

## Seal of Fate 1/8

Series Ripping Confessions.

Summary Giles suffers a prophecy of the Slayers death.

Giles hardly knew when it had started. His ability to read her mind unnerved him. He had always been vaguely aware of Buffy's whereabouts. Even when she had run away all those years ago he had still known that she hadn't left the country. Now he was beginning to have nightmares about her. That was always a bad sign for a watcher.

#

They were walking down the street eating ice-cream. Willow and the others were behind them dressed in black. The wind blew Buffy's hair into her eyes and it swept his high silk hat off his head. He chased after it, catching it and looked back as the galloping black horses rode straight over him baring his Slayer to Hell.

#

"Giles? What's the matter?" Buffy's smiling voice brought him out of his trance like sleep. He smiled wanly in her direction. She'd bought him ice-cream. He removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes. He really must stop reading Edgar Allen Poe for relaxation.

"Ooh, vanilla my favourite." He smiled and took the tub from her hands. She shook her hands. They were frozen from holding the ice-cream for so long.

"Anything happening in the Watcher-world?" She raised her voice over the din of bowls being fetched from his kitchen cupboards. Giles didn't answer immediately because he had snuck a sneaky spoonful of vanilla delight in the kitchen.

"Uhm, no just the odd dream. Nothing unusual. What's happening in the Slayer World?" He brought the bowls into the living room. He gave Buffy the bigger serving; after all, she had bought it.

They passed a pleasant couple of hours chatting in general about nothing in particular. He tried not to continuously end each of her sentences for her but he seemed to hear her before she said anything. In the end he waited until she stopped speaking before nodding in response. If he could hear her, couldn't she hear him in turn?

"Well, I've got to go..."

"....on a hot date? Off you go then Buffy. Be careful after your movie."

"How'd you know I was going to a movie?" She sounded annoyed. This whole visit had been slightly creepy. Her Watcher laughed and shrugged.

"Don't know. Call the X-files!" He laughed some more. Buffy shook her head, convinced that Giles had been smoking grass again.

#

He ran after the vampire. Although the stake in his hand felt familiar, the rhythm of his stride was all wrong. It almost felt like he was shorter. He flew gazelle-like over obstacles that were placed in his path by the fleeing vampire. Eventually the vampire was cornered in an alley. Standing triumphant at the mouth of the alley, he waited for the vampire to make its final assault. Launching itself forward in a vain attempt to escape its fate, the vampire impaled itself on the stake, showering his clothes with dust. He coughed, tasting the foul dust in his throat. He found his throat constricting and could not draw a breath. The smell of the dust was familiar, like bitter almonds. He sank down on the damp ground gasping his last breath...

#

He shot up in bed taking a giant breath, bathed in a cold sweat. That was awful. Choking he left his bed and dashed to the bathroom, hastily filling a glass with water and greedily gulping it down, the coolness soothing his parched throat. He glanced in the mirror and saw a ghostly image of Buffy curled on the ground of an alley. Her mouth open in an agonised silent scream for breath, her hand falling away from her throat as her eyes fluttered closed in death. The glass shattered in the basin as he gripped the edges of the bathroom mirror in disbelief.

"Buffy..." He gasped.

End of PT. 1

### Seal of Fate 2/8

Giles stared in shock as the ghostly vision misted and faded from view. His hands fell from the mirror into the basin and he gasped in pain as the splintered glass pierced his fingers. He quickly wrapped a hand towel round the wound and opened the cabinet door for the first aid kit.

With his fingers cleaned and bandaged he sat down on the couch in his living room and stared into the empty fireplace until the dawn chorus shook him from his reverie. It had come then. The hour that every watcher dreads, the death of his Slayer. He was strangely calm. He sighed and walked to the phone. He had to call someone; who first?

His front door burst open. He dropped the phone. Buffy! Buffy in his arms. He hugged her, squeezing the life from her.

"Giles.. Not that this isn't nice, but the doors open.. The neighbours will talk.." Her voice was music.

"Not to mention the best friend!" Willow remarked playfully.

He released her and cleared his throat. Where were his glasses? He found himself dreadfully embarrassed and awfully relieved to see her safe and well. Willow's smile faded when she saw his hands.

"Giles! What happened?" She took his warm hands in her cool ones and examined the bandages. He let himself be lead to the sofa. Buffy went into his kitchen and made tea.

"Willow, it's nothing. I cut myself on a glass last night. That's all." Her concern warmed his heart and he dared to stroke her bowed head as Buffy put the tea on the coffee table. Buffy smiled secretly at his gesture. He'd been doing that a lot lately. Willow noticed and didn't notice, like she almost expected affection from him but never encouraged it.

Xander had once made a bet with Buffy as to who would touch the other first. (Willow and Giles) It was an on-going thing. Giles was winning but not by much! Buffy didn't know if she liked the touchy-feelies between her Watcher and her best friend.

Giles picked up his tea cup awkwardly. "I had a bad dream, I got up to get some water..." He hesitated remembering the choking sensation and the acrid scent of bitter almonds. "...the glass slipped and I stupidly tried to clear it up in the dark." He lied. No reason to alarm Buffy over a dream!

"Last night Willow, Watcher-man and I shared ice-cream. That's probably what did it y'know. He wolfed down half the tub!" Giles smiled indulgently at his Slayer. Let her tell the story, he thought. He sat back and let the quiet babble wash over him. Just a dream.

"Get the rose lipstick, Buffy. Red is too dark for your colouring." He got up and walked to the kitchen with his cup and saucer.

Buffy and Willow stopped talking mid-word with puzzled looks on their faces.

"What? We were talking about a calculus assignment.. Giles are you feeling OK?"

He froze in the kitchen. He'd heard the calculus conversation, but he'd also heard a third voice rambolling on about lipstick. It would be laughable if it wasn't so strange! The voice was worried now, not saying anything. Just feeling it.

"Oh, sorry. My mistake. It's true though. Red wouldn't suit you." He called trying to make light of his statement while his forehead creased in a frown. He massaged his temples. Maybe he needed more sleep?

"Okay, I think that's enough weirdness for this morning.. Willow you coming? We can grab breakfast on the way to the job hunt." Buffy said over- brightly.

