

Electra – Touch The Sun

Pairing: Buffy/Faith, with *mention* of Buffy/Angel, Buffy/Riley

Summary: When the bond between the Slayers starts to grow into something more, the Buffy and Faith struggle to deal with their changing relationship while trying to keep up appearances and make everyone else happy. Faith's POV. Angst.

Timeline: Season 3 AU. Faith comes to Sunnydale but never goes bad. Angel comes back just like before, but a little bit later than he did in the series. Will work through at least two Seasons.

Rating: NC-17

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Distribution: Just ask. :)

"I know someday you'll have a beautiful life

I know you'll be a star, In somebody else's sky,

But why can't it be in mine?" -- Pearl Jam, "Black"

Chapter One - The Slayer Bond

If you asked me back then what it all meant, I wouldn't have been able to tell ya. But I could've told you exactly how and when it all started.

So here goes nothin'.

I had been in Sunnydale for about a month or two. It wasn't really 'home', but it was the only place that had come close to it in a while.

I was really excited when I had first arrived cos I knew that I was gonna meet this 'one girl in all the world' who was exactly like me. However, much to my disappointment, I found that the only thing we shared in common was the unique ability to kick major ass and a weird Slayer bond.

Actually, the Slayer bond wasn't so much weird as . . . comforting. We had discovered that we were both feelin' it while we were patrolling together one night. It was a warm tingle that ran from the top of my head down to the tips of my boot-clad toes. When we weren't around each other, I didn't feel it. When we were in the same area, it would gently start up, just givin' me the slightest indication that she was around. A 'biological honing device', we called it.

But when we were standing right next to each other or if we accidentally touched during patrol, the Slayer bond was off the hook! Warm-fuzzies turned into something much more intense. The 'inner poet' in me wants to say something like 'liquid-fire' or 'electric current' running through my veins, but both you and I know I'm not a poet, so I'll just say that it was

wicked hot.

Sorry. Got a little off topic there. I've been told that I don't have the biggest attention span, so you'll have to put up with my ramblin' every now and then.

Anyhow, so I had been in SunnyD for about a month. B and I would do our nightly patrol, y'know, makin' small talk and kickin' un-dead ass when the need be. I wouldn't say that we were close, but . . . that Slayer bond did make us feel kinda attached to one another. Y'know: the comfort factor.

So, this one night, I could tell that things were kinda off with her. She was unreasonably quiet, her reaction times were hella slow, and it seemed like her mind was off somewhere on another planet. And I couldn't be sure, but it looked like she had been crying.

I later found out that she was all upset cos Angel had come back and things were really weird for them or something, but I'll get to that part later.

Part of me wanted to ask her what was wrong, but it really wasn't any of my business. She had Red to do the 'friend' thing for her. Besides, I know that when I cry, I *definitely* don't like people gettin' up in my face and askin' me what's wrong and all that shit.

I know what you're thinkin', and yes, I do cry. I just don't do it too often, and when I do, I don't let NO ONE know about it. Cos, y'know, once you let down your walls, you leave yourself open for attack.

B once told me that the 'lettin' down my walls' thing was my inner-Slayer talkin', but I think she's wrong. It's not the Slayer that's tells me how to feel and how to protect myself from the non-physical type of hurt; it's the human in me that does that. The only thing I let the Slayer inside tell me is 'go kick that' or 'go punch that' or even 'look down that dark alley'. The Slayer doesn't rule my life; I do. *I'm* the boss of me.

So anyways, we were walkin' through this one cemetery, not really talkin' or sayin' much to one another, when all of the sudden this vamp came barreling out of nowhere and completely knocked B off of her feet. She just kinda lay still where she fell, so I was thinkin' right away that she was hurt pretty bad.

I let my inner-Slayer take control at that point. I went after the vamp, pourin' all of my hate and anger into him for injuring my sister-Slayer. No vamp was gonna hurt one of us and live to tell the tale. Not now, not ever.

After a short and rough fight, the vamp was dust and I instantly found myself kneelin' at B's side, frantically checkin' her over.

"B? Buffy? Are you okay?"

My frantic search for injuries over her body stopped when I gazed upon her face and saw tears streaming down her cheeks. She wasn't injured . . . but she was hurting. I didn't really know what to do. I'm not really good with words, and I definitely didn't think that it was 'sexual healing' that she needed, so I offered her that only other thing I had to offer: the comfort of the Slayer bond.

I grabbed one of her hands and pulled her up into a semi-sitting position, cradling her against my body. She must've realized that I wasn't gonna judge her and that I wasn't even gonna ask her what was wrong, cos she suddenly buried her face in my chest and began sobbing in my arms, completely lettin' go of her pent up emotions.

I didn't say anything. I just held her against me and rocked slightly, occasionally smoothing my hand down the back of her hair.

I think that part of me was expectin' her to push me away. So, I guess you can imagine my surprise when an hour had passed and we were still sittin' like that. She had stopped cryin' about five minutes after I had taken in my arms, but she made no effort to move, so neither did I.

Sure, my legs had fallen asleep, my butt was sore from sittin' on the hard ground, I was mad hungry, and I had to piss like a fuckin racehorse, but I wasn't gonna interrupt our little bonding session. Besides the occasional post-slayage screw with some random joe, it was the first physical human contact that I'd had in a long time.

It was comforting.

After about an hour, I finally felt her start to move a little in my arms.

I heard her sniffle a few times before she finally looked up, paralyzing me with her emerald-green eyes still wet with her unshed tears.

"Thanks." She said quietly as she looked into my eyes. It looked like she wanted to say something more or like she was waiting for me to do or say something, so I did.

"Anytime." I said gently, looking her directly in the eye so that she knew I was being honest with her.

I couldn't explain it then, but sittin' there and lookin' at her after our hour spent together, I felt bizarrely closer to her. I knew that if she ever needed a shoulder to cry on again, I would definitely be there for her.

Actually, I think it was more for selfish reasons that I knew that I'd be there for her. It was simple really: I didn't want anyone else to get as close to her as I had just been. It felt special, and I wanted it to be just for her and me.

After another moment or two had passed, we had both stood up and began walking' out of the cemetery. Patrol was over for the night, but I wasn't ready to let her out of my sight just yet. Not when she was leavin' herself open to attack like earlier. So, I didn't ask her, but I walked her all the way to her house nonetheless. She didn't question, so she must've understood my intentions.

Either we didn't notice or we didn't care, but somehow during the walk our hands had interlaced, and we walked like that all the way to her house.

When we finally got to her destination, I stood at the bottom of the porch stairs and watched

her walk up towards the door. She stood before the door for a few moments, completely still. I couldn't tell what was goin' on cos her back was turned towards me, so I just kept waitin' for her to go inside.

But she didn't go inside. Not right away, anyways.

Instead, she turned around slowly and walked down the stairs to stand next to me. I certainly wasn't expectin' it, but I suddenly felt her arms around me in a tight hug.

I'm not gonna lie: it felt damn good. I could feel her heart beatin' against my chest, and the warm-fuzzies of the Slayer bond were about 10 times stronger like this. It all felt kinda surreal.

Halfway into the hug, I realize that I hadn't yet responded, so I carefully raised up my arms and wrapped them around B's back, holding her protectively against me.

I felt it then for the first time . . . something tuggin' at my heartstrings. But I completely dismissed it, attributing the all-too-new feelin' in my heart to the Slayer bond.

I don't know exactly how long we stood like that but it had to have been quite a while, cos I watched the same strange-shaped cloud travel all the way across the night sky. When I finally felt B stir a little, I realized that our 'moment' was over, so I slowly loosened my grip around her and dropped my arms to my side.

I felt her take a step back, but she still didn't say a word. She just looked up into my eyes and gave me one of the warmest smiles I've ever seen. She took my hand and gave it a little squeeze before retreatin' up the porch stairs and into the house.

A few minutes passed and I found that I was still standin' in the exact spot where she had left me. I felt cold without her next to me. My heart ached a little bit, which I found kinda unusual.

Then, something hit me like a brick. It wasn't the Slayer bond that I was missing . . . it was the Slayer herself. I realized it then and there that I had some kind of feelings for the small blonde . . . maybe like, maybe lust, and yes, maybe even love.

But I would never admit it. In my life, I had learned that love was a weakness, and as a Slayer, I learned that a weakness could get you hurt or killed.

So I bottled up my feelings. I'd be there again if B needed me. I'd never take that away from her, and I wouldn't take it away from myself either. Sometimes a person needs a little human contact or human touch just to get through the day. But I'd never let her know how I felt.

I'd never let my walls down. I'd never let myself get hurt.

The next night, it was bout 9:00, and I was set to meet B for patrol at about 9:30. Normally, we'd just meet up at the first cemetery, but I was still worried about her. What if she was still unfocused and a vamp got to her before she got to the cemetery? I couldn't let that happen, so I left my motel room early and walked to her house, deciding to be her 'personal escort' for the night.

Before I had even walked up the cement walkway leading to her house, I started to feel the warm buzz in my body, indicating that she was close. As I approached her front porch, I glanced up at her bedroom window and saw that the light was still on. Realizing that it would probably be a few minutes before she left to meet me, I decided to cop a squat on the porch steps and wait for her.

She must've felt my presence too, cos I suddenly heard her bedroom window open and her voice calling out into the darkness of the night.

"Faith?"

I couldn't help the smile that crept up on my face.

I stood up from my place on the steps and walked to the base of the tree that was in front of her window.

"Yeah, it's me, B."

She paused.

"What are you doing here?" She didn't sound mad or anything, just generally confused.

"I was in the neighborhood. Thought we could walk together rather than meet up later." I didn't want her to think that I was worryin' about her. I wanted her to think that last night wasn't a big deal so that she wouldn't be afraid to do it again.

"Uh-huh." She said disbelievingly, a small smile playing across her lips.

I smiled back.

"So, are ya comin' down already, or are ya gonna make me wait out here alone all night long?" I asked playfully, earnin' another smile from her.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, keep your pants on. I'll be down in a second." She replied back just as playfully, closing the window after she spoke.

I made my way back over to the porch steps and sat down again.

Keep my pants on? Hmphh. Guess I'll have to put that whole 'sexual healing' thing on the back burner for now. I keep forgettin' that B's straighter than an arrow, and I keep forgettin' that I'm not s'posed to like her like that anyway.

I'll just have to settle for the warm fuzzies. On her terms, of course.

After a few minutes passed, I heard the door open behind me. I turned around to see Buffy standin' there, lookin' all cute in her low-rise blue jeans and dark gray sweater, her hair swept up into a loose clip so that some of it fell around her face . . .

Sorry, gettin' off topic once again.

Anyways, she looked cute. I stood up and faced her, suddenly feelin' kind of awkward. I think she must've felt it too, cos she dropped her head down and started staring at her feet.

"Umm, you ready to get this slayin' party on, B?" I asked, just wantin' to break the silence.

"Sure." She answered quietly, and we began to walk in the direction of the first cemetery of the night.

I couldn't help but think, 'Oh joy, another pa infully silent patrol', but then I remembered that yesterday's patrol started the same way, and it ended up bein' a pretty good night for me.

As we turned the street corner, I felt her hand brush up against mine. I shivered a little at the sensation, but I realized that it probably happened cos I was walkin' too close to her. I went to take a step away but before I could, I felt her hand sneak into mine. I'm not one to kick a gift-horse in the mouth, so I wrapped my hand around hers, relishing in the feel of the warm fuzzies of our Slayer bond.

We spent the rest of the night like that, hand in hand as we patrolled across the cemeteries of Sunnydale. Of course, we'd let go whenever we had to fight, but as soon as the fight was over, our hands instinctively latched onto one another again.

And it was nice. It felt safe.

After we had finished our sweep of the last cemetery, we began to make our way back to B's house. Along the way, we passed this big, run-down mansion. She stopped and glanced at it with a far-off look, and she actually took a step forward towards it. Only when she realized that she was still attached to my hand did she come back to reality.

"Sorry." She said, startin' to walk with me again.

"No problem." I responded. Then I noticed that she looked lost again like she had the night before. It had somethin' to do with the mansion. So, I casually brought it up.

"You know that place?" I asked, noddin' over my shoulder in the direction of the mansion.

"Yeah." She answered quietly, not lookin' back at it.

"Is that what made you sad all of the sudden?" I asked, not knowin' why I was diggin' into her problems.

She nodded her head a little, but looked like she was deep in thought. I wasn't gonna press it any further, so I just kept walkin' in silerxe.

A few minutes passed before I heard B speak again.

"Giles told you about Angel, right?" She asked quietly.

Shit. So that's what she's been sad about. G-man told me that before I moved here, B had to kill the love of her live to save the world. He told me about Angel, the vampire with a soul.

He also told me that he had tried to kill all of her friends after a night of bliss.

"Yeah, a little." I answered flatly. Didn't want her to think I knew too much. The something dawned on me. "Ohhh. That was his mansion, right?" I asked.

She took a deep breath, and I could hear it shake as it escaped her lips.

"No, it *wasn't* his mansion, it *is* his mansion."

'As in *now*?' I thought.

"As in *now*?" I asked, surprised.

She stopped walkin' and turned to face me, so I mirrored her actions. She looked up at me with tears in her eyes again, and my heart just about broke for her.

"As in now." She said quietly. "Angel's back." She managed to squeak out before beginning to sob again. I didn't have to pull her to me this time. She just came flying into my arms, wrapping her arms tightly around me. I wrapped my arms around her in return, holding her tightly as if tryin' to stop her sobs from shakin' her body so roughly.

"I killed him . . . but he came back, I don't know how . . . I think he was in hell or something . . . he was acting like an animal when I first found him, and I didn't know what to do . . . I couldn't tell my friends, they'd want to kill him, and I couldn't let them do that . . . and now he's better, but I still don't know what to do . . . I love him so much, but too much has happened . . . we can never be together . . . I hate lying to my friends . . . and it all just hurts so bad." She choked out between sobs.

Again, I just listened. What was I supposed to say? She needed to unload, and I was gonna be there for her, just like I told myself I would be.

I walked us backwards into a little wooded area nearby and sat us down so that my back was restin' against a big tree. Again, I held her close to me, heart to heart this time. I whispered soft 'shhhs' to her and ran my hands up and down her back until I felt her calm down. I was hoping that the feelin' from the Slayer bond would work its magic on her cos she definitely needed a little break from all of her pain.

Again, we sat there for over an hour. But it wasn't her who broke our moment this time, it was me.

"B?" I asked. "Are ya feelin' any better?"

After a brief pause, she looked up at me and stared me straight in the eyes, a small smile gracing her face.

"Yeah. I really am." She said softly, laying her head back on my chest. My body hummed at the contact, and I wasn't about to complain that my butt was asleep and that the dampness from the grass had seeped into the length of my jeans. I had B and I had warm fuzzies . . . what more could I ask for?

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In a repeat of the night before, we finally got up and I walked her back to her house. She hugged me at the door again before disappearing inside her house.

I stood there grinnin' like an idiot before I finally started to make my way back to the motel. I felt somethin' strange as I was walkin' away, so I turned around to see what it was. When I glanced up towards B's bedroom, I saw her starin' down at me. She smiled when I made eye contact with her and gave me a tiny wave. I smiled and waved back, then continued walking backward down the street until she finally faded out of view.

And that, my friends, is how the whole thing started.

What 'thing' you ask? Well, I'm gettin' to that. The story is far from over. We haven't even got to the good stuff yet.

But it all started with two Slayers and a special bond that brought them closer to one another than either one of them could have imagined.

Neither one of us knew what lay ahead in our future, but now we knew that at least we had one another to fall back on, whether for comfort or . . . something more.

Chapter Two - The First of Many Bumps

Okay. So things were pretty cool for a few days after our first 'bonding' sessions. Almost every night on patrol, we walked hand in hand, enjoyin' each others' company in a comfortable silence. It was 'Slayer time', and it was just for us.

And I was lovin' it.

But drawin' from my own past experiences, I knew that things could never stay good for too long before somethin' would come along and fuck it up.

Enter Gwendolyn Post.

Man, sometimes I really hate bein' right.

I guess I can't be too bitter cos things worked themselves out in the end, but still . . . it was the first bump in the road that B and I had since we had gotten closer.

So anyways, here's what happened.

G-man had been actin' as Watcher for me and B for a while at that point. On one particular night he was out on patrol with us, not really payin' attention to what we were doin'. He'd look up from his book every now and then, but he knew we had it under control.

After taking out a pretty big group of vamps, I grabbed B's hand like it wasn't a big deal. She tensed at first but after realizing that G-man wasn't lookin', she relaxed and held onto my hand tight, giving me a wink and a little smile.

Yeah. My heart kinda stopped beatin' for a second when I saw it.

But like I said before, I wasn't gonna let my feelings get the best of me, so I gave myself a little punch in the chest to give my heart a jolt. B gave me a weird look, but before she could ask what I was doin', we were jarred apart by the sound of a voice behind us.

It was Gwendolyn Post, comin' all the way to SunnyD to tell me she was my new boss. I mighta been nice to her if she hadn't started to point out flaws in our fightin'.

Whatever. I coulda kicked her ass while blindfolded and with my hands tied behind my back any day of the week. Right away, I didn't like the bitch. Still, I decided to give her a chance.

Okay, it was more like a half-chance, but still, it was somethin'.

After a short meeting in the library, we found out that there was some demon after the Glove of Myhnegon. When G-man and Mrs. Post got into the business talk, I kinda zoned out, but I got the gist of the conversation: the glove was bad, and it couldn't end up in the wrong hands.

I casually looked over at B to see if she was payin' attention. Right away, I could tell that she was kinda distant again, starin' off into space with a sad look on her face. I wanted to help her, but I don't think the sight of two Slayers 'cuddling' would go unnoticed.

I mean, I wouldn't have minded, but she probably woulda freaked.

So, fast-forward a little.

It was later that night and B didn't show up for patrol, so I headed for the Bronze after a quick sweep of the cemeteries. I grabbed a drink and went to sit down, and that was when I saw Xander playin' pool across the room. He looked wicked pissed. I almost didn't wanna go over . . . figured that it really wasn't a sitch that I wanted to get involved with. But still . . . it was B's friend, so over I went.

He ranted for a minute or two before finally tellin' me that Angel was back, which I already knew, but I still pretended to be shocked.

Then he told me that Angel had the Glove of Myhnegon, and that he saw him kissin' B.

Exit the fake shock. Cue the real stuff.

I didn't know which part of what he told me was gettin' to me more: the part where Angel, the guy who she said was actin' like a monster, had the glove, or the part where he was kissing B.

Not that she was mine or anything, but still . . . it kinda stung.

So Xander and I made a decision. Angel was a threat, and that threat needed to be investigated, possibly eliminated. With that in mind, we took off towards the old mansion.

When we got there Angel was in game face and was fightin' Mrs. Post. Right away I assumed the worst, and I decided that Angel had to be eliminated.

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I didn't think that it would be a hard fight. He was just another vamp as far as I was concerned.

Vampire. Slayer. Dead Vampire.

But then B jumped in, and things got ugly.

Real ugly.

I had B in my face tellin' me not to stake Angel. Then I had Mrs. Post behind me tellin' me that B was 'blinded by love' and that I needed to kill him, Xander next to me egging me on, and the Slayer in me wanted to dust him real bad. My human side was tellin' me to listen to B and take a minute to think . . . but my inner Slayer won out.

Angel was gonna die.

But B wouldn't let that happen. Not to 'the love of her life' or 'soul mate' or whatever other bullshit she thought he was to her.

She caught me by surprise when she threw the first punch and it caught on my left cheek. To tell ya the truth, I really wasn't expectin' her to actually thrown down with me. I shook off the aftereffects of the punch and just stared at her, a look of disbelief on my face. She gave me a pleading look, and I could tell that she didn't wanna fight me over this.

But how could I let Angel live? My Watcher was layin' on the floor bleeding and tellin' me to kill him and get the glove, Xander was tellin me to kill him and get the glove, and most importantly, my gut was tellin' me to kill him and get the glove.

So we fought. Hard.

Neither of us realized that Mrs. Post was up and back in action 'til we saw the glove on her hand and she was tryin' to zap us. And just like that, we were back to fightin side by side.

So, to make a long story short, Mrs. Post was an evil insane bitch and we took her outta the game fast and hard I didn't wanna stick around to see B go and coddle her vampire after all was said and done, so I high-tailed it outta there without sayin' anything to anyone.

I was fuming on the way back to the motel. I felt mad and betrayed, but most of all, I felt alone. I coulda been mad that she was kissin' the guy, but that wasn't it. I think I was madder at the fact that after several nights of sharin' the slayer bond and gettin' close, she still chose to defend Angel and kick my ass in the process; she didn't even take a sec to look at it from my point of view.

I mean, I knew that B didn't owe me shit. I helped her out through a few rough nights, but so what? I didn't do that to score points with her; I did it because I wanted to be her friend. It was that very thought that made me forget my anger and decide to just let the whole thing go.

I was tryin' to be her *friend*.

So fast-forward again to the next day.

I'm sittin' in my motel lettin' the Slayer-healing take its course. I woulda ventured out to get somethin' to eat or drink, but I looked like a big bruised freak.

Now, I don't wanna sound like a baby or nothin' . . . but B hits like a fuckin' tank. I'm not gonna deny the stars I saw when she belted me. The left side of my face was all swollen and bruised, a small memento of her killer right hook. She definitely has a lot of power for bein' such a small girl.

Anyways, I'm sittin' on my bed, watchin' TV and just relaxin', when there was a knock on my door. I knew exactly who it was cos I felt the slow tingle coursing through my body. After a minute, I yelled for her to come in.

She slowly walked in and closed the door behind her before walkin' up and standin' at the edge of my bed. I didn't wanna look at her, so I kept my eyes focused on the TV. She was waitin' for me to look at her, but after a minute passed and I still hadn't addressed her, she decided to start.

"Faith . . . I'm sorry." She said so quietly that I could hardly make out the words.

"Uh-huh." I answered as I continued to stare at the TV, a bitter chuckle escaping from my throat. I didn't mean for it to come out. I really wasn't plannin' on being mean or anything, but I suddenly felt all 'woman scorned'.

She sat down on the bed and turned so that she could continue to look at me.

"I know you don't believe me, but I really am."

I laughed again, finally facing her. She looked so defeated and tired. I felt bad for her, but I just couldn't let it go because she looked all sad and mopey. Yeah, I've got a soft spot for the girl, but that doesn't mean that I'm gonna let it slide when she kicks my ass defending her vampire.

"Okay, B. You're sorry. Now tell me *why* you're sorry." I said bitterly as I folded my arms cross my chest and sat back against the headboard. I figured that if she got it right, I'd let the whole thing go.

She scooted closer so that she was sittin' right next to me, only an arms length away. She paused for a moment, then spoke. "I'm sorry that I didn't tell you that Angel found the glove and that he wasn't planning on using it. I'm sorry that I didn't see things from your point of view . . ."

Damn. She pretty much hit the nail right on the head there, but she kept right on going.

". . . I'm sorry that I did that to your face . . ." she raised her arm up and gently touched the injured side of my face but I flinched at the contact and pulled away, furrowing my eyebrows at her. She pulled her hand away, looking a little dejected. ". . . and I'm really sorry that you don't wanna be my friend anymore."

She stood up from the bed and turned to face the window, lookin' like she was about to cry

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again. It melted the hard exterior that I had put up. I hated the fact that it was me who made her sad this time. It was my self-proclaimed job to make her feel better when she was hurtin', not add to her misery.

So I scooted to the edge of the bed behind her and grabbed her hand, hopin' to stop the waterworks before they started up.

"B . . . I never said I don't wanna be your friend anymore. It's just . . . I'm not real good with trustin' people, ever since I was a little kid. Mrs. Post just added to the craziness of the whole sitch. I was a little pissed before, but I'll get over it. In fact, I already *am* over it. So . . . please don't be upset cos of me, 'kay?"

Something in my head was yellin' at me, screaming '*what the fuck is wrong with you, Faith? This sappy friendly shit isn't for you! You're an action kinda girl, remember?*'

But I wasn't tryin' to listen to that voice. I was more focused on the slight pang in my chest when she gave me that little smile and squeezed my hand just a little harder.

"So we're okay then?" She asked me with a small smile.

I squeezed her hand back and shot her my best dimpled smile. "Yeah, B. We're five by five."

"I was hoping you'd say that." She beamed, walkin' towards the door and steppin' outside.

"Uhh, B? Whatcha doin'?" I asked, stretchin' slightly from my position on the bed so I could peek out.

"Sucking up." Buffy yelled from outside before she walked back in the room with her arms full. "Figured that if talking wouldn't convince you that I was sorry, I'd try to buy your forgiveness with goodies and entertainment."

I looked at her arms and noticed a pizza box, a bag of Cherry Twizzlers, the biggest bags of Skittles and Combos that I've ever seen, along with a bag of videos dangling from her left forearm and grocery bag dangling off of her right one.

I laughed. "I hate to say it B, but we coulda saved that whole little discussion if you woulda walked in with these in the first place." I stood up to help her unload her arms, grabbing the pizza box and the stuff on top of it.

No sooner than I had put the box down on the bed did I feel her arms around me in yet another hug.

"Whoa, B," I said with my arms in the air, "what's goin' on girlfriend? I already told ya that we're five by five."

"I know . . . I guess I was just afraid since yesterday that we wouldn't be able to do this anymore. Just wanted to make sure that it was real." She said, her arms still tight around me. I smiled and wrapped my arms around her in return.

"Nahh, I won't take this away from ya, B. Not as long as I know it makes ya feel a little better."

I'll be here for ya 'til my luck runs out or 'til ya find somethin' better."

Yep. I really said that.

Don't really know where it came from, but I think it made both of us tense up just a little. After a minute or so of silence, she finally spoke again.

"The pizza's getting cold. Maybe we should eat now."

"We? You're gonna stay and eat with me?" I asked, half expectin' her to run off to her vampire right away.

"Yep. We're gonna gorge on comfort food and 80's Brat Pack movies, and I'm not taking 'no' for an answer." She said with a pouty little smile. I think she was expectin' me to toss her out, but I had no intentions of doin' that.

"Sounds good to me, B. Now let's dig into this food before you wuss out, Skinny."

She playfully smacked me in the arm before settlin' down on the bed next to me. She reached over the side of the bed and pulled up the grocery bag which held a whole shitload of different kinds of drinks.

"Aww, B, YooHoo!" I beamed as she tossed me a cold bottle of the chocolate drink that I loved so much.

"Only the best for my Faith." She joked.

But that just got me thinkin'. *Her* Faith? Since when? How come nobody told me I was *her* Faith? Not that I minded or anything, but a girl likes to know these kinda things.

Anyhow, an hour later, we had devoured the entire pizza and the whole bag of cherry Twizzlers. We were both laying back against the headboard of the bed, the bag of Combos resting on my stomach and the bag of Skittles on B's.

"I feel like such a cow." B groaned as she tossed a few more red skittles in her mouth. She would only eat the red skittles, so the rest were discarded into an empty paper bowl for me.

It was kinda cute . . . the dye from the Skittles had kinda stained B's lips, makin' them look redder and cuter than ever.

"Aww, you're not a cow, B. You're fuckin adorable right now, especially with that little red ring around your mouth." I said playfully before I tossed a few Combos in my mouth, chewing loudly.

Before I could defend myself, I felt my body being pelted with the skittles from the paper bowl.

"I'll give you 'adorable'!" She said as she fired skittle after skittle at me, laughin' as she watched me try to defend myself.

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"C'mon, B! Stop!" I said through giggles as I lifted up my pillow to block the barrage of candied goodness.

That's right, I giggled. I know, I know . . . what the hell was wrong with me?

Somehow, she managed to pin me against the mattress, one arm keeping my hands down while the other tickled my sides. Ticklin' was worse than the skittle attack. I'm hella ticklish, and I always buckle under tickle-pressure.

She musta sensed that she had the upper hand, cos she was suddenly leanin' over me and makin' demands.

"I'm not 'adorable' Faith, I'm bad-ass. Just cos I'm little doesn't mean I'm adorable."

I scoffed, and she tickled me even harder. I began beggin' her to stop.

"I'll stop, but only if you say 'Buffy is bad-ass and she can kick my ass any day of the week!'"

I laughed.

"Yeah, B. You're about as bad-ass as Tinkerbell."

She tickled me even harder and I felt like I was gonna pee in my leathers. "Say itttttt!"

I finally had enough. "Alright, alright! 'Buffy is bad-ass and she can kick my ass any day of the week!' Now get off me, cow!" I said playfully.

She finally stopped ticklin' me, but she didn't move from my body. Instead, she threw a pillow to me so that I could prop it under my head, and she lay down on her back so that her head was restin' on my stomach.

"Now that *that's* over with . . . what do you wanna watch?" She asked casually, actin' as if her position was no big deal.

"Umm . . . I don't care B. You pick." I said and I tossed her the remote.

And that's how we spent the rest of the night before we went out for patrol: sprawled out on my bed watchin' infomercials, sheets and blankets tossed carelessly around us as we lay in a pool of Skittles and Combos. She kept her head on my stomach the whole time and I couldn't help but play with her hair as it draped across my abdomen.

We laughed and talked a little, but mostly we just sat there in a comfortable silence, lettin' the Slayer bond do all of the healing that we couldn't work out verbally.

And just like that, we had gone from awkward the night before to bein' totally comfortable around each other again. I tried to ignore the little pang I felt in my chest every time she smiled at me, cos I knew that those kinds feelings weren't good for either of us at that point in time.

Not between two friends.

Still, the more time I spent with B, the more I felt it and it made me kinda scared.

Scared, not because I felt it . . . but because I didn't know how long I'd be able to keep things up without acting on my feelings or getting myself hurt in the process.

But it was already too late to go back.

Chapter Three - The Small Stuff

We're gonna fast-forward a bit again to get to the good stuff, but I'll fill ya in on some of the smaller details first.

First, William the Bloody-Pain-in-My-Ass made a quick detour through SunnyD and caused a bit of havoc. Took Red and Xander hostage and tried to get her to do a little love mojo for him.

But as always happens here in Sunnyhell, things got kinda wacky. Turns out that Red and Xander were havin' some kinda fling. Bein' held hostage musta turned them on or something' cos they started makin' out in the middle of it all. Not that I'm against makin' out or steamy little flings, but I am against gettin' caught, and that's what happened.

Queen C and Dog-boy came to the rescue and walked in on the middle of the peep show. C tried to run, but she got caught up in the dilapidated warehouse and got skewered by an iron rod.

Needless to say, she kicked Xander to the curb at her first chance. Red and Dog-boy stayed together . . . but it was rocky.

Here's the funny part. After Queen C was all healed on the outside, she was still pretty banged up on the inside. I found her drinkin' solo at the Bronze one night and decided to join her. I have to say . . . drunk Cordy was a fun Cordy.

We kinda bonded. She told me about her pain over Xander and yunno what? I let the cat outta the bag and I fuckin told her about what I was feelin' for B.

What's that old saying? Something about 'when alcohol goes in, the truth comes out'. Guess there's a little bit of truth behind that little gem.

I musta been REALLY hammered to get to that point. Either that, or just really desperate for someone to talk to about it. And d'ya know what her response was?

'Duh'.

She said that she wasn't blind and that she could see it from a mile away. That kinda took me by surprise cos I never really thought that I let my emotions show about *ANYTHING*, but I guess that she's just Miss Perceptive.

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So anyhow, C and I had a kind of hidden understanding after that night. I knew she was still hurtin' about Xander no matter what front she was wearin', and she knew that I had feelings for B no matter how much I tried to hide them or deny them. But we never talked about it again.

Second, Christmas came and went pretty quickly. Angel got haunted by the First, B ran out to save him, blah blah blah. Someone shoulda bought them a balcony, they were so fuckin tragic. But that wasn't the important part. The important part was when B invited me over to her house to spend the holiday with her and Mrs. S.

Yep. I got a personal invite. Angel didn't, but I did. Me. Faith.

That's right.

I even did a little happy dance.

Anyhow, I went to this little antique store in town to find some kind of gift for B. I ended up buying her a small pewter locket in the shape of a heart and a chain to go with it.

Cheesy, I know. Cliché? Yeah, that too.

But I altered it up a little to make it more personal. I snuck into the metal shop at the high school and welded on a piece of metal so that it looked like a stake was goin' through the heart. I put a picture of me and B inside of it . . . it was from one of those corny \$ 4.00 passport photo booths outside of the post office. We were both makin' crazy faces in the picture, lookin' cute and happy at the same time.

