

## Poet – Chase This Night

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**Rating:** uhhh NC-17 eventually (why bother with anything else!)

**Pairing:** Buffy / Faith

**Disclaimer:** Yeah I'm poor, I own nothing. Don't sue me.

**Spoilers:** yup, and lots of it. But lets stop at Angel episode Sanctuary, its all AU after that.

**Notes:** VIRGIN!!!! Please be gentle with me...

**Notes 2:**I'm reposting parts 1-3 because I tend to get a little anal. I made a few changes that add insight to the characters emotions, but not a whole lotta changes plot wise.

**Summary:** Awaiting Summary

**Print Version:** Unfinished

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### Part 1

Its cold, so cold I feel it to the marrow, and the tears feel like ice on my face. I always remember this place being lit with warm lights and candles. But now, with just the pale and desolate streetlight pouring through the shattered window, everything is blue. And this light hides impossible things. It shows me awful things... things that I've done, what I could have been. It all plays on the wall. Flashing like some macabre and silent home movie. And it's always the same damn flick.

Why am I here...again? Why can't I just let it GO? This town, this apartment, this girl. This is just a dream. I know this, so why can't I wake the fuck up?! The shadows move through this space like slow oil, dripping down the walls, spilling over me and it's like I'm drowning. But that's not how I die.

I'm sitting on the bed, in my old apartment that the Mayor gave me. And old Dickey himself is sitting in the corner with that smile on his face. The one I used to love, the one I would do anything to see. It says 'I'm proud of this little pawn, I think I'll keep her for a while.'

I hate that smile now. It reminds me that that's all I ever was to him, to everyone. A pawn, a tool, a pet whatever other word that could describe being totally inconsequential. I can't fuckin' stand it. That smile. I've tried yelling at him, screamin' my hate and rage, even threw the floor lamp at him. But he still sits there with that shit eatin' grin. He's waiting. Because he knows, just as I do that door is gonna open and she's gonna walk over here and kill me. The shadows shift, I watch the wall, I just killed Allen Finch.

So this time I don't yell, I don't scream or beg. I just wait and watch. And the door opens, and she's there. Dressed in red leather and loathing. She's got my knife in her hand. It would be sexy, if I wasn't about to die...again. My eyes are burning, 'cause I don't think I can stand to see the satisfaction in her face that always accompanies my last breath. She steps over the threshold and I expect her to just stride across the room and gut me like she does every night, so I can die again caught between her hate and his disappointment. But something is different this time. She pauses and looks around, as if she's surprised by the situation. The shadows

shift...oil spills away.

And I know she's here...like REALLY here. Fuck. What am I gonna do? I didn't expect this. I'm not ready to see her...to talk to her...I was ready to die again. She looks to the corner and so do I, boss man is still sittin' there, still smiling at me. She looks back to me and even in this dark, this cold, the green of her eyes is so shocking, the heat...the intensity pulls the air straight out of my lungs. And it hurts. It hurts so fuckin' bad... more than her stabbing me, more than dying... cause she's got tears in her eyes.

"Faith?" Her voice is like a thread, all thin and unbelieving.

"B..." I'm kinda shocked by the sound of my own voice. I'm not used to hearing it here...`cause well...usually dying right about now, but I can't let that stop me. I gotta say something, try to make all this right. I may never get another chance at it.

"You brought me here?" B whispers and it isn't all accusing like I was expecting...In fact it was kinda...hopeful? Maybe? The lights flick and I'm lying to her face.

"I-I don't know B...I'm not real sure what's goin' on here." I'm telling the truth. I finally get the balls to stand up and take a couple of steps toward her. She looks around again and her eyes hold on the Mayor in the corner, then they move to the knife in her hand. Ok, getting a little worried here.

"You wanna fight me, Faith? That what this is about?" And there's the cold hard steel I was expecting. I gotta fix this, quick. Just the thought of losing this chance...

"No! B, I-I don't want that..." God, I'm stuttering here. Fuck! Hold...it...together. I take a breath to calm my nerves and I see her looking at the man in the corner again. The wall flickers and I'm kissing Angelus, she's chained to the wall. She sees this, too.

"It always comes back..." B says, almost to herself.

"What does?" I think it's best to maybe let her run this show, I take a few more steps closer.

"Past...things I've killed...put to rest." Now she's looking at me, all that green fire, burning right through my soul.

"I tried B, tried so hard but I can't hurt him...nothin' works." I look at him and the bastard chuckles...he LAUGHS and it's a hollow dead sound. God I was so stupid then, when I wanted his acceptance, his approval.

"No...but you hurt ME, didn't have to try very hard, either." But all I ever wanted was hers.

"Tell me what I can do..." I don't want to beg her, but I know I will. "B...I- I'm so sor-" The sound of the blade slicing through the air cuts me off and I look to the corner. And he's dead...My knife in his face... bleeding and dissolving before my eyes. My head snaps back and Buffy is suddenly, painfully close to me.

"Don't you dare. Don't you EVER..." And at this moment, when the sudden venom in her voice seeps into my skin, I break. And everything is suddenly so fast so bright...it feels like

I'm burning from the inside out.

"Don't what, Buffy?! Don't apologize?!" Why am I screaming? Why can't I stop? "You don't want to hear that it's all changed! That I sat in that fuckin' cell for months and rotted for you!! That I would have given anything...everything I had for you to just understand!!"

"Understand!?" And she's shouting now, too. Indignant and condemning. And it's more vicious than I could ever dream...`cause this is real now. "Understand what, Faith? What did you give me? You were a goddamn tomb! Nothing could reach you..."

"Did you even try?! God B, I was dead to you long before you gutted me!"

"Yeah you were, `cause the minute you decided that the darkness that..." She looks around for a second, it's a wild angry gesture. "...that all this was worth it... you became worthless to me." And that hurts so much worse than dying. And the knife is in her hand again.

"Does it mean anything that I regret all this!! That I'm s-sorry!" I hate that my voice is breaking, that it's so hot and bright in here now...I want the cold dark again.

She looks like she can't believe I said it...that I mean it.

"I said it B! Watcha gonna do?" I can't help but glance at the knife in her hand. She looks too, and it's as if she doesn't recognize her own hand.

"You gonna kill me now? Beat me to death?! Come on B, you promised!" And I know I'm losing it, I'm right in her face now. I grab her wrist, the one with the blade and yank it towards me.

"N-no! Faith I-" She's fighting me, shaking her head, but now I want it, `cause it would feel so much better than this.

"Maybe this would be easier, huh, B?" I jerk her arm harder. "Just like old times, yeah!? Come on B! Kill me! It's easy! You do it every fuckin' night!" God I didn't mean to say that...but I can't stop. It's all so fast.

"Faith, stop it! Don't do thi-"

But I pull harder, harder than she fights and it all slows down. For an instant...forever...I feel it, that cool, hard blade that burns all the way down to the grip. And I hear her scream `No' and then my name...but I don't die. We both look down and I expect to see my life spilling over her delicate fingers, but the knife is gone and there is no pain, just those fingers griping my shirt. Everything is so still and quiet now, our harsh breaths are the only sound...and they're almost in sync.

"Faith...I can't..." And it's her voice is breaking now. Frail. Why is this happening?

I finally pull my eyes up to her face, and it's like she's looking right through me...no, it's like she's actually SEEING me. I know I've never seen that look before, I don't know if I should be scared. But I don't have time to think about it because she moves so suddenly...and she's grabbing my head, her thumbs on either side of my face and pulls me towards her...and I can

hardly gasp before my lips are being crushed against hers. My eyes close despite the shock, despite the violence of it because her mouth is just too soft to bear. But this kiss is hard, and I can feel her teeth and her anger and her fear pouring over me. The force of it makes me stagger back, but she follows and presses harder. And something in the air around us begins to move...to crackle and I feel her press body press against me...sink into me. And my hands are moving on their own violation, up to her face. So smooth...into her hair. It's like silk.

A low mumble escapes and I don't know if it came from her or me, but it doesn't matter as she releases some of the pressure of her lips...and she's kissing me. Really kissing me, and the harshness is gone...and the pain is gone and all that's left is her mouth moving over mine in a hot wet slide that makes me tremble. She relaxes her grip on me and her thumbs softly stroke the sides of my face as her lips try to take...possess every part of me. I give it willingly. Her tongue glides slowly over my bottom lip and I hear another low moan and this time I know it's from me, because my whole body is shaking and her tongue just slid against mine. I can't help but dig my nails into her scalp slightly. It's so soft and warm, and I feel as if my mouth is melting into hers.

And we stay in that soft warm place for what seems like an endless moment. But it all shifts again and the gentleness fades and morphs into something new... and something deep inside me starts to tighten, it's coiling like a spring. It's something hot and wild now and we're suddenly ravaging each other's mouths. It's all too much, but I still just want more and she's sucking on my tongue and I'm biting her lips and the heat is rising so fast between us. She whimpers into me as my tongue glides over the roof of her mouth and I feel it through my entire being and I can't help but answer her in another moan.

I'm burning for her. She pulls me tighter against her body and I can feel everything...her breasts pressing into mine...god her nipples...they're so...her hips jerk a little and I don't think I can stand it. I feel my skin start to prickle and my nipples just got so fuckin' hard. I feel that down low clutch and now I have to whimper because this kiss just made me wetter than I've ever been before.

My hips buck in answer to her and suddenly there is a strong leg pressing between my thighs and my world is spinning and I hear myself cry against her mouth. It sounds desperate 'cause I am. My chest suddenly feels like it's gonna explode and I have to pull away for air. My face is still in her hands as I gulp in air. She does the same and I watch her eyes flutter open...it's the darkest green. She pulls me impossibly closer and she's shaking just as much as I am...I can feel her heart beating.

"Can't kill you Faith..." It's the lowest whisper I've ever heard from her and I have to bite back a groan at the sound of it.

"Why not?" And I can't believe my own voice either.

"I'm not ready for that..." Her lips brush mine, and this time I do groan and I almost miss her final word. "Yet."

And I'm suddenly awake. And alone and in some shitty motel room bed. I bring my fingers to my lips as I pant into the darkness. They're tender and swollen and I can still taste her on my tongue. I close my eyes and I can see the whole scene playing back on my eyelids...it's just too much all over again. So I stare at the cracked and leaky ceiling above me...and I can still

feel the heat of her wrapped around me...she was holding me. Tears spring to my eyes because I realize that's something I've never had. Never will have. A box fan roars its grief in my ear and its breath is humid and full of the air's ashes. Nothing moves here...not like in my dreams, and as the blackness of my room turns slowly to blue and gray I know I won't be sleeping again tonight...here comes the sun.

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### Part 2

I wake up and I'm on fire. That's what it feels like...the heat of her skin, her body pressed against mine, it's a phantom warmth and it blankets me. The dream is flashing Technicolor though my head...almost faster than I can comprehend. Every single emotion known is at war inside me and it feels like I'm being torn apart. The overwhelming disbelief, the violent rage, paralyzing fear, betrayal, remorse, hope...the lust. Christ I can still smell her hair...lavender and cigarettes and Faith. And it hits me then. She was here...or I was there...and...

Oh. My. God. I take a deep breath to keep the panic in check and move to sit at the edge of the bed. It was real. My lungs are burning...why am I crying?! When I stepped through that door, I had felt her, and I had known it wasn't just a regular dream...or nightmare, or whatever. So what does it mean? These dreams are always telling to some degree...prophecy girl here after all. But Faith...and the knife, well, that was past. 'But it always comes back.' My words and her words are flying through my head and I can feel that anger the rage bubbling in my chest...the outrage at her audacity...that she has any right to play the victim.

I feel my fists clench and I look down at my hands, only mildly surprised to find my nails digging into my palms. Another deep breath, I stand, and now I'm pacing.

"Think, damn it." I mumble into the darkness. I force the tears to stop...the anger makes it easier. But that ache is still there, pressing...burning in my chest. Why is this happening? Why can't I just let it go? That time when I felt so alive, when she made me feel everything and then took it all away. The nostalgia leaves a bitter taste in my mouth...It wipes away what was left of her flavor...Cherry Coke.

It's been more than eight months since I've seen her...since she went to jail. She belongs there, where she can't hurt...kill anyone else. Where she can't hurt me. So does this mean she's out now?! Christ! Trust the California legal system to set the murdering psychopaths free...

"I so don't need this now...not with everything else that's going on." And now I'm talking to myself...great! Lock me up, too! It would be all I need for Faith to show up here hell bent on revenge, when I've got the mother of all baddies running a-muck, after my family.

Ok, so Faith obviously brought me to that place, well I can only assume so. I certainly wasn't thinking of her before I fell asleep or anything. The girl is dead to me...hell, she said it herself, and it's true...it has to be. So why...? And I remember her face then...god her eyes...she looked like she was falling...like she was hurt... broken... NO! Faith isn't any of those things...you have to possess some modicum of human emotion first. She told me she didn't care...and now she wants me to understand? How can I possibly understand that she has no regret for killing a human...for taking a life! And she took so much more than that, too...my trust, my belief in everything that was still good in this world, my innocence, she took it and threw it in my face and she wants me to understand!! Why can't SHE understand?! Does she have any idea of what she did to me...how she made me feel...alive and free, like I finally belonged, like I

wasn't some freak occurrence, like I was RIGHT. She proved it because she existed too. We were supposed to be the same. And we WERE the same, until she killed it, with a cocky smile on those painted lips and oblivion in her voice.

I stop the pacing and lean against the door. Nothing is gonna come from this ranting...except the migraine I can already feel approaching. I slide down to sit on the floor, as I wonder why I can't stop thinking about her eyes...rimmed in red and a little puffy. They looked like caverns, dark and endless. I called her a tomb. But now I realize that isn't entirely true. She was...IS closed off. Hiding behind her callous indifference and sneering catch phrases, but her eyes were so telling. And I wonder what else I may have missed them say... what did they try to tell me. It's all so confusing.

I despise her. I know this. I know that that's what this burning feeling is in my chest. I know that's why my throat feels so tight right now and every muscle in my body feels like it's ready to spring. It's hate...it's rage. It has to be. It has to be or else that kiss actually meant something. God her lips...and I can't help but raise my fingers to my own, they feel so sensitive...

I kissed her...after I killed her. De ja vu much? Heck, yeah. My life has become one big broken record. But this is different, Angel died, she didn't. I loved him, and I...DON'T...don't even. I HATE her. I have to `cause if I don't that would mean all this pain was my fault...that this disgust...this dirty feeling is my doing. That I was the one that took something...that I was wrong. And I'm NOT! She took it all...and I have to hate her for it. I have to so she can't ever hurt me or mine again...

I rise from the floor as the light begins to change across the room. The first inklings of soft warm and yellow light. I pull back the curtains and let my eyes roam across the still sleeping town. The still oblivious town. The people ignorant and unaware of the promises the day will bring...the forces that are at constant battle all around them. Damn I sound like Giles...feel about 20 years older, too. Again I think of the one force in particular that is a bit less obscure as of late. A Big-bad of the week...and this one is gonna be a mother... and now, Faith reappears.

"I so don't need this now..." I whisper the words, but I know I'll deal. I always do. I will kill this thing that's after my sister, after my friends. I'll save this little Podunk town from another danger it isn't even aware of. And I'll deal with Faith if...when, she comes here...and I know she will. She can't surprise me anymore. And I know she she'll try to hurt me again...break me. Maybe we ARE alike. Because if she tries...and she will... I know I'll kill her...I'll become her. I wonder if I'm ready for that. The light finally breaks the horizon, a shocking hot burst of orange...here comes the sun.

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### Part 3

Waves. The amber liquid made waves in her glass. Tiny waves as the rocks melted and the cool glass cried against her warm palm. Waves, and she wondered why. She realized why. Her hand was shaking.

Faith raised the glass to her lips and the cool liquid burned in a slow, dark slide down her

throat. She turned her head and tried to take in her surroundings through the haze of cheap booze, smoke and...fear? Lies? Death? Yep. All that and more. It was a wonder she could see at all. She saw a bar like any other, every other and all the others. And she wondered what the hell she was doing here...again, and in the middle of the day, no less.

She wanted to drown it all out. The girl that crawled into her mind by nights, whispered in her ear through days. And mostly those eyes, jade green that had flashed more emotions in an instant than she had ever known. 232 days since she'd seen her, since they'd stood on that rooftop, and she'd pleaded, begged her to understand. Buffy couldn't understand. She sent her to rot, and she had for nearly eight months. And judging by last night's little occurrence...time hadn't changed much in that respect. But then...that kiss, THAT was a big change. That's why her hand was shaking.

"More?" The almost-cute guy behind the bar asked.

Buffy could never see. She was blind with her eyes wide. Blind to the pain, the fear the endless spiral into the abyss. No. How could she see the darkness when every thing she touches is light. Faith knew she could never be touched. But the dreams. 232 nights of them gave her the hope that she would somehow be close to it...again. It was repentance, you see. Faith died every night so that some day she might be reborn. It even sounded biblical in her head, and she had to laugh a little. She sure as hell wasn't anybody's martyr. But the endless nights were her baptism, and maybe her salvation. Her lips had felt like heaven.

"Hey. I said `You want some more'?" The bottle of Jack was held before her. Awaiting her decision, and Faith paused, her dark, heavy lashes fluttering shut for an instant. When they opened the haze was gone.

"Can't take any more." The reply was more to herself. She looked around, dark eyes scanning the handful of patrons. This city held a lot of secrets. She figured it would be a perfect place for her to start again. The constant rain, endless docks and Pacific air, the melancholy suited her just fine. The persistent fog and overcast meant day-walking for vamps, though the cold limited the population, she figured this place could use a Slayer. But after last night...she wondered how long she could stay here...away from her. It was, after all, just like every other city and inhabitants, a mass of the blissfully unaware. They didn't know about the vamp in the corner with blue leather pants. He didn't exist to them.

"So, I get off at 2..." Almost-cute smiled.

"Yeah, you have fun with that." She mumbled, and threw down what she realized was the last of her cash. Faith wasn't worried, she knew how to steal. She headed out the door, after `Blue-pants', who was following `Sexy-redhead'.

"Hey, can I get your number?" Almost-cute called after her. Faith threw him the finger without looking back. Dick.

The alley smelled like piss and garbage. Which Faith thought was appropriate `cause well...it was an alley, and that's usually where much of the world's piss and garbage meet their end. She wondered if Blue-pants would get the best of her here. He had the girl pressed against a dumpster. Classy. He was sniffing around her neck. Typical. She lit a cig and let it dangle off her full bottom lip.

"Hey!!" She shouted, and her voice seemed to bounce off the greasy brick walls that enclosed them. The dead guy looked up and his face vamped.

"Slayer!!" It was a hiss that was far more dramatic than what the situation called for.

The girl saw his face and started to scream. Faith rolled her eyes and took a drag.

"Like a goddamned broken record." She exhaled a white cloud with the words and sprinted down the alley as the redhead began to scramble away.

A quick right hook to the face and his leathered ass was in a puddle of funk. `Too bad, those were some nice pants' Faith thought. And she wondered at her own detachment. Sexy-redhead was still hollering in the periphery.

Kick to the face, pull out the stake.

"You can't do this!! You have no idea of my power!" And Faith found that funny considering the all-powerful position the guy was in...laid out flat on his ass and all. `God, not just a vamp but an ass too!' She reached into his very nice black leather coat and pulled out a very nice thick wallet. Sweet.

Kick to the face, stake to the heart. Dead...again. And Sexy-redhead is still screamin'.

"Hey..." Faith squatted down next to the cowering girl. "You're ok now, it's over." She tried to calm her before the fear turned into hysterics.

"Oh my God! His face! D-did you see his face! H-he was gonna...gonna...GOMYGOD!!!" Too late. Hysterics. And now the not-so-sexy-anymore redhead had flung her arms around Faith's neck. Christ, it just keeps getting better.

"Fuck, chill, ok?" She tried to put some strength behind her voice as she pried the other girl's arms from around her neck.

"Look, he's gone now." She held her at arms length. "And you're ok. You're gonna get up, walk outta this alley, get in a cab and go home to bed alright?" Faith watched as the girl nodded and slowly raised her head so their eyes met.

Green. A stunning, sharp hazel-green that sucked the air straight from Faith's lungs. And suddenly she wasn't looking at some anonymous vamp's victim anymore. It was the face of the one person she had made a victim.

"Go home..." The girl breathed. And the voice from her dreams...

"W-what?" Faith blinked as she stumbled to her feet. "uhh...yeah. Get outta here." She watched in a daze as the girl scrambled to her feet and staggered out of the alley towards the main street. As she disappeared into the mist, the words kept repeating over and over in her head. `Go home...go home...'

"But where the fuck is that..." She leaned against the wall and took a long pull on her smoke.



Her eyes squeezed shut on the thick exhale. She knew where the closest thing was. She knew she could never go back. It was the only place...ever. She was as good as dead if she did. Faith didn't doubt Buffy, she could never underestimate her fellow Slayer. She knew B because she WAS B. The same spirit...the same essence pulses in their veins...they're the same. At least they were...

"Until it all went to hell..." The words were thick in her throat. "Until I killed it..."

Faith didn't know how much more she could take. Her dreams and waking hours were haunted. The pain and the guilt pressing into some deep lost part of her. Having everything in life come down to one moment, one person, one failure. Her failure. And that voice a gossamer whisper in her ear.

"Fuck..." It was a ragged whisper as she looked to the cloudy sky. It was just a pale gray void. Not gonna cry. NOT gonna cry. But a thick sob broke the silence. But just one. Another shaky, smoky exhalation and the wall is back in place. She pulled the pilfered wallet from her pocket. Well, this is one good thing. Blue -pants was packin'. Eight...nine...ten grand!?

"Oh, hells yeah." It so pays to be good, sorta. She re-pocketed the wallet and was about to head back to the main street when the loud clang of a trash can being over turned gave her pause.

"Slayer..." Oh god, not again. But her radar wasn't going off...and the British accent. Oh fuck.

"It is your decision how difficult this will be." A scrawny and haggard man stepped from the shadows. A glimmer of steel in his hand. Faith looked around the alley, gauged her chances. Slim and none. They were everywhere, hidden in the fog. She flicked her cig into a puddle. Orange ash sizzled to nothing.

"The alley is surrounded, Slayer, we will have you. Alive or dead is your choice." He continued in his clipped tone. And Faith couldn't help but think he was probably right. Until she spotted her out. Fire escape.

"Well, since you put it that way, tweedy..." She gave him...them, her cocky smile. Yeah, she didn't believe it either. "Since when have I ever liked it easy...more of a hard and fast girl, ya know?"

And she jumped. Vaulted, really, to the ladder behind her and begin to climb. She had reached the second landing when she heard the shot...a second before she felt it tear through her shoulder. Fuck, not good. A second bullet whizzed by her head, then a third, then too many to count. She had reached the sixth floor when she was hit again. She didn't stop to inspect the damage just kept climbing until she reached the roof. Her left arm was numb.

Faith wasn't sure how she out-ran two helicopters or the twenty-something foot soldiers. She only knew the instinct forcing her to sprint across rain-slicked rooftops and foggy aback alleys, the adrenaline pumping in her veins, and the fear pushing her to hide in one abandoned building after another until she made her way to her shabby motel. Leaning against the door, she curled herself in a ball and waited...and bled. Too scared to cry...to afraid not to. But nothing came. And the only sounds were her harsh and labored breath, and the couple in the next room fighting.

After what she guessed was about a half hour Faith figured she was in the clear. She righted herself and with a shaky breath finally took in the damage. She was shot. The concept of it all felt sorta surreal. Shot as opposed to bitten, or clawed...or stabbed...again. But the pain, oh that was as real as it got.

"Shit..." It was hissed as she peeled off the blood soaked denim jacket. One in the shoulder, one in the upper arm, and lots of blood. She felt light headed, but she knew the damage would be minimal both bullets had passed clean through. A few days and she'd be gold.

"Gotta love them super powers." She wrapped a shredded towel around the wounds as best she could and sat on the edge of the bed. She spared a look at the clock on the nightstand, the glowing red numbers swam before her eyes. 2:44. Booze and blood loss, not a good combination. What was she gonna do now? The Council was serious and deadly so judging by the condition of her arm. Her recently acquired cash gave her a few options...run again. But what happened when that ran out. Faith had been running her entire life, never sure of where she was going, what she was chasing. She'd had enough. So one last time and that's the end. She wondered if it would be the end of her and was only slightly shocked that she really didn't give a fuck anymore. The apathy had no end she supposed, but something had to change. She glanced at the clock again, 2:45. It was time to go home.

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### Part 4

The persistent tapping was like a jackhammer on her sleep-deprived nerves. Continuous, and unrelenting its singular terrible goal was to drive her into the dark depths of insanity...it was succeeding. Buffy had to stop it before she slid further into the abyss.

"God! Will you just STOP it!?" The command came out in a harsher...and louder tone than she expected as she snatched the detested pencil from her best friend's fidgeting hand.

Buffy's chest felt tight, like there was this invisible force...a pressure pushing into her. It made it hard to breathe. It hadn't left since she awoke that morning, with tears in her eyes and Faith's taste on her lips. She crossed her arms across her middle and tried to block out the endless pull. Something was telling her to move...it was a tense and anxious feeling...and she had no idea what she was reaching for.

They were sitting around the large table of the Magic Box. Research mode, and all had been going about as well as could be expected. They were all talking, debating options but with Buffy's sudden outburst the steady chatter came to an abrupt halt. All eyes were on her now, and the microscopic feeling only served to add to her anxiety. Her eyes darted around the group, but she couldn't really meet anyone's stare. They were all on edge, she knew this; the stress of the new threat had taken its toll over the past few days. Buffy was thankful for them all, they were her support, her structure, but that didn't mean things didn't get a little shaky from time to time. That tightness was still inside her, and not just in her heart...she tried to quell it with a deep breath...but there was never enough air.

"Umm...You ok there, Buff?" Xander spoke cautiously as he closed the insanely large old book he had been thumbing through. The dust from the pages fluffed a musty cloud into the

face of his girlfriend. And Anya coughed.

"Yeah Buffy, you seem a little...on edge today. More so than in past days, not that you don't have reason for the edginess, `cause well things...and now with the demon and the...eviscerations...it's all kinda...edgy..." Willow's babble fizzled out and Buffy couldn't help but smile at her best friend. And her best friend's girlfriend. Yeah...wow that was new. She was still adjusting to that particular development. But Tara was sweet and part of the team now.

"I'm sorry Will..." Buffy sighed and rubbed her temples. "You're right...much edginess, I didn't get a whole lot of sleep last night."

"Are you worried? A-about this new vampire...or w-whatever it is?" Tara spoke, it was such a soothing and compassionate sound that Buffy couldn't help but relax a bit. Yeah, she liked Tara.

"No, it's not entirely tha-"

"Sexual frustration maybe!?" Anya piped up, sure of her conclusion. "I know sometimes I can't sleep unless Xander gives me a happy...he's very good at that." And she smiled adoringly at her now very red-faced boyfriend.

"Uhh thanks for the praise honey bear, but I don't think that's what Buffy was gonna say... unless that WAS what you were gonna say...Buff?" And all eyes were one her once more.

"What? NO! No that's not it!" Ok now SHE was turning red, because after that dream...that wasn't entirely the truth. And she was NOT about to get into that with them...Hell, she didn't want to get into it with HERSELF. The last thing any of them needed to worry about was Faith returning to their lives. One disaster at a time, thank you very much.

"Well, is there anything we can do...to help?" Tara again...and again so sweet, but Buffy was tired of that look. The one she had been getting so much lately, ever since her mother had died. It was a look that said 'Be careful she might break'. She hated it because she knew it was probably true, maybe she was already breaking. It made her want to run...to give into that that pull.

"Yeah Buffy, maybe we could all patrol tonight...with Spike and Riley, It'll give you the night off?" Willow chimed in, ever helpful and now she had that look too. Buffy felt her eye twitched. She had to take a deep breath to keep from snapping. She let it out in a listless sigh.

"No guys it's okay...I'm okay, really." It sounded believable, even if she didn't believe it herself. "Besides with this vamp-demon thingy running loose I really don't wanna put you guys in anymore danger."

"What? Are you kidding Buff, danger's my middle name!" Xander leered, and threw in an affective eyebrow wiggle for emphasis. Anya nearly swooned and Buffy couldn't help but chuckle at his enthusiastic girlfriend but a despondent pressure arose in her chest as she glanced at her friends...it kept the burning anxiety company. Xander's girlfriend, Willow's girlfriend, it seemed everyone had a girlfriend but her...but wait...that wasn't right! She had a BOYfriend. A very nice...and handsome?...well...and devoted one at that. For some reason

that didn't alleviate the distant ache, but added to her confusion. No sooner had the thoughts passed through her mind did the boyfriend in question entered the shop, with Dawn in tow.

"Hey guys! Any trouble on the way over here?" Buffy shook the disturbing thoughts from her mind as she approached them, she had to get her focus back. She couldn't afford this distraction.

"Nope, none at all." Riley leaned in for a kiss and his brow crinkled when he was presented with her cheek rather than the soft lips he was expecting. He wrapped his arms around her waist as she turned in his customary possessive display and was pleased as Buffy leaned back into the embrace...He didn't know she was grinding her teeth. Dawn rolled her eyes as she plunked herself down in the chair.

"I still don't see why I need a stupid chaperone... I mean... Hello? Daylight!?" The pout was of epic proportions.

"Dawn, we've been over thi-" Buffy sighed.

"Its just too risky, Dawnie." Riley cut in. Dawn rolled her eyes...again. Did the girl know any other means of self expression?

"And besides, there's no way I'm letting anything happen to my girls!" Buffy felt his arms tighten around her waist in what she knew was supposed to be a gesture of comfort, it only served suffocate her. It was claustrophobic and she had to clench her teeth to keep from throwing him off her...and across the room.

"He's right Dawn." Buffy stepped calmly from the bulk of Riley's arms. The tense mask of concentration escaped the entire group. Maybe they had seen it so much, they didn't realize it for what it was. Buffy liked the lie...her safe charade. She was in control.

"This thing knows what I am and its safe to assume he knows the people close to me. We can't take any chances." She was good at the fearless leader speech. And no one saw the flicker of fear to cross her eyes. Riley had his arms around her again and she felt her skin prickle when he breathed against her neck. She imagined a thousand tiny needles. Buffy clenched her fists and let him stifle her. She was brave like that.

"I agree completely." Giles clipped British tone cut the heavy silence that had settled like a fog across the group. "Especially now that I seem to have discovered exactly what it is we're up against." The groups attention shifted as he entered the room, and rested yet another ancient volume on the central table.

"So what do we got?" Xander spoke as he reached for the book, only to have his hand swatted by Giles as if he were a petulant five-year old.

"What we `got' is a force that I dared not even imagine..." He paused to remove his glasses, and the group became contrite. The heavy silence returned until Buffy spoke again.

"Alright, so enough with the dramatic pause..." She broke away from the man that was holding her once more. She had her limits, she could admit that.

"Buffy...what we are dealing with is a vampire...a demon so old he predates all of written history...she is a master- "

"Ok, so been there and done that...and a few times...and did you say SHE?" Buffy was pacing...she could feel her mask beginning to crack, she had to keep moving...something was pulling her. Her hands were shaking.

"Buffy, no." Giles continued, tone soft and full of fearful awe. "This is something I myself can hardly begin to comprehend...this creature is not only a master...she very well may be THE master. The alpha of all vampire creation. She walked the earth with the first humans...she has seen ice ages come and go...empires raise and crumble...and prophets persecuted. She is the very reason for the evolution of The Slayer...she is the reason you exist Buffy...and she has killed all others like you that she has come across."

The glasses came off again. Stifling silence and Buffy stood still.

"Well this thing can't...come here and...why the hell hasn't somebody killed it by now...what the hell does it want?!" She barely heard the tirade of her lover, because for Buffy, in that instant everything became a sharp and brilliant contrast. It was a clarity that could only come from the shocking distinction of black and white. It was all so simple.

"It wants to destroy the one thing that is a threat to its eternal existence..." Her watcher's voice seemed miles away. The world was fading around her, melting into a cool and dripping gray. And in the center of it wall was the piercing spot of light, its intensity nearly brought her too her knees. It was divine and she was left breathless in its multitude. And at the first hint of realization Buffy did fall, overwhelmed by her epiphany. She didn't notice her friends rushing to her side, or the worried voice of her lover...she couldn't hear them. Couldn't feel them. But she could feel that light. And it made her pant...her eyes burned with moisture. The heat of it was intense and the tightness, the weight was lifting from her chest...she shuddered at the precious release. Her eyes fluttered shut, but the spot of light remained. And it was part of her. Her spirit, her Slayer. And she gasped...an amazed and wondrous sound...when the light split, and one luminous point became two.

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### Part 5

I wake up and I'm on a train. Which isn't that big of a shock considering that's where I last remember falling asleep. The 4:15 barreling down the west coast. But I know somethin's up when I look around. Even with all the extra cash I KNOW I sure as hell didn't pop for this. I'm in one of those private first class numbers... a `sleeper' car. It's all plush bench seats and soft pillows.

What the hell?

I let the gentle sway or the car lull me for a moment and try to clear my head... It's a little foggy, but I figure that's from all the blood loss. The rhythm of the tracks passing beneath my feet is soothing and constant. I stretch out a little, `cause I can now that I'm not in coach anymore for some damn reason, and when I stretch my arm... that's when I realize... I'm stretching my arm, the one that those Brit bastards shot up not 3 hours ago. Fuck. Just a dream. Well it's a change of pace from my regularly scheduled program... no Buffy... no

Mayor... and no dieing. Yeah this could work out all right.

But then I look out the window... and nothin's right... that cold dark oil sweeps over me... this space... like a tidal wave. It's so sudden and all consuming. It's pressing on my chest, pulling the breath right outta me. The shock leaves me gasping. Goddamn it I can never get away! That silent movie is flashing outside the window. Where there should be trees... the sun setting and reflecting off the Pacific... there's just me, and my past. Morbid scenery. It's dark in here and cold, and everything suddenly looks kinda hazy. I look up at the continuous reel playing my life and it looks like cheap 8mm, all jagged around the edges. Figures.

I'm letting my Watcher die... god I'm so sorry Jen...

I put my head in my hands and try to just block it all out. But it just keeps pushing in... speeding up and making everything move so fast around me... the train feels like its flying down the rails. The light's flickering. It's chaos. Wake up... wake UP damn it!! There's this pull in my chest, it's making me clench my fists... nails in my palm. Why do I gotta relive all this? She's beggin' me to help her... This is just too hard I can't take it any more! I'm gonna give in. I just fuckin' know it... just for the peace that's all I want!! Just the peace... please?! I look at my wrists... skin's so thin there... NO!

"Mother FUCKER! WHY?!!" I hit the wall... literally. Trying to break the backdrop for the scene that's flashing in front of me. But I can't break it... its breaking me. God I still can't save her... he's still pullin' her skin off. My voice is echoing through the tiny cab and it sounds strained and horse. Shit, when did I start crying so much?!

I know my eyes must look wild... crazy even. My heart is poundin' against my ribs... Why can't I just fuckin' BREATHE...and now I'm shaking all over. Oh god I'm scared... I'm so fuckin' scared 'cause I know I might be losing it again, it's that same feeling I got last time... when I ki-...FUCK don't! Don't think about that!!

Too late.

It's playing in the window... B's screamin' but there's no sound... blood on my hands... too fast. Get it off! Gotta get it off! I'm rocking back and forth... can't be still... somethin's pullin' me...Dripping black oil... the look in his eyes, shocked and so scared...look in her eyes, disbelief, disgust...No B, HELP me! Why won't she help me!? I start rubbing my hands...FUCK!!

GET.IT.TOGEHR!

"It's not real... none of it is real." I gotta chill, stay away from that edge. I grit my teeth and try to back get a little bit of control... yeah like I had any to start with. When I was in prison, in that cell... the walls would move, start to push in on me. It took me a while but I finally figured out how to push back. Just gotta focus... Take all the pain and all that energy and focus it on the problem. Ok better... slowing down. Now just think. Eyes closed.

There... I guess the self-help bullshit Angel was preaching is paying off. Yeah, right. I still can't stop these freak-outs. Not enough that they happen when I'm awake? At least I got the shakin' under control... but that pain in my chest...

I gotta start to wonder if this all means somethin'... Like prophecy maybe, or some subconscious stuff like if its my brain trying to tell me somethin' about... myself. Ok now I'm just adding to the headache. Me and B are dancing. I can't help but smile as I get lost in that little memory. It quickly changes and I'm punching her in the face... shit it HAS to mean something.

"You always had a good right hook." And her voice doesn't even startle me. I had felt her a second before she spoke. Warm prickles on the back of my neck. I'm expecting her to be watching the wall, but when I turn my head her eyes are locked firmly on mine. And she's just sittin' there, in the seat across from me... all pastel light... she always reminded me of birthday cake.

"None of it's real ya know, B..." I'm trying to keep my wall up, but I'm just so tired... I sound tired. Wonder if I can deal with this.

"Oh as I remember it was all VERY real F." Cold as ice. Nope can't deal... wanna wake up now.

"I don't wanna fight Buffy." It's hardly a whisper, but I know she heard it. I expect a challenge but now its all silent... just the rails passing beneath us. Christ, I can't even look at her! What the hell happened to all that bad ass I had stored up?

"What DO you want then Faith?" She breaks the silence, her voice full of accusation, and I can tell right now that this whole damn train might be goin' to straight hell... better strap in. Now I got a couple of options here. I can do the smart ass thing...

She raises an eyebrow, all cocky.

...or I can just punch her in that sanctimonious little mouth, FUCK she pisses me off. I'm just tired of the games...

"I'm so tired of the games." Ok truth then. Different but doable.

"Yeah... me too..." Guess she's tryin' it too, cause that 'I'm so superior' look is gone. And I can actually look at her now... REALLY look at her, past that halo I force her to wear... and she looks...

"I'm just tired Faith..." It's dripping in her voice. "Everything is just falling apart, there is so much going on right now you wouldn't believe... and now you... and all this? Faith what are we doing?" Good question.

"I got no fuckin' clue B." And we're quiet again just takin' each other in. Those tingles start spreadin' down my spine. It's all surreal with the images flashing in the periphery. She spares them a glance, and then her eyes are back on mine.

"I can't make 'em stop B." She just nods... and with her eyes still on mine she reaches out one of those delicate hands to touch the glass. Then just like that they're gone. Like somebody pulled the plug. You GOTTA be kiddin' me.

Ok, yeah THAT is a sign. And that pull, that tightness in my chest is just as gone. She takes it

all away with just one touch. I think I'm shaking again. The window is clear now and light is pouring in like warm butter, taking away the cold. Everything is so soft and orange.

And she smiles at me, with that new warm light wrapping around her, bouncing off her hair and shining in her eyes. Fuckin' unbelievable.... Jesus I wonder how many files I'm catchin' here. Say somethin' idiot! Things are shifting... I can feel it. It's scary as hell.

"Ya know Faith, I've been thinking." She beat me to it, just as well... jaw still on the floor and all.

"I had this sorta, revelation I think... a-about you and me."

Woah... I mean... shit. She looks a little nervous now. I think she's waiting for me to say something... Good to know my thought process is just as quick as ever.

"W-what kinda revelation B?" and I thought SHE sounded nervous? She suddenly comes over and sits next to me, and yeah the cold is DEFINITELY gone now, 'cause I can feel the warmth just rolling off of her in waves and those tingles are all over me. How could I have ever tried to forget this feeling. And I think... I hope she's feeling too.

She does that shy smile thing and looks at me through her lashes... was I mad at her a few minutes ago?

"Faith was there something I could have done? When you were in Sunnydale? I mean... like I could have listened more... maybe tried harder or something... it all seemed like this downward spiral..."

"Buffy wait a sec." I have to stop her there. First so that I can adjust to the subject change and two, because she's blaming herself and that's just SO very wrong. But I can tell she's trying to understand... and its for real this time. I gotta get this right. Were close to something here I can feel in past my bones, to the very depths of me.

"You were right when you said it before. You gave me all these chances, but I was... I couldn't go there ya know?" The look on her face says she doesn't know. This is so damn frustrating.

But then she takes my hand. And my whole world just funnels to that prefect contact. Deep breath.

"B, I was angry when I met you... I-I was messed up more than you know... there are... things that you don't know about f-from my past... And I think I'm angry still but I don't want to be anymore..."

This is so hard... so fuckin' hard! Her eyes are burnin' through me and I can't stand not knowing what's goin through her head right now. I squeeze my eyes shut and feel her grip tighten on my hand and a wet splash...god I she cryin'?!

"I don't want to stay in all this... in this dark place ya know? Trapped like this... by my mistakes... and not being able to make it right..." and now my voice is breaking but I can't stop... I won't "I need you to hear, I need you to see me Buffy. I-I've seen my share of devils



ya know? So many I woulda sworn I was in hell... but I'd never thought I... could... would become one myself- "

"Faith no, you're- " She tries but I can't stop.

"No! B please I just gotta..." She's moving closer even though I still don't look I can feel it. And I can barely force the words out... my voice all breath and tears.

"I'm in a place B, and I can't escape it... a-alone. I need you to help me, I think you're the only one who can...Buffy you're in my blood... can't you feel it?!" I sound as desperate as I feel. I finally open my eyes to meet hers and I fall instantly into the watery green. It's quiet except the rhythm of the tracks as they slide by. I've said all that I can... it's all that I have. God I just hope it's enough.

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### Part 6

She's waiting. I realize that I'm holding something very precious in my hands right now. This moment has the potential to be everything. It has potential to be a disaster. And this time, if it all breaks apart, it will be my doing, no doubt and no where else to place the blame. Could there BE more pressure here? Doubt it.

I'm sitting in this train car filled with warm amber light. It bounces off the walls and the tiny dust particles dance in the glowing rays. It's beautiful and the warmth is drying the tears on my face. I know this is a dream but it feels so beyond real I don't think there is a word for it. Corporeal? Super-real? Whatever, it just IS. Her hand feels so hot. She smells like lavender.

Faith just laid it all on the line. In her own halted and cautious way. She's never been emotions girl, but this... just now... I know she gave me everything. And now she's waiting.

For me.

Two days ago I never would have seen this happening. A day ago I hated her. But a few hours ago I fell. When I had that revelation, or whatever it was, it all just became so clear. I saw what basically came down to this reason for being, flashing behind my eyelids...it was incredible... not to mention scary as hell. It was all very `meaning- of-life' like. I had felt this sudden all-consuming sense of purpose, racing through my veins and screaming in my head but all I could hear was blessed silence. My path... my destiny rolled out like a Hollywood red carpet. I had never felt such a force... it was peace and excitement and intensity all in one instant.

Well, I guess had felt it once before... but then I couldn't deal. It was stronger than me, bigger than me and I couldn't control it. And we all know how I like my control... I did learn SOMETHING in college. I went to class... occasionally. But that force, it was molding me, changing me and it was so RIGHT but all too much... we both rebelled against it... afraid of what it would do to us... what it made of us. She had pulled and I had pushed until one of us fell off the side of a building. We were so afraid then.

And I'm terrified now.

I always thought that we were the same... because we were slayers or joined mystically or

whatever. I really do listen to Giles too much. Maybe in a sense we are the same, but more than that we are complete and total opposites. Like that contrast I saw that made everything so clear. Darkness and light. Inside and out. I had fought it then... the darkness inside me that was trying to...screaming to come to the surface... To balance out the falsity of pink and pastel that was on display to the world. That was my armor, and she was stripping it away. She didn't know... hell I didn't either at the time. But I'm a bigger liar than she ever was because I refused to see... I denied the light that exists inside of her. Opposites.

It all had hit me so fast that I couldn't even stand. It had felt so GOOD. And there I was, blissed out of my mind on the floor of the Magic Box, not one of my finer moments. There may have been drooling. And with all the people I care about around me, trying to help me, trying to figure out what I needed I just wanted them to fade away... just for a while. Because I already knew. And now she's waiting.

I REALLY need to say something. She's starting to look a little worried. If only I could trust my voice right now. I smile at her a little instead. I can't NOT smile right now. Because I GET it... finally. I never claimed to be the sharpest of stakes. But I do catch on eventually. So much comes out of that mouth ...lies of omission and biting sarcasm. It's HER terrible armor and that's what I hate. And I hate whatever forced her to wear it. Whatever forces her to hide.

All this time I should have listened to her eyes. Oh but I get it now. And I can feel my smile getting a little bit bigger. I'm probably starting to look a little goofy. But I couldn't care less... because she wanted me to hear her, and now I do.

Like now! Those dark, dark pools are shifting back and forth, so slightly like she's reading something... and that tiny indent appears on her forehead as her eyebrows move together. And now I KNOW I'm grinning like an idiot, because she just asked me if it was enough? If it was too much?

My heart just sped up.

I'm gonna start to giggle any second now. I actually feel giddy with this new knowledge, this understanding. I really need to say something. Oh! Look at that!! She just pulled back a bit and that little frown got a little deeper! She thinks I'm going crazy! This is so great! I must look totally insane!!

Oops I can see doubt slowly turning to panic now so I better get this together...

"Faith..." Her name seems to hang in the thick air between us. I can feel this tension creeping up over me, it's laced with fear and apprehension and I can feel it clenching in my throat. And suddenly I can't find the words. Maybe I should have gone to more classes... But she's looking at me, her eyes shining like pure onyx. She needs to hear how I understand, she needs to hear that I get it all, that I forgive her, that I need her to forgive me. She needs to know that I finally know, she needs me to say that it's all ok, she needs me to say-

"Yes..." And again with the silence. Maybe there is more I can say. It sure seems like there should be... I mean one tiny word... but wait! Her eyes! They're squinting up some, like tiny chocolate moons. Is she gonna start crying? No! If she starts up again then so will I and then there will be all the sniffing and hiccups and we'll never get to the actual talking part...

"So that's yes as in..." She tapers off and no, not crying. Smiling.

Oh. My. God. I can actually hear the breath leave my lungs. She's just... amazing. The light that's coming in from god knows where is sliding over her like warm honey. Her hair is shining with it, all dark mahogany and splashes wine. Those full glossy lips are spread over her teeth and I think I might go blind for a second. Her skin is glowing and I'm suddenly very aware of two things:

One, she gets it. Like she can hear everything that's going on in my head or she can read it in my eyes like I'm reading hers. And two. I want to kiss her. The first is a good thing. The second...well. That's not what this was supposed to be about! I still can't figure out how that happened the last time... or that I was the one who did it! I'm really hoping she doesn't bring that up. Gotta stay on track here

"Yes I can hear you Faith, yes I can see you, and yes I can feel it... I- I understand." My voice breaks at the end and I hear a tiny snuffle as that smile gets bigger. Ok so maybe a little crying. She shakes her head in a bit of disbelief and those umber waves dance around her face. It makes me want to say it again... makes me want to shout it... but it comes out a whisper.

"Yes..." And I get another smile. This is so good. My chest feels so full.

"This is all so freakin' weird yeah?" Yeah it is.

"Weirder than what?"

"Well, for the longest time now, its just been about the pain ya know? I die every night... alone... just so I can make it better, but it's never enough..."

Ok that hurts... bad. `Cause I know I'm the one that kills her.

"But then we come here, to this place, and I say a few words... and you say even fewer and suddenly its all good?" She looks unsure, but she wants to believe it. Her eyes tell me.

It'll be good if we let it. Faith please just let it.

"It's a start though." When did I move so close to her?! She smirks like she used to, and I realize just how much I missed her dimples.

"A good one I think... beats the hell outta the alternative." Faith squeezes my hand then and its like a current running up my arm. It hits my shoulder and rolls down my spine like a wave. I wonder if she feels it too? She's looking very intently at where our hands are linked. And that's when I notice my thumb has been rubbing over the silky skin of the back of her hand. Gentle sweeps... unconscious circles. What the hell am I doing?! Her eyes slide back up to mine and I feel it like a caress.

I should not be thinking the things I'm thinking right now.

"Umm! So I guess this all means that you're out right? Of jail I mean?" Not the best of subjects to jump to but I need something to focus on... other than her mouth.

"You guess right B."

"And you're coming home?" It seems like a casual enough question, but she suddenly gets this look on her face, her lips part but there's no sound. Her eyes are all intensity. Until she finally whispers

"Yeah B, I'm comin' home."

"I'm glad." I really, really am.

"Yeah I got this feeling like I'm needed..." I get the eyebrow... huh? What does that mean?!  
"Like there's trouble coming and that's where I need to be."

Oh.

"Well there is this major baddie... raising all kinds of hell... literally." My head hurts just thinking about it.

"I want to help ya know... if you'll let me that is."

"I'm gonna need it." She nods, all serious. Then says

"Then I'm coming back B. And I want to stay. And I need you to know that I'm not gonna hurt you or anybody else, that's the last thing I ever wanna do. I'm gonna come back and we're gonna beat the crap outta this thing."

And there is so much conviction in her voice, its that old-Faith confidence. It feels like a magnet pulling me towards her.

Ok time for some shoptalk. How to do this... I feel a long drawn out explanation coming on. Giles was talking for hours about this thing and the Slayer and all that other stuff.

"It has to be you Faith. Thi- "

"It's always been you B."

Whaaa?!

I think I just blew a circuit. And now she's looking at me kind of... shy? Her eyes are peaking up behind those thick painted lashes.

Did I miss something?!

