

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

Rating: NC17

Pairing: Buffy / Faith

Disclaimer: Nothing belongs to me.

Spoilers: Yep. Trillions.

Dedicated: Most obviously to Mistress Martin. She finally gave it a title. She is SO clever. Also kinda hot. She gives me scorched panties.

Summary: Set post s7. Couple of years down the line. Everything's the same except the last series of Angel. Never happened. Just like that. Spike never came back. Fred never went funky. Everything's really hunky dory. Sweet like chocolate. Faith's settled in LA. Buffy's not settled. That's about it. Does it sound exciting..?

Part 1

The sun was setting. Slowly it began. It's descent from the top of the sky down to the horizon almost lazy, as if there was no rush to give up it's place to the moon. Once it first touched the horizon though, then it sped up, almost like it was being tugged away, and no matter how beautiful it was... how many last rays it allowed to play across the sea, how many clouds it tinted with vibrant pink and reds, it still had to go. There was a natural order to things like this. Night always followed day, and in return, the sun would soon come back to reclaim it's place in the sky.

Faith loved watching this part of the day unfold. Once upon a time, a long while ago, she would have watched this knowing that now was her time. That the hour had come for her to become a hunter, to search out and destroy all the nasties that believed that the night belonged to them. It didn't. As long as there was a slayer there would always be someone to stand up and fight. And now there were lots of slayers. Too many to know all the names of, even though she tried hard to keep up with them all. It pleased her. Made her smile. There might have been a time when she was reluctant to give up her power to many, but she knew it had been the right thing to do. It was simply a case that there was just too much badness in the world for one girl to fight all alone. Too much for even two girls.

She loved this time of day now simply for it's beauty. For the peacefulness that stretched out as the sun bid farewell. It wouldn't last. Darkness brought noise and disruption. Parties of people looking for the fun, the secret joys that L.A. could offer them. There was plenty. Faith knew, she had found a good many fun times here herself. But she was different now. Life wasn't always about partying hard. Sometimes it was just about kicking back and relaxing, about enjoying the beauties of a perfect sunset.

She hopped down from her perch and felt her bare feet touch the cooling sand, she wiggled her toes, the tickles from the grains still making her giggle. She raised her fingers to her mouth and let out a large whistle, calling forth her companion, letting them know that the peaceful times were over. She still had to slay. Not always for the sake of protecting the world, but because she was a slayer. It didn't matter how many girls she shared this with now, SHE was still a slayer. And her blood still rushed quicker as darkness beckoned, her hands

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becoming twitchy as they longed to wrap around a solid piece of wood, the power of life and death in her hands.

She wouldn't do a big sweep tonight, she didn't feel like it. Tomorrow was coming and it played heavy on her mind. Not in a bad way. Just a heavy way. She hadn't thought about the other for a long time, hadn't needed to, her life was full, she had friends, she had purpose, she had a home. She was content. But now. Now that the time was here, the time to find a hello again, now it was a lot of all she could think about.

The ball of fluff which could otherwise have been called a puppy, came steaming towards her, yelping, jumping, chasing it's tail... obviously just happy, in the way that dogs can be. Faith loved this animal. It had been a housewarming gift from Angel. He wanted to give her something she had always wanted. She chuckled as she thought about that, he had given her a home, how could he think that there was still more she needed? But in his own way he had been right. The puppy gave her companionship when she may otherwise have sought to be alone, gave her someone to think about, to care about other than herself.

Naming the thing had been hard. To her it felt like a huge responsibility. She didn't wanna give it a dumb name, a girly name, but on the other hand she didn't want to call it something butch and scary... it was too cute to do scary. For a little while she even thought about naming it Buffy, not for sentimental reasons, not really... but just because she had always thought the name more suitable for a puppy than a fully grown woman. Angel had vetoed that idea though, he had just said that some time in the future that could be a decision she regretted. Whatever. Maybe he knew best, what with the arrival of tomorrow and all.

In the end she HAD gone with sentimental. She thought about all the things in her life which had happened to her, all the things she made happen, times she had been happy, times she had been a whole lot less than happy, and it was decided. Her puppy, her friend would be called Scoobs. She liked it, it sounded right. After all, was there any greater example of friendship than the crazy mixed up bunch of people she had met in Sunnydale? She didn't think so. And yes, that friendship hadn't always been extended to her, but in the end... when it had counted, they had been the people that fought by her side, who taught her about what it meant to belong. To be a part of something.

She scooped up Scoobs into her arms, allowed him to take a long lick of her face, and then deposited him firmly within the safety of her house. Slaying was certainly no place for a ball of excitement as hyperactive as her little friend. Maybe one day, but definitely not this day.

Throwing on clothes more appropriate than the ones she had been wearing to kick back on the beach, she readied her mind and her body to take part in her nightly duties. She would swing by and see Angel, check if there was anything large and nasty which required attention or if this was just another normal nightly mission of dusting. She hoped for the latter. Just a distraction from tomorrow, nothing life and death. But if it was the former, so be it. She had found out that life had nothing to throw at her that she couldn't readily handle. A realisation that had come with maturity. She liked the realisation. She liked it a lot.

At that moment, halfway round the world, someone else was weighing up their life, their maturity, and for them they were finding it a lot harder to find fulfilment. Not that they were

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unhappy, far from it... they just hadn't found that niche. That certain place that is home, that place where you belong, the place that makes you smile because it's yours.

It was half the reason that she was heading to L.A. It had been over two years since she had last set foot on American soil, and maybe that was the problem. Maybe she had fled from the one place that WAS home. So quick to distance herself from everything that she had thought held her prisoner, when all the time it was the one place that she truly belonged. She didn't know. Answers were things she didn't always have. Lots of questions. But not always answers.

Contact with Angel had been kept up across the miles. She knew all about his Wolfram and Hart business. Didn't really understand it, but it seemed from the outside at least, that he was managing to make it work. There were lots of slayers in L.A. and all of them in some way liased with Angel, he helped them equipment wise, and also with knowledge that he, as head of a great former evil empire was privy to.

At first she had wanted not to trust him, to not believe that he could be a part of something that ultimately bad, and still keep a semblance of good. But word had come from many that good indeed was being done, and her basic love of Angel had allowed her to give him her trust.

It was him now that was helping her with this 'visit'. As soon as she mentioned to him that she felt like coming home, he had pounced on the idea. He had sorted her out a nice place to stay on the coast. Apparently when you head up a huge place like W&H you also get lots of perks, like beachfront properties. She wasn't complaining. The thought of staying on the beach in her own place was a darn sight more appealing then staying in a hotel. He had even said that if she decided to stay on and make L.A. her home, then the place was hers to keep. Apparently it was in a rather upmarket part of town, private access and all that. Nice neighbours. And most importantly... not a local demon hangout!

Sitting on the plane, waiting for take off, she could feel her excitement building. This was a good idea. She was sure of it.

Leaving Dawn had been hard. Her last 'real' family. But Dawn was a woman now more then a girl, and she had made her place. London it seemed had everything she needed. Boys for a start, and lots more after. Giles was there, so she didn't feel as if she was abandoning her... she just felt... sad? Being alone had been something she had always felt, less so lately with the sharing of her burdens... but still her, aside from the slaying, aside from her calling. She still felt lonely.

She cast her mind over the few relationships she had in the last couple of years. None of them had been serious, none of them had given her the feeling of togetherness. And she wouldn't settle for less. Love was too important to her to play with it. Half of her suspected that until she had found a place that she could call home, she wouldn't find a person she could share her love with.

Now that she felt that life wasn't gonna end at some soon to be met point, she felt able to relax a little more. The words she had spoken to Angel before, about not being baked yet, not ready to make things work with someone, they had been true. But lately, watching people around her find happiness, she wondered if being baked wasn't something you achieved WITH

someone, like a joint baking session. She didn't know. Another case of not having the answers. But maybe she was ready to learn?

Her ears popped as the plane raced through the clouds, heading into the dark night sky. She reached inside her jacket and fingered her stake, no matter where she was, darkness always made her think of slaying. A hazard of the job she guessed.

She thought also about the other slayers. So many of them now, bound together, working together, maybe finally turning the tide against all things evil. She wondered finally at her sister slayer. That's how she always thought of her. It didn't matter how big the extended family was now, no-one could ever feel like part of her the way that Faith had. She wasn't sure why. It wasn't like they were unique anymore... but maybe it was just all those years when they were alone, the only two, the chosen two. Those years had made her value the bond in ways she could never hope to do with a 'new girl'.

Not that she had kept up the bond. Not that she had kept up anything. No words. No Christmas cards. Nothing.

She knew that she was in L.A. Angel had kept her informed as to her whereabouts. Her life. She knew for example that she made it her own duty to take the other slayers under her wing. To teach them the value of being a slayer. The things it did mean, but most importantly, the things it didn't mean. That made her smile. Faith all responsible. It sat well with her. Almost in a way made her proud of her.

When they had left Sunnydale, or destroyed Sunnydale, there had been a moment then when she had thought that they could build friendship, but the past is a heavy cross to bear, and at that time the past was still waiting to jump up and take a bite from her ass.

Besides, she had known. That at any point, anywhere, any time, she would only have to say the words and Faith would have been there. Not in a lap dog kind of way. She had made THAT most clear. But as her sister slayer. Her partner. Her equal.

She lay her head back against the uncomfortable head rest and mused the idea that perhaps she should of let Angel spring for first class, instead of insisting she travel under her own steam. She had a lot of hours to be wedged into the confined space of economy, with it's tin foil covered meals, and crappy little tv screens showing re-runs of old comedy shows.

Accepting help wasn't always her best feature though, so refusal it had been. Plus she could always just sleep her way across the miles. Allow her eyes to settle on closed, her mind to stop wandering across memories new and old.

Her breathing slowed along with her thoughts. But the seeds had already been planted. As she gave up control to peaceful slumber it was her sister slayer that sought to carry her off to her dreams. Memories old. Memories new. And memories just waiting to be made.

Part 2

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Ten hours later the resounding bump of the wheels against the run way bought the oldest slayer fully to her senses. It hadn't been the most pleasant of journeys, far from it. Every time that she had sought some form of peaceful slumber, an escape from the horrors of economy travel, something or someone had equally sought to prevent it from happening. If it wasn't the nature of her dreams, it was the ever present stewardesses with offers of duty free or inedible meals, and when it wasn't them it was the annoying torment of the young family behind her. Sure she didn't have a problem with kids, but when those kids were kicking chunks out of the back of her chair it remained hard to find a smile.

But she was here now, and as long as she hadn't developed some case of deep vein thrombosis she vowed to be happy. Her legs were itching to move, and she was almost first off the plane such was the desire to be free.

She breezed through baggage collection and customs and before she knew it was stood in the arrivals lounge looking for a sign. Not a sign from the gods, just a cardboard variety proclaiming her name. Angel had said there would be someone there to meet her, and he did not disappoint. There it was 'Buffy Summers'. Her name. Her ride.

The luxury of the limo was welcome after her flight, and now she had to fight to keep sleep at bay. It would be easy to give in, but she wanted to some how seem refreshed for her meeting with Angel. Sure she didn't still want him in the way she did in her youth, but it didn't hurt to look good. Bright eyed and bushy tailed. So sleep was fought, and it was a very awake, if fading fast slayer that made the journey to the headquarters of W&H.

The sheer size of the building shocked her. She hadn't known what to expect but this level of grandeur was not it. And so many people. All of them buzzing around with a purpose. It frightened her a little, she felt quite small amongst so many, but she was a slayer, so she squared her shoulders, made her way to the reception desk and asked for an audience with the boss.

The private elevator carried her up and up and possibly higher. She had made it to heaven once before and this journey possibly felt like it was heading that way again. She would bet money that the views were to die for. If they weren't blocked by the clouds of course.

The doors finally opened and she was let out into Angel's private quarters, and there he was, looking exactly the same as the last time, waiting with open arms.

"Buffy."

The hearing of her name on his lips bought many things to the forefront of her mind, but she was quick to note that desire was not there. No need to rush with a bursting heart into those arms spread wide, no need to seek solace from the world at large.

"Hey Angel, great to see you."

She did take the offered place in his embrace, but it was measured, it was friendship.

"How was your flight? Did you get picked up okay? Are you pleased to be home?"

"Crap, yes and we'll wait and see on the last one!"

"I offered you first class."

"And I'm a dope for not accepting. But it's a lesson learnt, next time feel free to pick up the tab for luxury travel... heck, a private jet might be called for!"

"That's not a problem."

Buffy looked up and into the eyes staring back at her and realised this was no joke.

"You certainly have landed on your feet here haven't you?"

"It's a job."

"With a private jet?"

"A man needs perks!"

Angel led her over to the comfy seating area and went about getting her a drink. There was much to catch up on. Sure they had been in contact, but nothing was the same as face to face interaction, and interacting with Buffy had been something he had mostly always enjoyed.

She filled him in on her travels around Europe, the demons she had come across, mostly the same dumb kind as found here in America. She told him about Dawn's wish to stay in England, about Gile's forming of a new council of watchers, and finally about her own inability to put down roots in any of the places she had been. And thus her feeling of needing to come home, to here.

In turn Angel told her of how his operations with W&H worked, how he helped the many slayers and co-ordinated efforts so as no demons were allowed to gain a stronghold in HIS city. He filled her in on Wes and Fred and their relationship, told her how she would no longer recognise the man that her former bumbling watcher had become. And lastly they spoke about Faith. About the woman she had grown into.

Buffy felt the familiar feelings of something as the talk turned to her slaying partner. It was almost the same as her buzz for slaying. The way electricity sought to find it's way along her nerve endings looking for a release.

Times had certainly changed over the last two and some years, and now it was mostly nothing but excitement she felt as she looked forward to renewing her ties with Faith. Maybe the tiniest amount of trepidation, AND she found it kinda funny that she also wanted to look good for their first meeting. As if Faith would care at all what she looked like.

It was tomorrow. Tomorrow was today. And Faith was buzzing.

She knew how this was gonna go, kind of. She knew that the house next to hers, just along the beach, the one that Angel kept for visiting friends, was gonna be home to Buffy for a while. And that made her happy, and nervous, and kinda scared, in a way which wasn't really scary

but that made the hairs at the back of her neck all tingly. She also knew that Angel hadn't told Buffy exactly who her new neighbour was gonna be. She had asked him not to.

He hadn't been sure, thought that maybe keeping secrets from Buffy wasn't the best way to go, but she had assured him. Told him that her and Buffy were 'friends' now... and the fact that they had not been in contact at all since the hell mouth went bang..? Didn't mean shit to her. It would be a surprise, a pleasant surprise, and the tentative building of bridges that had begun in those last hours of Sunnydale would be built upon even more.

Faith didn't doubt that for a second. Sure she expected the odd bout of fireworks... this was her and Buffy, darkness and light, and where would be the fun if you couldn't have some fireworks? No fun, that's where.

And aside from the fact that they hadn't sent letters, made phone calls, she was absolutely sure that had there at any time during the last two years been a moment when she had needed her sister slayer, she would only have had to say the word. She KNEW that Buffy would have been there for her. It wasn't even a question. An unspoken agreement that stood for more than words.

Now though, waiting for her to arrive, she didn't know if not telling WAS the right thing to do. What if Buffy still had that stick up her ass, and took this as some kind of personal affront..? Wouldn't be the biggest shock ever. Sometimes the smallest of things could make her spurt the comical steam from the ears. She hoped that it wasn't like that. She felt it wasn't... but who really knew?

She decided to walk the puppy to get rid of some of her energy. There was nothing else to do. There was plenty of time until the sun went down, there was no big scary thing to research. Not that she did research, but she liked to hang with Fred and Wes and pretend she was researching. They knew the truth, she knew the truth, but they still kept up the illusion.

Faith picked up a shirt to cover her otherwise bikini only body and whistled for Scoobs to come join her. She slung open the door to the beach and headed on off into the distance. The beach was long and much walking could be done. Sometimes she would stop to swim in the ocean... but once, about a year ago, she had a rather not so nice run in with some demon who liked to live in the sea. It put her off a bit. It was the slime. She HATED the slime. So now she only occasionally, if she was feeling brave and hot, took the dive into the waves.

Part 3

Almost as if it was planned, Faith's departure brought about Buffy's arrival. She had taken ownership of a nice little jeep for the length of her stay, and with all her skills as a driver was now reversing it into the parking space in front of her new abode. So far only one flower pot had been sent to the flower pot heaven in the sky, but technically that was the fault of a wonky mirror, rather than the fault of a very competent Buffy. She was sure of it. And if the car was new, and the mirrors in all the right places..? Well then, maybe Angel needed to lodge a complaint with the people who supplied him with vehicles. Because something caused her to hit the pot. And it WASN'T bad driving!

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She effortlessly grabbed her bags from the trunk and made her way up to the front door. It was beautiful. Not the front door, that was just red, but the place as a whole, THAT was beautiful. It was all white and wooden and small and inviting. And she could hear the waves from the ocean, her own backyard.

She let herself in with the key that Angel had supplied and took a tour of the place. It had one main bedroom, a smaller bedroom, a bathroom, a kitchen and a front room. Everything she needed and not too much space to rattle around alone in. It was all tastefully decorated too, seemingly quite airy without too much clutter, but at the same time offering a comforting feel most welcome to the weary slayer.

Finally Buffy made her way out of the large glass doors at the back. There it was. The beach, the ocean... vacation!!! She was tempted to run for the waves now, fully clothed, just to remind herself of how inviting it could be. But she didn't. Not only was she feeling exhausted, but also she had a neighbour. A very nice neighbour from what Angel had said. And she didn't want to embarrass herself straight away with crazy shows of exuberance.

Angel hadn't mentioned a name, but from what she could make out, it was a girl of similar age to her, someone who worked with Angel and was fully aware of the things that go bump in the night. Buffy wondered if it was a slayer, one of the many, but hadn't gotten round to asking... there had been way too much other stuff to get caught up on. Now she wondered again though, it would be nice to make a friend. And she would never need to be lonely if her and her new neighbour could get along.

Deciding to be brave she crossed the length of sand that separated the two properties, it wasn't far, just far enough so as not to be on top of each other, and made her way up the little steps to the door at the back. She knocked lightly, and when no answer came, a little more firmly. Still no-one answered and she cupped her hands against the glass and peered in. It was mostly nice and tidy and looked well lived in. There was a bowl on the floor for feeding an animal and a few clothes thrown hap-hazardly across the furniture. Not in a slob way, just in a home kind of way. It made Buffy smile.

She decided to go back across to her own house and write a note for her new neighbour. Just to say hi, and suggest meeting later on. She supposed maybe the girl was at work, it was after all still a short while before evening came.

The note was brief and to the point, friendly without being freaky. Just a 'Hello, I'm your new neighbour, feel free to pop over and say hi.' Perfect.

With that she returned to her new home and went about unpacking, she also kind of fancied snoozing, and the large double bed, decorated all in crisp fresh white sheets was just calling to her to fall upon it.

She fell. And she slept.

'Hello, I'm your new neighbour, just wanted to say hi, feel free to pop over when you're home, looking forward to meeting you... Buffy.'

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Well that was nice. Faith peeled the note from the glass of the door and made her way inside. She wondered what time Buffy had gotten there, she had walked for miles and played with Scoobs, even taken a dip in the ocean. Today was not a day for feeling scared. It was about bravery and being brave and... 'feel free to pop over?'

Did that mean now..? Should she get washed up..? Maybe put on some fresh clothes..? Perhaps she should take a shower, she didn't wanna smell all salty and sweaty, not that Buffy would care, the shock of meeting her neighbour would probably be enough for her to take in.

She decided to get a beer first. And then that was drained and she decided to get another. She wasn't so much a big drinker nowadays, but a cold beer always helped to focus the mind.

But what was she focusing on..? This was Buffy for gods sake, not a stranger. They'd met a thousand times before, there was certainly no need to be feeling the steady stream of butterflies that were fluttering around in her stomach. But feel them she did. It almost felt the same as when you were going on a date, and just waiting at the door for their car to pull up in the drive. Not that she did much dating. After Robin had left town, she'd been happy to be alone. A couple of dates here and there, but nothing ever really serious.

She'd even given up on the cheap sex. It wasn't that she'd suddenly found a great reserve of morals she hadn't had before, she just couldn't be bothered. And this was her home. She didn't want any old person just wandering through her home.

She didn't know if she missed it. Didn't really think about it. She took care of her own needs, and for company she had her friends and Scoobs. It did. For now at least.

But Faith couldn't deny the flutters she was feeling at the moment. So another beer made it's way to her lips. And then the sun was starting to set, and she made her way out to her perch on the railings of her back porch.

As she relaxed herself back and allowed the days last warmth to wash over her, she stole a glance across the way to her neighbouring property. She couldn't see any signs of life, no evidence of Buffy bustling around, making herself comfy in her new home. She wondered if perhaps she had gone out. Had maybe dumped her belongings and searched out food. She knew that if she had just travelled halfway round the world eating crappy plane food she'd be searching out something more substantial.

Half of her was just dying to make the trip across the sand, to raise her hand and knock on the door, but the other half..? That was nervous in the way that Buffy had always made her nervous. It was excitement and fear and need and longing. She pushed them thoughts down though. She was a woman now, not a girl. Not governed by wasted desire, the need to be held and made to feel whole. She would be to Buffy the friend that she always could have been. And if desire was still there, far away in the back of her mind... well she would deal with that. She would swallow it down and put it to bed.

She wasn't stupid. Unrequited had been a word she had to learn a good many years ago, and now she was old enough and mature enough to cope with it. Time had taught her that sometimes it was best to just accept friendship. To make the most of what was on offer and to treasure it. So she would. Being Buffy's friend was what she wanted most.

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As lost as she was in her deep thoughts, Faith didn't really see the sunset, wasn't totally aware that the day had indeed passed and evening was upon them. It was Scoobs with all his pent up energy that finally roused her from her musings, barking away happily, looking for a playmate. She sighed an introspective sigh and made her body come to life again.

She didn't feel like slaying. For the first time in ages the darkness didn't pull at her like a slayer, it only made her think about slaying with Buffy. Nothing had ever compared. Even the last battle they had fought together, the one that had finally put to rest the hell hole that was Sunnydale had left her buzzing with the something that only shoulder to shoulder with Buffy could provide. There was a kinship between them that even her fellow slayer could not deny. Hell, even when they were at each others throats they had been bonded through dreams. Faith had never truly understood that. But then in her life there was so much she had never understood that to question everything would have driven her crazy. So she just accepted it. At times she had wondered if maybe this link meant 'something'. More than just a slayer something. But she didn't have the answers, so she just stopped asking the question.

She decided she would swing by and see Angel, pick up some food, maybe pop down to the lab and amuse herself with Fred's insane form of conversation, and then she would come back and search out Buffy. It was a plan.

Faith picked up the pup, wandered through the house and out the front door. She couldn't help but let out a chuckle as she noticed the broken flower pot in the neighbouring drive. Same old Buffy. Same old feelings.

Part 4

"Every fucking time! It has to be the slime, right?"

Faith was stood in Angel's office dripping with the gooey innards of some form of non-life form, staring at an equally goosed up Angel and Wes. She had known when she had arrived that sewer meant trouble. But why now? Why today when she had so much other shit to be thinking about.

"Well technically Faith, this is the first slime incident in the last two months, and not meaning to be pedantic, but that is not EVERYTIME."

"Bite me, Wes."

"Shower first?"

"Ha-freaking-ha! I tell ya, I don't know what that sweet cheeks downstairs sees in you..."

"Charm, good looks, a dashing sense of humour..."

"An over extended ego..?"

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They all turned to look at the new comer. Fred was dressed in her usual lab coat, but she still managed to make it look good. In her hand was a tube carrying the same slime that the rest of the room was wearing.

"So what have we got Fred? Just the usual sewer dweller, or something more substantial?"

"Not sure Angel, I thought it was usual, wasn't even gonna go with the tests, but the smell was just..."

She looked around the room, noticed the murderous looks being pointed in her direction...

"...the smell was, uh... different. So I ran it through the normal range of analysis and I don't know, it isn't registering as anything we've seen before. Perhaps maybe Wes could get a team together to research..?"

"There goes dinner."

"Dude, you could eat after that? You English types freak me out."

"Faith, don't even pretend that you're not already thinking about which flavour sauce you're gonna have on your ribs tonight."

"Yeah, but I'm from Boston... that's normal, plus... slayer! I NEED to eat after a good slay. There's no excuse for you, except perhaps plain old abnormalities?"

Angel ignored the banter going on around him and put the word out to Harmony to have the head of one of the research divisions sent up to his office. He wouldn't make Wes research tonight. As his friends they were always willing to keep at it, to put in the extra miles when they had already done enough. But sometimes he relented. They were human, they were alive, they had life. He would keep at it, and tomorrow they would reconvene at normal office hours.

"Guys, go home. You too Fred. We're not gonna find out anything tonight that can't wait until tomorrow. Go have fun, who knows where this slime thing is going to take us?"

Wesley smiled at his boss, at his friend, and made to leave the room. As the door closed behind him and his Texan beauty, the words 'no' and 'shower first' were heard ringing out in Fred's firm tones. It made Angel and Faith smile. That Wes and Fred could exist in this world and make a relationship work..? It gave them hope.

"So why are you still here, Faith? I thought you'd be first out the door."

Faith knew why she was here. Angel was her sounding board. Had been since he had saved her. More so since she had taken that little trip through his mind with him. Aside from Buffy, the bond she felt with him was the one she treasured the most.

"Ya know big guy, things on my mind."

"Things?"

"Yeah. Things."

"Buffy things?"

She thought for a moment. What exactly was on her mind? Ever since she had known that Buffy was coming here she had been plagued with memories of her. Not in a 'bubonic plague, everyone's gonna die' kind of way... but in a 'just can't think about anything else' kind of way.

"Yeah I guess. Buffy things."

Angel looked at her, studied her, and took a moment. He had a question to ask, a hard question, and he decided that blunt was the only way to go.

"Are you still in love with her?"

"HUH?"

"Don't act so shocked Faith. I may be old but my faculties are all still working."

"Or not."

She wiggled her eyebrows in a typical Faith way. It was still hard for her to talk about things which mattered. Which meant something to her. Didn't matter that Angel knew her maybe better than anyone. It was still hard.

"No need to go below the belt, Faith."

"But below the belt was exactly what I was talking about!"

Angel shook his head, maybe gave a sigh close to exasperated.

