

With This Ring 1

Thursday evening:

Cordelia scrunched up her face as Angel swept out of the hotel lobby. She turned to Wes. "Okay, is it just me or is Angel starting to get a little creepy again?"

Wes let out a sigh. "I'm afraid it's not just you. He's beginning to act like he did when he..."

Cordelia finished. "...when he let all those lawyers die. When Drusilla and Darla were around."

Wes' lips tightened. "Indeed." Wes pushed his glasses up. "I don't know what's setting him off."

Cordelia snorted. "I know exactly what set him off." She walked over to the counter where Wes was standing and she tapped a buff colored envelope.

Wes grimaced. "The wedding invitation."

"Yes, the wedding invitation." Her eyes looked at the door again. "He can't handle it. He can't handle that she's marrying someone else, even if it is Giles."

"He seemed so calm that they were together when we were up there at Halloween."

"I know." She picked up the invitation and waved it in the air. "But this isn't all right. I mean it's clear as day when you see them that they belong together, but as long as they weren't married I guess he had this little part of him that could hope that one day..."

Wes took the envelope from her and opened it, pulling out the actual invitation. "I can hardly believe it myself. Buffy and Giles." He smiled crookedly. "Not that I should be surprised, it was the two of them against the

world from the moment I met them, certainly the two of them against me."

Cordelia grinned. "My jaw almost dropped when I finally figured it out but once I did it made so much sense." She touched the invitation. "One week. A week from tomorrow and she'll be Mrs. Giles." Cordelia made a face. "Will she still call him Giles? That will be kind of weird."

Wes looked at Cordelia. "I'll tell you something else that Angel isn't crazy about."

"What?"

"You and Paul."

Cordelia winced. "I know. Those two are a little bit like oil and water. Paul can't stand him."

"I think Angel's afraid he'll take you away from him, and he's Giles' best friend so it's as if..."

"...Giles wins twice." Cordelia let out a deep breath. "I know but..."

Wes smiled kindly at her. "You like him."

"I do. I like him a lot."

"I like him too. I like that Roger bloke as well and his friend Linda. This new work they're doing with that man from the Council is very exciting."

Cordelia nodded. "John Drinan. He's great too. I met him when I was up there last weekend. The new lab is almost done. Linda is beside herself. And both Buffy and Spike have allowed themselves to be total guinea pigs for the cause."

Wes shook his head. "Pretty amazing that Buffy's allowing that at all considering what she's just been through."

"Well Buffy was always bounce back girl."

Wes pursed his lips as he considered Cordelia. "Would you move up there? If he asked you to?"

Cordelia sighed. "No, how can I? You guys need me here, I'm vision girl."

"Of course you are Cordelia but people move on, especially when they fall in love."

"Well, right now the answer is no. And he hasn't asked so let's not cross that bridge yet. I'm more worried about Angel. Do you think he'll be okay?"

"I don't know. I suppose I should talk to him."

Cordelia put her hand gently on Wes' arm. "Do me a favor, have a cross in your pocket when you do."

Wes looked at Cordelia with some concern. "You don't actually think he'd harm one of us, do you?"

Cordelia had been listening to Paul too much about the subject. "I don't know that either. I don't know if he's just going into a mega brood to end all broods or if something creepier is going on." She scrunched her face up again. "Should I call Buffy and warn her? I mean if he really...if he did...he'd..." She couldn't even finish her sentence.

Wes shook his head. "No, I don't believe he'll harm anyone. He still has a soul. It's not as if he's gone to work for Wolfram and Hart. Let's just watch him and if he gets any worse then maybe we should call."

Cordelia hesitated for a minute and then nodded her head. "Okay. Besides I'm going up there tomorrow for Buffy's shower, so if he's heading up there I'll have front row seats."

Wes winced. "Let's hope that doesn't happen."

Cordelia sighed one last time. "No kidding. Well, I'm heading home. Dennis will be pouring my bath any minute." She stretched, looking forward to a nice hot soak. "Goodnight, Wes."

"Goodnight, Cordelia."

##

Angel sat hunched at the bar, a few drinks to the worse. He could feel the dark gathering in him and he was tired of fighting it. He knew he should be meditating, or at least working off some of these feelings by finding something evil to kill. He knew the worst thing he could be doing was sitting here, drinking, letting it build inside but he couldn't seem to help it, pushed past the point of caring.

He forgot sometimes. Wrapped in the comfort of friends and the semblance of a real life he could forget that he was a demon. The soul made him care, but it was times like this that reminded him that the demon was always there, right beneath the surface, wanting to break out, to hurt, to kill. And he knew who he wanted to hurt now.

He'd known they were together, he'd seen them. But when he'd seen that wedding invitation something had let go inside. Angel couldn't get the image of them out of his head, the image of Giles holding her, touching her, on top of her, in her, her legs wrapped around him. Angel's fingers were clasping the bar so tightly that he left a slight indentation. His thoughts were merciless. He couldn't stand that Giles would be the one she turned to in all things. That Giles would be the one she would marry and cleave herself to. Angel had thought that he had moved past it, that he had moved past Buffy, but it was clear that he hadn't. Not even close, maybe not ever.

He could still remember torturing Giles when he had lost his soul. Things had been foggy at first but it had all come back. After all, that was part of the curse. To remember everything. A part of him wished he was back there now. If he'd killed Giles then, none of this would be happening now. Angel took a long swallow of his whiskey. Missed opportunities. He ordered another drink.

Next Friday they'd be married. The wedding was being considerably held in the evening so he and Spike could attend. So thoughtful of them. Angel had to fight to keep his human face on. He had no intention of going. If he saw Giles and Buffy together right now, saw them pledging themselves to each other, he'd lose it completely and instead of a celebration, there'd be a funeral. Maybe a couple of them. Possibly his own if someone got lucky, but at least he'd take Giles with him. So, best just to stay away. He took another sip.

And if anyone got lucky it would be Paul. Angel could feel Paul watching him whenever he was around. He knew that someone had told him what he'd done when he was Angelus. Paul would be easy prey but there was no doubt that he would stand between him and Giles. It would give everyone else that extra second to...Angel shook his head, alarmed at where his thoughts kept taking him. And yet there was a comfort in allowing those thoughts free rein, a seductive pathway that he'd denied himself for so long.

Angel wondered if there was any chance that Buffy still had feelings for him, if it was just the curse that was keeping her away. That perhaps she was settling on Giles because he, Angel was unavailable. He could understand that. It was certainly all he'd done. Anyone he'd looked at had been a substitute for Buffy. He would even be okay with this wedding if he knew it was a farce, if he knew that Buffy still loved him, that she still wanted him, that when she gave herself to Giles that he was merely a substitute for the vampire she still longed for. The need to know, to reassure himself grew strong.

Angel felt arms wrap around him from behind before he even sensed anyone there. A feminine voice crooned in his ear as her hands caressed his chest. "You were so very naughty."

Angel put his hands on top of hers to stop their movement. "Dru. When did you get back in town?"

She seductively moved around him until she was standing between his bar stool and the one next to him, her body inches from his. "Did you like it? Did you like seeing me dance in the flames?" She morphed into her vampire face and hissed at Angel. "Did you like watching me burn?" One hand moved again, rubbing over his nipples.

"Stop that, Dru."

"We have to fix the world again, my sweet. It's all dark and hazy. The stars won't even show their faces."

"What are you talking about?"

"She stole my Spike from me. It's not right. It's not right for her to be happy." Her hand started to move lower and again he stopped her.

Angel could feel his demon mocking him as he spoke, feel the darkness inside. "There's nothing we can do about it. I'm not hurting Buffy." He hated to say it but he forced himself to, "...or Giles." He still hadn't turned to face Drusilla.

Drusilla leaned in closer. "Don't want to hurt the sweet Watcher with lips like cherries and a tongue so warm and strong." She licked the side of Angel's face from his jaw to his temple. "Not like that, not with pain, not with blood."

"Dru, what are you talking about?"

She held out her hand. Resting in her palm were two vials filled with a yellowish powder. She placed them on the bar. "Look, someone gave me a present." Drusilla held up two fingers and undulated them in front of his eyes. She crooned softly to him.

Angel grabbed her hand and lowered it. "That doesn't work on me, you can't hypnotize me like you can your human prey."

She smiled coquettishly at him. "No, my dark Angel, it's not for you."

"Who's it for then?"

"I want to kiss him again." She hummed softly to herself, her eyes closed as if she was lost in her memories.

Angel turned and faced her. "You want to hypnotize Giles again?"

Dru slid between his legs. She lifted her fingers and waved them in front of his face again. "I want to make him mine."

"By hypnotizing him?"

"By making him forget. By making him forget her so he'll kiss me." She ran her tongue over her bottom lip.

"You can make him forget?"

Dru let out a drunken sounding laugh. "We can make him forget." She leaned in and whispered in his ear. "You know where he is. You know how to get him for me."

"What can we make him forget?" Angel smiled at the thought of a Giles who didn't remember being in love with Buffy, a Giles who had no memory of his new friends.

Dru smiled and drew a circle counter clockwise on the bar, over and over again. "I'll turn the clock backwards until you tell me to stop."

"Will it be permanent?" He scooped the vials off the bar.

She shook her head sadly. "No, it's just a game. Just a game to make it the way it was for a little while."

Angel smiled. Maybe it would be long enough. Long enough for him to talk to Buffy, find out how she was really feeling.

At his smile Dru let out another laugh. "You like this game, don't you? Won't it be a lovely one?" She wet one of her fingers with her tongue and used it to wet Angel's lips. "We'll make the stars sing again. But don't worry. If they grow dark again we can always play another game."

Angel gave into the temptation and kissed Drusilla, biting her lips hard enough to draw blood. She pulled her head away delighted, licking her lips, tasting her blood. Angel looked at her. "Just a game?" The darkness within him grew and he smiled.

"And what's wrong with a game between friends, right?"

Dru smiled back. "Maybe Spike will want to play."

Angel shook his head. "No, Spike won't want to play. You can't go anywhere near him."

Dru hissed again. "She stole him from me. My beautiful Spike."

Angel didn't want to talk about Spike. Looking down at the vials in his hand he spoke. "We'll need a dart gun."

She let out a sultry laugh. "I knew you were the one. I knew you would help me." Running her hand down his chest again she cooed at him. "Hurry now, we mustn't keep the stars waiting."

Angel nodded. "I'll be back in an hour. Be ready." She stood there, her body weaving a little, a dreamy look on her face. He left her standing there as he headed back to the hotel.

##

Buffy lay in bed, her head on Giles' belly as she admired her engagement ring again. Giles softly laughed and Buffy turned to kiss his stomach. She glanced up at him, grinning. "I can't help it, I love it so much."

"I think you love that ring more than you love me."

"Ha ha. Don't get me wrong, the diamond is gorgeous but it's what it means that makes me love it." She scooted up in bed and pressed her lips against

his. "It's you loving me, that's what it means. With a really, really big diamond."

Giles hugged her tightly. "You are worth a dozen really big diamonds." He reached for her hand and looked at her ring. "That ring on your finger, it tells me that you're mine. That in one week you will be my wife." He let out a quick laugh.

Buffy gave him a lopsided smile. "What?" She frowned. "You find something amusing in that thought, mister?" Buffy sent him a mock glare.

"No, I find something unbelievable in that thought. I still can't believe it sometimes. You'd think I'd be used to it by now but I'm not."

She kissed him again. "It hasn't really been that long." She started counting off. "Just a little over six months." She smiled at him, sighing. "But I know what you mean. Married. You and me. Can you imagine if someone had told us that when we first met, that we'd end up getting married?"

Giles snorted. "You'd have run retching for the bathroom and I'd..."

"You'd what?"

"I'd have had visions of metal bars or deportation."

She looked at him. "Did you think about me that way at all? You know, when I was in high school. Did you ever wonder?"

"Would you feel quite pleased with yourself if I said yes?"

Buffy grinned. "Uh huh."

Giles chuckled. "I suppose the thought crossed my mind every now and then, when you'd show up in those dresses of yours that were so short they made me nervous. But I tried very hard not to. It would have been wildly inappropriate, not to mention illegal."

"Don't you want to know if it ever crossed my mind?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I already know the answer. You thought I was very, very old, in addition to all the other charming adjectives you used to describe me."

"So shoot me. I was stupid." She looked at him, daring him to ask.

Giles let out a sigh. "So, did it ever cross your mind?" He winced, not really wanting to hear her answer.

Buffy kissed him again. "Yup."

Giles' eyebrows rose. "When?"

"When you stuck that sword in the mayor for me."

Giles grinned. "Really?"

"Yup and that night in the car, after Angel got turned and you were so wonderful to me. Just for a minute I wondered what it would have been like if I'd slept with you instead of Angel." She sighed unhappily. "I wish I had."

Giles held her tightly but shook his head. "While I can certainly say that I wished you had never slept with Angel, you were still far too young for me to sleep with, and I don't imagine that would have ended particularly well either."

"I'm sorry I did sleep with him. I'm sorry about so many things."

Giles touched her cheek. "Buffy, I never would have asked my question if I thought it would end up making you feel so sad. That was a long time ago,

the things he did, the pain he caused. And as odd as it is to say, I'm glad it happened, not what he did to Jenny but what he did to me."

"How can you say that?"

He glanced over his shoulder. "If I didn't have these scars, I don't know that we ever would have ended up together. In a certain light, Angel is responsible for us being together, for being in love."

Buffy looked at her cuticles for a minute. "Do you think if Angel hadn't killed Jenny that you'd still be together?"

"Oh Buffy. How can I answer that? Would you still be with Riley if he hadn't left? All I can tell you is what I had with Jenny pales in comparison to what I feel for you. And I would have missed out on so much if she and I had stayed together." He stroked her hair. "I'd like to believe that eventually we'd have worked it out, you and I, that we belong together."

Buffy repeated his words. "That we belong together." She smiled softly at him. "You know, now, looking back, I can see that we always did belong together. You and me, like salt and pepper shakers. Slayer and Watcher."

Giles lifted her hand again and kissed her ring. "Husband and wife."

Again she repeated his words. "Husband and wife." Her voice was reverent. She growled all of a sudden.

Giles looked at her in some surprise. "Buffy?"

"Somehow the thought of that makes me want you, a lot."

A slow delighted grin formed on his face. "So come and take me."

She grinned back. "You know what? I think I will." Moving to straddle Giles' body she leaned down to kiss him.

##

Friday dusk:

As Giles locked up the shop his thoughts were on Buffy. Willow had thrown Buffy her bridal shower this afternoon over at Roger and Linda's. Willow had decided to hold it in the afternoon to keep the possibility of anything evil from disturbing it to a minimum. It would be wrapping up by the time he got home.

Giles was hoping that the wedding would go undisturbed as well. They knew they'd taken a chance sending wedding invitations out. If any of them ended up in the wrong hands there'd be hell to pay, literally, if someone took the wrong kind of interest in it. They were all keeping their fingers crossed.

Giles headed out the back door and locked it behind him. Fumbling for his car key in the dark he neglected to look around. Giles felt something sharp pierce his shoulder. He turned and could just see the dart. He reached behind him and yanked it out, moving quickly to hide behind his car. Keys still in hand he felt them, trying to identify the car key. Staying hidden he looked across the street, straining to see who had attacked him. His vision was beginning to blur but he could just make out the outlines of two people.

Giles dropped the keys, his fingers growing nerveless. Grasping for them he fell on his knees. He could hear footsteps approaching from across the street. He tried again to see who it was but the drug overwhelmed him and he collapsed, sprawling on the cement next to his car.

Dru smiled at Angel as she stooped next to Giles. She ran her hand down his face and then down his arm. "Beautiful Watcher." She grinned up at Angel. "He's asleep. He must be tired." She started to croon to him. "Hush little baby don't say a word..." Dru lifted Giles up and rested his head against her breast, rocking him.

Angel picked up Giles' keys and unlocked his car. "Come on, we can't stay here, it's too open."

Dru pouted but together she and Angel managed to get Giles in the backseat.

She crawled in next to him while Angel got into the driver's seat. Pushing Giles' unconscious body up against the seat as if he were sitting she straddled his lap. Dru bit his lip, just hard enough to draw blood. She slipped into her game face and eagerly lapped it up. "His blood's so sweet."

Angel could smell the blood. He lost a little more control. Reaching from the front seat he fisted his hand in Dru's hair. Grabbing it hard he pulled her towards him, eliciting a cry of pain and pleasure from her. Angel licked her lips, trying to get a small taste himself. Then in his own game face he snarled at her. "He can't die yet. We haven't even started to play." He gestured back at Giles. "Hurry up, the drug will wear off soon." Angel let Dru go and turned to start the car.

Dru smiled again at Giles. She sneaked a peak at Angel, and seeing that he was preoccupied driving she dropped her head and licked Giles' neck. Sighing deeply she sat back up and with a feral grin she slapped Giles across the face. "Wakey, wakey." She slapped him again. "Miss Edith is expecting you." Again she slapped him, accidentally drawing blood on his cheek. She licked the wound and then moved down to kiss him on the lips.

Giles spoke drowsily, trying to force his eyes open. "Buffy?"

Angel's eyes grew dark in the front seat. Dru captured Giles' eyes and spoke to him. "No, it's Jenny."

##

By the time Dru had finished Angel had arrived at his destination and parked the car. Giles was still groggy and he was still in Drusilla's thrall. Angel rolled his eyes when he saw that she was kissing him again. Yanking her off of him he snarled. "Dru, leave off. Time for the games to start."

At his words Dru hissed. "I am playing."

Angel shook his head. "Time for a different game."

Dru turned back to Giles and ran her finger down his chest. "I like my game."

"You can play it again later. It's my turn now." Angel opened his car door.
"Help me get him out."

With Angel's promise that she could have Giles later, Dru got out of the car as well and assisted him. After looking around to make sure no one was looking they dragged Giles out and left him on the doorstep. After putting Giles' keys in his hand, Angel couldn't resist and he kicked him hard in his side. Smiling at Giles' groan he and Drusilla headed off into the darkness, moving far enough away to remain undetected but close enough for Angel to make sure that they'd been successful in turning back the hands of time.

##

Friday early evening:

Paul was working late. One of his officers knocked on his office door. Paul looked up, eyebrows raised. "Yeah, Carl, what is it?"

"Isn't Rupert Giles a friend of yours?"

Paul could feel a knot forming in his gut. "Yes, he is, why?"

"He's downstairs."

Paul let out a sigh of relief. "Oh, well send him up."

Carl looked a little uncomfortable. "Can't do that. They just brought him in."

The knot was back. "What do you mean, they just brought him in?" Paul was already standing, putting on his jacket.

Carl started to explain as he followed Paul down the hallway. "Dispatch got a call from some lady about a crazy guy trying to break into her apartment, insisting that he lived there, down on Oakpark."

Oakpark. Paul frowned. That was where Giles used to live. Carl continued. "They brought him in a few minutes ago and they were about to call the psych liaison when I told them I thought he was a good friend of yours."

Paul stopped. "The psych liaison?"

"Yeah, he's acting a little crazy."

Paul began to walk faster, only slowing as he approached the room they had put Giles in. Before Paul entered he turned to Carl. "I appreciate you coming and getting me. I'll take care of things from here."

Carl nodded. "I'll let them know." They all tended to look the other way for family and close friends, as long as no harm had been done.

Giles was sitting at the table, holding his glasses in one hand, the other massaging his temples. He looked up as Paul entered. "Why am I here? Why am I being detained?"

Paul frowned. "Giles?"

"Rupert Giles. I've already given them all my information. I want to know why someone is in my flat. I want to know why I seem to be under arrest when that...that impostor should be arrested." He put his glasses back on.

Paul approached Giles cautiously. "Giles, you don't live on Oakpark anymore."

Giles looked at Paul suspiciously. "Do I know you?"

"Giles, it's me, Paul."

Giles shook his head. As if the movement made him dizzy he gripped the end of the table. "What..." Giles groaned and put his other hand to his head. "I don't..." Giles let out a confused breath.

Paul moved closer to him, concerned, and he noticed the scratch on Giles' cheek and the cut on his lip. "Giles, what happened? Did someone attack you?"

Giles looked at him confused. "I don't understand." He touched the cut on his lip with his tongue.

Paul screwed his mouth up. "That makes two of us." He sat at the table. "Giles, I need some help here. Try and tell me what happened."

Giles stood and he groaned a little, grabbing at his side. His voice sounded strained. "I told you. I tried to get into my home and someone was there. Why haven't you brought her here?"

"What's wrong with your side?"

"I don't know. It hurts." Giles looked down at himself and frowned. "Whose clothes are these?" He closed his eyes and almost fell.

Paul was at his side immediately, holding on to his arm, supporting him. "Let me see your side."

Giles yanked his arm away. "What's going on? What are you doing to me?"

Paul held up his hands. "I'm not doing anything. I just need to see if you've been hurt." Paul approached Giles' side, keeping an eye on him in case Giles came out swinging. Paul knew he was in good shape but he hadn't been training with a Slayer for years. "Show me where it hurts."

Giles touched his side again and winced. He pulled out his shirt and lifted it trying to see for himself.

Paul's eyes grew angry at the darkening bruise there. "Who did that to you? Who cut your lip and your cheek?"

Giles let his shirt fall and shook his head. "I can't remember."

"Do you remember who I am?"

Giles looked at him, his brow furrowed. "No. I assume you work here."

"My name's Paul Erikson. I'm the Chief of Police." Paul watched Giles' eyes grow wary and he hastened to reassure him. "I know you don't remember me, but I am a friend. I'll call Buffy and she'll vouch for me."

"How do you know Buffy?"

"Giles, I know both of you. We're friends."

"Friends?" There was significant doubt in Giles' voice.

"Yes, friends."

"Since when have we been friends?" Giles didn't have any friends, not adult friends in any case, except for Jenny.

"For about a year. We met at Frank's bar, the one down the street by your shop."

"I met you in a bar?" Giles let out a sharp laugh. "Now why don't I believe you? And what shop?" His voice was cutting. "And where's Jenny?"

Paul's eyebrows rose. "Who?"

"Jenny Calendar. I was with her this evening. Right before..." Giles shook his head. "Right before..." He swayed a little on his feet and Paul grabbed him and sat him back down at the table.

Paul was starting to get officially freaked. Jenny Calendar. He reached for his phone and dialed Linda and Roger's home. Linda answered. "Hello?"

"Linda, it's Paul. I hate to interrupt the festivities but is Buffy there?"

"Yeah, hold on for a minute."

Paul bided his time and then Buffy came on. "Hey, Paul, what's up?"

Paul let out a breath. "Buffy, you need to come down to the police station."

"Why?"

"Giles is here and he's, well, he seems to think he spent the evening with Jenny Calendar."

There was a long pause and then finally, "What?"

"My thoughts exactly. His brain's a little scrambled. He doesn't seem to know who I am, but he knows who you are."

"I'll be right there. Should I come alone?"

"Yes, that might be a good idea."

Paul hung up and he turned to Giles. "Buffy's on her way."

Giles looked up at Paul. "What did you mean by my brain being scrambled?"

"Giles, you don't know me. You don't know where you live. You think you spent time with someone who isn't around anymore." He pointed to his temple. "Scrambled."

"What do you mean, not around anymore? What have you done with Jenny?"

Paul sat down across from Giles and pursed his lips. "I haven't done anything

with her, and as far as her not being around, let's tackle that one later. What's the last thing you remember before Jenny?"

Giles tried to think back. He took his glasses off and threw them on the table, running his hands over his face. "I got up and went to work..." His face scrunched up as if he wasn't really sure about much of anything.

"And where is that?"

"Sunnydale High. I'm the librarian there."

Paul leaned back in his chair, trying to keep his dismay off his face. "Then what happened?"

Giles thought again, then he looked up. "Is there anyway I could have some tea?"

Paul nodded and stood. "It's only tea bags, and Lipton at that. I know it's your least favorite kind of tea. Is that okay?"

Giles nodded. "Yes, that will be fine, thank you." Paul walked out of the room, closing the door behind him. Giles found it somewhat comforting that this man seemed to know what kind of tea he drank. He ran his hands over his face again, trying to figure out what was going on. He stood and stretched his arms, feeling a kink in his shoulder. His shirt scratched against a spot on his upper back. Giles reached back and touched the area and found it tender.

Paul walked back in with a cup of hot water and tea fixings and saw what Giles was doing. "What is it?"

"I don't know. I seem to be sore back here as well."

Paul headed over to him, cautious in case Giles was planning some big escape. He put the tea down and then took a look. "You've been bleeding. Loosen your tie and undo a couple of buttons so I can look." Giles wasn't quite sure why he did as this man was telling him but he found himself obeying. Paul pulled the shirt away from his neck and took a look. "It's hard to

tell but it looks like you've been stuck with something."

Giles sat down, suddenly feeling a little shaky. He looked at his tea and saw that Paul had brought some creamers, another indication that he really did know him. Giles smiled a little. "Thank you." Needing something to focus on he began to unwrap his teabag.

"You're welcome." Paul gestured at Giles. "You really don't remember getting hurt?"

Giles dipped his teabag in the hot water a few times, trying to agitate some flavor out of it. "I just remember being with Jenny. We..." Giles touched his lips.

Paul's eyebrows rose. "You kissed her?" Paul winced. He couldn't imagine Buffy would be too thrilled with that.

Giles stammered. "Well...we...she and I...yes."

Paul nodded his head. "Then what?"

"Then I...I think I fell on my steps at home because I was on the ground and..." Giles shook his head, unhappily aware of how unclear he was sounding. "Then I tried to get in my home and the next thing I knew the police were there and here I am. Why was that woman insisting that she lived there?"

"She does live there. You live in Granite Cove."

"That's hardly in my price range."

"Look at your license."

Giles retrieved his wallet and when he flipped it open he stared at his address. "I don't understand."

"Someone did something to you. I don't know what, but they did something."

There was a knock on the door and Paul got up and looked out the window. It was Buffy. He opened the door and let her in.

When Giles saw it was Buffy he stood. "Buffy." She looked so different.

Buffy ran over to Giles and wrapped her arms around him. "Are you all right?"

Giles stepped away from her and got a hold of her arms, pulling them down. He looked at her with some alarm. "I'm fine."

Buffy frowned at him but then she put her hand up and gently touched his lip and the cut on his cheek. "What happened?"

"I don't seem to remember."

"Do you remember me?"

Giles nodded. "Yes, but you've changed."

Buffy looked confused. "What do you mean?"

"Your hair, it's longer." There were other differences but Giles wasn't sure how to describe them.

Buffy had no response to that so she pushed Giles back down on his seat and pulled up another one right next to him. She reached for one of his hands and laced her fingers through his. Giles gently extricated his hand from hers. "Buffy, are you all right?"

Buffy frowned at him again and then she looked at Paul. Paul shrugged and then he stood. "I'm gonna go call Roger. I'll be back."

Buffy nodded and both she and Giles watched him leave. Buffy turned back

to Giles. "What happened? Paul said you thought you were with Jenny."

"I was with Jenny. We had a date." Giles frowned, his memories felt so hazy still. "At least I think..."

Buffy's eyes narrowed and she interrupted him. "What kind of date?"

"I don't believe that's any of your business."

Buffy's eyes widened. "Excuse me?"

"Whatever Miss Calendar and I choose to do in our own time is no concern of yours."

Buffy was speechless. Finally she rallied. "Miss Calendar?"

Giles nodded and then he grew concerned. "Buffy, you seem quite perturbed. I really am all right."

She shook her head. "No, really you're not. Trust me."

"I have to agree that I seem to be a bit confused about what happened to me tonight but other than that..." He looked at the wallet that was still lying on the table. "Maybe you can explain why my license says I live in Granite Cove."

"Okay, but you won't like it."

"Try me."

"We live there together, you and me."

Giles frowned at Buffy. "What are you talking about?"

Buffy had backtracked in her brain. "You went out on a date? What happened

on this date?" She could hardly believe she was jealous of a dead woman. Giles couldn't stop his fingers from touching his lips. Buffy let out a shriek. "You kissed her?"

Giles' eyebrows furrowed with displeasure. "I know you find the whole subject distasteful but Jenny seems to have developed quite an affection for me." He lifted out his teabag and laid it on the napkin. He added some cream and stirred. "Now what was this nonsense about you and I living together?"

Paul walked back in. Buffy glared at him. "He kissed her."

Paul winced. That hadn't taken long. "Buffy, he didn't. You know that."

"He kissed somebody." She sat there and thought for a minute and then her face grew hard. "Drusilla."

Giles looked up at her in some alarm. "What about Drusilla?"

Paul agreed. "Yeah, what about Drusilla?"

Buffy looked back at Giles. "Listen. No, read." She grabbed her purse and pulled out an envelope and she handed it to him.

Giles opened the envelope and pulled out the card within. His eyes grew wider and wider as he read. He looked at her in horror. "You can't be serious?"

She held out her hand showing him the engagement ring. "Pretty serious."

"You're sixteen years old. They'll throw me in jail. I can't possibly marry you." Giles stood up and backed away. "When did this happen? No wonder I can't remember. I'm sorry, Buffy, I..." He shook his head, appalled at himself.

"Sixteen?" She pointed at the card in his hand. "Look at the date."

Giles looked again and he frowned. "Is this some kind of joke?"

"Giles, what year do you think it is?"

"1997."

"Well, it's 2002. I just turned 21, and we're engaged and we live together and you're not allowed to kiss anyone but me." She started to pace. "I am so going to stake her."

Giles was standing in the corner, as far away from Buffy and Paul as he could get. "I don't understand."

Paul gestured at Buffy calling her over. He spoke softly. "Why do you think Drusilla did this?" Paul had heard the name but he'd never had the pleasure.

"She did it to him before. She made him think she was Jenny to get him to talk...when Angelus had him. It's how Spike kept him alive, stopped Angelus from torturing him anymore."

Paul ran a hand over his face. This was sucking so much. "Roger wants to run some tests." He nodded towards Giles. "Someone stuck him with something." Paul indicated the spot on his own back. "We need to get him to the hospital."

She nodded. "Can you leave us alone for a few minutes?"

Paul nodded. "I'll be outside, just ring the buzzer."

Paul glanced briefly at Giles and then he left. Buffy headed over to Giles. "Giles." When he made as if to bolt Buffy grabbed his arm. "Stay put. You need to listen to me."

"Am I just dreaming?" His voice sounded so hopeful.

"No, this is no dream. Someone has messed with your mind and it's making you think you're in the past." Buffy thought back to the conversation she'd had with Giles only last night and let out a short bitter laugh at its current unhappy relevance. "We really are getting married." She looked up at him. "I love you."

Giles looked back at her, trying to read the truth in her face. All he saw was her love for him and he didn't know how to refute that. He lifted up his other hand and gently touched her face. "How long...?"

"How long have we been together?" At his nod she answered. "Six months or so." She smiled sadly at him. "Don't worry. I was 20. Nice and legal, for smooching anyway."

"What happened to Angel?"

"He's down in LA. He left right after graduation."

"Where's Jenny?"

"Giles, Jenny's..." Buffy looked away, not wanting to tell him, guilt washing through her as if it had just happened again.

"Jenny's what?" As he took in the look on Buffy's face his voice grew sterner, demanding an answer. "Buffy, Jenny's what?"

Buffy lied. "She's gone. She left a long time ago."