Giles came from the kitchen. Willow hurried after Buffy, hesitated at the door, then ran back to Giles to give him a small kiss goodbye. He bent his neck slightly so the kiss landed on the corner of his mouth. She dashed away and he remained where he was head bent still feeling the press of her soft lips against his. He smiled to himself and turned to go upstairs to dress. His fingers smarted as he grabbed the hand rail. Damn dream!

End of pt.2

Seal of Fate 3/8

Summary Giles Gets Buffy a Birthday Present

Giles decided to forego his research and be out in the throng of bargain hunters. As he walked through the Mall absently looking at the displays, a few people he knew smiled at him.

He stopped by the jewellery shop and did a double take. That was just what he needed for Buffy. It was a charm with a hinged top containing a seal in the design of a cross and stake. It would go well with the others on her charm bracelet. He had bought her a charm for every Birthday since she had been a Slayer. She had become a lovely young woman and he was proud of his Slayer. It was a great pity that the Council didn't think the same. As he walked out of the shop the man who had served him ducked into the heavily shaded back room. Then, a woman's voice came from the shadows.

"Well done. I have decided, you are the one who will poison the Slayer." Extending her pale hand, he brushed his lips over her cool flesh. As she gasped at the heat of his lips her face changed to reveal broken scarred vampiric ridges. It was a face that bore witness to an ancient encounter with a Slayer past. Every Slayer now became subject to her terrible retribution. The ancient vampire bent to kiss her serf's hand, nipping his fingers gently. He hissed in pleasure, honoured to be her Chosen One. The lady Mary lifted her heavy veil to his gaze. Her terrible beauty held him transfixed while her fangs closed on his throat in a fatal kiss.

Soon, Mary's chosen returned from the dead. Enfused with speed and power, her chosens only needed these attributes for a short time. The chosen drank the poisoned blood from a crystal goblet that he smashed on the floor after he drained the last drop.

#

When Giles returned, he opened his door to find both Buffy agitatedly pacing and Willow curled up on the sofa reading one of his forbidden texts. At his entrance she slammed the book shut guiltily, pinching her fingers. She "Ow'd" silently then smiled as Giles wagged an admonishing finger at her. He was in a good mood.

Giles winced as Buffy shouted obscenities at him in her mind. What she said was..

"Where've you been? I've been waiting for hours!" He frowned at her.

"Well, twenty minutes." She pouted. Ah, the new lipstick, he thought.

"Out.. Just for a walk. Window shopping, actually," he said hanging up his coat and walking to the kitchen to make tea.

Willow and Buffy migrated to the stools on the far side of the breakfast bar. Their murmured chatter lulled his brain. He put the tea in the pot whilst absently humming the tune that Buffy exercised to in the morning. The kettle boiled and he poured the water, holding the heavy vessel with a cloth.... Suddenly he had a flash of his nightmare.

#

Harsh, ragged breath and darkness, he was running following the fleeing figure in a dark suit. There's something familiar about him. He's the man in the jewellers!

#

That revelation evaporated as the boiling water scalded his skin. "FUCK!" The kettle slipped from his grasp slopping on his clothes. He leapt from the kitchen and hurtled for the shower. Cold water, cold water. His hands stinging he quickly ripped off his jeans and threw them in a corner. He spun the control to cold and stepped quickly under the icy torrent. He angled his body and arms for maximum cooling effect. Someone was knocking. He opened his eyes, shivering.

"Yes!" His voice echoed.

A tiny, alabaster hand thrust round the door holding his robe. He turned off the water and stepped out, his wet feet squeaking on the floor. He took the robe.

"Thank you." The hand made a "thumbs up" sign. Slipping his robe on he shuddered from the cold and ran his hand through his hair, whipping icy droplets onto the floor. He studied his hands; they were scarlet. "Stupid Bastard," he muttered to himself. He then stilled himself as he remembered his vision. Who turned the assistant and when was he turned? Did his buying Buffy the charm have some evil portent? He shook his head while tying his robe.

#

Giles fell asleep over his books in the lounge, his open fingers twitching as he dreamt. The horses were galloping closer thundering over him, pounding into his head. He shouted to Willow and Xander for help. Only Willow answered him. He lay still shrouded in darkness. The graveyard at night in Sunnydale was far from peaceful. As he wandered around, he noticed that something was different. His heart began to race and he felt a curious ache in his belly. A vampire was near.

There, emerging from the tomb-side crept the assistant from the jewellers. The chase ended with the vampire trapped in the alley. He was breathing hard. No! Don't breathe this time. Use the extra time to learn! The vampire lunged toward his stake. An odd tinkling sound accompanied its headlong rush ending in dust.

He heard the choking, his vision blurring, swallowing the urge to breathe to hold on longer. Buffy's hand fell from her throat, her bracelet tinkling on the ground. His breath left him explosively. He woke starved of air with a parched throat that curiously filled with liquid. Bathroom!

He staggered out holding the door jamb for support. His vision still swam before him as tears spilled from his eyes. He had bought her a gift in innocence. That gift had sealed her fate. He sniffed back his tears and crossed the room. He locked the 'seal' in a drawer. Now she would never have it. Buffy would live. Ripper would see to that

#

The dark figure crept from the shadows. He had lingered by one storeroom for an hour to familiarise himself with the patrol schedule of the guards. He looked at his watch counting the seconds in his mind. Luckily Buffy was oddly quiet tonight, so he had no distractions. He made his move, skirting the shuttered doorways of the shops until he found himself at the right location. But, it wasn't there! He stared at the tiled floor. The shape of the unit was

there. The shop had gone. He stared at the ceiling and kicked at the dusty outline. Dropping to his knees he sniffed the air and found the smell of bitter almonds.

"Shit!" He carried the poison already. Then a guard spotted him and approached, drawing his weapon. Ripper spun away into the shadows and escaped into the silent night.

End of Part 3

### Seal of Fate 4/8

Summary Recurring nightmares and Willow gets a job.

Author's note Speech after in italics signifies thought.

His nightmare was always the same, his desperate chase and the vampire's headlong rush. Its expression of resolve matching its suicidal assault and the brief smile before the dust that peppered his lungs with an engulfing poison.

Giles arched out of his bed and heaved into a bucket at his bedside. His throat and lungs burning, without pause he reached for the bottle of water he now kept on the nightstand, taking a huge swallow to slake his thirst. He shifted his pillow and sat upright swallowing the tiny eruptions of bile that threatened. He opened his eyes and surveyed Sunnydale in the grey light of dawn.