"I know how you feel, Faith. It's ok. I've felt the same remember? I know how special Buffy is, I know the feelings she invokes in people. You don't have to play coy with me. If anyone understands, then I'm your guy."

She considered that. It held truth in it.

"Okay. Lets say for a moment that Buffy coming back is making me think about things I don't wanna think about... what do I do? Cos I don't wanna mess this up, ya know? I did that before, and yeah I was dumb, and young and a whole lot of stupid, but I'm scared. Scared that I won't be able to ignore it."

"Who said you have to ignore it?"

"Oh for fucks sake! Of course I have to ignore it. This is Buffy we're talking about, not some two dollar whore I can pick up and play with for five minutes... and hello? GIRL. You may not have the working faculties down there man, but at least you have the right bits! Aside from stopping at the sex shop on the corner and stocking up on silicone extras, I am NEVER gonna have the bits that she needs!"

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

Angel allowed his gaze to travel over the girl in front of him. The woman in front of him. Aside from the slime she was beautiful. But apart from that... she was special. More special than she ever gave herself credit for. It amazed him sometimes that people could ever make a go of things in this world. They looked at everything wrong, considered everything from the wrong angles. Sure he had the advantage of two hundred plus years of voyeurism, but still... he was often amazed at the shallow way people viewed the world.

"Do you really think it's just about sex, Faith? Everything you've been through, everything you've seen... you really believe in your heart that this just comes down to sex?"

"NO! But... argh! This is stupid! You can't tell me that it doesn't matter. Of course it matters! Buffy likes guys. Just guys! Even dead guys!..."

She made a motion with her hand to acknowledge Angel, that Buffy had once been his did not escape her memory.

"...but she has never, and that bears repeating, NEVER had a thing for a girl. Not even a little thing that she could put down to a teenage crush. She's straight. And that's cool. This isn't about her, this is about how to stop me from wanting what I can't have. Could never have!"

Faith threw herself onto the sofa, at the last minute remembering the pints of slime covering her body.

"Ah shit! Sorry bout that dude."

"Nothing that dry cleaning can't sort out."

Angel made his way to the sofa as well. He had words to say that he thought Faith needed to hear, and comfortable would be the best way to deliver them. Slime or no slime.

"Listen to me Faith, and listen good. Buffy isn't an open book, there has never been a clear way of knowing what she was thinking, what she was feeling... but I KNOW her, not in the same way I used to know her, but enough to know that what you felt, what you feel... it isn't all just you. Back then, when she was my girl, and you were all new and exciting and strutting through town with an air of invincibility, I felt it. I saw it. I recognised her need for you... because it felt like my need for her. Maybe I should have stepped back then. Maybe if I had, then some things that happened wouldn't have happened, and we wouldn't even be having this conversation now. But don't ever think that she didn't feel for you. I'm not saying it was love, I'm no-one to tell you that she loved you. But it WAS something. It was need."

Faith was floored. Forever and longer she had considered what she felt for Buffy all one way. And now..? Now Angel of all people was telling her it wasn't so. That maybe the glances she thought she had seen, the touches she imagined she had felt... the fire that she was sure had raged in Buffy's eyes was real..? Could it be?

"I don't know Angel. I just don't know."

He chuckled. So young. So innocent.

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

"You're not supposed to know. If you knew then where would be the fun? Just take it easy Faith. Get to know the girl again. Maybe you won't even feel the same for her anymore?"

The look that Faith gave him assured him that she had never felt different, and wasn't going to start now.

"There was this moment ya know? In the Dale, before we shut up that shit pit... I was fucked, totally led the girls into a trap, nearly wasted myself... and she came to see me, on the bed, in the bed..."

She raised her eyebrows at the memory.

"...in HER bed, and I just... I don't know, it was like I felt connected to her again, like I could say anything and she wouldn't kill me, and I nearly said it, I nearly told her... all the times, looking at her, wanting her, needing her... but I couldn't do it. And then it was gone. And there was Spike, and Robin. And the fight. And then she was gone, and I was here. Just... what if it isn't meant to be? Maybe I missed the chance, if I had said then, maybe... argh! I just don't know."

She felt kind of melancholy. A whole lot of it.

"Forget sorry for yourself, Faith. Buffy doesn't hold all the cards no matter what you think.

You're her equal, not just in slaying... but as a woman. You have as much to offer her as she has to offer you. And don't forget that. Just talk to her, get to know her, catch up, have fun. You don't need her to make you happy, you certainly don't need her to validate you..."

"I didn't say I needed her to 'validate' me!"

"Calm down. I didn't mean that in a bad way, but you've always looked for some kind of acceptance from her. You don't need it. You are important. You have friends. You have a life. When you think about it... it's Buffy that's come searching for something. Maybe you're that something?"

"And maybe I'm not."

Faith lifted herself from the sofa. All this talk was just helping to dredge up memories and feelings she had long put to rest. A lot of it still hurt. Still left her longing.

"I'm out of here big guy. I need to chill, get showered. Get sleep. I appreciate the chat, really... I just, I need time to think. Which scares me... cos thinking? Ouch!"

Angel laughed at the joke which was always there to cover feelings. To cover her pain.

"You take it easy. I might need you for the slime thing, ok?"

"Sure thing. But I want new clothes, I'm sick of my shit getting ruined for you!"

"You're supposed to be doing this as a calling, Faith. Not for a new wardrobe."

"Yeah, yeah... I got the memo."

She made her way to the door and went to leave. He called her back again though and she steeled herself for one last piece of advice, one last nugget of knowledge.

"Faith..?"

"Yeah?"

"What sauce you getting on the ribs?"

She had to laugh. He wasn't always the stuffy guy. Just most of the time.

"Hot and spicy baby! You know me!"

She winked at him as she left his office. He did know her. That was a given.

Part 5

Buffy rose dazed and confused from her slumber. At first she couldn't remember where exactly she was, but the roaring of the ocean soon reminded her. She was in LA. City of Angels. Maybe home.

All outside was darkness and she soon discovered that what she had thought would be a short nap, had somehow turned into a few hours deep sleep. She didn't mind, she had obviously needed it, and what with the time difference, and the jet lag, she had probably been sleeping when her body was most expecting it.

After she had made some calls to Dawn and to Giles to assure them of her safe arrival she turned her thoughts to food. She was starving. The crap on the plane had been laughable, and her tummy was growling in ways only fit for the most nasty of demons. She would've been embarrassed if there had been someone there to hear it, but there wasn't. So she wasn't. She just patted her stomach and assured it in placating tones that soon she would give it a whole lot of what it desired.

Searching the kitchen though didn't bring much joy. There was a few token bits of food stuff, but nothing that could satisfy the need she had right now. There was of course some low fat yoghurt, and Buffy wasn't entirely sure that this wasn't some form of cheeky joke from Angel. She turned up her nose and decided she would have to leave the house and find something wholly more substantial.

Freshening up and grabbing her keys, she made her way to the front door. There was still no sign of a vehicle in her new neighbours drive, and that led Buffy to wonder again that maybe she was a slayer, out performing her nightly duties. For a second she was envious... jealous of the action she wasn't a part of, but then she remembered... VACATION!!! And that made her feel a whole heap better. She could always call on Angel to provide her with action if she needed it.

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

Plus there was Faith. Buffy knew for sure that at some point she would be searching out her previous partner in crime, and that had to mean that they would slay together again. She allowed herself a smile at that, maybe more than a smile, a full wattage grin. Some things just couldn't be forgotten or replaced, and the feeling of slaying with Faith was one of those things.

She pulled out of her parking space and headed on out to the road, and although she WAS concentrating on the flow of traffic and the road signs by the way, her mind couldn't help but travel back to the times gone. Feelings gone. The absolute unmatched joy of being at one with Faith.

It was an unrivalled emotion. Knowing that the power you held so firm in your grasp was matched totally by the one beside you. That your thoughts, your feelings, your very mind was in total harmony with the other. Not like flip sides to a coin, but the SAME side to a coin. It had freaked her a little at first... it was Faith after all. Uncontrollable, unrestrained power. The kind that scorched you if you got too close. She knew. She had been scorched. Although it wasn't her that had the scars to prove it.

But now it didn't freak her. Hadn't freaked her the last time they were together. The words that Faith had spoken to her, about understanding, the loneliness, those words had given her a strange feeling of..? She wasn't sure. Maybe hope. Hope for something un-named.

She believed that Faith truly was her equal now. Not just in power held, but also in feelings felt. And she liked that. She looked forward to it. All she had to do now was work up the courage to seek her out. To renew the ties, renew the bond. Renew the feelings.

As she mindlessly pulled into the lot of a typical kind of highway restaurant she promised herself that tomorrow, as soon as could be, she would speak to Angel about speaking to Faith. He was after all Faith's friend, and he would know best whether she wanted to hear from Buffy in the same way Buffy needed to hear from her. She hoped so.

Little did she know that she would be face to face with Faith a whole lot sooner than she expected. And it would be a meeting that went with a bang.

Faith waited at the counter for the waitress to deliver her take out ribs. She had been ready to sit in and eat, but the looks she had received, the turned up noses, she just couldn't be bothered. She knew she stank. No need to inflict that on the public at large. Although if she thought about it she would maybe consider that the stench and slime had been gained whilst protecting these very people with the snooty noses. She didn't really care. She wanted a shower badly. Getting home sooner rather than later was no real hardship.

The waitress approached her with the boxes held at arms length. There was enough food here to feed way more than the five thousand, and the woman had to wonder to herself who on earth was going to keep this rather unkempt and disgustingly smelly girl company whilst she ate.

"Is that everything?"

"I don't know... err, maybe throw in a couple of slices of pie? I love the pie."

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

"Two slices?"

Faith looked at the display of deserts on show, they all looked mouth watering, and maybe she could manage more than a couple of slices?

"Okay, throw in the whole thing. The cherry one... and a slice of that chocolate thing, wait... two slices."

She cast an amused glance at the waitress who was stood with her mouth hanging open.

"What can I say..? I have a big appetite."

The waitress rang up the purchases and held her hand out for money. When she saw the slime that encased the cash though she looked a bit unsure about whether to take it.

"Hey lady, it's all that I got, if ya wanna give me this for free, I'm not gonna complain..?"

"No, no, that's fine... although, if you don't mind me asking, what IS that stuff?"

Faith wondered whether to tell her. 'Well at the moment it's some unclassified slime from some unclassified demon.' But she thought better of it. She was already getting strange looks. No need to get committed too.

"Over active sweat gland?"

The waitress just gingerly took the money and offered a sympathetic gaze.

"You should see someone for that."

"Don't I know it lady, but medical insurance, who's got the cash?"

With that she took her food and headed to her car. It hurt her to get in the car with the slime, but what was she to do? The car had been a birthday gift last year from Angel and Wes. It was a beautiful red and chrome AC Cobra. It purred. It sang. Hell, it made her cream. She'd put some makeshift plastic style covering over the seat and hoped for the best. If the car stank tomorrow though, then Angel was sure as hell gonna know about it. She LOVED her car!

She gunned the engine and listened to the familiar sounds as it kicked into life. Felt the throb as the car roared all around her. She checked her mirrors and reversed from her space, swung the nose round and went to leave the lot.

That's when it happened. She felt it before she heard it. And she was screaming even before the metal finished meshing together. Someone had hit her car. Some absolute fucking moron had hit HER car. Some person who was very soon gonna be getting acquainted with the nasty side of her rage. Not much could make her lose it nowadays, but this..? This was akin to killing her first born. It was her car for gods sake!

She was up and out of her seat and cursing all around her in seconds. She didn't care who the fuck was driving the other vehicle... and look at the thing! A fucking jeep! Probably a tourist, maybe a Brit, some mindless twerp that didn't know which side of the road to drive on.

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

Faith stalked menacingly up to the drivers side door of the little jeep, she was gonna unload and she was gonna unload good. This person was gonna regret the day they messed with her prized Cobra. Hell yeah!

"For FUCKS sake, do you have fucking eyes? Do you have a fucking drivers license? Cos that there..? That was fucking bullshit dude, fucking bullshit!"

The driver of the other car looked up as the words were thrown at her. She had been lost in her thoughts, lost in Faith... and now, hearing the familiar Boston tones, she couldn't believe it. Could it really be..?

"Faith..?"

Buffy spoke the word as her eyes travelled the distance to the ball of rage in front of her. It was Faith. It was the Faith from her nightmares. The one who could turn your insides to jelly for fear of what she was about to do.

It took a second longer for Faith to gain recognition. She was too busy pulling on the drivers door, intent to make the other person understand just how exactly pissed off she was.

"Buffy..? B..? I should have fucking known it, this is JUST great! Why the fuck people insist on still letting you in a car is beyond me. And a jeep..? What kind of bullshit is THAT? A prissy fucking car for a priss, is that it?"

Buffy was stunned into silence. This certainly was not the way she had hoped to be reintroduced to her fellow slayer. And for gods sake... it was a car! Just a car!

"I mean I saw the flower pot earlier, and I figured you still couldn't drive for shit, but this..? This is beyond a joke. Nothing like funny!"

All the excitement that Faith had felt about seeing Buffy again was lost in the moment. All she felt was pissed off. Angry. Enraged.

"The flowerpot? How do you know about the flowerpot? And THAT so wasn't my fault... it's the mirrors or something, they're faulty. Or the steering. MY driving is fine... maybe it was YOUR driving to blame here, huh?"

"My driving? You are joking yeah? I swear Buffy, you better tell me you're joking, cos if you're not, I am gonna be SO pissed."

"As opposed to the calm nature you're displaying now?"

Faith shook her head. This was all wrong. Buffy was joking with her? She had hit her car and she was making jokes?

Taking a deep breath to compose herself, Faith released her death grip on the door in front of her and took a step back.

"I AM CALM! Now back the hell up so I can see what the fuck you have done to my car... or maybe you need me to back up for you..? Maybe point out where the hell reverse is?"

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

"Oh for crying out loud! It's a car, Faith, I'll pay for the damage, ok? Just chill the hell out... AND I'm perfectly capable of reversing. I'm perfectly capable of driving full stop."

"As the flowerpot will surely testify."

Buffy waited for Faith to step back and duly reversed the jeep back off the front bumper of the little car in front. She did have to admit to herself... it was a beautiful car. Something she herself would be proud to drive.

She then got out of her own jeep and walked to the front to look at the damage done. In her opinion it wasn't much. A scratch. A really deep scratch. With dents. A little bit of paint transference. Nothing really.

"Is it bad?"

Faith was just shaking her head. She looked close to tears. Buffy wasn't sure, but maybe there WAS tears.

"Are you crying?"

"No I am not fucking crying. You're lucky it's you or you would be crying!"

"Is that a threat?"

"Oh shut up! Just shut the hell up!"

Faith looked again at the damage done. She felt it. Somewhere deep inside she felt it.

"Sorry."

"You're sorry?"

"That's what I said isn't it?"

"Forget it. Just... hell I don't know, just don't get in a car near me again, ok?"

She leant forward and ran her hand the length of her damaged bumper.

"I can't believe you hurt my car."

"I don't think cars have feelings, Faith. They're inanimate. Like flowerpots, which I still don't know how you know about, but yes. Inanimate. No feelings."

Faith huffed her way back to her own car, jumped in the drivers seat. Pretty soon Buffy would know how she knew about the flowerpot, and she wasn't so sure that they would be such happy neighbours now.

As she turned the key in the ignition and again felt the familiar purr, she saw rather than heard Buffy mouthing her name. She cut the gas and raised her eyebrows questioningly.

"What is it now?"

"I uh... just well... you kinda stink, did you know that?"

Faith had no answer. None that she thought Buffy would want to hear anyway. As she floored the pedal and brought her baby to life she mouthed silently to her former partner and flipped her the finger. Then she was gone. Buffy had caught the words, it wasn't a 'great to see you', no. It was a rather pleasant 'fuck you Blondie', but she had also caught the softening smile, the hint of a wink. This was going to be fun. She could tell.

A whole heap of fun.

Part 6

Buffy stayed at the restaurant just long enough to eat her dinner. She didn't take her time. Didn't savour the flavour of the food. There would have been no point. She couldn't think about food any more, her head was full of her meeting with Faith. Over and over again she replayed the events, the curses, the rage filled glances, the absolute venom which had filled Faith's tones. But more than that, the thing which she was seeing on repeat, the thing that had filled her senses was the smile. The one Faith had thrown at her whilst driving away. Admittedly it had been kept company by the finger and the mouthed comment, but it was still special, it still made her smile in response.

Whenever she had thought about Faith over the last couple of years, her smile had always been something which Buffy's mind had settled on. It was so full of promise, like she had a thousand secrets she was just dying to show you. It made the deep brown of her eyes just shine with life. Even when Buffy remembered the times when Faith had been 'Evil Faith', she still had visions of her smile, it's sadistic nature not always able to cover the beauty underneath.

She was glad for the smile now, it reassured her that tonight's incident wasn't going to taint any future get together the two girls would inevitably have. Buffy would hate to go back to the tempestuous relationship they had shared in the past. It was too exhausting. Took too much energy, and with nothing but pain as a reward. No. This time her and Faith would be close, the way they always should have been. Because she, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, would make it so!

At least she really hoped so.

As she drove home she paid extra particular attention to the roads, she was no way convinced that the fender bender of earlier had been entirely her fault, but there was no need to get into anymore little mishaps. All the way home she followed the speed limits, kept correct distances between herself and the cars in front... she was a model driver. And then she pulled into the little private road where her own house for the time being was situated. Next, so distracted by the familiar little red car with slightly damaged bumper sitting in the parking space next door, she managed to hit the dustbin which sat alongside her own drive.

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

Buffy couldn't believe it. Three accidents in one day..? It almost beat her record! More than that she couldn't believe that there was exactly the same two cars in LA with exactly the same damage on the front right hand bumper. She didn't believe in coincidences. It had to be Faith's. And what did that mean..?

Maybe Faith was friends with the girl that lived there..? It lent weight to her theory that the girl next door was a slayer, because Faith would surely be her friend, and would maybe pop over to say 'hi', and 'hello'. Maybe to have dinner... at past midnight.

Surely Faith didn't live there herself..? Angel would have said something. Would have warned her. Checked that it was ok.

Buffy didn't have long to wait to ask the girl herself. At that moment the front door opened, and there was Faith. Dressed in shorts and a bikini top, she was stood there with at first a puzzled frown adorning her features... then disbelief, and finally a smile, a smirk and a laugh!

"You TRYING to get my attention?"

Buffy eyes wandered over the vision in front of her. The teeny tiny shorts. The teenier tinier bikini top. She thought that maybe that comment should have been spoken by her... cos Faith surely HAD her attention.

"Earth to Buffy... come in Buffy?"

"Huh?... OH! Right... no I wasn't, I just..."

She gestured to the dustbin lying on its side, as if maybe THAT had been the responsible party in the latest of little driving mishaps.

"...I wasn't looking. I saw your car and I guess... well, the bin was just left there."

"You sure it didn't jump out at you?"

"Of course it didn't, Faith. It's a bin. And I guess you know that and I guess you were just making fun of me, right?"

"Right."

Buffy considered her next actions. She could either try and negotiate herself into her parking space and suffer abject humiliation if she hit another flowerpot. Or she could abandon the car halfway on the sidewalk. It was a private road. What the heck..? She unfastened her seat belt, and exited the jeep. And there she was, face to face with a smiling Faith.

For a second or two no words were spoken. They just stood there, studying each other. Neither one knowing the thoughts of the other, but at the moment just happy to be lost in their own musings. It was Buffy that finally broke the standoff.

"So you live here, right?"

"Is that a problem?"

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

"Do you stay up all night playing loud music and generally upsetting the tranquil nature of the neighbourhood?"

"Not last time I checked... and this IS the neighbourhood. No one else for miles. Or a block or two. But it feels like miles."

"Don't ya get lonely?"

"Yeah. I just spend my nights craving human contact... someone to talk to, a friendly ear to bend."

Faith certainly did not. She had Angel and the gang when she wanted company, at other times she craved the silence. She wasn't always a people person. It didn't bother her.

"You're still the same I see."

"Hot as hell?"

"Full of shit."

"Aw thanks B, coming from you that's almost a compliment."

"It was meant to be."

Again they sized each other up. Faith couldn't help but look, Buffy was still beautiful, her hair slightly blonder than the last time she saw her... her body still looked firm and trim as she knew it would do. And again she felt the ache. The ache that being with Buffy always brought. The ache that would only ever go if she could one day hold the girl in her arms. Could whisper in her ear all the promises she wanted to make to her. But she couldn't, so she got used to the feeling. Accepted it in the same way she accepted most things in life.

As for what Buffy was feeling..? It was almost the same. Seeing Faith brought to her an ache, a need. Maybe a longing. She was fighting to stop her legs from carrying her forward, from delivering her right up close and personal to the girl in front of her. Her hands wanted to raise. They wanted to travel the distance that was keeping them from the other and touch. Just a caress. Just a reaffirmation that this was indeed Faith in front of her. The Faith from her dreams. But she couldn't do that. She wasn't at all sure what Faith's reaction would be if she sloped up the garden path and started caressing her. It didn't bear thinking about, so instead she asked a question.

"Why are you wearing nothing?"

Faith looked down at her shorts and bikini top. It didn't look like nothing.

"Hate to break it to ya, B, but these are clothes I'm wearing... if you wanted, I could do naked, never been afraid of some skin action, but hell... ya just got back, you sure you're ready for nakedness?"

"I meant NEXT to nothing. Not 'nothing' nothing. Not NAKED nothing."

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

Faith laughed at Buffy's flustered answer. It had always been fun winding the girl up. And so SO easy.

"I know what ya meant. And I just got done showering, we had a fucked up run in with some sewer dwelling slime thing tonight... I was getting ready to turn in, heard the noise outside, figured you were here..."

"Came to welcome me... make fun of my driving?"

"It's hard not to."

Buffy just offered a pointed look which warned Faith not to comment further.

"So the slime thing, is that why you stank?"

"That or an over active sweat gland... depends who you ask."

"Anything I can help with?"

"The sweat gland?"

"The slime thing, dork."

"Don't know yet. Angel's got a team working on it, Fred says it's nothing we've seen before, so it could be exciting... you sure you want in? It could ruin the whole meaning of vacation."

Buffy thought for a moment... did she wanna get involved? Damn right she did. She wanted to hunt and slay and find some action. But more importantly, she wanted to do it with Faith.

"No rest for the wicked! And anyway... this might be more than a vacation. I haven't decided yet. I need somewhere to put down roots, you know? Someone that feels like home."

"Someone?"

"SOMEWHERE! I meant 'somewhere'. And on that note I've gotta go, been great chatting... maybe we can catch up tomorrow, if you want to, I'm not saying you have to, but uh... it'll be nice. Catching up."

"Sure, B. Tomorrow."

With that Buffy made her way to her own front door, careful to avoid the trashcan upturned on the sidewalk. She couldn't resist one look back though, and what she saw was Faith staring right back at her. It made her smile, raise her hand to wiggle a wave goodnight. It also sent a million tingles shooting throughout her body.

Faith watched as Buffy went inside. It had certainly been fun meeting up with her again. And painful... the car would bear witness to THAT! Also kinda confusing. She had seen Buffy looking at her. Had FELT Buffy looking at her. And all the while Angels words were ringing in her head... 'Its Buffy that's come searching for something. Maybe you're that something.'

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

Faith had also heard Buffy's own spoken words, her own slip of the tongue... 'Someone that feels like home.'

She didn't know what it all meant. Was terrified to even think about being in love with Buffy again... but if there was a chance, if she could be Buffy's 'something she was looking for', if she could be that 'someone who felt like home'... then she was damn sure gonna do everything she could to make it happen. She owed it to herself and she owed it to Buffy.

With one last gaze at the neighbouring house, and a last chuckle as she observed the abandoned jeep, she made her way back inside. She did turn in to bed. And she did fall into sleep. And as it was for Buffy, all her dreams were of the other slayer.

Part 7

The next day arrived full of sunshine and blue skies. This was nothing that much different if you lived here all year round, but for Buffy it was a treat. She had of course been living in England for the last few months, and over there it was all grey skies and cloudyness. Rainfall, and then more rainfall. Possibly followed by a rainstorm or two.

The sunshine was putting an extra special spring in her step. Something that had been missing since she had left America for pastures new. Buffy felt it and acknowledged it. Not for what it truly was... excitement at seeing Faith again... but as some kind of confirmation that coming home was right. She had made the right decision.

After she had retrieved the jeep from its haphazard parking space and collected some groceries from the store, she made herself breakfast and then went to bathe in the sun on her back porch until Faith made some kind of appearance. Buffy hoped it wouldn't be too long, already she was counting the minutes since their last meeting... had grown tired of going over and over the same words again and again in her head. She needed new material. Something else to analyse. At one point, as the sun beat down on her head, she had almost started to analyse her feelings for Faith. But she shook away her musings as sunstroke and went inside to fetch a cold drink.

It wouldn't do to have feelings for Faith. Aside from the fact she was a girl... a very hot girl, a girl who excited her more than anyone else she had ever met, regardless of gender... she was also the biggest cause of hurt and confusion in her life. Possibly ever. And yes, Faith was different now, a new person almost, but maybe she could still hurt her, WOULD still hurt her? It was all too much to wonder upon. So she didn't. She instead decided to wait and see, to let time tell if things were like THAT between the two of them. She wasn't stupid... always. She knew that at a time before there had been something there more than friendship. A need to be with the other. Even in the throes of badness, she could recognise that the reason it all cut so deep was because she cared. She CARED about what Faith thought of her, and that made betrayal all the harder.

And now... years apart, she still cared.

Buffy looked longingly at the house across the way. Still no movement. Was it possible that Faith still slept..? At one in the afternoon. She wouldn't have thought so, she herself could

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never sleep that long... had way too much energy to lay in bed all day. But as for Faith... who knew?

She placed her tall ice filled glass of tea by her side and closed her eyes again. The waves were beating a hypnotic rhythm as they lapped against the shore, and it was easy for Buffy to tune right out. She allowed her mind to play again amongst her memories, finding the ones of her and Faith in happiest times. Before it went wrong. Before they both fucked up.

In the distance she was vaguely aware of a dog barking. It sounded as though it was coming closer and closer. And then she could almost smell wet fur, as if the dog had swam in the ocean and was now coming to tell her about it. She ignored it of course. And then it was on her porch... she could hear it's nails scrape along the surface, and the minute she opened her eyes and went to sit up, was the exact minute the dog knocked into her glass and upended a half pint of iced tea over her baking body.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRGGGGGGGGGGGGHHHHHHHHHHHHH
HHH!!!!!"

