



Dark Awakening

by Ten

Spoilers: Up through Hell's Bells

Background: For this one, Angel is Spike's sire

Pairing: Spike/Buffy/Angel, X/A

Rating: NC-17 ... **some slash**

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CHAPTER 1

The lone figure sat against a tree on the gently sloping hillside at the down side of dusk. He stared at nothing, yet his expression seemed to see everything at once, all life, all movement, all death. Early evening moonlight danced in his intensely blue eyes and turned his peroxide hair to spun silver. Mindlessly he lit a cigarette and took a deep drag. The smoke danced about his head and then dissipated into the chilly night air.

It was an eerily quiet night, and he was glad for it. It helped him to think, and with any luck he could figure things out without having to think about what had happened ... at least for a little while. The moon was low still. He had time. He drew smoke into his empty lungs once again, holding it there, holding it like he had once held her, tightly, desperately. He could hold the smoke forever if he wished. No matter how hard he'd tried, he had not been so lucky with the Slayer.

He flicked the spent cigarette into the damp grass with the ten or so others, and stood up, still resting against the tree. He changed his focus. It hurt to look, but he did it anyway, as if the pain somehow made him feel more alive. The cold stone tablet winked at him, insisting it be read for the thousandth time

Buffy Anne Summers
Beloved sister, Dearest friend
She gave herself to save the world
Rest In Peace

There were no dates given. No birth year, no death year. Under the circumstances, he found that ironic.

The tortured thoughts crept in again, still fresh and raw with remembrance. It had been a normal, even mundane night patrolling. Spike himself had tagged along, as usual, playing second to the Slayer, as usual, taking some abuse from her, as usual. He hadn't cared, he never did. He knew beneath her tough words and constant denials that she ultimately cared for him. She just wasn't quite ready to admit it yet, to herself, or to anyone else. But Spike could feel it all the way down into his bones. He could wait. He had time.

They hadn't seen the ambush. Usually they would both have felt it long before they approached, but they were both busy with their usual venomous banter and were just distracted enough to not see it until the dozen were upon them both. The fight had been brutal, the vamps wearing brass knuckles and carrying all manner of nasty weapons, and both Spike and Buffy were taking a pounding, but seemed to be holding their own, dusting half of them fairly easily. Then things turned ugly. They got separated somehow, Spike took off after a retreating pair and Buffy was left with too many at once. One of them produced a fishing net and entangled her in it, still kicking, fighting, and managing to stake one more even from within its tangled snare. It took only a few turns of the vamps to take her down and they had dragged her off in seconds.

When Spike returned, still covered in the dust of the pair he had followed, she was gone. Panic gripped him as he looked for signs of the struggle.

"Buffy!!!" he called out, hoping she had wandered off in pursuit as he had. There was no reply.

Quickly examining the marshy ground, he saw their trail and took off in the direction of the tamped down grass. Something was being dragged and he didn't like the feel of it one bit. He began to run, fear beginning to tighten around his throat. No. He could feel it, smell it on the night air. It wasn't his fear, it was hers. He ran faster, each stride becoming a pounding, thrumming insistence that he hurry, that she needed him, that time was running out.

He found them in a small clearing just behind a row of family crypts. Buffy was completely immobilized by what looked like a fishing net and the three vamps were passing her around, each one taking a deep drink of her and passing her to the next. Slayer blood, the ultimate aphrodisiac. They were almost drunk on it ... when they saw Spike spring at them, knocking all three away at once, then firmly planting a booted foot in the stomach of one, as he staked the other two simultaneously. The third, doubled up on the ground, was dispatched less than a five seconds.

Spike ran to Buffy, urging her to stay conscious. "Stay with me, Slayer, I'm trying to get you out of this bloody mess," he told her as he struggled with the net, tiny shards of metal tied to it cutting his own flesh as he desperately tried to free her.

"Ss..pike?" She was weak, very weak, and he could feel her heartbeat slowing to a dangerous level.

"Hang ON, Slayer, I've almost got you," fear was expanding in his chest like an over-inflated balloon. He was sure he would explode if he didn't get to her RIGHT NOW! She wasn't doing well, he needed to hurry, he needed to there, free!

"Ssss...p," as she tumbled from the net into his arms, she tried to say his name, but she couldn't get the word out. It was worse than he thought. She had lost a lot of blood and it was still flowing freely from her

neck, her shoulder, and one of her wrists. Each vamp had chosen a different area to dine on her, each staking their claim to a different, virginal area of the Slayer's body. Damn them, whatever Hell they were in now wasn't enough.

He pulled her tightly to him and applied pressure to her wrist and neck, desperately trying to stop the bleeding, but with three open and heavily bleeding wounds it was almost impossible. He kept talking to her, trying to give her strength and not let her know how bad it was. "Come on, now Slayer, stay with me here, don't wimp out, it's just a scratch, stay with me."

She was going limp in his arms. "Noooo, now stay with me, come on. Hang on!" He ripped the bottom of her shirt and released the pressure on her neck long enough to tie a strip of it around her heavily bleeding wrist. The vamp had almost ripped her hand off when Spike had appeared unexpectedly, he couldn't slow the bleeding there. He tried to pay attention to the other two bites, one had closed, one was slowing, but the wrist was insistent, letting what was left of her precious blood flood out onto the cold, wet grass. The coppery scent of it made Spike dizzy, but she was more important than the temptation of her blood. "Dammit, they really did a number on her," he thought to himself, "No, no, no, no, don't give up, please, God, don't let her give up," as his pace became more frenetic.

Hazel eyes looked up at him, unable to focus, "Sp...ike cold," she breathed out. She was freezing, her body temperature almost that of his. She'd lost too much blood, even she could tell, and her expression told him everything. They'd lost this time. A well-planned attack and their own distractions had come together in a deadly combination. He felt her slipping away. Her breathing slowed, her heartbeat was almost imperceptible, even by him.

"Nooooo!!! Buffy, no!!!!!" He was almost pleading with her now, he wasn't going to let death win this round, but he felt the stab of defeat himself, his voice catching in his throat as he looked down into her soulful eyes, eyes that suddenly spoke volumes of love and regret to him. "No, stay" came a pitiful whimper from the desperate vampire.

She couldn't speak anymore and the air around them became deathly quiet, only the sound of her erratic breath as it became weaker and weaker, the sound of it smothering them both with the knowledge that he was too late. Too late.

He pulled her tightly to him, begging her not to go, to stay with him, to fight off death as fiercely as she had fought off him all this time. Acid tears burned in his eyes and threatened to run down his sculptured cheeks. No. He couldn't let her go. No.

He released her enough to look into her eyes again. She was trying to smile at him, or at some point beyond him, he couldn't tell, and a tiny moan escaped her lips. They had run out of time. He looked deeply into her very soul, into the face he'd loved so much for so long, his silent tears splashing down upon her bloodied face.

With the last remnants of his non-beating heart wrapped around her, he pressed his mouth to hers, enveloping her in a final kiss which poured every ounce of his love into her. She tried to respond, tried to cling to his lips and to life.

As she slipped away, he turned his vampire face into the heavens as a roar of anger and agony ripped into the night sky. And his heart was shattered.

CHAPTER 2

Angel looked up from his research, his eyes unfocused but searching as if he were trying to see something hidden from him. Suddenly pain and sorrow shone through, and he bolted to his feet, running down the elaborate stairway of the Hyperion, grabbing his duster without breaking his stride. Cordelia stood in the lobby, anguish written all over her face.

"It's too late," tears streamed down her face as the words caught in her throat.

"I know," he threw at her, hurrying toward the door. It didn't matter. He had to go. Buffy was dead. He could feel the world changing, as if it's strongest life force had ceased to exist, leaving a desperate hole in the fabric of his life. But that was not what had him running to Sunnydale. He was too late for Buffy. What he felt just as strongly was Spike. His childe. The world had just opened up and swallowed him whole and Angel was compelled to be with him. Angel could feel him as strongly as if he were in the next room, an intense mixture of anger, agony, desperation, failure, and something else that Angel couldn't quite understand, or perhaps he was choosing not to.

He was out the door and down the street before Cordelia could say another word. She sat down with a trembling sigh. Buffy was gone. Again. There was no doubt in her mind that this time it was permanent. No magical forces would be intervening and bringing her back. The price had been high last time, and she didn't see Willow or Tara taking such a risk a second time. Besides Buffy had made it clear after the last time that she didn't want them to. Being ripped out of heaven once was quite enough.

Cordy tried to focus on what would need to be done then went to tell the others.

Angel almost flew up the California interstate to Sunnydale. He tried not to think about Buffy, he tried not to feel Spike, but they were somehow so tightly interlaced with one another in his heart and head that he had little choice. Pain seared through him like fire, but it wasn't physical pain, and it wasn't his own, it was Spike's. Angel had more than an hour to figure out why. It didn't take him that long. He'd only felt this kind of torment from another vampire once before ... James, after Angel had accidentally killed Elizabeth, his mate. He reached out with his sire's touch to Spike, letting him feel that Angel was on his way and would be there soon, not that he thought it would be much comfort to him right now. Still, he did it and then began sorting through possible details of how things had progressed where they had with Buffy and Spike without him being aware of it.

Time and distance had tempered things between Angel and Buffy, he knew that. The hopelessness of their situation grated to the point of no return for them. Their moment had passed, though they would both always keep the other in their heart as none other could ever be. He also knew that Buffy didn't do well alone. Neither did Spike. Considering the amount of time they spent together patrolling, and suspecting that Spike was carrying a torch for Angel's ex, he should have realized that Buffy's resistance would eventually deteriorate and she would let someone else in, even a vampire. He almost smiled to himself. She does like some monster in her man. Liked. She liked. Past tense. Gut wrenching pain ran through him again as he mashed the accelerator to the floor.

He parked outside the cemetery and made his way in, following the scent of blood on the air. Buffy's blood, it was unmistakable. Even in death, the Slayer's blood could make even an old vampire like himself woozy. He quickly found the site of struggle, stains of dark crimson scattered over the grass, imperceptible to humans, but easily seen and felt by a vampire. Spike was nowhere to be seen.

Angel closed his eyes for a moment, reaching out to find his childe, opening himself to the pain he was suffering ... that they both were suffering. He turned sharply to find Spike standing behind him, his face

beaten and bruised, his eyes swollen not from the battle but from crying. Vampires rarely cried in their life. Some couldn't even manage tears and produced only blood in their sorrow, if they could cry anything at all. Spike's face was stained with salty trails of dried tears.

Neither man could speak. It wasn't really necessary anyway. They both knew what was in the other's heart, they felt the pain and loss radiating between them. Angel took a step toward him, and Spike collapsed into his arms, sobs rumbling through him and seeping into his sire. The two collapsed on the grass, surrounded by the scent of the now dead Slayer, and held each other, the older vampire holding and comforting the younger as best he could with his own tattered heart wanting to sink into the same sorrow.

After a time, Angel could feel the dawn coming upon them and survival became an issue. Spike was spent, a wretched rag of dead flesh unable to move or walk. Angel stood, hoisted his childe into his arms and headed for the crypt he thought Spike had been keeping. They arrived at the threshold just as the fingers of early dawn began to sparkle on the dew-kissed grass around the headstones and trees.

Once inside, Spike wordless showed Angel the way to his more private area beneath the crypt. The place was a disaster, charred and burned overall, like a bomb had gone off. An area which looked like it had been his bedroom had begun to be straightened up, the rubble moved out of the way and normalcy trying to creep in that one corner of the lower crypt. Angel directed Spike to the bed and sat him on the edge of it as he removed both their dusters and boots. Climbing onto the bed next to him, he gathered his childe into his arms and lay them both down, Spike's head resting on Angel's chest as his tears once again silently fell.

Angel felt surprisingly strong himself. He had thought losing Buffy again would destroy him, but he was so concerned for Spike that he reinforced himself rather than allowing himself to feel her loss. He let the younger vampire pour his sorrow into him. Angel would take it, reinforce it with his strength and then return it to Spike, an assurance that his grief was acknowledged and shared. After a time, his tears began to slow, leaving behind only the weakness of raw, exposed pain. Angel knew the best salve right now would have to come from him, the sire. In vampire culture, it was all about the sire, his strength, his leadership, his longevity, his love for his childe. No matter what offenses transpired between them, it could be cleansed and made right with the sire. He bit into his own wrist and offered it wordlessly to Spike, the rich, red, coppery liquid pooling quickly on his skin. The younger vampire placed his mouth over the offering and fed, feeling the strength of his sire flow into him with each swallow. It was elixir to him, liquid courage and healing to him.