Sunnyhell, Spike had called it. Too bloody right, he thought. His head rolled to his mirror illuminated by the bright sunlight that lanced into his room highlighting his wretched reflection. Ripper had been out every night for a month. Brute force wasn't working although it felt good for a while. He knew that Cyanide had killed Buffy in his nightmare. She was going to die it was inevitable. He dragged his bone weary body to his bathroom for a shower and shave. He had to go out today; he needed help. The Council was his last resort. He couldn't go on feeling like this!

He felt Buffy wake as he stepped under the shower's icy stream and his daylight nightmare started. He rested his head against the streaming tiles, shutting his eyes and ears to the incessant chatter of his Slayers' mind in the morning. His head ached with a slow thudding. He didn't realise he was pounding his head against the tiles until blood mixed with the water pooling at his feet. His eyes wide with shock; he threw back his head and adjusted the temperature of the spray. The blood washed out of his eyes. He ordered himself to concentrate.

He wiped the condensation from the bathroom mirror and donned his glasses. Considering his hand shook through lack of sleep, his shave was remarkably bloodless. He dressed and was soon on his way to the CyberCafe where Willow worked for the summer.

#

He opened the door and slipped guiltily inside, sliding into one of the window seats. He glanced at the bank of computers staring ominously at him from the far wall. He shifted his gaze to the tabletop, his eyes obscured by the dark glasses he wore against the sun's glare. Someone waited expectantly by his elbow. He breathed in her honeysuckle scent.



"Willow?" His head snapped up and he immediately regretted it. He saw in a nano-second all the worries and concerns of the world rip over her elfin features. She swallowed.

"Rup...Giles! What have you been doing to yourself?" She queried, aghast. Her hand reaching out to the fresh cut on his forehead he stopped her with a weak smile.

"I tripped in the shower this morning. I've not been sleeping well.." He added knowing that she had seen the dark circles under his eyes.

"Or eating.. I'm going to get you breakfast! Then I want some answers." Willow left the spectre of her "resolve face" bristling in her wake. Coming here was a mistake!

She was back in ten minutes with enough food to feed an army. His stomach flipped and complained. He lifted his cutlery and began. She helped him with the croissant.

"You don't have to stay and watch me eat, willow. Don't you have other tables to wait on?" He looked around; he was the only one in the café. She smiled at him smugly. He put his knife and fork down.

"Finished?" He nodded. "Good, now why are you here? Apart from eating breakfast." She quantified.

"Can you show me how to operate one of those things" He waved his forefinger in the direction of the terminals. "I need to do a search and to send an e-mail to someone." He smiled apologetically. In response she gave him one of her enchanting smiles. It nearly took his breath away.

"Follow me...." she crooked her finger.. He followed willingly and sat down awaiting instruction. Then the music started. Buffy was doing her exercises. He paled as the horrendous beat pounded inside his head. Willow was talking to him. He could just make out what she said by lip-reading. He asked her to write down some instructions for him to follow and he managed as best he could. The tension in his shoulders increased by the minute, causing him to rub his hand over his knotted muscles and sigh.

"Only an hour..."

Giles logged on, resting his head in one hand, trying to remember the password. The thundering rhythm stopped abruptly and he took advantage of the lull and quickly typed:- rgSlay2004 in the appropriate box. The save prompt came up and he saved all the information to disc. He swung his legs round the stool and was about to leave when the newspaper headline caught his eye.

The story told of Sunnydale's newest horror. He searched the café for Willow, grabbing the paper he surreptitiously nipped round the counter. He overheard Willow talking to Buffy on the phone. That's why the din had stopped!

"He looks awful, Buffy, like he's not slept or eaten in days... I think he's hurting himself as well."

*Willow, he wouldn't do that, not Giles.*

"Well you don't know how depressing it is being all alone with no-one to talk to.."

*Will, if he's depressed we have to undepress him. Give him an invite to my party! See if that cheers him up. Gotta go, gotta aerobiscise.*

Willow hung up and the music battered him almost senseless again. When Willow came out of the back room Giles had left. He forgot to disconnect his terminal and she spied some information on "A Slayer's death" before the connection terminated automatically.

#

Buffy pulled the headphones from her ears and listened. Someone was downstairs pounding on the front door. She tripped lightly down the stairs to open the door. Her smile of welcome faded when she saw her Watchers face. Un-dammed rage clouded his handsome features.

"Will you shut the fucking row off! It's driving me mad!" He bellowed and pushed past her into her hall. He took the stairs two treads at a time on the hunt for her CD's and batteries. He bounded down the stairs and whipped the headphones from round her neck and the stereo from her hands. She regarded him with an expression of shock written all over her face.

"Take up yoga!" He snapped and slammed the door behind him.

End of part 4.

Seal of Fate 5/8

Summary Character death

Buffy knocked at his door. Knocked was the polite way of saying hammered. She opened the door, fully intending to give Giles 'what for' for confiscating all her music. Then she saw him, huddled in a corner, hugging his knees and her heart hit the floor. Something awful must have happened. She picked up the phone and called Willow. She'd be able to help her to help Giles.

She knelt before him and covered his cold hands in her warm ones.

"Giles." She said his name quietly. His eyes shifted to her face and watered slightly.

"Buffy!" He gripped her arms. "I'm sorry, I can't prevent it." Tears fell silently down his face. His grip became painful when he noticed her clothes.

"Buffy, please stay with me tonight. Don't patrol! Please?" Giles' vehemence disturbed Buffy. She'd never seen Giles like this before. It scared her. She pulled slowly away and his eyes deadened once more. Buffy was in the kitchen making tea when Willow arrived.

Willow stood in front of Giles. He made no sign of recognising her. He became agitated when Buffy came in with the tea. Every time she came near he would pluck at her clothing, trying to gain purchase, to hold her. Buffy kept away. Giles was frightening her now. Willow



sat beside him on the sofa. He stared right through her. She caught a sob in her throat.

'He needs your help!' Willow told herself, 'don't go to pieces because he doesn't see you!' She wove a relaxation spell about him. Gradually, his eyes that had remained open all night, denying his mind the rest it craved, closed. His breathing deepened and he slept.

"He'll be OK now, you go and get ready for the party. I'll bring him along later, nice outfit by the way." Willow told Buffy.

