

Rating: R

Pairing: Buffy / Faith

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Time Line: BtVS, post-Chosen; Tru Calling, prior to Jack's arrival.

Summary: Tru meets a vacationing Slayer.

"So he slaps his cards down, aces over eights, and they all look at me to see what I'm holding, and I'm like, oh, shit, and then--"

Tru looked up from her shredded napkin when Harrison's story stopped mid-sentence. He was leaning back in the booth, his boots stuck out in the aisle, grinning towards the front of the diner. Grinning his 'ooh, a hottie' grin. It was never good news, especially when it was strong enough to knock him out of talking about himself. Tru prodded his shin under the table.

"Yeah, and?" she asked. Because even hearing about whatever last-minute daring had saved Harri from his loan shark this week was better than watching him ogle girls.

"She's comin' this way," he said instead, and gave a low whistle through his teeth, his eyebrows locked permanently at Leer.

Tru rolled her eyes and turned to look over her shoulder. The girl in question was blonde, short, and looked like she could use three square meals a day for a month or two. Probably a model or a character actress...she kinda reminded Tru of some makeup ads from a few years ago. "Give it up, Harri," she said. "What about Lindsey?"

"Uh, yeah, about that," Harrison said. "Last night she threw a drink in my face and called me a pig. I think I'm a free man again."

Tru snorted. "And tomorrow you'll be searching the pawnshops for gifts," she said. "I think roses are in season, if you were wondering."

"It's all one big circle of life," Harrison answered easily, flashing his rakish grin at her. "If we go a week without breaking up, maybe it'll be time to worry."

"Uh-huh." Tru glanced at her watch. It was more than habit these days--she never knew when she was going to need to remember exactly where she was at a given time each day. "Well, I'll leave you to it, then. I'm going to catch some sack time. Another midnight shift tonight."

"Right, Davis works you like a slave," Harrison muttered, still stealing looks at the girl, who'd settled at the counter.

"The sympathy act is coming along great, you should do fine when you apologize to Lindsey," Tru said, standing up and punching him lightly on the shoulder.

Harrison nodded absently. "Better wall than a window, Tru," he said.

Tru rolled her eyes. Was the girl really that good looking? Probably five minutes after she left the diner, Harrison would be sliding into the seat next to her and pulling lines like "What's your sign?" out of his handy collection of cliches.

"Fine. I'll see you around," she said, and headed for the door. She raised an eyebrow at the girl as she passed, wondering if she should warn her about a certain young charmer who was about to hit on her, but then figured it was none of her business. Somehow the girl looked like she could take care of herself.

As she brushed past, the girl suddenly spun around on the stool and grabbed her by the wrist. "Do you not understand the concept of vacation?" she asked.

Tru blinked at the random question from the stranger, but the grip on her arm was tight enough that she couldn't just keep walking. "Um, not that I've had one recently, but I think so. Time off work? Sometimes involving travel? See the sights, relax?"

"Exactly," the girl snapped. "One week, that's all I asked. No locator spells! No Scoobies! Not even you."

"Me?" she asked. Spells? she thought.

"Yes, you. Are you really so hard up that you'd follow me to Canada?"

Green eyes, Tru thought randomly, and then shook her head as the meaning of the words penetrated. "Excuse me? Who the hell do you think I am?"

The girl's eyes narrowed and her hand tightened on Tru's wrist until she felt the bones creak. Trying to ignore the pain, she started reciting their names in her head--hammate, pisiform, scaphate...

She'd done five of eight when Harrison slipped onto the stool next to her. "Ladies?" he asked, practically leaking charm. "Is there a problem here?"

"This is the best you could do?" the girl asked. "Your standards have dropped alarmingly. I guess that's what prison will do--" She stopped and looked guilty.

"Prison!" Harrison said. "My good sis, my role model, Miss High and Mighty Example, you never told me. Was it juvie? Or was it, like, a do-over day? The world needs to know. That would make a nice round one hundred percent of the Davies kids in the slammer at one time or another." He turned to the girl and wiggled his eyebrows at her. "Name's Harrison," he said.

The girl let go of Tru's arm and allowed herself to shake hands. "Buffy Summers," she said. She looked him up and down dismissively. "You're her brother?" Then, to Tru: "You have...family?"

"Hey!" Harrison exclaimed. "Does she have family? Come on, we're, like, everything to each other. My big sis! She rescues people, you know. I help."

"Help?" Tru asked faintly. It was news to her. He'd barely begun to believe her.

"I know," Buffy said.

"You know?" Tru asked.

"You told her?" Harrison echoed. "Why does she rate? You haven't even told Lindsey."

"I didn't tell her!" Tru said.

"It's kind of obvious," Buffy added. "I've seen her."

"You've seen her?" Harrison asked.

Buffy stared at them both like they were freaks. "Is there something in the water in this town that makes everyone all repeaty?" she asked. "Of course I've seen her. Who's Lindsey?"

"My best friend since about grade school," Tru said, wondering why she was still answering questions, since Buffy had let go of her arm. It still ached. The girl certainly had a grip on her.

"Oh." Buffy pouted. "I thought--well, other than that whole psychotic hatred thing--but, so not the point. I didn't tell you I was coming to Vancouver, so...but your family lives here? What about Boston?"

"What about it?" Tru asked.

"Great strip clubs," Harrison offered. "Or...so I've heard. A friend...an aeromiles plan...way too many beers."

"Looks like that much runs in the family," Buffy said acidly.

Tru tried to defend herself. "I don't--"

Buffy interrupted. "And you've changed your wardrobe. What, no leather?" Again, Tru thought she saw a flash of disappointment. She looked down at her clothes--jeans, a blouse, a jacket--and then realized how dumb it was to be worried about the fashion judgement of a girl who obviously thought she was someone else.

"Listen, I don't know who you think I am, but we've never met," she said. "I'm Tru Davies."

"Davies," Buffy said. "You have a last name? And it's Davies?" She shook her head.

"Wait...Tru?"

Part 2

One B.C. driver's license in the name of Tru Marie Davies. One Social Insurance Number, 763 328 392, made out to same. One UBC student card, one Vancouver Municipal Library card, on Blockbuster Rewards card, all with her signature.

They were spread across the table in the diner. Buffy Summers moved them around on the table cloth, lining them up, comparing the photos and the handwriting. She picked up the driver's license, read out the birthdate, stared back and forth between the picture and Tru.

"You need a magnifying glass or something?" Harrison asked. He was having the time of his life, sprawled in the corner seat, his arm resting behind Tru, his feet crowding Buffy's under the table. Tru glared at him, but he was too busy smirking at Buffy to notice. Even if he did, she doubted she could get him to shut up. In his book, this was way too much fun...and he probably thought he could still get a phone number out of it.

Why he'd want it was beyond Tru. Buffy was--was something. Either annoying as hell or far too interesting. Tru was supposed to be sleeping right now, and instead she was getting the third degree from this girl. Any sane person would have given up by now, would have been embarrassed, would have said, "Oops, guess I made a mistake, sorry," and gone on with her life.

Not Buffy Summers.

Irritating.

Intriguing.

Something.

Buffy snapped the driver's license back down on the table and narrowed her eyes at Tru. "Arm wrestle me."

Harrison shot up straight in his seat. "Yeah!" His grin was so wide it was a wonder his face hadn't cracked in half.

Tru drove an elbow into his gut. Harrison gave her an exaggerated "Oof!" and a puppy-eyed pout. "You wound me."

"Dork."

"Nerd."

Buffy thumped her elbow down on the table.

Harrison waggled his eyebrows and rubbed his hands together. "Oh, man, the Big Guy upstairs is listening. Chick fight. This is awesome."

"Shut up, Harrison." Tru tried to size Buffy up. Those green eyes were as deep as the Pacific, and about as cold, focusing intently on her. She was slim--a little too thin, Tru thought, noticing the pointy collarbones under her loose tank top--and she really didn't show much muscle. But the way Buffy had grabbed her before--Tru could still feel the strength of her grip. Even so, Tru knew that she was no lightweight herself. Four years on the UBC track team hadn't just taught her to run fast. She'd been doing weight training since she'd first gotten into sports.

She plunked her elbow down next to Buffy's. She hesitated a moment longer--recently, crazy out-of-the-blue things happening to her wasn't unexpected, but weirdness in her life usually came from dead people talking to her. This was different. It wasn't that Buffy didn't

believe

her--she didn't; she'd muttered something about "bramble magic" when Tru opened her purse and shoved ID at her--it was that, almost, Buffy

wanted

her to be someone else.

Who?

Buffy made an impatient noise and clasped their hands together. She frowned at their joined hands, as if she expected some sort of magic to happen just from their touching. Tru flexed her fingers and tightened her grip. Buffy's palm was amazingly hard, all callused, as if she was used to physical labour, yet her fingernails were painted a girly pink and the skin on the back of her hand was soft.

"Ready?" Tru asked, flexing her biceps.

Buffy met her eyes. Searching for something. Like she was waiting for more of a challenge, for different words. Finally, she said, "Yes," and looked back at their hands.

"All right, ladies, on my mark," Harrison said. "And don't hold back on my account, let me just say, I know a place where there are vats of lime jelly if you need to settle this some other way--"

"Shut up, Harrison." Buffy said it, this time.

Harrison was completely unfazed. "And, for the record, I'm completely impartial here--my sister against a beautiful stranger, hard to pick sides, am I right?"

"On three," Buffy said. "One...two..."

Tru threw her whole strength against Buffy's hand the instant her lips formed the word "three". The trick was to get an early advantage, hopefully surprising the other person and winning quickly, before stamina became the deciding issue. It was the way she ran the four-forty, it was why she'd been the anchor of her relay team, it was how she arm wrestled, and it always worked. As her shelves full of trophies showed.

This time, it didn't work.

Buffy tilted her head and gazed at her curiously as Tru felt sweat popping out on her forehead. Buffy hadn't moved, or even tried to move, but Tru felt like she could be pushing against a brick wall for all the effect she was having. Harrison was practically drooling as Tru strained and Buffy...sat there. Looking disappointed.

Finally, with no more effort than she'd use to pass the salt, Buffy sighed and pressed Tru's arm down to the table. They both stared for a moment at their linked hands. Tru was still sweating, even though the contest was over. Buffy's skin was so warm...not the tight heat of a fever, more like her metabolism was just naturally high, like a hummingbird's.

Harrison started singing "Bow chicka bow bow," under his breath.

Tru snatched her hand back and massaged her wrist, feeling her face burn. Sometimes she could swear Harri flirted as hard with her as he did with any girl he picked up. He'd probably cream his jeans if she and Buffy actually--did anything. Tru stared at the table top, blushing harder than ever.

"Fine," Buffy said. "You're Tru Davies." She pushed all of Tru's ID back across the table.

"The one and only, Harrison said. "So, Buffy...how long are you in town for? Need a tour guide?"

Buffy leaned back in her seat, drawing idle patters on the tablecloth in a bit of spilled salt. "I might be interested in having a native show me the sights," she said. Tru looked up quickly and saw that Buffy was staring straight at her.

Like she was seeing a ghost.

"Then you are in luck, my friend," Harrison said. "I happen to know this city like the back of my hand. I know everything there is to know about places off the beaten path."

"Do you have any cemeteries?" Buffy asked.

Tru frowned. "There are a few. Why?"

"I--I'm a big fan of cemeteries." Buffy shrugged and looked away. "I mean--no reason. I'm on vacation."

"Tru here works at the morgue," Harrison boasted, swinging his arm around Tru's shoulder. "If it's cemeteries you want, we can hook you up, right, Tru?"

"The morgue, huh?" Buffy asked. She didn't seem shocked. In fact, she was probably the first person who'd ever learned about Tru's job and not immediately started asking

why

--why she worked there, why she didn't look for something better, why a girl like her would want to work with the corpses. Buffy, instead, nodded and stared down at her salt doodle.

Admitting Tru wasn't who she thought--whoever that was--seemed to have drained all her enthusiasm away.

"Freaky stuff," Harrison said, grinning. "I could hold your hand if you got scared."

Buffy gave him a fake smile. "Uh-huh." She stood up. "Well, uh, anyway. Sorry I bothered you. It was nice meeting you...and...well...I gotta go." She gave Tru one last, searching glance, shook her head, and walked out of the diner.

Part 3

Buffy crossed her arms and headed down the street, hugging herself slightly against the cool, damp wind. She was watching her feet and not where she was going, so when the familiar voice shouted, "Buffy! Wait!" she spun around so fast she nearly walked into a sign post.

Faith, she thought, and almost said it out loud. Except it wasn't. Except it was. She looked exactly like Faith, and she looked nothing like her. Put the two of them side by side in a police lineup and nobody would have been able to tell one from the other.

But there were differences that Buffy could see. The long, wavy dark hair was too light--almost chestnut rather than black. Her face was beautiful, had always been beautiful, but where Faith's entire expression screamed sex-on-a-stick, this girl was softer. Her look was completely different, too. Those gold hoops in her ears were more Buffy's style than Faith's, and the comfortable clothes and lumpy, well-used handbag would have been right at home on a college campus, not a seedy bar.