Giles shook his head. "She can't have. I just saw her."

"You didn't. I'm sorry. She left back in 1997 and she hasn't been back. She won't be back." Buffy gently pulled him to her and she wrapped her arms around him.

Giles didn't pull away. He spoke softly. "She's been gone for five years?" Buffy nodded up at him. He shook his head, confused. "Why did she leave?" Buffy hated to do it, but she told Giles another lie. "A vampire attacked her

and she left." She couldn't stand to see the look on his face if she told him the truth that Jenny was dead, that it had been Angelus, and that she had been the one to set him free. Giles did pull back then. She looked at him and saw that his face was so sad. "I don't know if it helps but you told me last night that what we have, you and I, that it..." Suddenly Buffy wished she'd kept her mouth shut. It sounded so tacky, somehow, comparing herself to a dead woman.

Giles allowed her the right to not finish her sentence. It was all too much to think about. Too unreal. He lifted her hand, the one with the ring. "Did I come into some money?"

Buffy scrunched her face up. "Kind of. The Council gave you a really, really big check. That's how you bought the house, and probably how you bought this."

"Why did they give me a big check?" He couldn't imagine them being so generous.

"It's a long story."

Giles moved back to the table and sat down. "Tell me the fast version."

"You know the test, the test Slayer's get on their 18th birthday?"

Giles looked horrified. "They made me do that?"

"Well, sort of. You sort of cheated and told me about it half way through and they fired you for it. Then they rehired you and paid you retroactively."

"Why did they rehire me?"

"Giles, it's been five years. Too much stuff has happened for me to tell you all of it right now. Paul wants to take you to go see Roger. He wants to run some tests on you, see if whoever attacked you gave you something." Buffy walked behind Giles to look at his back, wanting to see the puncture wound for herself. Her lips tightened as she pulled his shirt away from his neck and saw

the small hole.

"Who is Roger?"

"Paul's brother. He's a doctor. He takes care of us now."

Giles flashed her a disbelieving grin. "We have a doctor and the Chief of Police working with us?"

"Thanks to you. They think you walk on water."

Another grin. "Really?"

She pulled him down and gave him a quick kiss. "Really. So do I. Now, let's get you to the hospital." She walked to the door and rang the buzzer; her back turned as Giles put his fingers to his lips where hers had just been. Going back and getting Giles she laced her fingers through his again and this time Giles didn't let go.

With This Ring 2

They were all at Buffy and Giles' home. Giles was upstairs getting changed. He had requested some privacy and Buffy had unwillingly given it to him. Buffy was sitting next to Roger, Paul next to Cordelia. Roger shrugged his shoulders, responding to their looks. "I don't know why they gave him sodium pentathol. I mean I can guess."

Buffy prompted him. "Guess."

"Well, if this really was Drusilla, and she uses hypnotism, sodium pentathol can enhance its effects. It makes you more suggestible, it would make the hypnosis last longer, perhaps be stronger. That's the only thing I can come up with." His eyes grew dark. "Plus shooting him with a dart full of it would have knocked him out. They still use it on animals sometimes."

"So Drusilla uses this stuff to knock him out, and then gets the double bonus of using it to hypnotize him big time?"

Roger looked at Buffy. "You got another answer?"

She shook her head. "I just don't understand why."

There was a knock on the door. Buffy frowned and went to answer it. "Hey, Spike." She backed away from the door and let him in.

"Hey. Linda tells me there's trouble in paradise."

Giles chose that moment to come down. He had changed into some casual slacks and a different button down shirt. When he saw Spike his eyes opened wide and he yelled. "Buffy, catch." He grabbed a stake that was lying on the table at the foot of the stairs and threw it to her.

Buffy caught it and stood in front of Spike. "Giles, don't. He's okay."

Giles looked at them all now with suspicion. "How can he be okay? He's a vampire." He was looking for another stake. "Does he have his soul, too, like Angel?"

Spike snorted. Buffy shook her head. "Remember those five years I told you about?" At his short nod she spoke again. "Spike's part of that and he's another very long story. The fast version is that he sort of works with us." She looked at Spike, her eyes flashing with anger. "We think Drusilla's in town."

Spike grinned. "Dru, here in Sunnydale? What's she up to?"

Buffy scowled. "We think she took Giles and did something to him."

Spike's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean?"

"Giles thinks he's back in 1997, and he thinks he was kissing Jenny Calendar." Buffy scowled again. She was so going to stake Drusilla.

Spike grinned. "She did sort of fancy him."

That got everyone's attention, including Giles. "Good Lord, what do you mean?"

Spike just grinned again and looked at Buffy. "She likes kissing your Watcher. We had a devil of a time making her stop." Then Spike scowled. "She'd get rambling about him sometimes. Called him her Watcher, kept talking about how she wanted to make him her pet."

Buffy looked dangerous. "Drusilla has the hots for my fiancé?"

Spike walked over to Giles. Giles was on the balls of his feet, ready to fight or to run. Spike put his hand up, sort of a gesture of peace. "How long did she have you?" He reached out and turned Giles' head to both sides, checking out his neck. Spike touched Giles' lip. "She bit you. She likes to do that."

He walked over and perched on the end of the couch. "What happened?" Roger filled him in. He pursed his lips. "Can't imagine she'd let him go if she got her hooks into him." He looked at the rest of them. "Besides, this all sounds like a plan, and Dru's not big with the planning. If it was her, she had to have some help."

Cordelia winced and then she let out a long sigh. "I don't want to create a panic..."

Buffy glanced at Cordelia. "What?" A chill ran down her spine.

Cordy hated to be disloyal to Angel. "Angel's been...well...ever since he saw the invitation to the wedding...he's been a little...off."

Buffy moved to stand by Giles, as if he was in danger right now. "Angel? What do you mean by off?"

Paul and Roger looked at each other and they both saw the concern mirrored in the other's eyes. Paul's lips tightened. "I knew I didn't trust that guy."

Cordy glared at him. "Look, it's understandable that he's moody. Buffy was the great love of his life. He's bummed. He'll get over it."

Paul wasn't willing to let her get out of it that easily. "You're the one who said he was off. What did you mean?"

Cordy blew out a breath. "He's been extra broody, really sullen. He went through this last year and he got kind of scary and he did some Angelus-y kinds of things." Then she added in a rush. "Except he did them to bad guys." Then she grimaced and qualified again. "But they were human bad guys."

Buffy's eyes opened wide. "He killed humans?"

Cordy nodded. "A lot of them. Well, he didn't do it. He locked them in a room with some vampires. Drusilla and Darla."

Spike's eyebrows rose. "Angel's been hanging around with Dru and Darla?"

"Not any more. He sort of went through this dark stage and then he stopped. He got all normal again, you know, for Angel, which is still pretty broody."

Buffy's heart was racing. She brought the phone over to Cordelia. "Call him, see if he's home."

Cordelia took the phone and called the hotel. Wes answered. "Wes, it's Cordy."

"Ah, Cordy, are you having a nice time?"

"Sort of. Is Angel back?"

"No, he hasn't returned." He heard something in Cordelia's voice. "Why?"

"Remember those front row seats?"

"He's there?"

"We don't know for sure but we think Drusilla is and she's already attacked Giles."

"Good heavens, is he all right?"

"Sort of. We think she hypnotized him. He's taking a trip down memory lane."

"Cordelia..." He had no words to warn her.

"I know, you too." Cordy hung up. "He's not there." Again she felt the need to defend Angel. "He does disappear sometimes. He checks on his sources, or he goes and finds somewhere to just be alone. It doesn't mean he's here."

Buffy was still standing in front of Giles. "We can't afford to assume that. If he's here..." Cordelia and Buffy looked at each other. They knew what it meant. They'd both lived it already. Buffy looked at Roger. "Call Linda, tell her that she and Kevin can't leave the house." Buffy walked over and retrieved the phone. She hit one of speed dial buttons. "Willow, it's Buffy. Angelus might be back."

Willow gasped. "How did that happen?"

"We don't know and it could be a false alarm, but you know the drill."

"We'll be careful. I'll call Xander." She gasped again. "You invited him into your home."

"Shit. I'll have Giles uninvite him." She scowled. Hopefully Giles remembered how to do that. "Gotta go. Be careful."

"You too." Willow hung up.

Buffy looked at Giles. "We have to do an uninvite spell. It's in one of your books. Can you find it?"

"If you explain this to me. Why is Angel such a threat?"

"He can lose his soul. It happened to him once already. Do you remember reading about him when I first found out he was a vampire?"

"Yes, he was a vicious brute, into violence and torture." Giles' eyes widened. "Oh, I see." He looked at the door. "You invited him in?"

Buffy scrunched her face up. "Actually you did."

His eyes opened wider. "When did I do that?"

"Halloween." She waved her hand, impatient now. "Will you find the spell?"

"Yes, of course." He turned around and then turned back. "Where...?"

Buffy rolled her eyes and took him by the arm, escorting him down the hall. She stopped and then led him into the bathroom, shutting the door behind her. "Take off your shirt."

"I'm not taking off my shirt."

"Take it off, I need to show you something."

Giles frowned but he began to unbutton his shirt. He hesitated when he had the buttons undone but at a look from Buffy he pulled it off. She half turned him. "Look at your back."

Giles looked at the scars on his back and let out a cry. He had noticed the burns on his chest when he had changed and had meant to ask Buffy about them. "What happened?"

"Angelus did this to you. And I need to tell you something else. I lied to you earlier because I didn't want to have to tell you this. Jenny didn't just leave. Angelus killed her. I need you to believe me when I say that he is dangerous. And that you are the one he'll go after."

Giles took one last look and put his shirt back on. "Why?" For some reason Buffy's words weren't quite sinking in.

"Angel loved me, we loved each other. According to Cordelia he's not happy about us getting married. If he's here, he'll try to stop it, he'll try to kill you." Buffy's eyes were bright with tears. "Giles, I can't lose you."

"Buffy, I appreciate your concern but it appears that if he's in town he's already had me in his clutches and he let me go." He gestured at the mirror. "And even after that, he didn't kill me, did he?"

A tear dripped down Buffy's face. "No, because I killed him."

Giles lifted a hand and caught the tear. "How is he alive again?"

"The Powers That Be brought him back." She looked up at Giles, her face full of anguish. "He likes to torture. He likes to play games. If he's here with Drusilla, this thing they did to you tonight, it's only the beginning." She threw her arms around him and held him tight.

Giles held her back. "Buffy, I'm all right."

Buffy pulled back just a bit and pulling his head down she began to kiss him. Giles tried to pull back but she wouldn't let him. The thought of losing him was unbearable to her and she kissed him as if it might keep him alive, as if it were all that connected them.

Giles felt himself responding to Buffy. His hands rose up her back and fisted in her hair, pulling her closer to him. When her tongue touched his lips he opened to her and he groaned as she swept his mouth, touching his tongue, exploring him fully. He lifted her and sat her on the counter, moving between her knees, pressing her legs open. She wrapped her legs around him in response.

Giles couldn't believe he was kissing Buffy. Or that she felt so good in his arms. He pressed fevered kisses down her neck, along her jaw. "Oh, God, Buffy."

She grinned at him, her voice husky, her breathing rapid. "See, this is what happened that first night. Kaboom."

He looked at her, an answering grin in his own eyes. "And you're really 21?"

"Legal in every way." Giles kissed her again. Then he remembered Jenny, the kissing reminded him of Jenny and of Buffy's words. Buffy could feel his withdrawal. "No, don't. This is the way it's supposed to be. You and me." She put her hands on his face. "You made love to me last night and this morning. Don't fight it."

He shook his head. "I...Buffy...it's too much. I can't think."

"Then don't think." She kissed him again, capturing his lips fully with hers.

He pulled away. "Please, please, I have to. I need to think about what you've told me." He opened the bathroom door, trying to ignore the look in her eyes. "We need to do that spell." He pointed down the hall. "Are my books this way?"

Buffy just nodded, unable to speak at the moment, trying very hard not to cry. He gave her a sad smile and left the bathroom.

##

Angel knew that it was time to start building his alibi. He pulled out his phone. After he spoke to Wes, he called Cordelia.

##

Cordelia's phone rang. "Hello."

"Cordelia, it's Angel."

"Angel, where are you?"

"In San Diego. I just spoke to Wes and he said you were worried about me." Angel lit a cigarette and he held the phone away to mask the noise as he took a drag. He watched them all in the living room from across the street.

"I was, we both were. Are you okay?"

"Yeah, sorry I got so moody. It's...it's hard for me. You know that. You know that better than anyone."

Cordelia glanced up to see Paul looking at her, a touch of anger in his eyes. "I do know that. You sure you're okay?"

"Yeah, really, I'm okay. How's everyone there? Wes told me he drove you up earlier today."

"Well, we were fine but we think Drusilla's here. She did something to Giles."

"Is he okay?"

Cordelia looked up as Buffy entered the room. Her eyes were reddened and puffy and she didn't look happy. "I'm guessing not."

There was a pause. "Is Buffy there?" Angel could see that she'd just walked into the room.

"Yeah, she just walked in."

Another pause. "Would you...can I talk to her?"

"Hold on." Cordy looked at Buffy. "It's Angel. He wants to talk to you."

Buffy took the phone. Her tone was wary. "Angel, are you here? Are you here in town?"

"Do you want me there? Do you need my help?"

"Where are you?"

"In San Diego." Angel watched as she went to the window, pulling the curtain aside. "I can come there if you need me."

Buffy hesitated and a satisfied smile crossed Angel's face. Buffy's voice was small. "He doesn't remember me. He thinks he's still with Jenny." Angel stayed silent. She spoke again. "I don't know what to do."

His eyes glittered. "I wish there was something I could do to help." He paused. "Maybe..."

Buffy prompted him. "Maybe what?"

"Well, I know you have strong feelings for him but maybe Giles still...maybe he still has feelings for Jenny. Maybe this is a...a sign of sorts." When there was no response from Buffy he spoke again. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that. I just don't want you to get hurt by marrying someone who still loves someone else. You deserve more than that."

Buffy couldn't speak past the lump in her throat. Angel spoke one last time. "Do you want me to come up? We could talk."

Buffy's voice was thick. "No, not now. But...thanks."

"You know you'll always be my girl, right?"

Buffy let out a soft sob and she nodded, aching for someone to love her, for Giles to love her. Angel watched her, feeling triumphant. Buffy squared her

shoulders. "If you hear anything about Drusilla will you call me?"

"I will."

Buffy hung up. Handing the phone back to Cordelia she started to lose control, the tears falling, and she ran up the stairs.

Cordelia, Spike, Roger and Paul looked at each other. Paul spoke to Cordelia. "What's his story?"

"He's in San Diego."

"And we just believe him?" At Cordy's nod Paul grew exasperated. "Why? He could have called you from anywhere. He could be across the street for God's sakes."

Cordy's eyes grew hard. "Look, I know you don't trust the guy. You have made that abundantly clear. But he's my friend. And I know him. He sounded fine, normal. Still sad and broody but normal. I'd know if he lost his soul." She pointed upstairs. "So would Buffy. You're barking up the wrong tree with this one. Let it go."

Paul looked far from satisfied but he could see that pushing Cordy any further would not be a good idea. Instead he let out a long breath and looked first down the hall at the library where Giles probably was and up the stairs where Buffy had just fled. "How do we fix this?" He looked at Roger.

"It should wear off. I don't have the expertise to start mucking around with his brain, trying to undo hypnosis. I could try and find an expert tomorrow...except it will be Saturday." He let out a frustrated noise. "It should just wear off. Sodium pentathol has a half-life of between 3-8 hours so by tomorrow morning most of the drug will be out of his system. I don't know about Drusilla's hypnosis." He smiled unhappily. "They left vampire hypnosis out of our curriculum. Can't imagine why." He slumped back on the couch. "I should get my money back."

Cordy stood. "Well, I'll go talk to Giles. I'm the only one here besides Buffy that he remembers." She looked at Spike and qualified her statement. "That

was on the same side he was." Spike shrugged.

Paul stood too. "I'll go talk to Buffy." They stopped in the hallway. Paul put his hands on her shoulder. "I know I'm kind of nuts about Angel, but I worry about you, all of you. After everything I've heard about what he's like as Angelus, I just don't like it. I don't like you even being around him."

"I know that. He knows that. You need to trust me on this one. I just can't believe he would ever hurt me."

Paul moved his hand up to touch her face. "I couldn't stand it if he did."

She smiled at him and reached up to kiss him. "I know. That's why I let you say the things you do." Clasp hands for a moment they both headed off in different directions.

Spike looked at Roger. "I guess I better go see if I can find out anything about Dru."

Roger nodded. "I need to get home. I need to see Linda and Kevin. This whole scare with Angel has sort of...made me need to be with them."

Spike nodded. "I'll walk you."

"I thought we decided Angel wasn't here."

"Yeah, but Dru still is. I'll walk you."

Roger grimaced. "Good point. Thanks." They both slipped out the kitchen door.

When Angel looked up next, the living room was empty and Spike was standing across the street. Angel slowly backed up to where Dru was lying on the ground talking softly to the stars. He got her attention and with a finger to his mouth to keep her quiet he helped her up, and the two of them disappeared into the night.

##

Cordelia walked into the library fully expecting Giles to have his nose in a book. She was wrong. He was sitting in the dark, and when the light from the hallway hit his face she could see the tears on his cheeks. Instead of turning on the light she just kept the door open and she moved into the room sitting next to Giles. She put a tentative hand out and touched him on the knee. "Giles?"

The eyes he turned to her were desolate. "Is Jenny really dead?"

Cordelia gasped at his words, at the despair on his face. She could barely stand the thought of him having to grieve again. Before she could respond he spoke again. "Buffy told me, just now, in the bathroom. She was worried about me, wanted to make sure that I took this threat of Angelus seriously." He gave Cordelia a small smile that was so sad she felt tears threatening in response.

"I'm sorry, Giles."

"She is dead, then." He couldn't believe it. He had just seen her, just held her and kissed her. Of course, if he believed what they were all telling him, then that wasn't actually true. He had been kissing Drusilla, and Jenny had been gone...dead and put in the ground years ago. But that's not how it felt.

"Yes, she is."

Giles nodded. "Angel killed her?" That hurt too. He had trusted Angel. He had gone against all his instincts and trusted the vampire. Entrusted Buffy to him.

"Angelus did. Angel lost his soul. He never would have done it otherwise." Still Cordy felt the need to defend him, even here.

"Are you with him now?"

Cordy's eyes widened. "You mean romantically?" At his nod she shook her head. "No, I'm with...with Paul." She pointed back towards the living room. "No one's with Angel romantically."

"Why not?"

Cordelia suddenly realized she didn't want to go there. She touched his knee again. "Can I get you anything?"

Giles let out a short unhappy laugh. "You can help me understand what's going on. I..." His lips tightened. "It's really 2002?" Five years, gone.

She nodded. "Roger thinks your memory will come back. All you need to do is hang in there. You'll remember Buffy and Paul and Roger. I know things feel pretty bad to you right now but you were really enjoying your life. You were...are happy."

He looked at her, some surprise in his eyes. "Happy?"

Cordelia was saddened that five years ago, the thought of being happy had been such an alien concept to Giles. "Really happy. You own a magic store and you make pretty good money, you have some really great friends, and you and Buffy, well, the two of you just work."

Giles touched his lips. He had kissed Buffy without giving Jenny a thought. Then when he had remembered her he had felt overwhelmed with grief and guilt all at the same time. Not hours from when he had last kissed Jenny he had kissed someone else. Had almost gotten lost in the sensation of it. He still wanted to kiss her. "Are we really getting married?"

Cordy nodded her head again. "Is it that hard for you to believe? Looking back on the two of you it always seemed as if you belonged together. Even when Wes showed up it was always the two of you."

"Wes?"

"Wesley Wyndam-Pryce, he was Buffy's Watcher after you got fired."

Giles felt his heart clench at the thought of being replaced as Buffy's Watcher. "What happened to him?"

Cordy snickered. "Let's just say that as far as Buffy was concerned you were her Watcher. She never gave him the time of day. Then she quit the Council and Wes left. He's down in LA with me and Angel and a couple of other demon freedom fighters. We do what we can down there."

Giles didn't respond, shamed a little by the satisfaction he felt with the knowledge that a new Watcher hadn't been able to replace him in Buffy's life. He just sat there on the couch and stared off into a darkened corner of the room. Finally he spoke. "Is anyone else dead?"

Cordelia thought for a moment. "A bunch more kids died in school but no one you guys were really close to. Principal Snyder died but we all sort of cheered about that. Harmony got turned into a vampire. Not a particularly good one, as you can imagine."

Giles smiled a little at that. "Yes, I can imagine that."

Cordelia turned her head to the side. "But other than that, everyone's still alive, Willow and Xander." She thought of someone. "Oh, Joyce died."

"Buffy's mother died?"

"Yeah, about a year ago. She burst an aneurysm in her brain. Buffy found her on the couch in her old home."

Giles' heart ached for Buffy. "I'm so sorry."

"Yeah, it was hard on her, but she had you. That helped a lot. You practically lived at her house." Cordelia let out a long breath. "You need to go talk to her."

"I don't...I don't know what to say to her."

"You always know what to say to her. Always. When none of us did, you just knew. You know her better than anyone."

"Knew her. I knew her better than anyone. She was sixteen, seventeen at most. In my mind she's still that young. Too young for us to be involved, let alone getting married."

"You can't just not talk to her. She's totally freaked. You're supposed to be getting married in a week. You'll think of something to say, just to get through the next few hours. Then hopefully your memory will come back and you'll be glad you made her feel better." She tapped him on the knee. "Because if you don't, I know you well enough to know that you'll feel all guilty that you made her so miserable."

"You really have grown up, haven't you?"

"Kicking and screaming, but yes, I have."

"How long have you and Paul...?"

Just a little while." She counted. "Almost four months I guess. Since Halloween." She smiled at him. "I owe you for that one. I'd have never met him if you guys hadn't become friends. Thanks."

Giles laughed softly again. "It seems absurd to say you're welcome for something I don't even remember doing."

"You will, you will remember and then you can say you're welcome." She looked at him. "Are you gonna be okay?"

He nodded. "Yes, I will. I...thank you for talking with me." His eyes were still so sad.

"Will you go talk to Buffy?"

He nodded again. "Just give me a few minutes."

"She's upstairs, in your bedroom." At his nod she rose and after touching his shoulder briefly she left the room.

Giles stood as well and went to the window, wondering where Jenny was buried, wondering where he'd been when Angelus had attacked her, feeling the loss of her, of what they could have been, like a raw wound in his gut. And as he stood there he also wondered what he could say to his Slayer, trying to deny the longing for her that seemed to be seeping through his bones.

##

Paul found Buffy crying her heart out on the bed. He sat down next to her and smiled a small smile as he remembered that she had cried like this the first night he'd met her. Cried about Giles. Paul put out a hand and stroked her hair. "Buffy, come on. I know it's odd having Giles without all his memory, but I don't understand why you're so upset." He stroked her hair again. "I was just remembering that you did this the first night I met you. I didn't understand then either."

Buffy turned her teary sad eyes to Paul. Her voice was small. "What if he never loves me again?"

Paul's eyes widened. He had never considered that. He shook his head. "Not possible. First of all, he'll get his memory back. Second of all if he doesn't, he'll fall in love with you all over again. I guarantee it."

Buffy shook her head. "He didn't want me. He wants Jenny."

Paul scooted towards the back of the bed and sat against the headboard, pulling Buffy up so she was resting on his chest. "Buffy." He ran his free hand over his face. He tried again. "I really believe that this is just a temporary problem. He'll wake up in the morning and have his memory back. And he'll be just as in love with you as ever." He gave her a squeeze. "I know this hurts you but can you try and understand what he's going through? This can't be easy for him either. It's got to be somewhat overwhelming. He's lost five years of his life."

Buffy let out a tremulous sigh. "What if he still loves her? I mean even when he loves me?" She looked up at him. "What if he's never really gotten over her?"

Paul shook his head. "Why are you even thinking that way? The guy is nuts over you. There is nothing in him that isn't completely yours. You know that."

"Angel said..." Buffy stopped.

Paul's eyes grew dark. He tried not to let his anger show in his voice. "Angel said what?"

Buffy hesitated but then she let it spill out. "He said maybe it's a sign, that maybe Giles still has feelings for Jenny."

"You know I'm going to have to stake him now."

That got Buffy's attention. "You can't."

"Oh yes I can. He's an asshole. Only an asshole would say something like that to you while this is going on."

"He was trying to make me feel better."

Paul's eyebrows rose. "By saying that? By saying that maybe Giles doesn't love you? By planting doubt in your mind a week before your wedding? This guy isn't a friend; friends don't do things like that, not when the guy is Giles, someone who so clearly loves you. Angel's the only one here who isn't over somebody, he isn't over you and he's taking advantage of this situation to pull you two apart." Paul pulled away a little and he put his hands on Buffy's shoulders. "Buffy, don't you dare let what Angel said make you doubt Giles. This isn't his fault. He doesn't deserve anything but your love and support. He needs you now. Maybe not as Buffy, fiancé, but he still needs you."

Buffy pointed towards the tissue box on the bedside table and Paul reached for it.

Buffy pulled out about ten of them and she blew her nose. She smiled at Paul ruefully. "I'm sorry. I totally freaked, didn't I?"

Paul grinned. "Totally."

"I just..." Her lips tightened.

"You love him. You don't want to lose him. I get that." He tucked some hair behind her ear. "You won't. This is just a thing, like all the other weird things that happen."

She smiled at that. "Just a thing?"

Paul nodded. "A thing that will get better."

She let out a shaky laugh and then she hugged him. "Thank you."

"Hey, that's what stand in dads are for." He scowled. "Sorry, didn't mean to bring that subject up." Paul had tracked down Buffy's dad and gotten his address. Buffy had sent off an invitation but there had been no response.

Buffy let out a sigh. "That's all right."

"No, it's not. But like I said, his loss, my gain." He lifted her chin. "Better?"

She nodded. "Better." She smacked him on the arm. "But you can't stake Angel." Paul didn't respond. Buffy looked up at him. "Paul."

Paul was saved from having to talk about it when Cordelia suddenly showed up. "Sorry to interrupt. I just left Giles and everything has finally sunk in and he's kind of having a hard time dealing with the fact that Jenny's dead." She looked at Buffy, a gentle warning in her eyes. "I just thought you should know that, before you talk to him."

Buffy nodded sadly. "Is he still down in the library?"

Cordelia nodded. "Buffy..."

"I get it, Cordelia. Paul smacked me upside the head and I'm better. I'll take care of him."

Cordelia smiled at her. "You're the expert at that."

Buffy got up and headed for the door. Then she turned around and grabbed the box of tissues. She gave them both a shaky grin. "Just in case." Then she headed downstairs.

##

Cordy sat on the bed, near Paul's feet. She looked at him, noticing that he seemed tense. "Are you all right?"

He shook his head. "No, I'm not. Angel told Buffy that maybe this was a sign that Giles wasn't over Jenny."

"He did not."

"Right, I'm making that up."

"You don't believe that, do you?"

"What? That Giles still has feelings for Jenny? Of course not. I mean, he's got to think about her every now and then, considering how she died, but he loves Buffy completely. That is not the issue."

Cordy let out a sigh. "Angel."

Paul moved over next to Cordy and took her hands. "I have to tell you something."

"Wait, let me guess. You don't like Angel." She grinned at him.

Paul wasn't in the mood to be cajoled. "I'm serious. I don't like him and I don't trust him. I never will. He's bad news. And I don't like you with him."

"Paul..."

"No, hear me out. I'm not just going to get used to him. I'm not going to wake up one day and think he's a swell guy. I'm going to continue to dislike him. I'm going to continue to try and get you away from him. And if he ever, ever, does anything that makes me think he has gone bad, I will kill him."

"Paul, he's my friend."

"I know that. I know that this is the life you've chosen right now. But, I don't like it, and I'll be trying to change it. So you need to decide if that's all right, if you can deal with that. I'm sorry to put you in the middle, but I don't know how else to be." He ran his hand down her hair. "The people in this house, and the ones next door, and you have become so important to me, the thought of losing any of you terrifies me." Paul's voice became thick as he spoke and he looked away for a moment.

Cordy watched him as he regained his composure. When he turned back to her she leaned up and kissed him. "You're important to me too. Very important. And I don't want to lose you either. And I guess I can deal with you not liking Angel, as long as you can deal with me getting annoyed about it every now and then. And as long as you understand that for right now, my place is working with him, and Wes, and Fred and Gunn."

Paul blew out a breath. "For right now." He kissed her softly. "Just do us all a favor. Keep him away from me."

"You got it."

Paul wrapped his arms around her and pulled her to him tightly. "I'm glad you're here." He looked down at her. "Stay with me tonight. Let me hold you."

They'd actually only dated a few times and up to now when Cordy stayed over she slept in Paul's guest bedroom. He had slept on the couch at her place. She smiled and nodded. "I assume you want to spend the night here." Cordy knew where much of Paul's heart lay. But the part of himself that he gave her, it still felt like so much, so much more than anyone had ever given her before.

"Do you mind?"

She shook her head. "Not as long as we can go back over to your place in the morning so I can change."

"I promise." Paul got up and ransacked Giles' drawers. "I am making an executive decision and stealing clothes for us both to sleep in." He grinned. "And I know where he keeps the spare toothbrushes." Laughing he headed into the bathroom and crooked a finger to Cordelia inviting her to join him. "I'm letting you in on a secret." He opened a drawer in the vanity and Cordy's eyes opened wide as she saw the dozens of toothbrushes there.

"Why do they have so many toothbrushes?"

"Giles buys them. It drives Buffy crazy. Every time he goes to the store he comes home with one. As far as Giles is concerned you can never have enough toothbrushes. Plus he's amazed they make so many different types." Paul laughed. "I love this about him. It's so stupid." He pulled out an array of them and held them up for Cordelia. "Choose."

She took her time and finally chose a purple and white one. "Would he kill you for telling me this?"

"Nah. Buffy would, though."

"I'll keep it our little secret then." She grinned. "At least until the perfect moment presents itself."

Paul laughed again. Holding her hand he pulled her out of the bathroom and out of Buffy and Giles' bedroom. Stopping at the linen closet for some towels

he dragged her to one of the guest bedrooms. She laughed. "How often do you stay here?"

"Often enough to know my way around." He gave her a kiss that quickly started to grow heated. Paul reluctantly pulled away. "I need to take a shower."

"Me too."

"I'll use the shower downstairs then. You can use this one." He pointed at the upstairs guest bathroom.

She smiled at him coyly. "I'll see you in a few minutes, then."

Paul captured her lips again with his and then smiling at her he headed downstairs.

##

Giles was still standing by the window when Buffy walked in the room. Giles looked up, expecting it to be Cordelia again. Buffy watched as he tried to pull himself together for her and her heart broke into a thousand pieces at the pain on his face. Walking over to him she put a gentle hand on his chest. "Don't. It's okay to be sad." She smiled softly at him. "I'm going to hug you. But I want you to understand that it's an okay hug. It's a hug from a Slayer who cares about her Watcher, and it's a hug from a friend who's sorry that you feel like you lost someone important to you tonight." She looked at him, hoping this would be okay with him. Buffy knew now how important touch was to Giles. How comforting he found it. And she knew that he needed this now. He didn't say no or pull away so Buffy took that for assent. Slowly she wrapped her arms tightly around him and just held him. And for the second time, Giles cried in Buffy's arms, grieving for Jenny.