"Thanks," Buffy beamed, "my shoes pinch a bit." She winced. "I was expecting a present from Giles." Buffy shrugged, absently jingling her bracelet. She studied her Watcher in repose, his lips parted in gentle breath. She gave in to an impulse and sealed his lips with a kiss. He moaned in his sleep.

"Thanks for seeing me to twenty-five, Rupert." She murmured as she left.

Willow hovered nearby, uneasy with the scene that flashed through her mind. "A Slayer's Death." She looked in horror at Giles sleeping soundly. He hadn't wanted Buffy to leave. She had made him sleep. Shit!

With her heart in her mouth she raced after Buffy, leaving Giles helpless in his tragic nightmare.

##

While Giles slept, some men from the Watchers' Council arrived to clear his apartment. They moved him to a car and he woke suddenly as it started.

"Where's Buffy? Who are you?" Giles reached for the door lock. He was shoved back down in his seat by two men opposite him.

"We got your message, Mr. Giles. We're taking you home to England." The younger of the two looked extremely pissed off. The elder had a kind face.

"Buffy has gone ahead."

Giles looked from one to the other, his fear growing heavy in his chest. He shook his head vigorously.

"No! Buffy, needs me, I need to get to her!" He struggled to open the door nearest to him. "Let me out!" He shouted desperately, fighting frantically to free himself from the men holding him. The Watchers exchanged worried looks as his body spasmed into stillness, giving the impression of calm. His agonised expression denied calm. Were they going to lose this one? Giles blinked and his nightmare played in real time.

##

Buffy walked through the cemetery, cursing her new shoes, toying idly with the charms on her bracelet. She smiled as she remembered Giles giving her the first one. He'd been so serious that first year! Her grin widened. She soon knocked that out of him. Her bracelet was more than jewellery to her. It represented her circle of friends. Each charm a memory, each link forged in love.

The dull ache in her belly alerted her to the presence of an exceptionally powerful vampire. He emerged from an ancient tomb, cast a casual grin over his shoulder at the Slayer and loped nonchalantly away. Buffy bristled!

Willow cut across his path and brought him to the ground. Buffy yelled and tore over the ground to the tumbling pair. What had got into Willow? Why wasn't she with Giles? Buffy couldn't get near because Willow fought so fiercely.

The vampire's heart wasn't in the fight, whereas Willow fought like a wild cat to stake him. She wanted him dead! If he was going to kill Buffy, he'd have to kill her first! That thought splintered her concentration and the vampire knocked her senseless. He crouched over her about to feed when Buffy hauled him backwards. Buffy guarded her friend. The vampire snarled and fled. She hesitated about giving chase until a voice she knew well urged her to do so.

"Go Buffy," Angel said. "I'll take care of Willow." They exchanged a smile of farewell and she took off in pursuit.

Willow revived in Angels' arms. He brought her to her feet. Surprisingly, instead of resting she began to follow Buffy with faltering steps. He caught her when she fell.

"What is it, Willow?"

"Buffy's going to die tonight. Giles saw it. He couldn't prevent it. I can." She sank against his chest; Angel placed her on one of the many benches in the cemetery.

"No, I can." He vanished into the night with preternatural speed.

##

The alley was a dead end. 'The vamp is trapped,' Buffy thought triumphantly. She drew her stake and adopted the "en garde" stance that so amused Giles when he first saw her use it. This is for Giles.

The vampire launched itself at her. 'He's aiming at me,' she thought. Why? The vamp froze in dust. She noted its smile with dread. What?! The light and life screamed out of her mind as she fought for breath through the choking, poisoned dust. Her last thought shot from her soul, GILES!

##

In the back of the speeding car, Giles felt her death. Black, all black now, the light of her pure spirit was gone. He ceased his struggle and collapsed onto his captors.

"What happened?" asked the youngest.

The eldest held Rupert's head, trying to soothe his tortured soul.

"Buffy the Vampire Slayer is dead."

End of pt 5.

## Seal of Fate 6/8

### Summary Angel Finds Buffy

### Warning Character death

The scream of anguish and mourning that was torn from Angels' throat when he first set eyes on Buffy, woke the living and the un-dead of Sunnydale. His cry that night signalled the Blood-Fast, the first in vampiric memory.

Willow, helped by Xander, arrived at the terrible scene. She limped down the alley, gagging on the faint scent hanging in the air. Buffy had been poisoned.

Angel sobbed over Buffy's body, crushing her limp form to his chest. He murmured in her ear to wake up, to stop this cruel game. Interspersed with his pleas he howled and screamed, shaking her, trying to rouse her from her eternal slumber.

Willow stumbled to the ground, blinded by her tears. Angel looked at her, mortified. He held Buffy out to Willow, a pleading look in his eyes. Willow sadly shook her head; there was nothing anyone could do.

Xander stood guard at the alley's entrance. His face hardened as the first of the vampires gathered there. He gripped the stake in his pocket. Angel was at his side, Buffy in his arms.

"They won't harm you. I called for the Blood-Fast. It's a mark of respect to a fallen warrior." Angel, sniffing back bloody tears, shifted Buffy's weight so her head rested under his chin. She looked so peaceful that he could almost pretend she was only sleeping in his arms and not dead.

Xander surveyed the amassed throng. They wore human faces, all masked in genuine sorrow. He had never thought he'd see the day! He took his place on Angel's right. Spike joined them walking next to and steadying Willow. Together they marched on to the 'Summers' house to tell Buffy's mother that her daughter was dead.

##

Buffy had named Willow her joint executor with Giles. Since Giles had vanished, Willow had to cope on her own. Buffy had drafted a typically jocular Will and Last Testament. At times they laughed, at times they cried. Humour is the twin of grief sometimes.

Willows' duties as executor ended with the funeral and the reading the Will. She could go back to missing Giles. She longed for the warmth of his touch as he tucked her hair out-of-the-way when they were researching and the scent of his cologne. Gulping back her tears, she felt immense guilt over the way she prevented him from saving Buffy. At least she could try to find him! People can't vanish so totally. There must be a trace somewhere!

