

Chapter 1 - Dru

Starts during crush, but Dru arrives at the crypt just after sunset, so the disastrous „date“ with Buffy never happens.

Let's pretend in LA Darla and Dru's campaign to free Angelus is still looking promising, Angels already gone pretty dark (firing his co-workers and letting Darla and Dru eat the lawyers) but he didn't set them on fire yet.

Dru finds Spike at his crypt and tries to convince him to join her and Darla in LA, in the hope to assemble the scourge again. She's quite excited about the prospect, which leads to her telling Spike exactly what is happening in LA.

In the darkened candlelit upper chamber of her dear boy's crypt, Drusilla is too caught up in painting out how life will be like once her family is complete once again that she misses the flickers of distaste clear on Spike's face. The first thought on his mind at the idea of Angelus return, is how his Grand-Sire will probably be hell bent on revenge. His Slayer and Red lined up as his preferred targets.

Furthermore Spike is certain that his own welcome will be less than friendly after his betrayal during the Alcaltha-incident. He can somehow find a way to stay clear of the older vampire, but the others will not, at least not without some form of warning. Otherwise Angelus will be able to walk right up to them as long as he manages to pretend to still have his soul.

His pondering leads the blonde vampire to exactly one conclusion; he has to find a way to warn them.

The idea of simply telling them what he has learned is quickly abandoned, as Spike is well aware just how much the Scoobies mistrust him. They'll probably believe any warning he gives them as being a part of some evil scheme of his.

Perhaps there is a chance he can convince them if he agrees to let Red put him under a truth-spell before surrendering his information. But Red has a habit of her spells not going the way she plans, his engagement to the Slayer for example. Plus, a truth spell might potentially lead to revealing his feelings for the Slayer, and he's pretty sure she is *not* in a state of mind where she will react kindly to **that**.

The only other available solution he can think of is to have Dru tell the Slayer the news herself with the help of some spell of course. They will never believe a word Dru says otherwise, not to mention Dru won't be too keen on revealing her plans to the enemy. But there's still the fact that his last plan will most surely lead to his Dark Princess ending up as a pile of dust. And that is something he is not quite prepared to lend a hand in, despite the fact that he no longer loves her the way he once did.

While Spike is contemplating other ways to warn the Slayer and her friends about the return of their worst nightmare, Dru's is still dreamily describing what he suspects will be a happy future - in her eyes.

Finally Spike realizes he has no other options than to sell Dru out to the Slayer if he doesn't want to risk Angelus killing the people with whom he wishes so desperately to be friends. He reaches behind the sarcophagus he's sitting on for the cattle prod he keeps there, in case of emergencies, ever since Finn pulled his stunt with the plastic-stake. His hope being that the device might enable him to render an attacking human unconscious fast enough that he at least has a chance to get away despite the chip.

Now though here he is preparing to use it on his sire. Bugger.

Lost in her happy dream of her reunited family, Drusilla does not realize what is happening until she hears a softly spoken "Sorry, princess," directly behind her just as she feels an electric shock which renders her unconscious.

Spike stares at her prone form for a few seconds. Sighing he picks her up and proceeds to chain her up in the lower level of his crypt. He finds himself taking great care not to hurt her unnecessarily during all this, which only adds to his frustration as he is well aware of the stupidity of being so tender with the same person he is about to sacrifice for the lives of people who hate him. But she had been his salvation from mediocrity...his bloody revelation. How could he not be tender with her?

Angered by his inability to think of a way to keep all of them safe, he takes his frustration out on the wall next to Dru's chained form; he stops only once his hands are dripping blood all over the floor. He fears the smell might wake the unconscious vampiress. Not feeling any better after his tantrum than he did before, he slowly makes his way out of the crypt.

After a quick detour to the magic shop to collect everything the witches might need for a truth-spell, he soon finds himself standing in front of the Slayers door, once again debating the consequences of his plan. Everything is decided for him by Dawn's enthusiastic "Hi Spike, what are you doing here? Doesn't matter, come on in - come in!"

Watching her enthusiastic welcome, Spike thinks regretfully that the Nibblem would suffer as well from Angelus wrath. While the others might not even think to thank him for what he is about to do, the little one trusts him and he is surprised to find that he won't be able to live with himself if he allows anything to happen to her.

Now that his final decision had been made, Spike's patience is nil. He needs this to be over now. The consequences weigh heavily in his mind, and he knows they have to act quickly. So he refuses to enter, biting back a growl of impatience, and asks Dawn to send her sister out to him.