Angel removed his wrist and tilted his childe's face up toward his own. He placed a gentle but earnest kiss upon blood-stained lips and lifted Spike closer to him, wrapping his arms more tightly around him and drawing the injured vampire to him. Tilting his chin away, he offered his neck to the suffering childe. With more strength than either man thought he had, he took the offered blood of his sire eagerly, taking them both into a sheltered room of the passion they shared for each other ... and her.

Services had been quietly carried out at dusk the next evening. The Scoobies were shell-shocked but held themselves together for Dawn's sake. Giles had sent word he would arrive as soon as possible to help clean up the details of Buffy's life, knowing all too well how difficult it had been to keep the practical matters of daily life in check. Anya and Xander, reconciled after the disaster of their wedding, took Dawn into their home, sheltered her, and would act as surrogate parents until a permanent decision could be made. She would be safe and loved there. Tara and Willow clung to each other once again, grief and helplessness overtaking Willow. As the sky darkened they made their way to Tara's apartment, still wrapped in each other's consoling arms, leaving Spike and Angel standing alone together at Buffy's graveside.

Silent pain still radiated from them both, but they took quiet solace in each other. They still had not spoken a word to one another. Angel had taken care of the practical matters while Spike slept. Whenever he would awaken, Angel would be there with him, holding him, soothing him, offering of himself and his blood to bring

his childe back. After the service, Angel knew it was time for him to leave. He had done as much as he could in the less than 24 hours he'd had, but it was now up to Spike to find his center and continue. If Angel stayed, the temptation to become Spike's focal point and reason for being would be too great ... for them both. Their blood ties demanded it if they remained together under these circumstances. Spike needed to heal on his own, not through the dedicated attention of his sire.

Spike felt Angel withdraw, almost as if he could feel Angel's hand on the car keys in his pocket. Turning toward the larger vampire, he embraced Angel urgently, holding him a moment longer than he intended to, then pressing his lips powerfully to those of his sire, a grateful kiss passing between them, a seal on their love for one another and their mutual love of her. Then Angel turned and slowly walked away, giving a silent prayer for his dead Slayer and his suffering childe.

Spike moved to sit against a tree on the gently sloping hillside and watched Angel leave, his fingertips reaching around behind him and reassuringly finding the shovel he had left there.

CHAPTER 3

He waited. Darkness began to cover the world in a blanket of ebony and stars. After the tenth cigarette he began to feel impatient. He began to doubt if what he had done was the right thing to do, if she would be angry or grateful. Would she kiss him or would she pound the Hell out of him as usual. He had no idea what her reaction would be.

He should have asked Angel to stay. He knew his sire would have if he had asked, but he feared that once Angel realized what he'd done he would be angry enough to dust him right then and there. He had crossed a line, he knew it. And to make matters worse he had never turned anyone before. Never. In his 100 years plus as a vampire he had never felt the need to make a childe of his own, he had never found anyone to even tempt him. His family was Angel and Dru and sometimes Darla, he needed no more. And eternity is a bloody long time to have someone around. God forbid he have been the one to turn Harmony and be forever tied to that mindless bint.

These were uncertain circumstances as it was. How would the Slayer return? Would she retain her Slayer strength? Would she be confused? And more importantly, how would she survive? Would she retain enough of her slayerness that she wouldn't take a human life to survive? Would she instead live a half life of animal blood and hatred for her sire? Or would she embrace this life, and her sire, completely?

He chided himself for being too quick to act impulsively. Of course, he also knew that was one of his charms, even to Buffy. She denied it, but he knew that she totally loved their unexpected, clandestine and sometimes public encounters. He continually surprised her sexually, and that was one of the reasons she hadn't been able to stay away from him. He smiled a little to himself. His spontaneity was indeed one of his strong suits, and he never, ever doubted himself for it, even if things occasionally turned out badly, as he desperately hoped they would NOT this time.

He felt her stir in the ground beneath him. Time to get busy. Buffy had already had to dig herself out of one coffin, he absolutely refused for her to have to do it again. He rubbed his own knuckles distractedly. No, she wouldn't have to do that herself this time. Not this time. This time it was his job.

By the time Spike had reached the coffin, he was covered in dirt, mud, and sweat. As he broke the latch, he heard her stirring a bit more, and quickly contorted himself to open the lid for her. Her eyes were still closed, but she was beginning to rouse herself, moving her fingers, hands, and feet, and showing a strange desire to breathe.

Her eyes fluttered open to a relieved expression on Spike's face. He smiled. He sensed her, her strength, a hint of confusion, and a great hunger. Good. Exactly as it should be ... aside from the strength, which was unusual but not unheard of when the sire was from a lineage such as his. Angelus sired few. He was selective with them and mentored them well. Spike doubted Angel could do as well and certainly wouldn't be too keen on this one.

Buffy's eyes knitted together in confusion for a moment until she realized her surroundings, then she bolted upright and pushed past Spike to get out of her grave, shivering with a kind of shock. Spike scrambled out of the hole in the ground and wrapped his arms around her from behind to quell her shaking, cooing softly in her ear, "It's okay, kitten, I'm here." She relaxed into him, closing her eyes and letting him comfort her. It was if, for the first time, her eyes were completely open and seeing clearly. It was bright and a bit frightening, but with his arms tightly about her, she felt no real fear.

After a few moments, Spike felt the dawn approaching and scuttled her off toward the crypt, suddenly aware of what bad condition it was in. "Bloody hell," he thought to himself, "I should have tidied up at least." The thought crossed his mind that perhaps leaving Sunnydale might not be a bad idea, particularly if things didn't go well in the beginning. He cringed a little at how difficult the Scooby gang could make this for both of them. They were likely not to like the idea of their beloved Slayer being among the undead.

Once they reached the crypt, he enticed her down to the lower bedroom, still a little shakey but completely confident in him. As soon as her feet hit the floor, she reached for him again, pressing herself to him, breathing in his scent and feeling entirely at home, as if this was the one place in the world she belonged. He embraced her again, just holding her for himself as much as for her, then took her hands and led her to the bed. She was a fledgling, she would need to feed almost immediately and there was no better blood for her than his. It would confirm their bond and make her completely and entirely ... his. Spike rather liked the irony that after all these months of her pushing him away, pounding him, and by her own confession, using him, that suddenly the tables had turned, and she was finally his. Completely. Entirely.

He settled onto the bed and drew her to him, confusion written on her face along with a dozen other emotions. Holding her hands gently in his, he looked up into her still sparkling hazel eyes and tilted his head slightly to one side, exposing his neck to her. The invitation was puzzling to her. His voice was soft and sweet, "You have to feed, luv. If you feed from me, it will make you stronger." Her eyes grew wider with recognition and she tentatively moved closer to him. Slipping his hand into her hair, he pulled her even closer, letting her sense that this was right and what he wanted her to do.

Hesitantly, she leaned into his exposed neck, just barely tasting it with her tongue, at first, then licking it, even placing a tiny kiss upon it, not quite sure yet what to do. Spike moaned softly beneath her touch and that was all the encouragement she needed. She felt herself change and sank her teeth into his flesh, ravenously drawing his thick, rich blood into her mouth and down her throat. Spike moaned loudly, hardly able to contain the ecstasy of her feeding from him, the intimacy of it, her urgent need for him and him alone. The scope of what he had done suddenly struck him. She needed him now, there would be an unbreakable link between them until one or both of them were dust.

He pulled her closer to him protectively, stroking her hair and feeling her pulling him deeper and deeper into her newly formed being. Mostly satisfied, she removed her fangs from his neck and began instinctively licking the wound to close it up. He moaned softly in approval. "That's my girl," he whispered to her approvingly.

This hadn't just sated her hunger, it filled every part of her, and she wanted more of him. She wanted to be inside him, she wanted to feel him on her, in her, and around her. And she wanted him to bite her, wanted to feel for herself the glorious sensation of sharing that part of herself with him.

She felt his need pressing against her, desperately trying to escape from the black denim jeans. Nuzzling her head into his shoulder, she sent her hand down to the bulge growing there, pressing and caressing outside his clothing, feeling him harden even further beneath her hand. She liked it, it felt right. A distant memory kept trying to remind her it was wrong, but in her current state everything felt perfectly natural, so she continued, gently unbuttoning his fly.

Spike gasped an unneeded breath. He hadn't expected her sexual awakening quite this quickly, but he certainly wasn't one to complain. Then again, he had little experience with fledglings, so he may have miscalculated what would happen. Feeling her hands on him, encouraged him to do the same. With gentle strokes her caressed her body, her shoulders, her waist, the curve of her hip and down her thigh. She was still the same strong, well-conditioned Slayer, only her skin was cool and her resistance was non-existent. She murmured his name and met him in a fierce kiss, the passion between them rising quickly. Their lips parted as tongues began to dance the dance of exploration and discovery of each other's mouths, as if it were the first time. To Buffy, it was. She had never known him to taste so good. In all their times together, and she remember quite a few of them in a shadow world of remembrance, she had no memory of wanting him this badly.

Clothes were shed rather quickly and soon they were pressed, bare skin to bare skin. Spike rolled them over, taking the upper hand and pushing Buffy down into the bed, intertwining his fingers with hers and looking down at her, at her need for him expressed in her half closed hazel eyes. He felt no need to break her, force her to say things she didn't want to say. It was so different from their human battle of intimacy, always filled with angst and guilt and usually fighting. They were seamless together, rubbing against each other, feeling and touching and becoming increasingly frenetic about it.

He couldn't hold back any longer and plunged into her fully, both of them crying out in the exquisite joining of their bodies. He stayed there for a moment, filling her to the core and holding them both in a breathless embrace, before he began slowly moving in and out of her. Buffy's hands were caressing and touching his back and hips, sliding down onto his buttocks, squeezing him and wrapping her legs around each of his, pressing harder and harder onto him. It was delicious, all of it.

Spike dropped his head to her throat, licking and nipping at her skin as she writhed and bucked beneath him. Slipping out of her for only a few moments, he engulfed her hardened nipple in his blunted teeth, teasing and pulling at it, making her moan and plead for him louder and louder, before he entered her deeply yet again. As their frantic pace increased they both lost themselves in each other, each touch seemingly to be exactly what the other wanted, as if they were joined in mind as well as body. They were able to anticipate everything the other wanted and needed. He felt her want as much as his own, and she wanted him to taste her. She was almost begging him to. He slipped into game face and licked her neck and throat, searching for just the right place for him. This was an important mark for him, it shouldn't be convoluted with those from Angel, Dracula, and those who killed her. He chose his spot carefully, next to and parallel to his sire's mark on her, and as gently as he could bit into her, drawing the sweet, sweet Slayer's blood into his mouth and into his entire being. They exploded together in cries of ecstasy and joy, splitting the air with ferocious growls of passion as wave after wave of pleasure washed over them. When they could give and take no more, they collapsed in each other's arms, completely spent, and settled into one another for the most comforting and rewarding sleep either had ever experienced.

Angel sat in Wes's office staring into space, a look of pain and pity mixing on his handsome features. He said nothing. He had said very little since his return from Sunnydale, but the gang was used to that when Buffy was involved, so they allowed him his space.

Cordelia came running in, breathlessly, bursting to tell him something important, a vision she'd had moments ago which, if it were true, would change everything. "Angel! I ..."

He cut her off without even looking at her. His voice was as stone cold and dispassionate as he could manage, "I know. He turned her." He closed his eyes tightly as if to block out the thought of what had happened in his own mind, and a single tear ran down his face.

CHAPTER 4

Buffy awoke with a start, her eyes wide and panicked staring up at the ceiling of the crypt. She was afraid to move and she couldn't breathe, though oddly enough she didn't need to.