Plus, there was the way she talked. No biting sarcasm, no lips that looked as comfortable around a cigarette as they did around a curse. Maybe she had her own ghosts, but Tru Davies had never known pain as Faith had.

And...when she'd held Tru's hand--

No slayer-tingles. Cool skin, not Faith's raging heat. Just human. Nothing special. Probably everyone had a doppelganger somewhere in the world. Six billion people on the planet, so probably odds were that you looked like one other individual. Very logical. Just a passing resemblance.

So why did Buffy want nothing more than to believe her eyes?

Buffy waited for Tru to catch up with her and wondered why in hell everything had to happen to her. Not everything--just everything weird and supernatural that could stuff itself into her life somehow managed it.

Vacation. Was there nothing simple about that? Go to Canada. Nice people who speak English, mostly. Beautiful cities. Luxurious hotels. Educational attractions. And, in the summer, really long hours of daylight. What more could one out-sourced Slayer ask for?

Certainly not this. Not Faith.

She wasn't Faith.

Faith was off on a hey-let's-try-settling-down tour of Cleveland, hand in hand with Principal Robin Fucking Wood.

Like that's going to last, Buffy thought, and then felt guilty for hoping it wouldn't.

Everybody had found love on the Hellmouth except her. What she got was a stalker-turned-lover-turned-bonfire and a really messed up sense of metaphor.

Was that fair?

Tru jogged up to her. "Hey." She shoved her hands in her pockets.

Nervous, Buffy thought--something Faith would never let you see.

"So were you serious before?" Tru asked. "About--needing a guide?"

"Is your brother selling maps to stars' homes?" Buffy asked lightly. "Because I gotta say, I'm not too keen on getting lost in a foreign country. I have this fear of customs officials."

Tru smiled. "Nah. Harrison's okay, mostly. You have a kid brother?"

"Little sister," Buffy answered. "I guess it's probably more about clothes and boys, and less about tag football. Or poker." Why is talking to her so easy? You met her five minutes ago. You don't know her. She's not Faith.

Tru nodded. "Yeah, I've got a sister, too. Older." She shuffled a bit, scuffing her feet on the sidewalk. "Anyway, what I meant was, I have some time today. Before work."

"At the morgue." Buffy couldn't help but smile. That was one thing they had in common--they both worked with dead people.

"Right. I want to get into med school, you see--" Tru gave a half-shrug, like she'd given that explanation way too many times before. She glanced down, her grin becoming a bit self-conscious. Dimples flashed.

"Makes sense," Buffy said, hardly aware of what words she was using. This was too spooky--a Faith who was open and carefree and talkative. And still gorgeous. Not that that had anything to do with the price of eggs, but-- "A guide. Yeah. If you wanted, I mean, as long as you have the time, and...I'm on my own, I don't know what's worth seeing, but, I thought, hey, first time out of the country, not that it's incredibly adventurous coming to Canada. Not that there's anything wrong with Canada, it's very--north. I mean, nice."

Tru was smiling sideways at her. "Do you always do that?"

"Babble?" Buffy nodded. "It's a medical condition, I'm sure. I've heard there are ways to stop it--" She cut herself off before she could explain to this stranger exactly what techniques Oz had used to stop Willow's babbling. "But. Um. If you don't mind me asking--why?"

Tru raised her eyebrows. "I don't know...to apologize for my brother's advances?"

"Trust me, I've seen worse come-ons." Buffy grimaced at the reminder of Spike. Guys who just couldn't take no for an answer. "And again, I have to ask--why?"

"Don't believe me?" Tru looked at her, all high cheekbones, dusky skin, lips made for kissing--shut up, brain, not helping here--they were Faith's features. But not Faith's eyes. There was no spark of mischief there, no lusty teasing.

"I--" Buffy smiled ruefully. "I guess not. I mean, you must think I'm crazy. Maybe not axe-murderer crazy, but at least up there with old ladies who have a lot of cats named Myrtle."

Tru laughed. "Why would you name all your cats Myrtle?"

"I meant the old lady's name was Myrtle...or maybe Ruth. But there's a continuum of crazy, that's the point." Buffy spread her hands apart, as though she was telling a "how big was the fish?" story. "See, this is sane, and then this is me. So, no, I don't know why you'd volunteer."

"I guess..." Tru tilted her head. "I'm curious."

"About me?"

"About...whoever you thought I was. About why you wanted to arm wrestle me." Tru paused, as though considering. "And about you."

Buffy nodded. "I'm glad I was in there somewhere."

"So...what's she like?"

Buffy turned and started walking down the sidewalk. "So...where are we going, Guide o'Mine?"

Tru caught up with her easily. "You ever heard of Stanley Park?"

"Nope. But if you say it's worth visiting, I trust you." Buffy stopped and turned. Tru nearly ran into her, then quickly took a step back. There was no stupid innuendo-laden comment at their brief contact, not even a second glance. But then, what did she expect? She's not Faith. She's not like that. Buffy sighed. "This is weird, isn't it?"

"Believe me, weirder things have happened to me," Tru said, nearly rolling her eyes.

Just like Faith.

Before she knew what she was doing, Buffy lifted a hand and cupped Tru's cheek, waiting to feel the slayer-tingle that didn't come. Tru's skin was soft--this was a girl who used creams and lotions and exfoliators. Her dark eyes were wide, just a little surprised, her mouth half-open as if to say something.

She didn't say it, whatever it was. Didn't back off. Didn't move. Buffy touched her thumb to

the tiny, perfect cleft in her bottom lip. Not Faith. Really not. Faith had left her on the front steps of the Hyperion, had swung that bus door closed and said, "Hey, catch ya later, B, don't go getting skewered again anytime soon, for me, hunh?" She'd winked, grinned that shit-eating grin, and disappeared down the street with half a dozen newly-minted slayers and a side of tall, dark, and handsome as her saving-the-world reward.

And that was it.

Buffy had Giles, Buffy had Dawn, Buffy had a suddenly-CEO Angel. She had Willow and Xander and yes, even Kennedy.

None of them were enough.

Vacation was supposed to make that better. Forget everything Hellmouthy, that was the plan. Faith had a whole lot of Hellmouth associated with her, so it was best to start the forgetting there. Staring at her own hand, looking pale and small against Tru's cheek, Buffy kinda figured that the plan wasn't going according to itself. She traced the side of Tru's face, then realized, finally, what she was doing, and pulled her hand away.

"Sorry," she muttered, looking at her feet. Blushing like a high school kid. God, what was her problem? Assaulting a stranger in a diner and then--this?

"I've had weirder things happen to me," Tru repeated. "So...tell me more about her."

Part 4

"Mixed signals." Buffy threw a handful of popcorn on the ground in front of a gaggle of Canadian geese. There was a flutter and a honking mass descended on the treat. "I could never be sure if she was serious, you know?"

Tru nodded, hands shoved deep into her jacket pockets, as they walked along the path near the river, leading to the sea wall. "Maybe it's none of my business, but did you want her to be serious?"

Buffy shrugged. "You ever feel like your work is taking over your life, whether you like it or not?"

Tru smiled to herself. "Strangely enough, all the time."

Buffy glanced up at Tru through her eyelashes, giving her a wry look. "Why do I get the feeling that you're not just talking about the morgue?"

"What does your work have to do with those mixed signals?" Tru shot back easily. Weeks of giving Luc excuses had really honed her answer-a-question-with-a-question skills.

"We worked together." Buffy grabbed another handful of popcorn for the geese, then offered the bag to Tru. She shook her head. If this was the way Buffy snacked, no wonder she was still so thin. Buffy sighed and continued. "Office romances...Once was too many times for

that, but I didn't learn. Oh, no. Instead I let it happen again, and it was worse. So, I don't know if it was serious, because I didn't have the time or the energy to find out, and there was another battle every day..."

"Battle?" Tru asked. This, and Buffy's mutterings about 'magic' and 'spells', was really making her more interested in the life the other girl had led than in her supposed doppelganger.

Buffy's eyes widened guiltily. "Yes. Battle. Um, a battle of words...and policies...there was a lot of diverging opinions, very vicious stuff, I think there was an epidemic of papercuts, at one point there was a very nasty incident involving a stapler..."

"What is it that you do?" Tru asked, laughing.

"School...guidance...counsellor?" Buffy asked hopefully, as though she knew she weren't going to be believed.

"Right." Tru smiled. Well, Buffy could have her secrets if she wanted. Tru wasn't about to tell her everything about her life, either.

"So if you work in the morgue," Buffy asked, "then why did Harrison say you save people? Isn't it a little late by the time they get to you?"

Although it wouldn't be easy.

"Oh, I--I help the families," Tru said. "You know, when they come to identify the bodies."

"And Harrison helps?" Buffy asked skeptically. "He...doesn't really seem like the sympathetic type."

"Yeah...he's not. But he's getting better." Tru ran her hand over the stone wall beside the path, then leaned over it, looking down to where the waves were crashing into the beach. "It can be really tough. People...I mean, you'd never realize how many people die before their time. Too young. Too suddenly. Violently, sometimes."

Buffy leaned back against the parapet, and suddenly she looked incredibly sad. She crossed her arms like she was trying to protect herself from something, one hand holding her stomach. "I know," she said softly.

Tru believed her. Even Davis, working with cadavers every day for the last twelve years, didn't really understand death. He saw bodies that had stopped functioning, and he found out the reasons why. They weren't people by the time they got to him. When Tru needed his help, he speechified and got all metaphysical...what Fate wanted and what it didn't want, who was meant to go and who to stay...but he still didn't understand death the way she did. He'd never seen someone die, right in front of him.

Buffy had. Tru could see it in her eyes, suddenly bright with tears that she refused to cry. The day was colder, the wind sharper now, clouds floating down from the mountains surrounding the city. The quick change in the weather matched Buffy's expression, which was older and far away.

"Penny for your thoughts?" Tru offered quietly.

"Ah, my...my mom," Buffy said. "I...haven't really thought about her for a while...I haven't had the time. But I just realised...um, there was, a, um...an earthquake, in my hometown, and now...I mean, the whole place is rubble. And, I won't be able to visit her anymore, or bring flowers..." Buffy turned around so that she and Tru were both facing the ocean. The wind had whipped her long blonde hair out of its clips, and now it hid her face.

Tru watched her for a moment before moving closer, wondering if it was the right thing to do, remembering the incredible warmth of Buffy's hand on her cheek. She put her arm around Buffy's shoulder. Buffy turned to her and wrapped her in a fierce hug. Tru returned it, but she couldn't help but wonder if Buffy wasn't, somehow, hugging that other girl...Faith. That was her name.

"My mom died too," she said, almost to herself--she didn't want to intrude on Buffy's grief with her own past, but it felt like something needed to be said to fill the silence. She didn't know if she was speaking loud enough for Buffy to hear, because the wind was picking up, but Buffy nodded against her chest, and she went on. "Ten years ago," she said. "Sometimes it still hurts...and it always feels like it wasn't supposed to happen. But mostly I remember the good things..."

"Like waffles from scratch," Buffy mumbled into her jacket. "They didn't have any calories if she made them."

"Yeah..." Tru smiled. "Or when she'd come to my track meets and cheer me on even if I was losing..."

Another nod, and Buffy's shoulders shook a little more, her hug tightening briefly before she seemed to remember Tru wasn't strong enough for her whole strength.

Tru sighed, and looked down to see that she was stroking Buffy's hair. When had that happened? It was soft...

The wind was carrying rain now, and when Buffy felt it she backed away, wiping the tears off her face. "Thanks," she said, giving Tru a soft smile. "I, uh...I haven't done that in a while..."

"I guess everybody needs to," Tru said. "Sometimes." In the arms of a stranger.

Buffy's smile widened. "Yeah. Well. Maybe we should get out of the rain?"

"Right."

They went back to the path and Tru led the way to a small teashop she knew of near the edge of the park. Buffy was holding her hand, and it was nice, and again, Tru didn't know when that had started.

Looked like this Faith person wasn't the only one who knew how to give off mixed signals.

Part 5

The rain slackened off around nightfall, and Tru and Buffy were still in the teashop, four empty glasses of bubble tea in front of them. Tru glanced at her watch and saw that she still had a few hours to kill before work. It looked like sleep was not going to be an option, though she would probably doze in Davis' office if there were no bodies brought in.

"So, um...would you like to go for dinner?" Buffy was staring out the window at nothing, pretending to be casual, but Tru could tell she was worried about being shot down. Was she talking about a date, or just a meal?

"Sure," Tru said. "Chinese? I know a place..."

Buffy looked back at her and smiled, a real, genuine, thousand-watt grin. "Chinese. Yeah. That would be great."

Tru smiled back--she couldn't help but answer that look of happiness on Buffy's face. So maybe it was a date. But she'd been enjoying herself this far. So who cared?

They took a cab to Chinatown, and Tru led the way to a small, out of the way restaurant that she'd discovered during her second year at UBC. They were seated quickly, and Buffy ordered enough food to feed an army. Tru had no idea how the two of them were going to finish it all.