I look down where her eyes were a second ago. How did my hand get on her leg! I certainly didn't do it... but there it is... fingertips stroking her jean-covered knee. Oh my god, STOP IT! Hand... listen to me... move away from the leg...NO not up! Away!! I have lost total control of my body... Shit! Don't think about losing control! I start to jerk back but she stops me, and now she holding both my hands... soft, soft skin.

"Buffy, you remember these dreams when you wake up right?" Her voice feels like gravel rolling over my skin.

"You know I do." I can tell she's thinking about something...biting at her bottom lip...Don't look... don'tlookdon'tlook. Shit! she caught me... and now she's running her tongue over it. I feel my own lips part. And I know where this conversation is headed.

"Why'd you kiss me last time?" And there's the million dollar question. I am so not ready to have this conversation...

Her eyes just flicked down to my mouth.

"I-I um... well..." Genius!! Pure genius!! Some one save me!

"Cause ya know it kinda came outta nowhere. One minute we're screamin' then the next... It was wicked intense yeah?"

Yeah. Intense. Tree pretty....

"I was just wonderin' if it was a 'heat of the moment' kinda thing... or..."

Yes! That's what it was! Heat of the moment, emotions on high. It had to be that or else things are gonna get way more complicated... she's still looking at my mouth. My heart is pounding on my ribs. "...or maybe it was it was something else..." What?! No! Not something else! She's leaning towards me and I scoot back a little but I'm trapped as my back presses against the soft back of the seat. I can feel her breath, hot puffs against my face... so close and all I can see are those lips.

I want.

"Why B?" A ragged whisper and they just brushed against my own. I hear my breath hitch and I can feel that part of me, that dark part that I've always buried, rising. That's the part of me that needs to close the two inches between us. It's the part of me that kissed her last time. It's the part that's needy, demanding, power hungry and out of control. It whispers to me 'I want' I try to jerk back... because it still scares me.

And her hand comes up... fingertips over my jaw... she's shaking. I'm panting. And I feel it again. Full and wet and for just a second. She's holding herself back, she's waiting. It feels like my entire body is tightening like a bow, and there's this energy humming all around us. I can smell her...more than the lavender, and I breathe deep.

"Tell me..." The sound of her voice makes my skin prickle. All roughness and longing. The sweep of her mouth makes my nipples get hard. God It's not enough... just that instant of contact. That dark part of me is screaming for more screaming for me to take it.

Her hand slides back into my hair. I want.

The warm tingles that I always feel when I'm near her suddenly become something I can't even recognize. It's a fire... and it rolls through every inch of me so fast I feel my spine arch from the intensity. My stomach muscles clench and a hot flood of lust spills between my legs.

Oh god I'm gonna combust. She hasn't even touched me yet.

And she feels it too. I see it as it passes over her face and her eyes turn black as midnight. That berry red mouth falls open and I feel her entire body shudder on a humid exhale. I think that's got to be the hottest thing in the world...

Until I hear her moan.

It's a pleading sound that's wrapped around my name and it makes me crazy. And I can't stand it any more. I snap and that part of me takes control. Both my hands are suddenly overflowing with silky strands of brown as I pull her lips down to mine.

It happens so fast I think I surprised her. I feel her gasp against my mouth and it just makes me hotter. My tongue takes advantage and slides into her hot mouth and suddenly we've reversed positions. She tastes so good. I'm pushing her back into the plushness of the seat as I try to taste every inch of her mouth at once. We're both breathing hard into the kiss, refusing to break for air and the panting just makes it slick and wet and messy. Out of control. Her tongue is fighting back, dragging over my bottom lip and I hear a groan as my body settles on top of hers. I think it's me. The shock of the full body contact makes us both tremble and I finally have to pull back to breathe.

I'm straddling her hips and the subtle rocking of hers is causing a wonderful pressure right on my clit. I don't even think she realizes she's doing it. It's getting me so wet. She is so absolutely beautiful. Her hair is a riot of dark waves spread out around her head... eyes half closed and shimmering black... and that mouth... wet and swollen, lips spread apart as she pants. I follow the hazy blush from her cheeks down her neck to the tops of her breasts and I'm mesmerized as I watch them strain against her shirt. I can see her nipples... they're reaching for me. My hands are moving on their own, over her chest and I take both of those perfect mounds in my hands cupping them...kneading them. The tips drag against my palms and I watch as her eyes flutter shut. She pushes into my hands and I take her nipples between my fingers and roll them through the thin fabric of her shirt. She likes it. I feel this power surge through me. I squeeze harder and she moans

"B...oh my god B... oh fuck..." Ragged mumbles as her hands travel up over my hips to my stomach they slide under my shirt. Oh god her hands...

And I start pushing back, and now she realizes exactly what she's doing. Her eyes snap open and lock with mine as she arches back a little and lets her hips roll into mine. And I can feel her heat... her pussy, pressed right up against me and just the thought of what that would feel like if our clothes weren't in the way makes me moan.

"Unnnnggghh...Faith..." is that my voice? I guess so because at the sound of it Faith starts rocking harder... a slow grind. I feel her hands slide over my back... nails raking gently. It makes me shiver. I lean back down and crush my lips to hers... taking her mouth. It's a wild kiss and I suddenly feel so fierce. I want to mark her... make her mine. Everything feels so hazy like a mist is saturating the air around us. It smells like lavender and sex. It makes me nuts.

"I want you Faith..." I sound feral... out of control...it's that dark part of me talking. But my words cause Faith to stop moving, her hands freeze on my waist

"B...?" She's gazing up at me with an odd expression, that little frown is back. She's taking deep breaths, trying to calm down. But my hands are still on her breasts... I pinch her nipples again, stroking the tips.

"Buffy..." a deep groan this time as her eyes close again, but her hands come up to my wrists and she pulls them away. I want... I move to put them back, but she tightens her grip.

"We gotta stop this B... we can't... I can't." What?! NO! I move in to kiss her again... so she can stop saying these things. But she dodges my lips. I settle for the smooth skin over her neck and let my tongue glide over her pulse... feel it jump under my lips... I feel wild.

She jerks me back again though holding me by the shoulders at arms length and I'm suddenly hit with a hot pulse of anger. It flies through me...violent and intense and I can feel my lips pull back in a snarl. I see her beautiful eyes widen. Oh my god she's afraid!

"Buffy not like this..." What am I doing!? What is happening to me?

"Faith I'm sorry! I don't know what-" And she sits up pulls me into her arms gentle... but cautious.

"Shhh it's ok, it'll be ok B..." No it won't! I've ruined it... it's all broken again.

"It's not broken...it can't be" Did I say that out loud? I'm really losing it.

"It's like I said B, none of this is real..."

"But it feels real." I whisper and she smiles and I feel a little better

"Yeah. Just think of it as practice."

"For what?"

"For when you wake up."And suddenly the train is gone. The warmth of her body, the smell of her hair. Gone. And I'm in my room watching the ceiling fan spin slowly in the darkness. I hear something shift next to me. And for an instant I think it's her. But as the weight of a large muscled arm drapes across my stomach I realize it can't be... may never be. And I feel my heart break. But then I remember... she's still coming home.

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## Part 7

Twenty four hours and its all turned upside down.

I'm sitting on the bed, in my old apartment that the mayor gave me... again. In fact I'm in the exact same position that I was in before... edge of the bed, head in my hands... but this time it's for real. No one's in the corner. The overstuffed chair sits empty like it's been for over a year now. And B's here too, but I'm not waiting for her to walk through that door. She's behind me actually... that's saying she's IN the bed... asleep. Fuck, I can hardly believe it.

The rain is battering against the window, making tiny rivers on the glass that shimmer in the pale light. I turn and look over my shoulder so I can see her. I can't seem to keep my eyes away for more than a few seconds. I'm not sure how long all this is gonna last. This beautiful peace... and she is beautiful. The streetlight is filtering in just as before, the glow is cool and pale. But I don't fear the shadows and I don't fear what the light shows me. Because it's shining on her... soft and blue it drapes across her face... her body like silk. It shows me her hair, blond but almost white in the faint hues of morning, her face... almost angelic, but I know better. Those long lashes rest feather-light against her cheeks... skin so smooth and kissed by a faint blush... kissed by my lips. And her lips part, as if they heard my thoughts... red ripe cherries.

Nothing in my life has ever felt this good... this perfect, and it's a bit ironic when damn near every inch of my body hurts like a bitch. And not in any kind of good way. Damn. But I swear I've never felt better, seeing her laying there... and she was holding me when I woke up.... I never even let myself dream of that. But it was real, her arms were wrapped around my waist, her legs all tangled with mine...those lips kissing the back of my neck. I thought I knew what warmth was, what safety was... all this time I had no fuckin' clue. It was in her arms.

I close my eyes and try imprint this moment in my brain, so it can be there forever. `Cause I know, the second she opens her eyes, its all gonna be over. Twenty four hours ago I thought I had it all figured out. What a difference a day makes.

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The smell of coming rain was thick in the air as Faith walked through Restfield cemetery. Back in the `Dale for a few hours and things were definitely looking up. Finally she'd made the right decision... actually it was the ONLY decision. In her mind it wasn't even an issue anymore. This was where she was supposed to be, it was her destiny. The absolute certainty in her decision gave her a confidence she had never felt before.... It was quiet and real. It had none of the anxiety and fear attached to it. In the past she had felt the need to display it, all posturing and hard talk, she hid behind it like armor. Faith felt lighter now without it.

She knew the battle was going to be an uphill one. She didn't delude her self with thoughts of welcome back parties and open grateful arms. Even after what had happened with Buffy, in their little dream world, Faith wasn't about to believe it could all be roses.

Reality was a much different place after all. It had a whole new set of rules.

She leaned back against the wall of a crypt and lit up a cig, shielding the flame from the gusting wind. A storm was approaching. The symbolism was not lost, Faith was all about the signs. And now she was waiting. She had been tracking Buffy and her gang of whatnots for about an hour, the entire flock was out tonight, so she was biding her time at a safe distance. Faith wasn't about to approach all of them at once. She was not in the mood for Red's panic-babble and if she had to hear Xander scream like a little girl she just may have to castrate him... at least then he'd have a reason...

So she held back. She was trying to control those violent tendencies after all. Instead she thought about the dream, the things they had said, the things they had done. Faith felt her heart beat a little faster. She had seen totally different side of Buffy, one that she was sure the rest of the world never even got a glimpse of. It was a darker B, free and untamed by all the



preconceptions that kept her wrapped in ribbons. It had scared Faith initially, until she recognized it for what it was. It was B's other half... and she was showing it... sharing it with her. It was in that instant, with Buffy straddling her... rocking against her, that Faith could see the other girl changing right in front of her eyes. With the pleasure shooting through her veins, clouding her mind one thing became strikingly clear... She was her balance. It wasn't about them being the same, it was never supposed to be. And despite all the shit about the Slayer, they were each MORE than the Slayer, her darkness to B's light And when she saw, in that instant a part of her reflected in Buffy's eyes Faith knew she'd never be the same, THEY would never be the same.

That's why she had stopped them. That's why she forced her self from the heaven of B's mouth... It couldn't happen there. If it happened at all it had to be real.

With all the deep and meaningful issues sorted in her mind, Faith started to contemplate the more physical possibilities. Like how Buffy's fingers would feel as they tugged on her nipples... in reality. She felt her breath hitch at just the thought. It had been beyond intense in the dream... and how would her kiss taste? B's mouth had been like a hot wet cave and she could easily see herself getting lost for hours in it. But then she pictured that mouth in other places... Shit!

She had to stop these thoughts. Her coming back to Sunnydale was not supposed to be about fucking Buffy Summers. Faith wanted that... but she wanted MORE than that. Yeah that was a first... and scary as fuck too. It was easier to just think about the physical....Sluttin' off with no strings attached, no one to tie her down... that, she could handle. But there was bigger shit to deal with here. She took a long slow drag as she rolled her shoulders, attempting to release some of the tension that had suddenly formed.

"Fuck!" She cursed a cloud of white as the burning pain shot down through her left shoulder and arm.

"Ok that'll keep me focused..." Fuckin Council bastard mother fuckers. Yup, pain and anger, old friends of hers. They would keep the thoughts of Buffy's hands and mouth under control... but then... Faith got a flash of Buffy hovering over her, eyes wild and fierce, when she had pushed her away... Yeah B was pretty hot when she was pissed...

The shit eating grin had just started to spread over Faith's mouth when she heard it. Voices. Coming her way. Faith ducked back into the shadows, holding herself very still.

"So is the complete and total LACK of action seem a little weird to anyone else?" Xander had that goofball swagger going, and Faith was surprised to see him carrying what looked like an axe. So he was allowed around the shiny pointy things now? Faith hoped no one would lose and eye.

"And you are complaining? I say the fewer life threatening situations the better!" Willow is bouncing around and holding that blond girl's hand. `HA! Knew it all along!"

The group had come to a stop in the clearing, about 50 feet from the crypt she was leaning on.

"I agree with Willow! The less `action' around here, means the sooner we can get to the `action' at home!" That came from the girl on Xander's arm... Anya or something like that,

and Faith balked... Xander and 'action' do NOT belong in the same sentence.

"Guys you know we have to do a full sweep of the area. This threat could go active at any point. And can you all keep it down? Its no wonder we haven't seen any hostiles, you're giving them all the warning they need."

Just the sound of his voice had Faith grinding her teeth. Solider boy was talking like he was runnin' the show or something. That fucker probably didn't know his own ass from a demon's. But she thought it strange that Buffy had remained quiet through the entire exchange. She couldn't really get a good look at the other slayer, what with the hulking mass of marine blocking the view and all.

But then she moved. And to Faith it was like the world had stopped spinning...everything slowing to reveal this one moment... this one girl, to her. Buffy stepped out from behind Riley and into the circle of light provided by the moon, the wind was whipping her hair around her face and she looked like some sort of goddess. And she was looking right at Faith.

And everything around her melted away

The force of Buffy's stare hit her like well placed punch to the gut. It took away all her air. Faith was sure B couldn't really see her, she was too far away, hidden in the dark... but she could feel her. And Faith could feel the panic rising. She wasn't supposed know she was there, not yet... not with all the others around. Faith was sure for a minute that Buffy was going to say something, somehow alert the others, but as the seconds passed she remained quiet... green eyes intense and burning right into her own. It was like time had stopped. Faith could feel her heart pounding, trying to escape her chest.

"Buffy, did you hear me?" The ongoing conversation suddenly filtered back in. Willow laid her hand on her friend's shoulder and Buffy spun around as if surprised... time started up again.

Faith felt barren at the loss of her eyes.

"Umm sorry Will, kinda spaced out for a sec." Her tone was apologetic, but her eyes kept cutting back to Faith's hiding place. And Faith suddenly felt like a ball of energy... she couldn't help bouncing on the balls of her feet a little. Get rid of `em... just get rid of `em B.

"Is there something out there babe?" Riley pulled out a huge gun, and if that wasn't a statement on overcompensation, Faith didn't know what was. He was scouting around, hunched over a little looking like some kinda Rambo wannabe... actually, he was even wearing the face paint! What the fuck!?

"Ahh NO!" Buffy answered a little too quickly, but Riley had stepped in front of her again, supposedly shielding her from the assumed threat. Yeah right, this kid was a real piece of work.

"Nothing out there, just... I umm... thought I ahhh... heard something? But its nothing."

Faith thought Buffy couldn't lie for shit, but all the scoobs just nodded... accepting the explanation. They looked like those bobble head dolls. Riley draped his arm over Buffy's

shoulders. And even from that distance Faith could see her tense... none of the others did. Faith wanted to save her. Swoop in like a knight in shining leather and be all with the rescue. Every muscle in her body was tensed... screaming `Mine!' She squashed the voice saying `hurt him!' with minimal effort.

"I think Xander is right though, the lack of action is a little wiggy... I think our prehistoric vamp may be rounding up her kiddies." Buffy got back on the subject.

"Y-you mean like...building an army?" Tara spoke up cautiously and her gentle voice sent a pang of regret through Faith's chest... just one more thing she would have to fix. She added that near the top of the ever-growing list.

"Yeah possibly. But anyway things right now can't get much deadier..."

"So! That means we can go and enjoy other types of action?!" The two witches were showing an appropriate amount of `Eww' at Anya's comment

"Ummm yeah..." So was Buffy. Faith held in a giggle. "There's no reason for all of us to be out here... there's really nothing we can do until this thing makes the first move..."

"Yes! And there are many moves that Xander and I should be making right now."

"Are you sure babe? Maybe we should check out some other spots." The `hurt him!' voice was getting louder. Faith clenched her teeth. Come on B!

"No Riley, we're just wasting time here... besides it looks like a storm's about to come in. I think I'm gonna do one last sweep around here, could you walk every one home... maybe check in on Dawnie for me?"

Buffy was laying it on thick, all pouting lips and fluttering eyes, Faith knew Riley didn't have a chance. As if on cue, thunder rolled in the distance... freaky.

"Ok if you say so..." And with a quick kiss to the top of her blond head he was gone and suddenly, it was just the two of them.

Ok, so now what? Faith didn't have a clue. Funny how she had it all planned out, she knew the script by heart. What she hadn't planned on though, was the mass of emotions sweeping over her like a wave. They kept her paralyzed, kept her hiding.

But then she spoke

"Faith..." It was so faint, and almost carried away on the wind, but Faith heard it and she was suddenly moving, then Buffy was moving and the distance between them became only a couple of feet.

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## Part 8

A strong and cool wind churned the night air into chaos, moving heavy clouds across a full but distant moon. Dead leaves danced swirls around them as the old pines and elms groaned their distress in an endless bending rustle. The undulating shadows made the cemetery sway...

it would have been creepy. Faith could feel the electricity... she was breathing it.

"Faith..." Buffy took her hand as she spoke again. It felt like she was trying to confirm something. Lightening flashed above them... illuminating the scene in a crackling blue instant, and the energy flying between them was just as intense. Faith was having an 'outside moment'. One of those times that are imagined again and again, so much so that when faced with the reality, the mind is unable to comprehend it as truth. It was as if she was seeing it all from someone else's eyes.

Was she dreaming again?

It sure as hell didn't feel like it. The warmth of Buffy's hand in her own was proof enough to believe. Faith thought she had it all figured out. She would breeze back into town and make a fresh start. Her and B would have a few deep and meaningful moments, nothing too heavy of course. She knew it wasn't gonna be an easy ride, but this wasn't gonna be like in her dreams either, she had control here. She would have that ice-queen-cool vibe goin'. Play the part to a fuckin' T, and keep it light, be all with the smooth and even crack a few to lighten the mood.

Yeah that was gonna be the plan.

"Hey B." but Faith had forgotten all her lines.

"You're here?" Buffy said it like she was making a wish.

"Yeah."

"How long?"

"Just a few hours...stopped by the old place then came here... I wanted to-"

Faith's words came to an abrupt halt as one of Buffy's hands rose to her face...finger tips lightly tracing her jaw line. It took the breath right out of her.

"And this is real." Soft again, but this time it wasn't a question. Faith didn't know if that was good or bad.

"Is it ok, that I'm here I mean... I know we kinda... talked about it but I still did-oompff"

Faith was saved from further channeling Willow when she unexpectedly found herself wrapped in the other girl's arms. Ok, talk about being knocked on your ass, this was the last thing Faith had expected. The feeling of being completely surrounded by the other girl was unbelievable.

"I'm glad you're here ok... just stop with the babble" Every word was a breath right on her neck, and the gentle brush of Buffy's lips was enough to make her skin prickle...

Buffy was holding her so close. The fuckin plan was shot straight to hell.

"Ok..." It was all Faith could manage, she was so focused on the other girl's body pressed full length against her own. How she could feel every breath... every heartbeat. Faith brought her

good arm around, her fingers lightly brushing the silky skin on the back of the blond girl's neck. She felt, more than heard Buffy's breath hitch at the touch... she felt her own pulse jump in her veins. Faith slid her hand down further to wrap tightly around the other girl's shoulders and the warmth was all consuming...a heat racing up and down her spine. The heady smell of roses and vanilla was pouring over her with every breath.

Things were shaking and Faith didn't know if it was the thunder or something else... something that they were making.

"Buffy I..." Faith felt the need to say something, break the spell that was overwhelming her senses and get back to the script. It was all too much... too good. It was too easy?

"Shut up F, I'm basking..." And with that Buffy tightened her hold, like she was trying to bury herself in Faith. And it took everything the dark slayer had not to moan at the engulfing heat. Buffy was actually moving, probably unaware that her hands were sliding up and down the other girls back, moist and humid breath washing over her ear...

Faith shuddered `cause it felt like rapture.

She could feel her self falling, loosing herself in the utter perfection of the moment. With B's hips, her breasts pressing tightly against her own, arousal was settling across Faith's mind like a fog... and everything around her was getting lost to it. But then Buffy squeezed her tighter and it was like she was suddenly awake. Faith winced as her arm was jarred slightly... the minor pain waking her from the haze.

"Umm... ok B, but could you bask without some of the slayer strength? Kinda hurtin' my arm."

"What?" Buffy pulled back a bit, frowning at the arm that wasn't around her waist like it should be. Her eyes widened when she saw how Faith was holding it. She stepped back further, slow to break the contact between them.

"You're hurt! What the hell happened?"

"Couple of guys with wicked bad accents... Got a fondness for the crumpets and shiny guns..."

"Council?!"

"Bang-bang... you know those guys don't play fair, all we get is a stick of wood ya know and they-"

"Fuck!" Impressive, since when did B make with the naughty words?

"Whoa B! Potty mouth!"

"Faith, we SO don't need this right now, not on top of this latest baddie!"

Did Buffy just say `we'? Faith was pretty sure she had. And she had to stop her right there. The Council was after HER, not Buffy, and Faith would be damned before she let those fuckers drag the other slayer down too. Make her pay for the mistakes Faith herself had made.

"B it's all good ok. I'm pretty sure I threw them off the trail, besides I figure Sunny-D is the LAST place they're gonna come lookin' for me." Faith knew it was the wrong thing to say the second it left her mouth, the light that had been in Buffy's eyes flashed to something dark, something from their past.

"So is THAT why you came back then!? All that stuff you said... on the train..."

"Buffy don't... please lets not Ok? I-I mean you know that's not the reason yeah?" Faith could only hope.

"Yeah... sorry. I just... sorry..." And Buffy did know, in fact she looked a little embarrassed at the outburst.

"Kinda hard to get over old times huh?"

"Yeah... But I want to try Faith... I want you... here."

And actually hearing it, Faith felt whole.

"Me too...this is where I'm supposed to be." They were both grinning like idiots now. They didn't care, it was all good again. Faith knew that this was her perfect moment. Staring into those ever changing pools of green, with the moon casting shadows all around them, and the wind announcing the chaos of the coming storm, Faith had found her peace.

And Buffy was feeling it too. Faith could see in the sudden sweep of amazement that settled across her features... parting her lips slightly. She could feel in the way Buffy's hand was squeezing her own. Faith could see it in her eyes. And she wanted to last forever... but it didn't. It ended when Buffy looked away, somewhat shyly to their joined hands. It was over, but it was ok, because they both had felt it.

They were STILL feeling it. That was made clear by the nervousness in Buffy's tone when she spoke.

"I can't believe those bastards SHOT you! Let me see..."

Before Faith knew it, hands were on her leather jacket, sliding it gently off her injured shoulder.

"Nah B, its cool... I uh...." Faith was trying to stop her, but her voice just seemed to stop working when Buffy made contact with the bare skin of her shoulder... and suddenly that touch was all that existed.

"Does it hurt?" it was asked in a whisper

Gently stroking fingertips... her hands felt so warm...

"N-not really..." And answered just as softly.

One sliding lightly down her arm, leaving sparks on her skin in its wake.

"It's already starting to heal..."

She was so close... the heat, radiating between them.

"Yeah...super powers...it's no big..."

She didn't know when it happened, but somehow the way Buffy was touching her changed. It became more deliberate... something full of intent. Faith was shaking, but she tried not to show it too much, tried not to react to Buffy's fingertips moving delicately over her collarbone...tracing feather light up to her neck. Thunder rolled somewhere in the distance and Faith could feel it in her bones...

Buffy's thumb brushed her ear.

"Uhh... what ya doin' B?" She tried to keep her voice even... but it came out like dark whisky. The hand on her neck slid in to her hair... nails raked against her scalp, and Buffy's body was once again pressed fully against her own.

"Not real sure F..."

"Gonna make me kiss you..."

And suddenly she was. It was cautious, a soft and hesitant brushing of lips. It lasted only a few seconds but to Faith it felt like forever. She didn't want it to end. The hand in her hair tightened and Faith heard what sounded like a husky whimper... she thought it funny that it came from her. But then Buffy pressed harder against her lips, and Faith couldn't think at all. The wet slide of Buffy's pink tongue over her lower lip became her entire world... Faith moaned again and it felt like surrender.

She pulled Buffy closer, letting her own hand sink into the thick strands of blond as her back was pressed against the cool stone of the crypt. Buffy's tongue was pressing against her own, sweeping over every part of her mouth... wet and possessive. Faith felt like she was being devoured, she was loving it. How could she ever have thought what happened in their dream could ever compare to this? Not even close.

She let her hands slide down, over the curve of spine and the gentle swell of hip to finally cup Buffy's ass. The thunder drowned out the desperate groan, but Faith could feel it against her lips. She swallowed it and pushed her tongue against the roof of the other girl's mouth...jerked her closer, squeezing hard. She felt B moan again... felt herself being pressed harder against the wall of the crypt... a hand slide down her thigh, lifting it up...

And then it was Faith's turn to groan.

"Mmgguuhh... B"

At the feel of a slim but solid thigh pressing hard between her own, she broke her mouth away, panting into the night air... she could see her breath. Her eyes fluttered as Buffy started to rock against her... grinding into her heat in a slow hard rhythm... Faith saw the undeniable lust clouding Buffy's face

And it was so fucking hot. Her breath hitched in her chest as she felt herself flood in a hot thick stream.

Faith took in the hooded green eyes... almost black in the scarce light, the parted lips, swollen and glistening from her kisses... Lips that were moving. What was she saying?

"...Faith... want you Faith..." Harsh and breathless...Faith had never heard anything like it. She couldn't stop her own hips from jerking, picking up the pace the blond slayer was setting, slow hard circles. The pressure on her clit was almost too much, wet and rough, sliding bare against the seam of her jeans as Buffy pressed so perfectly against her... she'd never felt so hard, so slick and wet. Faith was shivering with every thrust... and it was still nowhere near what she needed.

"...want you bad ..."

Buffy's other hand was hot on her stomach sliding up over the smooth skin... fingertips tickling her ribs, and Faith sank both her hands into the tangled blond mass. She pulled the other girls mouth back to her own, silencing the desperate whispers. And Buffy groaned...

Her name.

And Faith thought she could come just from the sound of it. She suddenly felt feral. She actually growled as her hands slid back down the other girls body, finding their way under her shirt to touch the silk of Buffy's back... then around to cup the softness of her breasts. They fit so perfect in her hands.

She squeezed. Buffy moaned.

"Uunnhhhh" It sounded so damn frantic, she had to hear it again... and again. She let her fingers drag slowly over the incredibly hard tips... pulling at the lacey material

"Oh god... Faith...baby..."

Baby? Faith was sure she was dreaming now. But she took the other girls nipples and started pinching them, rolling them

"Ahhh... fuck baby... fuck."

Nope, no dream.

Buffy's face was buried in her neck panting hard and licking the skin there, her hand still sliding over Faiths stomach... hips still grinding that slow rhythm that was driving her fucking insane. Faith was absolutely drenched, she could feel her abs clutch with every sweep of B's fingertips... an intense throbbing spreading through her cunt. Her clit twitched every time that hot tongue slid over her pulse. She tried to pick up the pace of their hips, relieve some of the aching need in her pussy, but Buffy kept it at a slow hard grind, those fingers leaving paths of fire over her skin. But then that wondering hand went a little lower, and she touched it.

The other it... the scar.



And it was like someone slammed on the breaks. Buffy's hand jerked back so fast... her whole body jerked back, but Faith was already reaching for her... hands on those curvy pointy hips. All that desperate aggression just melted.

"B its ok..." But Buffy was shaking her head no

"No Faith... I-I did that... to you... hurt you."

"Yeah you did, its ok though... I needed it." Faith cupped her hands around Buffy's face as she brought her mouth down in a soft brush... moist lips sliding back and forth.

"You saved me B... and its ok." and then she was kissing her again... pulling Buffy's tongue back in her mouth, sucking it gently, her thumbs stroking her cheeks... over a drop of wetness. Tears? Was B crying?

Faith pulled back just in time to see another cool drop splash onto her face, then one landed on own. Rain. Buffy brought a hand up to her face, following the droplets with her fingers. Her fingers were followed by her lips... which were soon back on Faith's lips. And the kisses turned desperate again before either realized it.

Buffy's hands were under her shirt again, skipping over the bleak memory and heading right for Faith's needy tits. The first brush of a thumb over her aching hard nipple had Faith groaning again

"Oh god B..." She was on fire and even the rain that was starting to pour down on them couldn't cool her.

"Faith... I wanna touch..." Buffy was pulling her nipples now, and that solid thigh was back between her legs. Their clothes were fastly becoming soaked, clinging to oversensitive skin.

"Fuck yeah..." Was all Faith could groan as she pushed her chest forward, trying to get more contact with Buffy's touch. Her hands were back in the blonds hair. Wet tresses clinging and tangling around her fingers. Her hips started a frantic grind.

A trembling hand was sliding down her stomach.

"Faith?" That other hand was still fuckin with her nipple... twisting a little, brushing over the tip. Faith felt her belt then her jeans being undone.

"S'ok B..." Buffy could have done anything she wanted to her at that moment... any thing but stop. Faith worked her hands back under the Buffy's shirt, her hands trailing over wet skin, the rain was spilling over them in rivers. Faith cupped her hands over the other girls breasts again, rougher this time

"Mmmnnnuhh" B groaned against her lips then pulled back as her hand slipped into Faith's pants.

Inches away and their eyes locked. Faith was panting so hard she was scared she was gonna pass out as Buffy's delicate fingers cautiously ran over the short cropped hair over her mound.

But when one of those fingers brushed her clit she stopped breathing all together.

But only for an instant. Because once Buffy realized her discovery each breath became a moan. Faith couldn't pull her eyes away from the sharp green that was focused on her. It looked like Buffy couldn't believe how wet Faith was, how hot and ready to be fucked she felt.

"Buffy... oh god... B you gotta..." Faith was beyond ready. Buffy's finger was rolling over her clit in slow circles, with only the slightest of pressure. Faith was going nuts, She felt so swollen...so raw. She could feel her pussy already starting to make those desperate little clutches, but Buffy wasn't giving her near enough.

"Faith I don't... tell me how baby."

"H-harder...." It was all she could manage and her eyes slammed shut as the request was instantly met.

Buffy not only started rubbing her harder, but faster too, fingers impossibly slick from the rain and the dark girl's pussy. Faith's hips picked up and the rhythm grinding back in desperation. She needed to come. Buffy had her at that grating edge. So fuckin close but she couldn't get there.

Her hands were sliding over Buffy's back, nails digging into the rain- dampened softness. Buffy was kissing her again, and all Faith could do was pant against her mouth. It was hot and slick and messy and Buffy just pushed a finger inside of her.

"Uuunngghh!" That finger quickly became two.

"Is that good Faith? Like this?" B whispered against her ear as her fingers pumped in and out in that same hard fast pace.

Buffy was fucking her. It was fucking surreal, and she was gonna come so fuckin' hard.

"Shit B Don't stop... dontstopdontstop!" She could feel Buffy's eyes on her as her back started to arch...wet hair whipping around her face... hips bucking out of control, trying frantically to keep the pace. Her pussy started gripping those fingers... pulling them in deeper, the moisture spilling out of her, hot and sticky. She was coating Buffy's fingers. Faith could hear the wet smacking noises they were making and it just sent her right to the brink.

"Beautiful...." She heard the whisper over the rain, over the thunder, over the rushing in her head and it pushed her over that edge

"Uuuunnggh...God!!! BUFFY!" Faith screamed so hard her throat went raw. Buffy's fingers started to slow until it was nothing more than a gentle stroking. Her legs we jell-o

"...beautiful... so beautiful baby..." Buffy was mumbling softly to her as Faith's hearing started to filter back in. She blinked her eyes, and she told her self it was the rain clouding her vision. Faith brought their lips together as she attempted to calm the pounding in her chest.

But she couldn't, if anything Faith's heart beat faster as she pulled away to stare at the blond

slayer. The rain pouring over her skin, matting her hair... lips so swollen and parted as she breathed, but it always came back to those eyes. Swimming with desire and so much longing...

"love you B..." The words were out before Faith could even think to stop them and if Buffy hadn't been a slayer she wouldn't have heard it

But she was. And she did. Faith held her breath.

"Show me"

Faith had every intention of doing just that. Their positions were reversed before Buffy had a chance to blink. Faith pressed her into the wet stone, their bodies sliding against each other as she let her hand make idle patterns over Buffy's flat stomach. Buffy's hips had already started rocking against her own again... all deep groans and urgency. She needed it... she had to be so worked up, Faith could smell it over the rain, she could hear those needy little whimpers in here ear.

But then she heard something else... and fuck if it wasn't the LAST thing she wanted to hear. She jerked back, ripping her body away from the heat of Buffy's, and she almost wanted to cry. She had her pants done up in seconds and was running trembling hands through wet hair as she met the other girl's eyes.

Confusion...pain... fear. Shit she had to get outta here.

"Faith?" The frailty in Buffy's voice kept her feet planted in the soaking grass. No time to explain. Faith could only hope Buffy would understand, but a fog had seemed to settle over her. Faith got a sinking in her gut.

And then the world started to end.

"Buffy?! Are you still around here? Ya know we got back the truck a and realized I don't have a key to the house..." He came stomping around from behind another nearby crypt.

"Riley!? Hey! I..." Buffy awakened from her stupor lust and confusion with a jump.

He stepped closer, shielding his eyes from the rain

"Who's tha... FAITH?!"

And that wasn't the worst of it.

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## Part 9

No, that wasn't the worst of it. Not even close. It wasn't when the rest of the gang came charging 'round the same corner, waving their flashlights and knocking into each other like dominoes. It wasn't even the high-pitched man-scream that Xander let loose the minute he saw me.

Nah, some things are to be expected I suppose.

“Buffy! Get the hell away from her!” Riley hollers as he draws that excessively large gun. Please, I can feel my eyes rollin’. But that ain’t the worst of it either.

The rain is finally starting to let up. Going from an all out downpour to a slight drizzle. ‘Sunny’-dale my ass. Lightening is still exploding behind rust-colored clouds, like flashes of paparazzi. And the whole world, in this hollow red second, feels like its waiting. This is all so surreal.

I look around at all of them in a quick gesture, my wet hair whipping around and blocking my vision some. Everyone is just standing there, the light rain wetting their clothes matting their hair, but it can’t wash away the shock on their faces. They would look like statues if it weren’t for the small puffs of breath I can see in the chilled air. It almost feels like I’m watching the whole scene unfold, like I’m outside myself. And all by myself.

No one has said anything, and Riley’s words still hang frozen over us all. It looks like its up to me to try and diffuse this situation some... I’m so screwed.

“Look, just chill ok guys?” I put my hands up as I say it, hoping soldier boy will turn the testosterone down just a bit. But my words just seem to set everybody off, it’s a sudden chaos and the force of it seems to hit me in the chest.

“What?!” From Xander

“Are you KIDDING ME!” Riley again. It’s all at once.

“You, BITCH! You expect us to CHILL?!” And I swear I have never seen Red look this cold, so hard and full of hate. Willow takes a few steps towards us, one look at her tells me she’s not that shy, timid little slip of a girl that I met the first night I rolled into this town.

No, she has new eyes now. They’re directed at me and it’s frightening. Something very dark is running through that girl. She’s changed. It’s all changed.

But that’s still not the worst of it.

The wind picks up again and the ground shakes with the vibration of thunder, tiny pinpricks of water stinging our faces.

“Sweetie h-hold on a sec we don’t know w-what’s going on...” It amazes me how Tara’s voice can be so gentle, in the face of all this madness. She’s looking right at me, rain drops clinging to her lashes like clear pearls... and I feel anger from her too, but the compassion there gives me hope.

It’s short-lived, of course.

“Oh I know what’s going on! The psychotic uber-bitch is back to murder us all!!” Xander chimes in and promptly returns to his hiding place... behind his girl. But his eyes still tell me he meant every damn word. I remember his eyes, when I saw them tangled in clean white sheets in a dirty little motel room. All youth and innocent wonder. He looks older now.

This is all getting so far outta control. This isn't how it's supposed to happen. Everyone is shouting, at each other, at me, at Buffy. It's all a whirlwind of confusion. Noise and venom swirling with the rain, making the air a bitter cold that I can taste.

She hasn't said a word. Its like she's frozen in her panic, her fear and... regret? Fuck what kinda game is she playin'... I want her to say something, anything. I want her to step closer to me to take my hand 'cause mine are shaking so bad right now.

My lips still ache from her kisses, I can still feel her body pressing into me... inside me, soft and hard at the same time ...so warm. I need to see her eyes. Like in our dream I could see into her soul, all that hazel light pourin' over me tellin' me without any words that it was all gonna be Ok.

And I NEED that now.

"Buffy look at me...?" my voice is soft but I know she can hear it. I hate the pleading tone of it but I just can't help it. I'm gettin' desperate here! I gotta know what she's thinkin' if she's still feeling what we had just a few minutes ago... before everything got shot to hell.

I need her eyes, but she looks away. She looks confused. And that one instant hurts so fuckin' bad.

So this is the worst of it then. And all of a sudden it becomes strikingly, painfully clear what's gonna happen next.

I wish I were dreaming...

"I-I... everybody just SHUT UP!!" I can hear the panic in her voice... it trembles. All the noise suddenly stops. She won't look at me.

And I feel myself breaking... frail slivers of glass. I miss my nightmare.

Lightening suddenly flashes close. Striking a nearby tree and everybody jumps. I can't seem to move though. A flaming branch comes crashes to the ground illuminating everything in flickering shades of red.

There's no getting outta this one now. Its one of those 'back against the wall' type moments I can feel this tension building, its rushing through my veins and its pure fight or flight.

And I'm so fuckin' sick of running.

"Listen! I- I just need everyone to...to just calm down for minute!" she takes a step away from me when she says this... it feels like miles. I feel my jaw clench, teeth grinding as I try not to scream. Please tell me this ain't happening.

"We're listening babe, just tell us what the hell is goin' on. Did she try to hurt you!?" I hear the safety click off Riley's gun, his thumb sliding over it like an after thought. Would it really be that easy? Is that all I am?

“What!? Riley no!” B says, and she walks over to him, putting a hand on his raised arm. “Put that damn thing away!”

He obeys like a good little puppy. Buffy stays next to him though, and I can feel my muscles tense, the Slayer in me makin’ ‘em burn. I need to run, or I’m gonna hit somethin’... hard. I know what’s comin’... I know what she’s gonna start spitting excuses, half lies that got nothin’ to do with what’s really happening here. And I feel like such an idiot, how could I have thought... GOD I thought she understood! Was it all just in my head? Was I just foolin’ myself here?

He drapes a massive arm over her shoulders. I wanna rip it off.

“Yeah, just explain it to ‘em B.” Explain it to ME damn it! My voice sounds tight... strained. It’s not because of the lump in my throat... its not ‘casue my eyes are burning... Its ‘cause I wanna shout.

Why, Buffy?!

It all happened so fast, there had been so much need in her eyes...I can still hear those desperate whispers in my head... she said she wanted me, I said I loved...

Oh... Fuck....

“Umm well...” She starts eyes darting. Just like a script, she can’t lie for shit. “Faith just got here and...”

“Shouldn’t she be in jail!?” Xander throws in.

“Yeah, umm... well I don’t know what’s up with that but... ah...”

“Well, why is she HERE?” He interrupts again. And I wait... we all wait.

“I – I don’t know...” She says it soft, eyes on the ground. I expect to see my heart there. All busted open and bleedin’... I know she can feel me, warm tingles should be a comfort right now... but it just makes me feel dirty. How can she just throw me away?!

“I don’t know what she’s doing here...” She meets my eyes then... with that dirty lie on her kiss-swollen lips. And just for a second I let her see it all... let her see how I’m destroyed, and then I throw down the shutters, ‘cause cold and indifferent is what I do.

Did I really expect more than this though? For her to stand up for ME? The one that hurt them all so deep, cut them to the core? Did I expect her to really believe how I’ve changed... how its all different now? How its ALWAYS for her? All for her...

I guess I did... I guess that’s why I feel my soul is in tatters.

“She um, just escaped...maybe? And I don’t know if she’s got a... ah... plan? Or something...so maybe we should talk... casue’ ya know, talking is um... good?”

B's really on a roll, but I stopped listening a while ago. Its all just kinda numb now. And yeah, REALLY can't lie for shit. But the gang all buys it... appropriate frowns of concern on their faces. Puppets. I gotta get outta here.

"Yeah, talk..." I hear Xander agree.

"Right. Care to explain then... Faith?" Willow spits out my name as she steps forward, closer to me than any normal person would dare. I finally tare my eyes off of B and I realize... Red ain't so normal, not anymore, and not by a long shot. Her blue eyes flash to black for half a second and I gotta take a step back.

"Willow, don't! j-just let her talk..." Tara grabs her girl and now all eyes are on me...

Fuck, I'm so screwed.

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### Part 10

What am I doing? I can't believe what I just said. Of course I know why she's here! She told me on the train... in that safe warm fantasy. She proved it by showing up tonight... open and trusting and real... she gave me everything. Her eyes just so full of...

Oh... Fuck...

I look down at my hands, the rain has washed away her warmth... but I can still feel it, desperate clutches around my fingers. God, I was inside her, more than her body... in her soul. It was a soft, hot heaven... she gave it to me, and now, this is hell. The look in her eyes was devastating. Pain, regret and fear... it looked like she was torn apart. I did that. But that's gone now and all that's left in her is ice.

Willow just threw down the gauntlet, and Faith looks ready to bolt. I gotta fix this. She's gotta know that I didn't mean for it to go this way. I need to get her alone again.

I should have said it back...

"What are you doing here Faith!" Will demands, and I watch as that slow grin pulls over Faith's mouth. It's that old Faith smirk and I realize with a gasp that I can't feel her anymore.

A new wave of panic washes through me.

I want to take it back... I want to go back to just a few minutes ago. Before it all went so wrong. Back to when I could feel her heart pounding with mine... so nervous we were both shaking, but wanting it too much to stop. Where she was calling my name, coming in my arms, holding me so tight, like she was scared I would ever leave her. God I didn't think I could.

"Well Red, thought I'd come back and re-live some old times..." She cocks her hip, she lifts an eyebrow...

"Shake things up a little, been a wicked long time and all." She's playing a part... putting that

ominous thread in her voice. I don't know if it's for my sake or to protect her self... maybe a little bit of both. But God, she sounds so dead... now that I know her real voice... thick with longing. She told me I saved her...

But I've killed her now. And the knowledge of it feels like a knife to my gut.

That's some irony.

"Faith don't..." I sound like I'm begging... I wish I could drop to my knees. I finally get Riley's arm off of me and take a step towards her. I feel myself stumble a little.

I can still taste her kiss...

"Don't what B?" she's so hollow. I'm so sorry Faith. I can't even speak, its like her glare freezes the words in my throat... I've lost her.

"D-don't do this..." I'm trying damn hard to keep the tears from falling but I can still hear them in my voice. I wish I didn't have to talk in this damn code. She scoffs, like she can't believe I'm even trying. But I've GOT to try...

Everyone is just standing around now, watching Faith and I have our own little silent showdown. Its one sided though, 'cause her eyes aren't talking to me anymore... she's gone. I have to bite my lip to keep the sob from escaping my chest. I can't let the others know... they wouldn't understand it... hell I barely understand it!

Through all this tension time is drawing out like a blade... the seconds cold and unforgiving. Then she looks away, shaking her head in a dismissive motion.

"Look I didn't come back here lookin' for a fight ok?" She begins, and she sounds defeated.

"Oh well that'll be a first now wouldn't it?" Xander again with the sarcasm, please somebody shut him up! I see Faith's eyes narrow and I can feel her muscles tense even from 5 feet away.

"Think you can take me Xan?" She looks him up and down with a smirk and its like everyone is holding their breath. Waiting for her to make a move. Its so silent its creepy, like more creepy than the average grave yard.

But things never stay quiet on the hell mouth.

There is something you should never do in this town... and despite the years of experience I always seem to fall into the trap. Just when you think things can't possibly get any worse... that's exactly when they do.

The first one came out of nowhere, and Riley is knocked on his back before any of us can even blink.

"What the hell?!" I hear him shout and he's already trying to scramble to his feat, looking for what blindsided him.

And that has to be the ugliest... vamp? I have ever seen!! Its kinda small, no hair, it's hands



look more like claws and I can hardly tell the difference between its skin and the shredded leather its wearing as clothes. And God what is that smell?! Its eyes glow orange as it lets out a fierce growl, and two more just like it emerge from the shadows.

There is a moment of absolute stillness before all hell breaks loose. And this happens to be the only spot on the planet where such a thing can actually happen. I see a flash a brown hair as Faith sprints past me catching the first stinky son of a bitch with a hard right that should've sent the thing flying.

Yeah, it should have. Instead it turns it's head back to her, it's morbid features contort into what I can only guess is a smile. Faith looks totally shocked for a second before the thing lashes out and sends her sailing through the air. She smashes into a gravestone with a sickening 'crack' and I feel my heart stop for a second.

It starts up again as she pushes herself to her feet with a groan.

"Ok so maybe X-man was right..." It's mumbled as she pulls a stake from her jacket. I do the same and suddenly its on.

Me, Faith and Riley jump right into it, each of us taking an uber-vamp and proceeding to get our asses thoroughly kicked. These things are strong. I'm taking blows left and right, so fast I can hardly keep up, so hard its dizzying. I know Faith can't be doing any better, especially with her injured arm.

I see Riley slam into the muddy ground and I know he's out for the count. The thing doesn't even try to bite him though, it just turns it's attention to Faith. Luckily, I just got the upper hand on the one I was fighting slam the stake in hard as I can. I look into the thing's face, where I should've seen it dissolving to dust before my eyes...

Again, should have. I dodge the counter blow as I try to see how faith is doing.

"Faith! Look out!!" I shout and she spins around just in time to dodge a blow from her second attacker. She plunges her stake into its chest and again, nothing happens. She gets a kick to the ribs for her trouble and I see her spitting out blood as she hits the ground.

This is so not good.

"Buffy!" Xander shouts from behind me and tosses his axe. I catch it, spin around, and slice the vamp's head off all in one motion. It poofs with a piercing howl. Finally!

But Xander's yell had drawn attention to the rest of the group. One of them charges so fast I can barely see it. But I see Will's eyes go black. The Vamp pauses its attack when it sees this, and if it was capable of fear it was definitely feeling it at that moment. It's suddenly on fire before anyone realized what's happening. When did she learn to do THAT?! She falls into Tara's arms, obviously drained.

"Darkness be your tomb!! Mother!! SHE IS RISEN!!" The thing on fire manages to screech before it bursts into ashes. What the fuck is that supposed to mean?

I turn to see Faith kick the last one off of her, and I quickly run/limp to try to help. She's back

on her feet again and about to attack when the vamp seems to realize that it's the only one left. It takes off in a flash disappearing into the murky drizzle. None of us are in to shape to follow

Faith turns to face me then, breathing hard and bleeding. The creepy silence is back. I take a step closer to her, I want to hold her make sure she's ok... not just physically. I need her to know I messed up, I just got a little freaked. God, I need her to...

Understand... oh so this is what it's like.

She's trembling slightly and I know it's a mix of pain and adrenaline. I'm feeling it too. That dark part of me that loves the hunt, lusts for the kill. It's rushing through my veins telling my body to sprint after that last vamp, screaming for me to grab Faith and crush that soft powerful body against mine.

I hate this part! I need to be rational right now, figure out this situation. I need to take care of my friends. But I don't feel rational and that dark part of me has forgotten that my friends are even here. All that's there is the need, it's a primal fire and I can see it burning in Faith's eyes too.

She steps closer and I feel my breath hitch in my chest. Her voice is liquid and rough when she starts to speak.

"You ok B?"

"What the fuck were those things!" Xander shouts, panic still in his voice. So I don't get a chance to answer. To tell her how much I want US to be ok.

I turn and see him helping my boyfriend to his feet as Tara and Anya help Willow to rest against the wall of the crypt. The same wall I had Faith pressed into just a while ago... I swallow back the lust so they won't hear it in my voice. It's hard to do.

"I- I don't know." Damn I seem to be saying that a lot.

"We need to get out of here, tell Giles, regroup." Ok that's better, fearless leader. I turn back to Faith, fully intending on bringing her into the mix. Getting her home and safe where I can fully explain to everyone what the hell is going on here... well maybe not fully.

But I can't, because she's gone.

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## Part 11

Faith ran, or more accurately, stumbled through the door to her old apartment, the heavy oak banging into the adjacent wall. Every inch of her body seemed to be screaming at her in pain. Any and all movement being strongly protested. But she pushed herself despite it. She had run full tilt all the way from the graveyard to her down town loft, the ache in her muscles at least drowning the one in her chest. Shifting it, changing it from that desolate feeling of loss to something more akin to anger.

