

Five Rings 1/3

Summary W/G are abducted. By whom? Where are they?

Warning Angst, pain, slight mayhem.

Ethan heard their screams from across the hall. He opened his eyes to drifting shapes and grey-cloaked figures drawing him nearer a great black void. They were passing through his body not being able to gain a proper hold on him.

He watched astounded as Rupert and Willow were dragged screaming through his wall, the sound brought tears to his eyes.

Ethan reluctantly dismissed the wards about his room. Taloned hands gripped him and for a brief instant Ethan experienced their pain, and then he was propelled toward the void. Just before a fog clouded his vision, he saw his friends' limp bodies, frozen and pale, breathless in death. His sense of self preservation won through however and he reinforced his wards just before the void took him, causing an envelope of chaos to form around his body protecting him but also preventing him from helping Willow and Giles.

##

Rupert took a deep breath, astonished that he could still breathe. He felt chilled everywhere except where Willow's small frame touched. Willow!

"Willow?" He whispered, shaking her shoulder gently. He smiled as she lifted her head and realised they were still alive. She kissed him hard, pouring passion and relief into the kiss. He returned her passion. She broke the kiss and smiled.

"Rupert? Still?" she looked at him incredulously, he blushed and stroked her beautiful face...

"Always, love, always. Seems we're trapped, Willow. You alright?" Willow nodded her gaze intent on Rupert's hand. They each wore a ring made from what looked like haematite. Willow held her hand level with his and stepped closer, the walls glowed then dissolved and they were out of the room and in a corridor.

Before she could utter a word Rupert exclaimed excitedly. "Look, look at this..." She looked at the long tapestry adorning one wall, it was reminiscent of the Bayeaux tapestry depicting the battle of Hastings only it had some extra scenes interspersed through it.

"Y'know what this is?" Rupert ran his hand over the bright silk, Willow smiled up at him, he looked like an excited child. "See? This is proof of alien visitation." Rupert began to interpret the story cloth for them. "Some beings came here, in the tail of Halles comet and landed, and thrived. They had demonic help-" Rupert frowned. "Who wanted them to destroy-No that's wrong. They asked Watchers for help to build a settlement but instead of helping the Watchers betrayed them and their-their..." Rupert glanced back over the writing. "Centre?" He frowned again. "Was destroyed. Their culture was wiped out by Watchers." Rupert's hand fell to his side in shock "We-we killed their leader and they turned to demons for help, they could have been our allies, and we blew it!"

Willow's hand curled round his waist in a gesture of comfort. "Who were they, Rupert?"

"Greys" Rupert said in a monotone. "Willow!" His warning shout came too late they looked on in horror as the apparitions closed on them and swept them through a second wall. The cold metal walls solidified once more drowning their terrified screams.

##

For a long time Ethan heard nothing. The pressure of wild magic would have crushed an ordinary man. He held on to the hope of escaping his self-imposed prison and helping his friends. Where's a Slayer when you need one?

"GILES? WILLOW?" Buffy's voice carried through the house. Ethan smiled. Glory be! A miracle!

"HERE!" He used the last of his oxygen with the shout and shut his eyes to a darkening world.

Buffy raced up the stairs when she heard the desperate cry fearing the worst, her Watcher and her best friend mutilated beyond recognition... She'd had a dream, a nasty one involving monotone monsters, givers of pain and more pain. It wasn't pretty!

She saw a pair of legs protruding from a half open doorway and pulled on them, Ethan gasped and sat up as she did so, the door slammed shut. He lifted a weak hand to its surface.

"They're in there, Buffy...Taken by creatures." He staggered upright and tried the door once more, it opened easily on silent hinges. Buffy stepped through first looking warily to right and left.

"There's no one here Ethan," She stopped in her tracks, the bedcovers were moving, writhing. She blushed a deep crimson and prepared to back off as a body arched away and the covers slipped down revealing a female back with waist length brown hair. Ethan peered round the Slayer with an appreciative leer plastered on his face.

Gasps and moans filled the room as the couple on the bed reached their climax, the man sitting up and clasping the woman to his chest and biting her shoulder as he came.

Buffy shifted awkwardly, Ethan slipped a hand to her bottom and gave it a crafty squeeze. She slapped his hand away. She cleared her throat and the couple started at the sound both stared at their audience.