I kinda wanted her to remember that moment in the photo booth forever.

Come Christmas day, I didn't think I was gonna be able to give it to her cos almost right after I got to her house, she took off to go save Angel.

I was kinda bitter at first cos she ran out on me for the vampire, but the night didn't turn out so bad. I ate dinner with Joyce and then we just sat in front of the fireplace for a while and watched TV. It was nice not spendin' another holiday alone.

When it started snowin', Joyce decided that it was too late and too cold for me to walk back to my motel. I was about to put up a fight, but she steered me up the stairs and into B's room, tellin' me to sleep there 'til B got home. She gave me a hug before she left the room, and yunno what? Right then, I felt like I was 'home'.

Anyhow, I kicked off my boots and laid on top of the blankets and before I knew it, I was out like a light. Yunno . . . turkey makes you tired. Tryptophan, right? Yeah, that's my excuse.

It had nothin' to do with the fact that I was layin' in B's bed, completely surrounded by her soft scent and her stuff.

Nope, nothin' to do with that at all.

So just after dawn, B came creepin' back into the house and up to her room. I think she was

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kinda surprised to see me there at first, but if it bothered her, she certainly didn't let it show. I woke up only when I felt her rollin' me over, tryin to put the blankets over me.

She tried to get me to go back to sleep, but I still wanted to give my gift to her. I hopped outta bed and grabbed my leather jacket from the floor. I reached in and grabbed the small box and then hopped back onto the bed excitedly and handed the box back to B.

I love gettin' presents, but I love givin' them even more. People don't expect it from me, so they act all cute and surprised when I give 'em somethin'. Just like B was doin' at that point.

So B opened the box and I swear, I saw tears in her eyes. She removed the necklace and locket from the box and proceeded to open the locket. A huge smile sprang up on her face when she saw the picture on the one side and the little inscription on the other side: The Chosen Two.

I was kinda shocked when she asked me to help take off the cross necklace Angel gave her and had me put on the necklace I got her instead. Once again . . . happy dance. Only, internally this time. She gave me a big bear-hug, and that was gift enough for me.

But the gift givin' wasn't done yet. She reached under her bed and pulled out what looked like a clothing gift box. I tore right into it as soon as she handed it to me, actin' just like a little kid. When I opened the box, I found that it was filled with a whole mess of shit that I liked.

Comic books, Combos, Cherry Twizzlers, Ring Pops, a Nine Inch Nails and a Rob Zombie CD, and the grand finale: The Goonies video tape. I love that movie! It really made me happy that she remembered all of the stuff that I loved.

Then it was my turn to give her a big hug. I pulled her close to me and held her there for a few minutes, big goofy smiles on both of our faces.

"Thanks B . . . this was probably my best Christmas ever." I admitted to her.

Who is this sappy Faith, and what happened to the real Faith? Yeah, that's what I kept askin' myself.

"No, thank *you*, Faith. For being my sanity. For being there for me when I needed a shoulder to cry on, and for just being here now."

And then it happened. I certainly didn't mean for it to happen, but it did.

I leaned forward and planted a kiss on her.

It was just a quick kiss, perfectly innocent and chaste. But still . . . I probably shouldn't have done it. I pulled back from her and my eyes musta been huge due to the realization of what I had just done.

I musta looked like I was gonna bolt cos I suddenly felt B's hand on mine, stopping me from jumpin' out the window.

"Come on . . . let's go to bed. I'm kinda tired, and we can sort through your goodies in the

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morning." She said sincerely before standing up and pullin' back the blankets on the bed, holdin' them up for me to hop under.

You better believe that I did.

I got my Christmas wish that year. I went to sleep snuggled up against B and holdin' her hand, and I woke up the same way later that morning.

Thank you Santa -fuckin-Claus! You finally came through, you pudgy bastard!

Third, B survived the Cruciamentum. I never even heard of the fuckin thing 'til after it was over, but you can bet that if I had, I woulda stopped it.

G-man had sent me on a bogus mission on the outskirts of town to keep me from interfering, so I wasn't even around 'til the next day.

They took B's strength away and locked her up with some bad-ass vamp to see how 'constructive' she could be when left powerless. She beat the vamp, but it hurt her relationship with G-man and it killed her relationship with the Watcher's Council.

Yeah, suddenly I'M the good Slayer. Go figure.

But I told 'em straight out that if they were gonna try to fuck with me in any way, shape or form, I'd kick their asses and take out their whole establishment.

Needless to say, the Cruciamentum is now a thing of the past, and needless to say, I was there to pick up the pieces when B fell apart cos she felt betrayed by G-man.

Fourth . . . this is the part where I kinda fucked up.

Y'see, since I had gotten closer to B, I'd been holdin' back on takin care of my hornies.

Wait. Let me rephrase that.

I stopped seekin' out random guys and girls to scratch my itches. But I was still takin care of my hornies. There's no way you can just let something like that go without burstin' after a while.

Somethin' about bringing random guys or girls back to my hotel felt wrong . . . like I was betraying B or something. She wasn't my girlfriend or anything and I realized that, but it still felt wrong. Not countin' the sex part (or lack thereof), our relationship was everything that I coulda ever even hoped for. I didn't wanna lie to myself and try to pretend that I could be happy with anyone else.

But, we all know that self-restraint ain't my biggest virtue. Never was. I'm kinda a 'fly-by-the-seat-of-my-pants' kinda girl, and I usually just take what I want.

So this one night, I was out patrollin' when this big bad mamma demon popped up outta nowhere. She got the upper-hand somehow and gave me a bit of a whoppin' and mighta done even more damage if Xander hadn't come along and picked me up.

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To make a long story short, we ended up back at my motel. I was all riled up from the fight, plus I hadn't had a real sexual release in some time, so I jumped his bones and took the guy for a test drive. I mean, I knew it was a test drive cos I had no intention of keepin' him around for too long . . . but I kinda felt like I wasn't able to stop myself.

After I kicked him out, I felt really bad. Not because I kicked him out; I'm used to doin' that. I felt bad because, using some kinda insane troll logic, I felt like I had cheated on B.

And I was disgusted with myself.

So I did the only thing I could think of at that moment: I got dressed and went out to get drunk.

Betcha you're glad that I did the adult thing, right?

So, I sat that the Bronze for about 4 hours, danced my ass off, and drank myself into oblivion. They didn't even care that I was underage. I never offered them my ID, and they never asked to see it.

I was sittin' at the bar workin' on my second bottle of Jack Daniels when I felt the warm tingles. I was just about drunk enough to think that it was a side effect of the booze, and I was perfectly fuckin comfortable livin' in that state of denial.

But then I felt a hand on my shoulder.

B's hand. Small and soft and warm, and . . . too fuckin good to be touching trash like me.

I wouldn't turn to look at her. I couldn't. I felt too fuckin guilty; too ashamed. I was in love with her but I fucked one of her best friends. What kinda person does that to a person they love?

I didn't deserve her, or her friendship.

As I felt the bar stool spinnin', I realized that it wasn't because I was drunk; it was because B was spinnin' me so that I faced her.

"Faith? What's going on?" She asked, her voice full of concern.

I couldn't answer her. I sat there silent, eyes lowered, chokin' on the tears that were tryin' to spill outta me.

"Faith? Talk to me." She said as she grabbed my hands and held them in her own.

I felt my bottom lip quiver.

I'm not a crier, folks. I don't know if it was Buffy or the alcohol, but somethin' made me all emotional and overwhelmed at the same time.

"Faith . . . you know you can tell me anything, right?" She asked sounding completely sincere

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and true, and it broke my heart.

I felt the tears start to fall, but there was no way I wanted her to see them. I couldn't let her see behind my mask. My head was still down, so I knew she hadn't seen them yet. I needed to save face, so I did the only thing I could think of.

I ran.

Out of the bar, away from B, and away from the reality where I loved her and could never let her know it.

But . . . here's the funny part. It seems that alcohol can turn the simple act of walkin' into a freak show in motion. Who knew?

I stumbled outta the Bronze and into the alley, trippin' on crates and garbage cans as I felt my way along the wall. When I finally made my way outta the alley, I slowed down my stumble-run into a clumsy walk and let the tears openly fall.

That's not exactly somethin' that they print on the side of the alcohol bottle: 'May cause drinker to have emotional outbursts and function like a complete freak show'.

I hadn't gotten even 100 yards away from the place when I felt a hand on my shoulder again, stoppin' my movement.

"Faith!" It was B again, and she was soundin' kinda frantic now. "Talk to me, dammit! Please . . . tell me what's going on."

Again, I wouldn't turn to face her. I kept my head straight up and looked right ahead of me, not moving an inch as the tears silently fell down my face. Frustrated, she finally came out from behind me and walked so that she was standin' in front of me.

She paused when she noticed my tears. I don't think she knew what to do. She'd never seen me cry; I'm not that kinda person. Guess I conveyed that notion pretty well.

Once I finally looked into her eyes, I couldn't hold it in anymore. Before the first sob escaped my mouth I felt her arms around me, supportin' me as my legs gave out. She softly sat the two of us right there on the ground and held me while I cried.

I was cryin' for so many different reasons at that point. Cryin' because I loved B. Cryin' cos I couldn't have the one thing I truly wanted. Cryin' cos I let down my walls in front of someone for the first time in a long time. Cryin' cos I fucked Xander. Cryin' cos B was holdin' onto me like I mattered.

And mostly . . . I was cryin' just because I was cryin'. Fucked up, right? I know. It's like . . . I couldn't believe that I was cryin', and it was just makin' me cry even more. I felt so fuckin' vulnerable, and that wasn't a feelin' that I was used to. Maybe it was the alcohol, cos that surely wasn't me. I was never an emotional kinda girl.

But I realized it wasn't the alcohol. It was B.

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With the last bit of clarity I had left, I mumbled into her shoulder, "What've you done to me, B?" Then the alcohol took over, and I slipped into the realm of unconsciousness.

The next thing I remember is hearin' a key chain jingling and the sound of a door openin' up. I realized at that point what was happening. B had carried me fireman-style all the way from the Bronze back to my motel room.

I felt her softly place me on the bed, tryin' her hardest not to disturb my alcohol induced slumber. She took off my boots and covered me up, and she finally noticed that my eyes had opened up.

"Hey." She whispered, cupping one side of my face with her hand.

"Ughhh." I grunted. I was still pretty drunk at that point. "I'm real fucked up, B. Faith drink too much."

"I realized that." She said with a gentle smile. "I stopped to kill two vamps on the way here. You told them both that you loved them, then you cried when I dusted them. I was kinda thinking that you weren't yourself."

Then the alcohol started to talk. Remember what I said before? 'Alcohol goes in and the truth comes out?'

"Did I tell ya that I looove ya too, B?" I slurred, giggling at my words.

"No." She answered quietly, smiling as she moved my hair outta my face.

"Well I do, yunno." I said.

Remind me never to drink again in my life.

She chuckled softly. "Yeah, I know, booze-hound. Rest now."

And I went to sleep, content with the fact that she hadn't thrown my earlier moment of vulnerability back in my face.

A few weeks went by and we really never spoke of that night again. I think B knew that it would make me uncomfortable, so we just let it go.

Fifth (and last) was the day when a big evil was revealed to us.

For a while by that point, B and I had begun to openly hang out. I'd meet up with her and the Scoobies at school and have lunch with them, she'd go shoppin' or to the show with me, etc. Basically, our interaction wasn't really limited to patrol-cuddles anymore.

But the patrol-cuddles were definitely still there.

This one day, I went and got B outta school early so we could go clear out the vamp nest. Her friends gave me death glares cos I was breakin her outta school, but I needed my quality B time, and we had work to do.

So we went and cleared out the nest quick and easy. It was kinda amazin' how much our strength and fightin' had grown since we started gettin' closer to each other. We could anticipate each others' every move, and not a single demon or vamp could stand up against the deadly duo that we were.

It felt hella good.

So we go to the Bronze and decide to celebrate the ass-kickin that we had just dished out. Well, I TOLD B it was celebrating, but I really just wanted an excuse to spend more time with her.

So, to make a long story short, Soul-boy came a-broodin' as always and told B that we had a nasty and powerful old vamp to deal with. Instead of sittin' on our asses, we decided to go and take out the vamp and his minions.

So we went to the factory district where the vamp was said to be holed up and decided to crash his little party. As we were walkin' down this one alley, all of the guys' minions came poppin' out left and right, throwin' down like they had nothin' to lose.

Me and B kicked into our new enhanced Slayer mode, stakin' vamps left and right without breakin' stride.

As this one vamp came poppin' outta nowhere I raised my arm to stake him, but I felt somethin'. It was my bond with B. She was tryin' to get me to hold back before she could even yell the words. As I rammed down my arm, I stopped it about an inch from the vamps' chest.

Then I realized why B wanted me to stop.

The figure in front of me wasn't a vamp. It was a human.

Holy fuck that was close.

"Don't kill me!" He yelled, his voice on the brink of panic.

B ran up behind me and exhaled sharply. "Oh, thank god!" She sighed. "I couldn't sense him 'til the last minute. I was gonna yell out but I didn't have time."

"It's okay, B. I felt what you were feelin too." I said as I pocketed my stake and offered my hand to the guy who was cowerin' against a dumpster. He grabbed my hand and I pulled him up, lookin' at him expectantly when we were finally eye to eye.

"My name is Alan Finch. I'm the deputy Mayor of Sunnydale. I know who you girls are." He said, and B and I both raised our eyebrows at him.

He continued, "Being as that you're Slayers and all, I figured that you girls would be the best place for me to turn to."

He waited for some kinda sign that it was okay to continue, so I spoke up.

"What's the deal, chiefy? Gotta demon problem?" I asked.

"You have no idea." He responded, soundin' kinda grim. "Think demon problem of epic proportions. It's the Mayor."

"What's the Mayor?" B asked with her eyebrows furrowed.

Damn. She looks so cute when she's confused.

Fuck, she looks confused even when she's not confused. In fact, she's adorable on pretty much all of those days that end in 'y'. Yunno . . . Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday . . . you get my drift.

"The demon is the Mayor. The Mayor is the demon. Or at least he's going to be. He's not quite human now, but he's planning some kind of Ascension. I don't know the big details, but I know that he's going to become 100% demon and that the world hasn't seen one of that magnitude for more time than I can account for."

"Why you tellin' us this, chiefy?" I asked skeptically. "If you know 'bout it, you're obviously involved with it all. How can we trust you?"

He sighed. "Because you have to. He's going to ascend, and when he does, not many people are going to live to see it. I can't let that happen."

"So, what do we do about it?" B asked.

"I don't know. And from this point on, you guys don't know me." He said. "He can't know I told anyone. I want to live through this too, and he'll kill me if he finds out. I won't be able to meet with you again, but I wanted to at least inform you on his intentions. Hopefully, you'll be able to look into it and stop it before it happens."

And just like that, he walked outta the alley and left me and B standin' there, completely bowled over.

There was a real big evil brewin' in town . . . but at least we had a heads up.

So there ya have it.

That's all of the small stuff that happened before the real good stuff began. I know it might seem trivial now, but I think that every little detail helps in me tellin' you this story.

So, what's to come, you ask? Revelations, heartbreaks, angst, love, hate, explanations, departures, reunions, old acquaintances, and surprising events. Yunno. Typical kinda stuff for lovin' on the Hellmouth.

And that's just the tip of the iceberg.

But I'll tell ya this much: B and me were gettin' closer and closer as the days went by. Her relationship with Angel was slowly fallin' apart, and I sure as hell was gonna be there to pick up the pieces.

Cos 'Buffy love' was kinda like a drug, and I was already addicted and cravin' more.

Chapter Four - Not-So Secret Thoughts

So here's that fast forward I was promising. I'm a girl of my word.

Anyhow, things had been kinda quiet for a while. We were researching everyday, tryin' to come up with as much as we could find on the Mayor and his planned Ascension. Actually, I take that back.

The Scoobs were doin' most of the research. Me and B were pretty busy trainin'. G-man figured that it would be better if we trained instead of researched cos he wanted us in top notch shape for the big battle. And it definitely looked like the battle was gonna be a big one. Xan-man was the one who made the big discovery. He found a sketch of what kinda demon the Mayor was gonna turn into after all the mojo was said and done, and let me tell ya . . . big and ugly doesn't even begin to describe it. So like always, B and I were left to pretty much come and go as we pleased. While the Scoobs researched in the library, we'd be in the back stacks sparring or doin' other routine exercises. Sometimes we'd get a little too much into it and the gang would kick us out. I always made sure to grunt a little too loud or egg B on a little too much, cos I knew that gettin' kicked out earned me and B some alone time. And I can't be certain, but I think that B was doin' the same thing. She'd wink at me right before she'd really rip into a routine, silently encouragin' me to do the same. So after we'd get kicked out, we'd either go to eat or go for a walk. Sometimes, we'd find other places to train, and on the very rare occasion, we'd do somethin' fun like to go the movies or to an arcade. I felt so fuckin' happy whenever we had days like that. It kinda brought us closer and closer, and I don't just mean emotionally. I mean physically, too. She was always holdin' my hand, even when the Scoobs were lookin'! They just kinda brushed it off, probably thinkin' that it was just a 'friend' or a 'slayer' thing. Maybe that's what it looked like to them. Maybe that's what it was to B.

But for me, it was so much more. I never let anyone get close enough to me before to get to the whole handholding phase. But B was different. Besides hand-holding, there was some other stuff too. A few times when we'd be out for a walk, she'd hop up on my back and I'd give her a piggy-back ride. Slayer style. I'd whip around turns, duck under low trees, jump over ditches, and spin like mad all at top speed. All it made her do was hold on tighter, her chin restin' on my shoulder as she'd giggle in my ear. Between the feel of her warm breath on the side of my face and the spinnin', I'd almost always topple over onto the ground, leavin' us both layin' there a laughing mess. Then the best part would happen. As we'd be layin' there on the grass in the middle of the park or wherever, she'd scoot up my body and nestle into my side, wrappin' an arm across my stomach kinda possessively. "I'm so glad you're here, Faith." She'd say with her eyes closed, a content smile playin' on her perfectly pouty little lips. "Yeah, I'm glad I'm here too, B." I'd answer back before we'd doze off for a little afternoon nap right where we lay. And I really meant it. I was completely and totally happy to be there with her. Moreso, I was happy to be anywhere with her. For once in my life, I felt like I finally found my 'home'.

Sorry, lost my thought train there for a while. Just the thought of B does that to me every time. Back on track then. The Scoobs would research and B and me would train or hang out.

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So this one night, me and B were out patrollin' when these two demons attack us. I had no idea what the fuck they were, but they were ugly and mean. Just as I was about to kill mine, I heard Buffy shriek behind me. I kicked the demon I was fightin' outta the way and the punk bitch actually ran away when it recovered.

By the time I got to B, she had already killed the demon that she was fightin', but she was covered in its blood. She was fine but decided that she wanted to go home to shower to get the goop off of her.

I didn't argue with her.

But I did walk her home, like always. When we got to her door she went to hug me, once again like always, but I kindly held up my hands to stop her. I was guessin' that sticky white blood wouldn't wash outta my leather jacket too easily, and B completely understood.

Anyhow, I didn't get to see her 'til the next evening. Apparently, she started freakin' out at school or somethin'. I got a pretty frantic call from G-man, and he told me that B had been infected by the demon and that she was telepathic or some shit like that. She was havin' fun listening to peoples' thoughts at first, but by the time the evening came, the voices were startin' to hurt her.

He thought that, seein' as though B and I had 'gotten so close', she might appreciate my company. What he didn't tell me is that she couldn't bare to be around anyone else and that he already had Angel workin' on the cure.

But seein' as that I was already completely and totally whipped, I ran over to B's house like the good little lap dog that I was.

Joyce let me in and told me to go up to B's room. Said that I should try to clear my head from any unnecessary thoughts.

Yeah, *that* helped. It's like sayin', 'hey, don't think about giant turkeys'. Next thing you know, BLAM!: You got a head full of giant turkeys.

Hmm. I'm kinda hungry now.

Oops. Thought train. Right.

So, I slowly made my way up to B's room. If there's one thing that I remember from my first Watcher, it was how to hide my thoughts. She taught me all sorts of techniques and stuff, so I figured that there was no time like then to try 'em out.

Before I even got to B's door, I began singing in my head. *'Old MacDonald had a farm, e-i-e-i-o'*. Childish, I know. But it got the job done.

When I opened the door, B was layin' on her bed lookin' completely pale and fragile, twitchin' a little as she pushed her head further into her pillow. She musta heard my song cos she suddenly relaxed a little and opened her eyes to look at me, the tiniest of smiles playing at her lips.

"Hey." *'And on that farm he had a duck . . .'*

"Hey." She answered quietly.

"How are you?" *'e-i-e-i-o'*

"I'd be much better if I didn't feel like there was a disco in my head." She answered with a smile, but it quickly faded into a pain-filled frown. "Hold me?"

And just like that, I was in her bed with her, holdin' her against me as I kept singing in my head. I had to keep singing. I knew that if I even stopped for a second, my brain would kick into 'do you realize the situation you're in?' mode and betray all of my secrets.

"Faith . . . could you stop singing?" She asked.

I really didn't want to. I was scared. But I did anyway. For her. Cos I rather have to live with her knowin' I love her rather than have her spend an unnecessary 5 minutes in pain.

Screwed up how love works, ain't it?

So I focused on another technique. Instead of singing, I pictured the ocean. I heard the waves rollin' onto the beach. I felt the wind hittin' my face. I could feel the cool water on my feet. And it was workin'. I didn't think about B at all.

Well, maybe I did. For just a split second I saw B runnin' in the water in a tiny little bikini, but that thought quickly ended when I felt her slap my arm lightly and jokingly chastise me.

Luckily, I flirt with her just enough on an everyday basis so that she thought the 'bikini Buffy' image was just another means of my flirting with her.

We just sat there for a while and it didn't even seem like anything was wrong with her. Then all of the sudden, she started freakin' out again. I had no idea what to do. I couldn't just standby and watch her suffer; it scared me to death to think that somethin' even worse could happen to her.

I called out for Joyce but when the door flew open, it was Angel that came walkin' in, Joyce and Giles in tow.

That's probably why B started freakin' . . . all of the thoughts were rushin' towards her at once.

I hopped off the bed when Angel approached and went and stood next to Joyce, placing a comforting hand on her shoulder and she watched on and cried.

Then it hit me . . . all of the emotion and thoughts that I had been tryin' to block out since I had got there. I still kept thinkin' of the ocean, but as Angel forced the neon-blue antidote down her throat, I couldn't stop the silent prayer in my head.

'God . . . I know I don't talk to ya much, and I probably owe ya a shitload, but B's gotta get through this. You gotta help her. I don't wanna live without her. I . . . I love her. I love her so much.'

As I realized that I had been thinkin' of things besides the ocean, I stared intently at B to see if she picked up on what I said. I thought I was in the clear cos she had been thrashin' around and I figured she probably wasn't listening.

But as the antidote took effect and her tremors stopped, she immediately shot up and sought my eyes out. Her eyes were wide and her mouth hung open a little. It almost looked like she was still tryin' to read my thoughts as she processed what she had heard from me just moments before.

But I didn't give her the chance.

Before I realized what I was doin', my feet led me down the stairs and outta her house as fast as they could take me.

My secret was out. B knew that I loved her.

And I couldn't stick around to take the rejection that I was sure was about to follow.

I did what I always do best. I ran. And I hid. Days went by and I holed myself up in my motel room, not wantin' to go back to the fucked up reality that I created.

B came by the motel every day, knockin' on the door and tellin' me that we needed to talk.

But I didn't wanna talk about it. I didn't wanna face the truth. *'Talking bad, drinking better'*. So I drank mass amounts of alcohol and I slept.

After almost a week had passed, I couldn't wallow in my self pity any longer. It was a Friday night.

Prom night.

I knew that B would be goin' with Angel, and it made me bitter. But I still had to see her. Not up close and personal cos I wasn't ready to deal with her yet, but I wanted to see her from afar. Wanted to see her giddy and happy with her friends and with her *boyfriend*. Wanted to see what I could never give her.

I stood across from the school in my black leather and black jacket, perfectly blendin' into the background.

Or so I thought. I forgot about the damn Slayer connection and that B would feel me as soon as she got near.

When I saw her get outta the limo with the Scoobs, I was completely and utterly blown away by her beauty. And I knew I shouldn't have been happy about it . . . but Angel wasn't with them in the limo, and it put a little smile on my face.

Just as she was about to enter the school with the Scoobs, she stopped her movement and turned in my direction. *'Shit.'* I thought. She mumbled something to the Scoobs and as they walked into the school, B walked right up to wear I was standin'.

Seein' as that there was no use in hidin' anymore, I stepped out from the shadows and glanced at her with a smirk on my face.

"I always knew you'd look like a Princess at your prom, B." I started, my hesitation apparent in my shaky voice.

"Where've you been?" She asked seriously as she walked up even closer, now standin' only about 3 feet away from me.

"Around. Had some shit I had to deal with." I answered, movin' my eyes away from hers.

"Faith . . . if it's about what I heard, I . . ." she began, but I quickly cut her off. I didn't wanna hear what she had to say.

"It's not always about you, twinkie." I interrupted, my walls instantly comin' back up.

She looked at me with a hurt expression on her face, but I wouldn't cave.

"Oh. I just figured . . ."

"You figured wrong." I answered back all too quickly.

But I couldn't fool her. After the time we spent together, she knew me better than I knew myself.

She hesitantly took another step towards me and looked up into my eyes.

"Patrol with me tonight, after the dance? Midnight-ish?"

I just looked at her, tryin' to find any hidden malice or threat in her demeanor. But there was nothin'. She continued.

"Meet me here? Please?"

I exhaled the breath that I had been holdin' onto. "Yeah, sure."

And that was that. She didn't say another word. She just gave me a quick smile before turnin' around and headin' back for the school.

My mind was tellin' me that I should walk to the nearest bar and get shit-faced, but my feet wouldn't listen to it. They were too busy listenin' to my heart.

So, let's talk about bein' whipped.

I sat there on the friggin schoolyard bench for 4 fuckin hours, just waitin' on B. I knew that I coulda left and come back, but . . . what if she came out lookin' for me?

See? Whipped.

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At about 5 minutes after midnight, B came walkin' outta the school. I smiled when I saw her, but my smile faded when I noticed that she looked really sad.

"Tell me all about the dance, B. Didja have fun?" I asked, tryin' to bring her out of her silent state.

She didn't look into my eyes as she approached. Instead she kept lookin' down, tryin' to hide the tears that were in her eyes.

"Can we just . . . do I still have a change of clothes at your place?" She asked quietly.

"Yeah." I answered.

I did. B got all gross one night after patrollin' and had to borrow some of my clothes when we went to hang at my motel room afterwards. The next day, she stashed a small duffel bag filled with clothes and products in my closet.

"Can we just go back to yours so I can get changed?" She asked, her eyes still averted.

I just watched her for a second before I answered.

"Yeah, sure. Come on, B." I linked my arm through hers and started walking towards my motel.

All of my nervous thoughts about her knowing my secret disappeared when I saw her like that. I knew that something musta happened to make her sad or mad, and I really wanted to know what it was.

Cos I wanted to fix it.

After a short walk, we awkwardly walked into my motel room. I told her that she could change in the bathroom, and she didn't say a word as she went in and closed the door behind her.

About ten minutes passed and B still hadn't come out. Now, I know that B's a girl and that girls take time to get ready . . . but she wasn't dressin' up. She was gettin' undressed. Even if she wanted to wash off her makeup and stuff, five minutes shoulda been more than enough time.

Hesitantly, I walked up to the bathroom door and gently knocked.

"B?"

No response.

"Buffy? Are you okay?"

Still nothing.

I wasn't gonna play her games. So I turned the doorknob and walked into the bathroom to find

Buffy huddled in the corner and cryin'. I rushed to her side and tried to get her to look at me, but her face was buried in her hands.

"B? Come on, tell me what's wrong." A minute passed and still, no reply. "B, you're kinda scaring me here."

Finally she lifted up her head and looked at me, her face red and her eyes spilling tears onto her cheeks.

"I can't take it anymore, Faith. I can't." She replied softly, then broke into sobs.

Like I said before, I'm not 'word girl'. I couldn't comfort her with words, so I scooped her up in my arms and carried her to the bed, gently layin' her down on her side. Once I had her down, I crawled into bed next to her and spooned her from behind, hoping that our Slayer bond would calm her down a little.

She sobbed for a few more minutes before finally calming down. That's when I finally asked her again to tell me what was wrong.

"Angel." She replied. My blood began to boil. If he hurt her in any way, I . . . "He's leaving. Just like that. He comes back into my life and then he just leaves. He didn't even ask me what *I* want."

"Well . . . what *do* you want?" I asked. Honestly, I had no idea. She's a confusing girl.

"I don't know." She said as she exhaled. "Nothing. Everything. I want a normal life."

That made me chuckle.

"We'll never be normal, B. That's one thing ya can never ask for. But, it's not so bad. Cos, even though ya may never get to have the normal life and live like your friends do . . . you'll always have me to be there with ya."

I meant it, too.

The room was silent for a few minutes. Then, I felt B movin' slightly. I picked my arm up from her, thinkin' that maybe I was makin' her uncomfortable. However, she kinda shocked me when, instead of gettin' up off the bed, she turned so that she was facin' me, our faces only inches apart.

She wasn't cryin' anymore, but her eyes were still wet with tears.

"Really?" She asked quietly, gazing into my eyes.

At that point, I got totally lost in her eyes. I know it's gonna sound mean, but . . . she's really beautiful when she cries. I couldn't find words to speak, so I simply nodded my head in response to her question.

"Faith," she began but paused for a moment before continuing hesitantly, "when I was sick, and I . . ." she watched as I shifted uncomfortably, ". . . did you mean it?"

I remember thinkin', '*oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck*'. She was asking me if I really meant it when she heard me think that I loved her.

There was no sense in lyin'. It was time for me to go balls to the wall and just let the secrets fly.

"Yeah, I did." I said, not recognizing the trembling voice that escaped my throat.

A small smile graced her lips as she brought both of her hands up to cup my face. She ran her thumb over my lips and the tears started to fall down her face again. And then . . .

. . . and then . . .

. . . and then she kissed me.

Soft and gentle, lips to lips, movin' them slowly against mine as if she was tryin' to learn and memorize their feel.

I'd never been kissed like that before. It wasn't about passion or lust or anything else like that. It was about an understanding. A silent acceptance.

See, she knew then for sure that I loved her, and the kiss was her way of tellin' me that it was okay; that I didn't have to run from it.

She didn't say the words back to me. I wasn't sure if she was feelin' them or not then.

But the way that the chaste kiss lingered for minutes? It got me thinkin' that maybe she did have some kinda feelings for me too. She didn't have to say the words. I felt it in her kiss; in her heart, which was pressed right up against mine.

We stopped kissin' after a few minutes, but we stayed in that position for hours. She moved only to call her Ma and say she was stayin' at mine cos I got hurt on patrol, but she was back in my arms as soon as she hung up.

Maybe I shoulda let the fact that she lied to her Ma about why she was really stayin' bother me, but I ignored it.

I was just happy to have her with me.

Happy to have her in my arms.

We didn't kiss or talk anymore. She simply curled up in my arms and we slept.

Sure, I was thinkin' of all the dirty and nasty things I wanted to do to her. My body was tryin' to react to her presence in a sexual way, but my mind was keepin' my body in check.

When she got up in the mornin' and had to go, I didn't wanna let go of her. I woulda been happy stayin' in my room with her for the rest of my life. But I knew that I couldn't keep her there forever.

And the worst part? I knew that I wouldn't be able to spend time again with her like I had the prior night unless it was on her terms. I wouldn't be able to walk up behind her and wrap my arms around her in front of her friends, and that kinda hurt me a little.

But beggars can't be choosy, and I was willin' to take whatever B would offer, whenever she offered it.

After another chaste kiss, B squeezed my hands and gave me another hug before she walked outta my room.

As soon as she was out the door, I plopped back on my bed and grinned as I stared at the ceiling, reliving every moment of the night before as I lay surrounded by the blankets that held her scent.

I had to wonder where things were gonna go from there. With Angel outta the picture, that tentatively left a spot open for me. I was hopin' that she was gonna let me fill the vacancy.