"It's okay, luv, you're safe," Spike wrapped his arms protectively around her. They had slept well, he thought, very well, in fact. Spike couldn't remember the last time he had rested so well. Having her near him, safe, made all the difference in the world. He began making plans for their future. The world was suddenly opened to them in ways it had never been before. She no longer had Slayer obligations, her life, or unlife, would now be hers to do with as she pleased instead of spending her nights fighting beasties, vamps, and monsters. It was a side effect he hadn't even realized. Freedom. She had the freedom to do whatever she pleased. He could take her anywhere, show her anything ... show her a world she could never have imagined existed. He idly wondered how she felt about traveling by boat, Europe in the springtime was so fresh and romantic.

Buffy stiffened. "Spike, what am I doing here? And why do I feel so," her voice trailed off, she was unable to express how she felt.

Spike released her and propped himself on his side, looking at her earnestly, a wisp of a sheet covering his hips. "What do you remember last, luv?" He stroked her bare arm lightly, a silent reassurance that she was safe. It wasn't much help for her confusion, but hopefully it offered some small security.

"Fighting," she squinted, as if trying to see clearly. "I remember fighting."

"When didn't she remember fighting?" Spike thought to himself. "Her life was fighting ... vampires, Dawn, herself, him, it was a never-ending life of fighting for or against one thing or another. It was not the least bit odd that fighting would be her first memory."

"And a net, I remember a net and vampires," she almost smiled at him, a little proud she remembered something else. "And I remember you," her expression changed to one of bewilderment. "I remember you ... kissing me ... and ... crying. You were crying, Spike." She turned toward him earnestly and stroked his cheek. "Why were you" She stopped suddenly, frozen in thought as her memory began to click into place.

Spike was already there. He could remember it so vividly that he could still smell her blood in the air. He could remember her expression of sorrow and regret. For him. He hadn't been able to stand the thought of losing her again, it was just too much. She had hardly been back, he hadn't really had the chance to tell her everything, to tell her all that was really in his heart. And as her life's blood had flowed from her body, he knew he had run out of time. He had felt her slipping away. Her breathing had slowed, her heartbeat had been almost imperceptible, even by him.

He had pulled her tightly to him, begged her not to go, to stay with him, to fight off death as fiercely as she had fought him. Acid tears had burned his eyes. No. He couldn't let her go.

He had released her enough to look into her eyes again, and that had been his undoing. She had tried to smile at him, and a tiny moan had escaped her lips. He had looked deeply into her very soul, into the face he'd loved for so long, his silent tears splashing down upon her bloodied face.

With the last remnants of his non-beating heart wrapped around her, he had pressed his mouth to hers, enveloping her in a final kiss which poured every ounce of his love into her. She had tried to respond, tried to cling to his lips and to life.

Then he had bit hard into his tongue and his lower lip, letting his mouth fill with blood, and he had passed it to her, forcing her to drink down as much as she could take in her last moments of consciousness. She hadn't even realize what she was doing, she was just trying to complete the kiss. Her final kiss before death. As her eyes had fluttered closed, Spike could only hope that she'd had enough. Then with the taste of salty tears of pain and regret mingling with his own blood, he placed his mouth over the bleeding wound on her neck and drew the last threads of her life into him. It had been the most painful moment of his existence, and he had turned his vampiric face toward the heavens as a roar of anger and agony ripped into the night sky ... and his heart had shattered.

Now, watching her as realization struck her, tears stung his eyes once more with the memory of what had happened, of what he had done. His face was twisted in remembered agony, but in the clear blue of his eyes, hope held on that she would forgive him and understand.

"NooooooooOOOOOOOOOO!!!" Her cry grew into a wail, and with it Spike's hopes of forgiveness and understanding were carried away.

She leaped from the bed, naked, and stood in the middle of the rubble-strewn floor, staring at him. "What did you do? Spike! What did you do to me?" Her voice was shrill and frightened and confused, and Spike could only gaze at her, love still simmering in his eyes, pain still shooting through his heart.

"No, please, no," he thought to himself. He had weighed her possible reactions, this had not been one of them. "Calm down, pet, please, everything is fine."

"The hell it is!! What have you done to me you bloody, murdering monster?!" She was furious. She was frozen in fear but absolutely furious.

Spike, threw his legs over the side of the bed, locking his eyes with her sternly. "I did what had to bloody well be done, luv." His voice held more anger in it than he intended.

Buffy looked down at her body, pale and cold. She tried to breathe and couldn't coordinate it, then with tears welling in her eyes she pressed her hand to her chest trying desperately to feel her heart, then the pulse at her wrist. She glared at him with a look of pain and betrayal. "How could you?! How could you do this to me, you fucking bastard!" She hit him hard across his porcelain jaw, sending him tumbling back across the other side of the bed.

He recovered quickly and crawled back toward her, "I had little choice, Buffy, they'd killed you ..."

"And you couldn't just let me be dead? It's not like I haven't been there before, I knew where I'd be going, I didn't fear it ... you couldn't just let me die????"

He moved toward her, wanting to touch her and make it okay. His voice was a whisper, racked with the pain of losing her yet again. "No, I couldn't."

She spun and kicked him hard on the side of his head, her face instantly changing into the monster she herself had become. She grabbed his hair and pulled his face up toward her, "I can't believe you fucking did this to me. Stay away from me. Come near me again and I'll rip your head off with my bare hands!" She whirled around, grabbed the nearest article of clothing and left the crypt, running out into the night with her vampire's face in full bloom.

Spike sighed and looked at the floor, trembling. "Bloody hell."

"You can say that again." Angel looked at him with a mixture of anger and distain, standing in the bedroom amongst the charred remains.

Spike had no idea how long his sire had been standing there. But it had seemed like only yesterday that he was here consoling Spike, holding and loving him, reassuring him, feeding him. It seemed like yesterday because it had been just yesterday. And here he was again, obviously furious at him, feeling anything but pity. He was literally seething in anger at his childe, and Spike felt like he was about to be beaten to Hell and back and then dusted outright.

"Are you going to just let her go like that? You sired her, you're responsible. Get after her, boy, or this is going to get messy. Come on." He threw Spike some clothes and climbed out of the bedroom to wait for him in the main room of the crypt.

As Spike appeared through the floor, his voice was shaky and uncertain, "Angel, I ..."

"Shut up, Spike, we have to find her before anyone else does or before she starts getting hungry." He turned toward Spike, pausing for a moment, vengeance flashing in the deep brown of his eyes, "But later, there will be Hell to pay, don't think there won't be." Spike cringed. He knew too well the Hell Angelus could inflict on him. The older vampire turned, all billowy coat and broodiness, and stormed out of the crypt expecting Spike to follow, which he did. He didn't dare not to.

CHAPTER 5

Buffy ran. She didn't know where exactly she was going, but she had to get way from Spike, she had to get away so she wouldn't have to think about what he'd done. She ran through the cemetery, dodging trees and headstones like an obstacle course which offered no challenge whatsoever and then stopped, frozen, trying to read her new body. She was almost overwhelmed with how alive she felt. Odd, considering she was dead, but that was the only way she could really interpret it. She felt everything; saw everything, heard for what seemed like miles away. Her head jerked about at every sound, a cross between a frightened bird and a predator listening for it's prey. It was strange and yet wonderful. She felt no pain, no anxiety really, except for her overt fury at Spike. And she wasn't winded, even after all that running. No wonder vamps rarely tired when she was in pursuit of them. Her heart wasn't racing. Her heart wasn't beating.

She collapsed, suddenly directionless and hopeless and having no idea where to go. She felt the wet grass beneath her bare hip. It wasn't cold, just wet. It should have felt cold. She dug her fingers into the blades, trying to make her hand feel cold, trying to get a feeling of familiarity with how things were supposed to be. Wet grass late at night should be COLD! But it wasn't to her because she herself was cold. Dead and cold. She ripped a handful of turf from the ground and threw it in frustration. It splatted with a muddy 'whump' sound against a headstone. Her headstone. She hadn't even noticed where she had stopped ... her own grave.

Now she was cold. Suddenly, inexplicably shivering at the sight before her:

Buffy Anne Summers
Beloved sister, Dearest friend
She gave herself to save the world
Rest In Peace

Her head began to throb uncontrollably, the shivering got worse, and mixed in with it all was something else, a desire, a want, she couldn't place it, but it was getting worse. She wrapped the duster around her and

tried to stop shaking. It smelled of cigarettes and bourbon. Spike's. If she'd had anything else to wear, she'd have thrown it away immediately, but she was rather stuck with it for now. And she needed something. What was it? God, her body hurt? Fucking asshole, how could he do this. Her mind was random. She couldn't focus, and she couldn't stop trembling. She needed to leave, get away from this place, it hurt too much.

She started running again, not having any idea where she was going. Her bare feet pounded on the pavement, they should have been cold, but they weren't, but they quickly became raw. She finally stopped at Revello Drive. Home. This was home, maybe she could go inside, get some clothes, figure things out, talk to ... Giles. Was Giles here? Had he come back for her funeral? Again?

She stepped up onto the front porch and started to knock. She was overwhelmed with that wanting again. She couldn't stop it and it was all her mind would focus on. She needed ... she wanted, she had to have ... she ... was hungry. Realization. She began screaming.

Spike & Angel hit the cemetery and split up almost immediately to look for her. Being the sire, Spike's sense of Buffy was more intense, however, Angel's own connection to her pulled him toward her location almost as quickly. They met up a few moments later at her grave.

"She's been here." Angel spoke flatly. "She stayed for a few minutes."

Spike had squatted on the ground, looking at the disturbed grass. "Yeah, she's none to happy about it, either."

"Should she be?" Angel added a barb to his voice, a subtle reminder that what Spike had done to her without her consent would not be something to make her, or anyone close to her, happy.

Spike looked up at him and snorted, tossing his head toward the street. "That way." They headed down the street, both of them silently and dreadfully realizing that she was headed home.

The door at Revello Drive flew open in response to the screams. Giles found himself staring at his Slayer, his dead Slayer. Her face was pale and panicked and her hands clutched the side of her head as if it were splitting in two. He grabbed her by the shoulders and her cries changed.

"Noooooooooooo!!!!!! Giles don't!!! Don't touch me!!!!!"

He reached for her anyway. Buffy pulled away viciously, her face changing immediately into the horrid mask of the undead. Giles was shocked, his mouth gaping open, his eyes wide with fear. This was not what he expected when he saw she was back again. He thought perhaps Willow had yet AGAIN dabbled in resurrection spells, having not learned a damned thing from the last time. From the moment he saw Buffy standing there he was already planning his lecture to the undisciplined witch. But this, Buffy a vampire, this took him by complete and utter surprise. He gathered himself quickly and grabbed her by the shoulders.

"Buffy! Listen to me! Let me help you! Come ... "

"Giles!! No! Do NOT invite me in! Don't! Don't!"

There was a flutter of black coats and Buffy was suddenly standing in the yard well away from the house, held between the two vampires, her body slumped and wracked with sobs. Giles could only stand on the porch and stare in awe at what had happened to her, her worst nightmare come to full fruition. His heart ached for her.

Angel broke the silence. "We'll take care of her, Giles, but she's right. Don't invite her in until we know she has things under control. She's strong, I think she can defeat the demon, but it's better to be sure. We'll be in touch." The trio turned to leave when Giles spoke up.

"Angel?" They paused and he continued, "Let us know "

Angel nodded appreciatively over his shoulder and they left without letting Giles finish.

Once they were well away from the house, they stopped, both men looking at Buffy, waiting to see how she was doing, if the hunger had hit her yet, and if she understood the situation entirely. From all indications on her porch she was well aware, but they needed to know exactly where she was in her transformation.

She raised her face slightly, the moonlight enough for their vampire eyes to make out the tears glistening on her cheeks and to see her smooth, human features had returned. Her sobs had stopped, but she was trembling. Spike and Angel stood back from her, allowing her to stand on her own and absorb and accept everything, as well as tell them what she wanted and needed.

She looked at Angel first, immediately looking away, unable to face him. She turned to Spike, her first expression pitiful and full of pain and then changing to such anger that her eyes yellowed and Spike took a step back. This could get ugly, he thought to himself.

Angel looked at him, angry himself, but also aware that he needed to help diffuse this situation instead of contribute to it's volatility. "She's your childe, Spike," he made sure Buffy heard this, a validation of Spike's position with her. "There are things she will need to know, things you will have to teach her outside what she knew as a slayer, things she will need to know to survive."