"Hunters!" Ethan choked out. Buffy stood her ground.

"What have you done with Willow and Giles?" her tone was accusing. They looked at each other and then took in their surroundings.

They changed into dark clothes and got off the bed, Buffy was still wary of them even though technically they were on their side now.

"How did we get here?" Dom asked. Cathy eyed the Slayer suspiciously she had seen a flash of interest cross the Slayers face at Dom's nudity.

"You tell me! You've been exchanged, why? Ethan says that Giles and Willow were carted off by some grey creatures."

Ethan stared at the Hunters hands; they wore rings identical to his own.

"Rings! Look," He held his hand aloft. "They sent them! I told you they couldn't be trusted! If they're here then Willow and Ripper are...are..." His face froze in rage and he launched himself at Dom. " You Bastard! Where are they?"

Dom batted Ethan away almost casually as one would swat a fly. Cathy looked after the fallen man. He was pitiful!

"We sent the rings as a contact device. If we were needed you put them together, to create a portal to the Grey's stronghold, and we will come. Obviously, something's gone wrong. The Grey's have taken your friends thinking them to be Hunter replacements. Its imperative we get them back,"

"Why imperative?" Buffy felt her heart drop to her boots, she didn't like Cathy's tone.

"Because they've not been changed beforehand. They can't survive in the Grey's atmosphere more than a day at the most, no human can."

Buffy was confused, "But you're..."

Dom shook his head. "No, we're not."

End of part 1

Five Rings 2/3

Summary Willow and Giles have been abducted by Grey's and Are now being investigated/trained/tortured by clones of the Watcher-Hunters Cathy and Dominic Thorn.

Giles held Willow's trembling body next to his stroking her hair. Whilst trying to hatch a plan of escape. He steadfastly ignored the dull ache in his limbs that had started when they first arrived here. By now he was sure that Ethan had alerted Buffy and the others and it would only be a matter of time before rescue came.

He sighed and Willow's head moved on his chest, her eyes luminous with unshed tears. Her head buzzed and she felt nauseous. Buffy will come, Buffy will come. She repeated endlessly in her head.

Giles sat up suddenly as a dark clad figure melted through the wall in front of them. Willow lifted her head and smiled in relief. She got up and took a step forward, Giles tried to stop her.

The green eyes, dark hair, pierced eyebrow and cocky grin told him it was Dominic Thorn, but at the same time, it wasn't. The Hunter's clothes had no personal touches that marked him as human. He extended his hand to Willow.

"No! Willow! He's not..." Rupert never completed his sentence because a stiletto-heeled boot caught him at his temple and he fell like a stone.

"RUPERT!" Willow screamed and struggled to get to her lover.

Dom dragged her through the wall into a separate training room, sparing a glance for his partner, Cathy, who had the task of training Giles.

##

Buffy looked at the rough plans, Dom sat close to her and traced the line of the Grey's defences with his index finger.

"This is the most we have explored, there are no more living Grey's. They died, all of them, because of something I did in my training. They are clones of three original Grey's and as such, if you kill one of the originals all of those cloned from it, disappear. I killed one when newly turned and we hid the fact from the others. Cathy killed the other two originals during our escape."

"So how come Willow and Giles were taken by Grey's? Are they ghosts? Can't fight ghosts..." Buffy grumbled.

Dom sighed and Cathy took over. "They're apparitions generated by the stronghold. It's a buried space ship. The Greys cloned us for the unlikely event of our deaths in battle. So, the Watcher and Witch are likely being trained right now." She shuddered. "Buffy? You may not recognise them when we get them back."

Ethan straightened at that. His mind was racing, Ripper could withstand most things, but if a lady was involved, his nerve always broke. He couldn't bare to see a woman hurt in any way.

##

Dom knelt in front of Willow and lifted her chin. Her wrists were bound behind her with his belt and she was silent at last, after hours of resisting his charms.

Willow had come and hated herself for it.

Dom smiled at her gently.

She shook free of his grip, stared defiantly into his eyes, then she spat in his face.

He rocked back on his heels, wiped the spittle from his cheek, popped his finger in his mouth, and slurped. "Essence of Willow... mmm Rest now, we're a tag team. You have Cathy and I get to play with 'granddad'" he chuckled as she struggled to be free.