In time she led him to the couch and sat him down, sitting close to him. She handed him the tissue box and flashed him a wry grin. "There seems to be a run on these tonight."

Giles smiled shyly at her and helped himself to a few, wiping the tears off his face. "I'm sorry, Buffy."

"Don't be." She touched his face. "I held you the last time too." Her face grew sad. "I'm sorry I even told you. If I'd waited maybe your memory would have come back without you needing to go through this." She looked away. "And I'm sorry about what else I did in the bathroom. It wasn't fair to you."

Giles reached out and with his hand he turned her face back to him. "Don't apologize. This can't be easy for you either. I shouldn't have just...well...run away."

She gave him a lopsided smile. "No, running was probably good. I was a little crazed. But Paul talked to me and I'm better now. Hands off Buffy, that's me."

Giles lifted a hand as if to touch her face but then he let it fall. "I know it doesn't make any sense considering Jenny and all but I find myself a bit disappointed by that."

Buffy grinned at him, delighted. "Really?"

He put up a hand, as if to make sure she didn't leap on top of him. "Buffy..."

"Don't worry. Still hands off, I get it. It's just nice to hear. Thank you for saying it, it makes me feel better."

"You're welcome." He smiled softly at her. "And thank you." They sat there, looking at each other, feeling content with the other's presence. Suddenly his eyes grew nervous. "Good Lord. I completely forgot about the spell."

Buffy waved her hand. "It's all right. He's in San Diego. False alarm."

Giles let out a relieved sigh. "Oh, that's a relief." He sent a dubious look at the door. "Is Spike still here?"

Buffy pursed her lips. "I don't know."

Giles' eyes widened. "You don't know? Don't you think that's something you should know?"

She grinned. "I know it's hard for you to believe but he really is okay. I can't tell you how many times he's saved your life."

Giles put a hand on his chest, surprised. "Me?"

"Yes, you. He took a crossbow bolt for you right after we...well...after we got together." She pursed her lips again. "My guess is that he's out sweeping the town for Drusilla." Her eyes darkened. "Who is so gonna die for this."

Giles smiled at the defiance in her voice. "You'll get no argument from me." Buffy yawned and then sent an apologetic look Giles' way. Giles smiled again. "Perhaps you should head off to bed."

Buffy shook her head. Instead she rested her head on his shoulder. Then she pulled it back and looked at him. "Do you mind?"

He shook his head and with his hand he laid her head back down. Then he wrapped his arm around her shoulder. Kissing the top of her head he spoke. "I don't mind at all."

Buffy snuck her arm around his middle and smiled. "Good."

She fell asleep quickly and Giles sat there listening as her breathing grew slow and regular. Finally, he also began to grow tired. He settled back against the couch, keeping his movements slow, trying not to disturb Buffy. Once he was more comfortable, still holding her close, he closed his eyes and eventually fell asleep.

##

Early Saturday Morning

Tara nuzzled Willow's shoulder. Willow smiled in return and snuggled more deeply under the covers. She opened her eyes. "Oh, good, it's day."

"Meaning?"

"Well, I know they called and said it was a false alarm but I'm still glad it's light outside." She looked down at Miss Kitty Fantastico and thought of her poor fish. She grimaced. "Very glad."

"He couldn't get in here anyway, could he?"

Willow shook her head. "No, he's never been here." She sighed. "Poor Buffy. Poor Giles." She looked at Tara. "Do you think he'll get his memory back?"

Tara nodded. "Yes, I do. At least I hope so." She turned and looked at the clock. "I guess it's a little early to call."

"This time next week they should be leaving for their honeymoon." Willow scrunched her face up. "They'll still get married, won't they?"

Tara hugged her. "Yes, they'll still get married. He'll get his memory back and everything will be back to normal."

"It's weird how quick things change. I mean one minute we're having her shower and the next minute he doesn't even remember who she is and he's in love with someone else."

Tara grinned her lopsided grin, the one Willow loved so much. "When they go on their honeymoon and Buffy starts modeling some of the lingerie she got, they won't even remember this."

Willow grinned in return. "He's gonna pop a blood vessel." She grimaced. "Figuratively speaking."

"It was a good thing you did, giving her a shower."

Willow let out a sigh of satisfaction. "It was fun, wasn't it?"

"She had fun. You made her feel normal for an afternoon."

Willow pouted. "And then Drusilla had to come along and ruin the whole thing."

"It was still a good thing and she didn't ruin it, it was almost over." She smiled at Willow. "You're a good friend."

Willow kissed Tara softly on the lips. "I couldn't have done it without your help." Tara kissed her back and then she started to slip out of bed. Willow whined. "Where are you going?"

Tara grinned. "Remember when we went lingerie shopping?" Willow nodded. Tara just grinned at her until Willow caught up.

Willow started to grin. "You bought something?"

Tara nodded. "I'll be right back."

Willow's eyes were sparkling as she watched Tara pick up a bag and head for the bathroom.

##

Anya sighed again. Xander rolled his eyes and realized that he really wasn't going to be able to sleep again until Anya said what was on her mind. "Anya, what is it?"

"I'm thinking about Giles. The way he is now he's never even met me. He doesn't even know he owns a store or that I work for him. How will he trust

me with his money?"

Xander bit back a grin. "Honey, he'll get his memory back and if he doesn't, he'll figure it out. He's still brain guy. That hasn't changed."

"Do you think if someone doesn't know you that a part of you doesn't exist anymore?"

"Anya, there are people all over the world who don't know you."

She gaped at him in horror. "Well, thank you very much for that demoralizing thought."

Xander let out a frustrated noise. "All I mean, is that you're you. It doesn't matter who knows you, you stay the same."

"How can that be true? I changed once you got to know me, I change every time someone gets to know me. I change a little to please them, or to be more like them. Or if I don't like them I act in ways to defy them or to punish them. It all influences me. So if that gets taken away, if someone suddenly doesn't know you anymore, it has to affect you."

Xander ran a hand over his face. "It is way too early to be having this conversation. You're making my brain hurt."

Anya lay back against her pillow with a huff. "I mean it's like he's died or something and now he's someone completely new that I'll have to change for all over again. And the changing I did before when I met him is all for nothing. It was just this huge waste of time."

"I'm so glad to see that you're thinking of Giles during all of this."

Anya smacked Xander on the arm. "I am thinking of him. I need to figure out how to be when I see him. Should I be the way I used to be? Should I be the way I think he thinks I am? Should I pretend I don't know him and we can just start over?"

"I think we should just pray that he gets his memory back and go back to sleep."

"You never take me seriously."

Xander lifted himself up on an elbow and rested his head on his hand. "Anya, all you have to be is yourself. That's all. It doesn't have to be so complicated. This is a time for you to be helpful."

She repeated the word. "Helpful." She nodded. "I can be helpful." She frowned at Xander. "Don't you think I'm helpful?"

Xander groaned and flopped back down on the bed. He turned to Anya and cupped her cheek. "Yes, I think you're very helpful. You are extraordinarily helpful. Giles couldn't possibly function at the store without you, with or without his memory." He sent her a beseeching look. "Can we please go back to sleep?"

Anya considered his words. Xander held his breath. Finally she smiled and nodded and he let it out. She snuggled back down under the covers and resting her head on his shoulder with an arm across his stomach they both fell back asleep.

##

Linda opened her eyes to find Roger watching her. She smiled at him, a questioning look on her face. "What are you doing?"

"Watching you sleep, loving you."

She let out a sleepy but happy sigh. She turned and looked at the clock and let out a groan. "It's only 7:00." Linda yawned and closed her eyes again. She could feel the tension in Roger's body and she opened her eyes again. "Did you sleep at all?" He had come home last night and made love to her with a frenzied passion that had taken her breath away.

"A little bit."

She ran a hand over his face, touching his eyebrows, his nose, his jaw. "I don't know what to say to make you feel better."

"Promise me that if he ever does show up that you and Kevin will get on a plane and leave."

"And leave you here? Like a soldier on the front line?"

"Linda..."

She sat up. "Roger, I understand that Angel or Angelus frightens you, and before you get all huffy I don't mean that in a unmanly way. You are one of the bravest men I've ever known. But he hardly knows me or Kevin, why would he come after us?"

"It doesn't matter. You know me, and I know Giles. And both he and Buffy care about us. That makes us, makes you and Kevin targets."

"So then we should all leave."

"I can't. You know that."

Her lips tightened but she nodded. "I do know that. But I also know that if things are going wrong enough for them to need you here, then they'll need me too. I know Buffy's physiology better than you now, and Spike's as well for that matter. If either of them get hurt there's no one who can take better care of them than me."

Roger scowled. It was true. With all the work she was doing on the two of them in the lab she was rapidly becoming the expert on both Slayers and vampires. "I just don't want anything to happen to you."

She let out a soft laugh, shaking her head. "I don't want anything bad to happen to you either. I love you." Roger pulled her down and kissed her. She put her hand on his chest, over his heart. "I will promise you this. If he comes

back, I'll put Kevin on a plane and send him to my sister. All right?"

Roger wasn't happy but he knew it was the best he could hope for. He nodded. "All right." He pulled her down again for another kiss. "And you know what?"

"What?"

"For a girl, you're pretty brave too."

Linda rolled her eyes and stuck her tongue out at him. Taking a deep breath she looked at him and felt how much she loved this man. She touched his face, wanting to erase the worry she saw there. "Well, you know what else this girl can do?" Roger shook his head. She grinned. "Help you relax." She began kissing him, starting with his lips and then moving down his body. Roger groaned in delight as he turned himself over to her ministrations.

##

Cordy pulled the blankets back as she heard Paul come back into the room. He slid in beside her. "Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you up."

"How are they?" She let out a small shriek as he put his cold feet on her calves. "God, did you take a walk outside?"

Paul wouldn't let her move away. "No, stay put, I need you to warm me up."

She gave up struggling. He clearly had no intention of letting her move. "So, how are they? I know you went to check on them. You're like a mother hen."

Paul smiled. "They're downstairs in the library, all curled up on the couch in each other's arms."

"Do you think he got his memory back?"

"I don't know. I didn't want to wake them. I sort of doubt it or I think they would have gone up to bed."

She frowned at Paul. "What happens if he doesn't get it back?"

"He will."

"What happens if he doesn't?"

"I don't know."

"That would totally suck."

"In so many ways."

Cordy wrapped her arms around him. "He'll get it back." Paul just nodded but he didn't respond. Cordy sighed and just held him tighter. "I love you." Cordy let out a gasp and clapped a hand over her mouth. She looked at Paul, alarm on her face. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to say that." She groaned and buried her face in his chest.

Paul just looked down at her stunned. He couldn't even speak for a minute. Finally he marshaled his thoughts. "So, does that mean that you do or you don't?"

Her voice was muffled. "Do or don't what?"

"Love me." Paul couldn't believe the sensations that were going through his body, the power those words were having on him. He pushed her head off his chest and cupped her cheek. "Cordy?"

She closed her eyes tightly. "Do." She opened one eye to see how he was taking it. "Does that freak you out?"

He shook his head, his eyes shining. He shifted his hand until he cupped the back of her head and, holding her still, he leaned towards her and captured

her lips in a passionate kiss. She threw her arms around him and kissed him back, pressing her body closely against his. When he pulled back for air he touched her face as if he couldn't believe she was there. "I love you too."

She smiled, relieved and delighted. "You do?"

He nodded. "I do."

"Oh God." She rested her head against his chest again, listening to his heart, feeling her own heart slam inside her chest in response to his words. She looked up at him. "Make love to me?"

They had just held each other all night. Paul needed no further encouragement and he began to kiss her again as his hands started exploring her the way they had wanted to do from the instant he had first seen her. Cordy reveled in his touch and did some exploring of her own.

With This Ring 3

Giles suddenly awoke. He noted that it was daylight outside, but still quite early. He felt Buffy shift in his arms and he looked down and just watched her. She looked so young when she slept. Giles tried to stretch his neck to relieve some kinks from sleeping sitting up on the couch all night trying not to wake her with his movements.

Thoughts paraded through his head and his brow furrowed. Looking down at Buffy he decided that she at least deserved to be more comfortable and catch another couple of hours of sleep even if he didn't think he'd be able to sleep anymore. Hoping she would just drowse through it he shifted his arms around her and lifted her, heading for the stairs.

She finally stirred when he reached the landing. She murmured. "What are you doing?"

"Putting you in bed."

She protested. "No, I want to be with you."

Giles' brow furrowed again. "Sssh. Stop talking, you'll wake up." He pushed the door open and then gently deposited Buffy on top of the bed.

When he made as if to pull away she protested again. "Stay with me. Don't leave me."

"I just thought I'd go make myself some tea. I'm not really sleepy."

She grabbed his arm. "No, stay. I promise I won't touch you." Her eyes were rimmed with sleep but they were pleading with him.

Giles sat on the side of the bed. "Why...?" Without finishing his question he brushed some of her hair off her face. She leaned into the touch and practically purred. He smiled. "Go back to sleep." Giles reached down and slipped her shoes off. Then he unbuttoned and unzipped her pants and gave her a soft order. "Lift your hips up."

Buffy complied. She opened her eyes again. "What are you doing?"

"Taking off your pants. You'll sleep more comfortably. For some reason we slept the night away downstairs on the couch. My neck is stiff." He pulled the covers out from under her and began to cover Buffy up.

Buffy was wide-awake all of a sudden. She sat bolt right up in bed. "Are you back?"

Giles sat again and frowned at her. "Are you all right? You keep saying the oddest things."

"Do you love me again?"

Giles looked at her with significant concern. "You see? What sort of question is that? Of course I love you." He brushed another strand of hair off her face. "What's wrong?"

Her eyes widened in disbelief. "What's wrong?" She threw herself in his arms. "Just hold me."

Giles wrapped his arms around her. "Buffy, what's wrong?" He could feel her shaking in his arms.

Her voice was muffled. "You don't remember?" She laughed a little at the absurd question. "I mean, you don't remember not remembering?" Making a frustrated noise she pulled back and looked at him. "What year is it?"

"Should I go get Roger?"

She grabbed his hand, the one that was pointing next door. "No, just tell me what year it is."

"2002. Now tell me why you're asking me this."

Buffy let out a cry and as if to make up for her one evening of deprivation she began to touch him everywhere, her lips latching onto his, yanking on his clothes to remove them, pulling him down to lie next to her on the bed. "Just touch me."

Startled at first by her ferocity, Giles hesitated, but it didn't take long for Buffy to awaken his own passion and he began to touch her in turn, making sure that there wasn't an inch of her that didn't feel his touch, or his tongue. As their bodies finally connected Buffy held on to him so tightly he knew he'd have bruises but he stayed silent, sensing a need in her to be this close.

Afterwards, their bodies still pressed tightly together he touched her cheek. "Now will you tell me what's wrong?"

Buffy drew in a deep breath and then she told him. And as she told the story his memories of it all came back; he remembered trying to get into his old apartment, being picked up by the police, Paul rescuing him, Buffy, Jenny. He looked at Buffy sadly. "I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry I put you through that."

She shook her head. "It wasn't your fault. None of it was your fault. And if we're comparing behaviors, you behaved better than I did. I attacked you in the bathroom."

Giles smiled softly at her. "An activity I can scarce believe I turned away from." He pushed a lock of damp hair off her temple. "And trust me when I say that I didn't want to. Even while I was grieving for Jenny I wanted you. I felt so guilty about it." He ran his fingers over her lips. "But when you kissed me...you woke something up in me." He grinned. "Again."

"I still wish I hadn't said anything about Angel killing Jenny."

"Buffy, you were trying to make me understand how dangerous he was. You couldn't have known it would set me off like that."

"I should have known. I was there when...you know...when she..." Buffy closed her eyes.

"When she died the first time?"

Buffy nodded. "I'm so sorry Giles, for all of it."

Giles kissed her softly. "There's no need for apologies. There was no need for them back then and there's no need for them now."

Buffy nodded briefly but she didn't look convinced. "Giles...?"

Giles cocked his head to the side. "What? What is it?" She looked away from him and he could see the pain on her face. He asked her again. "Buffy, tell me."

She shook her head, terrified to ask but needing to know. Giles just watched her, waiting. Buffy knew that he wouldn't let her not ask, not at this point. She tried a couple of times but stopped before she got past a word or two. Finally she spit it out, her voice tense and shaky. "Are you sure you want to get married? Are you sure you're over her, especially now with it all feeling so new again? Do you want to wait?"

He stilled for a moment and then he held one of her hands over his heart. "Oh, Buffy. I am very sure. I admit the whole thing is feeling a bit raw right at the moment, but it still all happened a long time ago. And over everything I went through with Jenny is the love we now have for each other. It has chased all the shadows away and has filled me past the point of anything I ever dreamed possible. There is nothing I want more than to be your husband, for you to be my wife, and for us to spend the rest of our lives together, however short or long that might be." He looked at her uncertainly. "Do you want to wait?"

Buffy's eyes were bright as she flashed him a brilliant smile. "Not for a second. I wish we were getting married tonight."

Giles grinned at her, relieved. "Just think, a week from now we'll be in Carmel, on our honeymoon." Touching her face he marveled at how unbelievable it still all felt. "I wish we could take more time. I'd love to take you to England."

She shook her head. "I'll take you up on that someday. Maybe our first anniversary. But right now, close is better. That way if something comes up we can get back." She grinned wickedly at him. "Wait until you see what I got at my shower."

His eyes lit up as he recalled that it was a lingerie shower. "Goodies for me, I hope."

She laughed. "Willow's afraid you'll have a stroke."

Giles looked offended but then he smiled, his eyes mischievous. "Well, maybe we should try things out ahead of time, make sure I'll be all right. We can research it thoroughly."

Buffy giggled, looking at him with adoring eyes. "No way, mister. You have to wait." She linked her hands behind his neck. "I love you."

He nuzzled her neck. "I love you too." Wrapping his arms around her he pulled her close and found himself yawning. Deciding that maybe he would be able to get some more sleep after all he soon drifted off.

Buffy watched him for a while, a part of her never wanting to take her eyes off of him, but eventually her own lids grew heavy and she also surrendered to sleep.

##

Dru was dancing around the crypt, her body swaying to music only she could hear. Every now and then she would move close to Angel and run a hand down his chest, or his arm, smiling flirtingly at him, then she would be off again, twirling, holding her dress out as if at a grand fête.

Angel watched her, the feelings in him still running strong, the demon prowling within, longing for release. A small piece of him kept it leashed, kept it from choosing this time and place as his battleground. They had done some damage. He'd heard the doubt in Buffy's voice, saw her nod in agreement that she was still his girl. It was a start. His voice broke into Dru's dancing. "I'm going back home tonight."

Dru pouted at him and she moved in close to him, her body still slightly swaying. "Home? Home is where the blood is." She laughed, in vampire face, and twirled away.

"This isn't the time, Dru."

She touched her lips. "His blood is so sweet. I want some more. You said I could have him."

Angel didn't want Dru to kill Giles. When and if the time was right, he wanted that honor. "Don't kill him." He got up off the stone coffin he was sitting on and approached her. "I mean it, Dru."

She spun again. "Just a taste." She licked her lips. "Just a sweet taste." Angel reached out for her and she snapped her teeth shut as if to bite him. "All that blood, it's calling to me."

"We'll play one more game tonight, then we'll go."

She smiled, her eyes glittering yellow in the darkness. "I don't feel like leaving." She spoke to her arms as if she held a small child. "But I do like to play games. This will be a fun game, all dark and red with pain."

"So you agree? One more game and then we'll leave?" The part of Angel deep inside knew he had to leave. If he didn't, Angelus would take over. And he wasn't quite ready for that; he wasn't quite ready to abandon everyone. If he killed Giles now, he'd have to kill them all.

Dru shook her head slowly. "I need my Spike first." She ran a finger around the crown on her head. "He needs my help. There's a hole in his head and all his evil is spilling out of it." She laughed, as if drunk. "It needs to be stopped up so the evil can grow again." She turned to Angel, grinning. "I know, we'll give him a taste of Watcher."

Angel rolled his shoulders, feeling tense. There was no point arguing with Dru about this. After tonight he'd just take her with him. Once she was out of Sunnydale she'd find something else to distract her. "Get some sleep."

She spun, tantalizingly close to the one ray of sunlight piercing the room. Dru put her hand out as if to touch it and then she pulled it back. "I don't feel like sleeping. I feel like dancing." She would feed tonight on her Watcher and the anticipation sang through her blood.

Angel scowled. "Just do it quietly then."

Humming softly she ignored him as she circled the dank room, her feet softly scraping the cement.

##

Saturday: mid morning

Paul and Roger were sitting in Giles' kitchen wondering where he was. Paul

had gotten out of bed after kissing Cordelia on the cheek softly enough not to wake her. He got dressed and headed for the library. Opening up the door he was taken aback to find it empty. He ran up the stairs and finding their bedroom door slightly ajar, peeked inside. Only Buffy was in there. Paul listened for the shower but he couldn't hear anything.

Frowning he headed back downstairs and found Roger at the kitchen door. Letting him in they wandered through the house, but saw no sign of Giles. Paul sat for a moment trying to determine where in the hell he could have gone. He'd have been able to make some good guesses if it was the Giles with all his memories, but if it was the hypnotized Giles he had no idea where to start looking.

Standing, he looked for his keys, and then realized that they were in his jacket, in the guest bedroom. "Let me get my keys then I guess I'll just go drive around and see if I can find him."

The kitchen door rattled and they both looked up to see Giles coming in. He had a bag of groceries in his arms. Roger jumped up. "Giles. We were wondering where you'd gone."

"I just went to the corner grocery." He pointed. You could just see the sign from the house. "I couldn't find any tea."

Paul got a sad look on his face and he walked over to the cupboard, opening it up. Pulling out the tin that Giles kept his tea in he pried the cover off. It was loaded with tea. "Giles, it's in here. You keep it in here."

Giles sent him a look. "Paul, I know..." Then Giles realized that Paul and Roger didn't know that he had gotten his memory back. He turned back to his bag of groceries and pulled out the brand of tea he'd bought. "I wanted this type. I didn't see it in there."

Roger started going through the rest of the groceries hoping Giles had picked up some donuts. He let out a cry. Brandishing the newly bought toothbrush he waved it at Giles. "Ah ha."

Giles snatched it out of his hands. "Ah ha, what?"

Roger and Paul both knew it was a fairly new fetish. It had all started when Buffy and Giles had moved in to this house and the two of them had gone on a shopping expedition to buy all the new things you need for a new home, including new toothbrushes. "You bought a toothbrush." They were both grinning at him.

Giles glanced down at the package in his hand. He held it up to them. "It has a new kind of bristle." He stared at it with some satisfaction and then he filled the kettle with water. "Do you two want coffee? And yes, my memory is back, if that's what all that ah ha-ing and grinning is about." He grinned shyly at the two of them.

He found himself being hugged by Roger. "You don't know how glad I am to hear that."

Giles gently extricated himself from the hug after briefly returning it. "Yes, well, me too."

Paul leaned back in his chair. "Make that hug from the both of us."

Giles smiled at him and started making both coffee and tea. Roger moved to sit next to Paul and they just watched him, a satisfied look on both their faces. Roger pursed his lips. "Is Buffy all right?"

Giles smiled. "Yes, she's fine." He looked at them both. "Thank you for your help yesterday." He grinned at Paul. "And thank you from keeping me from spending the night in a jail cell, or a padded one."

Paul waved off his thanks. "I'm just glad you're back." He ran a hand over his face. "You have no idea how glad." Then he frowned. "How worried should I be?"

Giles shot a puzzled glance his way. "What do you mean?"

"About Drusilla, about what she did to you. How worried should I be? Will she do it again? Was she working with someone?"

Giles leaned on the counter facing the table where Paul and Roger were sitting. "After I was shot I remember hearing footsteps and I saw two people, shadows really, but definitely two of them. Of course I was drugged at the time and could have been seeing things." He shook his head. "I don't know why she did it. I don't see the point. Why didn't she just kill me?"

Roger and Paul glanced at each other, not liking the casual way he threw that out. Paul glared at him. "You don't have to make it sound like a complaint."

Giles let out a half laugh. "Sorry, I didn't mean it that way. It's just that none of it makes sense. What did she get out of this? I mean, I know she's insane, but even for Drusilla this is a bit odd. It makes me believe that someone else was in on it, someone goading her on and keeping her from killing me."

Roger pursed his lips. "She's insane?"

Giles nodded. "Yes, she's the one that Angel tortured, I told you about her. How he killed everyone she knew and then turned her into a vampire the day she took her vows. It all pushed her over the edge."

Paul's face grew dark. "I hate that guy."

Giles sent him an appraising look. "I know you do. But Buffy seems to feel that he didn't have anything to do with it and that's good enough for me."

Roger was still stuck on Drusilla. "So, how insane is she?"

Giles turned as the teakettle began to whistle. Pulling out mugs for all of them he answered Roger. "Very insane and very dangerous, and she's deceptively strong given how frail she looks. Plus she has powers that most vampires don't have. The hypnosis thing for one, and I understand she has visions, that she can sense things."

Roger frowned. "But when you talk about her it doesn't send shivers up and down my spine like it does when you talk about Angel."

Giles took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. "Angel...Angelus is not like other vampires. Drusilla may be crazy but for the most part she is just after the momentary thrill, the feed, the pain and suffering she can cause moment to moment. She's not unlike most vampires that way. Angelus is the only vampire I know of that seemed to enjoy the torture much more than the actual kill." He glanced at Paul. "Drusilla was Spike's sire. I'm not sure if you knew that."

Paul's eyebrows rose. "Is that a problem?" He sincerely hoped it wouldn't be.

Giles hesitated but then he shook his head. "I don't think so. But it's hard to tell. He loved her for a very, very long time. He'd have done anything for her once upon a time. He'd have killed us all if it would have brought her pleasure."

"He didn't seem too ruffled about her being in Sunnydale last night."

Giles poured coffee for both Roger and Paul and walked the mugs over to the table. Going back into the kitchen he handed the milk over the counter and Roger stood to retrieve it. Fixing his tea he let out another half laugh. "Spike is the biggest enigma going. Nothing about him makes sense." Walking to the table with his cup he pulled out a chair and sat. "I find it safer to try not to predict what he'll do next. I'd hate to get complacent and find myself on the other end of his fangs."

Paul took a sip of his coffee. "So, again, how worried should we be? Will she attack you again? Are we done?" He looked at Roger. "Can this thing that happened to him come back?"

Roger shrugged. "I suppose. She could have planted some sort of post hypnotic suggestion that might set it off again."

Giles grimaced at that thought. "Let's hope that isn't the case."

Paul nodded. "Let's hope it isn't seeing a wedding dress." He grimaced. "Sorry, bad thought."

Giles shook his head. "No, it isn't actually. Could that be what this is all about,

stopping the wedding?"

Roger leaned forwards. "Why? Why stop the wedding? What sense does that make?"

Paul's face darkened. "I know I sound like a broken record but the way for this all to make sense is if Angel is a part of it. He knows Drusilla, he knows what she can do to you, and he sure as hell doesn't want this wedding to happen."

Giles let out a sigh. "Well, there's something to all of that, certainly. But I can't imagine how he could have fooled Buffy so completely, or Wes, or Cordelia." He shrugged. "Let's just keep our eyes open and I promise I won't go out in the dark by myself until then. None of us should."

The kitchen door slammed open and Kevin ran in, heading over to Giles, giving him a hug. Giles grinned and pushed his chair out a little so Kevin could perch on a knee. Linda followed along shortly. She took in Roger and Paul's grins and she grinned too. She kissed Giles on the cheek. "You look like a man with a full and complete past." She winked at him.

Giles let out a laugh. "Indeed."

She saw the bag of groceries. "Did you buy donuts?"

Roger got up. "Yes, he did, in all the toothbrush excitement I forgot all about them."

Linda's eyes sparkled as she caught Giles rolling his eyes. Looking up she saw that Buffy had joined the party. Giles smiled at her. Gently pushing Kevin off his knee he rose and moved to stand behind her, wrapping his arms around her. She took them all in. "What are you guys all grinning about?"

Giles pulled his new toothbrush out of his pocket and showed it to her. "My idiosyncrasies."

Buffy scowled and grabbed the toothbrush, shoving it in the pocket of her bathrobe.

Giles laughed and hugged her more tightly, nuzzling her neck. "Want some coffee?"

When she nodded Linda moved to get her a cup. "I'll get it."

"Wow, what's the party for?" Cordelia entered the kitchen.

Paul gestured to her and she walked over and leaned against him, his arm around her waist. Giles started counting heads. "Good thing I bought a lot of donuts." Then he got a serious look on his face. "As long as you're all here, we need to set up a new ground rule, at least until the wedding. No one goes out at night alone, or unarmed." He turned to Kevin. "And that includes you. The going out alone part, not the armed part." Giles grimaced as he recalled reading that Drusilla had quite a penchant for children. "In fact, I don't want you going out of the house at night at all, even to come over here unless you're with Spike, Buffy, me or Paul." At Roger's look Giles sent him an apologetic grin. "Sorry Roger. Paul's staked some vampires, you haven't."

Roger grudgingly accepted that fact. Everyone was quiet and sober for a minute. Then Roger grabbed the donuts. "Okay, now that we've taken care of that, I say we all go out to dinner tonight en masse and celebrate the upcoming nuptials. My treat."

Everyone fell on that idea with pleasure and digging into the donuts they began deciding where to go.

##

Saturday night:

It was a merry meal. Willow, Tara, Xander, and Anya joined them and towards the end of the meal, Spike joined them as well. Kevin was delighted and Spike sat next to him so he could properly harass him.

##

This would all come to nothing if he couldn't enter the house. He decided to go in through the kitchen and he forced the door open and was gratified to see that they hadn't done an uninvite spell. Grinning at Dru Angel held out his hands. Dru laid dozens of deep red roses in his arms. She started licking her hands, where she had pricked herself with the thorns, purposely holding them tightly enough to cause dozens of little wounds. Dru tried to follow Angel but she couldn't enter. Pouting she went back to her hands.

Angel went to the front door and opening it he worked one rose through the knocker. Then he shut the door and perused the house. He made his way up the stairs dropping roses and rose petals, creating a trail to the master bedroom. When he walked in the room Angel could smell Buffy. He could smell them both; smell the sex they'd had. It was all he could do not to tear the room apart.

Controlling himself with an effort he left the bedroom, shutting the door, placing the last rose balanced on the doorknob, leaning against the doorjamb. Going back downstairs he went to the stereo. Reaching into his pocket he pulled out a CD. With a sigh of satisfaction he placed La Boheme in the changer. Turning it on he hit the replay button.

Glancing at the scene one more time, wishing he dared to leave a clearer calling card he swept out of the house. He called for Dru. There was no answer. Calling again he ran quickly around the house and into the neighbors' yards. There was no sign of her. Swearing to himself he decided to let her go. He swore again. She still had the dart gun. Shaking his head he realized he had to get back, no matter what. They would suspect him after this and he had to be back in LA when they called. In LA and back at the Hyperion.