Spike nodded hesitantly. He was still shaky from Buffy's reaction, but he was encouraged that Angel was handing the responsibility of Buffy to him rather than keeping it himself. He stood a little taller and took a step closer to Buffy, meeting the fury in her eyes with his own confidence.

"Buffy," he was almost business-like, "tell me exactly what you feel right now." He began to explain, "This is important if things are to go well for you right now. This first 24 hours are crucial to your survival. So, tell me in as much detail as you can."

He took another cautious step toward her, she remained still, her eyes still angry but focused on Spike instead of Angel. He took another step, she recoiled, her eyes shifting to Angel, softening into a plea for his help.

"Spike," Angel's voice was forceful and full of warning, "take control of this or I will." His eyes did not move from Buffy's.

"Angel?" Her voice broke. "I'm ... I'm so hungry. I ... I don't know what to do." Every fiber of her begged him to help, all the love they had suppressed over the years driving it's stake into his heart. It tore him up to see her like this, he couldn't abandon her. But he had to let Spike take the first steps or the sire/childe bond could be weakened and that would make for a weakened fledgling. That could kill her faster than the pending sunrise.

Spike bristled watching them, his own words of years ago echoing in his head ... "You're not friends, you'll never be friends. You'll be in love until it kills you both." He looked at her pleading eyes, he saw the pain in Angel's. He snorted at them. "Fine. You take control. She was never mine anyway, she has always been yours, warming my bed she was still yours, when I was inside her she was still yours, dying in my arms she was still yours. Why should now be any different?" He turned and stalked away, leaving Angel no choice but to take her as his.

As Spike moved away from them, Buffy's focus shifted to the retreating vampire. She wanted to call out to him. His words had stung enough that they brought the truth more into focus for her. He was wrong. She

wasn't Angel's anymore. She was his. All those things he mentioned, she was his alone. If he had only stopped to look deeper he could have seen that behind her anger and terror. Each step he took crumbled her heart a little more. She felt Angel's arms around her protectively, and she began to weep into his shoulder, tears of sorrow and loss. Tears for Spike.

CHAPTER 6

Giles was sitting stiffly on the sofa with a bottle of Scotch in front of him when Willow and Dawn came in. He was shaking, and he couldn't make himself meet their eyes.

"Giles?" Willow said tentatively. "What's happened?" Her heart froze. Giles rarely drank like this, even in the wake of Buffy's death.

"We had visitors," he stated coldly, draining the glass in front of him.

"Who?" Willow was getting more concerned. She could see the anguish in his eyes and it made her heart squeeze in dread. "Who, Giles? Who was here??" She was beginning to panic. Dawn silently walked toward him and sat down, resting her hand on his.

Giles looked up at Willow, unable to face Dawn, tears welled in his eyes and the tell tale marks on his cheeks told them that these were not the first shed in the last few minutes.

"Angel was here. And Spike." He swallowed hard. "And ... Buffy."

"Buffy??" Willow's expression turned to joy. Buffy was alive! How? Who had managed to bring her back yet again? "That's wonderful! How? How did she come back? Who brought her back? Oh Giles! I can't believe it" Her joy faded with her words. "Giles? Why aren't you happy about this? I mean, it's Buffy! Back from the dead, AGAIN?"

He could only stare at her, unable to form the words. He waited for realization to hit.

"Wait. Angel? And Spike? Why would Buffy be with them? Why would ... " Willow's knees went weak and she crumbled to the floor. "Oh God," she whispered.

Dawn silently withdrew her hand from Giles's, staring off into space at nothing, trying to understand, trying to come to grips with how much the last 30 seconds of her life had changed everything. She reached into her jacket pocket and withdrew a stake, holding it in her hands, feeling it's shape and texture, finding both comfort and pain in it. She shifted her focus, silent tears falling onto the seemingly harmless piece of wood with the sudden realization that she might have to use it on her undead sister. It was her job.

The long walk from the street near Revello Drive and the old mansion had seemed even longer with neither of them speaking. Angel maintained his grip on Buffy for two reasons, one as comfort, and one as an assurance that she wouldn't bolt and go running after food. They hit the doorway of the old place just as sunrise was trying to crawl over the horizon.

Once they were inside, Angel pulled the coverings from the sofa and settled Buffy there. She appeared to be in shock, silent, trembling, unable to communicate. It seemed to him that if she spoke it all everything would be real and as long as she didn't say it, she could pretend it wasn't. Acceptance was going to be harder on her than probably any vampire in history. She had become that which she killed.

As she sat motionless, he opened up the house a little more and then disappeared into the bedroom, returning a few moments later with some clothes for her. They were her clothes, having sat forgotten in a drawer for years. He couldn't even remember how they got there. They were brightly colored, a remembrance of the vibrant teenager who used to wear them. They seemed oddly out of place for her now.

He unbuttoned Spike's duster and slipped it off of her shoulders, replacing it with her own clothes and tossing it over a still-covered chair. She was still so incredibly beautiful, even dead and pale and in shock. Her body was still slim but muscular, a few scars telling of her previous occupation as slayer, especially those on her neck. How many slayers could boast three separate sets of fang marks on her neck? His fingertips lightly traced them ... his, Dracula's, and Spike's.

She broke from her trance and looked up at him, tears welling in her eyes again. "Angel? I'm ... I'm so hungry."

"I know, baby, it's hard right now." He caressed her cheek tenderly as he spoke. "I had hoped your sire would stay with you, but he ..." Angel sighed heavily. "Do you two ever do anything the easy way?"

Her response was a single tear.

"You have to feed, Buffy." She shook her head, but he insisted. "You do. If you don't you might as well take a morning stroll. Your strength and resilience as a vampire depends on the first few days of feedings."

"Angel, I can't. Don't ask me to kill anyone, I just can't. I can't take human life, you know that. Even now ... " Her voice broke, a reflection of her broken spirit.

His hand moved to caress her hair. "I know. You don't have to." He wanted her to work this out herself. "How did you feed yesterday?"

Her brow wrinkled in thought, it seemed like a lifetime ago. "Spike. I fed from Spike, and then ..." If she could have blushed, she would have. The sex that followed her feeding from Spike had been a mind-blowing extension of it. She looked up at Angel with concern and fear.

He crouched down in front of her, taking her hands in his. "I know. But for now, it's the only way except to go hunting, and you can't do that in daylight anyway, even if you were willing to."

She bit her lower lip. "But ... the risk ... Angelus ... "

Angel smiled a little and tried to lighten the mood. This would be easier for her if she didn't have to worry about the affects it would have on him. "Trust me, Buffy, under these circumstances, I won't get that happy." He kissed her on the forehead then slipped onto the sofa next to her, wrapping his arms around her and pulling her into his chest. He could feel tiny sobs starting deep inside her. Spike was going to pay for this on so many different levels Angel couldn't even begin to make a mental list.

The peroxide blonde sat propped against Willy's bar. He could be a very messy drunk sometimes. It took a lot to put Spike out like this, but he had managed it. Willy had never seen him such a mess, not even when the Slayer had thrown herself off that tower last year. The bar owner tried to clean up around him, checking him now and then just to be sure he wasn't permanently unconscious. He grabbed a handful of blonde hair and lifted his head. "Spike? You okay?"

Spike mumbled something obscene and Willy lowered his head again. The mumbling continued, something about Angel and Buffy. Talk about ancient history, Willy shrugged and continued his cleaning. The mumbling continued until Spike's groggy head lifted on it's own with a bellowing, "Oh Bloody Hell!" and he collapsed off the stool into a pathetic puddle on the floor. His head was spinning, but there was one vision in it which wouldn't go away, one tortured whispering that insisted it be heard no matter how much he drowned

himself in bourbon, and now he could feel it as well as see it ... Buffy was feeding from Angel. He'd lost her. Again.

Angel held her until her sobs once again subsided, then gently lifted her chin so that her eyes met his. "Buffy. It's time." He could see her reluctance, but this was important to her survival and he wasn't going to let her moralize her way out of surviving. "Please. Don't make me force you." He pitched his voice with kindness instead of a threat, though at this point it was difficult to do. He needed to be strong for her right now, but it was becoming increasingly difficult for him. Holding her like this brought back all the old wounds. He was losing his edge on this and could feel himself being drawn back into her, wanting to be loved by her again.

Buffy could feel him opening up to her, see the tilt of his head which invited her to feed from him, his blood seeming to call to her, becoming her to taste him and be quenched. The hunger in her ached, the personal history and heart break between her and Angel ached, Spike deserting her ached, there was little in her that didn't ache from memory or want. She could smell it now, Angel's blood. And she wanted it. She wanted it so much.

Angel could feel her desire and hunger. He pressed the issue, placing his hand behind her head to guide her to his exposed throat, bringing her closer to him and his blood that would sustain her and save her and most likely seduce her. "Buffy, come on, sweetheart. I know you can do this. You have to change first, then it's easy."

"Angel," her voice pathetic and weak, "don't look at me. I don't want you to see 'that' face. Please."

"It's okay, I won't look," he said gently, "I promise." It tore him apart inside to have to reassure her he wouldn't look upon her demon face. This shouldn't be a time for embarrassment, it should be a time for validation, but he also remembered the fear he himself had the first few times Buffy had seen him in full game face. He felt her stir next to him and the prick of new vampire teeth piercing his flesh followed by the rush of his blood into her body. He held control tightly, but the demon inside him pulled and taunted him, wanting him to lose himself in her, in what he was giving her, in what she was taking from him. The heat of blood, even vampire blood, the intoxication of the blood exchange began to swallow him.

Buffy felt her fangs slide into Angel's neck easily, the sudden influx of his blood almost making her head explode. It poured into her, a cool drink of water after days in the desert. The power of it surged through her, filling her, quenching her thirst, and filling her with another, different desire. A desire for him, for more of him, more than just his blood, for possession, for him to possess her, all of her. She wanted to tell him, to say the words, but she couldn't stop drinking from him, just the thought of releasing from him made her shiver. She needed more.

Angel settled back into the corner of the sofa, wrapping himself around her while she fed, feeling the demon inside him reminding him of what he'd always wanted, showing him how desperately close it all was. All he had to do was let go and the pain would go away and he could have her and she could have him and it would all be as it should be. Forever.

Angel felt himself harden beneath her, Buffy's passion beginning to build and bleeding into him as if he were a porous substance absorbing her. It was agony, he wanted her so badly, and he knew she wanted him, he could smell her on her. Try as he may, he couldn't ignore it, and it was absolute torture.

Buffy released him, panting with unneeded breaths into his neck. "Angel " she could hardly speak from the overwhelming passion.

"I know ... " In one fluid motion, he stood, lifting her into his arms, her face buried in his chest as much to take in his scent as to hide her face. He carried her to the bedroom, still shrouded in coverings from his long absence, but the canopy bed relatively undisturbed and protected. He pushed apart the curtain of it and set

her gently down on the soft bedding, his lips finding hers quickly and feeling them opening to him, welcoming him hungrily into her mouth.

Buffy wrapped her arms and legs around him, pulling him completely on top of her. His blood, cool as it was, shot through her body like fire, enflaming her to the point of desperation. She wanted to be rid of her clothes, but she didn't want him to move away from her long enough to open them, much less remove them. Her hands were everywhere, tearing Angel's clothes, her nails biting into his back, her lips permanently fixed to his, her tongue exploring his mouth with an urgency she'd never known. Angel felt it, too, he couldn't remember the last time he'd felt this swept away by anything ... or anyone, but her.

"Good," Angel thought to himself. "Urgency and desperate passion I can handle." There was no danger of losing himself in this, it was too animalistic. Oh, he'd enjoy the hell out of it, but there was no danger of his soul taking a powder and letting Angelus take over with this type of sex. It was the tender lovemaking that turned him into a quivering pile of weakness easily overcome by the demon within. He matched her urgency, trying not to tear her clothes, but trying desperately to get them off of her and reveal the pale skin beneath. As long as he didn't utter the word "love" ... as long as he didn't HEAR the word "love" he would be all right. Everything would be fine.