While they waited, Buffy picked up a chopstick and started twirling it between her fingers, making intricate patterns and never once dropping it. Tru raised her eyebrows, impressed. "Where did you learn to do that?" she asked.

"Hmm?" Buffy looked at her, the chopstick still whirling madly in her hand. She followed Tru's gaze and stopped immediately. "Oh...high school. I was on the cheerleading squad. Baton, you know."

"You cheerlead?" Tru took a moment to imagine Buffy in a skimpy cheerleading outfit. It wasn't horrible. "Is that where all the upper body strength comes from?"

Buffy shrugged, then leaned back as the waitress placed their dishes in front of them. "I work out a lot...tae kwon doe, kickboxing, that sort of thing." She started shoveling huge quantities of food onto her rice.

"Wow," Tru said, and didn't know whether she meant the sports or the pace at which Buffy devoured her food. Obviously her slender build came more from athletics and metabolism than from undereating.

As they continued the meal, Tru was trying harder and harder to figure out if she was on a date. And, if she was, whether that's what she wanted. And, if it was, then whether Buffy really liked her, or just the face of her friend in Cleveland. They were nearly finished eating, and Tru was trying to decide if she should panic about what came next, when her cell phone started ringing.

"Sorry," she said to Buffy, then dug through her bag and pulled it out. "Hello?"

"Tru, I-I think you'd better come in early tonight." Davis' voice stuttered on the other end of the line.

Tru glanced at Buffy, who raised an eyebrow at her, then looked back at her food as if to give her some privacy. "Davis--" Tru suppressed the whiny three-year-old part of her that wanted to whine and throw a tantrum. "I'm on a--" She stopped before the word date slipped out; she knew Buffy was listening, no matter how hard she was staring at her szechuan noodles, and really, Tru had no clue if this was even supposed to be a romantic dinner or just a "Hey! Vacation! Chinatown!" thing. "I'm on at midnight," she finished lamely.

"Gardan's got multiple pickups to make, all from the same area..." Davis said, then whispered, "Tru, I think they might need your help."

Tru frowned. She could just picture Davis, hunched over the phone in the empty morgue, whispering because it was dramatic, or because even when he was alone with the corpses he feared giving away her secret. She wasn't sure whether it was creepy or endearing that when Davis had dead people around, he was never alone. "They'll still be dead when I get there," she said. "If anyone needs me, they can ask then."

"We don't know that," Davis said. "There could be a window of opportunity...a threshold, after which there is truly no return..."

"Davis." Tru stopped him. Once he started into philosophy, it took a while to calm him down. "I thought you said fate was immutable?"

"Is it that good a date?" Davis asked wistfully.

"It's not--I mean, we're...I'm just in the middle of dinner," she said.

Davis heaved a sigh on the other end of the phone. "I thought you and Luc were on a break?"

"Are you going to keep asking questions until I agree to come down there?"

"Do you think it'll work?"

Tru rolled her eyes. "Goodbye, Davis." She snapped her phone shut and returned it to her bag.

"Let me guess--work?" Buffy said. She fiddled with her Seven Precious Jewels, separating all the cashews from the rest of the dish.

"Yeah, I'm really sorry...it looks like I'm going to have to run out on you." Tru wanted to punch something. If this was a date, it was the best one she'd had since her first night at the morgue...and, really, for quite a while before then, too. All things considered, it was a minor miracle that the day had gone this far without the jangle of her cell phone calling her away. "Let me get the cheque--"

"No, it's okay, look, I'm on vacation. Extravagant meals are part of the package. I'm feeling a bit of a tingle, it's about the first time in three years that I'm able to get all splurgy." Buffy

pushed her dish away.

"If you're not finished--"

Buffy shook her head. "Actually..." She trailed off.

Tru signaled the waitress. "Actually, what?"

"Well, I...had a really good time today. Um." Buffy smiled at the tablecloth. "Okay, this is going to sound weird."

Tru waited.

"Can I come to the morgue with you?" It came out really fast, all one big word.

"You're kidding."

Buffy looked up. "Nope. Trust me, dead people don't bother me, if you're worried. And, I--uh, mostly, I don't want to lose my guide. Big town, small Buffy. You know?"

"I guess I do," Tru said. She wants to go to the morgue because of me. Best date ever...if it is a date. At least if I had run out on her it wouldn't matter if it was a date or not, but now...I'll be at work, she'll have to do the leaving, so what will she say? She's in town for a week...maybe I can get her phone number. Oh, God, I'm turning into Harri. "Okay, if you're sure."

"Yeah." Buffy picked up the cheque and gave her the first choice of fortune cookies.

The slip of paper inside her cookie said, "Strangers entering your life make for interesting bedfellows."

It was probably a date.

Part 6

Buffy followed Tru, a little cautiously, as they stepped off the elevator into a long, shadowy hallway. Everything was green and white tiled and stank of cherry-scented disinfectant. The smell of hospitals everywhere. Buffy wrinkled her nose. Hospitals were not her friends. They were places where bad things happened. Cecilia's illness, Willow's injuries after Angelus attacked her, Faith's coma, Mom's operations, Tara's encounter with Glory...

It was very clear. Buffy and hospitals were unmixy things.

And yet.

Here she was, stepping into a small office off the main hallway. Tru pulled her bag off her shoulder and dumped it with her coat on the ragged sofa in the corner, indicating Buffy should do the same. She took a white lab coat off a hook and put it on over her street clothes, pulling her hair clear of the collar and fluffing it around her shoulders.

"If they let people into medical school on looks, I think you'd make it," Buffy blurted, then closed her eyes at how that had sounded. "I mean--you look very doctory. Professional."

"Thanks," Tru said, smirking slightly.

Looking almost like Faith, for a moment.

Stop thinking about Faith.

"No problem." Buffy waved Tru's words away. "After a big meal like that, it's a wonder I can still find room for my foot."

"You sure you want to come in?" Tru asked. "You were looking a little green there, for a minute."

"No, it's okay. Hospitals don't have many feel-good memories for me, that's all." Buffy clicked the blinds open on the window between the office and the next room. "I'm actually interested, which takes some doing...college didn't agree with me."

"Really?" Tru sat down at the desk and poked at the computer for a moment. "And I was going on the assumption that I was speaking to a certified guidance counselor."

"Would you believe they only hired me because of my amazing superpowers?" That had hurt to find out. Buffy shook her head, resigned. "They had to pay me because I saved the world. A lot."

"Well, if it was a lot," Tru teased, still reading the computer screen, "then I guess I believe you."

The door on the far side of the room opened and a bearded man breezed through, his smock and gloves covered in blood. "Tru, you're here, good, I need you to--" He stopped, blinked at Buffy, then turned back to Tru. "Take standards, weight and height, external exams."

"How many?" Tru asked.

"Four, and Gardez's still out collecting," he said, twitching slightly as he stared at Buffy.

Tru got up from the computer and pushed him towards her. "Davis, this is Buffy Summers."

"Oh," Davis said. "Is this really the best--" Tru kicked his shin. "I mean, hello."

"Hi." Buffy shifted a bit, looking at Tru for guidance. The guy was still giving her a weird stare.

"Buffy, this is Davis, my boss. He does this." Tru's wave indicated the morgue, and seemed to imply whatever spasm had now taken over Davis' blinking reflex.

"Nice to meet you. So, what killed them?" Buffy asked brightly.

"Oh, from a primary analysis, exsanguination from a series of median cervical traumatic injuries," Davis said easily. He flashed her a nervous grin, then looked away. More than anything, he reminded her of Willow when they'd first met--going non-verbal and spazzing in the presence of the opposite sex.

"Somebody cut their throats?" Tru sounded pretty shocked for someone who worked in the morgue full time. Or maybe, not shocked...more like indignant, as if these people, whoever they were, deserved a happier death. As if that was possible.

"Or bit them?" Buffy offered. She sighed, trying to remember that she was supposed to be on vacation.

"Yes." Davis narrowed his eyes at her. "You know Tru?"

"We just met today," Buffy said. "You don't mind if I take a look, do you? I've always thought that there was something...fascinating...about coroners..." She gave him her best sexy look, trying to keep a straight face as Tru broke into silent laughter behind him.

"I'm just a medical examiner," Davis mumbled. "Uh, if Tru is sure it's okay." He gave her a meaningful glare, this time reminding Buffy of Giles at his most British.

"You're the boss, Davis," Tru said, slapping his shoulder, and smiling widely at Buffy. Dimples. Really, it was unfair how attractive they were. "If you're sure you won't throw up or anything, you can come and see."

"No problem." Buffy walked after Tru down another hallway and through a pair of swinging doors. They were in a large, dim room with four gurneys draped in sheets. Sheets with tell-tale bloodstains right near the heads. Buffy tried to push down the itch that was her urge to slay. Even in Canada. Weren't the vamps here too polite to go on killing sprees?

"This is the standards room," Tru explained absently. "I have to measure the bodies, take fingerprints, DNA samples, that sort of thing."

Buffy nodded. "So, I'll get out of your way." She already knew what the cause of death was, even if it wasn't what would appear on the death certificates. She also knew that Tru was safe working with the bodies--none of them had been turned.

"You can sit there and watch, if you're not squeamish."

"Okay." Buffy hopped up on an unused table and watched while Tru pulled out a prepared tray of sterile instruments and clicked on the overhead microphone.

By the time Tru was finished with the first body, Buffy was staring in awe.

"That's amazing," she said.

Tru looked up in confusion. "What?"

"You--you know stuff. Lots of really big words. And expertise. There was that, too." Buffy hopped down. "I didn't know you did so much. You morgue people, that is. I never thought

about it." By the time she met the undead, all that work had gone to waste.

"Yeah, well, for me it's just a summer job," Tru said. "The internship I really wanted fell through." She stared at the dead girl, almost like she expected her to wake up at any second.

"Still, wow. Knowledge girl, is what you are." Buffy moved closer to the gurney and inspected the puncture wounds in the girl's neck up close. Definitely vampire. "What cemetery did they find the bodies near?" she asked.

"Memorial Gardens," Tru said, flipping through the chart. "Wait--how did you know they were found near a cemetery?"

"Um--I guessed?" Buffy tried. "With the neck-biting, and the blood being...gone?"

"You think some freak out there thinks he's a vampire?" Tru asked. "Now that's weird." She stared at the girl on the table for a moment longer.

"Waiting for something?" Buffy asked, after following Tru's gaze and not seeing anything noteworthy.

"Hmm?" Tru shut the chart. "No, of course not." She sighed. "Just--nine murders, all at once like this. You think you're used to it, and then--no reason, just a whole bunch of people who aren't going to get up tomorrow."

"Yeah, well, we're lucky for that much," Buffy said under her breath. "Nine?" she asked aloud. "That is a lot." Would one nest do that much all at once? Hello, I'm on vacation, what does it matter? It matters to Tru...and probably if they're this bold, they won't stop at nine.

"Work," she muttered, disgusted.

"What?"

Buffy grimaced. "I just remembered this work thing, that, um, it can't wait."

"School guidance counseling during the summer?" Tru asked skeptically.

"It's a, a paperwork thing. With the signing, and the notary public...that I forgot to send. I'd better go and do--that. Now."

"It's eleven-thirty at night," Tru said. "Nothing's open."

"Oh..." Buffy started backing away from the room. "Faxes, you know. Modern age. Nothing's ever really shut down. It's a disease, on our society, very...sickening. "

Tru started after her. "If you're going to hurl, you could just say so."

"No, no hurling." Buffy stopped, one hand on the door. "I really did have a good time. Maybe we could...do it again? Tomorrow?"

"If I have one," Tru said, glancing over her shoulder at the shrouded bodies.

Buffy nodded. "I think I can take that as a yes. And, I promise. Tomorrow, I will be totally on vacation."

"Okay," Tru said. "I know an excuse when I hear one, trust me."

"I'm sorry," Buffy said. "Just--with the work--if it weren't for that, I'd, um--oh, hell."

"You'd what?" Tru leaned forward, her eyes dark and eager.

Buffy blushed, tilted her head, and said, "I'd probably kiss you."

Then she took off running down the hall before she could hear what Tru thought of that plan.

Those vampires were in for a world of pain.

Part 7

Tru slid the last of the nine bodies into its drawer in the crypt and wandered back into the office, where Davis was pecking at the computer. He looked up as she entered the room.

"Nothing?" he asked.

She shrugged. "I'm still here, it's not yesterday."

He paused to consider that. "Oh. Right." He stared blankly at the computer for a moment. "I was pretty sure...nine people, all with the same cause of death, all discovered in the same area..."

"I guess you can't second-guess Fate," Tru said. "Next time, I think I'll wait for my shift to start before rushing in." She plopped down on the sofa, noticing that Buffy had left her bag. Did that mean she was coming back? Tru felt her cheeks warm at the thought.

"I wonder what happened," Davis mused. "Gardez says the police think it might have been some sort of cult activity, due to the similarities in their deaths."