When he had killed Jenny he had gone back to the factory and told Dru and Spike all about it. Spike would be able to attest to the fact that Dru had enough information to set this particular stage. Heading into the darkness he made his way to his car. Getting in he took one last look around for Dru, and when it was clear she wasn't going to materialize Angel started the car and drove off.

Dru watched as Angel left and then she headed back to the house. This game of Angel's, it would be fun but it wasn't enough. She wanted him. Settling in to wait she entertained herself with thoughts of tasting the sweet blood of her Watcher.

##

They caravanned home, making sure everyone got into their homes safely. Paul and Roger each pulled up in their cars, one behind the other. Buffy and Spike escorted Roger, Linda and Kevin to their house while Paul, Cordelia and Giles headed for his.

They didn't even notice the rose until they were standing right in front of the door. Paul's eyes widened at the sight, his curiosity aroused. Then he saw the look on Giles' face. Giles began to back away from the door, the keys still in his hand.

Drusilla watched from the corner of the house, smiling. She began to croon to Giles. His head turned in her direction, and against his volition he took a step towards her. Paul took a step away from the house and saw a woman standing there. He had no idea who she was but Paul was reasonably sure she was bad news. With a sick feeling in his gut he guessed that this was Drusilla. Reaching into his pocket he pulled his own keys out and handed them to Cordelia. "Open the door and keep it open."

He swore as he realized he didn't even have a stake. Calling Giles' name he ran to him, pulling his gun, pointing it at Drusilla. "You stay away from him." Giles seemed to be in a trance, his eyes focused on Drusilla.

Drusilla shot Paul a hostile look, angry he was trying to thwart her. "You can't keep him safe forever." She lowered her lashes, as if to seduce him. She was holding a rose. Running it across her face she scratched herself, and laughed. "Your blood may be sweet but his is sweeter. I can smell it." Her eyes closed for a second in sensual ecstasy. "I want him." She took a step towards them. Cordelia yelled for Buffy but knew she wouldn't hear her. They were making a racket over there laughing, everyone a bit punchy from the wine they'd had for dinner.

It was Spike who realized something was wrong. He glanced over and saw the frozen tableau in front of the house, Paul's gun drawn. Then he saw Dru. Cussing he yelled for the Slayer. He wasn't sure she heard him, but not wanting to wait he sprinted across the yard.

He spoke her name. "Dru. What are you doing?"

She smiled at him, delightedly. "Spike, my darling. Come to have some fun with me?" She pointed a long painted fingernail at Giles. "I want him, get him for me."

Taking advantage of the distraction and still holding the gun on Drusilla, Paul took a firm hold of Giles and started slowly walking him to the house.

Drusilla hissed and vamped out. Spike moved to stand between Dru and the two men. He spoke to Paul, never taking his eyes off of her. "Get in the house, now." Then he smiled at Dru. "Can't do that for you, luv. But come on, don't be pouty, we can go find something more fun to do than this."

Cordelia finally found the right key and opened the door. She let out a gasp and turned to Paul. "You can't bring him in here." She had been there that night, had seen what his apartment had looked like. What had Buffy called it? Gift wrapping. She put her hands up to stop Paul's advance.

He scowled at her. "Cordelia, I don't have much choice. We have to get inside." Giles wasn't helping; he was tripping over his own feet.

"Come up with a different answer. You really, really can't bring him in here."

Giles heard the music. He looked in the doorway and saw the roses and the petals. Letting out a cry he fell to his knees. Dru smiled, thrilled that the game was going so well. Then she scowled as she realized that she might not get to taste him tonight, annoyed that there were too many people in her way. Then she laughed as she realized that at the very least she could change the rules of this game, punish him for trying to get away from her. She called to him in a singsong voice. "Watcher?"

Giles turned his head to her and she lunged at him, shoving Paul out of the way, slamming him up the steps, making him trip. Holding Giles' head still, capturing his eyes with her own she spoke the word she had planted in his mind earlier, she spoke his Slayer's name. Before Paul could even get to his feet Spike pulled Dru away from Giles. Dru laughed and spoke to Giles again.

"I left something for you in the house."

She smiled and listened to his heart start to pound as her suggestion began to take shape, becoming reality in his mind. Suddenly she wrenched out of Spike's grip and launched herself at Giles again, the pounding of his blood intensifying her hunger. Spike broadsided her and the two of them fell to the ground. Dru was back on her feet in seconds. Spike yelled at Paul. "Get him in the bloody house."

Paul decided whatever was in the house couldn't be as bad as what was outside. Putting an arm around Giles he dragged him inside. Slamming the door behind him Paul looked around as he holstered his gun. There were roses everywhere. Giles took halting steps to the foot of the stairs and he looked up with an expression of horror on his face. Paul could barely make out what he was saying. "Not again, oh God, not again."

Cordelia could see the confusion on Paul's face and she walked to him quickly, speaking softly. "Jenny. This was how his apartment looked, the roses, the music, the..." She pointed upstairs.

Paul cursed. How had he forgotten? Giles had told him this, that first night he'd met Buffy. Looking now at Giles, Paul was rapidly revising his opinion that Giles was safer in here. He called his name. "Giles."

Giles slowly turned his head to Paul and the look in his eyes broke Paul's heart. He never wanted to see a look like that again. Giles spoke, his voice cracking. "Where's Buffy?" He looked upstairs again. And then again at Paul. "Is she up there?"

Paul knew she wasn't but for a terrifying second he wondered if she was. If somehow Dru had gotten to her and spirited Buffy's broken body up to the bedroom. He couldn't find the words to speak, to reassure Giles.

Giles picked up a rose and took a step upstairs. His whole body was shaking. He called to her. "Buffy?" He took another step. And called her again. "Buffy?" All he could see was the image Dru had put in his head. Buffy's body, her neck snapped, lying on the bed. When there was no answer he let out a cry and he screamed her name. "Buffy!" He ran up the steps two at a time and his movement broke Paul out of his dreadful reverie.

He looked at Cordy. "Get her. Now." He took up the stairs, following Giles. "And turn off that Goddamn music."

Cordy ran to the kitchen door and opened it. She yelled for Buffy across the yard. The voices over there got quiet as if they thought they heard something. Cordy yelled again.

Paul reached the landing and stopped. Giles had made it up the stairs but he hadn't found the strength to open the door. He was on his knees in front of the door, his hands over his face, his body shaking. Paul saw the rose on the door and he cursed again. Paul walked to Giles and he reached for the doorknob. As he was about to touch it, he pulled back, again the fear racing through him. Looking down at Giles, Paul found that his love for his friend overcame his fear and he seized the doorknob and opened the door. He let out the breath he didn't even know he was holding when he saw the empty bed. He crouched down in front of Giles. "Giles, the room is empty. She's not here, nobody's here."

Giles was beyond his reach right now. The keening noises he was making made Paul angrier than he had ever been in his life. Angry at Drusilla, angry at Angel, angry at this life that had mercilessly attacked this man past the point of endurance.

He heard Buffy yell. "Giles!"

Paul yelled back to her. "Up here."

Buffy raced up the stairs, her eyes filled with a corresponding anger as she took in the props that had been left for Giles to find. When she saw Giles her eyes filled with tears and she ran to him, kneeling beside him, taking him in her arms. Paul moved out of the way. "Giles, it's okay. No one's hurt." She rocked him, continuing to speak to him; trying to get past whatever nightmarish vision he was caught in.

Paul stood and ran down the stairs opening up the front door. Spike was still out there, doubled over, clutching his side. Paul ran outside, his gun again in his hand. "Where the fuck is she?"

Spike grimaced. "She's gone."

"Did you stake her?" Spike shook his head. "Why the hell not?"

Spike looked up at Paul and saw the anger there, the barely leashed fury. "She ran and I couldn't chase her."

"Why not? Where did she go?"

"Paul, you can't follow her." He gestured at the gun. "Bullets won't stop her. She'll just kill you. She's strong. She's stronger than me."

Paul walked over to Spike, looked where his hand was clutching. Dru had gouged out a sizable chunk of Spike's flesh from his side. His face was scratched, as was his chest, through his shirt. "Jesus."

He dragged Spike inside this time, helping him stay standing. Pushing him into a seat he ran to Cordy. "We need Roger and Linda." He picked up a stake that was always kept by each of the doors. "I'll be right back."

"I'll come with you. Someone needs to stay with Kevin."

Paul nodded and he and Cordy ran to Roger's house. Roger was already on his way. Paul spoke rapidly to him. "Giles is upstairs, he's...I can't even describe it except to say he's in a bad place. Spike's been hurt by Drusilla, he's pretty sliced up."

Roger nodded and as he continued to the house he called to Paul. "Get Linda, she can take care of Spike."

Linda hadn't wanted to leave Kevin on his own, nor bring him to the house, but when Cordy showed up she gratefully grabbed her bag and ran back over with Paul.

Buffy was starting to get a little frantic. She wasn't getting through to Giles. He was as wiggled as she'd ever seen him, lost someplace where even she didn't seem to be able to reach. She held him as tightly as she could, speaking to him, even yelling at him. Hearing steps on the stairs she let out a sigh of relief

when she saw Roger. "I don't know what to do. I don't know how to help him."

"What happened?"

She gestured to the roses. "A sick and twisted practical joke. Making him relive finding Jenny in his bed."

Giles moaned again, his hands clutching spasmodically at Buffy. Roger's lips tightened and he opened his medical kit. Pulling out a vial he drew up some medicine into a syringe. Recapping the needle he laid it down while he rolled up Giles' sleeve. Giles paid no attention to him, still lost inside his head. Holding his arm steady Roger took the cap off with his teeth and injected Giles with the medicine. Buffy looked at Roger. "What is that?"

"A sedative. It'll knock him out."

And it did. Quickly. Buffy kept him from falling and between she and Roger they got him to the bed. Buffy crawled in next to him, holding him tightly, her eyes bright with tears. She spoke to Roger. "Can you have someone clean the place up? I don't want any of it here when he wakes up."

Roger nodded. "I'll make sure it gets done." Roger checked Giles' vital signs, just to be on the safe side. He put his hand on Buffy's shoulder. "Spike's hurt too, I'm going to go check on him, see if Linda needs some help. Will you be all right?"

Buffy shook her head, her eyes sad and angry. "Only if he's all right." She ran her hand down Giles' face. "How long will that shot keep him out?"

"At least an hour."

Buffy nodded and then she looked at Roger. "Go check on everyone else."

Roger hesitated but then he turned around and left, closing the door to keep the sight of the roses and rose petals away from them. When he got downstairs Paul cornered him with his eyes. Roger almost took a step backwards. He didn't think he'd ever seen his brother this angry. "Is he all

right?"

Roger hesitated. "It's hard to say. I sedated him. He's sleeping."

Paul resumed his pacing. He wanted to hit something. No, he wanted to kill something. He headed over to Spike. "Could Drusilla have done this on her own?"

Spike grimaced as Linda put a last stitch in his side. He shook his head. "She wouldn't have been able to get in the house. Someone had to help her." As Linda pulled the stitch tight he glared at her. "For Christ's sake, do you have to yank so hard? I think you're bloody enjoying this."

"Shut up, Spike." Linda smirked at him. "Just be glad I found a suture that your body won't reject."

Paul spoke again. "Who? Who would have helped her?"

Spike lifted his head and looked around the room. Roger had gotten a broom and he was sweeping up the rose petals, the full roses already in the trash. He glanced at Paul and let out a short angry laugh. "One name comes to mind."

"Fucking Angel."

Linda looked at Spike. "Could it have been anyone else?"

"Yeah, it's possible. Angel told me and Dru about what he'd done to Giles' apartment the night he killed Jenny. I could have done this." He shook his head. "But if it wasn't Angel, Dru would have needed to work with someone who wasn't a vampire. Another type of demon or a human." He grinned. "And Dru doesn't work well with humans. She always forgets and ends up biting them. And like I said before, this is a bit sophisticated for Dru."

Paul pointed to the kitchen door. "They forced their way in there." Glancing around his eyes fell on the stereo. He walked over and opened the disc changer. He pulled out the CD that had been playing and handed it to Roger.

"Throw this away." He found the case, left artfully up on its side, as if to mockingly display the selection. "And this too."

Roger held up the trash can and Paul deposited them both, hatefully. Roger put the can down and went back to sweeping. He headed up the stairs to sweep from the landing down. Paul moved over to sit by Spike. "How long did they live with this? How long did Angel stay Angelus?"

Spike thought about it. "For about six months."

"They lived with this for six months?"

Spike nodded. "Angelus loved this part best. Even for a vampire he was about as twisted as they come."

Paul hesitated but he had to know. "Did...did you help him?"

Spike knew what Paul was asking. "No, I didn't help him." He smiled one of his sardonic grins. "Don't get me wrong. I wanted the Slayer dead too, but I rarely agreed with his particular tactics."

Paul felt ridiculously relieved for some reason. "How do we prove it?"

"That it was Angelus?" Spike shook his head. "We don't. Even if I could find Dru I don't know if she'd say anything and if she did you never know if what she's saying is true or not. She's a bit loopy."

"Maybe I should call him, call him on it."

Spike barked out a laugh. "Sure, that's right. Really yank his chain. Want a piece of advice? Don't get on Angel's bad side. Because you'll pay for it if he really has lost his soul." He caught Paul's eyes. "And I can only be one place at a time." Spike pursed his lips. "If he's really gone bad, we'll know soon enough. He likes you to know that it's him, he likes to make that real clear."

"I want to call him, make sure he's in LA. I need to know if we're all still in danger from him right now."

Spike shook his head. "That's not why you want to call. You just want to rip his head off. Not that I blame you."

Paul walked over to the phone and he called the Hyperion. Angel answered. "Angel Investigations."

"Angel? It's Paul...Paul Erikson."

"Is everything okay?" Paul didn't know if he was really hearing it, or if he just wanted to hear it, but he was sure he could hear the mocking tones behind that question.

"When did you get back?"

Angel passed the question to Wes. "Wes, when did I get back?"

There was a pause. Paul could hear Wes' muffled response. "About two hours ago."

Paul looked at his watch. There would have been time. Time for him to do this and still drive home. "Have you been in Sunnydale?"

"I was in San Diego. Buffy knows that, so does Cordelia." Paul could hear the challenge in his voice, as if to imply that Paul wouldn't be able to get around that, get around Cordelia and Buffy being on his side.

It infuriated Paul. "Listen. You might be able to fool them, but you're not fooling me, not for a minute. I'm guessing that somehow you were here, that you did this. And I know what you said to Buffy about Giles. You may think you're clever but I can see right through you."

There was a period of silence on the phone, as Angel turned and walked away from Wes. His voice was low and dangerous when he spoke. "I don't know what you mean."

"Buffy and Giles. I know you hate it. And I just want to make it perfectly clear that if I ever find out for sure that it was you...I'll come down there and I'll put a stake through your heart."

Angel laughed softly. "You mean you'll try." He laughed again. "But this is ridiculous, I didn't do anything. Really."

"I don't believe you. And if you ever show up here without an express invitation from Buffy and Giles..." He left the threat hanging.

"I was invited to the wedding."

"Well, consider yourself uninvited."

"Of course, that's assuming there still is going to be a wedding. How is Giles, anyway?"

Paul wanted to put his hand through the phone and rip Angel's tongue out. "None of your Goddamn business. And the wedding is still on. Even trying your hardest you couldn't stop that."

"First of all, it wasn't me. Second of all, if I was to try my hardest, trust me, there wouldn't be a wedding."

"You were the worst thing that ever happened to these people. Get out of their lives."

"Now why would I want to do that? I am a part of their lives. And I'm sure Buffy wouldn't appreciate you saying these things."

"I'll tell Buffy myself. She knows how I feel about you and if I have anything to say about it she won't ever talk to you again."

Angel had to fight to keep his vampire face off. His voice was soft but the threat clear. "Hasn't anyone told you that it's not a good thing to annoy a vampire?"

"Is that a threat? Are you threatening me? Please tell me that you are."

Angel laughed again. "Paul, Paul, Paul. Of course I'm not threatening you. You're a friend. You're important to Cordy. Cordy's important to you."

Paul felt a frisson of fear shoot down his spine. "Leave her out of this."

"Paul, no one gets left out. No one." There was a pause for effect. "But you need to calm down. No one's hurting anybody. I understand that you're upset but yelling at me isn't going to solve anything. I can come there if you need some help tracking Dru down."

"Stay away." Paul's voice was lethal.

Angel did vamp out in then, in response to Paul's tone. He snarled at Paul. "You don't want me as your enemy."

"Too late. Just stay away from these people." Paul slammed the phone down. Spinning away, Paul cursed again. He looked up to find Spike watching him, standing by the couch. Paul felt defensive for some reason. "I know it was him."

Spike snorted. "I'm not disagreeing with you. But I'm guessing you've just made it to Angelus' hit list."

"I hope he does come after me."

"If he comes after you, you're dead. After he has some fun with you first." He smirked at Paul. "And not the sort of fun that you'd want to be there for."

Linda was looking at them both, her eyes wide and frightened. She looked at Spike. "Will he come up here now? Are we all in danger?"

Spike shook his head. "Not right now. For some reason he wants us to believe he had nothing to do with this. He wants us to think that he hasn't lost

his soul."

Roger had also been listening. "Maybe he hasn't." At Paul's look he hurried on. "No, I believe you. I think this was Angel. It was too personal for it not to have been done by him. But is it possible that he just lost control for a while, but he didn't actually lose his soul? Cordelia said it happened before."

Paul let out a frustrated noise. "How do we protect ourselves from that?"

Roger made a face. "Or from Drusilla." He looked at Spike. "Will she be back? Will she come after Giles again?"

Spike deliberated for a minute. "Maybe. It's hard to tell with her. She can get obsessed about something but she can also lose interest pretty quick." He looked down at his side. "Let me have a night to recover then I'll go out and see if I can find her, see what my darling Dru is up to. See if I can get any information out of her about Angel."

Linda stood. "I better get back to Kevin." She walked over and kissed Roger. "Call me, let me know what's going on." She didn't even bother trying to get him to come home, not while Giles was in need of care.

He held her tightly. "I will."

Linda found Spike by her side. "I'll walk you back." Linda nodded and the two of them headed out.

When they got to her door she looked at Spike. "Spike?" Her eyes betrayed her nervousness.

Spike scowled, knowing what she was asking. "I'll do what I can. But I can't be everywhere, and I can't fight them both." He pointed into the house. "Keep him in at night. Dru likes kids, she thinks they're juicy." Linda covered her mouth at that comment, a cry escaping her. As Spike took in the look on her face he had the grace to look bashful. "Sorry." Spike looked down at his side. "Thanks for the needlework."

He put his hand on her shoulder, looking at Linda with one of his rare compassionate expressions. "We know Angel's in LA, hopefully Dru's gone

too."

Linda's eyelids were rimmed with tears. "And if she's not?"

Spike let out a sigh. "I'll take care of it. I promise."

"Would you be able to stake her? I know what she meant to you." Linda had heard a lot of stories from Spike as they worked together in the lab.

"I don't know. But I can probably talk her into leaving town, come up with something else for her to do. It works in our favor that the bitch has a short attention span. And if she is around she'll either be focused on Giles or she'll just be out causing the usual vampire mischief. The only reason anyone else would get hurt is if you get in her way or make it too easy for her to get to you."

"So how do we protect Giles?"

Spike snorted. "Are you kidding?" He pointed back to Buffy and Giles' house. "The ranks have closed. No one's gonna get near him."

Linda gave him a tight smile. "Poor Giles. He doesn't deserve this." She paused. "Will you be spending the night over there?"

Spike nodded. "And I'll probably stay the day too, down in the basement."

That made Linda feel marginally better. "Thank you Spike." She pointed to his side. "I know that hurt."

Spike shrugged. "Just a scratch." He grinned at Linda.

Linda rolled her eyes. "Well, thank you anyway."

Spike nodded and after making sure she got in he waited for Cordelia. Cordelia looked relieved to find him there waiting. "How is everyone?"

"Giles is sedated, Buffy's with him. Roger's sweeping rose petals up and Paul's acting like a bloody idiot and getting Angel all riled up."

Cordelia stopped up short. "What do you mean?"

"Paul called Angel and accused the wanker of setting Giles up tonight."

Cordy's eyes flashed with annoyance. "Angel didn't have anything to do with this."

Spike held her arm, preventing her from storming in the house in a rampage.

"Cordelia, he's right. I don't know how but he's right. This stinks of Angelus. Either he was here or he told Dru what to do and he hired someone to help her."

"Why? Why couldn't she have done this on her own?"

"Well besides the fact that she wouldn't have been able to get in the house, she's too bloody stupid to have figured this all out for herself, or to have remembered all these details after all this time."

"She used to plan things all the time. She was always doing something."

"I was always doing something. She'd say something like 'I want to annoy Giles', and then it would be my job to figure out how to work it out so she could do it." He tapped his temple. "Dru's gray matter sparks on and off a bit too much to be the brains of any operation. She has moments of sheer genius but they're only moments. Trust me."

"I don't believe it. I don't believe he'd do this."

Spike pursed his lips. "I know that. But he did. And now he's got Paul on his list because Paul has delusions of grandeur, thinking that he can take on Angelus and survive. And if Paul's on his list, you are too, because hurting you will hurt Paul. Be careful."

Cordelia grimaced. "This totally sucks." She started walking again. "Paul just couldn't keep his mouth shut, could he?"

"No, he gave Angel quite an earful, threatened him and everything."

"Great. What the hell am I supposed to say to Wes, or Gunn or Fred? Suppose you're wrong?"

Spike shrugged. Cordelia snorted and when they arrived at the house she opened the door quickly and stepped inside. Paul knew that Spike had ratted him out the minute he saw Cordelia's face. He put his hand up to stop her from yelling at him but he might as well have tried to stop the tide. "What the hell did you think you were doing? What were you trying to prove?"

Paul was still seething. He pointed upstairs. "Did you see what he looked like? Did you even see what he did to Giles?"

"Of course I saw it. I was there the first time it happened, remember? I tried to keep you from coming in."

"Right, and staying outside with Drusilla would have had a much happier ending."

Cordy let out a frustrated cry. "You couldn't have thought this out first? You had to call and accuse him?"

"Cordy. I love you but please, don't stand there right now and defend him. Just don't. You are the only person in this room who doesn't think it was him. And maybe I was foolish to call him but only because I think I've put you in danger. For that alone I wish I'd kept my damn mouth shut."

That shut Cordy up. "What do you mean?"

"Just something he said."

"What? What did he say?"

"He was reassuring me that he was a friend, reminding me that I was important to you as well. And then he pointed out that you were important to me."

"And...?"

"And what? He was reminding me that he had access to you, that he could hurt you."

Cordy rolled her eyes. "You got that from that?" She began to speak again but the look in Paul's eyes stopped her.

Roger stepped in. "Cordy, if he snapped enough before to allow all those humans to be killed, couldn't this have snapped him too, the wedding, Buffy and Giles?"

Cordy didn't want to believe it. "I can't talk about this."

Paul grabbed her arm. "I don't want you to go back there."

She pulled her arm back. "Well, I am going back. My place is there. I can't just give up on him." Her chin rose as Paul glared at her again. "I can't. And furthermore, you know Buffy would agree with me."

Paul's voice was hostile. "Not when I'm through with her. Not after what Giles went through tonight."

Cordy let out a sound of disbelief. "Are you planning on beating your version of the truth into her? Are you forgetting that Buffy's forgiven Angel for doing this once already, and worse?"

Paul looked like he was about to go through the roof. Roger interrupted again. "Cordy. I know this is hard for you. Angel is your friend and your loyalty to him is commendable." He held up his hand to shut Paul up. "However, I don't

believe Buffy will be as unwilling as you to suspect Angel, not when Giles' safety and mental well being are at stake." He glared at Paul. "But there will no convincing until after the wedding and after the honeymoon. The last thing either of them needs right now is more division, more confusion. Whoever did this, whether it was Angel or not, was up to no good, and they wanted to drive a wedge between Buffy and Giles and between us. Let's not help them."

Paul and Cordy both snapped their jaws shut. Roger looked at them, satisfied, and then he sent a warning look at Spike. Spike put up his hands indicating that he wasn't planning on saying a word. Roger put his hands on the stair railing. "I'm going to go check on Giles." With that he headed up the stairs.

Paul and Cordy looked at each other, both still feeling stubborn. Finally Cordy couldn't take it anymore and she ran to him, wrapping her arms around him. Paul rested his cheek on the top of her head and held her tightly. Neither of them said a word. Both afraid that if they spoke, their relationship might not survive.

With This Ring 4

Roger knocked softly on the bedroom door and heard Buffy telling him to come in. They were in the same position; Giles still out like a light, and Buffy close to his side, watching him. She looked up at him, her eyes weary. "Is everyone okay?"

Roger nodded. "Fuses are a little short and Spike got chewed up a bit but other than that, everyone's fine."

"Who hurt Spike? Dru?"

Roger nodded. "Linda stitched him up. He says he'll be good as new by tomorrow."

Buffy's lip trembled. "Why would she do this? Why would she do this to him?"

Roger shook his head. "We'll figure it all out, Buffy. The important thing is to

make sure he's all right. And he will be, once he wakes up and realizes that you're okay." Roger sat on the bed, on the other side of Giles.

Buffy's eyebrows rose. "Me? I thought this was all about Jenny again."

"It wasn't Jenny. He thought it was you. Paul told me he was yelling your name, asking if you were up here." He sat on the bed. "I think that's what hit him so hard. That it was you this time."

A tear fell down Buffy's cheek. She wiped it off and then she tenderly brushed Giles' hair off his forehead. "Our lives suck so bad, sometimes."

Roger felt tears pricking his own eyelids. "I know, and I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault."

"I know that, but I'm still sorry. If I could I'd change things for you."

Buffy smiled softly at him. "You already have. You've changed so many things and made it better."

"I'm glad. I wish I could do more."

Giles stirred and they both looked at him. He murmured her name, his voice filled with pain. "I'm right here, Giles. Sshh. It's all right." He settled back down. Buffy looked up at Roger. "Welcome to the nightmare room. If he's not waking me up from one, I'm waking him up from one."

"Do you have them every night?"

"Sometimes. They tend to come in runs. But I have them less now than I used to. It helps having him with me. It helps a lot. And now I don't wake up alone with them anymore." She brushed Giles' forehead again. "He has them almost every night." Buffy shook her head. "I don't think he ever stops Watching, even in his dreams." Roger just sat there, keeping her company. Buffy finally voiced her deepest fear.

"Was it Angel...Angelus?"

Roger let out a short, mirthless laugh. He should have realized that Buffy would have been thinking about it up here. "We don't know. Paul spoke with him. He's in LA, and, of course, denies it." He reached out and touched Buffy's arm. "Whether he did or not, right now, it doesn't matter. Getting Giles better is what matters. Getting the two of you married is what matters. We'll take care of the rest later. And I've told that to everyone downstairs too."

But Buffy was feeling too haunted to let it go. "I feel like such a hypocrite." Her eyes filled with tears.

Roger's eyes widened. "Why?"

"Because the last time this happened, I just forgave him, Angel, I mean. I stayed with him; I loved him. Even though it almost destroyed Giles; he would have died that night if I hadn't stopped him. It's like I didn't even care."

Roger shook his head. "Buffy, you were very young and you were in love. There's no better recipe for stupid in the world. And you did care about Giles; you just also had the need to see the difference between Angel and Angelus. And that's not really a bad thing."

"I don't understand how he could forgive me for that."

"Giles?" At Buffy's nod Roger grinned. "I have no idea. It's one of the great mysteries of life."

Buffy rolled her eyes and smacked him softly on the arm. "Thanks, that makes me feel so much better." But, despite her sarcasm, it did.

Roger pursed his lips, uncertain if he should ask his next question. "Buffy?"

She looked up at him, something in his voice clueing her in. "You want to know if it would be different this time?" Roger nodded. Buffy's face grew hard. "Yes."

Roger nodded again. "Good." He patted her on the foot. "Let's just hope we're

through the immediate crises. Spike's going to prod Drusilla on her way out of Sunnydale, and we know that at least for the moment that Angel's in LA."

Buffy let out a breath. "So, maybe the wedding will go on as planned?"

"No maybes about it. I want to stand next to Giles and hold him up when he sees you in that wedding dress." Roger had gotten a fashion show when he'd come home and found Buffy modeling the dress for Linda.

Buffy smiled. "Thanks." Her voice was a little shaky but the smile heartfelt.

"You are entirely welcome." Standing he looked down at them both. "I'll check in again in a little while. Are you all right? I could stay."

Buffy smiled again. "No, I'm fine. I've been saying pretty schmaltzy stuff to him so it would be easier not to have an audience."

Roger laughed. "Got it. I'll be downstairs if you need something." At Buffy's nod he left the room.

Buffy held one of Giles' hands between both of her own. Before Roger had come up, Giles had been getting more and more restless and Buffy had wanted to try something. The connection between them that they had established when Travers had kidnapped Buffy had grown weak, often out of reach. But every now and then it would show up, and they would feel each other, tap into each other's feelings. It happened most often when they made love, when their attention was undividedly focused on one another.

Buffy wanted to reach him now so she could reassure him of her presence before he fully woke. Closing her eyes she reached for him, sending her love out like a beacon.

Giles was beginning to awaken. Every time he began to surface he saw the image of Buffy, dead in his bed, and he recoiled. The pain was too much; he struggled to stay deep, hiding from the pain. But he was losing the fight. Then suddenly, he felt her. He felt her loving presence. At first he just bathed in it, not reacting, just letting it soak through him. He didn't know where she was, or how she was reaching him, but it kept him from hiding again. Focusing on

it, he found himself surfacing again and he started to fight against it, trying to stay hidden.

Buffy could feel him struggle. She wrapped her arms around him and held him tightly while at the same time she renewed her mental caress. And she spoke to him. "Giles, it's all right. I'm here. I'm alive."

She was everywhere. He listened and he grabbed on to her tightly, trusting her, trusting what she was saying. His eyes snapped open and he saw her, watching him, her arms around him. Giles closed his eyes in reverent prayer and then opened them again. "You're alive."

She nodded. "I'm alive."

"Oh, God." He clutched her to him so hard that if she had been anyone but the Slayer she would have been bruised. "Oh, God. I was so afraid you were dead."

"It was Drusilla. She messed with your head again."

Giles pulled back a little. "This is real? I'm not dreaming?" His face grew guarded. "You're really Buffy?" Maybe Drusilla was still messing with his mind and this was not Buffy at all.

Buffy nodded her head. "Yup. 100% Buffy." She made a face. "Do you believe me?" Giles didn't answer right away. Buffy's face grew sad and then it grew resolved. "Okay, here's something she couldn't know. The next morning after we made love for the first time, I told you that you were my everything, and you told me that I was..."

Giles interrupted her with a soft smile. "My dream come true."

She smiled. "It's still true. Except every time I turn around I love you more and you keep becoming more and more of everything, more than I ever thought I could have."

Giles pulled her close and kissed her, gently at first but then with a growing

passion. His tongue begged for entrance and she willingly gave it, wrapping her legs around him, pulling him on top of her. Clothes were hurriedly pulled off as if only when their bodies were united could they both fully believe that once again they had weathered the storm, that they were safe and alive and in each other's arms.

