

## Tombstone 1

It was raining. Buffy felt drenched and chilled to the bone. Tombstones stretched in every direction as far as the eye could see. One in particular drew her in. She slowly walked closer to it, dreading to see the words on it. Her heart was seized with an unbearable sadness. She could barely stand to look at it but she was powerless to turn her head away. As she tried to focus on the name the rain fell harder, impairing her vision. She fell to her knees, sobbing.

##

Buffy's sob wrenched her from her sleep. The sadness from the dream hung around her and she had to fight the urge to cry. She ran her hands over her face and it was covered with tears. She shook her head to try and snap herself out of it but the mood persisted. Buffy didn't even know who she had been grieving for, but it had felt so real. She finally got out of bed and went to take a shower.

The sadness was still lingering when she got to the Magic Shop. Giles took one look at her and stopped what he was doing. "Buffy, is everything all right?"

She smiled ruefully. "I don't know. I had the saddest dream last night and I can't seem to get over it."

"What did you dream?"

She let out a breath. "It wasn't anything, really. I saw a tombstone. I couldn't even read the name on it. But it made me feel so sad. Like whoever it belonged to, when they died that a piece of me died too. I can't really explain it."

"Did it feel like a prophetic dream?"

"No, I don't think so. Just a sad one." She looked up at him. "I mean suppose it was my mom, or Willow or Xander." Giles tried not to feel the pang that went through him as she neglected to mention him. She looked at her hands. "Suppose it was you." She looked back up at him and he was surprised to see tears in her eyes.

He put his arm gently across her shoulders and gave her a little squeeze. "It was just a dream, Buffy."

"I know but it made me so sad." She tried to fight back the tears, as she'd

been doing all day, but she finally lost the fight. She started to cry and moved towards Giles putting her face on his chest. Giles looked a little bewildered but then gently wrapped his arms around her, softly patting her back.

Riley walked in, surprised to see a man holding Buffy. Buffy had told him she was often here and Riley had come by on the off chance he might run into her. When Riley realized she was crying his brow furrowed.

Giles looked up when the front bell rang and saw a young man walk in. He gestured to Anya to deal with him, thinking he was a customer. Meanwhile he turned Buffy and began to walk her back to the training room so she could have some privacy.

Riley made a noise as if to protest but Anya had gotten to him by then and began to speak. "What would you like to buy?"

He frowned at her. "Nothing, I came to see Buffy." He pointed at Giles' back as the door to the training room shut. "Who is he?"

Anya followed the pointing finger. "That's Giles. He's my boss. He owns this place."

"What's he to Buffy? Why was she crying?"

Anya wondered who this guy was. "Don't worry about Buffy. They're very close. He'll take good care of her."

Somehow that didn't reassure Riley at all. He looked at Anya. "Will you tell Buffy I stopped by?"

"Who are you?"

"Riley, Riley Finn. I go to school with her."

Anya nodded. "I'll tell her. Now go away please." She smiled brightly at him. Riley wasn't sure how to respond so he just slowly walked away looking back at the door Giles and Buffy had gone through, hoping she might come out. When he reached the door with no sign of her, he left.

Giles continued to hold Buffy until she stopped crying. He had tried to pull away to get her some tissues or a drink of water but she held on for dear life and eventually he just stopped trying. This was so unlike Buffy he was feeling rather concerned.

Finally she pulled away, and wiped some of her tears away. He reached in his

pocket and offered her his handkerchief. She clutched it in her hand, looking up at him. "Sorry, Giles. I didn't mean to go all weepy on you."

He smiled down at her. "There's nothing to apologize for. Dreams can be very powerful. Do you feel better now?"

She took a deep tremulous breath. "I think so. Boy, I hope I don't dream that one again."

Giles felt the same way. "Do you want to pass on training today Buffy? If you're still feeling poorly we could wait until tomorrow."

"No. Maybe beating you up will make me feel better."

"Yes, very amusing." He had her start stretching as he began to plan their workout.

##

Later that evening Buffy ran into Riley at the Bronze. She smiled up at him, glad to see him. He smiled back and spoke. "Are you feeling better now?"

Buffy looked confused. "What do you mean?"

"Didn't that girl tell you I dropped by?"

"What girl, and dropped by where?"

"At the Magic Shop. I dropped by and you seemed upset. You were with that man who owns the shop. I told the girl who works there to tell you I dropped by."

She scrunched up her face. "She's not great with messages. She thinks it's a menial task. Sorry, I'll beat her up for you if you want me to."

Riley chuckled. "That won't be necessary. Are you better, though? You seemed really upset."

"Yeah, I just had a bad dream." She looked up at him and wrinkled her nose. "I know that sounds stupid but it really wiggled me out."

"Why was...who is he?"

"Who, Giles?" Riley nodded. Buffy waited a few seconds too long to answer. "He's just a friend."

Riley tightened his lips but let it slide. He pointed his chin at the dance floor.  
"Do you want to dance?"

She smiled, nodding. He took her hand and walked her over to the dance floor. As soon as they got there the band started to play a slow number. Riley took Buffy into his arms and started swaying to the music delighted at the opportunity to hold her close.

Riley insisted on taking her home. She knew he wanted to kiss her good night but she just wasn't in the mood for it. She still hadn't quite shaken off the mood of her dream. He didn't press it and after a moment reluctantly said goodnight to her.

She closed the door behind her and looked at her bed with some trepidation. Somehow the thought of going to sleep and maybe having that dream again terrified her. She grabbed a couple of extra stakes and headed back out. She found herself at Giles' door. She knocked. Giles opened the door and stepped back to let her in. She didn't come in. He looked back at her, a question on his face. She spoke. "What would you do if you found I couldn't come in, that I was a vampire?" At the look of alarm on his face she quickly stepped over the threshold. He shot her a glare and closed the door behind her. She persisted. "What would you do?"

He let out a breath. "I would be very, very sad, and then I suppose I...would try and kill you." His eyes darkened at the thought and he turned away.

She walked over to him. "I'm sorry Giles, I didn't mean to bum you out."

"Yes, well, that would...as you say...bum me out." He looked down at himself as he spoke, picking imaginary lint off his sweater

. "I really am sorry. I don't even know why I asked you that. Do you want to patrol with me?"

He looked up at that and softly smiled. "I'll get my coat." She smiled back and they headed out together.

Giles drove Buffy home after patrol. He walked her up to her dorm room. She smiled when they got there. "Boy, everyone keeps walking me to my door tonight." Giles shook his head, not following. "This guy, after...we were at the Bronze, he drove me home."

"Ah."

"We're sort of dating...but not."

Giles just nodded, hoping she was through. He hated hearing about her dates. He knew they'd never be together that way, but he still thought of her as belonging to him somehow. He hated to even think about her belonging to somebody else. When she opened her mouth as if to speak again he pushed her door open wider. "Goodnight Buffy."

She eyed her bed again and frowned. She looked up at Giles. "Wanna come in?"

Giles' eyebrows rose. He looked in the room, at her bed. He shook his head. "Uh, no...I think I'll just say goodnight." She pouted. He blushed. "Really...I....we...I really have to go. Goodnight." He turned around and quickly headed down the hallway and back down the stairs. As he reached the sidewalk he looked back up at her room. He sighed and walked the rest of the way to his car.

##

Eventually Buffy got tired enough and bored enough that she crawled into bed. She had the dream again and woke up in tears. She curled up into a ball and wept.

##

Anya watched the woman corner Giles over by the cheap ceramics. She nudged Xander. "Do you think that woman is attractive?"

Xander looked nervous. "Uh, why?"

Anya looked at him, annoyed. "Never mind why. Do you think she's attractive?"

Xander took a chance. "Yeah, sort of."

"There's nothing about her, nothing of a deformed nature, that would make a man choose to not wish to spend time with her?"

Xander looked even more confused. "No, she looks undeformed from here." Anya nodded, a determined look forming on her face. She moved from behind the counter and headed over to Giles and the woman.

Giles didn't see her coming. He was distracted trying to figure out how to turn down the woman's very kind offer to meet him for coffee. When Anya spoke Giles looked at her with startled eyes. "Is this woman asking you out?"

Giles glared at Anya. The woman spoke. "Yes, I am. I'm not sure how that concerns you."

Anya ignored her for the time being. "Giles, we had a deal. I would stop talking about sex if you would try and have some. Say yes to this woman and go out on a date." She turned to the woman. "Would that be acceptable to you?"

Giles groaned and covered his face with his hands. The woman explained that she was just asking Giles to meet her for coffee. Anya shook her head. "No, I think dinner would be better. How's Friday night?"

The woman thought for a moment. "Friday night would be fine. Should I meet him somewhere?" She and Anya discussed possible restaurant choices.

Buffy chose that moment to walk in. She pulled a chair up next to Xander and looked at Giles. "What's up with Giles? Why is he looking like that?"

Xander hesitated a moment and then grimaced. "Well, mostly because he's mortified. Anya's trying to get Giles to date but I think her technique needs some work. She thinks he needs to have sex and she's...well...essentially offered him to that woman."

Buffy's eyes opened wide. "What? She's playing matchmaker and worse with my watcher? I am so going to kill her." She glared at Anya as Anya made her self-satisfied way back to the cash register. Anya just glared back.

Giles finally came out from under his hands. He was still blushing. He looked at the woman and hesitantly smiled. "I'm sorry about that."

"Oh, don't apologize. I got what I wanted." She laughed. "Although, would you like to back out? She sort of steamrolled you into this."

Giles sighed then he smiled at her. "No, I'm afraid I need a little steamrolling. I'm not very good at this. Dinner would be lovely. Shall I meet you at 8:00? And I'm embarrassed to ask this, but what is your name?"

"Donna, and 8:00 would be fine." She smiled at Giles, sent a wink to Anya and left.

Giles headed back over to the counter. He pointed a finger at Anya and opened his mouth to harangue her. She beat him to the punch. "I don't want to hear it. I'm sick and tired of watching you fumble your way through every encounter. You could have sex every night with all the women who come after you."

Giles started to blush again. "Anya, please stop."

Buffy frowned. "Women come after Giles?"

Anya glared at her. "Yes, women come after Giles. He is a handsome, single bachelor with a successful business. He is a lure to all these women who are having the urge to mate and breed. But somehow he never ends up going. So we made a deal. I promised not to talk about me and Xander having sex and he promised to go out on a few dates."

Giles snorted. "I don't remember painful humiliation being a part of that arrangement." He glared at Anya. "And if you ever do that again, I shall fire you immediately."

"Ha. You wouldn't survive a day here without me. I am unconcerned by your threat. Besides now you have a nice dinner with an attractive woman to look forward to."

Buffy looked pained. "I don't understand." She looked at Anya. "Why are you yenta-ing for my watcher. If he doesn't want to date, why should you care?" She knew they'd never be together that way, but somehow she still felt like Giles belonged to her. She didn't even like to think about him belonging to someone else.

Anya snorted. "Like you should talk. I saw that Riley, Riley Finn guy come in here yesterday. You date. Why shouldn't Giles? But no, he's always 'I have to be ready to help Buffy', 'I should be seeing if Buffy needs me', 'I have to have no life so I can help Buffy.'" She pointed a finger at Buffy. "Xander's told me plenty of stories where you went out on dates and because of it Giles got hurt. You don't worry about him when you go on a date. He should be able to do the same thing."

Xander dropped his jaw at Anya's words. He snapped it shut and winced at the look in Buffy's and Giles' eyes. He stood. "Okay, well, I have absolutely no idea how to fix any of this, so you're both on your own." He gave Anya a peck on the cheek and quickly left.

Giles just looked at Buffy. "Do you want to train?" She nodded her head and stood. They both walked into the back but instead of moving to any of the equipment they both sat down on the couch. Buffy sighed. Giles looked at her, cocking his head to the side. "Are you all right?"

Buffy wasn't all right. "I had that dream again." She watched Giles get a concerned look on his face. "Do you really feel that way?"



Giles shook his head. "Do I really feel what way?"

"Like you can't do anything because of me?"

Giles tightened his lips and glared briefly in Anya's direction as if it might penetrate the door. "Buffy, I choose to be available to you. No one's forcing me. As you well know, it's difficult to date in these circumstances. It's just easier for me not to." He stretched his legs out in front of him. "Did you see anything more?"

"Did I see anything more what?"

"Of the tombstone. Did you see anything else, any words?"

"No." She stretched her legs out too. "Why did you make such a stupid deal with Anya?"

Giles shook his head. "I have no idea. Mostly to shut her up. I was so tired of hearing about her...well...her activities that I couldn't stand it anymore. I had no idea she'd terrorize me into actually doing it."

"Are you really going to go out with that woman?" She scrunched her face up at the thought.

"Well, I can hardly back out now. I suppose I'll have to." He looked pensive for a moment. He figured he might as well find out now about Buffy. "Is this Riley fellow the one you're dating?"

Buffy nodded and then corrected him. "Sort of dating. We haven't actually gone out on a real date yet. We're going on our first one on Friday." She tried to look excited about it but failed. Giles wasn't looking at her though; he was cleaning his glasses.

He put them back on. "Yes, well, I hope this works out for you." He gave her a small reassuring smile.

"Yeah, well, you too." Buffy slouched back against the back of the couch and sighed.

End Part 1



Thursday night Buffy had the dream again. Tendrils of fog whispered through the graveyard. She had her hand over her heart as if to ease the pain. The words on the tombstone were blurry; her head ached with the effort to make some sense out of the shapes. A few started to form. She saw a year, 2001. She looked up and saw a tall sandy haired man staring at her from across the cemetery. He shook his head at her and walked away. She was consumed with anger, trembling with rage.