"Mmm-hmm." Tru tuned him out. Buffy had said they should get together tomorrow--and, at this point, it seemed likely that they could, since no body had asked for her help. She thought about Buffy's last words, wondered what it would be like to kiss her. A little late for college experimentation, but--

But what?

She'd never felt that way about a girl before.

The way Buffy looked at her--

The only problem was, she didn't know if Buffy was really looking at her.

Faith. The crass, vulgar, sarcastic friend, who flirted as hard as she could, as long as she could. The leather-wearing friend. The friend who'd gone off to Cleveland with Buffy's old boss. The one, the only one, who called Buffy 'B' and got away with it.

Tru had heard enough about her, in the middle of all of Buffy's stories, that afternoon at the teashop and at dinner.

And Tru? What did Buffy think of her? There had been an instant when Buffy had really seen her--Tru, as herself. When she was doing the exams, Buffy had been impressed.

But was that moment enough to let her distinguish between Tru and Faith? Maybe Buffy only wanted an acceptable substitute. Or, worse, Buffy might think she was over Faith, and not even know that she was using Tru as a stop-gap replacement.

A hand, gently shaking her shoulder, woke Tru from her doze. Davis was standing over her, rubbing his eyes. "Gardez's got another pickup," he said. "Same area as before. He's on his way."

Tru rubbed her eyes and sat up. Davis handed her a cup of coffee.

"It's a Jane Doe, no identification found on the body. Apparently people driving by heard the commotion. They thought it was a gang war." Davis sighed. "Sorry to wake you."

Tru shook her head. "I should have gotten some sleep earlier. My fault."

Davis went out to meet Gardez while Tru prepared the standards room, getting out her implements and pulling on a fresh pair of latex gloves. When Davis returned, he stared at her like the first day they'd met, his wide brown eyes solemn, his mouth sad.

"Tru--" Davis stopped, shook his head. "I-I think, um, you shouldn't--it's, uh--maybe you should sit down."

She felt her heart stop, like her blood had frozen over. "What?"

"It's--it's your friend, Tru. Buffy."

Tru shook her head. "No--she had some work...she had a hotel. She was going to meet me tomorrow--"

"I'm so sorry..." Davis spread his hands, a that's-life gesture, a what-can-you-do gesture, and Tru shoved past him, into the hall. Gardez was waiting there with the gurney, covered in a sheet that was splotted with blood.

"No--" Tru started forward, but Davis grabbed her arm and held her back.

"Tru, Gardez and I will do this. You don't want to see." Davis stepped between her and the gurney, but Tru pushed him aside.

"I have to see her."

Gardez looked at Davis; Davis shrugged. Gardez pulled the sheet back.

It couldn't be her. This body was torn apart, like she'd been mauled by a wild animal. Her green eyes, wide and staring, were filmed over with dirt. Blood and mud smeared her clothes, her skin, her hair.

It was her. It was Buffy. Tru reached out and closed her eyes. She couldn't help noticing that the time of death must be very recent, because Buffy's eyelids stayed down.

Tru turned on her heel and ran back to Davis' office, grabbing up Buffy's bag and spilling out its contents. She tossed aside makeup and gum, a hairbrush, Kleenex, bits of trash, a--a stake? Tru stared at the sharpened bit of wood for a second, then went back to her search. She seized Buffy's passport and wallet, and any other papers that looked important. Sitting at Davis' desk, she went through them, slowly, committing everything to memory. Phone numbers and photographs. A business card for a law firm in Los Angeles.

She mumbled the phone numbers to herself over and over again, not realizing that her hands were shaking, her vision blurred by tears.

One day. That was all. But she had to ask for help, she had to...

Tru swept through the last of the papers...a Visa receipt for their dinner...Buffy's fortune. She crumpled it in her hand.

Davis hovered in the doorway. "Tru...I sent Gardez home. If-if she hasn't asked you yet..."

"She will." Tru went past Davis without a glance and headed back to the crypt. Buffy's body was white and still, cold, empty.

Lifeless.

Tru opened the fortune. It said, "In life, as in luck, the third time is the charm."

Buffy's head swiveled towards her and her eyes shot open. "Tru...save me."

Buffy turns and looks up at me, recognition and challenge in her eyes.

Buffy's hand grasps mine and I feel its warmth, its hardness, its strength.

Geese flock over pieces of thrown popcorn. Buffy leans next to me against the sea wall, her expression bittersweet, remembering. She hugs me and I want to wipe away her tears.

Buffy sits in the morgue and watches me take samples, cut hair, do dental impressions. She is wide-eyed, interested, impressed.

Buffy stands half-way out the door, asks me to meet her again, tells me she wants to kiss me.

I want to scream at her to be careful, to stay safe.

I can only watch her leave.

And the world dissolved.

Part 8

Tru woke up, thrashed out from under the covers, and reached for the phone, all in one motion. She silently recited the number she'd memorized right before Buffy had asked for her help, and forced herself to dial slowly so that she wouldn't make mistakes.

"Hello?" The voice at the other end sounded sleepy.

Tru took a deep breath. "Hi. Is this Willow?"

There was a pause, then: "Faith?"

Even her voice was the same as Faith's. This was just getting creepy. But it made everything a lot easier--people were less likely to try to have you committed if they knew you. At least, so she hoped. "I think Buffy's in trouble, Willow," she said.

Sheets rustled, and there was a murmur of someone else's voice in the background. "Is this a Slayer connection thing?" Willow asked.

Okay, the plan was now officially in trouble. Slayer connection thing? Tru crossed her fingers and took a chance that this was some sort of rhetorical question. "Yeah, uh, that's it," she said. "I--I'm worried about her."

Willow sighed. "Well, she's not here," she said. "She's taking a trip, and she asked us not to contact her while she's gone. I think she's earned that much, with all the world-saveage, don't you think? Anyway, she's a big Slayer, she can take care of herself."

Tru buried her face in her hands. The plan, once so simple, was busy dying a horrible death. What the hell was Buffy's friend going on about? How was she supposed to convince Willow to get Buffy out of town if she couldn't even understand the conversation?

"Faith..."

Tru didn't say anything for a moment, then remembered that for the purposes of this phone call, she was Faith. "Uh, yeah?"

"You aren't doing this because of Robin, are you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Look, I'm not saying that I approve, but after Car Ride Confessional '03, I get it, you know?" Willow sighed. "And, hey, gay for a while now. I do understand where you're coming from. But you made your choice. You chose Cleveland. You can't just jump back. Jumpiness is of the bad, because what if next week you decide, hey, time to jump again, maybe I want to

drive stick for a while, and then Buffy gets hurt? This is how accidents happen, when you don't know if your vehicle is automatic or standard, and you start changing horses in midstream."

Tru felt like banging her head against a wall. She had no idea what Willow was referring to. Was coherent English too much to ask for? "Listen, all I'm calling to say is, I think Buffy's in danger. I--I have a bad feeling. You need to get in touch with her, tell her to watch out, maybe even come back to L.A. She can have a vacation some other time. But right now, today, she needs to know, okay?"

There was a long pause. Then Willow said with a sort of surprise, "You really are worried."

"Of course I'm worried!" Tru burst out. "She--I..." How could she say it so that it didn't sound crazy? Although, maybe crazy would work. Willow certainly didn't seem to be playing with a full deck. "It was a dream," she said, inspired. "I dreamed that Buffy was killed, okay? She was..." Tru tried to decide how much of the truth to tell. "She was in a cemetery, and she was ripped apart. It--" She stopped and took a breath. "It was really realistic, Willow."

"You mean, a Slayer dream? Prophetic?" Willow was starting to sound anxious, now. "Why didn't you say so? I'll do a locator spell right away."

Buffy had said something about locator spells yesterday. And apparently, whatever a Slayer was, both Buffy and Faith were part of it. Maybe that's what Buffy had meant when she said they worked together. Somehow it was more plausible than that guidance counselor story. And did this explain why Buffy had thought vampires had killed those people?

Right, and if she believed that, then Willow wasn't the only crazy person involved in this phone call.

Well, but who would believe that she could relive days and talk to dead people?

Yeah, but vampires?

Buffy's strength. Her high metabolism.

The wooden stake Tru had found in her bag.

Would you believe they only hired me because of my supernatural powers? I save the world. A lot.

"Listen, Willow, I'm a Slayer, right?" Tru asked quickly.

"Um, yes, Faith," Willow said, like she was talking to a two-year-old. "You're a Slayer."

"And I'm--really strong, and I kill vampires, and I help save the world?"

"Should I be worried about the long-term effects of comas on your memory, Faith?"

Tru ignored the sarcasm. This was why Buffy had run out of the morgue last night. There had been vampire attacks. Buffy was a Slayer, who killed vampires. That was the work she was

referring to. But obviously there had been too many for her--she'd been all alone. She'd needed back-up. "Do you think I could help Buffy?" Tru asked. If Faith could save her--

Willow's voice came back faintly. It sounded like she had put the speaker phone on, and was walking around the room, shifting furniture and thumping things around. "You mean, you want me to send you to her, when I find out where that is?"

"Yes! If you could get plane tickets, she could be here on time..." Tru closed her eyes and did a quick calculation. "Cleveland's only a few hours away..." she muttered.

"Plane tickets?" Willow asked. "Or, you know, I could send you through the ether. There's no more scary dark bad magic here, Faith."

"Magic, right." Tru shook her head. Vampires, she thought she could handle--human psychopaths with porphyria and xeroderma pigmentosa were what had started the legend in the first place, so scientifically it was possible. But on the other hand, what did she call the force that caused her days to rewind? Maybe Willow wasn't certifiable after all.

It was time for stage two of the plan. "Okay, well...I'll get ready. Um--can you call me back when you know where Buffy is?"

"All right, I have your number. But it really won't take that long..."

"Okay, great, talk to you in a bit. Thanks, Willow." Tru hung up. When Willow called Faith, there would probably be a lot of confusion about what was going on. Tru thought that if they were both worried enough about Buffy's welfare, they'd act first and leave accusations about which of them was insane until later.

But, in case that didn't work, she had to get to the diner before Buffy--and, most definitely, before Harrison.

And she had some shopping to do first.

Part 9

Tru pushed open the changing room door and did a slow spin for Lindsey. "So, what do you think?"

Lindsey raised an eyebrow. "This is for...what again?"

"A costume party." Tru glanced over her shoulder at her reflection. If she'd known her ass could look this good, she would have done this sooner. "How do I look?"

"What are you supposed to be going as?" Lindsey asked, leaning back and eyeing Tru up and down. "Because right now you just look like yourself in a really skanky pair of leather pants."

"Perfect." Tru pulled her jean jacket over a white wifebeater and took out her gold hoop

earrings. She accepted her bag from Lindsey and rummaged through it, bringing out the makeup she'd bought earlier. "Now...tell me what my idiot brother did this time."

"He was holding a conversation with the man at the next table about the comparative merits of three different bars that hold wet t-shirt contests," Lindsey said. "While we were ordering." She paused, then: "How did you know he'd done something?"

Tru met Lindsey's gaze in the mirror. "You're my best friend. I could see it in your eyes."

Lindsey simpered. "That is so sweet."

"Plus I know Harrison," Tru added. "If you guys went for a week without breaking up--"

"--then you'd be worried," Lindsey finished. "Well, the make-up sex is good, at least."

"Ew," Tru squealed. "I did not need to know that...but...were you planning on that any time soon? Say, today, around noon?" She put the finishing touches on her makeup and backed away from the mirror.

"You want me to whisk Harrison away for make-up sex today at noon?" Lindsey said, handing her back her bag.

"Yeah...I'm, I'm meeting someone in the diner, and I don't want Harri to see me like this," Tru said, waving at her outfit.

"Oh-ho!" Lindsey bounced in excitement. "Tru, is it Luc? Are you guys back on? And is there really a costume party, or is it more like a costume party, if you know what I mean?"

Tru turned away to hide her blush. "It's not Luc," she said. "I don't think he and I can make it work. It's just--complicated."

"But..." Lindsey tried to lead her on. "...there's someone new?"

Tru disappeared back into the change room so that she wouldn't have to meet Lindsey's eyes. "Just a friend," she said, her voice muffled as she struggled to get out of the leather pants. There was probably a trick to it. She suspected that all Faith had to do was wiggle her hips just so and that would be that.

Oh, for the love of God, was she jealous?

"Mmm-hmm. Someone who could be more than 'just a friend!'" Lindsey said in a mocking sing-song.

Tru tossed the leather pants over the door at her. "I don't think so."

"Uh-huh. Listen, Tru, I know you," Lindsey said. "You know when Harrison's been an idiot, and I know when you've got a guy on the sly!"

Tru rolled her eyes and pulled her jeans on. "Oh, really? And when was that, exactly?"

Lindsey waited until she was out of the change room. She folded her arms and smirked. "You thought I never knew about Professor Donutface."

"You mean Mark? You knew about that?" Tru asked. She winced, remembering Mark and how that had ended. Well, she for one was happy it had, but it had hurt at the time.

"Just like I know that you've got it bad this time," Lindsey finished triumphantly. "Best friends! See, we know these things."