Yeah, Faith was pissed.

She reached for the light switch, flipping it, she paused when nothing happened.

“Oh just fuckin’ perfect.” The low grumble of her voice sounded menacing even to her own ears. But Faith thought she was justified in sounding a little threatening. The night had gone completely to hell. Tonight not only had she had she gotten everything she had ever wanted in her short life, she had also gotten it ripped away... and all in a matter of minutes. She’d come face to face with her biggest dread, and then gotten her ass well and truly kicked to top it all off.

Yeah, just fuckin’ perfect. What had possessed her to come back to this forsaken town anyway!? Not even one night here and it was already too much. She couldn’t handle it, she felt beaten.

Leaving the door open, for a little bit of light. Faith made her way though the darkened loft. She was headed for the bed, where she had dropped her bags. She immediately lifted the overstuffed duffle, slinging it over her shoulder. It was a well-practiced move. Every one of those dark voices inside her was telling her to run, whispering that sickening consciousness that it was all a mistake. Another mistake.

It was that instinct that had guided her all her life. Kept her running from one dead end to the next. Keeping her alive, but just barely. It was all she had ever known, all that she was ever taught.

Which is exactly why Faith couldn’t listen. Not this time, and not anymore.

She let the bag fall to the floor, sliding it off her sore shoulder, and Faith thought about where she was a day ago. Haunted and on the run, trapped by her own apathy. She thought about the last dream she had shared with B... She had made a decision, a promise to see this stint in Sunnydale through. A pulse of determination shot through her veins. If tonight’s bit of action was anything to go by, the hellmouth was gonna need her here. Buffy needed her here. And that had to be in spite of what was happening between them. And Faith knew a lot about spite.

God, she couldn’t even decide which she was feeling more, anger, hurt or something in between it all! All she knew was it was Buffy making her feel all this... so conflicted. It would be so easy to hate her again, but she didn’t think her soul could take the loss. Not now, not after knowing. But how could she survive loving her?

After letting the bag fall, Faith limped over to the large stereo system and randomly hit a button. She was pleasantly surprised when a soothing melody filled the air.

“Huh, Dicky sprung for those long life batteries...” She cranked the volume and let the deep melancholic voice wash over her. Whatever the woman was talking about didn’t really seem to matter, but the overall essence of it seemed to crawl over Faith’s skin, and that hopeless feeling was back before she could stop it. She couldn’t get B’s voice out of her head. One minute whispering how much she wanted her, throwing her away in the next. It tore her apart, just as she was made whole. She felt so used.

Faith swallowed hard and looked through the darkness surrounding her closing in on her. She had to stop the reel that had become her thoughts. She needed to get clean, patch up the newest wounds... some the bandages wouldn't be able to fix, but she had a bottle that could help.

Faith was able to locate a few candles, and she always had her lighter on her so the place was lit up with minimal effort. The pint of Jack was located just as easily. Ripping off the cap, Faith downed a few hard pulls, the sour liquid burning deep in her chest. It felt so much better... as long as she kept telling herself she liked that empty feeling. Bottle in hand, Faith then limped her way to the bathroom, peeling the blood-laden clothes off as she went. The JD was done when she set a bare foot on the cool tile floor.

Faith's head swam as she rested the empty bottle on the sink... that first slow buzz starting to creep across her mind, and she studied herself through the haze. She could hardly recognize the woman staring back at her in the mirror. Faith looked deader than the creatures she hunted. Not that she was really messed up or anything. The few cuts and burses she had sustained to her face would heal in less than a day. No, it was her eyes that scared her.

"Windows to the soul." Faith's voice cracked over the words. But she told herself it was still better.

She reached out a hand, knuckles still raw, and traced the reflection before her. The girl in the window was crying, clear rivers amongst the blood and grime. Faith hated how weak she looked. That naked vulnerability she never let reach the surface was painted in the tears and pain that ran down her cheeks. At the sight, unexpected rage mixed with the chaos in her mind and before she could stop it the muscles in her arm suddenly tensed.

And the girl was gone, glass raining like bells on the cold hard floor, and Faith's hand was bleeding anew. She ignored the deep crimson drops staining the clean white tile and turned on the shower as hot as she could stand it. The water stung all the cuts covering her body as it rushed across her skin; Faith relished the sensation.

She wasn't sure how long she remained under the deluge; the hot water supply seemed endless. She was waiting to feel clean again, waiting for the water to wash away more than the remains of the fight. Faith wanted to get rid of her touch. The feel of those hot gentle fingers sliding over her body seem to be tattooed into her skin... phantom caresses, and Faith hated it... hated that she still wanted it. She wanted to be sure that the rivers streaming down her face were no longer the shameful tears of the girl in the mirror... but the hot water finally gave in with a sputter and shaking of the pipes. So being clean physically would just have to do. Faith reluctantly shut off the shower, dried herself and changed into a loose pair of sweats and a clean tank. She had every intention of crawling into bed and sleeping for at least 24 hours straight. She figured she could start fresh when she was fully recovered. Confront the gang, and Buffy on her terms.

Yep, that was gonna be the plan. But just as the pattern had proven for the night... things weren't following Faith's plans.

When she opened the door, the first thing she noticed was that the music was gone. The second thing nearly brought her heart to a complete stop. There, sitting on the floor at the foot of her bed, was the one person Faith was trying so hard to forget. Still dirty, caked with blood,

the candles were casting dancing shadows over Buffy's slight form. She looked so tiny.

"Faith..." Her voice was thin. She sounded tired, and Faith wondered how long she had been waiting. Her legs felt suddenly weak.

"What are you doin' here?" Faith had to force the steel in her voice. Had to force herself to remain standing by the bathroom door... across the room, when all she wanted to do was crawl over to the other girl. It was like an energy calling to her but she forced herself not to listen. Instead, she focused on Buffy's reaction, the girl seemed thrown by Faith's cold response.

What? Did B actually think she was gonna make it easy for her? Like hell! Anger was easier...

"I- I wanted to make sure you were Ok." Buffy got to her feet as she spoke, taking a couple of steps towards the dark girl. Apparently whatever that pull was, B was feeling it too. She had seen it after the fight in the cemetery... arousal flashing in the light girl's eyes, but it was something deeper than that something more...

Something Faith knew B wasn't ready to admit. With that thought Faith's anger shifted again to dejection... Man she was like a big roller coaster tonight. But could it be better this way? Sticking with what you know keeps you from getting hurt right? It made sense to Faith. But all she knew was being alone... and that hurt all the time.

"Yeah, well, all things considered I'm 5 by 5 B." At that Buffy just nodded, eyes cast down to the floor. She looked as if she was preparing herself for something. Her eyes were watery pools of green when they finally met Faith's again.

"I'm sorry." A whisper that hung in the air.

Faith could have gotten angry at that, could have thrown that fragile apology back in her face... laugh at the audacity of this girl, the one that would have killed her not too long ago had she even tried such a thing. But it looked to Faith that such a reaction was exactly what Buffy was expecting. And as the tears finally overflowed in Buffy's eyes Faith realized she was just tired of the game.

"You hurt me so bad B..." But she was still shocked by the extent of her own honesty. Where the hell had that come from? But her words seemed to encourage the other girl. The hope was written plainly across Buffy's face as she took a few more steps across the room, bridging the miles between them.

"I'm sorry... Faith I-I just got-"

"Freaked, yeah I know..." Faith cut her off with a sigh, she had a feeling where this was headed... she didn't want to hear the hollow excuses.

"And it was all happening so fast...I didn't know... and the gang just came outta nowhere... but..." Christ why was B here? Couldn't the 'let her down easy' speech come after she had had some sleep. Buffy was in an all out babble fest now and Faith wasn't even sure what the conversation was about anymore. "But...I didn't mean it Faith." Faith tuned back in, just in

time to be thoroughly confused.

“Huh?”

“I didn’t mean to hurt you.” Buffy took her hand as she said it, lacing their fingers together gently. And damn if the blond girl looked like she really meant it. Faith could feel her self getting lost in those eyes all over again.

“Its Ok Buffy.” She said looking away at their joined hands. It was safer.

“No! it’s not! Faith, w-what we... um... did, ya know...” She was blushing now. And Faith could feel yet another babble spree approaching. She wanted to speed this little rejection up... get it all over with, because that pain in her chest was coming back full force... she hoped she had another bottle hidden somewhere.

“B, its cool it doesn’t have to happen agai-”

“...It was... I think that was the most perfect moment in my whole life...”

WHAT?!

“What?!” Faith was pretty sure her eyes must have popped outta her head.

“It was beautiful Fai...” And Faith gasped at the power, the pure emotion in her voice. The words just seemed to pour into her soul, filling that empty space so fast she could hardly catch her breath. Buffy’s voice had become nothing more than a whisper... and when had they gotten so close? The other slayer was now very much in Faith’s personal space. Their bodies nearly touching, she could feel the gentle breaths on her face... smell the sweat and adrenaline from the fight that still laced her skin... It made Faith’s own skin prickle.

“Jesus B... what are ya sayin’ here?” Faith’s own voice felt tight in her throat, it came out in a raspy whisper.

“That I’m asking you to forgive me... if you can... I’ll understand if not, because ya know, the positions are kinda reversed and all... and I-”

Faith cut her off, the best way she knew how. She brought her mouth to the other girl’s in a warm and gentle brush... She smiled and pulled back when B’s eyes went wide.

“ummm?! Th-that was..” The squeak in the blond girl’s voice was beyond adorable.

“Its Ok B, you don’t have to apologize to me.” Faith couldn’t resist brushing a dirty blond piece of hair from the other girl’s eyes... and her hand lingered, caressing her cheek her thumb brushing over a cut on that pouty bottom lip. And she felt like her heart was breaking when Buffy turned her head and kissed her palm.

“I do Faith... I need you to know...” Buffy’s hands came up then...sinking into Faith’s still damp tresses. She pressed their foreheads together

“But I do B...” They were speaking so softly and Faith said it with a grin, as she felt Buffy’s

mouth linger over her own once again... It was a longer kiss but no less gentle than the last. Faith felt the other girl's head move in her hands, she was shaking her head 'no'.

"You don't know, 'cause I didn't say it back..." And Faith's heart was suddenly pounding in her chest. She gasped as the Buffy's mouth slid against her own again... more insistent, warmer. She felt her tongue slipping over her bottom lip, asking. Their bodies were suddenly pressed together so tightly... the heat of it washing over them both.

"I wanted you... I still want you." Buffy mumbled into her mouth and Faith moaned at the feel of her words.

"B...I-I know...Shhh" Faith wasn't sure if she could stand to hear it... she had never let herself hope. She pressed her mouth harder against the kiss. Sliding her tongue around the other girl's, sucking that tender bottom lip. She felt Buffy's hands raking over her back, down to hold firmly to her hips, pulling her even closer. Faith didn't want her to talk, didn't want her to say the words she realized she feared more than the hate, more than the rejection.

"Oh god..." Faith couldn't stop the rasping moan as Buffy's mouth finally broke away to trail a hot path down her neck. It was slow, deliberate and so tender Faith felt as though she was coming apart.

"need you... Faith I need you" Buffy was whispering it again and again the words felt hot on her skin, like she was begging, praying... And Faith couldn't stop the tremors running through her.

"I know... B please... you don't gotta-" Faith could see her hands shaking as they cupped around Buffy's face...she pulled away slightly, but the intensity of those green eyes kept her only inches away. It was like the whole world had come to a stop.

"Faith... I love you"

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## Part 12

Buffy held her self very still, concentration focused intently on keeping her breathing even and deep. She didn't want to disturb the peace of the moment. The rain had started up again, a gentle shower to contrast the night's downpour. And with the pale light of dawn creeping through the windows, everything seemed softer, not quite solid. But she knew she wasn't dreaming again. The gentle breaths of the dark girl sitting at the foot of the bed were all too real, steady and constant; it would hitch every time she would glance back at Buffy's still form... like it was a surprise. She was watching, waiting. For what Buffy wasn't quite sure, all she knew was that she wanted to stay in this place forever.

She felt safe, she felt warm, she felt loved.

It was damn near perfect. The candles had long since burned away, but their fragrance still lingered in the air, mixing lightly with the stronger essence that was distinctly their own. Buffy liked that... the fact that THEY had a scent now. It was just perfect... well; it was that is...before.

When she had first opened her eyes she had been greeted by a torrent of coffee colored silk, awash in that faint smell of lavender. Her arms enveloping that slim waist, hands tucked under the covers, resting on a smooth, flat tummy. And the skin pressed against her lips was the softest she had ever felt...She had been wrapped in Faith and yeah... THAT had been perfect. But it didn't last. Faith had awoken a couple of minutes later, shifting slightly and mumbling something about potatoes before freezing suddenly when she realized her situation.

Buffy felt her chest tighten now just a little at the thought. The other girl had carefully extracted herself from Buffy's hold and had been sitting across the bed for the past hour. Watching the rain, watching the girl.

She didn't make a move to stop her. Something telling her deep inside, a bond or instinct maybe, that Faith needed time. Buffy didn't want to listen, she wanted to pull Faith back, throw the covers over them again and shut out the rest of the world. She knew the world was waiting. But she had to fix THEM first. Make sure they were ok so they could face it together.

Nothing had really been solved the previous night. After her stumbling, but heartfelt confession, they had both been caught in a little shock. It was love after all... Jesus Christ it was love! Buffy was actually a bit scared herself... just a little terrified is all. And she had supposedly done all this before.

Buffy had been lying to herself a lot longer than she'd thought.

The whole damn thing could've been a huge disaster. And Faith wasn't exactly emotions girl. Buffy had fully expected Faith to run and hide under the bed... maybe with a shovel.

But that's not what had happened at all. To Buffy's surprise, Faith had kissed her. Holding her face between her hands as if she would break, it was feather-light, and it made her shake all over.

"Say it again..." Faith had whispered in that pleading voice that was all sandpaper. When she pulled away an inch her brown eyes looked like they were going to spill.

"I- I Love you..." It was only a breath, and Buffy could feel her throat constrict on the words.

"Again..." It was more a plea than a command

"Love you...Faith please..." And Buffy was begging her to believe.

But Faith was kissing her again before the words were even out. And it had been a VERY different kiss that time. The dark slayer's tongue had slid into her mouth on a gasp. It was hot and slick and Buffy couldn't stop her self from moaning against it. She didn't want to stop herself. Faith tasted so good, like the whisky she knew the other girl had been drinking, but something darker too. Something that she couldn't taste in their dream, that she hadn't been able to get enough of in the cemetery earlier. Buffy suddenly wanted to know what she tasted like everywhere.

Her hands flexed where they had been resting on Faith's hips, pulling the dark girl tighter against her body. Buffy let her own mouth get into the game. Ignoring the cuts and bruises they both had, she pushed harder into this kiss, her tongue lapping at every soft warm inch she



could reach. Buffy felt the moan that came from Faith all the way down to her toes... that was right before she felt the dark girls hands. They slid under her mud-covered sweater, so hot against her skin. It made her nipples get hard.

Buffy felt herself being lifted, spun around, and suddenly her back was against the wall. Her legs wrapped around Faith on pure instinct. It was almost an exact reversal of their positions earlier. And just the thought of that alone had Buffy whimpering as Faith tried to devour her in the kiss.

“Faith...” It was all Buffy could gasp as she tore her mouth away, desperate for air. She had forgotten any other word. And Faith’s lips were trailing a searing wet line down her neck, her tongue coming out to swirl random patterns over salty skin, teeth nipping at the tender spot of her pulse point.... Sucking on her collar bone

“B... shit B...I wanna...” Faith was panting moist breaths on her neck, grinding her hips between Buffy’s spread thighs, creating a friction so deep they were both feeling it despite the layers of clothes. Buffy sank her hands deep into the other girl’s hair, pulling Faith’s head back a little, they never stopped the searing rhythm.

She saw the desire written plainly in Faith’s eyes. Deep and unguarded, she wasn’t hiding anything. The sight sent a shocking pulse of arousal through Buffy’s entire body, it pooled hot and slick between her legs and she couldn’t help but moan at the feeling... the sudden urgency.

“Ohh god... Faith... want you...” she said it between gasps against the darks girls neck, her mouth sucking gently. Peach sweet and just as soft, Buffy wanted to mark her. She sucked harder; encouraged by the hiss of pleasure she heard... the tremors that seemed to be taking over the other girl. Just the thought that she was causing that... making Faith moan and shake... making that flush spread across her neck and chest, it turned Buffy on more than she thought was possible

She tried to work her hands under Faith’s tank... she had to get more skin. She needed it. She wanted the dark Slayer’s tits in her hands... She could see her nipples, straining against that too thin shirt. Buffy wanted to feel them dragging against her palm... against her tongue... just the thought made her wetter.

Buffy had been so worked up after the fight... after touching...after fucking Faith before that, and then getting interrupted, she was way past the point of simple arousal now. It was a need, pulsing hot and dripping as Faith’s hands managed to get a hold on her ass... squeezing it in time with the grinding of their hips... The pressure was just where she needed it, her clit jumping out of control with each push against it Buffy could hardly stand it.

“Faith... baby...” She couldn’t even finish ‘cause one of Faiths hands just gently cupped her left breast... Her thumb circled her nipple and Buffy thought she was gonna die. The pleasure was electric, shooting right to her pussy as Faith toyed with her nipple... pulling it... letting her fingers roll around it. She locked legs tighter around the dark girls hips... trying to ride her

“So soft B... god...wanna fuck you so bad... can feel how wet you are...you want me in ya B?” And Faith was talking to her... whispers that were nasty-sweet, burning against the her

shoulder... all in that raspy tone that was wrapped in pure sex.

“uuunnuhhh god... yeah... Faith” Buffy was shocked she could even form the words... Faiths hand had abandoned her breast, it was now sliding down her side then lower in between them. It was cupping her over her jeans!

“Fuck... baby you’re soaked...I can feel it...” Her hand was already moving, rubbing her slow. Faith was watching her own hand as if she couldn’t believe it, then those dark eyes... bottomless in their wanting slid up to meet Buffy’s own, the sight was nearly enough to send her over the edge then and there. Seeing that lust, that ache she could feel herself, it made her feel wild... ferial.

She sank her hands back into Faiths hair, jerking the dark girls head towards her, crashing their mouths back together. It was a brutal kiss, almost violent, and Buffy didn’t know where the aggression had come from. It was all she could feel, thundering through her veins, mixing with the arousal... she felt dizzy at the sound of Faith’s moan, she had to have more... had hear it over and over.

She finally got her hands up under that skimpy excuse for a shirt Faith was wearing... she read the dark girls skin like she was blind... scrapes and cuts every where, but she was so soft, and warm.

She got her hands between them... covered Faiths breasts, hard nipples dragging against her finger tips, and Buffy watched in awe as the pleasure washed across the dark girls face... eyes fluttering, that sweet mouth open and panting...

“Oh fuck B... yeah like that...” And that voice again... dark raspy whisper.

Buffy’s hips moved faster demanding Faith’s hand to the same... her legs tightened even more hearing the other slayer whimper as she pinched her nipples harder.

“You like that Faith?” She breathed, then moaned as Faiths hand picked up the pressure working her aching clit through the material...

“god yeah... oh shit B” Buffy wanted their clothes gone. Like now. She was already so close she was shaking... her hips jerking randomly to break the rhythm... she couldn’t help it...couldn’t control it Buffy was loving it.

Buffy could feel herself slipping, her restraint dwindling. Faith’s hands... her mouth, her body all pushing her closer and closer into that dark place, that wild out of control place. Her muscles felt hot... twitching just like they did before a good slay. She let her hands slide down Faith’s back again, fingers digging into the pliant flesh... harder when she heard her named moaned... God she felt crazy! But Faith was talking to her again... her voice sounding strained this time

“Buffy... shit!” She was pulling away her had stopping that wonderful stroking against her pussy... why!?

“B... wait a sec...” What!? Faith wanted them to stop now? Buffy couldn’t wait, her body wouldn’t let her, it was demanding her to take what she wanted... to take Faith. She pulled

her back crashing their mouths together again... pulling that plump bottom lip with her teeth... she loved the way her nails felt sinking into Faith's warm skin...

"Buffy oww... stop it!" She had barely registered the words when she felt herself being slammed against the solid wall behind her... hard.

It was like a haze lifted suddenly as the pain shot through her already bruised body... she stumbled as she fell from Faith's arms, barely landing on her feet. She looked up once she had regained her balance and Faith's eyes were a mix of shock and concern

Fuck what had she done?!

"Faith! Oh my god I..." They were both still breathing hard. But Buffy's heart was pounding with the realization of how out of control she had just gotten...how she could still feel it running through her, still wanted it. Buffy couldn't understand it.

"I'm sorry! I'm so..." But Faith did. She was already taking the blond girl back into her arms trying to calm the shaking that had now seemed to be taking over Buffy's slight form... whispering reassurance.

"It's alright B...I get it..." To Buffy it felt like she was living the same moments over again. In dreams, in reality. Hurting Faith... Faith comforting her. What the hell was wrong with her!

"What's wrong with me Faith?" She whispered fear and tears in her throat.

"Nothin' is wrong with you B..." She actually sounded like she believed what she was saying! Faith was smiling and Buffy looked at her in disbelief. How could she be so casual about this! Buffy felt like she was losing her mind

"H-how can you say that! I...umm..." She gestured between them, at a loss for words, and Faith's smile turned to more of a smirk as she leaned in and cut Buffy off, lips brushing hers gently, chaste.

"Baby, you didn't even hurt me really, it's just the Slayer in ya." What the hell was that supposed to mean? She had never gotten this aggressive... this fierce with anyone else

"It's ok B...I feel it too. It's IN us... you don't have to hide it, not from me..." Faith was stroking her cheek so softly, you would never tell that seconds ago they were nearly tearing each other apart.

"I don't?" still unbelieving

"Never B... Ya know, normally I'd be right there with ya with the grrr... but after the fight and all..." And with the words Buffy suddenly became aware of her own body, with the adrenaline finally wearing off and the arousal beginning to fade, Buffy realized that she was hurting all over...

"Yeah I guess we're not really in any condition to... ya know..." Her smile was slightly embarrassed as she spoke. She couldn't believe how fast things had gotten out of hand... it

was just-

“I just... want you so much...” Shy again as she looked into the dark girls grinning eyes.

“I know the feeling” But Faith stepped back and Buffy felt lost without her warmth. “It’s gettin’ pretty late...” She began again

“yeah... maybe I should...um.” Buffy was already making a move towards the door

“No! Stay with me?” Faith got a hold of her hand, lacing their fingers.

“Ok...”

And that’s how the night had gone. Buffy had showered, changed into a huge t-shirt and crawled into bed with Faith. They had both been out in seconds, and now in the hazy light of morning Buffy couldn’t help but wonder what the hell was supposed to happen next.

She thought of her friends, what they would think... of the attack in the cemetery, new super vamps... Faith tasted so good... could she stand to see the look on Riley’s face, on any of their faces... Willow’s new dark eyes... when was she gonna tell her? They would be disappointed... would they reject her? Did she care? Faith made her feel so alive, so totally and completely... well, complete. So much was racing through her head she forgot for a minute to keep up her charade. She jumped a little at the sound of a sleep-roughened murmur

“Buffy... you awake?” Yup she was caught... so what was supposed to happen now?

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### Part 13

So much for the silence... I was loving watchin’ her sleep... Her eyes fluttered when I called her name, and sleepy green is revealed to me. Damn she’s beautiful, even all ruffled. But I hate that she’s awake now. ‘Cause that means it’s all over.

“Yeah... I’m awake...” She says. It’s my first time hearin’ her scratchy-morning-voice. My chest feels like it’s gonna bust open, ‘cause I know it’s gotta be the last. I look out the window at the rain still sliding over the glass, It’ll be easier if I just don’t look at her.

Nothin’s ever easy. I’ve been sitting here coming to that realization for the past hour or so. Nothing that is, but loving her. Hell, I’ve been doin’ that since the moment I set eyes on her. Yeah, I can admit it. Here and now, finally, is everything I’ve ever wanted. And for a moment, last night, I was so sure she wanted it too. Fuck, when she told me... I can hardly even think it! I thought I was gonna combust. It was so perfect. And then after... I can’t help but grin a little...heh, yeah, hotness.

Damn she just makes me feel things... wild and out of control type things. It’s always been that way, no matter how much we tried to fight it. When she put me away it had faded some... the space between us too much I guess, and besides... nothing can bust through two-feet of concrete and steel bars. I was dead in jail anyway. Dead and haunted. But now... I feel so alive. It was like I couldn’t breathe, couldn’t feel my heart beating until the minute I set foot back on the outside... my first step back to her.

Back to makin' things right.

And this, when we're together, when she touches me...kisses me its so right. Its like I'm always burning for her. Like a comet entering the atmosphere, consumed by the fire before I can even touch ground... And its not just sexual either... no, seriously. I'm not whole if she's not there. She feels it too. And that thought, that we're finally on this same level, that she wants me just as much as I want her... it should bring me comfort...

Yeah, nothin's ever easy. See, B isn't ready.

"You sleep ok...?" I ask, trying to delay the inevitable and my voice sounds strained.

"Yeah... no crazy dreams." She smiles, and it reaches her eyes. It's breakin' me. She reaches a hand from under the covers... "Come back... its still early."

I want to. And I mean I REALLY want to. But I can't, 'cause she's not ready.

See I think, when I was locked up, somethin' happened to me. I think I got smarter about this whole life thing. Soul boy liked to call in 'insight'. He told me I'd lived a lot to have lived so little... fuckin' riddles...

Anyways, he said that I spent my whole life trying to survive. True, you don't have a lotta time to sit around contemplating when you're not sure where your next meal is comin' from. Which is why prison was good for me. As much as I hated it, as much as it ripped me apart, it was a good thing. Those walls that pushed in around me, those dreams of dying every night... they helped me see, who I am... what WE are.

"Baby? What's the matter?" Heh heh 'baby', god I love that... I must be worrying her with all this 'deep in thought' shit. But hey I thought she liked 'em dark and brooding. Buffy can't see it yet, she's afraid to. I saw it in her last night, in that dream we shared before that. The girl is running from herself, from that darkness that's part of us... that MADE us. It's the part that allows us to stalk the night... to kill things, it's the part of her that was able to stick a knife in my gut. But she still wants to keep it all in a nice pretty package.

Well it ain't about the wrappin' paper, its what's inside the box that counts.

"Buffy... we really gotta talk." Damn, did that sound ominous? Must have 'cause she's sitting up, pushing the covers outta the way. She's got that concerned frowny pout thing going on... its even cuter than normal with her hair all crazy, I just wanna kiss her. A soft little hand touches my arm and its like my entire body prickles

"Um... Ok. Just, tell me what's wrong." And she moves to sit right next to me, her bare thigh brushes against mine and fuck its too close. I can't think when I can feel the warmth just leaping off her body, when I can smell her skin.

I get up and start pacing back and forth in front of her... I can still feel her eyes like a caress though.

"Listen um... I think we really need to slow this whole thing down" I stop and meet her eyes.

“Wha- slow down?” Ok the eyes maybe not the best place to look... they’re pleading with me already. But I gotta say this. Its for both our sakes

“B, I just think that we’re kinda rushing this a little ya know? I mean, we’re hardly back to good... and we haven’t even talked about what went down the last time I was here...”

There is so much baggage between the two of us I don’t know how we could ever get past it all... she has to see that. I mean I wanted to do it all the right way this time. And a relationship with B? How can that be right when so much shit between us is wrong?

And ‘relationship’... fuck, I’ve never done that before. With all the trust involved and, expectation, I don’t know if I could deal... what if I let her down. What if she realizes she really doesn’t want me? It would send me over again... and god, just the thought of hurting B again... But wait! All this shit isn’t about ME, its about Buffy’s issues.

I gotta stay focused here... shit, she’s talking again...

“...and I know we have a lot to work out, but I want us to do that. Together...” She’s sittin’ on the end of the bed now... looking up at me with eyes so full of... everything. I feel my heart speed up. This is so damn hard! But I gotta do this...It’ll hurt less in the long run.

“No, you don’t want that B, you can’t!” I gotta make her see this, but I got a feeling that was exactly the wrong thing to say. She’s up in my face in an instant... eyes flashin’ anger and something else... disappointment?

But damn the girl is quick.

“And how the hell do you know what I want?! That I don’t want this?” Well duh? Her freakin’ out every time things get a little intense maybe?

“Cuz its obvious! You’re not ready for this B!” She’s not the only one who can get a little loud.

“What!? Was last night in the graveyard not ‘ready’ enough for you Faith?! ‘Cause the way I had you screaming for me, it seemed like I was perfectly ‘ready’ then!”

I can’t believe she just said that, and now she’s lookin’ all holy. Bitch.

“Fuck you that’s not even what I mean!” I mean seriously, ouch. But this is obviously upsetting her a lot... fuck are those tears? See this is the type shit I’m talking about its always been this way. So intense that we clash in one way or another... fighting or fuckin’ I guess.

“Then what DO you mean! Faith why are you doing this!?” Her voice is gettin’ all shaky all defeated, but-

“Don’t you see it’ll be better this way!?” She is just so stubborn!

“Faith... you’re the only thing I see...”

Oh. God. That was so not fair! I think I feel my heart breaking... suddenly my own eyes are burning. She takes a few steps to close the distance between us, and fuck its so good being this close to her... she cups those soft warm hands around my face...

“B...god B don’t say shit like that...” I can hear the tears in my voice... why does she make me feel so helpless, so conflicted? She’s kissing me... brushes of her lips all over my face... eyes, cheeks... I feel them against my mouth and my breath freezes... NO!

“Don’t...stop. B, that’s my whole point. I can’t be the only thing for you...” I push her back.

“Oh...” Its totally dead sound, like some one just flipped the off switch to her emotions. But it looks like she starting to get it. There’s definitely some realization goin’ on in her head... but she looks pissed as hell.

“Buffy it’s just that-”

“No, its alright... I- I get it now...” She does? I take a wary step closer and attempt to take her hand. But she just avoids me.

“You do? Really?” Is it too much to hope?

“Yeah, it’s... this is the ‘get gone’ part of the deal right?”

WHAT?!

“NO! B that’s not it!” Is that all she expects from me? She’s got the self-righteous eyes on again and I just want to shake her, I feel my fists clench...but I start pacing again instead.

“Shit B, what I mean is... you gotta life here. A whole bunch of people that count on you... that need you, that aren’t exactly crazy about ME. I’m not gonna ruin your life.”

“Is that it?! You’re scared of what they’re gonna think?”

Umm no? I mean hell no! I force a chuckle and pray its believable. She crosses her arms... lifts an eyebrow. Was that a challenge?

“I can give a fuck what they think!” Ok that’s not entirely true...at all. But I care MORE what they think of her... and again, this isn’t about what I’m scared of, so I say

“But YOU care... and that’s the thing B, there’s a part of us that you’re not ready to accept, that you don’t want anybody to see. You feel it all the time... you feel it more with me. You gotta deal with that first...”

Ok that threw her off her game a little. The defiant look in her eye is gone because she knows what I’m talking about... I mean Christ, she’s been a slayer longer than me! I thought she woulda come to terms with all this ya know? If she can’t even accept her self how the hell is she gonna deal with me with US... god I want there to be an ‘us.’

“I don’t... It doesn’t matter to me.” And she tries to say it with some conviction, but just

comes out week.

“Right B, that’s why you went all spastic when everybody showed up last night!” I’m trying not to get pissed...really I am... but fuck it!

I wasn’t gonna bring that up again but man it just stings... how she was so quick to just throw me away. I mean, sure getting damn near caught with your pants down, can be a little awkward. And I’m not naïve enough to think she was gonna be all ‘hey guys! Look who I just fucked!’... But STILL. Just thinkin’ about it gets me pissed and depressed in equal parts.... Oh yeah... AND she still has a boyfriend. Why can’t it be easy?

“I said I was sorry for that!” what like I have the audacity to even bring it up?

“Right, you’re sorry you hurt me, you’re sorry ‘cause it was so easy for you!”

“You have no idea how hard it is! How this all terrifies me!” And she’s standin’ so close to me again... I’m startin’ to think she gotta thing for being in my personal space.

“Yeah I know B, you’re scared of what they would all think if-”

“No! I’m scared of what you make me feel....”

Oh... and now all the venom is gone from her voice and she just sounds... defeated.

“Can you help me Faith?” She comes close and wraps her arms around my waist. I’m not strong enough to push her away this time. She kisses my neck, close to my shoulder and I gotta try hard to find my voice.

“Help?”

“Help me face this part of me... balance me?”

Ok she’s asking unstable slayer of the year for balance? How the hell am I supposed to help her? I barely can figure how to help myself? Does she realize what she’s askin’ me? She wants me to be the one she comes to for support... for trust? Again all that relationship stuff... Fuck that could never work, but she sounded so damn sure...

“B how can that work? H-how can you know-” She cuts me off when her thumb brushes my lip, she presses our foreheads together.

“I love you Faith, that’s all I need to know.” God why does she say these things? A few simple words and it all turns around... she just spins me. Her mouth follows where her thumb had been. Its one of those gentle kisses that just gets me shaking all over...B’s the only one that can do this to me... make me feel like I’m gonna fly apart with just a single kiss. This has all gotten so far from where I thought it was gonna go. All my resolve is just melting under the sweet pressure of her mouth as it slides over my own. I try to break away, but its just a hopeless gesture

“I- I can’t...we can’t B...” Oh, but we can. I’m kissing her deeper already... my tongue exploring the soft recesses of her moth as we shuffle backwards. Her knees hit the bed and



we're suddenly horizontal. Soft sheets and her skin... the only sounds our heavy breathing and the rain beating constant on the window. She feels so good under me.

That t-shirt she's wearing is gone in a matter of seconds. Her hair goes tumbling everywhere as I pull it over her head... its shiny yellow silk in my hands. And she's kissing me so deep now, like she needs it to live...her tongue wrapping around mine, I feel teeth on my bottom lip. So good, but I shouldn't be doin' this...

"W-we should stop... this... its wrong" I whisper across her lips. It sounds like I'm begging... and I am, but its with myself.

Her hands are holding on to my head and she's got those strong skinny legs wrapped around me...kissing me with everything she has... fuck its desperate. God that's exactly how I feel, I NEED her, but I pull my mouth away, cuz I need to breathe just a little bit more.

I'm kneeling between her legs now and I finally get to look at her... all of her. Fukin' Christ she's unbelievable...

"Buffy..." Its all I can breathe, what does that mean? This is wrong...

I let my eyes travel over all that's exposed to me. Her skin is so flushed the pale light pouring over her body like a liquid...the cuts and bruises from last night have faded a lot... they'll be gone by tonight... I let my fingertips brush gently over her knees...up her thighs, never felt anything softer than this... I shouldn't go any further, but the higher I go the more the muscles of her stomach contract. Her breathing is picking up...her chest rising and falling so quick, her back arches and fuck I cant believe just this little touch is turning her on so much... that its turning ME on even more. I'm getting so wet just from watchin' her react to me... my clit starts to throb as I watch her nipples harden.

"Faith..." she breathes my name like I'm her savior, it's a beautiful sound, but it just makes that doubt in my head scream louder... how can I be the one she needs?

I watch as my hands tremble over her stomach... her skin is on fire, my thumb swirls over her navel and her hips jerk up towards me and it's incredible. She makes this sound in the back of her throat... half moan and half whimper and its like pure need... it rolls down my spine and I can't help but moan a little myself. My eyes travel lower on their own... to where she spread out for me and I'm suddenly breathin' a hell of a lot faster too.

"B you're so wet..." I can hardly recognize that whisper as my own, it was so rough and needy. I can't help it though. Her juices are shiny, spread over the inside of her thighs... she just looks so swollen, so ready. My hands stay on her stomach though, makin' those idle patters, it just seems to be makin' her hotter... fuck she smells so good.

"Faith...god. Need you..." She practically growls as she takes one of my hands in hers and slowly drags it up. And we both moan when she stops over her left breast. The hard point of her little pink nipple is burning in my palm... my hands are still shakin' like crazy.

"Touch me baby..." she whispers and arches her back again... pushing herself further into my hand. It's sexy as hell... I start rubbing my palm over her nipple, letting it drag slowly over all the ridges of my hand... she makes that sound again. God I'm gettin' so wet from this... her

eyes are locked right into mine, they're so dark there's hardly any green left.

I take the tight little bud between my fingers, rolling it around over my thumb and her mouth falls open as her head tips back... Fuck I wanna take this slow, but just watchin' her... I can feel my control slipping. I get my other hand into the action, squeezin' and rubbing both her tits, her eyes flutter closed on a sigh... god she's getting so worked up... my eyes fall back down between her legs and she's dripping for me.

"Faith... baby I wanna feel you." The sound of her voice draws my eyes away from her soaked pussy. It's a dark needy sound.

"How?" I pinch her nipples harder... pullin' a little and I get that moan again... makes me nuts... but there's still that voice in the back of my head telling me I gotta stop this...

"T-take off your clothes Faith" But I can't... She sits up to help as I pull my tank over my head. It puts right at eye level with my chest... this is goin too far.

"Oh fuck! Buffy!" The sudden feel of her hot mouth over my aching nipple has me moaning outta my mind. Her tongue is flicking over it as she sucks on me... it so good I can hardly stand it. I feel my pussy contract as a hot flood drips outta me. I hold her head in one hand as we fall back again, keeping her mouth attached to my breast, I support my weight with the other arm. Suddenly stopping this is the last thing on my mind. B seems to be right there with me. Her hands are sliding down my back... down to my ass and she jerks me down between her legs again.

"Oh shit B..." I have to gasp, the feeling of her heat spreading all over my stomach makes my whole body tense up. I wanna taste that heat... be in it. I slide down her body, touching, kissing her everywhere. It feels so... sacred, and I want to worship her forever. I feel saved when I reach her breasts... when she arches into my mouth, puts her hands in my hair. But I can't stay long.

I move lower, feeling her skin jump and twitch under my lips... Her breathing is so ragged, those whimpers turning into moans. I curl my hands around her hips, because they're moving constantly now, her pliant little body reaching for me.

"Faith... please." I can barely hear her over the rushing in my head, Its all gone too far... Her hands are pushing me lower and all of a sudden I'm there. I've never been nervous about these sorta things, but now, my breath is shuddering out of my lungs. I get my first taste of her high on the inside of her thigh... and its darker than I could have ever dreamed. She tastes like sex... like raw femininity, and the heat is just coming off of her in waves.

"Oh... god... baby" She's trembling all over and so am I. I feel her nails rake over my y scalp as her hands clench in my hair. She's almost frantic, but I need to take this slow, need to look at her... fuckin' beautiful. Her lips are puffy, glistening with her need, and her clit has to be aching ... the thought that I did that to her, its just unbelievable. I finally lower my mouth to her and it feels reverent. She hisses at the first contact, my lips placing a tender kiss on her swollen clit. Then those strong hands are pulling me closer, and her hips start up a rhythm immediately.

"Faith! nuuuuhh...lick me baby..." I can't believe this his happening... that I'm sliding my

mouth around in her, covering my self in her juices. I press my tongue against her clit and she's so hard I can feel her pulsing. My hands slide up her thighs, spreading them wider as I bury my face in her heat. I'm never gonna be able to get enough of this... of her.

We both moan as I push a finger into her. I tare my mouth away, because I just have to see this... I have to believe it. Her back arches hard as I add a second, it's so tight.

"...oh fuck...baby...yes." I start pushing in and out of her and I'm torn between watching my hand or the pleasure that is sliding over her face. She's frowning a bit concentrating on the feel of me fuckin' her... those long lashes are resting against her cheeks, and she keeps biting her bottom lip... trying to muffle those sexy groans and sighs that keep breaking free, a fine sheen of sweat is covering her and she's almost glowing in the early morning light.

I can feel her starting to tighten up around my fingers... she so close but she fighting it, those moans getting harder and harder to restrain. I speed up my thrusts, pushing into her as deep as I can... curling my fingers a little. I need to see her come. Its like I can almost feel it building inside me... its never been like this. I lower my mouth over her aching clit again... take it between my lips and suck.

"ahh...g- god... Faith" I can feel her getting wetter, I can taste it but then "Faith S-stop baby... wait..."

"What?" I pull my mouth away... panting...licking her juices from my lips. My hand keeps going though, still fuckin' her but slower. "What's wrong B?"

Please don't tell me she wants to stop, not now, not when I need this so bad.

"Get... uuuhh...up here... want...need to feel you" Relief washes through me and I crawl quickly up her body until were face to face again. She gets her hands back in my hair and kisses me hard. I know shes gotta be tasting herself, but she's lovin' it.

"Clothes... off... Faith." She mumbles against my neck. I feel her teeth scrape me gently and I think I'm gonna die. We get my shorts off quick and now, there's nothing but skin. Hers and mine and it feels like my whole world just stopped.

Our eyes are locked as I sink down on to her...into her, our centers pressing together. She's breathing in all gasps, sharp... erratic. Her eyes flutter open and B's looking at me with every kind emotion. My heart is suddenly in my throat as I realize... this is so much more than sex. I can hardly breathe at the thought. I try to swallow down the sudden wave of nerves but its almost overwhelming... God this is everything to me... SHE is everything! Im shakin' all over again... I can't do this!

"Buffy I-I can't...I... oh god!" She moves her hips... rolling them up and the pleasure rushes through me as our clits grind together.

"Ahh fuck B!" I almost come then and there.

"Look at me Faith... feel me" Her hands are cupped around my face... she's so open right now. And I do feel her... everywhere. It's so intense. I can only hope I'm reflecting every I'm feeling right back at her. I start moving with her, sliding against her. Its all so wet and slick

and hot I'm on the edge of way too quick. And the whole time she's just lookin' right into my eyes, letting our bodies set a pace that's getting more and more frantic with each passing second.

"B... ahh fuck... I-I'm gonna..." they way she's looking at me... how she's panting right along with me tells me she's just as close.

"I know...me too...mmm--don't stop baby..." Her nails are raking down my back I gotta struggle to keep my eyes open, I have to see her... need to. And then it starts. Her eyes flicker closed just for an instant before they open wider than before. Her whole body surges against me and I feel it... in the slick heat between us, rolling down my spine, prickling my skin and thundering through every inch of me. And somewhere distantly I hear both of us moaning... shouting desperately but all I can see is her eyes.

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It's a little later now... I'm not real sure how much time has past, just been soaking up the afterglow... But its not peaceful, not like when I first woke up... God I just made love for the first time and its not peaceful! B's got her body slung half over mine, her warm skin making all the sheets and blankets unnecessary. I've been trying to sort through all the shit in my head. She wants to give this all a go, she doesn't want the consequences of what that could mean... I want... hell I just want it all to be right.

"Don't doubt this... don't doubt that I love you." She whispers so soft, and I open my eyes to see the watery depths of hers. How does she get in my head like that?

Fuck just hearing those words... she just has this pull over me... IN me. Its every thing good inside me, everything that makes me want to come outta these damn shadows. Everything in me that makes me wanna live in the light. Its all her, and it makes me feel whole. But its not enough...

"I know Buffy... its just not enough." And then there's this silence, so heavy I can feel it crushing me. There's just the rain. I want to say it back... I want to shout it to the world that I love her more than anything in this life... 'cause I do, but I just can't.

She pulls away from me and I hear her choke on a sob. Why can't it be easy.

"Its getting late, we should get going. The gang's gonna be waiting." She says finally... her voice is strained. She gets up and puts the T-shirt back on, looking around for the rest of her clothes.

"They're all getting together at mine to figure out what went down last night..."

"Yeah, they're probably freakin'... what did you tell them after I left?" I stay in the bed, and wrap the covers around me. I feel like I need the protection

"Nothing..."

"What are you gonna tell them now?"

"I don't know...nothing." I can't really ask for anything more than that. Its all she can give

me right now. I watch her walk out the door, the soft click of the wood echoes through the loft and I feel my eyes burning. She loves me, but its not enough.

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### Part 14

I come down the stairs and the chatter that had been filling the air comes to a sudden and abrupt stop. And all eyes are on me. Its ok though. I'm showered and changed, squeaky clean with my armor gleaming. It's a far cry from when I first walked through the door. It was like they had been counting the seconds. The door was barely open before I was slammed with a barrage of questions.

All about Faith.

I didn't have any answers. I mean, what could I tell them? That she didn't want me? That my love wasn't enough for her? That I had walked home sobbing in the rain trying to put together the pieces of my shattered heart?! Yeah, that would have gone over REAL well.

I love the smell of melodrama in the morning. Seriously, I was a mess.

I had retreated to the sanctuary of my room, spent a good half hour bawling my eyes out, then, finally dragged my butt off the bed and out of that cliché high school moment. I was the Slayer I should be stronger than this. I kill things! Big ugly bad type things!

I had looked at myself in the bathroom mirror for a while. Still slightly bruised and cut, an interesting mix of greens and blues... my eyes were red and puffy. Damn I looked like hell. But I couldn't help think, what was it that she wanted? After all this time, all that we had been through, we finally get to this place and it wasn't 'enough'?

Who the hell did she think she was anyway!?

I told her that I loved her... what more could she possibly want?!

Did that sound conceited? Well, so the fuck what!

I mean, SHE was the one who started all this right? She said it first! And she did SO much more than just that too!

She pulled ME into those crazy dreamscapes, showed me all her demons, and fears... let them flash before my eyes... I never noticed the how scared she was that night... not until I saw it all played back to me. Blood on her hands, tears in her eyes... I would have been fine NEVER knowing, but god, she just HAD to put it out there.... In the dream, she let me kill her, cause she thought that's what I wanted...

But it's NOT! I never wanted her to die, and I didn't ASK for any of this! She didn't have to come here! I know I told her about this big thing that's on the loose...but, she could have said no right?!

Why would she risk it? Risk coming back to a place that holds so much pain for her where she's HATED, just because we MIGHT have reached some kind of understanding? I mean,

the Council was after her for fucks sake! Surely she realized they would look here eventually! Her arm hadn't even gotten a chance to heal, and she runs back here?

Back to me?

And I SO didn't ask for her to apologize for all the shit between us either! She just DID! I didn't WANT her to bare it all the way she did on the train... It was like she put her soul in my hands. All her pain all her hope she just let me take it...she gave me everything and asked me with those deep beautiful eyes if it was enough....

She ... Oh...

She said it FIRST...in a tiny whisper that let me know she hadn't said those three words together in a very long time... like she was scared of them... and...

Oh my god it was SO much MORE than just that!

It was everything.

And it was like that realization had washed over me like a wave. All that she had done, all she had risked. It was for me! And what did I give her in return? Hollow words with no action to back it up? Ok the anger is gone and I feel like crap again... but for an entirely different reason.

God I can be so blond some times!

I can't help but think about what she said to me in that dream... the hope in her eyes, just as they had been last night and god, this morning. Yeah I'm getting it now.

The girl is terrified. Maybe even more than I am.

She's scared that I'm gonna let her down again... that she might mess up again It could all so easily go to hell... but it WON'T. Because they weren't hollow words. I just need a chance to make her see that.

I have to prove it to her. She's more than proved herself to me. I can't believe the determination that's coursing through me. It was like back on that train... understanding. But the dilemma is less than ideal. How am I supposed to win her over in the midst of all that's going on? I have not only a potential apocalypse here but all my family and friends to win over too?!

Talk about multi-tasking.

And then there is Riley. I can feel something inside me melt a little at the thought of him. I'm not naïve enough to believe that I love him, that what I feel for him could EVER possibly compare to what I feel for Faith. But still. He represents everything I thought I ever wanted in this life. Everything I was TAUGHT to want since I was a little girl. A princess wishes for her knight. He gallantly slays her dragons and they live happily ever after.

It's supposed to be easy...And Riley fits so easily in that spot. With his 'all American boy' looks and attitude, he wants to be my prince.

And it does feel like a fairy tale when I'm with him... sometimes.

People see us holding hands as we walk across campus and they smile... my friends make those 'awww's when we kiss...we DO make an attractive couple after all.

A beautiful stereotype.

And I revel in those moments... Being seen as NORMAL for just a moment. I can forget then that I'm not... that I come home every night covered in dust and blood, thankful just to be breathing still.

And sometimes it actually does feel good to be wrapped in those large arms. And I don't ALWAYS feel smothered when he towers over me. Sometimes I feel protected. But then I think about how I can snap him and the white horse he rode in on into pieces without even breaking a sweat.

I slay more than just dragons.

I'm not supposed to want another princess... God Faith would knock me half way around the world if I ever called her something so girly. This is gonna hurt Riley so bad. When we're alone, he talks so much about the future... and I'm always a part of it. I've never thought further ahead than what it takes to kill the thing I'm hunting. Never about tomorrow, cause tomorrow I could be dead. But his tomorrows are filled with suburban houses and PTA meetings.... And those aren't bad dreams... but they aren't MY dreams. He deserves someone who can make them come true.

Lately I've been dreaming of her.

So I know what I have to do now. It's not gonna be easy, I'm actually a little terrified, but thinking about all she's done all she wants us to be, I know its gonna be worth it. SHE is worth it.

And now, my foot hits the bottom stair and the whole gang is looking at me. It's ok though. I look around and see everyone but Riley. It's probably for the best that he isn't here... one step at a time and all.

"Not that I was expecting applause or anything guys... but a good morning maybe?" I think I'm gonna try to keep this light as long as possible...