He slipped through the wall and she began to pull on the belt securing her arms. A whiplash stopped her. Stinging blood dripped from the wound at her elbow and she froze, her gaze gliding up to meet the cold dead eyes of the dominatrix, Cathy Thorn.

The Hunter coiled her whip carefully and secured it to her belt loop.

She smiled glacially and paced in front of her. "Tell me my pretty, did my slave make you shiver and tremble with lust? Your man... Well, he's male in name only now," she sighed and shrugged, her grin becoming wide and gleeful at Willow's angry blush. "Shall we listen to Dom's tender treatment of your lover?" She stood in front of the wall through which Dom had passed. She waved her arm in front the metal and sound of blows and grunts, yells and screams invaded the room where Willow crouched on the bed, her face turned to the corner, eyes tight shut against her tears. Buffy Will Come, Buffy Will Come...

"Would you like to see him?" Cathy's voice purred in her ear and she felt the bed give as she sat down. "I think he's done." Willow turned her head to the far wall and saw Rupert pinned to the wall his head slumped forward onto his chest. Her gasp made him snap his head up and a moments glance renewed her resolve and bolstered her love for him. They shouldn't have let her see him!

"Bitch!" Willow roared and head-butted Cathy. The woman fell sideways stunned, Willow shook her head "Ah, Shit! Why didn't they tell you that hurt?" Fighting waves of dizziness, she eased her arm out of the belt grimacing with the pain but she didn't get far. Cathy's whip round her throat stole her breath. She clawed at her throat and tried to reach for the door with her other hand but soon passed out.

Cathy stepped over her on her way out to Dom.

##

"It's dangerous, but it's the only way." Cathy explained. " Four sharing two rings' power. One ring left here to keep the portal open." Cathy looked at Buffy and Ethan; they had to agree to this. Buffy nodded and Ethan scowled his consent.

Dom took Buffy's hand and she trembled. He ignored her and gazed at Cathy. She took Ethan's hand and returned Dom's open lust.

Buffy blushed. Dom's hand was warm and strong and she couldn't help but imagine his hands stroking and lingering over her body.

Ethan smirked picking up the scent of her arousal. "Better tighten his leash, sweet lips. Slayer's "got the horn" for your lover!" he winced as Cathy's fingers tightened fit to crush his fingers. "Dom? Its time."

Cathy's clipped tones forced Dom to concentrate. He strode to the wall his right hand outstretched; Buffy followed and shut her eyes as they broached the wall. Dom walked beside her, unerringly through the empty mad chaos.

Buffy struggled with her secret fears and wildest imaginings. Dom's face was stony with concentration. He lifted his hand once more and they were through.

They stepped onto the metal floor of the Grey's stronghold. He held Buffy as she swayed adjusting to the heady atmosphere. "You alright?" His voice was gentle and his lips were so close. Buffy kissed him and he gripped her shoulders lightly and gently eased her away. "Feel better now?" He smiled. She parted from him and nodded, breathing a little deeper and faster than normal.

Cathy stepped through with Ethan and smiled at her lover.

Ethan had fared better than the Slayer, because of his love of chaos, he treated its domain as his own.

##

"Willow?" Her name echoed in her head and she opened her eyes slowly. Her mother calling her for school? She blinked and eased herself up on raw wrists, groaning in pain

"Willow?" The whisper carried as loud as if it were a shout.

She swallowed painfully, got up, and faced the transparent wall.

"Giles!" she shouted and ran to get a better view. He was still secured to the wall and his face was crusted with dried blood.

He managed to smile for her. "Willow, you don't have to shout. Did he hurt you?"

His gentle question shattered her hard-won calm and she wept openly before him.

His expression changed and he struggled briefly with the manacles. "Willow, listen to me, darling. We will get out of here, Ethan is at home, they didn't get him! And believe me, you don't want to mess with Ethan when he's pissed!"

She laughed and hiccupped at the same time. She took a deep breath and took a step closer to the wall, placing her hand on its cool surface. "I love you Rupert."

Those words wrenched at his heart and he felt renewed and refreshed. Her face was tear stained and her neck was raw from a rope burn but she possessed a quiet strength and radiant beauty.

"I love you, my sweet Willow and when we get out of here, I'll make sure you never forget it!" He looked up suddenly. His breathing increased. "They're coming!" He sounded panicked. "Courage Willow!"