Tru sighed and took the pants back from Lindsey. Was there really anything to know? Depending on how she played the day, she and Buffy could do anything, or nothing. Of course she wanted to save Buffy. That went without saying, destiny or no destiny. But maybe it was wrong to trick her like this. And what would happen if and when Faith showed up? If Buffy had to choose--

"Nothing's going to happen," Tru said. Fate had given her the day and she wasn't going to mess it up. Save Buffy's life, then worry about the consequences.

"Okay," Lindsey said, raising her hands like she was disassociating herself from all of Tru's decisions. "But I'm telling you, look at me and Harrison. If we were normal people, this wouldn't be happening, but obviously we're deranged, so it is. I'm not talking about wedding bells, I'm talking about getting back on the horse."

Tru slapped the leather pants down on the clerk's counter and handed over her credit card without a second glance at the price. "Speaking of getting back on the horse...and, again, ew, I can't believe I just said that...but how much groveling are we talking for Harrison?"

"Oh, candy, flowers, a nice night out with no mention of other women's breasts, perhaps a werewolf-shaped Pez dispenser--they're really rare--" Lindsey shrugged. "I'll let him come over and apologise to me, for a start."

"Great." Tru pulled out her phone. "I'll tell him you're expecting him."

"Don't think this doesn't mean you owe me, Tru," Lindsey said. "I mean, I know you say there's no such thing as too much cleavage, but that shirt is really stretching things. And I'm talking literally. So there had better be details tomorrow."

Tru forced a smile. "I'll see what I can do." She put the phone to her ear. "Harrison?"

"Hey, sis, I promise I'm not going to be late--"

"Harri, listen, I'm shopping with Lindsey, and--"

"Aw, come on, Tru, is this a conspiracy? Does everyone have to know every time I screw up? The guy ran a Hooters franchise! And I'm supposed to not make polite conversation? I'm an interested consumer. Lindsey is railroading me..."

Tru sighed and let Harrison go on for another minute. "Harrison, I'll try to calm her down. But I want you to go over to her place this afternoon and apologize!"

"I don't think so! I know the rules, you gotta have a cooling off period or whatever. And, Tru, you know Lindsey and me'll be fine. Anyway, I thought we were meeting for lunch."

"Not today." Tru took her bag from the clerk and smiled her thanks.

"So it's a rewind?" Harrison asked.

"Yes. And I'm telling you, you'll be better off with Lindsey than with me today."

Harrison chuckled. "Will I get lucky?"

Tru glanced at Lindsey's contented expression. "Depends on the groveling."

Harrison paused to consider that. "Make up sex, huh? Better than yesterday?"

"Better than getting shot down in the diner," Tru promised.

"Ooh...but was I shot down by a hottie?" Harrison asked.

"Let's just say she liked me better," Tru said, lowering her voice and waving goodbye to Lindsey.

"And this is supposed to keep me away." Harrison made little tsk, tsk, sounds. "I don't know, Tru, Lindsey and I can make up any time, but watching a girl hit on you might be my once-in-a-lifetime opportunity..."

"Harrison." Tru forced herself to stay calm. "She asked for my help. And to help her, I need you to be gone. Got it?"

"All right, but you could really ease the sting if you happened to know the Pick-3 number..."

"Goodbye, Harrison." Tru hung up, took one last, long moment to wonder if she had gone round the bend, then headed home to change. She was due to meet Buffy in the diner in less than an hour.

Part 10

Buffy folded her map of Greater Vancouver and checked the nearest street sign. She was, maybe-sort-of, a little lost. Just a bit. Not that she really had a destination in mind, and she could always take a cab back to her hotel, but that didn't alter the fact that right now she had no clue where she was. She stuck out her bottom lip and sighed, blowing a wisp of hair off her forehead. For all that she'd argued that she needed to get away, this vacation wasn't really turning out the way she'd hoped. Having a credit card that drew on the Watcher Council's hidden funds was nice, but it wasn't as satisfying without someone else to go shopping with.

After months of having her house filled to the brim with strangers, Buffy thought that going

somewhere by herself--with no one to be responsible for, no one to lead or guide or bitch at--was all she really wanted. Anya probably could have told her it would end this way. She'd wished to be alone, and now she was lonely.

Go figure.

Buffy shoved the map back into her shoulder bag. Her stomach rumbled. Across the street there was a small hole-in-the-wall restaurant, the Standard Diner. Good enough. She jogged over, dodging the trickle of traffic, and pushed open the door. She headed for the counter, glancing around at the few customers, and--

Faith.

Faith was lounging in a booth, facing her, a strange look on her face--a small smile that was nervous and happy and yearning all at once. Buffy felt her breath stop. What the hell was Faith doing here? She was supposed to be in Cleveland--well, not supposed to be, because there was no way that Faith was supposed to be playing Little Miss Domestic Suburbia with Robin Wood--but the fact remained that Faith had been in Cleveland and now she was in Vancouver and how had she known Buffy was here? Buffy shook her head to stop her internal babble and stalked over to Faith's table, sliding into the seat across from her.

"Do you not understand the concept of vacation?" Buffy asked. It came out sharper than she had meant it, and she winced. Since Willow had brought Faith back from L.A., it had been like this--Buffy wanted Faith around, she liked her, she--well, she wanted them to be friends, to get back to the way things had been (were supposed to be) all those years ago. Instead she snapped and turned into some sort of uberbitch. What was her problem?

"Well, not that I've had one recently, but I think I got the general idea--time off from work, sometimes involving travel, see the sights, relax?" Faith's amused drawl was the same as ever, smoky-rough, sexy.

"One week, that's all I asked," Buffy said, resigned now. She should be annoyed at this invasion of her privacy, but instead she felt a grin that she couldn't suppress spreading across her face. "No locator spells, no Scoobies. Not even you."

"Not even me?" Faith pouted. "Thought we were friends."

"Yeah..." Buffy shrugged. "I thought you'd be setting up shop on the new Hellmouth. Although I gotta wonder what good it'll do. It's like that game with the gophers you bop on the head with the mallet. You turn one city into a crater, the next thing you know the First is popping up somewhere else. At least we have the other Slayers now. Did you find many on your little road trip?"

Faith blinked and shifted in her seat uneasily. "Sure. They've got it covered."

Buffy gave a snort of laughter. "You're looking real certain, there, Faith. What, did you just leave it all up to Robin?"

"Figured he could handle it." Faith picked at the tablecloth. She certainly seemed different--nervous, unsure. Something. Buffy stared at her, trying to see what had changed. She'd dyed

her hair, but other than that, it was the same old slut-bomb Faith. It looked like not even her attempt at domestic bliss could subdue her wild streak, and seeing that made Buffy obscurely happy.

"Fine, no more shop talk," she said. "So why are you really here? Are you so hard up you'd follow me to Canada?"

Faith blushed.

Buffy's eyebrows lifted in an incredulous stare. Faith had blushed. Faith had blushed. A tiny bit of teasing--far tamer than anything Faith had ever tossed her way over the years--and she reacted like Buffy had come straight out and propositioned her.

"Oh, my God, that is why you're here!" Buffy said, her eyes widening, excitement fluttering in her stomach.

Faith looked up quickly, panic in her eyes. "Nah, that's not--it's, um, Slayer stuff, actually."

Buffy narrowed her eyes. "Uh-huh."

"For real, B--" Faith stuttered over the nickname, and looked at her sideways, hesitating. When she spoke, it sounded like a speech that she'd rehearsed. "I had a Slayer dream. I called Willow, and she thought it was prophetic, so she sent me here."

"I see. And what was it about?" Buffy asked. This was wrong. Faith was not acting like herself, and she was a lousy liar. Buffy concentrated on her Slayer senses, trying to feel out Faith. It wasn't something she was particularly skilled at, even though Giles had tried to train her to understand what her 'spidey sense' was telling her. This time, she couldn't feel a thing--it was like Faith wasn't even there.

"I dreamed that you were attacked in a cemetery and you died," Faith said. That came out more easily, and Buffy found herself believing that much, at least. There was a hint of desperation, or fear, hidden behind Faith's words, that made them convincing.

Buffy sighed, suddenly tired. "And did you ever stop to think that maybe it's about time? Who ever heard of a twenty-two year old Slayer?" She tried to laugh. "I mean, it is getting a little ridiculous how many times I've come back from the dead."

"Fuck that, Buffy."

Buffy looked up, surprised. Faith's eyes shone with tears. What was going on with her?

"It is not your time to go. I am here to save you, and I am going to do that if I have to kill every vampire in this city myself. You need my help and I'm going to give it to you."

Buffy didn't know what to say. Faith had changed so much. For those few weeks when they'd fought side by side against the First, she hadn't seen it--she'd been too willing to believe that Faith could never truly grow up. After Faith left with Robin, Buffy knew she'd been wrong. There had been signs, and she'd ignored them because she was too busy being the general or dealing with Spike. And then it was too late to say anything, or do anything.

She missed Faith.

She missed the flirting and the dancing and the mixed signals and the tactless honesty Faith was so willing to give her. And now--what was this? A second chance? Or were they at third and fourth chances by now?

"Faith...I'm sorry. I didn't mean I was going to go out and get myself bit." Buffy spread her hands out on the table, hoping that Faith would make the first move and hold them. She needed Faith's warmth, the slayer-tingles that were so a part of their physical relationship, from the first time she'd handed Faith a stake in the alley outside the Bronze until Faith had bandaged the puncture wounds in her stomach as they both stared into the hole that had been Sunnydale.

"Maybe it would be better if you went home," Faith said, watching her carefully. "Or, at least, don't go out tonight."

Don't go getting yourself skewered again any time soon, for me, huhn?

"I'm still a Slayer," Buffy said.

"Yeah, well, you don't have to be a Slayer alone," Faith countered.

"I guess that's kind of the point, now, isn't it?" Buffy nodded to herself. "So, you feel like being a Slayer with me today? I got Council credit cards."

Faith smiled--a real smile, showing dimples, not just her usual smug grin--and stood up. "I know how you get all tingly when you get to splurge," she said.

"I'm on vacation," Buffy defended herself, following Faith out of the diner. "And if you're here, so are you. Today--" She paused, raised an eyebrow at Faith. "Today is about us. We can do anything we want. Deal?"

Nervousness flashed across Faith's face for a second, but just as quickly it was replaced by the more familiar lustful leer. "It's a deal...B."

Part 11

Faith found her way around the city better than Buffy could, even using her map, which was completely unfair. Before long, though, Buffy had tossed the map in her bag and forgot about it, content to let Faith lead the way. Navigation was the last thing on her mind.

Despite what she'd said to Faith about her Slayer dream, Buffy found--somewhat to her surprise--that the thought of dying again was just unpleasant. No matter how many prophecies she'd defeated over the years, there was always one more coming down the pipeline to bite her in the ass. For one glorious, shining moment, standing with the Scoobies in front of

Sunnydale's remains, she thought she had cheated death for the last time.

And now here she was, dodging her own mortality again. The fact that there were no recorded Slayers older than twenty-five had never bothered her before--it seemed like such a distant time that she could ignore it. But now the reality of it came crashing down on her head. She was twenty-two and a half years old. Two and a half years more and she'd be setting dangerous records.

It wasn't enough.

There was so much she hadn't done, hadn't seen...so much she still wished for. Buffy glanced sideways at Faith. They were walking down a path beside a river, through a misty forest. She could hear the ocean ahead of them, and the air tasted of salt. Faith seemed lost in her thoughts, hands jammed in her jean jacket pockets, watching the geese on the banks.

Was she thinking about what Buffy had said?

A day to do anything. A day just for them. Buffy wondered what Faith thought of the implication--because surely, whatever else was different about Faith, she hadn't missed the implication.

Live life to the hilt. Do what feels good. Leave a pretty corpse.

If Buffy had a deadline--she winced at the unintentional pun--then maybe it was time to throw caution to the wind.

Maybe she could finally say something--do something--

"How are you doing, B?" Faith asked, then smiled self-consciously. The name 'B' wasn't exactly rolling off her tongue these days. Were they both growing up so much that Faith was willing to leave the nickname behind?

Buffy sighed. God, she was being morbid. She wanted to go back in time, to that point before they--or, well, she--had messed everything up. "I'm five by five, F," she said, enjoying the saying she hadn't heard in so long.

Faith laughed and looked at her curiously. "You don't say."

Buffy shook her head, amused. "What, you don't want to share your little catch phrase? I swear, someday you're going to let it slip what it means and then we'll see who's down with the hip street lingo the kids are talking these days."

"I'll tell you," Faith offered. They had left the path behind, heading over to the low parapet that separated the park from the beach. Faith turned around and leaned on the sea wall, then jumped up and sat on it, kicking her heels against the stone.

Buffy crossed her arms and rested her elbows on the wall, turned slightly so that she faced Faith but she could also see the ocean. "I think you made it up."

Faith shook her head and grinned a secret smile. "Don't believe me? I'm all wounded and

stuff."

"Fine, fine, I'm all ears. What does it mean?"