##

She started with what she knew about Buffy's death. The poison used was cyanide, a fast acting poison that acts on the Krebs cycle of the body. When Buffy breathed in the poisoned dust it stopped her body absorbing any more oxygen. Cyanide is used to purify precious metal ores. She paused in her note taking and sipped the tea that Angel had made for her. Spike and Angel, were letting her stay at the mansion while she investigated Giles' disappearance and Buffy's murder. Willow called it murder now. Poison is traditionally a Femme Fatale's weapon. So they were looking for a female vampire with connections to gold and silver mining. No, that's too big. A Jewellers perhaps? The email alert sounded on her laptop. She cursed and hit the Read Mail button.

She stared at the message. Her mouth became dry, her heart pounding in her chest. All the information is here! Everything I need. Her eyes burned with tears of happiness. She had the identity of the vampire that ordered Buffy's murder and best of all Giles was alive! Her ragged sobs brought Angel into the room, fearing the worst.

She searched down the page to see whom she had to thank for this bounty! She laughed out hysterically. Ethan Rayne!

"Good news?" He asked. Willow closed the lid on her laptop carefully, placed it to one side then leapt up catching him by the arm and whirling him round in a breathless twirl.

"Yes!" She squealed and kissed him impulsively. Angels' eyes widened in shock. The contact was brief and unforgettable.

"Giles is alive in England. A vampire called Mary Sebastian ordered Buffy's death. Do you know her?" Willow chattered breathlessly. She sounded like the Willow of years past, her eyes bright with unfulfilled promise and intelligence.

"I know her; we know her don't we Spike?" He raised his voice unnecessarily. Spike shifted round a nearby pillar, a grim smile decorating his angular features.

"Yes. Don't worry Pet. The vampire posse will take care of Mary Sebastian for you." He and Angel exchanged knowing looks. Willow stilled in her dizzy dance and her face became serious.

"I want to watch." Her witch-green eyes burned with vengeful fire.

End of part 6

### Seal of Fate 7/8

Summary Willow has her vengeance. Spike plays

Xander balked at sharing the Mansion with Angel and Spike until Willow insisted their plan wouldn't work without him. He looked at her pattering about in the small kitchen making their dinner. It smelt delicious! His head rang with the banging of the blacksmiths hammer, wielded by Angel in the courtyard. His game-face lit with satanic resolve as the hooks slowly began to take shape. He plunged the glowing metal into the bucket of water by the

furnace, stepping back to avoid the lethal steam. That was the last one; there were four in all, one for each of Mary's limbs. He smiled with satisfaction. Buffy died in seconds, Mary, if they were lucky would last at least a day.

"Xander!" Willow called. "Dinner!" She put the pot on the table, extricating her hands from the pot holders.

"What's in it?" He sniffed appreciatively, holding out his plate to the ladle.

"Everything that does you good, nothing that does you harm." She smiled and sat down with her plate. Spike sat down opposite Xander and toyed with a spoon.

"You clear on what's going to happen then?" Willow glared at Spike, he sighed and left the table, without saying anything more.

"What did he mean by that?" Xander gazed at Willow, she couldn't meet his eyes. "What's going to happen?"

"I'll tell you after you've eaten Xander..." She shovelled a spoon of the stew into her mouth to prevent him from asking any more questions.

##

Xander was so glad Willow hadn't told him about the plan over dinner! He and Spike had to act friendly; how friendly was yet to be determined. He shuddered at the thought. Angel, Willow, Spike and he were going to be a 'family', for Mary's benefit. They were going to invite Mary to the mansion, overpower, and torture her for murdering Buffy. And who had planned this venture? Willow!

##

Spike paced in front of him. Xander sat hunched in the chair. Spike had interrogated him for three hours. The vampire muttered Xander's answers under his breath committing them to memory. They had so little time to prepare! He glanced at the adjoining room where his Sire was doing the same to Willow. Only she looked sweeter. He stopped pacing and studied Xander. He didn't look like any member of any family he remembered. From the information he'd managed to drag from the boy he didn't belong anywhere. Perhaps that's what made him so effective as part of Team Slayer!

"Xander, anything you want to ask me?" Xander looked up and took a breath, his ordeal over. He shook his head. He just wanted to get some sleep.

"For fucks' sake!" Spike exploded. "Don't you know what's at stake, boy? If you don't know how to act round me, she'll kill you. Slowly!"

Xander wracked his brains for questions after that. Gradually after half an hour the tension had passed Spike lay on the floor at his feet recounting fascinating adventures of his youth. Xander didn't want him to stop.

"See, most important thing to remember is, I protect you. She'll expect you to be scared of her. You've got to have confidence in me. She'll sense that too. Ownership, understand? Now get some sleep." He placed a tender kiss on Xander's forehead as he left.

"Night, Mom." Xander's response came unbidden from his lips. Spike hesitated his back stiffening, then after a beat, he strode out of the room with a shake of his head.

Xander looked around and gasped. Leaping from the chair he staggered down the steps from the raised dais. He had been sitting in the same chair in the same place where Giles had been tortured at Angelus' hands. He sank down on the steps remembering his friend's ashen face and broken body. He shut his eyes and rested his head against the rough stone wall.

The faint waft of flowers and rustle of silk told him Willow was beside him. Her scent had changed over the years he'd known her, baby powder; bubble gum; soapy; now floral and sexy. He had to admit it, Willow had grown up; she was adult enough to organise a torture he thought bitterly.

"What are you thinking?" Willow's soft voice intruded on his musings.

Xander looked at Willow, with her long Empire line gown and elaborately braided wig she looked like a Napoleonic lady. Her sneakers peeping from beneath her dress shattered the illusion. She turned her head to study his face in profile.

"Giles. I was thinking of Giles. Where is he now, Will? He should be here! So you wouldn't be thinking of torturing someone. It's not your job Willow. Let Dead-boy and Spike handle it!"

"Xander, Mary isn't 'someone,' she's a 'something'. She killed our Buffy! Spike's told me she has no minions. She uses those she sires as assassins to kill Slayers. She's a rogue...a real Bitch!" Xander studied Willow's face unsure whether he liked the sudden change in her attitude.

"Are you sure, Willow?" He clasped her hands in his wishing his Willow to return.

"Yes!" She affirmed vehemently, her eyes cold. "You didn't see how Giles fought to prevent Buffy's death and what that struggle did to his mind. I did. I expect you to play your part, Xander. Mary must suspect nothing, understand?" He nodded.

"What do you have planned for her?" He asked dreading her answer.