I didn't think about it for very long as I slowly began to fall off into a peaceful slumber. I know that I was wearin' a huge smile on my face as I drifted off, and the goofiness of the situation didn't even bother me.

Cos I was in love . . . and I think that B mighta been too.

Chapter Five - Ascending

The days were countin' down till graduation and the Mayor's Ascension. The Scoobs found out that he had done some kinda ritual to make himself immortal, so that limited our action to when he transformed.

The plans were set . . . we'd unleash hell on the Mayor and his allies with the rest of the Senior Class . . . and me and B had the job of takin' out the beast.

The only thing we had left to do was wait.

We were spendin' most of our free time in the library. The Scoobs researching, me and B developing strategy, Giles analyzing it all.

Though me and B really never brought up the night of the prom, I know it was on both of our minds. Maybe under different circumstances, we woulda talked it out.

Or fucked it out.

Heh.

Yeah, that woulda been MY chosen path.

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But in all truth, we were kinda too busy to focus on anything but graduation and the Ascension.

Still, there were little changes that I was noticin'. She was always holdin' onto my hand or found some way to keep constant physical contact. It's not like she was really tryin' to hide it from the Scoobs. They'd see her holdin' onto my hand or playin' with my hair, but I didn't think that it really phased them.

Interesting side note? They really DID notice it, and they were all forming their own opinions on what was happenin' between us. But I'll get more to that later.

Another thing that changed was that B would let me give her a kiss every night after patrol. On the lips. Hell yeah. It was simple and innocent enough. Just a peck, really.

But the fact that she was lettin' me take that from her, especially with her 'boyfriend' still in the picture? Well, it kinda floored me. Cos if she was lettin' me take that much from her when he was around, I kept imagining what she might possibly give AFTER he was outta the picture.

And THAT'S what got me through the cold lonely nights at my motel.

Well . . . that, and porn.

But that's a different story altogether.

So about two days before the big showdown, me and B were patrollin' like always. I could tell that somethin' was up with her cos she was grippin' onto my hand so hard that it kinda hurt.

I finally stopped us and made her face me, tilting up her chin so that she was lookin' me in the eyes.

"What's wrong this time?" I asked her. I wasn't tryin' to be rude, but I kinda hate when she gets all quiet and kitteny. I rather have her ramble on about her schoolwork or somethin' equally boring.

"It's . . . I was just wondering . . ." She said before pausing.

"Spit it out, B. I'm aging here, and not so gracefully either."

Did I mention that I'm a little impatient? Heh.

". . . I was thinking that maybe instead of walking me home tonight . . . you could just drop me off at Angel's instead."

Oh.

Not exactly what I was expecting. So, what then? She wanna get in a few last minute screws before he leaves? I couldn't hide my confused and slightly hurt look, and she picked up on it right away.

"It's not like that, Faith. Him and I just have some . . . unresolved issues. He's leaving soon, and I'd rather him and I clear things up first." She explained, tryin' to look as calm and comforting as possible.

I shook my head as if to clear my thoughts.

"Whatever, B." With that said, I let go of her hand and started walking quickly in the direction of Angel's mansion. I heard her steps next to me, trying to keep up.

We walked in silence; I think she was smart enough to realize that I wasn't feeling particularly fuckin talkative. I wasn't sure exactly what to feel. I mean, yeah, I was kinda pissed. But what business was it of mine? He was her 'boyfriend' or whatever. I was just a bit of cold comfort.

When we finally got to the mansion, I had no intentions of hangin' around to see the lovey-dovey festivities. Before B could even fully face me, I tried to make my escape.

"Alright, you're here safe and sound. Catch ya later."

I began to walk away but stopped when I felt her hand on my shoulder.

"You're leaving? Just like that?" She asked. What the fuck did she want from me? I just nodded. She looked down before she said, "Aren't you forgetting something?"

I furrowed my eyebrows as I thought about it. What could I be forgetting? Dignity and pride? I checked those at B's door. Heartache? I had that. Confusion? I *definitely* wasn't forgetting that one.

After a second, I shrugged my shoulders and gave her a blank look before shaking my head, 'no'.

As she closed the distance between us and stood up on her toes to brush her lips softly against mine, I realized what I had forgotten: her goodnight kiss. Guess it had kinda become an unspoken tradition.

When she backed away from the soft kiss, I shook my head at her.

"I wasn't forgettin' that, B. I just figured that you'd be savin' your vicarious smoochies for your boy-toy in there. Besides, now he's gonna smell me on your lips. That can't be healthy for your 'relationship'." I couldn't help the bitter tone in my words.

She sighed. "Faith, I already told you. Angel and I aren't . . ." she began but her words were cut off as we heard her name being called from inside the mansion.

I was ready to make my exit once again, but I suddenly found myself being dragged into the mansion by a fairly frantic Buffy. She practically ran us through the house and to Angel's bedroom where we found him slumped up against the wall, as arrow stickin' out of his back.

Heh. 'Angel the Undead Pincushion'. Comes complete with fake blood and girly whining.

When B saw him, she ran over and dropped to her knees in front of him, cryin' at the very

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sight. It was pretty fucked up; he was shiverin' like mad, but he was covered in sweat. His face and torso were beat red, a truly odd color to see on the usually pale vamp.

I stood there debatin' what I should do. B obviously wasn't gonna be any help cos she was too busy blubbering. Rollin' my eyes and sighing, I walked over to the vamp and began to check him over.

Without givin' it too much thought, I grabbed the arrow and yanked it outta his back, causing him to yell out in pain. B looked at me like I was an alien or somethin'.

What? He was technically already dead. It's not like tearin' the thing out was gonna kill him even more.

I inspected the arrow closely, sniffing the tip for traces of toxins under the coating of blood. That's when I smelled it. The very distinctive scent of a poison that was particularly lethal to vamps and other undead creatures.

It kinda scared me. I mean, I wanted Soul-boy outta the picture, but I didn't want him dead or whatever.

B looked at me and raised her eyebrows, waiting for me to explain my 'unhappy' face.

"It's Absalom, B. Poison. Deadly to vamps."

"Is there a cure?" She asked, lookin' up at me desperately.

I snickered. "I'm the muscle, not the brains. I'll call G-man."

I placed a call to Giles and found out that there was in fact a cure. But it wasn't gonna happen. See, it seems that the poison can be reversed only by the blood of a Slayer. A whole Slayer. I wasn't about to put my own life on the line for that fuck tart, and I wasn't about to let B do it either.

I re-entered the bedroom with a grim look on my face. Right away, B was up in my face, askin' what the cure was and how to make it better.

"There's only one cure, B, and it ain't gonna happen. He needs to drain a Slayer."

I could see her rollin' the words around in her head before her eyes grew suddenly large.

"I have an idea." She said, and right away I felt like boltin' outta there. "He needs to drain a Slayer. How about instead of draining a Slayer fully, he drains two partly?"

Remember before when I said I was wearing an 'unhappy' face. Well, it came back right then. Times ten.

I was about to ye ll 'fuck no' and run outta there, but she was givin' me this pleading look, and she had tears in here eyes, and she was holdin' my hands so gently that it almost made me wanna cry.

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After about a minute of silence, I finally growled out loud.

"Fuck, B. I can't believe you're fuckin askin' me to do this." I said, turning my head to the side and shaking it with disbelief. Maybe a little bit of disgust thrown in there too.

"I know." She replied quietly. "But we don't have any other choice. If he dies, we lose a champion. We lose a fighter on the side of good.

Yeah, and she'd lose her boy-toy.

I wouldn't look at her as I walked over to the bed Angel lay in and kneeled before him, brushin' my hair away from my neck as I leaned over him.

"Don't get too suck-happy, fang. I'm still a fuckin Slayer and I *will* kill you if I have to." I said quietly just before he sunk his teeth into my neck. "Motherfucker." I grunted as a tear slipped from my eye at the feel of the pain.

No need to go into details here. He sucked my blood. He sucked B's blood. It was a big Suck Fest. End of story.

As soon as I saw B was okay, I got up and I walked out.

Okay, so I kinda stumbled out. Blood loss will do that to ya.

Never thought I'd have to learn from experience.

I stayed away from her and the Scoobs and the library until the big day came.

B didn't bother to come to my room during those few days . . . I guess she figured I was still kinda steamin' over the whole thing. Kinda funny how we were even more alike after the whole incident.

How? Matching bite marks.

So, the big day came and we were all meetin' up at the library before the graduation ceremony started. The plan was to get there at about 6:00 so that we'd have an hour or so to finalize our plans. But I didn't need a refresher. I knew exactly what my role was: Get in, get medieval, get out, and go home alone.

Yeah, that's me soundin' bitter.

I showed up fashionably late at about 6:45. I didn't have a chance to talk to Giles or the Scoobs cos as soon as I walked in, B was draggin' me away to the back stacks. When we were finally outta sight, she turned so that she faced me.

"Faith! You were supposed to meet us here at 6:00. Where were you?" She whispered.

"Sorry, B. I know the plan forwards and backwards. Get in, get out, go home. Didn't wanna get in the way here." I said. I didn't let my bitterness come through, but I did sound mildly annoyed.

She sighed and dropped her shoulders, losing her original offensive position.

"You're not in the way, Faith. You're as much a part of this as the rest of us. We need you here." Then she took a step closer to me. "I need you here."

She was lookin' up at me through her eyelashes, and she looked so cute and smelled so good. I was about to grab her and kiss her, but the reality of the situation came back to me and I shook my thoughts away.

"Where's your boy-toy?" I asked her.

She lowered her eyes from me and took a step back, lookin' kinda shy.

"He's rounding up the rest of the cavalry. Getting everyone ready." Then she looked up at me. "He's leaving tonight, you know. He said that he wants to talk to me before he leaves, but that he's not staying the night. I can't believe he's really leaving me. I don't know what I'm gonna do."

I had enough at that point. 'Angel this' and 'Angel that'. She knew that he was fuckin leavin' for a while by then. To think that she was still all mopey about it. I mean, it's not like she was bein' left alone. She had her family. She had her great friends. She had *me*.

That's more than I ever fuckin had, but still, it wasn't enough for her. As if on cue, I felt my walls go back up. I loved the girl. Next to slaying, she was my everything. But for some whacked out reason, she thought that she had nothing; that without Angel, she'd be lost.

A bitter chuckle escaped my lips. "Well, good luck with that, twinks. Make sure you send me a copy of the novel when it comes out."

I turned and started to walk away but she grabbed my shoulder and spun me around to face her. Her face was a combination of hurt, anger, and confusion.

"Faith, what is WRONG with you? Why are you acting like this?" She said through clenched teeth, tears in her eyes.

And then I let her have it.

"Like *this*? What . . . you mean bitter, scorned, a bitch? Because *I am*. You have the world, B. You have family and friends and a house and lots of pretty stuff. AND YOU'RE ACTING LIKE YOUR FUCKIN WORLD IS OVER BECAUSE YOUR BOYFRIEND IS LEAVING! I have nothing, Buffy. I live in a shitty motel, I have no friends or family, I have no possessions besides what I can carry in a back pack. But you know what? I have you. Or at least I did. Now you're too busy wallowing in your self-pity to think of anyone else besides yourself. Everything I've done, I've done it for *you*. I let Angel drink from me. I'm here fighting this battle when I could just walk away. I stay because of you. But it's not enough for you, Buffy! Nothing is ever enough. Just when I think I've made you happy, you find another reason to wallow. And I hate to fuckin say it, but I don't know how much longer I can stick around to watch!"

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Then I turned around and walked outta the library, blinkin' back the angry tears that were threatening to fall.

I ignored the several pairs of eyes that watched me as I walked out. I wasn't exactly talkin' quiet, so there was no doubt that they heard everything I said. There was no way I wanted to deal with their thoughts on the matter. Of course they'd side with B.

Even though I was pissed, I wasn't about to let them down by runnin' off and poutin' somewhere. Instead, I made my way to the ceremony area and nestled myself in a dark corner.

I hadn't been standin' there for ten minutes when I felt a tingle. It wasn't B; it was a vamp. Just when I was 'bout to whip my stake out, Angel popped up outta nowhere and scared the shit outta me. I took a step back and crossed my arms over my chest, waiting for him to speak.

"How come you're not in the library with the others?" He asked as he stepped closer to me.

"I don't play well with others." I answered with a bittersweet smile.

"Listen, Faith. About the other day . . ."

"Stop right there, soul-boy." I interrupted. "Save your lack of breath. I didn't do it for you, I did it for B. I woulda walked away, but I couldn't do that to her."

He gazed at me intently. Suddenly, a look of realization came across his face.

"How long have you loved her?" He asked me softly.

The look on my face musta been priceless when he asked me that.

I mean, come on. Am I that fuckin transparent?

Either I had let down my walls in front of him, or he was really fuckin perceptive.

Instead of denying it and fighting with him over it, I decided to just give up and let the truth come out. I mean, I was already down. Gettin' kicked a few times while I was down there? Not that big a deal.

"My whole life, I think." I answered, then I snickered. "Does that make feel like more of a man? Knowing that I love her but that she'll always be yours? Maybe not in body, but in mind and soul? Does that make you happy?"

I took a step in his direction, tryin' to intimidate him. But he musta knew what I was doin' cos he stepped forward too, lookin' me right in the eyes.

"No, it doesn't make me feel happy. That's why I'm leaving."

What? *That's* why he's leaving?

Damn. I just though he was a big prick that liked to play heartbreaker.

He continued.

"She's going through a lot of changes in her life right now. She graduating from high school, going to college; she's growing up. Being a Slayer is really hindering her from seeing what her life may look like 10 years down the line from now. She wants a normal life . . . and I can't give that to her." He paused, thinking over his next words. "If I stay, there will be no reason for her to try to find that normal life. It's gonna take her some time to realize that she's better off without me. She's probably going to be hurting a lot, and she's gonna need someone there to help her through it. Someone who has a similar life to her."

I scoffed. "I'm anything *but* similar to her. The only thing we have in common is that we're both Slayers. I don't have the friends or the family or the home. *Slaying* is what I have. I don't get all broody cos I want a normal life because I don't. I'm not normal. I accept that. Now, I've been here for B for almost the last year, and I've seen her through ups and downs. But I don't know how much more I can handle. I have nothing to offer her but me, and that's not enough. She's got the world, and it's still not enough."

As I looked up at Angel, I noticed that he was looking at me too. REALLY looking at me. Almost like he was looking *into* me. I suddenly felt really vulnerable.

I started to back up and I probably woulda ran the hell outta there, but his gentle voice brought me back down.

"She needs you more than you know. As much as you think you're so different from her, your destiny is intertwined with hers. You're the Chosen Two. As fate would have it, you're basically meant to be together. It's up to you to determine what 'together' means."

And with that said, he backed away and slowly disappeared into the background.

For a split second, I could see why B loved him.

He was the voice of reason, and believe it or not, he talked some sense into me that day.

So the big battle came and went. We lost some of the good guys, they lost most of the bad guys. I fought side by side with B and it felt completely natural. Our motions were perfectly coordinated and we moved as if we were one.

For a pretty monstrous demon, the Mayor was surprisingly easy to blow up. A little TNT, a little fire, and BLAM! Demon no more.

Oh yeah, and we got to blow up the school.

That was wicked cool.

As the battle ended and we began to collect ourselves, I looked across the rubble to survey the damage we did. That's when I spotted B and Angel talking between a couple of ambulances.

I wasn't pissed at her anymore. After my talk with Angel, I realized that she really would need someone to be there for her, and I realized that someone was me.

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Not wantin' to disturb their moment, I left the battle scene and headed back to my motel room.

As soon as I walked in the door, I peeled my battle-worn clothes from my body and tossed them into the duffle bag that was serving as my laundry bag. I gathered a few other dirty articles of clothing from around the room and tossed them in the bag, makin' a mental note to go to the Laundromat the next day.

With that said and done, I made my way into the bathroom and started the shower, steppin' in only when the water had heated up.

I let the hot water spray against my face as the dirt and blood washed away from my body. The heat slowly relaxed my tense muscles, and I suddenly felt as if I could sleep for days.

That's when I heard knocking at my door.

I ignored it for a minute or two, but whoever it was wasn't goin' away.

I cursed as I turned off the hot water and wrapped myself in a towel and made my way to the door. When I opened it, I saw B standin' there lookin' all sad and confused and shy.

"You okay?" I asked her quietly, suddenly feelin' kinda exposed as I tugged my towel higher.

But she didn't answer. She just walked right up to me and wrapped her arms around me as if I hadn't freaked out on her earlier. I felt her warm hands on the skin of my back and it made me shiver.

Seein' as that she was makin' no effort to move or say anything, I started backing us up into my room.

There was no way I was gonna let any of the dirtbag inhabitants of the motel walk by and catch me in a towel huggin' another girl. That's one fantasy I don't wanna be in.

When we were fully in the room and I was able to close the door, I felt her tense up against me. I glanced down and saw that she was staring at somethin'; the duffle bag full of laundry.

Yeah, I can see why that mighta freaked her out a little. From an outsider's point of view, it probably looked like I was packin' up to leave. Then it hit me: she probably thought I was leavin' *her*.

I took a step away from her and put my hands on her shoulders, tryin' to get her attention. When she wouldn't meet my gaze, I shook her a little to get her attention.

"It's not what ya think . . ." I started, but she interrupted me.

"You're leaving me too." She said with tears in her eyes, letting them spill down her cheeks as she turned to meet my gaze.

It broke my heart. The girl really had some abandonment issues. And to think that I was

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addin' to her pain *yet again* .

"I'm not leavin'. Not as long as you need me." I answered truthfully.

A sensitive side of me broke to the surface as I pulled her close to me and started to kiss away her tears. I could feel her breath hitch as my lips met her cheeks. She closed her eyes, probably to hide the emotion behind them.

I moved my lips from one cheek to the other slowly and deliberately kissin' away each and every tear. It was then that I noticed that a few tears had escaped my lips and had made it to her jaw.

Now, you have to remember. Not only was I fightin' the love that I was feelin' for her, but I was also dealin' with a mad case of the post-slayage hornies.

Tentatively, I moved my lips down to her jaw line, sneaking my tongue out to taste the salty tears that had pooled there. It was when I hear an audible moan escape her lips that I knew she was feeling the post-slayage hornies too.

I froze, not knowin' whether I should pull away or keep up my ministrations on her tears.

When I felt her turn her head a little and felt her lips brush against mine, I knew that she wanted me to continue as much as I wanted to.

Slowly but surely, our lips started movin' together. It was gentle and as sweet as the kiss that we had shared on the night of the prom. But I came to the realization that our intentions were different on that night as I felt her tongue sweep against my bottom lip. I didn't think twice about it as I parted my lips and let her tongue enter my mouth, lettin' it slide sensually against mine.

Now, I may be a bit naïve, but I'm not an idiot. This was Buffy Summers, kissin' me of her own free will, makin' the next move.

I just about did a little happy dance. Actually I kinda did do a little excited movement.

And that's when I felt it: the towel I was wearin' slipped from me and pooled around my ankles, makin' a little thud noise as it hit the floor.

B pulled back to see what the noise was and her eyes grew wide as she gazed upon my naked body. I watched as she slowly raised her right hand and ran it across the skin of my stomach, smilin' lightly as my muscles jumped at her touch.

As her caresses became more intent, I couldn't help the words that escaped my mouth.

"God, I want you so much, B." I groaned as she ran her left hand down my side.

Note to self: Fire my internal censor. Hire a new one.

When I realized that I had said the words out loud, I clenched my eyes shut and froze, waitin' for her to run the hell outta my room. As a minute passed and I heard nor felt any type of

reaction from her, I opened my eyes just a little to look down at her.

Her intense green eyes were staring up at me with somethin' in them that I had never seen before. I'd seen hurt, confusion, sadness, happiness, relief, etc. But this was different.

She was lookin' up at me with two things I never thought I'd get to see in her: lust and love.

Slowly, she closed the short distance between us, her clothed body pressed firmly against my naked form. As she wrapped her arms around me and caressed my back, she uttered two words that would change our relationship forever.

"Show me."

And you better believe that I was gonna.

Chapter Six - Point of No Return

Two words. B just went ahead right then and there and blew my fuckin mind with two little words.

'Show me'.

I knew exactly what she was askin' me for. She wanted me to show her how much I wanted her. How much I *needed* her.

Let me tell ya: She didn't need to tell me twice.

Before I even realized that I was movin', my lips were on hers and my arms were wrapped tightly around her hot little body. Sexual instinct, if such a thing even exists, took me completely over. As I kissed her hungrily, I began to walk her backwards towards the bed.

I didn't stop my movement even when I felt the back of her knees hit the bed. I kept pushin' until her back was softly laid down on the mattress and my body was resting firmly atop of hers, her legs parted slightly to allow me close full-body contact.

Our bodies were melded intimately together as we kissed hungrily, craving as much contact as possible. Her lips were so soft against mine and her mouth was so warm and inviting that for a split second, I felt like I was in heaven.

I grabbed her hands from her sides and raised them above her head, holdin' them there as I began to rain kisses all over her face and neck.

Somethin' strange was comin' over me. I didn't wanna just fuck her. I didn't wanna just make love to her; I wanted to *worship* her. I wanted to kiss and lick every single part of her body and just lavish her with my attention. I wanted her to be perfectly clear that I wanted and needed her; that I completely and totally loved her.

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I placed soft and tentative kisses along her lips and chin, movin' slowly along her jaw line to her ear. Her body was shakin' like a leaf and I realized how nervous and emotional she had to have been at that very moment. I brought my lips to her ear and whispered, "Shhh . . . it's okay, B. You don't have to do anything, baby. Just relax and let me show you how much I love you."

I was just about to start kissin' her again when I felt a hot drop of water hit my cheek. It wasn't from me; it was from B.

Slowly, I pulled my head back to glance at the completely tear-stained face of the small blonde beneath me. She wasn't shakin' cos she was nervous; she was shakin' cos she was cryin'.

I completely froze.

I mean, come on. I've never once made someone cry in bed. Cries of pleasure? Sure. I'm Faith. Pleasure is what I do. But tears like this? Tears of pain? It was somethin' I wasn't used to seein'.

Then somethin' hit me like a brick.

She wasn't doin' this because she wanted to. She was doin' this because she wanted to feel needed; cos she wanted to feel some kinda self-worth in dealin' with all of her loss and hurt.

As much as I wanted her, I wasn't gonna be temporary escape. I'm the QUEEN of the temporary escape, and if there's one thing I learned from it, I know that it always leaves ya feelin' emptier than before.

And I wasn't gonna be that for her. I just couldn't do it.

As quickly as I had us on the bed, I was off of her and standin' at the foot of the bed, starin' down at her trembling figure.

"Faith?" She asked quietly.

Put the dunce cap on me, folks.

I'm such an idiot. I can't believe I almost fell for that little 'death trap'. There was no way in hell I was gonna be the convenient way out or the easy way out. There was nothin' convenient OR easy about the whole situation.

"I'm sorry, B. I can't." I said shakily.

She looked up at me through her glistening eyelashes and gave me the most honest look that I've ever seen.

"I need you." She replied evenly.

Fuck. Maybe I was wrong about the situation.

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Still, I couldn't just jump her again. Stupid decisions are made in times of emotional duress. I didn't wanna be the stupid mistake.

Shit, I had been the 'stupid mistake' my entire life. For once in my life, I wanted something different for myself.

I stilled myself and tried to regroup.

"No." I shook my head. "You don't need *me*. You need to *feel*. Something. Anything. And as much as you think this may be a good idea, you're gonna fuckin hate yourself in the mornin'. I can't be a part of that, B. I'm sorry, but I can't."

I stood in silence as we just stared at each other for a few minutes. I watched as her tears stopped and a look of realization came across her face. She raised up from her position and sat facing me, her legs on the bed still.

"No. Faith, I *need* you." She said, determination in her voice.

I shook my head again.

"I won't be your temporary escape. I'm sorry."

She raised herself up on her knees and made her way to the end of the bed, placing herself just a few feet away from me.

"I feel cold without you. I feel so empty when you're not at my side."

What?

Color me confused. I thought it was the boy-toy's job to make her feel complete. Not me.

I was lost in her gaze for a brief moment, but I shook my head and steeled myself.

"No. Ya just feel lonely and abandoned right now. That's okay, I *totally* get it. But you're really reachin' here, B."

And, yunno what? Then she really *was* reachin'.

She extended her arms across the distance and pulled me closer, her hands graspin' onto the material of my shirt.

"I'm not 'reaching', Faith. I'm trying to tell you that I *need* you. That I *want* you. That I . . ." she paused, pullin' me even closer, ". . . that I *love* you. That I've wanted this for a long time and that at this moment, there is nothing more in the world that I want than to be in your arms, kissing you and feeling your warmth."

That . . . was . . . beautiful.

For the first time in my life, someone said 'I love you' to me and really meant it.

Yunno what? She really *did* mean it. I could see it in her eyes as I closed the distance between us. I could taste it in her kiss as I crushed my mouth to hers.

And I could feel it in her heart as I lay her down on the bed and pressed my chest up against hers.

"What does this mean for us?" I mumbled against her lips as we kissed and shimmied up the bed.

"I don't know." She mumbled back, putting her hands on my face and pushin' me back enough to look into my eyes. "I *really* don't know. Are you . . . okay with that?"

I blinked as I continued to breathe hard.

"What do you want, B?" I asked her, not really knowin' where she was goin' with this.

She chuckled. "I want something normal. But more importantly," she pulled my face down and gave me a soft and gentle kiss, "right now? There's nothing more in the world that I want than *this*."

Should I have taken that little revelation as a sign to stop? Probably. But she was lookin' at me with such emotion and such love . . . and I just couldn't hold back any more.

In a flash I was kissin' her again, tryin' to convey every emotion and feeling I was havin' into that very kiss. I needed her to know that I loved her, and words weren't enough at that point.

I needed to show her.

I ran my thumbs under the hem of her shirt as we kissed, tuggin' gently so that she knew I wanted it off her. She raised her back slightly off the bed, leaving me just enough room to slide the shirt up and over her head. It left her hair lookin' kinda messy and wild; it matched the untamed look that she was wearin' on her face.

Instead of layin' back down, she arched upwards even more so, pushing her stomach and chest against mine.

Before I could make a snarky comment about her eagerness, she was pullin' me down by my sides so that we were restin' against each other again.

"I need to feel you against me." She breathed out, her mouth instantly seekin' mine out again.

Now, remember a while back I told you about the Slayer connection and the warm tingles, and about how it was even more intense when we were touching?

Well, take that and triple it in our then situation. No, that's not even a good enough way to describe it. Try 'intense times ten'. My entire body was humming from the contact I was havin' with her.

Now, see, a feelin' like that can't be ignored or dismissed. It's almost as if fate was tryin' to tell us that *THIS* was exactly how we were supposed to end up. Together. Lovin' each other and

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bein' as close as possible. It felt so right . . . how could I see or feel any wrong in what we were doin'?

I pulled my mouth away from hers so that I could kiss down her body. I needed more . . . I wanted to be touchin' her, tasting her skin, just breathin' her in.

I kissed down her neck, down her chest, stopping at the valley between her breasts. Receiving no stop signs, I unhooked the front clasp to her bra and pushed it away down her sides before leanin' in and circling one of her hard nipples with my tongue. I licked and nibbled it a little before opening my mouth and taking more of the flesh into my mouth, suckling gently as she writhed beneath me.

I repeated the same gesture on the other nipple before I started to slide further down her body, dippin' my tongue in her belly button before movin' my fingers to unbutton her jeans.

Before I had the chance to pull her pants from her body, I felt myself being pulled back up so that our faces were right in front of each other. She pulled my face to hers and started to suck on my bottom lip before thrusting her tongue into my mouth.

I couldn't get over how every part of her tasted like vanilla and honey. Her lips, her tongue, her skin. There was only one other part of her that I wanted to taste, and I was willin' to bet that it tasted just as sweet as the rest of her.

I stopped suckin' on her tongue long enough to groan out a few words.

"B . . . I wanna taste you."

I didn't even recognize my own voice. It was so deep and throaty, and just drippin' with sexual desire.

She pulled back and looked at me, my face in her hands. It looked like she was studyin' me or was searchin' for somethin' on my face. I gave her a small smile for reassurance. I wanted her to know that I was there with her and that I really did need this as much as she did.

A smile appeared on her face as she ran her thumbs over my dimples and then over my lips.

"I want you up here . . . with me. Can you do that . . . for me?" She asked almost shyly.

She really is fuckin' adorable. She can go from vixen to shy-girl in the matter of seconds. Pretty fuckin' hard for me to say no to a question like that, don't ya think?

I didn't answer her with words. Instead, I dipped my head down and caught her lips in the softest kiss that I could ever imagine. She kept her hands on my face, caressing my cheeks with her thumbs as she relaxed into the kiss.

Slowly, I ran my right hand down the side of her body, stopping to tickle and caress every inch along the way.

When I finally reached the already undone button of her jeans, I pulled back from the kiss so that I could look into her eyes. I don't think that I ever felt so much love in my life than I was

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feelin' for her right then and there.

As if she was readin' my mind, she raised her hips up just a fraction, a silent sign for my hand to continue its descent.

I couldn't help the groan that escaped me as I slid my hand into her damp panties and felt the warmth beneath them as I cupped my hand over her slick sex. Now, I'd been with a couple different girls before B came along, and I don't ever remember such heat comin' from them. Needless to say, it was wicked hot.

I made sure to keep my eyes on B's face as I wriggled my fingers around her wet folds, gettin' used to the fuckin fantastic feelin' of havin' her juices all over my fingers. Her breath hitched in her throat and she shuddered as I collected the moisture with my fingers and brought it up to her swollen clit, teasingly rubbin' it ever so gently.

After about a minute or so of soft-rubbin', she finally got frustrated enough to ask for more.

"Harder, Faith . . . please."

You better believe that I complied with her request. Not only did I increase the pressure on her clit, but I also sped up my movement on it. She was so fuckin wet, I could hear my fingers slidin' around, makin' all sorts of nasty little sounds.

It was so fuckin hot.

When I heard her breathing pick up, I knew that I had to slow down the momentum or she'd come too soon. I wanted it to last for her; I wanted it to be memorable as well as pleasurable.

Call me old-fashioned that way.

I removed my fingers from her clit and lowered them to her dripping channel, teasing over it with my juice-coated fingertips.

"Faith . . . please." She pleaded. I knew what she wanted; I just wanted to hear her say it.

I mean, come on. She's a fuckin big girl. If she knows what she wants, she should learn how to ask for it.

I continued the teasing motion with my fingers as I began to nibble and suck on her neck, her warm breath ticklin' the side and top of my face.

"Faith . . . please . . . inside." I lifted my head up and looked her in the eyes, givin' her one last chance to back out. Her eyes pleaded with me as she said, "I want . . . n-need you inside of me. Please, Faith . . . please make me come, baby."

Those seven words, 'Please Faith, please make me come, *baby*'; those had to be the sexiest words I ever heard come out of her mouth. The only thing that would got me hotter woulda been, 'put your mouth on my hot pussy', but I could only expect so much from her on our first time.

Yeah, I was already plannin' the next time . . . and the time after that . . . in fact, I think I've had us booked up for the next decade or so.

Besides . . . I had more plans for later than night. I was gonna taste Buffy no matter what. I was driven to do so. Anyhow, I put those thoughts to the back of my mind as I focused on the task hand.

I ran my fingers through her silky folds a few more times, makin' sure that they were wet enough so I wouldn't hurt her. I knew that she had only ever had sex with Angel, and I didn't want this to be a painful experience for her.

Feeling ready, I lowered my lips to B's as I slowly entered her hot pussy with two fingers. She groaned into my mouth and I stilled my hand, lettin' her adjust to me bein' inside of her.

That still fuckin' floors me when I think about it. There I was, dark Faith, a big nothing, with my fingers buried in the tight little pussy of Buffy-fuckin'-Summers. I coulda died right then and there and have been happy, cos I woulda knew what heaven had felt like, even if it had only been for those few seconds.

When I felt her hips slowly start to rock against my hand, I knew that she was ready for me to continue. The movement of my hand was kinda restricted cos she still had her jeans on, but I guess that it just made the whole thing that much more intimate. My palm was pushed up pretty hard against her clit and I felt her inner muscles start to clench around my fingers almost as soon as I started to move them.

I picked up the pace and started to push into her more deeply, lovin' the way that she felt around my fingers. I was literally holdin' her in the palm of my hands, and she gave that to me willingly. It was kinda beautiful.