Buffy is more than slightly unsure how to react to the vampire's presence. Still remembering vividly what Dawn had revealed to her the night before about his supposed feelings for her, she is not sure if she should go outside. Caught up in her disgust that Spike could entertain romantic thought about her, she's about to give him the brush off; when she remembers **he** doesn't know she knows, so there is no

reason for him to behave any different than he did yesterday. And the thing is, if he showed up at her door offering information about some demon yesterday, she wouldn't have thought twice about going with him. So what if he is telling the truth and in refusing to follow up on this she causes some innocent to die. It made her head hurt.

After she ponders this conflict a few moments Spike gets impatient and practically orders her to hurry up, they still have to get the witches before they can continue. The mention of her friends' involvement causes the Slayer to stop her stalling and follow the vampire out in to the street; after all he can barely plan any embracing romantic gesture or such if he plans to take Willow and Tara along.

On the way to her friends place he is strangely silent and seems to almost completely ignore her presence, leading the Slayer to wonder whether her sister was even right with her assessment of his feelings. At least now she's happy she didn't refuse to come with him, she really could have caused someone's death tonight, for no other reason than her worry that she might possibly be getting into an uncomfortable position, some Slayer she was.

They collect the witches at their place, and it doesn't take the four of them long to arrive at back at Spike's crypt. To the girls' surprise the vampire doesn't enter. He stops outside, shoving a letter into Buffy's hands and asks them to be gone before sunrise then he leaves.

The Slayer is already moving to intercept him, but Willow holds her back. She points out how troubled he had looked the whole way, and maybe they should read what he's written first. If it doesn't explain his unusual behavior satisfyingly they'll probably be able to find him at Willy's for further questioning.

Buffy agrees and finally opens the letter, only to gasp in astonishment after reading the first few lines.

"Slayer,

You're probably wondering what's going on here and you'll know soon enough. But I just couldn't tell you and then listen to you making fun of me, especially with you being the one person who should be able to understand how hard this is for me.

In the lower level of my crypt you'll find Drusilla. Don't worry, she's chained up.

She showed up earlier tonight trying to get me to return to LA with her, so I could join her and Darla in their quest to turn Angel into Angelus again.

Yes, Darla. I know she should be dust, don't worry it will get explained once you talk to Dru.

What's more important is that from what she told me they are well on their way to success.

Now you might remember just what my opinion of the ponce is and why I sure as hell wouldn't want to aid anyone in bringing him back. Should they succeed, you and yours will be on top of his list of people to kill. I'd guess you and Red would be the first to go, and despite what you might want to believe about me, I don't wish to see any of you dead. Well, not anymore.

I don't know if you can do anything about what's going on in LA what with the hell-bitch on the loose in Sunnyhell, but with some warning you'll at least know not to let him in if he shows up in front of your door.

Now I know you well enough to realize you didn't believe one word of what I just told you. That's why there are indigents for a truth-spell on the sarcophagus; the witches might want to try casting it over Dru, so she'll tell you herself.

If you have any understanding of how hard it is for me to give the woman I spent a century with over to you, you'll make sure there'll be nothing left behind after you leave. That way, I can at least pretend I don't know you dusted her.

Spike"

"Son of a bitch, how can he dump these shitty lies on me when he knows I've got Glory to worry about?"

Buffy knows she is being unreasonable, really she does. But she just can't stop herself from automatically searching for a way to deny what she has just read. She has enough troubles to worry about at the moment without having to give up her illusions that Angel's soul always prevented him from doing wrong. She needs to cling to her beliefs especially since having so recently realized her mom will not always be here.

Luckily for her Willow is there to be her voice of reason.

"Buffy, you might want to wait with the accusations. If we go in there and really find Drusilla in the lower level, and how is it that we never even knew there is a lower level to Spike's crypt anyway. Oh well, if she is really there we'll do the spell, but I doubt this is some joke. It would be too easy to call him on it; he couldn't even deny it, what with the letter and all. So I say we go in there and check his story, and if he is telling the truth, then we'll figure out what to do."

Buffy opens her mouth to say more, but seeing her friend's famous resolve-face she decides to just lead the way into the crypt. To the Slayer's disappointment they do discover all the components needed for a very effective truth-spell on the sarcophagus and the blonde vampire's former lover chained up in the lower level. She really had hoped for this to be nothing more than a particularly cruel joke. Not that she had really believed that, since she knew deep down that this wasn't really Spike's type of joke, but she hoped none the less.

Realizing that the vampiress is about to wake up, the witches instantly start casting the spell so the questioning can begin as soon as Drusilla is fully conscious.