She snapped awake, the anger almost compelling her out of bed into a defensive posture. She stopped herself before she actually stood. Her face was wet with tears again. She stood up and went to stand by the window. She couldn't shake the sensation that someone she loved would be dead soon. This year. And that there was nothing she could do to stop it. She turned and looked at her alarm clock. It was the middle of the night. She sighed. She'd get no more sleep tonight.

She wished she had a good enough reason to call Giles. He had made her feel so much better the other day. But she figured that even Giles would probably be in bed by now. She eyed her backpack with some distaste but finally headed over to her desk and pulling out some books began to work on an assignment.

##

Giles came back from running a few errands. He looked at his watch and frowned. Buffy was even later than usual. He looked at Anya. "Have you heard from Buffy?"

She nodded and pointed towards the training room. "She's back there. She said she was going to take a nap until you got here."

He walked to the back. She was there, asleep on the couch. He stood there, watching her. He hadn't intended to disturb her but she opened her eyes as if she could feel his eyes on her.

She stretched. "I'm sorry. I didn't get much sleep last night." She sat up, her face darkening as she thought of her dream.

Giles moved over to sit next to her. "Did you have the dream again?"

She nodded. "I saw a date, or a year to be exact. 2001. That means this year. That means soon."

Giles almost put a hand out to touch her knee but pulled it back. "I do find it somewhat disturbing that you keep having the same dream."

She rested her head on her hands, elbows on her knees. "Tell me about it." She rubbed her face with her hands. "Giles, it's totally wiggling me. It feels so real."

"I can try and do some research if you'd like. See if there's any information on dreams such as the ones you're having."

She nodded then frowned. "No, no research. You have a...a date. You're not canceling it on my account. Anya would wreak vengeance upon me."

"Are you sure? I'd be glad to cancel." His eyebrows rose, a hopeful look on his face. Then his face fell. "Although I have no idea how to get a hold of her. I didn't get her number. I don't even know her last name." He looked appalled at that. He shook his hand and then looked back at Buffy. "Well, you probably ought to take it easy tonight."

She groaned and slumped back. "I can't. I have a date too."

"Ah, yes. That Riley fellow." He bit the inside of his cheek. "Well, perhaps you'd best finish your nap then, hmm?"

She yawned and then unexpectedly leaned into him, nestling into his shoulder. She closed her eyes. "Okay."

He looked at her a bit stunned and then he softly smiled. He raised his arm up so she'd fit more comfortably and then he leaned back.

Riley chose that moment to come into the store. Anya frowned at him. She closed the register drawer wanting to protect her money. Riley walked up the counter and smiled. "Hi, is Buffy here?" Anya pursed her lips, considering her answer. "Yes, but she's sleeping." She pointed towards the back. "Back there."

"Would you mind if I went in there? I need to talk with her for a moment."

"I just said she was sleeping. Besides Giles just went back to be with her."

"Excuse me?"

"Giles is with her."

"While she's sleeping?"

Anya was bored with this conversation. "I'll be glad to give her a message. What was your name again? Finley, Finley something?"

"Riley, Riley Finn. Just tell her I'll pick her up at 7:00." He sent Anya a serious look trying to impress upon her that his message was important.

She just smiled at him. He shot another look towards the closed door and frowned. He slowly left the shop.

When he got back to his room he logged on to his computer and began to check out this Giles guy. What he found made him very uncomfortable. First of all he had a rap sheet. Sure it was from a long time ago but that probably just meant that he'd gotten smarter. Then he'd had a good job at the British Museum, but had left it to work at Sunnysdale High as the librarian. The only excuse for that was that he must have gotten fired from the museum. And then he chose to work someplace he could be around high school girls. And now he owned a shop that sold magic crap. He muttered. "Man, this guy is a scumbag." He leaned back in his chair. "What's he doing with Buffy?" He noted the time and picking up a towel, headed for the showers.

##

Giles was almost enjoying himself. Donna seemed pleasant enough company. They shared some similar likes and dislikes. The problem was that he couldn't get Buffy off his mind. He felt that he should be home researching those dreams of hers. She had looked so tired. She had seemed so fragile lying there on his shoulder as she slept. He hadn't wanted to move. His shoulder had been screaming at him by the time she woke up. She had smiled sheepishly at him and then had left, first reminding him that they both had dates to get ready for. He scowled at the thought.

"Did I say something wrong?"

Giles looked up at his companion. "No, I'm sorry. I'm afraid I'm a bit distracted this evening."

She shook her head. "No, you've been charming company."

He laughed softly. "That's very kind of you to say, but we both know it isn't true."

She smiled at him and looked at the window. Her eyebrows rose. "Oh, to be that young again."

Giles furrowed his brow. "Sorry?"

She pointed out the window. "I can't remember what it felt like to be young enough to just kiss like that, out in public, without worrying about who might

be watching."

Giles turned his head as well and saw Buffy and Riley, kissing. Right in the parking lot. His eyes darkened and his jaw clenched. He moved his eyes from the sight. Donna watched him. "Someone you know?"

Giles barely nodded. "Yes."

"Someone important?"

He let out a breath. "Yes." He glanced at Donna and clarified. "Not that way, she's not..." He paused, not sure what he was trying to say.

"Are you sure?"

He took off his glasses and laid them on the table. That way he couldn't see the two of them outside the window. It also meant he didn't see as Buffy pushed Riley away. Buffy glanced up and saw Giles in the window. She almost raised her hand to gesture to him when she saw his date lean forward and gently cup his face in her hand. She turned to Riley. "I'm not feeling very well. I've been kind of off all week. Will you just take me home?" Riley nodded and opened the car door for her.

Donna repeated her question after laying her hand on his cheek. "Are you sure?"

Giles reached up and took her hand away, lowering it to the table where he gently patted it. He didn't answer her. "I'm sorry. I..." He sighed.

She smiled sadly. "Dinner's over." She lifted her hand and gently touched his. "After you figure out what's going on, if you want to try again...have that astonishing woman in the shop get in touch with me." She rose and gathering her purse touched him lightly on the shoulder and left. Giles sat there, his tea growing cold.

Riley walked Buffy to her room again. When they got there he spoke. "Can we talk for a minute?"

She felt badly enough for ruining the evening, she hardly felt she could say no. "Sure." She invited him in. He sat on the bed and she perched on the edge of her desk. "What's up?"

"How long have you known Giles?"

She was surprised at the question. "Since I was fifteen. He was the librarian

at Sunnydale High. Why?"

Riley unclenched his jaw. "How well do you know him?"

"As well as I know anyone, I guess. Riley, what's going on?"

"Where is he from?"

"England."

"No, I mean, where was he born? Where did he grow up?"

"I don't know."

"Does he have any family? Are his parents still alive?"

Buffy bit her bottom lip. "I don't know."

"What sort of training does he have? What degrees does he have? What job did he have before he came here?"

She squinched her face up. "Some museum thing." Her face brightened. "I know he went to Oxford."

"Would you consider him a good friend?"

That one she could answer. "Absolutely."

"And have you been good friends since you were fifteen?"

"Yes." She thought back on the conversation and her eyes darkened. "Riley, don't even go there. Wherever your twisted brain is going, just come back."

"I don't trust the guy, Buffy. I don't trust his motives."

She stood. "Riley, you really don't want to do this."

"I just worry about you."

"Well, don't. I can take care of myself." Her eyes glanced at the door. "Time for you to go."

He stood. He approached her for another kiss but she backed away. He frowned and ran his hand through his hair. "I'm sorry, Buffy. I didn't mean to make you angry. I just don't want anything bad to happen to you."

She sent him a small smile. "I know and I appreciate it. But you're barking up the wrong tree with Giles. He's a friend, a good friend. He takes care of me."

Riley nodded and let himself out. He ran his hand down the wall as he walked down her hallway. "That's what I'm afraid of." He quickly ran down the stairs. This time he hung around, out of sight. In a few minutes Buffy came walking outside. He followed her. He watched as she knocked on someone's door and when he saw Giles answer it his stomach knotted. When Buffy entered Giles' house and then closed the door behind the two of them, Riley settled back to wait. He was used to long stakeouts.

There were a few minutes of awkwardness between Buffy and Giles. He helped get past it by making tea. She finally broke the silence. "So, did you have a good time? Planning on seeing her again?" She braced herself for his answer.

He opened the cupboard and brought down two mugs. "No, I don't think so."

"Oh, that's too bad." She fought back a smile.

He nodded. He started to pour the tea, not looking at her. "And you? Will you be seeing your young man again?"

Buffy scowled. "I don't know." She opened another one of Giles' cupboard doors and pulled out a box of gingersnaps. She reached her hand in and pulled out a couple, shoving one in her mouth. "He thinks you're a bad influence on me."

Giles turned to her, a look of astonishment on his face. "Excuse me?"

"Yeah, I know, weird. He thinks I'm with you too much and he questions your motives."

"He questions my motives?" Giles would have gladly hit Riley if he'd been standing in front of him right then.

"Yeah. Plus he thinks it's weird I don't know anything about you."

"What on earth do you mean? You know me very well."

"But nothing I could tell him. All the stuff I could tell him, like about your past, and your family, you know, that stuff, I didn't know any of it. Why don't I know any of that?"

Giles shrugged. "I suppose it just hasn't come up."

"I've known you five years and it just hasn't come up?"

"Well, Buffy, we have had a few other things vying for our attention. Which reminds me, I've been doing some research." He gestured her back into the living room after handing her a mug of tea. She held onto the box of gingersnaps.

"Find anything?"

"Well, not much. Clearly the tombstone could be a symbol of something you're afraid to lose, or have lost. That's if you're going for dream interpretation. There's not much to go on if it's a prophecy." He ran his hand through his hair. He sent her an apologetic look. "I haven't had much success."

She looked at the multitude of books lying open around the room. She smiled at him. "Not because you haven't tried. Thanks."

He nodded and took a sip of his tea. "What did you tell him?"

"Who?"

"Riley. What did you tell him after he impugned my intentions."

"Assuming that means something bad, I told him to back off."

"Ah. And how did he respond?"

She wrinkled her nose. "All nervous, and full of the I'm just worried about you sort of stuff." She put her mug down and leaned back in her chair. "It sucks being the slayer and trying to date."

Giles bit back a grin as he took another sip of his tea. She yawned. He looked down at his couch. "Did you want to sleep here tonight?"

She nodded. "Yeah, maybe I won't have the dream here." She grimaced. "I'm really hating that dream."

Giles rose heading for his closet. He pulled out a blanket and a pillow. She took them and stood moving over to the couch. She gestured at the books. "Feel free to stay down here. It won't keep me from falling asleep, I'm pooped." She yawned again.

He settled back in his chair with a couple of watcher diaries in hand. "I might just glance through a couple more." He reached for the box of gingersnaps. She held them tightly to her, frowning. Then she grinned and handed him the



box. He rolled his eyes and helped himself. He began paging through one of the books as she easily fell asleep. Giles glanced at her every now and then, glad to have her safe and sound. And glad to have her not be with Riley. He shook his head at his own thoughts and picked up another book.

##

Riley watched as Buffy left Giles' house at seven in the morning. She closed the door quietly behind her and then after stretching she began to jog for home. Riley followed her until he was sure she was heading back for the dorm and then he veered off heading for his own room and a much-needed nap. Then he needed to figure out how to get Buffy out from under Giles' influence.

End Part 2

### Tombstone 3

When Buffy arrived for training on Monday she noticed something was up with her watcher. She walked over to him. "You don't look very happy."

He grimaced and sent a glare to Anya. "Yes, well, I seem to have another date for tonight."

Buffy's eyes widened and she turned to glare at Anya too. Then she turned back to Giles. "How did that happen?"

Giles blushed. "I was talking to this woman about herbs and I saw Anya heading our way and I...well I panicked."

"You panicked?"

Giles squinched his face up. "I just blurted something out about her meeting me for a drink after work." He pushed up his glasses pinching the bridge of his nose. "God, I hate this."

"So, you can deal with vampires and demons and apocalypses, but somehow Anya's matchmaking techniques make you panic?" Buffy put her hand out to stop him from answering. "I'll talk to her and make her stop."

Giles looked momentarily hopeful. Then he scowled. "It's no use really. Either I date or she'll start regaling me with tales of..." He flinched just at the thought of finishing the sentence.

Buffy grinned. "Tales of the sexual adventures of Anya and Xander?"

Giles looked like he'd just eaten something that tasted really bad. "Exactly."

She patted him on the chest. "I'll talk with her. If necessary, I'll slay her."

"If it comes to that would you mind waiting until I can find a replacement?"

Buffy chuckled. "No promises. No one messes with my watcher and gets away with it."

Giles smiled at her. "Yes, well, anything you can do would be appreciated." He looked at her closely. "You look tired."

"I am tired. I hate sleeping."

He looked compassionately at her. "To sleep, perchance to dream?" She nodded. He pointed to the back. "Do you want to take a nap? You don't seem to have the dream when you nap."

"A nap would be good." She frowned in Anya's direction. "But first, I have talking to do."

Giles looked moderately alarmed. "Well, I'll leave you to it." He moved into the back office.

A few minutes later Buffy joined him there. Giles looked up at her. "Well, how did it go?"

Buffy scowled. "Badly. You might want to start looking for a replacement. I think I'll have to slay her."

Giles leaned back in his chair sighing. "I'll give it some thought." Buffy yawned. He stood and turning her around he pushed her out of his office and towards the back room. "Go take a nap. We'll skip training today."

Riley happened to walk into the store right then. He saw Buffy with Giles' hands on her shoulders propelling her to the back room. He called out. "Buffy."

She turned around and Giles dropped his hands off her shoulders. "Oh, Riley." She looked up at Giles. "That's Riley."

Giles turned to look at the young man who had been maligning him. Riley walked over to them both and spoke to Buffy. "Can I talk to you for a

moment?" He didn't even look at Giles.

Buffy's eyes darkened for a moment. She turned to Giles. "Giles, this is Riley, Riley, this is Giles."