Their clothing vanished. Suddenly confronted with bare skin and the overpowering scent of her desire, Angel felt himself falling into an all-engulfing pool of pleasure he wasn't sure he could resist. Buffy needed this, he knew it would compound her strength to have his blood and his mark on her. No one would bother her with his fresh mark on her. But the floodgates of their years-long desire for each other was so overwhelming. He felt panic creep into his thought, the tiny voice of warning trumpeting danger ahead. He tried to pull back from her, to avoid complete consummation of his long-forbidden love for her. He tried.

"Angel?" Her voice was soft, seductive, urgent, full of want and need. He wanted to die inside it, inside her. He relaxed into her and their desperation quelled, their intimacy melting into the tenderness of caresses and the slow, prolonged touches of lovemaking.

"I want ...," she murmured, her hands and lips continually moving over his body.

"Shhhhh, I know, it's okay, I'm here," he cooed to her as he surrendered and slipped inside, his hands and body never ceasing their dance of love over her.

The stars exploded around them, a fiery waterfall of emotions and desires. And in the echo of it all, in the softest of whispers, she finished her thought "Spike."

CHAPTER 7

By nightfall Spike was almost sober again, not a state he wanted to be in right now. He preferred to drown in unconsciousness. He was good at that. Unconsciousness didn't hurt, well, unless he got extraordinarily clumsy, which was rare actually.

Willy was not an effective accomplice and shoved him out the door, leaving him to stand on the empty street feeling suddenly directionless.

Buffy. She'd been with Angel. He could still feel them, all passion and blood, settled now into the comfort of sleep. Well, she was anyway. He could feel his sire awake, filled with his usual dose of broodiness. Damn him. He'd gotten the woman of his dreams. Couldn't Angel be happy with that?

Spike let out a laugh that echoed off the brick buildings lining the road. "Well, no, ya bloody poof, I guess you can't be happy with that, not and still be Angel," he said out loud to no one. He suddenly wished for Angelus. It would be so much easier to get Buffy back if Angel became the hideous monster that ate Europe

again. Well, maybe. Depending on what shape Buffy's new vampire life took. She could just as easily fall into the arms of Angelus and become more infamous as a vampire than she ever was as a slayer. Angelus had just that kind of talent, in fact, he'd stake his claim to her and break her to the point that there was no Buffyness left in her, then use her as the ultimate weapon against the world. A hundred years ago, that would have been a good thing to Spike, but now, not so much.

He started walking, not specifically thinking where he was going, just walking and thinking and trying like Hell not to feel ... not to feel Buffy, Angel, and especially not himself.

Angel sat in the darkness near the fireplace, staring into it without really focusing on it, a half-empty glass in his hand. He hadn't sipped it in nearly a half hour. It was just there, the ice melting, diluting the potent liquid inside, turning it into something weaker than it had been before. Like he was now.

He had very nearly lost everything. Had the last, whispered word of his lover not caught him when it did, he most certainly would have been lost again, and Angelus would be having a bloody festival day with the vampiric vampire slayer now innocently sleeping in the next room.

The logs shifted, sending sparks out onto the stones surrounding the huge fireplace. He couldn't continue this. If he stayed and acted as sire for Buffy, teaching her, bonding with her, feeding her, having sex with her that would consistently turn into making love to her, he would lose his soul. He had no doubt about it, just now he had come too close. There was no way he could stay in Sunnydale and be everything to her and not find that moment of happiness that would steal everything from him. The damage that Angelus and a now immortal, soulless slayer could bring to the world was unconscionable.

He drained the glass, still staring, unblinkingly into the fire. He was angry at what Spike had done, but it was mixed with a silent gratefulness that Buffy still lived, in an unlife sort of way. He couldn't imagine this world without her in it, even if she wasn't his, even if he never saw her. The world would just seem emptier to him.

Somehow, he had to give her back to Spike, and he had to find a way to do it without hurting her and without Spike thinking he was getting a cast off from his sire. How could he make Spike take the responsibility of her back upon himself? How could he manage it so that Spike thought it was his own idea? He had stormed away like a petulant child, making assumptions that were not true, no matter how much Angel himself wanted them to be. He knew Spike well enough to know that he would never come and demand or ask for her back. Of course, it didn't help that he was Spike's sire, that added an extra complication to the dynamics of it. Then there was Spike himself. He had run off at the least conflict, would it be wise to hand her over to Spike if there was a chance he might abandon her again?

He thought on these things as he stared into the fire for another hour, then went to check on Buffy, kissing her lightly on the forehead then watching her sleep for an interminably long time. There was only one way he could think of to make this resolve, only one way to make Spike accept his responsibility to Buffy and to himself. Spike would have to fight for her, be forced to say the things he didn't want to say and do the things he didn't want to do. That bleach head could be such an idiot sometimes.

Angel smiled to himself, poured another drink, and sat back down in his chair before the fire. There was only one way to make this happen, to force Spike into doing what he needed to do and what Angel wanted him to do. His smile broadened, this was going to be fun. All Angel had to do was tell Spike "no."

"Angel?"

He looked up to see Buffy standing in the bedroom doorway wearing only his shirt. His unbeating heart squeezed with the pain of wanting her and knowing he'd never have her that way again, and worse, that she didn't really want him. "Are you okay?" he managed.

"I'm okay. Confused, but okay." She blinked then looked deeply into his eyes. "Come back to bed?"

He set down the empty glass and stood up, seeing Buffy's eyes flash at his shirtless form, her eyes dropping to the part of him which was already attentively reacting to her. Desire was welling up in them both again, and, as tempting as that was, he knew he shouldn't let it happen. Then again, knowing her thoughts were on someone else would keep him from that much-avoided happiness; unfortunately the side affect to that was intense pain for himself. How do you hold and make love to a woman you've always desired when you know her heart really belongs to someone else, even if she doesn't?

She had a sly smile on her lips. "I'm hungry."

"I know," he said resolutely, "I'm coming."

"Oh, I hope so," she said with the most evil intent.

He followed her into the bedroom and closed the door. He could feel Spike on his way to the mansion, slovenly, annoyed, angry, and still somewhat drunk. He wouldn't be much longer. If Angel timed this just right Spike would have no choice but to intervene. It was going to hurt. God, it was going to hurt. He suddenly heard his own words coming back to haunt him, "Do you two ever do anything the easy way?"

Angel felt Spike approach and come into the house. He half expected him to come into the bedroom uninvited, but from the scent of blood and sex throughout the house it was quite obvious what was going on behind their closed door. He relaxed into an almost sleep again, letting Buffy feed for a little while longer.

Their second session had begun somewhat like the first, with timid feeding. From there it exploded into uninhibited, almost violent sex. They both no doubt had scratches and bruises from each other and the furniture and the floor and the wall. But once climaxes had been reached, repeatedly, things began to calm down and he offered his vein to her again, for strength, for her survival. He had to close his heart to her, even though his body kept betraying him. And he had to set the ritual here, so that when things were in place, he could break it and send her running to her true sire.

Once she was sleeping again, Angel joined Spike in the main room. He was wearing a fine silk robe, which did little to stave off the chill, but a great deal to show off his muscular build. Neither man said a word, but Spike had put a pretty good dent in the bottle of Scotch left out for him. Angel grabbed another glass and poured himself one, then stood by the fire, staring into it as he spoke. "She drank from you first." He kept his back to Spike. "She will need to again."

"What? The blood of my sire isn't good enough?" The sarcasm in his voice made Angel blanch. Okay, this was going to be harder than he thought.

"She tasted you first. She's still unsettled. Even though she despises you right now, the familiarity of your blood will help her." He was short, to the point, and completely full of shit. However, since Spike hadn't ever made any childer of his own, Angel was betting he could get away with this. At least he hoped he could.

He turned toward Spike, almost business like. "I'll allow it for her sake, but you surrendered your claim as sire when you walked away with her in such need. I'll be in the room with you at all times, no matter what happens during or after."

The clear blue of Spike's eyes sparkled for just a moment. If Angel was saying what he thought he was, that meant the three of them would do a blood exchange ... vampires did not sit around and watch blood play without participating ... and what would follow would be the first time in very many years that Spike had been intimate with his sire or shared his blood. The thought of it was suddenly thrilling, an old memory of excitement and devotion. It almost made him forget the insult which had just been handed to him, "... surrendered your claim ..." Spike bristled.

Angel continued. "She's sleeping now. Are you tired? It might make things easier on us all if she simply woke to both of us there with her. It's somehow easier to explain things to her when she's undressed."

Spike almost spit the last mouthful of Scotch onto the floor. "That's for sure." Spike couldn't hide the grin now. This entire arrangement was becoming too delicious. "So," he smirked, "Shall we to bed then, 'Sire,'" the final word dripping with sarcasm.

"Lead the way, 'childe,'" Angel could play that game, too. Both men vanished into the bedroom to be with the woman who owned both of their unbeating hearts.

CHAPTER 8

The two vampires stood at the foot of the bed admiring their charge. She was absolutely exquisite, lying there innocently, a wisp of a sheet covering her hips and nothing else, moonlight reflecting off the round fullness of her breasts and the long taper of her muscular legs. The peaceful expression on her face was framed by sex hair. She was the Birth of Venus. They remained there for a long while admiring her, then Spike slid his hand into Angel's, interlacing their fingers.

Neither man really knew what to say. There was so much pain and past between them, so much anger and bitterness, yet, at this particular moment, they were bound together in their mutual admiration of the beautiful vampire before them, who would forever be as lovely as she was now. They also shared an oddly renewed appreciation for each other and the balance they seemed to offer the other.

Spike was so full of gratitude he felt ridiculous not expressing it in some way. Taking Angel's hand seemed inadequate but was certainly more efficient than stumbling over words that would no doubt come out wrong and result in an argument. He wanted to thank Angel for taking care of Buffy when he stupidly left them in the street. He wanted to thank him for not staking her outright when he found out what Spike had done. He wanted to thank him for this moment, this incredible moment of peace and beauty and silence and moonlight.

Angel, though surprised at Spike's affectionate act, was pleased at the feel of his childe's hand in his and the meaning surrounding it. He stood there, silently, enjoying the closeness for a few moments, finally turning his admiring eyes away from the sleeping slayer and onto the alabaster features of the beautiful man next to him. Though he hadn't aged a day since the night Angel turned him, Spike seemed to grow more handsome every year. Perhaps it was the comfortable confidence he had in himself, usually, or maybe he had such a perfect grasp of his own style that it made him stand apart. Either way, between the piercing blue eyes and those blade sharp cheekbones, he was as tempting to stare at as the beautiful woman sprawled across the bed. Truth to tell, Angel was having difficulty deciding which of them to look at.

He squeezed Spike's hand and turned toward him. Spike followed suit, whispered words on his lips the moment they moved.

"Angel ... I ..."

Angel placed his fingertips on Spike's lips. "Shhhh. I know," he whispered back, "I know." They released hands, Angel bringing his up to cup his childe's face. Those hypnotic blue eyes sent shimmering shards into Angel's heart. He remembered now why he had turned William, why Angelus had been so obsessed with him, with breaking him. Spike still wore the scars from that time hidden deeply inside him, but he was never completely broken. Angel was suddenly grateful for that. As much as the sire must dominate the childe, he never, even as Angelus, wanted to see the light of rebellion completely extinguished in those eyes.

He took a step closer, brushing his lips across those of his childe, bringing them together in a kiss of home. Spike parted his lips, welcoming his sire into his mouth and his life once again. They lingered there, lips parting, tongues tasting the other after a long fasting from being together. They fell into one another, completely absorbed by what they were and what they could again become.

Things between them remained uncharacteristically tender, as if each kiss and caress was a test to see if the other was going to withdraw. Never had they been like this together, it was exciting and a little frightening and so completely contradictory to any prior intimacy when Angelus brutalized Spike repeatedly. This was unexpected, very much wanted by both vampires, and quite marvelous. With compassion and whispered apologies they nourished each other emotionally, like photosynthesis, each drawing in something from the other then releasing something more wonderful back.