##

Some time later Paul, Cordelia, Roger and Spike looked up to see Giles and Buffy at the top of the stairs. Paul felt the anger stir in him again as he saw Giles look down the stairs and around the house with a nervous glance, as if he might still find the roses. When it was clear that the house had been cleaned up Giles, with Buffy tucked close to him, headed down the stairs. Buffy sent a grateful glance towards Roger. Roger looked at Giles. "How are you feeling?"

"Tired." Giles shook his head. "It's been a bit of a roller coaster ride." He gave them a rueful smile. "Sorry you had to ride it too." He ran a hand over the lower part of his face.

Spike agreed. "No kidding, especially as this ride had claws." He gestured at his face, which while already healing, still sported a variety of scratches.

Giles sat down slowly on the couch. Paul thought he looked as if he might shatter if someone touched him too hard. Giles caught his look. "Paul, I'm all right. I've been through..." He was going to say worse, but those few moments when he thought Buffy was dead had been the worst of his life.

Again the anger surged. "Yeah, but you were just forced to spend most of the weekend reliving the worst of them." At Roger's annoyed look, Paul shut up.

Giles could feel the tension in the room. He squeezed Buffy's hand and stood. "I think I'll make myself some tea. Does any one else want some?"

Buffy stood. "I'll make it for you."

"No, I'd like to make it." He smiled softly at her. "I like to make tea. It makes me feel better." Giles touched her cheek. He asked again. "Anyone want tea or anything else for that matter?" Everyone shook their heads, no one speaking. Giles let out a little sigh, which no one heard, and he headed for the kitchen, one ear listening for the voices he knew would start as soon as they thought he was out of range.

Buffy watched him and listened until she heard the water turn on. She looked at the three of them. "Okay, I was buying the Drusilla theory with the hypnosis thing, because that had her psycho bitch handwriting all over it. But this, tonight, it screams Angelus. As much as I don't want to believe it, I don't know who else would have done this, or been able to recreate it so well."

Cordelia shook her head. "There has to be someone else. He's with Wes, Wes would know if he'd lost his soul. He was so different when he was Angelus."

"I know. That's the only thing that doesn't make any sense. But I can't risk it, not when he's messing around with Giles."

It took every ounce of self-control Paul had not to send Cordy an 'I told you so' look. He could feel her looking at him, daring him to do it. Instead he just looked at Buffy. "What do we do?"

Buffy let out a sigh. "Nothing, right now. For some reason he wants to pretend or maybe Cordelia's right and he really didn't do it." As Paul started to protest Buffy captured his eyes with a Slayer stare. "After the wedding, after the honeymoon, we'll go down and pay him a visit."

Cordy snapped at her. "I hope you'll bother to talk to him before you just stake him. He's saved your life a hundred times."

Buffy looked at Cordelia, her eyes hard. "We'll go down to talk." Her eyes grew even flintier. "But I'll have a stake in my pocket. He won't be able to hide it from me. I'll know."

"You talked to him on the phone. You didn't think he was Angelus then."

Buffy glanced at Paul, remembering just what Angel had said to her. "You're right, I did. And he played me." She looked at Cordy. "He knew just what to say to make me weaker. And I fell for it. That's not Angel, not the Angel I know, anyway." She let out a long breath. "We play it safe this week. Cordy, are you going back?" Cordy nodded without looking at Paul. "So, you can let us know if he leaves again, right?"

Cordy nodded, feeling that it was a reasonable request. "I can do that." She could feel Paul about to speak and she turned to him. "Don't say it. I'm going back."

Buffy touched her arm. "Be careful, Cordy."

Cordelia thought she'd scream with the conflicting emotions in her. She was terrified at the thought that he might really be Angelus, but she refused to believe it, refused to believe that her friend was gone. She just nodded, not trusting her voice.

Buffy called to Spike. "Spike, you and I will be on Drusilla patrol."

Spike rolled his eyes. "Won't that be fun." He sent Buffy a warning glance. "You let me talk to her first, before you go and stake her."

Buffy sent him an incredulous stare. "After what she did to Giles? I don't think so. You better just hope you find her before I do."

Spike let out a snort. "Oh, I'll find her. Don't you worry about that."

Buffy looked at them all. "Giles is never to be alone. He'll hate it, but I don't care. I'll make sure the rest of the gang know it too." She blew out a breath and looked at Roger. "At least the wedding's at your house, so we don't have to worry about any vampires crashing the party." Then she looked at Spike. "Except the invited ones." She scowled as she thought of Angel.

Paul grimaced. "I told him not to come."

Cordy rolled her eyes. "He wasn't going to come anyway. Like he'd want to

see you marry someone else."

Buffy sighed. "Cordelia..."

Cordelia waved her hand. "I know, I'll shut up now. I didn't mean anything about Giles, he's great, you guys are great together, anyone can see that." Everyone thought the obvious response but no one said it out loud. Anyone but Angel.

There was a discrete cough from the hallway and they heard Giles' voice. "May I come back in now? Or do you need more time?"

Paul barked out a laugh. "We're done. You can come back in."

Giles walked in, holding his tea, giving them all a look. "Is this anything I should know about?"

Buffy shook her head. "No knowing for you, not tonight. You get to be ignorant guy."

Giles snorted. "Oh, yes, well that's a role I always enjoy." He sent Buffy a glare, that was softened quite a bit by the love in his eyes.

Buffy cuddled into his side as soon as he sat down. He welcomed her presence and for a brief moment his eyes grew dark with remembered pain at the vision Dru had given him and his arm squeezed her tightly. None of them missed it but no one commented on it, only Paul's face tightening in response.

Roger sighed as the silence grew again. Searching his mind for a safe topic he kept drawing a blank. Surprisingly it was Cordy who came to the rescue. "So, have any of you guys been to Carmel?" Everyone let out a sigh of relief and the conversation began to flow.

##

Sunday night:

Buffy and Spike headed out to search for Drusilla, both going in separate directions. Buffy had been annoyed about it but Spike didn't care. Buffy wasn't staking Dru, not if he could help it. And Spike was pretty sure he knew where to find her. He knew Buffy would be looking for all the places that Drusilla might be hiding. Spike knew she wouldn't be hiding. It rarely crossed her mind to hide. He headed for the Bronze.

She was there. Not inside, but in one of the alleys, a young woman hanging limply in her grasp. Spike approached her. "Save any for me?"

Dru let the woman slide to the ground. "Is that my Spike?" She turned to look at him, her face petulant. "You ruined my fun last night."

"You don't need that kind of fun, pet. That kind of fun winds up with you on the wrong end of a stake."

Dru lashed out, her fingernails making new furrows in his face. "You're supposed to be on my side."

Spike let out a cry and grabbed his face. "Bloody hell. I am on your side. I'm trying to save your bloody life right now. The Slayer's out looking for you, you need to get out of town."

Dru's eyes lit up. "So the Watcher's alone? Come with me. You can get in the house. You can get him for me."

Spike shook his head. "Can't do that, luv."

Dru moved closer to him, and then her hand flashed out and she grabbed his side, squeezing hard. Spike let out a cry of pain but she just pulled him closer, her grasp relentless. "You used to like it to hurt. Remember? We used to have so much fun together." Drusilla caught his lips in hers and bit them at the same time she caressed them with her tongue. "You used to hurt me too."

Spike did remember. He remembered all their years together. He began to

kiss her back, his hands fisted in her hair, pulling on it hard enough to make her wince. "You were all I ever wanted."

"So come be with me."

"Dru, I can't."

She let go of his side and touched his head. "The piece of metal still screams in your head." Dru looked at him sadly. "It's made you soft. It's made you forget that you're a vampire." She smiled coyly. "I can help you remember. The badness is there, it's crying out, it's crying out for blood." Dru got a faraway look in her eyes and she let out a gasp.

Spike looked at her, concerned. "What is it? What are you seeing?"

She put her index finger over his lips to quiet him, and then she ran both hands over his head.

Spike shook her off. "Come on, we have to get out of town. My car's over here."

"Where are we going?"

Spike grinned. "Don't worry, I have a fun little adventure in mind for my lovely Dru."

Dru clapped her hands together. "Is it a party?"

He nodded. "Your favorite kind of party." Squealing like a little girl she allowed him to lead her to his car, waiting for him to open the door for her. When he got in she cuddled up next to him, and as he drove she ran her hands up and down his leg, her touch sexual and arousing.

Finally he couldn't stand it any longer, it had been far too long, and there were too many memories. He pulled the car off into the woods and grabbing her he took her right there in the car, her laughter and her screams being absorbed by the silent trees surrounding them.

##

Monday morning:

Giles looked up in surprise when Paul showed up while he was still drinking his tea. "Good morning. To what do I owe this visit?"

"I'm driving you to work."

Giles rolled his eyes. "I'm perfectly capable of driving myself to work, thank you very much."

Paul raised his eyebrows. "That isn't the issue and you know it."

Giles let out a deep breath. "Ah, yes, my house arrest."

Paul grinned. "Slayer's orders."

"Does that include making me stark raving mad, as I will undoubtedly be if I don't get to be by myself this entire week?"

"You're lucky she's even letting you out of the house." Paul sat down at the kitchen table. "Has anyone heard from Spike?"

Giles shook his head. "No, at least he never came back here."

Paul pursed his lips. "You don't suppose..."

Giles' eyes widened. "No, I don't. I don't think she could kill him anymore than he could kill her."

"Then where is he?"

"Regardless of where he is, we won't see him until dark. He'll be holed up somewhere." Giles moved to the sink to rinse out his mug. "Are you sure you won't let me drive myself?"

Paul just grinned at him and stood. "Come on, your chariot awaits."

Giles shook his head in disgust and shrugged into his jacket. "Let me just run up and tell Buffy I'm leaving."

Paul sat back down. "If you're not down in fifteen minutes I'm coming up to get you." He reached for the paper.

Giles grinned and headed upstairs.

##

Paul escorted him inside much to Giles' chagrin. He was surprised to find John Drinan sitting in the shop. "John, what are you doing here? When did you get back?" He had been in England for the last two weeks.

"Last night. Just long enough to find out from Roger and Linda what happened to you and to volunteer for body guard duty."

Paul looked him over. "Are you armed?"

He heard two yeses. John opened his jacket and Paul saw the holstered pistol. Looking towards the register he saw Anya reach down and retrieve a crossbow from under the counter. Nodding in satisfaction he looked at John. "You know how to use that?"

John just flashed him a look. "Yes." Paul believed him.

Giles looked at Anya with some concern. "You'll be careful not to accidentally

shoot a customer, won't you?"

Anya let out a disgusted noise and refused to honor his remark with a response.

Paul slapped Giles on the arm. "I can see you're in good hands." He frowned at Giles. "Don't go out by yourself."

Giles gestured outside to the sunlight. "It's daytime, no vampires will be out and about."

Paul didn't care. He wasn't taking any chances and neither was Buffy. John spoke up. "Don't worry. We won't let him out of our sight."

Giles rolled his eyes. "Good Lord. I appreciate everyone's concern, but aren't you all overdoing it a bit?"

Anya answered that. "It's because of the wedding. We figure everything that can go wrong between now and then will, just because anytime anything really good is going on, something screws it up."

Giles opened his mouth to complain again and then thought better of it. Perhaps a little bit of caution was in order. "Yes, well, anyone want some tea?"

Paul grinned at his capitulation and shook his head. "I gotta go. I'll check in later."

Giles rolled his eyes again, but didn't say a word. He just let out a sigh and moved over to the small warmer to heat himself some water.

##

Monday night:

Cordelia sighed as she looked at the ingredients on her bed. Paul had dropped her off last night, taking her straight to her apartment. She had been impressed that he had kept his mouth shut, even though she knew it was killing him to not try to convince her that she should go right back up to Sunnydale with him.

She had watched Angel all day. He had been quiet, hadn't really said anything all day, but had otherwise seemed okay. But she'd been jumpy. Cordy wasn't sure about anything anymore. She didn't know if she was jumpy because he was off, or because of the accusations everyone in Sunnydale had been making for the last two days.

Cordy had pulled Willow aside at one point, needing to talk to her and swearing her to secrecy. Before she had left, Willow had given her a small bag. It had taken her a day to work up to it but Cordy had finally opened it and was now looking at what was inside. A part of her felt awful for doing this, as if it was a betrayal. The other part of her knew it was a sensible precaution, just in case. Angel didn't come by that often, hopefully he'd never know she had even done this. And if he came by, well, she was an actress wasn't she? She'd come up with a plausible excuse. Taking a deep breath she picked up the cross and hammered it into the lintel to her front door. Then lighting the candle and the sage, she began the incantation.

##

Spike still wasn't sure why he was going back. He hadn't felt this alive in far too long. It was as if she had made him a vampire all over again. She'd done it once 120 years ago and she'd done it last night. Dru had killed, over and over again, and he had fed. She'd broken their necks and handed the bodies over to him, and he'd fed until he thought he might burst with the pleasure of it. He'd almost forgotten what fresh blood tasted like, warm right from someone's body. Spike had fed that one other time, when she had last been in town, but since then it had been bagged blood, warmed in the microwave. She was right, he was little more than a pet dog.

What had happened to him? How had he fallen so far? And how had he chosen to befriend humans and turn his back on his black beauty? She still had the capacity to make him weak with desire for her. He had loved her for so long, adored her, longed for her. As crazy as she was, as much as she'd hurt him, she was like a drug and he couldn't get enough. Between feedings,

they had shagged, and it was as good, and as painful, as he remembered it being. Spike knew he had many more scratches and bites to match the ones he'd already had.

Spike knew she would be perfectly happy where she was for the time being. The pickings were plenty and the accommodations adequate. Spike had known her long enough to be reasonably sure that it would only take a couple of days for her current obsession with the Watcher to run its course, as it always did, and then she'd get lost in the pleasure of the current activity. Besides he planned to be back at her side before the night was through.

He supposed that was why he was driving back to Sunnydale now. To let them know that she was gone, that they didn't need to worry about her. He grudgingly admitted that perhaps he owed them that. But then he was gone. Time for him to be true to what he was. Time to stop being a slave to a Slayer.

Pulling into the driveway he turned the car off and just sat there. He had spent too much time with these people. Too much time pretending to himself that they mattered to him, that keeping them alive was a worthy goal, that having them care about him was important. Spike grinned. He was back, the big bad was back, and he was about to rid himself of all these humans, once and for all, turn his back on them and never look back. But first he'd deliver his message. Finally he got out of the car and headed for the kitchen door. It was unlocked and that pissed him off. He pushed it open and stepped inside. The fact that he was able to made him even angrier. He stormed into the house, looking for someone to yell at.

Spike stalked into the living room and surprised Giles by his sudden appearance. That made him furious. "Why the bloody hell can I get in your house? Why haven't you done an uninvite spell? And the back door was unlocked. Any demon could have just walked in here without even having to knock down a wall to do it. What the hell are you thinking? Why the hell am I worried about Dru when you've got a huge demon welcome sign hanging on the door?" He looked around. "And where the hell is everyone? You were so lost in your book you didn't even hear me come in. You'd be dead right now if that was what I wanted."

Giles wasn't quite sure how to respond. Spike was right. He hadn't heard him come in and he'd meant to do the spell but somehow he had forgotten. True, Buffy had only run next door for a minute but he was by himself, and obviously Buffy had left the door unlocked.

Spike began to prowl around the room. He could hear Giles' blood pounding through his body. He couldn't believe how used to it he had gotten, how much he had learned to ignore it, knowing that he couldn't do anything about it, and also knowing that at some point he had realized that he didn't want to do anything about it. Spike could feel the blood lust grow. He fought to keep his vampire face off.

Giles started to feel a bit uneasy as he watched him. Something was different. Something had happened. Spike started in on him again, his voice almost pleading. "I'm a bloody vampire, and so is Angel. It doesn't matter that he's got a soul and I've got a chip. We're demons and you can't trust us. Don't trust us. You shouldn't let me near you."

Giles could hear the warning in Spike's voice. He tried to understand what was going on. Could his chip have failed? Was Spike for some extraordinary reason, giving them fair warning before he struck? "Is your chip...?"

"No, the sodding chip's still there." Spike began to prowl again. Giles relaxed a little but he could still feel the danger. It was a disconcerting sensation. He was amazed to realize just how relaxed he had learned to be in the vampire's presence. He found it disconcerting that he had come to trust him that much. And yet, he had proven that trust over and over again.

Spike wanted to scream with frustration. The feelings inside of him were confusing him. He could see Giles' tension and a part of him hated it. Spike clenched his jaw. He had a message to deliver and then he'd leave. Then he wouldn't have to face these feelings again. "Dru's gone. I took her someplace where she could unwind a little. She'll forget all about you soon, unless someone reminds her again."

Giles nodded. "Thank you Spike. I appreciate it." He winced when he wondered what Dru might be doing to unwind and how many lives it would take.

Spike just glared at him. "Well, I said I'd do it. So, it's done. Now we're square and I'm leaving." He moved a little closer to Giles. "And when I'm gone, do the bloody spell."

"What do you mean, you're leaving?"

Before Spike could answer the back door opened again. In a moment both Buffy and Kevin walked in. Kevin took one look at Spike and let out a delighted whoop. Running to him he threw himself at the vampire. "You're back."

Giles stood, uncomfortable for the first time at seeing Spike with Kevin, wondering if Kevin were safe. Buffy caught his unease. "What's the matter?"

But Giles was watching Spike. Watching the emotions race across his face. One fighting with the next for dominance. Spike dropped to one knee and pushed Kevin away. He started to speak but then he just looked at him, and then looked at Giles and Buffy. Paul walked in next and when he saw Spike he smiled in relief. "Spike, you're all right. We were worried about you."

Spike groaned and dropped his head. Giles walked over to him and crouched down. "Spike, what is it?"

Spike just shook his head. He realized right then that he should never have come back. He had severely underestimated the power these people held over him. He was truly caught, like a fly in a spider web. How Dru would be laughing at him now. At the thought of Dru he groaned again.

Kevin was leaning on Giles, not quite sure what was happening to Spike. He spoke softly to Giles. "What's the matter with him?"

Giles put his arm around Kevin. All Giles could do is guess. So he did. He guessed that being with Drusilla again had affected the vampire more than he had expected. And he had come here to warn the humans in his life that things had changed. But once here, Spike had come face to face with the fact that the humans here thought of him as family. No one here ever forgot he was a vampire, but it was secondary, he was family first. And Giles realized that he felt the same way. Despite all his warnings to Paul and Roger, Spike had become family, even to him. And that left Spike, stuck in the middle.

Without looking up at anyone, keeping his eyes on Spike, Giles spoke to the rest.

"Will you leave us alone for a minute?" He did look at Kevin, and smiled at him. "Go on, go with Buffy and Paul." When he didn't hear any movement he looked up to find Buffy frowning at him. "Buffy, I'll be all right. Go, please."

Buffy looked at Paul, still frowning. Paul frowned back but he reached for Kevin. "Come on, Kevin." The three of them left the room. Giles was sure they were right around the corner, eavesdropping. Giles shrugged, he couldn't help that.

He sat on the coffee table, facing Spike, who was now sitting cross-legged on the floor. "I'm guessing Drusilla wants you back."

Spike glanced up at him and then his eyes skittered away. He ran his hand through his hair. "She's..." Spike shook his head.

Giles let out a commiserating short laugh. "She's like Buffy is to me."

Spike shook his head again. "No, she's like what Buffy is to Angel. She brings out the best...and the worst in me." He glanced up at the doorway to the room. "I know you're standing right there, I can hear your hearts beating."

Giles stood and gesturing to Spike he headed over to the sliding glass doors. Opening one he slipped outside, Spike directly behind him. Spike grabbed his arm, his voice angry. "Why do you trust me? I could have Dru out here, waiting for me, waiting for you. She asked me to get you for her."

Giles shook his head. "I don't know, Spike. This may be one of the stupidest things I've ever done." He looked at Spike. "Is she? Is she out here? Are you giving me to her?"

Spike shook his head, his voice sullen. "No."

Giles smiled softly at him. "We're not going to let you go without a fight." Spike looked at Giles, his eyebrows raised in surprise. Giles continued. "Did you think you could announce you were leaving and we'd all just watch you go?"

Spike scuffed a boot in the dirt. "You'd all be safer if you did."

Giles pursed his lips. "Maybe you're right. In some ways we are all in more danger from you than we are from Angel."

Spike's eyes flashed. "The hell you say."

"No, I mean it. With the exception of Buffy, none of us have been comfortable around him since his stint as Angelus, let alone now with the events of the last few days and his possible involvement. None of us let our guard down with him and I'd never let Kevin be alone with him. But you have access to all of us. We don't hesitate to let you in our houses, near the people we love most of all." He let out a half laugh. "We trust you." He touched himself on his chest. "I trust you." Shaking his head, he laughed again, in amazement. "And I never thought I would, or that I should."

"You shouldn't. I'm a vampire."

Giles walked a couple of steps and then turned to face Spike again. "Yes, you are. And I'm a human, who also happens to be a sorcerer and a Watcher. Buffy is a human who is also the Slayer. Willow and Tara are witches, Anya's an ex-demon, and even Kevin has magic. And Xander, Roger, Paul and Linda are human but they are something more as well. They're a part of this misfit group of people who have chosen to belong to one another, as family. And it's even larger than that. There's John now, and Wes and Cordelia. Even Fred and Gunn, and...well, let's leave Angel out of it for the time being. There's no place for us in the ordinary world, not anymore, but that's all right, because we have each other."

Giles paced a little, still speaking. "You have never been an ordinary vampire. And I know the chip made you turn to us, but it also allowed you the chance to see what's inside of you. I don't know why you're able to care and to love, why you've chosen to save us all time and time again. I've never understood. I don't know why you're so different from any other vampire I've ever met."

"I'm weak. I've grown bloody soft."

"Or you've grown strong. Why does this have to be the 'weak' part of you? Do you really think you can ignore this part of you? Do you really believe that you

can go back to Drusilla and just forget that you cared about people, close off your heart again?"

Spike looked at Giles. "If I didn't have this chip, I'd kill. You know that, right? I don't have a soul. I don't care about hurting people. I watched Dru kill a dozen people last night and I never tried to stop her, didn't even think about stopping her." He jabbed himself in the chest with one of his thumbs. "She killed some of them for me, so I could feed. Don't fool yourself, Watcher. Just because I've gotten soft about this family of yours, it doesn't mean anything."

"It does to us." But Giles knew it wasn't that simple. One reason they trusted Spike was because they knew he couldn't hurt them or other humans. The knowledge that Spike had fed on humans last night, even if they were dead first, made Giles feel nauseated "But you're right, you do have to choose, because you can't be both. You can't be with Drusilla and feed on humans, and then come here and expect us to think that's all right, because it's not, it won't ever be. And if you choose to live that way, you will become our enemy again and you won't be welcome here anymore. Or you can stay here, with us and be a part of this family, the way you have been, with people who care about you, children who trust you, a Slayer who needs you."

Spike snorted. "She doesn't need me."

"She does, or at least I need you. I need you to help keep her alive. I need you to help keep them all alive." Giles took off his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose. "I know you came back here tonight to say you were leaving, that you were going back to Drusilla." He smiled wryly at Spike. "I also know that you didn't need to come back at all, nor did you need to warn me, however obliquely, that we shouldn't trust you anymore. But you did. You could have even called to tell me that, but you came here in person. Why?"

"I wish the hell I knew."

"I think you do know, Spike."

Spike looked up at the sky and then he nodded. "Yeah. I wanted to see what it felt like compared to how I felt last night."

"How did you feel last night?"

"Strong, powerful, immortal."

"How do you feel now?"

Spike let out a laugh but he didn't answer. He just shot a look at Giles. And suddenly things became clear for Giles. Spike had found a comfort level inside of himself for the doing of things. Being with them, protecting them, hanging out with them. But he had never reconciled the emotional part of it. The loving and the being loved. He'd pushed it down, he'd denied it and all because it made him feel vulnerable. It made him feel weak, and it surrounded him with mortality. And coming back here was making him face it.

Giles understood the choice lying before Spike. Go with Drusilla, and live life without care, without worry, with no thought of consequences. Or stay with them and open his heart to love and to pain, and to loss, and to the consequences of his actions. Giles put a hand on Spike's shoulder. "I'm sorry, Spike. I don't know how to make this easier."

"This isn't my nature. I'm a bloody vampire."

Giles bit back a smile. "You keep telling me that, as if you were trying to convince yourself. And how do you know it isn't your nature? Why does it keep happening? Why have you stayed so long? We all have a dark side to us, Spike. Why can't you have a light side? In my youth I embraced my dark side and people died because of it. After Buffy met Dracula she had to deal with her own dark nature, it almost took her over. But she was brave and took on the task of subduing it, through meditation, and the choices she made from that point on. You can too."

"You're assuming I'd want to do that."

"No, I'm hoping you want to do that."

Spike shook his head. "I don't." He looked at Giles. "I'll be around for the wedding, make sure it all goes all right, and then I'll do my best to keep an eye on things while you and Buffy are on your honeymoon. But then I'm gone." He paused. "And once I'm gone you have everyone do an uninvite

spell and you make it clear that no one invites me in if I show up. You got that?"

"Spike, how can I make you change your mind?"

"You can't. I am what I am. Whether I've got a chip in my head or not."

"You're wrong. You're so much more." Giles was somewhat taken back at the sense of loss he felt.

Spike just shook his head. "Go in the house."

"Spike."

"Go in the house. And when you get in there, do the bloody spell."

Giles let out a deep sigh. "Are we in any danger from you now? Would I be a fool to invite you back in this week, to let you be near Kevin?" He hated to ask but the question had to be voiced. And it was another proof of the level of trust he still had for the vampire, that he trusted him to tell the truth.

"No one's in danger from me right now. And I plan to keep it that way. I won't be back to Sunnydale. I'll take Dru and we'll go far away."

Giles smiled sadly at him. "Well, thank you for that, anyway."

Spike gestured towards the house. "Go inside." When Giles hesitated, Spike prodded him a little. "Watcher, go inside. I can't leave you out here by yourself and I have to go."

Giles nodded and he headed to the glass slider and he stepped inside. When he turned to slide it shut Spike was already gone. Latching the door Giles rested his forehead against the cool glass, his heart heavy.

##

Late Monday night:

At first he thought she was gone. But then he saw her, her eyes glittering as she sat in the corner, watching him. She smiled. "You came back to me." Her body was swaying back and forth and he felt her power as if she were a snake charmer.

He moved towards her. "Nothing can keep me away this time."

"Are they dead, then? Have you killed them all?" She pouted. "Did you have a party without me?"

Spike shook his head. "Still got the chip, Dru, you know that. I can't hurt anyone, anyone human, that is."

She smiled, a feral grin. "Good, then I can kill them."

Spike grew still. "No, you can't. Not them, anyone but them. There's no need to ever go back to Sunnydale. I'll take you anywhere in the world you want to go but there." At her dark look he tried to convince her. "Come on Dru. You kill any of them and you'll have the Slayer on us quicker than white on rice. Let's just forget them."

She prowled over to him, her hand tracing a line across his chest. She sniffed him. "It's like they put another chip in your head. But this one makes you love." She reared back from him, as if the smell of him was more than she could bear. "You stink of them all." She moved in again and smelled his shoulder. "You've been to see him, my Watcher." Dru scowled at him. "You went to see him and didn't bring me a taste." Vamping out she growled and she shoved him across the room.

Spike grinned. He knew where this would end up. Springing back up he lunged at her and hauled back and punched her in the face. Dru laughed and tried to scratch him on his arm. Spike moved back in time and caught her hand, reeling her in. "It's over and done with, Dru. It's just you and me. Forever."

Dru didn't respond but she started touching his head again, her eyes unfocused. Spike started to speak but she put a hand over his lips. "Sshh, it's rude to interrupt." She tilted her head to the side. "Your chip, it's talking to me, telling me what it needs." Pulling her hands down until they rested on his cheeks she grinned. "Soon we'll have all the pieces put back together." She curved her nails in and started to dig gouges in his cheeks.

"Bloody hell." Spike grabbed her hands and twisted her wrists until she cried out in pain. She was panting with the pain but her face was flushed with excitement. Dru moved in close to Spike and pressed her body against his. Spike laughed and letting go of one of her wrists he pulled her even closer so she could feel what she was doing to him. She began to lick the wounds she had just made on his face.

##

Thursday afternoon:

Willow looked around the shop again. "Doesn't it seem awfully quiet?"

Anya nodded. "It's the calm before the storm."

Willow frowned. "What do you mean?"

"The wedding. It's tomorrow. So if something bad is going to happen, it'll happen tonight."

Willow shook her head hard. "Nothing's going to happen. Bad already happened, last weekend. We've moved past bad now."

Anya just shrugged.

Willow poked Xander. "You don't think anything bad is going to happen, do you?"

Xander yawned. Giles' bachelor party had been last night and he was tired. They had all stayed up drinking way too late. He shook his head. "I'm too tired for any badness." He grinned. "I like that Frank guy."

Tara looked up from the book she was flipping through. "Who's Frank?"

"The guy who owns that bar down the street. That's where we had Giles' soiree. That's the place where Giles met Paul and Roger."

Willow frowned. "So, how'd you get to be so chummy with this Frank guy?"

"He knows everything. Apparently Giles has been suffering from loose lips and just telling people willy nilly about the whole Slayer thing."

Giles chose that moment to come in from the back. All four of the young adults had decided to play babysitter for him this afternoon. He overheard Xander's comments. "I have not been..." He stopped in exasperation. "I killed a vampire that was attacking him. It was exceedingly difficult after that to pretend that nothing had happened." He straightened his back. "I did try. It was all Paul and Roger's fault."

Willow grinned. "I'm telling them you said that."

Giles glared at her. "Good, they get blamed for far too little around here." Giles was tired too, and tired of his non-stop company. He was counting the minutes until tomorrow, when he and Buffy would be on their own, away from everyone.

Tara tried to change the subject. "When did the store next door go out of business? I don't even remember seeing any signs."

Giles looked up from the bills in his hands. "A family illness, or some such thing. She had to relocate quickly."

Willow looked next door, as if she could see through the walls. "Maybe you should lease that too, Giles. You could expand the store."

Giles nodded. "I've thought about it. I did contact the realtor to see how much square footage it is and what the additional cost would be."

Xander yawned again loudly and then he looked around the shop. "I could help you remodel." He paused, grinning. "So, Giles, did you have fun last night?"

Giles grinned in return. "Yes, actually I did. It was awfully nice of Wes and Gunn to come up for it."

Xander grinned at the girls. "We had quite the gang thing going."

Giles nodded. "The only one missing was Spike." Giles' lips tightened as he thought of the vampire and he turned away.

The mood sobered. Xander scowled. "I can't believe he's going back with Drusilla. Wasn't 120 years of that lunatic bitch enough?"

Willow pouted. "It won't be the same without him." She looked up at Giles. "But he did say he'd be here for the wedding, didn't he?"

Giles nodded. "Yes, yes he did." Giles wasn't sure if he would be though. He hadn't expected Spike to just vanish for the week, but no one had heard from him.

Tara pointed at the suitcase. "What's that for?"

Willow grinned. "Buffy's making Giles do the not seeing the bride for 24 hours thing. So Giles is staying at Paul's."