Her breathing became really rough as I thrust my fingers faster and faster into her. It became clear to me then that no matter what I tried to do to stop it or slow it down, she was on the brink of coming.

I gave her one last deep kiss before pullin' back just enough to watch her face. Her lips were parted and kinda swollen from me kissin' her. Her eyes would be open for a second here and there, but she kept scrunchin' them shut every time that she'd let out a moan. Her walls start to clench even tighter around my fingers, and I knew that she was startin' to come.

"Buffy . . . open your eyes." I said, and she did.

Her big green eyes were staring up into mine and I could see so many emotions runnin' behind 'em. I knew that she could probably see the emotion in mine too, but I wanted to make sure that she was certain of it.

I placed my knee between her legs and pressed it into the back of my hand, makin' me drive my fingers that much deeper into her.

"I love you, B." I whispered as I gazed into her eyes, curling my fingers so that I hit her g-spot.

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Her body arched up into mine as she came, callin' out my name over and over as small jolts ran outta her body and into mine. Her juices came pourin' outta her and covered my hand, but I made no effort to move it. Instead, I kept it buried deep inside of her, movin' it really gently so that she could ride out her orgasm for as long as possible.

She kept her eyes focused on mine the whole time. I could see her tryin' as hard as she could to keep them from slammin' shut as each wave of pleasure rolled over her.

The corners of my mouth cracked up into the tiniest of smiles as I leaned in and kissed her gently, lettin' my tongue softly caress hers as she wound her hands in my hair.

I started movin' my hand just a little bit more, tryin to tease her a little bit. I never thought that she'd come again so soon, but two minutes later, her walls were clenchin' around me and she was gasping into my mouth.

It was the single most sexy moment of my entire fuckin life: me kissin her softly as I slowly fucked her again, her gasping into my mouth as she writhed beneath me.

Yeah. Like I said. Pretty fuckin sexy.

After she came for the second time, I finally pulled my hand out of her panties. I was so fuckin tempted to completely lick my fingers clean . . . but I wanted my first time tastin' her to be right from the source. I couldn't wait to get her thighs wrapped around my head as I fucked her with my tongue . . .

. . . but all of that had to wait cos at that moment, B was closin' her eyes to get some rest, holdin me tight against her the whole time.

And yunno what?

I didn't even care that I wasn't gettin' any in return. Fucked up, right? I don't know exactly what it was, but I was completely happy just havin' her let me get close like that. Close enough to 'make love' to her, and close enough to hold her 'til she fell asleep afterwards.

That night, I went to sleep with Buffy on my mind, in my heart . . . and on my fingers.

Heh.

Sometimes, bein' me wasn't so bad after all.

Chapter Seven - Rock My World

Remember that part where I said that bein' me wasn't so hard sometimes?

Well, it *definitely* wasn't hard to be me when I woke up in the middle of the night to feel B trailin her hands up and down my naked body and leavin soft kisses everywhere she touched.

That was one hell of a wake-up call.

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See, now, I was never given that kind of attention before. Sex was more of a 'wham-bam thank you ma'am' thing for me. Normally by this point, I'd be happily alone. I would never let anyone get close enough to do the sweet and loving things that she was doin' to me then and there.

It wasn't just touching. It wasn't just kissing. It wasn't just gettin to know my body.

She was *worshipping* me, just like I had wanted to do to her the night before. Only, I never got the chance.

I was too busy with the whole 'fucking her' thing. Heh.

No, wait. I've gotta stop myself there. It wasn't fucking, and it wasn't just sex either. I was makin love to her. For the first time in my life, I made love to someone. True, I didn't get off or anything . . . but that didn't matter. The only thing that mattered to me was the fact that she let me get so close to her; that she let me tell her and show her how I felt without pushing me away.

Yeah, it pretty much blew my fucking mind.

But, I guess that whole 'me not getting' off' thing wasn't a big issue anymore, cos Buffy soon started trailin her kisses southward from my stomach.

I musta shivered or twitched or somethin cos all the sudden, she was kissin her way back up my body, not stoppin 'til she reached my lips.

Yeah, I could DEFINITELY get used to bein woken up like that.

"Morning, sleepy." She said as she pulled back from the kiss, propping herself up so that she was lookin down at me. Her voice was raspy and thick, most likely a result of her crying and then sleepin all night.

"Hey." I smiled, liftin my head up a little to give her a chaste peck on her lips.

"Did I wake you up?" She asked playfully as she traced lazy circles on my stomach.

I couldn't help it as my muscles jumped at her touch. Not only am I ticklish, but . . . well, I had Buffy's hands on me. *Buffy's hands*. My muscles were as fuckin excited as the rest of me was.

I nodded my head a little. "Yeah, ya did. But I'm not exactly complainin here. Feel free to continue." I joked.

Somehow, I didn't think she was gonna take me seriously.

But, as I was quickly learnin, Buffy Summers was just full of fuckin surprises. After leanin in for one last mind-blowin kiss, she started lazily draggin her tongue down my body.

She started at my jawline, then made sure to nibble and suck on my neck for awhile. Next thing I knew, she had a nipple in her mouth and was busy rubbin and tweakin the other one in

her warm little hand.

Much like a pre-pubescent boy, that's all it took. Sixty-seconds of her hot little mouth on my nipple and I was coming. She didn't even get close to my pussy yet, and I was already feelin satisfied.

She pulled her mouth off my achingly hard nipple and looked up at me through her eyelashes, arching an eyebrow at me.

"Did you just do what I *think* you did?" She asked.

Cue inappropriate blushing.

"Uhh, yeah, I guess I did, B." I said sheepishly.

Wait a minute. There was no reason for me to feel awkward about that. Life would be good if everyone had spontaneous orgasms like that. I think there'd be a lot less angry people out there.

On that note: let's give a big 'Hell Yeah!' to spontaneous orgasms!! HELL YEAH!!!

Heh. I guess that makes me a fuckin cheerleader. Mmm . . . fucking cheerleaders. Wasn't B a cheerleader? Oh man, that's HOT.

Sorry, thought train. Right.

Anyhow, after B found out that I came without her even having to touch me, she laughed out loud.

"Oh, Faith. I can SO do better than that. I thought my first time with a girl would be more of a challenge than *that*."

I smirked at her and waggled my eyebrows.

"So, you've thought about havin sex with girls then, huh?"

Yeah, it was HER turn to blush then.

"Umm . . . only you. But, I always pictured it a little differently than how it happened 2 minutes ago." She said with a wicked little grin.

Well.

That was a pleasant little revelation.

She thought about having sex with me before. Definitely made me feel like less of a perv for all the times I thought about fucking her senseless.

Far be it from me to stop her dreams from coming true. Yeah, I'm real giving like that.

Again, I smirked at her.

"Well, I'm pretty sure I don't have any plans at the moment. Maybe ya wanna show me how that dream went, yeah?"

And with a huge grin on her face, she continued her descent down my body, kissing and licking and sucking every inch that she came in contact with. When I felt her pass my bellybutton, I knew that I'd be experiencing her hot and talented mouth on my pussy any second.

No sooner than I had the thought did I feel her tongue run up my dripping slit.

Holy Mary Mother of God.

She hadn't even *touched* my clit yet and I felt like I was about to pop again. Maybe it was because I had pictured havin sex with her for so long that my body was too excited. In hopes of tryin' to hold off my oncoming orgasm for just a little longer, I grabbed a handful of sheets and gritted my teeth.

B musta sensed what I was tryin to do . . . and I think she was completely entertained by it. She lifted her head to look up and me and had this goofy grin on her face. Gently, she brought her head back down and nudged my legs further apart, openin me up more so she could have her wicked way with me.

She inhaled real deep a few times before placing a kiss on my inner thigh . . . then the skin where my inner leg meets my pussy lips . . . then the top of my clean-shaven mound . . . and finally, right smack dab on my clit.

I hissed at the contact, but still, I was tryin' to control myself.

But my little B knew exactly what she wanted and exactly what she was doin'. I glanced down to catch her devious grin right before she took my clit in her mouth and started to furiously suck on it.

She had an agenda: she was gonna make me come fast and hard. Repeatedly, I think.

I clenched my eyes shut as my breath hitched in my throat. This. Was. Heaven.

There was no stoppin the girly little squeal that escaped my throat when she started to flick her tongue over my hard clit as she continued to suck on it at the same time.

See, now this was where guys were different. They could get the 'suck' down, and they could get the 'flick' down, but they couldn't do both at once. Nope, not at all. Not like Buffy was doin' to me right then and there.

I made a conscious decision at that point: no more sex with guys. Ever. Strictly ladies for me from that point on.

No, fuck that. Strictly *Buffy* for me from that point on. There was no way that anyone else would ever be able to compare to her, so there was no use tryin. My heart belonged to Buffy.

And apparently, my clit be longed to her too cos she wasn't lettin up on it *at all*. SO not complainin about that. Shit, as long as she kept doin' what she was doin' I didn't care about anything else at all.

Not even a minute after she started, I felt myself startin to lose control. My tight grip on the sheets managed to tear them down the middle, and I'm pretty sure that I was tastin blood in my mouth from biting my lip so hard.

As my stomach muscles tightened and my body trembled roughly from the orgasm running through me, Buffy changed up her method a little. She released my clit from the confines of her mouth and started to run her tongue flat against it, letting me ride out my orgasm in perfect comfort.

I lay there panting like mad, eyes still clenched shut as my body slowly stopped its trembling.

Not to brag or anything . . . but that was the most wicked powerful orgasm I'd ever had in my *life*, and I've had LOTS of sex, man. I'd say that you should try it sometime, but . . . yeah, I'm not about ready to share B with ya.

When I had finished coming down from my orgasm, I was finally able to unclench my eyes. Blinkin a few times to clear the stars I was seein, I glanced down at B. She looked like the cat that got the canary . . . all proud smile and raised eyebrow.

"B . . ." I huffed out huskily, but she didn't let me go on.

"Shhhhh." She whispered. "I'm not done yet."

With that said, she lowered her head to my dripping pussy yet again, this time licking away some of my juices. I coulda told her to wipe the wetness that was on her chin, but I was at a sudden loss for words as I felt her languidly licking along my folds.

Again with the heaven.

My clit started throbbin again, still supersensitive from her last encounter with it.

She shocked me again when she slowly pushed her tongue into my dripping hole and started rubbing my clit at the same with her thumb.

I was startin to wonder exactly if I was really the first girl B had been with, but I couldn't even finish that thought as the ecstasy of the moment hit me.

Her little pink tongue suddenly felt large and thick, like it was fillin me up completely. She started out workin it in nice and slow, but she picked up the pace as the minutes progressed. Her thumb kept a constant motion on my clit . . . soft enough to make me crave more.

My body started writhing on the bed, arching up and conveniently pressing myself harder into her. Heh. Yeah, I know how to work it.

I half expected her to tease me . . . to back off the more I pushed into her. But, she didn't. She

was givin me exactly what I wanted . . . what I *needed* .

Just when I thought it couldn't get any better, she started doin' this *thing* . She was kinda moanin or groanin, makin her tongue hum with the vibrations. It was fuckin hot, and just enough to bring me to the point of orgasm.

"Oh god . . . oh, B . . . fuck." I groaned out, surprisingly silent with the exception of a few moans, grunts, and hisses until that point.

My hips started to pump a little more furiously as my orgasm began to wash over me. I felt her hands grab onto my hips, tryin to steady me as she pulled her tongue from my cunt and started flickin at my clit again.

I was almost disappointed to feel the loss of her tongue inside, but her fingers quickly replaced it and began to work their own magic.

"OhgodOhgodOhgodOhgod!" I cried out, again clenching my eyes shut in fear that they'd shoot right the fuck outta my head if I didn't.

When my third and final orgasm washed over me, I fell completely limp back onto the bed. I was panting so hard and I coulda swore that I was seein' stars. I was completely spent. Heh. Apparently, it's really hard to lay there and get worshipped, especially three kick-ass orgasms later.

I sighed contentedly, a smile playing across my lips as I felt B climbing up the bed and nestling herself along the side of my body. It all felt too good to be true. Fuck, it probably was. 'Naughty girls' like me don't end up happy, and we *definitely* don't get the girl.

But I was too fuckin' ecstatic to let *anything* bring me down at that point. Aliens coulda landed and took over, the moon coulda crashed into the sun; hell, even an apocalypse coulda started and I still woulda thought it was a pretty damn good day.

So, I lay there completely spent, B curled up against me and placing soft kisses on my arm and shoulder. Our legs were tangled up together and I came to the sudden realization that she musta taken her jeans off at some point in time. My mind was yellin for me to perk up and glance down at her goodies, but my body wouldn't let me.

"Don't worry . . . it'll still be here in the morning." She said jokingly, instalnly knowing what I thinkin about.

I didn't let it show, but I was so completely fuckin happy when she said that. It meant that she was stayin' the night with me. It meant that I wouldn't wake up alone feelin' used and dirty. And I was fairly sure that it meant that she wasn't havin' any regrets about what happened between us.

During my thoughts, she had leaned up on her elbow and was starin' down at me with an amused look on her face. I was finally broken from my thoughts and looked up at her with my eyebrows furrowed.

"What?" I asked, wondering what was amusing her so.

"Nothing." She giggled. "You're just adorable is all. Guess I've never gotten to see that side of you before. I've seen happy and sad, sultry and alluring, angry and more angry, but I've never seen cute and adorable. I like it."

Before I could complain about being called 'cute' and 'adorable' her lips were on mine and she was suckin on my tongue.

Yeah, not fair. Way to throw a girl off: tongue sucking.

I pulled back slightly when I noticed a particular taste in her mouth . . . the taste of my pussy. It jarred me slightly. I couldn't believe that I was tasting my pussy on Buffy Summers' lips. In fact, I couldn't believe that Buffy Summers had just fucked me and made me come three times. Apparently, the Powers that Be musta been havin' a lotto on good fortune, and I was holdin' the winning ticket.

Heh . . . 'all it takes is a dollar and a dream', baby. Well, maybe not a dollar and a dream so much in this case. More like a giant worm demon and a boyfriend on the run.

Whatever. It all worked out in my favor anyways.

"You taste like me." I murmured against her lips as I pulled her body closer to me.

"Pretty good, huh?" She asked, tickling my sides slightly and making me wriggle around a bit.

I giggled, finally making her pull away from my lips. She brushed the hair outta my face, her face only about a foot away from mine.

"Well, I don't really know if it's 'good', B. I don't have much to compare it to at the minute. Maybe you can help me out with that part." I said with a wicked grin.

Slayer stamina. Gotta love it. I was just about rarin' and ready to go again.

"Mmmm." She mumbled as she lay her head back on my shoulder and closed her eyes. "Sleep first, eat later." She finished with a smile, causing me to laugh aloud.

"You can count on it." I said as I placed a chaste kiss on her forehead before swiftly falling asleep.

The morning came all too soon. I woke up completely wrapped up in Buffy. Her hair was covering me, her arms and legs were intertwined with mine, and she was basically on top of me.

I'm pretty sure that it was the best possible way I could've ever imagined waking up. I guess that makes me a big ol' sap, but I don't fuckin care, man. If you were in my shoes . . . or rather, in my bed with her, you'd feel the same way.

I woke her up by placing a hundred tiny kisses all over her face. Girly, I know, but I guess she just brings that out in me.

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Sex was probably the next thought that crossed my mind. I realized how intimate our position was and it was makin me wicked hot. Gently, I rolled her over and started kissin her really soft, but I stopped when I felt her hands gently pushing on my shoulders.

"Mmm, Faith." She moaned. "If we start that, I'm never gonna leave."

I kissed her a little deeper before I finally pulled my lips from hers and buried my face in her neck.

"That was kinda the plan." I joked. As if she had never stopped me, I started kissin and sucking on her neck. Her skin tasted like a mixture of cherries and vanilla.

Made me want to eat her in more ways than one.

After about a minute of letting me have my naughty way, she finally pushed me back again.

"As much as I'd love to stay . . . my mom's probably worried sick about me. I wouldn't be surprised is she sent out Willow and Xander as a search party." She said with a small amount of sadness in her voice. "I should probably go."

She moved to get up out of bed, so I let her go. If it was my choice, we'd stay in bed for days, completely naked. But, I knew she was right. Joyce was probably worried sick, and I didn't wanna add to B's oncoming grief.

I watched her as she walked around my room and picked up her articles of clothing, putting them on one by one as she found them.

Suddenly, a wave of fear hit me. What did the night we spent together mean to her? Was she my girlfriend? Was she gonna pretend it never happened? Was I supposed to be low-key, or could I shout it out to the world?

"Hey, B." I began, my voice slightly shaky. "So . . . what do we do now?"

She looked kinda confused.

"Umm, well . . . I'm gonna go home . . . shower, probably go back to bed for a while. You can go back to sleep too . . . I know it's kinda early for you. Hey . . . if you're hungry, I'll run across the street and pick up some pastries and coffee for you."

Thoughtful as she was, it wasn't exactly the answer I was looking for.

As she leaned over to pull on her shoes, I grabbed onto her hand and pulled her into a sitting position next to me.

"That's not what I was talking about. I mean . . . where do we go from here? Last night was . . . well, it was pretty fuckin fantastic. I loved holdin' you against me and just havin' you here with me. Was it . . . was this a one-time deal?" I asked shyly, turning my head down.

She paused for a minute before putting her finger under my chin and tilting my head back up, placing a feather-light kiss on my lips.

"I don't really know where to go from here." She said honestly.

I just about felt my heart break. But then she continued.

"But I do know that being in your arms? It felt right. Like I was supposed to be in them." She paused again, thinking over her words. "I don't think that I'm at a point where I can be defining things, because my life is in such disarray right now. But . . . I don't want this to be a one time thing."

I couldn't help the huge smile that popped up on my face.

"Really?" I asked excitedly.

"Really." She answered back with a smile. "But . . ."

Oh Jesus. Not the but. Anything but the but.

" . . . I don't wanna make big with the publicity. I'm definitely not ready for all that. Can this just be between you and me? At least for now?"

Well, that wasn't too much to ask. I could understand her wanting to be low-key for a while. Like she said, her life was in a pretty big state of chaos then. All she needed was the drama of introducing something like this to her friends and family. I didn't wanna add to the mess, so I shamelessly agreed to keep things quiet.

"Yeah, that's fine with me B. But, there's just one more thing: there'll be more sex, right?" I added with a devious grin.

A grin popped up on her face that matched mine perfectly.

"Well, duh." She said as she closed the distance between us and kissed me hungrily.

It didn't take me much convincing for me to have her completely naked and writing under me again as I made her come like a freight train.

But, I did make her call her mom first.

I'm considerate like that.

At about noon, she was dressed again and walkin out my door. I was sad to see her go, but I was in definite need of a good nap.

As the door closed behind her, I buried my face in the pillow she had been using, inhaling deeply as if to soak up her remaining scent.

I was so completely wrapped up in her, and things were looking as if they were gonna work out. I just had to be patient and show some self-restraint.

I guess it just sucks that two of my weaknesses are a lack of patience and a lack of self -

restraint. Oh yeah, and let's not forget my weakness for cute blondes that give good head. Heh.

I fell asleep with a big-ass goofy grin on my face. For once in my life . . . I was almost perfectly happy, and things were looking up.

Chapter Eight - Summer Lovin

If you asked me to list ten ways that I thought I'd be spending that summer, 'shackin up with Buffy' probably wouldn't have been on my list. I mean, yeah, it's what I *wanted* to happen, but I'm used to not gettin' what I want

Maybe some things are too good to be true, but at the time? Man, it seemed so fuckin perfect.

Shortly after graduation, Xander decided that he wanted to travel. He packed up his beat-up old truck and took off for about eight weeks, driving as far as his gas money could take him. I think he was tryin' to find some kind of direction in his seemingly directionless life

Hey, I can relate.

Willow, on the other hand, got pretty wrapped up in her relationship with Oz. I guess that after she finally had sex with the guy, she realized what she had been missin' all those years. I'm pretty sure that most of their summer was spent shacked up in his bedroom, which was, of course, fine by me

Not that I didn't like Red, cos I did. I *do*. She's a cool girl and all, but . . . even though she didn't know it, she was pretty much the biggest factor in why B didn't want people to know about 'us'.

After years of being 'good Buffy', she didn't want to seem 'flawed' or 'wrong' in the eyes of her best friend. I guess I can understand that. I mean . . . B's probably the closest thing to a 'best friend' that I've ever had, and I'd never want her to see my flaws

Trust me, I have *many*

But I'm not here to tell ya about my flaws. It'd take up too much of your time

As I was sayin' B's two main distractions, Red and Xander, were pretty much outta the picture. Angel was in L.A. Her Ma was workin' lots of over-time, tryin' to save up money to pay for her college. Giles was around, but he had his own stuff. You know, boring bookish kinda stuff

Anyhow, that pretty much left me and B to ourselves

SO not complaining

I don't think I've ever been closer to another person in my life. Physically and emotionally. It

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was kinda new territory for me, and I had to learn as I went, but . . . well, folks, it was a bona fide relationship. First one I ever had

And it pretty much turned me into a big fuckin sap. I can't really say that I was 'pussy-whipped' cos B had me wrapped around her little finger long before I ever got to taste her. Still, you get the idea

We spent pretty much every night together. We spent so much time together, in fact, that I decided to get outta that old dingy motel. My B was too good for that. I needed someplace new and fresh that was worthy of her and that didn't make me too ashamed to smuggle her back to every night

But, see, apartments aren't exactly free, as I had to learn the hard way. I had to get all responsible and stuff. I got a job at the Bronze, workin' wherever they needed me. Bartending, waiting tables, security, settin' up musical instruments for the bands, etc. The manager had a sweet spot for me, so he gave me more money per hour than I deserved, and I got tips some nights too

I found a decent apartment in downtown SunnyD and with Giles as a co-signer, I moved in in the beginning of July. It wasn't spectacular or anything, but it was home. It had 2 bedrooms, a kitchen, a full bathroom, living room, a loft . . . but most importantly, it had B. It was more than I ever needed

So, as I was sayin, B and I spent most of our days together. Most nights, too. She didn't lie to her Ma about where she was sleepin either. I guess that Mrs. S figured that since her two best friends were temporarily outta the picture, I'd be serving as the new distraction. Besides, she was outta town on business a lot and didn't want B to be alone

I was kinda surprised how natural my relationship with B came along. It was like she didn't even care that we were pretty unconventional. Seein' as how strait-laced she was, I was pretty sure that she'd freak out after that first night we had sex . . . but she was really casual about it. Comfortable even. A lot of our communication was done through silence . . . a glance, a touch . . . we just seemed to fit perfectly together

We also laughed a lot. One time after I had chased her around the apartment until we collapsed in a fit of giggles onto the bed, I asked her how I ever got so lucky to end up with her. Her response?

"Because no one else answered my personal ad: 'Single Slayer seeks Same. Must enjoy moonlit strolls through the cemetery and candle-lit rituals'."

My girl. So witty. You better believe that I gave it to her good after that

I guess that you're probably wonderin' what our sex-life was like.

Well, a true lady reveals nothin'

Then again . . .

. . . I'm no fuckin lady. I'm a sex-machine. Faith, the sex-bot. That's me. So . . .

Sex with B was fuckin awesome. She was a really quick learner and an incredible student. I'd like to think that I taught her everything she knows about pussy . . . but then I remember that she's had one her whole life and pretty much knows how it works. I was just her practice-dummy. Not that I minded of course.

I *really* didn't mind.

I think maybe that the thought of it *did* freak her out for about the first week or so, but she got over it when she realized how good things could be.

How good we were together.

We snuggled a lot. At her request, of course. But it's not like I minded. In fact, she turned me into a closet 'snuggler'. I'd get all kindsa cranky if I didn't get my daily Buffy-snuggles.

But, see, being that close in proximity to her got me all worked up, too. To feel her heart beating against my chest or back. Her breath tickling my neck. Her warm skin pressed up against mine. If she was a drink, she'd be called a 'Horny-Maker', and she'd be completely intoxicating. And addicting. 'One taste and you'll be coming back for more'.

Basically, this is how it would go:

We'd be sittin' on my new queen-sized bed watchin TV. Sure, we coulda stayed in the living room and done the same thing, but . . . the bedroom was kinda our safe-haven. It was special . . . just for us.

Most of the time, I'd sit with my back up against the back wall and she'd settle in-between my legs, her back into my chest and her head resting on my shoulder. I'd always be really warm, especially with her body against me, but she'd insist that she was cold and pull the comforter up around us.

We were the perfect little 'Fuffy Cocoon', as she liked to call it.

But like I said, bein' that close to her just does somethin' to me. Always has. Only, I was finally able to act on my urges after our little revelation on graduation day.

I'd try to behave as long as I could. B would undoubtedly be wrapped up in some kinda girly movie that she was makin' me watch. So, I'd start little. Yunno, wrap my arms around her stomach a little bit tighter. Squeeze them a little 'til I saw the corners of her mouth crack up a bit in the teeniest of smiles. Give her a little kiss on the shoulder.

Then she'd mess up though, cos she'd make that little 'mmm' sound in the back of her throat. It was a simple little sound. A single syllable of appreciation or contentment. I, for one, certainly appreciated it. It made me even hotter for her. There was no turning back at that point.

I'd slowly drag my lips from her shoulder to her neck, kissing really gently along the way. I wouldn't do it too hard, cos if I did it would drag her out of her little daze and she'd probably try to stop me and make me watch the movie.

Finally, my lips would get to her neck and I'd be REALLY turned on by that point, see, cos that's where most of the 'Buffy-smell' is located. It's where I can smell her hair and her skin all at the same time . . . a perfect combination of jasmine and vanilla and . . . something else. I think I finally found out what the secret ingredient was in her scent. It was like she added a little bit of 'delicious' to her patented mix of lotions and sprays.

Softly, I'd start to suck on her neck at just about the same time that my left hand would creep up under her t-shirt and start to massage her breast. By that point, she'd know what I was gettin' up to, but she'd be pretty powerless to stop me.

Powerless, you ask?

Yeah, powerless.

Why, you ask?

Well, that's simple. Right as I'd be suckin' and lickin' at her pulse point and toyin' with her nipple, I'd slide my right hand under the waist of her panties and start to tickle at the spot just above her hairless pussy.

Her response was the same every time. She'd turn her face slightly towards me, just enough so that she could see me out of the corner of her eye if she tried. But, she wouldn't take her eyes off the TV. It was a game . . . tryin to see who would give in first . . . either her to call out my name or stop me or somethin', or me to flip her over and fuck her properly. Then her breath would start to pick up and her lips would part, just enough so that she was blowin' warm puffs of air on the side of my face.

Yeah, she knew what she was doin'. She's a fuckin temptress, she is.

After a few seconds of gettin' not *nearly* close enough to her clit, I'd finally stop my teasin' and slide my hand down that extra couple of inches and give it a nice quick flick. Just one or two flicks. Just enough to make B's breath pause in her throat and her back arch a little.

I'd keep my eyes on the TV as I slipped my fingers through her slick folds, gettin' them nice and wet from her juices. I'd tease around her hole for a minute or two, not fuckin' her but just lettin the tip of one of my fingers enter her every now and then.

It made her all kindsa hot. I could tell by the way that she'd wriggle around ever-so-slightly against my body.

But she wouldn't give in. She wouldn't cry out for me to fuck her or rub harder or faster. Nope. Neither of us would say a word. We'd just feed off of the silence between us.

Then I'd get to the point where I couldn't hold back anymore. I was gonna win if it killed me.

Without warning, I'd glide my fingers back up through her wetness and search out her clit, instantly starting to move against it. There was no sense in going slow. We got to do 'slow' all night long. This was about just being together, and casually at that. No neon signs, no fireworks. Just us.

Yep, just us. Oh, and my intense desire to get her screamin' out my name.

I'm selfish like that. If I'm gonna make her come, she's gonna scream for me.

It's the courteous thing to do, after all. Heh.

Her clit would basically be callin' out for attention by that time. All swollen and sensitive and hard. I'd slide my fingers around and across it, fast, hard, repeatedly. There was no letting up on it or givin' her a chance to catch her breath. There are no time-outs in sex. At least, not in the kind of sex *I* have.

She'd be moving against my hand, tryin' to keep it right where it was, pushin' against it harder. I'd keep teasin' her nipple, pinchin' it a few times and cuppin' her whole breast in my hand, pullin' her back against my body.

Then her breath would start comin' out in short gasps, and she'd be moanin' and groanin' in the back of her throat, tryin' to keep from cryin' out in pleasure.

Have I mentioned that I'm fuckin GOOD in the sack?

Yeah, I probably mentioned it once or a hundred times. What can I say? I know what I know, and fucking just happens to be one of my three specialties, 'slaying' and 'making love' being the other two. Yeah, B helped me with that last one. I loved her silly.

But back to my hand in her panties and her coming against it. I won't pretend that you're interested in anything but that. I'm not completely stupid.

Her breathing would be pickin' up and that's when it would happen: She'd bite down on her bottom lip to keep from callin' out.

That's also when I'd take my eyes off the TV and start watchin' her face. I'll tell ya, there is NOTHING sexier than watching Buffy come. Her eyes kinda close half way, and she scrunches up her face a little. If her teeth weren't so busy biting into her lower lip, they'd be clenched together and her lips would be parted, allowing the sexiest little noises to escape her mouth.

Kinda like, 'ngghh' and 'mpffh' and 'ahhh' and 'mmmhhh' and 'ohgodohgodohgodohgod'.

That last one was kinda one of my favorites.

Still, my number one favorite had to be 'Faithhhhhh', which I'd have her incredibly close to callin' out at that point in time.

I'd know how close she was by the way she was pumping her hips, and I'd know how close I was to winning. So I'd get a little bit mean.

I'd slow down my fingers to a gentle caress, slowly circling her clit but not really touching it.

She knew what I was doing. I knew what I was doing. Fuck, the people on the TV probably

knew what I was doing.

Finally, she'd give in.

"Faith, please." She'd whisper. Almost like if she whispered it, it wasn't losing.

"Please what, B?" I'd ask coyly, bringing my mouth up to her ear so my breath tickled it. I'd press my fingers into her hard little clit real quick before softly circling around it again.

"Ngghhh!" That sound, oh god, that sound! "Make me come." She'd reply, her voice shaky and hoarse.

Her wish was my command.

I'm not a complete sadist, yunno. All she had to do was ask in the first place.

I'd slide my fingers across her clit again, fast and hard and with determination. The sound of her wetness would fill up the room, even over the soft voices of the TV.

B's a pretty bendy girl . . . she'd somehow manage to twist enough so that she was kissing me sloppily on the mouth, her tongue bumping up against my teeth and lips. Hey, YOU try kissing from that angle with your hand in your girls' panties and see how neat it is. I can guarantee that you'll end up with a nice little trail of saliva around your mouth.

She'd finally come with my fingers rubbing across her sensitive clit, screaming my name against my lips. I think I may have partial hearing loss in both of my ears from her. Not that I'm complaining or anything. It was wicked hot.

Her body would tense up as she rode out her orgasm, my fingers slowing down a little bit and becoming more gentle as the shudders passed through her body. When she finally stopped quaking, I'd pull my hand up out of her panties and lower my hand from her breast, wrapping them again across her midsection.

Even though we were already impossibly close, I'd pull her even tighter against me, slumping us back against the wall. Neither one of us would speak until her breathing had evened out.

"I love you, baby." I'd say, kissing her temple, both of our eyes back on the TV as we smiled softly.

"I love you too." She'd reply, wrapping her arms over mine.

I'd sigh contentedly and continue watching the movie with her, commenting on the general crappiness of it.

"B, why are we watchin' this? Freddie Prinze, Jr. is such a bad actor. Couldn't we watch Aliens or Bride of Chucky or something?" I'd whine a little.

"Shhhhh." She'd answer, nudging me a little in the ribs and trying to hide her smile.

We'd lay there as late as we could, basking in the afterglow until life would come in and

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sweep us away. Slaying, work, family, friends. Something would always come in to break up our day. But it didn't really matter to me, cos I knew that I had her every day anyways.

That was only one aspect of our sex-life: our little midday romp.

There was also the morning sex, and the pre-slayage or pre-work sex. Then there was the bed-time sex. Oh! And sometimes, middle-of-the-night sex, too. No, it wasn't all in one day. Some days we just spent cuddling or snuggling

Even then, though, when life would get in the way, we *still* found time for each other. I'd go to work. She'd go out slaying. When she was finished, she'd come and visit me. I never failed to hook her up with free drinks, and I never failed to sneak in a few dances with her during the night.