"It's a code that radio operators use--EMRs and EMTs, paramedics, police, everyone." Faith glanced down at her to see what effect this was having. "See, the first number is volume, the second is clarity--so if your radio is quiet and crackly, you say, one by one, or two by three, or whatever. If everything's coming in loud and clear then that's five by five."

Buffy let her head fall back and gazed up at Faith. "You're kidding. It means something? And the something makes sense, in a weird way? Where did you learn that?"

"Hey, I'm not just another pretty face," Faith teased. "I'm a Knowledge Girl." She chuckled, almost to herself, and leaned back further, hanging over the empty space, extending her legs for balance.

"Yeah?" Buffy quirked an eyebrow at her. "You think you qualify? What else do you know?"

"I know...that you've been thinking about people dying before their time," Faith said. Suddenly serious, she sat up straight again. "You aren't going to die, Buffy."

Buffy looked away. "This time. Maybe." She watched the clouds flowing in from the horizon, darkening the skies. She shivered a bit. There was always something out there, something you didn't expect. There was always a stronger vampire. It had been like that for Mom--she'd beaten the brain tumour, she'd recovered from the operation, she was doing well--and then the aneurysm had hit her, out of nowhere, like lightning.

And now she was buried, along with the First, in a forgotten town. The lie--an earthquake--had been all too easy to come up with. Buffy blinked back tears and folded her arms against the suddenly sharp wind. She'd never be able to go back--Mom was really, truly gone, now...

Faith slipped down from her seat on the wall and wrapped her arms around Buffy from behind, resting her chin on Buffy's shoulder. "I'm sorry," she murmured, her lips pressed close to Buffy's ear. Buffy closed her eyes and leaned back into the hug. Her throat was a tight ball of pain. She clasped her hands over Faith's, resting on her stomach, and held them there, suspended from time.

In front of them, the ocean seemed endless. Buffy let her tears flow, feeling safer than she had for years, as safe as she had been before Angel had lost his soul. Like nothing in the world could get through Faith's arms. Warm. Protected.

Loved?

Buffy turned her head, eyes still closed, and let her lips brush against Faith's.

Faith's hold tightened on her, and for an instant Buffy was sure she would turn away. But then Faith's mouth met hers again, slowly, lightly. Buffy turned around in her arms. Fear and desire shone in Faith's eyes. Deliberately, Buffy kissed her again, more firmly this time, their breaths mingling. A deep thrill that came from finally acting, finally doing, spun through her, and her heart raced.

"Buffy..." There was hesitation in Faith's manner...not at all like her...but Buffy let the kiss carry her doubts away.

She wanted this.

"Shh..." She smiled up at Faith. "It's my vacation."

And she held Faith's hand as she led the way to her hotel.

Part 12

Tru had no time to think. No time to react.

Which was a lie. There was an entire taxi ride between one mistake and the next, and she did nothing to stop it. Heart pounding, hands sweaty, she followed where Buffy led, the soft kisses in Stanley's Park eating away her resolve to do the right thing.

They were barely through the hotel room door when Buffy was kissing her again. Tru moaned as Buffy backed her up, slamming the door behind her. Their bags and parcels slipped to the floor, unnoticed, and Buffy's hands settled on her waist. Tru closed her eyes and marveled at how easy this was, to cup Buffy's face in her hands and draw her nearer, feeling the heat of her body through their clothes.

Tru traced her tongue over Buffy's lips and Buffy sucked it into the slick warmth of her mouth. Even her breath was warm, tasting of Juicy Fruit gum. God, she was a good kisser, the hint of frustration and desperation in her actions only heating the space between them faster. Buffy was whimpering, small stolen words that were lost between her mouth and Tru's. Tru slipped her hands lower, stroking Buffy's back, her fingers stuttering over the clasp of Buffy's bra under her shirt.

Buffy pulled hard on her lower lip, then nipped her chin, dropping kisses on the curve of her jaw, pulling Tru lower to nuzzle her neck. Tru's breath came in sharp gasps, excitement flooding through her. She buried her face in Buffy's neck, licking the warm place behind her earlobe, then sucking in earnest when she heard Buffy's moan.

"God, so good...Faith..."

Ignore the words. Just go, just be, just feel...heat and wetness, the tight ache beneath the seam of the leather pants, Buffy's hands massaging her ass--oh, God, what was she doing, this wasn't how the day was supposed to go--but she was still sucking on Buffy's neck, still tracing Buffy's ribs through her shirt. Her skin was so sensitive, each touch whispering pleasure to her, telling her to give in.

"Please--Buffy--"

Buffy turned her head and kissed her again. "Hmm...what?..."

Tru lost herself in the kiss, twining her tongue around Buffy's, her mind hazy with arousal. She couldn't remember what she'd wanted to ask, she could only remember what she wanted. Buffy. Forget that this was wrong, that Buffy thought she was someone else. Forget--

"Don't wanna stop," she mumbled, and felt Buffy's laughter against her lips.

"Don't have to," Buffy said, and pushed her hips into Tru's. Pleasure flared, sharp and immediate. Tru sucked in a sharp breath and bucked her hips forward, returning the pressure. Buffy hissed, her grip on Tru's ass tightening for a moment. "See...it's okay...it's okay..."

Tru bent her head, rested it against Buffy's shoulder. "You make me so hot..."

"Yes--" Buffy's kisses would devour her, steal her breath, leave her empty, then give it all back. Tru pushed forward, until Buffy stumbled away from the door. They bumped up against the bed, and Tru thought she was on top, pressing Buffy down.

But before she knew what was happening, Buffy flipped them around even as they were falling on to the bed. She straddled Tru's waist, rolling her hips forward until they both sighed at the sensation. "Got you." Buffy's eyes were half-closed, her pupils dilated. She moved back, then repeated the motion, pressing their crotches together. "See...Faith," Buffy said, then squirmed again, her body going still as she gave another gasp, "you don't always have to be on top--"

"How would you know?" Tru asked, half-amused, half-jealous, mostly focused on the incredible feeling spreading through her thighs and stomach. She needed more, God, who cared if it was wrong, she needed Buffy--

"I know." Buffy gave a languid, glorious smile, her wind-loosened hair hanging over her shoulders, and leaned forward, slowly--too slowly--and kissed Tru again. It was softer this time, lips barely touching, butterfly kisses that fluttered and teased. Tru raised her hips and moved with the kiss, her fingers busy on the buttons of Buffy's shirt. Buffy lifted up enough to allow the shirt to be slipped from her shoulders. She deepened the kiss, tongues meeting and dancing, soft, soft.

Tru let her hands wander over the ripples of Buffy's ribs, feeling her jerk when she touched a ticklish spot, and smiled. She let her fingers wander to the clasp of Buffy's bra again. She unhooked it, then moved her hands to cup her breasts. Buffy moaned and shifted closer. "Please...touch me..."

Tru didn't know what to do, or how, she only knew what she wanted. Buffy was beautiful, her gentle curves and flat stomach hiding taut muscles, her breasts small but perfectly shaped. Tru followed desire, rolled Buffy's nipples between her fingers, pinched and rubbed, felt pleasure fill her with Buffy's encouragement.

"Oh, yes, God--like that--" Buffy let her head fall back, eyes closed. She massaged Tru's shoulders and arms, then found Tru's erect nipples through the material of shirt and bra. It was like lightning, like her breasts were wired directly to her clit, and Tru reared off the bed. Buffy looked down at her and smiled, easily holding her in place with the strength of her

thighs.

"Here--get that out of the way--" Buffy trailed her fingers lower, then pulled up on the hem of Tru's shirt. Tru yanked it over her head, then put her arm around Buffy's head, sinking into another timeless, fiery kiss. Buffy was panting when she finally let go, her smile full of love and desire. She drew her fingernails down Tru's chest, over the swell of her breasts, still caught inside the black lace of her bra, then over her stomach.

Suddenly, Buffy stopped, a surprised frown creasing her forehead. "Faith..."

Tru hated that name on Buffy's lips, wanted to erase it. "What?"

"Where...where's your scar?" Buffy's hands rubbed over one spot on Tru's stomach, just below her ribcage. Smooth skin. Of course. Not even an appendectomy. And here was where she and Faith were different. A scar that Buffy knew about. A scar that Buffy mentioned with guilt hiding deep in her eyes.

"It was still there when you were hurt by the bomb," Buffy said, her voice edged with hurt and suspicion.

Tru could only shake her head. "Buffy--" God, how could she tell her? She'd lost all perspective, she'd forgotten saving Buffy's life and given herself over to her own desire. And Buffy didn't even know who she was. The love that had been in her eyes only moments ago was for Faith.

Tru wasn't who Buffy wanted. Yesterday--last time--perhaps there'd been a chance. Not today. Buffy thought she was with Faith, at last, the girl who'd almost been her lover for years. The girl she knew. Tru had cheapened that; she'd known, and yet she'd let herself become some phony substitute.

The door handle turned abruptly, the lock crunching open. Buffy and Tru twisted sideways. The door swung open. Buffy's eyes went wide with shock her mouth dropping open, naked from the waist up, as she sat up, still straddling Tru where she lay on the bed.

Tru didn't need to look at the reflection of herself standing in the doorway to know who it was.

Faith.

Part 13

Buffy scrambled off Tru's lap and leapt to the floor, seeming to forget her own nudity as she stared at Faith. Tru sat up, snatching her shirt of the floor and yanking it back on, her face flaming. She wanted to run and hide, anything but face the look of utter disbelief on the face that was so like her own, but she couldn't move. They were all frozen, Faith clutching the door handle she'd broken off, Buffy and Tru trying to be as invisible as possible.

Then, slowly, Buffy turned and looked at Tru. Her mouth gaped open, like she was trying to say something, but no sounds emerged. She backed away from the bed, her eyes wide with horror, as if Tru were some sort of monster. Her chest heaved with her harsh breathing, and it sounded like she was about to cry.

Oh, God, what had she done?

Tru leaned forward, keeping one eye carefully on Faith. She had stepped into the room, the door swinging shut behind her, though it couldn't latch. The shock was fading from her face, and something darker was taking its place. Tru could hardly even look at her--it hurt to even see that much anger and despair on her own features.

"You--you're not--" Buffy had finally found her voice.

"Buffy..." Tru couldn't force out another word. There was no way she could explain this. She'd known it was wrong and she'd done it anyway. She'd pretended, and she'd made excuses, but there was no way she could rationalize her way out of this. She'd deceived Buffy, made her nothing better than a victim, when she was supposed to be saving her life.

There was a huge crash, and they both turned back to the doorway. Faith had thrown the handle, and it had smashed right through the drywall and nearly into the next room. Her expression didn't show a thing now--it was tight and composed--but her black eyes blazed with rage.

Buffy shook her head, tiny denials, refusing to believe what was before her eyes. "Faith--"

"Put your fucking shirt on, B." The voice--Tru now knew why Willow had believed she was Faith on the phone--was empty of emotion, almost conversational, but Faith's arm muscles kept knotting every time she clenched and released her fists.

Buffy's pallor melted under the sudden heat of her blush, and she bent over to retrieve her shirt, her fingers clumsy on the buttons. Faith turned her glare on Tru.

"This is why you didn't want anybody knowing where you were going on vacation, huh?" she asked. She was staring at Tru, but her words ignored her completely. Her eyes flickered over to Buffy for a moment, until Buffy managed to pull her shirt together. "So you could fuck me without ever getting near me?"

Buffy's hands dropped from the last buttonhole, her shirt fastened crookedly. "Get near you?" she asked incredulously. She flushed a deeper red, more angry than embarrassed now. "When did I have a chance, Faith? When we were on battle readiness for five weeks straight? When I was mortally injured by the First? When you left with Robin?"

Faith twisted slowly to look at her. "You know when," she said softly--the words seemed to hit Buffy like a slap--and Faith spun on her heel to leave the room.

"Wait!"

Tru could hardly believe that it was her voice calling Faith back. Both of them turned back to

her, and Tru finally felt like she knew what a Slayer was--it was all there in those deadly, dangerous stares. Neither of them had any reason to trust her, or even listen to her, but she still had to try.

"You can't go out there. You'll be killed."

"Who the fuck do you think you are?" Faith asked. Buffy crossed her arms and said nothing, but Tru knew she wanted answers to the same question.

"My name is Tru Davies," she said. "I'm here to save your life." Right, because that was believable. Tru winced at the sound of it, but there was really nothing left for her to say except the truth. She would do what she could to stop Buffy from getting hurt by the vampires, or whoever the murderer at Memorial Gardens cemetery was, and Buffy would go back to her life. She would live, at least, even if she hated Tru. Which seemed likely.

"Tru Davies." Buffy's voice was flat and disbelieving. "And you just happened to know all about me, and you look exactly like Faith, and you knew how to act like her. To trick me." She glanced at Faith. "To hurt me."

"You might not believe me--"

Anger flashed in Buffy's eyes. "You'd be surprised what I'd believe."

Tru nodded. "We met yesterday--"

Buffy cut her off. "I wasn't even in Vancouver yesterday."