"Ok... morning Buff" Xander starts cautiously, only to be interrupted.

"Yes, good morning. Now, what the hell is going on with that other Slayer?" Anya... well, you gotta love her directness.

"Umm honey, sweetie, we talked about that whole 'tact' thing, remember."

"No Xander, I'd like to know what's up too... I mean you ran after her last night and

everything Buffy... and you DID kick Faith's ass right? Or well at least give her a good hard questioning? Send her back on her way to wherever her way is? Like jail?"

Despite the babble there is nothing funny about Will's expression... I can practically hear her teeth grinding from across the room. I already know she's gonna be the toughest. Before everyone else can jump on the bandwagon though I stop it all right here.

"Listen guys, Its not what you think..." and I think it's SO not what they think... but I can already see Xander rolling his eyes.

"Well that's good 'cause I was thinking murder and mayhem part 2... or is it 3?"

"No. It's nothing like that. I...I haven't exactly been telling you guys everything that's been going on."

"What do you mean Buffy?" Giles ask and he has that curious frown going on. I try not to be intimidated.

"I've been in contact with Faith..."

There I said it.

"What for? How long!?" Xander is getting more and more high strung by the minute... Willow is just seething quietly, and I'm losing control of the conversation... fast.

"The past couple of days. Slayer dreams."

"Dreams? As of... have they been prophetic in nature?" Giles asks... and there go the glasses...

"Not as far as I can tell, but I can't ignore the timing. Nothing for months and then, all of a sudden when this big bad moseys into town, with a all these ties to 'The Slayer' ya gotta wonder..."

"Yeah I wonder if she's working with it to end the world!" And now he jumps to his feet... arms flapping and everything.

"No! Xander, will you just let me finish? We talked... about a lot of things, about everything. She's here to help."

"Help!? Buff you can't be serious!" Arms still flapping... he's gonna take flight any second now.

"Yeah I am, and so is she... Its all so different now." I push on though. I have to make them see.

"Buffy certainly you've considered the consequences of this."

"Yeah Giles I've been doing nothing but considering--"



“But she tried to strangle me!”

“You’ll have to excuse Xander. Seeing this Faith person was quite traumatic for him. She was his first lover other than Mrs. Righty and the whole experience last night has left him both terrified and aroused.”

“Thank you for that summary Anya, although I’m sure that’s more information than any of us will ever require...” Giles looks equally disturbed and annoyed. And I SO didn’t need the reminder of the whole Faith and Xander naked thing.... And whoa where did that flash of jealousy come from?

“You can’t possibly think that she’s changed? After everything that’s happened?” Xander’s insistent questioning pulls me back and I think only a couple of days ago the answer to that question would have been an emphatic ‘hell no’ but now...

“Yeah I do.” Simple as that. So much has changed. And I look around at my family as they all try to process it all. My eyes finally rest on Willow, asking.

“No.” Is her answer. And her voice is like ice. My heart plummets.

“I can’t do it again... go through that HELL she put us through...”

“Willow calm down..”

“No Terra I won’t calm down! That BITCH put all our lives in danger. Killed people!! MURDERD, lied and betrayed us... all for her own selfish, jealous vindictive--”

“NO! You don’t understand, you don’t know what it was like for her--”

“Oh and I suppose you do now? How do you know she’s not playing you all over again?”

“Its not like that...I just--”

“She raises a point Buffy, how can you foresee Faith’s motives to be genuine? This could be nothing more than yet another of her manipulations.”

“No... listen guys in these dreams... she showed me things, everything. And yeah she messed up, big time. But she gets it now guys. She sorry for it all... god that doesn’t even begin to explain it. She seriously regrets the choices she made, but she’s not looking for forgiveness. She’s just looking for a chance.”

“Right. And why should we trust her?” She like talking to a brick wall... Willow’s never been this way.

“I’m not asking you to trust her. I’m asking you to trust ME. Every damn night we walk a line, its on the knife edge of darkness. And Faith slipped. And you have no idea how easy that fall is, how accepting and GOOD it can feel.”

“But Buffy you’ve never crossed that line.”

“Yeah, because I have a tether to this side... to the light. I have you all, my family. Faith’s got nothing, no rope and no one to catch her. And all she wants now is a chance. A chance to do it right.”

And now they ALL have the thinking frown going, and I’m holding my breath. This HAS to work. Finally Xander sighs and sits down again.

“Ok I’m on board. But I’m not breaking out the ‘welcome back’ fruit basket.” He takes Anya’s hand and she too gives a nod of approval.

“That was a very nice speech Buffy. I found it convincing.” I give them both a smile, and then I look at Wills.

Fuck.

“You know this sucks...that its just total shit right?” I’m trying to wrap my mind around the fact that Willow just said ‘shit’ so I don’t even realize she’s up and in my face until she’s talking again.

“I’m not going through it again.” And the ice... the venom that she puts in those few words is shocking.

And just like that she leaves. Walks right out of the kitchen and its not until I hear the door slam that I snap out of my stupor.

“Well that was overly dramatic.”

“Anya, sweetie... tact.”

I ignore the exchange I rush to go after her and my hand is just on the doorknob, but Tara’s hand on my shoulder stops me.

“J-just give her time... Seeing Faith again, it just brought back all those insecurities... It’s a lot for her to deal with...she’ll come around.”

“God do you think so?”

I feel desperate. I need my best friends with me on this... If Willow can’t even deal with Faith being back, how can she handle... well... all the rest.

“Yeah she’s been really stressed lately. She w-wants to help with this new bad... s-she’s been studying a-a lot of spells... umm... and do-doing some really umm... in-intense magic.”

“Intense? Like with making with the great balls of fire last night?” I question. And Tara looks around, nervous. And even though we’re alone in the foyer now she lowers her voice even more than normal when she speaks.

“Y-yeah like that... it’s... w-well it’s of... the black variety.” And this little revelation comes as a total shock.

“Black magic!? That’s...like, dangerous right?” I try to keep my voice down but I’m just totally blown away here... I mean, Willow? The black and evil arts?

“No! Well, not... not always. Umm... it’s s-safe...you know, in moderation.” And she says the last part a little funny. In a way that gives me a sinking feeling in my chest. But moderation is good right?

“Oh well, that’s alright I guess. I mean Willow’s totally ‘responsible girl’. She knows her limits right?”

“Right. Limits...” And there goes that sinking feeling again... but Tara smiles and its comforting.

“She just needs some time to deal. I-I’ll talk to her later.”

And with that I nod and we go back to meet the others. There seems to be a silent agreement just to give Willow a little space for now. Giles for his part is ready to take on the more pressing matters. He starts right in the second I sit down at the table.

“I’ve been doing some research, using the accounts of what everyone has told me about last night. It would appear what you faced last night was an ancient breed of vampire. The first children of the original...”

“Oh just fantastic. Momma’s brought the kiddies out to play.”

Giles ignores Xander’s nervous sarcasm and pushes on. We’re all worried we just have different ways of showing it I guess.

They are known as the Torak-han. They are the vampires that modern demons fear. Extremely powerful and resistant to most kinds of attack.”

“Right, when I tried to stake it, nothing happened.”

“Yes, you would have received the same result had you attempted to harm it with a cross or holy water. The Torak-han were created thousands of years prior to the first coming of the Christ. Thus making any kinds of religious relics obsolete... It can respond only to the most basic distinctions of good and evil. Darkness and Light.”

“I think they can sense dark forces and l-light ones... t-that might be why it was so afraid of Willow.” I think everyone agrees but I’m not so sure... I get another pang in my chest as I think about how that thing totally freaked when Willow started making with the mojo.

What could scare something that’s existed forever?

“So sunlight can kill it.” Anya concludes

“Right as well as fire, the incarnation of the sun here on earth.” Giles agrees

“Chopping off their heads works pretty wicked too.” The husky timbre of her voice resonates

suddenly through the room. We were all so involved in the conversation we didn't even realize anyone had entered.

“Faith!”

Yeah, what Xander just shrieked ...Faith.

Jesus she looks unbelievable. She's still standing in the doorway, the late morning light shining at her back. It just gives her this glow.

Her hair is a tumble of dark waves around her shoulders and she's wearing... she's wearing...shit I have to drag my eyes back up to her face to avoid suspision.

But it's a look that's distinctly what I've come to know as 'new Faith'. Jeans that look totally comfy and hotter than hell all at once. Torn and tight in ALL the right spots. And that shirt gives the 'old Faith' edge that just gets me wet in seconds. It's just a simple tank, deep red of course. But God the way she fills it!

I hate that she's wearing her denim jacket as well... its blocking my view.

Eyes on her face Buffy. Ok... no, higher... good. I have to swallow hard when I meet her eyes. My throat is suddenly so dry. She looks to fuckin beautiful... her eyes are painted up, all smoked out, and they just look bottomless but her lips coated in a clear gloss...and all I can think about is how they feel on my skin...

I'm using all my willpower to restrain myself and not jump across the table and have my way with her right on the kitchen floor. Its hard... like REALLY.

She takes a few steps into the kitchen, looking around. I can tell everyone is holding their breath. Including me. I was hoping for a little more warning. Maybe get her alone first... talk to her about all I've realized in the short time since I've seen her last. Her eyes finally rest on me and she raises an eyebrow. Damn that's sexy...

Oh guess that was my cue.

“Hey Faith...I um. I'm glad you decided to come over.” Jesus I'm nervous, sweaty palms and all, but I get out of my chair and walk over to her anyway. Not too close... I'm only so strong

“I said I would B.” She looks right at me and she says it all soft like.

“Right, we were discussing what happened last night. Everyone knows what the deal is now... I um, explained everything.” And that gets me BOTH eyebrows and she actually looks a little panicked.

“Everything?”

“Well, almost...” I smile as I grab her hand. I feel her try to pull away but I hold on tight and lead...err... drag her across the kitchen to the table where we're all gathered.

“Guys?” I give them all ‘the eye.’ Making sure they understand to be civil. That its not an

option.

“Hi Faith... Really good timing.” Tara breaks the ice and I’m so thankful for her. I could feel the tension rolling off Faith in waves but it’s just something about Tara that just makes everyone relax.

“Hey.” Xander says cautiously... not cold, but not exactly welcoming.

“Yes It’s nice to have you on board. If last night it any indication we will be in dire need of your assistance.” Giles makes a better effort

“Just here to help out... B told me some of what’s been going down. Figured you could use a little extra slay power.”

“Yes! She also convinced us all that you weren’t going to maim anyone this time. Buffy you should do your speech for Faith!” Anya suggests and I’m considering getting Xander a ball-gag for his birthday.

Ok REAL uncomfortable here

“You made a speech?” But it gets Faith to smile, and I feel her hand relaxing in mine.

“Well sorta...” I smile at her, and she smiles back at me and I suddenly have butterflies and goose bumps and all sorts of other tingly feelings.

“That’s cool. You were always good at the super girl thing.” And she goes and takes a seat next to Xander.

He doesn’t exactly look comfortable, but he’s not screaming in terror. It’s a start.

“Well Faith, I hope you’re looking forward to a day of decoding and allergic re-reactions.” Tara says, then, she tosses her one of the larger most dusty of books from across the table.

Faith raises and eyebrow.

Tara raises one of her own. And there is about 3 seconds of absolute unbearable tension.

Until Faith cracks, with a shake of her head and that dimpled grin, she opens the book.

And it was like that the ice was broken. We spent the rest of the morning huddled over piles of dusty books exchanging theories. Some progress was made but not nearly enough. My attention was split though. I was mostly just waiting and watching.

Waiting for an opportunity to get just a minute alone with her. Watching her every move. She would catch me once and a while, and I knew she was expecting me to look away, shy at being caught. But instead I would just meet her eyes... give her a smile.

I’m showing her you see.

I think it’s making her nervous. It’s not part of her plan. She thinks she can just tell me we

can't be together, that I'm not ready to be with her. She thinks she can say that, right after making love to me. And she expects me to do nothing... after she's done so much.

She thinks she can hide behind MY insecurities so that I don't see her own?

She told me it wasn't enough... well Faith is gonna get more than she bargained for. I just hope its not more than she can handle.

I stretch my arms and lean back in my chair a little, and I have to bite my lip to keep from smiling. Faith's eyes were totally all over me on that one.

"Guys... Isn't almost lunch time or something?" I throw out, hopeful. I really need a break.

"Oh yes I do believe it is."

"Yeah I can go for a break. Pizza?" Xander agrees with Giles, and my stomach definitely agrees with his suggestion.

"Sounds good."

"Me and Ayn can go pick it up then.... Back in a few." He calls on their way out.

"Right, I think I'll take this opportunity to run to my place. I think I have a volume there that will be helpful." And Giles is out the door too... muttering something, in Latin I think.

"I should go talk to Willow, she's probably back at the dorm..."

And just like that, Faith and I are alone. That was easier than I thought. But something tells me that this conversation is gonna be far from easy. She's standing all the way across the room from me. Leaning against the countertop... fidgeting with a spoon, nervous.

Sexy and unintentional.

"So, ya think something lit a fire under all their asses, or is it just me?"

"No, its not you, not entirely. They're dealing. Its just gonna take some time. Everyone is on board here."

"Everyone but Red, right?"

"Yeah, umm, she doesn't really agree with my whole view on the situation."

"And what view would that be, B?" she finally puts the spoon back on the counter and looks me in the eye. Its like a magnet and I'm up out of my chair and moving towards her.

"You know how I feel about you Faith."

"Yeah, we've talked over all that shit this mornin" And her tone is dismissive. At least on the surface. Beneath all that façade I can feel her. She's anxious, the tension rolling off her liek bitter liquid... it burns me.

She finally breaks the eye contact, like that could stop this energy that's flowing between us. Liek she can just make herself stop feeling me. Not a chance.

"No Faith, YOU talked. You just made the decision, that despite how I feel about you... how we BOTH feel, that we can't--"

"Right Buffy. We can't. End of story." I see her fists clenching at her sides. She's trying to fight it... I'm not gonna let her.

"You think you can just make this decision for me? Faith I lo--"

"I know Ok! You told me!" She tries to back away from me but she's got no where to go.

"Yeah I did... and you told me too. You've SHOWN me, so much in just these last few days. In our dreams... by coming here. You put it all out there, and now, its my turn"

I come to a stop in front of her, not too close. I don't want her to freak out and bolt. But god, just a few feet away and I'm getting chills.

"Your turn for what?"

"I'm gonna show you Faith. I'm gonna make you believe it." And I put every ounce of conviction I have into those words.

"Buffy it doesn't matter whatever you think you can show me... It can't work."

And she just blows it off!

"You're such a wuss ya know."

"Excuse me, but fuck you Buffy, I'm trying to do the right thing here!"

Bull shit.

"Yeah? Well you're still a wuss... we both are...just total cowards." She just rolls her eyes and gives that dismissive shake of her head.

"You say you want to do the right thing? Well tell me then Faith, doesn't this feel right? Don't WE feel right?"

And that gets her, She knows it's the truth because she feels it too. It's the real reason she came back here.

"It's... Its not about that." She tries to deny it but her voice just comes out shaky

"Just let me show you Faith, what it can be like... I know you're scared and--"

"I'm NOT scared!"

“Ok, ok, sorry. But, can you give me a chance... I just need a chance to show you.”

“Its not that simple Buffy there’s so much we--”

“Do you trust me Faith?” I have to stop all this avoidance. It all comes down to this anyway. What she asked of me and what I’m asking of her.

“What?”

“Trust me.” And I move even closer, right in her personal space.

“What... what if it all goes to hell again. I mean this ‘us’ thing... B, its gonna mess up your whole life!”

“Well that’s just it Faith, its MY life. And I want you to be a part of it...”

And she just sighs, and shakes her head again. I think I’m winning!

“I didn’t plan it to go this way ya know.” She says it low, with that little grin that shows her right dimple, and she’s looking at me through those thick dark lashes. The sight makes my breath catch in my chest because its almost... accepting.

“YOU had a plan?” I say it with all the cute I can muster. Which is a lot. Or so I’ve been told. But I cant help but turn up the flirting, because I can feel her relaxing, even though I’ve moved closer to her, even though she’s practically trapped as she leans against the counter.

Even though I can feel the heat radiating off her. God I want her so much.

“Hells yeah I had a plan! A good one too.”

And wow is that a pout? I think she’s flirting right back.

“I was gonna come here, help out with this bad... maybe settle for a while, get a new place. Just start slow ya know?”

“Wow Faith, that just sounds so... responsible!”

“Well, it was bound ta happen one of these days, yeah?” At that I just nod, but then I replay what she just said? Settle?

“Settle?”

“Yeah, kinda tried of running.” And now all I can do is hug her. My arms are around her waist and my face is pressed against the soft warm skin of her neck before I even realize what’s happening. And she lets me!

In fact, she slides her arms around MY waist too!

“This mornin’...” She starts, whispering in my hair. “waking up like we did... I never knew I could want somethin’ like that.”



“And do you still?” I ask just as softly, and I feel her nod. I squeeze her tighter... I don’t think I’ll ever be able to let go.

“Its gonna work out, you know.” My lips brush just behind her ear and I feel her tremble. God I want to kiss her.

“Won’t be easy though B, you sure ya think I’m worth the effort?”

Ok, and now I HAVE to kiss her... just a little one, a brush against the corner of her mouth. I feel her smile against my lips.

“Definitely worth it F.” And then she kisses ME. And Faith doesn’t do little kisses. Her lips are sliding over mine, all warm and wet, but still just so gentle. It makes me gasp.

I feel her arms tighten around me first, then her tongue sliding over my bottom lip. Teasing, but asking as well. And I’m just about to give her anything she wants when I hear a door slam suddenly.

“Willow wasn’t at the dorm, but she left a no—Oh my GOD!” Tara comes to a screeching halt half way into the kitchen. And me and Faith jump apart but not anywhere fast enough.

“Oh shit!” Faith shouts, her eyes are cartoon-big as she attempts to push me back a little. So now I guess is the whole moment of truth. Put up or shut up Buffy. Faith looks like she’s gonna bolt any second now. And Tara’s mouth just keeps opening and closing, I think her CD is skipping.

“It’s... umm. Tara, this isn’t what it looks like.” Faith finally manages to stutter out. All the while inching away from me. Trying to wiggle out from where I have her trapped between my body and the counter.

I make my decision. And it’s a hell of a lot easier than I thought.

I take a step back, a small one, enough to give Faith a little room. But I hold on tight to her hand as I turn to face Tera completely. And when I finally find my voice I know the words are the truest I’ve ever spoken.

“No, Tara, its exactly what it looks like”

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### Part 15

‘I can not be seeing this.’ It was the only thought that was circulating again and again through the confused witch’s brain. ‘I REALLY can not be seeing THIS’

It was beyond the realm of her comprehension, beyond all logical, mystical and physical reason. Buffy was kissing Faith?!

“E-exactly wh- what it... it looks like.” The blond witch shook her head, repeating the words

of the slayer. Trying to wrap her mind around an impossibility, that was so evidently possible.

“Right.” Buffy said. Defiance in her eyes and determination on kiss swollen lips. And she said it like that was supposed to explain everything!

Tara looked to Faith then. Hoping, beyond hope some further explanation may come from her. Because ‘what it looked like’ had potential to be disaster. But those big brown eyes were just as lost, jerking back and forth between the two blonds in the room.

So it was up to her then.

“O-Ok so, what—what e-exactly is ‘this’?” Tara was trying to keep her stutter under control. And she usually could, all but in extremely stressful situations that is.

Tara felt justified in her impediment right now. It couldn’t get any more tense.

“Well...” Buffy started “This is... uh... well--”

“It’s nothin’ Tara!” Faith cut in, pulling her hand away from the death grip it seemed Buffy had her in. Panic was clear in her voice. “We were just messin’ around. And uhh--”

“Wh-what Faith, Buffy tripped and f-fell on your mouth?”

Tara folded her arms, set her jaw stiff. She was clearly bothered by the lame attempt. When Faith had come back this morning, she had gotten a vibe. A good one. One telling her to expect so much more than the stories she had heard.

“No, it’s not ‘nothing.’ I-in fact I think its pretty damn f-far from nothing. Am I right Buffy?” As the initial shock started to fade Tara’s tone became sharp, near demanding. Now she just wanted answers.

The blond slayer took a breath. An attempt to compose herself.

“Yeah. This... I’m not even sure what to call it. But it’s new. Like, less than 24 hours new, and neither one of us really planed this to happen but, God its so RIGHT Tara. I’ve ne ver felt anything close to this and--”

“And Faith?” Tara cut Buffy off. If she didn’t the girl might have never stopped to take a breath. It was clear to her how the blond slayer felt. She was obviously in deep smit here. And more than that, the vibe... the clear and absolute waves of certainty that were pouring off her were almost jarring.

No, Buffy wasn’t where the bad energy was coming from, she wasn’t the source of the continuous ripples of uncertainty, of fear and pain.

Tara wanted to know what Faith was thinking. She wanted to know if she should believe the stories.

Well... Umm. Ok see we uhh—I-its like this Tar—we kinda...” And Tara thought she had the monopoly on communication problems. It was refreshing to see she wasn’t the only one. She

stared hard at the dark girl watching her fidget and bounce on the balls of her feet. She tried to see beyond all that fractured energy... But Faith was like a cloud of smoke. So many layers... years of hiding, it was like she was permanently lost.

“I need to talk to you, alone.” Tara cut off the rambling, looking at the both of them.

“Tara, any thing you have to say about this you can say in front of Faith!” Buffy took a step forward. All bold and unapologetic. She even had her ‘hero face on’

Tara though it was cute.

“No Buffy, not you.” She walked past Buffy and grabbed Faith’s arm.

“Wait! Me? What?” Faith was looking from the stunned slayer to the hand that was now dragging her from the room. Her eyes pleading for mercy.

“You. Living room, now.” What choice did Faith have but to follow?

Once she was satisfied that they were out of earshot. Tara turned to face Faith. The so -called ‘evil slayer’ looked freaked. Tara looked at her hard again... hoping that if she focused enough she would be able to see the truth in the girl she knew so little about.

“Faith, tell me what you’re up to.” She said finally. She hated the air of suspicion that laced her voice but she couldn’t help it. She couldn’t just dismiss all that she’d heard. All that they told her.

“Nothin’ Tara I swear it. Look I’m just here tryin’ to help with this whole end of the world thing.”

“Then what was that I saw in there?” She asked it gently now, instinct telling her that demanding answers was a sure way to get none from her.

“It’s just what Buffy said, isn’t it?”

“Yeah. It is...”

“And it’s real to you.” It wasn’t a question, because Tara felt she already knew the answer.

“Shit Tara its everything to me.” The sincerity in her voice was nearly palpable. And just for a second, Tara could see beyond the walls. But it wasn’t enough, she had to be sure.

“Give me your hand.” The dark slayer gave it willingly. Her face open, wanting the other girl to believe. The second their skin made contact they both gasped. Faith, because she had never experienced some one seeing into her. It was personal... so intimate, and she had nowhere to hide.

And Tara lost her breath simply because she saw. All that the dark girl was and wanted to be. It wasn’t specifics, just feelings. So many in such a rush it was shocking. Fear and sorrow, joy and elation: all at war within her.

All this from the girl who Willow had said ‘feels nothing’. No, that was wrong. Faith could feel. And she felt intensely. Tara’s eyes fluttered open after endless seconds. And now, she didn’t have to look so hard. And there was more... Faith was more. More than her own existence. She was tied, completely intertwined with another.

It all made so much sense now.

“You’re purple.” She said at last, smiling.

“What?” Faith finally opened her eyes too, a small indent of a frown making itself known on her forehead.

“You’re aura... its purple, more of a lavender really.”

“Oh... lavender.” Faith made a face. And Tara figured it was the finding out she had such soft color spirit.

“Well what does it look like? What’s it say?”

“Just think of it as this ubiquitous energy. It surrounds you.”

“So like a blob.”

“Umm... yeah ok, blob is good. And it’s says everything that you are.”

“So I’m guessing that might be a bad thing?” She raised an eyebrow, but Tara knew she was anxious. She could see it.

“Nope. It’s a Faith thing.” And for that she got a smile, complete with dimples.

“So you believe me, that I’m tryin’ to make it all right here?” And to anyone else at that moment Faith’s voice would have sounded indifferent, as if she didn’t give a damn if she got a yes or a no. But Tara could feel the desperation flowing around the dark girl. The woman that was so very tired of the pain, the loneliness.

As answer, Tara pulled her into a hug.

“Yup.” She said simply. And then:

“But there’s more. You know she’s apart of you. I can see her... y-you’re tied.”

“Huh?” Faith seemed a bit stunned by the sudden show of affection. And it hurt Tara’s heart to know someone so unfamiliar with such contact. So when she pulled away she kept the Slayer’s hands in her own.

“Your auras, your souls. You know how you’re purple? Well, Buffy is kind of goldish. But there’s always been some purple hanging around her too. Now I know where it comes from!”

Tara was beaming, excited by her discovery, and Faith was just trying to take it all in, as the witch continued.

“And lately, these past few days, I’ve been noticing more and more of that other spirit hovering with hers. And now, I can see it’s the same for you.”

“That seems wicked heavy...”

“You’re matched Faith, more than any two people I’ve ever seen. You just have to trust it.”

“I do. At least, I think I’m beginning to.” And Tara could see the admission was hard.

“Good. Now go in there and tell her that. I’m gonna go pick Willow up from the library. The note she left said she’d be there.” She finally released Faith’s hands, satisfied with her new knowledge.

“Tar... one more thing.” Faith stopped her, a hand resting on her shoulder.

“You won’t tell anybody about this yeah? Me and B aren’t real sure what we’re gonna do. And she’s got Riley still and--”

“I’m not going to tell anyone Faith. But I-I won’t lie to Willow. I can’t. They’ll figure it out eventually.”

“Yeah I know, Thanks Tar, for everything, ya know. For believing me.” And they shared a smile and Tara was gone and Faith turned towards her destiny...

The kitchen.

She found Buffy hitting the ‘end’ button on the cordless phone, and placing it back in its cradle. No, make that slamming it back on its cradle. The phone was actually lucky to survive.

“Damn it!” It was a harsh and frustrated whisper as Buffy ran both her hands through her hair. “Pesky telemarketers again B?” Faith asked from the doorway, joking but visibly concerned.

“Wha?! Oh Faith, hey!” The pissed expression quickly turned into a tentative smile.

“So, how did it go with Tara? What did she say? Is she gonna tell?”

“It went, she said stuff, and no. You should really chill B.”

Faith smiled at the other girl’s nervousness, and walked further into the kitchen. She leaned against the counter, started fidgeting with her lighter.

“What? that’s it? Chill?” With each word the blond’s voice seemed to jump a whole octave.

“Yeah B, relax a little.” Faith winced as she pulled out her pack of cigs, placing one on her lip.

“Faith, please don’t smoke in here. And what did Tara say?”

The questions followed Faith out the kitchen door, onto the back yard porch. She kept Buffy

in suspense. Lighting up and taking a good long drag. She enjoyed a smoky exhalation before turning to face her, a slight grin on her face.

“She said I was purple.” Simple, direct to the point.

“Huh?” Dazed and confused.

“I’m a purple blob, and you’re a gold blob and our blobs are mixed together.” Faith took another drag, nodding her head as she considered her words. Deep and philosophic

“Again, huh?” Or, not so much.

“B, I thought you were supposed to be the Slayer with all the know how about this stuff.” Faith sighed, rolling her eyes a little.

“Am I? I didn’t get that memo.”

“Our auras B, energies, or whatever. Tar can see ‘em.”

“Oh ok I get it! And she saw all good stuff?” Finally catching on, Buffy’s tone was expectant. And Faith felt something in her tare a little at the thought she might disappoint.

“Well, not all. There was bad shit too. Stuff that’s in me...”

“Faith, you’re not—”

“Whatever B its no big. Basically the stuff with us, all of the good. And she says she won’t go blabbin’ it to the world either.”

“Really?!” Buffy smiled.

“Yup.” And Faith smiled back, tentatively.

“Oh thank god! I don’t know what I would have done if this got out—”

“Don’t sound so fuckin’ relieved B. Guess its good you aint gotta worry about the rest of the scoobs fining out you’re bangin’ the psycho.”

And Faith didn’t even know why she had said it. But something in her had assumed the worst. Call it instinct, or doubt or fear, but they were all in flux in the dark slayers mind.

“What? No Faith that’s not what I meant. That totally came out wrong.” Buffy moved closer, standing in front of Faith as she leaned against the porch banister. “I just wanted to tell them myself first. You just drew the wrong conclusion baby...”

“Yeah well fuck you and your conclusions B.” Yeah, She was defensive like that.

“Damn it Faith why do you have to be so defensive?!” And B had her pegged right on. Faith deflated a little. She flicked her cigarette into the yard and took a breathe of clean air.

“Sorry, I just... it’s all kinda hard to get used to. This whole ‘caring’ thing? Its new ya know?”

“Yeah I know. But we’re gonna work at this ok?”

“Kay.” Buffy had just sounded so certain. She had wrapped her arms around Faith’s waist, pulling her into a gentle hug. It was the same position they had been in the kitchen, when Tara had caught them.

And Faith took a few moments just to bask. Let the indescribable sensation of the other girls warmth permeate her being. Being like this, feeling so surrounded by the other slayer, it was peace. It was the gentle rise and fall of her chest, the warm, moist breath cresting against her neck. It was the fingertips trailing, drawing little hearts on the small of her back.

It was the soft lips that were kissing her ear.

It made Faith gasp, and she heard Buffy sigh and push their bodies impossibly closer. She could feel the hard wood of the guardrail pressing against her spine, but only barely. The softness, the heat of the blond slayer against her front was overwhelming all her senses.

Not to mention the way Buffy was actually sucking on her neck now.

“Ummm wha? Uhh... ya sure we should be... ohh shit... doin’ this B?” Faith was trying to keep her voice steady, keep her own hands from moving lower to cup the firm swell of Buffy’s ass. She was failing at both

“There a reason why we shouldn’t F?” and she knew the other girl was smiling, she could feel it in the lips that were planting wet kisses over her jaw... breezing across her lips, and back down the other side of her neck.

It was getting Faith so hot.

“W-well... ahh... the others are gonna be here soon, and...oh... fuck!” And Buffy’s hands weren’t idle either. They were sliding over every inch she could reach.

“Yeah? Well, they’re not here now...” Another kiss, right in that spot behind her ear, and now Buffy’s hand was cupped around her right breast. “Are they?”

“Guess not...” Faith nearly groaned. As she felt the brush of a thumb over her painfully hard nipple. It was quickly followed by fingers that pinched softly, tugging a little.

“Guess right.” The words were spoken into her mouth as Buffy’s hands continued to fondle her breasts, stroke and roll her nipples to the point where all Faith could do was pant.

She could feel her knees start to give, Buffy was making her so fucking hot.

“B... I-I can’t—” She whispered. Her voice hoarse, strained by the force of her arousal

“I got you, baby. Won’t let you fall.” And Buffy kissed her again. Sealing the promise in the heated cavern of their mouths as one hand quickly slid down her stomach.

It wasn't like the night before. There was no hesitation. Buffy's hand dove straight into the dark girls pants... her fingers parting the soaked and tender folds

"mmm oh...god B... tha-that feels so good."

"You like this?" But her voice was still timid, belying the confidence of her touch.

"Fuckin' uhh... perfect B." and Faiths hips jerked in agreement.

"This morning..." Buffy started, her hand still tracing gently, fingers timidly exploring the wetness, the heat. "What you did to me... wi-with your mouth. It was so...I-I want to..."

"Oh god B." And just hearing those words from Buffy's kiss swollen lips sent Faith's arousal through the ceiling. She felt her inner walls clench, looking desperately for something to cling too, begging Buffy's finger to slide lower, into her. She didn't think she could get more turned on.

That is until Buffy pulled her hand from her pants, and brought those two glistening fingers to her lips. Faith watched in arousal-drenched shock as B's eyes locked onto her own. So dark and heavy with lust, then, that pink little tongue slid from between her lips and licked every drop of her juice from her fingers.

"Fuck...B...fuck..." The sight had severely limited Faith's vocabulary.

"Baby you taste so good..." And at the sound of that shaky, raspy whisper Faith had to have that mouth back on her own. She brought their lips back together in a fast and desperate slide. She could taste herself. It was all harsh breaths and searching tongues, and Buffy's hand was between her thighs again. The blond girls fingers reached her clit instantly and started up that gentle, teasing, barely there stroking.

"Buffy... makin' me fuckin' nuts."

More than that, Faith was going insane... Her back was starting to arch, her stomach muscles jumping, shuddering with every gentle stoke across her swollen bud. Her hips were moving desperately trying to get Buffy to give a little more pressure, stop the teasing, stop the torture, but never stop touching her.

She could hardly believe she was actually on the verge of begging.

But was so VERY good, and judging by the way Buffy was kissing her again, so hard and deep and desperate, it was only gonna get better. Yeah, the way she was pushing their bodies together, purposely sliding a thigh between her own those fingers slowly making their way lower, sliding though the ridiculous amount of juice that was spilling from her pussy... it was DEFINITELY getting better.

But the sound of the front door slamming brought it all to a screeching halt.

No! Nononononono NO!



“Tell me this isn’t happening B.” Faith groaned, biting her lip trying to get herself under control.

“Wish I could baby.”

“GUYS! We’re back! And we brought cheesy fatty sustenance!!” They heard Xander holler from inside. Buffy sighed and reluctantly pulled her hand from the warm haven that was between Faith’s legs. She gave a little pout of sympathy at the tiny whimper the other girl let out.

“Jesus B, you got me so ready...” Faith considered that an understatement. She was practically aching for more of Buffy’s touch. She felt so wet she was throbbing, so on the verge her legs were trembling.

Her words made the other girl blush though. Who would have thought Buffy could be so shy, especially when you consider where her fingers just were!

“It’s like I just can’t help my self Faith... I just have to touch you.” She whispered

“Totally know the feelin’ B.”

“Maybe we can finish this later?” And now she was getting the ‘cute look’ again, that one from earlier in the kitchen, that irresistible one. It caused a dreamy smile to spread across Faith’s own lips.

“Yeah... later.” Man she couldn’t wait ‘till later!

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### Part 16

Riley Finn was in the same position he’d been in the last 20 minutes. Sitting on the bed, staring blankly at his cellular phone. The connection had long since ended. In fact he had been the first to hang up. He just couldn’t wrap his mind around the words that had just come from the device however.

Couldn’t understand who had just said the words... and why.

WHY!?

Hadn’t he done everything he was supposed to do? Hadn’t he done everything right? He was the supportive boyfriend! The quintessential emotionally available guy! And now?

“It wasn’t enough...”

Buffy’s words ran circles around his skull. He had given her everything... given UP everything. She had said it wasn’t him, that she just needed some space. Every cliché line you could imagine. Every line but the truth.

They were perfect for each other! She knew that! Everything had been going so well. All except the last few days that is. The days when she had started pulling away from him. Buffy

---

had always been kind of distant, never totally open with him. But that was just her personality right?

He knew her well enough to know that... didn't he? Of course she was closer, more open and giving with her friends, but that was only because she had known Willow and Xander for so long. It would have gotten better. Buffy would have eventually let him in. She would have eventually fit into his life... kids, the 3-bedroom house, Iowa, all of it.

Right?

It was only the last few days things had really changed. When she started pulling away from his touches, his kisses. And Riley knew exactly why.

Faith.

Buffy thought he didn't know, thought he was clueless. He noticed how she tensed last night in the graveyard, the way she looked at the slut. Did she really think he didn't hear her when she would speak that name in her sleep. And that had been happening for months.

She never said HIS name that way, even when she was awake. He hadn't been with her, inside her for weeks. And she didn't even come home last night.

"That BITCH!" The phone shattered against the opposite wall, victim of his sudden burst of rage. One night with Faith... that trash, and it was over for them?

No, it couldn't be. He wouldn't let it! Riley had given up everything. His power, his life in the military... he had let that chopper leave without him. And he would be damned if he let it be all for nothing.

He opened up the drawer to his nightstand, removing the 2-karat solitaire from its long time hiding place in the back. He watched for a moment as the diamond glittered in the early afternoon light, before clenching it hard, tightly in his fist.

The rock cutting into his palm, the red drops spilling from his fist made him forget the clear one falling from his eyes. And he wasn't sure how long he sat that way. All his hope, his dreams, spilling from the tiny stone in his hand. He imagined he could crush it away to dust.

Just as she had crushed him. But he wasn't strong enough... would never be strong enough. Not like her, and not like Faith.

A sharp and sudden knock on the door brought his thoughts to an abrupt end. He rose on feet made of lead and walked across the room.

When he opened the door to a man he had never seen.

"Mr. Finn..." The guy had a British accent, was dressed all in black, he could smell nicotine on his breathe.

"Yes."

“We believe you can be of some assistance to us. And we can help you as well.”

Is it later yet? I am SO ready for later.

Everything had been goin’ all right, well as well as could be expected. We all had been sittin’ around munchin’ on the pizza Xan got us. And it had been at least semi-comfortable small talk.

Then Red and Tara got back. Then things got tense. All that semi-comfortable chatter went to insanely UNcomfortable silence. Tara was looking between me, and Buffy and Willow, as if she was trying to figure it all out, read through all the tension.

Don’t look at me blondie, ‘cause I got no clue.

Red was busy throwin’ daggers at me with her eyes. Not literally, though, after her fire-starter act last night, I wouldn’t put it outside her skills.

And its all pin-drop quiet for about two minutes of eternity, then out of nowhere, Anya busts the silence wide open.

“This is all very awkward. Shouldn’t there be some yelling and throwing of things? If not can’t we at least talk about the end of the world. I’m getting bored, and my mind is starting to wander towards sex.”

I hold in my chuckle, but just barely. She’s a real piece of work. And besides, I can sympathize with her entirely. After what went down on the porch with Buffy, or should I say, ALMOST went down? Shit my mind’s wandering all over the place.

“Yes Anya perhaps we should continue our research.” Giles saves the moment from rollin’ any further down hill. And we all find a book or two to bury our faces in.

I cut a quick glance towards B, just at the same time her eyes fall on me, and I instantly feel myself blushin’. I can’t help it! Her eyes, they just feel SO good on me, it’s like I never want to look away from that sparking green. It’s just so intense. It’s where I’m supposed to be!

I hope nobody else notices though. B wants to keep it all on the hush. At least until this whole apocalypse thing blows over. I pull my eyes away from her and glance quickly at Tara. Yeah she knows. And I almost freak, but she’s smilin’ at me behind that long veil of silky blond.

Reds a lucky girl.

“So Willow, that was some pretty wicked mojo you worked last night!” I try and make nice, make some progress.

“Simple combustion spell.” She replies flatly. Damn. But then Tar says:

“Not all that simple, Willow.” And it woulda been a complement if she wasn’t frowning. And Red looks a little sheepish for a second.

“But that fight was some kinda rush huh?” I say trying to push things along. B smiles at me

for making the effort, and I swear my heart is gonna beat right outta my chest.

“Yeah nothing like those life and death moments to get ya going, huh Faith.” Xander says all sarcastic like.

“You know me Xan.” And I give him the eyebrow wiggle.

“Yeah, a bit too well I’m afraid!” But he says it with that goofy grin, and an eyebrow of his own. Anya just smacks him on the arm. But it’s all in fun. And B takes the moment to bring them all into the loop. ‘Cause I really don’t see it getting anymore relaxed than this.

“Guys. Faith and I have been talking.” She starts. She comes around the table and sits in the empty chair right next to me.

“She’s thinking about staying here in Sunnydale. Settling.”

“What? You mean this out of jail thing isn’t temporary?” Xander asks.

“Dude, I’m on parole. What, you think I broke out or somethin’?” And he just looks guilty and shrugs his shoulders. I give him a smile letting him know not to worry about it.

“It wouldn’t be a surprise.” I hear Willow mumble. I know B heard it too. I feel her hand brush against mine under the table. This is gonna get rough. Quick.

“We’ve been talking a lot, working through things. It’s all still got a long ways to go, but I’m glad she’s staying. In fact there’s something more. Faith and I, we—”

And here I am thinkin’ this is it. The big moment.

“Buffy you can’t be serious! She’s evil!” But red cuts her off before she can get to the good stuff.

“Willow things change, they—”

“Oh they change? Like she can bring back the two people she murdered?!” She gets up out of her chair, and after that comment so do I. She has no idea what its like.

“I wish to god that I could Red, every fuckin’ day of my life!” I tell her.

“Oh please Faith, spare me! Once a killer always a killer.”

“No! You’re wrong Will.” B is at my side now. And I hate so much that this is happening. That her eyes are all watery and she’s fightin’ back tears. It feels like it’s my fault.

“She may have slipped a little back then but its different now. The good in her outweighs the bad. A-and... she makes ME feel good. Like I’m right.”

Oh my god I love her so much. I need to tell her that, like now. But I can’t. I should have said it this morning, or when we were outside. She’s so fuckin brave.

“Good?! Buffy you already ARE good, you’re not like her.” Willow insists.

“Yeah... guys, you may have seen a lot, been in all the fights. But you have no idea what it is to feel that darkness in you... to be made from it.”

And now B really IS crying. Silent tears and each one’s rippin’ my heart apart. But I still stay quiet. Red is her friend, and this is her battle. I’ll be here to pick up the pieces; I just hope it doesn’t go that far.

“You expect us to just give her a pass because she’s a slayer, because you supposedly have this darkness, this force that’s a part of you? Well wake the fuck up Buffy! It’s called human nature and we all deal with it. We all have choices to make, we have FREE WILL!”

“She’s right. We all make those choices.” Tara says. But she looks at Willow as she speaks, not Buffy and me.

Oh god this is a disaster, cause now Tara looks pissed as hell too. And now I gotta wonder, what the fuck is going on with those two. Willow softens a bit when she meets her girl’s eyes.

I knew this was a bad idea. Comin’ back, telling her friends, all of it. I shoulda just stuck with running. Yeah that sounds pretty damn good right now.

“Looks, guys. This is all getting wicked outta control here. I’m just gonna moter and--”

“Good idea Faith. Get the hell out.” Red narrows her eyes and takes a few steps towards me and B, fearless. And I feel that surge, that power coming off her that I felt last night. But B seems totally oblivious. She’s too caught up in the pain.

What the hell is up with that?

“Right then. Fuck this.” I’m outta here. It’s all just too much. I turn, making my way to the front door.

“Faith, No! You’re not leaving.” B grabs hold of my wrist with both hands. And her voice is total desperation. God, if I look at her I know I’m done for. But I do anyway. And there’s no way I can deny those eyes.

“B, it’s all goin’ to hell.” I tell her and raise my hand to her face. I wipe gently at the trails on her cheeks.

“I need you here. I need you with me.” She whispers it. But I know they all heard. Fuck, like, ALL of them! I can’t believe she’s doing this. I mean, yeah she kinda told them we were workin’ things through now, but FUCK she just basically came out to the world!

And now she’s pullin’ me into a hug! Wrapping those skinny-strong arms around my waist, and bringing her body flush against mine.

“Please don’t leave me baby...” It’s spoken right against my ear, and I don’t know if the others heard that too, but I don’t give a shit anymore. Every doubt, every lame ass excuse I thought I had just shattered. It feels like my walls are crumbling all around us.

“Fuck B, never again Ok... never.” I tell her just as soft. And I can feel the tears in my voice. Shit I can’t cry in front of all of them! I hide my face in the sweet spot of where her neck meets her shoulder for a second and get myself in check.

And that’s when I notice, the complete silence that’s taken over everything. B finally pulls away. It felt like forever, but still not long enough. She has one of my hands in both of hers as we both face the group again.

I meet Tara’s eyes. And she’s actually smiling! Its cautious, but still, I’ll take all the points I can get. She’s the only one though. Xander’s jaw is practically on the floor, his girl is lookin’ at us like we’re under a microscope, slightly puzzled, mostly indifferent. Giles just looks British. Poor sap, I hope he doesn’t go and have a stroke or nothin’. The guy is gettin’ wicked old.

And Willow. Fuck. Nuff said.

I hear B snuffle. Getting rid of the last of her tears.

“Faith is staying.” She tells everyone. And her eyes may be red and teary still, but that face is nothin’ but The Slayer. It’s not an option. She’s lookin’ directly at Red as she says it and the tension is so thick it’s stifling. It’s a stand off and you can practically see the air crackling between the tow of them.

Fuck I so wanna get outta here. The only thing keeping me, grounding me, is the feel of her hands on my skin.

“Interesting...” Anya breaks the silence yet again, with all the grace of a sledgehammer.

“Buffy and Faith are bed-buddies now!”

Ok now I’m looking for that giant hole to come suck me into another dimension. Hopeless I know, but hell it’s the ‘Dale... could happen. Please? The silence is back for a moment until:

“She’s playing you Buffy.” It’s nothin’ but ice in Red’s voice. And now I gotta say somethin’. She is SO way off on this.

“Re—err... Willow. I’m not playin’ anything here. This isn’t some fuckin game to me!” I’m trying to stay calm. No really, I do.

“I came here to help. How me and B started all this... the dreams, all that. I didn’t plan any of it. But it got me here, where I’m supposed to be. I’m tired of running from this.”

And I take a deep breath, ‘cause this next part, it’s scariest thing I’ve ever done.

“I-I’m tired of running from her.” I look over at B, and she’s lookin’ back at me like I’m her whole damn world. I know she’s mine... has been for the longest.

“So you’re just gonna end it with Riley? For this? For her!?” Xander sounds as if someone just turned on a light. He also sounds a little hurt. It’s a valid question, one that I don’t think

she even knows the answer to...

“I broke up with him right after you guys went for lunch.”

After all, they’ve been together for more than a year and all that history is...Wait, What?!  
Broke up with... WHAT?!!

My eyes must be tellin’ on me, ‘cause B gives me her sly-smile.

“Yeah...for her.” Fuck I can’t even breathe. I gotta say somethin’

“Buffy...I—” I was gonna tell her. I really was.

“None of you can see.” Red says in that ominous tone that’s just become regular for her now.

Then she looks at me, and Buffy even, disgusted. And she turns from us and heads for the door. After that I find it hard to even give a fuck if she leaves. ‘Cause me, yeah, I’ve been looked at like that my whole life. But eyes like that should never fall on B.

“Will don’t--” B starts.

“I’ll go talk to her.” Tara cuts her off, and follows her girl out the door. Not before giving both of us a smile though. I hear B sniffle again, find her eyes still locked on the door .

“Tara will make her understand B.” I tell her and I can’t stop myself from smoothing a few strands of hair away from her face. I just gotta touch her. I kiss her forehead.

Right there for all of them to see.

“I know.” She whispers. And then she looks around at the rest of the room. All the spectators of this little show we’ve been puttin’ on.

Ask me to define awkward. ‘Cause this is it.

She stalked through the streets of this quiet town. This place where she spent her whole life. She liked the picture perfect surface. The icing that was the pristine suburban homes with their well manicured lawns. The bundle of shops that made up the downtown promenade. The mall. It was serene. It was a lie. Willow knew this because she had seen it, because she had lived it.

Scratch the surface and the pretty picture faded to black. Beneath it all there was a whole lot of darkness in this town. You just had to know where to look. And Willow Rosenberg knew where to look.

She was seeking it now.

And it wasn’t for the nefarious purposes for which ‘it’ was created. She could NEVER see herself doing such a thing. It was for good. A greater good even! Yes, it was her time to step up, to save the day. Now that Buffy couldn’t.

Faith, that bitch, had her best friend so confused, so caught up and blinded that she couldn't see through all those games, all those lies. No, it was up to her now. She would make Buffy see. She would make them ALL see. Then she would help Buffy fight this new evil. And they would win, and go out for pizza... or maybe Chinese. It was the way it should be, the way it ALWAYS had been.

And Buffy would be so PROUD of her. Be so grateful for showing her. Willow could picture it, see it in her mind. Buff would give her that smile. The one that only they shared. The one that made her heart beat so fast back in high school.

It was the one that said 'I kinda love you'

And Tara made her heart beat fast now. Made her pulse race and her soul sing. Tara made her forget high school, almost. And she'd be so impressed! Tara would give her that coy smile before laying those luscious lips against her own...maybe wrap that curvy soft body around her and then...

Woo boy! And THEN! Willow couldn't help but grin at the thought. Unbeknownst to the redhead, her entire face, entire being appeared to light up, to glow just at the thought of the blond witch. The thought of her love. She had left her standing on the doorstep of the summer's house. Upset and confused.

She hated hurting Tara. But it was all going to be worth it in the end. It would make her happier, make all of them happier.

Sure it was powerful, but so was she, now. She'd been practicing, garnering her strength for over a year now. She could handle it. And the fact that it all felt so good was just a bonus. A BIG bonus. But it wasn't like she needed it or anything. She just needed to set things right. And it was with that self-righteous determination painted across her clear blue eyes that she turned off the main downtown boulevard and ducked into a side alley. The change in scene was like going from day to night.

Willow loved her perfect phony little town, the secrets it kept. Now, it was nothing but slick brick walls and overflowing dumpsters. She felt like the shadows were trying to surround her, but she pressed on without fear. What was hidden under the perfection, it was gonna help her. It was right, because she was good. It was simple as black and white, nope no shades of gray here.

She came to a spot, a seemingly empty spot, and held up her hand. The air wavered, it bent and moved and suddenly Willow was standing in a dingy apartment. Incense engulfed her lungs instantly and a slow raspy voice filled her ears.