Every now and then, Red and Oz would come in too. The boss would take pity on me and let me go sit with them for an hour or so, and he'd even send us over some free drinks. Like I said, he had a sweet spot for me.

Well, that, and I think he saw me and B screwin' on the pool table after I had closed up the place one night.

Fuck, if it meant that I got to spend more time with Buffy AND we got free drinks outta the deal, I didn't mind if he took a sneaky-peak every now and again. As long as he didn't ask to touch or join in, it was five-by-five in my book.

When Red and Oz would come to the club, B and I would act like we were just friends. Let me tell ya, it was a HARD thing to do, man. My body was used to bein' rear her and touchin' her. It would subconsciously try to do so.

One time, Red caught me when I was softly rubbin' my hand on B's back. B and I were so used to small stuff like that that we didn't even realize that it looked out of the norm. Only when I glanced over at Red and saw her raised eyebrow did I realize the predicament that I was in.

My hand jumped a little and I startled B, and she finally realized that we were caught.

But smooth as ever, I saved the day.

"You got hair all over your back, B. Are ya shedding or something?" And I started to pick at her shirt like I was pulling strands of hair off of it. "Hey Oz-man, is it shedding season or something?" I asked, tryin' to change the subject.

"Not that I'm aware of." He answered with a little grin.

"He only gets shed-y right after the full moon." Red said, turning to look at him with that goofy grin on her face. Fuck, they were so in love.

Crisis averted. The two of them started to coo at one another, and B and I were in the clear. We gave each other a relieved look as we put a little bit of distance between us.

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Yeah, it hurt that I couldn't be with her the way that I wanted to, yunno, in public and all. It was damned hard to keep my hands off of her. But, I was willin' to take her in any way that I could get her. If it meant keepin' things on the low-down for a while, I was fine with it.

After an hour or so, I'd have to go back to work. I always made sure to keep an eye on B from behind the bar though, cos I wasn't about to let anyone mess with my girl. An hour or two after that, Red and Oz would finally say goodbye for the night. It was always perfect timing, cuos I'd be getting' ready to close up the club and the crowd would slowly start to thin out.

B would watch me across the room, smilin' at me and waving a little every time I looked over at her, which was pretty fuckin' often. It never failed that some meathead would come up to her and try to get her to dance, but she'd politely say 'no thank you' and go back to sipping her drink and watching me.

After I'd throw out the rest of the boozers and lock up the doors, I'd turn on the sound system in the club and have a few of my own personal dances with B. Not fast songs, cos we got to dance to plenty of them through the night. She liked the soft, sappy songs. Kinda like 'Wonderful Tonight' by Eric Clapton and 'Groovy Kind of Love' by Phil Collins.

That's what we had. A 'groovy' kind of love.

I tried to look past the general cheesiness of the song, cos it had a good beat and made B dance just that much closer to me. Sometimes she'd cry a little into my shoulder cos she knew she had to go back to her own house that night, but I'd make sure to rub her back and tell her that I'd come over with McDonalds breakfast in the morning.

I was sure to tell her that she was strong and that she'd be able to get through the night, and then I'd try to convince myself of the same thing.

It was kinda scary to become so dependent on another person, but I guess that 'love' just keeps ya from lookin' at those kinda scary aspects.

We would walk back to her house hand-in-hand, sometimes rambling on about stupid stuff such as the merits of old-school Nintendo versus Playstation or the difference between Vanilla and French Vanilla ice cream. Sometimes I'd chase her around the park in the middle of the night and try to tickle her. And sometimes we were just quiet. To be honest, I kinda liked our quiet time. I think it was how we communicated best.

After givin' her a big bear hug and a scorching kiss goodbye, I'd be walkin' backwards down the walkway, keepin' my eyes locked firmly on hers until I was at the sidewalk. She'd give me a little wave and blow me a kiss . . . and I'd lift up my shirt and flash her.

What, you thought I was gonna say that I'd pretend to catch it? Get real. I was whipped, but I wasn't completely lame.

With a devilish glint in my eye, I'd turn around and walk down the street, back to my apartment with a little hop in my step.

That summer fucking RULED, and I couldn't help but think of how promising the future seemed.

Chapter Nine> - What Goes Up . . .

You know how time drags on when things are going bad, but it flies by like a fuckin bullet when things are good?

Well, suffice it to say, the summer came to an end before I had even realized it.

B was practically livin with me by the time late August came around. Her friends would come to see her at *my* apartment. She had her own closet full of clothes and shoes at *my* apartment. She spent 5 outta 7 nights a week at *my* apartment.

Fuck, if I hadn't been such a fuckin chicken-shit, I woulda called it '*our*' apartment. But I didn't wanna overstep her boundaries or cross the 'comfort' threshold. See, cos once you cross the line of what's comfortable with B, she runs scared. At least until she can work things out in her mind

Sounds a lot like me, right? Yeah, that's what I was thinkin. She and I are more alike than I think anyone could imagine. Only thing is, when she runs, she always comes back cos she has her family and friends to think of

Me? Well . . . generally when I got scared enough of something to run from it, I had NO problem with staying gone. No friends, no family, no cares

That all changed with B, of course. Running was the furthest thing in my mind. Fuck, truth be told, I *never* wanted to leave. Then again . . . that summer was so good that I didn't really have a reason to run

But, as it goes, all good things must come to an end, or somethin' like that

I still remember the first thing, the first *clue* that gave me the feeling that things were gonna start to go downhill

Personally, it's a day I'd like to forget, but . . . well, I've told you guys about pretty much everything else. Why not share this little gem?

So, it was the end of August. B, Red, and Oz were starting up school in a few days. I could tell that she was nervous, but I also knew that she was excited about this new stage of her life. She was growing up. Despite the baggage of being a Slayer . . . she was living life. It was new territory for her

She seemed so happy underneath her nervous exterior

I'm pretty sure that I had a lot to do with said happiness. After all, she was always tellin' me, 'You make me so happy, Faith'.

She and I were really comfortable around each other. She'd grab my hand when we were out together. It was cute as fuckin hell. I can appreciate cuteness when I see it. And Buffy holding

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onto my hand with both of hers as we stood in line at McDonalds or some shit like that?
Yeah. Wicked cute

She was always more reserved when we were around her friends though. I mean, sure, she'd hold my hand a little bit in front of them. But then she'd also hold Red's hand on occasion . . . and Xander's, too.

Fuck, I even saw her try to get closer to Anya once, but Anya just wandered back off behind the counter of the Magic Shop, thanking Buffy for being attracted to her but explaining that she wasn't gay

I had to stop myself from choking on my Pepsi when I heard her say it

I liked that chick a lot. But she was always kinda lookin' at me and B . . . watchin' how we interacted together and stuff. In fact, everyone kinda watched us a bit. I thought I was just being paranoid at the time so I blew it off. Didn't wanna make B uncomfortable or anything, yunno?

So, this one day just before classes were starting, the gang decided to get together at Giles' house for an impromptu dinner. Kinda like a last 'hurrah' before everyone began their new lives

B and I went early to help G-man prepare. She thought that she'd be able to help in the kitchen . . . but I eagerly steered her into the dining room to set the table. There wasn't a chance in hell that I was gonna let her screw up a perfectly good meal. Fuck, she really lacked talent in the kitchen. Every morning when she was leaving my apartment, she'd put a few pieces of toast down for me. She'd kiss me goodbye before she walked out the door . . . and then I'd scrape all of the burned sections off of the toast. I guess she never quite got the theory behind "insert bread, push down lever, let cook, remove finished product"

Still makes me laugh every time

Anyhow, I'm off-topic again. Dude, snap your fingers in front of my face or something next time I do that

Back on track. So, B and I helped Giles finish things up before the rest of the gang got there. Xander, Anya, Red and Oz arrived at the same time, all of them paired up nicely. We sat down and had a really nice meal. I didn't use my fingers once. I think B did once or twice, but she can get away with something like that. Not me

After dinner, G-man even let us open up a bottle of wine to share between the seven of us. He sat back and watched us all discuss stupid stuff with a little smile on his face. As stiff as the guy was, I think he was proud of us all. Even me. He'd nod every now and then, but mostly just sat back and sipped at his glass of wine a bit

When the gang started to reminisce about high school stuff, I stood up and began to clear off the table, excusing myself with a smile and a wink

As welcomed as they all made me feel, there were some things that I just couldn't share with them, such as those moments that centered around Sunnydale High School. They needed to

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have their own moments to share together. I get that. I liked having my own special moments with B, too

I started to clean up in the kitchen . . . washing a few dishes and picking up the pieces of the plate and the glass that I smashed on accident

Slayer strength. Can't help it sometimes

After a few minutes, I was surprised to feel a pair of arms wrap around me from behind. I didn't need to turn around to know who it was. The tingles I was gettin' was proof enough

Besides, it'd be fuckin weird if Red or Xander walked up to me and snuggled me from behind, right? Heh

I smiled real big as B tightened her arms around me and rested her face against my back, sighing contentedly against me

"You're great, you know that?" She asked me

"Yeah, real great." I replied sarcastically. "Tell that to the dishes I broke."

I felt her chuckle against me. Just feeling her body against mine, her warm breath against my back . . . it made me feel so fucking grateful. I couldn't just sit there with my hands in the soapy water. I quickly dried them off and turned in her arms so that I was facing her

"You really are great." She said as she looked up into my eyes, smiling. "I love you." She whispered before giving me a quick peck on the lips

"Yeah, you're pretty okay too." I said, earning a smack on my ass from her

My eyes widened for just a minute before I grinned mischievously. I moved my fingers a bit, tickling her back in a really sensitive spot she has. She started wriggling in my arms, trying to free herself, but I pulled her tighter against me. Laughing, I leaned in and planted a kiss on her lips, letting them linger there for just a minute

That's when we heard someone cough at the door

Oh, FUCK ME

Standing there with a little self-satisfied smirk was Anya, arms folded and blocking the doorway

Buffy gasped and jumped back, and I just tried to stand there as expressionless as possible

I think that B's pink lip-gloss all over my lips was enough to imply guilt almost more than our kissing and groping had

"Anya, what are you doing in here?!" Buffy asked in a loud whisper, putting as much space between us as humanly possible

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"I suppose I could ask you the same question." Anya replied, stepping further into the room. Buffy stood still, trying not to imply any further guilt by backing up

But, me, on the other hand . . . well, Anya took her eyes off of me for 2 seconds and I had already passed her and was standing at the doorway of the kitchen, ready to make my escape

"This is all very interesting." She said matter-of-factly, glancing back and forth between B and me

I think that maybe the sound of my own heart beating in my ears was impairing me, cos I didn't even hear Xander next to me in the doorway until I heard him speak

"What's interesting?" He asked with a goofy smile, looking between the three of us

"Well," Anya started, "I was just coming into the kitchen to get another bottle of wine, and when I walked in, I . . ."

"Anya!" I yelled out, interrupting her just in time. Words fumbled outta my mouth, trying to distract her as best as I could. "Why don't you come with me and B for a second? I have some money I wanna show you."

Her head jerked a bit and her eyebrows furrowed as she played my words over in her head, finally smiling brightly after a moment

"Yes, I'd love to see your money." She beamed, nodding her head

Before she could say anything else, B had grabbed her hand and was dragging her along as we practically ran up the stairs and into the bathroom, locking the door shut behind us

B and I stood with our back to the door, passing worried glances between us. Anya backed further into the bathroom, a questioning look on her face

"Hey, what's going on here?" She asked, a flicker of fear in her eyes. "Is this some kind of 'gay' initiation? Because if it is, I have to say . . . I'm going to decline. Though you're both strangely attractive and quite aesthetically pleasing, I prefer my love interests with a penis."

If I hadn't been so tense, I mighta laughed. But as it was, my entire body was rigid and unmoving. Fuck, it wasn't that *I* was scared about bein' found out. I coulda fuckin cared less. I was more concerned that B was gonna flip and push me away

"What do you mean, *gay initiation*?" Buffy asked before I had any chance to respond

Anya crossed her arms over her chest, trying to look menacing. Yeah, I think she actually thought we were bringin' her up there for a threesome or somethin

"Gay initiation: a welcome into the world of gay. I thought it was a fairly simple term, Buffy. You and Faith lure me up here with the promise of money-touching, and then you try to incorporate me into your sexcapades."

"Hey, I never said you could touch the money." I pointed out, missing the obvious

Like I said, I was nervous

The ex-demon turned her eyes to me. "Surely touching was implied. I wouldn't have come up here if I didn't think you'd let me touch it."

That flipped the 'dirty-Faith' switch in my mind

"It? Touch *it*? What 'it' are we talking about again?" I asked, confusing myself and Anya at the same time

Her eyebrows furrowed in confusion. "The money 'it'." Then her eyes grew wide. "Ohhh, no . . . not *it* 'it'. Xander would kill me. Besides . . . like I may have mentioned, you seem to have a certain lack of penis."

I was too involved in the conversation at hand to notice B gettin' antsy next to me. She had finally had enough

"Anya!" Buffy yelled, trying to get her attention

"What?" Anya said back loudly, annoyed. "I'm standing right here. No need to yell, it's a bathroom. A bathroom in which no sex with me shall occur."

Buffy shook her head, dismissing the comment

"What do you mean, 'sexcapades'?" B asked, staring Anya down long and hard

"Geez, Buffy, you should really start to look more into the obvious. I'm talking about all of the hot sex between you and Faith here." She said, flapping her arm randomly in my direction as she said my name

B turned her head and looked at me, fear, desperation, and misunderstanding all in her eyes. The silence was gettin' pretty awkward, so I finally tried to dig a little deeper

"What makes you think that me and B are havin sex, An?" I asked, tryin not to give her any clues as to the obvious

She raised an eyebrow at me, taking a deep breath. "Ohh, I don't know. The hand-holding, the piggy-back rides, the satiated look on both of your faces, the inherent cuteness between the two of you, the moon eyes, the raw sex-smell in Faith's apartment any time we stop over . . ."

"That's good enough." I said, holding out my hand to stop her

"It's not like you hide it well." She continued, earning an even more desperate look from B. "In fact, we've all been making assumptions as to the state of your relationship. Xander has \$20 on it; he thinks that you're just good friends. Of course, he's a man and wouldn't be able to see it if the two of you were having sex on the dinner table. Actually . . ." she thought about it, ". . . he might see it then, but he'd likely forget about it after he fainted from the ecstasy."

Silence filled the room again as B and I let the truth sink in: the gang may not have actually

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known about it, but they were making assumptions. It pretty much meant one thing for us

Can you smell that? Yeah, take a good whiff. It's the smell of *doom*

Buffy kept her eyes on the ground, nervously fiddling with her hands. I tried to put my hand on her back to comfort her, but she flinched away at the touch

Yeah. Ouch

"Anya, I need you to do something for me." She said quietly

Anya just sighed. "Is it difficult or labor-intensive?"

Buffy shook her head, eyes still on the ground

"I need you to pretend that you don't know anything about this." She said, finally looking up to meet Anya's curious gaze. "I'm not saying that you have to deny that it's happened if there's some big reveal in the future. But, for now . . . I need this to be our little secret. Just the three of us."

The ex-demon huffed a bit

"I don't think that's right, Buffy. I shouldn't be left to hold back a secret of this magnitude. I've often believed that secrets kept in cause physical pain after a while, and that blurring them out is the only way to make it better. Plus, gossip is a part of my nature. It's like asking the sun not to shine." She said innocently

I was keeping quiet

If I had to talk, I probably woulda told B how much I was beginning to dislike the whole 'secret' thing, and that I wanted everyone to know. That I wanted *the world* to know. But again, I didn't wanna make her run scared

Plus, I was too busy thinkin' about how much this was gonna fuck things up between B and I over and over in my head. Any progress we had made over the months was gonna be all for shit now

I was distracted by B who had started talking again

"Listen, Anya, I know it feels like it might be a big deal, and it kinda is . . . I just need to figure things out. They can't know. Not like this. They'd be hurt if they heard it from you. Please . . . just . . . don't say anything. Can we just let it be?"

What the fuck? 'Figure things out'?? What the fuck does *that* mean? I thought we had pretty much figured it out. I love her. She loves me. We keep it on the lowdown until she figures out how to say it aloud.

I thought that part was already figured out

Again, just another example of how wrong I am sometimes

Awkward silence filled the room again. Buffy was making pleas with her eyes. Anya looked deep in thought, staring B down. I breathe d deeply as I clenched my fists, trying to swallow the lump in my throat

The tension was only broken when there was a knock at the door

"Everything alright in there?"

Giles

Well, it *is* his house, after all

"Nothing." Buffy said as calmly as she could, eyes still glued on Anya. "Just talking."

"Talking?" Giles asked through the door, obviously knowing that something was up, with the three of us being locked in the bathroom and all

After a moment of silence and the continued stare-down between B and Anya, the ex-demon finally sighed and broke eye-contact

"Yes, nothing. And certainly not any lesbian sex."

Without another word, she had walked between B and I, opened the door and walked outta the room

Giles stood on the other side, looking at us over the rim of his glasses

"Nothing." Buffy repeated quietly, side -stepping her way around him and down the stairs

A bitter chuckle escaped my lips as I watched B walk away, turning Giles' attention towards me

"Yeah, nothin." I said angrily, clos ing the door between us

I returned to the living room a few minutes later to find the group laughing and smiling away. B was sitting on the couch, silent but smiling as her friends chattered on. It was so fucking fake

All of it

I grabbed my leather jacket and swung it over me, clearing my throat to get their attention

"Well, dinner was great and all, but I gotta go. Stuff to do, yunno. Good luck with classes on Monday and all." I said with a fake smile, trying to fit into their obviously fake little world

As I walked toward the door, I heard B call out to me from the couch

"Do you want me to walk you home?" She asked nonchalantly.

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I kept my back towards her and called out over my shoulder before I closed the door behind me, "Nope, I'm five by five."

And just like that, the walls were back up

It was about 1:30am when I heard the keys jangling in the door

I had fallen asleep on the couch, not able to stay in bed with B's scent all over it. It made my body wanna run to her, but my mind wouldn't let it

Nope. My mind wanted to mope and be bitter

I kept my eyes closed, pretending to be asleep. Or dead. Yunno, like they say with bears: play dead, they'll lose interest and go away

But not my Buffy-bear

...

...Fuck, I really said that

Anyhow, I kept completely still until I felt the couch sink a little bit beneath me and a hand on my face

I opened my eyes to the teary face of Buffy

Now, don't get me wrong. On any normal occasion, I'd be holding her tight and kissing her tears away. But this wasn't a normal occasion. She really fucking hurt my feelings. Or my pride. Whatever

I stayed completely still, eyes locked on her, not responding at all to her touch

"I'm sorry." She said

Yeah, I get that. Hence the tears

Still, I stayed quiet

"I know this sucks." She continued. "You know how I feel about you, and I know how you feel about me, but this is a hard situation for me, Faith. I was so sure that Angel and I would work out because I was so madly in love with him. Then he went away and you came along out of nowhere. And I know that we may not have been close at first, but then I realized how much alike we were . . . are."

Her thumb rubbed circles over my cheek, pleading for me to respond in some way. I couldn't. I didn't know what to say. I didn't know what kinda point she was trying to make

"But now, I feel that I have to prove to my friends that I'm strong. That I'm able to handle something of this magnitude." She indicated the space between us with her free hand. "And I know it may not be something I *have* to prove to them, but, in my own mind, I *need* to. Faith .

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.."

Oh boy, here it comes . . . wait . . . wait . . .

" . . . I want to be with you. But I have to sort things out within myself before I can do that publicly. I don't wanna stop seeing you, and I don't wanna stop loving you . . . I don't think that I can. But I have to put a little bit of distance between us if the gang is going to believe that I'm strong and functioning on my own."

Pang. Ouch

I don't get it. I don't fucking get it. Distance does NOT make the heart grow fonder. I've been distant my whole life. I know from experience

But I was too far in love with B to tell her to fuck off with her distance

I'd give her distance; room to breathe, help her throw off the Scoobs, whatever. That didn't mean I liked the plan . . . it just meant that I wasn't at the point yet where I had to let go

We gazed at each other for a few minutes, trying to let the silence say more than we could ourselves

After a few minutes, I finally gave in. I lifted the blanket up and scooted back on the couch, leaving a small spot for her in front of me

She lay down without hesitation, placing her back against my chest and snuggling up against me

I may have let her sleep in my embrace, but it wasn't as warm and as comforting as I think she hoped it would be

What can I say? I guess that I just freeze up when someone turns their back on me. Literally, in this case.

Chapter Ten - . . . Must Come Down

Life is interesting.

Of course, by interesting, I mean that it fuckin sucks.

Eight weeks. That's how long I've been miserable for. Eight weeks of having Buffy avoid me whenever her friends were around. Eight weeks of fleeting visits, whereby B would come by after patrol, stay for a few hours, and leave before her absence was noticed. Eight weeks of workin lotsa over-time cos I had nothin else better to do.

Eight weeks of weird mixed signals that I couldn't even begin to decipher.

I think I was pretty fuckin patient. I never asked more of B, and I let her act distant and then clingy without givin her shit about the sudden changes between hot and cold. For anyone else,

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I woulda pushed them out the door with their jacket and shoes a long time ago. But this was B. It was a different situation. We were madly in love.

Or so I thought.

But last night was the breaking point. Something in me finally snapped; made me realize that maybe even a person like *me* doesn't deserve to be treated like B has been treating me.

I'm nobody's dark, dirty secret, and I won't let myself get used anymore.

That's exactly what B has been doin' to me all along. Using me. Stringing me along. Making me feel like she needed me, when in actuality, all she needed was to support her superiority complex.

That's right. Superiority complex. Imagine that: Faithy knows some big words. It's probably cos of all that time I've been spending with G-man and his books lately. It's not like B has been there to entertain me or keep me company. Well, not most of the time anyways. If I'm not workin, I'm at Giles' place, just reading some books with him and stuff. I think it keeps us both from goin' crazy while the rest of the gang is at college and stuff.

But instead of rambling on about all that shit, I should probably tell you about when I knew things were really startin' to get fucking bad.

B had been living on campus for about two weeks. Yeah, she was spending a lot of time doing school stuff, but we still had a few nights a week together. After all, her roommate wasn't about to run and tell the Scoobs if B didn't come home for the night. They didn't like each other; the girl was probably happy to be rid of B every now and then.

Things didn't seem so bad when it was just me and B, just laying on my bed and talking or touching or whatever. It almost felt like the times that we had spent together that summer.

But in the morning, she'd have to get up wicked early in order to get back to campus and shower before her first class. She'd get real quiet as she wandered around my apartment, gathering her things up into her arms and randomly stuffing them into her bag. Mostly, I'd just stand at the doorway of the bedroom and watch her, wanting to stop her from leaving but too scared to jeopardize our few happy moments by making demands of her.

When she finally finished gathering her stuff, I'd walk over and stand before her, trying to catch her eyes. She'd finally look up at me, give me a sad smile, and close the distance between us to wrap her arms around me. I'd hold her back just as tight, keeping quiet and just enjoying the feel of her against me. After all . . . I never knew how long it was gonna be 'til I would be able to touch her again.

After a minute, she'd finally sigh out, "I don't wanna leave here", her voice thick with tears. For that one moment, she'd admit it to herself that she wanted me; needed me.

There was a simple solution to it all, really.

"Then don't." I'd tell her. Simple as that.

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She'd pull out of my arms just enough to give me a small kiss on the lips, then pull away completely and collect her bag.

"I have to."

It always ended that way. She'd grab her bag and walk towards the door, carefully avoiding my eyes as she opened it, walked out, and closed it her softly behind her.

Sometimes she'd just stand on the other side of the door for a few minutes. How do I know this? Well, cos I'd stand there and wait for her to come running back in; to jump up, wrap her legs around me, and tell me that she loved me and wanted to be with me, no matter what. I'd stand there and wait until I would hear her footsteps walking away.

I was always waiting for her.

Suffice it to say, she never ran back in like I had hoped. I think you pretty much guessed that by now.

After those first two weeks, things started to change up again. Buffy's roommate situation got all wiggly, and, after her demon-roommate had left . . . Willow decided to move in.

That, my friends, was the official signature on the death warrant of mine and Buffy's 'relationship', pretty much.

Don't get me wrong; it wasn't completely Red's fault. Maybe if she had known about me and B, she wouldn't have screwed things up so badly. But, as the situation would have it, she was the catalyst behind all of the bad stuff that was going to happen.

For a week after Red had moved in, I hadn't been alone with B once. Twice we had seen each other at Giles' place, but the Scoobs had been there both times. That pretty much meant that we sat on opposite sides of the room, avoiding the knowing glances of Anya and the oblivious ones of the Scoobs. Apparently, since B and I had been so distant from one another after the dinner fiasco a few weeks before, they had assumed that there really *was* nothing going on between us.

I wonder if Anya ever actually gave Xander the money for winning the 'bet' that we were really only 'just good friends'. That chick is so tight with her money . . . I can't see how'd she give it up willingly, especially knowing the secret truth.

The few nights that we patrolled together, Red had tagged along cos she really didn't have much else to do, apparently. She and B would talk excitedly about college stuff, and I'd just stay quiet and grumble to myself.

Especially when Red would bring up the 'totally cute and available' teaching assistant, Riley.

"You should go out with him, Buff. He's totally into you." Red squealed, jumping up and down a bit.

I just snickered and said, "Yeah, B, you should *totally* go out with him." I mimicked Red as best I could without being too obvious.

B would just give me a no-nonsense glance before responding to the redhead.

"I don't think so, Will. I don't really want, or *need*, a boyfriend right now." She answered with indifference.

Red's giddy expression turned into a more concerned one, and her voice took on a softer tone.

"But, Buff . . . maybe it would be nice for you to go on a date or something. This whole past week, all you've done is sit in our room and mope all night."

Oh really?

I stole a look over at B whose eyes had widened at the comment. She kept her vision focused straight ahead of her, taking a moment to respond.

"These are one of those kinds of fish that I'm gonna let get away, Will. I appreciate the thought . . . but I'm not much of the pursuer these days."

Red just nodded her head, trying to wear some sorta look of understanding on her face. We walked in silence for the rest of that night, each of us lost in our own thoughts.

I remember thinking, 'Please, let this be the last that we ever hear of this fucking topic'. It felt fucking scary . . . mostly, I think, because it felt like foreshadowing; like it was gonna happen, and that the conversation was just a little taste of things to come.

And when I'm right, I'm fucking right.

After another week of B 'moping' around the room, Red finally took matters into her own hands. She arranged for a date between my girl and the Teaching Assistant, Riley.

A big and dorky fucktart, if you ask me.

Me, B, and Red had been walking out of Giles' apartment after a Scooby meeting when Red had finally told her about it.

"You what?!? Willow, I told you that I don't want or need a boyfriend right now!" Buffy said exasperatedly, stopping right in the middle of the sidewalk. "I don't want to go on any dates!"

Willow looked both nervous and concerned at the same time.

In all honesty, I think she was just trying to be a good friend. She just wanted B to get outta their dorm every now and then to find the fun a little. She just didn't realize that B was supposed to be 'finding the fun' with *me*.

"Buff, it's not a date. It's just . . . coffee. A meeting of acquaintances. A chance for conversation with someone who isn't one of your close-knit friends. Getting to know someone that could be a possible love interest if things go well."

B just tossed her arms down to her sides and did a half-stomp kinda thing.

"I may not be Miss On-top-of-the Latest-Trends, but I think that's what the 'kids' these days are calling 'dates'! That's not something I wanna get into, Will." B said excitedly, finally glancing over to me.

I think that I was just frozen where I stood at that point. I don't even think that I had heard most of their conversation . . . I was too busy listening to the sound of my teeth grinding against each other.

Pissed off? Yeah. You have no idea.

B and I locked eyes with each other, a silent battle being fought between us. Her eyes were begging me to understand. My eyes were telling her to fuck off.

"I just want to see a bit of the old Buffy again." Willow said concerned, a pleading smile on her face. "The one from the summer that was all smiley and light-hearted. I'm not saying that you have to marry him and have incredibly cute babies. Just . . . get out for a night. Even if only to make me feel better about it for a day."

She said the last part in a joking manner, but I knew that B would take it seriously. She's always serious when it comes to her friends, and keeping them safe and happy.

B just stood there, eyes still locked on mine, when she gave the slightest nod of her head A motion of agreement, of submitting.

I just shook my head slightly and clenched my jaw, my lips cracking up at the corners into an angry grin as I held back my anger.

Finally, Willow turned to me.

"Faith? What do you think about all this?" She asked, furrowing her eyebrows as she studied my face. I wasn't gonna let on one ounce of what I was feeling.

I unclenched my teeth to put on a fake smile, keeping my eyes locked on B's.

"What do I think?" I asked with a chuckle that came out more bitter than I hoped to let on. "I think it sounds like B's going on a date." I smiled as big as I could, completely fake-looking, I walked away from them and in the opposite direction down the street.

If B thought that I was gonna sit back and be cool with her going out with some random meathead, she had another thing coming. I had been patient. I had been understanding. But then I was just pissed. Pissed that I had ever let things get that bad.

I walked to the bar down the street from my apartment and had a few beers, hiding out for most of that afternoon. I just wanted to be numb for a while. To stop feeling.

After a few hours had passed and darkness had finally fell over the town, I made my way back up to my apartment and stumbled in the door, not drunk but not quite clear-headed either. I was leaving the slaying to B that night cos I really needed some time to just fucking mellow out. I was too fucking wound up.

When I flicked on the light, I came face to face with a teary-eyed Buffy. It sobered me right up. So much for not feeling.

She sat silently on the couch, eyes locked on mine from the moment that I had caught sight of her. I blinked hard a few times before finally tearing my eyes away and moving through the room. I tossed my jacket aside and kicked my boots off, going about my business as if nothing was wrong. Again, my jaw was tightly clenched.

"Are we going to talk about this?" She asked solemnly, her eyes following me around the room.

I couldn't stand still. I was afraid that if I did, my emotions and my anger would catch up with me and have me completely overwhelmed. I had to keep moving.

"No." I said simply, my voice hoarse.

She sighed. "We really need to." Her voice was pleading. She wanted me to make it easier for her, I think, but I wasn't gonna let this go down without a fight.

"No, we really don't." I replied quickly, standing to face her. "You made your decision. I obviously have no fucking say in it, so I'm backing off. I get the picture, B. You have a new prospect so you're done with me now. Fine. Okay. Whatever. Now leave."

I started moving around the room again, making my way into the kitchen and grabbing a bottle of beer outta the fridge. I opened it quickly and took a long swig, draining half of the contents in one go.

"So you've resorted to drinking?" Her voice rang out from just behind me, leaning on the doorframe. She was giving me a look . . . condescending and . . . arrogant?

"Just like you resorted to serial dating to make you feel better. Don't patronize me, Saint Buffy. You don't get to turn this around on me, so back the fuck off."

Nice Faith was gone. Nice Faith had left the building a long time ago. This was the real Faith . . . straightforward, uncaring, and unwavering. It felt good to have her back.

I walked past her and into the living room, plopped down on the couch with my beer, and turned on the TV. As far as I was concerned, the conversation was over. She needed to take the hint and get gone.

Just when I thought that maybe I had scared her off, I felt the couch sink down next to me. There she was, sitting so that her body faced me, her eyes glued onto my face.

I turned my head to her after a few minutes of silence, staring at her emotionless. "What?" I asked her, annoyed.

"I'm not doing this for me." She said quietly, her eyes begging me to understand.

"Well, that makes ME feel a whole lot better, twinkie. Wanna fuck?" I said as sarcastic and crude as possible.

It made her flinch. I'm not a sadist, but . . . it felt good.

"Faith, don't. Don't be like that." She whispered, looking down at her lap.

"How the fuck do you want me to act?" I asked, sitting forward a bit so that I could get in her face. "How do you want me to react to the fact that my GIRLFRIEND, whom I can't even be with in any other capacity than secretly stashed away in my apartment, is going out on a fucking date with someone else? I'm pissed off, B, and there ain't no way for me to hide it."

"I know." She said, eyes still trained on her lap. "I'm not happy about it either."

I scoffed.