Riley didn't miss the flash in Buffy's eyes. He realized he needed to do some work here. He turned to Giles and put his hand out. "How do you do, sir?"

Giles could hardly ignore the hand being offered him so he clasped Riley's hand and returned the greeting. Work done, Riley turned back to Buffy. "Can I talk to you?"

Buffy nodded and walked outside the shop to speak with Riley for a few minutes. Giles watched them through the window.

Riley had decided that the first thing he had to do was get back in Buffy's good graces. Even if he had to lie to do it. He smiled at her. "I'm sorry about the other night. If I promise to not say anything bad about someone you like will you go out with me again?"

Buffy looked up at Riley, face tight. "I don't know Riley, I'm not sure..."

He interrupted her and reached down to take one of her hands in his, holding it to his chest. "Please Buffy, I didn't realize how important he was to you." He gestured into the store with his other hand, indicating Giles.

Buffy laid her other hand on Riley's chest, looking up at him earnestly. "He is, he's very important to me, and you need to understand that."

Giles sighed and went back into his office.

Riley schooled his expression carefully to keep the anger off his face. "I can see that." He smiled his most winning smile at Buffy. "I'll be good, I promise."

Buffy couldn't help but smile back. She still had misgivings but then she remembered that Giles had a date tonight and that she'd be here at seven. "How about tonight? We could maybe meet for a drink or something."

Riley nodded, immensely relieved. "Should I pick you up at the dorm?"

Buffy shook her head. "No, you can pick me up here."

"Here? You'll still be here?"

She nodded, looking at her watch. She missed his annoyed expression.

"Yeah, I'll still be here." She yawned and then grinned in apology. "I have a date with Giles' couch right now."

"Why don't you let me run you home to sleep? I'm sure you'd be more comfortable."

She shook her head. "Nah, lately I've been sleeping better when..." She stopped mid sentence as she realized that what she'd been about to say is that she slept better when Giles was around. It was true. She didn't have the dream when she slept here, and she hadn't had it when she'd slept at his house. But she figured if she finished the sentence that Riley wouldn't be exactly thrilled so she switched topics. "Why don't you pick me up at 7:00?" She wanted to check out Giles' date.

Riley nodded, not happy, but realizing that this was not the time or place to have this out. He bent down and kissed Buffy on the cheek. He got in his car and put the key in the ignition. Buffy hadn't needed to finish that sentence. He knew exactly what she had chosen not to say and he didn't like it one bit. He wasn't sure what Giles was up to, and he sure didn't understand how Buffy was involved or what game she was playing but he was determined to figure it out.

Buffy walked back in, waved at Giles in his office, and headed for the couch. Giles walked back there a short time later and found her fast asleep. He gently covered her with a blanket and left her to her dreamless sleep.

##

Giles had already sent Anya home and was getting ready to close up. He was just waiting for...he groped for a name...Ellen. He almost gasped in relief that he had remembered. He looked up as the door opened and his brows furrowed when he saw Riley step in.

Riley wasn't any happier to see Giles. He made an effort for his voice to sound pleasant. "Buffy said to meet her here at seven."

Giles' lips tightened and he nodded. "She's in the back. I'll go get her."

Riley stepped forward. "I'll go get her."

Giles shook his head. "It's private back there. Non-employees are not allowed."

"Buffy doesn't work here."

"Buffy's...different. I'll go get her." Giles headed back to the training room.

Riley watched him go, suspicion in his eyes. He'd come back later and see exactly what made that room so private.

Giles smiled when he saw Buffy was still fast asleep. He went over and crouched down by the couch and lightly touched her shoulder. "Buffy."

She jerked awake and then relaxed, smiling, when she saw Giles. "Hey." She spoke softly.

He smiled his soft smile. "Hey." He couldn't resist, he tucked some stray hair behind her ear. He hesitated, not really wanting to deliver his message. He sighed. "Riley's here."

Buffy's eyes opened wide. "Oh God, is it already seven?" She sat up running her fingers through her hair. "Oh God, I must look awful." She looked at Giles. "Do I look awful?" She breathed into her hand and sniffed. "Does my breath stink?" She slumped back against the back of the couch. She really didn't want to go out with Riley tonight.

Giles smiled at her. "You look fine but..." He reached into his pocket and brought out a roll of wintergreen breath mints, "...you might want one of these."

Buffy grimaced and took a mint. She mumbled around it. "Thanks." Then she frowned. "Is your date here?"

Giles shook his head. "I can only hope it slipped her mind."

Buffy made a face at him. "Not likely. According to Anya you're one of Sunnydale's most eligible bachelors." She scowled.

Giles rolled his eyes at the thought. "Hardly."

"Well, if she doesn't show I'll blow Riley off and maybe we can go grab some dinner before I patrol."

Giles smiled. "That would be nice."

Buffy smiled back and then reluctantly stood. She went to the mirror and started to fix her hair and repair her makeup. Giles just stood there, entranced with her motions. When her appearance was restored to her satisfaction Buffy turned to Giles. "Ready?"

He snorted. "No, not really." But he headed towards the door.

When they reached the main part of the store Buffy paused, dismayed. She was there and she was gorgeous. Too gorgeous. She saw the woman's eyes light up. Buffy looked behind her to see what she was seeing and she saw it. Giles smiling that soft smile, his large and strong body shrugging into his suit jacket, the way his maroon shirt set off his eyes. She saw the whole thing, the eligible bachelor thing. Her eyes narrowed as she watched the woman walk over to claim Giles.

She almost purred at him. "Rupert, I thought you'd forgotten." She smiled at him in a way that let everyone know that she was forgiving him.

Giles looked apologetic. "I'm sorry if I kept you waiting." He turned to Buffy. "Buffy, this is Ellen, Ellen, Buffy." He motioned to Riley. "Did you meet...?"

Ellen smiled, running a hand down Giles' sleeve. "Yes, we introduced ourselves while we were waiting." She slipped her arm through Giles'. "Shall we go?" She sent him another smile and Giles seemed momentarily dazzled by her beauty. He smiled back nervously.

Buffy had to almost physically sheath her claws. She walked over to Riley and put her arm through his. She smiled brightly. "Why don't we all go together?"

Giles' face brightened at the thought. Ellen's eyes narrowed while Riley started to shake his head. Ellen put her hand on Giles' chest and shook her head. "I'm sorry Rupert, I know it was presumptuous of me but I made us dinner reservations for eight." It was a lie but she was damned if she was going to let some twit of a girl ruin her chances with this man.

Buffy stood her ground. She hated this woman. She smiled even more brilliantly. "Great, that's perfect. That gives us time for a cup of coffee. We can go next door." Buffy returned Ellen's glare with a small evil smile.

Giles was more than amenable to Buffy's suggestion so the four of them stepped next door to the coffee shop there. Giles walked next to Ellen, his hand at the small of her back. He assisted her into a booth, remaining standing so he could place their orders. Buffy maneuvered herself so that Riley slid into the booth first on their side so she would be across from Giles. She sat down. Giles looked at Ellen. "What would you like?"

Ellen gave him a look from his head to his toes that told him exactly what she would like and he blushed. Buffy glared at Ellen. Ellen ignored her. "Coffee, black."

Giles nodded and asked Riley the same question. "I'll have ice tea."

Giles looked at Buffy. "Do you want your regular?"

Buffy smiled. "Yes, thank you." She had no idea what Giles was going to bring her but it was going to be her regular from now on and she was going to love it.

Giles nodded and headed up to the counter placing their orders. Both Ellen and Buffy watched him. Watched as he reached to pull his wallet out of his back pants pocket, the way his pants hugged his butt. Ellen licked her lips.

Riley reached for Buffy's hand, trying to capture her attention. She reluctantly pulled her eyes away from Giles' butt and looked at Riley. She smiled wanly at him. Giles finished paying and slid into the booth next to Ellen. Ellen moved over a little closer to him and underneath the table put her hand on his thigh. Giles' eyes shot open and he looked at Ellen. Ellen grinned and moved her hand a little higher.

Buffy was watching through clenched teeth. Thoughts of homicide were running through her brain. Suddenly the clerk called out Giles' name. He shot out of the booth, relief clear on his face. He retrieved their drinks, carefully placing them on the table. He had gotten Buffy a hot chocolate, double whipped cream.

She smiled at him. It really was her favorite. He'd remembered. She was thrilled. "Thanks, Giles."

Ellen frowned. "Why do you call him Giles? Why don't you call him Rupert?"

Buffy pursed her lips and looked at Giles. She shrugged. "I don't know. It's just what I've always called him."

Ellen shook her head. "It seems quite disrespectful to me."

Buffy looked at Giles anxiously. He reached across the table and patted her hand. "It's fine, Buffy. I don't mind. Really."

Buffy's forehead wrinkled. "Would you rather have me call you Rupert?"

Giles was about to answer when he felt Ellen's hand again, even higher, a lot higher. His eyebrows rose high on his head and he put his hand on top of hers to stop her from doing any further explorations. He closed his eyes, wishing he was home, or wishing he were helping Buffy slay vampires, wishing he was anywhere but here being practically devoured by someone he hardly knew and didn't want to be with. He laced his fingers through hers and



gently but firmly put their joined hands on the seat between them. She pulled her hand out and placed it on top of his, lacing her fingers through his. Then she lifted both of their hands and placed them on her thigh.

Buffy saw that too. She caught the look on Giles' face. She spoke his name. "Giles." He looked at her, begging her to come up with something. "Uh." She looked at her cup. "Would you get me some more whipped cream?"

Giles extricated his hand and stood quickly. "Of course." He looked at Ellen and Riley. "Does anyone else need anything?" When they both shook their heads he nodded and headed up to the counter.

Buffy murmured an excuse and got up to join him. She stood close to him. "Do you feel like Tweetie Bird?"

He almost smiled. On those Saturday mornings after Buffy had spent the night he had watched some Loony Tunes with her. "Good Lord, yes. Does she have feathers hanging out of her mouth?"

Buffy glanced back at the booth and then back at Giles. "No, but she's licking her chops."

He exhaled a quick breath. "I'm firing Anya tomorrow. No, in fact, I'm calling her right now and firing her tonight."

Buffy laughed. Now that she was next to Giles and she knew he wasn't enjoying himself, suddenly she was. She looked up at him. "How are you getting out of this one research guy?"

Giles grimaced. He ran his hand through his hair. He frowned as he saw Riley walk up behind Buffy. Riley put one of his hands on her shoulder and turned her around. He pulled her to one side of the counter as if he wanted to talk to her. As prearranged, Ellen walked up to Giles and tugged on his arm. She was stronger than she looked and had him out the door and around the corner before Buffy even saw that he was gone.

When Buffy did realize it she turned accusing eyes to Riley. He looked at her in confusion. "Buffy, you were sort of monopolizing Giles, and she was his date." He ran the backs of his fingers down her cheek and smiled at her. "And you're mine."

The thought of Riley touching her made her skin crawl. The thought of what that woman was maybe doing to Giles right now made her want to go get a stake. First things first. She looked at Riley. "I'm sorry. I can't."

"Can't what?"

"I can't date you. I..." She looked in the direction of the door.

"You what? You and Giles? Is that what this is about? Some sick thing between you and that old man?"

Buffy's eyes narrowed. No one called Giles old except for her. "What do you mean, some sick thing?"

"Come on Buffy. You've been 'good friends' since you were fifteen? Do you think I'm stupid? The guy's a creep. He's just using you."

Buffy stared at Riley incredulously. She was speechless. She simply turned around and left the coffee house. Riley ran after her and grabbed her arm spinning her around. "What's the attraction? I don't get it."

She brushed off his hand. "It's not like that. You don't understand. Giles takes care of me, he's good to me."

Riley laughed unpleasantly. "Yeah, I'll bet he is. What does he give you? Money, jewelry?"

Buffy hauled back and plowed her fist into Riley's nose. He yelled and grabbed his nose as blood started pouring out of it. She couldn't remember being angrier on someone's behalf. "Don't you dare talk about him that way. He doesn't deserve it. He's good and kind." She brushed away some tears. She looked at Riley, at his nose and the blood without any remorse. "I don't want to see you again. Stay away from me." Without a further look she walked away.

##

Ellen let herself into her apartment. She was frustrated. Who knew that Rupert would have the strength of will to turn her down. No man had ever turned her down. She'd never expected to find anyone who would be able to resist her pheromones. She shook her head and dropped her human disguise, softly touching the bulge at her side. She had to find a place to lay her eggs soon. A human host, someone with power. The larvae would feed on the power as they grew. The stronger the power of their host, the stronger her children would be. She snarled. Rupert Giles was perfect. Or would have been if not for that blond creature. She snarled again. Her time was on her. She had to mate. She put her human face on and headed back out.

End Part 3

## Tombstone 4

Ellen returned to the Magic Shop. She was hoping she could find Rupert's home address inside. When she got there she smiled. He was there. There was a light on in the back of the store and she could see someone's shadow. She walked around to see if there was a back door. There was and it was ajar. She eased her way in.

Riley couldn't believe what he was looking at. Weapons, vicious weapons of every kind. And books, dealing with magic and the occult. This guy Giles ought to be locked up. He closed the book he had been looking at when he heard a noise. He froze and then nominally relaxed when he saw it was Ellen. He looked at her quizzically. "What are you doing here?" He couldn't help but run his eyes appreciably over her. She was a stunning woman.

She smiled at him. "I could ask you the same thing." She wanted to scream with frustration. It wasn't Rupert. And she was out of time. Riley would have to do. At least he was large. At least her children would feed well even if there'd be little power for them to grow strong on. She walked over to him, her hips swaying provocatively. Riley could feel himself hardening in response to her movements; everything about her was turning him on.