"Hey there strawberry..."

"You don't seem surprised to see me." She turned to face him. This is when the dread always started. She told her self it'll be worth it.

She thought of Buffy's smile. Of Tara's kiss.

"Baby girl I can feel you comin' from miles and miles and miles..." He was high. His little



explanation tapering off in near maniacal laughter. The rush making that southern bayou accent all the more distinct. His voice poured over her like motor oil. It made her feel as dirty and greasy as him.

“And how’s that?” Willow forced her self to question. Forced herself to stay there just that bit longer. Just until she could get it.

“Oh chere, don’t you know nothin’ now?” He trailed off again into that chuckle, as if he was trapped in his own private comedy.

It was tragic.

“I guess I don’t.” Willow made her voice sweet. Trying to ignore the way he was leaning into her, towering over her.

“You got... the ‘power’!” He whispered his little secret as if he were telling her something new. Like she didn’t know this already. But Willow just smiled at his glassy eyes and crooked teeth.

“So what brings my strawberry ‘round these parts?” He dropped down to the off-orange sofa and pulled a cigarette to his lips. Willow considered him for a moment. Her head tilting to the side slightly.

“You know why I’m here.” Her voice made him pause in lighting up.

“Maybe you should refresh me...”

“You know.” She was officially tired of his shit. “How soon can you get it for me?”

He sat up a little straighter.

“Oh, well it may be a while baby girl. And its gonna cost heavy, I--”

“No it won’t. You have it here. I want it. Now.” And she raised an eyebrow and her eyes weren’t blue anymore. He was off the couch in an instant, heading to one of the back rooms.

Willow smiled, satisfied, and her eyes were crystal clear once more.

“Well...” she whispered. “that was easy.”

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### Part 17

Buffy was waiting for Faith. She had been waiting for the past 10 minutes! How long did it take to pick out a couple of weapons anyway? Just grab the sharpest shiniest one right? That’s what she always did. But no... Faith had to look at, test out each sword, each axe, weigh it deliberately in her hands, test the range. It was a careful selection process.

And it was driving Buffy insane.

“Faith will you just pick something!” She said at last, exasperation evident in her voice. She barely restrained the foot stomping. So she thought she did good.

They were supposed to be on their way on patrol soon, well, as soon as the others got back. Their very first patrol together in more than a year. Buffy was more than just a little nervous. That was where most of the impatience was coming from. She had wondered if it would be like old times. If they would find the rhythm they’d shared before. She wondered if it would be awkward. If all those old memories would come flooding back, would Faith try and pull away from her again? God, she hoped not.

Not after they had gotten so close. Not now that everyone knew.

“Hold up a second B. This is a very important decision here.” Faith turned away from the weapons chest to face her. She was holding an axe over her shoulder and had a grin on her lips.

It was sexy as hell. It made Buffy wonder if she’d be able to keep her hands to her self through their patrol.

“You guys have really stocked up!” She continued digging through the big wooden box again. And Buffy knew Faith was saying something more but she simply couldn’t bring herself to listen. She was far too entranced by the sight of the other girl’s luscious ass on total display as she continued her search. Those faded, worn jeans hugged her curves like a second skin and the tare, high up on the back of her left thigh, it exposed just enough flesh that Buffy’s eyes had no hope of looking anywhere else.

They still hadn’t gotten that ‘later’ they had talked about. Things had turned into a bustle of activity after Willow had left. The rest of the gang had come to the obvious conclusion. They were shocked at first, but Tara had come back and in her own gentle way managed to smooth everyone’s feathers.

Buffy thought again how grateful she was to have her. Xander had been understanding.

“Hey, I’m accepting guy.” He’d proclaimed, only slightly red in the face.

“I’m a well adjusted and modern male type person. Nope, nothing but open-mindedness here!” But the way his voice had cracked at the end let everyone know exactly what his mind was open to at that moment.

Anya had smacked him. And had continued to do so at random intervals throughout the afternoon, when she caught him looking at the two slayers.

“I did put emphasis on the MALE part didn’t I? You all should expect this from me!” He finally ended up hollering in his defense around the tenth punch or so. And well, he had a point. Sort of.

Giles had expressed his concern in the suddenness of it all, but Buffy was pretty sure in his book, he was happy if the person she was involved with had the base requirement of being alive.

Buffy figured he still hasn't let go of the Angel thing. That and the concept of her love life just plan made him uncomfortable. But he seemed more interested in the research and got everyone back on track fairly quickly.

Soon after that Dawn had come bounding through the door from school.

"Is it true!" The first words out of her mouth and been shouted. And Buffy had no idea how so much noise can come out of a small 15 year old. She briefly considered it must possession.

"Is Faith really here?!" The entirely too loud talking continued as the sound of a backpack thudded against the floor.

"Dawn! Can we try a few less decibels please!!" Buffy had shouted back equally as loud as she came out of the kitchen.

"Well I'm just trying to find out what the hell is going on!"

"Dawn, language! And just take a breath for a minute!" Dawn had been a big ball of energy. Strictly in the metaphorical sense. She was keyed up, bouncing around excitedly and trying to look over her sister's shoulder into the kitchen.

"No way! I've been sitting through school totally clueless, because SOMEBODY never lets me come on patrol and never tells me anything and—"

"What's with all the shoutin' with you people?" Faith had chosen that moment to come striding into the living room, with her typical carefree swagger. Obviously happy for the distraction from mountains of books and the constant leers from Xander.

"Faith!!" Dawn kept with the trend of the yelling as she went charging straight for the dark slayer. She stopped short of actually jumping on the other girl, instead bouncing excitedly in front of her.

"Yup that's me." And Faith couldn't help but smile, though it was cautious. Buffy saw the nervousness in those bottomless brown eyes and tried to make her own reassuring. They both knew that Dawn had always liked Faith. But that didn't mean she hadn't been hurt like all the rest of them.

"So I take this as you're not one of the ones who want to kill me?" Faith gave her the most genuine smile she had.

"What!! Are you kidding!? This is so awesome! You're totally here to help Buffy kick the bad guy's ass right! Buffy so needs help, and you're way tougher anyways!"

Dawn was talking a mile a minute and it was entirely too much excitement in Buffy's opinion. She was more than glad her sister was happy about Faith being here, but this level of euphoria had to have been chemically induced. She had warned Dawn about the post-class mochas!

And Faith was NOT tougher!

“Hey! I’m equally as tough as she is!” Buffy had said in her defense.

“Oh whatever!” The now confirmed possessed teen had rolled her eyes. “Anyways you’re here for good stuff right? I mean, you’re not still all...umm...”

“Crazy?” Faith had finished, that right dimple showing. “Nah, I came back to help with the ass kickin’”

And at that Dawn had actually let out a shriek, followed by a squeal. Faith stuck her finger in her ear and winced. And Buffy pitied her; she knew what it was like. She lived with the constant ear-splitting creature after all.

“Happy to see me then?” Faith had replied. And Buffy was glad no permanent damage had been done.

“Oh my gosh totally! You were always the cool one Faith! Buffy’s just lame. And she never lets me do anything.”

“Well, I don’t think she’s so lame.” She replied and winking at the oldest of the two sisters.

And Buffy couldn’t help but blush. All Faith had to do was just look at her and she was lost. Their eyes had locked once again and Buffy could feel herself getting lost in that gorgeous chocolate gaze. She could feel herself heating up from head to toe when that slow smile crept its way across those plump glossy lips. It was like warm honey swelling in her chest, spilling out to cover every inch of her in contentment... and Christ, those delicious tingles chasing themselves up and down her spine. She could feel herself smiling in response. Buffy knew Faith had to be feeling the same. She could tell in the way the other girls eyes had fallen on her lips, how her pupils were getting larger, making her eyes starting to shine like polished granite, how she skin was starting to flush slightly, her chest—

“Wait... what’s going on?!” Dawn’s voice shattered the daze the two slayers had fallen into. She was looking back and forth between the curiously.

“Um...Dawn, I need to tell you something. About me and Faith.” Buffy’s voice came out clear by pure will alone as she suppressed the sudden wash of arousal that had enveloped her.

“What? You AND Faith?”

“Yup, AND” Faith cut in nodding and smiling big. And she took Buffy’s hand, not even attempting to be subtle. Buffy could only stare at her as her mouth dropped open in shock. SO not helping.

“You mean... wait... Oh my god! AHWW ewww!” The sudden realization and subsequent shock played animatedly across the younger girls face.

“Hey Dawn calm down its no big” Faith spoke gently taking some of the leer out of her voice this time. But Dawn could not be pacified.

“No big?! This is HUGE! When did this happen!? What about Riley!?” And Buffy was glad at least that she didn’t seem upset by the whole thing. She was just letting the entire neighborhood know was all.

“We told everyone this afternoon, and I broke up with him.”

“So you two have like... and with the.” She made some wild gesture with her hands that resembled octopus wrangling.

“Yup all that and then some kiddo!” And it actually sounded like Faith was bragging this time! The leer was back full force too. Again, SO not helping. Buffy thought about using duct tape.

Which of course led to all sorts of other thoughts she REALLY shouldn’t have been having while her little sister was present. They were the ‘later’ type thoughts. Hmmm. The look on her face must have been giving Buffy away. She knew she had to have been blushing, and it was confirmed by the sudden look of horror that crossed her sister’s face

“Oh EWW! I SO didn’t need to know that Faith! So what is it with everyone turning gay ‘round here? First Willow, now you guys and I swear I’ve seen Giles checking out that really skinny guy that works in the java stop! I swear its something in the water.”

“Dawn you know it doesn’t work like that... and Giles!?” The hell’s spawn just rolled her eyes.

“Listen kiddo. It all happened kinda sudden, but I really... I-I... umm we’re real happy.” And Buffy couldn’t help but smile at Faith, she knew full well what the other Slayer had tried to say, had wanted to say but couldn’t, wasn’t ready to. Faith was looking at her apologetically, almost worried. And Buffy brought her hand up to her mouth, laying a gentle kiss across her knuckles, letting her know it was all right.

“Oh my god Faith! She turned you all mushy! That’s so sweet!” Dawn’s eyes were wide and her eyes amazed as she pulled Faith into a hug.

“Hells no! I’m not mushy!” Faith had protested, but it was only halfheartedly.

“Yeah you are! And I’m happy for you.”

“Hey what about me? No happiness for me?” Buffy pouted, even though she already knew the answer. She knew her sister.

“Whatever Buffy! I can’t believe all this happens when I’m not here. That you told everyone before me, your own SISTER! I’m never going to school again! I miss all the important stuff!!”

Buffy could only sigh, figuring she just couldn’t win. Demons are nothing compared to a little sister lost in the thorough of adolescence and puberty. Dawn smiled one last time at Faith, sent her sister a final scowl and grabbed up her backpack.

And it was with that last bit of eye-rolling attitude she had indignantly stomped up the stairs. Both Slayers were sure they would find the door to her bedroom in splinters later after that ferocious slamming as well, but they didn't have time to consider it too much. At that moment Giles came bustling into the room. His glasses perched on his nose and one of the large more ancient books in hand.

"Prophecy!" He said with as much excitement his Britishness would allow.

"What? Another one?" Faith had asked, flopping down on the sofa. She pulled Buffy's hand, forcing the other girl to land beside her, nearly on top of her.

"It appears so. An extremely old one." His voice was serious as he took a seat in a chair opposite from the slayers. Buffy noticed he was paying particular attention to NOT paying attention to how they were practically snuggling in front of him.

"What's it say?" Faith questioned absently, more interested in playing with the rings on Buffy's fingers. Giles would just have to deal Buffy thought. It just felt too good being this close to Faith. It was like a need, one she had denied for far too long.

"Well it refers to what as known as 'The Ancient' I do believe this is the first vampire, ever. The mother of all the rest."

"Yeah, we already knew that. And she's turned all her Turok-han kiddies loose to rampage through my town." Buffy replied.

"Correct Buffy, but we don't know to what purpose—"

"So now we do?" Xander asked as he entered the room, also purposely not looking at the girls on the couch. His avoidance had less to do with discomfort and more to do with the condition of his arm. Anya was right behind him. He let her take the remaining chair and sat on the floor beside her.

"Precisely. It would appear these vicious killings we've been seeing have not been caused by the Ancient herself, but by the Turok-han, in order to release her."

"Wait, so she's trapped someplace?" Faith asked finally taking some interest in the conversation

"Yes, and has been for the past five millennia according to what I can decipher of the prophecy. From what I've translated so far it seems when the Ancient was born, out of the primordial oceans, it was at a critical time in the formation of the earth. When good and evil were at their most basic and their distinction was just occurring."

"Why do I feel like I'm back in Bio lab?" Tara sighed from her perch on the arm of Giles' chair.

"Yeah with a nice dose of End of Times 101."

“Despite your sarcasm Xander you are precisely correct. This revelation is quite threatening. It seems that once the Powers that Be became aware of the distinction that was forming, they attempted to stop it. Prevent these evil forces from coming into existence.”

“But they couldn’t. Something stopped them, or else we wouldn’t have demons and shit today, and me and B would just be hot chicks without superpowers.”

“Umm... err. Yes. That’s right. The book speaks of an even higher power... ahh, it calls it, ‘THE’ power.” Giles said it cautiously, softly, looking into the book, reading the words again and again to be sure. But he was sure. Buffy could tell.

He was sure, and he was afraid.

“Oh y-you mean like...” Tara whispered.

“Yes.”

“Is it me or is this REALLY heavy shit here.” Buffy could feel Faith tensing next to her. Her hand holding tighter to her own. She knew the other slayer was feeling the need to break some of the pressure that had blanketed the room.

“Yeah I’m starting to think church this Sunday would be a good idea?” Xander cracked also clearly nervous.

“From what I can tell the, ahh... creator, prevented the Powers from interfering.”

“But why? Why let the evil come into existence?” And this time when he asked all his sarcasm was gone.

“For it to be there at all it had to be part of a greater plan. Right?” Faith sighed. “So is the whole meaning of life thing in that book too?”

“I’m sure you’re right about the purpose Faith, but the text doesn’t site any motives for these actions. It does however say that the Powers were discontent with the decision. And as an act of mercy the creator granted that one of the most powerful of the evils be exiled.”

“And let me guess, the powers chose this ‘Ancient’ bitch.”

“That is correct Faith. With the stipulation that she resurrect once every 5 millennia so that balance may be maintained.”

“But the Powers intentions were just in vein!” Anya shouted, frustrated at what she’d heard so far. “All the ‘old ones’ died out. Killed each other off! Long before humans were even capable of comprehending—”

“Yes the text does make mention of their error.” Giles sighed, and Buffy had heard enough. This thing wasn’t even supposed to be here. And if it hadn’t been for the usual meddling of the PTB it wouldn’t.

“Does it say how we kill it.” She said at last. Her face a mask of determination.

“Yes in fact it does. Although it is muddled, the slayer is mentioned. You both are.” He paused, finding the correct spot on the page and began to read.

“At a time when there are two, one of darkness and light, shall the first and final be defeated. They will kill as it rests, on the eve of its 500th awakening and... I can’t quite decipher the rest. It appears to be the location... near the hell-mouth but I’m not sure. The rest switches into an even earlier dialect which I am unfamiliar.”

“So its that easy? We sneak up on this thing and kill it in its sleep?” Faith said surprised.

“It certainly looks that way. But no doubt there will be dangers. The Torak-han will be guarding her heavily...”

“Some shiny weapons should take care of that!” Buffy piped in. She stood up, already working a plan out in her head.

“So how much time we got to stop this thing’s alarm clock from going off?” Faith was thinking as well, her process noticeably different from her counterpart however. Where Buffy couldn’t be still, the ideas shooting rapid fire through her mind, each being sorted, kept or eliminated. She was pacing, her hands moving. Comparatively, Faith was more deliberate. Her process more meticulous and she weighed the balance of what it all meant.

Tara looked at them strangely, apparently the only one aware of the contrast of their actions, the balance, the blending.

“Well, according to this... and cycle of the moon... and 5 month of... Exactly one week.” Giles finally answered, sure of his calculation.

“Kinda Short deadline were working on here.” Faith nodded, solemn.

“Right. To kill it, we have to find it. Giles, keep working on the translation, we need an exact location.” Buffy began delegating

“I’m going to find Willow again. We should be able to help with that part. Maybe even figure out a locator spell.” Tara offered

“Sounds perfect!”

“Anya can you come with me? We can stop by the shop for supplies.”

“Supplies? As in Free supplies!? Giles?!”

“Anya the free supplies will be permitted in this occasion.” Giles sighed, removed his glasses and began massaging his forehead.

“All right, but only because it’s a special occasion!” Anya pouted.

“Great! Xander, do you think you can give Riley a call, update him on—”



“Wait B we’re still gonna bring him along on this?” Faith stood up at that, the mention of his name pulling her from her deep contemplation.

“Baby, he still wants to help.” Buffy spoke softly, aware that they once again had an audience. She took the other girls hands as she continued. “And He has resources, connections to fire-power that we’re gonna need here.”

“But...” Faith whined a little, and Buffy could tell she knew this was right.

“Don’t be mad ok?”

“I’m not, it’s just gonna get wicked awkward ya know.”

“You’re right, but it will be fine,” Buffy said it with all the confidence she felt. And she moved closer, wanting to feel the heat coming off the other girl, feel her presence.

“I’m with you now, remember.” It was said gently, her hand coming up to brush a few random dark strands away from the other girls face. It was just reason to touch her, to feel that soft warm skin against her fingertips

“Yeah...” Faith replied, leaning into Buffy’s touch, their bodies getting impossibly close...

“Ahem! Ok now you guys are just giving me more reasons to get smacked!” Xander had to stop this, for the sake of his own sanity.

“He’s right, he will be severely bruised by the end of the day.” And she smacked him again as she rose from her seat. She and Tara collected a few things and headed for the door.

“Oww! Woman, can you at least switch arms!?” He shouted at his girlfriend’s back as

“Sorry...” Came the sheepish reply from both girls and then Buffy had her business face on again

“Ok Xander, can you go see if Riley has any of those flame throwers laying around?”

“I’m on you... eer-- It! I’m on IT!” He grinned, glad to be out of striking range at last, Anya still shot him a glare from the door.

“Right. Meet us back here before sunset hot stuff.” Faith winked at him chuckling gently. “So, you still keepin’ the weapons in the chest B?”

“Help your self. Everyone meet back here and then we patrol.”

And now, Faith was still trying to decide on a weapon of choice. And Buffy had just been caught staring at her ass. Faith had spun around so fast Buffy hadn’t even a chance to blink.

“Gotcha B!” Faith grinned, cocky. Her eyes glowing, and Buffy knew she was in for some serious teasing.

“Oh! I-I was just... umm--” If she could just come up with a clever excuse...

“Checkin’ out my ass!”

“I was not... well, ok I was.” Buffy knew when she was beat. Besides, why shouldn’t she check out Faith’s ass? It was allowed now.

“Yeah? Got ya thinking about ‘later’?” Faith smirked. Dropping the crossbow she had been inspecting and taking a few steps towards the other girl. Buffy smiled at her light and teasing tone, but she still couldn’t shake the worry, the insecurity that plagued her mind.

“Well, actually I was kinda thinking about earlier. All this stuff we found out, and then patrolling again...”

“You worried about the big bad... or is this more of an ‘us’ thing?” And Faith’s tone instantly became more solemn as she picked up on Buffy’s obvious concern.

“Little bit of both I think.”

Buffy answered honestly, unable to hide anything from the eyes that were showing so much care, so much vulnerability, and hurt and pain and love and just so MUCH. It was all reflected in her voice.

“Well as far as this old evil vamp bitch. You can consider her ass kicked. You know we got this.” The confidence she felt in that was like pure steel and Buffy felt instantly infused by her strength. But Faith continued softer, stepping closer and laying the palm of her hand gently against Buffy’s cheek

“And as for us? B I don’t have any answers. I just know...” Faith took a breath, pressed her forehead to Buffy’s, warm breath whispering across her skin.

“I just. I feel you. Ya know. In here.” She brought Buffy’s hand up to her chest. Skin on skin, where her tank left Faith exposed. And the strong and steady beat Buffy felt was a beautiful revelation.

“You feel it?” Faith’s voice was a horse, ragged whisper. And Buffy knew she asking so much more.

“Yes.” It was all she could say, and at that moment it would have been the answer to anything Faith had asked.

“That’s where I feel you...Like, deep inside B. You’ve always been there. And before it was like you were rippin’ me apart, but now... Fuck its like you... its like I found what I was missin’.”

“Faith, god baby I...” Buffy felt like she had lost voice. Her breath was caught in a lump high in her throat, there was a similar one swelling in her chest. Her eyes burned but she blinked the moisture away and slanted her mouth across Faiths. It was the best response she had to Faith’s heart felt words. It was the truest one, the realest.

Buffy let her mouth slowly explore the other girls. There was no rush, no urgency, only pure expression of passion, of need. She felt more that heard Faith’s pleading sigh against her lips

and answered it instantly. Buffy slid her tongue along her lip, sinking it into the heated depths of Faith's mouth as she pulled her closer and let her hands run lazy paths up and down the dark girl's back.

It was soothing, deliberate and slow. And Buffy could feel the world melt away, all her fears, her doubts, swept away in the confirmation of the kiss, of Faith's arms wrapped around her. She wanted it to go on forever, she wanted to feel this forever.

But breathing had become an issue. Faith pulled her mouth away first with a reluctant sigh. And Buffy shuddered at the feel of those moist lips trailing down the curve of her neck until finally Faith buried her face in the curve where her shoulder began.

"Damn B what are ya doin' to me?" She finally asked. And Buffy took a moment just to breathe the other girl in.

"Same thing you're doing to me."

"It's all kinda scary but it's right ya know?"

"Oh yeah, I know..." And she let the mischief mix with the green to sparkle in her eyes. Her hands slid lower and cupped Faith's ass, gave it a squeeze.

"So after patrol we can get some of that 'later' we talked about?" Faith grinned, eyebrow lifting and lusty grin creeping over her lips.

"Count on it." Buffy nearly growled and purposefully jerked Faith's hips against her own. She was getting all kinds of ideas about 'later' again. And maybe even 'not so later'. She wondered how much time she had before the others would arrive.

That question was answered by an extremely uncomfortable cough from the foyer. Shouldn't Giles be making tea? Buffy thought. And she was barely able to restrain the tantrum that started to bubble up when she felt the warmth of Faith's body pull away from her own.

"Sorry about the PDA G-man." But Faith blushing was still the most adorable thing ever.

"It's umm...quite understandable Faith." Giles was vigorously polishing his glasses, and Buffy wondered if he'd have any left.

"The others have assembled out front. Ummm. They're waiting." And with that he turned stiffly and headed back to the kitchen. Back to 'Research Central'.

"It's party time B!" Faith exclaimed, scooping up a small hand-axe and a broad sword and shoving them into her shoulder duffel. She turned towards Buffy then, her hair tumbling around her shoulders like long dark mahogany waves. Her eyes bright already with just the prospect of a good fight, skin tan and glowing.

"Ready?" she asked, striding to the door, hips swaying in that way that dared anything to even try and touch her, try to get close.

“Oh yeah Faith, you can count on it.” Buffy mumbled and followed the other slayer out the door.

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### Part 18

We’ve been walking, searching through the cemetery for hours now. All with out a single hit. Not one vamp, demon or slime covered monster. It’s eerily quiet. More than it should be considering this gang, but the tension has stolen everyone’s voice. And it’s not just what we’re up against.

It’s also about me.

Or more accurately, me and Faith. Or even MORE accurately, me and Faith and Riley. He met up with us at the gates of Shady Pines, he and Xander looking very business like in their dark clothes and holding those shiny flame-throwers. Too bad it doesn’t look like they’re gonna get a chance to use them.

And Xander had been so excited at the prospect.

But everyone’s on edge now. Riley had greeted us all with just a nod. He had looked at Faith, then at me. He had stared right into my eyes, letting me feel, letting me know his pain. Letting me know that he knew. I had wanted to explain it to him, wanted to be sorry or contrite. It felt like I SHOULD be sorry, or sad or something?! I had just ended a relationship that had lasted more than a year. Just ended something I had convinced myself that I had wanted.

But I couldn’t. I couldn’t bring myself to feel any of those things. Any kind of regret. Instead I felt proud, I felt certain. I wanted to take Faith into my arms and show to the whole damn world what we have... what we’ve finally realized. He saw all this of course. Saw it in how my eyes refused to waver from his glance; in the way when I finally turned away from him, it was to look for Faith. She had been standing in the back, off to the side, pretending to inspect some detail of her sword.

I had walked straight back and stood by her side.

And he knew then, and she did too.

The look on her face had been surprised. Her smile tentative, and unbelieving. She’s still so unsure about all this. Even after that beautiful declaration. Hell I’m still unsure! It’s all happening so fast. It was just last night after all the same group of people had been walking through a very similar graveyard. How much can change in a day I wonder? An entire life? Heck yeah.

We had headed through the gates then without a word. Xander had tried to strike up some kind of rapport, but all his attempts fell flat. We were all just so anxious. And as if the bizarre triangle going on wasn’t enough, there was definitely major angst going on between Willow and Tara.

God, Willow... I get this awful hole in my gut; in my heart just thinking about it and it's filled with helplessness and dread.

They had been late meeting us. Tara walking up the path to the house a good bit ahead of Wills. Just one look and you could tell she had been crying. Willow had hung back, and she had looked pissed too, but in a different kinda way. A way that wasn't Willow, not my Willow, not the best friend that I know.

It was petulant, indifferent.

She had looked so changed standing there at the street arms folded, a slight sneer on her mouth. I never thought her face could look so hard, so full of disdain. Her eyes had looked kinda glassy, kinda hazy.

"Ahh...Everybody ready to go?" I had asked, cautiously. Looking back and forth between them, trapped in the silence. It was oppressive. Tara just nodded. But Willow brightened a little, actually a lot. Like some one flipped on a switch.

"Ready to kick some demon butt Buff!" She had this goofy smile on her face. She even giggled a little but no one else was laughing. It wasn't close to funny.

Tara couldn't even look at her. And I felt my jaw drop in disbelief. It was one of those moments that totally blindsides you. A sucker punch to the gut. I watched and that hole in my gut got about ten times bigger. She staggered a little, bumped into the mailbox.

"Cm'on guys! What'rr we waitin' for!" That slur, that drawl I hated it. It was a conformation. Because now that I think about it, I guess it wasn't so much of a surprise after all. We had all seen it. More supplies laying around than usual, all the books. That worried frown that was so often on Tara's face lately...

"Woah, talk about never in a million years..." Faith had mumbled, and unfortunately Willow heard.

"What the hell's that 'spose ta mean?!" She'd raged. That high-happy mood flashing away in a blink.

"Willow please..." Tara tried to plead from the periphery. But she couldn't break through. Willow had walked right up to Faith; I think she meant to be intimidating. But she was swaying. Faith's eyes had darted to me, wide and surprised, looking for help.

I couldn't offer any. I think I was running through the denial stage of coping still. I remember shaking my head, amazed.

"I asked you a ques'n Faith!" God the way she just spits out her name. It's all revulsion. Why? Why is she holing on so tight to this rage? I didn't ask them to forgive Faith, for them to be friends. Just to give her another chance, give US a chance.

"Ya know Red, I don't think I'm the one that has anything to answer for right now."

And I can tell Faith is controlling herself. I can hear the faint ring of mockery in her voice, but its only because I know where to look. I've had it directed at me enough times after all. But she's all serious.

Even though, I know, somewhere deep deep down, she's reveling in the fact that it's not her this time. That it's not her falling. It's laughing, and its satisfied. Its that dark part of her that I'm beginning to understand. Because as much as I hate to admit it, as much as this is ripping my heart out I'm glad that this is Willow's fall from grace. That she no longer fits into that perfect white space. And I'm hopeful. I'm hoping that this gray she finds her self in will give her perspective.

But it still hurts.

"Who do ya thin' you are anyways huh?!" She was right up in Faith's face then, and everyone else had become statues. Then I hear a door slam and I turn from this unbelievable scene to see Tara has gone inside.

"B? Get your friend." Faith says through gritted teeth, I can see the muscles in her arms tense.

"Whatcha gonna do, killer?" The woman I thought I knew taunts. And I've seen enough. More than enough, more than I ever wanted to see.

"Willow, stop it." I say and take her arm, she moves with me easily, like a rubber band... with a lot less grace.

"Oh chill Buffy." She shrugs away from my grip, and nearly falls over. She thinks its funny, and her tone is full of bitter cynicism "Really need to find the fun."

"Looks like you've found more than enough." I tell her.

"What the fuck do you know? What do you care?!" she shouts back and it feels like some one just slapped me. What do I care?! I can't believe this is happening to her. I want to ask her why? What would push her to this? But I doubt I'll get an answer. Not when she's like this

"Willow you're—" I start

"I'm what? Your best friend Buffy? You're fulla shit ya know?" She staggers up to me and I see the haze in her eyes now. It's like a swirling black film, misting the sparkling blue I'm wishing for now.

"I'm your bes' frien' and you bring the person who tried to murder us all back into our lives? Why? For some cheap touch."

Ok I don't care how high or drunk or buzzed she is right now. That was so out of line.

"Willow, stop now. Before you say something you can't take back." And I almost choke on the words, 'casue I know its too late already.

"Why I wanna take it back Buff? 'S true right?" She continues to slur. Her eyes get darker.

She's looking at Faith, and I'm looking at her. And Willow has this odd little smile on her mouth.

And I suddenly have this indescribable urge, this need or instinct to protect Faith, like physically. It rushes up my spine like sudden frostbite before I shake it off.

"And nothin's changed. I mean, I know she's plannin' somethin'... kill us all... She's a murderin' psychotic--" She raves, and I have to stop this now. Willow's on the verge of going totally belligerent

"Do you honestly think if she wanted you dead that she would have failed? She's a slayer Willow, we were born to kill. Trust me, you would have never known what hit you."

And to myself I think, 'back then.' Because now, with that darkness swirling in her eyes. I don't think either Faith or I could have had a chance.

She just makes a dismissive sound, rolling her eyes.

"Whatever..." There's no reasoning with her in this state. So I take her arm again leading her into the house.

"You're in no condition to patrol with us..." I tell her. I'm surprised as she goes willingly.

"Ooo big surprise, pickin' her again." She laughs a bitter sound, and I choose to ignore that comment.

"Doesn't matter... got things ta do anyways." And she opens the door, and goes inside.

"That was uncomfortable." Anya speaks, and it's the first time I even noticed she was there. And if that wasn't the understatement of all time. All I can do is stare at her in disbelief.

I feel Faith's hand on my shoulder then. Soothing strokes up and down my arm. When I face her, those dark eyes blanket me in their concern. I watch her mouth open, that tiny frown creasing her brow, and I can tell she's looking for something to say. Anything that wont end up sounding like some lame platitude.

"I'm here..." she settles on, and damn if that was the only thing I wanted to hear.

"I know." And it feels like acid in my throat. I want her to tell me its all gonna be ok, I need to hear that we're all gonna make it through this. But she won't lie to me.

"So Willow is on drugs now, I think we should consult Betty Ford." Anya sighs gently, sadly, trying to help. She's just as troubled by all of this. "This shouldn't be happening."

"No, its not drugs." And the three of us turn and see Tara coming down the walk, her eyes showing fresh tears.

"It's magic, the dark variety." I finish for her, repeating her words from earlier. And I can't help thinking that I knew it. I KNEW! But I said nothing, because Willow is responsible and

good and would never ever...

But she has.

“Well what can we do now?” I ask. I need to fix this.

“There’s nothing. She needs to come down, and that may take a while... we should go.” Tara sets herself, her whole posture becoming more rigid, more determined. But I still have to ask

“For how long.” And I fear the answer. Weeks?

“Months.” She states. God where have I been? So caught up in my own discontent with school and Riley, my depression over losing mom that I forget all the lives that are going on around me? Faith must sense my inner conflict, because suddenly a gentle hand is on the small of my back, guiding me as he head down the street, leaving Anya to help with the research.

“One crisis at a time B.” She tells me

And now, walking through the towering crypts and mausoleums I feel that they’re all pressing in on me, surrounding me. And it’s suffocating. I think I’m about ready to call it a night. We aren’t gonna find anything out here, and I’m tired of feeling Riley’s eyes burning holes in my back.

“Can a graveyard be TOO dead?” Xander questions absently.

“I was hoping the place would be more UNdead.” Faith replies. I wonder how long they can keep the puns going? I’d rather not find out, I’m just about to suggest we wrap it up but I don’t get a chance, because out of nowhere I hear a growl.

Make that growls... plural. As in more than one. Several even!

Faith and I both freeze instantly. And the others who were following bump into us.

“Ok frozen slayers, not of the good.” Xander whispers

“Shut it!” Faith whispers and pulls out her sword. She’s got her fighting face on, that come and get me smirk. She’s scanning the darkness, eyes wide and searching.

“I’m thinking we got four or five B.” She tells me. And I listen and...

“Six.” I tell her.

“We’re surrounded.” Riley says, and it’s the first thing he’s said all night. “Let’s light ‘em up.” He un-shoulders his flame gun and Xander mimics his stance. And its all knife edge tension for half a second, until they move.

They come flying out of the shadows, faster than anything I’ve ever known. They’re all ubervamps, Turoks or something. Faith and I jump right into it and now that we know what we’re up against, they’re a hell of a lot easier to fight. Just gotta aim higher.



Faith slices off the first head before the thing can even swing at her. And she lets out a satisfied shout of victory, going right after another. Xander and Riley hang back, guns ready and waiting for an opening. The one I'm fighting lands a solid right that sends me flying. The second after I hit the ground I hear the roar of a flame gun.

I lift my head just in time to see one of the Turoks burst into ash. Xandar's gun is smoking and that has got to be the biggest grin I've ever seen.

"I'm so keeping this! I can keep this right?!" He's staring in wonder at the gun, but I don't have time to answer because another one is heading right for him.

"Xandar! Behind you?!" Tara shouts and now one more is coming after her! Thank god for back up. I start pummeling the one that was after Tara, just as Riley burns the other one to dust. That's four down. I turn and see Faith taking out one more, but the last is coming up on her. Fast.

I can't even get her name out before the thing is on her, knocking her to the ground, and then I'm sprinting. I can't even feel the ground below my feet. I backhand the son of a bitch and I love how it flies.

"You ok?" I ask Faith with a smile, even though I know the answer.

"Love this stuff B!" And she hops to her feet. But her lip is bleeding a little! Damn it I had plans for that!

The little bit of blood makes me want to kill this thing even harder. But as the Torak staggers upright it sees all of us bearing down on him, and it takes off like shot. I'm not letting it get away this time! Me and Faith are on the trail, running top speed, but these things are so FAST. We're out of the cemetery and into the woods before I know it.

I feel my lungs burning, my heart pounding, sending all that adrenaline thundering through my veins. All my muscles are on fire with that tingle, with that rush and all I can hear is the constant thump of feet hitting the ground. Me and Faith, totally in sync. She's matching me stride for stride and I know she's the only one who ever could.

I glance over at her and her eyes are bright, the breath puffing from her smiling mouth is visible in the chilled night air. Her hair is flowing behind her, like dark, wild ocean waves and even in the dark I can see the flush of exertion, of excitement spreading across her cheeks. It's beautiful. She's beautiful and she makes me push that much harder. I pull ahead, and follow the Turok around a corner just in time to see it disappear.

Disappear?!

"What the fuck?!" Faith comes to a stop beside me a second later, breathless and wild-eyed. All I can do is stare at her for a moment. I'm entranced watching her hair whip around her face as she looks around, her chest rising and falling, and all that exposed skin glowing in the moonlight. Damn I want her.

"You see where it went B?" Her ragged voice brings me back to business. 'Later,' I gotta

remember the meaning of that word!

“No, it just vanished!” I say, also searching the darkness. Its then that we hear footsteps from behind.

“Buffy?! Are you around here?” I hear Riley shout, just before they all appear, clearly out of breath.

“Man you guys were flying!” Xander wheezes. “Did—did you get it?”

“No it’s just gone!” Faith sighs. And I know she’s pissed at the thought of letting one get away, but then Tara steps forward, concentration focused on something only she can see.

“No, its still here...” She says.

“What where?” Riley has his gun up again, always ready. But Tara just remains silent. She closes her eyes, lifts her hands in front of her.

“They’re here... I can feel them.” And we all watch as the air wobbles, sparkles in front of us. “Can feel the evil.”

“There, look! It’s a cave!” Faith says as the gaping rocky opening is suddenly revealed.

“Wait, you said ‘them’ as in more than one?” Riley questions. And that’s a damn good question. Faith looks like she’s about ready to run right in there. Tara frowns, trying to focus.

“Definitely more than one, I-I think I could even say lots.”

But I still see Faith step forward, eyes glued to the entry of the cave. She’s wound tighter than a spring. Hell so am I! Knowing the enemy is right there. Right in front of us, waiting and within reach. That instinct to fight has to be singing in her veins. I watch her hand flex around her sword. And I remember another time. Watching her balancing on the lip of the unknown. Taunting me, daring me to follow. It feels so long ago.

I watch as she bounces on her toes one last time before letting out a long sigh, the muscle in her jaw twitches.

“We’re gonna need a plan.” She says at last. “Some more fire power at least. We don’t know what’s in there.” She looks me in the eye and the challenge is still there, along with a grin. God, I’m getting those chills again!

“Yeah you’re right. At least we have a location now.” I breathe and each word takes me one step closer to her, each one feeling better than the last, until I’m right in her personal space. Feels amazing.

“So we’re done here then?” Riley’s voice shatters whatever moment had just started, terse and cold as ice. Shit I forget he had been standing right there. He’s looking at Faith and I with a strange combination hurt and loathing. Way to make the whole situation easier Buffy.

“Yeah. Umm. We all can get together tomorrow. See if Giles has found anything new. Then

go from there.” And I put a little bit of space between me and Faith. I don’t wanna rub it in after all.

“Fine. I’ll be in touch” He answers, shouldering his gun, then turns and leaves without another word. And as I watch him go, I feel that pang of remorse I was looking for. But it’s not for my decision it’s for his pain. I hate that I hurt him like this, but it’ll be better this way. I just hope with time he can see that.

“Second thoughts B?” I hear Faith at my side, her voice so small, despite her confident posture. And I wait a second before I answer. Until her eyes leave her shoes and meet mine. Then, my hands are sinking into the warm silk of her hair, my mouth slanting across those gorgeous lips as I pull her against me.

Right there in front of Xander and Tara. I’m still showing her.

And I kiss her hard. My tongue pushing into her mouth, taking her mouth, showing her she’s mine. It’s fast and aggressive and a little messy but I don’t care because her mouth is just so perfect. Hot and soft and she tastes like heaven. It’s an affirmation. One of my hands slides down her back resting in the curve of her spine and I press her further into me, I let my tongue rush over the roof of her mouth. She gasps and I love how her breath feels mixing with mine. God, I wanna get out of here. I NEED to!

The weight of Faith’s body against mine suddenly becomes more insistent and I feel her yield to me, her body fitting perfectly into every curve. From her hips up, and oh god her breasts feel so soft against mine, hard nipples burning points against me. I feel her whimper and it’s so good, I swallow it but I know I gotta end this, at least for now. Or else Tara and Xander are gonna get a show.

I jerk my mouth away, ending the kiss as quickly as it started. And I grin a little as Faith’s mouth follows mine. Her eyes flutter open and they’re black as midnight.

“No regrets ok?” I tell her quietly. She’s still watching my lips.

“Kay...” She breathes, all sexy-soft. And as I step away I see she has the shit eating grin of all time going on. She chuckles a bit more, and shakes her head a bit, like she could clear the lust webs away. I take her hand as I face the others.

Faith and I always seem to have an audience.

Tara is giggling; Xander is gawking. It’s about what I expected.

“Let’s go home guys.” I say walking past them, Faith still grinning, letting herself be dragged.

“You people are really trying to kill me!” Xander rants, but he still manages to sound cheerful. I’m guessing it’s because his girlfriend wasn’t around this time.

He stood hidden by the overgrowth. Letting the dark web of hanging moss and drooping branches conceal his presence. And he watched. The anger thumping through his system, the disgust and the rage a steel bubble deep inside. It was courting him, carrying him away to that place that let him forget. A place so dark he never knew it could exist within himself. But he reveled in it now. Loved the feeling of righteousness, of justification spilling over him like a slow, cold liquid.

It numbed the pain.

Buffy was kissing her. Not a moment after dismissing him. It was Faith. It had to be. She was doing something to Buffy, using her. For what he wasn't sure. But that had to be it. Why else would she want that whore? Why else would she leave him?!

A possessive rush filled him, setting his jaw, darkening his eyes. Buffy was his. It was no question, and after all he had sacrificed, he deserved her. And no one else did. Certainly not the other 'slayer', the other freak. If Riley let himself be completely honest, Faith and Buffy were no different than the demons they claimed to hunt. Abnormalities of nature.

So maybe that was the attraction? First Angel and now this, slut. Maybe Buffy needed that, maybe he was just too ordinary.

He would save her though, save his girl. He would rescue her from this freak show of a life, filled with the constant battle and pain. Once that other one was out of the picture it would be so easy to have her back, she would come crawling back!

He would be forgiving, gracious even, accepting all of Buffy's apologies with soft kisses and gentle admonishments.

"You should never have left me." He said it low, out loud. Practicing. And he watched as they all left the clearing, listening to their footsteps against the marshy ground. He wasn't surprised when he heard a new set approach from behind.

He had smelled the stink of cigarettes that preceded them.

"Mr. Finn." The voice was icy cold, distinctly British. "I take it you've had ample time to make the arrangements. The Initiative will cooperate?"

"I told you, the Initiative no longer exists. Just a small sector, a research division run by the ex-general. Privately owned." Riley replied, still gazing upon the space the others had been.

"Of course, which is exactly why the resources of the Council will be useful. We can provide the 'forces' as well as the funds required to capture the slayers." And the dark man smiled, if you could call it that. Closer to a grimace.

"Right, with the stipulation that the Initiative share the information gathered from any experiments preformed."

"Precisely Mr. Finn." He placed another cigarette between his lips. His posture casual. And Riley found it strange for a man to be so familiar with conspiracy.

“I don’t want Buffy harmed, not in any way. Otherwise the deal is off. I only want you to fix her... make her normal.” And Riley finally turned stepping up to, towering over the haggard man in the leather. The smaller man was far from intimidated.

“That is agreed. We only want the rogue permanently.”

“Why are you agreeing to this? Why are you helping me?” Something inside Riley made him ask. It was only then that he was able to see emotion spread across the other man’s face. And it was pure disdain. Insult and revulsion, blending to form an acidic scowl.

“The Council has long since grown tired of the antics of the first slayer, her refusal to conform...” And Riley found himself nodding in agreement. Buffy had always been a bit too independent for his liking

“And as for the other, Faith...” A cloud of smoke was released with the slayer’s name “she is the only thing preventing us from calling a new slayer. One that can fit more into the status, one that will respect the institution of the Council.”

“I see.” Was all Riley could think to say. The man obviously believed strongly in his task. That was good. Riley didn’t want any mistakes. Buffy would be his again, the way they should be.

“I’ll make some calls.” He agreed at last and the hit man gave him that so-called smile again.

“So we have a deal?” A calloused hand was extended to him, and as Riley gripped it in his own he felt nothing but the wash of satisfaction.

The easy and relaxed tone the four of us had once we left Shady Pines vanished the second we set foot back in B’s house. It was like we were all putting off the inevitable. Coming back to face one more disaster.

It shouldn’t be this way. This should be a good night! A fuckin’ fantastic night! We kicked major ass and found the big bad’s hide away to top it all off. We all got away with hardly a scratch and Xander got to play with the flame-throwers. Riley even seemed cool with everything. As cool as could be expected that is. Sure he was all quiet and hurtin’ but at least he was civil. I had expected the boy to go totally ballistic.

But it was a good fuckin’ night! There shouldn’t be tears clouding Tara’s eyes again, and Buffy shouldn’t be squeezing my hand so tight.

“Guys we’re back!” Buffy shouts, the worry is etched across her face. And I can see that Tara is trying to be strong too.

Is this my fault? I know that thinking that way isn’t rational, but how can I not? Red going over board on the mojo, maybe that’s just her trying to escape from all the stress, the shock of me being here. Of me being with Buffy.

I got a lot more insight than people give me credit for. I know what it was like for Willow back in the day. I would see those smiles of adoration, of awe directed at Buffy. And that went a hell of a lot further than the basic ‘hero-worship’ shit. Nah Red had it bad. And I can

totally sympathize with her on that one.

That doesn't mean I didn't play on it. All the time me and B would spend together back in the day had to be like rubbing salt in an open wound. I hate the way I was then. That I could see a weakness and exploit it with barely a second thought. Survival mechanism is what Angel calls it. I do what I had to just to get by.

But the shit that went down THEN doesn't explain anything about NOW. Willow is totally in love with her girl. Tar and Red are such an obvious fit, when I look and the two of them, I can almost see that whole intertwined auras thing.

Besides, Tar said Willow had been using for months! But maybe I was just a catalyst, that one little thing she needed to push her over.

Hell all this is just too much drama. I don't want to think about it. I wanna think about the way B kissed me tonight, just before we left the woods. I wanna focus on the way her mouth felt, how her tongue felt sliding around mine, all hot and demanding... possessive and wet. Fuck she had wiped every second thought clear outta my mind. No ones ever made me melt the way she does. I had been hoping that after patrol me and B could get a little time alone. Not even to necessarily get all with the physical...really, but just to talk some more.

We still got so much to work out. And there are some things I really gotta tell her.

I doubt if we'll get the chance. Giles and Anya come into the living room, they look completely whipped from all the research. Willow is following lazily behind them, lookin' totally unconcerned. Her eyes land briefly on me and I get this chill up my spine.

"How was your patrol? Anything helpful?" G-man asks wearily and Buffy proceeds to tell him about the vamps we dusted and the cave. His eyes brighten with the good news.

"I also shot one 'em with this!" Xander adds holding up his new prize possession. I swear he's gonna sleep with that thing tonight. "It was extra flamey!"

And as if on queue Anya is all over him, admiring his nifty big gun. I'm bet that wont be the only gun she's admiring tonight. Hopefully she'll quit smacking him around for a while.

"Well this is a very good development. I suggest we all call an end to this... ahhh... eventful evening. Perhaps we sh—"

"Good! We're leaving now!" Anya announces, totally cutting Giles off. "Come on Xander, and bring the gun!" and she's practically dragging him out of the house.

"We'll be over tomorrow!" he manages to shout, just before the door slams shut.

"Err, right we can reconvene in the morning, discuss these new developments." And as Giles is speaking, Red comes over and joins Tara on the couch. She's ignoring the fact that me and B are right across from her, still holding hands.

"Hey sweetie." She says all soft. And Tara looks way past pissed, all that tension is just pouring off of her. I feel B grip my hand tighter. I'm not gonna have any fingers left.

“Willow I think we need to leave, now.” Tara says, and her voice is tight from holding all those tears in.

“Aww baby, don’t be like that.” And I recognize that tone. Those exact words... Its like a flash back to Rucker Street when I was nine. Ma trying to console me through her dizzy haze. I can’t believe its coming out of Willow’s mouth.

Shake it off Faith. But I can’t loose that helpless feeling.

“Be like what?” Tara stands up then, her eyes unbelieving.

“So... I don’t know? Up tight about this. It was just a little magic is all.”

And that explanation just falls flat. No one’s buying it.

“Its always just a little bit. And ya know what? Those little bits add up Willow, it adds up to a lot!”

“I know, and I’m sorry I just wanted to get stronger, so I can help. I wanna help Buffy fight this thing.” Red sighs finally and I know B can’t take just being quiet anymore

“This isn’t the way to help Wills. I don’t need you hyped up on magic, I just need you.”

She tries to appeal to her, but Red’s way past the point of seeing logic here. Her own wacked-out reasoning isn’t gonna let her see. Not with all that power rushing through her. It’s a cloud across her brain and nothing makes sense when you can’t see through the fog.

Trust me, I know.

“You don’t understand, none of you do... But you will” Red shakes her head and sighs before she turns and heads to the door. And B goes to rise, run after her, but I squeeze her hand a little, keeping her seated beside me.

“Leave it, there’s nothin’ you can do tonight.” I tell her softly.

“We’ll be back in the morning.” Tara tells us sadly. This is all so unreal.

“Right, it’s late, I’ll give you a ride.” Giles offers. And then after collecting a few things they’re all gone. And me and B are alone.

And I wonder what the hell is supposed to happen now.

She answers the question for me, standing up from the chair and pulling my hand.

“Lets go to bed.” She says simply.

Ok, I have no idea what she means by that. But I follow silently up the stairs. I’m really worried how she’s not saying anything. I feel like we should be talking about this or something. So much has happened.

We get to her room and I pause just inside the door. I haven't been here in ages. It's kinda surreal. I watch as B goes and sits on the edge of her bed, head in her hands. I know that pose... hell I invented it I think.

"You ok B?" I ask worried, and I hope that wasn't a really stupid question. I'm scared of the answer.

"Faith I'm so far from 'ok' I don't even know where I am." And she finally looks at me. Her eyes nothing but pain. It rips at me. Ok then, I can deal with this. I take a deep breath and turn and shut the door gently behind me. The click of the latch seems way to loud.