"Then do something about it. Say no. Tell him to fuck off. You're not powerless, B. Grow a fucking pair already." I sat back against the couch and exhaled loudly, breathing out a bit of my anger. I brought my hands up to my face and pressed the heels of them into my eyes, rubbing hard.

"If I can just do this, get through this, keep my friends off of my back for a little while longer, then I'll be able to deal with telling them about us. I just need you to be patient."

I laughed, shaking my head. "I've been patient. I'm all out of patient. Now I'm full of 'pissed off' and impatient."

Then, in an act of desperation I think, she bypassed the talking and went right for the feeling. Before I could stop her, she was straddling my lap and had my face in her hands, staring deep into my eyes.

"Just a few more weeks, Faith. Two weeks. I'll have my friends off my back about the finding the fun. I'll tell them that I only wanna find the fun with you. I'll let them know about the summer, and how you've been there for me since last year. If we can only get through these next two weeks . . . we can be happy together."

I couldn't move. I was lost so deep in her eyes . . . in her words . . . in the way that she had leaned in and was softly kissing my lips.

I wanted happily ever after with B. I really did. So I let go of the tension in my body and unclenched my fists, placing them softly on her lower back, pulling her closer against me.

That was about four weeks ago.

I gave her twice as much time as she had asked for. I let her come to me as she needed and spent time with her, only for her to leave before bedtime. She'd cry against my chest, her arms wrapped around me, and told me that she didn't want to go back to her dorm . . . that she wanted to stay with me.

I thought that she meant it.

But last night was the breaking point. She came and told me that she was still 'dating' Riley.

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That she had kissed him a few times, but that it was only so not as to rouse suspicion within him at her lack of interest. That she was going to 'continue' dating him, because her friends were so happy for her at the moment. That she needed me to wait a little bit longer.

That she couldn't stay because she was going to the movies with him.

I didn't let her see any of what I was feeling. Any of the pain, hate, hurt, anger. I waited until she left . . . and then I broke down. I finally lost control. I finally realized that my dream world was crashing down before my eyes . . . and that I was powerless to stop it.

So, now you know what's happened up 'til now.

I fucked up. Allow me to explain.

Buffy Summers is like the sun. She's bright and warm, and one of the most beautiful things that I've ever seen. I was entranced by her. I had to get closer. I wanted to see, to feel, to touch . . .

. . . and I did. Guess I just never realized that, when you touch the sun . . . you're gonna get burned.

Yes, I was stupid. Yes, I reached out. Yes, I touched. And yes, I got burned.

And now I'm leaving.

Don't shake your fucking head at me, and don't gimme that fucking look. You don't *know*. This has gotta be one of the hardest fuckin things I've ever done . . . walking away from the one thing in life that I've ever loved unconditionally.

Buffy told me that she loves me. I believed her once. Maybe she does, I dunno. I guess I can't know for sure. But I DO know that love isn't supposed to hurt. It isn't supposed to make you feel broken and used. That's why I know that this 'thing' between B and me can't be love.

She's *my* great love . . . and I'm her crutch. She's using me . . . and I think it's killing me.

Not physically, of course, cos I'm a fucking ROCK. But when I look in the mirror, I don't recognize who the person in the reflection. 'Faith' is gone. All that's left is this . . . *girl* . . . and she looks broken . . . sad . . . hurt. That's not me. Never has been.

I never should have let myself get to this point. Fucking pathetic.

This isn't who I am, or want to be.

So, like I said, I'm leaving. I need to find myself again. I need to get back into the routine of not giving a fuck . . . cos it hurts too much when I do.

I've just finished packing the rest of my clothes into my backpack and 2 duffle bags. That's what my life amounts to. Three bags full of clothes and the small wad of cash in my pocket.

I've got the row of pictures that B and I had taken in the cheesy photo booth stashed in my

backpack. It'll serve two purposes: one, to remind me of the good times. Two, to remind me not to let my defenses down again, cos I don't know if this is something that I would willingly put myself through a second time.

Just as I heft the backpack over my shoulder and bend down to pick up the two bags, I hear keys jangling in the door.

I don't need a psychic to tell me who it is. I can feel the tingles. B is here for her casual dose of Faith. But I'm not gonna let her have it this time. I can't. If I give her any more, it might break me.

I almost feel like I wanna panic . . . throw my bags out the window and jump out after them. But that's pretty fucking cowardly, and I generally like to think that I'm tougher than that.

With every ounce of will that I have left in my body, I put the bags back down on the floor and take a seat at the end of the bed, looking down as I fiddled nervously with the hem of my shirt.

The shirt B gave me.

Fuck.

"Baby?" She calls out into the apartment, getting closer to the room. I flinch as I hear the chipper tone in her voice, knowing full well that though she may not love me . . . this could very well break her heart. Fuck, it's breaking mine too.

She enters the room with a bounce in her step and a bag from McDonalds, pausing immediately as she notices the solemn look on my face.

Our gazes stay locked on one another, her eyebrows furrowing as she works out the implications of the scene around us.

The open drawers. The empty closet. The bare clothes hangers lying around. The bags that lay at my feet.

I can hear her breath catch in her throat, and I'm pretty sure that she's either about to say something or cry. I know that at this moment, I can't handle either.

If she cries, I'm gonna run to her. If she speaks, I'm gonna run to her.

Therefore, I need to get the fuck outta here before I bend to her yet again.

Slowly, I stand up from the edge of the bed, flinging the backpack over my shoulder and lifting the two duffle bags in either hand. I turn my gaze toward the bedroom door and start a path towards it, cautiously avoiding eye contact as I make my way past her and into the living room.

This feels so familiar. I wonder if she's feeling what I normally did when she walked away from ME like that.

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Just as I approach the apartment door and think that I've made it out without a hassle, I hear the McDonalds bag drop and a pair of footsteps running out into the living room.

I can do this. I'm Faith. I tilt my neck and hear it crack as it adjusts for the onslaught of whatever is to come at me.

Warily, I drop the bags at my feet and turn around to face the living room, keeping the most unaffected look on my face that I can muster.

Fuck. Be strong, Faith.

As she stands 10 feet away from me with tears running silently down her face, I draw in a deep breath and prepare to make the hardest speech of my life.

Chapter Eleven - They Say 'Goodbye' Is a Difficult Thing

How exactly do you start out a conversation like this?

Seriously, tell me how, cos B and I have been standing here staring at each other, completely silent, for the last five minutes.

Yeah. Pretty fuckin awkward.

She has this steady trickle of tears streaming down her face, and I can tell that she's biting on her lip to keep back from crying aloud. As for me, well . . . I'm just tryin' to look as emotionless as possible. I don't need to have an emotional outburst at this point in time, cos I'm pretty sure that she knows exactly what I'm feeling.

Still . . . I don't think that I can be mean right now. Don't get me wrong, besides being sad about the situation, I'm just pissed off. I think that's understandable. But this moment doesn't need to be any tougher than it already is. I'm gonna keep my cool, and I'm gonna try to be as calm and rational as possible.

Finally, the silence gets to be too much for me and I just say the first thing that I can think of.

"It doesn't mean that I don't still love you." I mumble out, my eyes burning into hers as if trying to convey the truth behind my words.

It's true; I *do* still love her. Always will, I think. But for the first time in a long time, I'm putting myself before her. Fuck, it's exactly the same thing that she's been doing to me; putting herself first. Only difference is that I'm trying to be considerate of her feelings.

"Then what *does* it mean?" She whispers, her lips barely moving.

I sigh as I choose over my words.

"It means . . . well . . . I guess it means that I can't be your security blanket anymore, B." It

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wasn't said with malice or contempt. I don't think I said the words for her . . . it was more of an affirmation for myself.

Her eyebrows raise a bit and she shakes her head, trying to convince me as well as herself that it's not true.

"Security blanket? No, that's not what you were. What you are. I love you, Faith, and I want you here with me. *Need* you here with me."

She takes a few steps forward until she's standing just in front of me, an arms length away. Tentatively, she reaches her right arm out to me and rests it on my upper arm, but I don't even react to the touch. I've made myself numb so that I can go through with this. Not even the power of the Slayer-tingles can break through my resolve right now.

My mind is made up, and I know what I have to do.

"I don't doubt that you love me, B. I know you do. Or at least I think you do. But you're not *in* love with me. There's a difference. For as long as I can remember, I've been *in* love with you. Madly. I've done everything that I can to keep you with me and to make you fall in love with me back. But, in light of recent events, I've come to the conclusion that you'll never love me the way that I love you. It's not fair for me to keep trying when you'll just . . . never get to that point."

She pulls her hand back to her side and keeps staring into my eyes, her lip trembling a bit as my words wash over her.

"That's not true. I *am* . . ." She begins, but I cut her off before she can finish her sentence.

"Don't." I say, shaking my head just once as I let my eyes close. If I let her finish that sentence, I'm gonna break. I need to stay focused and get this over with.

And I think the situation is really starting to sink in with her. She knows that my mind is made up, and I think she just figured out that there's nothing she can do to stop it. Not by being pouty and sad, anyways. I open my eyes just in time to see her wipe her tears away with the back of her hand before walking a few steps away and turning her back away from me.

"So this is how it's gonna be." She says, and I can tell that her jaw is clenched. "Something doesn't go your way and you run, just like always. That's so cowardly, Faith."

Ahh. Reverse psychology. I know it well. How so? Because I always fall for it.

She says my name as if it hurts to say it . . . like it's leaving a bitter taste in her mouth. She's trying to piss me off, just so that I show some kind of emotion.

Well, it worked. My sense of 'cool' is gone.

I take a step forward in her direction, letting my arms flail around as I start to rant.

"Hey, you don't get to make judgments like that, Saint Buffy. The day that you asked Anya to hide our 'relationship' is the day that you gave up that right, and when you came here

yesterday and told me that you were gonna keep 'dating' Riley, I decided that I'm not gonna give you that right back. I've had enough of your bullshit, so you can find someone else to mindfuck. I'm done being the 'dirty little secret'."

Hello, Angry Faith. Welcome back.

Ha ha! And now she's even more pissed off. She spins around and gives me the most defiant look that she can manage. Her arms are crossed over her chest, and I'll be damned if I didn't just see her stomp.

"You were never my 'dirty little secret', Faith. I was just trying to keep our relationship safe from the judgment of my friends while I worked out the details of it in my head."

Do you smell that too? More bullshit. I'm not buyin' it.

"Bullshit." I say, calling her out, taking another step towards her. "There are no details to work out, Buffy. I love you. You love me. Your friends and family love you, so they deal. It's as fucking simple as that. But you, of course . . . you have to complicate things and over-think them. And if you haven't realized the fact that your friends have probably known about us in their own way for *months* now, then you're really not as smart as you're given credit for."

Zing! You wanna know how to really get Buffy's attention? Point out that the secrets she thinks she's keeping aren't so secret.

Then question her intelligence.

Did I mention that Angry Faith likes to push people's buttons?

The defiant look remains on her face, but I can see her fists clenching at her sides. I know that I'm egging her on, but I think that's what I'm going for here. It'll be a hell of a lot easier to walk away from her if we're fighting; will make me wanna run back to her less.

"You're such a *victim*." She utters.

And here I was expecting her to go on the defensive. But I was wrong. She's gonna keep attacking. Fine. She wants a victim, she'll get a victim.

"Victim?" I say bitterly. "Hmm. Let's see. You come to me when you feel empty or need something. You get your fill and then you leave and go back to your life, feeling happy and content and ready to deal, at least for a while. But me? I don't *have* another life to turn to when you leave. You're my life. And I can't pretend that my heart doesn't fucking break every time that you walk out that door."

I couldn't help the way that my voice trembled on that last sentence. I felt like I wanted to cry. Fuck, I can taste the tears in the back of my throat, feel my eyes stinging. I know that my resolve is breaking . . . not that I'm gonna run into her arms, but . . . I'm definitely a few steps away from letting the tears fall.

She must have noticed the tremble in my voice, cos suddenly she's a step closer to me and looking up into my eyes.

"Faith . . . that's not all you have. I'm not all you have. You have Giles, and my friends. And you have slaying." She says, her voice soft as she tries to comfort me.

But her words have only served to piss me off even more.

"I have *slaying*?" I ask in disbelief, my voice going up an octave, my eyebrows raised.

Does she really think that *slaying* is something that I base my life on? That I would *ever* base my life on something like that *willfully*?

"Fuck that, Buffy." I say, my voice dripping with anger. "Slaying is NOT my life. It's not even a fucking *hobby*. I do it cos I'm meant to. I don't get paid for it, I'm *not* gonna get famous for it, I don't live for it, and I certainly won't fuckin plan my life around it. And far as your 'friends' go . . . they're not my friends, B. They don't like me. They'd never waste their breath on me if I wasn't a Slayer and somehow attached to you like that. They simply tolerate my presence. Trust me, they won't fuckin shed a tear when they find out I'm gone, and they can go back to fawning over you and Riley."

Did you ever watch a kid get yelled at in public? The way they kinda cower and slink back? I mean, that's what I used to do when gettin' screamed at by my parents. Part of the body's natural instinct to protect itself, possibly from physical attack. But I'd never hit, B. I'd never put her through anything like that, like I used to get when I was young.

I think that I've already lost her attention at this point in time. She's looking down at some random spot on the floor, her eyes welling up with even more tears, her head silently shaking back and forth.

She doesn't wanna believe me. Doesn't wanna believe that the words I'm saying are true. But she knows that I'm right. That she's wrong. That her candy-covered world is suddenly taking a bitter turn.

"I have *nothing*, B. And I think you like that. You like having that kinda power and that kinda control over me. Gives your life that much more worth. And I don't mind giving up some stuff for you, Buffy . . . any material things I had I would give up for you. But the way you use that power against me and don't even realize it, or care even . . . it makes me feel weak . . . and it's killing me."

That last sentence made her eyes shoot back up to me, giving me a pained expression before sinking her eyes back down to that random spot on the floor.

Yeah, B. The truth hurts. Fuck, I've been able to learn that first-hand.

And I know I should stop talking. That I should just pick up my bags and go . . . get the hell outta here before I hurt her anymore . . . before I hurt myself anymore. But before I can stop myself, I let just a few more words slide out.

"So, yeah. Maybe I am a victim, Buffy. But yunno what? You made me that way."

It brought the whole issue back home.

I was hurt . . . and she was the one who had done that to me. And in the space of 10 minutes, she went from thinking things were fine to knowing that her life, again, was taking a fucked up turn.

And it had been her own doing.

For someone who likes to think that she has a certain amount of control in her life, that musta been the thing that hurt her the most. *She* let things get this bad. She's gonna have to step up and take responsibility for this one; nobody else can.

For the first time in forever . . . a 'shitty situation' isn't my fault. It makes me feel a bit better about myself, but, still . . . shitty situation nonetheless.

I should be used to this kinda crap. Really. I never learn.

I turn away from her, about to just pick up my bags and be done with this all, when I hear a small thud behind me. I casually steal a quick glance over my shoulder to see that Buffy has fallen to her knees, her hands over her face as she weeps silently.

Part of me wants to watch her cry, just to get a little closure. Part of me wants to just walk out and start to move on.

But then there's that little nagging part of me that still loves her so much, and wants to make sure she's okay before I go. Cos, yeah . . . I'm still going. Ain't nothin' gonna change that.

I sigh aloud, knowing that I should say or do something, but not knowing exactly what.

With my eyes locked on her huddled figure, I manage a few jumbled words.

"Don't cry, B. It's not worth it." I'm trying to be as emotionless as possible again.

Her head shoots up at me and she gives me a dangerous glare. It says, 'back off'.

"Don't tell me how to *feel*, Faith." She spits out. "Go."

And I stay.

"Get out."

And I'm still standing here, staring down at her.

"Leave."

Tell me again why I'm still fuckin standing here? I sigh.

I know why I'm still standing here.

Fucking lovesick fool.

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"Run away, Faith. Run. Run away from me, because I'm a big, scary, nasty, un-loving, cold-hearted bitch, and because . . . because . . . because I don't wanna hurt you anymore. I can't. I won't."

She inhales a sharp breath before her shoulders start to shake uncontrollably with her sobs. God, she's cryin so fuckin hard, and she's just lookin up at my face . . . just watching me though her teary eyes.

And I realize that I don't want to hurt her. I don't wanna leave on a bitter note. I can't. There's still too much love.

I walk forward and drop to my knees in front of her, waiting just for a moment before I wrap my arms around her and hold her tight to me, trying to still her shaking body.

"Shhhh." I whisper, one hand on the small of her back and the other on the back of her head, holding her to my shoulder and smoothing down her hair.

I hold her like that for a few minutes. There's no fighting the few tears that escape down my cheeks. 'Goodbye' has never been a difficult thing for me before, but . . . this is just tearing me up inside.

It feels so final.

Her breathing finally evens out and I release my tight hold on her enough so that I can pull back and look at her face.

Big mistake.

We stare into one another's eyes for a few moments. Her tears are still falling, though silently now. Slowly, I bring my hands up to her face and run my thumbs over her cheeks, wiping her tears away.

A soft breath escapes her lips, and before I know what's happening, we're kissing.

Hard, deep, fast, desperate, wanting, loving, hating.

It's her last attempt. Or maybe it's her goodbye. I dunno. But I'm not fighting it . . . I'm just letting it happen . . . letting us feel for the last time.

Our arms find their way around each other and we cling tightly, our bodies swaying as we kneel there, the force of the kiss making us teeter back and forth.

When I feel her whimper into my mouth, I know I have to stop this. Once and for all.

I pull back from her mouth, resting my forehead against hers as we catch our breath. We're still holding on tightly to one another, her fingers continually moving on my skin.

"Faith." She whispers, trying to catch my eyes with her own.

But I just unwrap my arms from her and sit my butt back on my heels, looking down at my

lap.

"Faith." She whispers again, but I just can't look up at her.

I can't.

You understand, right?

With all of the strength and will that I have left in me, I stand up and turn around. I walk the few steps to my bags, bend slightly, and pick them up.

"Faith!" She says louder, pleading with her voice.

She knows I'm not deaf. I know I'm not deaf. I can hear her perfectly . . . but I'm not listening. I'm already out the door and walking down the hallway when I pick up her quiet whisper.

"Please . . . I love you . . . please." Her words are being choked out quietly between sobs.

I feel so fucking cold-hearted that I can't even force myself to turn around and look at her, or give her any type of response at all. I'm walking through the hall, down the stairs, and out the front door rigidly, my jaw clenched tightly, my fingers gripping tight around the handles of my bags.

It's not me. It's the old Faith. The girl who doesn't care and doesn't feel and doesn't get hurt. And something inside of me is screaming . . . trying to get my attention . . . telling me that I don't wanna be that girl anymore. That I've changed. That Sunnydale has changed me into a person that I actually kinda like.

But it hurts too much being the girl that cares.

I don't know if I can fully go back to being the old Faith.

So, I go for the next best thing. If you can't take the Sunnydale outta the girl . . . take the girl outta Sunnydale.

As I walk out the front door and down the middle of the street towards the Sunnydale Bus Terminal, I can feel something wash over me. A light tingle that starts at my toes, courses through my body, and tickles my scalp. She's watching me walk away, I can feel it. Just like when she used to watch me walk down her walkway from her bedroom window.

I stop dead in my tracks in the middle of the street. I know I shouldn't, but . . .

I turn my head back and steal a glance up at the window. Sure enough, I can see B standing there, looking down at me. Her body jumps a little when she sees me look up at her, and we just lock eyes over the distance. Slowly, she brings her hand up to the window and places her palm flat against it, holding it out to me.

And of course, because it's the way life always works out for me, the sky decided to start pouring buckets of rain on me at that exact moment.

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Fucking priceless. Someone wanna write a book about this shit?

I give her a brief sad smile before nodding my head once and continuing my way down the street, my boots sloshing in the rapidly filling puddles.

I keep repeating "I am not making a mistake" over and over in my head, making sure that I can agree with it every time that I say it.

So far, so good.

I barely even realize that I had been walking for so long as I approach the bus terminal. It's the middle of the night, so there's pretty much no one around. An old man is propped up against the one bench with his suitcase against the building, using it as a pillow as he sleeps. There's a greasy dude behind the ticket window, eyeing me up as I approach, his eyeballs popping outta his head as I get closer.

Hot girl. Lotsa rain. Wet t-shirt. You get the idea.

"Where you headed to, little girl?" He asks as he stares at my tits, bringing his eyes up to mine only after I pulled my jacket closed.

"Wherever gets me outta here the quickest." I mumble as I pull a few soggy bills outta my pocket, tossing them on the counter.

He tears his eyes away from me for just a moment as he looks towards the large bus that is pulling up to the terminal.

Lazily, he brings his eyes back to my wet figure and looks me over some more like a total fuckin perv, waggling his eyebrows a few times.

"Bus 104 - non-stop to LA. Or . . . you could always spend the night here with me, sweet thang. I could show you a real nice time." He says as he slides the ticket a bit my way, trying to keep it just outta reach.

Yeah fucking right.

I use my slayer reflexes to slip my hand across the counter and grab the ticket before he could even realize that I had moved. He watched on in awe as I flung my bag back over my shoulder, my ticket in my hand.

"Keep dreaming, pencildick." I say under my breath as I make my way towards the open door of the bus.

I hop up on the bus but stand for a moment on the bottom step, turning back to take a last glance at Sunnydale.

Yunno, it doesn't look as bad as it did when I first stood here a year ago.

I should probably be having some kinda profound revelation as I take in my last breath of sweet air before turning back onto the warm and stuffy bus, but . . . there's nothing.

I think Sunnydale taught me a lot, but the main thing I learned was that you can't keep yourself aloof and unaffected when you drop anchor and try to grow roots. Maybe I'm not meant to have a home and friends and any other marker of stability.

Maybe when I was telling B earlier that there's more to my life than slaying, I was being presumptuous. Maybe it's all I really need.

Either way, I'll have to find out soon.

As the bus takes off towards LA, I sit there in my soaking wet clothes and try not to think, cos all of my thoughts are going right back to the same place. Buffy, smiling. Buffy, laughing. Buffy, crying. Buffy, sleeping. Buffy, lying in my arms.

My life has been so completely consumed by her these last few months that I wonder exactly what I'm gonna do with myself now.

I'm wondering if I made a mistake.

I'm asking myself if I couldn't have just learned to be her number two, her backup.

But then I remember how it made me feel, and how no matter how much I would change myself or try to accept it . . . I just couldn't.

I settle back against the seat and rest my forehead against the window, watching the last year of my life pass before my eyes under the dark cover of the passing landscape. I know I can be strong. It's who I am, or was.

As the bus passes the last streetlamp heading outta town, I catch something in the reflection of the window. Blonde hair just next to me.

I snap my head towards the aisle, my heart pounding in my chest as I prepare myself to see B standing there.

But she wasn't. The old man with the briefcase is now across the aisle from me, sleeping with his arms folded across his chest and his head against the window.

'It's not her, Faith. It's just her ghost. Don't let her haunt you.' I keep telling myself.

I sigh loudly, turning my head and pressing it back against the window.

'Goodbye' isn't difficult. It's fucking terrifying.

I'm so fucking screwed.

Chapter Twelve - Old Friends in New Places

Electra – Touch The Sun

I think I was pretty much dazed for most of the bus ride. I tried to do all of those mind exercises that my first watcher taught me. Pictured beaches and forests and mountains and all that other crap that I was supposed to. Did breathing exercises, just like I was taught

But I'm starting to think that her methods were crap, cos there's pretty much one thing that's been on my mind. Yeah, you guessed right . . . Buffy.

I picture the beach, and I see me and her and I playing a game of tag before I tackle her down in the sand and tickle her silly. I picture the mountains, and I see us camping together in a tent made for two. I picture a forest, and . . . well, that one actually made me picture that Forrest Gump guy, and that little girl, Jenny. 'Run, Forest, run!' Fuck, the thought almost has me laughing, but then I realize that it's the same thing B was tellin' me to do just a few hours ago

Run. Run away

See, this is where I'm gettin' twisted up. Running away from a situation would normally convey cowardice. But, I don't think I'm wrong for leaving. I think I *had* to. Staying in Sunnydale to be Buffy's security blanket; staying there cos it was a 'safe' choice for me . . . fuck, I think that woulda been the more cowardly thing to do

I took a stand.

I didn't run cos I was scared . . . I ran because I was . . . it was . . . hmm. I'm not sure what I wanna say there. I think maybe it was just me reverting into a state of self-preservation

If I stayed there, there would be nothing of 'me' left. Just a pawn looming quietly in Buffy's shadow

And I'm not about to fuckin go out like that. No way

I don't even realize that the bus has come to a stop until I see a bunch of the other passengers getting up from their seats and taking their baggage down from the overhead racks

Normally, I'd be hoppin' off the bus so fast, bags in hand as I barreled down the aisle and towards the cool fresh air of the night. But my ass kinda seems to be stuck to the seat. Not physically, of course. The bus is gross, but it's not *that* bad

It's just me, being scared and unsure and a bit hesitant about what I'm gonna do when I step off the safety of the bus

I know what you're thinking . . . 'yeah right, a public bus in LA is not a safe place'. I've seen the movie Speed.

But as fucked up as it sounds . . . I think maybe being on the bus stopped me from breaking down after I walked away from B. I was allowed to be caught up in my thoughts, but couldn't freak out cos I was in a confined space

I dunno know to explain it, really

And now that I actually have to step off the bus and into the unknown . . . yeah . . . ass planted

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firmly in seat

When I finally manage to catch the annoyed glare of the bus driver in the rear-view mirror 5 minutes later, I finally decide to just get on with it. I stand up and grab my bags before hesitantly making my way down the aisle and down the steps, hopping with both feet onto the black pavement

Yeah, that's definitely me: always jumping in with both feet, failing to test the waters before I make my move. That's always my downfall.

I make my way outta the bus depot, wandering pretty aimlessly cos it's the middle of the night and I have absolutely no idea what I'm doing here

Sure, I've been to LA before. Was one of the pit-stops I made on the way to Sunnydale. Lotsa demons, lotsa vamps, and lotsa bad. But, even for a big city, it's not really as bad as Sunnydale. No Hellmouth to get them all rowdy and grrr.

The more I think about it, the more I think that LA could probably use a Slayer to make sure things don't get too bad to spill over onto the Hellmouth. Fuck, maybe I could make a temporary home outta this place

Then again, it's *still* pretty damn close to Sunnydale. And let's not forget that B's ex, Ange l, is probably roaming around here somewhere too. I gotta watch my back twice as much . . . partly to make sure that B doesn't pop up around me, and partly to make sure that Angel doesn't find me. If he does, he'll just tell B I'm here, and then I'll just have to pull up anchor and take off again

See? Gotta be doubly careful

I walk up towards a small diner that seems to be one of the only places still open on the darkened street that I've been wandering down. My clothes are still wet and I'm looking completely like a drowned rat, so it's probably a good thing that I don't really know anyone around here. Can't let them see me like this

I make sure to stand outside the diner for a moment and use my slayer tingles to make sure that I can't feel any vamps or threats around

Cos, yunno, all I need is to walk into the place and find Angel sittin at the counter, eating pie and listening to Manilow on the jukebox

When I'm pretty sure that the place is clear of any big nasties, I peak through the glass door before pushing it open and walking slowly in towards the lunch counter

The place seems pretty clean. Better than most of the joints that I've eaten at while on the road. I try to ignore the squishy-squeaky sound that my boots are making on the linoleum floor, but the place is so quiet that it draws the attention of the few remaining patrons

I look from person to person, giving them all a menacing glare so they know that it's just not a good night to mess with me in any way, shape, or form

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The old man and woman in the corner booth just turn back to their bowls of soup and crackers. The three young guys at the table against the window leer at me lustfully, but turn back to their food uncomfortably when I lift up my hand and pop them the finger. The cute brunette girl waiting for her order at the counter is just staring at me, mouth open, and . . .

"Faith?"

Aw, fuck

I quickly glance back over my shoulder as my body remains temporarily frozen, almost as if I don't move, she won't see me.

"Faith?"

I pan my options out in my head . . . the door isn't too far behind me if I just wanna take off . . . or I can just pick up a salt-shaker and chuck it at her head, hope it knocks her out long enough for me to run and for her to forget she ever saw me . . .

"Hellllllo?? Slay-girl! Deaf much?"

. . . or I can just give in to the inevitable

Slumping my shoulders in defeat, I turn my head back to the perfect form of Cordelia Chase and make my way towards the stool next to her

Fuck. I forgot that she was in LA. Next time that I walk into a place, I'll have to put out my 'cheerleader' sense as well as my spidey-sense

And before you ask, yeah, I can detect a cheerleader from a mile away. Call it a hidden talent. Proved to come in handy back in my less love-whipped days

I plop down on the stool next to her and try to avoid the annoyed and surprised that she's giving me. Like, the kinda look that says, 'What are you doing here, and why do you look like a wet rat?' I reach down and grab a menu, making sure to look as unaffected and unreadable as possible as she keeps staring at me

"What are you doing here, and why do you look like a wet cat?" She asks, her eyebrows furrowed at me in that cute, kinda annoyed way that I'd only let *her* get away with without reacting in some kinda child-like manner

Oh, and wet cat? Bonus. That's definitely a step up from a rat. See? I knew that LA would turn out to be good for me

"Hey, Cor. Nice to see you, too. You lose some weight? You're looking good as ever." I say, artfully dodging her questions as I glance down at the menu. It's gotta work. Cordelia Chase is one of the most vain people in the world. I've baited the trap. Let's see if she bites

She opens her mouth to say something, but then pauses, distracted.

"Actually, I *have* been trying this new work-out regime. I started doing these squat thrusts for

my gluts, and . . ."

I'm vaguely aware that she's still speaking as I shift my gaze from the menu down to her perfectly sculpted ass, which she has actually turned to face toward me

It only takes a second for me to realize that she has actually *stopped* talking, and that she's now staring down at me over her shoulder with a little self-satisfied smirk on her face

And there is the eye-contact that I was avoiding

Ooh, she's a sneaky one, that Cordelia Chase. She knew exactly what she was doing. Round one goes to her

"I thought that might get your attention." She says, still smirking. She turns back so that she's facing me full-on again, leaning against the counter as she looks over me with a critical eye. "So, you gonna fill me in on your little detour from the Hellmouth?"

I keep quiet, not able to tear my eyes away from her penetrating gaze. She's trying to look inside of me . . . to see if she can find what I'm not telling her

I wonder if she can tell that my heart is broken just from looking into my eyes, cos she suddenly has a little concerned look on her face

Instead of probing me further, she grabs the bag of food that the waitress placed on the counter in front of her and stands up, walking towards the door. She spins around to face me, smiling

"It's your first night in LA. How about I take you for a cheap drink in a dank bar?" She asks

Yeah, I could use a drink. But then I catch a glimpse of myself in a mirror and realize that I'm looking pretty rough. Just as I turn back to her to refuse her offer, I feel a hand on my leather jacket pulling me up and tugging me towards the door

"Yes, you're welcome, Faith, it *WAS* nice of me to ask you. And sure you can open the door for me. How chivalrous of you." She says with a grin on her face, giving me a light poke in my side with her elbow to let me know that she was just being silly

I open the door for her, still silent, but liking the distraction from the thoughts that had been swimming throughout my head the whole night

We walked for about two minutes before ending up in a small, dark bar about a block and a half away

I'm lookin pretty rough, but still look better than most of the schleps in this place.

Cordelia pulls back the chair at a table in the corner and sits down, waiting for me to do the same. She looks up at the bartender and holds up two fingers before looking back at me, watching me sit down

"So, what exactly did little miss perfect do to you this time to make you run?" She asks, and

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before my ass had even settled down on the seat, I was standing up and getting ready to walk out

"Nuh-uh, you sit your ass down!" She orders, and I'll be damned if I don't like her even more for being take-charge gal

I groan as I sit down, knowing fully well that she's gonna make me do a 'share and grow' kinda thing here. Copying her move, I look towards the bartender, holding up four fingers instead this time

Cordy looks down and fumbles through her purse as she sarcastically mumbles under her breath, "Right, because large quantities of alcohol help with depression."

"Hey, I am NOT depressed." I state defiantly.

"And I'm not gorgeous." She answers back, pulling her lip-gloss from her purse and applying a light layer over her lips

I grin. "Hell yeah you are, Queen C."