She ran her hand down his chest. "That girl, she didn't understand what she had, did she?" Riley shook his head, glad that at least this woman could see what he had to offer. Ellen purred. "Her loss, my gain." She lifted up her head and kissed him. Riley ignored the pain in his nose and wrapped his hand in her hair, pulling her even closer. He found a fierce delight in the thought that this was Giles' woman. He hoped Giles loved her. He gasped as Ellen's hand ran down his body and covered his erection. He slowly lowered her to the floor.

When they were done Ellen had to revert to her demon shape to lay her eggs. She did it quickly, injecting him as she changed, with a chemical that would make him forget it all, forget that they had made love, and forget that she was a demon. She used her egg sac tentacle to inject her eggs into him. The relief she felt when she was done was almost excruciating. She could go home now. She'd provided a home for her offspring. They'd either survive or they wouldn't. It wasn't her concern anymore. She stood, straightening her clothes and left, leaving Riley lying on the floor.

##

Buffy had searched for Giles for a while but hadn't found him anywhere out

and about. She finally approached his home with some apprehension. Suppose Ellen was there. Suppose she and Giles... She shivered. She didn't even want to go there.

She knocked and then knocked again when no one answered. She scowled as she continued to look at the unanswered door. She finally used her key to let herself in. She heard movement upstairs and put her hand over her stomach to quell the nasty feeling there. She called out. "Giles?"

"Buffy, is that you?"

"Yes."

"I'll be right down, I just have to get dressed."

Buffy sat quickly not quite silencing a little moan. She rested her head in her hands. As she heard Giles come down the stairs she braved a look. He was dressed in jeans and a flannel shirt, not tucked in. His feet were bare and his hair was wet. He wasn't wearing his glasses. She couldn't believe how good he looked, couldn't believe how much she wanted him, how much she wanted to kill Ellen for getting there first. She scowled. "Where's Ellen?"

Giles looked alarmed. "God, why, is she here?" He began to look around him nervously.

Buffy looked confused. "What, do you mean she's not here?"

Giles looked at her as if she was insane. "I certainly hope not. I barely escaped the one time. I doubt I'd be so lucky again."

Buffy started to breath again. "So you got through the evening with your virtue intact?"

Giles grimaced. "By the skin of my teeth."

"Not your type?"

"No, not exactly."

"She certainly was beautiful."

Giles nodded. "That she was." Buffy frowned. "Extraordinarily beautiful." Buffy's eyes narrowed. "But certainly not my type."

"Why not, if she was so beautiful?" Buffy couldn't keep her tone from

sounding snippy.

Giles ignored the tone and just answered her question. "She was...I don't...let's just say I like my women a little less aggressive."

Buffy figured that jumping his bones right then was probably not the right move. "So, how'd you get away from her?"

Giles winced. "I'm afraid I had to be rather rude." He shook his head sadly as if her forcing him to be rude had been the worst and least forgivable of her transgressions. He ran his hand through his wet hair. "Have you been here long? I felt a strong need for a shower when I got home."

She shook her head. "Nope, just got here."

He looked down at his feet, digging his toes into the carpet. "Ah. Did you enjoy your time with Riley?"

"No."

He looked up at her, surprised at her abrupt answer. "No?"

"No." Buffy curled her legs up underneath her. "I punched him in the nose." Giles' eyebrows practically rose off his head. "You...you punched him in the nose? What on earth for?" He moved to sit on the couch near her. She bit the inside of her cheek deliberating her answer. She went someplace else instead. "Giles, when you meet someone new, you know, someone who doesn't know about us, who we are, how do you explain who I am?"

Giles blew out a deep breath. "I usually don't, or if I try I seem to do it badly. I'm afraid they...well...I can see in their faces that they..." He squinched his face up.

Buffy finished his sentence. "They think we're having sex?"

Giles nodded. He made the connection. "Riley?"

"Riley."

Giles frowned. "You punched Riley because he thought you and I were having sex?" He wasn't sure he found that idea particularly flattering.

She shook her head. "No, I punched Riley because he thought we'd been having sex since I was fifteen and that you were a creep and were using me."

Giles slowly smiled. "So you punched him?"

Buffy smiled back. "I think I broke his nose." She started to giggle. Giles joined her, laughing his silent laugh. When she stopped giggling she looked at Giles. "What did Ellen think I was?"

Giles grimaced. "Yes, well, she had quite a few unflattering things to say about you and...you and me."

"I don't suppose you punched her?"

Giles let out a half laugh. "No, I'm afraid I just ran away."

Buffy cocked her head to the side. "So, does everyone think that about us?"

Giles ran his hand over his face. "Well, certainly not everyone. Although I imagine many people when they see how much time we spend together, and how close we are, and after they learn that we're not related, have probably and will continue to assume the worst."

Buffy looked affronted. "Hey, what do you mean, the worst?"

Giles' eyes widened at her tone. "I didn't mean it that way. Having sex with you wouldn't be..." He let out a frustrated noise, shaking his head. He tried again. "I was talking about how people let their baser natures lead them, not about what it would be like to...if..." He stopped, realizing finally that he was just digging himself in deeper every time he opened his mouth. He laid his head back on the couch and closed his eyes.

Buffy used the opportunity to look at him, at his face, his body. Where had her eyes been all this time? She felt like she'd just been given the gift of sight. She spoke. "So, if everyone is already thinking that, why aren't we? It's not like they could think anything worse."

He opened his eyes and turned his head to look at her, sure he hadn't heard her correctly. "Why aren't we what exactly?"

Buffy blushed. "You know, you and me, having...sex." She covered her face with her hands and let out a moan. "Forget I said that." She scooted to the edge of the couch and flashed him a fake smile. "Want some tea?" She raised her eyebrows encouragingly.

He grabbed her arm as she tried to stand up. She sat back down, not looking at him. He spoke softly. "That's my line."

She didn't understand. "What do you mean?"

"Asking if you want tea. That's my line."

She looked confused. "So, what, do you want to go make it?"

He shook his head. "Why did you ask that?"

"If you want tea?"

"No, the other question, about you and me having..." He swallowed nervously, "...sex." She didn't answer. Giles sat there, still holding onto her arm as he ran the conversation through his head. He reached a conclusion that stunned him. He let go of her arm. "Buffy, do you want me that way?" Never in a million years had he expected that, not after all her comments about his age and general lack of all traits appealing to women, young women at any rate, certainly Buffy.

Buffy didn't look at him. She mumbled. "Maybe."

"Maybe?" He let out a shaky breath. "I think I will have that tea now."

He made as if to stand. This time she grabbed him. She pulled him down, next to her. She looked at him, a truly miserable look on her face. He took pity on her. "Was this just a stray question with no true purpose, like your vampire question the other night? Should I just ignore it?"

Buffy saw the lifeline Giles was throwing out to her. She could nod and this would all blow over. And she could watch him go out on dates that Anya would continue to force him to go out on until he found someone he really could care for. Someone she'd lose him to. She decided to see if she could get him to do some of the work. "Have you ever thought about it?"

Giles shook his head slowly. Her heart sank. He spoke. "This isn't about me, not yet. It's about you and what you said a few minutes ago. You need to tell me what you meant, or you need to tell me that it meant nothing."

"You don't care either way?"

He shook his head again. "Buffy, you started this. I have no idea where you want this to end up. Based on your past comments about me, I'd be somewhat foolish to set myself up for your derision."

"My what?"

"Your ridicule."



She looked away from him, unable to meet his gaze anymore. She felt she had to explain. "I just didn't want you with anyone else. You were my watcher. You belonged to me."

Giles smiled gently at her. This he could understand. "I often felt the same way. You are, after all, my slayer." She looked up at him again, relieved he understood. He decided to help her out a little more. "Did seeing me tonight with another woman make you feel like you were losing me? Would it help if I told you that I do belong to you and even if I loved someone else, they could never change that?"

The thought that he could love someone else, that he could even say that as a possibility, was painful. Tears sprang to her eyes. He saw them and he took her hand and held it between both of his. "Buffy, what is it?"

She could barely get the words out. She was terrified of what his response might be. A tear rolled down her cheek. He had to strain to hear her. "I don't want you to fall in love with anyone."

"You don't want me to fall in love with anyone? You want me to just be here for you, whenever you need me?" He refused to assume anything about her words.

She gave an almost imperceptible shake of her head, still speaking very softly. "I want you...I want you to fall in love with me."

Giles grew very still. Another tear fell down her cheek as she waited for him to respond. He raised a hand and with a gentle sweep of his thumb wiped the tear off her face. "Why, Buffy? Why do you want me to fall in love with you?"

Buffy hesitated for a moment. Then instead of speaking she put her hands on his face and pulled him to her. She pressed her lips against his and tried to answer him with a kiss. His lips felt so good. She moaned and moved in closer to him. He couldn't help but respond. He adjusted his head to get better access to her lips. One hand cupped her face, the other started running through her hair. He ran his tongue over her lips and she opened to him. He groaned and slipped his tongue inside her mouth, finding hers, warm and strong, ready to mate with his. He pulled his hand from her face and wrapped it around her, pulling her up tight against him. Her hand dropped to his thigh. She felt the strong muscles bunch underneath her fingers.

Giles wanted Buffy's hand to move higher. He almost reached down to encourage her but a part of him remembered Ellen's hand on his thigh earlier. He realized Buffy hadn't really answered him and he pulled back. At her whimpered complaint he laid her head on his chest running his hand through

her hair. She listened to his heartbeat slamming underneath her ear. She tried to move her head wanting to kiss him again but he held her still. She grew nervous. "Didn't you...don't you want to kiss me?"

He breathed out a laugh. He could hardly believe how instantaneous his body's reaction had been to her. He held her tighter. "Parts of me want nothing more than to kiss you, and much more than that."

Her voice was small. "Only parts of you?" Her head was swimming from his kiss. She didn't think she could stand it if he didn't feel the same way.

He kissed the top of her head. "Buffy. I need to know what you're feeling. I need to be sure. This is too important, our relationship is too important to do anything rashly. If this is being done for the wrong reasons the repercussions could be...could mean the end of what we now have. I'm not willing to risk that because you're jealous, or because you feel that being with me this way will somehow make me belong to you more, or as a way to keep me from being with anyone else." He took a deep breath. "I understand all those motives, but it wouldn't be enough."

He let her go and put his finger under her chin to make her look at him. He stated his last sentence again. "It wouldn't be enough, not for me, not to risk losing you."

Buffy felt overwhelmed by everything she was feeling and she started to cry, laying her head on his chest again. Giles held her tightly as she sobbed. After a few minutes, between hiccupy breaths she started to speak, a river of words falling from her lips. "I don't know what I feel. I just know that I hate it when you're with someone else. I always have. You're mine and I don't want to share you. And tonight I saw the way that...that Ellen looked at you and it was like I'd never seen you before. How handsome you are, and sexy, and how beautiful your eyes are and I just know that when she touched you I wanted to claw her eyes out. I wanted to be touching you, I didn't want her anywhere near you."

She raised her head and looked at him with tear filled eyes. She spoke in defiant tones. "You belong to me. All of you. I want you to be mine. What I have now, the parts of you that belong to me, it's not enough, not anymore." She sat up wanting to see him even more clearly. At the look on his face she let out a frustrated moan. "God, Giles, is it that hard to believe?"

"To some extent it is." He looked at her. He reached into his pocket and pulled out his handkerchief. He wiped her tears away. "It's all happened so quickly." He wiped yet another tear away. "It's not that I don't want to believe it." His eyes dropped to her lips. He leaned closer and placed his lips softly on hers,

just a small kiss, his plan to gently kiss her and then pull back. But her lips parted under his and just that small movement on her part aroused him so strongly that he thrust his tongue in her mouth and she groaned in response pushing him back until he lay on the couch and she was astride him. He cupped her bottom, pulling her down against him as he continued to ravish her mouth. Her whimpered moans were making him crazy. He moved from her lips and kissed her jaw and her neck, placing small bites before and after his kisses.

She moved her head to give him better access as she started to unbutton his shirt. She began to place kisses on his chest. She wanted to crawl inside of him. She could feel his hardened cock pressing against her and she rubbed herself on it. Suddenly she felt his hands on her shoulders pushing her away. He pushed her into a sitting position and he sat a few inches away from her. He was breathing hard. He looked at her and then looked away. "God, I want you so much."

She didn't understand. "So why are you stopping? I want you too."  
He shook his head. "It's too much, too soon. I can't just have sex with you."

She mewled her frustration. "Why not?"

"Buffy, I just can't. I need to be sure. I need to be sure that it's right, for both of us, for you." As her eyes narrowed he took her hand. "Please, for the past five years, it's been my job, my life, to protect you, to make sure that you're all right. That's part of who I am. No matter how much I want you, I can't not be that man. I can't just stop thinking that way. I need you to understand this Buffy. If this is to work, it needs to be because you want me the way I am, the way you know I am, especially when it comes to you."

She was struggling to not feel rebuffed. She spoke the truth, haltingly. "I...it just...I don't understand how you could just stop if you really wanted me." She could barely stand how vulnerable she was feeling.

He smiled gently at her. "Buffy, that's your youth talking. I'm not young anymore. I'm almost fifty years old. I learned long ago that there are reasons to not let passion rule you. Painful reasons. Don't think that because I stopped that I didn't want to continue. You are sorely testing my restraint tonight. And if you chose, you could break through it. But I'm asking you not to. I'm asking you to wait until things are clearer, so that we don't damage something beyond repair if it's wrong." He ran his hand down her face. "And if it's right, I want it to be something that has no room for doubts. I want to be able to take our time, exploring each other slowly, both in here..." He tapped his chest over his heart, "...and out here." He ran his hand up and down her arm. He looked at her seriously. "Will you give me that? If it's meant to be, it

will keep, and it will last." He pulled her into his chest. "I'm not going anywhere, I promise."

Buffy's voice was muffled. "No more dates?"