Their timing seems to be perfect, as they have only a few seconds to wait after finishing the spell for their captive to open her eyes. Instantly they begin to ask Drusilla to repeat exactly what she had told Spike earlier. After getting the confirmation they needed that what the chipped vampire had written in his note was the truth, they decide to find out if there is more to her story than that which she had told Spike.

By now Willow and Tara are doing all the questioning, as Buffy had gone strangely silent after Dru retold the part about the lawyers. But once all valid information is revealed the Slayer speaks up again.

"You're psychic Dru so explain to me why Angel would do something like that! I mean, he obviously still has his soul, or you wouldn't be searching for a way to rid him of it. Is he under some sort of spell? What is going on?"

"You really don't understand dearie, do you? He behaves no differently than he always did. His first concern is always himself. Doing something that offers no reward is not in his nature."

"Because he's a vampire? But his soul..."

"No! The nature of **who** he is, not **what**. Did you think he was someone else before he met Mommy? Didn't that delightful watcher of yours tell you what Liam was like? Didn't they teach you how the human that was decides who the vampire becomes? You think we're so different now from the way we were before, you know nothing little girl."

"I...that's, ok I'll think about that later, but tell me does that mean there is no chance for Angel to ever be able to stay on his path?"

"Oh there is, if we fail now we won't ever get another chance to get Daddy back. He's going to discover what was foretold to be the reward for the souled one who fights on the side of light, but he won't ever understand, and thus never receive."

"Huh?"

"Silly little girl, no one gets rewarded for doing something if they're only doing it for the reward itself, not in your line of work. I could tell him that, but then why would I."

At Drusilla's last sentence Buffy suddenly turns excitedly to Willow.

"Wills, I've just had the best idea! When she said she could help him but she wouldn't, that's only because she's evil, right, so if she was good she could help. Do you think you could change Angel's curse to work on her? And maybe without the actual curse part? 'Cause what with her being nuts one never knows what'll make her happy..."

To Buffy's disappointment Willow isn't as excited about her idea as she had hoped. The witch fears that dumping the entire guilt that comes with the soul on Drusilla's already broken mind might damage the vampiress too much for her to be of any use; besides Willow is certain that she would feel bad about being responsible for completely destroying someone's sanity – even if that someone is an evil being.

Tara stops them before the two friends can get into an argument over whether doing something bad to an evil being automatically makes the bad deed good, or not.

"I'd have to do some reading to double-check it, but I believe that she'd feel a lot less guilt than Angel about her time as a vampire. A damaged mind often takes unconscious actions to protect itself against further harm. The overwhelming part of her guilt would be blocked from her consciousness, allowing her only to recognize the loss of any desires to continue as she had before, but not forcing her into atoning for her past to relieve the pain. She would effectively be like any human, not forced to take any sides in the whole good/evil thing. If she is as attached to Angel as she seems to be she will probably want to help him though."

After realizing that the blonde witch appears to know what she's talking about, the three girls agree that Tara should check her information, and if it is confirmed they will leave it until the next evening so they will be able to perform the spell at night.

While the witches put Drusilla to sleep so that they can take her to the magic box without alerting anyone who might see them – people in Sunnydale might live in denial about demons and vampires, but dragging a young woman in chains through town would probably shock even them. Buffy decides to look for Spike, thinking it might be helpful if he's with them when they perform the soul-curse, since he does know the vampiress best.

After escorting the others back, the Slayer makes her way to Willy's where she finds the blonde vampire at the bar just as Willow had predicted.

Spike is more than slightly shocked to see her and becomes instantly defensive; believing she is there to make what happened somehow his fault once again. Thus he's pleasantly surprised when she takes a place next to him and orders a drink before turning to him and actually thanking him for his help.

He manages little more than a slight nod, which she then takes as an invitation to tell him about her plan. Soon it's Buffy's turn to be surprised when instead of getting angry at her for wanting to give Drusilla a soul, as she had expected, he voices the same concerns as Willow earlier.

Once she repeats Tara's theory he doesn't seem to have any objections and she is unable to contain her curiosity any longer.

"Why are you so calm about this? Here I was all prepared for you to go 'you crazy bitch' on me but you seem to **like** the idea?"

"Bloody hell Slayer, of course I don't like you shoving a stupid soul down Dru's throat, but I was prepared to see her dusted tonight and knowing that it would be mostly my fault. And now you're offering an alternative, how could I be angry with that? If what the blonde witch says rings true Dru won't be too bad off, and she finally gets to be with her precious Daddy without any of us having to endure the git's evil version. So instead of becoming dust she gets to be happy. It's a hell of a lot more than I ever expected."