The scream would've woken the dead, if there had been any dead present.

Faith ran the distance to Buffy's porch to see what the hell was the matter. She had seen Scoobs make his way onto the porch, but thought nothing of it. She couldn't believe that Buffy was scared of dogs... of puppies?

What she saw on arrival brought nothing but laughter. Buffy covered in ice cubes and tea, desperately trying to stop Scoobs from licking the juice from her body.

"Is this YOUR beast, Faith? Can you call it off, cos I swear... one more second and this dog is gonna be a dead dog!"

"Whoa there girl... take it easy on the pup, he's just happy to meet you, I've told him ALL about ya, he's just excited."

"Well let him be excited all over you, I need to get up and clean the mess that the thing spilt all over me!"

Faith whistled and the puppy returned to her side. She gave it a look which may or may not have been scolding. Then she patted its head and offered it a quick tickle. Watching Buffy getting all wet and flustered was not a bad vision to return home to. She had to admit, she was kinda grateful to her four legged friend!

She hung out on Buffy's porch whilst she waited for the older girl to get herself cleaned up, and she couldn't help the slight frown which crossed her features as she returned almost fully dressed. Damn drink spilling dog!

"So... you hear from Angel yet? You know what the demon thing was?"

"Is that all you want me for, B... a little bit of demon action?"

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The sun chose that exact moment to shine full on in Buffy's face, turning her skin an unnatural shade of red.

"You blushing?"

"NO! It's the sun. And no to the demon thing, I don't just want you for demon action, I want you for all sorts of action... like talking, and eating."

"You wanna eat me?"

"Faith!"

"Yes, baby?"

"Oh god... my head hurts."

"From the sun?"

"Can you just be quiet for two seconds..? Please?"

Faith was quiet. She didn't wanna push too far, too fast, but it was hard. This banter, joking with Buffy... it was the best times she had ever had, and it was far too easy and comforting to fall back into it. But she would try. For two seconds.

"What I MEANT was... I don't just want to go slaying with you, although I'd be lying if I said I wasn't looking forward to it a little bit, but apart from that... I wanna hang out with you. Catch up. Maybe get some lunch? Not the other thing, which I'm sure would also be all sorts of fun... but no. Lunch. Ok?"

"So you don't wanna eat me?"

"Do you ever give it up?"

"I'd give it up to you."

Buffy shook her head in defeat. It was always like this. Everything she said, no matter how innocuous, Faith had always found a way to make it suggestive. Sometimes yes, she maybe planted the thing because she enjoyed the banter... but even if she didn't, Faith still found a way.

"Can we just start with lunch?"

"Fine. But don't say I didn't offer. And I want dessert!"

"I don't have dessert... but I can do lunch."

"No worries, you can have some of my cherry pie."

"Will we ever have a conversation that isn't a sexual innuendo?"

Faith raised her eyebrows in her patented way and travelled the distance back to her own house. There she picked up the leftover pie... innuendo indeed! It would be cool catching up with Buffy, and then this evening they could both go to Angels and see about the slime. Faith hated the slime. HATED. But at this moment, the thought of getting all messed up with Buffy..? It had her all kinds of hot and all kinds of excited!!

Part 8

They were up against it. Standing closed in at a dead end in the sewer system, Buffy, Faith, Angel, Gunn and Wes, were currently being faced down by six of the same slime demons they had come across last night. They hadn't gone hunting, they had simply gone for information. The research team had found possible links between the demons and a very old, very evil demon king of the sea. These apparently were its minions, sent to do his bidding, clear the way for some sort of return to existence. From legend it was rather huge, able to swallow much of the western seaboard of North America in just one bite. The gang had decided that this wasn't something they wanted to see and therefore had gone searching for a way of stopping it from coming to pass.

All they had found were the slime fiends. And now they were getting their asses kicked. The sewer was dark and dank, not a problem for the superheroes, but certainly some problem for Gunn and Wes. Also the slime demons seemed to have an innate understanding of exactly where they were heading, hence being able to corner the group of friends in their current predicament.

The fighting was fierce, the slayers and Angel were pretty much able to handle a demon each, but for Gunn and Wes, the most they could do was keep a demon at bay. Striking out blindly, but with speed, hoping the sheer flurry of movement would be enough to deter. It was working. Kind of, but unfortunately they were outnumbered, with two spare demons able to land blows.

Faith was rethinking her earlier thought that getting messy with Buffy would be fun. This wasn't fun, this was dangerous. If she could take Gunn and Wes out of the fight, it would be easier, then the three of them left could just let rip, teach these slimy motherfuckers who was boss. Sure they had a king, but she was in the mood to teach them who was queen! Gunn and Wes were hard to persuade though, and she was getting hoarse from shouting.

"Guys... just clear the fuck out! There's a manhole above us for Christ sake... climb the ladder and reach for the stars..."

"Not happening Faith... oomph!"

The air rushed from Wes' body as he took a particularly hard hit, he fell to his knees and crawled back towards the ladder.

"Glad we see eye to eye, English boy... now Gunn, go with him, make sure he gets to the top... then call in the troops... I want three more slayers... ARGH!"

She broke off to sweep the legs from under the demon dumb enough to hit her face, she brought her boot down with such fury upon it's head that it split like a grape. Squelchy.

"Go for the heads, guys...they split real nice!"

Laughing to herself, Faith turned again to the retreating Gunn and Wes.

"Make that two slayers, just in case... get Rhona... and maybe Ken... now motor!"

The two guys made haste to the top of the ladder and up into the street. There Wes used his cell to summon the reinforcements, and within minutes they arrived. Wasting no time they dove straight through the hole and into the sewer. They were experienced slayers now, and always ready to fight.

"Yo Faith... great to see ya!"

"Hey, Ken, Rhona... you remember Buffy?"

The two newcomers ran their appraising eyes over their former leader. They couldn't help but feel respect for her command of the fight, her obvious superiority over her foes... but that didn't mean that their memories were necessarily fond of the old slayer. They remembered her bossiness, her detachment... her inability to bond with any of them.

"Yeah, Hi Buffy... great to see you too."

It was said by both of them with sugary sweetness.

"Guys, great to see you... now maybe a little help? We can play catch ups later."

Rhona and Kennedy looked to each other, raising their eyebrows as if to say, 'same old Buffy', then they did indeed join the fight. It was easy now. Four slayers and a vampire against five measly demons. No sweat. But a hell of a lot of slime.

They didn't killed the last one straight away... had kept it alive to question, had pummelled it repeatedly until it gave up some words. They were not happy words, they had made the whole group uncomfortable, had turned their worlds upside down.

The demon spoke in a serpents tongue, hissing its words out, seeming to spit forth more slime with each one.

"The king will rissse... long livvve the king... when the vampire lossessss his sssoul to the woman he lovelssss... then he will ssshhhhow my master the way... will open the gatesss to hell... will let loosssse all manner of tormenntsss on... ARGHHHHH!"

The demon screamed his death. His head squashed between the fingers of the dark slayer. She hadn't liked his words. Not one bit. The vampire losing his soul to the woman he loved? Sounded like bullshit to her.

Angel was looking at Buffy, staring at her to gage a reaction, Buffy was staring at Faith, looking to see what effect the words had had on her... Faith was staring at her hands, covered in slime... wondering if she had the courage to look up at Buffy. Rhona and Kennedy were staring at each other, wondering what the hell was going on. A demon talks in riddles and everyone spaces out? Seemed odd to them.

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"Uh... guys? We won. Can we go now? Maybe get cleaned up?"

"Huh? Oh yes. Go girls. Thanks for coming and helping. Ring through to personnel, get them to update your bonuses. Add expenses for clothes."

"Hey, thanks man... that's great."

"No problem. Catch you later."

"Right. Bye Faith... Buffy. We'll catch up soon?"

Faith's reverie was broken. She looked up. At Buffy. Caught the eyes staring back at her. But she couldn't read what they meant, had no idea what Buffy was trying to say. Turning her attention to the others, she told them they would indeed catch up, to come out to the beach house on Sunday, they would have a party.

But she didn't feel like partying. She felt like getting the hell out of there. Trying to make sense of the words spoken... cos they DIDN'T make sense. Buffy and Angel..? That was over wasn't it? There had been Spike... and for Angel there was Cordelia. Kind of. They weren't still into each other? And even if they were... they wouldn't be THAT stupid, wouldn't end the world to get laid. No lay was worth that.

She looked again at Buffy. Maybe ONE lay was worth that. One girl.

At that moment, Faith vowed to herself that she wouldn't let it happen. She may have to stake Angel's ass, hell... she'd stake Buffy's ass too, but there was no way that the King of slimey shit was rising in her town. Her city. No way in hell.

"Guys, I think we should get out of here, obviously we need to talk, need to figure this shit out... get Wes on the case, get everyone on the case... just lets get the fuck out of here."

"Faith... lets not panic. That demon didn't know what it was talking about, I'm not gonna lose my soul to the woman I love, I can't... I wouldn't DO that. Nothing could make me do that."

Faith's face wore a wounded look as she spoke her reply. The words barely left her mouth a whisper, as if she almost didn't want to speak them.

"But you ARE still in love with her..? She could still MAKE you lose your soul..?"

Buffy was frozen, the same question had crossed her mind when Angel had spoken his words. They had moved on... she had been sure of it. Had known that Angel had fallen in love with Cordelia. And now she waited to hear his reaction. Breath held, not daring to make a sound.

"Yes."

He spoke the word as if he were ashamed. He HAD moved on. Had accepted that him and Buffy would never be. Could never be. But he hadn't stopped loving her. Hadn't stopped feeling his heart leap whenever he saw her, as if it was crying in his chest to beat out her name. To beat out his love. He had never thought he would speak the word though, but now,

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in this instant, it just seemed right. As if everyone should know the truth of the situation. If this threat was real, which he couldn't believe it was... they had to know.

Faith turned away from his truth. This all felt so dangerously familiar, Angel and her in love with the same girl. Again. Part of her felt betrayed by Angel, feeling like he shouldn't have spoken words to her about Buffy if he himself still loved her. She didn't register the disbelief and confusion in Buffy's eyes, she was already climbing the ladder to the street.

She didn't wait for them there either. This hurt, and she didn't need to hang around and make the pain worse. She would go home, sink a couple of beers. Maybe train. Wear herself out so she didn't have to think.

Anything was better than seeing Buffy right now. Faith was certain she had let some of her feelings show for the other girl in her reaction to Angel's words... and now she felt slightly lost. Fenced in by the weight of her fear of rejection. Of humiliation.

The Faith of old would have sought to take her pain out on someone else. But not this Faith. She would go home and she would push her body beyond all of its limitations. Would train until she collapsed. She owned her own pain these days. She owned it and she beat it.

As she pulled her car sharply into the space in front of her house, she looked forward to an evening of numbness. She hadn't felt such a need to be numb in a long time... not since the last time Buffy had chosen Angel over her.

She would train. She would hurt. And she would make herself feel better.

Buffy had exited the sewer and been upset not to see Faith waiting for her. She had seen how hurt Faith looked when Angel had spoken his words... couldn't miss her hasty retreat from the sewer tunnel. It all made her think that things WERE like that between the two of them. That Faith did have feelings for her that she had maybe been considering that she might possibly have for Faith. It confused her and she needed to see Faith. Now. Because the hasty retreat also told her that Faith was believing that her and Angel was a possibility... that she would ever sleep with him again. That she still loved him. She didn't. Not anymore.

She looked at Angel uncomfortably as he followed up her rear into the street. She had to tell him that she didn't love him, that things weren't like that for her. He was still in her heart, always would be... but never like that. Not again. He deserved to know.

"Angel."

"Buffy... wait, before you say anything that it's gonna hurt me to hear... I know how you feel, or how you don't feel..."

His shoulders slumped a little as he spoke. He had always harboured hope.

"...when I hugged you when you got here, I didn't feel your heart race... didn't feel excitement, I accepted it then and there... had been foolish to hope for any different. But I

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know. I didn't say what I said to make you love me back, I said it so everyone knew... so we could deal with what's coming."

"Thank you."

"Thank you?"

He looked at her questioningly.

"For not making me say it, for not making me hurt you. I'd never want to hurt you, Angel."

"I know..."

Angel took a moment, considered his words.

"...but now you have to make sure you're not hurting Faith."

"Hurting Faith? I wouldn't hurt Faith."

"Because you love her?"

Buffy's face showed her shock. She hadn't meant that. Hadn't been thinking that.

"I love her?"

"You don't? I saw how you reacted to my words in there, it confirmed what I thought. You didn't look to me, you looked to her, I saw your eyes register her pain, I saw you reach out with your gaze... feel it Buffy, because she needs you..."

It hurt to push her towards another's arms. But he wasn't stupid. He also loved Faith, couldn't stand the thought of her in pain because of him.

"...She'll never admit it, but she's hurting now, and only you can stop it. Let yourself feel. Tell her how you feel."

Buffy stood there stunned. Did she love Faith? Was that the answer to her life's conundrum? Could it really be that simple... or that complicated? She shook her head, looked to Angel.

"I don't... how do you know? Why would you say that..? And she doesn't, she wouldn't... me?"

"Yes Buffy. You."

Her face showed shocked again. Or fear. To finally totally recognise her feelings. Be told what she needed to hear. It scared the living shit out of her.

"I need to go to her."

To make it better.

"So go."

"Thank you, Angel. I mean it. Thank you!"

Buffy lent into the offered embrace. It felt warm. It felt safe.

She was mistaken.

As she made her way down the street, took off at a jog to make her way home, Angel studied her retreating form. His eyes narrowed. Her ass looked good. So tight. So firm. He could bite that ass. Sink his teeth straight into it and suck the very life force from her. It thrilled him, made him shudder with expectation. Made him want to lose his soul.

He shook his head clear. A confused look shadowing his face. He had spaced out for a minute. Blacked out. He didn't know, but he certainly hadn't a clue what he had just been thinking. Was aware only of a hissing.

The confusion worried him as he walked down the street. He would mention it to Wesley, no need to worry the others. He hoped it wasn't something to do with the demons. An attempt to take over his mind... get him to lose his soul.

In the sewers underneath him, more minions of the king hissed their excitement. It was working.

The king would rise. Long live the king!

Part 9

Buffy had returned home as quick as her little legs would carry her. She was desperate to see Faith, to put things straight. She wasn't thinking to pour out words of undying love, no, the idea was all too new to her to even think about speaking it to Faith, but she had to tell her that Angel wasn't even a blip on her radar screen anymore. That was long past. It was history.

She took her time in the shower, made sure that all the slime deposited on her body was now firmly deposited down the plug hole. The smell was atrocious, and she had to lather, rinse and repeat many times until she was happy that the smell no longer lingered.

Then she dressed in just a nice comfy pair of joggers and a little white vest. Admittedly it wasn't high style, but she looked good. She looked clean. And she felt refreshed. Ready to face Faith.

But facing Faith wouldn't be that easy. It never really was.

First she had gone to her front door, knocked a few times, even hollered a little, but there was no answer. Even the hellhound, who had attacked her on the porch, only offered subdued whimpering instead of a full on bark fest.

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Next she had gone back inside and manned the phone. Rang Angel, retrieved Faith's cell number and then left maybe excessive messages on her answer phone urging her to call. No joy there. A return call wasn't forthcoming.

Buffy was stuck for ideas. Had no clue where Faith would be likely to hang out. If she was the Faith of old she was probably out partying now, looking for the fun, maybe looking to get laid? But Angel had said Faith wasn't so much the party girl now... so where was she?

She finally gave in. It was getting late, bed was calling, and tomorrow was another day. Sure she would rather see Faith now, get things nice and sorted, but it seemed as though that wasn't an option. Buffy warmed herself some milk, added a couple of spoons of chocolate, took her mug and headed for the porch. She would sit outside and drink this, meditate under the stars, then she would sleep.

And that's where she found Faith. Under the stars, working her ass off. She had moved a training dummy out onto the beach, and she was kicking the absolute shit out of it. Pounding on it. Unleashing a fury of moves so fierce that it was a wonder the dummy still stood. Or that it's limbs were still attached.

Buffy could feel the anger coming from her, but more than that the raw power. It was as if she was in a trance, focussed wholly in the thing in front of her. Buffy had to wonder who it was she was seeing, who it was she was beating the crap out of. She kinda hoped it wasn't her, but then she also knew it was a possibility.

For a while she decided to not say anything. To not make Faith aware that she was there and watching. She reasoned with herself that obviously Faith didn't want to be interrupted... so she wouldn't. Because that would be rude. And she wasn't rude. So she sat back and watched. Observed. Thought.

Love was a funny thing to her. She was sure it had been real with Angel. Knew it had been real. But then it was doomed, so really..? Not fun. And then Riley. She had never felt that THING for him. Sure he had meant a lot, but never enough. Not enough to satisfy. And Spike..? Not love. Never love. Just need. A need to exist at first... and then the last days, the ones in Sunnydale. Maybe that had been as close to loving him as she had ever come, but even then it wasn't with all her heart. It had been an acceptance that he was there for her, that he believed in her when others didn't.

And now..? Did she love Faith?

Buffy watched as Faith executed her body through a stunning array of moves. Watched the way her muscles twisted and turned underneath her skin. Her perfect skin. In the moonlight she could just about make out a bruise above Faith's right eye, probably from where the slime thing had caught her... it didn't alter her beauty. For Buffy it maybe increased it. Knowing that it was an injury received whilst slaying. She didn't mean to study so intently the curves of Faith's figure, but she couldn't help it. The dark haired girl was wearing so little, just those teeny shorts again which so perfectly hugged her firm little round butt, and a shirt so small, that for sure it had to have been just an afterthought. She felt desire when she looked at her. Not necessarily a desire to sleep with her, but a desire to go to her. To touch her. To hold her. It kinda felt like love.

For a moment she smiled to herself.

But how could it be love? She had been back for less than two days. If it was love now, did it mean it had always been love? All the times she had dismissed feelings, at first because Faith was a girl, then because Faith was so darn coarse all the time, then because she was evil... and then because she hadn't said the words. All those times..? Had it been love?

When Faith had spoken to her before about the loneliness, and existing together... that had filled Buffy with hope that things would get better between them, but something else. At the time, even in the midst of all the First crap and the Spike crap... part of her had longed for Faith to say the words. To tell her that she had feelings. Real feelings. But she hadn't. Had in fact told her about Robin. So she had forgotten the idea again.

In the end, she could see that it would have to be her that went to Faith. Her that spoke the words and asked the questions. She had to know. Had to know if this was love, if it was something else... if Faith even felt anything like the same way?

So lost was Buffy in her own little world that she had forgotten about the presence of the one she was thinking of. But the one she was thinking of was more than aware that SHE was there. Had been aware from the minute she had walked out onto the porch, all the minutes she had been staring into space, the minute she had sipped at her cup only to make a funny face cos the liquid had gone cold. Totally aware.

Faith hadn't waved or spoke recognition because she wasn't ready to deal with that crap yet. She still had a hell of a lot more pounding to do before she felt ready. But then she had looked over, had seen the wonderment on Buffy's face as she stared out to sea, and for her, at that moment, the most important thing in her world was to know what Buffy was thinking about, what could make her face light up in such a way.

She stopped her punches, her kicks and walked slowly over.

"Hey, B... what ya thinking about?"

The words exited her mouth so softly, afraid to break the silence which had encapsulated the two of them.

It still caught Buffy unaware though. Made her look up in surprise and then pleasure.

"What am I thinking about?"

Her eyes went wide as she considered the multitude of things which had crossed through her mind in the last hour or so, it was all so deep, all so meaningful. All so Faith.

"I guess I was thinking about a lot of things. Life. Love. The usual."

"The usual? Sounds kinda heavy to me. I pretty much think about food and slaying. Keeps it simpler."

"I guess it would. But then I'm not hungry, and I'm done with slaying for the night..."

"Did you speak to Angel?"

Faith had to ask. Didn't really want to know, but HAD to know.

"Yeah. And thanks for waiting for me, by the way."

"I had to split, I smelt like shit AGAIN, needed a shower, needed fresh air."

"And you couldn't have that with me?"

"A shower..?"

Buffy mentally kicked herself. Of course she hadn't meant a shower. The fresh air bit she had meant.

"No, Faith. Not the shower."

"Tell ya the truth, B, I just didn't wanna get caught up in 'you and Angel' shit. Figured you guys maybe needed to 'talk' or something..."

"About that, Faith..."

Buffy considered to herself what to say, how to say it. If she could find the words.

"...me and Angel. Well there ISN'T a me and Angel. Not anymore, not for a long time."

"Not my business if there is. Unless of course you were planning on giving the guy a happy, then it's my business, cos well... with the demons and stuff..."

"I'm not planning on giving Angel a happy."

"Well then, I guess it's not my business."

Buffy couldn't help but let out a sigh. Nothing was ever just easy.

"Faith, it IS your business, ok? All this talk about catching up, hanging out together... well in my head that's all kind of the prelude to a friendship, a friendship which I want with you, so will you stop acting as if my life doesn't concern you. It does. I WANT it to."

"You want your life to concern me?"

"In my mind, Faith, it already DOES concern you. That's kinda what I was thinking about."

"Oh."

Faith didn't know what that meant exactly. But it sounded kind of good, kind of promising. And if thinking about that had been what had lit Buffy's face..? Well that kind of made her feel a whole lot of happy.

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For a couple of minutes there was silence, neither one really knowing what to say next. Buffy was scared at the realisation of her feelings, not scared of them, not now, but scared that Faith wouldn't be able to give her what she needed, wouldn't want to. So she was biting her tongue, trying desperately to think of something non related to say. Faith was just silently wondering. If this time was finally gonna be the right time. The time when it became necessary to say all the things she had always dreamed of saying, to whisper the words she had always longed to speak. But how did she know? And how did you start to say words you had kept prisoner for so long?

So neither of them spoke the words. They studied the floor, they studied the porch, and finally they silently studied each other.

Faith could feel her body tensing again. Straining. Her muscles winding tighter and tighter by the second. If something didn't break the spell in a moment, then she would be mounting the porch and mounting Buffy.

"So, B..?"

But Buffy didn't answer, was still lost in the eyes of Faith. The most she gave of acknowledgement was the slight dilating of her pupils as she spread her eyes to wordlessly encourage Faith to continue.

"...do you wanna, heck, I don't know..."

She broke the eye contact, it was too much right now, she looked around for escape, spotted the dummy standing forlorn and alone on the beach.

"...do ya wanna train?"

Confusion registered on Buffy's face. Did she want a train? Was that slang?

"Train? Why would I want a train?"

"You really are a spaz ain't ya? I always remembered ya being one, but thought maybe I'd twisted things in my head, maybe knock some of that perfection off ya, but it's all true."

"Do I want a train and 'I' am the spaz? You lose me."

Faith had to laugh. It was all so familiar in it's own crazy way. Buffy was just so... Buffy like! And she loved it. And she loved her. And if she wanted a train, she'd steal her the biggest god damn locomotive the world had ever seen.

"I asked you if you wanted TO train. Dumbass!"

Buffy coloured red. It was a good colour on her.

"Right, which I knew really, and makes a lot more sense then wanting A train... but train? Now? In the middle of the night, in the dark, you want to train?"

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Sure it was kinda dark, but the moon was out and bright, and yeah it was the middle of the night, but it wasn't like they had jobs to go to in the morning. Faith thought that training was the best idea in the world. The second best at least.

"You scared of getting beat down, sweet cheeks? Cos if that's the problem, well I guess I can go easy on ya, treat ya like a newbie... just a little tickle here and there."

"Do you know how much I'm gonna have to hurt you for that, Faith?"

Buffy spoke the words, but truthfully? She had seen Faith, seen the power in her punch, speed in her moves... and she wasn't so sure she COULD take her.

"Ya think so do ya? Well then...hurt me, baby."

"I'm NOT your baby."

"I know that, B... but come the end of this little sesh, I might just make ya me bitch!"

She wiggled her eyebrows, offered her sexiest smile. This could be fun. Something was happening between her and Buffy, not sure what, but things were getting there, the there she had always thought they should have gone to. And now they were gonna kick shit out of each other. The mating ritual of the slayer.

"Maybe you'll be MY bitch, Faith."

"Who knows..? Maybe I will."

Buffy downed the remaining dregs of her cold chocolate drink and walked the steps from her porch to the beach. With each footstep her heartbeat increased, her excitement grew. Faith was waiting for her. Hands on hips, sizing her up. The funny thing was though, she didn't look like she was sizing her up for a fight. Nope. It kinda looked like she was sizing her up for a whole lot more.

A hell of a whole lot more!

Part 10

Angel had returned to W&H after the run in with the slime demons. It didn't take long to shower and change... he didn't need to primp himself to look good. He always looked good. After fielding a couple of calls from Buffy, looking for Faith, he headed down to fill in Wes on the words of the demon.

He hadn't been able to get the words from his head. He KNEW that Buffy didn't love him, didn't want him, but still... somewhere, deep down, he could feel the words excite him. And that scared him. It was like something that he couldn't control, in the pit of his being, coiling round, looking to strike, strangling his soul. He hoped that Buffy had found Faith. He hoped that they sorted it out, finally. More than anything, he hoped that he would do nothing to harm her. To hurt Buffy. He could never live with himself if he hurt her again.

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Finding Wes was easy. Follow the Texan twang of Fred, and her cowboy was always just behind her.

"Hey Fred, Wes around?"

"Oh, hey Angel. Nice run in with the Nyloraci?... Don't say anything, but you look a lot better off than Wesley did when he got back. And that smell..? I've got TWO divisions working on an odour neutraliser as we speak!"

"An odour neutraliser..?"

"To stop the smell."

"Of the... Nyloraci..?"

"Uh-huh. Of course, Angel. What else would it be for? Wes's feet?"

She laughed away to herself as she negotiated her way round the lab. Always so much work to do, evil to stop. It exhausted her often, but she would never give it up. Couldn't give it up. Not only would her own conscience not allow her to, but she was in love with Wes, and this was his life too.

"So where is he then, Fred?"

He had to marvel at her ditsyness. It was both endearing and welcome on one so clever.

"Oh right! Wes... I think he's up in my office." She lowered her voice conspiratorially. "I think he's sleeping. He said he was researching, but I don't believe him. If I catch him he says it's narcolepsy... he even used that excuse last year at Christmas dinner. My mom felt so sorry for him. And I drove."

