002