They settled onto the foot of the bed, Angel pulling Spike's shirt off over his head before releasing the tie of his own robe. Spike watched in wonder. He'd not seen his sire like this in, well, ever. Tender, compassionate, affectionate, these were not terms that usually described Angel, much less Angelus. Just the sight of him made Spike shiver. The touch of him was the welcoming embrace of home and belonging mingled with the sexual tension of want and need. It was overpowering. No matter their conflict, their sire/childe bond was as strong as ever, as if they had never been apart, as if they never disagreed. They were one.

Angel took Spike by the hand and led him effortlessly toward the vacant side of the bed. This isn't exactly what Spike had in mind when he came here. He had actually planned to kick Angel's ass for circumventing his role as Buffy's sire and for, well, just being Angel, for being her 'first', for being here for her when he wasn't. He wanted to kick Angel's ass because he couldn't kick his own. He was to blame for it all, and he damned well knew it. But this was so not what he had expected, to find Angel willing to share her and himself.

As if Angel could read his childe's mind, he pressed his palm to Spike's cheek. "It's okay, William. It's time to heal what's between us ... for us and for her. He tossed his head slightly toward Buffy. He was right of course, if the two of them kept at it, Buffy would be destroyed before she could settle down into any kind of vampire existence. Spike nodded and sat on the edge of the bed. Angel put a hand on each of his childe's knees and spread them apart, stepping into the opening and taking Spike's face into his hands. The expression on his face was almost apologetic as he captured Spike's lips with his own.

As their kisses became more urgent and their hands began to please more than explore, the sleeping blonde began to stir next to them. Unspoken sentiments were passed between the two men as they reluctantly parted from one another in an effort to include her. Angel moved to Buffy's side of the bed and slipped beneath the sheet next to her. Spike followed his sire's lead, shedding the remainder of his clothes and sliding in next to the former Slayer.

It was still strange to Spike that she was no longer warm and no longer held the hidden thump-thump-thump of her heartbeat that few, save vampires, could feel and hear. It made her seem hollow somehow.

Angel wrapped his arms around Buffy and pulled her into his chest. She nuzzled into him automatically without even opening her eyes. Her voice was soft and filled with sleep, "Spike?" Angel felt his heart squeeze a little, that little pain that reminded him she was no longer his, and he lifted his chin toward Spike, silently beckoning him in closer.

Spike obliged immediately. "Right here, love," he murmured to her as he wrapped his arms around her as well and pressed his body into her back. She turned in his arms, resting her head on his chest, still lost in sleep.

Angel reinforced himself, knowing what he had to do now to make their bonding complete. He didn't want to, but he hadn't been able to come up with anything better to guarantee that Buffy would bond herself only to Spike and not to him instead. He bit his lower lip hard as the last threads of his plan wove themselves

around his thoughts, a tiny trickle of blood making its way into his mouth, filling him with the taste and power of his own blood.

He reached across Buffy, bringing Spike in for yet another kiss, his hands touching and caressing both his former lover and his child. Spike joined in, echoing the movements and adding kisses and nibbles to Buffy's hair and neck. Her own moans of pleasure stirred, bringing her closer to consciousness and to the wondrous attention she was receiving. When her eyes opened she saw before her the two most beautiful men she'd ever known ... kissing one another just above her. She watched them in amazement before being overwhelmed and joining them, adding her own lips to theirs. It became a free-for-all, a lover's caress met with another lover's kiss with limbs and nipples and sex brushing against each other and captured hungrily by whatever was handy, digit or mouth.

No spot of flesh lacked for attention, no pair of lips ceased kissing, licking, or whispering little nasties that set them all into a more frenzied pace. Their positions shifted frequently, Buffy slipped in and out of game face almost as often, not quite having the control that her two partners did. Buffy let out a cry of release every few minutes, sending an eerie echo throughout the stone-walled mansion. Spike & Angel paced themselves a bit better, more for her and each other than themselves. They were amazingly in tune and tandem in the things they did with hardly a signal between them to keep the other apprised of what they wanted to do next. Buffy was in ecstasy, which was exactly where they wanted her, filled with desire and passion instead of anger and mistrust. The three of them, there together, completed each other, each one bringing something more to the other, a mutual giving and taking of not only bodies but of emotion and commitment.

As their pace came to a fiery peak, Angel slipped between Spike and Buffy, hovering over her, his hard length poised and prepared to enter her, rubbing urgently against her cool thighs. He reached for his child, the man to whom, as Angelus, he had done such great wrong, and pulled him toward him, urging him onto Angel's back. He felt Spike's cool, hard erection against his bare skin and pressed toward it, purring low in his chest. In all their years together, Spike had never been allowed this privilege; he had always been the one to receive Angelus into him, usually quite painfully, rather than the other way around. Spike smiled suspiciously. "Are you sure?" he whispered across the back of Angel's neck.

"Yesssss," was the hissing reply.

Spike was momentarily tempted to force his way in viciously, as had been done to him what seemed like hundreds of times in their tempestuous past together, but he resisted, preferring instead not to break passionate bond and intensity they were building here. He resisted as much for himself as he did for Buffy or Angel. There was something happening here which surpassed the sexual acrobatics their vampire existence was capable of sustaining. He wanted to explore it further, feed on it, and ultimately demonstrate to Buffy that the world she had unwillingly entered had some incredible rewards to counteract the painful consequences.

He reached around Angel's hips and stroked Buffy, the copious wetness between her legs covering his fingers within moments. She moaned and writhed beneath his touch, so he lingered there a bit longer until Angel reminded him of his presence, wiggling his backside into Spike's stomach.

"Patience, luv," he whispered to his sire. "Your turn's coming."

Before he withdrew completely from the now urgently thrusting pelvis of his new child, his talented hand guided his sire into Buffy, pushing him with his own hips until Angel was completely inside her, both of them gasping in pleasure and surprise. Spike's hand returned to his own length, coating it with the juices of his now very changed love and sharing it with tight opening of his sire before him. As Angel pulled out of Buffy, he found himself impaled on Spike's cool, hard cock. The two men gasped and held their position for a few moments before Spike pushed Angel away and drove him into Buffy once again. And again. And again. Each stroke into her was followed by Spike's stroke into Angel to the point Angel was perpetually either filling or being filled by one or the other. When they reached a completed 5th stroke, Spike sank his fangs into Angel's neck and they both came with an ear-splitting roar that seemed to shake the old house. Buffy, screaming beneath them, wanted hers as well and found it quickly as Angel collapsed into her one last time,

her own fangs finding the other side of his neck. Angel howled as his body exploded again in what he thought must be the perfect moment of passion, both Buffy and Spike feeding from him at their moment of final release and his body joining the three in an unbreakable bond of passion.

They lay there a long time, each of them panting with emotion, pleasure, and afterglow. Their tower toppled over, with Angel and Spike falling to Buffy's side, arms and legs intertwined once again as they positioned themselves to sleep. None of the three had ever felt such peace and contentment.

As Spike and Buffy's eyes closed in slumber, Angel's flew open ... the usual warm dark brown of his eyes replaced with a dark, hideous yellow.

CHAPTER 9

Spike awoke naked and chained to the stone wall of Angel's bedroom. He felt like he had been drunk or drugged and was trying to claw his way from a long, forced sleep. He had no idea where he was or what time it was, but as he slowly came to consciousness his first thoughts were of Buffy. He could see her nearby, but she was hazy, out of focus, and the fact she no longer breathed or had a heartbeat was unsettling. He squinted, trying to bring her into focus ... nothing.

The last thing he remembered was a rather long, passionate session of ... um ... bonding. He knew it was necessary to help Buffy be more solid in her new life, or unlife, that intimacy, closeness, the blood of her sire ... and grandsire. Angel. What had happened to Angel? Where was he? Spike closed his eyes and made an effort to "feel" for him ... he found him, except ... Spike's eyes flew open and he began struggling against the shackles around his wrists and ankles. "No," he thought to himself, "no, no, no, no, not now!" After almost a century of wanting Angelus back, the old, vicious, cruel sire, Spike had finally reached the point where he no longer needed or wanted him. He had other priorities in his life, and besides he usually enjoyed the Hell out of taunting Angel. But fate had a sick sense of humor. Now, when Spike needed the stability and confidence Angel offered from his "champion" status with the PTB, he was lost. Spike could feel it all over and through him: shackles aside, something was very, very wrong. Angel was gone. Angelus had returned.

Spike willed his eyes to focus and began calling to Buffy in hopes that she was able to assist him. "Buffy! BUFFY!" She stirred a little, moaning softly as if she were uncomfortable, but not in pain. As his eyes began to clear he saw her, shackled as well, but spread-eagled and naked across Angel's bed. She was still unconscious, but he could feel her rousing already, and the sick feeling in his stomach about what might happen shortly made him suddenly wish she would stay unconscious for a good while longer. Unable to keep from looking at her, he finally surrendered to it and visually examined the stunning woman restrained before him. She was still the most glorious creature he'd ever known, only now her skin shone with a pale luminescence that she didn't have when she was alive. Her body was still taut and firm, her death hadn't seemed to diminish that at all. He wondered if she would retain her Slayer strength and agility or if they would fade away gradually. He felt something in him begin to stir and tried to will it away. He was unsuccessful, his physical response to her being quite obvious.

Before he could call to her again, he felt the presence of his sire in the room. Angelus was in the doorway, leaning against the frame with his arms crossed, wearing only a pair of jeans.

"Well, William, look what you have brought for me here."

The distinct brogue chilled Spike to the bone. Why hadn't he seen this coming? Anticipated it? It's not like Angel was known for getting major happies anyway, but Spike himself had been too involved in what was happening to see that it could very well have been one of the most profound nights of Angel's life as well as his own. How could he have been so stupid?

With his eyes penetrating Spike's, Angelus approached the still-sleeping Buffy slowly. Spike froze, his lip lifting into a snarl and a low growl of warning rumbling from deep inside him.

"Now, what's this fuss you're makin', William? Don't be growling at me like that. I don't much care for that kind of lack of respect for your sire ... you wouldn't want me to take it out on this sweet, young thing now, would you?" He licked his lips as he glanced at the naked woman on the bed. "Just like I like them, too, all newly-made and vulnerable, just like you were, William." He flashed Spike a sadistic smile.

Angelus crawled onto the bed, hovering on all fours over the still-unconscious Buffy, sniffing at her skin and filling his lungs with her scent mixed with that of his own, Spike, and sex. He smiled over at Spike again. "Yes, boy, it was right nice of you to bring me such a ..." He ran his tongue from her navel to the hollow of her throat, "... mmmmmm lovely gift."

Spike growled ferociously, an animalistic cry of warning and threat. "Get away from her, Angelus, you motherless bastard."

Angelus turned his head toward Spike again, his grin unstoppable. "Ahhhh, right you are there, William. I am indeed motherless. Drained her m'self." He pursed his lips in a little blown kiss toward Spike then returned to Buffy's belly, where he began to nibble and lick her once again, tracing her ribs, sucking on the soft lower belly, even brushing his chin against the curls of her still-wet sex.

Buffy began to stir beneath him, tiny moans of pleasure mixing with grogginess. When her eyes fluttered open, Angelus's face was almost nose-to-nose with hers. Her lips curled up in an almost shy smile. "Angel? Mmmm that feels so nice." She sighed, her eyes still a little dreamy. "Where's Spike?" She tried to stretch a bit and found she couldn't, a crease of concern forming between her eyebrows.

"Buffy!" Spike yelled from the other side of the room, panic filling his voice. "Buffy! It's not"

Before Spike could finish his warning, Buffy's eyes flew open in fear and recognition just as Angelus captured her mouth with his in a fierce, painful kiss. She began screaming into his mouth, giving him a healthy dose of the taste of fear on her lips. His face changed as he lifted from her, yellow eyes gleaming down at her before he went for her mouth again. When she resisted, he bit her lower lip, sucking on it, bringing her blood into his mouth and sighing in pleasure at the taste of it. He pulled away just enough for her to see how much he enjoyed it, as he reached down with one hand and unfastened the buttons of his jeans, freeing himself.

"Nooooooooooooooooo!" Spike roared as he struggled against the chains, a rain of dust from the strained bolts falling to the cold floor like dry snow.