"Wes is a bad boy."

He didn't know what else to say.

"No silly! Just a little challenged."

She winked as he walked away from her, and he was left thinking, as he did often, that he was so pleased that he had managed to bring her back from Pylea. Such a lovely girl. And kind of hot. He opened his nostrils and breathed in deep, allowed her scent to invade his senses... it prickled. It was sweet. Tempting.

He knocked on the door, and when there was no answer, felt free to enter. Wes quickly awoke, grabbing on to his upside down book, which he began to read most diligently.

"Uh... Angel, I was just researching..."

"Save it Wes. I know all about your narcolepsy. Maybe you should talk to medical, let one of our doctors look at you?"

"Ha ha. And let them transplant my brain for medical research? Don't you worry about me Angel... the narcolepsy's selective."

"Around in-laws?"

Wes coloured, looked away. He really would have to speak with Fred about discussing personal medical conditions. HE hadn't told anyone when she had an outbreak of Pylean warts, had he? No. Because HE was an English gentleman!

They discussed this and that, before coming down to business. The demons and Angel's blacking out.

"So tell me, Wes... these Nyloraci..? Could they be making me lose focus, blackout?"

"Quite fascinatingly, Angel... it could be narcolepsy."

"Right. Funny..., now really?"

"Yes, well, from what we've found out so far, these Nyloraci, or followers of King Nylorac... they do indeed possess telepathic powers, almost like sirens if you will... they emit a hiss, or a chant like hiss in the area of their victim... and Kapow! You're out of there, under control. Like a guinea pig, really."

"Kapow?"

"Fred is 'Americanising' me. She finds my use of American words 'sexy'."

Angel just nodded. Never sure if Fred was serious, or completely winding Wes up. He knew which he thought it was. 'Kapow!' Laughable.

"So these things want control of me?"

"It looks that way. Now we just have to figure out 'why'?"

"I think we already have that one covered."

He explained to Wes about what the demon had said. How he would lose his soul to the woman he loved and open the gates to hell.

"So did he mean that the gates would open at the simple act of intercourse... or that you would lose your soul and then as Angelus, show them how to open the gates?"

"Does it matter? There will be NO intercourse, NO soul losing."

"Right. Of course."

Wes paused. Studied a confused looking Angel.

"Are you okay? You look..."

"I'm fine. Just... tired."

With that Angel turned and left the room, and a bemused Wes. It was only early in the night really. Much too early for Angel to feel tired. He decided he would research the demons more now, narcolepsy be damned! He was worried. No one would benefit from a return to Angelus.

Angel WAS tired. Unusually so. He had climbed straight into bed and was out in minutes. It wasn't peaceful sleep though. Far below him, under the streets, more demons were gathering. Hundreds now, all hissing, all chanting. They wanted their King to rise. They needed him to. Without him to sustain them, they would die in this hostile world.

Angel's body was sweat soaked. He twisted and turned under his sheets, wrapped tightly within a dream. An un-named emotion playing across his face.

In his mind he could see her. She was so real, so there, so his. He raised his palm to touch her, to feel her skin... and he could. It was warm to the touch, slick to the touch, bathed in the sweat that their love-making had produced.

He could feel her all around him. Feel himself inside her, sliding against her, her muscles tightening to keep him there. Hers. He opened his eyes. Felt love.

Buffy. His Buffy, riding him. Her head thrown back in total ecstasy, hers hands down at her sides, clenching the sheets, balling them up in her fists as she fought to keep concentration. To keep focused on her goal.

Then it changed. She was gone from him, her weight lifted... her mouth taking the place of where her pussy had just been. She was sucking him. Her lips wrapped around his cock, reclaiming all the juices that she herself had just put there. She looked so perfect, so beautiful...

With that he was ripped from his place. He was above the bed, watching, nothing but the voyeur, again. It was still her. But now it was not him she was riding. It was Faith.

Her head was still thrown back, the ecstasy holding her firm in it's grasp, from dream scene to dream scene, it stayed the same. He could see where Faith's hand was touching her, could see where her fingers disappeared inside of her, could see the wetness spilling forth. Buffy's wetness. HIS wetness.

Buffy was riding her hard. On her hands and knees above Faith, rocking mercilessly, slamming down, taking everything she could... and as she came, she screamed. Over and over. Faith's name. Just Faith.

He felt it tug at him. Felt it anger him.

When he looked again, they were pulling back. Together, their eyes meeting. Buffy and Faith. And he could see it, see the love, the real love, the true love. From deep within his soul he screamed. An animals scream. A monsters scream.

With sudden force he was thrown back on the bed. And now HE was looking into Buffy's eyes. He could see the fear there. Laughed. She struggled underneath him. He morphed. She began to scream. He bit her. Felt the power as her blood filled his veins. Spilt into his mouth as he spilt into her. As he drank her dry, he could feel the silent pleas fall unanswered from her lips. It made him smile as he awoke.

Slowly his eyes opened. Took in the room around him, took in the firm hand grasping his cock. The dream. Buffy. He let out a sigh as he lay his head back down and reclosed his eyes. Buffy.

He could see her again as he stole the blood from her veins, as her legs wrapped around him, trying to pull him from her. As he drunk her dry. Her screams. And he came, by his own hand, dreaming of her misery.

He was up and dressed quickly, ready to leave. Walking around, one last look. Pausing. For a minute, a moment, recognition in his eyes, pain, understanding. And then gone again. The sound of hissing all he was sure of.

He approached the elevator, pushed the down button. As it slowly climbed the floors to collect him, he laughed to himself. Manically. Spoke with the voice of Angelus.

"Looks like a got myself a hot date."

Part 11

Down on the beach, at the waters edge, Buffy and Faith were still training. Both of them were going at it hard, not afraid to let go, never afraid to let go. Their bodies were becoming exhausted but their souls felt replenished, rejuvenated, and it urged them to continue. To keep pushing. Their moves were fast, frantic... and both of them would be lying if they had said it didn't make them hot. They were almost burning for each other. Intense.

Far back in the distance were the high standing buildings of downtown LA. The sun was rising over the m now, just peeking it's first rays over the smallest of them and between the gaps of all of them. Warming rays. Rays that travelled the distance to the beach, and illuminated the sweat engulfed bodies of both girls, making them shine with the sunrise.

They collapsed together, in synch. Just their toes creeping forward to cool in the ocean. The sea still cold from the night just passed.

Faith looked over at Buffy. Just an outstretched arm away. Just a touch away. It seemed funny to her that she had spent all night touching Buffy, and now the thought terrified her. She opened her mouth, stole the silence.

"So, B..? Are we done?"

"Done? Have you had enough, Faith?"

"Of you, Buffy?... Never."

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

She offered her trademark grin and flipped to standing. Outstretched an arm to help Buffy to her feet. Safe touching.

Buffy was glad to keep going. Ecstatic. Nothing had felt this good in ages. Nothing had come this close to feeling this good in ages. And by that, she meant NOTHING! It was thrilling and exciting and electric and passionate... and really..? Kinda hot, as well. She vowed to push it now, to unleash the last of her everything. She was taking Faith down, and when she had her down..? Well that's when she got a little bit lost.

They fought fierce and they fought true. Both of them pushing the last ounces of strength from their bodies, trying with all they had to be the one that took the other down. In the end it was Faith who succeeded. The old kick and sweep, worked on Buffy ALL the time. Well some of the time. Faith didn't care, it had worked this time.

And now Buffy was underneath her. Firmly underneath her. And she could feel her, feel where skin touched skin, sweat mixed with sweat. Her thigh was pressed hard between Buffy's thighs, and maybe that was why Buffy was panting, breath ragged, or maybe it was the way that their breasts pressed so tightly together, making friction, using friction... or maybe it was really the way that their eyes were meeting. All the time that their bodies sought to writhe against the other, their eyes stayed firm. Locked together. Asking questions and answering questions. Finally, understanding. Finally as one.

It was with a whisper that Faith eventually spoke. Hoarse. Scratchy.

"So tell me, B... have YOU had enough?"

For a moment Buffy felt thrown by the question. Yes. No. Help? Everything was so close, so real. This was Faith, on top of her, pushing against her, asking her if she'd had enough. So close. So real. And so everything that she wanted.

But so quick. She could feel the heat racing through her body, tearing through her. It both excited and scared. But mostly..? Excited.

She locked again into Faith's gaze, saw the answers. Put her lips to her ear, drew a deep breath in.

"More, Faith. Show me more."

Faith didn't need any further invitation. She lowered her head slowly, still not sure that Buffy wouldn't come to her senses any second and beat her shitless for groping her. It would ruin the mood if she did. So slowly she went. And then she was there. Their lips were dancing softly together, their mouths barely open, just nipping at each other. Faith ran her tongue along Buffy's lower lip, looking for entrance, asking for permission, and then they were kissing.

And it wasn't soft and gentle anymore. It was real and hard and urgent. It was every single pent up emotion, every single longing gaze, every single furtive touch... all of it. Now. Theirs finally to have. To know.

They were getting lost in the moment, both of them, hands seeking to find purchase on skin. To uncover it and to claim it. Their mouths had left the other, Buffy's to taste the sweat that

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glistened along the collar bone of her partner, and Faith to throw her head back and wish a silent hello to the morning. To the heavens. It was beautiful.

And then the dog was howling.

Morning had woken him too, and he was distraught to find his master still missing. He was worried and alone. And also kinda scared. He was only a puppy after all. So he barked. And when that didn't work he howled. Like a wolf to the moon.

On the beach, down by the water, Buffy and Faith broke apart. It was so quick it was comical, as were the shy and embarrassed glances that they then exchanged.

"I had better, uh..."

"You should go let the hound out."

"Right."

"Uh-huh."

As they found a silent stare their embarrassment fell away. Everything fell away. They were lost again in the other, nothing else existing. Buffy reached out and drew Faith softly to her. Gave her the sweetest of kisses. Their lips yielding to the other, in a show of control. Controlled by meaning.

And then the dog started up again. Faith couldn't help but glare, she knew the puppy didn't mean it... but... ARGH! That just now, kissing Buffy by the waters edge with the sun coming up behind them..? Well that was probably fantasy number somewhere in the top ten in her mind. And it was ruined! By the damn dog barking. It was a good job that she loved the little guy.

They slowly rose from their position on the ground, shaking sand from their clothes and bodies.

"I suppose I should go in... get some rest?"

Buffy didn't want to. She wanted to stay here. With Faith. Kissing Faith. Definitely kissing Faith. But she couldn't because... well, she didn't know why, but she figured that going in and resting was the right thing to do. And she was kinda bowled over. By the kissing Faith. Maybe she would ring Willow. And rest.

"Yeah, B. Long night. I spose I should go rest too."

As they started to separate, travel the distance to their homes, they still kept their eyes locked together, held prisoner by longing.

"I WILL see you later, right?"

She knew she would, but she had to ask. Had to have Faith's reassurance.

"You can bet on it!"

And with that she was at her door. Her last glimpse of Faith, her retreating smile. A huge smile, which also made her smile pretty huge. There was assurance in smiles. And she loved Faith's. Absolutely loved it.

Part 14

The upstairs floors of W&H were almost empty. People had cleared out, had collected their missions, and gone to fulfil them. Only those at the top knew what was going on, it had been Wes's call, he believed that the demon population as a whole knowing that Angel was missing and a possible return to Angelus was on the cards would be a rather undesirable situation, only those that needed to know knew. Most of the others agreed with him; with the gift of hindsight perhaps they wouldn't have.

The slayers were up in Angel's private quarters, they reasoned that they couldn't go back to the beach, and Angelus would never show up here, it would be stupid of him, and he was anything but stupid. They had tried to relax, tried to shake off the numerous injuries from the fight, but it was hard. At the end of the day, this building was home to many a demon, and their slayer senses just couldn't stop tingling, electricity shooting.

"I have to get out of here, I'm going with the next team, I've gotta find him B."

"I wish I was coming, this place is MAJOR with the wiggins."

"I wish you could come, but you can't... it's not safe."

"I don't know if I like this 'obeying' any more."

"You love it!"

They released some nervous laughter, it did nothing to break the underlying tension in the room.

"What will you do, Faith..? If he's Angelus, if it's too late, if he's turned."

It was the question that Faith had been dreading.

"Then I'll bring him home and turn him back. Won't be the first time, I've done it before..." She showed Buffy her eyes, the truth in them.

"...I won't kill him, B. You can't tell me I have to... no one can tell me I have to. I wouldn't kill him before, and I won't kill him now!"

It was an answer that made Buffy sigh.

"Maybe I 'should' come then. Because being leader, Faith..? That means making the hard choices sometimes... you don't wanna kill Angel..? I'm with you on that one, but if things go wrong... if the situation calls for it? Then you might have to kill Angelus."

She didn't like to say it, it pained her to say it, but it had to be said.

“I know that, Buffy. I'm ignoring it, but I know it, ok?”

“Okay.”

The silence that followed, pulled them together. A nervous kiss, both of them looking to lose the worry, the weight of the burdens which fell on their shoulders. It quickly turned to more, the flames which they had been stoking for the last two days were heating up desire, driving on their need to possess each other. To truly know each other.

It was desperate hands that tore at clothes, ripping at buttons on jeans, uncovering skin, tops being raised, first one, then the other, bras unhooked, panties shed. Lust was uncoiling around them, reaching out, tracing patterns on their glowing skin, bringing their bodies together. Making them whole.

Faith brought her fingers to Buffy's waiting flesh, to her straining nipples, lightly skimming over them, looking to see if she could make them stand higher, want more. Her palms next, one moment soft, then hard... making Buffy gasp, taking her breath, it was all so perfect, all so right. And then a word.

“Faith...”

Just one word. Not more than a whisper, yet it spoke so much. It carried love, and hope and trust. And it carried Faith on. Made her focus her eyes on Buffy's eyes. See what was written there.

And then she was falling. Deeper than ever. Lost in a feeling. And on to a bed. Angel's bed.

They broke apart again. It seemed like they were always breaking apart. Faith looked at where they had landed. It seemed wrong. It WAS wrong! And that was why she had pulled back. She didn't want to. Looking at Buffy again, she REALLY didn't want to.

“I guess doing it on the big guy's bed when I should be out looking for him, is wrong on many levels?”

“More than many, and... doing it? We were 'doing it'?”

She smiled at Faith, lent up into a kiss, sat back for her answer.

“Uh..?”

What should she say? That they were making love? Merging souls? Climbing the dizzying heights of the stairway to heaven?

“...not 'doing it' B...more like uh... merging souls?”

She couldn't help it, Buffy cracked up. ‘Merging souls?’ What the hell? Had Faith read Shakespeare lately or something? Did Marvel have a new romantic comic strip?

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

“Merging souls, Faith? That’s a little err... ‘cute’. I was just gonna say that, well... never having been with a girl before, I didn’t quite understand that getting to third base was ‘doing it’... I kinda hoped that there was more, ya know... Willow had led me to believe there was something called... ‘going down’, now that sounds nice... surely we should have done THAT if we were ‘doing it’?”

“You’re an idiot, B.”

“Ooooo, you ‘did it’ with an idiot. Does that make you an idiot too?”

“Okay, okay, we weren’t ‘doing it’... we were ‘doing stuff’. Still probably wrong on many levels, MANY many levels.”

Buffy nodded an agreement. Angels bed was not her prime make out spot, probably wasn’t anyone’s prime make out spot.

“Can’t wait to ‘do stuff’ with you again, Faith.”

“Feelings mutual, B”

She lent across and ran her fingertips over Buffy’s naked flesh. Watched the goosebumps rise to her touch. This was everything she had ever wanted, and still she couldn’t have it. Not yet. There was stuff to get done, and after that there would be loads of time for Buffy. For her and Buffy. She wanted to forget it all, wanted to forget Angel, forget Angelus... and looking again at what lay before her on the bed, she nearly could. Nearly but not quite. She didn’t want to worry, but she HAD to worry. She would find Angel and she would protect Buffy. It was her job. Finally tearing her eyes away, she rose from the bed and redressed.

“I have to go now.”

“I know.”

“I’ll be back.”

“I know that too.”

She went to leave, had got to the door already, but something pulled at her. Made her go back to the room, back to Buffy.

“Hey B..? One more kiss?”

“For luck?”

Their eyes met.

“No... for me.”

A couple of hours later and everyone had gone hunting. The finer points of coverage had been worked out and everyone knew where they were going. Who with.

The foyer of W&H though, was still busy, the lawyers seeming to never go home, to always have some pressing detail to attend to. One more reason to stay late. To rack up bonuses.

“Excuse me..? Mr Angel, sir?”

Angel froze, he hadn't thought that they would expect him to come here, had thought he was safe, he would kill if he had to, he wanted Buffy.

“What's the problem, err...”

“Kevin, sir... I work in accounts, there's an extreme upsurge in bonus claims this week... I wanted to clear it with you before I okayed it, was going to come to your office, but Harmony said you were unavailable..?”

“Right, yes... go with the expenses, hell, I feel generous, must be my heart swelling, double the bonuses!”

“Double, sir? But... the accounts?”

“Double!”

He spoke in a tone that asked for no answer, and Kevin went to leave. His manners were remembered at the last.

“Mr Angel, sir..? Have a good evening.”

Angelus flashed him a deep sensual smile as the elevator door slid to closed. As it steadily rose to the highest floor, he allowed the excitement to flood his senses. He could smell her, could nearly taste her. Would taste her.

Have a good evening? He was going to have a blast.

Part 15

Buffy hadn't redressed when Faith had. Hadn't felt the need to. No one could come up to the private suite unless she knew about it. Except Faith of course, but hey, she was out fighting demons! Which pretty much meant it was her, all alone, wandering the apartment naked. It was kind of freeing. And just a little bit chilly.

She was bored was the problem. There was NOTHING to do. She had 'manned the phones' as Faith had told her to, had phoned Wills, spoke to Wills, phoned Giles, spoke to Giles, phoned Dawn... left a message. All the super slayers were in transit, or thinking about transitting, half the population of LA was out looking for Angel. Which left nothing. For a while she had tried to lose herself in Angel's movie collection, but she swore half his stuff

was from back before they even made movies. Definitely not much in the way of girly fun flicks.

She even amused her self by looking at Angel's antique weapon collection, unfortunately a pretty close call with a sharp axe and a pair of naked breasts, put an end to that as well. At the end of the day, she just wanted to be out there. At Faith's side, where she belonged. Fighting the good fight, being a slayer. But instead she was stuck here, kept prisoner by the four walls. She was going a little stir crazy, cabin fever, blood pounding. And it certainly didn't help that half the employees at W&H were setting off her slayer tingles.

She decided to shower. A shower would be nice. Then she could be clean for Faith, and Faith would come home and she would stink of sewer, and then SHE could shower, and then they'd both be clean. And they could lay on the bed, Angel's bed, nice and clean, and compliment each other on the cleanliness! It was kind of a plan. It was something to do. It was just a little better than nothing.

She turned the jets up hot, wanted to burn away some of her frustrations, ease some of the tiredness in her joints. She stepped under, and it was heaven. Just what she had needed. Tilting her head back, she let the water run over her hair, down her back, across her ass and down the drain. The only soap was man soap, man smelling, man cleaning, but it would do, for now.

Once done, she stood there, just letting the water caress her, losing her thoughts to thoughts of Faith. Thoughts of Faith caressing her. Earlier had been strange. On the one hand she felt as if she had known Faith forever, that this wasn't too fast, or too quick... because... well, kinda because she felt in a deep down part of herself that it was always meant to be. But on the other hand, the smaller one, it was overwhelming her. Faith. She wasn't quite sure that she shouldn't be committed for even thinking about starting something with Faith. For loving Faith. But what could she do? From the second she had seen her again, screaming and shouting about the bumper on a car, she had wanted to be with her. From before that even. On the plane, knowing she was coming, knowing she would see her. If she was honest with herself... the thought of seeing Faith again had been the single most important reason for heading back to LA.

'Yes, Dawn, I want to go to LA, just for a while... catch up with Angel, check on the slayers...'

'And to find out if my body still hums in Faith's presence, if my heart still races, if my temperature still rises.'

Of course she hadn't added that line. But she had thought it. Had meant it.

And now, standing in the shower, letting her fingers glide over her own body, she still meant it. Yes; her body did hum, yes; her heart did race and yes; her temperature did still rise. Was rising now, heart racing now.

This hadn't been what she had planned to do in the shower, to touch herself, bring release to herself, but that was what she was doing. Faith had brought her up to a fever pitch, it wouldn't take much, it would take barely nothing... just a hand sliding down.

Buffy leant forward and braced herself against the wall with one arm. In her mind she could see Faith. Naked on the bed, but not Angel's bed like earlier... no, this was her bed. Which meant she wouldn't have to stop, could finally carry this on to a finish, see all the delights that Faith's smile spoke about.

As she imagined running her hands over Faith's body, so she ran her hands over her own, massaging her breasts, pinching her nipples, twisting them... harder then she would normally touch... but now wasn't real, and she wanted to feel it, needed to feel it, needed to pretend. She let her hand wander down her stomach, running in little circles, teasing herself, making the fantasy more...

In her head now she was seeing Faith above her. Seeing how it would look if Faith was between her knees... how it would look if she was slowly and torturously kissing her thighs... running her tongue up and down... almost there... but no, not yet...

She slid her finger finally between the folds of her pussy, soaking in the water of the shower, just a slight pressure, nothing too much, nothing too fast... already she could feel the excitement building, it had always been like this when she thought of Faith, always so quick, so urgent... from the very first time, the guilty time years ago when she first realised that the thought of Faith turned her on. But now it wasn't guilty. It was wanting.

In her mind she was still being tortured... Faith's tongue just flirting with her, reaching down for a long slow lick, and then disappearing from her again, then her hip being nibbled, maybe her thigh, maybe her tummy... but not where she wanted...

She pushed her fingers up inside herself, tried so hard to imagine that they were Faith's... felt her walls tighten at the welcome intrusion, moved them ever so slowly in and out, sometimes taking the juices and running them up to her clit, giving a tweak, a promise of what was to come...

And then her mind switched off. Imagination had taken over, and now it WAS Faith, touching her, it was Faith's hand buried inside her pussy, fucking her mercilessly against the wall of the shower... telling her how much she wanted it, how much she was going to fuck her, how hard she was going to fuck her... and Buffy rode her hand, pushed herself down, took as much in as her body could stand. In and out, twisting, turning, fucking.

She ploughed on through the first shudders that gripped her body, pushing harder, faster... all through her she could feel Faith... it was immense, so real, could feel her tongue sliding across her slit, driving into her, wrapping around her...

She screamed Faith's name when she finally let it all go. She couldn't help it. So much tension had been released. And she did feel better for it... kinda horny, wanting more... but better. And she was bound to have killed some time, and that meant that maybe Faith would be back soon, and she didn't care if they had to go book a room in flashy hotel... she was having Faith, and she was having Faith soon.

Yeah, these were tough times, and yes, finding Angel was important... but she was learning, so was love. Perhaps it was the most important.

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

As she stepped from the shower and wrapped a fluffy towel around her midriff she could hear the elevator approaching the top floor. It had to be Faith or she would've taken a call from reception. She heard the doors ping open, the footsteps across the plush carpet...

“Hey, Faith... welcome home!”

She had planned to enter the room and give a flash. Do something carefree. Make Faith smile. But now her hands froze, her body froze, her heart froze. It wasn't Faith. It was him.

Angelus.

“Long time, Buffy... and I'll think you'll find this is MY home.”

She didn't have a chance for a witty retort, he hit her. Hard. She felt herself going down, and then she felt something else. A prick, just a small one, and he had her. Had injected her with something, had knocked her out. Didn't matter. What mattered was Buffy's last thought. 'He's got me'. It was the truth.

Angelus let out a little chuckle to the room. He was laughing at the ease, and the stupidity. Did they think he would've been too scared to come here? That they didn't need to guard here? THIS was his home. HIS building. And he would come and go as he pleased.

And now he felt like going.

He looked down at Buffy, felt the stirring in his groin. It would be so easy, so easy to just take her now. Screw the prophesy, screw some demon King. Just take her, have her, possess her. But he wouldn't. Not yet.

He could smell her though. Could smell her pussy as it gave off such heat. A part of him wished the heat was for him, the other part couldn't give a fuck. He would have it anyway. He lent slowly towards her and ran his fingers over her body, pulled the towel away to look at what was his, ran his tongue the length of her neck, pausing at her pulse point, teasing himself. Imagining her begging him for it, to drain her, to eat her.

He beat down his desire and wrapped her body in a blanket. He would have hoped for something a little more undercover, inconspicuous, but it would do. He only had to get to the sewer entrance out front. There were demons there, waiting for him.

As he went to call the elevator his thoughts passed quickly to Faith. Poor little Faithy. She would get home and no Buffy would be there... what would she do, such torment, such grief. He decided to make it easier for her. Let her know exactly where Buffy was. That he himself was looking after her. Yes. That was just what Faith needed.

He felt the thrill of excitement as he penned a quick note, left a quick offering. He didn't get out much. Didn't get the chance... but when he did? Hell, he liked to have fun!

Part 16

Deep below the streets of LA, Faith was paired with Kennedy in her seek and find mission. Most of the teams numbered more than two, but Faith didn't need anyone else, Kennedy was a kick ass slayer, almost as good as her, and with the two of them on the case, she was sure they would find Angel sooner rather than later. So far though..? Not even a sniff.

Faith reached up and adjusted the headset walkie talkie which all the slayers used nowadays, on many occasions they had proved useful, but to her they were just an inconvenience, something to get in the way when fighting, although this time she had relented. The urgency which she felt in finding Angel, overtaking any worry about having her head squeezed by some techno crap. No-one had anything. Not even the slimey guys themselves were out and about. Nothing. It dampened her spirits a little... she hated the waiting, but no news was good news, and pretty soon she would call it a night and head back to Buffy. She was half thinking about leaving Angel's and getting a room in some flash hotel. But then maybe Buffy wouldn't want that, wouldn't want her pawing at her whilst they had a possible major disaster to avert. She didn't know... but she thought she would suggest it. Hoped Buffy would like the suggestion.

“Yo, Faith... what's got you so quiet, huh? Normally patrolling with you is like a full on fun fest... you lost the fun?”

“Sorry, Ken... I don't know... maybe it's the fact that my friend is missing, possibly having his very soul ripped from him? That kinda quietens a girl down, ya know?”