"Oh."

"Yeah. Oh. So how are you coping Slayer? Couldn't have been easy to hear what your former got up to?"

"How dare you..."

"No wait, you're taking this all wrong again. Didn't say that to make fun of you! 'Twas a serious question."

"Ugh, ok, but I don't think I can talk about it right now, Drusilla said some things, and I have to sort them out for myself first."

"Alright, you do that Slayer, but don't ignore whatever she told because it doesn't fit into your worldview. Don't forget she's a seer. If you ignore it now it might bite you in the arse later on."

Answering him with a curt nod Buffy briefly debates staying and using alcohol as a means to forget everything that's bothering her for just one night. Then remembering Glory and the threat the god still poses to her family she realizes she can't afford to get drunk right now! So she decides to return home, and with that, to the unpleasant task of making sense of the things Drusilla told her.

Too upset with her recent discoveries about Angel, Buffy decides to skip patrol for the night. She is relieved to find that her mother and sister are already asleep when she arrives at home.

After spending most of the night twisting and turning while trying to figure out when she had started seeing what she wanted instead what was really there, Buffy finally decides that she will try talking to the vampiress again after the spell is finished in the hope of getting more information.

The next day she arrives at the magic box in the mid afternoon, sleep deprived but determined to find out the results the research.

To her immense relief there seems to be no problems and when she wonders how they managed to remove the happiness clause from the curse so fast, Willow and Giles state guiltily that they have been working on it for quite some time.

The watcher grudgingly explains, when she questions why they had never told her, that it is his fault. He couldn't decide whether he really wanted to grant Angel this

ability to feel perfect happiness. Buffy is shocked at the resentment her watcher still harbors towards her ex, but wisely decides not to call him on it at the moment.

Instead she uses the remaining time to ask how Tara knows so much about psychology. Shyly the other girl explains how she started to read up on what causes people to behave the way they do after her family's return. She just wanted to understand how they could have tried to make her believe she was a demon just so that she would stay at home.

When Spike arrives later in the evening, Giles and the witches are already starting with the spell – Willow had found, that with her new skills, changing the curse to remove the loophole had been no problem at all.

Despite their request for silence, Xander can't resist the urge to comment about how only a demon could possibly sell out his ex to her enemies. Regretting his words instantly when it causes Anya to contradict him by describing – in great detail – some of her most famous cases where she had punished human men for just that. Even Buffy is unable to feel sorry for him, realizing how immensely stupid it is to insult the vampire for essentially saving them from having to confront Angelus again, with absolutely no warning or preparation.

Anya is still talking when the three spell casters finish, although Xander is looking decidedly green around the gills by now. She stops when Giles announces they are now going to lift the sleep-spell they had left intact in order to spare the vampiress from potential pain during the re-souling.

Chapter 2 – What Is Evil?

As the spell is being lifted, Buffy looks warily at her friends before quickly nodding at Spike signaling to go and check on the newly souled vampiress in the training-room. To her relief nobody says anything about Spike being the first one to see her. Most of them agree he is the best one for the job, and even if Xander does think otherwise - he is still trying to recover from Anya's tirade.

Cautiously opening the door, Spike is relieved to find that Drusilla is none the worse for her recent re-ensoulment. He approaches her warily.

"Lo' pet, how's my princess?"

"My Spike, you've been a bad boy, to choose the Slayer over Mummy," suddenly Drusilla tilts her head and smiles blindingly at him, "but now they made it so Daddy will again love his Princess again and take her back. You must help me go to them my Spike. I have to thank them for this."

Laughing Spike releases her from the restraints; trust Dru to do the unexpected and actually want to thank the Slayer for giving her a soul.

Gathered in the main room of the Magic Box, the Scoobs have all taken turns watching the closed door, looking for any sign of what might be taking place within the training room. When the doors open revealing a happily smiling Drusilla and a still chuckling Spike, the gang feels an extreme release of the tension they each had been holding. However the gang's relief is temporary, as Dru rushes across the room towards Willow, Tara and Giles.

Not wanting to waste any time Drusilla instantly makes her way to the three spell-casters, enveloping the nervous girls in a hug before kissing Giles lightly on his cheek. She giggles wickedly at their surprise. She loves watching the charming Watcher blushing all sorts of pretty shades of pink remembering how she had gotten lost in their shared kisses while interrogating him about Alcaltha.