"Ah now, William, you'll get your turn. Be patient, m'boy." He began working his way down Buffy's body once again, licking and making tiny bites on her skin then savoring her blood on his lips. He looked up at her, raising an eyebrow. "Mmm you're quite delicious, you know. Even more so than when you were alive, all covered and tasting of my William and me. But then, I've tasted you before, long ago, only that sod wouldn't allow me to enjoy it. Still," his grin was suddenly chilling, "I did enjoy almost draining you."

"Angelus!" Spike's tone had changed, changing the anger and fear into something more useful. He was trying to distract him, and he intended to use any means possible to do so. Dropping his voice a bit lower, adding an edge of whispered seduction to it, he tried again. "Angelus"

Buffy's face snapped toward Spike, a look of confusion on her face. Angelus reacted differently. It had worked. He had stopped nibbling on Buffy and now hovered over her, his attention to her wavering.

"William? Are you calling me, dear boy?" As he spoke he settled his body between Buffy's legs, his hip bones heavy on hers as his cold length pressed against her. He was not so interested in her as he was in watching Spike's reaction to what he was doing. What would the threat of him violating Spike's child do? Would he object? Would he care? Would he still want his sire's attention?

Spike's voice held an edge of laughter to it. "Angelus! Come on, now, it's been far too long since we whored together. Let's both have a go at her, shall we?"

Angelus was fascinated. He could feel the terror inside Buffy as well as the wetness lingering between her legs, a heady reminder that only a few hours ago Angel and Spike had both had a go at her. The scent of the three of them and sex still hung in the air. His eyes held on Spike, and without looking at the woman beneath him, he pushed into her with one, long, cool, impersonal stroke, making her gasp in surprise and indignation, then he held there deeply inside her as he spoke to her.

"Ah, did you like that now, Buffy sweetheart?" Now he glared down at her lasciviously. "That was but a little taste for you, darlin'. I'll be back to tend to you all proper-like after William and I have had our fun." Turning his eyes on Spike again, he abruptly pulled from her and hopped off the bed, dropping his jeans in the middle of the floor.

Angelus approached him as if stalking prey, walking from one side to the other, smelling him, reading the fear and anger in him, the fear directed toward Buffy's safety, the anger at him. Good, that was exactly what he wanted. He reached a hand toward the pale, hairless chest of his childe, spreading his fingers as he morphed into game face, his fingers changing to claws which pierced the alabaster skin and brought a cry of unexpected pain from Spike.

"Bloody Hell, Angelus! You could at least ..."

"Quiet, William!" he barked, the sharp ridges of his forehead deepening, making him even more ominous-looking. "Perhaps I should explain the rules to you." His voice was cold, hard, and laced with eager anticipation at what was to come.

Spike's eyes grew wider with apprehension, fear gripping his throat as he bit his tongue to keep silent. He had a sudden wash of memories, of just how much he hated these games, and just how good Angelus was at them. Buffy began to struggle on the bed, hurling obscenities toward the naked man standing in the room. With a glance over his shoulder to be sure Buffy was watching, a demonic smile distorted his vampire features as he took the cat o' nine tails from its position on the ornamental wall and slashed Spike viciously across the chest. Spike's body flinched in agony, but he didn't make a sound.

Buffy screamed, the shrillness of it echoing in the stone room and making Spike's eyes once again grow in fear and pleading ... toward her. Angelus watched her as he took another nasty stroke across Spike's bare chest, and as, again, Spike made no sound except for the unneeded panting which seemed to help him control the pain.

"Ah, William, I see you've guessed the rules already. More's the pity." He glanced at Buffy. "I would have loved to take this to her as well. Her flesh is much too pristine. It even still holds a bit of tan to it. I would love an excuse to flay it off of her." He looked at Spike expectantly then dissolved into what might be considered a pout.

"Buffy, dear." Angelus turned toward her, still gripping the weapon in his hand. "The rules are simple. Every time you make a sound, William here gets a lovely kiss." He held the multi-tailed whip higher so she could see it; bits of glass and sharp metal were tied to four of the nine leather strips so that in addition to the sting of leather, the skin would be cut and gouged. She bit her lower lip ... her screams had caused Spike to be struck twice already. She could smell his blood--it permeated the air like fog. She wouldn't make that mistake again. Her eyes, soft and remorseful, turned toward Spike. His chest was slick with rapidly darkening blood, some of the wounds openly weeping, sending crimson rivers down his stomach. With a sudden stab of guilt, she realized his silence, under extreme pain, had saved her from the same fate. She wanted to cry out to him, beg him for forgiveness for her not realizing sooner. Angelus hovered near her now ... waiting for just that. She refused to give him an excuse to hurt Spike again, and she met his yellow eyes with her own, lifting her chin defiantly.

"Awww, and my little kitten has caught on, too?" Angelus was visibly disappointed as he tossed the whip aside, the metal bits making a tingling, metal clang as it hit the floor. "Good, so you both know ... if Spike makes a sound, Buffy is punished, if Buffy speaks, my boy William will suffer for it. Though ... " He turned a mischievous grin toward Spike, " ... as I remember, you rather enjoyed some of my little toys." Spike's nostrils flared. No, he had never enjoyed them, especially when they had been used on Dru to punish him. Horrific memories flooded his mind, of blood, torn and seared flesh, pain, screams. And Angelus's smile. Spike involuntarily shuttered as he gave his sire a scathing look.

Angelus laughed. This was turning out better than he had hoped. Without another word he approached Spike once again, stopping only a few inches from him as he morphed back into his handsome, human features. With delicate hands he touched and rubbed the bleeding wounds of Spike's chest, pressing on them just enough that he could feel Spike flinch before moving to another spot. Then he would lick the blood from his fingers and moan softly in pleasure. As the blood began to dry, Angelus slid down Spike's body, licking and nipping at his skin, worrying his nipples before lapping at the still-raw wounds. He found one oozing and covered it with his mouth, sucking hard and drawing in a mouthful of blood. Pulling away, he stood and smiled at Spike as he swallowed, then turned toward Buffy.

The room was silent. Eerily so. Inside Spike's head, he was screaming.

When he reached her, Angelus climbed astride her again, his hands on either side of her head, his knees on either side of her hips. She could see, as well as smell, Spike's blood on his lips. When he leaned down to kiss her, she tried to move away, but his lips were insistent, capturing her mouth and deliberately plundering it with the taste and scent of Spike's blood. She couldn't resist it and suckled greedily, trying to reclaim every drop of her Spike's blood for herself.

Angelus lowered himself and rubbed his hardened length onto her again, knowing the influx of her sire's blood would arouse her. She strained up toward him, unable to control the rush of passion she was feeling. Angelus ground his hips into her again, but refused to give her what she wanted, leaving her whimpering and empty beneath him. Turning his head toward Spike, he smiled sadistically, enjoying the emotional pain he was causing his child by sexually teasing and taunting Buffy. It was delicious.

As he felt Buffy thrust toward him, he pulled back from her more and more until she was straining at the restraints. He pulled away completely, standing up, towering over her with one foot on either side of her waist. "See anything you want, kitten?" Buffy thrashed around, trying to get to him, wanting that pleasure, even the pain, just ... wanting. He licked his lips, gave her a little growl, then jumped off the bed, ignoring her completely as he turned his attention back to Spike.

It was time for the main event. Enough had been made of teasing, he wanted to be done with this. When he reached Spike, he reached up, intertwining their fingers as he pressed his naked form into the cool, naked flesh of his new partner. Spike tried to pull away, clanging the chains against the walls and trying to push Angelus away with his knees.

Angelus was undaunted, leaning in and whispering into Spike's ear, "Be a good boy and come for me and I'll give my attentions only to you ... if you fight it, then she gets them as well." Spike froze. He knew what those attentions would mean. Whatever was done to him didn't matter; what was done to Buffy did. She was still too young as a vampire. Angelus's special attentions could make things very bad for her ... or kill her. There was no doubt in his mind that Angelus wouldn't care one way or the other, and in fact would probably enjoy the former Slayer becoming an extraordinarily warped vampire.

Still not wanting to talk and break the rules again, Spike nodded, catching the glimmer of passion and mischief in the melted chocolate eyes of his sire. Angelus rewarded him with a deep, almost affectionate kiss before beginning to feast on Spike's flesh once again. He kissed and nibbled and bit his way down the marble chest, across the taught abs and plundered his tongue into Spike's navel, occasionally letting his fangs drop and scraping them across his skin as well. Slowly working his way down, Angelus kneeled before his immobile lover and made clear what his intentions were, rubbing his hands up and down Spike's bare hips, cupping his ass, and pulling at the dark curly hair of his groin with his flat, human teeth.

One of his hands parted the tight cheeks of his boy and teased the tender opening there, just as his lips parted and engulfed Spike, taking him entirely into his mouth and sucking hard. Spike wanted to cry out, wanted to moan ... he wanted to come. It had only been a few hours since they had touched and explored each other sexually for the first time in a very, very long time; the memory of it was still vividly passionate, and it took very little of Angelus's attentions now to excite him to the point of explosion. He pressed it down, willed himself not to, not here, not in front of her, and not for "his" pleasure. A low growl started deep in his chest.

"Now, now, William, growling counts. Do I need to show Buffy my little toy again?" Angelus purred as he spoke, all the while running his nails up and down Spike's inner thighs. The growling stopped and the predatory vampire began an alternate torture on his childe, licking and sucking him to the very edge of orgasm and then pulling back, allowing him to calm before starting beginning again. Spike was torn between overwhelming passion and overwhelming frustration, writhing against the wall, unable to so much as whimper without vicious repercussions coming to Buffy. When he could seemingly stand it no longer he saw Angelus morph once again into the demon as his fanged mouth one again engulfed him to the hilt. Spike cringed as searing pain surged throughout his body, his violation complete as razor-sharp teeth penetrated him at the hilt. The last sound he heard was his own uncontrolled cry of agony and release.

Spike awoke with a yelping start.

"Spike?" Buffy's tentative voice rang in his ears. "Spike?!"

He muttered incoherently for a few moments before being able to reply. "Yes ... luv ... "

"Thank God you're awake. Spike .. SPIKE ... are you okay? He's gone."

His eyes finally focused completely to see Buffy still restrained and sprawled across the bed; fresh, bloody slash marks showed across her abdomen. Apparently his howl counted.

"Yes ...yes ... I'm ... I'm okay." For a split second he felt a wave of fear, as he looked down, terrified there would be no dangling parts left. He gave a sigh of relief to see nothing missing, though the site of puncture marks made him momentarily nauseous. He began to struggle against the shackles while Buffy explained what Angelus had done, the threats he had made to her, and then how he had left.

"Spike." She was hesitant. "He said he wouldn't start until you woke up. He didn't want to do it until you could watch." Her voice grew more desperate, the ring of panic obvious. "He wants to be sure you could watch while he ... Spike ... he called me an abomination ... and when he's through with me ... Spike, we have to get out of here."

As if on cue, Spike's struggling paid off as the restraint on his right wrist fell away. Time froze for a moment as he looked at Buffy and she at him, both in total amazement, then he rapidly freed himself and ran to her. Her restraints were a bit more of a challenge, but he had her out of them quickly. Both of them looked worse for the wear, bloodied and scarred and naked. They scrambled to find their clothing, most of which was shredded and thrown about the room and under furniture, and put on as much of it as they could manage. Spike grabbed a fighting axe from the wall and peeked through the door. Motioning to Buffy for her to follow, he slipped through the door, heading through the large main room, and with Buffy at his side, ran out into the night.

Inside the mansion, hidden in the shadows just beyond the fireplace, Angel watched them go. His handsome features sported a sinister expression, but it was mixed with something else, something that could only be interpreted as ... pride.

Spike and Buffy arrived at Revello Drive within minutes. Even battered and bloodied they had moved swiftly through the city away from Angelus and toward perceived safety, even though they had no idea what kind of reception they would receive at the Summers home.

Willow and Dawn answered the door simultaneously, a mixture of relief and fear on their faces.

"Is it safe here?" Spike was urgent; the girls looked confused.

"Angel ... does Angel have access to this house?"

Willow squinted in thought. "No, no, we removed all vampire access, individually and collectively after ... after you came to get Buffy."

"Good, Red, smart girl. Can you invite us in?" He looked confident and safe enough in spite of being banged up and wearing shabby clothes, but she was obviously more concerned about Buffy and whether or not she should be allowed into the house just yet.