“Shit, I'm sorry. Wasn't thinking. Just go back to ignoring me.”

Faith let out a small laugh. Yeah, Angel was missing, but she was Faith. She never lost the fun. Not really.

“I'm kidding. I was just thinking... no ignorance meant.”

Kennedy caught up to Faith, fell into step beside her, was pleased to note that they were heading towards the exit. Too much sewer time was hell on her complexion. Willow was due back in town tomorrow, and she kinda wanted to look good. To look hot.

“So what time are the guests arriving tomorrow?”

“Not sure, Buffy spoke to them... I think that Willow was coming via Budapest, meeting with Giles in London, and then on to here.”

“Budapest?”

“Yep... something about an old Hungarian coven, roots in dark magic... blah blah blah, personally..? I think it's more to do with the whole pride thing they got over there at the mo, Red just loves gaying it up.”

She saw the brief flash of pain across Kennedy's face. She had forgot for a moment, forgotten how it used to be.

“Shit. Now 'I'm' sorry... letting my mouth motor away. I'm sure it's just the witches thing. Not the gay thing.”

“Doesn’t matter Faith. Me and Red were over months ago... she’s free to do what she wants.”

“You nervous about seeing her?”

“Oh no... we keep in ‘touch’...”

“In touch?”

There was something smug in the way Kennedy had said it...

“Oh ya know... she was in LA two months ago... we touched.”

Kennedy threw a wink at Faith as she said it. Yes it hurt, not being with Willow, but it just wasn’t working. She wanted to stay here, to slay in one place, have roots, have friends. Willow wanted to travel around, said she had spent her whole life in one place, and now she wanted to visit many. It sucked. But that was life. She still loved her, couldn’t imagine ever stopping... and maybe one day? Maybe one day Willow would feel like settling down, and then she would be on hand to swoop in and claim the lady.

“What about you, hot stuff?”

“Huh?”

“Don’t play coy, Faith. REALLY doesn’t suit... you and Buffy, the queen of angst... you scored yet?”

“There’s more to life then scoring, Ken.”

“So that’s a ‘no’ then, right?”

Faith shook her head in exasperation, why didn’t anyone ever think she wanted more then a fuck. More then a tumble? It used to amuse her, but now that she had Buffy, she wanted people to understand that it was more. That Buffy was everything to her.

“That’s a ‘no comment’. It’s a ‘maybe I’m more then a quick roll person’. It’s a ‘doesn’t anybody see that I’m fucking CRAZY about this girl... crazy about Buffy?’”

Kennedy was stunned into silence. She had known that it WAS more to Faith. The amount of times she had ended up speaking about Buffy with Faith for no apparent reason. EVERY time they were out slaying together...

‘so there was this one time that Buffy did this thing...’

Or...

‘man, you should see the way that B does this totally bitching flip...’

Or...

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

‘so why do ya think B left? You think she’s happy in Europe..? With all those... Europeans?...’

Or the one which popped up every week. Or everyday. Depended how often they saw each other...

‘do you think she wants me to ring her? I mean, she never called me, but I’m the tough one, she probably thinks I don’t think about her... maybe if I rang on her birthday, ya think that would be cool..?’

She knew that Faith had never rung. Buffy was like her ‘thing’. Her weak spot. In fact the reason that she had been stunned into silence now was because Faith had never come out and said how much Buffy meant to her. Everyone knew. Or guessed. But Faith never said it.

“What, Ken? Why the dumb looks?”

Kennedy shook the look. She hadn’t meant to stare open mouthed, eyes wide. But she HAD been stunned.

“I just... I get that you’re crazy about her... I kinda get that you’ve always been crazy about her...”

Faith looked at her questioningly. How could she know about always?

“...Willow.”

“Right.”

Made sense to Faith. Willow would of known.

“I just guess... I never heard you SAY you were into anyone. Even when you were with Robin, you never, ya know... gave a shit?”

“Uh-huh.”

Faith looked around to check that there was no-one about to over hear her. She wasn’t big on the chat, certainly didn’t want an audience. It was quite handy that the sewers were not packed to full with people dying to hear about her love life, she could talk unfettered.

“You know what it’s like to be a slayer, Ken... it makes it hard to be with anyone, to care about anyone... and boy did I learn THAT the hard way...”

She laughed as she remembered. The past wasn’t so painful anymore.

“...but her? Buffy? I just... I don’t even know what I’m saying here, it’s just like she’s always been what I wanted. WHO I wanted. The first time I saw her, I knew I wanted her... wanted to fuck her...”

Now Kennedy laughed. THAT was more like the Faith she knew!!

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

“...slow down, Chuckles... I figured out pretty quick that it was more than that! And then I had it figured out, but she... well, she... I guess she just never got it.”

“Until now?”

“Fuck knows. I think so. I hope so. I kinda love her. I DO love her. Be nice to be able to tell her one day.”

“Don’t sweat it, Faith. Ya gotta figure that if Buffy’s finally giving it up, then something’s at last clicked in her head. Or she’s finally gone mad... but something must be different.”

“Maybe it was just finally time. Our time.”

Kennedy looked into the face of her friend. Could see the hope. The love in the eyes...

“She IS finally giving it up then?”

“Huh?”

“‘IT.’”

“Up yours, Ken.”

“Now THAT’s just gross... I mean, not Buffy as a whole, but Buffy up mine... wrong... she’s kinda cute, I’ll give her that... and the body is guaranteed hot... but ewww!”

The sound of the clump she took to the head could be heard echoing through the tunnels of the sewer system. As could their laughter which followed. It was getting late. There was no sign of Angel, or the demons... time to call it a night. Kennedy was eager to get home and primp for tomorrow. Faith was eager to get home and see the woman she loved. The smile on her face said it all.

Faith got back to W&H in record time. She didn’t think she’d ever been so excited to make it there... except maybe after Sunnydale the last time. That had also been all sorts of welcome. Still this was better though. She could taste Buffy’s last kiss on her lips, the one she had taken... not for luck, but just for her. She planned on taking loads more of them. Kissing Buffy was beyond great, it was sexy and hot and lusty and ungh!

Talking to Kennedy had just made her more hyped. To be able to tell someone else what she was feeling, how she was feeling... it felt pretty good. Freeing. And now she wanted to go grab Buffy, drag her down from the monsters tower, check into a nice private room with bitching room service and tell her. All night long. Just telling her how much she meant to her, had always meant to her. And sure sign language was part of the plan. It was all in the hands after all! As she hit the button on the elevator, which would deliver her to her girl, she looked in the mirror, gave herself a wink, and thought just how lucky Buffy was. She was prime cuts, and she was all for her.

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

When the elevator opened at the top, she was a little disappointed that Buffy wasn't all arms outstretched and pining, but it was cool. She could cope. Maybe Buffy had got tired. Was having a lay down. She checked the bedroom, and still wasn't overly worried. The bathroom next. The wet towel on the floor giving something away. Buffy was a slob! She'd speak to her about that, no woman of hers was gonna be a slob. She was slob enough all by herself! Next she dug out her cell and tried calling Buffy's number, but she could hear the answering ring in the room, so that was a no no.

Deep down inside of her, just beginning to take shape, was the slightest little slither of fear, just working it's way up the back of her neck, travelling her spine... icy fingers reaching out.

Maybe Buffy was down with Fred? The two of them could surely babble away for hours. Or catching up on old times with Wes? Watcher, slayer talk. Or in the training rooms? Or...

But Faith already knew. Had already seen the note propped up on the table. Was ignoring it. Because she KNEW!

HE had her.

She dropped to her knees in silence. Sucker punched completely. Winded. Broken.

It was only the thought that she had to get Buffy back, had to save her, that finally made her able to rise, to approach the table, to glance at the flower in front of the note. It was from the vase... she didn't think it had any special meaning, the petals were all ripped from the head... scattered across the table top.

It took forever for her fingers to reach the note, to open it, for her eyes to focus on the words.

'She loves me, she loves me not, she loves me, she loves me not...

So which is it, Faith?

Will she, won't she, will she, won't she...

Will YOU join the dance?'

And once she had read them, she felt first her heart break, and then her heart harden. Everything was different.

She was going to hunt Angelus.

Part 17

She slowly came round, as if wading through a swamp surrounded by a dense fog, at least it smelt like a swamp... she wasn't sure if it felt like one, she couldn't move... her arms felt heavy and her legs... wait, no. They didn't feel heavy, they were chained... held fast.

Buffy started to struggle as clarity returned to her brain. This wasn't a dream, it was real, and it was her worst nightmare. Angelus had returned, and he was going to kill her. So many times over the last years, she had had this nightmare... so many times she had seen him come in her sleep to claim her... and every morning she had woken up and banished the thoughts to the back of her mind. But now she couldn't. This was really happening.

Immediately her thoughts flashed to Faith, was she looking for her? Was she scared, worried? Did she know where she was..? Maybe she was coming now... to rescue her, to save her..?

She forced her eyes open to look over where she was being held. She was bound to a stone slab... maybe an altar, it was hard and cold... and she was naked? That realisation made her struggle again, but it was no use. The chains which enslaved her were tainted with magicks, all of her strength made no difference whatsoever. It wasn't enough.

On every side, all around her, Buffy was surrounded by the slime demons. They were staring at her, hissing amongst themselves, and she could feel the malevolence just blanket over her with each of their wicked gazes. Their desire to kill her was calling to her slayer senses, her need as a warrior to fight... but what could she do?

She couldn't understand why they didn't attack her. Didn't kill her... it was unlike demons to know restraint.

As if reading Buffy's mind, the slime demons suddenly started to separate, to clear a path for her eyes so as her vision could take in the other prisoner. Someone else in chains.

“ANGEL!”

He slowly lifted his head, brought his own eyes into focus, penetrated her with his gaze.

“Buffy..? I...”

He wanted to say sorry. He knew that it was Angelus that had bought her here. Knew it was the plan that he would lose his soul in her. But how do you apologise for that? How can you ever say sorry?

He took all of his rage, all of his anger and directed it at his bonds. Pulling, kicking, hitting any demon that came too close to him. He couldn't stay here and hurt Buffy, he would kill himself before he let that happen. He wouldn't do it!

Buffy was spurred on by Angel's struggle, by his animalistic clawing at his chains, she tried to join him, pulled with all she had, thought of Faith and pulled harder... but it really was no use. She finally fell back, gave in, allowed the first tear to slide silently from her eyes. She turned her head and locked gazes with Angel again. She didn't understand what was happening... how he was Angelus, now he wasn't, why he was chained... but it gave her hope. Futile probably, but for the moment it helped.

Eventually, Angel also gave up. He knew the chains would hold, they always held, but he had had to try. He'd try anything. Buffy was staring at him so hard, perhaps looking for reassurance..? He offered what he could. Spoke the words she needed to hear.

“I won’t do it, Buffy... I won’t hurt you... I...”

His voice broke as he made the empty promise. They both knew that he had no say.

“...I swear I won’t hurt you.”

The lair filled with the hideous noise of the demons laughter, all of them rising up to join together. To mock the Vampire’s words, and the girls tears. The head slime made his way to Angel, regarded him with disgust, a weakened half breed... they were doing not only themselves a favour, but also the Vampire. Ridding him of his soul for good.

Buffy’s eyes went wide as the hissing began. It was SO loud, it seemed to be creeping into her brain so as her whole head swam with the sound, chanting over and over... she looked to Angel, for comfort... for understanding? But she saw the truth. All he had was desperation and pain. And weakness.

“I’m sorry, Buffy...”

The demon leader turned to Buffy, a twisted smile on his twisted face.

“Angel may not sssleeeep with you...”

She witnessed as Angel fell, as he rose, as his eyes opened and found hers. As his mouth curved into a sardonic smile, evil personified.

“But I sure as hell will!”

His laughter froze her. Deflated her. There was no hope.

“Tell ussss Angelusss... do you want to play?”

Buffy could feel his eyes as they crawled over her, prickling her flesh, making the chill seep through to her bones.

“I don’t play.”

He almost whispered it. Not making boasts. No empty threats. Just the truth. This wasn’t a game to him, it was more. It was vengeance, it was justice. It was Buffy. And she was his.

The chanting rose again, and Buffy wasn’t sure if it was that which made the chains fall from Angelus’ arms, or if maybe it had imbued him with extra strength, enough to break the bonds himself. Either way, it didn’t matter. He was free, and he was stalking her. And she was terrified.

The lead demon spoke again, but his voice carried a warning now, something for Angelus to remember.

“Do not forget, vampire... not until it issss time... when the moon callsssss the tidessss... then the...”

“Save the speech, Slimes... I know the jingle... ‘moon, tide, gates to hell’...”

He slowly approached the bound form on the altar, almost with caution, maybe reverence. Circling her, studying her from every angle... trying to see what was so special... why it was her that could rip the soul from his alter ego’s body. His body.

Buffy tried to pull back. Tried with everything she was and had ever been to make herself disappear, to make the stone crack and swallow her whole, anything but this. But as was her hope, her efforts were futile.

Angelus allowed his hand to travel the distance to her skin, ran his cold as ice fingers slowly up her body... his passion igniting as her fear increased. Urging him on. He kept smiling at her as he found her breast, touched her there almost delicately, his eyes promising that this would be the only time she felt a gentle touch.

“...don’t worry about me jumping the gun...”

He let his face morph to show his true features, the monster inside.

“...me and Buffy got a whole lot of foreplay to keep ourselves busy.”

He took one last look at her fear, the terror etched so firmly on her face, the dread seeping from her every pore. To him she had never looked more beautiful.

Removing his hand from it’s lazy ministrations, he slowly bent his head, traced the unwillingly erect nipple with the tip of his tongue. And then he bit. Sank his teeth into the firm flesh of her breast, tearing into her skin, gulping down his first taste, he felt like howling with joy.

The demons around him were becoming excited, the hissing intensifying, the belief in their prophesy being realised. When the time came, Angelus would take her, kill her and the gates would open. Nylorac would rise.

Buffy felt the teeth prick her, felt her skin give way, felt her blood as it swam from her veins. Felt as her throat opened and her scream was released.

Knew that it was futile.

Part 18

The queue at immigration was predictably slow, and Willow and Giles were amusing themselves with what they would do once Angelus had been restrained, and Angel restored. Both of them hoped that this would be wrapped up sooner rather than later, and that they would have some free time to play with once the crisis had been averted.

“Wesley spoke of a rather glorious text he had come across in his last call... I really would like to be able to study his library, perhaps take some copies home...”

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

“So whatcha gonna do for fun then, Mr Bookworm..? Maybe decorate the library and watch the paint dry?”

“No, Willow, in my free time I’ll obviously be coming to watch your comedy debut at the local stand up club, I believe they call it... ‘open mike’?... I can just picture you up on stage.”

He chuckled at her panicked look, happy to be the victor.

“No need to get nasty, Giles. I was only saying, what with the fun and the books...”

“Indeed.”

He moved his luggage another foot in front of him as they waited to show their passports.

“So, need I ask what you plan to do with your time, once this latest little disaster has been diverted?”

Willow paused. Part of her wondered that maybe they were being too blasé in their worries over Angel. It just seemed that they had been here before, her twice before... and if it was just a job of safe guarding Angel’s soul..? Well, she felt more than qualified to deal. She just hoped it wasn’t anything more. She remembered quite clearly what Angelus was capable of.

“I was thinking I’d catch up with Buffy, it’s been a few weeks, and we can really let go if we’re both on vacation... then there’s Faith, she NEVER lets me leave LA without a good knees up...”

She cast her mind back to the last time that Faith had caught word she was in town. It had been a blast. She had been blasted. There may or may not have been an incident with a cocktail waitress named ‘Carly’, she couldn’t quite bring herself to remember... but either way... Faith had made sure she had memories to take away with her. Or half memories.

“And Kennedy?”

“Uh... what about her exactly?”

“Well, is the romance off again, or on again... will the room next to mine be filled with the glorious cries of a slayer, or shall it be silence is golden?”

“GILES!”

“Don’t pull the incredulous face at me, Willow... I do recall that I spent the best part of my last holiday with my ears firmly covered.”

Willow didn’t know what to say. And the last holiday they had shared had been different... it was a brief cross over in a hotel as her and Giles travelled to India, and Kennedy was returning from a slaying job in Asia. It had been a few hours, and yes, that may have been a very noisy few hours... but well, they were still together, and they hadn’t hardly seen each other in weeks, and the beds were REALLY comfy... and well, she couldn’t really see that it was Giles’ concern.

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

“I’m not with Ken now, Giles... I’m sure your ears will be suitably rested.”

He gave her a look which was not quite believing and proceeded to the front of the queue.

The time two months ago when she had last been here was firmly locked inside Willow’s head. It had encouraged her excitement at coming this time. Her and Kennedy had more than made noises. Had possibly invented some new ones... and it had been nice. Felt good. Part of her hoped that maybe something more could happen this time, that maybe they needed to talk again about whether they could be together long distance.

As they went through the motions of flashing their passports and smiling sweetly at officials, Willow began scouring the faces of those at the gates waiting to meet friends. She didn’t know who it would be... had money on Buffy... and that would probably also involve Faith, if Buffy’s last call about a crazy kiss was anything to go by. Maybe it would be Kennedy. Or it could be anyone of many. Maybe a limo. With a chauffer and champagne...

“Willow... Giles.”

Kennedy’s voice pulled her from her musings.

“I’ve been waiting forever, what took you so long?”

“Ever so sorry to keep you, Kennedy.” Giles stole a mischievous look at the red head.

“It was Willow, she had some of her herbs confiscated again... ‘magic’ indeed.”

He shook his head despairingly.

“Giles! That story remains unfunny every single time you bring it up. That was once, they WERE magic herbs, and it wasn’t a plane, it was an elephant ride!”

Now it was her turn to shake her head.

“Sorry, Kennedy... the old guy doesn’t travel so well anymore.”

But Kennedy couldn’t find a smile, or a chuckle. She could only find her arms which she wrapped around Willow. Held her as tight as she dared.

“Hey, uh... air?”

She released her grip, couldn’t hide the urgency in her eyes.

“What is it, Ken? Is there a problem, is it Angel?”

Giles felt himself stiffen at the girls side. Didn’t want to hear the news, could feel the dread already ensnaring him.

“It’s Buffy.”

Both the newcomers eyes shot wide. Surprise and then shock and then fear.

“Buffy?”

As you travelled through the grounds of the W&H building you would not know that anything was amiss, people and things still mingled, jobs were still being done, everything was still operational. The activity startled Willow and Giles at first. Kennedy had filled them in on everything on the way over and they had expected the building to bear sombre witness to the news.

“I can’t believe it’s all still so busy.”

“Don’t let it fool you, Will... get past the first floor and this place is dead. Everyone who’s anyone is in on this, Faith’s taking it personal... it IS personal... it’s all on the top floor. Angel’s apartments.”

The journey up seemed to take forever, with not much more to be said between them all. It was relief they felt when the doors finally slid open. Everyone in the room turning to see whom had arrived.

The thing that struck Willow the hardest was the hope in Faith’s eyes as the doors had pulled back. As if some part of her believed that it was going to be Buffy. That she was going to walk away from this unharmed. But she wasn’t Buffy, and Faith’s eyes had gone dead. She still smiled a hello, but her eyes never once showed any light.

“Hey, Red... I’m glad you’re here.”

“Faith, I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry... be helpful.”

She didn’t mean to be harsh, but she didn’t have time for this. Didn’t have the patience. Buffy was out there somewhere, and HE had her. It was twisting her up inside, picturing what he might be doing to her... and she could almost feel as if Buffy herself was calling out to her... her senses tingling so bad, the need to find her driving her crazy.

Everyone got back to business, back to planning. How Giles could help, how Willow could help. But it didn’t matter. The feeling that permeated the room was helplessness. As if they guessed that they wouldn’t be able to do anything, that Angelus held all the cards. He did, in a way, he had Buffy.

Faith eventually called a time out. Just half an hour. Eat if ya needed to, sleep if you wanted to, but in half an hour be ready to go again. No one rests till Buffy is safe.

Everyone took the opportunity to grab some time, it was hard going in the room with Faith, suffocating under her fear, yet willing to do anything in the face of her refusal to give in.

Willow approached her slowly, noting the faraway look in her eyes.

“Hey, Faith..?”

“Hmmm..? Uh... Oh sorry, Red... miles away, what can I do for you?”

“I just wanted to see how you’re doing..? How you’re holding up..?”

“How I’m holding up..?”

She let out a harsh laugh, an empty laugh.

“... I’m fine, Willow. Five by fucking five!.. Now haven’t you got some shit you ought to be doing? A nifty spell up your sleeve to save the day?”

The sarcasm hurt, but it didn’t stick. Willow could see the walls Faith had erected, could see the steely determination in her eyes, but she could see the chinks too. The redness, the tiredness. The desperation.

“You can drop the macho crap with me, Faith... I get it, ok?”

“You get it?” She threw Willow a disbelieving look.

“Tell me how you get it, yeah..? Cos I can’t fucking breathe! Every second, Red, it’s killing me... knowing he’s got her, he’s touching her... and I don’t know what to do, what I can do...”

She offered a hopeless gaze Willow’s way.

“...what can I do, Willow..? Tell me what I can do?”

Willow’s arms found her then, held on tight, encouraged her to let it go, let it out. Reassured her with soft words, comforting phrases. It was empty comfort, but it was welcome. Faith was running on empty, hadn’t stopped since she had returned the night before, to Angelus’ note. Had screamed blue murder, had destroyed some furniture, and then had taken command. She had people out all the time looking, searching, trying to rumble the underground grapevine. But nothing. No one was speaking, no one was finding. She, herself had been out too, but all to no avail. It was like Buffy had vanished. Had ceased to exist.

She allowed herself just a brief moment in the safety of Willow’s arms before she pulled herself together. Her losing it wasn’t going to save Buffy, and she hadn’t allowed that idea to fade yet. Wouldn’t allow it to fade.

“So give me a plan, Red... give me something I can do.”

“I take it you did a locator spell, for Buffy... and Angel?”

“Me personally..? Not a chance... but talk to Wes, he deals with all the mumbo jumbo stuff.”

Wes took that as an opportunity to join the conversation, offered whatever he could to Willow, told her how they had tried spells, had tried everything, but something was blocking them, something was preventing them from getting a hold on either Buffy or Angel.

It didn't phase Willow for a second. Yeah, she may have come here with nothing more taxing than soul saving in her mind, but she was a kick ass Wicca, maybe the best, and no cheap hide and seek spell would be able to stop her. Well she didn't think it would. She just hoped she had the time to find Buffy before it was too late. While she could still be saved.

"Giles? Get Dawn on the phone, she has to know what's going on, and she can sure as hell help me with what I'm going to need... tell her to get my books from storage, the old ones... she'll know the ones, she complained about the dust when we were cataloguing... tell her to get in touch with the coven, might need them, better be prepared... uh... and tell her not to worry. Tell her I'm going to find her."

She looked at Faith as she spoke the words. She didn't make a promise, they didn't need promises... but as sure as she stood there, she knew she would do everything and anything in her power to get Buffy back.

Giles made the call immediately, Wes left to find details of everything they had tried, others retreated back into what they were doing before Willow had commanded the room.

"You really think you can do it, Red..? You think you can find her for me?"

Faith wanted to believe her so much, wanted to trust in her. The stake she had been absentmindedly twirling in her hand was now being held tight, starting to strain with the force being exerted on it, her fingers gripping as if for dear life.

"I can do it, Faith. It might take time... I need to get the stuff together, to break through whatever's cloaking her... but I CAN do it."

"How much time?"

"A day... two?"

She deflated at that. Wanted results now. Yesterday. Willow noticed the faraway look come over Faith's eyes again. The 'not really here-ness' to her.

"I swear, Red... I fucking swear, if he so much as thinks about touching her..."

She released the grip on her stake, let it rest in her hand the way it belonged there.

"...if he even so much as looks at her wrong, I will fucking kill him. No if's... no but's, he hurts Buffy, it's game over..."

Her grip went tight again now, ready to plunge, ready to kill.

"...he's dust."

And she meant it.

Part 19

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

Far below ground, somewhere under the streets of Los Angeles, Buffy was in more pain than she had ever known. She didn't have any concept of how long she had been there, just the level of hurt she was being forced to endure. It was like a game to Angelus. He would taunt her, spit words of filth at her, explain in explicit detail exactly how he was going to fuck her, to possess her, to make her his again, the way she should have been. Over and over.

She would try to block him out, try to make it all go away, but then he would be on her. As soon as he realised she was phasing out he would bring her back. He would bite her, or scratch her... he'd already touched her. Forced his fingers into the places that were never meant for him to go.

He called it softening her up. Making her ready for what was to come. Marking his territory before he claimed it. It all made her sick.

Made her want to die.

But then she thought of Faith. And even at the worst, as he hit her repeatedly, violated her unmercifully, she would not give in. Not give up.

Buffy was thinking about her now. Trying to recall times before when they had dreamt together... had managed to keep contact even with both of them unconscious to the world... but she didn't know how. Seemed like it was Faith who had made it happen. But she tried... what else did she have to focus on? He was at her now, Angelus... drinking from her inner thigh... not enough to bleed out, but enough to stay weak, to keep her welts raised, her body torn.

And she focused. She focused on Faith. With all her mind, everything she had. She brought forth the feeling, the tingle, the hum. She remembered the voice... the husky yet gentle tone, the way her name sounded like it was coated in honey whenever it slipped from Faith's mouth... the passion that burned in her eyes, whether she was slaying or training, or arguing over which top went better with her leathers. There was always passion, belief in something. She focused on the feel of her, the touch of her... everything she had waited for, was still waiting for... she focused on everything. She focused on the love.

And then she was slipping, falling, spiralling.

Unconscious at last.

Willow glanced over at Faith, she looked exhausted, totally spent. She had been out searching again, had come back empty handed and dejected again. A cycle that repeated itself every few hours. Willow was worried about her, scared that she was coiling tighter and tighter under the pressure, ready to explode at any moment, and she understood why, she really did... but she couldn't bear to see someone else self destruct because they had lost the woman they loved.

She wished that there was more that she could do other than poring over the books, but she knew that, that was where she was doing her best. The sooner she could put a spell together that would reveal Buffy, the sooner she could really help Faith.

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

Willow cast her mind back just a few days, to the almost giddy Buffy that had rang her with unbelievably crazy news. Well if it was news you hadn't suspected for the last three years. More with hindsight.