I cross the room and just drop to my knees in front of her. I'm so far outta my element here, but I gotta at least try. This girl, she's my whole universe in a tiny perfect package.

"What can I do?" I say at last, I let my fingers lace with hers and I stare up into her gorgeous face. I hope she can see that I wanna help. That she can still read my eyes. I don't know some times, I'm so used to the hiding. Whatever she sees though it makes her smile. It's a soft one that reaches her eyes. They shimmer.

I did that?

One of her hands comes up, her fingertips brushing my hair out of my face.

"Kiss me?" She whispers, and her thumb runs over my bottom lip.

Ok, I can totally do that! I rise up a little; bring my mouth to hers. It's a soft kiss, and so tender I can feel my chest clutching. When I pull away I can see her eyes are still smiling as they flutter open.

"Better?" I ask and how the hell did my voice get all husky?

"Little better." She says, and now those eyes are glittering, teasing.

I raise up again, kiss her a bit deeper, longer. Her mouth opens like an invitation and I slip my tongue in right away. Shit, her mouth is always so hot, she pulls me in so deep I can't help but sigh a little. And I already know how much she loves it when I do that, how much she likes to hear me. So I do it again, letting her really feel it as I slant my head going deeper. It makes her hot. And suddenly her hands are buried in my hair and she's holding on to my head, tipping it back. And I feel her tongue pushing into my mouth now, so slick and wet as it wraps around mine.

Fuck that feels so nice. And I really hope this is heading where I think it is. Judging by the demanding way her tongue is exploring every part of my mouth... I mean its gotta be 'later' now right?!

I finally tare my mouth away from hers when my lungs can't take it anymore. My hands slide up from where they'd been resting on her knees, up her thighs 'till my arms are wrapped around her waist. Her legs part for me so now I'm kneeling between them.



“Better?” I ask again all breathless. Feels like I’m shaking.

“Getting there.” She husked and damn she looks so sexy. All happy-flushed and breathing a little hard. Her eyes look heavy, and they’re locked on my lips. I give her somethin’ to really think about and let my tongue make a lazy trail over the bottom one.

She gasps. And I let my hands slide up under her sweater. Her skin feels hot.

“Let me make it better.” I sigh, my mouth skimming over her throat. I feel her pulse jumpin’ beneath my lips.

“I—I oh god... Faith.” Her voice is all breath, dark and rasping, ‘cause now my tongue is tracing random patterns across her neck.

“You smell so sweet B.” I tell her, right in her ear and she groans my name again.

“Unnhh Faith...” It’s making me crazy, I’m getting desperate here!

“Please B... let me. I wanna make it better” I can’t keep my hands still. Endless motion across her back, as much skin as I can reach, its still not enough.

“Yes... baby please.” She answers finally and crashes her mouth back down to mine. And the kiss is so insistent, so and needy and possessive all at once I can’t help but groan. She just made me so fuckin’ wet.

With permission granted, her clothes are gone in seconds. I didn’t even know my hands could move that fast. But suddenly she’s in nothing but her bra and panties, laid out on her back and I’m straddling her hips. Just looking at her... fuck, my pulse is hammering in my veins. It’s all that summer time skin just spread out before me, waiting for me. It’s a beautiful offering. I let my fingertips play gently over the tight muscles of her stomach, love how they jump for me.

“You’re so damn perfect B... ya know that?” She just smiles and shakes her head. Then she reaches for me. Pulling me down to another kiss. And this one is slower, deeper her wet pink tongue wrapping around mine. I let my hips start up a little rhythm, grinding into her, nothing too intense yet. But it’s then I start hearing those tiny whimpers coming from her throat. I grind a little harder, the throbbing between my thighs demanding it.

“You get me so hot B.” I tell her, and feel her hands on my ass, guiding the motion speeding it up. And now her hips are pushing up into mine. She’s breathing hard... in time with me and the pressure against my clit is so good.

Fuck I gotta get a grip. Or else this is gonna be over before I even get outta my pants.

“Faith, your shirt... off” And she’s pulling on my tank. I sit up and yank it off. I loose my bra while I’m at it and it’s hardly off before she’s reaching for me again. Her eyes glued to my tits. But I grab her hands instead.

I get the pout. I just grin and shake my head.

“Faith, I wanna touch you.” She wines. Brat.

“Nah B, not yet. Turn over.” I tell her and she looks unsure for a second. “Let me do this for you yeah?”

And I lift up a bit so she can turn, then I’m straddling that tight little butt.

“Relax, Ok?” I whisper against her shoulder, and my hands rest for a second on the small of her back before I start running them up and down over her skin.

“Ok...” she sighs. And my hands travel, they explore every slope and valley of her form. Up and down, it’s an even, soothing cadence from her neck to just above her ass. I only break it briefly for her to loose her bra, then its back to the rhythm, slow and deliberate I’m letting it build. My mouth drops slow, wet kisses into the mix, seeking out all the places that make her moan, make her squirm, make her wet. There are so many.

I don’t know how long I keep this up. I’m judging time by the urgency of her moans. They’ve gone from breathy whimpers to deep and pleading sighs. Her whole body is in motion now, nothin’ but chills and tremors.

“Oh yeah... baby that’s so... uhhh yeah” She moans when my tongue swirls over the back of her neck again and I suck the skin I find there. Her hands are making fists in the sheets and her hips are moving in needy little thrusts, looking for something to grind into.

“Like that B?” I mumble, my voice feels like gravel in my throat. I want her so bad. And I finally lay my body out against hers. We both groan at the intense feel of skin on skin, my tits pressing up against her back my nipples hard as stone, but so sensitive every breath she takes sends a pulse of white-hot pleasure coursing through me.

I pant against her spine for a minute, trying to get back some control. It’s so hard when all I wanna do grind against that firm little ass ‘till I come. But after a few deep breaths I get it together, then I let my body drag down the length of hers.

“Want you so much...” I whisper into the small of her back, right where her spine forms that delicious curve. I lick it and let my fingertips find their way under her pale blue panties. She’s got her legs spread and I’m laying on my stomach between them, the heat is just flowing off her in waves. Right from the main place I wanna be most.

I let my hand wander down to that place, my fingers tracing over the thin cotton that is totally soaked. I find her clit easy, with just a fingertip and press a little, circle it...

“Oh fuck!” she gasps and her whole body jerks. God, I’ve got her wound up so tight, I think she almost came. Her thighs tremble as she spreads them wider for me. It’s the hottest thing ever. Her pussy is overflowing, warm juice glistening on the inside of her legs.

Enough teasing. I can’t wait anymore. I get up on my knees and slide those wet sexy panties down her legs.

“You ready B?” I ask her gently, even though I know the answer. It’s hanging in the air all around us. I take a deep breath. Her soaking pink slit is revealed to me and my throat is

suddenly so dry.

“Ahh!... yeah Faith ... So ready.” And she goes to turn over but I stop her.

“No B... stay like this. Just like this.” And I start stroking her ass, lifting her hips. I see her face turn into the pillow as she tries to muffle a groan. Her silky folds part and it’s like fuckin’ art to me. I just run my hands up and down the back of her thighs for a second. It’s more to calm myself, but those moans are getting louder... she’s on the verge of begging.

“Yes! Oh god yeah baby...” She groans as I finally slide my hand up her dripping pussy. Not inside her yet, just stroking through the wetness, through heat. And god she’s just coating my hand in her juice.

“Oh fuck B...you want me inside?” I can barely gasp. I had started this thing all slow but I don’t know how much longer I can hold out. I NEED to be inside her! I slip one finger in... just a little. And the tight pull of her pussy is all the answer I need. I push another one in right behind it, stretching her.

She moans for me and I add a third.

“You’re so tight...” I tell her, breathless and the grip she has on me shows she can get even tighter. I start pumping my fingers in and out. I keep one hand on her hip, stroking over her ass and lower back, soothing as she cries out into the pillow.

“Faith...Faith...Fiath...” My name, again and again with every push. The deeper I go the more she takes me in and I’m losing myself in her. In her scent, the searing heat, those wet smacking sounds that are filling the air. I speed it up, fuck her harder like I know she likes it, like a slayer needs it... And her back arches like a bow, her head tosses back from the pillow and those blond strands are melting over her shoulders. Her mouth falls open and she can’t even say my name anymore, it’s all ragged breaths and whimpers. She’s so close... looking over that edge.

“Let it go Buffy... just feel it.” I bring my other hand down her front and find her clit with my fingers. I don’t give her any warning I just press hard, grinding rough circles right where she wants it. And it’s a sudden wash that explodes through her.

“Oh God!! Faith!!” She finds my name again as she breaks... as she comes so hard. It’s a jolt through her whole body and her pussy is clutching at my fingers in a frantic rhythm. She falls back to the bed, shaking and traps my hand that’s rubbing her clit. I follow her down, my cheek resting between her shoulder blades. I slow down my fingers but keep them moving inside her... drawing out every twitch of pleasure she has.

She’s breathing hard. We both are, the aftermath of lust so heavy all we can do is gasp. I can hear her heart slowing as I finally still my hands. And I turn my face to kiss the salt of her skin. She shivers again and I smile against all that softness.

“Feel better?” I whisper, lift my head, and brush her hair away. I need to see her face. Her eyes are closed, long lashes resting on her cheeks, breathing deep and even.

“B?” I ask again, and kiss the side of her mouth that’s not pushed into the pillow. Still no

response.

“Buffy?” Still nothing. Did she fall asleep on me?! I raise up on my hands more so I can get a better look.

“Buffy?” I say a little louder. Nothin’! Oh but look at that! The corner of her mouth curves up into a smile. The little faker! I’m just about to launch an attack, when her eyes pop open. She flips and then the world flips and I’m suddenly laid out flat on my back with a very naked Buffy straddling me.

Her eyes glitter and she grins.

“I’m feeling much better.” And she kisses me slow and deep, she rocks against me, her wet slit grinding against my stomach... she painting with her come. Fuck it just makes me remember how wound up I am. I groan as she pulls away. Her mouth leaves a wet path to my left nipple. And she laps at it quickly and it’s like a current shooting through me. She sucks until I’m gasping, then she pulls away like it’s nothing.

She gives me that slow lazy smile, satisfied that she’s turned me in to a pathetic quivering mass.

“What about you baby? How’re you felling?”

How am I feeling?! She’s killing me! And she smiles like she knows it.

Fuck I’m in so much trouble. I blink once and she’s got me pulled to the edge of the bed, my legs spread with her standing between them. Gotta love those slayer powers of recovery. And B is fast, ‘cause my pants are gone before I even realize it.

And now she’s kneeling on the floor, spreading my legs wider. Oh fuck is she really gonna?! I can’t believe this.

“God B... what’re you doin’?” My voice is shaking, like the rest of me. B answers by running her tongue up my thigh. It’s so hot and slick it makes my whole body arch.

“Ohh f-fuck!” I moan and I hear B groan in reply as she starts licking her way higher. And then I realize what she’s doin’. She’s tasting me, where my juice has leaked out over my thighs.

“You taste so good baby.” And fuck, just hearing that again it makes me even hotter. I sink my hands in her hair, not to force her or anything. I just need her to ground me. It feels like I’m flying. Her hands are so gentle as they run over my legs. I can feel her breath, right there; so close to where I need it. My hips jerk towards her mouth, I can’t help it

“B... Buffy... oh god!” I can’t help moaning either.

B lifts my legs then, placing them over her shoulders. It spreads me so wide, and now I’m totally exposed to her. Nothing has ever felt this intense... this intimate.

“Faith...” Her voice sounds small, hesitant, and I have to pry my eyes open to look at her.

The sight is like a dream. Her face between my thighs, lips swollen and flushed as she hovers inches from my clit. I'm throbbing for her.

"Watch me Ok? I want you to watch me eat you." And that was almost enough. I bite my lip and groan as I nod. Its all I can do. The first touch is a shy, delicate flick of her tongue, its right on my clit and my eyes slam shut. Its so fuckin' intense, I'm trying to hold back, but I'm on the brink already.

"Baby open your eyes." I hear over the rushing in my head. Oh god she's gonna kill me... Once our eyes lock she lowers mouth again, and this time she's not tentative at all. She buries her face in my pussy, her tongue flat, lapping up all I got to give... her lips wrap around my clit and she sucks. Hard.

I can hear myself moaning, curses, her name, but it sounds so far away. She's so fuckin' good. I try and tell her.

"So good B...a-ahh fuck so good!" My hips are moving out of control, my hands clenching in her hair, and then she fills me. Three fingers deep and to the hilt. And she's fucking me, just the way I was fucking her and her mouth is devouring me and its so good and so hot and too much

"Buffy!! I-I'm gonna ... gonna come baby I—" But she knows this, and she fucks me, licks me just that little bit harder, and I'm gone. Every muscle in my body tensing arching into her and my eyes close again because its so good I can't stand it. But I can still see her in my mind... and she's all I can see.

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The last thing Faith remembered was Buffy crawling up her naked body. She remembered the warm brush of silky skin blanketing her own, warming her. Buffy laying on top of her, raining gentle kisses across her face. And when her eyes had opened Buffy had been smiling. She remembered B whispering that she loved her. Just before they had finally stilled for the night. She had fallen asleep in heaven.

So why was she opening her eyes to hell?

Faith was on a rooftop. Not just any rooftop. Yeah it was that one.

The air was whipping her hair all over, the rain felt like pinpricks of ice on her skin. An angry sky swirled above, heavy black clouds on a backdrop that was orange fire. Thunder rolled a command from above and Faith could feel it shake her to her core. The dread sank into her, the fear bubbling up like a well.

Her fists clinched. She looked down. She was holding her knife.

"Hello? Who's there?" She called out, tried to keep the panic in check. She felt a presence, like some one was watching her. How the fuck had she ended up here? Everything had been perfect, she and B had been all snuggled up in bed and now...

"Oh shit..." Faith sighed. She thought she would be rid of this. Rid of the dreams. Now that

she'd found Buffy, now that she was where she was supposed to be. What could possibly be the point? Why here?

Lightening flashed above as if to answer and a figure was illuminated. It was small and seated on the ground, not five feet away. How the hell had she missed that?! Instinct made her raise her knife. Defensive.

"What the fuck are you?!" Her voice echoed. The thing didn't answer. It was bent over, chanting and Faith could smell a dark rich and incense. She took a step forward and the thing raised it's head.

"Slayer!" It hissed. It was one of the Turoks! And it lunged, swiping viciously with razor sharp claws. Faith fought back with all she had, she had gained the upper hand quickly, ready to strike the final blow when a sudden one stuck her from behind.

Pain exploded through her back and Faith spun around to face her new attack. Black endless eyes and hair the color of oil. But the face was all too familiar.

"Willow?!" Faith gasped, disbelief etched on her face. The response came in a slow dark voice that could never belong to the redhead she knew.

"Hey Faithy, having fun?"

"Willow what the fuck is goin' on!?" She demanded, truly scared now. The wind was picking up, chaos churning around them. And Willow didn't answer. Her eyes instead flicked to the creature at Faith's back.

"Keep your mind on the fight, killer." The witch grinned.

And Faith could feel the thing rushing up on her fast, and she spun around, arm rising and the knife caught the lightening a second before it plunged in deep hard, to the quick easy... too easy! There was a gasp, so small and frail, surprised. NO!

"Faith?!" Buffy, oh god! Green eyes filled with pain, blood spilling from her lips

"Buffy!" Faith's voice was carried away on the wind as she caught the other girl as she toppled forward in her arms and her entire world was swallowed in that one crimson instant.

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## Part 20

That awful scarlet had faded to black. Or more accurately gray. It was a color Faith knew all too well. But it wasn't the calming tone of a cool overcast sky, and it wasn't the warm comfort of that blanket she loved back when she was nine.

This gray was dirty. Concrete walls, framed by solid steel; corroded with the grime and anger only time could provide. Time like twenty to life.

It was all too familiar to Faith and it made her heart seize in her chest, a sudden stop from the racing tempo of just an instant ago. Was it just an instant ago? It felt like forever... how long

had she been here? Faith couldn't breathe she the stale air felt like ice as she tried to suck in one ragged breath after another.

She couldn't be back here! Not in this box, not sitting on this rock hard mattress staring at the cracked and crooked mirror on the wall, the rusted out sink it was all just as she had left it. If she left it!?

How long had she been here?

Faith looked at her hands.

Her clean trembling hands. That just a moment, or, forever ago had been covered, drenched with blood. Buffy's blood. God what had happened?!

She'd killed her, and the realization, the reality of it slammed into Faith with a force she'd never known.

Her breath hitched, she squeezed her eyes shut, and she tried to hold back the hot tears that were burning acid-hot in her throat. She failed and a harsh sob echoed off the gritty walls.

The stark sound was like a shock though. And Faith found herself sitting back up again, looking around, LISTENING around. Silence, complete and total.

And that just wasn't right. At least, judging from Faith's experience on D-block. Prison was never silent. There was always noise, someone screaming, someone crying, cumin' or dying. But never silence.

Faith stood up, cautious, running her hand quickly across her damp eyes. She took the five quick steps that put her face to face with steel bars. If it wasn't real she could just walk right outta here right? Her hands came up, wrapped around the metal and she pushed. They didn't budge.

"What the fuck?" She asked no one, 'cause no one was there.

Faith was fairly convinced now that this was a dream, or still a dream... new or the same, she couldn't be sure. She didn't care either. She just wanted out.

"Wake up... wake the fuck up..." Faith pressed her head to the cold rails that held her, mumbling the same words again and again. She was getting so accustomed to the sound of her own voice that she didn't notice the other presence until it were nearly in front of her cell.

"Who's there!" Her head snapped up and she squinted down the dark corridor in front of her.

"Hey baby..." It was everything Faith wanted to hear. Exactly what she didn't want to see. Buffy, there, standing before her nothing but angel hair and glittering eyes. She was beautiful... and she was covered in blood.

"Oh god! Buffy! Y-you're hurt you're..." Faith's arm slid between the bars reaching, desperate. B was just out of her touch.

“Yeah...” Buffy said softly, glancing down at her clothes. She looked sad, but not in pain, it was weird. She took a few steps closer, wrapped her sticky red fingers around Faith’s. And it was like a confirmation to the dark slayer. That she could do it. That she could fall... again.

“I’m sorry B. God, I’m so—” Faith’s voice was breaking; the rest of her was breaking too. She couldn’t believe she was seeing this, that she’d done this.

“Shh. It’s ok baby. It’s ok...” It was soothing, it was calm...way too calm for someone who should be dead. And it wasn’t ok! But this wasn’t real either.

“I killed you?”

“No...” Buffy leaned closer then, kissed the tears from Faith’s face, avoiding the bars and whispering the words again and again.

“What’s happening B?” Faith sighed, her eyes closed. She was getting lost in the endless gentle kisses. Heaven, she was sure.

“It’s not real... hasn’t happened yet baby.” And she said it so soft, so sad, and Faith could feel those lips brushing over the frown that was now marring her brow. Yet?

“What? No B... this... it’s a dream, I won’t—”

“Love you...” It was whispered against her lips, sealed between their mouths. And Faith sighed because it felt like peace.

But it still didn’t explain what B had said. Buffy’s eyes were still apologetic when she pulled away.

“I guess it was supposed to be like this.” And Buffy took a step back, looking again at the thick blood that was covering her small form, dripping off her. Sickening taps on the concrete floor. Tiny splatters of contrast in Faith’s gray world.

“Wh-what do you mean?” Why was B moving away? Why wasn’t she helping her get out of here? Faith could feel something inside her starting to flicker, it was like a light dying, and something desperate, like panic was replacing it.

Buffy just kept walking back. One step; then another... too far way!

“You hurt me. We hurt each other.” Buffy said it gently but still felt like a slap, like truth.

“No! No B it’s not real... It didn’t happen!” Faith pleaded, nearly frantic in her denial. She brought her fist up, slammed it into her cage. “Don’t leave me here! Please!”

“But it will.” And Buffy turned away.

“No Buffy please! Just come back... We—we can talk about it! Don’t leave me!”



“You know I’m right baby. Everybody leaves, it always ends with pain... goodbye Faith.” And she was gone. Buffy’s footsteps made a hollow sound... as empty as Faith’s heart. And she was alone.

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She’d been up all night. Sneaking from the warm, safe embrace of her love to sit for hours on a cold hard rooftop. She loved it up here though, high enough to see the lights of her town.

Back in the beginning they would spend hours up here just talking, about things in the dark unknown, but mostly about nothing at all. Their eyes would catch fleetingly, shyly and then skip away. It was before she knew. Or was ready to know.

And to be wrapped in those arms now, would be so close to perfect...she had to do this alone though. It would be better in the end, better if she just leave now.

If she just got rid of her now.

Willow closed her eyes again, centered her energy on the pile of smoldering herbs, mumbled words in an ancient and long forgotten language.

Words of protection. They had all been hurt so much, years living in Sunnydale it couldn’t be avoided. Vamps and demons, possessions and ghosts, Willow had pretty much seen it all before she got out of high school. But that was different, SO different.

Why couldn’t they see it?

Faith had betrayed them. Had betrayed Buffy. She had made the choice to walk with the darkness and would no doubt do it again. Things don’t change that much on the hellmouth.

Willow could still remember the pain that ran rivers down her best friends face that night. Buffy had come back to her place, after ‘the setup’... after all their fears and suspicions had been confirmed. She had said she couldn’t stand to see Angel, couldn’t be alone either. So Willow had done her job, picked up the pieces.

It was what best friends were for.

She’d held Buffy, her Buffy as she cried. And even though she hated the pain, hated the bitch that caused it more... she loved the feel of Buffy in her arms, clinging to her. Willow had whispered every calming phrase she could think of, every platitude she knew Buffy wouldn’t remember in the morning. She had assured her that Angel still loved her, would never leave her.

“She kissed me, why did she have to kiss me?” It had been a soft whisper against the skin of her neck, and the words had shocked her even as they had sent shivers through her core.

And another suspicion had been confirmed that night.

“Don’t cry for her Buff... she-she’s not worth it... she brought it on herself?” She had tried and it had even sounded hopeless to Willows own ears. She had held Buffy’s face in her hands trapped by watery green, she had drowned in all those eyes had to tell her.

“No, I did. God, why didn’t I—” And Willow didn’t want to know, didn’t want to see that it wasn’t Angel her best friend was breaking for

“Buffy you can’t think this is your fault. We all make choices...” She pulled Buffy back into her arms. The eyes had been too much... they made her want things she shouldn’t want, couldn’t understand. “Faith made hers, we can’t change that.”

“She kissed me Will.” She had sighed again, and Willow knew any response to that wouldn’t be anything Buffy would want to hear. She gave her more banalities instead.

“It’ll be ok, just stay here, it’ll be ok in the morning.” All lies. Nothing close to what she really wanted to say. The things Buffy was making her feel at that moment. Jealousy, anger, want all meshed and swirled in a confused young mind.

“Just hold me Wills” And Willow almost had said...something, ANYTHING?! But she couldn’t. Instead they had lain on her bed then, Buffy falling asleep, Willow remaining awake, watching her.

A part of her hope had died that night. Something that she hadn’t had the capacity to realize at the time, something she didn’t even know she could want. It was buried before it could ever have chance to see the light. And Faith had killed it.

Willow blinked away her reverie noticing the candles were nearly burned away. She took a deep breath, calmed the surge of power, of ecstasy the spell brought about.

“Fear is made real, in dreams they’re revealed, haunt the vessel and hearts are healed.”

And the last of the ash finally burned away.

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Faith’s been acting weird all day. Quiet and stand off-ish. I had woken up alone this morning, her spot in the bed still slightly warm. I had pressed my face into her pillow, breathed her in and this deep ache had suddenly enveloped me. It had crawled into my chest where it rested, heavy and right on my heart.

God, I had never felt anything that intense before. It was want and longing and desire and I just MISSED her. After last night I had expected to wake up in her arms again, wrapped around each other in our own little world. But I was alone.

I had left the warm sanctuary of our bed after a few minutes of waiting, realizing she might not be coming back. I wasn’t too worried, I could still feel her near.

And yeah, it’s definitely ‘our’ bed now.

I had found her sitting outside on the bench we keep in the back yard by mom's flowers, her face turned up to the slowly brightening sky. She looked beautiful. The new golden rays had just started to creep across the horizon, bathing her skin with soft warm tones, highlighting the rivers of burgundy in her hair that I'd never allowed myself to notice. Not until now.

I watched as she sighed and closed her eyes, thick dark lashes making shadows across her cheeks. And I had no clue what to do next. Good thing I'm not the one running this show I guess. 'Cause then her eyes opened, and they looked so, so deep catching the orange rays.

I swear I couldn't breathe for a second.

"Checkin' out the merchandise B?" She grinned, but it was nowhere near those beautiful eyes.

"Yeah, definitely." I smiled back, wanting to go to her so bad. But something was telling me to stay. Give her some distance, she needed it. It might have been the tense set of her shoulders, or the small pile of cigarettes at her feet. I don't know. I must have said the right thing though, because that smile finally did reach her eyes.

Sunrise was nothing compared to that.

"I missed you." I told her. And I couldn't believe how hard that little admission was making me blush, how shy I suddenly felt. Especially after last night! But it's still all so new, all so much to feel. I'm guessing that might be why she's out here. Got a little freaked, needed a little space.

I hope.

"Yeah?" She was standing up then, and I noticed she was fully dressed in her clothes from yesterday. Damn. I kinda felt a bit underdressed in just my robe, but my heart was beating faster all the same. All I could do is nod at her as she came to stand right in front of me, inches away. I wanted her closer.

"So you're going somewhere?" I had asked instead of grabbing her.

"Yeah, I better. Gotta grab a change before things get started 'round here." She's right, but I don't like it. I like the idea of having her here...

And I think I'm about to say something really scary... yup, I'm gonna.

"Umm. Why don't you, ah...ya know, bring your stuff back? Y-you can, ya know, if you want... maybe crash here? Till all this is done? Or maybe, just whenever?"

It sounded a lot cooler in my head. Really. But her eyes got really soft then, like I was maybe melting her a little.

"Ok." Simple as that and I couldn't freaking believe it! And thankfully she saved me from the incredibly Dawn-like squeal that was seconds from escaping

She kissed me. She cupped her warm, soft hands around my face and those full lips were on mine. It was soft and gentle and it brought my heart up to my throat. It made that longing in my chest go away.

My hands were sinking into her hair before I realized, my mouth searching for deeper access to hers. I felt her sigh and I got chills all over. She was just so warm against me... so close.

I wanted to tell her to forget about the meeting later. Forget about all this damn bad. I wanted to drag her back upstairs, back to our bed, back to our world. I tried to tell her in the kiss.

I wanted to convince her, something was telling me she needed to be convinced. I pressed in harder, let my tongue wrap around hers, pulled her tighter against me. And I got another sigh, and a bit of a moan this time.

God, does she even know what that does to me?! My hands slip down her back, over the delicious curves of her hips down to cup her ass and I can feel my lungs starting to burn but I don't care. Who needs to breathe when I have Faith pressed so close to me, when I can feel her breasts pushing against mine, her heart pounding so fast?! Her mouth is so hot, so wet, and just seems endless... it reminds me of other places I've discovered.

And suddenly I want her. Now, and so damn bad I can hardly stand it. The kiss turns rougher... the aggression, the extent of my need showing itself in the messy slide my lips are making over her mouth, in the way we were both starting to tremble, muscles straining and yet barely restrained.

God, I feel so desperate, desperate enough to take her, have her, fuck her right here on the soft grass in my back yard... I bet she'd look so good laid out with that green against her bare skin... But she pulls away then, gasping.

"B, fuck... what are ya doin'?" She was all breathless. I love her breathless. I'd love her more spread out naked on the ground and breathless.

"It isn't obvious?" I ask the skin of her neck, it tastes so good. Faith flavored, I should call Ben and Jerry's.

"Well I was sure you were goin' for subtle." She grins and my lips find the dimple that just appeared as I try and get my heart to slow a bit.

"Nope, not subtle, not me... I want you." I had to whisper the admission, because I could hardly believe its true. I never dreamed I could want something like this, like HER. That I could want a body so soft and full and lush. That I could want to run my hands through long, infinite waves of brown. I can't believe I'm acting this way! But Faith just makes me feel so uninhibited, inspired even... Before, I'd never let myself think about soft berry red lips or hard rose colored nipples, but now I can hardly think of anything else. And it's the truest thing I've ever known.

"I want you so bad Faith, I need you." I tell her again, and I kissed her again to prove it.

And my mouth was all over hers, lips tongue, teeth. I nibbled that bottom lip she likes to tease me with as one of my hands slid away from her ass and up under her shirt.

What happened to her bra? Why am I wasting time wonder what happened to her bra?!

I cup the soft curve of her breast, squeeze a little as my thumb passes over her nipple. And I'm still amazed as I feel it harden under my touch. Faith groans into my mouth and it vibrates between us. It feels so sexy, knowing that she wants this just as bad. Her skin is heating up as I play, rolling her nipple over my thumb... stroking the tip, and I finally pull my mouth away from hers. We should be doing this upstairs, should have started the second our eyes opened.

"I wanted to wake up with you..." I confess, watching her eyes flutter open, watching her mouth try and form words for a second

"Fuck B...ohh... I-I can't think when you're doin' that!" Good, so she can't think about leaving.

"Doing what baby?" I ask innocent, and tug her nipple gently, pinching it harder, giving her more of that pressure I know she likes. It's not nearly enough though.

"Uhh... That! Ohfuck" God her voice sounds so dark. It gets me wetter than I already am, it makes me ache. I use the hand that's caressing her ass to pull her into me and I grind a bit.

"I maybe thought we could stay in bed for a while longer, but you weren't there"

"I-I um... a-ahh B! Damn you gotta stop that." But her hips are moving too, unconscious little thrusts against the leg I managed to slip between hers. I ease up on her nipple some though and she sighs. It's both relief and disappointment.

"I um... couldn't sleep is all." She finally manages, a tiny frown makes her eyebrows go all smooshy. I kiss it away and wonder what could have caused it. There're so many things. I try and find the answer in her eyes but hers are focused on the strand of my hair she's been playing with. I pull back a bit, and my hand slips out of her shirt, concern suddenly taking the forefront over horny.

"Baby, what is it?"

"Just night—I mean nothin'... I'm just stressed I think, no big." And I wanted to think about what she started to say, but she grins and her eyes meet mine a second before she leans in and I feel her mouth on my neck

"Stress is bad...umm...m-maybe I can help you with that." God what's she doing to my ear?!

"Mmm you got no idea how good that sounds B." I kiss her collarbone, suck a little. "Or how good that feels."

"Then come back to bed..."

"The others are gonna be here soon." She sighs and pulls away some and meets my gaze, pouting a little, knowing that she's right and not liking it one bit.

"Its early." I tell her bottom lip.

“So Giles doesn’t get up at the ass crack of dawn anymore?”

I smile and pull her back to me, slide my hand back into her shirt.

“Don’t care.” And when did my voice get so raspy? Her mouth lands back on mine in a slow deep caress, my tongue matching the strokes my hand is making over her breast. And it’s different now, not as urgent, not as demanding.

The need is still there though. I can feel it in the way Faith’s starting to rock against me again, in the way she’s panting against my mouth, making the air between us so warm and humid.

“Buffy...shit, B...makin’ me so wet.” She tells me and I swear I feel my whole body tense. Shit I love how she talks when she’s turned on. But I tamp down that urgency, I don’t want to rush it. I don’t want to think about time, or how everyone will be up soon.

“Can you show me?” I ask, each word a feather against her mouth and I feel her nod, feel her hands reaching between us slipping past the token barrier of my robe and god, then, they’re on my skin. They slide over my hips, hot and shaky, and make a quick rush up to my breasts.

“Damn, B... you’re so fuckin’ soft” She says it like she can’t help it, rasping puffs against my neck as her fingers brush back and forth over my hard aching nipples. “So damn sexy... want you so much... You know how hot you make me B?”

God I can’t believe how gentle she’s being, I can tell she’s holding back can feel it in the way her hands are all trembles, the slow deliberate kisses she’s burning into shoulder. But it’s so good, I can hardly stand it. I gotta find a better place for this to happen... like, now.

“Mmm... Faith, baby... inside.”

“Oh god...Ok.” And she’s gasping and I feel a trembling hand suddenly between my legs, parting my slick folds

“No, baby...uuunnhh Faith!” I groan and feel her finger against my clit, pressing, circling, oh fuck she’s so good! “Inside the house...”

And now I really am desperate.

We make it as far as the kitchen, barely. Kissing, stumbling, groping the whole way. Her hand is still between my thighs when my back hits hard against the kitchen door.

“B... need you.” She whispers into my ear and I can’t believe how small it sounds almost like a question, just as she picks up the stroking over my clit again.

My legs feel like water and the rest of me feels like its gonna combust. I slump back against the door, try not to scream as she picks up the rhythm matching the deep pulsing in my clit. God she has me so close already.

“Buffy?” Its that tiny voice again. And I realize my eyes were shut tight. I open them, and fall right into the depths of hers. I bring my hands up, cup them around her face, show her what she’s doing to me. Its too much, too good. I’m gonna come, but I want her with me. I need it.

I still her hand with mine just as she started to slide in and out, then, as best as I could with the way my hands are shaking, get her pants undone and slide them down. She kisses me again, her mouth hard and reckless as she kicks her pants off.

She spreads her legs some, giving me better access and the instant I touch her, my hand is coated in her juice. I touch her slow my fingers part her, trace her every outline, she's burning as she pours into my hand.

"Uuunnhh B!" It's moaned into my mouth and I can tell she's trying to hold back, keep her hand still inside me, give me a chance to catch her up... she's not too far off though. I can feel her shaking against me. I let my fingers make a lazy slide through her pussy, drag lightly over her clit, and then away again, teasing. She so hard the slightest touch makes her whole body shudder.

"Fuck... so good...B, please...B, oh yeah."

She finally breaks away from the kiss then, buries her face into my neck as her knees go weak. She's whispering the words again and again each one sounding a little more pleading than the last. Her hand finds the rhythm on my clit again rubbing those tight little circles that are taking me to the brink so fast. I do the same on her, a little harder, little faster every time and soon it's nothing but muffled groans and whispered pleas.

I can feel her body starting to arch against mine, her hips starting to lose the pace and she's making those desperate whimpers, biting her lip so hard. She's about to come for me.

"B! Oh f-fuck... I-I can't—" I slow my hand down, she's right on the brink, but she's fighting it... I can feel her clit making those twitches against my fingers. But she wants me with her too, and I try to tell her what I need.

"So good baby...a-ahh! J-just... more...oh god!" But she already knows what I needs, plunges two fingers up inside me and starts to fuck me.

"Yes!! Faith! baby!" And I'm moaning, we're both moaning as our passion reaches fever pitch and Faith's body jerks hard against me suddenly she tenses and I watch her face as the ecstasy sweeps through her.

"Buffy!" The sigh of my name as it falls from her lips is enough and I'm flying with her. Falling for endless moments and I feel the rush of her come coating my hand, the weight of her body as it slumps warm and safe against mine, the incessant spasms that rack both our forms. They're slow to fade, intense after shocks keep us both trembling. And damn I don't ever want to move again... I'm not sure if I'll be able to.

After a while, our breathing finally start to slow and I pull back a short bit, just enough to see the sleepy smiley face she's making.

"I love you." I whisper, and her eyes flutter open like magic. That smile gets bigger.

"That was so...god B I don't even know what that was." Her voice is all raspy and her eye's look like they might overflow...

Can your heart be breaking if you're this happy?

"It was us." I tell her with a snuffle of my own. And we stay like that, just holding each other, basking in each other until she finally sighs and pulls away. She pouts a bit at the loss of contact.

"I should really get going B... don't want the kid wandering down here and seeing all this. Could damage her young mind."

"Dawn is plenty damaged, little more won't hurt." I argue.

"Plus I gotta go get my stuff, get back here" She puts on her pants. I hate pants.

"You suck. With all this being right stuff." And I show her a REAL pout. She just grins bigger.

"It's my curse." Such a smart ass. I pull her back to me quick, catch her mouth again and let my hands roam to all the places her clothes are hiding, all the places I know I won't be seeing for at least a while. I let my nails rake gently down her back and feel the prickle of goosebumps follow my touch. My other hand is back at her breast for only a second before she can pull away with a groan.

"Fuck...B, I need to go, now, or else I won't be able to... I'll be back soon yeah?" Her smart ass smirk gone and she's talking to the gap in my robe that is nearly exposing me again.

"Ok..." I grin, happy that now she's still in the land of horny with me "Hurry."

And she just smiled as she backed away. And I watched her stride out the door, cross the yard... that's how she left, full of wanting and joy and peace. But that's not what's in her eyes right now. I have no idea what's changed between then and now but the difference is like night and day. And I'm worried.

When she came back she'd been subdued and only gotten more so as the day went on. She's almost down to single syllables...

Everybody's here now, deep into the research of things. Last night's patrol had been really lucky. So we're pretty sure where this Ancient vamp is bedding down, now all we have to find a way to kill sleeping ugly. Apparently a nice splinter to the heart or a good old-fashioned beheading just won't do. Giles had informed us all, with way too much enthusiasm, that when you chop off one it'll just grow another... he really needs a new hobby.

Faith had used a small portion of her apparent word quota to suggest fire, but Giles shot that down too. So that leads us to this again. Research.

Translating actually, which is even worse. I swear none of this stuff even makes sense in English!

I let Dawn skip a day at school and even Riley came over to help. We need all the minds we can get. But I really don't like the way he's been looking at me. Like a twisted cross between remorse and lust and satisfaction.



I have no idea what's going on in his head, but he's looking at Faith too. And there's nothing but disdain then.

I don't like it.

It makes me want to go to her, stand by her side and protect her. But Faith's too caught up in her own thoughts to even notice.

At least Tara and Wills seem to be getting back to their usual sunshine selves. I had heard them arguing just after lunch. They had thought they had been alone in the kitchen. I had been passing by I really didn't mean to snoop or anything. I didn't catch all of it, but it sounded pretty heated, and of course had been about the magic. I didn't stick around to listen, but it looks as though they made up a bit. They're all moon eyes and hand-holding again.

I look over at my best friend just as her eyes flick away from where they've been locked on Tara. I can hardly recognize the girl I've known for so long under all that pain, but I can finally see hope again too. And it makes me smile.

Maybe things are getting better...

"I got balls!!" Or, maybe the world's gone insane.

Now everyone is looking at Xander like he's... well, nuts.

"Uhh... we all kinda know that Xander." Tara says, turning an interesting shade of pink. And Xander's eyes get big as he realizes what he's saying. It doesn't stop him from saying it again though.

"No! not balls, balls... um I got those too but... ORBS! Big glowing orbs!"

"I shouldn't be hearing this..." My sister covers her ears, closes her eyes

"The stress is getting to him..." Anya sighs, uninterested.

"No! Look!" And Xander stands up!

"He's gonna flash us!!?" Dawn's eyes pop open and I stick my hand out to cover them. What the hell is wrong with him!?

"Xander no one wants to see—"

"In the BOOK!" He finally shouts. Oh, I knew that. "See! I think I translated it right... balls right?"

Then he holds up a page he's been translating from. Giles is next to him in an instant reading over the lines.

"Oh bloody hell why didn't I consider this before!"

“What is it Giles?” I ask and he hands me the page, like that’s gonna mean something to me. I raise an eyebrow.

“The orbs of N’stasis” Uh huh. Right. I raise both eyebrows.

“There a set of ancient crystals, forged about 800 years ago. For the specific purpose of dealing with the oldest of demons. There were about twenty or so originally.” He explains

“Originally?” Faith asks, suddenly interested. It’s almost disturbing that she didn’t say anything when Xander’s balls were about to come out.

“Yes well, if I remember correctly, each time one is used, it is destroyed as well as the beast it vanquishes. From what I can determine from this we will need at least two”

“Sweet. So how do we get our hands on ‘em?”

“Yes well the Council is in possession of several. However I’m sure they’d be reluctant to turn one over, due to their rarity... they would have to rule the situation to be a considerable threat.”

“It’s the first fuckin’ vamp ever created?! We’re talkin’ apocalypse how much bigger threat could they need!?” She stands up and the book she was holding goes sailing across the room. Her frustration evident in every line of her body as she stares my watcher down.

“Faith now there is no need for—”

“No Giles she’s right.” I cut him off, but stay seated. I reach out, my hand landing gently on the small of Faith’s back and she takes her seat next to me again. Tense as stone

"This is beyond serious. Call them and get what we need."

“I think I might be able to help.” Riley says, breaking the stare down between me and Giles. “I have some connections... left over from the Initiative. There’s a lot of things like that just sitting around in storage.”

And he says it so casual, but there’s something behind that, in his eyes. I can’t quite figure what though. But hell if he can get these super balls for us...

“Really? You think you can find that out soon?”

“No problem Buffy. I can check it out before patrol.” He says with his best smile, with satisfaction, like he’s won something.

And I really don’t get what’s going on with him, but I finally feel like we’ve made some progress. That we actually have a chance to beat this thing and we’ll all come out of it ok... better even. And it’s my sister that seems to put my thoughts into words.

“This is great! We have the when the where and weapon. But what are we supposed to do now?”

The kid asked a damn good question. And as far as Faith was concerned, she had the answer. She was outta here. Now would be the perfect time to make a little escape. When everyone was relaxing, taking some time off from all things end-o-times.

All the tension, the doubts the fears... they were crushing in on her. She had thought she'd had a handle on it, especially after last night. Why was she feeling this way? Things were supposed to be getting better!

It had seemed as though she was finally ready to move past it all, she had all she needed to right? She had her love.

Faith could still hear the words, Buffy's whispered declarations as they made love. It had all been so complete and she had felt perfectly whole. But then the dreams, they had ripped it all to shreds. And now Faith felt like tatters blowing in the wind.

Faith had awoken lost, disoriented. She could still feel the hard steel under her fists; smell that stale and acrid air. It had been tinged with blood. God, it had been so much blood.

And even though Faith knew it wasn't real, that Buffy really hadn't been there this time the sight had been burned into her mind all the same. She had tried to close her eyes, block it out and find sleep again, but the tears only burned hot rivers on her face.

And she could still see it all. It was what she had been, what she knew she would always be capable of.

It had been all that darkness that had pulled her from the comfort of Buffy's arms and she'd looked for the sun.

It had been ok this morning, been so much better when B had come looking for her, held her kissed her. But as she left the thoughts had started up again, and it had only gotten worse as the day wore on. Sitting there, watching them all... how could she possibly belong here?

Simplest answer. She didn't. Right?

Faith thought so and she was just at the front door, hand on the handle and everything, but the voice behind her brought her to a stop.

"You running off again?" She said gently, and Faith swore she could hear a challenge. She turned around.

"Nah, just ahh... need a little air is all." Faith tried to make it sound convincing, but she knew she couldn't ever get anything past this girl.

Tara smiled at the attempt. And yeah, it was a challenge.

"It is a little tense around here... I could see how you'd have trouble dealing." She came closer as she spoke so they were both in the foyer.

“I’m dealin’ ok I think.” Tara eyed the hand that was still gripping the door handle. “Ok, so maybe I’m not dealin’ all that well.”

“What’s changed? I mean last night... the graveyard... you and Buffy seemed, well... umm.” Tara gestured, the blush spreading across her cheeks

“Yeah last night...and this mornin’.” Faith couldn’t help but grin, blush a little herself as she thought about being in the other girl’s arms. But that was the thing... all that contentment that love it felt shaded, tainted by feelings she couldn’t understand

“Oh!? Umm...Right...” Tara’s blush had spread all the way to the roots of her hair by now “Anyway, now first chance... you’re looking for some ‘air’? What gives?”

“I got no clue Tara, it’s just...see I—”

And a near confession was cut short, as Willow stepped into the room, cautious, her eyes jumping between Tara and Faith.

“Tara sweetie, what’s going on?” She smiled, but it was a fake smile.

“I was just talking to Faith.”

“Yeah, I see that... why?” And Faith saw exactly where this was heading. She thought it best she make that escape before another round of Willow-rage like yesterday.

“Look Willow, its nothin’ I was just leavin’ and—”

“No Faith, you’re not...” Faith had made to grab the door again, but Tara had grabbed her.

“Well if she wants too...” and then Red had grabbed Tara. And it was just a little thing, a tiny sprig of something that Faith never would have noticed. It had fallen like an afterthought from Willow’s sleeve...

“Will? Baby, what’s this?” But Tara noticed. She picked up the frail looking branch from the floor and Faith watched the frown that made a slow creep across her gentle brow.

“Ginger leaf? You’ve been having bad dreams?”

It was asked gently, nothing but concern

“Ahh... yeah, its just a little something for sleep. Nothing hard Tara I swear.” But Willow’s eyes were nothing but worry.

“I believe you Willow, its ok. We talked about it remember? I know you’re giving it up.” But Faith didn’t believe her. And it sure as hell wasn’t ‘ok’. In fact it was like a big ass piece in the middle of the puzzle just got filled.

“Hey T? You think me and your girl can talk a little? I wanna try and work some stuff out.”

Tara had smiled, looked hopeful, thankful at Faith before she turned and brushed her lips quickly over Willow's. The small gesture had erased the contempt in the red-head's eyes. It was for only a moment though. Willow's expression slammed shut like a vault the minute they were alone.

It didn't faze Faith one bit. Not now that she knew.

"Ya know Red, a hell of a lot has changed since last time I was here." She tried a smile

"Yeah, it happens. What's your point Faith?" Willow only glared, and Faith knew it was time to drop the pleasantries.

"Well I just never thought you'd be the one to make a little trip to my side of the tracks."

"What are you talking—"

"Save the shit Red. You might got you're girl and all the rest of them fooled. But I know what's the what. I know that little dark place that gets you all hot, how you can't quit... I lived it. All that power the control that rushes through you it hooks you"

"I can stop when ever I want." It sounded dry, without emotion. It was practiced. Faith knew that tone all too well.

"Yeah you keep tellin' yourself that. But more than that... I know you're fuckin' with me." She stepped closer, throwing the words, the truth at the other girl. But it was without venom, without malice. Just the truth. And faced with that Willow started backing away, shaking her head in denial.

"You're still psychotic."

"Depends on who ya ask. But it doesn't change that I know." And Faith felt a little bit of spite that time, a little satisfaction as Willow's eyes widened in realization, but she forced it down, she wouldn't go there again. "Don't worry 'bout it Red. It's only fair right?"

"What's fair?"

"I knew what the deal was with you, back in the day. With Buffy. I knew, and I didn't like it and I fucked with your head every chance I got."

It was raw, it was honest and Faith felt lighter for speaking it.

"It's not like that any more. I love Tara." Faith was at least glad she didn't even try to deny it. Why bother right? Now that they both knew where they were coming from

"Yeah I know. Doesn't mean it still doesn't sting a little yeah? Especially now."

"So now you win or something?" And Willow's sigh sounded like defeat to Faith. "You're gonna go tell them all how Willow is just as evil as Faith, show them really that you're all of the good?"

And the witch didn't realize how far off she was. But Faith couldn't blame her. It was expected... was something she would have done in a heartbeat, back then.

"First off Willow, you can never be as evil as me. Like, not even close." She said it even though she wasn't quite sure anymore. Not after all she'd seen, after those dreams. She remembered those black eyes...

"And second, no. I ain't tellin' this stays between you and me. But it ends, like now. Whatever you did to fuck with my head. Its over."

"Fine." And that was easier than she'd thought. But Willow's eyes still looked like ice. But Faith pushed on, knew she had to say this next part

"And last. And this is the part you're really gonna love see, I'm gonna help you."

"What?! You... what can... help?" At least that callous, frozen expression was gone. Red wore shocked and flustered a lot better anyways.

"Don't bust a vein Red. See, Buffy she's... she's like, everything to me. And what you're doin' this magic, she's worried, and hurt... and so are Tara and Xand."

"They don't understand. With all the bad we face, its been getting worse. And ever since her mom died, its like Buffy's been looking for it... She can't do it alone."

"Your right. And she won't have to... but losing yourself ain't the answer either. Look I don't think you're wrong. I'm always down for a little more fire power, and if ya get a little tingly as a result, that's sweet too. Just think about the source of it, that's all I'm sayin'."

Faith reasoned, she didn't want to go the whole condemnation route. She knew first hand how much that DIDN'T work. She just wanted to give Willow something to think about.

"I'll think about it, Faith." See, and it worked!

"I'm gonna see if Giles has had any luck with Xander's orbs." Willow said then, just a hint of a smile pulling at the corners of her mouth.

"Willow, tell me YOU didn't just say that!"

"Things change Faith." And this time Willow gave her a full smile.

"And not always for the worse..." Faith said softly, watching as the other girl left in search of answers. And Faith felt, at least for now they had reached some understanding. Almost instantly she began to feel the weight, the pressure of her doubts lifting. Her soul felt lighter, and instead of screaming out her fears, it was singing for her love.

Things were finally starting to look up.

## Chapter 22

Riley stood uneasily by the door facing the slightly disheveled British man from across the

room. To the ex-marine, he looked like some being that was not wholly of this world, something far more nefarious than anything that could be spawned of the earth. A shadow made real; clothed predictably in all black, the older man's image was emblematically evil, a sinister whispering of intent.

A sullen voice crackled distantly from the battered clock radio. A painfully soulful melody that clung to the decrepit walls and hung herself in the humid air, she kept company with rank smell of bourbon and cigarettes that draped the stale motel room like a shroud.