Giles laughed his silent laugh, his chest vibrating under her cheek. "No more dates. Even if it means I really do have to fire Anya."

She laughed a little. She sighed, letting out a long breath. "I'm sorry. I really do like how you take care of me. It's important to me."

Giles kissed the top of her head and held her tightly. "Good." She laughed again. He looked down at her. "What's so funny?"

"You. You keep getting sexually assaulted by women."

Giles barked out a laugh. "Happens to me all the time." She raised her head to give him a look. He let out another short laugh. "I'm kidding Buffy." She still didn't look happy. He started to move them both until he was lying behind her on the couch and they were spooned together, her head resting on his arm. "Let me just hold you for a while."

She smiled and snuggled back against him, holding his arm tightly around her with her hands. She closed her eyes, feeling warm and protected. They both fell asleep.

##

Riley woke up and all he could feel is his nose throbbing. He sat up and looked around, realizing he was still at the Magic Shop. He had no idea why he'd passed out but he'd been here for hours and it was time to leave. He staggered to his feet and lurched out the door. He made it home and fell into bed.

End Part 4

## Tombstone 5

When Giles arrived at the Magic Shop the next morning he went directly over to Anya. He pointed with his finger and jabbed the counter with it as he made his wishes known. "No more interfering. No more pushing my customers and me into dates. If you see me talking with anyone you will leave us alone. Is that clear?"

Anya narrowed her eyes, her lips pursed. She thought for a minute. "So, if you're talking to a woman here in the shop, you want me to leave you alone."

Giles reviewed her words looking for the trap. "If you see me talking to a woman anywhere, you will leave me alone."

Anya nodded. "No matter who, no matter where. I just let you talk."

Giles nodded, he still felt like he was missing something. "Right."

Anya smiled. "You're the boss."

That made Giles even more nervous. "I mean it." Anya just smiled again. Giles frowned at her and started going through the mail. After some reflection Anya started looking for a blank piece of paper. When Giles went into his office she wrote a couple of sentences on the paper and then with a piece of tape secured it to the front window.

Throughout the day Giles kept looking at Anya, suspicion in his eyes. She hadn't approached him once all day. Every conversation with a female customer had progressed uneventfully. True, Anya did seem to be having lengthy conversations with several of the customers, which was out of character, but she actually seemed to be heeding his wishes. He started to relax.

Willow and Xander were having an argument as they walked in. They continued it until they got next to Giles and then they just stopped. Willow looked up at Giles. "We're worried about Buffy."

Giles got quite serious. "Why? What's happened?"

Xander shifted his feet. "It's this dream she's having. It's making us all a little loopy. She keeps looking at us like we're already pushing up daisies."

Willow nodded. "She keeps asking me if I feel all right." She made a sad face. "Why does she keep having it? What does it mean? How do we get it to stop?"

Giles raised his eyebrows turning his head to the side, considering Willow's questions. "It is concerning. I know it's keeping her from getting the sleep she needs. I don't know why she's having it. Or what it means. I've done some research but I've come up with very little."

Xander pulled up a chair and sat down. "So, how do we stop it? Can't you or Willow do a spell or something?"

Giles sat down across from Xander after Willow had seated herself. "I'm not sure we should. We're not sure if it is only a dream. It might be a prophecy of some sort. It might be important." He rolled his shoulders. It had been wonderful to wake up with Buffy in his arms but he was a little stiff from sleeping on the couch. "She doesn't have it every night. She didn't have it last night."

Xander scowled. "Yeah, well she had it Saturday and Sunday night and yesterday she was practically measuring us for our coffins."

Giles was about to respond when he heard the front door slam open. Buffy was standing there with a sign of some sort in her hand. She looked angry. She stormed into the shop waving it in front of her. "What the hell is this?"

Anya looked up and saw Buffy coming. She tried to intercept her, trying to grab the paper out of her hand. Buffy kept it out of her reach and handed it to Giles. "Did you okay this?"

Giles read the words there and his eyes darkened. He turned to Anya. "What is the meaning of this?"

Xander grabbed the note. He read it out loud. "If you want a date with Giles, please see his assistant Anya." He laughed. "Right, like this is going to work."

Anya reached behind the counter and pulled out another piece of paper. "Five women signed up. And that's just today and there's still a couple of hours to go before closing."

Giles' eyebrows rose. "Five women? Really?" Buffy glared at him. He quickly glared at Anya. "I told you not to interfere."

Anya crossed her arms over her breasts. "You told me to not interfere with any conversations you were having with women. And I haven't. They came to talk to me. Then I'd send them to talk to you. I've developed a grading system with two parts." She was quite pleased with herself. "They get one grade based on how pleasing they are to the eye, and a second grade based on how you interacted with them. How close you stood, how much you laughed, how long you spoke to them." She held up the paper for him to see, one of her fingers tapping someone's name. "See, based on this grading system, this woman is at the top of the list. I think you should go out with her on Friday night. I have all their numbers."

Xander's jaw had dropped. He looked at Giles. "Five women? Five women in one day want to go out with Giles?"



Buffy grabbed the list from Anya and she tore it up. Then she tore it up again and again until it was in tiny pieces. "He's not going out with any of them." She threw the pieces of paper at Anya and they swirled around her like a mini snowstorm. "No dates. None. Nada. Got it?" She reached down and grabbed Giles' lapels. She yanked him up and then started pushing him backwards into the training room. "I need to talk to you." When she almost had him to the door she spoke again. "Door, behind you." He turned and grasping the doorknob he opened the door. She pushed him through and shut it behind them.

Willow watched them, confused. She turned to look at Anya who was standing there, small pieces of paper in her hair, caught in her clothing, and surrounding her on the floor. She looked at Xander. "What was that all about?"

Xander just looked at her. "Five women?"

Willow smacked him on the leg. "Xander."

He shook his head. "Sorry." He looked towards the training room and then he looked at Anya. "That was definitely of the weird and I have no explanation other than Buffy's general weirdness these days with that dream of hers." He stood up and went over to Anya and started picking the pieces of paper out of her hair.

Willow grimaced. "I hate that dream."

Xander nodded his agreement. They heard a loud thumping noise in the back room and they all winced. Xander winced as they heard it again. "God, they sound like they're killing each other in there."

Willow looked concerned and then confused. "Why is she so mad, anyway?"

Xander shrugged. "I don't know, but she was definitely not a happy Buffster." The three of them looked at each other as things got very quiet in the back.

Buffy slammed Giles up against the wall and then plastered herself against him, pulling his head down for a kiss. She felt desperate for him. She fisted her hands in his hair and lifted one of her legs wrapping it around him to pull him closer. He groaned and lifted her up to bring her face level with his. He ran his tongue over her lips and then nibbled his way to her ear. He bit her earlobe, gently pulling on her earring. She wrapped her legs around his waist, rubbing up and down against his hard cock. Her movement slammed him into the wall again.



She spoke, her voice husky. "God, I've been thinking about this all day."

He buried his face in her neck breathing her in. "As have I."

"I want you so much. How much longer are you going to make me wait?"

Finally their curiosity pushed beyond reason, Anya, Willow and Xander tiptoed over to the door, quietly pushing it open.

He captured her lips again and kissed her gently this time. She pulled away from his mouth and ran her cheek over his jaw enjoying the sensation of his slight stubble. She nibbled on his jaw and then she whispered in his ear. "I love you so much."

He almost dropped her. "What? What did you say?"

She got nervous, and slid down his body until she was standing. "Nothing, I didn't say anything."

He groaned and grabbed her shoulders, shaking her. "Don't do this Buffy. Don't play this game. My heart can't stand it."

She took a deep breath and found some courage. "I said that I love you." She lifted her face. Fear, desire, and love were all there in the look she gave him.

He started smiling until it lit up his whole face and shone out of his eyes. He reached for her and held her so tightly that she squeaked. He let up just a little. "Oh Buffy." Just the way he said her name let her know that it was going to be all right. They were going to be all right. She hugged him back, reveling in the knowledge that he was really, really hers.

He walked her over to the couch and sat down with her, pulling her into his lap, his arms still wrapped around her. She turned her head so her cheek was resting over his heart. She listened to the steady beat. Closing his eyes he rested his head on the top of hers. They sat there in their own little world oblivious to the wide-eyed stares of Anya, Willow and Xander peeking through the doorway. After a while the three of them quietly closed the door.

They all went and sat down at the table. Anya reached for her window sign and began to rip it up.

Xander sat there as if his world had fallen apart. "Five women and Buffy?" He couldn't believe it.

Willow just kept shaking her head. "I don't understand. How long has that been going on? Why were you trying to get him dates if that was going on?" She looked at Anya for that last question.

Anya threw the ripped paper on the table. "You think I knew? You think he tells me anything? I just work here. I'm just his assistant. I just stand at his side day after day trying to get him a life. Why should he tell me?" She gestured to the pieces of paper on the floor. "Do you know how long it took me to create this grading system?" Xander looked at her. She shrugged her shoulders, annoyed. "Well, all right, it only took me fifteen minutes but I've been trying really hard all week."

Willow was starting to calm down and think things through. "I think this is brand new." She pointed towards the training room with her thumb over her shoulder. "Giles had a date last night. He'd never have gone out on a date with that going on. He wouldn't do that." She smiled. "That was real. There was nothing not real about that." She turned to Anya and beamed at her. "Anya, you did it. By forcing Giles to date you made that happen. You found him a girlfriend."

Anya considered that and then she grinned. "I did, didn't I?" She nodded her head well satisfied with the results of her work. She even bent down and started to pick up the pieces of paper on the floor.

Xander was still having trouble getting past his initial reaction. He murmured to himself. "Five women and Buffy?"

Giles could feel it when Buffy slipped off to sleep. He kissed the top of her head and held her for a few more minutes. Then he noted the time. He had to get to the bank before it closed. He shifted her until she lay on the couch and he was sitting on the edge. He laid his hand on her cheek and noted how even in her sleep that she smiled a little at his touch. He shook his head. She loved him. He still wasn't quite sure how it had happened but he had heard it in her voice and seen it on her face. He reluctantly rose. He hated the thought of being parted from her.

He quietly opened the door and headed back into the main shop. He smiled at them and gestured back to the training room. "She's sleeping. Still not quite caught up on her sleep I'm afraid." He stepped behind the counter and reaching down retrieved the moneybag. He didn't notice their silence. He opened the register and lifting the tray took out all the checks and large bills. He started counting it, making notes on the pad by the register. When he was finished he made a neat pile and slipped the money and checks into the bag. He lifted it, gesturing it at them. "I'm off to the bank." He headed out the door.

Their eyes just followed him. They listened to the bell as it rang while the door shut behind him. Xander shook his head. "I don't get it. I mean that's Giles, right?"

Willow just smiled at him. "Love doesn't care who anybody is. It just happens."

Xander just shook his head again. He just didn't get it.

##

It was still raining. It seemed as if it rained all the time now. As if the sky itself were grieving with her. Her boots sank into the wet grass as she approached the tombstone. Even with the rain wetting her face, she could still feel her tears. Her chest was tight. She looked around wishing there were someone there who could comfort her, who could tell her that everything would be all right. But, she knew no one was there. And she knew that nothing would ever be all right again. She touched the tombstone and sank to her knees in front of it. The rain made it hard to read but she could just make out the name. Her fingers traced it in the cold stone, a stone that felt as dead as her heart did. She rested her cheek against his name and wept.

End of Part 5

## Tombstone 6

Buffy opened her eyes. She yelled out his name. "Giles?" She ran out of the training room and stopped when she saw Anya, Xander and Willow sitting there staring at her. She was breathing rapidly as if she'd just finished exercising. She put her hand on her chest. "Where's Giles? Where is he?" She looked around the store, a panicked expression on her face.

Willow stood up and walked over to Buffy. "He just went to the bank. He'll be right back." She gently touched Buffy's arm. "Are you all right?"

Buffy just shook her head. "Which bank? Where is it?" She turned to Anya. "Do you know?"

Anya started to speak when Giles walked back in. He took one look at Buffy and hurried over to her. "Buffy, what's happened?"

She looked at him. She took a deep breath trying to get her body back in control. She was trembling. Giles grew concerned. He moved closer to her and he put a hand on her shoulder. "Buffy. Tell me what's happened."

He looked at Willow and Willow shrugged, lifting her hands, confusion on her face. "She just woke up. She just came in like that."

Buffy moved closer to Giles and rested her head on his chest. He pulled her in closer and wrapped his arms around her. He started running his hand over her hair. He thought for a minute. "Did you have the dream again?" He felt her nod against his chest. She was still shaking. She held him tighter. "What did you see? What's gotten you so upset?" She had never been this affected by the dream before.

She finally looked up at him. Her eyes were filled with pain and tears. She took a deep breath and with a shaky voice asked him a question. "What's your middle name?"

Fear started to form in Giles' gut. "It's me?"  
She asked him again. "What's your middle name?"

"Jamison."

Buffy started to cry for real. Willow looked at him with nervous eyes. "It's you? It's your tombstone?" She shook her head. "That's not all right. You can't die." She looked like she was about to cry too.

Giles sat down and pulled Buffy into his lap. He pushed his glasses more firmly on his nose. He started speaking to Buffy trying to calm her down. "Buffy, I'm all right. I'm right here. It may not mean anything. It could still just be a regular dream. Sshh. Come on, it's all right." Buffy seemed inconsolable.

She spoke softly. "I can't lose you. I can't. Not now, not ever." She held him even tighter.

"Ow. Buffy, you need to let go a little."  
"Sorry." She pulled back on the hug.

Giles laid his cheek on the top of her head and spoke softly still trying to reassure her. "Buffy, even if it is a prophecy dream it doesn't mean it will come true. In fact, your dreams have more often than not given us the foresight to keep them from coming true. I have no intention of dying any time soon." He hated that there were so many people around. He needed some privacy; Buffy needed some privacy.