"So guess what I did, Wills... betcha can't!"

"I don't know, Buff... bought new shoes?"

"You think I'd be this excited over new shoes?"

"Made a new friend?"

"Will."

"Ooooo did Buffy make a boyfriend? Is Buffy in lurve?"

Willow had smirked to herself at Buffy's uncontrollable giggling.

"That's it isn't it? You scored!"

"NO! Will...not scored, but I did kiss someone, a very sexy someone, a very sexy, very yummy, very 'oh my god, what am I doing' someone..."

"Oh wow! You kissed Angel?"

"No, Angel! Much sexier... kinda... well, she's...she is SO sexy!"

"She..? As in... Faith? You KISSED Faith? Lips together, kissing?"

There was more giggling from Buffy's end.

"Yes, she... yes, Faith... and how the hell did you know?"

Willow sighed at the memory. It seemed so long ago now, yet it really wasn't. All that energy and excitement, the happiness in her voice. It hurt. She couldn't even imagine how bad Faith was doing inside.

Glancing at her again, she caught her eyes drooping, saw her fighting herself to stay awake... forcing herself to remain alert. Remain focused.

She approached her softly, not wanting to push, to say the wrong thing.

"Faith..?"

"Hmmm?"

Faith was studying a book, not willing to stop doing something, anything, as long as it was something. It could be the bit of information that saved Buffy. The next line, the next page, the next text. She would keep looking.

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

“Do ya think maybe you need a break... just a nap, a rest?”

“Hmmm.”

A non committal answer if ever she heard one! She could work with that.

“You could lay on the sofa... I’ll wake ya in thirty, just rest a little, yeah?”

“What’s that, Red? Sorry... lost in a book. Who would’ve thought it, huh?”

“Find anything?”

Faith glanced away, not able to speak her growing failure.

“Let me take over, give yourself a break.”

“A break? Not a chance.”

“Faith... You’re gonna burn out, you NEED a rest. Just close your eyes, I promise I’ll wake you.”

Faith choked out a pained laugh. Shook her head.

“I closed my eyes once, Red. Yesterday. Just for a minute... ya know what happened?”

Now it was Willow’s turn to shake her head.

“I saw her. She was smiling at me, holding her arms out... and I wanted to run to her, to take her and hold her forever, but I couldn’t could I?”

Her voice broke over the words, even the memory of a dream too painful.

“Because it isn’t fucking real. And that was the worst, waking up and forgetting... for two seconds, that first second... I can’t do it, Red. I can’t close my eyes... I can’t see her again...”

Willow’s heart was breaking, the pain was so real, so tangible. She understood, she understood better than most, but she also knew Faith needed to sleep. Even a few minutes would be enough for a slayer. She hoped that Faith would forgive her, would understand.

She raised her hand and placed it on Faith’s shoulder, seemingly giving comfort... whispered a couple of words under her breath, and watched as Faith’s fight against sleep was lost. It wasn’t a deep spell, wasn’t a deep sleep, just a moment.

One moment of peace.

The first thing she was aware of was a warm pair of arms, arms that felt safe, arms that were holding her as if they would never let go, arms she belonged in.

Next soft lips. It was a ghostly touch, almost as if it wasn’t really there, just a tickle across her

mouth. And then tears. She could feel them as they slipped silently from her eyes, they felt real. They were real.

“Buffy..? Open your eyes.”

She didn't want to. It may not be real, but it felt safe, opening her eyes could mean the truth, that she wasn't safe. She was there, with him... and this was just a hallucination, her mind feeding her images they knew she needed to see.

“Faith..?”

It came out a question, her voice pleading with the other to be really real.

“I'm here, B.”

And then the arms were there again. Firmer, offering her something to hang on to, something to cling to. She opened her eyes slowly, still unsure, but so hopeful. Just let it be Faith. Just one more time.

“Oh god, it's you. It's really you.”

“Buffy... listen to me, Red's here... Giles too, we're gonna get you...”

“I'm so weak, Faith...”

“I know, baby... but we're coming, you've got to hang on...”

Buffy's eyes held a far off look. Far off in pain.

“Buffy?”

Her shoulders were sagging as if in defeat, she couldn't meet Faith's eyes again.

“I don't think I can hold on... it hurts so bad, Faith... he... he... oh, god... he drinks from me...all over...”

She thought of all the other things he did to her. The other ways he weakened her.

“...he hurts me, Faith...”

Her head dropped, pointed to the floor the, same as her eyes. Just a whisper escaping from her lips.

“... he HURTS me.”

Faith knew exactly what she meant. Exactly how he hurt her. Not only the physical, but the mental. The emotional. The hopelessness, the humiliation, the degradation... they were things she knew... things you never forgot. It killed her to hear Buffy speak the words. She had known, deep down, that Angelus would be tormenting her that way... but to hear the words spoken, to hear the pain the words were wrapped in. She wanted to kill.

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

She tried to hold on to her rage though, to stay calm, to reassure, to comfort.

“It’s ok, B. I’ve got you.”

Asking her next question was gonna be hard. She didn’t want to hear the answer. Was scared it would ruin her. Would break her.

“I... has it..? Is it..? Did Angel... lose his soul..? Did he..?”

“No.”

Buffy let out a harsh laugh. Why would he do that when it was so much fun hurting her other ways. Taunting her about the pain that was to come. When she would be his. Forever.

“He has to wait... the demons have a schedule... I think my slots Friday at eight, right after dinner...”

Her attempt at humour didn’t bring a smile. It was all too helpless.

“Buffy... B, look at me... I’m going to save you...”

“It hurts, Faith.”

The younger girl could feel it mounting. The pressure of needing to end this. To find her, to save her, to kill him. The anger, the frustration. Everything.

“Fuck that shit, Buffy!... Fuck the hurt, you’re a slayer...”

She almost wanted to shake Buffy. To tell her. She had to hold on, couldn’t give up, because if she gave up now... then what about her? But she didn’t shake her. Saw the fear that her outburst had brought, and instead held her. Enveloped her in safe arms.

“I’m so sorry, B.”

Both of them looked up at the tug. Could both feel it... as though they had used up their time, money run out. Buffy’s eyes were desperate, she was clinging so fiercely, afraid to let go, aware that this could be the last time.

Faith was aware too. Her whole body was fighting to stay here. Forever if it meant with Buffy.

“I’m gonna save you, B... I swear it. I am going to save you.”

As it started to fade, already becoming a memory, nothing but a dream, Faith captured Buffy’s lips in a final kiss.

A ghost’s touch.

Buffy awoke with a start. With pain. With fear. He loomed above her, snarling, more beast than man.

“Honey... you’re back... just in time for a snack...”

He laughed as his face changed, showed his true nature. Moaned as his teeth touched flesh, sank below the levels, pierced a vein and tasted blood. Her blood. He couldn’t get enough of it. So intoxicating. So sweet. He only hoped that he could hang on for his new friends. But he wasn’t so sure. Every time he touched her, tasted her, he could feel control slipping. And as he tasted her now, felt himself firm between her legs, felt her flesh touching him... he didn’t really care.

Faith also awoke with a start. For a moment she could feel it. The connection still just there. Her mind and Buffy’s. And she felt the pain, felt the hopelessness... the helplessness. Felt everything.

And it felt like giving up.

Hours swam in her head, minutes, seconds. All mixed up. She had tried so hard to hang on to some sort of clock, an inner thing. Counting the nights by her body’s need to slay. But it hadn’t worked. She had become too weak, her body not caring anymore when the sun sank and the moon rose, it wouldn’t fight. Couldn’t fight. It didn’t need to know the time anymore.

Everything just seemed like forever. Like daylight didn’t exist. Like people didn’t exist. Maybe even that she herself didn’t exist. Reality had become nothing but pain. And the hissing... endless and over and over. So many demons now, more than an army. They constantly surrounded her, not communicating with her, nothing but the hissing.

Angelus was there all the time. She hadn’t seen Angel again, wasn’t sure that Angel hadn’t been vanquished forever. That this whole losing the soul gig wasn’t just an excuse for Angelus to get laid.

For a time it hadn’t been so bad. She couldn’t think when since, just knew that there had been no fresh pain in a while. A welcome while. But she also knew what that meant. Had been told what that meant. Seemed like maybe she was nearing her time slot. Her dinner date, and don’t be late.

A part of her just wanted it all to be over. Whatever that entailed. Wanted to go to sleep, to rest, to be free. To stop hurting.

But another part, the largest part... that cried for something more. Sure it wanted to rest, to be free, to stop hurting, but it wanted it where it belonged. It wanted it with Faith. SHE wanted it with Faith. To be wrapped in arms that didn’t scare her, to feel a touch given with love... it was everything that was keeping her going.

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

To have woken so fresh from her dream to her nightmare had been horrendous, one second it was Faith's lips that had claimed her, and in the next it was his. Pleasure and pain. Whoever had said they went well together..? She was going to fucking kill them.

She used every ounce of strength she had left to focus on the pleasure, to cling to every moment she had ever had with Faith, good and bad. All of it, because every second of those memories was so much better than this. Anything was better than this. And Faith's words, the last ones she had heard her speak in the instant before a kiss...

'I'm gonna save you, B... I swear it. I am going to save you.'

...they were her mantra. They drowned out the obscenities, the threats, the promises... everything that Angelus was offering her. The things he was doing to her. They kept alive the final piece of hope in her body. That once... just one more time, she would be able to see Faith.

The sudden silence in the lair was as deafening as the noise had been. It confused Buffy. Disorientated her. As she slowly took the effort to open her eyes, she didn't half wonder, maybe pray... that it HAD all been a nightmare. The in bed, eyes shut tight, nothing's really real, kind of nightmare.

But it wasn't. The pain was still too fresh for her to have truly believed it anyway.

Her neck strained as she turned her head, all the muscles protesting against movement, begging for maybe, just a moments more rest. But curiosity was too much, she had to know what was happening, what was going on, what her fate was to be.

The demons were paying her no mind, all their thoughts concentrating on the Vampire in the corner. He was being anointed, his body painted with the symbols of the great King Nylorac, made ready for the union, the opening of gates, the return to existence. It was so close now. Tonight after sunset it would begin, and then it would end. Nylorac would rise.

Angelus could feel the power infusing his body as the symbols were painted upon him, whatever it was they were using was sinking beneath his skin, finding it's way into his veins, un-tethering his soul, the need for the hissing less now. Let them save their voices as he had saved his strength. All he could think to himself was 'not long now' and that finally she would be his. Buffy would be his. It almost made him happy.

Buffy herself, closed her eyes, relented against her neck muscles. She didn't need to see. Didn't need to know. She already KNEW. It wouldn't be long now, and she would be his.

A nagging voice just wouldn't go away though.

'I'm gonna save you, B.'

Keeping her there. Keeping her sane. She wanted so much to believe it. Because if there was one thing that she was sure of, more than sure of. She sure as hell needed saving. A whole lot of saving.

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

In the boardroom of W&H there was also a sudden silence, the hum of chatter and excitement brought to an end. Faith had entered the room. There was a time before, when Faith entering a room would have meant happy times, jokes, banter... a whole lot of crudeness. All the slayers knew her, some well, some not so well, and some of them considered her a friend. Ones like Kennedy who had bore witness the last few days to the absolute pain that Faith was going through. It ripped at her, tore into her... yet still she kept going. She was an inspiration. That was why the room had quietened. Out of respect.

Faith glanced around, not seeing faces, only numbers. This was it. Tonight was the night. Party time. They were just waiting to hear from Dawn, hear word from the coven that everything was set. That Willow's spell had indeed uncovered Buffy's whereabouts, the correct time for the ritual. She knew it had. She trusted in Willow and her abilities as a witch. She could also feel it inside, her heart beating out the seconds... a tingle so slight, a warmth so vague... it pulled at her, niggled at her, as if Buffy herself was letting her know. Was calling to her to come. To keep her word. To save her.

As she totted up figures in her head, mentally calculated who was going with whom, which girl was leading which group, she hoped and prayed that it would be enough, that she could save her. It was in her nature to have confidence, to be the cocky one, always leading into a battle... not so hot on the planning, but this was different. Her bravado felt like shit in the face of losing Buffy, counted for nothing. She gathered her wits about her, shrugged Kennedy's supporting hand from the base of her back... she walked to the front of the room alone. The leader.

“Guys...”

Everyone's eyes were already on her, she took a deep breath, prepared for a speech.

“... first off, thank you. I mean it... each and everyone of you. None of you had to be here today, no-one is forcing you... you CHOSE to be here. Offered to be here. It means a lot to me... means everything to me. What we have, what we do... it's a calling, a curse, a gift. The best and the worst...”

Understanding nods went through the 'audience'. Truth was being spoken.

“...but no-one can MAKE us do it. No-one can force us against our will to put our lives on the line for the sake of good, never a thank you, not even acknowledgement... We do it because of the person we are... the person we want to be...”

She thought of Buffy. Every thought was for Buffy.

“...the person she makes us be.”

For a second it seemed as though her voice would crack, the weight of her words too much for her to handle. But it didn't; SHE didn't.

“Buffy's always been a leader, always been the one at the front of the room inspiring everyone to follow her, to trust in her. But tonight she can't be here... tonight the scum sucking evil that she helps put in the ground is looking to return the favour, looking to take one of our own... the best of our own.”

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

Everyone's shoulders squared. Words inspiring them to be ready to give their best. To give their all. To be slayers.

"I say we don't let that happen. I say we go down there and make slime pie of every piece of shit that dares stand in our way, show them what a slayer is, what a slayer means... show them why this city is OUR city."

The answering hum of the girls was like music to Faith's ears, she could feel the electricity as it charged the air around her, warriors replacing girls, a battle ready to be fought.

"Buffy isn't theirs... was never theirs. She ours. She's one of us... and I say we go bring her home!"

The roar of the slayers wasn't triumphant, wasn't an orgy of excitement. It was a cry of readiness. Ready to fight. Ready to win. They had learnt well.

Kennedy stepped forward, she had shown herself, to be ready to lead the last few days. Quick to offer suggestions, to volunteer for one more job, anything else to help. Now she issued Faith's orders. Repeated instructions to each of the team leaders, clarified directives. Everyone was ready. All they needed was the go ahead. The call from England.

They didn't wait long.

Faith settled herself in Angel's chair as the call was put through, Dawn appearing as if by magic on the screen in front of them.

"Hey, Dawnie... what's the word? We all systems go..?"

"Hi, Willow, yes. Definitely. They went over everything... agreed with the texts for a change..."

She chuckled slightly at that, not for long, but was rewarded with an answering chuckle from Giles. They often had 'run-ins' with the coven over what held more truth... magic or literature. Very rarely did they agree. Giles was glad that this time they had. He could not bear it if Buffy didn't make it, had only grown to love her more since she hadn't been his slayer. His charge.

Final words of the plan were exchanged between England and LA, they were preparing to offer goodbyes, when Dawn spoke again. Not so much the woman now, just the scared girl, the little sister of Buffy.

"Faith..?"

"What is it, Dawn?"

"Promise you'll save her..? Please..? Just promise me?"

The emotion poured from the screen, the time delay between sound and mouth not dampening the pain etched across Dawn's features... the begging in her voice.

“I...”

Faith didn't know what she could say, she hadn't even promised herself that she would save Buffy, so terrified was she of tempting the fates. But how could she refuse..? This was Dawn, and she wanted so bad to offer her the comfort she hadn't been able to find for herself.

“...oh god, Dawn... I swear to you, if there's anything I can do... any chance that I can save her, that I can bring her back to you..? I promise I'll do it. On my life, Dawn. I promise.”

It was the best she had to offer. She was prepared to die trying. It was EVERYTHING she had to offer.

Dawn silently disappeared as the connection was cut. That was it. All systems go. Willow approached Faith, a question to ask, a just in case to consider.

“Faith, should I prepare a spell for Angel, for his soul... just in case, if we can save him..?”

The room froze, everyone turned to see the verdict. To hear Faith's words. They came out flat. Dead.

In her head she was seeing thousands of images, flooded by thousands of memories. The first years old, her and Buffy, side by side, fighting evil. Drawn together like an unstoppable force, heading towards a euphoric conclusion. But then he was there. On the sidelines. Always. Watching, waiting, claiming. The girl was his. She was alone.

The next an alleyway, the end of a line. She remembered her words, her pleas.

‘Angel... just do it! Please, just do it! Kill me. Just kill me.’

But he hadn't. He wouldn't. He had saved her.
So many more, so many times... so much he had done.

Finally her images flashed to Buffy, felt her heart break at the view, tug at the feeling.

‘He hurts me, Faith... he HURTS me.’

Felt the pain crash through her, knew it was real.

She shook her head clear, sucked in a breath, let out a sigh. Stared Willow straight in the eye. No one doubted the conviction with which she spoke.

“No, Red. Not this time... if he's lost his soul... if he's touched Buffy..? That's it...”

She steeled herself then for what she knew she would have to do. For the action she had just assured herself she was prepared to take. To kill Angel.

“...No more chances.”

The slayers had split into two main groups for the upcoming battle. One group would go underground, would follow Willow's directions and find Buffy. Save Buffy. The other group would man the shoreline, beat back any slime that looked for a short cut into the city, and if the worst came to the worst..? If the prophesy was fulfilled..? Then these would be the first people preparing to face the king. To protect humanity. Wes and Giles had researched every single little nugget of information that they had been able to uncover about Nylorac, spent days reading and re-reading, cross referencing until at last they had settled upon a possible description of the King. Although he was in fact very large, the size they had first been led to believe was a myth. He could never swallow the whole of the western coastline in one go. They estimated that it would take at least two sittings.

Now that the slayers had left, Giles slumped in his chair and buried his head in his hands, he didn't fight battles anymore, not really... not much past the odd vampire or two, just to keep his hand in. But today he had wanted to fight. Had argued with Faith until he was blue in the face, but all to no avail. The only people fighting were slayers. Even Willow had a hard time convincing Faith to put her in the front line, only the fact that her magic could help, getting her a trip to the coast. No way was Faith letting her underground.

Wes and Gunn had also been relegated to the bench for the fight, Faith had seen them in the sewers, seen how little good they could do against the slime demons, wasn't prepared to put them in there again. Wasn't prepared to risk slayers lives to protect them. They had taken it hard, to them Angel was their responsibility too, their friend. Being brushed off had been a bitter pill to swallow, only accepting it in the end, because it made sense. They WERE crap against the Nyloraci. Wes was still carrying the bruised ribs from last time. This wasn't the first occasion that he wished he possessed slayer strength and healing.

Deep underground the first army of slayers was already deeply entrenched in fighting. The directions had been correct, the lair was exactly where it should have been, but the girls couldn't get near it. All the tunnels leading in were barricaded with demons, and as hard as they fought, the slayers were making slow progress. They knew they had to give more, had to go faster. The 'ritual' was due to happen at sunset, and the time was drawing ever closer.

The second army were in position along the coastline. Watching, waiting. Being watched. Demons were gathering, the horizon was almost blocked by the number of minions that had gathered for the Kings arrival. All of them waiting for sunset. Their time to come.

The sun it seemed though didn't want to set. It hovered in the sky, dipping so slowly, as if it knew that it might not rise again. That giving up it's place to the moon could mean an end of days. The demons lulled it on, urging it with the steady stream of chanting, the hissing rising up to batter the ears of the waiting girls.

The slayers were aware that the sun was losing it's battle against nightfall, against dusk. As it finally disappeared, it's last rays vanishing, the girls all felt the familiar rush of blood, the keening of senses, a rising of power. This may be the time for the ritual, but more than that..? It was THEIR time. A slayers time.

Below the ground, the warring girls also felt the passing of the sun. Felt the moon rising, felt confirmation of their empowerment. They surged forward as one, an arrow of death, shooting through the demons and the defences until the lair was reached. Until finally they could see the reason they were all here; Buffy.

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

The altar seemed to raise right up from the centre of the room, just stone slabs, nothing fancy, no glitz, no glamour, a basic structure for a basic act. Faith's eyes found it first, were drawn to it the moment she had entered the lair, at the front, leading. What she had seen had frozen her for an instant, she felt the urge to hurl, to vomit out the hurt from the depths of her soul. Buffy was there, tied there... restrained, her skin so sallow, the colour of bruises and bites so livid against the dullness of background. She didn't seem aware of anything going on around her, she just lay there, broken.

The chanting filled the cavern, added to now by the yells of the slayers. They attacked full throttle, all of them desperate to clear a path to Buffy, to stop the prophesy from coming to pass. Faith, herself, went into overdrive, drawing on everything she'd ever known as a fighter, utilising every muscle, attacking anything that moved. She HAD to get to Buffy. Not only had she witnessed her laying there, defeated, but she had also seen Angelus. Seen him approaching the naked form, seen him touching her, seen him preparing to banish his soul forever in the woman she loved. It was pushing her forwards, calling her on. Drawing her closer and closer.

Angelus was aware of the intrusion, knew the slayers were there. Had expected them. It didn't stop him, didn't phase him... he had waited too long to possess Buffy, nothing would stop him from fulfilling his desire, from claiming his prize. He stalked her now, touching her flesh with the cold of his fingers. Caressing the blemishes which still marked her skin, his markings, his work. It made him proud. He leant forward and ran his tongue across her neck, her last wound was still open, still seeping a thin river of blood, and he allowed it to tickle his senses, arouse his lust, let his teeth sink back in as he mounted the altar to be with her.

As he positioned himself between the legs of a helpless Buffy, Angelus allowed his eyes to roam across the battle raging around him, every act he committed sought to utilise pain, and now he wanted to find Faith. To share with her this ultimate moment, the moment when he would take Buffy, and then kill Buffy. His perfect moment of happiness.

Faith could feel his eyes as they fell upon her, felt the hairs raise across the back of her neck, felt the cold dread seep through her body, turned and met his gaze. Froze with understanding. It was as if the world melted away for her then, as if what was going on around her ceased to exist, his eyes were drawing her in, holding her captive. In her mind she was thrown again into the alley, begging, pleading with Angel to make it end, to kill her, to release her, only this time it wasn't Angel's ears that her pleas fell upon. It was Angelus laughing down at her, allowing her to beat his chest, to scream her pain.

She could hear his words in her ears as if it was real, it felt so real.

"I would've done it, Faith. I WILL do it."

And then she could feel it. His teeth in her. His mouth at her. It felt exactly like last time, he was tearing at her throat, gulping down her life, and she was getting weaker and weaker, could feel herself giving up. Feel herself slipping away.

"Faith!"

Kennedy's screams released her from her binds. Her mind freed from the hold Angelus had exerted upon it, and not a moment too soon. She ducked under the swinging arm of a demon,

and swept his feet from under him, making sure her fist connected with such force to his head, that she wouldn't have to waste time with second shots.

“Thanks, Ken.”

“Don't mention... now get Buffy, I've got your back!”

Faith focused her attention again on the altar, what she saw making her scream out obscenities. He was on her, Angelus had mounted her, was drinking from her neck, Buffy just lying there pliant, no fight left in her. Barely life left in her.

She threw herself forwards then, parting the demons like the red sea, gaining ground with every second, almost close enough, almost there. She could feel her fist tightening around her stake, aware of nothing but the feel of wood against skin, the power in her arm. Seeing the monster violating Buffy had stripped her to her most base form, the warrior inside taking over all that she was. As her eyes watched him thrust into her, she felt her arm drawing back, preparing, she was aware as he lifted his head and his eyes locked with her again, saw his blood tainted smile as it twisted his face, saw the delight he was taking in making Buffy his prey. The next instant she felt her own thrust, felt her arm fly forward, her hand release, her stake thrown. Witnessed the euphoric expression on Angelus' face as he felt the soul preparing to be finally gone from his body, saw it burning bright in his eyes, heard the stake hit home. Her gaze fell immediately to his chest, witnessed her perfect strike, her piercing of his heart, felt the thrill of slayer lust as the vampire turned to dust.

It shocked her.

She had thought in the hours leading up to this, in the days just gone, that this would have been hard, that staking Angel would destroy a part of her. But at the moment, for the first second, she was only aware of the joy. Of the kill.

And then her eyes fell on Buffy.

She looked so small. So empty. Just a lifeless body, laying chained to an altar.

The slayers who had been manning the coastline had been semi aware of what was happening under the ground. As the sun had set, the demons had spilled forth from the sea, encroaching upon their land, their city. They had fought them well, fought them valiantly... had each of them seen the silhouette of Nylorac as he had begun to appear before them. A great shadow cast across the sea, waiting for the final moment when the gate to his hell would be opened and he would be freed. They had also seen AND heard the instant in which that was foiled, the demons as they began to screech, no longer hissing, but screaming out their failure, their extinction. Could not know whether Buffy had been saved, only that Angelus had been stopped, that the demons no longer had a reason for being here, that they died much easier once their existence was futile.

Willow was using her magics. Trying to reach out and find the minds of the people she loved. To ascertain that they were all ok, that they had all made it. That none of them had died. But she couldn't find all of the minds, couldn't make a connection, and a silent tear left her eye as she realised what that meant.

The air hung heavy in the waiting room at the hospital. Yes, they had won, yes, the prophecy had been laid to rest, but in the face of their losses, the victory felt empty. They felt empty. Everyday slayers learnt to deal with death, with destruction, but that still didn't desensitise them, didn't protect them from the pain they felt when they lost one of their own. Couldn't protect any of them from feeling the weight of their own fragile mortality.

Willow and Giles sat slightly apart from the others, their grief more personal, their desolation more pronounced. To lose not only someone you worked with, but also someone you had loved was something that both of them had suffered in the past. Too many times. And still it hadn't become any easier. Never became any easier. Willow's plaintive sobs bearing witness to the breaking of her heart.

"Why, Giles? Why? Everyone I love dies! Everyone.., is it me..?"

She was pushing the words from her mouth, even though she felt too exhausted to speak. After the battle she had tried to find her friends immediately, had looked for them first with her mind, and then in the flesh. Only finally believing what she had feared, when she had found Faith. When she had seen the confirmation in her eyes, heard it from her mouth.

"...did I do something wrong..?"

Her voice slipped into silence, the merest hint of a whisper.

"...am I a bad person, Giles? Is that it?"

He didn't know what to say, didn't think that there were any words he could say. The most he could find to do was to wrap his arms just that little bit tighter around her, offer her the comfort of human contact, the warmth of not being alone. He knew it wasn't much, but he hoped that it helped, hoped it gave Willow something to hang on to.