It was a fitting place for betrayal.

"You wanted to see me?" The door hinge groaned when he shut the door.

Though, betrayal wouldn't have been the term the ex-marine would have used. No, this was NOBLE work. Something they would all thank him for. Something Buffy would love him for.

Love him forever.

The man from the Council was seated at the small table by the window, early evening sun filtering in across his unshaven face. The wax-yellow rays only aided in making his gaunt form appear more haggard. Sinking his black eyes deeper in his skull, hardening the sharp planes of his face.

He fingered a small black velvet bag.

"Come in Mr. Fin, sit down."

Riley hesitated a moment before crossing the room. The heavily accented voice was unusually light. That crooked smile pulled at his features, deepening the lines of time.

Humor, of the most morbid since of course. They were here to discuss death.

Riley sat opposite the dark man with no name. Anxious. The endless seconds of silence only added to his discomfort.

A moth fluttered across his vision, landed on the window.

He shifted in his seat, beads of sweat formed above his lip, his left leg bobbed, rapid-tense. The man in black only grinned wider, seemingly nonchalant, but Riley felt scrutinized on a cellular level.

And now, to the point where he couldn't take it anymore, he was just about to speak when the Councilman slid the bag across the table. And there was another moment's pause before Riley was able to venture opening it.

"You have them?" He spoke in a surprised and hushed tone, gazing at the two crystal spheres that now lay exposed in his hand. They were small, both resting spaciouly in his palm. They caught the sparse light and glittered colors he didn't realize existed.

"How?" Riley asked, awed. An exhale that was mostly patronizing crossed the table.

"Did you honestly think, Mr. Fin, that the Council wasn't fully aware of the situation here in Sunnydale?" That twisted smile, it called him 'Foolish boy' and for it Riley had no response.

"This is good." He said instead, cautious. "It's what we need to defeat the Ancient."

"Of course it is. It's what YOU will need. After tonight, the Slayer issue you will be moot. They will both be..." He paused, lit a cigarette, and grinned smoothly "Incapable, as you know."

Riley watched the glowing, burning ash.

"Oh, tonight?" He hadn't expected this. Not so soon.

"Surely you wish the process to begin immediately, so that you may pursue your own plans. Your own... desires?"

And Riley thought about his desires. About how every day that past Buffy drew further away from him, closer to that slut, that garbage. The thought brought a hot rage to his chest. It flowed, branched out like creeping vines to every corner of his body, consuming him.

Grey smoke curled around his head, horns and whiskers; Riley breathed deep. Pleasure second-hand.

"Right. Sooner the better." His jaw set and any hesitancy felt was replaced by raw determination. He felt fierce, felt like he would win.

Certainty spread across his lips and his smile began to match the man seated across from him.

Two needles were slid across the table. Olive liquid swam thickly in the sparse light.

"What does it do?" Riley kept his hands flat on the cheep formica. His fingertips itched.

"A powerful, mystical formula. The smaller one is for the dark slayer. The dose will incapacitate her long enough for transport. The larger will rob Ms. Summers of her powers entirely. Permanently."

"Side effects?"

"Minimal, she may be incapacitated for a few days. After this is done you will return Faith and the crystals to my possession. You can do what you like with the other."

Riley thought about what he wanted to do with Buffy, to Buffy. And that hot rage swirled with something raw. The slow familiar creep of arousal filled his mind with deeds and images yet to be acted upon. He felt his muscles burn with anticipation, stir with longing... a hard throb in his pants.

The older man across from him smirked like he knew

"We will be patrolling tonight." He offered, ignoring that perceptive grin. He waited, hoping



for orders. He needed a plan. A plan that would lead him, without fail, to his goal.

"I will be following with operatives." An uninterested sigh and a cloud of smoke was released. "Get the rogue alone and inject her. The affects will be nearly immediate. We will then collect and transport her to the remaining labs of your former employers."

"Right." Riley wondered briefly what would happen then. What would happen to Faith at the hands of the Council and former Initiative. Experiments of some sort he was sure. He knew of the disturbing things that would go on there.

But Riley Fin wasn't disturbed in the least...in fact, he couldn't care less.

And besides, what good is there in wondering? A good soldier, a right and perfect soldier doesn't ask questions. That was a concept his Buffy could never really grasp. She was just so silly in that way. So very inappropriate. He would be sure to fix that little flaw as soon as possible.

The thought of fixing her made him smile as he stood. He would make her perfect.

"I will see you tonight then?" Riley extended his hand. It was taken after a moment of snide consideration.

"Of course Mr. Fin. Until tonight." He didn't stand up.

The evening sun was a glaring contrast to the dank interior of the motel room and he had to squint as he eyed his prize, the tool that would set it all in motion. It was going to be a new beginning for he and Buffy. A chance to finally put Sunnydale, monsters and all that other nonsense behind them. Soon they would be Mid-west bound and never looking back to this freak show.

Riley could hardly wait.

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As I make my way down the basement stairs the sound I hear makes me pause. It's loud, constant, and very familiar.

THWAP! THWAP! THUMP! Over and over.

It's the distinct sound of fists pounding into tight stretched vinyl. It's comforting in a way that's strange and violent in equal parts.

But hey, that's me right?

After my little chat with Red I had another conversation with Tara. And I so totally dig that chick! She's so... hell I don't know, solid, so stable. She grounded me some and it was just what I needed after all that wicked insecurity flying through my head all morning.

Turns out she and Willow had talked it all out. Well, more like yelled and screamed and cried it all out. She helped me understand what's going on with Red a little better. How she's afraid

to stop the magic. How she thinks the minute she does, everything will fall apart... she's just scared. In the same way that we're all scared. The magic just gives her some sense of control, security.

It all made me want to find B. She was the one I should've been talkin' it all over with. And plus, I just plain MISSED her. Man that's so fuckin' crazy!

It's not a feeling I'm used to see. But it feels kinda good... knowing she's there inside me and I can finally go to her whenever I want.

Scary, but good.

So I had searched the whole house and the back yard too, lookin' for her. And now I find her here, amongst their collection of punching bags and training equipment. I guess after all the hours of research she needed to get a little physical. Plus with me being all with the quiet, the distant...

THWAP! THWAP! THUMP! Over and over.

I stop on the middle stair and just let the image of a hot and sweaty B run through my mind. Man that's nice. That's how its supposed to be. Not like earlier, with the bad and tainted thoughts, cursed thoughts. But I handled all that mess with Willow. I at least, I think I did.

Well... lets just call it an 'understanding'

I understand that she's pissed as hell that I'm gonna be stickin' around. She understands that I'm still gonna be stickin' around. And we'll both just deal. Yup.

Things are definitely lookin' up.

I hope at least. I hit the bottom tread and the energy that's spiraling around the room almost makes me gasp. I smile at the thought of B gettin' so worked up that she just had to go beat the crap outta something. Its frustration man! All the translating and stuff ended up giving us some real good news, but that actually makes it kinda worse... cause now see, we're ready for the action.

And I'm SO all about the action. But with it still being light out, there's only a few options left for gettin' with the hot and sweaty.

THWAP! THWAP! "Ugh!"

The constant pummeling is intermixed with scattered grunts and mumbled... expletives? Damn, I think she's pissed.

"So fuckin' stupid, ugh!" And I wince, actually feel for the heavy bag.

"Can't believe--ugh! All silent-I'm soooo broody-- raah! Fuckin' ugh! Make--"

THAWP

"Up!" THUMP

"Your!" THWAP

"MIND!!"

She shouts the last part and lays into the bag with a punch so hard it goes flyin' off its chains.

Double damn, I think she's pissed at me. Hmm... wonder if Giles needs any help with the books... No, I can deal with this.

"Gettin' the frustrations out B?" I ask gently, with a smile. Stepping into the room, into her realm.

"Yep." She doesn't even turn around to face me, just steps over the fallen heavy bag, and walks over to the dummy. She starts layin' into it somethin' fierce, and I feel sorry for its plastic blue head.

I know why she's pissed. Mixed signals as usual... All this back and forth stuff must be making her insane. This morning everything is roses then I went all moody detached bitch.

But it wasn't my fault! For once.

Damn, those dreams, just the thought cuts the air cold in my lungs. Red's spell or whatever it was, it fucked me up somethin' serious. Turned and twisted every doubt and reservation I thought was put to rest, everything that I know B saves me from, brought up all that darkness and reminded me exactly what it is I am...

A killer and a fuck up that should be locked up.

No, WAS. Damn it I WAS those things. See, it's still got me all wrong, feelin' so dirty, like that killer-craze is creepin' back under my skin.

I need my light.

"You pissed at me?" I ask her taking a few steps closer. I'm brave, officially within striking distance here. All she's gotta do is turn around.

I shove my hands in my pockets and watch as her back muscles tense and stretch, the sheen of sweat makes her glimmer. I try not to think about that skin covered in blood.

"You could say that." She backhands the dummy.

I'm really no good with this type shit.

"Listen, B, I didn't mean to- " But she cuts me off, spins around so fast, and now she's right in my face

"Didn't mean to what, Faith!?" She's breathing hard, skin flushed and I can almost hear the adrenaline speeding just below the surface. My heart is suddenly pounding. I can't help my

eyes as they flick down to take her in. That tight body wrapped in nothing but a tiny pair of gray shorts and a thin white tank. I lock onto a bead of sweat as it travels down her chest, between her breasts. It disappears and I force my eyes back to meet hers.

I swallow, hard.

And as I stare into her eyes I realize she's not all that pissed. Her eyes actually look... kinda sad. And now my heart is doing something else all together. Like jumpin' up into my throat.

"Buffy..." God I don't know what to say! Its like looking at her just blankets my mind. Fills my head with nothin' but her presence, nothin' but the knowledge of how right it is to be this close to her. How fuckin' wrong it is that she's hurting.

"I just wanna be enough for you." She fills in the silence and even though her whisper was directed at the floor it still feels like she hit me harder than she was going after the dummy... hell maybe I'm the real dummy here?

Damn it she can't think that can she?! That SHE'S not enough?

"You don't really think that, you know it's not true." I cup my hands gently around her face, fingers sinking into the damp strands as they cling to the nape of her neck. Wishing I had the words...I try to convince her with my eyes, she HAS to know!

But she's just shaking her head. Staring at where her hands are clutched in my t-shirt.

"Why are you shutting me out then? Being all distant? I mean, last night, then this morning... in the kitchen, I thought- "

"And you're right B! It was so... it was so perfect" I kiss her forehead, taste the salt, I feel her breath against my ear as she speaks.

"Then tell me what's wrong. Tell me why you can't look at me... haven't said more than three words to me today until now?"

And here is the decision. Whole truth or half. I settle for most.

And its not to protect Willow, and it sure as fuck isn't to protect myself... she already knows what I am. It's to protect B. 'Cause I know how bad it'll hurt her to find out how low her friend got, how easily she can loose someone else over to the darkness. B thought last night was bad, that Red's binge was as deep as it went. Knowin' Willow actually went after me with the voo-doo... that might tare them apart forever.

I just hope this is the right thing... just hope it's enough.

"It was a dream..." I start. And it all comes out. About the rooftop, the Torak, and the knife. I tell her how her eyes melted my soul as the knife slid into her. I tell her about prison, being trapped in that damn cell again. Being so cold inside. I talk about her blood how its sticky warmth mocked me. And I tell her how she walked away, left me alone and desperate.

I tell her how I'm always alone...

I tell all but the source and pray that she can understand.

"Look at me baby." It's spoken softly and I didn't even realize I had closed my eyes. Guess it made it easier. The first thing I see is the tiny frown on her forehead.

"Why didn't you say anything this morning?" She asks finally, and I'm so glad there's no anger there. But what can I say when faced with all that concern? Christ, all that love?

I chose to look at the floor instead, step outta her arms a little, 'cause its just too much ya know?

"I just, its not something I'm used to doin'... the sharing. Never really had anyone to listen, to really even give two shits ya know? Why start now right?"

Ok... fuck. Please tell me I didn't say that. Real adult there, slayer. Why do I always fall back on that? Back on my past... all those old good for shit excuses! How can I ever expect her to understand if I can't even put it to words, can't even tell her how all this just plain terrifies me?!

I watch and feel helpless as she frowns a bit, shakes her head. God why do I even fuckin' bother!?

I try to step further away I gotta get out of here, but she doesn't let me, she doesn't say a word either, just runs her hands softly, slowly across my face.

It's quiets my soul, but makes my heart speed up all at once.

And in this moment, here in this tiny basement, nothin' else even exists. Just me and just her. With the soft rays of afternoon sneaking in through the only window to touch her flushed skin, its like she's glowing in my arms. And I can feel that light every time she touches me. Its melting away all that fear, that disgust that burns like heavy acid in my chest... she frees me from it, and its so beautiful. Her eyes follow her hands and I wish to god I knew what she was lookin' for. I'd give her anything she wants. Can she feel how fast my heart is beatin' right now? Can she feel it?

Her thumbs finally brush across my lips and I can't stop the little gasp it pulls from me. I can't believe how right this feels, how right she just made it.

"I was really worried ya know." She says softly, at last, just a whisper, choosing to ignore my minor freak-out. Her lips brush mine and I gasp again, wrap my arms back around her waist. Relief fills me as our lips part.

"I know." I sigh, I admit. "The funny thing is, I didn't tell you because I DIDN'T want you to worry ya know?"

"Yeah. Funny. I broke the heavy bag and almost decapitated Mr. punch-n-stuff!"

"I'm sorry B. I just... I've always dealt on my own. Just--just don't think you're not enough for me, ok? God, y-you're everything... you know that yeah? Back in the day I could hardly think

of anything else... and now?! Fuck, B do you get it? Really, its like all I could ever- "

I'm really trying to make her see, tell her all that I'm feeling... but it's just so much to feel. And at my ranting babble the pout disappears, replaced by a funny little smile. I feel her hands tighten in my hair and she holds me closer.

She cuts me off

"Faith?"

"huh?"

"Shush." I shut up quick and she kisses my mouth briefly, too briefly. God it's such a soft heat.

"You don't have to hide from me ok? You don't have to deal with stuff like this alone... not anymore. I get you, ok? I love you."

And fuck, I know in my heart that it's true. All of it... she GETS me!

"Yeah, and I'm startin' to get that now." I grin and she smiles, but her eyes are so intense

"Good. Trust it Faith, I need you to trust this, to trust me." It's a low murmur, almost a growl; I feel it rumbled out of her chest and against mine, and then I feel those lips again. A slow pass across my lips, she sucks on the bottom one and I sigh. She's quick to take advantage, slidin' her tongue in deep, wrapping it around mine, and I try to push back, but her mouth is just in total control.

Nobody kisses like B. So aggressive and insistent, like a first kiss... or a last. She always gives me everything she has and demands it right back. So I just give it to her, my control, my heart, my fear my need. It's all in this kiss and it feels like freedom

And I do trust her. I trust this.

It has me shaking, all gasps and sighs... she holds me closer, tighter as she takes it all. With soft plump lips and hot slick tongue... she takes it and keeps it safe. She gives me love in return.

God, her hands feel so good, one in my hair, nails scraping gently against my scalp the other makin' lazy patterns low on my back. Its heaven and I don't ever wanna leave. Even though my lungs are 'bout to burst, even though she's starting to pant against my mouth; even though I can hear those needy whimpers breakin' in my throat, her hands tightening around me, muscles in her arms tremble, slick skin glides across my bare arms.... Fuck I need this.

I pull away, barely a gasp. A second of escape.

But that's it 'cause god...she pulls me back so quick, she's kissin' me again. Harder and so deep it's getting outta control... she's losing control. It feels desperate, like she's desperate for me, it's a need so pure, so unquestioning. She's asking nothing but for me to believe... she's frantic for me to believe... her words, her heart. And I moan as she gives herself to me. It's

messy and rough and I need to feel more of her. So much more...

I want to give her everything, want to give her my heart. I wanna take her how she's taking me. The thought has me on fire.

My hand slips over the clingy damp material of her tank, down to cup the firm curve of her ass. I squeeze and pull her to me tight, she starts suckin' on my tongue and I can feel my knees getting weak. How can she reduce me to this? So wet I'm shakin' with the need, and every deep throb between my legs matches the strokes of her tongue, every eager twitch of my clit comes from the sucking pull of her lips.

I try and push harder into the kiss, press her harder against the wall, let her know exactly where she's pushin' me... where I need this to go... but she whimpers and finally pulls her mouth away. I'm left to gasp against the salty sweet skin of her neck, so hot it almost burns my lips.

I lick up to her ear, feel her shiver. Fuck, I want her so much... I wanna-

"So do you think it means anything?" She asks out of NO WHERE!

I pull back a little, but all I can look at is that mouth, wet and swollen and, God! She can't kiss me like that and then expect me to concentrate!

"What means... huh?" I pant. It's disbelief and awe in equal parts. What happened to the kissing!? I try and lean back in, catch those cherry lips again. My hands are playing at the bottom edge of her shorts... that blurry line between cotton and flesh.

"Baby..." She kinda giggles, chastising a little, and pushes back some, which really doesn't help things here 'cause now I'm looking at the rest of her.

The rest of her that's still dressed in a skimpy tank that's damn near see through!!

But now all I'm holding is her hands. She swings 'em back and forth; she looks nervous, biting that lip.

Fuck, what's happening here?

"B?" I ask, trying to calm it some. Trying to really see her, blinking through the lust-haze. Her eyes are dartin' all over the place.

"The dream, I mean- I wasn't really there this time, so technically it wasn't a 'Slayer' dream, but you ARE a Slayer so I guess every dream is a 'Slayer' dream, but-"

"B, you're makin' me dizzy here." She stops her babble, takes a breath and finally looks at me

"The whole j-jail thing umm, I wouldn't leave you- ya know that right? You trust me not to hurt you? 'Cause things, they're different now right? I mean I know you don't still hate me or anything-I-I just..."

She stops again and I sigh, try my best to look supportive. I stroke her hair and look in her

eyes hoping I don't show all the worry that's rushin' up on me again.

"Just spit it out B."

And she does. Fast.

"What if the dream means that deep down you really still hate me for hurting you and that you want to hurt me back and it'll all go back to being bad with the hating and betrayal and the us NOT being an US anymore!?"

She takes a breath, finally, and I take the pause in the insanity to pull her back to me. I really couldn't stand the distance.

"Baby..." She says again all flirty and I brush my lips over hers again. But just for a sec. I have to tell her somethin' because through it all its obvious she's more than a little worried.

I never thought that SHE would be so insecure about all of this. I thought we established that I was the one with all the reasons to be all about the angst. So I whisper the words in the inches between us, keep her eyes locked with mine. Enough of the bullshit, enough of the hiding...

"The dream didn't mean anything B. Nothin'. Just a lot of old loathing that still haunts me from time to time. And you're helping me through, saving me from all that. Every time you look at me with that smile, every time you kiss me, trust me... You know that right? You know how much I need you? How I've always needed you?"

She smiles and my heart flips. She's blushin' for me. But I know that's not enough. I know what she needs to hear, the words I've been so damn scared of speaking since I let it slip that first night.

"B..." And her eyes are gettin' all big, shiny. She must have figured me out. It makes me smile as I say it.

"Buffy, I love you."

A bead of sweat drips from her ear, splashes on the back of my hand.

"Faith, baby..." she sniffs back the tears, her smile is almost blinding. I say it again, my own voice a little tight.

"I-I love you "

Oh man... wow. Ok, don't freak.

And we just stand there for a moment. Holding each other, feeling everything that's melting around us. I'm trapped in her eyes and it's beautiful custody.

"I love you too." She whispers, sighs such a content sound. "And I'm sorry I kinda freaked, went all doubt-girl on ya." That cute grin is back again, and I feel her arms tighten around my waist.



"Forget it, the freakin' was justified... So we good then?"

"Hmm. I don't know... tell me again?" Oh now she's teasin', not that I mind.

"I love you B." Its getting easier, but still... wow ya know?

"Ok. Now we're good." She says and to prove it, she places a delicate kiss on my shoulder. "Just no more with the bottled up issues ok? I want us to be able to talk about everything."

Her hands are moving slow. All over my back, fleeting caresses down to my ass, then back up. Her fingertips sneak up under my shirt a little. Yeah sure, talk.

"Any time B." I just gotta grin at her, 'cause that spark is back in her eyes. I know what this means. I give her my bedroom eyes, run my tongue across my lip. She can't look anywhere else, those hands still movin'

"So, you feel like talkin' now?" I growl, pressing up against her even more. Oh man that feels good, she's so soft, the heat from her skin infusing me.

"Nope." She tells me, all flirty and that's fuckin' perfect 'cause now I'm gonna just lean in and-  
Suddenly my feet aren't on the floor!

"Fuck! B!" I gasp, not shriek, no way did I shriek. My legs go around her waist on pure instinct. "Put me down!"

"Nope!" She laughs, and it's such a wild, pure and joyful sound as she spins me a couple of times before plopping me down on a low vaulting bench. I don't think I've ever heard her laugh like this, like the light and carefree chime of bells... seen a smile reach so far into her eyes, like its pourin' straight from her soul.

And I realize, in this simple but stunningly beautiful moment, that she's happy. That I made her happy! "Baby..." She says quietly that unbelievable smile making my heart tremble "I want you to know that you're not alone in all this, in the pain. I won't leave you Faith, ever. I promise...ok?"

Everything I ever needed to hear. "Ok..." I tell her 'cause I don't think I can say anything else.

She's grinnin' at me all victorious now, making her eyebrows dance the way I usually do. And I'm catchin' flies. Nothing has ever felt this perfect... and she SO got me. Good thing I love her, the little shit.

"So, all that trainin' got you feeling kinda aggressive B?" I finally recover with a tease, I'm tryin' to regain my pride here! I love how the mood is shifting, how I can almost feel the strength between us, a slow burn that builds with every touch.

She's eyeing me up now, like a kid with a new toy or somethin'... and I'm so glad she's wanting to play. Hard to believe just a few minutes ago she was feelin' all unsure about us.

"It ain't the training F, I just like the thought of sweeping you off your feet." And it almost

sounds predatory!

Ok, I'm liking this side of her I think. She's finally startin' to embrace it.

She's standing so close, between my legs, runnin' her hands up and down my thighs, her nails draggin' over my jeans and I'm gettin' chills.

I can feel this heat radiating off her skin, this power that lies just underneath the surface. It has her muscles tense, anticipating; makin' her shake a little. And she's letting it rule her... letting it drive this moment and trusting me to accept it. I drag my mouth over the perfect column of her neck and feel her groan; whisper my name. My hands slip under that tank, hot damp skin prickles against my fingertips.

"So what's got you so worked up then?" I tease her more, whisper the words right in her ear, keeping that low dangerous rumble in my voice. I wanna see how far she'll take this.

I feel that shiver again, and she answers me by letting our mouths collide, letting her tongue make a wet lazy dance 'round mine before moving on... down my neck, tiny kisses before she sucks the skin hard, and I know she's gotta be marking me somethin' serious. The thought, the feeling of it shoots a thrill through me, and I feel my nipples harden, its almost pain but I love it.

"Jesus...Buffy." My back arches outta pure instinct and she just sucks harder-oh shit- bites a little, teeth pinching my flesh. She brings her hands up, takin' hold of my breasts and teasing me with touches that are barely there. The contrast of her mouth, her touch, its got me spinning.

She pulls her mouth off my neck, eyes locked on what she's doin' to me. Fuck, her eyes... she looks ferial. The spot where marked me throbs, my whole body throbs...

"You're so beautiful." She tells me, a single finger tracing around my right nipple. God that feels so good and when she says it, I almost believe it.

"Unhh... fuck, B...quit teasin'..." I try and arch a bit more, get her to add just a little more pressure. I'm nearly frantic for it. And she must see the desperation on my face; feel the need coming off me because her hands make a quick slide under my top, straight to where I'm aching for her. Her fingers close around points that feel so, so hard. She pinches gently, strokes a little harder and oh fuck-fuck! That's so-- She's kissin' me again and I'm gettin' so wet. My hips jerk seekin' the contact where she's pressed against me, letting her know, letting her feel it.

"God... Buffy, oh god..." I swear she makes me believe. She pinches harder, rolls my nipples between my fingers-shit-- laps at my ear between whispers.

"That good baby? Like this?"

She really doesn't have to ask. She knows.

"Y-yeah. Just like that..." I tell her anyways and she sucks my neck again, presses her self harder between my spread thighs. Fuck, I'm gonna die.

"I can feel you..." She tells me. "Love how you feel" And her voice is like hot, thick liquid sliding all over me, and she grinds a little, just a slow, so insistent push, but it makes all my muscles tense, a quick hard rush up to the edge, it surges through me and it's so jarring it makes me gasp in almost as much surprise as pleasure and...and -- Oh god oh-oh fuck!

"B?!" It's urgent, it's all I can say, my hands clench around her shirt holding on, tryin' to hold back-

God there's no way! But she holds still. So very still 'cause she knows. She knows how easy it is for me, when I'm with her. She lets me gasp against her quiet mouth, thumbs brushing my nipples in time, she's slowing me down. Waitin' for me to pull back, not so close to that point that has me trembling.

"Oh fuck Buffy..." I can hardly breathe

"Not yet baby." A sweet whisper and a knowin' smile, but full of need and my voice is a dark agreement

"Yeah... slow."

It's easier said, 'cause god she almost took me there and my pussy is still throbbing and I really wanna get her outta that shirt, get her outta everything... see everything, touch... My hands sneak their way around to her front, fingers brushing over her stomach. And it's all warm damp skin. I feel her muscles jumpin' beneath by fingertips, I let my palms trace up slow, just the outsides of her breasts...

"Oh yes... yes Faith." Love how she breathes my name against my lips, how she's got one of my legs in her hand, lifting it up to wrap around her waist so she can grind RIGHT against me, oh Jesus, how she's kneading my breasts even harder. I cover her tits and feel her nipples burning against my palms. Her groan is surprised.

I wanna hear it again.

What I hear instead is something distant... something muffled "Buffy? Faith?"

That didn't sound quite right, but I kiss her harder anyway. I push my tongue against the slick warmth of her mouth, all the places I can reach and I just wanna go deeper, drown out whatever noise that's trying to bust through in the periphery, break into our world.

My fingers wrap around her straining nipples and play, teasing, stroking all in time with this kiss that feels so obsessive... fuck nothing else even exists right now.

"Oh god...ugh!" Now that's the sound I wanted to hear, all breath and need. Christ she needs me! I still can't get over it...I feel her wiggle a hand between us, between my legs... oh my god. Now it's my turn to moan to pant light-headed into the kiss, and now in time with the way she's slowly rubbing my pussy through my jeans...

"Buffy...Buffy..." it's so incredible.

"Buffy?"

Shit what IS that?! I got a good idea, but I refuse to believe its true. B doesn't seem to notice..."God, Fai I gotta feel you..."

Yeah, she's too preoccupied with getting my pants open, slippin' her hand inside... fuck, stroking her fingers through my slit, taking her time.

"Baby you're so wet..." It's an amazed whisper, her fingers gliding so slowly, so firmly over my clit and I'm watching her. Watchin' her face as she stares in awe at her hand moving over me, that flush spreading over her skin... it's so damn beautiful. My hips jerk tryin' to keep her pace, tryin' to let her lead this, not to give in to the urge that's thundering through me, demanding me to take what I want, what I need and have her on my terms.

"god I love you..." she whispers it, still watching her fingers slip though me, watching my hips rock in slow time. The length of a finger drags hard over my clit. And I think she knows, she senses what this means for me, to give her more than just my body but my heart, my trust and control.

"mmf...fuck B, love you too" More than I can possibly say right now 'cause fuck, I can't take it... I need her eyes. I pull her face up, catch that dark ocean green a second before our mouths crash back together. My hand slips back down to her ass, squeezing, pulling her impossibly closer. She hisses my name when I pinch her nipple again, a little harder, little rougher. God I love this... love her.

"Want ya so much." Her eyes seem to flash at my words, glimmering fever-bright...she looks so damn wild!

"Yeah? You want me baby? You want this?" That voice was dark, shaky, barely restrained I can't believe how turned on she is... how much hotter its getting me, and her fingers are moving lower, through all the slippery heat that's pouring outta me, swirls just a fingertip around my entrance...so close and god I'm already clenching... Fuck I need her inside me so bad.

"Faith! Buffy!?" Fuck not now... I need this! But I think B must have finally heard, because her hand is slowin' down even more. My clit jumps against her palm, protesting the loss. Oh god I'm dieing here!

I feel the deep breath that shudders from her lungs. "Fuck" she mumbles and that wonderful hand quits movin' all together.

"Not quite." I groan, meet her burning eyes with my own, let my hands trip over her nipples again, reluctant to let go. Man I love how she nibbles her bottom lip, how her lashes flutter a bit... she's so pretty.

"Ya know..." I whisper it, lips teasing her earlobe "There are just too many people in this house... I'm takin' you on vacation when this is all through." I really can't have this becoming a habit, my sanity is fragile enough as it is.

"I'm sorry baby." She sighs but she looks more pissed than sorry at the moment, gives the

door a good death stare. We can both hear the footsteps now, getting closer and closer to our little world.

"Not your fault B..." I catch her eyes again. "hey, love you...kay?"

And that sinister expression disappears like a blink, replaced by the gorgeous light of her smile. She kisses me again, and slides her hand outta my pants, has them all zipped and buttoned just as we hear the basement door creak open.

She's good. Too good damnit, I don't wanna let go of her mouth.

"Buffy!? FAITH?!"

But our lips come apart at the shrill noise coming from the top of the stairs. I try to resign myself to my fate, that I can't have her all to myself... every second of every day, that I can't touch her, kiss her where I want to right now, that I can't shut the world out forever.

"Riley just called he said he found the crystal things and... Oh god they're having sex AGAIN?!"

"What!?" And now Xander's trying to squeeze through the doorway too.

Shit, just keeps getting better. I sigh, slip my hands outta B's top, and just let my arms rest on her shoulders as I try to get a grip.

It ain't easy.

Not with all the tension that I can still feel in her body, with that thick heady scent of skin and sex hanging in the air, with how B's lips are resting like a feather against that spot where she marked me... reminding me how good it all felt.

Yeah, definitely not easy.

"Anya, we are not having sex!" Buffy shouts but its pretty much muffled against my shoulder. She's hugging me tight, not looking at them yet. I'm guessing she needs a sec to calm down too.

"Not yet." Whispered just for her, and she pinches me!

"Anya honey, lets just give them some privacy..." Xander starts ushering his girl back up the stairs. Strangely, he's takin' his sweet time leaving.

"OW! An, I thought we agreed you'd switch to the other arm!" Anya's not stupid. She smacked him a good one that time.

Ugh, enough already.

"Oh for fuck sake chill Xand, no free show alright. There's nothin' to see anyways." I sigh. I feel B give me a discrete kiss on the shoulder her face was hidden in before she steps away.

There's the pout. I'm sure mine is matching. Damn her eyes look so dark...

"Nice hickey ya got there, Faith." Xander smirks and gets the glare from all three of us. I see the muscles in B's arms tense, the one in her jaw jump and I know she's grinding her teeth.

"Look Xander- "

"So what were you saying before Anya?" I hop off the bench, covering how weak in the knees I feel with a slow stretch, Xan will never know how close he just came to death...

Yup, I'm a real hero. A suffering hero, damn I'm surprised I can even walk!

"Oh !" Anya remembers her purpose at last "Riley called. He said he was able to find the two crystals."

"This is good, time for action." I say. Finally, best to settle for slayage variety if it's all I can get. I glance over at B, and damn, she's still lookin' all sexy and flushed, even more now that she's not just horny but a little pissed too...

"Yes! And Giles said that once you two finish having sex we can get ready to meet him for patrol."

"We weren't- "

"Sounds like a good plan. Hopefully we'll be able to take out more of those pesky Toraks, huh B?"

"Right. Then maybe I can get that other type of 'action', right F?" She smirks and smacks me on the ASS!, "I'm gonna grab a shower!" She hollers over her shoulder and makes her way quickly up the stairs, leaving two of us staring after her with our mouths hangin' open, and Anya nodding in approval.

"Yes! I like the way Buffy thinks. She understands me!"

Damn right demon girl and she understands me too. Read my fuckin' mind even...I'm definitely liking this side of B!

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A while later they had all situated themselves about the living room, waiting for the arrival of the final member of the hunting party. Casual conversation wasn't forced, but not exactly easy in its flow. Things weren't perfect after all and Faith had no illusions.

But there was still the feeling of progress. And she was learning patience. It was almost easy to endure all the cautious glances from Giles and Xander and Anya, especially when mixed with happy ones from Tara, the ones so full of love from B.

What Faith couldn't figure was the eyes of the other witch. The one that had haunted her, afflicted and violated her dreams. There was still a lot of distrust there. On both their parts. Still too much hurt to ever hope to fix so quickly. But the blind hate was gone; all that icy

venom seemed to have melted.

Maybe it had something to do with the way everyone was also looking at Willow the same way they looked Faith. Wary, and even a little suspicious. Red's binge last night hadn't been pretty.

It had been pretty fuckin' scary. And the rest of the scoobs didn't even know the half of it.

And now Red and Tara were speaking so softly to each other, the way their eyes would hold it looked like words weren't even necessary. Perhaps it was how Faith could almost feel the strength, the courage being interchanged.

It gave her an intense and sudden hope, for Willow, and for all of them. It made her take in a quick breath, squeeze Buffy's hand the second before the witch turned from Tara to face the group.

"Umm guys?" Willow spoke softly to everyone, held Faith's eyes for a moment as she stood.

The conversation had been primarily focused on the finest films of the 80's. Buffy had been holding firm to all those 'Breakfast Club' type movies, while Faith had been attempting to explain sociopolitical importance behind The Wall... She was getting a lot of blank stares, but it was Pink Floyd for fucks sake! But all that had come to a halt, the mood taking an instant turn to the somber.

"What's up Wills?" Buffy spoke, and it was obvious to Faith that she was feeling some of the hope too, but more of the fear.

"Not to get everyone all with the solemn, but I just wanted to say something... to all of you." The girl that was so powerful, capable of things she couldn't even quite perceive, looked frail at that moment.

"Go on Red." And Faith knew, she knew what this moment was like, what it could so easily become. Her own was just a few nights ago after all. And despite all the bad blood, all the pain between them she didn't want the script to be the same. "It's no pressure yeah?"

Willow's eyes looked grateful, and Faith was glad that she understood. She wouldn't forget their agreement. As long as Willow did her part.

"I wanted to apologize, to everyone."

"For your cracked-out of your mind act last night?" Xander speaks, and it's cold, so cold from the boy so usually full of the good times and jokes.

"Right, that." Willow forgave him with a smile. It was clear that anger was born out of fear, out of concern.

"I've been in a really stressful place lately." The words floated on a sigh. "We all have, and not just with this bad guy. It's way more. I guess... w-what I'm trying to say is that things are changing...." Willow's eyes landed on Faith again, they looked sad.

"A lot. And its all been happening so fast and I guess the umm... the magic? It helps me deal."

"Will you gotta know-" He starts but Willow held up her hand, cut him off.

"Yeah I do know Xander, I've known this whole time... but it was easier than all the real. I just wanted to let everyone know I'm done with it. All the hard stuff, the dark stuff? It sends me to a place that I hate, that makes me do things, awful hurtful things. And I'm sorry."

The silence was oppressively thick for about five seconds. Until Buffy rose from her spot on the sofa and wrapped her best friend in a hug. Xander quickly followed suit.

"We're here to help you through this Wills, whatever you need, ok?" Buffy's muffled words came from the midst of the embrace.

"You bet. Anything, anytime." And Xander echoed the sentiment.

"This is all very touching..." Anya sniffed at the site, eyes teary. "Better than a movie of the week!"

Faith for her part remained silent. Glad to see this start, seeing this first step she knew all too well. But she remained skeptical. Some things you just have to see to believe, and the truth of this moment could only be revealed through time.

Time, however it proved, was not something the group had much of. Before further things could be said, more amends extended, the front door opened, and the sharp hot beams of a setting sun followed a soldier over the threshold.

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## Chapter 23

They were packing things up. Weapons of sharp swords and combusting guns. No one spoke, because there was nothing more to say, only work to be done now. When Riley had first arrived the disposition had shifted, morphed and churned into something far more grave.

The undercurrent of determination was nearly palpable.

He had shown them all the beautiful elements that would prove to be their salvation; that would defeat this latest threat to their world. It was agreed that Giles would keep the crystals. The full moon was still several nights away after all, and this patrol was a hunting expedition.

After the pretty rocks had been thoroughly admired Buffy it seemed, had been infused by a new resolve. Faith had felt it too. It was a serious and sure knowledge that it was time to fight... it was time to win. She felt it in her bones and beyond, to the very core of her being. Faith's eyes couldn't look at anything else as B stood and began to pace.

She wore the role of the leader like a second skin, the way she commanded attention, accord, it was clear the Slayer was in charge.



"We've got four nights now guys." Buffy had spoken to the tight bundle vigilantes. "Four nights until the final show, until the Ancient wakes, and we've got a totally unknown amount of Toraks protecting her."

"According to all that we've researched the Ancient once held authority over an army of these primitive vampires." Giles glasses had come off; he was rubbing his brow, it was a move Faith recognized from back in the day. It showed his uncertainty, his inability to reconcile all that he knew with what stood before him. A small, fragile looking girl, with the weight of so many lives on her shoulders.

But Faith couldn't share that sentiment. Because she knew the power, the strength that rushed hard and relentless just below the surface... she felt it. And it didn't only live in Buffy anymore. It was the chosen TWO now, and it was time she took her place in that title.

"Right, but it was thought that most of these things had died off right? Over the ages?" Faith made her way over to Buffy as she spoke. Stood by her side, every bit as much the Slayer as Buffy was. "So far we've only come across few of these things and there can't be a whole 'army' hiding out in that cave right?"

"Those caves can go for miles under ground, Faith." Riley had spoken in that tone of casual confidence; that ever present grin so very certain. It put Faith's teeth on edge because it felt like a lie.

"Right, but Tara, help me out here?" Faith spoke to the witch but kept her eyes trained on the soldier, onyx black and harder than any stone, the contempt was evident.

Riley leaned back on the sofa, crossed his arms over his chest.

"I think Faith may have a point. The reason why no one's ever seen one of these Toraks until now is because there just aren't that many of them. I-I mean last night, at the cave I sensed lots, but not an army."

Tara smiled at Faith, Faith grinned at Riley, and this time it was satisfaction in her eyes. The former spy didn't blink, at least not at first. It wasn't until B spoke that his expression faltered.

"I think Faith's right." Yeah those words shut that smile down quick. Faith had to try hard to keep hers from growing... too much

But Buffy took her hand then and Faith couldn't help but turn her eyes away from the man in the corner... to look at her love. "I don't think there are more of these bastards than we all can handle. So I say, in the last nights we have left we try and dust as many as we fuckin' can!"

"Hell yeah!" She couldn't hold back her grin now, despite the gravity of the prospect. B sounded like she was up for kicking major ass! The slightly surprised expression of the scoobs, at B's liberal use of expletives was quite the trip too.

Farm boy didn't look pleased in the least! It was so fuckin' great!

"So we load up on weapons, you guys Xander and Riley can do the dusting and Tara can go to help with any magic that might be useful." Willow suggested the line up, tentatively. "And I

can stay here, help Giles with the research and- "

"Ya know Red, why don't you come along too. If we need the major mo-jo, I'm guessing you'd be the go to girl." Faith put on her most encouraging face. She didn't want Willow to hide from herself, she wanted the witch to face it, to own it, to do it right.

"No offence T."

"None taken." Faith was assured by Tara's smile. But disappointed by the panic that started to wash across Willow's face at the mere prospect.

"That's a great idea!" Buffy agreed, and Willow's eyes only got bigger

"No! No I-I can't I might... I-I mean no more dark stuff remember!? Just had this conversation?"

"We know Red, and that ain't what we're asking for."

"Yeah Wills. All we need is for you to be the all powerful... well, you." Both Slayers tried for calming, but the frantic head shaking continued.

"I don't know if I can!! What if I-"

"Honey..." And it only took one word, spoken in that tone that was so much more than soothing with those eyes that told of so much more than reassurance. One word from the right person. From Tara.

The calm that slid over the red-head was visible and Faith stood entranced as the two witches' eyes met, a quick, silent moment but a profound exchange. This wasn't something she was used to. Seeing love and strength so willingly given, trust so eagerly shared. It made her kind of uneasy, a bit unsure if she'd ever be good enough, pure enough to walk in such a light.

And she wondered if her eyes got that bright when she looked at B.

"Ok so..." Willow spoke at last facing the rest of the group once again, her confidence back in place "Tara will stay, and I'll go... so, we ready to go?"

"Yeah lets gather up the goods. Its only a few 'till sundown." Buffy agreed and Faith felt her squeeze her hand, felt those eyes on her again and she couldn't look anywhere else. And she thought about that all too short time in the basement, about how the sound B's laugh could fill up her soul, how totally at peace she looked when Faith had finally found the words...

"You all right there Faith, you look a little spacey." She felt another squeeze and this time a playful nudge from the girl that held her captivated. Was she all right? Her stomach was in knots her heart was thumping against her ribs, they were about to throw down something major and then after she was probably gonna get some REAL action later on!

Hell yeah she was all right!

"I'm fuckin' perfect!"

"Bet your ass you are." And she felt better than perfect from how Buffy was grinning at her.

"You'd bet my ass B?!" It only took half a second for her eyes to droop a little, to take on that smoky 'come and get it' look. It was so easy when she was looking at the other slayer.

So easy when B was leaning just a little closer.

"Well, maybe if- "

"Guys! Hold the PDA, for the sake of Giles' British composure at least?" Xander cut in, detouring what was sure to be some inappropriate groping if Faith had anything say about it. But G-man was looking awful red.

"Umm err... quite right. Perhaps you all should prepare to ahh... depart for the evening. I think starting early would- "

"Can I speak with you a minute first? Please?" Faith turned her attention from her former watcher as the soldier oh so politely interrupted him. And that wonderful happy-buzz she felt evaporated. She hated the way he let his gaze slip over her, so dismissive, and then cling to Buffy's form like a leach. Just looking at him made something in her tense, made that dark thread that was so eager, shout... demand to be heard.

She let go of Buffy's hand, took a few steps across the room. Steel-toed boots made menacing thumps on the hardwood.

Faith loved that sound. More, she loved that everyone knew what it meant.

"Somethin' 'bout the patrol soldier boy?"

"No, actually. Its not." Riley stood, crossed his arms across his massive chest, never losing that patronizing expression. Faith wanted to slap him, hard, maybe into another time zone.

Her pace had progressed, setting her inches from the boy with the casual smile that was so infuriating, but her hand didn't even have a moment to clench.

"Well then I don't see- "

She felt a soothing touch, warm circles on the small of her back, that gentle current sweeping all thoughts aggression so far away.

"Faith...." And now, a look from HER girl. It came in the form of an eye roll. "Its ok... ok?"

B smiled, gave her another little nudge with her shoulder, and Faith had to grin a little at herself, at her own impulses. Christ could she ever doubt what they had?

"Yeah, it's cool B." She leaned in, placed a quick kiss on Buffy's cheek. More to see that dark shadow pass over Riley's eyes than for her own reassurance. Because now she had no doubts about Buffy's feelings... it was Riley she didn't trust.

"Back in a sec"

And Faith watched her girlfriend go. Watched as she was followed by her former lover. She watched and she ignored that nagging voice in the back of her mind. The one telling her that something was off. Something that tickled and shifted in the fringes of her mind, that place driven by instinct.

She ignored it. Made herself ignore it, and turned instead to the weapons chest. She was in the mood for the biggest fuckin' sword they had.

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Buffy was glowing. All bright eyes and flushed rose skin. Even with the prospect of a coming battle. With violence and possible death just minutes and a short walk away, Buffy was still shining like nothing he had never seen.

The sight enchanted him... but then he remembered the cause. He thought of that stark, deep red bruise that Faith was wearing like a fucking medal. He knew who put it there.

Riley tasted bile, far back in his throat.

The thought of his Buffy, behaving in such a way. Like a wanton, corrupted whore. Like that bitch she was fucking. And fucking is all it had to be, right? Buffy couldn't possibly fall in love with something like Faith. Something so different from himself.

When they were together Buffy had never left a mark on him, never behaved so crudely like some filthy slut. She was so proper and reserved. Restrained.

His girl.

Riley let their past times together slip through his mind, a caressing mist of reminiscence. Everything that he wanted. Not this twisted perversion Buffy had somehow fallen into.

What was up with this whole dyke thing anyways! Faith had not only stolen what was his, she had managed to change her! The bitch's influence was so strong that it had taken only a few days!!

It's not like anything like this could have existed in his Buffy before. No, Faith was just that dangerous. To Riley, the quickness with which all this had happened was just further proof that what he had planned was so very right.

And he would make his Buffy right again. But first he had to be absolutely sure.

"So what did you want to talk to me about?" Buffy spun to face him, all bouncy and joyful. Had she ever smiled this much?

It wasn't real, it couldn't be.

"I just, I wanted to make sure you were doing ok? Ya know, with everything going on. The prophecy, Willow and the magic ... us taking a break. We haven't really had a chance to talk after... ya know"

He couldn't bring himself to say it. Even mention that conversation... over the god-damned

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phone! Just the thought brought that ripping sensation back to his chest. How could she have done that to him? She LIED to him! And for so long, she knew he wanted forever he would always talk about the plans he had for them... and she'd never said a word. Never lead him to believe that she wanted anything other than the same...

Bitch.

"I'm fine, really..." Buffy took a step forward, pretty hazel eyes nothing but concern. She placed a delicate hand on his forearm. The sudden heat was a firecracker beneath his skin.

"But Riley, are YOU ok..."

Riley grinned. No, but he would be.

"I mean, you know it's not just 'a break' with us right?" She said it so kindly, big eyes all warm and gentle... he couldn't help but think how frail her neck looked at that moment, how just one of his hands could-

Soon.

"I know Buffy, and I'm fine with that. I just want you to be happy, whatever that means." It was well practiced, and he would have been able to convince himself had she not looked so eager...

"Really?!" Looked so fucking happy...

Why did her eyes keep cutting to the doorway?

This couldn't be real... he would show her what happy really meant.

"You bet! So ah... you and Faith then?" That blush was revolting... did he ever make her blush like that? Had there ever been a thought about him, that when fleetingly passed through her mind, made her skin flush, her eyes brighten? Made that bubbling effervescence that was such an inherent part of her break free in such a stunning display.

The sight made him sick. Fucking slut.

"Yeah, Riley... I-I just." The smile was splitting her face, splitting his heart. "I've never felt this way. Back when she first came to Sunnydale I tried so damn hard to fight it, to deny it ya know? But she's just... she's like this force, this wicked energy. And she fills me with it! She just makes me FEEL Riley, and... and its love, sh-she loves me... and its just so-when she kisses me I just-"

No more. Never, ever again.

"Ok, ok Buff, I get it, no need for the details." Riley gave his best smile and was a bit surprised at the contrast between his thoughts and his outward appearance. But he couldn't stand to hear any more he had his answers

'Wicked energy'? Christ Buffy was even starting to sound like Faith, so foul and repulsive. It

was a good thing the Council wanted to act so quickly. No telling what could happen to his girl if they were to wait much longer.

And love? Please. Faith didn't know love, and apparently neither did Buffy. Hadn't he shown her? After all this time she still couldn't see how much he adored her, after all he'd given; all he'd sacrificed!

He'd have to try harder. He'd have to love her harder.

"So you're ok with this? Really?" He couldn't believe she had the audacity to even ask, to wear those pouty lips for anybody but him. Yeah, Riley had all the proof he needed.

"Absolutely"

It was time to fix this.

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This wasn't right.

The words pounded through the dark slayer's mind in time with her heavy footsteps. This wasn't a good night for hunting. It was as if the air itself had sensed her tension, her unease. It had thickened; laid itself low and heavy amongst the tombstones. It had shrouded that feeling of surety, of confidence she'd felt as they all had left the house.

But it was more than just the air it was a restless presence that stirred and reached to the marrow, made her skin jump, her muscles burn in anticipation of more than just a fight.

And it didn't make sense!! It had crept up on her slow, the nearer they got to the cemetery the more her anxiety would increase, and she couldn't understand the cause. It made her briefly consider her sanity... only briefly. Faith knew the mystery of evil was too deep to be illuminated by the light of reason. This feeling had nothing to do with the rational... it was instinct, and her gut was sensing something foul.

Faith gripped the cool steel of her hand axe, the ridges pressing into her palm was a comfort. She had opted for the more practical after her girl had returned from her little chat with the Marine.

Buffy had taken one look at the insanely excessive, ornate Samurai she'd been waving around and gave her the patented eyebrow. Faith had to admit the sword had been a bit much, besides this axe would dust 'em just was well. But Faith felt like she needed the security, the extra protection, even if it was only psychological.

They had all approached the gates in silence, Shady Pines looking every bit as eerie as it usually did.

Riley had seemed extra eager to get to the action. He was walking quickly, even slightly ahead of Buffy and herself. It was a demeanor that had Faith instantly cautious. No one else seemed to notice however, so she figured she was probably being paranoid, that it was all part of that greater sense of foreboding.

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Splitting up had been a good idea at least. They could cover more ground this way. And so what if it had been the Farm boy's idea and not her own? Whatever gets the job done.