He shifted his arms around her so that he had her in his arms when he stood up. He turned to the others. "We'll be right back." As he turned so he could open the door with Buffy in his arms he saw someone enter the shop that

looked like Buffy's mom. He muttered. "Good Lord." He quickly opened the door and carried Buffy through. He took her over to the couch and sat down with her still on his lap.

Joyce gasped at the sight of Buffy in Giles' arms. She walked quickly over to the table. "What's wrong with Buffy? Is she hurt?"

Xander tried to explain. "You know that dream she's been having?" At Joyce's nod he continued. "Well she just had it again and apparently Giles' name is on the tombstone. Buffy's a little wiggled." Xander didn't even want to talk about the other stuff or how wiggled he was.

Giles gently pulled Buffy's face from his chest. He lowered his face and captured her lips in a gentle kiss. She moaned and moved in, deepening the kiss. This was what she'd needed. To be touching Giles. She shifted her position so she was straddling his thighs. She thrust her tongue in his mouth while one hand moved to his belt, the other stroking his hardening cock through his pants. He groaned and instinctively thrust against her hand. He had thought a kiss or two would suffice, he hadn't quite bargained on this. He groaned against her shoulder as her hand stroked him again. He tried to be the voice of reason. "Buffy, I think your mother's right outside the door."

She moaned. "I don't care. I need to feel you inside me now. I need to feel that you're alive." She stroked him again. She'd gotten his belt undone and his top button and was working on his zipper. She reached for one of his hands and placed it on her breast, over her hardened nipple. She moaned at the sensation. "Giles, touch me. Please."

Joyce watched the closed door. As the minutes passed she looked at Willow. "What are they doing back there?"

Willow looked panicked for a moment and then she spoke. "Uh, I think Giles just knew that Buffy'd want some private time with him. You know, with the him maybe being dead soon stuff." She swallowed, hating the words she had just said, hoping they weren't true.

Joyce wasn't convinced. She had been terrified at first when she'd walked in and seen Giles holding Buffy in his arms. Now, it all seemed like something else entirely and she didn't like it. She frowned.

Giles was almost lost. He flicked his thumb over her nipple wanting nothing more than to take it in his mouth. He reached deep inside for a last bit of strength.

"Buffy, this is insanity. You know this is probably what kills me."

Buffy pulled away to look at his face, his words alarming her. "Why? What?"

"Your mother bursts through that door, finds me molesting her daughter on the floor of the training room and she skewers me with one of those swords."

Buffy couldn't help it, she giggled. She slid off of Giles' lap. Giles rested his head back against the couch and let out a breath. He started doing up his pants and buckling his belt. His hands were shaking, partly with sexual frustration, and partly with relief that Joyce hadn't burst through the door and killed him. Buffy leaned towards him and grabbed him by the tie pulling him in for a quick kiss. "Okay, I see your point. Having sex within earshot of my mom and in a room filled with weapons, maybe not the best idea. But, next time we start this buster, we're finishing it."

He leaned in for a quick kiss of his own. "You'll get no argument from me."

Buffy snorted. "Yeah, right. So far all you've done is argue and make excuses. But from now on your words will be falling on deaf ears."

Giles grinned at her. He put the backs of his fingers against her cheek. "Are you feeling better?"

She held his hand there with one of her own. "Yes and no." Giles gave her a small smile. "We'll stop it from happening, Buffy." At her nod he stood, straightening his tie. He reached down a hand to help Buffy up. Joyce couldn't stand it anymore. She headed towards the door and reached for the doorknob. Willow held her breath and Xander closed his eyes. Anya just waited in breathless anticipation. Before her hand reached the knob the door opened and Buffy and Giles stood there.

Buffy looked at her mom. "Hey mom, what's going on?"

Willow and Xander let out a breath and slumped back in their chairs. Anya just looked disappointed.

Joyce put her hands back on her hips. "That's what I'd like to know. What exactly were you doing back there?" She knew she sounded like a shrew but she couldn't help it.

Giles ushered Buffy to a seat. He looked at Joyce. "I just thought Buffy might appreciate some privacy to pull herself together."

Joyce wasn't satisfied but she didn't have time to get to the bottom of it right now. She looked at her watch and then looked at Buffy. "Buffy, we're



supposed to be having dinner with the new neighbors. You were due at the house 30 minutes ago."

Buffy looked dismayed. "Oh mom, I completely forgot. I'm really sorry." She bit her lip. "Can you call them and reschedule?"

"If we leave now we can still make it."

Buffy shook her head. "I'm not leaving Giles."

Giles touched her arm. "Buffy, it's all right. I'll stay right here until you get back. I'll be fine."

Xander nodded. "We'll watch him for you Buff. We won't let him out of our sight."

Buffy wasn't convinced. She looked at Giles. "Why don't you come with us?"

Both Giles and Joyce looked alarmed at that suggestion. Giles spoke first. "Really, Buffy, I hardly think that's necessary."

Willow hastened to assure Buffy. "He'll be safe. None of us will leave him, and Tara will be here soon too."

Buffy sighed and stood. Joyce smiled and reached for her purse. Then Buffy spoke. "You guys are so not getting it. Do you never watch horror movies? The minute I leave something big and snarly will leap through that window and attack Giles. I am not leaving him." She turned to her mom. "Mom, I'm sorry. I'd do the same for you if your name had been on the tombstone. I need you to understand. Either he comes with us or I stay. Period."

Joyce swallowed her disappointment and tried to suppress the flare of anger she felt towards Giles. "Fine, I'll make your excuses this time." She pointed her finger at Buffy. "But next time young lady..." She didn't finish her sentence.

"Got it, mom. I'll be there with bells on. Just don't make any plans for me until we get this figured out."

Joyce nodded and then with a glare at Giles she left the shop.

They all sat there in silence for a few minutes. Then Anya looked at Giles. "Would you please explain to me why you were having me find you a girlfriend when you were already kissing Buffy?"

Giles' jaw dropped. "Why I was having you find me a girlfriend? I never



wanted you to do any such thing. You forced it on me." The rest of Anya's sentence worked its way into his brain.

He looked at Buffy and she grinned. "Oops. Cat's out of the bag."

Xander let the book he was standing on its end drop on the table. All eyes turned to him. He looked at Buffy and Giles. "So, it's true? The two of you?" He did a little thing with his hands which could have been interpreted any number of ways.

Buffy grinned and nodded. She had moved her chair right next to Giles' and had her arms wrapped around one of his. She laid her cheek on his upper arm. "He's all mine." Giles smiled down at her.

Anya looked puzzled. "What happened to Ellen? And that Finley guy?"

Buffy frowned. "They're both history."

Xander wasn't done. "So how long has this been going on? And when does Buffy's mom get to know about it?"

Giles looked at Xander over the top of his glasses. "She gets to find out when the relationship is more than 24 hours old and Buffy and I have had a little time to get used to it. In fact..." He stood and encouraged Buffy to stand too, "...Anya, I'll let you close up. I am taking Buffy out for dinner."

Buffy grinned delightedly. "Yay me." Giles grinned back at her and gestured for her to lead the way. He kept his hand on the small of her back as he escorted her out. Buffy sent a last grin back towards her friends and then the door shut behind them.

Xander slumped back in his chair. "I don't get it." Anya walked over to him and smacked him on the back of the head. "Ow! What did you do that for?"

"Get over it."

"Get over what?"

"Get over the fact that you don't get to have Buffy, or that Giles has more women interested in him than you, or whatever it is that has you all grumpy. I hate it."

Xander looked at both Willow and Anya. "This is really okay with both of you? It isn't wiggling you out at all? Not even a little bit?"

Willow giggled. She pointed at herself. "Hello? Werewolf, lesbian witch." She

pointed at Xander. "Cordelia, ex-vengeance demon."

Anya nodded. "And let's not forget Angel."

Willow got up and stood behind Xander wrapping her arms around his neck. "Giles is almost boring compared to all of that. I mean, really, what's weirder? Cordelia or Giles?"

"Ha, ha, ha." He patted her arms and slumped back in his chair. "It's just a cruel blow against young male egos everywhere."

Anya shooed Willow away and sat down in Xander's lap. "Do you want me to make your ego feel better?"

He nodded at her. "Yes." She held his face while she leaned in for a very thorough kiss. He pulled back, taking a deep breath. "Can you close up shop early today?"

Willow laughed. "I'll close up. Anya, take him home and stroke his ego." She gasped as she realized what she said and blushed a furious red. She motioned them with her hands, her eyes closed. "Go, go." They needed no further urging. Willow put her hands on her face to try and cool it down. She pulled out her laptop and logged on waiting for Tara to arrive so she could have some of her own smoochies.

##

Riley sat at his desk flipping through all the new known demon reports. He was appalled at how many of them were masquerading as humans. Suddenly he stopped at one. He held it in his hands and he became very still. It was Ellen, Giles' girlfriend. How interesting. He thought about that room in the back of the Magic Shop. Everything became crystal clear. He shook his head when he realized just how clever Giles had been. How much effort he'd put into masquerading as a human. He'd have gotten away with it too, if Riley hadn't run across him. If Giles hadn't been taking advantage of a young human girl. Riley could only think how lucky Buffy was to have met him.

He looked at the bottom of Ellen's sheet. He spoke the words written there. "Considered to be extremely dangerous to humans, terminate." He opened up another file and pulled out one of the surveillance photos he had taken of Giles. He started to staple it to the back of Ellen's report but then he reconsidered. "No, I think I'll keep this one for myself." He smiled, looking forward to seeing the look on Giles' face.

He scratched his side. He was developing some sort of rash. He needed to have it looked at. No time for that now. He looked at his watch. It was almost

time for the team to report in and for him to give them their assignments. And then he had some planning of his own to do.

End of Part 6

## Tombstone 7

The sexual energy was running high between them. Even the most innocent of touches was leaving them breathless. Giles told Buffy to stay on her side of the car just so he could safely drive them home. Giles parked the car and shut off the ignition. He could feel Buffy staring at him. He slowly shifted his body towards hers. With her face hidden by shadows he could barely make out her features. He reached out to touch one of her loose curls, lying against her collarbone. His hand brushed her skin and he felt her sudden intake of breath. He needed to get them in the house or he was going to take her, right now, in the car.

He opened his car door and walked to her side. After opening her door he reached down a hand to help her out. She stood, trying to brush as much of her body against him as possible in the process. His breath caught in his throat and he held her against him just for a moment, feeling every cell in his body vibrating to her touch.

He pulled away from her and taking her hand he escorted her to his door. He inserted the key and let them both in. Giles stopped Buffy from turning on the light. He pointed to the couch and she went and sat down. She watched him as he found some matches and lit a few candles around the room. He moved to the stereo and put on some soft music. Going into the kitchen he opened up a bottle of wine and filled two glasses. He carried them into the living room and sitting down next to Buffy he handed her one.

They both took a sip of their wine, still not touching each other. Giles was warm. He placed his wine down and stood, taking off his suit jacket. He rested it on the chair across from the couch. Buffy watched him, never taking her eyes off of him. He sat back down and he loosened his tie, unbuttoning his top button. She inched closer to him and reaching towards him she slowly untied his tie. She pulled on one side of it and slid it around and off his neck. Lifting up first one arm and then the other she undid the wrist buttons on his shirt. While she started unbuttoning the rest of his shirtfront he ran his hand down her arm and back up again and then continued to run his hand along the neckline of her blouse. She shivered in response.

When Buffy got as low as she could she started tugging on his shirt and Giles

helped her. She pushed his shirt off his shoulders placing small kisses on each of them as she helped him shrug it off. She placed her hands on his chest and felt the warmth of his skin and the feel of his chest hair. She couldn't remember wanting anything as much as she wanted him. She also was having trouble believing that something she wanted so badly was here and was hers for the taking. Even with him sitting here right in front of her she still almost didn't believe it.

He lifted her chin with one hand and pulled her in for a kiss. The slow pace that had been set ignited. He groaned as he pulled her up against him and she whimpered in response. While kissing her he slowly pushed her backwards until she lay on the couch and he covered her with his body. She wrapped her legs around him trying to bring him in even closer.

It still wasn't enough. She moaned in frustration. She thrust up against him. "I want you naked. I want you inside me. I can't wait anymore." He groaned in response to her words. Pressing kisses all over her face and neck he reached down and pushed up her skirt feeling how wet she was. He started to explore her but she pulled his hand away. "No, don't touch me. You'll make me come. I want to come with you in me the first time." She sat up and started helping him get out of his pants. He kicked off his shoes and socks. He stood so he could kick off his pants. As he stood she lifted her hips and pulled off her underwear, throwing them on the floor. She looked at him. "Hurry Giles." His eyes dark with desire he lay on top of her again. She reached for his cock and when she found him she helped him enter her.

He thrust inside of her with a single motion. She arched her back letting out a loud cry of pleasure as she felt him within her, filling her. He closed his eyes knowing that nothing had ever felt this good. She echoed his thoughts with her words. "Oh God, this feels so good. You feel so good." She ran her nails down his back and he pulled out of her only to thrust back in.

As he drew out of her again someone knocked on the door. Buffy groaned. "This cannot be happening." She held him to her tightly. "Don't stop. Please don't stop. Whoever it is will go away."

Giles kissed her neck. He slowly just moved the tip of his cock in and out of her until she let out another soft moan of frustration. As he finally relented and surged into her he spoke softly to her. "I will bet you everything I own that it's your mother out there."

Buffy bit her way across his jaw holding him deep within her as she wiggled her body to more fully stimulate her clitoris. She gasped as Giles pressed down harder, trying to assist her. She barely got the words out. "Why do you say that?"

He moved his mouth down to gently bite one of her nipples through her blouse. He started to unbutton her blouse and ran his tongue over her nipple, the sheer lace of her bra the only barrier between her skin and his tongue. She held his head as her body arched again at the sensation. He let out a soft rueful chuckle. "Because there is no one in the world I want less to be standing at my door right now."