Giles rolled his eyes. "Silly superstition." He didn't want to sleep without Buffy. But she'd insisted and had even packed his bag for him.

Xander eyed him, his eyes half-kidding and half serious. "Well, you need all the bad luck avoiding mojo you can use."

Giles nodded and then he looked at Willow. "Speaking of mojo, do you have everything you need for tomorrow?"

She nodded. "Yup. We're starting nice and early." At the puzzled looks from Anya and Xander she explained. "Tara and I are putting up all sorts of wards at Roger's house to keep the baddies away. We're also doing the little Bed and Breakfast place that Buffy and Giles are staying at tomorrow night before they leave for their trip."

Giles sent her a look. "And please do make sure that that is all you do at the Bed and Breakfast place."

She giggled and Giles sighed.

##

Thursday early evening:

Spike sat on the bed, wearing only a pair of pants, as he smoked a cigarette. Things were not going as smoothly as he'd hoped they would. Unless they were in bed, all he and Dru did was argue. Now that he was back with her he was remembering all the things she used to do that annoyed the hell out of him.

She flirted with anything that moved. Spike, twice, had had to forcibly eject potential lovers she had brought home. Ostensibly to share, but Spike knew better. Dru didn't care. Oh, she loved him, but that didn't mean anything, it didn't affect how she acted. Spike took another drag off his cigarette. This was yet another way that he'd been changed. Hanging around people who respected one another and looked out for one another. It made Dru seem... Spike shook his head. He missed them. There, he'd said it. Mocking himself with a smile he stood and began to pace the room.

Then there was the killing. Spike had stopped her from killing someone last night. A kid. A kid who reminded him of Kevin. Spike let out a bitter laugh. Then to be perverse Dru had started specifically going after children, and

Spike had stopped her every time. He kept thinking about parents, about Linda and Roger, about what they'd be like if Kevin were attacked by a vampire and killed.

Dru had looked at him so sadly. "You've been poisoned, Spike. Poisoned by the Slayer, and her friends. It seeps through your blood, changing you."

Spike hadn't been able to argue. "Just give me time, Dru."

She had considered him. "It's not time you need. It's freedom. Freedom from them."

"I walked away. What more do you want?"

She'd had a look of ecstasy on her face. "Death, blood, pain. You won't be free until they scream and you can laugh at it."

Once again he'd warned her. "Stay away from them."

"No, us, Spike. We have to do it, together."

He'd shaken his head. "Dru, I'm tired of this conversation." He'd tried to pull her in, to kiss her but she'd pushed him away.

"Poor Spike, he needs to be saved." With that comment she had raced off, presumably to hunt what and who she wanted without Spike interfering. Spike had found a bar and gotten drunk.

Then today, while they waited for the sun to set, the argument had continued. Spike had been thinking about Paul. About how when Paul had discovered that Spike had never seen a professional baseball game, had promised to take him to the first home night game he could. Spike had shaken his head at his own foolishness; at the sadness he felt that he wouldn't be going to that game after all. He remembered the argument he'd then had with Dru.

Dru rolled over to face him. "You're thinking of them."

"No, I'm not."

"You are, I can tell." She started picking at his sutures until he finally batted her hand away in aggravation. "Poor Spike, he's so lost."

"Shut up, Dru." She started to laugh and then she just kept laughing at him. Spike grew angry. "Dru, shut up."

She moved so fast he almost didn't see her, moving to lie on top of him, his hands pinioned above his head. "Come with me tonight. Let's set you free."

Spike thrust up against her. "What are you talking about?"

"Your chip. I know how to make it stop hurting you."

That stopped Spike, cold. "You know how to get rid of this sodding chip?"

She nodded. "It spoke to me." She shook her head sadly. "But it won't help with this poison inside of you." She rolled back off of him and began to sing softly, waving her fingers in front of her face, as if entertaining an infant.

Spike rolled his eyes. "Dru. What did the chip say to you?"

"Can't tell you." She caressed his cheek. "But I'll show you, if you make Dru a promise."

"Anything, luv."

"Your first kill, make it one of them, and let me watch."

Spike sprang out of bed. "Dru, will you leave it alone?"

She hissed at him. "You tell me you want me but you don't. You want them."

"I don't want them. Don't be ridiculous."

"Then prove it. Prove that humanity isn't crawling under your skin poisoning everything you touch." She began to frantically wipe herself as if suddenly noticing that he had infected her as well. Dru let out some cries and she inched away from him.

"You like being poisoned. You came here to poison me."

"Now Dru, you're getting all worked up over nothing. Come back and tell me what the chip said to you." He reached for her.

But she got up, off the bed, and moved away from him. Pulling on a robe she continued to back away, looking at him in horror. "They have destroyed you."

Spike snorted. "Will you stop being so melodramatic and can we get back on the subject of the chip?"

She moaned. "So lost. So lost."

Spike rolled his eyes. "The chip, please." She didn't answer him. Instead she began pacing, mumbling to herself, her fingers weaving the air in front of her. Spike watched her for a while and then he shrugged. "Whatever." When she got like this it was impossible to get any information from her. Spike rolled back over in bed and drew the covers up. "I'm going back to sleep."

Now it was dusk and when he'd woken, Dru was already gone. Spike didn't think anything of it. In fact he was somewhat relieved. Finishing his cigarette he ground it into the cement floor. He walked into the small bathroom to splash some water on his face. That's when he noticed it, the small vial in the trash can. A look of curiosity on his face he reached down and picked it up. Sodium pentathol. Spike's eyes widened.

"Shit." Getting dressed as quickly as he could he ran out to find a phone.

##

Paul had arrived so the rest of them had left. Giles wanted to get a few more things done before they headed out, so after locking the door Paul sat down at the table and began thumbing through one of Giles' demonology texts. Neither he nor Giles noticed the face looking in the window.

Dru was ecstatic. He was there; her Watcher was there. And so was that man, the one that had kept him from her the other night. It was perfect. Before the night was through she'd have her Spike back and her revenge.

She was through the door before Paul could even get his head up out of his book. She shot him with the first dart. Reaching for his gun he yelled. "Giles, run." He shot at Drusilla, hitting her arm. Before he could fire again she was next to him and had one hand around his throat, choking him.

Giles reached for the crossbow but before he could get behind the counter she shot him too. Paul tried to shoot again but she punched him and he slumped over the table, his gun falling from his senseless fingers. Giles yanked out the dart and reached again for the crossbow, stumbling, until the crossbow was finally in his hands. His vision was blurring and she stood so close to Paul he was afraid he might hit him instead of Drusilla. The drug finally did its job and he sprawled on the floor, unconscious. Drusilla brought the dart gun up to her mouth and blew on it, grinning.

She had everything set up next door. She dragged first Giles and then Paul out the back door and into the back room of the empty store, where she chained them to the wall. Then she straddled Giles' waist and waited for him to wake up.

With This Ring 5

Buffy reached for the phone. "Hello?"

"Buffy, it's Spike. Is Giles there?"

"Spike, where the hell have you been? I thought you told Giles you'd be around this week." She shot a look at Willow who was spending the night.

"Shut up, Slayer. Is he there?"

"No, he's with Paul."

"Shit."

Buffy's heart began to speed up. "Why? What's wrong?"

"Dru's gone." There was a pause. "Call Paul, see if they're there."

"What makes you think she's here?"

"I'll explain later. Make sure he's safe. Make sure everyone's safe. I'm on my way."

Buffy hung up. She called Paul's first but there was no answer. Then she called the shop. Willow looked alarmed. "No answer?"

Buffy disconnected. "No answer. Paul was there though, right?"

"Right. He showed up, we left."

Buffy grabbed her keys. "Let's go." They ran to the car and Buffy raced to the shop. The door had been forced open. Paul's gun was lying on the table and a crossbow was lying on the floor, by the counter. Willow found the dart. She held it up and Buffy's face grew desolate. "This is all my fault."

Willow shook her head. "Buffy, don't say that."

"It is. I made him leave. If I hadn't made him leave he'd have been home with me."

"No he wouldn't have. Paul would have picked him up like he has all week and the same thing would have happened. They hadn't even left the store."

Buffy suddenly felt overwhelmed by it all. She sat down and putting her hands over her face she burst into tears. Willow looked at her, her eyes wide and then she reached for the phone. Stymied, she tried to figure out who to call, as the first two people she would normally call were unavailable now, and apparently in serious trouble. She wished Spike were here. Willow hesitated another second and then she called Tara.

They were all there within twenty minutes. Roger, Xander and Anya, Tara and John. None of them knew what to do. Paul and Giles had been taken out the back door, that much they were able to figure out. But the ground out back was all cement so there were no footprints, no sign of a struggle. Paul's car was still parked in front. No one next door had noticed anything but, as it was a music store with music playing quite loudly that wasn't much of a surprise. Plus, over the years, they'd learn to ignore the noises coming from the magic store.

Buffy was pacing. "I can't just sit here. I have to do something. She could be..." Buffy couldn't even finish that sentence. She didn't need to. Everyone's imagination was working overtime. Picking up the crossbow and a few stakes she gestured outside. "I have to go look for her."

Xander stood as well and went to the back to get himself another crossbow. "I'll go with you."

Buffy nodded. Willow was flipping through a book. "Maybe Tara and I can find a spell that will help, help us figure out what happened to them, where she took them. Check in every now and then."

John stood. "I'll go back to your house and wait there, Spike will probably go there first. I'll fill him in."

Anya looked around the shop. "I'll stay here."

Roger nodded. "I'll stay too. Everyone can check in here, periodically." He handed Buffy his cell phone. "Here, take this."

Buffy took the phone and with one last look at everyone she and Xander headed out, John following closely behind.

##

Dru watched them go, delighted that she had what they were looking for and he was so close. Giggling she ran her hands down Giles' face.

Paul woke up first. Opening and shutting his eyes a few times to try and clear them he noticed first that he was laying on the floor and his wrists were chained above his head. And then he noticed that Drusilla was sitting on top of Giles. He lunged for her but the chains prevented him from getting far. He yelled at her. "Get off of him, you bitch."

Drusilla turned her head and looked at Paul. She looked down at her arm. "You shot me. I don't like you." Turning away from him she looked back down at Giles. She leaned forward until her breasts were pressed against his chest and she licked his lips. Then she nuzzled his neck and vamped out.

Paul struggled against his chains but they were strong and he knew it was futile. "Leave him alone."

She looked at him again, her eyes yellow and feral. "I'm going to turn him, and then he's going to kill you." Drusilla laughed. "It will be so much fun." Getting off of Giles she approached Paul. She ran her hand over his body, starting at his knees, running her hand over his crotch, up his chest and finally wrapping her hand around his throat again. "You kept him from me the other night. You wouldn't let me play." She shook her head making a disapproving noise. "You've been very naughty."

Paul was momentarily paralyzed with fear. He knew he wouldn't get out of this room alive, not unless someone found them. But then he got angry again. Angry at everything this woman had done to Giles. He lashed out with one of his feet, kicking her as hard as he could.

Drusilla let out a cry of dismay and she slashed at his leg, her fingernails ripping through his pants to the skin below, making four gouge marks on his thigh. Paul hissed with the pain but then he tried to kick her again. This time she just moved away. Pouting at Paul she moved back over to Giles, straddling him again, her hands running up and down his chest as she softly

hummed to herself. Then she lowered herself down again and kissed him.

Giles woke up, expecting to see Buffy. When he realized it was Dru he let out a cry and tried to turn his head away, scooting back as far as his chains would allow him too. Dru didn't care, she kept on kissing him, holding his head still with her strength, her legs straddling his, preventing him from kicking her.

Paul struggled again against his chains, yelling at her. "Stop it. Let him go."

Finally Dru pulled back. Giles spit in her face. She wiped the spittle off her face and then licked her fingers. She grinned putting her human face back on. "I like spit." She sighed. "You usually like to kiss me. Don't you want to kiss me?"

"I'd rather kiss a pig." Giles tried to dislodge her but her thighs gripped him too firmly.

"I can make you want to kiss me." She crooned at him. "I can make you want to touch me." She writhed against him. "Would you like that?"

Giles turned his head away, keeping his eyes shut tight, trying not to look at her, afraid she would hypnotize him again and make all her threats all too real. She nibbled on his ear lobe and spoke softly to him. "Look at me. Look at me or I'll kill your friend." She crooned again, reaching out a hand to turn his head towards her. "Look at me."

Paul yelled at Giles this time. "Don't look at her. Keep your eyes closed."

Giles kept his eyes closed. "Let him go, you can do what you want with me."

"Giles, shut the hell up."

Dru laughed. "You both have to stay. Miss Edith will be so disappointed if all her guests don't show up." She started to unbutton Giles' shirt. "Open your eyes, Watcher or I'll turn your friend and feed your Slayer to him." Running her hand through his chest hair she suddenly dug in a fingernail and

scratched him deeply.

Giles' eyes opened at the sudden pain. That's all it took. Her eyes caught his and she had him, capturing him easily, the hypnosis easier this time, his brain having gone there so recently, twice. Crooning, fingers undulating before his face she metamorphosed into Buffy right in front of his eyes.

Paul watched in horror as Giles smiled and let out a sigh of relief. "Buffy. Thank God." Dru smiled back at Giles and leaning back down she kissed him again. This time he kissed her back.

Paul started yelling again. "Giles, it's not Buffy. It's Drusilla. Giles. Giles!"

Giles tried to put his arms around Buffy but the chains stopped him. He looked at them in confusion. "Buffy, why am I still chained?"

Paul tried again. "It isn't Buffy. Drusilla's hypnotized you again." Giles turned to look at Paul, his brow furrowed as he tried to comprehend what Paul was saying. Paul kept talking. "Giles, she kidnapped us, she chained us up." Paul rattled his chains as evidence. "She hypnotized you and she's making you think it's Buffy, but it's not."

Giles turned back to look at Buffy. He tried to touch her face but again the chains stopped him. "Buffy?" He closed his eyes.

Dru was tired of this game and she had someone to go meet. She turned Giles' head and vamping out she lowered her head to his neck and bit him.

Giles let out a cry and Paul went crazy. "Get the fuck away from him." Again he tugged on his chains. He screamed at her. "Get off of him." Paul let out a cry of anguish.

Dru pulled away from Giles, his blood dripping from her lips. She had a dreamy look on her face. She got up and wiping off some of the blood she brought it to Paul's lips, making sure she sat on his legs to immobilize him this time. "Taste him, he's so sweet."

"You're a fucking lunatic." Paul fought her, turning his head away.

She brought his head back around and smeared his lips with Giles' blood. "It's only fair. He'll be drinking your blood later." Grinning she stood up and moved away quickly before he could kick her again. Without a word she opened the back door and left them both.

Paul was almost afraid to look at Giles. When he did finally look he let out another cry. He was lying there so still. Paul called to him, his voice thick with fear and tears. "Giles." There was no response. "Oh, God, Giles, talk to me." He wiped his lips off with distaste on his shirtsleeve. "Giles, please, say something." Paul gasped as he thought he saw Giles move. He spoke louder. "Giles, damn it, do something, show me you're alive."

This time Giles moved and groaned.

Paul sagged against his chains, the tears finally falling as relief overwhelmed him. "Giles, are you okay?" Giles opened his eyes and he started to turn his head to look at Paul.

Paul suddenly swallowed. "Oh, God, she didn't turn you into a vampire, did she?"

Giles winced as his head turned and he put his hand up to his neck. Paul's words slowly filtered in and his eyes widened. He looked at Paul with some alarm. "I didn't drink any of her blood, did I?"

Paul shook his head. "No, she just drank yours. Are you all right?"

Giles let out a breath. "I think so. Apparently she just wanted a snack."

"Well, she scared the shit out of me. I thought you were dead."

Giles smiled softly at Paul, noticing the tears, appreciating the concern. He moved a hand to try and run it through his hair but the chains stopped him. Giles dropped his head to his chest and sighed. Then his brow furrowed. "Was Buffy here? Or did I dream that?"

"It was Drusilla. She hypnotized you again."

Giles let out a groan and wiped his lips on his shirtsleeve. "God, I kissed her again?" He looked around. "Where is she?"

"I don't know. She bit you and then she just left."

Giles closed his eyes. "I'm tired."

Paul got nervous. "Do I need to keep you awake? Are you...did she take...?"

Giles looked at Paul. "I'm all right, really. I'm just tired. After a transfusion I'll be good as new." He closed his eyes again. "I'm going to try and contact Buffy. She was able to reach me after Drusilla..." He didn't finish his sentence, moving instead to a new one. "Maybe we can connect again." Taking Paul's silence for agreement, Giles tried to reach out.

##

Buffy suddenly stopped and gasped. She looked at Xander. "It's Giles. He's alive."

Xander looked around. "Where, where is he?"

Buffy tapped her head. "In here."

Xander looked at her with a confused expression on his face but then he remembered about the connection. He grinned. "Where is he?"

Buffy shook his head. "I can't make out any words, all I know is that he's alive."

"Can you follow it? Isn't that how he found you in LA, by following the

connection?"

Buffy nodded. "It's so faint." She closed her eyes, trying hard to read him. After a few minutes she shook her head, frustrated. "Nothing." She looked at Xander. "But at least I know he's alive."

Xander gave her a hug. "And that's majorly of the good."

Buffy couldn't agree more. She pulled out Roger's phone and dialed the Magic Box.

##

Dru waited for him at Giles' house. She knew he'd go there first. Her eyes lit up when she saw his car pull up in front. Dru intercepted him before he got half way up the lawn. "Spike."

Spike glared at Dru. "What the hell are you doing here? I told you to stay away from Sunnydale."

"I have a present for you."

Spike had a sick feeling he knew what that present was. "What is it?"

"Come on, I'll take you there and then you can be free."

Spike grabbed Dru's arm and hauled her up close to him. "Where is he?"

She pushed him away and started to run, laughing, as if she was playing a child's game of tag. Spike swore and took off after her.

John had watched the conversation from the living room, staying out of sight. It hadn't looked like a particularly friendly conversation but John knew too little about Drusilla and Spike's relationship. He called the shop to tell them that

Spike and Drusilla had hooked up, unable to tell them if it was a good thing or a bad thing.

##

Paul watched Giles. He watched him breathe. He didn't want to interrupt in case Giles had gotten through to Buffy but he had gotten so still again that Paul was afraid that each breath he took might be his last. He knew that Giles had told him he was all right but it had been too close. He had felt completely helpless as Drusilla bit him. If she'd wanted to, she could have killed Giles, or worse, as Paul watched, and he wouldn't have been able to do a thing about it. Paul heard a noise out back and his fear increased as he realized she was coming back.

Spike chased Dru right to the Magic Box. But then she slipped in the door next to the back entrance to the shop. Spike followed her in and he saw Paul and Giles. "Bloody hell." He went over to Paul and yanked on his chains.

Paul looked grim. "She bit Giles."

Spike crouched down next to Giles and turned his neck, exposing the bite marks. He made as if to stand when Dru was suddenly behind him. Paul yelled out a warning but it was too late. She hit Spike in the head with a blast from a taser gun and he crumpled to the ground, landing on Giles' legs. Dru giggled and she dragged him across the room and sat down, holding him to her while she sang softly to him.

Spike's fall had startled Giles awake. Moving away defensively he realized it was Spike and that Drusilla was dragging him away. He looked at Paul. "What happened?"

"She blasted him with a taser."

"Why?"

Paul shook his head. "I have no idea."

Dru looked up smiling. "It's so he can be free." She pointed at Giles. "You're his present. His first. He promised me."

Giles looked at her in horror. "You're disabling his chip?"

She touched Spike's head, her fingers creeping across his scalp like a spider. "It speaks to me. It's dying now." She sent Giles and Paul a venomous look. "Soon the only poison he'll have is you."

Dru moved away from Spike and blasted him again, placing the taser against his temple. Spike's body convulsed in response. Giles let out a cry. "Stop that, you're killing him."

Dru cradled Spike again against her breast. "No, I'm saving him." She ran her hands over his scalp again, nodding. "It's so quiet now. It's gone to sleep." She vamped out. "Soon, he'll feed." Laying Spike down gently she walked back over to Giles, sitting on him. "He'll feed on you." She ran her hands down his face and tugged at his lower lip. "But don't worry, I won't let him kill you. I want you too much. We'll make you one of us and then we can play such fun games." She pointed at Paul. "We can play with him."

Giles bucked up against her ferociously, trying to dislodge her. The sudden move was almost successful but she backhanded him across the face, slamming his head against the floor, stunning him. Spike stirred and she turned to him. "Spike, are you waking up?"

Spike groaned. Dru turned Giles' neck to her previous bite mark and she leaned down and bit him again. Before Paul could even let out a cry she rose up. Walking over to Spike she flipped him onto his back. She held his mouth open with one hand and opening her mouth she let the blood in her mouth flow down to his. When she was done and she had captured the few drops of blood that had rolled down his face with her tongue she spoke to him. "Spike, time for your present." Paul watched the scene with horrified eyes, the whole thing too grotesque for words.

Spike licked his lips and smiled. "Dru, I'm trying to sleep." He rolled onto his side.

"Isn't his blood to die for? Don't you want some more?"

Paul yelled at Spike. "Spike, wake up. That's Giles' blood she's making you drink."

Spike's eyes shot open. He licked his lips again. Spike looked at Dru with narrowed eyes. "What the hell did you hit me with?"

She held up the taser. "It made your chip go to sleep. No more talking, no more pain."

"The chip's dead?" Spike couldn't believe it.

She nodded and then she pointed to Giles. "Shall I bring you some more, or do you want to go get it yourself?" She leaned into him. "Time to be free, Spike." She hissed at him. "Turn him, turn the Watcher. And then we'll kill them all."

##

Buffy and Xander swung into the Magic Box. She looked at Willow and Tara. "What did you find?"

"Well, we're not sure it will work but we think we can enhance your connection, just for a few minutes, so you can sense where he is."

"Do it."

Tara had anticipated that response and already had the ingredients assembled. Willow explained. "It will sort of put you in a trance and I don't know how long it will last so when you sense him you have to move fast. Can you sense him at all right now?"

Buffy shook her head, her teeth clenched. "No, I lost it a few minutes ago."

Tara indicated a circle on the floor. "Buffy, you need to sit here."

Buffy moved and sat cross-legged on the floor. "Now what?"

"Think of Giles and we'll do the rest."

Willow started to light candles while Tara lit the herbs she had stirred together. They started to chant.

##

Spike stood, his legs still a little shaky and he walked over to Giles. Crouching down next to him he turned his head again, running his fingers over the puncture wounds, bringing a single drop of blood to his lips. He vamped out. Paul fought against his chains again and his voice was pleading. "Spike, don't."

Dru moved to where Spike was crouching and she ran her hand up and down his back. "Spike, it will be just the old times. You and me and Angel."

Spike grinned. "Just like the old days." He turned around and looked at Dru. "When did you last see Angel, luv?"

"I always see Angel. Once we're done here we'll both go see him, and we'll set him free too. There'll be four of us again."

"Four of us?"

Dru pointed at Giles. "Him. I want him." She giggled and held onto Spike's arm tightly. "Make him one of us."

Spike looked at Giles again. Giles began to stir and he opened his eyes, looking around the room and then straight into Spike's yellow ones. He guessed what was happening. Giles smiled sadly at Spike. "Time to choose."

Spike nodded. "Time to choose." He looked up at Paul and then back at Giles. Then he turned to Dru and smiled at her. Faster than the eye could follow he gripped her around the neck. "Dru, I told you to leave them alone."

Dru tried to push his hands away. "Spike, you can be free now, free of them."

Spike stood, dragging Dru up with him. "Maybe I don't want to be free."

Paul and Giles glanced at each other, stunned that Spike appeared to be choosing them.

Dru lifted her leg up and kneed Spike in the balls. Spike let out a gasp and grabbed himself. Dru ran to Giles and grabbed his head as if she was going to snap his neck.

Spike spun and kicked her away from Giles. "I said, don't touch them."

Dru picked herself up and she lunged at Giles again. Spike intercepted her and the two of them rolled on the ground. Dru got on top and pinned Spike down. She grinned at him. "Spike, don't you love me?" She ground herself against him. "Don't you want me?"

Spike head butted her and she let out a cry of pain. Lashing out she drew blood on his cheek with her fingernails. "Sorry Dru, I guess the magic's gone."

Dru backed away. "I don't understand." Her face was a picture of hurt and confusion. "I don't understand this game you're playing." She threw out a hand taking in Giles and Paul. "They're poisoning you, making you forget who you are."

Spike advanced on Dru. "You're the one who said I liked the poison."

She shook her head. "They're only humans, they're not like us."

"You're right, they are only human."

"So, why? Why would you choose them over me?"

"Because they're family."

Dru looked at him in horror and she began to keen in distress, cowering at his words. "You're dead to me now. My Spike, my beautiful Spike, you make the sky dark with your words."

Spike drew a stake out of his coat pocket. "Time to go visit your stars Dru." Drawing back his arm he thrust the stake into her heart.

##

Buffy's eyes snapped open and she stood, striding purposefully towards the back door. Everyone followed her at a respectful distance. She walked out the door and moved to the door a few feet away, resting her hand on it. She broke out of the trance. Frowning she looked at where she was. "This is as far as I got?" She glared at Willow. "Did I already run out of time?"

Willow grimaced and shrugged. Tara pointed at the door. "Maybe he's in there."

Buffy glanced at the door again. He couldn't have possibly been this close. "Only one way to find out." She kicked the door open and her eyes widened as she watched Spike stake Drusilla. Then she saw Giles and Paul. Letting out a cry she ran in and fell to her knees beside Giles, the rest of the gang behind her.

Spike was looking down at the dust settling on the floor. He threw the stake to the ground and sat down, his hands over his face.

Giles looked up and saw Buffy. He looked at Paul. "Is it really Buffy?"

Paul grinned and nodded. "It's really Buffy."

Giles closed his eyes in relief. Paul rattled his chains. "Buffy, chains?" Then he gestured toward Giles. "She bit him."

Buffy turned Giles' neck and saw the bite marks. Her jaw muscles working she reached for the chains and she pulled. They wouldn't budge. She tried again. She felt someone stand behind her. Turning her head she saw Spike. Spike grabbed a hold of the chains too. "Ready? One-two-three." They both pulled and the chains came out of the wall.

Giles groaned at the sensation of being able to lower his arms. Buffy moved as if to hug him but he shook his head. "Get Paul free."

Buffy and Spike moved over to Paul and working together they pulled his chains out of the wall as well.

Roger moved to Giles' side. "How much blood did she get?"

Giles gave Roger a weary look. "Nothing a transfusion won't fix."

Buffy moved back to Giles' side and this time she pulled him up and wrapped her arms around him. He rested his cheek on her shoulder and just soaked her in. Then he lifted his head up to look for Spike. "Where's Spike?"

Everyone looked around but he was gone. No one had seen him leave. Buffy turned back to Giles. "He staked Drusilla." Her voice was full of wonder.

Giles touched her face and nodded. And then he rested his head on her shoulder again. Roger spoke to Buffy. "We need to get him to the hospital."

Buffy nodded and spoke softly. "Giles, we need to get up."

Giles shook his head. "I can't. I'm too tired."

Roger and Xander moved to him and standing on either side of him, they hoisted him up. Xander coaxed one arm around his shoulder. "Come on G-man. Time to go."

Roger pointed at Paul with his chin, taking in the bruise on his face and the gouges on his leg. "You're going too. I want to check you both over."

Paul nodded. "Let me call the station and have someone meet us there who can take off these chains."

Getting Giles' other arm around his shoulder, Roger helped Xander get Giles out to his car. They all piled into two cars and headed for the hospital.

##

Roger had insisted on keeping Giles in the hospital overnight. Someone from the police station had shown up and removed their chains. John had been called and most everyone had gone home. Roger had declared Paul relatively fit and hale, after patching up his scratches. Giles was given several transfusions when it was determined that his haemoglobin was life threateningly low.

Paul had sat by his side for the first couple of transfusions, fear clutching at his gut as he realized that Giles might have died if Drusilla had decided to leave them there much longer. That he might have watched Giles draw his last breathe as he lay there helplessly chained. Buffy sat on Giles' other side, holding his hand tightly, running her hand down his face. Roger had medicated Giles to keep any blood reaction to a minimum. Between that and the night's events, Giles appeared to be sleeping soundly. Paul caught Buffy's eyes and smiled ruefully at her. "You know what? This week has really sucked."

She snorted. "Tell me about it."

"At least she's dead."

Buffy nodded. "I can't believe Spike staked her. I never thought he'd do that."

"She wanted Spike to turn him, to turn Giles. I was going to be his first meal."

"Spike can't bite anyone."

Paul's lips tightened. "We think maybe he can. We think she made his chip fail by shooting him in the head with the taser gun."

Buffy's jaw dropped. "His chip's not working?"

"That's what Dru said. I guess she could be wrong. Spike left before we could say anything to him."

Buffy's eyes grew nervous. "That could be bad."

Paul shook his head. "I don't think so, at least not for us. He staked Drusilla. He told her that we were family."

"Spike said that?" Buffy's eyes were wide.

Paul nodded. "I don't think he'll hurt us. I think the worst that will happen is that he'll leave." Paul sighed at the thought.

Buffy pursed her lips. "That could be even worse." Spike had been saving Giles on a regular basis lately. She wasn't sure she wanted to not have him around. Besides, he was sort of family. "Where do you think he went?"

Paul shook his head. "I don't know. I didn't even have a chance to thank him." He grinned at Buffy. "Or you. That was quite an entrance."

Buffy grinned back at him. "I try."

Paul let out a short laugh. "Well, I guess I better go. Big day tomorrow."

Buffy scrunched her face up. "Nothing else can go wrong, right?"

Paul put out his hand to stop her. "I'm not touching that question with a ten

foot pole." He pointed outside Giles' hospital room. "I've posted two officers. I know we don't need them but it made me feel better."

Buffy looked so forlorn sitting there that he walked around the bed and gave her a big hug. "It'll be fine, Buffy. He's fine. Drusilla's dead. I called Cordy and Angel's still in LA. You're going to get married tomorrow and then Saturday you'll leave for Carmel and forget all about this place."

"How can we leave if Spike isn't here?"

Paul blew out a breath. "We'll cope. And if things get bad, we'll call you. Besides, he may show up. He may just need to be by himself for a while. He loved her for a long time. It couldn't have been easy for him."

Buffy thought about what it had felt like to kill Angel. "No, you're right." She shook her head. "I still can't believe he did it." Giles mumbled something. Buffy put her head down closer to his lips. "What?" He mumbled again.

Paul moved closer. "What? What's he saying?"

Buffy giggled. "He wants us to go away so he can sleep."

Paul bit back a laugh. "I'm definitely gone. If he's grouchy, he's fine. I'll see you both tomorrow." He grinned at Buffy. "Tell him I'll bring him by a toothbrush in the morning." He ran from the room as Buffy started to look for something to throw at him. Laughing, he looked for his brother, wanting to say goodnight to him before he left.

Buffy kissed Giles on the cheek. "I love you so much."

Giles smiled and turned his head towards hers. "I love you too. Now let me sleep."

The way Giles was sprawled on the bed there really wasn't room for her, not without seriously disturbing him. With a sigh she curled up in the chair next to the bed, still holding his hand. Listening to his steady breathing she finally fell asleep.