"I definitely think we should have a Slayer in each group." He had said, leaning against somebody's grave. With that big gun thrown over his shoulder, he was the picture casual brutality. But no one could disagree.

"Right, and a flame thrower too." B had picked up and everyone nodded again.

"So Xander can go with Willow and Faith and-" Riley had started again and Faith could already see where this was headed. Army boy wanted some more one on one time with her girl. Faith wasn't about to have that. Not with the way he was looking at her... not with this feeling she had burning in her gut.

It was a bad night for all of this.

"Ya know... why don't both Xander and Riley come with me? Red's got her own brand of fire power if you guys need it, right?" She had locked her eyes with B, prayed for some of that silent communication stuff. Worked for the witches...

Buffy just tilted her head and frowned at her. Shit.

"Fai... I don't think Willow can, ya know..." And B had made a little gesture, not sure if her thoughts should be spoken, but the witch had reassured them all with that quirky grin

"No, its Ok Buff! I can handle a little flamey goodness without getting all black eyed girl."

And that had decided it. Faith had expected Riley to be a bit more upset, to lodge some type of protest, but none came.

Just that cold hard set of his jaw.

Faith had watched as Buffy and Willow turned, making their way to the north half of the cemetery. It was agreed they would meet later at the cave, and already Faith couldn't wait until that moment. A conclusion to this hunt, to this patrol. She just wanted this night to be over; wanted to crawl into B's arms and find that haven that was just the two of them... shut the world out again if just for a while.

Buffy had thrown a wink at her over her shoulder, and it had alleviated that hard bubble of doom that rested in her chest. Faith turned with a smile and led the way for her group. She felt better about this arrangement at least. As long as B was nowhere near the man that was currently marching along beside her.

Maybe the night wouldn't be too bad after all.

But then Riley opened his fucking mouth.

"So Faith, how's life on the outside?" He kept his stare straight ahead his expression void of the rancor that was so evident in his tone, and Faith couldn't believe her ears.

She stopped dead in her tracks.

"What did you just say to me?!"

"Guys! Can we not do this? Please?" Xander moved quickly. Jumping between the two of them. "We have a job to do here. Can you both just leave it for now?"

"I was just making conversation..." It was false innocence in his smirk.

"Not another word farm-boy." Faith had hissed through gritted teeth, a tone that she hadn't allowed herself in years. Riley's ever-present grin had faltered, and an instant of apprehension flickered in his eyes and to Faith, it felt good... so good that it worried her. But not enough to keep her from clenching her fist, from taking a threatening step closer, letting that dark warmth flow through her veins, letting it speed her heart rate.

Yeah, it felt damn good. A sneer spread over her mouth, a deep red promise of violence, of pain.

She loved how Riley took a step back. She wanted to break him. Who the hell did he think he was anyways to judge her, to look at her with those disdainful eyes? Faith had seen all the looks, the sidelong glances at her and B and yeah, maybe he had a right to be pissed, but Buffy had made her decision and he would have to live with that...

"Oh you feeling some of those murderous impulses now, Faith?" he sounded entirely too sure of himself... maybe he DIDN'T have to live with it.

Another menacing step brought her closer; she felt her hand spasm around her axe

"Actually, now that ya mention it-"

"Faith! Both of you, no more got it?!" And Xander had been more assertive than Faith thought possible. Bold enough to step in front of her, to place a hand on her shoulder; catch her stone cold eyes with his pleading ones. It made her pause, take a calming breath that did nothing to quiet her rage. She turned from them both and continued on.

After that they had fallen into a rigid silence. They fought a few newbie vamps, none taking more than a few minutes to dust. Faith was seething the entire time, the quick hard fights doing nothing to dispel her anger, only causing it to fester.

She couldn't believe the soldier's nerve, but more, she couldn't believe her own reaction to it, how she had been so quick to embrace that dark slide that wanted to carry her away. These thoughts were still plaguing her as they passed a series of hulking mausoleums.

The thick fog was broken by a low growl. Faith froze.

"You hear that?" Xander whispered and had raised his gun towards the menacing noise, which was unfortunate since the attack came from the opposite direction.

It was a sudden flurry of chaos, a creature bursting from the shadows faster than any of them



could perceive. Faith spun around just in time to see the Torak slam into Xander.

"No!!" She shouted even though she knew it was too late, but her feet had wings, and she was flying, leaping through the murky air to deliver a powerful strike to the dead thing's head. It hit the ground the same time Xander did.

"We got two more!" She heard Riley shout on the fringe of her senses as her fist connected over and over, the thing's face exploding in a ghastly mess. Faith brought her axe down and for a moment the only sound was the beautiful crackle of a combusting soulless life.

Faith wanted to relish in her victory, in the ecstasy that rushed through her, but she knew there was no time.

"Xander!" she ran over to the fallen boy. There was a large lump forming at his temple, thankfully that seemed to be the extent of the damage. But he was still out cold.

"Slayer! A little help here!?" Riley hollered attempting to fight off two of those awful things. He was backing up, couldn't get any kind of room to fire off a shot.

Faith let her axe fly, a precision strike that landed square in one of the creature's chest. It gave the soldier just enough time to light both of them up in a hot orange radiance of flames and ash and screams.

Faith stood as the dust settled.

"How bad is it?" Riley asked and Xander groaned as if to answer.

"He'll be alright, we need to get him outta here though, find B and Red. We should be pretty close to the cave by now."

"Right, we can carry him, grab his arms." He said making a move towards Xander's feet. And Faith knelt down again, just slowly stroked the dark curls from the fallen boy's brow... his skin was a little damp. She heard the thump, the rattle of a gun hitting the ground, whisper soft brush of heavy boots on grass, and the wind, sudden and cool, no... chilling. The layered reverberation of thunder made the ground quiver, and something in Faith's chest clenched tight in resistance; that feeling again, a white-hot rush, intense pulse of adrenaline sharp and piercing and her muscles burned with it, her breath held, frozen in her lungs and something was WRONG!

She felt the stab, an instant before she could turn. It was hot focused pain in the back of her shoulder.

"What the fuck!" She stood, faced that smile that was so much more than victorious. Electric blue vines lit the sky for an instant, the crash chasing a heartbeat behind, and Faith knew what evil was.

Something inside of her started to sink.

She threw the punch anyway, a backhand that connected with his jaw, it should have sent him airborne! Riley only turned his head, didn't even take a step back. He was smiling through his

split lip as his eyes made a slow trip over her body.

"That the best you can do?"

And Faith experienced the wash almost immediately, like something sick crawling inside her, it was spreading; melting away her strength, her power; everything she knew was the Slayer being swept away.

Weak and dizzy, she staggered towards him.

"What the fuck did you do to me!"

Her voice broke, and this time, Riley held his ground.

"What should have been done a while ago, putting down the rabid bitch." He chuckled, tilted his head as he watched her sway, like a twisted child pulling the wings from a fly.

Without conscience, without empathy; incurably sociopathic.

Panic began to sweep over Faith as his words began to sink in, as she met those dead-crazy eyes... as more of her strength began to seep from her being. And it HURT... it burned through every inch of her, like getting shot slowly... all the shock, the power of the impact; the singe and explosion of the violation, stretched out over an eternity.

She tried to reach up; pull the wretched needle from her shoulder, but her arm felt numb, she could see her hands shaking. She felt sick, dizzy; her legs were collapsing...

"How ya feeling there killer?" He grinned as she fell to her knees.

The wet grass was cold.

"You son of a bitch!" It hissed from her lips, as the ripping pain seemed to double with each passing second, her hands clenched in the soggy earth, she tried to breathe through, focus on any thing but the pain... but God it hurt so bad, she was being torn apart.

"Aww, now that's not very nice!" He was grinning as his fist connected hard and suddenly with her face, and Faith's world swam.

"You think you can just come back here?" He hit her again, snapping her head back. It hurt so much more than it should. "Take what's mine, TOUCH what was mine?! Ruin everything I had planned!!?" A swift kick to her ribs and Faith was laid out on her back, staring up into his manic eyes. She could taste blood in her throat, feel it rolling down the side of her face.

"You lose bitch." And his foot had risen once more, poised to deliver yet another blow to her frail body when they both heard the growl... a haunting rumble that resonated the desperate strings of terror in Faith's soul. And barely a second to process before it was followed by the vile, wet bursting sound of flesh being ruptured.

Faith's vision was going hazy but she could still clearly see the gnarled claws that now projected from the army man's chest, could still see the deep red that poured from the gaping

wound like a fountain exploding.

This couldn't be happening...

Thick splashes rained down on her face like hell's christening and the air roared with distant thunder again.

She managed to roll out of the way as his body began to fall. She got to her knees; began to crawl... her arms felt like they were boiling... god what had he done to her! What had happened to the fuckin' gun? Where the hell was B!? She couldn't die here. Not like this, not without seeing her again.

Riley was screamin' and it sounded miles away, her hand closed around the gun at last, she needed both to lift it, all her strength and she could hardly keep it steady. The things mouth was dripping red, eyes a flaming yellow. It lunged; Faith pulled the trigger and a billowing riot of heat and ash burst around her.

The settling dust burned her already straining lungs. Everything was starting to spin.

"Oh god! Oh god! Somebody!!!" Riley's voice was breaking over the words; he sounded like he was choking, drowning. Faith crawled unsteadily to where his prone body lay. What she saw was almost enough to have her giving in to swimming pain in her head.

His chest was almost completely busted open. Gouges so deep that Faith couldn't ever imagine them being closed, were glistening and nebulous in the scarce light, the thick pool seeped, slow-overflowing from his body...

He was breathing hard, sweating, crying.

"Fuck, Riley...oh my god..." Looking at the morbid spectacle, feeling her energy fading fast, she had never felt more helpless.

Too much blood! A sticky hand grabbed her arm, she flashed back to her dream the night before, the sadness in Buffy's eyes... to a filthy alley and a man she didn't know with eyes that were so afraid.

"Not again, no fuckin way...please!"

To a shitty apartment where a woman gasped for breath and with desperate eyes begged forgiveness from a nine yearold.

"No, no more!!" She tried to jerk away, but she was weaker than a dieing boy.

Those were Riley's eyes now. No longer filled with rage, just fear and knowing. Faith started to shake. The blood was on her hands... all over her hands.

"Help... help me Faith...please, ple-" His plea was broken by violent hacking coughs.

"I-I can't... I don't know!" Tears flooded her eyes along with a swelling black void. She tried so hard to fight both; she was failing.

"Please..." blood gurgled up from his lips, spilled across his ashen cheeks. Oh god he was gonna die, and there was nothing Faith could do to stop it.

She wanted to hate him for what he'd done, for this deafening roar that was filling her head and how he'd brought this on himself. But she couldn't, because now, laid out in her arms, the man she'd detested was nothing more than his own frail mortality.

"I'm sorry I... Riley I'm -"

"Faith?!" And she hadn't even heard them coming, hadn't felt that wonderful sensation that always preceded B's presence. Her entire body swayed as she tried to turn, she couldn't tell where they were coming from....

Were they even here at all?!

Her mind was a blur, a haze of the injection and the shock and the pain. Markers of the dead were floating, zooming in and out of her perception like some LSD inspired hallucination.

"Buffy... I-I-"

"Wha-what the hell happened?!" and Buffy was suddenly beside her.

"Oh my god, Xander?!" And Red was coming too. "Faith what did you do?!"

"I didn't... it was-I tried and-" She was blank, complete and total. She took in the scene around her, realizing what they must be seeing. Xander knocked out, and she was kneeling over the body of a dead man, covered in his blood.

Willow's eyes were getting black. B's were wide, devastated. Faith started shaking.

"What did you do, Faith!?" And that voice...that dark hollow echo from her nightmare.

"Willow, wait! Just wait a sec!" Buffy dropped to her knees in the muddy grass. She had looked unbelieving at Riley's glassy lifeless eyes, then looked to Faith's crying ones.

"Oh god... Faith what happened, what's going on?!" Buffy stroked a cautious hand over Faith's face, wiping at the tears, the blood. Faith could do nothing but collapse into her arms.

"I-I... can't feel you B. Fuck I-I can't... So tired"

"Baby I need you to clam down, what's wrong with you?" Buffy's face kept going in and out of focus, she sounded so far away; she sounded so afraid.

"It hurts..." Voice raw, she just wanted to rest.

"Where? Did the Toraks?" B's hands were moving gently all over her looking for the source of the pain "Jesus Faith? Talk to me please!"

"In my back..."

"What!?" And she felt the sting, the syringe being pulled from her flesh "Oh god... oh my god!! What the hell is this?! How-"

"Riley... couldn't stop... couldn't help 'em B." Faith let her eyes slip closed... it was too hard keeping them open... "mm tired..."

"No! Faith! Baby, open your eyes!" And Faith wanted to, she really did... "Please just look at me..."

And she wanted to quiet that burgeoning thread of panic that rang so clearly in her voice... she wanted to hear B laugh again.

"Don't cry...so sorry" Faith whispered, and wanted so bad to wipe the moisture that was pouring down Buffy's face, but she couldn't lift her arms anymore... it all felt so numb.

"B...my arms, they're gone..." She couldn't make sense of it, she could still feel the blood on her hands, sticky as it cooled in the night air, but the dark cloud that her mind had become dulled even that terrible sensation.

"Shit...what happened..." More voices fading in now, a groan, it sounded like Xander... was Xander ok? "Oh my god..."

"Buffy, we need to get her out of here. More Toraks could be coming." Red's blurry face came into view.

"B... so much blood...won't come off" And Faith tried to sit, but the pain was so intense it took the breath from her lungs, made those inky blotches burst from the corners of her sight.

"Baby hold still! Fuck, oh fuck! Wills she's burning up! What's wrong with her!? She's shaking so bad!!" The panicked tremble of Buffy's voice melded with a distant rumble... a growl.

"Giles will know what to do, but we gotta move... now!"

"What about Riley? Is there any chance..." Somebody asked.

"He-he's gone..." Came the reply. Oh god not again... another one.

"Baby hold on... we're... we're gonna get you help..." Help? No, she was no good at that so many had died at her hand, because of her... this was just another.

"Couldn't save 'em B... 'mm sorry, so fucked up"

"Shhh don't think about that! Just-hang on." Faith could feel herself being lifted. Was she flying? Was this it!? Was she dieing!? Please, not yet.

"Buffy... B lisnn ta me." The world was bouncing a little. Why was B breathing so hard?

"Just hang on baby, stay awake for me ok?" Buffy panted and Faith could just make out those

beautiful eyes, poor B thought she was just gonna take a nap. She had to tell her, just once... had to make sure she knew

"love you... you know right? B...I-"

It was all she wanted and was thankful she had one last chance to say it. Glad she could see that smile, hear the whispered "I know..."

And her world faded away to darkness but Faith was held by her light.

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### Chapter 24

This was certainly interesting. A new twist if you will. He stood over the abandoned body of a so-called soldier and watched as the new speckles of rain dotted the syrupy puddles as it spread over the ground. It would be washed away soon. No one would know of what happened this night.

One less thing that needed to be done. He smirked, at the fortune of nature; it was blend of amusement and disgust.

"Bloody useless." He chastised, but Riley only stared back in silence. A fly landed on his left cheek and the Councilman sighed, flicked the ever-present cigarette somewhere near the dead boy's ear and pulled a cell phone from his pocket.

"We have a situation." He paused, rolled his eyes at the clipped outrage that echoed across the wire. "No nothing that severe, our soldier apparently wasn't up to the task... He did however manage to inject the rogue."

The rain began to beat a little harder and the Englishman turned from the eviscerated body of his former collaborator. He listened for a few moments, pulled the worn black leather tighter across his gaunt frame.

Heavy steps beat a splashing pace away from the scene, a new strategy already forming; the fallen tool already dismissed.

"Don't be ridiculous there is still plenty of time. Send a team. We'll need to make a trip to the Summer's residence for retrieval." After another few moments he sighed again, snapping the tiny device shut he began making his way through the maze of graves and tombs.

"But first, I'm going to need a new puppet." He stopped at the street, watched the sky streak with light for a hot and luminous second then turned in the direction of downtown. It was time to visit an old friend. "If you want something done right..."

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It's been more than a day... and I'm watching my second sunrise without her. Sitting on this the roof of this ancient tomb, I feel as cold, as lifeless as the stone beneath me. That's despite the warm orange rays that are bursting over the horizon, spilling a new morning across my

city.

It's another morning without her.

I wonder how long I will be able to go on this way. How long can I last without her... a month maybe two? I look at the destruction around me... watch as the two enormous, dismembered bodies dissolve on the ground below.

They sizzle.

And I'm crying, again. I don't know if I've even stopped! The deep, body wrecking sobs abated a while ago... its just the tears that are left. They've run endless stinging rivers since... since it all happened.

And I still can't believe it happened; can't believe how I failed her... how I couldn't see it! But Faith could...my mind keeps flashing back to last night. How the worry was in her eyes, but she wouldn't voice it, because she wasn't sure. She didn't know if her concerns would be accepted or be met with contempt.

Still so afraid. And I didn't see it!

I had been so sure, so absolutely certain that everything would be all right. As damn near everything in my life always was. I thought I could make demands of this life... deem who I wanted, dismiss who I didn't, and all without consequence. I thought that maybe I was even BEYOND consequence.

And they call Faith the reckless one... But she had seen it.

I saw Faith and I as some beautiful destined fairy tale. Sweet kisses, happy endings. I believed it to the very soul of me. Faith had been right to have reservations, to worry; to be afraid of what this all meant. She knew the avoidance; the denial of possibilities can never bring you peace in this life. It would mean you're always being chased.

Faith had said she was tied of running.

And here I was thinking she was just afraid of 'love'.

God I'm such a child!

I had rushed through the front door, her still and broken body in my hands, her skin so wrong and pale under all that blood. Everyone had been hovering and I hated having to lay her down, at first on the sofa and then up to my bed when we realized she wasn't waking up.

"God Giles, why won't she wake up! What the hell happened to her!!" I was panicked, hysterical... I still might be. Giles had taken the needle that Willow thankfully had the presence of mind to grab as we had rushed from the cemetery.

One look and he knew.

"Dear God..." His tone was hushed, but dripping with rage. That dark Ripper-pitch that

always sets my hair on end.

“Giles?” my heart was sinking and I could feel my knees beginning to go weak, I felt cold all over “Damn it Giles, please!”

“It’s the Council.”

I watched as Willow and Anya helped Xander sink down to a chair, she was holding an ice pack to his head... it was dripping on the floor.

“Riley... he-he was—.” I heard Willow make an attempt to articulate what my watcher had just told us... But she couldn’t even say it. “Buffy?”

And I couldn’t say anything at all. Not a fucking word, because the anger, the utter disbelief was choking me. He was working with them, to hurt Faith, and now he’s dead.

God.

“B-Buffy we should get her upstairs...”

I had blinked at Tara’s gentle voice, not understanding the words at first. Nothing made sense; just the unbearable weight of knowing, the rage that was so intense it felt suffocating.

There was this ringing in my ears. The muscles in my arms were jumping. I wanted to hurt something...

But then she groaned, made the tiniest of murmurs and it was like I was suddenly awake. Pulled from that coiling dark hollow that was threatening to swallow me whole. And at first, for a single thrilling moment of hope, I thought she had been waking up... but then I had realized, and the grief that had hit me was almost more than I could stand.

And that’s when the tears had started.

I had lifted her, carried her upstairs to clean her up; put her so nicely into our bed where just the pervious night we’d spent in heaven, tangled so completely in the sheets; in each other. Filling so completely until exhaustion forced us to sleep. She looked like she was sleeping now...

I knew different.

But I had stayed with her, held her hand and talked to her... just anything to fill the silence, anything to keep me from losing it completely. Time meant nothing and everything all at once. It was like holding your breath, you stop living as everything moves around you... separate from the chaos, but you NEED to breathe.

Its like I can’t without her.

“Just open your eyes Fai’... please baby. I need to see you” The rain beating the windowpane had been my answer. I knew it was nearly morning even though it was still fairly dark... it seemed fitting that the sun wouldn’t be coming out.



“It’s not enough... not enough time.” I was to the point of pleading with her, with anybody who could just make this right... bring her back. And I knew they were all trying. Anya had taken Xander home to rest, but everyone else had remained downstairs... throwing themselves once again into the books, but this time it’s for Faith.

Just the thought makes me smile through the tears. They were doing this for her! Because despite all the history, all the bad stuff between them, they can see that she’s trying and she’s here to help... that its all changed.

“No...can’t.” Her voice pulls me from my thoughts again, and again, I hope that she might be waking up. Its been happening all night, she’ll murmur something, sometimes my name. I wish I knew what she was dreaming... if she was scared or hurting.

She apologizes a lot.

“I’m here, its ok Faith.” I stroked the hair away from her forehead, brought the hand I was holding up to my lips and kissed her bruised knuckles... It didn’t seem to comfort her, she was still frowning a little and her skin was damp. She was still running a slight fever.

Did she know I was here? Did she know I was dieing right along with her?

“Any change?” Looking away from her just feels wrong, but I do anyway and see my little sister hovering in the doorway. The look in my eyes, the tears that are threatening to spill again must have been answer enough, because she switches right into placating mode.

“Buffy, I’m sure this is all gonna be ok. We’re all working really hard. And Giles thinks—”

“Dawn please...” I cut her off. I know she’s trying but I can’t deal with the empty hope, with the platitudes. Not when Faith is lying on this bed, when I could be so close to losing her so soon. Not when I can’t fucking FEEL her anymore!

“No Buffy, that’s why I came up here, Giles found something!” She came further into the room, trying to make that forced smile believing.

“What?”

“He wants to talk to you, downstairs.” She’d said instead of answering me. Maybe there aren’t any answers.

“Can’t he come up here?” I turned my attention back to Faith again. She had made a little whimper sound. I stroked her hair; made sure the blankets were keeping her warm enough. “Shh, its ok baby...” I hate telling her lies

“Buffy, you need to get out of this room...” Dawn said at last, after a few moments of watching me. She’s kidding right?

“I’m not leaving her. I-I promised I wouldn’t leave her.” Why couldn’t she see that?! None of this should have happened! I couldn’t take this anymore it was all too much...

“Buffy, Giles thinks he—”

“I don’t give two shits what Giles thinks, I’m NOT letting her down again!”

She’d told me she loved me... she trusted me.

“Buffy if you don’t want to let her down, then go downstairs and find out what you can do to actually HELP her!”

Her words had caught me off guard, they had been so assertive; willing me to believe. But I need to be here, I need to be close to her

“I need to—”

“No Buffy. This isn’t about what you need! This is about getting Faith well!” She had stared at me, determined, until I had to look away. I turned my eyes back to Faith unwilling acknowledge the truth in Dawn’s words. Still running.

“Now, I’ll stay with her ok?” But before I had realized I had even stood; let go of Faith’s hand...she was guiding me by the shoulders, firmly escorting me out the door. “You go be Slayer now.”

And even though I knew Dawn had been right, had I known what was gonna be asked of me, I would have kept my ass parked firmly upstairs. He had closed one of his massive books when I entered the kitchen... the glasses came off too.

This might not be good.

But the look that Will and Tara are giving me, they look so hopeful, and more than a little tired. No one had slept yet.

“Dawn said you guys maybe found something?” My voice sounded cautious, raw from all the crying.

“Yeah Buff we have some really good news!” My best friend comes and takes my hand, leads me to sit at the table with all of them. Her eyes keep cutting to Giles, he doesn’t look nearly as chipper. “We figured out what was in the needle, and there’s a cure!”

“Ok... and anyone wanna give me the sugar-free version of that? I’m sensing a dangling ‘but’ here.” I hadn’t meant to sound so harsh, I knew she was just trying to make this easier. But I don’t have time for drawn out and easy...Faith may not have time.

“Buffy you are right, there are two sides of this...” Giles sighs and I brace myself. “As we thought, Riley was indeed working with the Council. I made some calls and found that they’ve been tracking Faith for several months.”

“Right since she’s been out of jail... they sh-shot her. She told me the first night she got here.”

It seemed so long ago.

“Well it would appear that Riley was enlisted to assist in capturing Faith... a deal was made. One slayer in trade for another.”

“In trade for another?” Willow had questioned not fully grasping the implications of what my watcher had just said. She didn’t get it. But I did and the rage pulsing through every cell of my being... my muscles burned with it. My chest felt tight.

“The Council would get Faith, Riley would get me.” I stated flatly showing no outward expression of the hell that was raging just below the surface.

“Right...” Giles eyed me warily. And I suppose he was suspecting some sort of outburst. But there was none, because deep down I know I’d suspected something like this. Some organic part of me that’s purely instinctual, the darker part of my nature that I fight so hard... That Faith’s been trying to get me to embrace.

I had seen the looks Riley had been giving Faith, felt the insistent pull to go to her, protect her. I had ignored it, ran from it like always, and now I might be losing her forever.

“My sources tell me,” Giles continues and it sounds so far away. “that there had been authorization given to administer a certain formula—”

“We think it was the same stuff Giles pumped you full of! You know? For your birth...day...” My expression must be a bit more threatening than I had thought “Right, ok...so shutting up now.”

“It’s ok Will.” I tell her...even though it’s all so far from ok. I really didn’t need to be reminded of yet another betrayal in my life...the frailty of this life I trace my finger over one of the books spread out in front of me. “Death, it’s possible you know... we all die. What’s now or later really?”

I feel the delicate page bite back at my skin. A paper cut. I do it again.

I’m scaring them. All I can hear is the rain and none of them will look at me now. I’m really fucking losing it. They’re only trying to help.

“Sorry, guys I’m just...I might be falling apart...”

My eyes burn anew with new tears they pour down my face and across my lips. A more bitter flavor laced in anger. Different than the absolute despair that has gripped me all night. They’re hot, like her kisses but only serve to pull sobs from me... I can’t stop.

“I-if you need some time...” I gentle hand on my arm is the farthest thing from comfort, it’s not the right touch. And I try and pull it together...I wipe at my eyes and they sting

“No, Tara I-I’m fine... I mean I’m not...” I’m breaking completely, and I pull away from that warm touch, because Faith’s hand felt so cold. “But we don’t have time.”

I hate how they’re all looking at me. Tired eyes, brimming with pity and fear. Like I’m some beaten animal.

“W-we think the Council is still here, that they might try to get to Faith again.” Tara tells me and I’m grateful for the peace that the subject change brings... How sick is that?

“Right which is why we must obtain the cure as quickly as possible”

“Which is?” I ask my Watcher but my best friend answers me.

“It’s a simple spell, and kind of umm... anti-venom. It should work.”

What does that mean “Should?” I don’t need maybes right now.

“Buffy, the results have never been tested. It may very well cure Faith, but it also may have no effect. She was given a much more powerful concentration of the poison. And as you know the powers of the Slayer are directly affected. The hindrance of her capabilities might—”

“What are you saying here Giles? Could this ‘cure’ kill her?!” I can’t believe this...

“Well, that is doubtful. I believe NOT treating her would be more dangerous...” He sighs his non-answer and I just can’t take this anymore!!

“Then what is the fucking problem!!!!?” I’m out of my seat, pacing... “Why can’t we just—”

“We think if we give her the cure she will wake up, but she w-won’t be the same... she won’t be a Slayer Buffy.”

I just stare at Tara. Those words, it brought it all to stop. I should have stayed upstairs.

“Wh-what?! Are you sure?” I know they’re sure.

“Nearly certain of it. The ingredients—”

“Y-you have to decide what Faith would want...there’s still a chance she can f-fight this on her own. The Council obviously didn’t want her powers gone, if-if she wakes up she still could be fine”

Tara thankfully cuts through Giles’ bullshit, gives me my choice. But this shouldn’t be my choice! Not when this is my fault...

“She’s so weak...oh god” I press my hands to my head, but it doesn’t make the world stop spinning, doesn’t stop that distant roar that’s all overwhelming white noise. Oh god Faith.

“Buffy we may not have much time.” He tries to make it gentle I can tell, and something in me hates him for it, hates the world for it... that I could ever be asked such a thing!

“I-I don’t know!” Being the slayer... its so much to Faith she needs it like she needs air, wears it like a skin. And I’m realizing the same goes for me. This power, the force that runs through us... its what we were BORN for damn it! How can I possibly try and take that from her, make her live without it!? It’s her purpose OUR destiny!

But, to have her not live at all... Christ, I'm not that strong! "Giles I can't let her die..."

"Willow, I believe all the supplies you will need are at the shop" I sit back down and everyone else stands up, moving immediately, putting into action my ruling. It all feels so final, so absolute. Like a tomb being shut. "Here take the keys."

Her fate sealed, and I don't know if this was the right choice, was it for her or for me?

"We should rest first sweetie... we'll n-need the strength." They're gathering up their things, making plans. Should I stop this?!

"Yeah, I'll get to the shop tonight, the spell shouldn't take long..."

And I know, the rational, sane part of me knows that Tara is right... but how DARE they even think of sleep now. I swallow it, the indignant ridiculous fury; focus that rage it where it belongs.

"So, the Council? You think they're still here?" its battery acid in my throat.

"They're mission is not complete. Buffy... what are you planning to do?" It actually makes me glad to hear the guarded thread in Giles' voice. It lets me know I'm in the right frame of mind. My voice reflected it. Flat, void, distant.

"I'm going back upstairs to Faith... and waiting for night fall."

And the night came, as it always does. Every minute of my daylight had been spent in silent preparation...listening to Faiths quiet cries, watching the pain shift across her face. Letting the anger build, the darkness have free reign though me... letting my self FEEL it. I haven't slept, because I see her face every time I close my eyes. So afraid, covered in blood. I had stayed awake and watched her instead, preferring the horror of reality to the ones I know would haunt my dreams. She's so weak and so terribly still. I've never felt so helpless.

I sat unable to do nothing... Nothing in the light.

It rained all day.

But when the darkness came it stopped... as if the skies had made the night ready for me. And I was ready for the night.

I had left the minute the last of the gray light had sank into the earth. I was hunting now, letting that dark and seething rage be my guide. I wanted to find the Council but would settle for anything that came along...

My ribs hurt and I'm covered in dust.

The sharp ring of my cellphone is painfully loud in the darkness. I hit the ignore button for the third time tonight.

They were all worried, and they should be. One slayer down, the other on the verge of self-

destruction... and a prehistoric evil rising in a matter of days. No, things were not looking good for the hell-mouth; for the world.

I hop off my seat, start to make my way out of the cemetery... I hope something else comes along.

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I can feel things around me shifting I don't know where I am, WHEN I am even... but I knew B was with me. Her presence was this surrounding all consuming calm. It dulled the pain, kept all these awful images from flashing through my head.

I hear waves crashing on some distant shore, but I can't smell the sea.

She's gone now, and getting further away... and I ain't talkin' physical presence here. I can FEEL her leavin'. It's a connection that's so much deeper than just the slayer thing, than just the sex and the physical.

Its this love thing, this need thing.

I can feel the anger, the pain and fear creeping up. She's letting it take control letting it have the power, she's losing her balance and she's gonna lose herself.

I can't stay here, I can't let this happen to her. She NEEDS me damn it. And she may not have much time. I know better than anyone how quickly it all can overcome you... how good letting it all go can feel, how letting that dark half totally free can feel like being reborn.

And that's a second before your soul dies.

I can't let this happen to her... Somebody show me the fuckin' door. Its time to get out of here.

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### Part 25

And she raged. It wasn't just simple fighting for her. It was too pure, unadulterated, it was a struggle she could not lose. It was hurt and passion and anger, betrayal, fear-loathing-hate-dust-lust-blood, so much blood she felt as though it filled her lungs and mocked every near-last breath she took.

She raged. Because it wasn't just her life she was fighting for.

"We alone here, Lester?"

Had it been she alone, maybe Faith wouldn't be fighting this hard, maybe she would just let this nightmare swallow her whole. Succumb to an anesthetized void when the last dribble of pain had finally been wrung from her body. And it all hurt so fucking much, more than any stab or punch or bite. Being assaulted by her own conscience, with each memory torn from her like some vital organ, Faith could feel herself falling apart. Taking that trip back into the

wasteland of a world filled with death and pain.

The one where she was a murderer. The one where she didn't care.

"If you ever apologize to me I will beat you to death."

That face had been chiseled out of ice and Faith felt her lips move.

"Go ahead..." Her throat burned just the same as it had that night, and it had all felt so wrong all over again.

She raged. Angel's basement melted, and the world spiraled again but when Faith opened her eyes it was just the same old scene.

"That's my knife." Faith didn't want the knife, didn't ever want it again. Didn't want to see the killer in those hazel eyes, didn't want to watch B become her again.

It was all happening too fast. The wind that whipped through her hair spun the rooftop into blackness, and she was pushing through it. Like swimming through slow time syrup. Thick and impossibly stagnate.

It took her to another time another place, nowhere near where she wanted to be.

Her mother stands before her sobbing, the greasy walls of that Southie walkup the background of her miserable portrait. Faith could smell the whiskey as each burst of sorrow tore from the broken woman's throat. It was so hard to breathe.

"You're useless ya know firecracker..." Slurred words that coated her skin and that used, dirty feeling from way back was sneaking up on her. Faith couldn't see a way out.

"You're dead." Faith told the woman with eyes that matched her own, but she didn't sound all that convincing.

"Nuh uh babygirl I live in you." Her mother grinned, and for an instant Faith could feel the bitter truth in those words. "Ya know how to get rida me..."

And at the looming suggestion Faith raged.

"That's my knife..."

"You're about to get it back."

The macabre replay seemed endless but Faith fought, because through the muddled gray she could sense the falsity of this place. And just as in her other dreams she longed to be awake, to live in a world she had just so recently discovered.

The one with love in it.

And that thought, that thin simple thread was like a lifeline. And Faith was pulling for all she was worth. Through the hazy muddled hauntings of her past, through the pain that was so

much deeper than the physical, and through the doubt.

Because there were some things she just couldn't question. Some things she knew with a certainty to her soul.

"hey you must be Buffy," She head-butts a nobody vamp and the little blond girl she'd been chasing her whole life looked at her with wide stunned eyes. "I'm Faith..."

And the fog started to dissolve, leaving the only thing that Faith understood in this life with total clarity.

She was running... they were running, free and breathless through all those back alleys from so long ago. The heavy bass still thumping distantly behind them, the sound of their laughter resonating off concrete and stone. It echoed because they were alone, because the night belonged only to them. And Buffy came to stand in the pale blue circle of the streetlight... "I think I'm finding the fun, F"

God that smile, it let her breathe again.

And it all came as such a surprise, that someone who had only known pain, and contempt; lies and betrayal... who felt that was all they had to give, could be saved by the opposite of all that. Faith had always tried not to need anything, from anybody... Living, but just barely. But that wasn't the case anymore. She needed this, and Buffy needed her.

It was like surfacing.

"I love you baby..." And Faith gasped as she broke free. She could suddenly feel again, the sheets around her, the air that was a little cool... it smelled like rain and B's perfume. She could hear also. The clock ticking... someone was breathing in time, someone was holding her hand.

"b..." and god was that her voice? She sounded like shit. She gave the hand that was in her own a little squeeze

"huh?! What? FAITH! Ohmygod!" And no, that certainly wasn't Buffy. Faith wondered exactly how long she had been out for, wondered when the gang let a howling banshee move in.

"Faith?" Dawn managed to lower her voice to a whisper, and Faith figured she must have picked up on the pained grimace she was making. She let her eyes open just the smallest bit. The early morning light sneaking through the gaps in the curtain stung, but provided just enough to make out a very blurry, and very worried face.

"Wh—who are you?" Her voice was raw on the words, and Faith watched as the younger girl's eyes grew wide. Dawn's mouth opened a few times and the ailing slayer could almost sense the babble that was about to break free. She gave her a weak smile.

"Oh my god Faith! I'm so gonna kill you once you get better!" And the kid was smiling at her now, wiping at eyes that were damp around the edges.



“Lookin’ forward to it squirt.” Faith rasped, and tried to sit up a little, her arms trembled and Dawn helped her until she was leaning against the headboard.

“How do you feel?” She asked, and handed Faith the cup of water from the bedstand before it could be requested. And where to start with that question. Her entire body felt as though it was trapped under some immense weight, her muscles aching with a dull throb. She still felt drugged, could still feel that sick intrusion swimming faintly through her system. But mostly, Faith felt empty... there was something missing, an inherent part that she couldn’t quite name.

She felt detached. But instead she just said.

“‘Bout 2 by 4...” Faith closed her eyes after a few sips. “Like I got hit in the head with one.”

“I can get you something... some aspirin maybe?”

“Nah it’ll pass...” She hoped, Faith opened her eyes again, met all the concern that was coming from the younger Summers girl with a smile. “So how long this time?”

And Faith hoped Dawn would understand. She hated talking about that time... about losing time. It made her feel more weak, more outta control than any fight, any drug. She was glad the younger girl caught on relatively quick.

“Oh not long thankfully. Just yesterday and all last night, we were all so worried.” She looked genuinely relieved, and Faith was surprised that she found herself believing the words.

“Yeah?” She was too tired to hide that frail ring of uncertainty though. After all it didn’t sound like a whole lot of worrying going on. She focused her senses... even though that little bit was draining “It’s kinda quiet, where is everyone? Where’s B?”

And Faith realized what she had missed. Why she still felt so disoriented. The dream, that was still hanging like a vivid tapestry in her mind suddenly made so much sense. She couldn’t feel Buffy, and she needed to feel her. The hurt and the pain? It came right along with the joy and the love... Faith needed it all because feeling it all... she knew she was alive.

And the questions came rapid fire through her still clearing mind. The reason why she had fought so hard, the reason why she opened her eyes... how she had felt her love slipping away. Why wasn’t B the one holding her hand? Was she too late? Why couldn’t she feel the other slayer near?

“Dawn? Wh—” Faith saw the moment of hesitation before Dawn cover it and it was like her anxiety doubled. Fear and panic melding with the pain. Oh god “Dawn where is she?! Wh—”

“Relax Faith, Buffy is out killing stuff.” Dawn had sounded uninterested, choosing now to start straightening up the room rather than looking the slayer in the eyes. She began tossing filthy bloody clothes in the trash. It was evident in the high-jittery tone of her voice that she was faking it.

“After we found out Riley was working with the Council, she went a little batty, she stayed up here with you all day while everyone else tried to get some sleep... its hard with everything

that's going on. But the witches need their strength if they're gonna wake you up with that spell and..."

But Faith still wasn't prepared to what Dawn's prattling revealed. The Council? So they had managed to track her here...and that could only mean Riley... Holy fuck.

"I fuckin knew it...I knew something was up Dawn." Faith sighed, the throbbing in her head seeming to grow more insistent with her realization. "I should have said something ya know... but I didn't think I—"

"No, no Faith." And at the first hint of remorse, Dawn abandoned her nervous busy work and made her way back over to the bed. "You couldn't have done anything, no one really could have anticipated this. No one knew what was going on with him, in his head. Besides, we don't need two slayers being all angst-ridden here."

"Two?" Frowning actually made Faith's head feel better. This was all too much. She wished she didn't remember! Another death, all the blood on her hands... and Buffy's devastated eyes.

"Weren't you listening?" And the teenager had said it like she had been speaking English or something! Faith just watched the patented eye-roll as Dawn continued. "Buffy's tripping the guilt big time. When we were all sleeping, she spent the whole day up here with you, then hit the streets when night fell. She's looking for the Council."

"Shit...alone?" She didn't need to see Dawn's slight nod to know the answer to that. Faith sighed, hating that she was stuck here...that she brought the Council to Sunnydale... like they didn't have enough to worry about. But most, she hated that she wasn't right out there at B's side, out there making all this right.

"D, I gotta get outta here." She made a move to rise, and her muscles immediately protested. And Dawn's hands were on her shoulders, gently...effortlessly, guiding her back against the pillows

"Are you on crack!? Xander could kick your butt right now!" The pain had brought Faith up short, and she couldn't help but think Dawn just might be right. But still the need to see, to be near the other slayer, the need was weighing on her more than the pain. The events of the other night were rushing back on her, the reality of it sinking in.

"But I need to find Buffy, c-can you get that Dawn? I- need to... I just need her."

And at the raw emotion, the near desperation that was so evident in the dark slayer's voice the younger woman's face softened.

"She's Ok Faith, the sun's almost up so she'll be here soon, everyone will be. We all agreed to meet back today to do the spell."

"Spell?" Faith was distracted, thoughts of B at the forefront of her mind, the aching memories of her dreams clouding the back, but she finally picked up on that.

"Yeah the one to get rid of whatever that fuckface did to you." Dawn said it with such venom,

Faith felt herself actually drawing back a little. She watched as the other girl took a breath, calm it some. “But well, I guess that won’t be necessary seeing as how you’re all land of the living again, I should probably give Willow a call, let her know”

Faith watched as the other woman began moving around the room once more, this time with actual purpose, looking for the cordless.

So they were going to fix her with a spell? That seemed a bit drastic, but maybe she didn’t know the entire situation. Whatever the beefstick had done to her, had injected her with had been pretty serious. And if the persistent ache, the weakness in her limbs were anything to go by, it had been pretty effective too. The Council weren’t ones to bother with the light stuff.

Maybe a spell was the only way. Buffy wouldn’t have let the witches do anything unless they were sure right? Not with Willow just coming off of the dark stuff, and not if there were any other chance she’d pull through right?

But yet, here she was. Wide awake without so much as an abra cadabra...

“You guys sure were quick to jump to the mojo huh?” Faith asked Dawn’s rear end, the only part of her visible at the moment as she dug through the closet, still in search of the telephone. She emerged quickly, phone in hand, and pulled a t-shirt off her head.

“Umm well, it wasn’t exactly like jumping. We had to find out some stuff... you know before we—it— could be decided.”

Ok, that was disconcerting. Faith had asked the question lightly, attempting to brighten the situation, but Dawn’s expression was borderline panic.

“D?” She wasn’t sure she wanted the answer, but Dawn sputtered on.

“It wasn’t an easy choice—see, Faith.... Buffy, she...” and quickly trailed off again... and Faith could feel something inside her sinking. Dawn was backing out the room, her gaze focused on the phone in her hand, on the floor, the window, anywhere but the Slayer who was imploring her with her eyes.

“What Dawn? Buffy what?!” Faith needed an answer now. Something was going on here and Faith was growing more anxious with every second. She thought about trying to get up; stopping the younger girls retreat, but she flexed the muscles of her legs briefly and thought better of it.

“Y-you guys should talk about it... later.” Dawn was at the door now, and all Faith could do was stare at her, bewildered. “Ya know... it’s really not even important now! I mean you’re awake, so spell? Pointless, right? So I’m gonna go call Willow now”

And the door snicked shut behind her and Faith was left to stare at the polished wood. She brought a pillow up to her chest and hugged it, inhaling the lingering scent and listening to the quiet house.

She hated feeling this helpless, so completely alone and utterly in the dark. The silence left her with nothing but her own thoughts to fill the void, to fill the time. She hated being so

still... but what choice did she have now? All Faith had to left, was to wait. Wait until some one could give her answers, for her strength to come back... until Buffy returned, and she could feel whole again.

Faith closed her eyes and hoped for patience.

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It was way to early in the morning, the bright warming rays of dawn just creeping their way above the roof tops of the city. And she was running late, and she had no one but herself to blame. Well, that wasn't exactly true. She could have blamed her alarm clock for not being quite loud or insistent enough, or the bed for being just too damn comfy.

She could have blamed Tara's warm and wonderful arms for making her feel such tranquility in the midst of all this madness.

But if Willow was honest with herself there was only one simple reason. One thing that kept her from heading to the magic shop right upon waking. One thing that kept her hesitating as she selected each item from the shelves; that made her hand tremble as she lifted the required texts. It was doubt. Self-doubt more specifically.

Willow thought back to the promise she had made to her group of friends, to the uneasy agreement between her and Faith. She didn't think she would be tested so quickly.

The red-head smiled sadly at the irony. The one person who knew how low she had sank, the one person who TRULY knew the depth, the pleasure of the darkness; knew how easy it could be to lose yourself to it... was now the one asking her to walk that edge.

Leave it to Faith to make things complicated.

And she still wasn't quite sure how she felt about the dark slayer's return, how she had come in like a sudden wind, stirring up everything around her... they had all been so unprepared. Well, all but Buffy. And THAT was going to take some getting used to. But her best friend had never looked so happy, so at peace than she had the past few days... and that was despite all the chaos around them.

Tara had really helped her see. They had gotten past the resentment she had long harbored against Faith, and called it by its true name: jealousy. And it had felt a little like freedom; being told it had been ok to feel those things for Buffy back then, and being able to let it go. Tara had told her about seeing the Slayer's auras, the purity of their joining, the perfection in their balance.

Tara had been so absolutely certain, that Willow hadn't any choice but to believe. She still didn't know if she could trust Faith, but she knew to the core of her being she could trust Tara.

And besides, she reasoned that one chance deserved another. And since the redhead was being honest with herself, Faith was living up to her half of the deal; proving her self...that she'd changed. Keeping her secret.

The problem was, Willow wasn't too sure she'd be able to do the same.

It was like that, with that shiver of uncertainty and confusion still clutching at her skull, that he found her. She was fumbling with her cellphone, trying to balance it, the books and her bag of tricks. The melodic ring danced through the calm of the early morning air.

“Shit...” The phone hit the ground, and she’d bent down to grab it, only to come up short as another hand came into view and wrapped around the tiny device.

“Such dirty words from such a sweet, ripe mouth...”

That drawl, that low, slow timbre felt like a sudden punch. Willow jerked backwards, sending the rest of the supplies tumbling. Rak only grinned and hit the ‘end’ button, bringing silence to the morning once again.

Willow became very aware of the vacant alley where she stood, and of the only exit that was now blocked by a towering form.

“Stay away from me.” Even with all her loathing, her voice still shook.

“Aww now baby girl, don’t be so mean to me. Not in front of our guests...” He spread out his arms and made a slow spin gesturing their surroundings.

There was no one there, no one that she could see.

“You’re high Rak.” She was backing up, even though there was nowhere to go; her eyes kept darting to the brick and concrete walls around them

“No shit sweetheart! I had to celebrate! I got me some new friends from far away. They showed me some big things.” He laughed a low chuckle that gradually became maniacal. Willow could see the creeping oil swimming in his crazy eyes. “Yup things that are gonna get me outta this town. But first I got somethin’ ta give ya.”

The sight made her sick; reminded her of all that she could so easily be. She forced the defiance in her voice “I don’t need anything else from you.”

It only made him smile wider...wilder, the leer in his voice filthy and savage.

“Oh, I know you don’t, you’re juicy enough all on your own”

“Then what the fuck are you talking about?!” Willow was done; she’d had enough. The courage was knifing through, sparked by the way Rak’s gaze was clinging to her body. She took a step forward, bold now. It was just the other day after all that he was sniveling in fear of what she could do. He didn’t know about her vow to never use the dark magic again.

Of course her bravado was short lived.

“Oh don’t you hear the bells strawberry?” After he spoke again she saw them, dark figures stepping from the shadows of the alley. “Its Christmas!”

Rak proclaimed with perverse joy and Willow didn’t even need a moment to consider who

their ‘guests’ were. Not after what had happened last night, not after what Giles had told them. The Council. And now with Riley dead Willow was sure of who their next pawn would be.

“Proceed...” A horse but distinctly English voice came from the man who just pulled a cigarette from his jacket. And before she could blink, before she could even consider what the hell was going on... it hit her.

Hard. Shimmering waves made the air bend and tremble as they flowed from Rak’s finger tips, slamming into her, filling her and Willow gasped because she liked it.

She felt it swim through her like a violation, a rape that she wanted. The intensity between the longing and the thrill, the shiver to the spasm, it was an intrusion she knew to her soul she should resist... she didn’t.

She thought of Tara, a brief shining light before the slow ripples began to lap at the edges of her mind. Creeping thick waves and Willow’s eyes were black with it.

Somewhere, distantly she could hear Rak starting to scream, as the power between them began to shift, as it became apparent that he was no longer giving it willingly, but Willow was taking it. She was draining him. She stepped closer, her eyes bright and wild, and pressed her hand to his chest. His screams became pathetic little whimpers.

The smoking man smiled, cautious, and Rak fell to the ground in a heap, his insane screams echoed down the alley.

“You shouldn’t have done this!” She spoke to both the man she had destroyed and the one dressed all in black grinning calmly.

“Really? Do you not like your gift Miss Rosenberg?” In the periphery Rak slammed his face into the wall. He laughed as off yellow pieces fell from his mouth, clattered to the concrete, tiny splashes in his blood.

“Gift?!” Her body shook with twisted bliss, it fought the rage and pulsing through her.

It felt so good.

“Why yes dear girl. A gift, with more to come... in exchange for your assistance.”

He smiled a wicked smile.

“I didn’t ask for this.” The part of Willow that was still just the girl was afraid of the new menacing resonance of her voice. A hollow timbre that was imposed; in no way natural.

“No you didn’t, and yet you are blessed... chosen one might say. Chosen for this power, this pleasure.” He spared a glance to the crying bumbling fool. He drew grotesque murals on the wall with sickening red, unaware of their presence.

“It must be destined right? After all, you are but a girl and you thrive; you flourish, where others...” The trailed off and Willow’s vast eyes cut once more to Rak, the tool she destroyed,

## Poet – Chase This Night

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and she smiled, and she whispered.

“I want some more...”

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