In the meantime Spike quickly turns toward Buffy, informing her in hushed tones about Dru's reaction to her new soul, in order to prevent the Slayer from stopping the vampiress. Buffy stares at him confused for a few seconds before she finds herself sharing his amused grin at the rather surreal situation. Her smile grows even bigger as she notices Dru has made Giles blush causing him to remove his glasses and making as if to clean them.

Having thanked the other three, Drusilla then joins the Slayer and Spike. Embracing Buffy in a hug, she whispers into her ear that soon she will receive the answers to all her questions.

Soon normal conversation starts up again as the novelty of having Drusilla amongst them begins to wear off, as she is keeping quiet for most of the time.

The dark haired vampiress, however, was easily picking up the Slayer's restlessness. She knew the other girl had questions she required answers for, questions that had been brought about by their earlier conversation. Approaching the troubled Slayer she fixes her with a deep intent stare. "There is much we should talk about. If you want answers, my sweet, then come with me" With that she drifts back towards the training room she had exited earlier.

Eager for the answers she hopes Drusilla will provide, Buffy quickly collects Willow and Tara and takes them to the training room with her to meet up with the vampiress. The witches, she feels, are the most likely to be open to what she believes they are about to hear.

"Alright Dru, I'm pretty sure you already know what's bothering me., So if you aren't going to be able to help me, then you should tell me now and not waste my time." the Slayer demands, cutting right to the chase as soon as the door closes behind them.

"Don't fear my lovely, I will, 'tis my present to you for making me so my Angel will like me again. You think I'm being a bad girl for giving you such a bad present, but when the time is right you'll see."

"All right then. Let's begin with what the hell you were talking about the other day. Do you really expect me to believe that a vampire still has the same personality they had as a human? 'Cause let me tell you, I am so not seeing it!" Buffy's words lash out viscously.

"Ah, Buffy..." Willow tries to interrupt, but Drusilla silences her with a wave of her hand. The red-headed witch's mouth snaps shut, deciding temporarily to keep her comment about the non-existing changes in Harmony's nature to herself.

"Daddy was a very bad boy, blinding you with his spark. Put ugly little lies in your pretty head. But he didn't mean to, you see, it hurts him and Daddy doesn't like to hurt – only in the good way."

The vampiress' dreamy expression causes a shudder of disgust to rush down Buffy's spine as she considers exactly what Drusilla means by the last part of that statement.

But before she can contemplate that unpleasant thought any further, she is brought out of her reverie as Drusilla shakes off her memories by uttering one sentence that will change the Slayer's world-view forever.

"The spark decides kin, no more, no less."

After her statement Drusilla waits expectantly. Seemingly certain that they must have understood exactly what it was she just revealed. She is disappointed, as Buffy turns a blank, bewildered stare upon her.

While the Slayer is still figuring out how to respond to her, Willows face lights up with understanding.

"Oh, oh, I know what she's talking about!" excitedly turning toward Drusilla she continues, "You're saying a soul lets you recognize all beings with the same kind of soul as being kindred. So you would feel differently about harming them, than say someone without one or with a different kind of soul. Like humans don't feel bad about killing and eating animals – that would be 'cause we have human-souls not cow-souls or chicken-souls. Right?"

After she finishes Drusilla begins enthusiastically clapping her hands "Yes, yes, the little witch has the answer!"

Buffy thinks she gets it now and tries to put it into words "I get it, so any vampire would feel bad about the humans he had killed if you gave him a human soul. Because suddenly he feels like he's one of them, instead of viewing them just as food. But I still don't see how it could change Angel's whole personality though? I mean, we were in love and then all of a sudden he wanted to torment and kill me..."

"No Buffy, see, what is the normal reaction if you feel guilty about something?" Tara questions silently.

"I'd try to make up for it of course."

Tara nodded. "Yes, anyone would, 'cause the feeling stays with you until you do. But you don't only try to make up for what you did wrong, at least not if you feel really bad. You try to change your whole behavior, so you don't unconsciously add to your guilt."

She looks hopefully at the slayer, trying to gauge if she comprehends before continuing. "So no matter how Angel treated other people before he was turned, he'd try to be as pleasant and helpful as possible once he got the soul. As for his feelings for you, we can only guess. Perhaps caring for others is originally a minor part of his personality. Maybe once the guilt stopped suppressing the not-so nice parts, it disappeared again. Willow told me Angelus was disgusted with the way he'd felt for you, so I'd guess the human-Angel was simply one of those people who view positive feelings of any kind as a weakness."