"You're right." Tru finally felt the beginning of anger herself. She may have hurt Buffy, but strictly speaking they hadn't done anything wrong--Buffy wasn't with Faith; Tru wasn't with anyone; they were both adults. "If you would listen to me, I'd explain."

Buffy and Faith exchanged looks--silently asking each other whether Tru was worth their time. All their anger was dismissed for that moment, as if it was that easy for them to trust each other, no matter how upset they were.

"Something happens to me," Tru said, pushing ahead. "I don't know if it's magic, or Fate, or what. But sometimes, people brought into the morgue--dead people--they talk to me--"

"You speak to dead people?" Buffy asked sharply.

"The First," Faith said, looking like she wanted to spit. "I thought we got rid of it." She narrowed her eyes at Tru. "Doesn't explain how she looks like me. I never died. And it looked like she was pretty touchable a few minutes ago."

Buffy looked like she was about to rise to Faith's bait, but Tru interrupted. "What are you talking about? The first what?"

"Evil," Buffy said. "And yes, she's corporeal. For what that's worth."

"It's not evil, what happens to me," Tru said. "People ask for my help, and I go back in time. I

save them--stop them from dying before their time."

"And you figured a little unnngh would save her?" Faith gave a humourless chuckle and shook her head. "I've been saying that for years."

Tru tried to ignore the bitterness in Faith's voice. "No. I'm saying Buffy died--"

Faith rolled her eyes. "Fuck, B, are you trying to set a record?"

"--and she asked for my help. So the day rewound. The first time, I met Buffy, and she told me about herself. That's how I knew that if anything could keep her out of the graveyard, it would be Faith."

"You were the one who called Willow?" Faith demanded.

Tru didn't answer. Buffy was looking ashen, her arms crossed more for protection than with anger. "I'm sorry, Buffy. Yesterday--today--I thought--" No. She couldn't burden Buffy with knowing how they had almost-- No. "Nine people died. You were with me in the morgue. You thought it was vampires. You left--and you were killed."

Tears were sliding slowly down Buffy's face, though she was silent, seeming to be carved from ice.

Faith relaxed a fraction, and almost reached out to Buffy before pulling back. "B, it's not gonna happen."

Buffy wasn't listening. "You thought saving me was worth it," she whispered to Tru. "Saving me...for this." Her fists tightened at her sides. Faith grabbed for her hand, but Buffy threw her off. Faith tackled her again. They struggled sharply for no more than a moment, the movements coming too quickly for Tru to see what was happening, and then Faith was pushed to the floor and Buffy had fled, leaving the broken door swinging behind her.

Part 14

Faith flipped to her feet an instant after the door banged against the frame. For a second, she looked like she was going to tear off after Buffy without a second thought, but then she checked herself and turned to Tru. "Where's she going?"

"I don't know--"

"You said this already happened," Faith said, her voice vicious with frustration. She whirled around, pacing, filling the room with her presence, her energy. "If you're trying to save her, then tell me where the hell she ends up."

Tru didn't miss the implication of Faith's emphasis on the word 'save', tinged with disbelief and bitterness. It stung, but Tru couldn't do anything about it. She didn't know where Buffy

was headed. How much had she managed to change the day? Would Buffy still end up on the slab in the morgue? It was only nine o'clock, the sun just now falling beneath Vancouver Island to the west--Davis would be calling in an hour to tell her about the bodies found outside the cemetery--surely Buffy wouldn't go looking for trouble?

Faith stalked toward her, lithe and dangerous as a panther. "Tell me," she said. "Tell me where she is." She cracked her knuckles, massaging her fist with the other hand, and then, between one second and the next, there was a knife in her hand. She grabbed Tru's shoulder and squeezed--Tru remembered Buffy's grip on her wrist in the diner--but this was far worse. She could feel the bones grinding together, the creak as muscles and tendons protested. Tears of pain sprang to her eyes, but she couldn't stop staring at the knife. "Tell me..." Faith was holding it loosely, casually, tapping its point against Tru's collarbone. The metal was warm from being next to Faith's skin inside her jacket, but it quickly cooled.

And nothing happened. Faith's hold on her shoulder loosened a fraction, and the knife lifted a hair's breadth away from her skin. Tru looked up at her--they were the same height, but Faith was wearing thick boots, and Tru was barefoot. Faith stared at her, not meeting her eyes, but examining her, the way Davis sometimes stared at samples in a petri dish, as if she was something fantastic, amazing, and repulsive all in one.

"You're nothing," she said, softly, the words dull. "You're disgusting. Murderous bitch..."

"I'm not," Tru said, but she could tell that Faith wasn't listening. God, it was like staring into a funhouse mirror, the same and yet distorted. It wasn't even like looking at her family--Harri and Meredith both had their father's sharper features, and they'd both chosen to be blond rather than advertise any more Davis traits. In the fading red of the sunset, Faith was a wilder, darker version of herself.

Even after everything that had happened, Tru couldn't help wondering, was that what Buffy wanted? Faith, without the danger? All of the benefits and none of the risk? She stared at Faith, trying to see past the surface reflection. She felt like they'd be locked this way forever, searching for some evidence that they were more than just lookalikes, but then the sun slipped below the horizon. The hotel room was cast into shadows--she and Buffy hadn't bothered with the lights--and Faith shoved Tru aside. She hit the bed, hard, and nearly had the wind knocked out of her.

"You're not the hero here, you know," Faith said, slipping the knife back into its hiding place. "You never were."

"I'm not you, you mean," Tru shot back.

"No." Faith smirked and pulled a sharpened stake out from another pocket. "You're not her." She moved to the doorway.

Tru got up, ignoring the pain of breathing. "I'm coming with you."

"What are you going to do?" Faith asked.

Tru didn't answer. She grabbed her jacket off the floor and brushed by Faith to leave the room. She had nearly reached the elevators at the end of the hall when Faith shouted, "What

makes you think she even wants your help, now?"

Tru slapped the call button, her shoulders tense. "I don't help people because it's what they want, I help them because it's what they need."

Faith joined her as the elevator doors opened. "And how are you going to find her? The Powers That Be help you out on that account, too?"

"I know where the vampire attacks happen tonight. I don't know if that's where Buffy will be. But if you're a Slayer, maybe you can save those people, too." Tru tried to talk without looking directly at Faith. It was easier to deal with her if she didn't have the constant reminder that Faith could have been her twin. She wanted to pace, feeling cramped in the tiny elevator, her body still charged up with Buffy's kisses and the adrenaline from Faith bursting in on them. She had to forget that, now. She crossed her arms and tried to take up as little space as possible.

Faith had no such worries. She was aiming punches at the padded walls, pulling back at the last minute, and looking like an animal trapped in a cage. When the doors opened, she nearly sprinted out. On the sidewalk outside the hotel, she calmed down, closing her eyes as if she was concentrating, or listening to something Tru couldn't hear. More magic, probably--or, as Willow had said, a Slayer thing. Tru rolled her eyes and hailed a taxi. The cabbie's eyes widened when he got a good look at who his fare would be. Tru yanked the door open and grabbed Faith's wrist to pull her inside. It was obvious that her strength wouldn't be enough, but Faith pulled her hand back and got in of her own accord.

"Memorial Gardens Cemetery," Tru said, fishing through her pockets for the last of her cash. She tossed a twenty over the seat. "Quickly." The cab sped off through the growing darkness, under the flash of the streetlights. Tru checked her watch--the numbers glowed nine-ten. If Gardez got the call and had a load of bodies back at the morgue by ten, then they only had about fifteen minutes to spare. Would Buffy find her way to Memorial Gardens on her own, and if so, would she be able to prevent the murders? Today, this time through, Buffy had no idea what she was dealing with. If the vampires got the drop on her--

Faith twirled the stake in her hand, playing with it like Buffy had with the chopsticks, way back when. Precision timing. Perfect balance. Like a superhero.

Faith was right--there was nothing Tru could do now except get in the way. She wasn't wanted, wasn't needed; she was only human, after all.

If there was one thing that Davis had convinced her of, it was that there was a reason for the forces that controlled her life.

So why was she there?

Buffy ran, blinded by tears, not caring for a second where she was headed. The city was full of hills and curving streets to fit it between the mountains and the ocean. But geography was the last thing on Buffy's mind. Even if she had been paying attention, she would have soon been lost.

She was thinking about the day Faith came back.

She'd known that Willow had gone to get her, of course, and on an intellectual level she knew what that would mean--forgiving if not forgetting--but she wasn't prepared for the way Faith casually walked back into her life. Within a minute of her showing up in that graveyard, Faith had Buffy questioning everything about her relationship with Spike--because really, at that point, she had no hold on what was evil and what was good.

And there was still something there, something that the years and the interim boyfriends couldn't erase. When Faith had shown up in Vancouver, or so Buffy thought, she was sure it was because they were finally ready. No more defensiveness. No more mixed signals.

Now all that was ruined.

She heard the scream and felt the tingle of her vamp-alarm at the same time. She looked up and saw that she was walking beside a stone wall, and dollars to donuts there was a cemetery on the other side. This was the last thing she needed right now, but no matter how much she'd promised everyone--including herself--that she was retired now, she couldn't ignore her calling. With a quick glance to see if anyone was watching, she made a standing jump to the top of the wall and dropped down inside the graveyard.

She knew from the sound of laughter around her that she'd made a big mistake. She turned around slowly, already mentally kicking herself for not looking before she leapt. She was surrounded by the biggest nest of vampires she'd ever seen, thirty at least. One of them held a woman's arm as she struggled, but she hadn't been drained yet. Buffy reached for the stake she always kept in her jacket pocket.

And remembered that she'd run off without her jacket.

Oh shit.

"Hey, guys," she said, glancing around for a convenient tree branch and seeing only hedges. "You know eating this late gives you a tummy ache, don't you?"

"Y'know, B, your quips have been going downhill ever since that marzipan thing."

Buffy looked up sharply. Faith was standing on the wall above her, stakes in hand. She was annoyed, but more than anything, relieved. At least Faith hadn't run straight back to Robin and Cleveland, as she'd half-expected. "Where did you hear about that?"

"Dawnie couldn't wait to tell me all the good stories. Here." Faith dropped a stake, and Buffy caught it, turning back to the vampires.

"You take the right half, I'll take the left half," she said. "On three. One...two..."

Faith jumped into the midst of the vampires and dusted two in quick succession, before they even knew what she was doing.

Buffy rolled her eyes. "Three." She stepped forward to meet the charge of bloodthirsty demons.

"I'd just like to remind you that you're not the big-ass general anymore," Faith said, sending a vamp flying with a roundhouse kick.

"Oh, so sorry for trying to keep us alive with a little planning," Buffy shot back, backhanding the fanged face in front of her and spinning a kick at the one she could sense coming at her from the side. "And my ass was never big."

Faith staked her vampire and turned around. "Running alone into a graveyard after some supernatural chick tells you your number is up, is that part of the plan, then?"

"Faith, watch out!" Buffy threw a stake straight at Faith's heart. She ducked, and it impaled the vampire that had been about to grab her from behind. "Where the hell is she, anyway? Did you outrun her getting here?"

"Nah." Faith stuck an elbow in the gut of a second vamp charging her from behind, then rammed a palm into his nose. "She's fast. But she had to make a call."

Buffy flipped away from two vampires, then shoved one into the other so that they both went tumbling. She staked them both before they could scramble to their feet. "Make a call?" she yelled, blocking a punch and catching a kick aimed at her ribs. "My life is in danger and the person who claims she's trying to save me stops to make a call?"

"You believe that stuff?" Faith asked, sticking a foot out to trip a vampire, slamming her stake through its back, and then tossing Buffy another stake. "The day-rewind shit?"

Buffy didn't answer, just beat harder on the vampire in front of her until she found an opening to dust him.

"For serious, B, you didn't know she wasn't me?"

Buffy grabbed a vampire in a choke hold, holding him back as he struggled. "Well, I admit my first thought wasn't 'Gee, I wonder if she's a time-travelling duplicate of the person I know?'"

Faith strode forward and staked the vamp she was restraining. The dust settled between them. "So what are you saying? That was for real?"

Buffy shrugged. She had suspected that the imposter wasn't Faith, but she hadn't wanted to believe it. This was her chance--her last chance, maybe, even though it seemed like the world didn't mind throwing do-overs to her and Faith with a certain regularity. "I--"

A vampire crept up behind Faith and she yanked his arm and threw him away without looking. "Do you fucking mind?" she asked. "I'm having a conversation here."

"Uh, Faith?"

"What?"

"Listen, I do want to have this talk. Eventually. But, for right now..."

"Yeah?"

"Well, we are still surrounded."

Faith glanced around at the upwards of twenty vampires that encircled them. "No wonder there were nine people who bought it yesterday. Or today. Whatever. Fuck, enough of them, aren't there?"

"Nine people died?" Buffy asked, lunging at the nearest vamp and using him as a shield against the attack of another. She and Faith were fighting defensively now, with none of the wild moves from earlier. Slayer or no, this was getting a bit ridiculous. She was breathing hard, and there was a stitch growing in her side. "And I thought it was just me."