Willow's eyes gleamed with evil mischief, she smiled and tossed her pretty head.

"Well, I thought I'd use Holy water, but in an IV. I mean, if it burns on the outside. It should be spectacular inside the body. Burning drip by drip by drip." She hugged her knees smiling brightly. Xander swallowed hard revolted by her enthusiasm for torture. "I really want to do this Xander. Don't you think Giles would want to have revenge on the vampire that killed Buffy? Or perhaps you don't have the stomach for it?" She challenged venomously.

"I'll be there, Willow. I just don't think Giles would approve of you taking such an active part..."

"How the fuck do you know? Everybody else ignored him 'cept me! I Put him to sleep Xander!" She screamed. "So he couldn't save her I've got to do something!" She sobbed



desperately. She wiped her tears away viciously and got up to leave.

"Hey, Willow," she hesitated, looking back at him. "Nice sneakers." She smiled. He held on to that image of Willow while he went back to his brooding melancholy.

##

Mary walked into the mansion courtyard, her nostrils flaring. She smelled humans here. She scoured the doorways and hiding places for her meal.

"Lady Mary," Angel gushed, sweeping towards the ancient vampire he clasped her hand in his own, brushing her delicate knuckle's with his lips in a courtier's greeting. "You do us a great honour."

Spike hovered in the shadows his Sire's fawning sickened him. Just knock her on the head so we can get to the fun stuff! Xander stayed behind Spike trying to peep round him.

"Will you stop fidgeting!" Spike hissed. "Angel's just about to introduce Willow," Spike grinned at Xander. "It'll blow her mind!" He chortled.

"Why?" Xander asked in a whisper.

"Because Willow's the image of the Slayer who tried to Slay Mary. Angel has seen to it that Willow knows everything there is to know about her. She will become that Slayer tonight. It should be quite a show. Its time...Now." Spike stepped from the shadow's with Xander on his heels. He approached Angel and Mary with carefully measured ease, fixing a smile on his lips he too greeted the vampire warmly.

"Lady Mary, so good of you to come. May I introduce Xander?" Spike stepped to one side. Xander kept his face serene but was totally unprepared for the vampire's disfigurement. No wonder she hated all Slayers! He took a step toward her and surprised Spike by offering his wrist inviting her bite. Spike shifted involuntarily. By the Gods he's got guts! Mary inspected his wrist and with a flick of her hand waved it away. Obviously his blood was not to her taste. Spike grabbed Xander back; he hoped not too eagerly. Xander offered his wrist to Spike. Xander's eyes conveyed one word. Ownership. Spike caught on at last. The boy really had been listening! He bent his head nipped his flesh, licked a few drops and released his hand slowly. He felt the boy's relief as Mary drifted past them. Angel's turn.

Willow appeared at the top of the stairs. This was her big entrance, I hope I don't trip, she prayed. Angel, Spike and Xander looked toward Willow. Their gaze forced Mary to look in the same direction. Willow glided down the stairs. Angel let his studied gaze fall on Mary he wanted to memorise her horrified look. Terror alternated with disbelief as she stared at Willow descending the stairs. Willow took Angel's arm and he lead her to Mary. The vampire backed away, shaking her head. Willow smiled serenely extending her pale hand, then Willow's expression changed as she whipped her fist back, her eyes burned ready to stake the bitch. Angel dragged her screeching, away. She'd lost it! Mary panted with unnecessary breath in the centre of the courtyard.

Spike whirled a strange contraption above his head he aimed it at Mary. The Bola wrapped around her, the hooks thudding into her flesh making her scream and writhe in agony. The wounds gently smoked with an unholy fire.

"Not exactly as planned but it worked out OK.." He shrugged. "Xander, grab her feet." The vampire struggled and wailed all the way to the dungeon. Angel held Willow securely and finally managed to pry the stake from her grasp. She sobbed into his chest.

"I'm sorry..." She sniffled, tears dripping on her dress. She felt so wretched. Angel gave her a handkerchief.

"Willow, I know how you feel...Really, you forgot everything in the lust for revenge. That's bloodlust, Willow. For a second you knew what it was to be a vampire. Do you still want to watch?" She nodded.

"C'mon. Spike an' I are gonna have fun!" His eyes gleamed. He held her hand and they walked towards the stairs that lead to the dungeon.

##

Spike released the hooks one at a time. Mary lay helpless on the rack. Being without minions she had no hope of rescue. She paid now for her centuries of isolation. She didn't know these vampires, all she had done was kill a Slayer. That's all. She couldn't understand why they were making such a fuss!

"My name's..." Spike held the hook aloft, gripping her arm with one hand and positioning it over the arm rest. He drove the hook into her wrist fixing it to the stout oak board. "Spike!" He walked round the table and released the second hook from her knee. He pulled her leg straight and drove the hook through her left foot. He breathed in the putrid scent of her burning flesh. It had been so long!

"I'll be your torturer for this evening...." Xander freed the next hook and held it out to Spike. He smiled at the boy. "Thanks pet." Xander blushed. Spike couldn't find the last hook. He tapped his nails on the rack then he realised. He reached under Mary's body and wrenched the last hook from her back. He hammered this one into her other foot. Xander flinched with each blow. Mary howled and writhed her shattered game face phasing back and forth with pain and terror.

Willow appeared with Angel. Spike looked up from his work. She was a distraction he could do without! He couldn't work with her here. Willow went to a small cupboard and collected her equipment.

"Thank you William, I'll take it from here." Willow busied herself setting up the drip and sliding the I.V. into Mary's vein. The vamp's head turned straining to bite her. Willow bent over her studying her. She caressed the vampire's scarred face, smiling brightly she said. "I'm giving you a special beauty treatment Mary; it's SO to die for!"

She checked the connections and started the drip. Mary twitched and hissed as the drips of Holy water mixed with her stolen blood. Willow withdrew to the side of the room. Spike stared at Mary; This was no fun! Where was the screaming? Then, abruptly Mary jerked and an unearthly scream of the damned spewed from her throat. That was more like it! He grinned and applauded.

The Holy water dripped into Mary staining her veins crimson then cinder-black. It seeped into her tissues searing her flesh, causing her skin to split into bubbling eruptions. The

deadly liquid pooled in her joints darkening each junction to charcoal grey.