##

Thursday: well past the witching hour

Giles was pushing his IV pole before him, making his way back to the bed from the bathroom when he almost ran into someone. A voice spoke to him. "You need to watch where you're going, Watcher."

Giles let out a sharp cry. "Good Lord, Spike, haven't I been jumped at enough this week without you doing it too?"

Spike rolled his eyes. "I was going to ask how you are, but I can see you're fine."

Giles had the grace to look sheepish. He touched Spike's arm. "Thanks to you." Scrutinizing the vampire closely Giles spoke again. "How are you doing?"

Spike shrugged. He pointed to the hospital room. "This place isn't safe for you. Why are you here?"

Giles frowned. "Dru's dead. Paul posted officers and Buffy's here."

Spike snorted. "And so am I. The officers didn't even notice me, and your Slayer's fast asleep. You'd be dead if that's what I wanted."

"Well then I guess it's lucky for me that you don't want me dead."

"Yeah, lucky for you."

"Lucky for all of us." Giles touched Spike's arm again. "Thank you. What you did for us was...it was extraordinary."

Spike looked away. "She just couldn't leave it alone. I'd have gone anywhere with her, all she had to do was leave you alone."

"Well, I'm very grateful, as is Paul. He was sorry he didn't have a chance to talk to you before you vanished."

Spike looked at the floor for a moment. "Can...?" Spike shook his head and started over. "We need to talk."

"What is it Spike?"

Spike shook his head. "Not in here, not around anyone. Can we go...?" He gestured outside the room.

"Of course, I imagine the waiting room is empty at this time of night." Giles started pushing his IV pole as he headed for the door.

The officers looked up as he walked out and then their eyebrows rose as Spike followed him out. Spike patted one of them on the arm. "Good job, officers. I'm sure Giles here will rest easier knowing that you're both on the job making sure no one goes in his room." Sneering at them he caught up with Giles.

Giles sent him a sideways glance. "Must you always be so pleasant?"

"I'm a vampire, remember? Pleasant isn't in my nature."

"Neither is saving humans but you seem to be making a habit of that."

Spike snorted, but didn't respond. The waiting room was empty so they entered it and sat down. Spike pulled out a pack of cigarettes but Giles glared at him and he put them away. Spike got up and started to pace. Giles gave him a few minutes but then he finally couldn't stand it anymore. "Spike, is your chip still working?"

Spike swung around and faced Giles. "I don't know."

Giles' eyebrows rose. "You don't know?" Spike shook his head and let out a short laugh. He started to pace again. Giles couldn't believe that Spike hadn't tried to find out. He stood up, holding on to his pole. "Hit me."

Spike looked at him, his expression incredulous. "I'm not going to hit you."

"Let's find out. You don't have to hit me hard."

"The chip doesn't work unless I mean to hurt you."

Giles winced. "That's all right. I'm ready."

Spike glared at Giles. "You're out of your friggin' mind is what you are. If I hit you now, I'd probably kill you, not to mention the fact that Buffy would stake me."

"We need to know."

"Does it matter that much?"

"What do you mean? Of course it matters."

"Why? Is that the only reason you trust me? Because I'm neutered, because it creates the illusion that I can't hurt you?"

Giles sat down. He took off his glasses and ran a hand over his face. Glancing up at Spike he saw several emotions run across the vampire's face, and Giles watched as Spike desperately tried to look as if it didn't matter to him how Giles answered his question. But Giles knew that it did matter, and it would determine whether Spike stayed or not. Giles smiled tightly. "I suppose it has been just an illusion, hasn't it?" He put his glasses back on. "I can't speak for everyone."

"I'm not asking you to speak for everyone. I'm asking you, you either trust me or you don't."

"Ah, my turn to choose, Spike?"

Spike nodded. "That's right, Watcher. Your turn."

Giles gazed up at Spike. Spike met his gaze and the two of them stared at each other for quite some time. Giles' hand rose to his neck and he felt the puncture marks there and he saw in his mind's eye Spike staking Drusilla. He nodded. "I trust you, chip or not." He saw something in Spike relax. "But, it's not that simple."

Spike grew guarded again. "What's not that simple?"

"If the chip isn't working, will you try and feed on humans?"

"Those meditations that you taught Buffy. Can you teach them to me?"

Giles smiled at the implied answer. "Yes." He looked up at Spike. "You understand that just because I trust you doesn't mean they all will. I don't know how Roger and Linda..."

Spike interrupted him. "You don't know if they'd want me around Kevin? This is all his blasted fault."

Giles' eyes opened wide. "Excuse me?"

"Things were going great with Dru, well, not great, but okay. Then she wants to feed on this kid." Spike stopped, letting out a disgusted noise and he started to pace again.

Giles gazed at Spike with a great deal of affection. "You stopped her?"

Spike nodded. "I kept thinking that it could be Kevin, that it could be Roger and Linda getting the news that their kid was dead." Spike ran his hand through his hair, disgusted. "A bleeding conscience. Where the hell did that come from?"

Roger, his eyes bright, watched from the hallway, awakened by one of the officers when Giles had gone for his stroll with Spike.

Spike continued. "All bloody night she kept going after kids, Jesus H. Christ, she kept me running."

"Did she feed on any of them?"

Spike shook his head. "No. She finally got away from me so she might have then but not while I was with her. Then when she got home she started in on me about how I'd been poisoned by you. That's when she must have decided to go after you." He glared at Giles. "I'm still a bloody vampire, conscience or not. I'm not about to go all sweetness and light."

Giles grinned. "I have little fear of that." Giles touched his neck again. "Does a Watcher's blood really taste different, or was that Drusilla being crazy?" Giles wasn't sure why he wanted to know.

Spike grinned. "It was pretty sweet. But I don't know if it's the fact that you're a Watcher, or if it's the magic in you. I've never fed on a Watcher before today."

Giles scowled. "And let's just assume that you never will again." He stood. "But let's find out about your chip. Hit me."

Roger stepped into the room. "Giles, don't be stupid, you're in no shape to get hit by a vampire."

Spike rolled his eyes. "How long have you been standing there?"

"Long enough. Why don't you hit me instead?"

"I'm not going to hit you either."

"Come on, this would be good to know. When Buffy was hallucinating from

that antidote it would have come in handy if you could have restrained her."

Giles nodded. "Very handy. And you could sit on Paul when he goes off half cocked."

Roger looked at Giles. "Or when you do." Giles let out an affronted noise and Roger grinned. He tapped Spike on the shoulder. "Come on, let's find out. Hit me."

Spike looked up at the ceiling, as if looking for guidance. Buffy spoke from the doorway. "How about you hit me?" They all turned to face Buffy.

Spike rolled his eyes. "So much for this private conversation."

Giles looked at Buffy and then back at Spike, and his eyes lit up. "You could spar with Buffy, and I could actually see what it feels like to not be bruised, not to mention that it would be much easier to observe her." He gestured at Buffy. "Would you mind letting Spike hit you?"

"Not if I can hit him back."

Spike moved to face her and bounced a couple of times on his feet. Then he hauled back and punched her in the stomach.

She doubled over. "Hey, I didn't say you could hit me in the stomach."

"Well, I didn't think you'd want bruises on your face for your wedding."

"Oh, good point, thanks." She stood up and stared at Spike. "That didn't hurt you, did it?"

Spike shook his head. "No, not even a tingle." He grinned at Buffy. "Other than the pleasure of getting to wallop on the Slayer."

"Yeah, well if I start sparring with you you'll be lucky to land a punch."

"In your dreams, Slayer. You'll be lucky if you can stand."

"Just so we're clear, you may be a part of this family but you still aggravate the hell out of me."

"That works both ways."

Buffy grinned. "I can live with that." Then she moved forward and gave Spike a big hug. Giles and Roger shared a grin at the astonished look on Spike's face. Buffy let go and looked up at Spike. "Thanks for today. I owe you, big time." She moved past him and went to sit next to Giles, wrapping her arms around him. "I was spooked when I woke up and you were gone."

Giles pointed to Spike who was still standing there, nonplussed. "Spike wanted to talk to me privately."

Spike stared at the three of them. "You're all daft."

Giles chuckled. Roger slapped Spike on the back. "Come early tonight, as soon as it's dark. You can sit on Giles if he gets the last minute jitters."

Buffy stood and reached down her hand to help Giles up. "You need to get back in bed so you can at least stand tomorrow night." She smiled ruefully at Roger. "At least I know if he tries to run, he won't get far."

Giles laughed again. He took Buffy's hand and stood but then he spoke to her. "Let me have another minute with Spike. I'll be right there."

Buffy frowned. "Well, make it quick. You shouldn't even be out of bed." Gathering up Roger she left the waiting room.

Spike gestured to her with a thumb over his shoulder. "And you're marrying that?"

Giles snorted. "This whole week has been rough on her. All her hover and

protect genes are on full alert."

"So, what'd you want to talk to me about?"

"It's a favor, actually, or just reassurance."

"Spit it out, Watcher."

Giles hesitated a moment. "I do trust you, Spike. But, I can't imagine that this choice you're making will be easy for you, especially now that you know that you could feed on humans if you wanted to." Giles pinched the bridge of his nose. "If you feel the urge I'd like you to come and talk to me, tell me, let me see if I can help."

"Thinking of starting a twelve step program for vampires?"

Giles smiled. "I guess I just want you to know that I don't expect this to be easy for you and if I can help in any way, I will." He spoke again. "Obviously Roger trusts you, and I expect Linda will too. But we'll need to let everyone else know." At the alarmed look on Spike's face Giles qualified his sentence. "Well, not everyone, but everyone here, in Sunnydale, and Cordelia, of course. Although we'll have to make sure she doesn't tell Angel. In fact we should probably keep quiet about Drusilla as well. If Angel is working with her that could really send him over the edge."

Spike snorted. "Well then you better be the one to tell Cordelia to keep her mouth shut because if Paul tries to tell her the first thing she'll do is get on the phone and call Angel."

Giles sighed. "He does seem to be a significant source of contention between the two of them."

"It'll get worse."

Giles sighed again. "Well, I'll make sure she doesn't tell Angel. And I'm sure John can be persuaded not to share this information with the Council."

"Suppose someone's not okay with it, with me hanging around?"

"Depending on who it is, we'll take a vote and decide who gets cast out."
Giles grinned at Spike.

"You're a bloody comedian."

"Do you really think so?"

"No."

Giles laughed and he started pushing his pole back to his room. He turned to Spike. "Go see Paul."

"It's late."

"He won't care." Spike nodded and without another word he headed down the hall to the exit. Giles entered his room and Buffy was standing there waiting for him. He held on to her tightly and smiled. "I hope that's the last surprise this week."

"At least it was a good one." She frowned. "I think."

Giles sat on the bed and she sat next to him. "I do believe he'd never do any of us harm."

"I believe that too, I just...it's like he got a soul or something. It's just weird."

Giles tried to lay back and Buffy assisted him, then she crawled over him and lay down next to him, resting her head on his chest. Giles rested his cheek on the top of her head. "It is as if he's gotten a soul. He said it himself tonight, that he'd developed a conscience, much to his dismay."

"Do you think something happened to him? Maybe the Powers That Be zapped him when he wasn't looking?"

"That seems more likely than the thought that just being with us changed him that much."

"Hey, we're pretty great."

Giles chuckled, his chest vibrating beneath her cheek. "That we are, my love, but I don't know that we have the power to transform vampires."

"Well something did. And whatever the reason, it's pretty clear that we're important to him, or at least you are. Important enough to kill Drusilla over." Buffy snaked her arm around him and squeezed tightly. "She could have killed you so easily, or turned you." Her voice was taut with the terror of that thought.

"Sshh. It's all right. It all worked out."

"I still agree with Paul. This week has totally sucked."

"I agree as well. But, it will end wonderfully. This time tomorrow you'll be my wife."

Buffy pulled her head up to look at him and she smiled. "And you'll be my husband."

Giles lifted his head up and kissed her. "And if you expect me to perform my husbandly duties, you better let me get some more sleep."

Buffy let out a snort. "I'm not the one who was out of bed cavorting with vampires in the middle of the night."

"We were hardly cavorting."

"How do you cavort, anyway?"

"I'll show you tomorrow night."

Buffy giggled and then she sighed, nestling in deeper against Giles' side.

##

Paul was still awake when he heard the knock on his door. Every time he tried to close his eyes all he saw was Drusilla sucking the life out of Giles. Slipping out of bed he walked to his front door. When he saw who was on the other side of it he opened it wide. "Spike." He moved out of the way so Spike could enter.

Spike walked in but glared at him. "What is with you people? Do you all have a death wish? How do you know I can't just kill you now?"

Paul rolled his eyes. "Is this a trick question? Is there actually a right answer?" He grinned at Spike. "I'm glad to see you. I'm glad you stopped by. Did you go see Giles?"

Spike nodded. "Just came from there. He seems all right."

Paul clasped Spike's arm. "Thanks to you." He held on tight. "I can't ever thank you enough for what you did."

Spike put out his hand. "Don't even think about hugging me. The Slayer hugging me was bad enough."

Paul started to laugh and dropped his hand. "Buffy hugged you? You poor thing. How ever did you stand it?"

"Well, at least she let me hit her."

"You hit Buffy?" Paul figured it out. "Ah, to see if the chip is working?" At Spike's nod he spoke again. "And?"

"No pain."

"And Giles knows this?"

Spike nodded again. His eyes drifted down to the small table he was standing next to. Spike's eyes widened. He picked up two baseball tickets.

Paul watched his face. "Want to go see a game?"

Spike looked like a kid for a minute. "For real?"

Paul nodded. "Those are for us. It's not for a while, but it's a night game and they're pretty good seats." He paused. "You can't eat anyone while you're there."

"Ha ha. You and Giles both suck at comedy."

"What did Giles say?"

"You mean that he thought was funny?"

"No, about your chip not working."

"Exactly what you'd think. That I can't bite anyone, not and stay here. He offered to start a support group for vampires who are trying to kick the habit."

Paul snickered but then he turned a serious gaze on the vampire. "I want you to stay. And not just because of what you did today. I know you hate this mushy stuff but I think of you as friend, a good friend, and I'd miss you if you left."

Spike nodded but didn't respond. He put the tickets down but he ran his fingers over them a couple of times. "I'm still a vampire, I'm still..."

"Spike, you're what you've always been. No one will expect that to change, I

won't in any case. You're a pain in the butt, you poke at everyone's weaknesses, you love violence, and you hate that you like us all so much. But if you stay, you're going to have to deal with the fact that the secret will be out. We're all going to know that you do like us, that you chose to be with us. No hiding that any more."

Spike scowled. "Nobody better say it out loud."

Paul barked out a laugh. "Do you want to stay here tonight? I've been fixing up the basement as a guest bedroom. There are curtains on all the windows. You're welcome to stay there any time you want."

Spike grimaced. "So I can hear you and Cordelia caterwauling when you're shagging?"

Paul rolled his eyes. "First of all, she's hardly ever here. Second of all my bedroom is on the second floor so there'd be two floors between us." Paul could see that Spike's discomfort level with this conversation was growing acute. He tried to make the whole thing as casual as he could. "Look, stay or don't stay, I don't care. You know where the door is to the basement." He pointed to the table to where a key was laying near the tickets. "There's the key to the outside door. There's some blood down there in the refrigerator and a TV hooked to cable. Do what you want. I'm going to bed." With that Paul yawned and turning his back on Spike he headed to his bedroom.

Paul leaned against the door, listening to see what Spike would do. Spike would guess of course if he went down there that the room had been set up for him. But Spike stayed around he was going to have to get used to having friends, whether he liked it or not.

Spike just stood there. What the hell had happened to him? Yesterday he had been with Dru, feeding on fresh blood, relishing in the experience of being a demon. Now Dru was dead, the Slayer had hugged him, a Watcher trusted him, and he had a ticket to go to a baseball game with a human who thought of him as a friend. Staying here at Paul's would make it easier to change. He knew that. It would be easier to not feed if he had a place to go, someone to hang out with, if the reason he was even thinking about denying his demon was in his face all the time.

But a large part of him wanted to go out that door and off into the night, find

someone stupid enough to be out walking alone at this time of night, and feed. The thought of that thrilled him. He could feed again, for the first time in two years. Spike was sure that he could still feed and kill and lie to these people about it. He could pull it off, as long as he fed out of town. No one would ever know. He could still protect them, and they'd never be the wiser. Surely he had the right to do it at least once. To feel his fangs puncture someone's skin and suck them dry. The longing for it was so strong it almost made him dizzy.

He headed for the front door. He could feel his demon chortling. In fact, it said to him, you could feed on Paul. Spike slid down the door until he was sitting on the floor. How was he supposed to do this? How could he spend an eternity dealing with this longing and saying no to it? No one was that strong. And yet it had been so clear this evening. Even right after he realized the chip didn't work there was no doubt in his mind about who was walking out that door. The rage he had felt towards Dru for daring to hurt his family had swept all doubt away. His family.

Spike let out a short laugh. What was that stupid twelve-step mantra? He remembered it and laughed again. "One friggin' day at a time." He sighed. "Bugger it." Spike stood and walking to the table he scooped up the baseball tickets and then headed for the basement door.

Paul smiled as he heard Spike's steps heading downstairs. He crawled back into bed. Paul could feel sleep descend on him and he laughed a little, realizing that even with a vampire in his basement who could come into his room and kill him at anytime, that he could sleep better now knowing he was here.

With This Ring 6

Friday early evening:

Giles, Paul and Roger were donning their tuxedos at Buffy and Giles' house. All the women were getting prepared at Linda and Roger's. No one could actually believe that the time had arrived. Spike was assigned to Giles with orders to stick to him like glue. He had smiled with satisfaction when he had not been able to get in the house.

After Giles invited him in he had scowled at Giles. "About bloody damn time."

"Shut up, Spike." Giles was pacing.

Spike grinned. "Feeling a little nervous there Watcher? Having second thoughts?"

Giles just glared at him. All three men were wearing classic black tuxedos with black bow ties. Even Spike was impressed. He stared at them, nodding his head. "Very dapper."

Giles rolled his eyes. "Well, I can certainly rest easier now knowing that you approve."

Spike looked at Paul and Roger. "Has he been like this all day?"

Roger grinned. "Just about. Buffy got Giles discharged from the hospital at the crack of dawn and then arrived at my house at about eight this morning with strict orders to not let Giles near her. She wanted to go for at least twelve hours of not seeing the bride, sort of insurance so nothing else will go wrong. He's been grumpy all day."

Giles glared at Roger. "Well excuse me, I've had a rough week."

Roger let out a short laugh. "Which is why we're letting you get away with it. Now stand still so I can pin this on." Roger was attempting to pin a boutonnière on Giles. "Linda is so much better at this than I am."

Spike brushed his hands away. "Here, I'll do it." Within seconds he had the boutonnière in place, straightening the sprigs of Lily of the Valley's with a sure hand.

Giles looked down in surprise. "Where did you learn to do that?"

Spike shrugged. "Dru liked corsages." He moved to pin on Roger and Paul's boutonnières as well.

Giles' lips tightened. "I'm sorry, Spike. I'm sorry it had to come down to that."

Spike shrugged again. There wasn't really anything to say. He stood back and gazed at the three men again. "You'll do."

Cordelia walked into the living room. She gasped. "Oh my God, you are all so handsome." She walked up and kissed Paul hard on the lips. Leaning against him she looked at Giles. "Buffy is gonna flip when she sees you."

Giles grinned and with nervous hands he fixed the lines of his jacket. "Really?"

Cordy nodded and rested her head back on Paul's chest. Spike snapped his fingers at her. "Hey, be careful of the flowers."

She turned her head and was nose to nose with Paul's boutonnière. She glared at Spike. "Relax already. What are you anyway? The wedding planner? Sheesh."

Spike pursed his lips. "So, Angel behaving himself?"

Cordelia just glared at him and refused to answer. Paul glared at him too. "No Angel conversations today, of any kind. Please."

Spike shut up. Cordelia already knew about him. He suspected that they all did, the news seemed to be traveling fast. What amazed him even more was that no one seemed to give a rat's ass. He didn't understand that at all. Even Xander had been all right. Well, more or less. Xander had been the first person he'd seen when he'd gotten to Roger's. Xander had just looked at him for a moment and then he'd spoken. "Look, I'm not crazy about it, but I figure anyone who kills his 120 year old psycho vampire girlfriend to save Giles' life and who hates deadboy is okay in my book. Just don't go all fangy on me and we'll get along. Clear?" Willow and Tara had acted as if nothing had changed at all. And Linda had given him a kiss on the cheek and told him thank you. He still didn't know what that was for.

Kevin barreled in, interrupting Spike's thoughts and skidded to a stop, his

eyes wide. "Wow." He just looked from one tuxedoed man to the next. Then he looked up at Spike. "I'm supposed to tell you that they're ready for you guys and that you're supposed to walk Giles over and make sure nothing attacks him."

Spike made a face. "Let me guess. Buffy's orders?"

Kevin nodded and looked back at the three men. "You look so different." Kevin made as if to bolt again but Spike's hand flashed out and stopped him. "Let me walk you and Cordy over first. Then I'll come back and bring the three musketeers."

Cordy kissed Paul and squeezed his hand. She whispered something in his ear and his face flushed. When Cordy had walked away from him Spike turned to Paul and mouthed the word *caterwauling* to him. Only Kevin's presence kept Paul from flipping Spike a bird. Spike grinned and headed out the door with Cordy and Kevin.

Giles looked at his two friends. He shook his head. "Now that we're here I don't know what to say."

Paul put a hand on Giles' shoulder. "You don't need to say a thing."

Roger put a finger to his eye. "Besides if you do you'll make my mascara run."

Giles let out a short laugh but then his face grew serious. "I love you both." He blushed a little at his confession, public acclamations unusual and still uncomfortable for him.

Neither Paul nor Roger felt capable of uttering a word so they just smiled at him, their eyes suspiciously bright. Giles cleared his throat and picked up a box that had been sitting on the coffee table. "I was told that it was customary to buy the best man a gift, but I wanted to get you both something." He handed it to Roger. "Sort of a reminder of how we met."

Roger opened the box and grinned, showing the contents to Paul. "Darts, our own set of professional darts. We won't have to use Frank's ratty old ones anymore."

Paul picked one up. "Frank's coming tonight, isn't he?"

Giles nodded. "He's bringing somebody."

Roger grimaced. "I hope it's not Kathleen. I'd hate for her to start wailing as you say your vows." He started to laugh at the horrified expression on Giles' face. "I'm kidding. He knows better than that."

Paul tested the dart, moving it back and forth in the air. "Anyone coming that we don't know?"

"Buffy has an aunt and a couple of cousins who showed up early this afternoon." He shuddered. "They were supposed to have arrived last night. Thank God their car broke down. Her name is Eileen and I can't for the life of me remember the cousins' names. You met Wes, Fred and Gunn already." He grinned. "I did manage to dissuade Anya from putting a sign in the window inviting all our customers." Paul and Roger both grinned at that. Giles looked at Paul. "And you made arrangements for whoever is actually marrying us."

Paul nodded. "Yeah, I've known him a long time. He's one of the Judges at the County Courthouse. His name's Peter Benedict." Paul reverently replaced the dart. "These are great, thanks. I can't wait to use them

Roger grinned. "I'll whip your butt with these darts too, you know."

Paul sighed. "One day, one day you'll lose and I hope I'm there to see it."

They all looked up as Spike entered the living room. "You ready?"

Giles took a deep breath. "I'm ready."

##

Buffy was a nervous wreck. Willow and Linda watched her pace and chant.

"Everything's fine. Nothing else could possibly go wrong, right? No, everything's going to be perfect. Spike's getting Giles, right? Maybe I should go get him. No, he can't see me. Okay, I'm okay." She stopped and turned to them and asked for the hundredth time. "How do I look?"

Linda laughed. "You look gorgeous, Buffy, as gorgeous as you looked five minutes ago. That dress is stunning." She looked at Willow. "And so is yours. Buffy really is a true friend, picking such a lovely bridesmaid dress that you might actually be able to wear again. Every wedding I've been in the dresses have been hideous and I couldn't get rid of them fast enough."

Buffy was dressed in a beautiful white gown. It was form fitting over the bodice, accentuating her curves, then at the waist it swept into a full skirt with lace and embroidery on the lower part, attached to it was a sheer embroidered train. It had a low cut back filled in with several strings of crystal beads. Her hair was swept up with more crystals sparkling amongst her curls. Willow was wearing a pale yellow satin two-piece dress, the top plain, the lower half also covered with lace and embroidery. Both women held bouquets of white and yellow chrysanthemums tied up with yellow ribbon.

Buffy turned to Linda. "I can't believe I forgot my Aunt Eileen was coming. Suppose they had shown up last night?"

Linda adjusted one of Buffy's hair crystals. "Well, just be grateful for that little bit of luck. You certainly deserved it."

Buffy smiled at Linda. "Thank you for putting up with me and them all day. And thank you for making this place so beautiful." She looked at Willow. "You too, and Tara, and for all the magic you did, too." Her eyes grew bright. "I really love you guys."

Willow's eyes grew wide with alarm. "No crying. Stop it. You'll wreck your makeup."

Buffy let out a soggy laugh. "Sorry, I can't help it. I can't believe it's really here, I can't believe it's really happening. I can't believe that Giles is alive." Buffy waved at her face as if the breeze would help keep the tears away.

Linda turned away for a moment, overcome again at the life this young

woman led and that her fears for her wedding had to include the possible death of her fiancé Not to mention that he almost had died and today could have been spent planning a funeral instead of decorating a house for a wedding.

Cordy poked her head in. "Spike's bringing them over." She grinned at Buffy. "You look beautiful. And wait until you see Giles, he's gorgeous." With one last grin she pulled her head back and disappeared.

Buffy looked at Willow. "Do you believe that I'm marrying Giles?"

Willow giggled. "No. I mean yes, but no." She pointed a finger at Buffy and taunted her. "You're marrying the tweedy, stuffy librarian."

Linda laughed at them both. "Let me go get the music started and make sure everyone's in their positions, and then I'll bring Paul back with me."

Buffy blew out a big breath. "Okay." She looked at Willow. "How do I look? Everything's fine, right? Spike will take care of Giles, right?" She blew out another breath and started pacing again.

##

Spike walked out the door first putting a hand up to stop Giles. Looking in both directions he stayed still for a moment. Paul and Roger flashed each other a nervous grin, neither one of them wanting to even consider the possibility that something else could go wrong. Spike lowered his hand and allowed the three men out. There was no way he wasn't getting Giles alive to that house. Taking Giles firmly by the arm he began escorting him at a rapid pace across the yard. Paul and Roger kept even, Roger next to Giles and Paul one step behind him.

Xander was watching for them and as they neared the house he opened the door, beckoning them in. After they got in he shut the door behind them and let out a sigh of relief. All of them did, feeling as if they had just accomplished something remarkable. Giles could feel the protective magic sizzling in the air. Xander slapped Giles on the arm. "Hey big guy, I'm gonna go tell Buffy that

you made it."

Giles nodded distractedly and Xander grinned. He headed down the hallway to the master bedroom and then knocked. Willow opened the door and Xander spoke into his watch. "The eagle has landed. I repeat, the eagle has landed."

Buffy heard and dropped down on the bed. "Thank God." From now on, she'd be with him, able to protect him.

Willow grinned at Xander. "Thanks."

Xander nodded, grinning, and shut the door.

##

Linda met the three men in the kitchen where Spike had left them. She let out an appreciative whistle. "Yum." Grinning she pointed down the stairs towards the great room for Giles and Roger and she took a hold of Paul's arm to take him to Buffy.

As Linda led Paul away Roger turned to Giles and straightened his bowtie. "Relax, Giles." Giles blew out a breath and shook out his arms. Roger's eyebrows rose. "You're not nervous about getting married, are you?"

Giles shook his head. "No, it's just doing it in front of all those people."

Roger laughed. "Just pretend you're about to give them all a talk about demons."

"A talk that Aunt Eileen and Frank's date will surely appreciate."

"Don't give the talk, Giles. Pretend." He shook his head at his friend, amused that a man who faced death on a much too frequent basis from unimaginable evil was nervous about facing twenty humans. "Besides most of them are

your friends, people you hang with on a daily basis."

"I know. I know." He looked at Roger. "You have the rings?"

Roger grinned. "Ah, the obligatory best man question. I was hoping you'd ask. Yes, I have the rings."

Linda walked back into the kitchen. "Are you still here? Go on, scoot." She shooed them with her hands. "You don't want Buffy to walk in and not have you standing there."

Roger grabbed Giles by the arm. "Come on, prepare to meet your doom."

Giles stared at Roger with mock horror. "Please find a different phrase to use."

Laughing, Roger pulled Giles down the stairs.

##

Xander had been watching the two of them from the other side of the kitchen. He grinned at Linda. "Giles with jitters. Not a pretty site." The front doorbell rang and he frowned. "Everyone's here, aren't they?"

Linda nodded. "Everyone who RSVP'd."

"Well, I'll go see who it is. Why don't you find Spike, just in case."

Linda nodded again and turned. She saw Kevin racing down the hallway. "Kevin." He turned. "Go find Spike, send him to the front door." Kevin nodded and raced off. Linda grinned. Kevin always knew where Spike was. She walked down the stairs that Roger and Giles had just descended and looked around the room with satisfaction.

The room was very large, the length of the house and between Buffy and the rest of them, Buffy doing the lion's share of the work, they had moved all the furniture out. Then the fun had begun and the results looked magical. The color theme was ivory and soft yellow. The fireplace mantel was set with a row of yellow and ivory pedestal candles with some ferns interspersed, creating a perfect contrast.

There were dozens of vases filled with white and yellow chrysanthemums placed around the room. The rest of the great room was bedecked with votive candles and strings of white Christmas lights and with the lights slightly dimmed it made the whole room appear dreamlike.

White chairs had been rented and were presently filled with guests, eagerly awaiting the ceremony. All were present and accounted for, the family she'd come to know and love so much in such a short period of time, and a few extras thrown in for good measure. Buffy would come around from the master bedroom, enter down these stairs and be escorted up the middle aisle to the front.

Casting her eyes up she saw the Judge standing there, looking quite grand in his robes, Giles and Roger standing next to him. The photographer was making a final check on his video equipment, a camera slung around his neck. Linda could hear the gentle solo guitar music playing on the stereo system. Kevin's job was to switch the CD changer to Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring for the processional as soon as she gave him the signal. Linda sighed again. Perfect.

##

Xander opened the door and saw a man he thought he recognized. "Can I help you?"

"Is this where the Summers-Giles wedding is?"

"Maybe. Who are you?"

"I'm Hank Summers, Buffy's dad."

Xander's jaw dropped. "Mr. Summers?"

"Do I know you?"

"I'm Xander, one of Buffy's best friends." He shook his head. "Never mind, it's been a long time." He frowned at Hank. "A very long time."

"Can I come in?" Xander backed away from the door and let out a sigh of relief when Hank stepped across the threshold. Not a vampire, then. "The wedding's about to start, you just made it."

"May I see my daughter?"

Xander shook his head. "No, not right now."

Hank's eyes narrowed. "Excuse me, but I'd like to see Buffy."

Xander let out a small sound of disgust. "You're kidding me, right?"

Hank shook his head. "Now."