The wall turned opaque. She couldn't see but she could still hear. Her head pressed against the wall, wanting to be near Rupert in his suffering, but torn apart by his anguished cries. The soft roar of a flaming blowtorch sent her scurrying for the solace of the bed and she buried her face in the pillow and screamed to drown out the screams of her lover.

##

Dom held Buffy's hand and ran through the corridors leaping through walls. He noticed that the Slayer was still keeping pace, but was covered by a sheen of sweat. The sickness took humans in various ways.

Her hand slipped from his grasp through the tenth wall and she banged into the solid mass and fell on her rump.

Dom stepped back through and looked at her. She didn't make a move to get up. He glanced at the wall and mentally counted the remaining hours Willow and Giles had. They could spare only a few minutes for rest.

"What will they be doing to them?" Buffy looked into his eyes.

Dom looked away, too much humanity there. "I was already dead when my training began, I can withstand more pain than humanly possible and inflict it beyond human endurance," his voice lowered to a whisper. "I enjoyed it." He drew his legs up and rested his hands on his knees.

"I knew someone like that once..." Buffy muttered. She looked at him, his age was indeterminate. She was suddenly curious. "How old are you Dom? What did you do before you were turned?"

He sighed, "I was a martial arts instructor with my own Gym in London's East End. I met Cathy in 1980 when I was 30 and she just captured me. She was so hot and sexy; I've never met anyone like her. She made me feel...desperate and dangerous to know." He paused as he saw Buffy's shocked expression. "I'm 51, such is the gift of the Thorns." He ended bitterly. "Immunity to all disease and the ravages of time and I only had to kill and kill and kill."

He held out his hand and she took it. They set off at a cracking pace. After three more walls Dom began to glimpse Cathy in flashes, they were getting close.

##

Giles hit the floor and groaned. His wrists and ribs ached. He lifted his head in time to see the sole of a boot coming his way; he moved his hands in front of him and caught Dom's foot before it connected. He staggered to his feet and the Hunter overbalanced. Giles eased his shoulders and scowled toward his grinning adversary.

"Well, Life in the old dog yet, eh, Granddad?" Dom muttered

Giles kept his eyes on the pacing hunter.

"Willow's so sweet! Does she always pant and moan like that when she comes?" Dom's smile grew wider as he saw that item being digested.

Giles roared and launched himself at Dom. The hunter spun and kicked at Giles' head so hard it made his teeth rattle. He staggered back against the wall and through his jolted brain, he saw the end wall open and Cathy Thorn and a man running toward him. He shook his head; tunnel vision prevented him from seeing Ethan clearly. He took a tortured breath and ran hell for leather between them.

Willow took her chance when she saw the open wall and ran as fast as the wind, her tears blinding her to Buffy's presence.

"Willow! Giles!" Buffy yelled. Both slowed and looked back and ran into Grey's with gurneys.

"No!" Dom yelled and yanked Buffy along behind him, he angled sideways and shot through two intersections at once. Buffy held on desperately, if she let go mid-wall, it would put a crimp in her style!

End of part 2

Five Rings 3/3

Summary Giles and Willow are rescued in the nick of time by Cathy and Dominic Thorn.

"Thorn room!" Dominic shouted.

Buffy barely kept pace with him, her lungs burned and her flesh crawled as they penetrated a third and fourth wall.

Cathy and Ethan charged after them, zipping through chaos and metal walls at a dizzying pace. Ethan glanced at the floor as the hammering taps became more insistent; the sound Cathy's boots made on the metal floor of the rooms they traversed in ten paces.

Buffy's heart hammered in her chest and still they ran. What was the hurry? The Greys were dead.

Dominic threw a glance in her direction as if he'd heard the silent question.

"The thorn room is automated. Any human in there is changed, mutated into an assassin."

They leapt into the thorn room Buffy and Dominic stumbled, Ethan fell; Cathy was the only one on her feet.

"Christ! I hate this fucking room!" Dom spat out venomously.

Ethan slid down the cold wall and rested his head on his knees fighting to get his breath back.

The Greys entered dragging trolleys bearing the still bodies of his friends.

Dom's fury rolled off him in waves. He wasn't going to let this happen to anyone else, least of all Willow! He glanced at Cathy who readied herself at Willow's machine. He folded his arms and glowered at the apparitions of his former masters.