Soon the original site for the IV crumbled. So Willow shifted it to the opposite arm. Spike danced about her, complimenting her on exquisite taste for torment. Willow smiled wanly. Only Angel knew what it cost her to endure her own 'torment.' Willow wavered in her resolve clutching the rack. Angel steadied her disguising her weakness by whirling her round in a merry dance to the new IV site. The drip started anew; forging its volcanic flaming path to throat and thorax, liver and lungs.

Spike adjusted the rack to crank up the volume of Mary's groans, as her joints cracked open a putrid odour filled the air, Willow gagged; Xander raced for the stairs unable to stand anymore. Willow remained.

Angel had nothing but admiration for her; Spike would have joyfully married her! Near exhaustion, Willow waited until she was sure that Mary's body was beyond 'bloods' repair. Then she arose, her emerald eyes burning with an unholy fire. She leaned over the shattered visage of Lady Mary.

"You, cheated my stake! You, killed my friend!" She spat venomously. She held her hand over Mary's heart, green ribbons of witch-fire strangling the organ in her chest. "You, drove him mad! For that, I will see you dust. I have had my fill of you, you bitch! Send Satan my greetings. Tell him I sent you!" She smiled the ancient Slayers smile, then, she stepped back from the rack and dropped like a stone.

Angel smoothed Willow's hair, as he lifted her from the floor and took her upstairs. Xander was in the kitchen retching, when he spied Angel with Willow. He laid her gently on the couch and kissed her lips lightly.

"Goodnight, little vamp." He whispered, hesitating he inclined his head slightly. "Night Xander." He walked back to the dungeon. He had work to finish.

##

Xander shared the couch with Willow; he slept at the opposite end and had nightmares. He heard the cranking of machinery followed by haunted screams. Finally near dawn an agonised wail cut short woke him. He shot from the couch in search of a stake. Angel and Spike came from the dungeon. They froze when they saw Xander; they didn't expect him to be awake.

"She ?" Xander queried, his chest heaving with fear and anticipation.

The two vampires' nodded as one. Xander sank to the couch not knowing whether to laugh or cry. Willow yawned awake; she looked so dewy-fresh this morning. It was hard to believe that she helped to torture a vampire to death the night before. Xander held his head in his hands. What were they to do now? Willow's arm snaked round his shoulder. He clutched her to him and sobbed.. She rocked him gently, her own tears silently spilling down her cheeks.

End of Pt.7

## Seal of Fate 8/8

Summary After taking her revenge on Mary, Willow set's out to redeem Giles.

He walked down the gravel drive towards the Victorian redbrick edifice. The impressive limestone portico spoke volumes of the care the Victorians lavished on their lunatics.

This was the country residence of Rupert Giles, no director or therapist he. He was an inmate. Ethan adjusted his case in his right hand as he rang the bell with his left. The door was opened by an immense Neanderthal in a ridiculous three-piece suit.

"Yes?"

Ethan gazed up at the giant and gave him his most disarming smile.

"Good morning, I'm here to see a patient. My name is Ethan Rayne." The cave man shuffled out of the doorway and pointed down the hall.

"Thank you!" Ethan marched past rows of doors until he got to the head psychiatrist's office.

##

"Rupert Giles is a man who's suffered a massive trauma. The Watcher's Council pays for his care here and want us to help him remember. I think that it would do him more harm than good. He seems fixated on young blonde women.."

"Who isn't?" Ethan smirked.

"Quite. On the odd occasion that we let him go out, he visits cemeteries and sits for hours watching."

Ethan nodded drinking his tea while he watched a video of Rupert's treatment. Giles could have attempted suicide in the first few weeks, so he was watched all the time. Ripper was acting strangely, pacing his room, listening then pacing again. He would become violent for no reason. Ethan rewound the tape to just before the violent outbursts. He noted that just before Rupert became aggressive he looked like he smelled a scent. The some men entered his room, overpowered and sedated him. It was disturbing to see.

"Could you not talk him down from the violent moods instead of sedating him. Surely that suppresses the memories you're trying to unlock?"

In answer the psychiatrist ejected the tape and played an earlier one. It depicted Ripper full force, his face a mask, flinging men twice his size to the ground. He fought with an economy of movement not stopping until everyone in the room was still. Then he turned to the window and stared out at the trees.

"If we could get away with a dart gun, we'd use it! He's extremely violent, Mr. Rayne. Are you sure you want to see him?"

Ethan nodded. He had found him for the little witch. She would be able to help him better

than any asylum.

##

Ethan walked down the path towards the seated figure. His heart beat fast in anticipation of seeing his friend. He sat down next to him and looked fondly into his face. Ripper had gone. Ethan's smile faded. He swallowed the lump in his throat.

"Mr. Giles?" Rupert's head lifted imperceptibly.

"Yes." His lips barely moving; his tone was flat and lifeless.

"It's Ethan, Rupert." He said softly, appealing to his subconscious mind, smiling as Rupert's fingers curled into a fist. "You remember me don't you?"

"Yes." This time he nodded, turning his head minutely.

"Good," Ethan patted his thigh and Rupert's eyes flicked dangerously from his fist that clenched tighter to Ethan's face.

"Rupert, you've got to concentrate on getting better old chap, I'm sending Willow to you."

"Tree..." His hand relaxing, his eyes watering.

"Willow?" A tear fell on his cheek and he swiped it away quickly. Ethan held his breath at the inflection in his voice. Rupert's expression hardened.

"Sleep." He said bitterly. Ethan didn't like the sound of that.

"Your psychiatrist tells me you're going to an Art gallery next month, if you're good."

"Yes." The dead voice was back.

"Be good Ripper, she misses you! You won't see me again till near the end. See you later, Rip." He kissed Rupert's head as he left.

##

Willow dashed through the rooms clutching the email she'd printed, her heart fluttering in her chest. Found him, found him! Her mind repeated her new mantra. She stopped her desperate search for the errant vampires and stood in the centre of the courtyard, screeching their names.

Xander fell out of his bed with an almighty crash. Spike and Angel jumped from the upper floor to the courtyard in a leap that would have killed mortal men.

"You bellowed?" Spike quipped.

"What is it, Willow; what's the matter?" Angel asked. She thrust the crushed paper into his hands, not trusting her voice with the news. Angel grinned and passed the paper to Spike. Willow flew into Angel's arms and he whirled her round giving her a kiss. After a moment Willow pulled away, a little embarrassed. Spike hugged her and called for Xander but he

was already downstairs watching the commotion.