Xander looked up and saw that Spike had entered the foyer and was watching the conversation. He turned his attention back to Hank. "So, let me get this straight. After not getting in touch with Buffy for more than two years, after letting her deal with the illness and death of her mom with no help of any kind from you, without sending an RSVP even letting her know you were coming to the wedding or that you even cared, I'm supposed to just let her see you two minutes before she's about to get married and deal with this?" He shook his head. "I don't think so. You can talk to her after the ceremony's over."

Hank tried to push Xander aside. "She's my daughter. I have the right to..."

Xander put his hand on Hank's chest. "Right now, you have no rights. She already has someone walking her down the aisle, she's happy, she's about to

marry a guy she's crazy about, that we're all crazy about and you're not blowing that for her."

"Who's walking her down the aisle?"

Xander let out a sigh. "Buddy, you have a choice, you can make this a nice thing for Buffy that you're here, or you can leave."

"You can't talk to me that way."

Spike walked up close. "Yes, he can. And so can I. So tell me you're going to play nice or I'll throw you out the front door."

Hank stood up tall and straight. He had quite a few inches on Spike and at least thirty pounds. "Are you threatening me?"

Spike grinned. "Yes."

Hank was about to retort with anger when he saw the deadly intent in the man's eyes. He swallowed. "She's my daughter."

Spike pressed him against the door, his hand replacing Xander's on Hank's chest. "I don't care. Nothing is going to ruin this night. Nothing." He asked again. "So, are you planning on behaving and keeping your mouth shut, or are you leaving, the hard way?"

Hank looked at Xander, hoping for some assistance but Xander was grinning at Spike. Kevin came racing by. "She's about to come out." Grinning with delight Kevin raced for the CD player, his finger poised.

Spike looked at Hank. "Time's up." He pulled Hank away from the door and reached for the doorknob.

Hank had no idea what was going on but he wasn't leaving. "All right, all right." As Spike removed his hand, Hank straightened out his suit jacket.

Spike grabbed his arm and moved him out of the line of sight, not wanting Buffy to see her dad when she walked by. Hank tried to pull his arm back but the man's grip was incredible and he was unable to. Spike grinned again. "We'll wait here. Once she's past I'll take you downstairs. And you say anything or do anything I don't like, you'll be on your face in the front yard."

Xander bit off a laugh and moved into the living room, wanting to see Buffy but also be able to run interference if Hank somehow got out of Spike's grip. Not that he expected him to. Xander grinned. Having an unchipped vampire around was obviously going to come in handy sometimes. Rocking back and forth on his feet, he kept his eyes focused on the hallway.

##

Paul slipped into the room and just stared at Buffy. Finally he found his tongue. "You look fabulous."

Buffy grinned. "Will he like it?" She spun around, showing him the back of the dress.

Paul snorted. "He'll try to meet you halfway up the aisle." He walked over to her and kissed her softly on the cheek. Then he looked at Willow. "You look beautiful too."

Willow smiled, and she pirouetted as well. "I love this dress."

Paul smiled at her and then he looked back at Buffy. "You ready?"

Buffy nodded and then she let out a squeal. "I can't believe it's happening."

Paul touched her cheek. "It's happening. And I can't imagine anyone I'd rather have my best friend marry than you. Even if you were my daughter, I couldn't be prouder of you."

Willow smacked him on the arm. "Don't. You'll make her cry."

Buffy was grabbing a tissue. "Too late." She let out a soggy giggle, dabbing at her eyes. Buffy reached up and gave Paul a hug. "I'm so glad you're walking me down the aisle." She let out a breath and pulled back, looking at Willow. "Is my face still on?"

Willow grinned. "Yup."

Linda poked her head in. "It's time."

Willow gave Buffy a hug and then she headed out the door, Linda right behind her, telling Kevin to make the music louder, signifying the start of the procession.

Paul crooked his arm, offering it to Buffy. She wound her arm through his and she smiled up at him. Then she blew out another breath and nodded. Placing his hand over hers they waited for Linda to give them the signal.

She waved them out and they walked and stood in the living room. Linda watched by the steps, waiting for Willow to get up by the Judge. Xander's jaw dropped when he saw Buffy. Buffy grinned at his reaction and her hold tightened on Paul's arm. Paul winced. "Buffy, you're bruising me."

Buffy looked up in apology. "I'm sorry. I'm just so excited."

Paul softly laughed. "It's okay. Bruise away, it's for a good cause." He touched a tendril of her hair.

Buffy panicked. "Is my hair okay?"

Paul laughed. "Your hair is fine. You look perfect."

Hank could see Buffy in the mirror and watched her talk with the man by her side. Hank wondered who he was, and how he had gotten so close to his daughter. Overwhelmed for a moment by sadness Hank realized that he didn't even know this stunning young woman. When had she grown up?

Linda nodded to Kevin and Kevin switched the music. Then he bounded past

Buffy and leaped down the stairs. Linda rolled her eyes and then grinning she turned to Paul and gestured with her hands. Fighting back tears already she watched as Paul proudly walked down the stairs with Buffy on his arm.

##

Giles heard the music get louder and he looked up to see Willow heading down the stairs. She stopped for a moment at the end of the runner and then getting the rhythm of the music she began her march up the aisle. When she got up by the Judge she flashed Giles a big grin and he grinned back. She looked lovely, and Giles' heart was full of affection and love as he grinned at her.

This time Giles heard the music change. He looked towards the back of the room and saw her, and she stole his breath away. If Roger hadn't moved a little closer and grabbed his upper arm he'd have run to her. His bride. His heart was so full of love for her he didn't know if he'd survive. Roger grinned at the look on his face and he exchanged a grin with his brother.

Paul was having a hard time trying not to laugh. It was taking every bit of his strength to keep Buffy from running down the aisle towards Giles. She didn't have eyes for anything else. He was finally going to be hers. She felt a thrilling rush of possessiveness flow through her, that this gorgeous, wonderful man was hers.

Spike escorted Hank down the stairs. He pointed to one of the few empty seats in the back row. Hank sat down and could feel the man move to stand behind him. Xander walked down the side aisle and sat down next to Anya, feeling that Spike had things well in hand.

Hank looked up at the front of the room at the two men standing there. For an instant he wondered which one was the groom but then he saw the one's face and he stopped wondering. Hank's first thought was dismay at the man's age, but it was quickly eclipsed by the look of love he was directing at Buffy, as if every treasure in the world would be found lacking in comparison. Hank's eyes moved to his daughter and she seemed to shine like the stars above. The crystals on her dress and in her hair sparkled as she moved.

Paul managed to sedately walk Buffy up the aisle and he stood with her in front of the Judge. Buffy and Giles had put together a combination of traditional and self-written vows. Opening the book in his hands the Judge began. "With great joy, we come together to join this man, Rupert Daniel Giles, and this woman, Buffy Anne Summers, in matrimony. This marriage..."

His voice continued but Buffy looked up at Giles and she found his gaze on her. The connection between them surged into life and they found themselves surrounded by their love for each other.

The Judge coughed. Paul squeezed Buffy's hand. Buffy pulled her gaze away from Giles and looked up at Paul to find him grinning at her. He gestured at the Judge and Buffy's eyes widened and she blushed as she realized that she had no idea what he had just said. Paul rescued her whispering softly. "It's all right, we're just at the next part."

Buffy nodded and looked at the Judge, waiting. Now that he had her attention he spoke, a twinkle in his eye. "Who gives this woman to be married to this man?"

Paul answered. "I, Paul Erikson, give this woman to this man, on behalf of all her friends and family." With that Paul gave Buffy a hug and kissed her on the cheek. He took her hand and gesturing Giles closer, he put Buffy's hand in Giles'. Holding both their hands in his for a second he then let go and moved away, sitting next to Cordelia, taking her hand in his.

The Judge motioned for Buffy and Giles to face each other, and after Buffy handed her bouquet to Willow, Giles took her other hand as well. Giles softly smiled at her, fighting the urge to kiss her. He took a deep breath and spoke very softly, so only she would hear. "You look so beautiful."

Only Giles' hold on her hands kept her from running them up his tuxedo lapels. He looked good enough to eat. Letting out a sigh she just squeezed his hands and sent him wave after wave of love, both from her eyes, and through their connection.

Giles had to work very hard to listen to anything the Judge was saying. Buffy drifted in and out, catching an occasional word, content to just watch Giles, watch him watch her.

The Judge coughed again and Giles realized that there was some gentle laughter coming from their guests. His eyes widened and he blushed as he sensed that another cue had just been missed. Buffy caught his chagrin and she looked at the Judge, giving him an impish smile. "Sorry."

Paul had told him that there weren't two people more in love and more committed to each other than these two and the Judge was beginning to believe it. He almost felt redundant, the vows between them already securely in place. But, he'd been brought here to do a job and do it he would even if he did need to continually remind the two standing before him to join in. "Time for your vows." He looked at Giles, prompting him. "Rupert?"

Giles cleared his throat, nervous all of a sudden. Then Buffy gave him a smile and he found his courage and it all suddenly seemed so simple. "Buffy, you are a star from the heavens given to me to love, honor and cherish, for all the days of my life. You are my pearl of choice, an unexpected gift of joy and delight. You amaze me with your strength and courage and it has been and will continue to be my honor to stand at your side. My love for you will never fade. I ask you to let me be the shoulder you With you I will walk my path from this day forward."

Buffy took a deep breath, trying hard not to cry. The Judge spoke her name next. "Buffy?"

She took another deep breath. Her voice started out shaky but it grew strong and clear. "Giles, since we have been together, you have provided me with strength, security, confidence, honesty, love and plenty of much needed guidance. Whenever I looked for you, even at my darkest hours, you were always there. You are truly my knight in shining armor. You have helped me and saved me in so many ways and I love you for that. I am honored that you will have me as your wife and I am proud to have you as my husband. I believe that we were meant to be together from the start and I will always love you with all my heart."

There were some snuffles from the guests and the sound of someone blowing their nose. The Judge looked at Roger. "Do you have the rings?"

Roger fished into his pocket and brought out a box. The Judge looked at the audience assembled including Buffy and Giles and he spoke. "Traditionally,

the marking of the passage to the status of husband and wife is marked by the exchange of rings. These rings are a symbol of the unbroken circle of love. Love freely given has no beginning and no end, no giver and no receiver for each is the giver and each is the receiver. May these rings always remind you of the vows you have taken." He took the smaller one and handed it to Giles.

Giles took the ring and placed it on Buffy's finger. "With this ring I thee wed. I pledge all that I am to you, my constant faith and abiding love."

The Judge handed Buffy the larger ring. She slipped it onto Giles' finger. "With this ring I thee wed. All that I am, I give to you."

The Judge smiled at them both and he spoke a few last words of wisdom and blessing. "Treat yourselves and each other with respect, and remind yourselves often of what brought you together. Give the highest priority to the tenderness, gentleness and kindness that your connection deserves. May beauty surround you both in the journey ahead and through all the years. May happiness be your companion and your days together be good and long upon the earth."

He continued, speaking now to both Buffy and Giles and to the assembled guests. "These two, Rupert Giles, and Buffy Summers, have pledged their love and loyalty to each other, and have declared the same by the joining of hands and the giving of rings. By the power vested in me by the authority of the State of California, I now pronounce you husband and wife." The Judge grinned at the slightly stunned looks on Buffy and Giles' face. He prodded Giles. "You may now kiss the bride." And Giles did. Long enough for a bit more laughter. Reluctantly they pulled apart, hardly able to bear being even a few inches away from each other. The Judge motioned them to face their friends and he made the announcement. "I now present to you Mr. and Mrs. Giles."

Everyone went crazy, standing and cheering. Buffy and Giles grinned at each other and at all their friends. Buffy finally gave into temptation and ran her hands up his tuxedo lapels and clasped her hands behind his neck. "You're finally mine. I don't believe it."

Giles gently kissed her. "I've always been yours. From the day I met you."

Fighting off tears again she hugged him tightly. The Judge coughed again. Opening her eyes Buffy looked at him, grinning. "Aren't we done? Did I miss something again?"

The Judge laughed. "No." He pointed to the aisle. "You're supposed to process out."

Laughing Buffy pulled back and she took Giles' hand again. "Walk with me?"

Giles nodded, grinning at her. "Anywhere you want to go." Hand in hand, they walked back down the aisle, barely aware that there was anyone else in the room.

As everyone started chatting Buffy dragged Giles through the living room and back into the master bedroom. Again she clasped her hands behind his neck. "Hey, husband."

Giles grinned. "Hey, wife." He lowered his head and captured her lips in a kiss that started soft and quickly exploded with passion. Wrapping his arms around her Giles groaned to feel her bare skin on her back. "Can't we leave now?"

Buffy giggled. "I wish."

There was a knock and Roger called through the door. "Just want to remind you that you still have guests, and no one's leaving until you come out." Buffy and Giles grinned at each other as they heard him laugh and walk away.

Then there was another knock. "Buffy?" It was Xander.

Buffy walked to the door, dragging Giles with her. She opened the door and looked at Xander. "What is it, Xander? You sound worried."

Xander grimaced. "Your dad's here. He got here a couple of minutes before the wedding started. He sort of insisted on seeing you and I told him no, and Spike sort of...well...he helped."

Buffy's eyes widened. "My dad's here?" She looked up at Giles, momentarily stymied by Xander's announcement. She looked back at Xander. "Like here, here, like in person?" At Xander's nod she smiled distractedly at him. "Okay." She shut the door and looked up at her new husband. "My dad's here."

Giles kissed her forehead, looking at her with some concern. "Are you all right? Shall I have Spike kill him?"

Buffy barked out an astonished laugh and smacked Giles on the chest. "Thanks, I needed that." She squared her shoulders. "Let's go see him." Then she grabbed his hand again. "But don't you leave me." She looked up at him again. "Aren't you at all freaked out by this?"

Giles rolled his eyes. "Buffy, after the week I've had, and with what you and I just experienced in there, I find myself feeling quite unrattled at the thought of having to deal with your father. It seems rather a small thing." He frowned. "However, if he upsets you I shall take it somewhat amiss." He grinned. "But then again, we do have Spike now."

Buffy mock frowned at him. "Don't be giving him ideas. He might think you're serious."

"Trust me, Spike will never hear those words from me unless I am serious."

Buffy looked at him for a moment, wondering at his words, trying to imagine a time when he might be serious. Finally she shook her head. "Okay, so you'll stay right next to me?"

"I'm afraid you're quite stuck with me."

Grinning at him Buffy opened the door and the two of them left the safety of the bedroom to find Buffy's dad. It took them awhile as quite a few of their friends stopped them for hugs and to offer their congratulations. Finally they saw him standing unhappily in a corner next to Spike. Giles pointed him out to Buffy and they started making their way across the room. Giles moved to stand behind Buffy, his hands on her shoulders. Buffy looked up at her dad and waited for him to say something.

Hank pointed to Spike. "This man threatened me."

Buffy's eyes took on a dangerous glint. "You haven't seen me in over two years and that's what you want to say to me first?"

Hank's eyes widened as he took in her unhappy glare, not to mention the glare from her husband. He took a deep breath. "No, honey, I'm sorry, that's not what I want to say first." Hank took a good look at her. "You look so...so grown up and beautiful."

Buffy smiled. "That's better." Moving forward and away from Giles' comforting hands she gave her dad a hug. "I'm glad you made it." She reached behind her and pulled Giles to her side. "This is Rupert Giles." She grinned up at him. "My husband."

Giles smiled down at her and then looking at Hank he put his hand out. "Very nice to meet you."

Hank shook hands with him but he was clearly thinking. "I recognize that name. Have we met?"

Buffy shook her head. "Nope. But I used to talk to you about him all the time, back in the days when we actually talked, you know, when I knew where you were."

Hank snapped his fingers. "He was one of your teachers." He frowned at Giles, an unpleasant look in his eyes. "How long...aah." Hank glared back at Spike who had just increased the pressure on his arm.

Buffy looked at Spike. "Spike, you can let him go now." She looked back at her dad. "We just started dating six months ago, dad. And I'm twenty-one now. You know that, right?"

Hank let out a sigh. "I've missed so much and I can't tell you how sorry I am."

"Well, if you start being around a little bit more, I might take that apology and raise it with a little bit of forgiveness."

"I will be around more, I promise." He caught the look in Buffy's eyes. "You don't believe me, do you?"

She shook her head. "No, but that doesn't mean I'm not glad to see you today. It's important to me that you came."

Hank turned to find that Spike was gone. He rubbed his arm. "Who is that guy? Is he a body builder or something? He's incredibly strong."

Buffy laughed. "He's a or something."

Xander walked by and slapped Giles on the back. "Nice groom's cake, Giles." He continued on to wherever he was going.

Giles eyed Buffy a little nervously. "What type of cake did you get?"

"Roger and Paul picked it out. You'll love it. Come on." Linking one arm through Giles' and the other through her dad's she headed them towards the dining room where the food was set up. Once they got in there they quickly got caught up in happy felicitations. John and Wes both came up and gave Buffy a hug and Giles a hardy handshake before heading off continuing the conversation they had been having. Willow and Xander gave them both a hug.

After a little bit Giles lost his hold on Buffy but as she seemed to be doing fine with her dad Giles made his way up to the table. In a moment he found himself flanked by Paul and Roger, both of who watched Giles as he took a look at the cake. It was decorated to look like a book. Paul pointed at it. "That's how we first saw you, nose in a book, a year ago this month. A Latin one, if I remember correctly."

Roger nodded. "You refused to play darts with us because of it."

Giles smiled at the two of them. "Fortunately for me you didn't give up very easily." Giles squinted at the cake trying to read the writing on it.

Paul grinned. "That's Latin too."

Giles spoke it out loud. "Omnia iam fient fieri quae posse negabam." He softly chuckled. "Ovid."

Paul smacked Roger. "See, I told you he'd recognize the quote."

Roger grinned. "It seemed fitting somehow. Something you might say today after all that's happened this year."

Giles nodded and translated. "All the things which I denied could happen are now happening." He sent an affectionate glance to his two friends, and his eyes caught Buffy's from across the room and he saw the love he had for her reflected in her eyes. He laughed softly again and shook his head looking at his friends. "You're right. It is something I could say today. Never could I have imagined how much my life could change in a year."

Roger clapped Giles on the arm and pointed back down at the cake. "So you like it?"

Giles smiled and nodded. "I love it. It's perfect. Thank you."

Paul let out an exaggerated sigh. "One thing hasn't changed. We still haven't beat Roger at darts."

Roger snorted. "And you won't." He looked for Frank. "We have to go show Frank our new darts and make him green with envy." All three sets of eyes looked for Frank and found him in the middle of a conversation with Linda and a woman that Giles didn't recognize. Roger's eyes lit up. "Oh, by the way, Frank brought his sister, Julia. She's an obstetrician." He grinned at Giles. "She might come in handy some day."

Giles raised his eyebrows. "Does she know about any of this?"

Roger nodded. "Some of it, not all of it. Frank told her about that night you saved him, and he's filled her in on some of the other parts since he's gotten to know you better. He reassures me that he's sworn her to secrecy."

"Where does she practice?"

"In Los Angeles."

Giles felt arms sneak around him and smiled when he saw the rings. Holding her hand out he admired them, then he turned in her arms and gave her a kiss. "Everything all right with your dad?"

She smiled. "He's a little on overwhelm but he'll just have to deal. I'm sure he'd love to get some time with you to give you the third degree." She grinned up at Paul. "Or you." Then she smiled at Giles. "Do you like your cake? Did they do good?"

Giles grinned. "I do and they did. Very fitting. Is it chocolate inside, as well?"

Her answer was interrupted as voices started taking up a chant. "Cake, cake, cake, cake."

Buffy laughed. "I'm guessing it's time to smear cake all over each other."

Giles frowned at her. "Buffy." She just laughed again and dragged him over to the larger cake.

She gasped when she saw it. "It's so beautiful. I don't want to cut it." It was festooned with frosting flowers and butterflies. It looked as if a breeze might set it stirring.

Roger put his hand on Giles and Buffy's shoulders. "First a toast, and as best man, I claim that right. Champagne all around." He looked for Frank. "Frank, will you make sure everyone has a glass?"

Since Frank had provided the champagne he was more than glad to oblige. In a few minutes everyone was holding a glass with the sparkling beverage and Kevin had some sparkling cider. Roger turned towards Buffy and Giles. "I have known you both for less time than many of the people in this room but at this point I cannot imagine my life without the two of you in it. I was proud to

stand up with Giles as his best man, about as proud as I know Paul was to walk Buffy down the aisle. Even if I did have to grab Giles to keep him from sprinting down the aisle towards Buffy."

Paul interrupted. "I've got matching bruises."

Roger grinned at him, and everyone grinned as Buffy and Giles both blushed a little. Giles wrapped his arms around her and held her close, her back against his chest.

Roger continued. "I have never seen two people who belonged to each other more. Their commitment to each other astounds me and humbles me." Turning to them he held up his glass. "I wish for you both a long life, as many peaceful days as possible, and good friends at your side as you walk through your life together." He raised his glass. "To Buffy and Giles."

All repeated the toast and the champagne was consumed. Attention was turned back to the cake. Giles' hand slid over Buffy's and they both picked up the serving knife. Making two slices they cut a piece of cake and they levered it out and got it on to a plate. Using his fingers Giles picked up a small piece and hand fed it to Buffy, being the perfect gentleman and not smearing any on her face. Buffy kissed him in thanks and then she grinned.

Giles glared at her. "Don't you dare."

Buffy picked up a rather sizeable chunk of cake with her fingers and she held it up in front of him, her eyes filled with mischief. He was about to protest again when she hit him with it, all of it. She grabbed a napkin quickly to keep any from falling on his tuxedo. As he glared at her she couldn't stop giggling. Standing on her toes she whispered in his ear. "I'll make it up to you tonight, I promise." Then she licked some of the cake off with her tongue.

Giles was still trying to swallow what cake got in his mouth and clean the rest off his face but Buffy saw the flash of desire in his eyes and figured she was forgiven.

##

At the appropriate time Buffy and Giles made their getaway. To avoid bloodshed Buffy just handed her bouquet to Anya. They had already packed, had their suitcases in the car, and the car was parked in Roger's garage so they didn't need to go outside. Everyone would be meeting tomorrow for a late brunch, and then the newly weds would be heading up to Carmel. Hank had been put in charge of getting Aunt Eileen and the cousins to their hotel, and he promised to be in town in two weeks for the weekend to sit down for a long talk.

As they drove away Willow and Tara joined hands and in a soft voice spoke an incantation.

##

When they opened the door to their room Buffy and Giles couldn't help letting out a small gasp of delight. There were candles everywhere, all freshly lit. The bed was turned down and there was another bottle of champagne and two glasses sitting on the small table by the window. Giles could feel the protection magic here as well. Closing the door behind them he turned to Buffy and cupping her face in his hands he kissed her. Pulling back he looked at her in amazement. "I can't believe it, I can't believe you're married to me."

"I know. Who'd have believed it? Me, marrying the tweedy, stuffy librarian."

"Or me marrying the class trouble maker who has never read a book in her life unless forced to at gunpoint."

"Hey, I was only the class trouble maker because you forced me to be the Slayer again. As far as I was concerned before I met you I was retired."

"You totally flummoxed me when you told me you had no intention of being the Slayer. I was so unprepared for you." He started to laugh.

"Well that makes two of us. I don't think they could have sent a better Watcher to get me to start again. Can you imagine if they'd sent Wes then instead?"

"Sunnydale would be a wasteland, completely swallowed by the Hellmouth."

"And you'd still be in England, happily mucking around with your books, probably married with two kids."

"Happily?" Giles shook his head. "I didn't even know what the word meant until a few months ago."

Buffy pushed him down on the bed in response and dealing with her dress with some difficulty she straddled him. She leaned down and kissed him, meaning for it to be a short caress but it quickly escalated. Giles groaned and wrapped his arms around her, his tongue requesting entry. Buffy opened her mouth gladly and their tongues mated as Giles ran his hands up and down her back, cupping her bottom, pressing her against him. Buffy pulled away and grinned as he groaned out a protest. She stood up and rested her hands on his thighs. "I'll be right back." Picking up her smaller suitcase she wiggled her eyebrows at him and headed for the bathroom.

Giles let out a sigh. He stood as well and opened the champagne bottle. Filling two glasses he found the small boom box that had a note on it with an arrow and words that said to 'push here'. Laughing quietly at Willow he pushed the button and smiled as some lovely romantic music filled the room. Giles undid his bow tie and slipped it from around his neck. Then he toed off his shoes. He was just starting to unbutton his jacket when Buffy came out of the bathroom and he froze, unable to take his eyes off of her as she made her way over to him.

She was a vision of lace and skin, and he didn't think she had ever looked more desirable. Buffy reveled in the look in his eyes and she took over for him, unbuttoning his jacket and then unbuttoning the shirt underneath. Giles finally found his tongue. "You look ravishing." He ran his hands down her arm and then moved them to her hips. Pulling her close he brushed up against her. "Feel what you do to me."

Taking his hands she put them on her breasts so he could feel her hardened nipples and then she took one hand and dragged it down to between her legs so he could feel the dampness there. "No more than what you do to me."

Giles growled and he picked her up and threw her on the bed, yanking off his jacket and shirt. He crawled up the bed until he was lying on top of her. Buffy ran her hand down his face and his neck, heading towards his chest, when her fingers caught on the scab on the side of his neck. When he winced she turned his neck and looked at the bite marks. Buffy pulled him down into a rib-crushing hug.

When she finally let him go he pulled back and saw that she had tears in her eyes. Shaking his head he touched her cheek. "No sadness tonight. We're alive, and we're together. It's already so much more than I thought I'd ever have." He found her hand and he kissed her palm, twisting the rings on her fingers. "You're my wife. It feels like a miracle to me."

Buffy's eyes were still bright but her sad look was replaced with one of love. "You're the miracle." She let out a long sigh. "My husband." She found his hand as well and looked at the ring on his finger. Then she looked up at him. "I love you."

Giles lowered his head and kissed his wife. "I love you too." And with that he proceeded to show her just how much as he worshipped her, with his words, and his hands, and his tongue. Their clothes made their way to the floor, and as husband and wife they made love for the first time.

##

Kevin was in bed and the guests had left. John had accompanied Wes, Fred and Gunn to Giles and Buffy's, where they were spending the night, John and Wes still deep in conversation.

At Roger and Linda's, Paul and Cordelia were on one end of the couch, and Roger and Linda on the other. Xander and Anya were cuddled on one chair and Tara and Willow were on the opposite one. Spike was in the kitchen, drinking some blood. They all looked exhausted. Roger finally spoke. "I feel like we actually got the Titanic to shore."

Paul let out a half laugh. "This has been a hell of a week."

Willow let out a sigh. "But it ended so great." Tara let out a sigh in agreement.

Linda nestled closer to Roger. "It was nice, wasn't it?"

Xander grinned. "Even Hank behaved himself." Spike walked in the room and Xander continued. "Nice job with Hank, by the way."

Spike snorted. "Bloody pillock."

Willow spoke on his behalf. "He said he'd start hanging around more." At every one's looks she protested. "Well, maybe he will." Tara gave her a reassuring hug.

Xander gave her another look. "Right, and the Hellmouth is going to dry up and all the badness is going to go away."

Tara was looking out the side window. She could just see Wes and John talking in the kitchen next door. She turned to Willow. "Is Wes gay?"

Cordelia's eyes opened wide when she heard the question. "No he's not gay, why are you asking that?"

Tara looked at Willow and Willow grinned. She pointed to the two of them across the way. "Do you think he knows that John is gay?" Willow giggled.

Cordelia looked out the window and saw the two of them animatedly talking. She rolled her eyes. "He's on his own." Paul laughed and nuzzled her neck.

Xander held up his glass to Roger. "Nice toast by the way. I second the motion for them to have a long life."

They all raised their glasses high. "To a long life for the two of them."

Paul looked over at Spike. "With you around it might just happen." He smiled at him.

"Thanks again. Without you we'd be having a funeral tomorrow."

Cordelia hugged Paul tightly. "Two funerals. You'd have been dead too."

Linda shook her head. "No more talk of death tonight. Tonight is a night for love and happiness." She turned her head to Spike. "But I for one am very glad you are staying around."

Spike scowled. "That's it. You people are too happy. I'm gonna go patrol so I can kill something." Paul barked out a laugh. Spike scowled again and headed out. Paul yelled after him. "I'll see you later."

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

Paul hesitated. "Uh, he's sort of living in my basement now."

Cordelia's eyes opened wide. "In your basement?"

Paul stood and yanked up Cordelia. "Yes, in my basement and on that note I'll take my leave as well so I can get some lovin' of my own." He grinned at Cordy. "He won't be home for a couple of hours." At her look he grinned wider. "Look you have a ghost, I have a vampire, what's the difference?"

"Dennis won't kill me while I'm sleeping."

"Yeah, but Dennis can't stake a vampire and save your guy's life, either." Cordy let out a sigh but she had no argument against that.

They all started to stand, including Roger and Linda. Willow looked around. "We'll come over in the morning and help clean up."

Linda smiled and then she looked at all the men. "Buffy helped move the furniture out, but I'll need all you big strong men to help move it back."

There was general groaning and agreement and everyone started to leave. Paul was last to go. Roger gave him a hug. "If I'd lost you both last night..."

He couldn't even finish his sentence.

Paul smiled tightly at Roger. "I know...I get it." He clasped Roger's arm. "A long life to us all."

Roger pulled him in for another hug and then he kissed Cordy on the cheek. Holding Linda and looking again at Paul and Cordy, Roger repeated a variant of Paul's words. "A very long life."

He and Linda watched out the window making sure everyone got to their cars safely. Then Roger turned to Linda with a wicked grin on his face. "And now it's time for my lovin'." He started to kiss her and holding on to each other tightly they kissed all the way to the bedroom.

##

They lay in bed, naked, the candles burning down, the music having played itself out. Giles' breathing was slowing down and getting very regular. Buffy kissed him on the shoulder. "Are you falling asleep already?"

Giles made a sleepy sound of assent.

Buffy protested. "But it's still so early."

Giles tried to rouse himself. "Buffy." He turned around and faced her, touching her cheek. He smiled at her. "I love you so much, but I'm tired. I had a rough week and a very rough night last night." He gestured towards the bite marks on his neck. "You might need to pace me if you want me to last all week." He closed his eyes.

Buffy grinned at him. "Feeling old tonight?"

"Very old."

He opened his eyes again and for a second Buffy could see a flash of

vulnerability there. She looked at him lovingly. "I meant what I said tonight in my vows, that I'm honored that you'd have me as your wife, and that I'm proud to have you as my husband. I meant that." She touched his shoulder. "And you promised me a shoulder to lean on, so lie back so I can do some leaning."

Giles rolled onto his back and Buffy lay down with her head on his shoulder. She ran her fingers through his chest hair, occasionally touching his nipples. Giles kissed the top of her head and ran his hand up and down her arm, his fingers barely touching her breast as it moved past. Then on the next pass his fingers stopped and moved to caress her. "Buffy?"

"Yes?"

"I think maybe I'm not as tired as I thought."

Buffy laughed and ran her own hand down his body to investigate. As her fingers closed around him she leaned over him. "You sure? I don't want to wear you out too much."

"Buffy, just hush and kiss me."

The End

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