"But ... Buffy, she's a vampire, right? Giles said to wait for ..."

"Red! It's okay. She's under control and in good shape." He looked at Buffy, then back to Willow, "I mean, she's in good shape for someone who's been through what she has. Oh Bloody Hell! Just let us in, I'll explain it all, but if we stay out here much longer it won't matter, we'll both be dust ... or worse."

Willow still looked apprehensively at Buffy but neither saw nor felt any sign of the demon. "Yes, Spike, Buffy, please come in."

As they moved into the living room, Dawn went to get bandages and water while Spike queried Willow as to where Giles was and gave her the Readers' Digest version of why Angelus was back.

"Oh ... oh that's so not good. There are degrees of not goodness, and this is so far up on the scale it has a degree all its own. What are we going to do?"

Spike's tone was flat and unemotional. "Kill him."

Silence permeated the room until Dawn returned. They washed and dressed the visible wounds before Spike carried Buffy upstairs to her room. She needed rest. They both did, but he felt it was more important that she get some. He knew that there was no way he could sleep as long as the threat of Angelus loomed over them. After he had tasted both of them like that, Spike knew chances that he wouldn't track them down were slim.

"Let me know when Giles is back," Spike commented to Willow as they disappeared up the stairs.

Buffy's room was just as it had been, as if it were being kept as a shrine or, in some odd way, for her return. Again. Spike set her on the bed and closed the door before he climbed onto the bed with her, carefully removing her tattered clothes. She didn't speak, she simply let him tend to her and then enfold her in his arms. They sat quietly for a few minutes before he turned her face up toward him.

"Buffy. Luv. You need to feed. Do you understand? You've been through too much, lost too much blood yourself, been to Hell and back ... you need to feed."

She frantically shook her head at him; somewhere inside she feared he wanted her to feed on someone human.

"No, luv, it's okay. It's okay. Shhh." He stroked her hair and captured her eyes with his own. "It's okay, luv, but you need to feed. If you don't I might as well stake you right here, you won't be able to control it, and ... and you'll hurt someone. You don't want that now, do you, pet?"

Comprehension was beginning to take hold and she nodded slightly.

“Good girl.” Spike smiled at her with love as he moved the shreds of sleeve out of the way and offered her his wrist. “Here, luv, you know how to do this. Feed from me. That’ll make you all better. Okay?”

She was still hesitant, but with Spike’s urging she succumbed and accepted his offered blood, bringing into her not only his strength, but also his love and his desire. Feeding turned to kissing, kissing into a quiet, gentle lovemaking that did not usually go hand-in-hand with a fledgling. It was at once tragic and beautiful. In spite of the abuses they’d both suffered in the last day, they could still offer and accept tenderness from one another, and they reveled in it. Just this once. When they were spent, Spike wrapped her tenderly in his arms again as they both drifted off to a peaceful sleep for the first time since she had been turned.

A gentle rapping at the door woke them up. Spike slipped from Buffy’s grasp and met Willow at the door. A few whispers later, he returned to Buffy. “Giles is here, we’re needed downstairs. Something has happened.”

He kissed her softly and helped her up, trying to reassure her that everything was okay. They dressed in fresh clothes quickly and met the others downstairs. Giles was on the sofa, bloody, swollen and fairly beaten to a pulp. Spike cringed.

“Let me guess,” he said stiffly.

“And the first two don’t count,” Dawn chirped.

Giles nodded and tried to explain that he was attacked just outside his apartment. “It was Angel, how could I have known? He was Angel only yesterday. I didn’t even have to invite him in.” He tried to speak clearly despite the ice pack on his jaw and he squinted through the bruised and swollen eye. “He rather enjoyed the ruse, actually.” He was trying to sound upbeat. “Can’t say as I did,” he muttered afterward, “bloody bastard.” He looked at Spike. “Though I can’t quite understand why he didn’t kill me.”

“I can,” Buffy interrupted. “He doesn’t like to just kill, he wants to ‘enjoy’ you first. By attacking you and leaving you alive, he promotes more fear amongst us and reminds us all that he can reach anyone he pleases.” She was suddenly the Slayer again, strong, confident, trying to take charge and take care of business. “Willow, we need to find a way to contain him, then Spike and I can” She stopped mid-sentence.

Wordlessly Spike had gotten up, grabbed Angel’s fighting axe, and gone to the weapons chest, selecting as many as he could carry. He was half way out the door when Buffy stopped him.

“Spike! Wait.” Buffy got up to join him.

“No, Buffy. Not this time.”

“I don’t think so! He did this to me, too, you can’t take him alone, and I’m the only ...”

He cut her off. “Buffy, if you go with me, he’ll kill you. He knows that’s the way to win. Killing you would destroy us both and he could do whatever he wanted to with me and the rest of Sunnydale.” He took a deep breath just to keep silent for a moment. “Besides, the shape you’re in ... he’d corrupt you if he so much as touched you again. He’s had you now, luv, he’s had you and you’ve fed from him. In his mind, you’re his now. You can’t come with me.” He turned to go.

“You’re right,” she said quietly. She looked to Willow and Dawn and Giles. They obviously agreed. She saw no one else who could go without being a bigger handicap. She acquiesced and went to him.

Snaking her arms through his weapons and limbs, she pulled him to her. Spike dropped everything; a symphony of clangs and bangs rang throughout the house. They held each other, kissed each other urgently, before Buffy whispered only for him, "Don't try to make him suffer, don't drag it out, don't even make it fair. Just kill him." They kissed one last time.

She helped him load up the weapons in silence, then opened the door to let him out. As he walked down the stairs of the porch and out into the night, Buffy stood in the doorway, her arms crossed, hugging herself as he went. Halfway toward the street, she called out to him. "Spike?" He stopped and turned back toward her. She chewed at her lower lip for just a moment. "Come back to me," she said quietly. He lifted his chin and gave her a smile that said wild horses couldn't keep him away. She only hoped that Angelus couldn't.

As Spike approached the old mansion on the outskirts of town, he felt an odd foreboding as if something wasn't right. Well, truth to tell, nothing had been right since Buffy died, except for the few hours they had spent in her old room. But this was different. The air crackled with an odd electricity and heat that was very wrong. Something inside him told him to quicken the pace, to get there, to be done with Angelus and the Hell he had brought with him.

In the distance he saw it, the amber-glowing clouds and tufts of smoke hovering over the trees just before the property line. He ran toward it, stopping only when he reached the rich, green lawn and saw the place fully. Angel's house was engulfed in flames. Most of it had already burned away, save the heavy stone walls which were already scorched and blackened as the flames licked them repeatedly. The ceiling had already collapsed, the draperies were long gone, the heavy oaken door was in cinders, any plant life near the house was incinerated.

Spike watched the flames, motionless, as it dissolved the last of the combustible elements. He watched as flames slowly turned to embers and billows of smoke reduced to tiny trails barely visible in the dark night sky. It was odd that the fire department never showed, but then, they were probably never called. Why would they be? It was as if the old house never really existed in the first place. Now it would be hollow, burned out, empty and unoccupied until some annoying historical society would insist it be refurbished. Somehow Spike thought even then it would never restore completely. Some curse would hang there for all time and any attempt at rebuilding the place would vanish through mystical forces.

Buffy wasn't going to like this. Spike didn't either. The threat that Angelus would stalk them off and on for all eternity was not very comforting, yet somehow, and with no real reason, Spike didn't feel threatened. He felt oddly free, as if the threat of Angelus himself died away with the smoke and flames.

As he felt the sunrise nearing he walked toward the door one more time, peering in to see if anything of substance remained. He already knew he wouldn't find anything. Anything of value would be gone, any sign or trace that a vampire had lived here would have vanished like the smoke and flames engulfing the old estate. There would be nothing salvageable, no information on how it started, no forwarding address. This place, where they had once called forth Acatla, where he had lain with Dru, where he had fought with Angel, both alongside and against, where he had tortured and deceived Giles, where he had at long last been claimed once again by his sire and reclaimed his own childe, where the three of them had loved and then lost it all: this place was gone. And so was Angelus.

EPILOGUE

Angel looked up from his work, his hand resting on the sword hilt beneath his desk. He was suddenly glad he had attached that a few weeks back and made a mental note to thank Gunn for the suggestion later. He felt Spike enter the Hyperion. A tingle of fear ran through him as he realized he might have to do battle with his errant childe yet again. Their parting had not exactly been amicable and Angel was concerned that perhaps Spike had returned to Los Angeles with the sole purpose of dusting his sire. He wasn't quite sure how he was going to explain that not only was he not Angelus, he never had been.

Spike sauntered into the office, leaning on the doorframe, crossing his arms casually. "Hello, Peaches," he smirked.

"Spike." Angel nodded, a hint of a smile on his face. He kept his hand hovering near the unseen weapon.

"I thought I'd drop by and see how things were doing here." He paused and corrected himself, "Well, that's not exactly true, Buffy sent me after Angelus. Rather trusting of her, I thought, considering our past history of murder and mayhem and," he lifted the scarred eyebrow, "other things." He took a few steps inside the office and plopped into a chair. "Rather than try to explain things to her, I thought it best just to make the trip and then report that things were back to normal. She doesn't have to know all our dirty little secrets." He looked absolutely devilish.

"So, when did you figure it out?" Angel relaxed, stood and walked around his desk, settling onto the corner of it with his arms crossed. He wasn't surprised Spike had caught on, but he was curious what gave him away.

"I pretty much knew from the beginning. You made a mistake early on." He shrugged, fighting off the temptation to be smug. Considering how well things had worked out for him and Buffy, he preferred to just enlighten Angel and move along to other things.

"Oh really?" Angel was curious. "Exactly what kind of 'mistake' was that?"

Spike approached him, brushed Angel's cheek with his own, then nuzzled against him, whispering, "You never marked her."

Angel pulled back, surprised. "I what?"

"Come on, Angel," Spike chided. "You know as well as I do that Angelus would have marked her the first time he took her. He'd have probably sodomized her as well. He always took great pride not only in marking what was his but in torturing them while he did it. By the way, I owe you one: that bloody cat o' nine tails hurt like a son of a bitch, and I won't even go into the below-the-belt biting!"

Angel smirked. "It was necessary. Besides," his eyes twinkled, "I made up for it in other ways."

"You bloody well did, you bloody poof," Spike grumbled, with a touch of a grateful smile attached.

After a few moments of silence settled between them, Spike spoke up, almost timidly.

"Angel?" His voice had a serious tone to it.

"Mmmm?"

"Thank you." They were the most sincere words Spike had ever spoken. Angel had selflessly helped to resolve not only the issue of Buffy's survival as a vampire, but he also managed to ensure that the sire/childe bond between Buffy and Spike remained intact. Spike knew none of this was an easy task, and that knowledge alone re-established his own devotion to Angel. The mutual respect, admiration, and love between the two had skyrocketed beyond anything they had experienced in their more than 100 years together. Angel had given the love of his life to his childe. As a vampire he had every right to claim her as

his own, but he went wildly against vampire tradition to benefit the love they shared, not to mention burning his own home to the ground.

"You're welcome, Childe," he responded, deliberately using a hint of brogue in his words. He paused "And Spike?" His tone was serious now. "Be good to her, because if you aren't, I'll be forced to come kick your sorry arse."

Spike feigned disbelief. "Oh, yeah, as if THAT could happen!" He gave Angel that devilish grin once again before he licked his sire's neck playfully and moved away. His eyes flashed, a mixture of dare and eager anticipation.

Angel went for him, Spike retreating in a wave of black leather, running up the stairs, his sire hot on his tail. A door slamming reverberated through the cavernous lobby, followed by growls and roars that all but shook the windows.

Gunn and Wesley were just coming in the front door when the sound effects began.

"Wasn't that Spike's car outside?" asked Gunn.

"Apparently," said Wes dryly.

"So they're ..." Gunn was already squirming uncomfortably.

"Evidently. Vampires, you know." He nodded at Gunn.

They looked at each other with a simultaneous roll of the eyes.

"I hear a beer calling me from down the street," Gunn stated with a toss of his head toward the door.

"I'm with you," replied Wes.

They pivoted and headed back out the door just as an ear-splitting roar filled the lobby.

THE END