Tara's voice lowers and she glances over at Willow drawing strength and support from her presence. "I've seen that before. After my mom died I caught my dad actually crying. And I've never heard him say more horrible things about her than he did afterwards."

Before Buffy can even begin to question Tara's explanation, she sees Drusilla nodding happily in agreement. The Slayer is still not sure what to think about the latest revelations, but she decides it is best to just get on with the conversation and ponder the ramifications later.

"Ok, ok, I think understand all that. What you're telling me is a vampire has, in a way, the personality they had as a human. So now what? I should stop slaying?"

"Why?" Drusilla looks completely bewildered at Buffy's question "Humans are their food; a Slayer's purpose is protecting humans, why would you stop?"

"But, if not to get me to stop slaying, why are you telling me all this?"

"Why, to show you your destiny is not about hate, dearie. Hate is such a nasty thing, it destroyed our lovely family, it did. No...not about hate, but about protecting your kind. Didn't that nice watcher of yours teach you anything?"

"You know she's not wrong Buffy. There are tribes in Africa who have their fighters who protect them against lions and such. I don't think they need to hate the lions to do so." Willow feels compelled to point out.

Even though she has never mentioned it before, Willow has realized how much they had all changed over the years. She had made this discovery as she had witnessed her girlfriend's fear of the Scoobies' reaction to her during the time Tara had believed herself to be part-demon.

What the group had begun as a way to help save the world by fighting those who threatened it had rapidly degenerated into resenting and wanting to annihilate anything of demon kind, regardless of its intent.

This change had not been intentional, but something that could happen all too easily when one allowed oneself to forget the existence of two sides to any argument.

By now all the new ideas have Buffy massaging her temples in an attempt to fight off the massive headache she can feel approaching. She decides the best thing to do is to call it a night for now.

Upon returning to the main-room, the girls view with amazement the scene before them. While they had been having philosophical discussions, the others had solved a more practical problem, one that they had completely forgotten about. None of the girls had ever considered where Drusilla was gonna stay. Though the cot, with its neatly folded blankets now positioned near the door, makes it quite clear that the others must have decided to let her stay at the magic box.

As they are about to leave for their respective homes, and let Drusilla settle in for the night, Giles reminds them they have yet to inform Angel or his co-workers about the vampiress' change of status.

Before they can start an argument about who should make the call, Willow volunteers. She is the one who used to phone to exchange updates about recent threats with Cordelia, so it just seems easier that way.

With that problem solved, Spike and the rest of the Scoobies each make their way home. All of them immensely relieved that the night had gone so well.

Chapter 3 – Simple Solutions

Having been left to her own devices, Drusilla considers getting some rest, but the knowledge of what was about to happen to the Slayer prevents her.

Instead she decides to go out and rid Sunnydale of its latest threat by herself. She realizes that she should be plagued with guilt from her reign as a soulless vampire, but ironically she is not. Her special sight drives her forward into the night. She feels compelled to help those who have given her this new chance at happiness. How could she not? Considering what she knows was yet to come, this night's work is so small a token on her behalf.

With this in mind she leaves the Magic Box and makes her way across town.

Arriving at her destination she decides to settle in and lie in wait for her intended victim. So much easier a task to wait for her prey, instead of endless searching, and potentially alerting others to her intentions.

As she had expected, she must wait little more than an hour before her prey leaves the building. Once he passes her on the way to his car, she steps out of the shadows. The surprised man doesn't even have the time to wonder whether the frail-looking woman in front of him might be a threat before he has lost himself in her eyes.

Held firmly in the grip of Drusilla's strong thrall, he is unable to resist her orders to follow her, by way of the fire stairs onto the roof of the building he had just exited. He is equally unable to refuse her command to jump.

Looking down at the young doctor's shattered body Drusilla feels no guilt about her actions, newly souled or not. Knowing that her choice was between either him now or the Slayer later, the vampiress prides herself on having forced him into a death similar to the way she had seen the Slayer die in her visions. To her, the manner of his death seems fitting considering the pain the months ahead would have caused had she not taken action.

Not wasting any time she hurriedly makes her way back to the Magic Box, well aware that it wouldn't do for the others to notice her disappearance. She knows that the people she's already considering part of her new family wouldn't be able to understand the concept of killing one to save many, at least not if you're talking humans. Sometimes the forces of good simply wouldn't be able to win without the odd infusion of a little gray.

So silly really, the watcher would not have hesitated to do the deed once it was too late, but that was for her to know and for them to learn. For now she would amuse herself with preparations for the arrival of her Angel, and maybe she'd even figure out how to save the nice woman her William cared so much about. But that was a task for another day.