They heard Joyce call Buffy's name. Buffy's eyes widened at the sound and Giles stopped moving, making a small moaning sound. Buffy whispered. "Why is she here?"

He ran his hand over his face. "No doubt to see what my evil intentions are towards her only daughter."

Buffy looked down at the two of them on the couch, and then looked around the room taking in the music and the candles. She pursed her lips. "This looks kind of bad."

Giles started to laugh and once he started he found he couldn't stop. He put his head on Buffy's shoulder and laughed so hard his body was shaking with it. Buffy listened to his laugh, smiling. She waited to hear her mother's footsteps walk away. When they did she ran her hand down Giles' back and down his butt to get him moving again.

Giles got his laughing under control as Buffy started stroking his body. He caught her lips with his and the kiss was gentle at first but it quickly grew fevered as the passion between them began to rise again. His tongue mimicked the action of his body as he plunged into her over and over. Buffy encouraged him with her words and her hands. They were lost in each other. He heard her cry as she went over the edge and he quickly followed her gasping out her name as he found his release. They held on tight as their bodies pulsed together. When they were done they lay there exhausted and panting. After a few minutes Giles rolled them a little so they lay facing each other on the couch. Their bodies were still connected and he placed a string of kisses on her eyes and cheeks.

He pulled his head back and she opened her eyes. He looked at her fiercely. "Now you do belong to me." At her nod he spoke again. "Say it."

She held his face in her hands. "I belong to you, Rupert Giles, body and soul. Just you. Only you."

He kissed her long and hard and then he pulled back again. "And I belong to you. All of me. Only to you."

She ran her hand down his face loving him so much. She'd never been given anything more important. She tried to put it into words. "No one's ever...I never..." She stopped frustrated. Giles just smiled at her and kissed the end of her nose. She tried again. "I believe you. I don't think there is anyone in the world who could say those words to me and make me know, beyond all doubt, that they're true." Her eyes grew bright.

Giles was about to respond when she frowned. Giles watched her, wondering what she was thinking. She looked down at their bodies. "Why are you all naked and I still have all my clothes on?"

Giles grinned, a mischievous glint in his eyes. "That's so that I can unwrap you after I take you upstairs."

"Like I was a present?"

He leaned in and kissed her. "The very best of presents, the best one I've ever received."

She made a soft sound and pulled him in, hugging him fiercely. She pulled back and looked at him, anguish on her face. "Promise me you'll never die." At his hesitation she spoke again. "Lie to me, please, I need to hear it."

He nodded. "I promise you I will never die. I will never leave you. I will always be at your side."

She began to kiss him deeply. He responded but then stopped her. She pulled back an aggrieved look on her face. He climbed over her and stood. He scooped her up in his arms. She smiled and laid her head on his chest as he carried her upstairs.

##

She didn't have the dream that night. She realized that she never had it when she was actually with Giles. He had left the shop when she had it yesterday. She laid on the bed her head resting on her elbow watching him sleep. Last night had been the most incredible night of her life. She felt so loved, so cherished, so ravished by this man. She couldn't believe he'd been there all along. That she'd been missing out. Her stomach did a flip-flop at the thought that it could have so easily passed her by. That her eyes might not have been opened and she might have settled for Riley, never knowing what she would be missing.

She dropped a kiss on his shoulder and he smiled and settled more firmly on his stomach, still fast asleep. She snaked the sheet off of him and just looked



at his back, his butt, and his legs. She could see that he wasn't young anymore. His body looked worn, and covered with scars. But, he was still strong and... she grinned, ...there was nothing wrong with the way his body worked. Besides, all the scars and signs of use on his body were because of her and their fight and she loved every inch of him.

She covered him back up and deliberated about what to do with her classes today. She supposed it was unrealistic to think she could spend every second with him but she just knew that whatever was going to happen would happen when she wasn't there to protect him. And she'd never forgive herself. Giles was half convinced that his name had shown up because of their new closeness, that it was something she was afraid to lose. He'd followed up that thought with some lovemaking that had turned her insides to mush. She felt herself getting aroused just thinking about it.

She grinned and rolled him over taking his cock in her mouth. She sucked on it enjoying the feeling as it started out soft and limp in her mouth and then grew harder and harder. She felt Giles' hips move in response to her ministrations. Giles reached down and ran his hand through her hair. He bucked again and groaned. He held her head still as he got closer and then he let out a hoarse cry as he came in her mouth. After he started to soften she let him go. She lay her head down on his lower abdomen and smiled up at him. "Good morning."

He groaned again. "Oh God. To say the least." He reached for her and pulled her up for a kiss. She wasn't sure if he would want to kiss her after what she'd done but he did. Just the thought that he maybe liked the taste of himself in her mouth made her crazy and hotter than she'd already been.

He kept kissing her as he explored her with his hands. They drove her wild and she bucked against the fingers he had buried inside of her. He made as if to move down her body but she held his head where it was. She couldn't get enough of his kisses. He lubricated his finger well with her juices and gently rubbed over her clitoris, and then he did it again and again. She screamed against his lips and came, her core pulsating against his fingers.

He pulled out his fingers and brought them up, putting them in his mouth. He closed his eyes as he tasted her. She moved against him groaning. Everything he did just turned her on so much she could hardly stand it. She moved her mouth to his, working her tongue in his mouth, around his fingers, wanting to participate, wanting to taste it too. He took his fingers out of his mouth and put one of them in hers joining it with his tongue. She suckled on his finger and his tongue the way she had on his cock and he groaned as he felt his cock start to grow hard again. He moved to cover her and he spread her legs with his while he entered her. She prodded him to roll and he did until



she sat astride him, riding him. He lifted his head and she shoved pillows under him so he could suck her breasts as she lifted her body up and down. He bit her nipples, just hard enough to make her cry out at the sensation. She reached behind her and played with his balls. He began bucking up, holding her hips as he rammed into her. She saw on his face that he was close and she let her own orgasm claim her. He pulled her down into a tight hug as he thrust one last time into her.

Giles held her tightly for a minute and then he flopped his arms down on the bed on either side of him and he let out a chuckle amidst his labored breathing. "Okay, I think this is how I die."

Buffy sat up, still on top of him and wiggled a little. He moaned and reached back up to grab her hips to keep her from moving. She grinned at him and moving quickly she got off of him and lay at his side her head propped on his chest on her hands. He ran his hand through her hair and grinned back. "Good morning." She laughed and moving her hands, laid her head on his chest, listening to his heart. They both drifted back off to sleep.

When Giles woke next he let out a quiet curse when he saw how late it was. He carefully eased out of the bed trying not to disturb Buffy. He wondered if he should wake her, wondering when her classes were. He cocked his head to the side and watched her slumber. He decided she needed sleep more than classes so he left her alone. He jumped in the shower and then got dressed. He left her a note with little hearts all over it, rolling his eyes at himself that he was doing it but knowing that she'd love it. He decided breakfast would have to wait until he got to the shop and he dashed out the door.

##

She could see the whole tombstone now. She stood in front of it, a bouquet of daisies in her hand. She stooped down and laid them in front of the stone. The words continued to cause her pain, as they had every day since he had died. Rupert Jamison Giles. Beloved Watcher, Beloved Friend. Born September 13, 1954. Died September 19, 2001. She was so tired. She didn't think she'd ever feel rested again. She heard a noise, a thumping noise. She looked up and saw a dozen demons dancing on the hill above the tombstone. Dancing and thumping.

##

Buffy woke up and still heard the thumping. She let out a breath and tried to figure out what was going on. She reached for Giles but he wasn't there. She raised herself up on her elbows and looked around. She heard her name being called. It was her mom. She finally figured it out; her mom was at the

door. She sat on the bed and called down. "Coming." She drew on Giles' robe laughing as it engulfed her, covering her to her feet with the sleeves extending several inches past the end of her fingers. She drew the sash tight and then hugged herself, imagining it to be Giles holding her tight instead of just his robe.

She walked downstairs and opened the door. Her mom almost rapped her on the forehead. Joyce's eyes widened and she drew back her hand. She frowned. "What took you so long?"

Buffy ran her hand through her hair; she could only imagine what she looked like. "Sorry, I was sleeping." She backed away so her mom could enter. "What's up?" She headed for the kitchen. "Do you want something to drink?" Buffy opened the refrigerator and pulled out some orange juice. Her mom just shook her head no. Buffy poured herself a glass and then she saw the note from Giles.

She picked it up and grinned at all the hearts. She had a hard time picturing Giles taking the time to draw silly little hearts all over a note for her but she loved that he had. Her mother looked around. "Where's Giles?"

Buffy held up the note. "At the store."

"Why aren't you with him? I thought you had to be with him." Joyce's voice was snippy.

Buffy grimaced at her mom. "God, mom, grouchy much?" She waved the note again. "He snuck out on me." She frowned. "And he is going to be in so much trouble for that." She looked at her mom. "So, what's up? Why are you here?" She felt impatient now, feeling the need to see Giles with her own eyes, to know that he was okay.

Joyce moved into the living room intending to take a seat but she stopped, seemingly rooted to the spot. Curious, Buffy walked over to stand next to her and she winced when she saw what her mom was looking at. Giles clothes, all of them, and her underwear, on the floor, next to the couch. Joyce turned horrified eyes to Buffy.

##

Giles sat at the table drinking his tea and eating a jelly donut, happily ignoring Anya as she told him about her adventures of stroking Xander's ego last night. He grinned as he thought about what she'd do if he decided to share some of his own adventures from last night, or this morning. God. That had been nice to wake up to. He grinned again.

Anya noticed his grin. She looked at him, her brow furrowed. Then her eyes widened. "You had orgasms of your own last night, didn't you?"

He grinned again. "Several of them, as a matter of fact, but that's all you're going to hear about it."

She looked insulted by his attitude. "I tell you all about me and Xander." Giles rolled his eyes. "Yes, you do. So, now we can try something new. I won't tell you anything, and you won't tell me anything, and we'll be even." He rose to rinse his tea mug out. Anya stood there pouting.

A customer came in and Giles watched as Anya approached her quickly. They both flashed quick looks at him while they spoke. Giles imagined that this was yet another woman that Anya was telling the sad news to that he was a taken man. He'd lost his heart yesterday and was off the market. Giles grinned at what a ridiculous world it was. Not a one of these women would have stood by his side for five minutes once they realized what he really did. Not to mention surviving Buffy and her claws. He chuckled out loud at that thought. He was so relieved that he'd never have to watch her moon over another man.

##

Riley looked over his weapons, trying to decide which would be the best choice. He wanted it to hurt. He knew he wasn't being quite rational about it but he didn't care. He knew Giles had to be terminated; there were no rules about how it needed to be done. He was doing the world a favor. He deserved to get a little extra satisfaction out of it.

In the end he decided on a variety of things. That way he could change his mind right up until the last moment. He picked up his keys and he headed out. As he walked across the room he grabbed his side. It had begun to hurt more and more. He'd get it checked tomorrow.

End Part 7

## Tombstone 8

"I knew it. I knew there was something going on." Joyce was furious. "How could he take advantage of you like this?" She started to pace. "He knew you were upset, he knew you were afraid of losing him." She lifted her hands and made a strangling motion. "If he were here I'd..."

Buffy cut her off. "Mom." Or she tried to. "Mom!" As her mom finally stopped

her tirade Buffy pushed her into a chair. "Mom, just stop for a minute." Buffy walked over and scooped up the clothing. She quickly ran it upstairs. When she got back down she sat on the couch. She felt butterflies in her stomach as she remembered what they had done here last night. She focused back on her mom. "He didn't take advantage of me. If anything it was the other way around. I practically attacked him the other night. He refused to have sex with me, several times."

Joyce pointed at the floor where the clothing had been. "Well, he certainly seems to have changed his mind."

Buffy bit her lips to keep from grinning. She took a deep breath. "I told him what he wanted to hear. I mean I didn't say it to get him to have sex with me. But until I said it he thought I wanted to have sex with him for all the wrong reasons."

"And what were these magic words?" Joyce's tone was scathing.

"I told him that I loved him." That was not what Joyce expected to hear. Buffy laughed at the expression on her mom's face. "I know it's backwards. That's supposed to be his line. He's supposed to tell me he loves me so that he can have his way with me. But that's not how it happened."

"But, he should be the responsible one. He should have seen it was wrong."

"What's wrong about it?" Buffy leaned forwards. "No, really mom, what's wrong about it? Give me one reason that really means something considering my life and what I do. Come on, just one."

Joyce just stared at Buffy. She tried to speak a couple of times but every reason she came up with sounded feeble somehow when measured against Buffy's life as a slayer, his as a watcher.

Buffy watched her try to find something. She spoke softly. "Mom, I just figured it out. A week ago I would have thought you were certifiable if you'd told me that I'd end up with him. Then I watched him go on two dates with other women and it made me crazy. I hated the way they looked at him, I hated the way they touched him. I couldn't bear the thought that he wasn't mine. And it opened my eyes to what he is, the man he is. And now there's no one else in the world for me but him."

Joyce slumped back in her chair. "I still don't like it."

Buffy nodded her head, her face sad. "I know it, and I'm sorry. I'm sorry that I'm not going to bring home some nice young man with good business

prospects so you can plan a wedding and dream of grandchildren. I know that you got cheated out of a lot by this slayer deal."

Buffy laid her head back on the couch and her dream drifted back into her conscious mind. There had been something new and she struggled to remember what it was. Suddenly her eyes widened. She looked at her mom, panic on her face. "What day is it? What's the date?"

Joyce looked confused. "It's the 19th. Why?"

Buffy stood up and raced upstairs to change. "Today, today's the day he died. Call the shop. Get him on the phone."