"That's your problem, B, you always think it was just you." Faith killed a vamp with a thrown stake and pulled another out of the back of her waistband. "This's my last one," she muttered. "Try not to let yours get dusted."

"Makes me wonder what happened the last time I did this," Buffy said. "How many did I get?" And what happened with that girl Tru? What made her decide to get up close and personal this time around? Did Buffy--the yesterday Buffy--come on to her? And if so, was it because she looked like Faith? Buffy tried to figure out what her own motivations were, had been, might have been (stupid time travel grammar), and realized she didn't know. There was just no way to tell, when she couldn't remember anything about meeting Tru the first time.

The vampires were coming quicker now, and their blows were getting through her guard more easily. They just refused to stay down. Maybe today was going to end pretty much like yesterday had, after all. Except worse, since Faith would be dying with her this time. So much for Tru saving her.

"Buffy!"

Buffy jerked around. Tru was running around the headstones, heading for them, looking more like Faith than ever--still wearing leathers and a wifebeater. Faith was right--she was fast. And she was carrying something--

It was the Scythe.

Part 16

Buffy shoved her way through the crowd of vampires to reach Tru before they could.

Tru sprinted up to her, clutching the Scythe. "Here. I called your friend Willow...she said this would help."

"Thanks." Buffy paused for a moment, feeling a strange disconnection. Tru, not Faith. She's not Faith. She wanted to look closer, to see if there was something there, something deeper-- those kisses had been amazing, but they were also a lie. Buffy shook her head. There was no time for this-- no pun intended. "You're a live-saver, Tru."

Tru smiled and handed her the weapon.

Power flowed through Buffy the instant her hands closed around the shaft of the Scythe. Buffy could feel herself growing stronger, her injuries vanishing. She looked at the nearest vampire and smiled sweetly. His yellow eyes widened as she took a step forward, apparently sensing the immense energy that radiated from the instrument in her hands.

He turned to run, and it was the last step he ever took.

Fighting with the Scythe was a blur of joyfulness. Everything that was right about being a Slayer was embodied in it, from the razor-sharp axe blade to the sturdy stake hafted at its opposite end. Buffy mowed down the vampires that stood between her and Faith, whirling with incredible lightness and precision.

This was what it was to be a hero.

Faith faltered, her blocks and kicks coming slower. There were still too many vampires between them. Buffy called, "Faith!" and tossed the Scythe to her. Letting go of it was like losing a part of herself.

Faith reached up over the mass of vampires attacking her and caught it. Buffy saw the look of exultation on her face as she claimed it, and the wolfish grin she turned on her enemies when it was safely within her grasp.

Buffy would never tire of watching Faith fight. With the Scythe in her hands, she became a force, unstoppable and lovely. She smiled, and Buffy knew she was feeling that sense of belonging, of acceptance.

Buffy staked another vampire that tried to run; she stayed near Tru to keep her safe; she helped the vampires' victim to her feet; but mostly she watched Faith. Tru reassured the woman, who only had a trickle of blood on her neck to show for being the captive of the nest--damn lucky, Buffy thought--and finally the woman gave them one last horrified, disbelieving look and ran for the cemetery's gates. Buffy knew the type. By tomorrow, she would have convinced herself that she'd gotten ahold of some bad liquor, and it was all a dream. Again, lucky.

Buffy smiled at Faith's gymnastics, running up the wall and spinning over a vamp's head only to pin it with a casual backhand stab of the Scythe's handle, while simultaneously beheading another two with the blade. The huge nest was reduced to three stragglers too stupid to stop fighting, and Faith was having fun toying with them.

"You talked about her a lot today. I mean, the first today."

Buffy turned to Tru. She was still watching Faith fight. Buffy thought of the Buffybot and realized how much weirder it must be to know your double was real, not built. Remembering the Bot still left a bad taste in her mouth. It hadn't been quite self-aware, but enough that interacting with it was just...wrong. And what it had been built for--even worse.

"I was alone for a long time," she said. "Even when we were enemies, Faith understood that. Understood me. It's hard to let go of our connection."

Tru nodded. "Buffy...I wanted to tell you I'm sorry."

Buffy crossed her arms and ducked her head. She didn't want to delve too deeply into this, but she couldn't just leave it hanging. For their sakes, and for Faith. "When you and I met...I don't remember, but...I must have done something, for you to, uh, want--that." She met Tru's eyes. "Today, I thought you were her. It wasn't me and you. I'm sorry for that. You were the one who got used."

"Because I tricked you." Tru shrugged. "I knew what would happen...or, I guessed. And I knew it was wrong. You want her. You always have."

Buffy looked at Faith, battling the last vampire, and smiled. "How do you know that?"

"You told me." Tru gave Faith's trademark leer, but Buffy only shook her head ruefully. Not the same. Never the same.

"Have you ever done this before?" she asked. "I mean, with a girl?"

"Nope."

"Me neither." Buffy smiled slightly. "You were my first."

"Faith was your first."

Buffy nodded, accepting that. "Do you think she'll want to go back to Cleveland?"

"What, choose you over some principal guy?" Tru asked, trying and failing to hide her smirk.

Buffy's face warmed. "Oh, my God. What did I say about him?"

"I'm too polite to listen when people start muttering under their breaths," Tru said, laughing. "Buffy...maybe I'm biased...but I can't imagine her settling for anyone when she can have you."

Buffy blushed harder. "I, uh..."

"She's a sweet-talker. I like that." Faith sauntered over and draped one hand around Buffy's shoulders, still holding the Scythe in the other hand. She wasn't even breathing hard after her fight. "Ta-da, by the way," she added. "The night is once again safe for really dumb pedestrians."

Buffy snuggled into the warmth of Faith's side and smiled apologetically at Tru. "So, Tru Davies," she said. "You saved my life after all."

"She saved a hell of a lot more than that, and you know it," Faith said. "What, you think just 'cause I was busy killing vamps I wasn't listening?" She grinned at Tru. "Super-hearing. One of the many benefits to the superhero gig. That and being one hot chick...but I guess you figured that one out on your own."

"Faith," Buffy warned, "stop ogling your doppelganger."

"What? She's hot. You noticed." Faith winked at Tru. "Love the pants, by the way."

Buffy rolled her eyes. "Don't tell her where you got them or we'll never make it out of Vancouver."

"Aren't you staying for the rest of your vacation?" Tru asked.

Buffy paused. She'd come on vacation...and it seemed very long ago, whether there had been two todays or not...because she was lonely, more than anything. And now she had Faith.

At last.

"No," she said, sounding almost surprised. "I want to go back to work. I want a hellmouth and vamps to slay every night. God, am I crazy?"

"Nah, B. Just a Slayer--one among many." Faith paused. "Think Willow will magic us back?"

"Um..." Tru said. "I think you'd better not call Willow, Faith..."

Buffy's eyes widened. "Willow doesn't know? About you?"

Tru gave an innocent shrug. "She thinks Faith has suffered brain damage or a split personality, she's not sure which. She keeps talking about too many comas..."

Buffy laughed out loud this time. "I'll phone her. And I'll tell her--" She paused and smiled at Faith. "I'll ask her to bring us home."

Part 17

Tru was herself once again, dressed in low-cut jeans and a silky blouse. She'd put the leather pants away deep in the back of her closet, knowing even as she did so that the day would come when she would find someone she wanted to wear them for. Until then, she'd hide them, and that part of herself. Today, a new day at last, she was Tru Davies, potential med student and some-time saviour, and for now that was enough.

She pushed open the door of the diner, not surprised to see Harrison and Lindsey sharing a bench at their usual booth. Harrison was stretched out as much as possible, legs in the aisle, one arm slung around Lindsey. She was sitting primly beside him, ankles crossed, holding a mug of coffee. Harri whispered in her ear and she smiled at him, relaxing a bit into his arm.

Tru slipped into the booth across from them. "Do I even need to ask?" she said, signalling the waitress to bring her coffee.

"All is right with the world," Harri answered easily, grinning lazily at Lindsey. "I guess you figure we have you to thank for that, sis. Trying so hard to get us back together yesterday." He raised an eyebrow at her, a sign that once Lindsey was gone, he'd be asking about the rewind.

"Well, a little appreciation never goes wrong," Tru said. She returned his silent question with a superior look of her own. One that said there was no way in hell he was dragging this story out of her. For one, he wouldn't believe her. He was still mostly in denial about her powers. To start talking about for-real vampires and the Slayers who fought them would only earn her an incredulous laugh and a lot of mockery. For two...well, for two, if Harri knew everything there was to know about this particular do-over day, then he'd probably never take her seriously again. He'd be too busy imagining her with a bed full of strippers.

Not that she didn't suspect that was the way he usually thought about her. But there was no need to fuel the fire.

Lindsey finished her coffee and set it down. "So, when are you going to dish? Who'd you go out with last night that was such a secret?"

Harri's eyes widened. "You went out with her?"

"Her?" Lindsey echoed. "You dressed up like that for a her?"

Tru sighed. This was all her fault, of course. She'd told Harri over the phone yesterday that a girl was going to hit on her. And even though she'd told Lindsey that the person she was meeting was no one special, she knew that "best-friend intuition" could detect a lie like that a mile away.

Harrison twisted to look at Lindsey. "There was dressing up? How exactly are we talking? French maid, or warrior princess...?"

Lindsey rolled her eyes and shoved Harrison. "You are such a pervert."

"What? Just because I like to hear detailed stories?" Harri tried his best innocent look. Lindsey made a disgusted noise. "Oh, come on. Like you aren't curious where she went."

They both stared at her.

Tru's phone started ringing. "Oops. Gotta take this," she said, and flipped open her phone, covering her other ear. "Hello?"

"Tru. I thought--I don't know what I thought. Where were you last night?"

Tru groaned silently. Just to make her morning complete. "I'm so sorry, Davis. I went to a costume party last night and I completely forgot about work."

"A costume party?" Davis asked, sounding scandalized by the very idea that a party might be more important than a night shift at the morgue.

"Yes, Davis," Tru said slowly, hoping he'd get it. "A costume party."

"Oh. Oh. Well then. I guess, uh, you'll tell me about it when you come in tonight."

"Sure." Tru sighed. Not likely. Sorry, Davis. "Was it busy last night?"

"Nope. It was--it was dead around here. Get it...?"

"Yes." She wondered how long he'd been saving that joke. "Thanks, Davis."

"I guess we have you to thank for that. And this, uh, party."

"I do what I can." Tru hung up slowly. She didn't really want to get into this with Harri and Lindsey. She wasn't ready to think about it too hard inside her own head, let alone to start making public declarations. The fact was, she'd fallen for Buffy. Even knowing all the things that stood between them, she'd fallen.

What did that mean for her--and for Luc, if they ever decided to give each other a second chance?

If she'd learned anything from Buffy, it was that second chances were worthwhile. It was hard to imagine that it had taken her and Faith five years to take advantage of the feelings they both said had been there from the start.

Harri was still trying to break through her silence with his 'oh my God my sister's a freak' stare. Tru had been on the receiving end of that stare for too many years for it to make much of an impression on her. Lindsey, though, was looking speculative--like she knew something Tru didn't.

"Candace!" she said at last.

"What?" Tru asked, bewildered.

"Candace, the bitch from highschool, Candace?" Harri asked. "No way."

"I always thought there was something going on between you two...all those basketball practices without the rest of the team." Lindsey nodded to herself, as if it was all falling into place.

"It wasn't Candace," Tru said.

"Mmm-hmm." Lindsey stood up. "I have to go to work. Don't worry, Tru, it's not a big deal." She whacked the back of Harrison's head to shut his mouth. "You see? Best friends. We know this stuff."

Harrison rubbed his head as Lindsey left the diner. "I thought you already saved her once. Talk about selfish if she made the day rewind again. And were you and her really-- "

"God, Harrison, it wasn't Candace." Tru stood up. "It was a total stranger, and yes, I saved her life, and no, I am not romantically involved with her."

"Okay...jeez. Sorry. I wasn't going to freak out on you, you know."

Tru sighed. "I know. I gotta go."

"Where?"

"Running."

Tru headed for Stanley Park at a steady jog. Lindsey and Harrison acted like they were just waiting for her to come out to them. And Candace...well, they'd never done anything, but back when they were friends Tru thought she wouldn't have refused...

If Buffy hadn't gone back to L.A. with Faith...if she'd chosen Tru instead?

She would have gone with it. No question.

And Luc--if one day, they met in the hall at work, and she apologised to him for always running off, and he said they should try again?

Well, she would go with that too. She wanted that.

Tru sprinted the last few yards to the sea wall where she'd stood with Buffy on two very different yesterdays. The sun was warm on her back as she looked out at the ocean. So much had changed since then. Her first kiss with a girl. The realization that it was good, that she wanted it so badly--as much as she'd ever wanted a guy.

Tru turned away from the ocean and ran back towards the edge of the park. She couldn't forget her yesterdays; they were what made her who she was. But for now--

It was finally a true tomorrow.

Tru would never be the same again.