Had the Scoobies been able to hear her thoughts that moment, they would have wondered whether she really was insane or whether it was all an act. They wouldn't understand how she lived in a world where thoughts were like pictures that she was unable to describe to anyone.

With Drusilla, Angelus truly had crafted a masterpiece. In her time, a seer was considered an 'evil' thing, something that must be repressed or hidden. Angelus had preyed upon Drusilla, exploiting her visions before turning her and further corrupted her as a vampire. Although to a person who is truly insane, they do not perceive themselves as such. In their reality, they have simply receded so far into their own mind that no harm can reach them anymore. That might have been the fate of Drusilla had Angelus not turned her, the demon that was brought forth did not allow her insanity to fade instead it strengthened and darkened her gifts.

When Drusilla arrives back at the Magic Box, she goes straight into the training-room and lies down to sleep.

Upon opening his shop the next morning the first thing Giles does is check up on their guest, only to find the vampiress still fast asleep. Hesitating only briefly he decides to let her get some more rest, as they will not be needing her until Buffy arrives in the afternoon anyway.

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While Drusilla spent the night doing what could be considered her first good deed in over a hundred years, Buffy didn't succeed in getting so much as a wink of sleep. Her mind was still too troubled by what had been implied by the seer's words the day before to rest.

The lack of rest combined with the continuing questions still whirling in her mind yields a cranky Slayer in the morning. Upon her announcement that she's going to visit Willow and Tara, her mother and sister give her relieved smiles and nods – so grateful to be rid of the decidedly cranky slayer that neither of them had any intention of questioning the need for such an early morning visit.

Despite the early hour, the two witches do not seem too surprised when they open the door to their friend. In fact their already made beds lead Buffy to the conclusion that they were in fact expecting company. However, Willow's question as to whether she had worked out what was bothering her, finally makes it clear to Buffy that the witches are well prepared to help her through these new revelations.

Grateful for having such insightful friends, the Slayer proceeds to work through her issues with the gentle help of the two girls. Willow's analytical mind and Tara's personal harrowing experiences with the twisted ways of human nature each assist her in making great strides towards understanding that adapting a different view of her calling and the creatures it brings her in contact with does not have to be a bad thing.

Slowly she begins to accept that just because demons follow their nature, as does anyone else, she has no reason to harbor this all-consuming hatred for everything

demonic. Realization dawns that it might make her life a lot less stressful if she simply viewed her calling as a way to protect those near and dear to her.

In the end that's what every human does, it matters little if she fought demons and vampires instead of illness and poverty? She had the strength and the knowledge to do this; she should use her abilities the best she could, just like anyone else.

After talking for hours at the witches' place, the three girls finally arrive at the Magic Box late afternoon. They encounter an only recently awakened Drusilla, whose happy smile has them guessing that she's completely aware of the conclusions the girls have made from her revelations.

Seeing that Giles is occupied by a customer and won't be available for training for some time yet, Buffy recesses towards the research-table with her friends and the vampiress. Sensing the need for a change from the heavy conversations of the morning and the day before, Tara decides to lighten the mood by questioning Drusilla about the beautiful, old-fashioned dresses the vampiress always wears.

Soon Willow and Buffy enthusiastically join the conversation, after all which girl can resist discussing fashion. Especially if you have the chance to discuss it with someone who has seen all the changes it has undergone over almost two centuries.

To their astonishment the girls realize that they don't have any problems at all getting accustomed to Drusilla's odd way of speaking. It's not nearly as confusing if she talks about everyday stuff, instead of vague theories or the future she sees in her visions.

The dark haired vampiress even has them laughing out loud with her stories about some of the more embarrassing styles of dress Spike has tried over the years.

The group's laughing and giggling leads to Giles having one of the greatest shocks of his life in Sunnydale, when Anya approaches him and asks him to take care of the remaining customers so she can join the group at the table. No one had ever seen the ex-demoness letting anything, that wasn't Xander, come between her and earning money

His surprise is so enormous that the usually reserved watcher forgets all about his manners and asks his employee why she would want to do that. Her answer leaves him stuttering his agreement and cleaning his glasses, all the while seriously considering how he should change his treatment of the girl. Anya, in her usually blunt way, explains how satisfying it would be to have a conversation with someone who would not treat her as if she had oozed from under some rock every time she mentions her time as a demon.

Soon, Giles notices, Anya has become an active and vital part of the conversation, joining Drusilla in leaving the other girls in fits of hysterical giggles. He promises himself that at the next available opportunity, he will address each Scooby member's treatment of Anya. However, by the sounds and body language on display before him at the Scooby central table, the female Scoobies will not need his words of

advice. That left only Xander, and as her boyfriend he really should know better, but still he would have a word with the young man.