I know she's gorgeous. She knows she's gorgeous. But something about hearing it from me made her blush a little. It's kinda cute

"That's kinda the point, tough-stuff. I'm gorgeous. You're depressed. This much we can tell just from looking at each other. My question is . . . what was it that Buffy Summers did to depress you so much that you ran away? You told me before that she's the only person that has ever affected you, and, well . . ." she lifts her hand and waves it in my general direction, ". . . you're looking kinda . . . well . . . affected. And sloppy."

I exhale and chuckle at the same time, shaking my head at her bluntness.

"Thanks, Cor." I say, keeping my eyes planted on the table, raising them only for a second to acknowledge the waitress and knock back a shot of whatever Cordy had ordered for us

"You know what I mean." She says, annoyed

I can feel her studying me as I play with the shot-glass in my hands, tapping it lightly on the table and spinning it a bit

After a minute of silence, she finally breaks in again

"She broke your heart, didn't she?"

And I try to think of something to say that's gonna hide the truth or make me look less affected. That will make me look like less of a fool and more like the old Faith that never woulda let herself get into a situation like this. But there's no use in hiding it. Cordy already knows

I nod my head so subtly that I'm not exactly sure if she's able to see it

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But the way I hear her exhale the breath that she had been holding in . . . almost as if she was disappointed . . . I'm pretty sure that she saw it

She takes a long, slow sip of her shot, shuddering ever so slightly as it burns across her tongue and down the back of her throat

"And here I was almost starting to think that she'd finally start to see the good thing that was right in front of her face this time." She says quietly, and I can't help but notice that she sounds so disappointed in Buffy . . . like she had really expected us to have a happily ever-after together

"I was hoping she'd come around too, and trust me, I fucking gave her all the time and space that she could ever hope for. Too much, even. And that's how the story ends: I couldn't hang around there and watch the Buffy Show anymore. So here I am." I respond

And now we're both just sittin here, lookin kinda sad

It feels too awkward . . . I don't like to feel pitied, and she is really giving me a little pity party here with her little sad face and furrowed eyebrows

I can't take it anymore, so I try to change the subject

I grab another shot-glass and hold it up, as if to make a toast

"But hey, no worries, Cor . . . I'm moving on to bigger and better things. New town, new friends . . . new life. Cheers."

I nod my head before bringing the glass to my lips, emptying the contents down my throat without thinking about it

It should burn . . . but I just don't feel it

Just as I swallow the liquid down and put the glass back on the tray, she opens up her mouth to speak, her eyes locked down on the table

"You have to go back." She says matter-of-factly

"Aww, fuck, Cor!" I whine out angrily, slamming my hand down. "There is NO going back . . . don't fuckin say that to me, man, I'm trying to mellow out and move the fuck on here, yeah?"

She lifts her eyes up to mine and speaks gentle words to me

"You can't make it better if you're here in LA." She says, and her voice is completely serious. I've never quite seen her like this before. I think LA has maybe changed her a little.

It's good

But I'm not ready to hear it

"No, there's nothing to make better. The ball was in Buffy's court, and she just let all of her

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chances slip by. So, I just packed up and moved to a different court, simple as that. I'm NOT going back, and I'm done trying to fix it." I blurt out, antsy in my seat as I feel her gaze on me

My clothes are still damp and clinging to my body, and I'm just getting irritated now

"What happened for it to get this bad . . . for you to run away from the one thing that ever made you want to stay? I know 'coward', Faith, and that's not you. That's Xander, on a *good* day."

And maybe it's the kinda thing I would share with her some time, cos she's a cool girl and I think that we get along together pretty nicely. But I'm not gonna get into it . . . not right now. I'm damp, I'm getting pissed off, I need a shower, and I have no place to stay. She's not gonna get anything outta me tonight

"Yunno what, Cor? I'm not real keen on the sharey-ness right now. Thanks for the drinks . . . I owe ya one. But I need to find a place to stay and a hot shower." I stand up from the table and pick up my bags, about ready to turn around and walk out when I feel her hand on my shoulder, stopping me from running out

"You'll stay with me. I've got a big cushy couch with lotsa pillows, a huge shower, and a ghost that will scrub your back for you if that's your kinda thing."

I get caught up on the last part of her sentence and don't even realize it as I feel myself get led out of the bar

I could probably fight her on it and find a cheap motel for the night, but honestly . . . I just wanna shower and sleep. At the moment, I could really care less

After about a 10-minute walk, we finally end up at the door to Cordelia's apartment. She knocks four times and the door comes swinging open. I was just about to comment about not wanting to disrupt her roommates, but then I notice that there's actually no one behind the door

"Bet you thought I was kidding about the ghost, huh?" She says with a grin as we walk in. "Faith, this is Phantom Dennis. Phantom Dennis, Faith the Vampire Slayer."

Confused? Fuck yeah

I unload my bags onto the floor and take a quick glance around before saying, "Umm . . . hey, Denny-boy."

I feel a slight breeze move across my back before I see my bags being mysteriously lifted up and carried into Cordy's bedroom

She scoffs

"Phantom Dennis! That is *MY* bedroom! Guests stay on the couch! We *really* need to work on your bellhop skills."

I crack a small smile at the scene, cos . . . come one . . . it's just kinda funny and weird.

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Cordelia Chase, trying to teach her ghostly roommate some manners

Fucking classic

She groans before turning to me, putting on a friendly smile to hide her annoyance.

"That's the living room and the couch, where I, apparently, will be sleeping. Kitchen is off the living room, and the bathroom is at the end of the hall near my bedroom. There are fresh towels in the closet, so . . . go do your thing. I'm gonna eat some of this high-quality, room temperature diner-food and fight off the bacteria it's collected."

And before I can thank her or say anything, she's making her way to the kitchen with her bag of food

"Thanks." I mumble under my breath before making my way down the long hallway and stepping into the bathroom, closing the door behind me

I peel off my damp clothes and drop them in a pile by the door, standing naked and staring at my reflection in the mirror

I blink my eyes hard and shake my head, pulling myself away from the thoughts of 'you're dirty' and 'you're not good enough' and 'you're such a waste' as I step towards the shower and turn on the water, letting it heat up before stepping in

I let the hot water flow down my back, tilting my head back to dip my hair under the powerful spray. My cold and clammy skin is quickly heating up and turning beat red, getting scorched under the water that I hadn't even realized was on such hot temperature

I reach toward the handles and turn some cool water on as well, letting the temperature even out just a bit.

After a few moments of just letting the water pour over me and refresh my body, I reach for the shampoo bottle and squeeze a dollop into my hand, not even looking down at it until I have it lathered up in my long hair

And then it hits me . . . the scent. Surrounding me, engulfing me, covering my body as the water carries the suds from my hair down towards the drain

It's the same shampoo Buffy uses

I don't want to remember. I don't want to think about it. I don't want to feel . . . I don't want reminders of it all around me. It's too much

I reach back out towards the handles and turn the cool water off, letting the hot water pour out and scald me again

My skin is tingling everywhere, from the top of my scalp down to my toes that are in the pooling water. I grab the bar of soap and feverishly run it all over my body, hoping to wash away the scent of her, the memory of her

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I'm pretty sure that I'm crying now, but I can't be bothered to fret about it

I keep scrubbing and washing until the hot water turns warm, and then finally cold

When I find myself shivering against the cold tiles, I know that it's finally time to step outta the shower and forget about it all again

I step out of the tub and grab the soft cotton towel, wrapping it around my body and holding it tight. It's both a blessing and a drawback at the same time. I'm so cold that I need the warmth of it around me, but I've chafed my skin so much from the hot water that each little cotton thread feels like a razor against my skin

But hey . . . if I can't be numb, at least this is the next best thing

After I dry off just a bit, I wrap a second towel around my hair and quietly walk out of the bathroom, hoping to go unnoticed. I look out through the dark kitchen and into the living room, where I only see the dim light of the TV. I'm pretty sure that I'm safe, so I creep into Cordy's room and close the door quietly behind me, kneeling down to get a shirt out of my bag to sleep in

I stand up to put it on and just before I'm about to pull my towel off, I hear a voice behind me

"I heard you crying."

I jump and turn around, surprised to see Cordy sitting on the end of the bed

"Thin walls." She explains

"Ah." I answer, averting her gaze

She leans over and turns on the bedside table and then turns her gaze back to me, and it only takes a moment for her to make that little shocked noise and appear at my side

She's looking over me in a panic, the hot water from the shower having made my skin all beet-red and chafed

"Jesus, Faith." She says as she touches my skin, and I start shivering again. My skin is burning hot, but I'm still freezing from that last few minutes under the cold spray. "We . . . you . . . I need . . . here, get under the blankets." She says as she leads me towards the bed, setting me down gently on the one side

I hiss as I lay down and the sheets scratch against my skin

But even more poignant at that moment was the way I could smell the shampoo on the pillows. Cordelia's shampoo

Buffy's shampoo

And just like that, the tears are falling again. I just can't help it

God, I'm such a weak fucking little baby

Cordy hesitates for a moment, not really knowing what to do. She takes a deep breath before saying,

"Bare with me for a minute here, cos I'm not exactly an expert in Comfort Techniques and the Art of Faith, but . . ."

. . . and just like that, she crawls down next to me on the bed and ever so gently wraps herself around me from behind, careful not to bother my aching skin

"It fucking *hurts*, Cordy." I say

I'm not sure if I'm talking about my skin or my heart, but I think she gets the picture

And I just hear her sigh sadly before holding me a little closer and saying, "I know."

Chapter Thirteen - Counseling Cordy-Style

I'm standing in the middle of a field.

It's kinda on the top of a hill, so the trees surrounding it are just a bit lower on the horizon. The grass is kinda deep, with butter-yellow flowers scattered throughout it. I look down at my feet and see a small butterfly fluttering by, unaffected by my presence.

I spin around slowly once or twice, looking to see if there is anyone or anything recognizable around me, but it's just the grass, the trees, the sun and the breeze.

I don't have to wait to hear the giggling sound of munchkins to tell me that I'm not in 'Kansas' anymore.

Besides, I seem to be lacking the ever-fashionable ruby-slippers.

As if I'd ever fuckin wear them anyways. I'll stick to my black shit -kicker boots, thank you very much.

It's a pretty typical dream, I guess. Grassy meadow, open spaces, birds chirping, a sweet smell in the air from all of the flowers. I know it's a dream, cos when I look up into the bright sun, I don't have to shield my eyes and I can't seem to feel the warmth of it on my face.

That's generally the downfall of nice dreams: they always lack that one crucial element that you know you're supposed to feel, but you just don't. It's how you know that it's actually a dream, and that you're likely to wake up to something not as nice.

But, see, this is just about where my dreams take on a different turn. Cos just when I think it's not real, that I'm in a dream and everything I'm feeling is just some kind of an image or illusion in my mind . . . the tingles start.

From the bottom of my toes to the top of my scalp. A warm, gentle hum reverberating

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through my body.

I start to spin again, excited, scanning my eyes over the horizon and against the backdrop.

This is the part that I always see her. Buffy. Walking toward me in the distance with a smile on her face, her white sundress moving lightly against the breeze as she lifts her arm up and waves at me.

I always just stand there and smile back at her, my legs unable to move under the influence of her beautiful gaze.

Sometimes it feels like she's moving in slow-motion; that I'll be standing there waiting for her forever in the middle of the field. Sometimes, she runs to me as fast as her bare-feet will carry her, jumping up and wrapping her arms and legs around my body when she finally reaches me, sending us both tumbling backwards until we're laying in the grass

Yeah, that's always the best outcome. Trust me; I have this dream a lot.

But, the dream is different today

The sunshine feels even more artificial than usual. That little butterfly must've chosen another meadow today. And most importantly, there are no tingles. She's not here in my dream

I start spinning around frantically, trying to find her figure somewhere along the horizon. I can almost feel myself starting to panic, which is weird in itself cos I'm normally cool as a fuckin cucumber. I can feel my breathing become more crazy and erratic, drawing in short breaths and exhaling them quickly. It's weird . . . the sounds of the birds are gone and all I can hear is my own breathing; my heartbeat thumping fast in my chest, pumping my blood hard and fast through my body. It's echoing in my ears

As I spin more and more out of control, I finally lose my balance and start to topple over onto my back. Just as I'm about to hit the ground, I wake up from the dream with a gasp, quickly rising up into a sitting position

"What, what's wrong?" I hear Cordy mumble as she sits up and looks at me, concerned

I draw in a few deep breaths as I close my eyes and shake my head a bit, trying to get rid of this feeling I'm having. Nightmares always seem to fuck me up for a few minutes

After a few moments pass, I realize that Cordy is still staring at me, her hand rubbing my lower back a bit

"Uhh....it's nothing, C. Just got spooked is all." I mumble, quickly laying back against the pillow and turning onto my side so that she can't see my face

Having her stare at me like that is fucking trippy. It's like she can see what I'm thinking and feeling without me even having to say it. Some kinda secret super-power, I think. Vision-Girl

She stays sitting up for a minute, just staring down at me. Being under her constant penetrative gaze is starting to get to me. Like I'm kinda itchy all over. I can't take it anymore

"Cor, you're fucking trippin me out here." I say as I turn and give her an annoyed glare. "I appreciate the hospitality and all, but seriously . . . I never signed up to be part of a Faith Show."

She doesn't reply; she just lies down gently on her back, staring up at the ceiling. I know what she must be thinking: she's probably gonna sic the ghost on me. Fuck, that's what I'd do if I had a demon at my beck-and-call

But I feel pretty shitty for snapping at her. This whole 'hospitality' thing is new to me, and I know I shouldn't take advantage. I'm not gonna be able to sleep unless I say something

"I'm sorry....about the not-so-pleasantness. It's just . . . well . . . not to bash your reputation as a good hostess, but I fucking hate this. LA, I mean. I hate how things went down. I hate how bad things got. I hate how I had to leave the one place I ever called home. For the gazillionth time in my life, things are getting turned upside-down again, and I don't think I'm ready to deal at the mo'. B turned me into a fuckin pussy."

After a few minutes of silence, she finally responds, turning on her side to face me with a little grin on her face. Man . . . that grin . . .

"Yeah, she kinda did, didn't she?" She jokes

And it's just what I needed to make me forget the sitch for a minute and just kinda chuckle and relax. I turn on my side to face her, propping myself up on one elbow.

"Yunno . . . you're a pretty cool chick, Queen C. It's a shame I didn't know you for longer before you jumpedship in Sunnydale. Maybe if I woulda fucked you a few times, I woulda forgot all about B." I say the words . . . but even I don't believe them. I think I just did it to kinda see if the old Faith would be there to pop out . . . but I think it's gonna take a little more than that

"Ha . . . you wish, Slayer. It's common knowledge that Cordelia Chase's door only swings one way . . . and that's in the general direction of the men-folk."

I shrug

"Hey, you can't knock it 'til you try it, Cor. Sometimes having the best of both worlds can be a good thing." I joke, trying to keep light-hearted. I really don't need another meltdown right now

I keep chuckling to myself, amused, until I notice that she's tilted her head a bit and is staring at me with an inquisitive look on her face

"Show me." She says seriously

Excuse me?

"Excuse me?" I say

Electra – Touch The Sun

"Is your hearing broken too? I said 'show me'." And she leans forward a bit towards me

I'm really feeling fuckin thrown by this.

Cordelia wants me to kiss her? See, this is the kinda thing I should be thrilled about. Laying in a bed with a hot girl and getting asked for some physical stuff. This is the part fo the test that I can always get an 'A' on. Well, that, and the oral

On the other hand . . . it doesn't feel right. It feels so beyond fucking wrong. And it reeks of some kinda twisted motive. She's setting me up. Right? Right

But . . . fuck it. I'm Faith. This kinda shit is what I do

After hesitating for just a moment or two, I slide forward a bit so that we're pretty close. She's staring into my eyes; not the moon-eyed kinda gaze that says 'I wanna fuck you', but the kinda gaze that says 'I know what's going on in your head. Now you just have to be able to see it'.

I'm not completely Buffy-whipped though; I still know how to work it, so I decide that I'm gonna do this right. Before Cordy can change her mind, my lips are on hers and my tongue is gently slipping into her mouth. I kiss her nice and deep, flicking my tongue across the roof of her mouth as I pull back to suck on her upper lip a bit. She groans into my mouth a little, and I know that this is a fuckin HOT kiss, but . . . I don't feel a thing. There's nothing.

I give her lower lip a few kisses and soft nibbles before pulling back and flopping back onto my pillow and covering my face with my hands, groaning into them. This is so fucking frustrating for me. You have no idea

Cordy sits dazed for a minute, composing herself as she moves to sit back against the headboard

"That was . . . different," she says, staring at the wall a bit

"Yeah, different," I groan out

"And it was nice and hot and everything, but . . . no spark. How about you?" She hedges

"Nothing," I groan again, pushing my palms into my tired eyes

I hear the scoff before I feel her pillow hit my arm

"Nothing! You're crazy! That was HOT, Faith! I'd put it right up there in my top 5 kisses. Top 3."

I move my hands away from my face long enough to look at her and raise my eyebrow. She scoffs again

"Okay, okay . . . top 2. But seriously . . . nothing?" She asks

I shake my head, running my fingers through my hair as I move my eyes back up to stare at the ceiling. Cue frustrated sigh . . . now

"Oh god, I thought you were just being overly dramatic about this whole fiasco. She really gave you some kind of mental handicap, didn't she?" Oh boy. I've kicked Drama-Queen Cordy into gear with my little pseudo-rejection. I cover my head with the pillow she tossed at me as she continues." I mean . . . come on! I'm far more desirable than 99.9% of the population, and when you kiss me, you feel 'nothing'? That's messed up, Faith."

The way she mimicked my voice when she said 'nothing' was pretty fucking funny. Anyone else woulda got a kick in the ass for that one, but I'll let her slide on it this time. I chuckle a bit into the pillow, and she musta heard it cos it's suddenly off my face and on her lap again

"I'm serious, Faith, she broke you!" She says dramatically

I don't need to hear it anymore. I'm far aware of that fact. I groan before flopping onto my stomach and burying my face in my pillow

She laughs. "The funny thing about pillows is that you can actually hear through them if the other person TALKS VERY LOUDLY." She just about screamed that last part

But me? I'm stubborn. We all know this. I show my objection to her talking by kicking my leg a few times

After a few minutes of silence, I'm thinking that I won and that maybe she'll shut up and go to bed. That's when I feel the pillow being yanked from under me and my face hitting the mattress

I groan and kick my legs more

"Why are you bothering me about this right now?" I whine, uncharacteristically.

"Because, this is my apartment and I say so. You're the one who's waking me up with your bad dreams in the middle of the night. We either talk about this now and get it out, or I harass you about it all day long tomorrow. The choice is yours, slayer."

I can hear the defiance in her voice. She's gonna win this. Fuck, I think I've finally found someone who is more stubborn than I am

Thinking that I'd much rather spend 10 minutes on this than a whole day, I flip over on the bed and lay on my back, stealing my pillow back and putting it under my head

"Fine. You wanna talk? Let's talk. Did Buffy break me? Kinda, yeah. My heart hurts, and my head hurts when I think about it. Everything is fuzzy. I don't know how I feel about everything, but I know that I couldn't stay in that position anymore cos it was killing me. If Buffy called me right now and told me that she loved me and that things would change, I would probably believe her and run my pathetic and well-built ass back to her. But I'm trying to keep my resolve here, cos it hurts to *not* be strong about it. And that's all. Can I sleep now?"

I can almost hear her analyzing everything that I just blurted out. I wanna cover my head with my pillow, but I know that she'll just tear it off, so I keep my eyes up toward the ceiling

After a few minutes, she starts speaking quietly

"When Xander cheated on me with Willow, my heart broke too. I never expected to fall for someone like him, and if you would've told me that I was gonna, I probably would have sued you or something. But, he won my heart. Then . . . then he threw it back at me. I tried to be strong. I got through the rest of the year with a fake smile on, and then I got out of there as soon as I could. But the difference between you and me is, I ran because I was weak; you ran because you were strong."

"I don't feel strong." I mumble

She scoffs

"Then toughen the fuck up. Take charge of your life." She sounds pissed off now. She turns and faces me, staring intently into my eyes which have drifted over to her. "What do you want?"

What do I want? There are a million things. Most importantly? Well, that's easy

"I want Buffy." I say quietly

"Then fucking FIGHT for her. Stop pussy-footing around."

I groan, slamming my hands down on the bed in frustration. She doesn't even blink an eye

"It's not that fucking easy, C. I can't play cat-and-mouse with her for the rest of my life. If she wants me, and I mean *really* wants me, she needs to tell me. I need to see the truth in her eyes, and feel that she's ready to end the fucking games. If she can give me that? Then I'll run back to her faster than my legs can carry me."

Cue silence. Cue reflection.

It only takes a few moments for Cordy to process all of that

"Okay then, we have a goal. We smack Buffy upside the head and make her see what she's missing out on."

I chuckle. "Yeah, I kinda thought that my running away might have that effect on her."

"Ooh, good. Way to put the plan into action. Okay, so part one is done. Now . . . we just . . . wait on her." She says the last part optimistically, but . . . I'm not feeling so positive. I can tell that she's a bit unsure too by the way her voice trailed off into the silence

I roll onto my side and get comfortable, kicking the blankets off cos it's hot as hell in here

"Thanks for the chat, C."

I can almost hear the little smile that creeps up on her lips

Electra – Touch The Sun

"It's my pleasure, Faith." She says, and lays back down against her pillow. Then I hear her snicker. "Very much my pleasure." She mumbles under her breath, making sure to say it just loud enough for me to hear

She knows that it will make me smile

And it does

I wake up in the morning before Cordelia does. It's a bit earlier than normal for me, but there's no use in trying to sleep anymore. I sniff a few times to clear my sinuses. I can barely smell the shampoo in my hair anymore. The shampoo Buffy uses. I miss it. So, I decide to take another shower before Cordy wakes up.

The first thing I smell when I step out of the bathroom, freshly showered and dressed, is fresh coffee brewing. I walk into the kitchen, expecting to see Cordy sitting at the counter, but I see the coffee pot floating across the room instead and pouring into a floating cup

What the fu . . . ah, right. The ghost

I'd be a bit weirded out by it if it wasn't so damn convenient to have him around. Unfazed, I walk to the chair at the counter and am about to sit when I hear it being tugged back a little

Well, whattaya know? Ghostly has manners

"Umm.....thanks." I say as I sit down on the chair and take a sip of the coffee.

I hear a noise from the hallway and I turn to see Cordy standing there staring at me

"Were you just talking to my ghost?", she asks with one eyebrow raised

I take a nice long glance around the apartment and a long sip of my coffee before nodding to her. "I guess I am, yeah."

"Did he make you coffee?!" She says incredulously

"Kinda looks that way." I say with a shrug, still sipping at my coffee.

Cordy stomps bare-footed into the kitchen, looking around the place as if she's trying to find something

"Phantom Dennis! You know her one day and are making *coffee* for her? I have a hard enough time trying to get you to wash the windows, and I've been living here with you for months now. That's just unfair." She wears what she thinks is a menacing look on her face as she pours her own cup of coffee

What can I say? I'm just likable like that. Plus, the guy probably appreciated the fact that I walked completely naked from the bedroom to the bathroom

"Anyhow . . . I take it that you'll be staying here for awhile?" She asks as she plops down on the chair opposite of me, looking slightly irritated

"Umm, I dunno. Am I?" I ask. I have no idea. Didn't really have a plan when I came here

"Well, I just figure that since you unpacked your clothes and hung them in the closet, you'd be staying for awhile."

I blink a few times. I did what? I left my clothes all messy in my bag when I left to go into the shower. I . . . ah. I get it. Right. I hold up my hands

"Don't look at me, Cor. I didn't do it. But I think your ghost may have the teeniest bit of a crush on me."

Her eyes move around the room again, eyebrows furrowed and lips tight

"You're walking a thin line, mister." She grumbles into the mostly empty room. Off in the other room, I hear a door closing on it's own. It seems that the ghost is embarrassed now. Let's just hope he doesn't go all poltergeist on us

"Give the guy a break, Cor. I'm hard to resist." I say with a slight smirk.

She just makes a little scoff noise and gets up from the chair, walking towards the hallway with her coffee cup in her hand

"As if, Faith. Observe the resistance as I walk away and into the bathroom." She closes the bathroom door behind her and I hear the shower turn on

I chuckle aloud into the room. Man, this chick really cracks me up. She's one of the few people that can actually out-wit me. And trust me . . . if she was up against the Faith from two summers ago, there would be no resisting. I'd have her on the kitchen table with her legs spread wide and my face buried in her pussy before she even knew what hit her. Let's see her try to resist that

Fuck . . . that's a pretty hot image, actually. She's got these super-long toned legs that just seem to go up and up forever. I'd love to have them wrapped around my back as I slip my tongue into her . . . holy hell, I gotta stop thinking stuff like that. I'm likely to lose my cool and just cave

I don't want anyone but B, but . . . hot damn, Cordy's a nice distraction

Speaking of distractions, I kinda need one now to get my mind off of all the nice and naughty thoughts I'm having. I hop over the back of her sofa and prop myself up on some pillows before grabbing the remote and flicking on the TV.

Infomercial. Crap. Football Game. Crap. 7th> Heaven. CRAP. The Simpsons. Score! I settle back against the cushions and chuckle a few times as Homer goes through the normal process of making an ass outta himself. I don't think I've ever missed an episode of this show. Me and B used to watch it together, too. I remember the night I moved into the apartment, everything was still packed up in boxes, but I made sure to have the bed and the TV all settled so I could watch the new episode that was on. I'm a dedicated fan, yeah. But can you blame me? That shit is funny

Buffy liked the episode where Homer smokes weed, cos . . . wait a minute. I'm not meant to be thinking about her.

I shake my head to clear the thoughts from it and decide to flip the channel. There's gotta be something on that can distract me. Ooh, maybe Cordy gets porn on her TV. I start flipping through all of the channels quickly, watching like a hawk for any flashes of T&A. I was beginning to get discouraged and annoyed when I heard the front door buzz

I keep still on the couch. I don't even think about bothering myself to get up until I hear Cordy yell from the shower

"Faith . . . it's probably the paperboy! Can you pay him with the money in the bowl on the table?"

Oh great. Now I'm her fucking personal assistant

I hop off the couch and make my way into the kitchen, grabbing a few dollar bills from the bowl and making my way to the door as the buzzer rings for a second time

"Keep your pants on, junior." I mumble as I unlock the multiple locks on the door

Yunno, if I was really smart, I'd take this \$9 and go get some breakfast at McDonalds. But the thing about trying to be a responsible adult? Disappointing people who are nice to you kinda stops you from doing careless stuff

I swing the door open half -way and don't even look up, my eyes concentrating on re-counting the money in my hands before I hand it over

"I've got nine bucks, junior. Take it or leave it." I say flatly. What? Paperboys aren't allowed to bargain?

"We're not here for your money." I hear a deep voice say

My eyes flick upwards at hearing the familiar voice, only to find myself face to face with Xander and Anya. I swallow hard, waiting to get over the shock of seeing them so I can take a breath

What the fuck are they doing here? After all of Cordy's hard work, I allow myself to slip back into closed-off mode

"Okay. You don't want my money. Then what do you want?" I ask with disinterest.

"First," Anya interrupts, "that's Cordelia's money, as evident from the strong perfume on it. Second . . . we'd like to take you home. Please don't put up a fight. We might look weak and powerless, but we fight dirty. I bite."

"And she pulls hair." Xander adds with a slight wince. Looks like he's learned that the hard way

After standing and staring at them for a few minutes, I finally shake my head and toss the \$9 at Xander's chest.

"That should be enough money for gas back to SunnyD. Thanks for coming. Enjoy your trip back."

And with that, I close the door and walk back to the couch, trying to act as unaffected as I can. Being responsible doesn't necessarily mean I have to be compliant, and I'll kick and scream and scratch and punch to hold my ground

Yeah, maybe I'm not as adult as I'd like to think

Chapter Fourteen - Guilt Trip

No, I didn't actually think that they would go away just because I closed the door. I mean, sure . . . I was hoping it would work. But B's friends are, unfortunately for me, a bit smarter than hamsters. When they hit a wall in the maze, they just keep banging their big thick-skulled heads against it 'til they poke a hole through it.

Not literally, of course. That would just be weird. But you get what I mean.

I just barely sit my ass back down before the buzzing starts again.

"Geez, Slayer. Get off your ass and open the door. Are you seriously this deficient?" Cordy yells from the bathroom, the shower water now turned off.

"Faith, we know you're in there."

Well, duh. I hear Anya trying to be quiet and discrete. It doesn't work for her.

"Slide some money under the door, Xander. Tell her there will be even more for her if she opens the door."

Cha-ching. Maybe I should hold out for a bit longer.

Then again . . . between the voices, the banging, and the buzzing, I finally start to cave. I swear to god, these people will make me go schizo yet. I groan loudly enough for them all to hear before hopping off the couch and stomping my way to the door. And just to prove how annoyed I am . . . I kick one of Cordy's sneakers across the room, not even flinching as it crashes into the front door with a loud thud. As hoped for, it made everyone quiet down. They're probably afraid I'm about to freak out on them.

And this, my friends, is a perfect example of how to throw a temper-tantrum.

Putting on a big, overly sweet smile, I open the door and hold it open for Xander and Anya to walk in. They eye me suspiciously before passing by, glancing at me over their shoulders.

"Welcome to La Casa Cordelia. Please take off your shoes and keep your hands to your sides at all times." I say in a big dramatic voice, kinda like I head that one tour-guide chick do at the Grand Canyon once.

It's kinda funny as I watch Anya slide off her shoes with a smile on her face, looking all around the place with interest, like it's a fucking museum. I chuckle to myself and plop back down on the couch, anxiously flipping through the channels.

After a few moments of some pretty awkward silence, Xander finally sits down on the chair opposite me and leans forward with his elbows on his knees, looking right at me. I try not to let his gaze bother me, cos I know I'm likely to break under pressure. This will be easier if I just start things off.

"So . . . what's up, Xan? Taking a long weekend to see the sights in big LA?" I ask as if I really had no clue why he was there.

"Yeah, I was just about to ask you the same thing, Faith. You know, it's not exactly travel season yet. Besides . . . LA? I always pictured you going somewhere more . . . exotic." He's still staring at me. There's no doubt he knows about everything that happened between me and B at this point. He's got on that 'concerned friend' face.

I shrug.

"This is just a pit-stop for me, Xan-man. Thought I'd visit a friend while I was passing through. But I'll be heading out soon. Don't wanna cramp anyone's style here."

It's true. As cool as Cordy is, I'd never put her off by crashing with her like this for too long. Another day or so and I'm gonna head out and go to . . . well, I haven't quite got the 'where' figured out yet.

Before Xander can respond, I hear a little offended scoff that can only be coming from the Queen herself.

"Two days? That's not even near enough time for me to give you all of the Cordelia therapy that you need."

I give her a little smile before I say quietly, "I don't need therapy, C. Not the kind you're willing to give." I waggle my eyebrows at her a little for good measure. That's just about when I feel my head being smacked from behind.

Anya.

"You're not supposed to be having any kind of therapy or sexual healing, unless it's the kind that comes from your *girlfriend*. Buffy. Remember her? About 5'3, pouty, likes to kill stuff.." She puts emphasis on the word 'girlfriend' and gives Cordy an evil glare. Cordy just glares at her back.

And Xander, well . . . he just looks nervous and uncomfortable. Not only did he used to date Cordy, not only is he dating Anya now, but he also had a roll in the sack with me. Every single one of the three people in his life that ever saw his unit, all here in one room. I probably

would have paid more attention to him and the little nervous gestures he was making if I hadn't been distracted by the evil glares being passed between Cordy and Anya. I stand up, putting myself between them. Just to be safe.

Besides . . . having a little sandwich action between the two of them could be just the distraction that I'm looking for. A smirk creeps up on my face at the thought, but I fight it back as I give Anya a serious look.

"Buffy's not my girlfriend, An." And now everyone is looking at me.

"But . . . I saw you with the touchy and the feely in the kitchen. And there were the moon eyes, and . . . and . . . the sex smell! You both smelled like sex. Sex with each other." She says with a little pout, then nods as if she's made a valid point.

"Yeah, the sex." Xander agrees, nodding his head and standing up. "That was going on for awhile. There has to be some kind of girlfriend-ness that's associated with that."

I look at him, furrowing my eyebrows. I'm kinda confused here.

"Wait . . . are you tryin' to tell me that you knew all along?" I ask.

He gives me a guilty little nod before taking a deep breath.