Joyce reached for the phone and punched in the number for the Magic Shop. Buffy was downstairs in a flash. Joyce looked up. "No one's answering."

"Come on, let's go." Buffy reached for her mom and yanked her out of the chair. Joyce grabbed her purse and flew out the door behind her daughter.

##

Giles finally reached the phone but when he answered it there was no one on the other end. He frowned and hung up. He was surprised that Buffy wasn't here yet or hadn't at least called. He picked the phone back up and dialed his home. When his answering machine picked up he hung up again. He thought about it and figured that she'd probably gone directly to school.

He decided to do a weapons check. He'd been neglectful and they couldn't afford to run out of stakes or crossbow bolts. He headed towards the back.

##

Riley was out front in his car. He watched Giles head to the back. He smiled and opened the car door. This was what he'd been waiting for. He walked around to the back of the building, holding a hand to his side.

Riley quietly let himself in using his master key. Giles had his back to him, crouched down in front of a box on the floor. Riley slowly drew a knife out of his side pocket. He crept across the room and as Giles stood he threw his right arm around Giles' neck and held the point of his knife at Giles' throat.

##

Buffy raced into the shop, her mother behind her. She saw Anya. "Where's Giles?"

Anya looked momentarily annoyed until she saw the look on Buffy's face. She

looked around the shop. "He must be in the back." Anya finished up curtly with the customer she was with and followed Buffy and Joyce.

Buffy skidded to a halt when she saw Riley with a knife to Giles' throat. Her heart was slamming in her chest and she had to breath deeply to not let her fear consume her. She took a step in his direction. "Riley, what are you doing?"

Riley smiled at her. "I figured it out Buffy. Giles is a demon. He's been using you. It's time for him to die now."

Buffy put her hands up. "No, Riley. He isn't a demon. He's human." She looked at Riley. He was sweating; he looked like he was in pain. She caught Giles' eyes. They looked at each other, both trying to come up with a plan.

Riley let out a groan and almost doubled over, lowering his knife hand to hold his side. That was all Giles needed. He used one hand to grab the arm around his neck and he jabbed back with his right elbow into Riley's midsection. Buffy had moved in by then and kicked him in his side, the side Riley had been clutching. Riley screamed and he fell to the ground his mouth opening and closing as he held his side, writhing on the floor. Buffy squinched her face up and looked at Giles. "I didn't kick him that hard."

Giles agreed with Buffy. She hadn't kicked him that hard. Giles picked up the knife Riley had dropped and handed it to Buffy. He crouched down next to Riley to see what was going on. He tried to pry Riley's hand away from his side. He could feel something moving. Giles stood up and quickly moved away, his instincts getting the best of him. Buffy moved over to stand next to him. She looked up at him. "What, what is it?"

Then she saw them, big white maggoty things crawling out from under his shirt. And there were more still trying to get out if the movements under his clothing were any indication. Buffy shuddered. "Gross, what are those?" She stepped a little closer. "And why does Riley have them?" As one started to slither across the floor she backed up quickly and stood behind Giles.

Giles rolled his eyes at her actions. He pointed at them. "They're demon larvae, you need to slay them."

Buffy shook her head. "I'm not touching those things." Riley let out another scream and then became deathly still.

Giles headed out the back door and Buffy stuck close. Anya looked at Giles as he disappeared. "Hey, hey, don't leave us in here with them." She yelled again as she stepped behind Joyce. "Hey!"



Giles reappeared with a metal garbage can. He reached for a sword and began to skewer the larvae. He scraped them off the sword into the garbage can. He hesitated to get too near but he finally walked over to Riley. He placed his hand on Riley's neck to feel for a pulse. Looking up at Buffy he shook his head. He put out his hand and asked Buffy for the knife. She placed it in his hand. Giles gingerly cut away Riley's shirt exposing the gaping hole in his abdomen. There were still some larvae in there. Giles turned his head to the side trying very hard not to throw up. Buffy had gotten braver by then and she took the sword from his hand and retrieved the last of the larvae, a look of total disgust on her face the whole time.

Giles flipped Riley's shirt closed and stood. He rustled around under the sink until he found a can of lighter fluid and some matches. He dragged the can back outside, covered the larvae with lighter fluid and dropped a match in. He smiled at the satisfactory whoosh of flame that ensued. Buffy watched him from inside the door as the light from the flames danced across his face. Her knees got weak when she realized that despite all the warnings that she'd still almost lost him. Giles saw her and moved to her side quickly, catching her before she fell. She grabbed him tightly.

Anya had moved over to the body and was looking down at him. "Hey, this is that Finley guy." She nudged him with her toe. "I knew I didn't like him."

Buffy turned around, her back against Giles' chest, pulling his arms around her. She looked at Riley. "I don't get it. Why did he think you were a demon?"

Giles shook his head. "Maybe the larvae were affecting his brain. I don't know."

Buffy scowled. "What do we do with him?"

Giles blew out a breath. "I have no idea."

Suddenly two people walked in the door. Two young men dressed in fatigues. They were looking at a small handheld device that was beeping quickly and loudly. They looked at Riley on the floor. One of them ran over and felt for a pulse. He looked up and shook his head. Both the young men took in the four people standing around them. The young black man spoke. "What happened here?"

Buffy made a face. "I don't think you'd believe me if I told you."

"Try me."



Buffy decided to keep it simple. "He was here visiting me and all of a sudden he grabbed his side and fell to the ground. These yucky things came out of him." She pointed to the garbage can outside and then pointed at Giles. "He burned them, they're in there." She turned back to Riley. "He was already dead. There was nothing we could do."

Giles walked over to Riley and with the knife he flipped back open Riley's shirt. "Whatever they were, they were eating him up alive." Giles grimaced and closed the shirt back up.

The men exchanged looks and then they lifted Riley up and began to take him out the door. They looked back at Giles. "We'll need to take the garbage can. And the less said about this the better."

Giles nodded. "Of course, who'd believe us anyway?" Giles shut the door behind them and leaned on it heavily. Buffy ran to him and burrowed into his arms.

Giles looked up and saw the stunned look on Joyce's face. He spoke to Anya. "Anya, maybe you could offer Joyce a drink. There's a bottle of scotch in my office." Anya nodded and headed Joyce out of the training room.

Buffy spoke, her voice muffled against his chest. "Okay, that was bad in so many ways." She shivered. "How did that happen?"

Giles ran his hand comfortingly up and down Buffy's back. "There are some demons that lay their eggs in humans. They're pretty rare but there are documented cases. Riley seems to have run across one. He was dead the minute it happened." He lifted Buffy's face by her chin. "I'm sorry. I know you liked him."

She shook her head. "I wouldn't want that to happen to anybody, even someone I hated, which towards the end he qualified for. It's just spooky and creepy and this room is so gonna need a new rug before I train in here again." She looked at the stains on the floor. "How do they do it? How do they get their eggs inside?"

"Well, the ones I've read about have to have sex with the human first and then they, well, essentially inject their eggs using some sort of appendage."

Buffy looked horrified. "God, Anya could have been setting you up with a demon who could have done that to you."

"I hardly think that's likely. Besides I don't need to worry about that anymore do I?" He grinned down at her.

She grinned back up at him. Then her eyes narrowed. "But you and I are so gonna have a talk about you going off without me this morning."

Giles let out a half laugh. "Yes, well in retrospect it does seem to have been foolish of me." He looked at her. "How did you know? You came running in here as if you were expecting trouble."

"I had the dream again. The date you died? It was today." She shook her head. "I was sitting there arguing with my mom about you and you could have been dead."

"Your mom and you were arguing?"

Buffy put her head down on his chest again. "She came over and found my underwear, and your clothes by the couch. She sort of figured it out."

Giles pinched his nose under his glasses. He could feel a headache coming on. "Do I dare go out there and face her?"

Buffy nodded. "Yeah, she's not thrilled but I think she's moved past the sword thrusting stage." Buffy pulled back and put her hands on his chest.

"Especially after the manly way you handled those gross disgusting maggot things. Ugh."

"And she had a rare opportunity to watch her slayer daughter in action." Giles started to laugh.

She whacked him on the chest. "Hey, I don't do maggots. Besides I helped at the end."

He kissed her softly on the lips. "Yes you did, thank you." He grinned. "I'm just glad there wasn't a chair handy for you to jump on and yell eek."

She whacked him again. "No more snide slayer remarks, buster." She looked around the training room. "And you can forget about getting lucky in here until you get this carpet changed."

He smiled. "Then I shall get it changed immediately."

She stood on her tiptoes and kissed him. "Come on, let's see how my mom is coping."

Joyce was drunk. Giles went and grabbed the half empty bottle of scotch from Anya. "Good Lord, Anya, this bottle was almost full. How much have you given her?"

She looked indignantly at Giles. "She just kept holding out her glass so I kept filling it. How was I supposed to know it was too much?" She shook her head muttering about stupid humans as she walked away.

Buffy looked down at her mom, whose face was plastered on the table. She looked up at Giles and sighed. "Well, I guess I'll take her home and go to class, now that I know you won't be dying today." She walked over to him and yanked on his tie. "But you are still going to get yelled at tonight and then you are going to tell me how very, very sorry you are that you scared me to death like that."

Giles smiled at her, loosening her grip on his tie so he could stand straight again. He ran his hand down her face. "I shall do my best to apologize quite thoroughly, no matter how long it takes."

Buffy thought about that for a minute. Then she nodded. "Okay. That'll work."

Giles helped her get Joyce to the car and watched with some nervousness as Buffy got behind the wheel. "Please drive carefully."

She waved off his concern and started up the car. Giles watched, wincing as she sped down the street. He walked back into the store. Anya looked up at him, a puzzled look on her face. Giles lifted his eyebrows at her expression. She looked towards the training room. "Who were those guys?"

Giles took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. "I have no idea but they were obviously looking for Riley. That device they had led them right to him." He shook his head. "They looked like soldiers but I really don't know who they were. Quite convenient for us, I must say. I had no idea how to dispose of a human body."

Anya snorted. "This town is so weird."

Giles nodded. "I couldn't agree more."

##

Giles ran his hand down Buffy's hair as she lay with her head on his chest. "You're awfully quiet."

She sighed. "Still a little wigged, I guess."

"About Riley?"

"Yeah. About him, and just the thought that humans can get used that way

and not even know it." She placed a kiss on his chest. "I mean I know our lives are sort of like a horror movie but that just seems especially horror movieish." She shuddered. Giles wrapped his arms around her.

She moved so her head was on his shoulder, so she could better nestle against the length of his body. "I was thinking about how easy it would have been for this not to happen."

He tucked some hair behind her ear. "You mean what happened to Riley?"

She shook her head. "No, you and me." She lifted herself up so she could see his face. "I mean, it took me five years. And then it only happened because certain things happened in just a certain way, and if any of those things hadn't happened, I'd still be clueless." She hated to think about how chancy the whole thing had been.

Giles lifted his head to kiss her. "Buffy, that's how all of life is. A string of coincidences piled one on top of another." He looked up at her as she stared down at him, her blonde hair brushing softly against his chest. "All I know is that somehow you were put in my life and I will be eternally grateful for that." He put his hand behind her head and pulled her down to him so he could kiss her properly. She was happy to oblige.

When they drew back from the kiss she looked at him, small crease lines on her forehead. He raised a hand and touched them. "What are these for?"

She tightened her lips. "Do you think I'd have figured it out sooner or later?"

"Figured what out?"

"How wonderful you are?"

"I'd like to think so." He looked at her. "Didn't you ever think I was wonderful until now?"

"Sometimes." She wrinkled her nose. "But mostly in a watcher kind of way." She shook her head. "I didn't get the rest of you for the most part."

He snorted. "Well, thank you very much."

She poked him in the ribs and he grunted. "Hey, how about me? Did you think I was wonderful?"

"Heavens no. You were too horrible for words most of the time." He shifted to avoid being poked again and he chuckled. "But you were my slayer and I

loved you. The rest of it didn't matter to me, not really."

"But see, that's what's wiggling me out. How does it all change so fast, so completely? How come I am so in love with you now when you're exactly the same as you were before, and I'm exactly the same way I was? How do you know that it won't all just shift back? How do I know you won't wake up in the morning and think I'm horrible again?"

"Well, I can guarantee that will never happen if you always wake me up the way you did today." She poked him again. "Ow." He rolled her so he was lying on top of her. He cupped her face with one of his hands. "Buffy, you know better than most that there are no guarantees. And I suppose our feelings could change but I don't believe that. I believe this is real and true and that we belong together. I can't ever imagine not loving you the way I do now. Ever." He grinned at her. "Besides if I can love you as horrible as you've been we should be fine. You couldn't possibly get any worse." He grabbed her hands to keep her from injuring him.

She broke free and started tickling him until he was crying for mercy. She threatened him with more and he begged her to stop. "I'm sorry, I'll never mention how horrible you were again." He laughed and captured her under his body again, holding her hands above her head. He lowered his head and kissed her, parting her lips with his tongue. She tried to resist but after a second she gave in and kissed him back with her whole heart. He pulled back when he needed to breath and smiled at her. "I love you so very much, Buffy. Right now, right here. That's all we ever have. Let's not waste it worrying about a future we can't control. You make my life complete and I want you at my side, as my slayer, as my friend, as my lover. For as much time as we have."

Buffy's eyes filled with tears. She took a deep breath. "Me too. Love you, I mean, what you said." She watched him as he bit back a smile. She narrowed her eyes at him. "And if you say one thing about my skills with the English language I will punch you in the nose."

He put his hand on his chest. "I would never say anything like that."

She rolled her eyes. "Oh, please. I know you think my communication skills are just a cut above a chimpanzee."

"And yet, there's no one I'd rather talk to."

She smiled at him. "God, we are quite the pair, aren't we?"

He held her close. "That we are my love, that we are."

The End

September 15, 2001