The sound of the doors gave them a second of something else to focus on, a moment of not thinking the same thoughts. It was Faith. She looked dead on her feet, all the hours of the last few days rushing to catch up with her. Every moment she'd spent not prepared to sleep, not prepared to take an ounce of rest, weighing heavy in each of her limbs. She'd been through it today. In so many different ways. Couldn't remember any other time in her life when she'd felt so utterly overwhelmed by the myriad of emotions she was made to endure. Not even her darkest time was this screwed up. She wanted to scream, to shout, to whoop, to holler, to laugh, to cry. And she sure as hell wanted to sleep. But she still couldn't. Not yet. There was still miles to go.

She slowly approached Willow, still had to tell her the details, still had to explain what had happened, how she let it happen. It was so fresh in her memory, playing on a loop. Every detail, over and over, from the second she had entered the lair. It was plaguing her, making her wonder if she could have done anything different, changed the outcome. Prevented the headache.

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

Willow allowed Faith to envelope her in her arms, to share her pain. It was different pain they were feeling, two different kinds of loss, but both of them drew comfort from what they could share.

Faith was the first to speak. To offer condolences.

“I’m so sorry, Red... so sorry.”

“Tell me how it happened, Faith... I need to know how.”

Faith broke apart from the warmth of Willow’s hold, needed to distance herself... she couldn’t stop thinking about it, seeing it... she didn’t want to speak about it, not yet, but she knew she had to. Knew she had to give Willow some sought of closure.

Her shoulders slumped as she made to sit down, collapsing under the weight of everything she bore.

“Wait, Faith...”

Willow had recognised the despondency in the other girl, remembered how much she had also been through, so much more then anyone else maybe.

“...how are YOU holding up..? Are you okay..?”

She didn’t look okay. She looked lost. Overwhelmed. But at Willow’s words, she steeled herself, hardened her defences against anymore pain.

“I’ll be fine, Red... five by five. Don’t worry ‘bout me, ok?”

“Of course I’ll worry about you...”

She offered Faith a glimpse of her resolve face.

“...and there’s nothing you can do about it, so don’t even try.”

“Bossy broads... I like it.”

They allowed themselves a small smile, a small second of relief, before Faith began the telling. Shared with Willow the last moments of Kennedy’s life.

“It was so fucked up, Red... the noise was deafening, all that chanting... and there was so many of them, way more then we thought, too many to keep a sense of...”

She could see it again behind her eyes. The lair filled with demons.

“...we could see B, they had her chained to some fucking slab, an altar maybe... but it was so far away, we had to fight our way through, just swinging and killing, really fucking letting fly...”

She remembered Kennedy at her side, matching the demons blow for blow.

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“...she was awesome, Red... and then... shit, then I saw him, and I zoned. I dunno, maybe it was some vamp mojo, but I just lost it... had Angelus in my head, and it was so real... I fucked up, let him get to me, and if it wasn't for her..? Man, she saved my ass... saved Buffy's ass...had a demon just about to make mince meat of me, she gave me the heads up...”

She remembered coming round and seeing Angelus at Buffy. Throwing her stake.

“...she said she had my back. Gave me the moment I needed to save B. Helped me break the fucking chains they had her in, lifted her up and put her in my arms...”

This was the bit that hurt. The moment she'd never stop saying thank you for.

“...and I saw it in her eyes. The moment she went to push me out the way..? I knew. Could feel it coming up behind me, knew I couldn't move, knew I had to hold on to B... and she just fucking pushed me. She must have known...”

Her voice was so hoarse with the emotion, her eyes making way for silent tears.

“...must have known she'd take the blow... but she still did it. She did it for me, she did it for Buffy...”

She allowed her eyes to seek out Willow's, wanted to convey all she felt.

“...and I am so fucking sorry, Red. If I could've stopped her... could have saved her..? I just couldn't do anything.”

She saw again the head demon, heard it's shrieks as it realised what had happened, felt it close in behind her as her arms cradled Buffy, saw the blow meant for her as it hit Kennedy, saw her fall, saw the blood. Felt the pain.

Willow slipped her hand into Faith's and gave a slight squeeze. It wasn't her fault, there was nothing she could do. She took comfort from knowing that her death hadn't been in vain, that she hadn't died for nothing. Her last act being one of absolute courage and bravery. It made her proud. It didn't ease the loss, but it offered a small comfort.

“She always got her own way, Faith... you know that. And if her way was doing what she did to save you, to save Buffy... then we have to respect that. Have to love her for it.”

Giles broke into their conversation to ask if anyone wanted refreshments. He hated sitting around these places. The waiting to know how loved ones were faring. If your world was going to be shattered.

“I'm cool, Giles... the nurses made me drink a couple gallons of water so I could piss in a cup for them, wanted to see if I had any internal injuries. I don't think I could drink anything else if I tried... maybe a shot or ten, but nothing soft.”

“Willow?”

“I'm fine. I'm with Faith. Unless it's got mind numbing qualities, it's just not worth it.”

He left to get himself some refreshment and returned with Wes and Fred. They had come not only to catch up on what had happened, but also to be there for Faith. They knew better than most the level of the bond that she had shared with Angel. Understood how hard it was going to be for her to accept what she had had to do. It was going to be a hard adjustment for all of them.

Wes broke through his normal reservations to take Faith in a hug, to offer her words he thought she might need to hear, to let her know that he was there for her, always, anytime, anything she needed... he would be there. Just like Angel had been.

They were words which brought fresh tears to Faith's eyes. It was all so much. She still hadn't seen Buffy since they had brought her in, knew only that the nurse said she was strong, and out of danger. Didn't know if she had woken up... didn't know what state she would be in when she did wake up. She was buckling under the loss of Kennedy, one of the best friends she had made in LA, someone who was always willing to share a joke with her, companionship with her. And Angel. She hadn't even gone there yet. Wasn't letting herself. She didn't know how to feel, how she should feel. Even though she knew there was no other way, that she would do it again a hundred times over... there was still a part of her that felt as if she had let him down, had given up on him.

"Thanks Wes, I appreciate it."

"There's some stuff we need to go over... papers that Angel had in case... well, in case something happened to him..."

"I leave all that stuff to you, Wes. Just let me know what the big guy wanted..."

She broke off there. The doors swung open and the doctor walked through. He met their eyes immediately, having nothing that he needed to keep from them, glad to be able to offer some sort of good news to this bunch of people. He wasn't sure who they were, what they did... but he'd seen them before. He thought perhaps they might be vigilantes, keeping the streets of LA safe for folk like him, free from gangs and such. Whoever they were, he just had a feeling that maybe he should be thankful to them.

He pointed his look at Giles.

"Are you her father?"

"Yes."

A little fib never hurt. All eyes turned to the doctor, all ears strained to hear what he had to say.

"Well, she's rather been through it, I'd say. There was significant blood loss... multiple injuries, lacerations, puncture wounds... luckily nothing looks to be infected, nothing that won't heal..."

He cast his gaze round the room, knew that some of these girls seemed to recover from injuries super fast. Had seen breaks and fractures heal in record time.

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

“...she’s just waking up now, we’ve got her pretty juiced up on the morphine, so she’ll be disorientated, but if you wanted to see her for a moment, that would be fine.”

Faith stepped forward, felt she should be first through the doors.

“Giles?”

“Faith, let me go in first. I know you want to see her, but just let me go in. We don’t know how she’s going to react to any of this, what state she is going to be in...”

“I want to see her.”

“...I’ll be quick. Be patient Faith.”

She gave a resigned shrug. Didn’t have the energy left to argue.

The room was bathed in the hues of a breaking dawn. The first light of a fresh day sneaking through the slats in the blinds. Buffy lay silently on the bed, seemingly so small against the large white sheets. Her eyes were open, but she wasn’t focusing on anything. Barely looked up when Giles entered the room. He walked forward and gently reached out a hand to her head, just a tender stroke across her brow, a fathers touch. She flinched at it though, not use to a touch that didn’t bring pain.

“Buffy... are you..?”

“Hey, Giles...”

Her voice was tiny, worn out from all the screaming she had done.

“...I’m ok. Sore. Need a new vacation... but I’m ok.”

He perched on the side of the bed, careful not to jog into her. She had bandages everywhere, covering the places Angelus had marked her... stitches in the worst of them. Her skin still lacked any colour, her injuries still shining in stark contrast.

“Maybe next time you feel like going away for awhile, you’ll pick something a little more tranquil... less...”

“Stalked by menacing demon..?”

“Exactly.”

Giles took a moment, knew that Buffy liked to make light in a crisis, to deal with pain by making it bearable. He could also see the tiredness in her eyes, the exhaustion that she was wearing on her face.

“Can I get you anything, Buffy... a drink perhaps..?”

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She thought about that. There was only one thing she thought she needed now, one thing which could start to make things better.

“Is Faith here..?”

Giles smiled. He should have known.

“I’ll just go and get her for you.”

He went to leave, barely heard Buffy’s faint call, turned to see what it was she wanted.

“What about Angel..? Did she..? Is he...?”

She couldn’t say the word. Had no memory of what had happened.

“Yes, Buffy... he’s gone. I’m sorry.”

He saw the flash of pain as it sped through her eyes, the understanding as it settled on her features. He didn’t know how she would take the news. What it would mean to her. As he left the room, he saw that her gaze had again fixed on that place which wasn’t quite here.

Buffy was being bathed in memories of Angel, from the first time she had seen him to the last... it hurt to think he wasn’t there anymore, hurt to realise he was gone... but a part of her..? It was glad. The torment she had suffered at Angelus’ hands was too much for her to forget, would have been in her mind every time she had seen Angel... she never could have trusted him again. Never could have felt safe with him.

She closed her eyes and banished the hurt of Angelus, banished every word he had spoken to her, every thing he had done to her. He couldn’t touch her now, would never touch her again. In her head she said goodbye to Angel. Allowed the silent tears to slip down her face. As she heard the door handle turning, she forced her eyelids open, fought against the morphine to have a clear view. Her eyes opened on Faith.

And she found a reason to smile.

It was five days since she had dressed in proper clothes. Five long days in the comfort of a hospital gown. But not today. Today she was taking her time, choosing her clothes carefully. Sombre clothes for a sombre day. She still felt weak. Still felt overwhelmed, but today she was making herself leave. Returning to the world to wish someone else goodbye.

Buffy glanced around at the now familiar walls of her room. The starkness, the smell... these things all assaulted her senses, and whereas before they would have repelled her, now they felt like sanctuary. Safety. When she had first woken up here, she had been bathed in a morphine daze, able to deal with everything, because nothing felt quite real... but after that..? The next time she had woken up..? That had felt like hell.

Faith had filled her in on what had happened. The events in the lair. What Angelus had done to her. And it was all just so much. Kennedy’s death. Angel. Everything had piled up on her,

tormented her, until the point that waking up was scarier than her nightmares. She knew that Angelus was gone, was thankful that he was gone, but she still hadn't managed to completely banish the fear. Hadn't managed to come to terms with her own mortality creeping up on her. Again.

She had sought to be alone. It had been hard, everyone wanted to see her, Willow, Giles, the newly arrived Dawn, Xander, so many. And of course Faith. But she didn't want their company, couldn't deal with it yet. So she'd retreated. Had spent all her time in virtual silence, not able to make conversation, because she was scared of what they would want to talk about. Didn't want to relive her hurt in spoken memories, the hurt she was feeling at the unspoken ones was bad enough.

Their worried gazes had permeated her silence, she knew that she should be trying harder, that to get on with life was the only way to go. But not yet. She'd needed the time, needed to make peace with her own mind, before she could move on. Now, today, she felt almost ready. At least ready to see what awaited her on the other side of the door.

Faith had been the most attentive, nearly always there. Morning, noon AND night. Buffy had ignored her whilst she was there, giving not more than non-committal grunts to any conversation starter, and then missed her terribly when she woke to find her gone. On the occasions that she had fallen asleep in her chair, then Buffy watched her. Studied her intently... wanted so much to go to her, to ease HER pain. But she had remained paralysed by her own lack of dealing. Unable to start the healing process. Faith hadn't been by yesterday, nor this morning... and Buffy just hoped that she hadn't left it too late. Hadn't taken too long to reach out a hand.

She realised how hard this day was going to be for Faith. For Willow as well, but especially for Faith. Buffy had never felt particularly close to Kennedy, even in the days after Sunnydale when she had hung with her and Willow for a while, it still didn't click. They really had not much in common, and when distance was put between them, they felt no need to close it. If Buffy had known though what Kennedy would one day do for her, she would have taken a whole lot more time getting to know her. But that wasn't the case. So she would do her best. She would go to the funeral and pay her respects, and then she would be there for Willow, and also for Faith.

She would make the most of the life that Kennedy had given her.

Dawn had arrived to take her to the service, her mood reflecting the downbeat slump of Buffy's shoulders. They hadn't spoken much on the way to the cemetery, neither of them looking forward to the emotional toll the day was sure to take on them. Dawn and Giles had tickets to fly home the following day, and had also booked Buffy a ticket. They had seen how unresponsive she had been in hospital, and thought taking her home was the best solution. Faith had disagreed, but Buffy hadn't. Hadn't said much of anything when the idea was put to her, was still too busy trying to put her head back together.

Dawn had pestered Buffy again in the car for her thoughts, insisted she needed to confirm the flights, but still Buffy couldn't be drawn. Had said they would talk later, at the beach. After the service. Dawn had finally accepted that and the rest of the journey had bathed in silence.

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Now, at the cemetery, Buffy was watching Willow place a final rose on Kennedy's coffin before it was lowered into the ground. Was feeling the weight of the words spoken, by friends, family, Faith. Words about love, about life, about living.

She herself hadn't said anything. Couldn't find the words to say to the wooden box that housed the body of the girl who had saved her life. She would pay her respects later, in private. She had cried tears though, from the moment her eyes had locked into Willow's, had witnessed her best friend's pain, she had cried. Faith's eyes weren't for catching. She was wearing reflective sunglasses, every time Buffy had tried to catch her gaze, all she had seen was her own dejection staring back at her.

It all felt so wrong. Felt like she should be standing at Faith's side, helping her on. Not the other side of a grave which seemed thousands of feet wide. She didn't know how to approach her though, didn't know what words to say after having said none for so long. Usually it would be easy banter, the flow of traded innuendo, the warmth of a shared smile which found them talking. But today there wasn't room for any of that, so she didn't know how to go to her. How to comfort her.

As the service drew to a close, Buffy watched as Xander drew Willow into his embrace, placed a hand to her face and wiped at her tears. She longed for the contact. Watched as next Faith clung to Willow, watched them exchange words, touches. Watched the removal of sunglasses, saw the lost look in her eyes. Saw Willow squeeze her hand, watched the hint of a smile return. Wondered how on earth she hadn't found a way to be there for her.

She prayed that Faith would look up, would offer a small glance her way, just a look because she had to. Because she needed to. But she didn't. Her head had nearly turned, but then it had dropped, fixed to the floor, and the glasses were replaced.

They all slowly made their ways back to the cars. Everybody would be going to the beach. To Faith's house. No-one was making small talk, meeting each other's eyes. They still had one more goodbye to make. One final farewell.

Faith was stood on the beach outside of her house. She was surrounded by a great many people, all of them here to say goodbye to Angel. To forget the demon Angelus, and to instead say goodbye to the man who had meant so much to them. Done so much for them.

She was dressed in the same black leather pants and black shirt she had worn for Kennedy's funeral, hadn't seen a need to change, her mood still matching the colour of her clothes. In her hand she carried just a small ornate little box, the last remaining ashes of her friend and mentor, and as she cradled them, her mind flashed back to the time that she had collected them, gathered them.

She had taken Buffy to the hospital, ascertained that she would be ok, that Giles was there, left him with Willow, and then she had gone. Had retraced her steps and returned to the place it had happened. The place where she had killed him. To the lair. It hadn't seemed so big when she returned, had seemed eerily quiet, a nowhere special. But the blood which was already leaving stains on the floor, on the altar, spoke the truth. She had bent at the altar, almost on her knees, painstakingly collecting what she could of Angel's ashes. Her tears

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falling steadily to mix with Buffy's blood, some of that coating the ashes to leave just a paste. She'd managed to collect so little, but to her it didn't matter. She had some. And at the moment, surrounded by people speaking words about Angel, telling memories... she didn't care. That she had something, just a little bit to hang onto, that's what counted.

Almost everyone who had wanted to say something, had been, there was just the last few left, the ones who had known him the longest, perhaps the ones he meant the most to. As a silence started to stretch out, Xander stepped forward. He looked a little uncomfortable, as if he'd never given thought to standing at Angel's funeral, to what he would say if that was ever the case. He wanted to though. Say something. Felt he should, not for himself, but for the others.

"I uh... well, I guess I should say something..."

He loosened the tie at his neck as he felt all eyes go to him, felt his mind go blank. He didn't have much in the way of memories to share.

"...I never really liked the guy, you know..? He was kinda creepy... and he drank blood..."

He knew that had sounded wrong as soon as he said it, caught the pointed look from Willow, and tried to recover.

"...but he always dressed really cool. What with the leather... and the hair, his hair was always well styled..."

"Thank you, Xander!"

He flushed as Willow cut him off, glad for the intervention. He never had liked the guy though... not really.

Willow used her interruption as the beginning of her own remembrance. It was such a hard day for her, burying Kennedy, and now this. She was just grateful that she had had the last times that she did with the other girl... the whispers of promises to try again, touches that would stay in her memory forever. It didn't make her hurt any less, but it meant she didn't have to live with the added regret of words never spoken. As for what she had to say about Angel... it was also hard.

"I don't have a lot to say..., not so good at the speeches anyway. I just... I saved Angel's soul, you know..? It was his job to save other people's... and it was my job to save his..."

She looked across at Buffy. At Faith stood close by her.

"...but this time I couldn't."

Tears looked to push their way down Willow's cheeks, and as she stepped back, ran out of head space to make more words, she mouthed a silent 'sorry' to Buffy.

Buffy saw Willow's word, smiled an acceptance. She didn't need an apology from her, laid no blame at her door for not being able to prevent what had happened. But she still accepted the word... to ease Willow's pain, didn't want the girl to feel her conscience burdened by 'what if's'. By things she wasn't able to do. Lives she wasn't able to save.

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She was just preparing to step forwards and speak her own quick goodbye, when Faith brushed past her... stood with her back to everyone, looking out to sea. Still holding on tight to the box in her hands, her pitiful last remembrance of someone who had meant the world to her.

“Me next...”

The words sounded so empty as they floated back over her shoulder to the people behind. She couldn't face them, had kept her glasses on most of the day so she wouldn't have to look into anyone's eyes... didn't wanna share her pain. Her voice continued, flat. Almost devoid of feeling.

“...I'm not so good at this stuff... at saying shit. Things that mean anything. What I feel. But I guess today I have to... got no choice...”

She trailed off for a moment, her breath freezing. Her mind flashing back for the last time, to her final memory of Angel.

It was from her time in prison. She'd never felt so alone in all her life. Even in Sunnysdale she had been able to feel hate, had let it wash over her, invade her... give her a reason for existing. But then she had crashed, and then she was there. And she couldn't feel anything anymore. Had nothing. No reason to go on. No one. She had sat in her cell, not even thinking... just empty. Truly alone. Until a guard had come. She had a visitor... the only one she ever had. Angel. And she wasn't alone anymore.

“...he did so much for me. He saved me. He loved me. He believed in me when no-one else did... when even I didn't. I trusted him with my soul...”

Her voice collapsed on her words.

“...he gave me back my soul.”

The tears flowed freely from her eyes. She didn't care to wipe them, didn't care for much. Everything just hurt. The last few days had been hell for her... almost literally. All her emotions had been struggling for a stronghold. Her grief, her relief, her sadness, her joy. But as the days had passed, her reason for happiness had evaded her. Had left her confused. Bewildered as to what was happening, what the future held. And she was just too tired to do it anymore. Was ready to just stop caring.

Faith's pain was obvious for everyone to see, had many shedding tears for her. She just looked so alone. So forlorn, standing on her own, gazing out to sea. Her words echoing back towards them. She appeared lost, a boat that's missing it's anchor. Free floating, not caring which way it went.

Faith didn't know how much longer she could hold her breath. Didn't know why she was holding it. When she had started. Her body was rigid with tension, ready to explode, to combust... it felt like the world was spinning, like she was spinning. She had been in

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control... was going to make it through... but then talking, saying the words... it was just too much. And now she was losing control, nothing to hang on to.

The touch startled her.

She hadn't been expecting it. At first just a tug, warmth against her fingers. And then a hand slipping into hers, a hand she had missed so god damn fucking much the last few days, a hand that said it was going to be ok. Buffy's hand. And then it was a squeeze, a squeeze that reassured, a squeeze that gave her strength. A new anchor.

She released her breath, released her tension, and found the power to continue with the last few words she needed to say.

"I'm so sorry, Angel. So fucking sorry...I just hope you forgive me, that you would've done the same... I didn't..."

Her voice broke at the last, finally giving up. She had run out of words, had only tears.

Buffy knew that Faith had finished, couldn't say more, could feel her silent sobs vibrating through her hand. Was so glad she had taken her hand. Watching her fall to pieces had been awful, seeing her crumble before them... it had pulled at everything she was. Every feeling she had. She had let go then, knew she had to go forwards, not only for herself, but for Faith.

She gathered herself to speak the expected words. Words that were supposed to touch, to remember. She wouldn't have much to offer though, the pain of Angelus was still too fresh in her mind to give lamenting prose about Angel. She gripped a little tighter to the hand in hers, opened her mouth to say goodbye.

"I don't have too many words to say..."

Her voice still bore the signs of her hours spent screaming, rasping in the back of her throat.

"...I've made my peace with Angel, and I've said goodbye to him. Wherever he is... I know he hears it..."

She looked down at the box still cradled in Faith's other hand, and for a moment she fought back tears.

"...I love you, Angel."

She bowed her head to show that she was finished.

Faith took her hand from the safety of Buffy's, walked forwards and lifted the lid on the box she had been holding. As the wind picked up Angel's ashes, it also picked up Faith's whispers.

"I love you too, big guy... I'm sorry."

Only Buffy heard the words, and she walked forwards to join Faith, to press a hand into the base of her back, a slight rub, a healing touch. It was over. He was gone.

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As everyone stood and watched the breeze take Angel on his final journey, they all became lost in their memories. Some good, some bad. Some that would last forever.

The little house on the beach was emptying of people, all evening they had stayed, comforted each other, shared memories. Spoke of the future, plans that would have to be made. Faith was exhausted. Physically, mentally, emotionally. She felt like she was running on empty, couldn't wait for everyone to just be gone so she could finally think about nothing. About everything. About Buffy.

After the service, after Angel had blown away on the wind, she had looked to her then. Looked for comfort, for sustenance, something to keep her going. But people had crowded her, pushed in on her... no-one seeming to understand that if they just left her alone with Buffy, just gave her five minutes... then she would be better. Then she could start to get better.

She'd kept her eye on her, at first anyway. Had allowed her gaze to rest by her side, even if she herself couldn't, but there were just too many people. Too many seekers of attention.

When Wes had taken her away for a private talk, then Buffy had been with Dawn and Giles, she'd watched them talking, wishing she could hear the words... wondering if it was final plans for tomorrow they were talking about. She hated tomorrow.

What she hated the most was that she could understand it. Could see why Buffy would need to go home. To rest, to recuperate. To be with family. Didn't mean that she wanted it though. She wanted Buffy here. With her. Forever.

When she finally got the chance to speak to her, she decided she would tell her. Every single word she had ever wanted to say. All of them. From her first thoughts.

'Holy fuck! That girls hot... gonna borrow her stake, impress her with my moves...'

To her now thoughts.

'I love you.'

She would tell her all of them. Not to force her to stay, not to make Buffy be there for her. No. So that she could be there for Buffy. Fuck it. She'd travel the world if she had to, England beware... if Buffy wanted it, she'd follow her to the ends of the Earth.

But she hadn't gotten the chance to speak to her.

Wesley had so much to say. So many unknowns to divulge. So many opportunities to pass her way. All so overwhelming, all so more than she could think about. It had stolen her time, stolen her gaze from Buffy, and then she hadn't been able to find her again.

Faith had looked for her, dodged people's words to cross the beach, rattled the locked doors on an empty house. Had suffered a slump in hope as she searched in vain. Giles and Dawn had left by time she came back and she only guessed that Buffy had gone with them. Had

parted for the final time without words, crossing an ocean without a goodbye. A small part of Faith didn't let go of the idea that Buffy would come to her in the morning, that the hand in the hand meant all it had felt like. Meant something. But another part told her that this was it. That once again fate would fuck up her and Buffy, take the time and steal it away, ruin what could have been so right.

“Hey, Faith... we're gonna go now.”

She looked up from her misery. It was Xander and Willow, the final stragglers, the last witnesses to her pain. She took Willow in her arms, was getting used to sharing this comfort with her, was glad that she at least wasn't leaving tomorrow, was staying on in LA... close by.

“You ok, Faith?”

“Five by five, Red. Totally fucked, sinking fast... but still ‘five by five’, right..?”

“I'm here for you, you know that... anything you need...”

“I know. Thank you.”

They walked slowly towards the front door. Neither Willow or Xander really liked to leave her alone, but that was what she wanted. Searching out the solitude. They'd already said their farewells when a thought struck Xander. A person he hadn't seen. Hadn't bid farewells too.

“Faith, where's the Buffster..? You got her hidden out back or something..? Been keeping her all to yourself?”

He smiled at his suggestion, didn't notice a smile wasn't being returned. Only realised by the tone of voice. The detachment.

“I don't know where she is. I didn't see her go... think she went with Giles.”

“Oh.”

The silence that covered them was awkward, Xander wishing he could recover his foot from his mouth. Willow just wishing for better times.

“It'll be okay Faith. You just wait and see. Buffy just needs a little time maybe... it's been hard on her, hell on her. Just give her the time... let her get better, then you'll see. She loves you Faith. She'll come back. I know she will.”

Faith wanted to believe Willow. So wanted to believe. But she was too tired right now. Would sleep on her dreams.

“Whatever, Red... I guess only time will tell.”

They bid their last goodbyes, made plans to see each other soon. And then Faith was alone. Finally able to rest. She knew she probably wouldn't sleep, would spend the night tossing and turning... seeing Buffy in her head. Touching Buffy in her head. But at least she was alone.