Xander knew it meant one thing; Giles had been found and he would be alone.

"Giles is sick Xander. Ethan says I'm the one to make him better. I've got to go to London to meet him at an Art Gallery" He nodded.

"Willow, it's alright. You go. I'll be fine here.. Give G-Man a hug from me OK?" She reserved her best hug for him.

"I love him, but Xander, you're the best friend ever," she whispered. That's all he could expect now, wasn't it?

##

One week later Willow Rosenberg found herself stepping through the revolving doors to the Tate Gallery in London. There were two reasons for her excitement. Ethan had assured her that Giles would be there today and she had never been to London before. She bought a program and wandered round. She realised that she ought to be methodical, go to the artists that Giles would like. Then she changed her mind; let the Gods decide.

She became fascinated with one particular painting. She stepped forward for a closer look, then stepped back onto someone's foot.

"Sorry.." she glanced round with an apologetic smile, which widened to an ecstatic grin. Giles! Her mind rejoiced, then her smile died. Giles wasn't there. His eyes were vacant.

He had an aura of a caged animal, looking past Willow at the painting she had studied. His eyes gained expression briefly. Someone came along and attempted to move him along. He shrugged them off angrily but followed them all the same. Willow gulped back her tears, searching her bag for a tissue to blow her nose.. 'Fight for him, Rosenberg!' she ordered and marched off in search of her prey. For two hours she stalked him. Every time his eyes left a painting she made sure she was right beside him smiling happily.

She gained confidence toward the end, making him search for her. Search for her he did. Her reward was his smile. He was looking at her, seeing her. She was jubilant! Willow bent to collect her bag and he'd vanished! Her heart stopped.

She raced to the exit, galloping down the steps. She saw him get into a minibus with a dozen other people. She grabbed her pen, ripping off the top and noted the name printed on the side of the bus. She waved and saw Rupert look out the back window. She stayed frozen like a statue until the bus faded from view. She read the hastily written address Redhill Sanatorium, Surrey. Right! She picked up her bag and slapped the top on her pen. Prepare for a Willow invasion!

##

The occupational therapist had instructed her patients to draw a familiar face. It was part of the 'zone of safety' therapy for trauma patients. Rupert Giles had been sketching the same girl over and over; always sleeping. Now he was drawing a tree, not exactly wrong if it was familiar to him but a bit abstract for therapy.



She showed Rupert's sketches to his psychiatrist who decided to agree to the request of the Watchers Council and use Electro-Convulsive Therapy to jolt Rupert's memory. It might even help with his violent tendencies.

##

Giles walked in the gardens by the pond. He liked it here. It was peaceful. Not like the first place, that was hard and white. They had hurt him there.

Oz put his case on the ground and fixed the sight to his weapon. He checked the focus revealing his target. Giles, he gasped. He couldn't kill Giles! He had to though; it was a full moon tonight. If he didn't kill now, he'd kill later. He lifted the sight to his eye and pulled the trigger. The shot spat harmlessly into the ground at Giles' feet. Someone had forced his gun down at the last second. Oz glared at the man scowling down at him.

"Werewolf," He tutted. "Not now, not ever! Don't you want to be free? Let him help, wait.." Ethan dissolved into the trees. Oz looked back to where Giles had stood. He wasn't there.

##

"Is it enough?" Asked the nurse. The doctor nodded. Orderlies held Rupert still but he wasn't calm; his muscles cording with the effort to free himself. He struggled desperately beneath the men. The needle slid home and he slumped back on his bed. The orderlies didn't let go straight away. They prepared Rupert for his treatment, dressing him in a robe and dumping him in a wheelchair. One of them rapped his knuckles on Rupert's head.

"Hey Rupert, who's gonna have their brain fried, 'eh? You'll drool like the rest of 'em then 'eh?"

"Tree.." Giles whispered.

"What? Ere yer not suppose' to say nuffink."

Giles eyes closed, as he was moved from his room. His hand drifted down to the wheel rim slowing its progress.

##

The psychiatrist studied the determined young woman sitting opposite him. Her name was Willow Rosenberg. She recognised the girl in Rupert's sketches as Buffy Summers and the tree that Rupert obsessed about was a willow tree. He didn't need the E.C.T. His mind was waking. He grabbed the phone.

##

"He's already left?" Willow felt her chest constricting. The plump psychiatrist dropped the phone.

"Let's stop it, stop it now! You're not going to shock him! I won't let you!" Looking at her face, he believed every word.

"Second floor..." She shot out of the door before he could rise from his desk.

She thought she saw someone familiar in a chair being wheeled to a lift. She screeched to a halt as the doors closed. Cursing, she crashed into the door marked 'Stairs,' turning her ankle. Cursing again, she ripped her shoes off and chucked them viciously down the stairwell. She tore up the stairs, her lungs burning and smashed through the second floor door, powering down the corridor; people scattering before her.

"Giles!" She screamed. Not knowing where she found the breath!

The orderlies finished their smoke and prepared to wheel him into the treatment room.

"Move him and you're dead!" She growled dangerously. Sinking to her knees before him. She searched his face for a sign that he recognised her. He looked much as she had seen him the day of Buffy's death, when she had used that disastrous relaxation spell. Tears squeezed past her tight closed lashes. She caught her breath as she felt his hand sweep through her hair.

"Willow.." He smiled.

She flung her arms round his neck and held him secure in her arms until the psychiatrist arrived to cancel the session. A nurse took Rupert back to his room, where he slept off his sedation.

##

Willow arranged to have Giles released into her care. Although the psychiatrist had orders from the Watchers that forbade his release, he didn't trust them. He trusted this young woman, who had travelled half the world to be with the man she loved. Rupert Giles would be safe with Willow Rosenberg.

"Taking care of him will be tough, here's my private number should you run into difficulties or simply want to talk. If it gets too much for you..."

"It won't. Thank you." She shook his hand and went to collect her prize 'I've got him Buffy; he's safe!' she thought as she opened the door to his room. She smiled. He stood quietly in his room waiting for her, clutching his case looking almost like the old Giles; the high school librarian Giles.

"Let's go, Rupert." She took his hand in hers and they walked out of the building. They were free.

The End. Next Willow's secrets.