"We all kinda knew, Faith. Even Willow and Giles. It's not easy to hide that kinda thing. Despite what you may believe, we're smarter than your average hamster."

My eyes fall to the floor as I run over what he just said over and over. I'm feeling like the biggest asshole right now. I mean . . . I know that B and me weren't exactly discreet all of the time. There was more than one occasion where we had to tear away from each other as someone walked into the room during one of our make-out sessions. But you know what's bothering me the most? If they knew, and they're *such* good friends with B, why didn't they say anything about it? They coulda saved so much time and heartache. They had to see that it was hard for me and B to pretend that there was nothin' going on.

I shake my head a bit, raising my eyes back up at Xander who is now standing next to Anya with his arm around her back. They're both staring at me, trying to read my facial expressions.

"Why didn't you say anything then?" I ask quietly. I need to know. Is it me? Was it because they didn't want me with her?

Xander shrugs, looking to Anya for help.

"It wasn't our news to tell. The Buffster was going through a lot of changes in her life . . . she still is. She needs to come to terms with it on her own, and then tell everyone when she's comfortable with it herself. It's a big step, Faith, admitting that she's in a hot and steamy lesbian relationship with another slayer, and on top of that, that she's head-over-heels crazy in love. You can't force something like that out of a person."

I sigh dramatically, rubbing my eyes with my fingertips.

Electra – Touch The Sun

"Fuck, Xan . . . that was the problem though. She was too afraid to tell anyone. Ashamed even. If she had known that you guys knew and supported her . . . shit, things coulda ended a lot different then they way they are now."

I walk back over to the couch and plop down in the middle, just disgusted with the whole situation. To think that this whole thing coulda been avoided . . . just makes me feel sick.

"Things don't have to end this way." He says, sitting down to my one side.

"Yes they do." I respond. "She's better off without me; she can have her perfect little life with the meathead she's 'dating'. Besides . . . she'd never able to admit that she loves me in front of her friends. Her precious reputation would be tainted."

That came out a bit more sarcastic and bitter than I had intended. Oops.

He shakes his head. "You obviously don't know her as well as you think you do." I look up into his eyes and he continues.

"I get this call in the middle of the night from Willow, telling me that I needed to come to her and Buffy's room. I'm thinking . . . 'hey, party at the dorm'. I grab the appropriate offering of chips and pretzels from my cupboard, pick up Anya, and head off for what I'm thinking is gonna be a fun time filled with ha-ha's and hearty chuckles. We get there and I find Willow holding the Buffster as she lay crying on her bed. Right away, I think the worst . . . she's hurt, or her Mom is hurt, or . . . just bad stuff. I run over, ready to lay my pathetic little life down on the line just to defend her existence. She's so choked up with sobs that all she can say is your name."

I keep my eyes trained on the floor as he talks, trying to avoid moving at all. See, I knew that picking up and leaving like that would hurt B, but the up-side to that was that I didn't have to deal with the aftereffects. I know that seems harsh. It is. But had I just have broken it off with her and hung around in SunnyD, I woulda been back at her side in the matter of hours. Leaving was my only option.

Xander keeps telling me his little story, and I can feel his gaze burning into me. Man, this kid can be serious when he wants to be.

"When I heard her say your name . . . I can't even explain, Faith. I thought the bad of all bads had happened. I didn't know what to do. I knew something like that would kill Buffy, even if she wanted to play all Denial-Girl about the two of you. Before I had the chance to really freak out, Will cut in and told me that you had left. Just . . . up and out the door with your bags tossed over your shoulder. That's the point when Buffy was able to stop crying long enough to look up at me with her big green eyes and say the words you doubt she'd ever be able to say."

He stands up and starts pacing the room.

Does this mean what I think it means?

"What are you saying, Xan?" I ask, keeping my head tilted down but looking up at him with my eyes. I can feel the tears burning in my throat.

"Have you not been listening to any of this conversation?" Anya asks, turning to face me on the couch. "She told him that she loves you. She said it in front of all of us. I'm not into vengeance anymore Faith, but . . . your wish was granted. Buffy told her friends that she loves you, and then she cried her eyes out all night long."

I'm still having a hard time believing that she actually told her friends about it. It seems so . . . surreal. Fuck, they know I'm with Buffy, and they're not trying to stab me or anything right now. But that brings me to another point. What exactly are they doing here?

"So, what's up? You here to drag me back, kicking and screaming?" I ask, lifting my head up and trying to stare Xander down. I can be scary when I need to.

"Actually, yeah," Xander replies with a crooked smile. Then he gets a serious look on his face. "Buffy told me she loves you. The she asked me to help her; to get you back. And that's what I'm here to do. I know I don't look like much to you, Faith, but I'll do anything for my friends. Even if that involves getting squished by an angry Slayer in combat boots."

Awkward silence fills the room.

Fuck, I don't know about all this. How can I justify going back? Xander can pull and drag me all he wants, but I'll pull his lip over his head and make him swallow. If I go back, it's not cos of him. I think over it for a few moments. As much as I love B, I can't see me going back just because she's upset.

I can't do it.

I lower my eyes and shake my head, yet again trying to act as unaffected as possible. My voice comes out as a quiet mumble.

"What's done is done. It's too far gone, Xan. I'll always have Buffy's back, but . . . I can't go back for any other reason right now. I can't justify that in my own mind."

He steps forward and stands right in front of me by the couch, his arms hanging at his sides. His eyes plea with mine as he stoops down and rests his hand on mine.

"Then justify it in your heart."

I hold his gaze for a minute before looking away, moving my hand from under his, crossing my arms across my chest. That's my final answer.

And he knows. He can tell that I'm not gonna budge.

"Fine," he states, defeated. "Come on, Anya. Let's go."

Anya stands up and grabs his hand, letting him lead her away towards the door. Just before he's about to lead her out, her cell phone rings. She hands it to him to answer, telling him it's Willow's phone as she puts on her shoes that she so kindly took off earlier.

"Hey Wills . . . yeah, it's a no-go . . . I tried . . . yeah, I know. We'll be hopping back on the

freeway in about 10 minutes, so we'll be back in a few . . . wait, what?? What do you mean? . . . How did he . . . is she . . . are you taking her to the hospital? . . . okay, stay where you are, we'll be back as soon as humanly possible." And he hangs up.

He turns to face the door to walk out and comes face to face with me.

I'm not an idiot. I know who he was talking about. Something happened to B.

"What happened?" My voice is low and . . . I'll be damned if it didn't just tremble a bit when I said that.

"It's not your concern, Faith. We'll send you a letter or something."

Yunno . . . he picks the wrong times to get smart with me.

"Xander!" Cordelia scolds.

"What?" He responds, annoyed.

"Hey." Anya pipes up as she takes a step towards Cordy. "Xander is *MY* boyfriend. Only I can say his name like that. I'll ask you nicely to refrain from using such tones, and then I'll have to start pulling hair."

Cordy chuckles and steps forward. "Do your worst. It's been awhile since I've gotten to kick some ass."

A small smile cracks up on Xander's lips before he steps between them, puffing his chest up all manly.

"Ladies, ladies. You can both yell at me."

I'd like to tell you I got to see a girly-fight and know how it all ended, but I don't. While they were all wrapped up in the moment, I grabbed Xander's keys from the table and made my way down to his car.

Not my concern? Yeah fucking right. Buffy's hurt, and . . . I can't help but feel guilty. This is my fault. And I have to make it better.

I'm on a guilt-trip to Sunnyhell.

I dunno how long it took me to get to SunnyD, but it definitely didn't take as long as it did on that damn bus. It's weird to think that less than 24-hours ago, I was on a bus running away from there, and now I'm running back like a scared little girl.

I'm pretty much panicking at this point. I don't know what happened, but I know it's bad. I can feel it. I wasn't about to wait around and ask Xander during that little show of hormones a while back. Besides, I couldn't take his shit at that moment. Something is wrong with B, and I have to help. Or fix it. Or do something. I can't just sit and let her . . . fuck, I don't even wanna think about it.

Electra – Touch The Sun

I drive through Sunnydale, scoping the usual place for the remaining Scoobs. The dorm, B's house, Xander's house, Giles' apartment . . . hell, I even checked out the Bronze. No sign of anyone. Frustrated, I drive back to my old apartment and decide to start calling around.

As I approach the building, I feel a slow tingle running through me. It's the Slayer bond. B's in my apartment. I pull the car over as quick as I can, leaving it running as I leap out and leave the door open.

The front door flies off of its hinges as I push it open and bound up the stairs three at a time. I was nervous before, but now the anxiety of not knowing what I'm walking into here is killing me.

When I get up to my floor, I'm surprised to find Willow there, waiting for me.

"Hey." She says, looking like she's trying to quiet and calm me down.

"Hey." I respond back, stopping right in front of her while I try to even out my breathing. I look into her eyes and then glance over her shoulder before looking back at her. I feel like I can't bring myself to say the words and ask what happened. "So, you knew I was coming?"

She nods, her face serious.

"Xander called and told me about the slight case of grand-theft auto. You're lucky you didn't get pulled over, Faith. You could've got into lotsa trouble. You don't even have a license."

"Yeah, yeah." I say, motioning my hands for her to speed it along. She can save the lectures for later. I never really listen to them anyways.

"We decided to leave the dorm and go back to Buffy's house. She just wanted to be somewhere quiet. It was the middle of the day, so we really weren't really on full alert. That, and, she had been so upset that I don't think she was really in full Slayer-mode. We just get about half-way across the quad by the bike path and we come face-to face with Spike."

"Spike?" That name is familiar. "William the Bloody?"

She nods her head.

"The vampire?"

She nods again.

"In broad daylight?"

She nods and starts to fiddle nervously with her hands.

"He found a gem that basically makes him impervious when he wears it. We thought it was just a myth, so we never even knew it was a threat to us. Heck, we didn't even know he was back in town from the last time he ran scared. Anyhow, that's how he was able to be out in daylight. He caught us off-guard . . . Buffy tried to fight, but . . . he had the upper-hand."

Electra – Touch The Sun

I nod my head, hoping that she'll let up for a minute. I need to breathe this all in. My eyebrows are furrowed so tight that I'm sure they're gonna stay like that permanently. She continues softly, laying her hand on my forearm to comfort me.

"I think she's got some broken ribs . . . he kicked her pretty hard. Her lip is busted open, but it stopped bleeding. She's got bruises all over, but I think they're already starting to heal a bit. And, don't freak out . . . he . . . he bit her."

My eyes go all big as my breath catches in my throat.

"He didn't turn her, and he didn't get near to draining her, but . . . she's weak. And she's still crying. She's really upset, Faith."

I want to scream. I want to cry. I want to punch the wall. I want to tear down the walls of this apartment building and howl in fury. I'm itching because I'm so conflicted here . . . I don't know what to do.

Maybe Red can sense my internal conflict, cos she's touching my arm again and trying to get me to look up at her.

Cautiously, I raise my anger-filled eyes back up to hers and wait for whatever she's about to throw my way. This is partly my fault. Fuck, it's all my fault. If I hadn't left, none of this shit woulda happened. I'm guilt-ridden.

"Fix it." Red whispers, nodding her head very slightly in the direction of the door.

I can't respond. I just nod my head and walk slowly toward the door to my apartment. I will the tears to stay back, but my throat is burning from them now. I can taste them. It's taking all my power to keep from crying out in anger, frustration, and hurt.

Tentatively, I walk into the apartment and look around. There's a dim light coming from my bedroom. Our bedroom. The room I shared with B. I take slow and quiet steps, so scared to come face to face with her in the state she's in. If I suffer from one thing, it's pride. I never let the people I care about get hurt. B coulda died cos of my negligence and stupidity. Not only is my pride hurt . . . but so is my heart.

Gently, I push the bedroom door open just a bit more so I can walk through. My heart jumps up into my throat as I see B laying there, all bandaged and bruised and bloodied. My jaw clenches and I take a deep breath through my nose . . . I'm swallowing back so many raw feelings right now.

She must've heard my breathing cos her eyes suddenly open and move to mine. Her bottom lip trembles and her eyes well up with fresh tears.

I close the distance between us and sit on the edge of the bed next to her, giving her a small smile as I bring the bottom of my shirt up to her face to wipe away her tears.

"Hey." I whisper, trying to sound as calm as possible.

"Hey." She answers back with a low rasp. It only takes a minute for her to start crying more

forcefully. "I'm so sorry," she whimpers as she leans her bruised face into my hand, closing her eyes and letting the tears roll down the sides of her face and into her hair.

"Shhhh," I whisper, moving my other hand so that I'm holding her face gently, rubbing my thumbs over her cheeks to brush away her tears. "You have nothing to be sorry for. *I'm* sorry . . . for leaving like that. I never shoulda . . . shit, I'm just sorry, Buffy."

She opens her eyes and nods her head a little, moving her head to the side to kiss the palm of my right hand.

Just when I think that my anger has melted away . . . that I just want to sit here and comfort her and make her better . . . I see the bandage on her neck pull back as a trickle of blood escapes down her neck and onto the pillow.

I grab the damp cloth from the bedside table and wipe it away, clenching my jaw to hold back my seething anger. No one does this to someone I love and gets away with it. Fuck it . . . I've been so stupid. B is *my* girl. No one is ever gonna touch her again.

Slowly, I lean down and brush my lips against her forehead before standing up from the bed.

"Wait . . . why . . . please don't leave me." She pleads, holding onto my hand as I try to move away.

No, I'm not leaving you, B. Never again. I kneel down next to the bed, keeping my one hand in hers as my other comes to brush the hair away from her face.

"I'm not leaving you, baby. I'll be back, I promise. I . . . I have to make things right. This never shoulda happened, B. I've gotta set things right before I can make things better . . . before we can make 'us' better."

She nods her head, understanding fully what I have to do. As much as she may not like it, she knows there's no way she can stop me from what I have to do.

"Faith, please . . . be careful . . . he's almost unbeatable, and he's so strong . . . please be careful, I . . . I can't lose you again. I love you." She manages out between tears.

I give her a little nod and lean down to give her a soft kiss on her bruised lips. I pull back and keep eye contact with her for just a moment before standing up and kissing the top of her hand, finally pulling away from her as I walk towards the door.

Thank god I left most of my weapons behind. I reach into my weapons cabinet in the living room and pull out a stake, a hunting knife, and a small hand-axe. I tuck them into my leather jacket before making my way into the hallway, passing red along the way.

"Faith? What's going on?"

I keep my eyes pointed forward, determination washing over me.

"Time to set things right." I mumble as I start to bound down the stairs, twirling my stake in my hand.

Nothing's gonna stop me now.

Chapter Fifteen - Taking the 'Solution' Out of Resolution

The walk from my apartment to the campus isn't very long. Especially now since I'm in Slayer-mode. My steps are long and graceful, each stride taken with confidence as I carry myself towards my destination. Eat your heart out, Terminator. I make this look right.

You may be wondering why I'm not just driving there to save on time.

Well, did you know that Sunnydale has the sixth highest number of incidences of car theft in the State of California? Yeah, neither did I. Fuckin' thieves. Xander is so gonna have a meltdown. But I've got bigger things to worry about. Such as . . . how do you beat an invincible vamp with a stake, an axe, and a knife?

Talk about failure to plan. I don't need a stake, I need a fucking cannon.

Don't get me wrong . . . I'm gonna find a way to win because I can't let a second-rate vamp with an ego problem top me. Plus, there's that whole "he hurt B so now I have to kill him hard" thing going on. It's just . . . fuck, I've gotta learn to prepare better. Remind me to take a seminar or something.

I get to the edge of campus and I know that something's gotta be up. There's not a single person around. Even in the middle of the night, you can find a few drunk frat guys or some chick on her nightly jog with her big bottle of pepper-spray clenched tightly in her hand. B and I always tried to make sure that things were extra safe around here. Cos after all . . . if you can't be safe in your own backyard, where else can you turn to?

Seeing as that there's a lack of people walking around, I pull the hand-axe out from under my jacket and hold it in my hand, readying myself to lash out at any small movement. I hear a small rustle in the branches above me and I turn and take a long swipe with the axe, slicing a falling leaf in half.

Great. Get your shit together, Faithy. You're supposed to be slicing and dicing vamps, not making a salad.

I loosen up my shoulders a bit and take a deep breath, trying to relax myself when I hear some faint thudding in the patch of woods not too far behind me. Footsteps. Steel-toed boots. Size 12. Slight swagger in the step.

My head spins towards the direction of the noise, my breath held in my chest as I wait to see some kind of movement. My body is tense again, my hand gripping tightly onto the axe-handle.

The first thing I see before I can even tell that it's a human-form is a flash of platinum blonde hair. Just a moment later, I see the full figure emerge out of the brush, long black duster to

complete the dark ensemble. Steel-toed boots. Size 12.

God, I'm fucking *good* at this.

"Lovely night for a walk, in'it?" His voice breaks out lowly into the silence of the night. The smell of his cigarettes is wrapped around him, as stale and putrid as the scent of his faux-leather duster. "Kinda late for a pretty lil' thing like yourself to be just walkin' around out 'ere with your . . ." he glances down and sees the axe in my hand, ". . . very large axe."

Ooh. I don't like this fucker already. The time for pleasantries is done. In one flowing motion, I rear my arm back and fling the axe at him. It slides through the cool air quickly, impaling in his thigh before he had even realized that it had left my hand.

Hey, bonus. At least it didn't bounce off him like he was made of stone or something. Then I woulda really been shittin' my pants.

"Owwww. That bloody well hurt!" He yells as he grabs the handle and yanks the axe out, tossing it aside. I see the emerald ring on his hand flicker in the moonlight. Jackpot.

"You shoulda kept that." I mumble as start to take long strides in his direction. "Coulda been your last hope."

He shakes his head, smirking and chuckling to himself as he takes one last drag of his cigarette and tosses it to the side. "Everyone's a whitehat these days. What's a bloke gotta do to get some minions?" He mumbles under his breath. At that moment he looks up, his eyes flashing yellow. "Don't need an axe to beat you, luv. Got all the weapon I need right here," he boasts, then morphs into game face.

He's only able to take about two steps before I lunge forward that last step and start pummeling him with my fists. He blocks a few of my punches, but I'm able to disorient him a bit with the few that I was able to sneak through his defenses. He manages to pull back in his arm and give me a nice upper-cut to the jaw, tossing me off of him long enough to catch a breath.

"Baaaad manners. You never even told me your name, kitten." He stalks over to me where I landed, smirking down at me. "Allow me to introduce myself. I'm Spike." And he kicks me hard in the ribs, sending me flying into the nearest tree.

"I know who you are, William the Bloody." I say with contempt, spitting out the blood that worked its way up into my mouth. "Now, allow me to introduce myself. I'm Faith." I jump up into a standing position and take my fighting stance. "The vampire slayer."

He stops and looks at me, then chuckles as he lowers his arms.

"Try a new story, luv. I've heard that one before. Unless . . ." he gets a thoughtful look on his face, ". . . did she die? Is she dead? Did I finally manage to beat Buffy-bloody-Summers?"

I'm pretty sure that he's misjudging the situation. He's taking steps closer to me, his defenses lowered as he rests against the tree he just bounced me off of. He continues his little boast.

Electra – Touch The Sun

"That brings the count up to three. Ol' Angelus would be so envious. But . . . I thought I'd at least get a bit more time than that before a new Slayer was called."

I lower my shoulders a bit, hoping to distract him from thinking I'm gonna attack.

"Three things." I say lowly. "One . . . get an update on the info when you've been away for so long. You make yourself look like an asshole when you say this shit out loud. Two, never let your guard down." I watch as he visibly tenses, realizing that I'm probably about to make my move. I continue quickly.

"And three, old slayer . . ." I spin around and pull the knife from my jacket, impaling him in his shoulder and pinning him to the tree, ". . . new tricks. You may be invincible, but that doesn't mean I can't hurt you."

I start to pummel him again, swinging my arms wildly and knocking him in the head every time. He'd probably fall to the ground unconscious if that knife wasn't holding him up to the tree. I kinda wince as I hear his flesh tear as his body goes limp and he hangs from the blade, his own weight working against him.

After a few minute of beating him senseless, I finally take a step back and rest my hands on my knees, catching my breath and trying to figure out my next move.

And then it hits me. Get the fucking ring.

He whimpers a bit as I approach him, trying hard to stand on his wobbly legs. I just shake my head at him as I grab his hand and try to pry the ring off. He closes his fist tight, trying to hold onto it with all of his might. It's like trying to get a piece of candy out of a kids' hand . . . he ain't budging. I sigh loudly.

"Listen up, living dead. I've got better things to do than sit here and play 'mother' with you. Open your hand and give it to me nicely, or I'm gonna drive a stake through your limp wrist and chop your hand off with that axe over there."

It only takes him a moment to unclench his hand and let me pull the ring off.

"Thank you" I say as I pocket the ring, smacking him across the head just for fun. I know I have to finish the bastard off . . . and luckily, I have that stake I was promising him tucked away in my jacket still. I pull it out and get ready to get it done when he mumbles a few words to himself.

"Faith . . . I know that name. Where do I . . . ahh, yeah . . . I know now. That's the name your precious Buffy gasped out when I slid my fangs into her sweet neck." He looks up at me, his eyes weary and wild at the same time. "Does that drive you mad? That I got to taste her, to claim her?"

"You almost done yet?" I interrupt, thoroughly annoyed that he thinks he can get to me with that crap.

He looks up at me, studying my face. He's trying to find a weak point . . . something he can exploit in hopes of possibly saving himself. Or maybe he just wants to go out thinking that he

was able to affect me. Both you and I know that I'm not gonna give him that.

"I could smell you all over her, through the salt from her tears. Were you the one to make her cry?" I visibly flinch. He perks up a bit. "Ahh, that's it. You caused those tears. Then you weren't there for her when her throat was getting torn out. And still . . . your name was the last word on her lips after she pleaded for her life. Interesting."

Oh great. Another vampire with a degree in psychology. Just what I fuc king need. Tell me . . . why does everyone want to piss me off? Am I wearing a "kick me" sign on the back of my shirt or something? And here all I wanted to do was kill the vamp and protect the girl.

"Listen up, blondie. I love Buffy, and she loves me. Things got confusing there for awhile, but I know we have the real deal now. And you better bet your pale-ass that I'm gonna defend her from bleach-blond pieces of undead shit like you." I keep my eyes fixed on his as I step forward and start flipping the stake around in my hand.

"That slayer is battin' for the same team now? Pardon me; slayers. Can't say that's an entirely unhappy image for me. Did you ever think that maybe it hurts so bad because now you know she loves you . . . but you're not sure if you really love her? Any vamp with half his senses can smell the hurt coming off of you like cheap perfume. Maybe you didn't show up to play hero earlier because you just . . . didn't want to. Maybe . . . you want her to be hurt, because you're hurting too. Ever think of that, luv?"

I know I shouldn't let him get to me, but . . . I'll be fucked if he's not making me step back and consider his words. Maybe somewhere in my fucked up little mind, I started to associate hot sex with love. But Buffy and I have so much more than that. We have . . . TV watching days . . . that lead to hot sex. We have cuddle time . . . which leads to hot sex. We have play-chases after slaying . . . that lead to hot sex.

Shit, is it possible that what he said is true? Did Buffy start to love me more and more as time went by? Did I love her the most when I didn't have her, and then just start to accept the sex as love as we started having other issues? I mean . . . looking back on it, I'm fairly certain . . . no, I mean I'm completely fucking certain that I remember feeling nothin' but love for her the entire time.

But dead-boy here has me pretty much questioning it all now. There's only one way to fix this.

I turn and face him.

"Hey Freud? Die. Now."

I close the distance that I had walked away while I had been doing my little doubt-fest and spin the stake in my hand. My hand clutches around the handle and I draw it back, using all of my strength to plunge it forward again. I just about have it down to his chest when I feel myself getting tackled to the ground and a burst of commotion going on around me.

"Move! Move! Move! Subdue the girl and secure the hostile!"

There are about a half-dozen guys in army fatigues around me with these weird fucking guns

pointed at Spike. They're not even worried about me, or about the one poor guy who thinks he's strong enough to hold me down. He's already stood up with his foot on my back to hold me down to the ground.

I fling him off of me like he's made of air, slamming him into another soldier. Three other soldiers turn their weird-ass guns on me, snapping orders like I'm actually gonna listen. I stay in fighting stance, daring any one of them to step up.

That's right. It's a battle of balls, and I got the biggest pair of them all.

After only a few moments pass, I see the last soldier step forward and issue an order for the others to stand down and to secure the vamp. They lower their guns straight away and turn their attention back to Spike, who is now looking like a scared puppy. The last soldier steps forward from out of the shadows, revealing his face to me.

"Meathead?" I ask, instantly recognizing the face of B's boy-toy as of late.

"Actually, it's Riley. Agent Riley Finn. And you're . . . Buffy's friend, right?" He says casually, kinda like we're old friends. And . . . I could be wrong but, I think the fucker just tried to shake my hand.

Seriously. Do I give off the kinda vibe as someone that shakes hands and plays nicely after I've just been tackled to the ground and had my kill stolen? If he's expecting 'nice' he has another thing coming.

"Friend? Nah. I just stalk her and she kindly puts up with it." I reply sarcastically. "So, tell me this, Agent Finn: What's with the soldier get-up? And why are you stealing my kill? You seem to have a seriously problem of taking what's mine."

He has this confused look on his face. I sigh and roll my eyes before continuing.

"Slayer, comma, The. That's me. And Buffy. She's a slayer too. The original, actually. Betcha didn't know that, did ya Beefy?"

Part of me is thinking, 'okay, why are you giving up your secret identity, genius?' Then again . . . I'm not Clark Kent, and this dude has gotta know about this shit if he's wrangling a vamp with a bunch of high-tech gizmos.

"Buffy's the Slayer?" He asks aloud, more to himself than to me. "I can't believe she didn't say anything. That must be why she'd never let me hold her hand or touch her . . . it's the Slayer life-style. She's used to harsh training and lots of solitary time, at least according to the textbooks. Maybe she . . ."

"Whoa whoa whoa." I interrupt, holding my hands out for him to stop. "She didn't want you touching her cos she happens to like pussy. Mine, in fact. So maybe you should take the multitude of hints and BACK OFF."

I'm up in his face, giving him the most dangerous glare that I can manage. I'm pretty sure that he's gettin' the hint now, cos he's taking a step back and holding up his hands.

Electra – Touch The Sun

"Hey, I'm not the one to get involved in lovers quarrels. I wouldn't have ever went out with her had I have known. Rest assured . . . I won't be going there again. You have my word as a soldier."

Good. The meathead knows what's good for him. I wasn't really in the mood to be torturing him anyhow. I have other people to torture and ki . . . fuck, where the hell did Spike go? And what's with the whole soldier thing anyways?

"Okay . . . I have your word as a soldier. So, what exactly is happening to my friend Spike over there?" I ask and nod over towards the direction of the now unconscious vamp. The question kicks him right into soldier-mode. He stiffens up.

"The hostile will be contained and handled in a manner that is in accordance with the Initiative. By authority of the US government, I remove him from your custody and will transport him into a specialized containment unit. The situation is hereby controlled."

Umm . . . what?

Wait, that's a good thing, right? They're gonna take Spike off of my hands, and I don't have to get dust in my hair? Sounds like an even payout to me. But I can't let him get away with just taking my kill away from me like that. I have to show some kinda resistance.

"Well, I was gonna kill him real good, yunno." I say, grabbing my stake from the ground and twirling it again, showing off my skills. "He brought the hurt to Buffy? I bring the hurt to him."

His face gets even more serious.

"He hurt Buffy?" He asks solemnly. I nod, looking just as serious. "He'll be put in a new program. He'll never hurt another person again. You have my word."

I nod at him again and we hold gazes for just a moment before we both walk off quietly in different directions. Do I believe him? Yeah. Something in me is telling me that he means business right now. He looked truly pissed when I told him that Spike had hurt B. As much as I wanna make him out to be the bad guy cos of all the shit that happened between me and Buffy . . . it's not his fault. He was pretty clueless about . . . well, damn near everything, I guess.

And I'm pretty sure that he's gonna take care of Spike reeeeeeal good.

I take a slow walk back towards the apartment, not sure if I'm ready to face everything yet. Xander and Anya are probably back by now, and he's gonna be looking for his car right away. I'm thinking I might try to blame that on Spike somehow . . . there's no reason to make everyone upset with me when I have a perfectly good scapegoat to utilize. Red is gonna want a full report on everything, but really? I'm just too exhausted to go over things right now. I can use a nice warm bed and lotsa sleep, but . . . B happens to be in my bed right now. I'm not sure that we're to the point that we're ready for all that again.

Goddamned Spike. Here I was, ready to make things better and hop back on the horse. But now he has my mind filled with all kindsa doubts. Is what Buffy and I have really love? Or is

it more of a dependency kinda thing? We kinda jumped head-first into things after graduation without really talking about any of it. After our first night together . . . we just both just assumed that we were 'together' together. There was no dating, and there was no asking her if she wanted to be my girlfriend . . . everything just was.

Maybe we have to take two steps back before we can take one step forward. Cos really . . . what comes first, the chicken or the sex? Okay, that made more sense in my head, but yunno what I mean. If B and I really wanna be together . . . maybe we need to start out with the simple stuff first. Dating. Telling the friends. Taking it slow.

It sounds like a viable plan to me. But exactly how am I gonna explain that to her?

The whole thing is weighing heavy on my mind as I make my way back into the apartment building and up the stairs. My boots are heavy on the stairs, clunking loudly on the old mahogany steps. The Scoobs know that I'm there long before they see me walk in the door.

A barrage of questions hit me before I even have the door closed behind me. 'Where's Spike? Are you okay? What happened? Where's my car? Is everything taken care of? Where's Xander's car? Is that a footprint on your back?'

I shake my head a little and decide to answer their questions all at once.

"Blondie is taken care of, but not quite dust. We can all rest easy tonight. Except for maybe Xander, who needs to go report his stolen car. The footprint is from a commando, but I'm all good. I'll tell you more about it in the morning. But in the meantime . . . bed. How . . . how is Buffy?"

Everyone quiets down, except for Xander of course, who is having a mini-meltdown on the sofa. Anya is doing her best to comfort him, but it looks like she's secretly excited. I think she's already thinking about what kind of new car she'd like.

"She's doing better . . . the Slayer healing is really picking up now. She's just . . . tired, I think. And she's worried about you, so . . . maybe you can go in and see her?" Willow says, looking over at me timidly. Like she's afraid that I'll not want to be near B.

"Of course I will. Later, guys. I'm gonna crash. I'll take care of B, so . . . you guys can go home for the night. Meet back here in the morning. Bring food and coffee or I ain't letting you in."

I stalk off towards the bedroom after giving them all a small smile, letting them know that everything's gonna be okay. I wait until I hear the door close behind them before kicking off my boots and turning off the lights, finally making my way into the bedroom.

B is laying there with a sheet draped over her, looking kinda pale and tired. She smiles as soon as she sees me and lifts up the sheet for me to slide under. I give her a small smile before taking off my pants and shirt and climbing onto the opposite side of the bed.

"All taken care of?" She asks softly, her eyes searching over my face.

"Yep." I nod as I check her bandages.

"You?"

I grin and shrug my shoulders like it was nothing. "Five by five."

She pauses for a second and then grabs my hand that's fiddling with the gauze on her neck. A scared little look creeps up on her face.

"And . . . us?"

It makes me smile a little softer, a little sadder perhaps, and I open my palm to cup the side of her face.

"Strong enough to get past anything."

A small smile appears on her face and she opens her mouth to speak, but I put my finger over her lips to shush her.

"B . . . we're gonna have to talk, and we're gonna have to figure some stuff out, but . . . not tonight. Let's just . . . be. And we can sort it all out in the morning, 'kay?"

She nods her head a little and kisses my finger before guiding my hand down to her stomach, wrapping it over her and tugging me closer in the process. I chuckle a little because that was such a move that she woulda tried weeks ago to pull me closer and get snuggles outta me.

And yunno what? I'll be damned if it doesn't work every single time.

I scoot closer to her on my side and nestle myself along her body, my arm draped loosely over her and keeping her close to me.

This is the way things are supposed to be. Me and B, soft and close and in each other's arms. We can deal with all the technical stuff another time. Right now is about feeling, and this feels more right than I can say.

We're gonna make it past this . . . because we have to. Doubts or not . . . this is where I belong.

For the first time in ages, I fall asleep peaceful and easily.