Rupert's struggles reminded Dom of his own so long ago. Giles' feet twitched as he turned to Willow and sought her eyes. Dom felt sick.

The spectral Greys withdrew, their job done.

"Rupert!" Willow screamed as she was secured to a second machine.

Cathy stood sentry at the machines foot and waited like Dom, for the right moment.

Buffy tried in vain to free her friends from their bondage, but her Slayer strength was exhausted. Giles lay his head to one side as did Willow.

Buffy stepped back from the machines her fingers bleeding from wrenching and hitting the metal. Sobs wracked her body. She could do nothing to save them!

Willow's voice was silenced as she saw the arm descend to her bare feet and she felt the

point of the thorn. She looked over to where Giles lay as helpless as she did.

He met her gaze seeing her tears and bade his love a fond farewell

Cathy turned to her lover to see him poised ready destroy the deadly thorn arm. She nodded and together they kicked the arms out of alignment, delivering more blows until the machinery lay shattered beneath their feet.

Buffy and Ethan looked from one to the other. They had worked to destroy the last remnants of the Grey stronghold without a word being spoken.

Willow and Giles were safe.

Dom helped them up and then released Giles from his bonds. Cathy did the same for Willow.

The hunters watched, hands linked as Witch and Watcher embraced. Dom smiled and lifted his hand to Cathy's cheek caressing her with fingertips and they shared a brief sweet kiss.

##

"You!" Giles yelled. He relinquished his hold on Willow and advanced on Dom with murder in his eyes.

Dom backed away from Cathy and smiled at the rampaging Watcher.

"Yeah, me. I saved your hide, Granddad. Gonna thank me?" He ducked Giles' punch easily. He smirked as Willow stopped Giles from launching another. He winked at Willow. "You alright Princess?" Willow blushed and nodded. "Good." Dom glanced round "Cathy? Explain to them, I got to go rest now..." Dom backed into the wall and disappeared.

"I hate that man!" Giles sighed and Ethan nodded in agreement.

Cathy guided them out of the thorn room. She raised her hand and the wall before them dissolved. She walked normally and soon they found themselves in what looked like a large art studio apartment with lofty windows and wood floors. Sculpture was placed throughout the ground floor. The gallery, which also doubled as bedroom, was lined with books.

"Welcome to our home. Would you like some tea?" Cathy asked pleasantly as she walked to the small kitchen. She summoned a change of clothes, halfway across the room, using her Thorns power.

Willow marvelled at how neat it was, to have a thorn controlling everything. Then she realised that both Dom and Cathy had fought fiercely against the slavery the Thorn brought so it was a mixed blessing.

Buffy knelt by Willow and Giles and just looked at them for several minutes. "I nearly lost you both" she smiled. "Beware of Grey's bearing gifts!"

Giles sat in one of the leather armchairs and let his body relax. His toes curled on the warm floor and Willow came and sat by his bare feet.

Cathy brought in the tray and then Dom walked down the stairs from the loft, the soles of his feet making a slight clicking sound on the treads. He accepted a drink from Cathy and slipped his arm round her waist. "Sorry for being a prat earlier, Giles. I just hate that room! I still have nightmares about being taken," Dom's voice dropped to a whisper. Giles nodded in understanding.

Dom cleared his throat. "So you got the rings then? Cathy and I thought you'd better have some way of contacting us. If you need us... We have one each. The Grey compound recognises haematite as a key."

"You sent them?" Giles' voice was laced with a control he didn't feel. "As a key...haven't you heard of the telephone? I object to being abducted in the dead of night and nearly transformed into an assassin..." he continued, hotly.

"How do you feel?" Cathy asked.

Giles whirled round in his seat and glared at her. "Beaten and burned, you?" He rasped acidly.

"It's just that we cut it a bit fine. Five more minutes and you'd be dead. You are in an atmospheric envelope of our creation. We can live in the stronghold or here but not for long in Sunnydale. So, that's why we sent you the rings. Call us and we will come, we can spend ten hours comfortably in your reality then we have to re-charge."

Dom's hand snaked round Cathy's waist. "We were re-charging when you summoned us."

Buffy blanched. "Not the word I'd use!" Dom winked at her.

Ethan cleared his throat. "Are we safe here for the time being? Because I could really do with some tea!"

End.