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She carried some of the empties from the front room to the kitchen, smiled down at Scoob's empty bowl. At least she wasn't totally alone. In her head she rewound the time to when she had found him, had heard about the dog washed up down the coast, battered and torn, barely alive. The morning after they had saved Buffy.

At the time she had seen it as an omen, a sign from somewhere that things would be okay, that things would be better. Now she wasn't so sure, but she thanked whoever anyway. Praised all the lords that someone had seen fit to get him to a vet, that they had found him worth saving. He was still in bad shape, still pretty sorry for himself, but he was home, and he was alive... and that gave her at least something to be happy about.

She grabbed some doggy treats from the cupboard under the sink, and decided to go see him. He was in her room, on her bed... making the most of his convalescence, revelling in being Faith's bed buddy. She was happy to let him, happy to have someone to snuggle with. A little hairier than she would normally go for... but warm all the same. Comforting.

She opened the door to her room and let her eyes fall on the bed. And she froze. Felt like she was falling. Had never expected.

“Buffy..?”

She hadn't left. Hadn't fled without a word. Hadn't abandoned her, hadn't left her alone.

The smile Faith found took over her whole face, she'd never known that being wrong could feel so fucking good, so fucking perfect.

She approached the bed slowly, she wanted so much to get this moment right, this one thing in her life right. So much she wanted to beg Buffy to stay, to never leave her, but she knew she couldn't, knew she had to let her go. And it hurt so badly. But at least she hadn't gone now. At least she could say goodbye properly. Tell her the words.

“Buffy..? B..?”

She reached a hand out to her shoulder.

“Hey, sleepyhead?”

She shook her, so gently. Not willing to use force.

Buffy slowly started stirring, her eyes squinting before they opened, her eyebrows stretching. When they finally managed to open she smiled at what she saw, ran her hand self consciously through her bed hair, trying to look her best.

“Hey.”

The word was music to Faith's ears.

“Hey yourself.”

“Sorry bout the sleeping... I just snuck in to visit the wounded.”

Kelly – Where The Heart Is

Faith's tone took on mock hurt, a pretence at being left out.

“You mean ya didn't stay to see me..?”

“Are YOU wounded..?”

Her eyes glowed with sleep and mischief.

“...you want me to snuggle with you?”

They both let their gaze fall to Scoobs, to Buffy's arm wrapped across him, her body pressed close to him. Within seconds Faith was moving him, trying to ignore his indignant stares at being disturbed. She placed him gently in his basket and took in his drooping eyes and down turned mouth.

“Sorry little guy, but she wants snuggles.”

He turned his nose up, like he didn't want to hear. Faith looked back at the bed, at Buffy sitting alone. Waiting for her.

“Sorry buddy, what can I do..?”

She patted his head for good measure, turned back to Buffy. She went slowly again, wanting every second to mean something, every detail kept in her memory. Buffy rose to greet her, didn't want to wait, had waited forever. Felt all the unshed tears filling her eyes as she finally went to the arms she needed.

Faith wrapped her in her arms, tried to offer her everything with her embrace, didn't know what Buffy needed... didn't know what to expect. She pulled back as she felt her start to speak. To tell her. Locked eyes with hers. Spoke to her heart.

“I need you Faith.”

Buffy reached up her hand, ran her palm across her face. So gently. A loving touch. No pain, no force, just love and trust.

“I 'need' you.”

'I need you'

The words echoed through Faith's head, reverberated through her body. She believed them, because she needed Buffy too. Now. She could feel the desire, it felt like it was ripping through her veins, taunting her... to take, to possess. But she wouldn't. She would be slow, she would gentle.

Buffy needed love, and she would love her. With everything she was. It would be the one last thing, the last thing she could do to say goodbye. A final thing before Buffy left. All night she would show her that she loved her, and then she would tell her.

Her voice came out husky but smooth, caressing Buffy's ears with its honesty.

“I need you too Buffy, for so long...”

Any other words were lost as the blonde girl's mouth claimed hers. Delicately at first, tiny teasing kisses, so soft they almost tickled her lips, made her smile. And then with more force, still soft, still restrained... but with underlying urgency fighting to be heard.

Their tongues wrapped around each others, stroking together, making tingles spread throughout their bodies and filling them with warmth, it felt so good, so right. And they both needed it so much.

Buffy was the one who pulled back from the kiss, wanted to run her eyes over Faith, wanted to confirm again that this was the Faith from her dreams, that this WAS her dream. And everything she saw reassured her. She stepped back to give herself room to touch, to devour with her hands what she had already devoured with her eyes.

Faith stayed perfectly still, not daring to move or to break the spell. Buffy was studying her so intently, with such need in her eyes. Bringing her hand up to her face to run fingertips down her cheeks. Across the collar of her shirt to the buttons which kept it closed, slowly teasing them open, one by one... and then a caress across her stomach. Her breath catching in her throat at the contact with Buffy's hand. The muscles tensing unwittingly, straining to make each touch last longer. Feeling Buffy's lips as they traced their way down her body, such small fleeting kisses, the warmth of her mouth quickly replaced by the cold of the air. As Buffy's fingers reached behind her, found a clasp to her bra and deftly unclipped it... the little giggle she heard escape from her lips. And then those fingers were playing with her nipples, a graze across and then something firmer, pinching them between her fingers, rolling them. Making Faith pant from the hotness. She could feel her clit coming to life, feel her pussy start to ache as it longed for a touch, for pressure, for Buffy.

Buffy could feel Faith tensing, could guess why. It was killing her going so slow, taking her time to make it real. But she had to. She needed this to heal herself, to banish anything that remained from the last few days, any last hurt that she hadn't let go of, she wanted to lose it in touching Faith. Wanted to lose herself in Faith.

It was working.

Slowly her nerves, her pain, her sadness... it was all being replaced by desire. By passion. By lust. Her kisses travelled up from Faith's stomach to the breasts she had been massaging with her hands. She allowed her mouth to close over one nipple, to feel the skin as it touched her tongue for the first time, the way it puckered, seemed to swell for her, to be begged to be sucked, to be licked, to be consumed. Her hands lost their need to lazily discover, they wanted to possess, they wanted to know. What it felt like, what Faith felt like.

She managed to negotiate her down onto the bed, to land above her, her lips still seeking to torment breasts, whilst her hands looked to release the buttons on her pants, to let the skin free.

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Faith bucked at the first touch inside of her leathers. As Buffy's hands sought space within the confines, running her fingers across her panties. She struggled to keep her breath steady, to not let go too quick... keeping control.

“Faith... I need you to help me...”

“Wha..?”

The half word was exhaled, she couldn't have spoken it.

“I wanna take your pants off.”

She nearly fucking lost it then. Nearly burst out in crazy laughter. It was so surreal. So absolutely perfect, but still surreal. That Buffy had her on her bed, asking for help to take her pants off..? She felt like crying. Tears of joy.

She didn't lose it though. She smiled her smile, and lifted her ass, wiggled her hips to ease the journey of her pants. Anything for Buffy. And then she lay back and let herself be studied.

Buffy's eyes were having picnic, Faith was lying on the bed in just the tiniest little black panties, so simple, just covering that last piece of her, a piece that Buffy needed. Now.

It was burning through her, felt like her blood was boiling. Never had an urge to fuck been so clear in her mind. She could feel Faith tensing again, reached out her hand to rub gently across the front of her panties, raised her eyebrows at the wetness she felt there, felt her own pussy throb in response.

“Do you want me?”

She had to hear it, had lived to hear it.

“Oh god... my whole life, I never wanted anything this much...”

She pushed the material to the side, not taking the time to remove it, didn't have the time. It was now.

Faith gasped at the first touch, moaned low at the second. Buffy's hands were finally on her, her fingers stroking her clit, sliding up and down, trying to find a rhythm amongst the slickness, and it all felt so damn good. She was arching her back, trying to get Buffy to travel her hands down, to take her... she felt like she would explode if she didn't have her inside of her, if she didn't fuck her soon... she found the air to speak... to whisper...

“Fuck me, Buffy... please..?”

It was the last she would speak for a while.

Buffy tore off her panties and then her fingers were inside of her, hadn't needed further prompting. She'd entered her so fast it had taken her breath, so deep... she could feel her moving in and out, feel her fingers moving inside her, as if Buffy was looking to touch every part of her, to possess every part of her. She loved it. Pushed into it. Fucked Buffy's hand

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liked she'd never fucked no other. Went as far as she could and pleaded for more, she wanted everything gone, nothing to exist except what she was feeling now.

Buffy's mouth was on hers, drawing out kisses, sucking at her tongue, biting at her lips, down to her neck, marking out the place where her pulse beat so fast. Her hand was still going, fingers buried inside, twisting up, stroking her sweet spot... her thumb rubbing insistently against her clit, turning her whole body into sensation, pushing away reality.

It'd never been this good, she'd never lost herself like this, just let it all go. It was building in her, her cunt starting to tighten as her muscles tensed before release. She clung on so tight, held Buffy to her, stopping her from fucking her, just keeping her there as she rode it out, pressed so tight into her, Buffy's tongue taking over her mouth, no need for air anymore, just this.

Buffy was lost in the kiss, her fingers were inside Faith, she could feel Faith coming, feel it touch something within her, the need to give more, could feel Faith's juices as they coated her hand, her whole body seeming to freeze, to hold her in place... so she gave more. Fought back against Faith's death grip to fuck her harder. Tore away from the kiss to move down her body, held her legs in place as she buried her fingers repeatedly in her, in and out... so fast and furious, claiming her.

And she was screaming, and it sounded so good. Buffy had never heard a sound like it. Faith coming for her, because of her. She watched as her own hand stopped moving, felt Faith's muscles stop contracting... wanted to kiss her. Wanted to taste her.

And she tasted so great. Not like anything before. Yet kind of familiar. It infused her senses, led her on when she might have looked for direction. She traced Faith's clit, so gently, just the tip of her tongue... it was making her shiver, making goosebumps raise on her skin. She could see them. See the lazy smile that was spreading over Faith's lips... the obvious approval. She ran her tongue down to her hole, her slit, tasted everything she had made, licked it up, lapped it up, feasted upon it.

Faith was in a daze. Floating somewhere. She could feel Buffy's mouth on her, so good, it felt like heaven. But she wanted to see, wanted to watch as the girl's tongue disappeared into her pussy, needed to know how pretty it looked, how perfect it looked.

She raised herself up and wasn't disappointed, it was beautiful. And she so had to touch her, wanted to taste herself on Buffy. To seal it with a kiss.

She ignored Buffy's moan of complaint to move herself, to reverse a position so she had the girl underneath her, still clothed, but at least she had her. She brought her mouth to claim her lips, to taste the taste. Her tongue massaging Buffy's, stoking desire again. She pulled away to look into eyes, to check... to see that it was ok. That she could touch her, wouldn't hurt her.

She whispered the question into Buffy's ear, asked if she wanted her, did she need her..?

And then she was fucking her. Her clothes lost so quick, lost to desperation and urgency. She was pushing her fingers inside of Buffy, just one at first, not wanting to do wrong, not wanting to cause pain. But Buffy hadn't wanted that, hadn't wanted half of Faith, had wanted all of Faith. Had wanted to banish the last of everything in her.

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When she came it wasn't crazy, wasn't screaming and mad, it was almost silence. Faith had stroked it out of her so expertly, touched her in all the right places, soft and gentle then hard and fast. She'd let go, given over to it, and then she had come. And now she was glowing. On the bed, Faith half across her, eyes fighting sleep.

In the seclusion of the last days she had worried about this, worried that she would see Angelus when she was in her bed. With Faith. But he wasn't there. Hadn't even touched the edges of her conscious. He may have used her, and hurt her, but he had never touched that place that belonged to Faith, had never touched her heart.

'I'll save you B.'

It had been those words that had kept her going, kept her heart beating when she sought to give up. Beating for Faith.

She wrapped her arms just a little tighter around her now, gave the snuggles she had promised to entice her onto the bed. Let her mind bask in the come down from euphoria as she sought to find sleep.

“Buffy..?”

The word startled her. She'd been giving in to the pull of tiredness. Relaxing.

“Uh-huh?”

“Open your eyes, doofus... I wanna speak to ya.”

Faith lifted herself up onto her elbow, stared down at Buffy and waited for her eyes to open, waited to speak the words.

“Eyes open, wide awake... now what's eating ya, baby..?”

And then that stopped her dead in her tracks. She had wanted to be serious, had so wanted to be touching and romantic and all the other kind of things that she imagined Buffy wanted. But how could she let that go? She couldn't.

“What's eating me, B..? I was kinda hoping for you...”

She let the suggestion register on her eyebrows, lifting them, let her mouth fall into a smirk, a sexy smile. Buffy rolled her eyes.

“You woke me up for ‘that’?”

“You weren't sleeping... and so what if I did...”

She used her free hand to trace lazy circles across Buffy's flesh, dipping lower every time, blazing a trail.

“...you complaining?”

She claimed her mouth in a hot kiss, a wet kiss.

“You had your fill of me..?”

“Never.”

Buffy didn't need time to consider that question, she knew the answer now. She'd never have her fill of Faith. Never.

“Can I go back to sleep now?”

Faith's look was unimpressed, she was back with the words she needed to say.

“Sorry...”

“Don't worry about it, B... just be quiet for two secs, yeah?”

“Ooooo sounds serious...”

“Buffy.”

“Sorry. Quiet.”

She mimed the locking of lips and throwing of key.

“I tell ya, you really know how to mess with a girls moment...”

She looked into Buffy's eyes, realised the moment was still there, would always be there.

“...I wanted to say B... I guess I wanted to say I love you. I always loved you. From the first minute... god, every minute...”

Her mind remembered all the minutes, each and every one of them.

“...I love you.”

Buffy just stared into the eyes staring back at her. Felt it all click into place. She just finally got everything. All of it. She just got it. Her smile was huge, genuine. Her heart felt bigger.

“I love you too Faith. I do. I love you.”

They kissed, they laughed, they kissed some more. Whispered things to each other they had always wanted to say. Once the first words were spoken all the rest seemed to rush to follow, wanting to be heard, to finally be voiced.

It freed them. The burden of not knowing, always wondering, lifted from their shoulders. Freed them to just 'be'. To be together.

Buffy was in a perfect place. Still almost fast asleep, maybe just the beginning of morning making her open her eyes. Not a lot. Just a little, just enough to realise where she was. Whose arms she lay in, whose bed she slept in. Faith. Made her smile.

It felt so good, so safe, so warm. Everything she'd ever wanted really, but had never known she would find here. She never wanted to leave here. Would be happy to forsake everything else if it just meant she could stay here. Maybe forever.

She lost herself in the daydream, sleep still close enough to make her truly give over to it. Imagining her and Faith together. Living together, training together, working together. A whole lot of togethers. And she hadn't even got to the sleeping together yet.

She could still feel the parts on her body where Faith had touched her, it felt like they were glowing, alight... made to feel like never before. It sounded so clichéd... but so true. No-one HAD ever touched her like Faith, had never fucked her in such a beautiful way, made it all feel so special.

She was glad they had finally done stuff. And the going down..? Willow hadn't told her the half of it!

The sound of the alarm on her phone drew her mind back from it's wanderings, brought her back to reality, but it felt too early to wake up... felt too comfy to even think about moving. She half heartedly grabbed at her phone, pressed the silent button and tossed it across the room, not hard... not hard enough to break, she'd learnt THAT lesson... but hard enough so as to make the phone far enough away not to bother her.

And then she remembered. And then she awoke.

“Shit!”

She ripped herself out of Faith's embrace, and sat herself up. Had forgotten. Completely forgotten.

“The plane... what time is it..? Shit shit shit shit shit!”

Faith was confused. Not only was she just sleeping, lost in a pretty nice dream about a certain hot slayer. But she had no idea what the fuck was going on. Buffy was here. That was good. Buffy was awake... not so good. Buffy had a mouth like a sewer... she'd always suspected as much. Buffy was talking about a plane. A plane.

Then it dawned on her. It was tomorrow, tomorrow was today. And it felt like bullshit.

The weight of realisation hit her like a ton of bricks, took all of her happy thoughts and crushed them under the harshness of reality. Buffy was going. Home. To England. Today. And more then anything that made her wanna... cry? She felt like she hadn't stopped crying lately, like every day gave her fresh reason for tears, more hurt, more crap. It was exhausting, and it was wearing her down. It seemed that wanting happiness was just too much.

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She watched as Buffy pulled herself from the bed, started making a mad dash around the room looking for underwear, for clothes, for a hairbrush. She wanted to scream at her, to beg her to stop, to not leave, never leave. But she couldn't. So she just watched her.

Watched as her flesh was slowly covered, tried to memorise every last part, like a strip tease in reverse. Only this wasn't teasing, it was real. She watched as she brushed her hair, trying to untangle the knots that had been part of the franticness of the night before, caught her eye in the mirror, caught her smile, her mouthed 'I love you'. And again she wanted to cry.

But she wouldn't cry. Not anymore. Not today. Not in front of Buffy.

She would be strong. Buffy knew how she felt now, felt the same. She didn't doubt that, had felt it... not just last night, but since the moment she had been back. Before the crap, during the crap, after the crap. Buffy loved her. And she believed in that.

Believed that this time, fate wouldn't fuck them, they would fuck fate. She wasn't quite sure how yet, or where, but they would do it. They WOULD be together.

Finally Buffy was stood at the end of the bed, fully clothed, hair pulled back in a pony tail. She was looking at Faith expectantly, waiting for an answer to a question not heard.

“Well..? Have you completely zoned out..?”

“Huh?”

“I said... ‘how do I look?’”

She gave a little twirl. She was wearing the same clothes as yesterday, maybe a bit rumpled from being on the floor all night. But that was besides the point. What Faith was wondering was why the fuck was Buffy worried about what she looked like anyway, when all SHE could think about was how her heart was going to be torn from her body at some soon to be met point.

It seemed kinda inconsequential to her. Like who really gave a fuck? Her answer came out harsh, betrayed a little hurt.

“How do you look..? Fucking gorgeous, ok?”

Buffy's brow furrowed at the response, hadn't expected anything quite that harsh, didn't get what the attitude was for. Suddenly had a clue.

“Oh god... are you ok, Faith?”

She stared at her intently, perhaps trying to see her soul.

“... I KNOW this... I slept with you and now you're gonna go evil, right?”

She couldn't help but laugh. Faith looked like she was gonna burst on the bed. Like she was so pissed at something and trying to keep it in. Buffy didn't know why... didn't have a great deal of time to work it out... but she wasn't gonna pay it mind. If Faith had attitude, Faith

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would have to get over it. She had places to go... and she didn't think Dawn would be too impressed if she was late. The thing that stopped her were the tears. She had been joking, didn't really think Faith was evil... had no clue what the tears were for. Why.

She softened her voice, rid it of the joking tone.

“Hey what is it..? I was joking... I didn't think you'd take it so serious.”

“I'm sorry, B... really... it's just...”

Faith gave it up. She had sworn she wouldn't cry, wouldn't pressure Buffy. Wouldn't do this, wouldn't do that. But she couldn't help it.

“...I know you have to go. I get that... I do, really... and I know I'll see you soon... it's just, ah... fuck it. I love you Buffy. I'm gonna miss you.”

She looked so sad. So dejected. Even Scoobs had heard her sobs and made his way to the bed, happy to regain his bed buddy spot. It was pulling at all of Buffy's heart strings. She'd never had such sweet words that meant so much said to her, but it didn't stop her feeling a little confused. A little bit perplexed.

“Stop me if I'm crazy Faith... but what the hell are you talking about..? I mean, I get it... I love you too...”

She observed Scoobs exuberantly licking Faith's face.

“...although maybe not as much as Scoobs... and is that hygienic? Cos I don't wanna catch anything...”

The glare that Faith shot her seemed only to be matched by something similar from Scoobs. Double glaring. By one woman and her dog. Buffy smiled, the glare didn't take the edge off of her amusement.

“...sorry... joke..? But really, Faith... I won't be long, a couple of hours maybe.”

“A couple of hours..?”

Now it was Faith's turn to find confused.

“...how... what?”

“You CAN come too if you want to, in fact I'd like you to. It'll be nice.”

She could come too? She had past confused. Had left confused about two blocks ago. Was now just totally utterly lost.

“To England..?”

“Huh..?”

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Buffy ran the conversation back through her head. Ran a lot of things back through her head. Ran a certain something that she had completely forgotten to mention to Faith through her head. And she cracked up. Realised exactly what was going on, exactly what the confusion was... and she couldn't help but laugh. A release of everything.

“To the airport you dork!... to say ‘Tally Ho’ to Giles, to Dawn.”

“You're not going..?”

Disbelief tainted Faith's tone, she had thought Buffy was leaving. Just like that.

“NO!”

Buffy allowed a very sexy, very searching gaze to travel over the still in bed, still naked Faith.

“As if I could!”

The dog was again pushed aside, again drooped his eyes, again was ignored. Faith couldn't help it. Buffy was staying..? Did she get body snatched in the night and replaced by someone whose dreams DID come true..? She threw off the covers to crawl down the bed and meet up with Buffy. Allowed her to slide her tongue deep inside her mouth, take her in a kiss which was bursting with carnal desire. Sighed as it came to an end.

“So tell me... you got a place to stay B?”

“A nice place across the beach...”

“You sure you don't wanna stay with me...”

She eyed her predatorily, ran her tongue out across her own bottom lip, caught it between her teeth, let Buffy know with the intensity of a look exactly why she wanted her to stay there.

“...maybe get to know each other a little better... someone to ‘snuggle’ with at night..?”

“I uh...”

She leant forwards and grabbed the front of Buffy's shirt, pulled her in close, kept her there trapped.

“I think the answer your looking for is ‘yes’.”

The phone which was still laying on the floor began to ring loudly, flashing Dawn's name across the front. Faith let go of the shirt, let Buffy go to the phone. Watched her as she spoke to Dawn and confirmed plans to drive them to the airport... raised her eyebrows at the thought of Buffy driving. Rose from the bed and started to get dressed.

By the time the call was ended Faith had slung on some old jeans and a tee and had her car keys in hand.

“You decided to come see them off then, yeah?”

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“Course B, although I don’t think we’re gonna all fit in the Cobra.”

“Cobra..?”

“My car... the one you smashed?”

“Oh. Right... you still going on about that then..?”

She offered a cheeky smile.

“...and don’t worry, I’ll drive the jeep, that was the plan.”

“That’s the part that worried me... I only just got you back, ya know...”

“Not funny.”

“Not joking!”

She held out her hand, waited for Buffy to relent and give over the keys to the jeep. It didn’t take much. A look. A promise.

They left in a hurry, not wanting to be late. Wanting to be home.

It was closing in on sunset, the day coming to an end. A day of farewells, but also a happy day. Their first day. They were laying out on the porch, snuggled together under a blanket, Scoobs resting down by their sides. It was a happy scene, one they didn’t want to leave, one they wouldn’t have to leave. The silence that surrounded them wasn’t awkward, it was peaceful, gave them the time to enjoy the moment, to let their thoughts just rest with where they were, who they were with. It was Buffy who eventually broke the silence, missing the sound of Faith’s voice.

“It was nice of you to say Wills could stay at the house.”

“Well you won’t be needing it B, no point in the place staying empty... and it’ll be cool with Red, me and her have had some times, found some fun. I need some fun.”

She released a bitter sweet laugh. She wasn’t lying, finding the fun again was high on her list of priorities... only this time she had Buffy to find it with her. A whole new type of fun.

“I don’t know if she’s ready to find the fun, Faith. I’m sure when she is, you’ll be her first port of call... but for now? I think she might just need some time, friendship.”

“I can do that too, I’ll be her ‘fun’ friend. You can do the ‘angst’, and I’ll do the fun. We’ll be a winning combo B... get her smiling again in no time.”

Buffy didn’t answer, didn’t know the answer. She hated to see Willow in pain again, see her losing someone she loved again. She vowed she would be there for her. Do her best to help her through.

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Faith pulled Buffy closer in towards her, wrapped her arms just a little tighter around her, felt the rub of naked flesh, felt her answering hum. Spoke the thought that was most on her mind.

“Ya know, I was kinda surprised... I mean, I’m STILL kind of surprised...”

Buffy turned herself in Faith’s embrace, looked up into eyes, wanted to know what the surprise was.

“...I really thought you were going, thought I was gonna have to go be an English lady to claim your hand, take ya for tea at the Ritz... or whatever it is they do over there. Maybe a scone or two...”

She thought to herself for a moment.

“...and what the fuck IS a scone..?”

“Not a clue.”

“Right. Well I guess the scones out then.”

Buffy waited for her to continue, seemed like she was still pondering on the scone.

“Is that it... is the ‘no scones’ the surprise?”

“Huh..? Oh, no , not the scones. You.”

“Me?”

“Yeah. I thought you were going. Thought you would’ve gone. With Dawn, with Giles, gone home.”

Buffy allowed her gaze to leave Faith’s eyes, to glance at all the colours in the sky, painting the clouds, a welcome for the moon. It was all so pretty, all so right. She had thought about leaving, about recuperating in England, with Dawn and Giles. Letting the fresh country air replenish her strength. But then she had thought about all that she would miss, everything she had found, everything she had remembered.

She felt the pull and turned her eyes back to Faith, drew the blanket a little tighter around them, cocooning them together, enclosing them.

“I am home Faith. You’re my home.”

Faith answered with a smile, a mirrored truth, a shared feeling.

“And besides... if Wes is wanting you to head up W&H with him..? I’m thinking maybe you might need to get yourself a little secretary...”

Faith arched her eyebrows, interest raised by Buffy’s suggestion.

“You wanna be my secretary B?”

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“I wanna be your personal secretary.”

“Oh ya do, do ya..?”

She loosened her grip, allowed Buffy to fully turn, face to face, body to body.

“...and just how personal do ya plan to be?”

Buffy could feel the hunger rising up in her, could feel every point of contact, skin touching skin. Pulse racing, heart thumping. Her words were weighted with desire.

“Very. Fucking. Personal.”

She closed the gap, brought mouth to mouth, lips to lips. Slow at first, every time a brand new hello, but then as night came upon them and their senses awakened, so did their lust. It rose up, took over them, kept them enslaved as they made love on the porch, the moon rising above them, and a dog sleeping beside them.

It seemed the sun had set quickly that evening. Not needing to hold on, not worrying about the safety of tomorrow. It was night time now. The moon’s time.

A slayers time.

THE END. DONE DIDDIED DONE DONE!!!!