Later that evening, shortly before Giles closing the Magic Box for the day, Spike arrives. At sunset, he had decided to make his way over to the shop. Now only Xander is missing; however Anya explains that he has to work late today. They agree to start the meeting without him, as Anya can fill him in on everything at home.

Giles starts the meeting by asking Willow how her phone call to LA went, making Buffy realize that she never once even thought of asking her friend this herself during the entire time they had spent talking all day. Maybe, she wonders, Angel isn't as important to her as she tends to believe. Instead of the disappointment she half expected to come with this revelation, she only feels relief and further accepts the truth in what Drusilla had told her.

This acceptance also helps her to digest what Willow tells them about her conversation with Cordelia.

It seems Angel had fired his team, throwing them out of the office and offering the hardship of his existence as pitiful excuse for his erratic behavior. Cordelia was not sure that Angel would come to Sunnydale to help, or in fact if it were safe to ask him to do so; however she would do her best. Cordy had gone on to assure Willow that the former Angel Investigations crew would be mobilized and on its way.

During the course of the conversation Buffy finds herself being friendlier with Spike than ever before. Instead of hurling insults at him every few minutes and dismissing everything he says, she begins treating him like one of the gang. His actions with Drusilla, as well as the vampires' words must have made more of an impression on her than she had realized.

While she contemplates whether this change in her is for the good or not, she nearly misses the worried looks Willow and Tara keep giving the blonde vampire, while whispering with each other. Finally Willow decides to voice their worries.

"Say guys, what are we gonna do about Spike? I don't think Angel is going to react too kindly to him being here, as Cordelia told me she never mentioned it to him. If Angel is as - uhm, I'm gonna go with angry, since there is no way I'm repeating what Cordy called him - as he seems to be, how can we be sure he won't seek Spike out and stake him as soon as he finds out?"

Giles surprises everyone by offering the vampire a place to stay at his apartment until Angel leaves town once more.

Her watcher's fast offer of safe harbor to Spike calms the Slayer's worries about her new acceptance of their local vampire. However, Giles' admission that Spike would be safe at his place since he uninvited Angel again after his last visit, triggers her guilt that she never really paid any attention to the resentment this man, who is like a father to her, still harbors against her former lover.

Seeing Giles like this, while at the same time realizing that maybe Angel hadn't really been everything that her young, romantic self, had believed him to be, she can't help but feel like the most self-centered bitch in the world. How selfish of her had it been, to expect her watcher to endure, for almost a year, the company of the man who had killed his girlfriend? And she would have continued to expect this of him if it had not been for Angel's leaving.

What the hell had she been thinking? Not about the feelings of anyone beside herself, that's for sure!

Spike's first reaction upon hearing the watcher's offer is to refuse, and explain to the witches that he could bloody well take care of himself. But not hearing anyone protesting the idea, not even a sarcastic comment about him being weak from the Slayer, stops him from voicing his refusal, and instead he takes the time to really think about it.

He isn't so dense that he doesn't realize how differently the Scoobies are suddenly treating him. Polite, even friendly and isn't that what he has wanted for quite some time now? Looking at their sincere faces he realizes they are not trying to mock him, but seem honestly concerned about his safety. Happy about this new development, he decides to forget about his pride just this once and take Giles up on his offer.

Besides, by staying at the watcher's he might be able to see the Slayer on non-slaying related occasions. What better way to convince her to look upon him as more than just a former enemy.

Not able to do more about the Angel-situation until the LA-gang shows up, the conversation turns to the matter of Glory, since no one except Drusilla knows that this threat has been eliminated as of the previous night.

The vampiress is aware that there are still problems surrounding Glory that the Scoobies need to take care of on their own, so she keeps quiet and only watches.

Chapter 4 – Fallen Angel

Nearly two weeks have passed since Willow called Cordelia requesting Angel's presence in Sunnydale. When the former cheerleader finally calls the Magic-Box, she explains that a new situation has developed, and she and the others will arrive in Sunnydale the next day.

Giles questions Cordy about Angel; however, he only receives vague answers. No, Angel didn't lose his soul again as far as they know; yes, he'll be there – in a way; and yes, they will explain everything else once they arrive.

The two weeks since Drusilla's resouling have been quite eventful for the Scoobies, even if though the Glory-front has been suspiciously quiet.

After Buffy informed her mother about the recent events concerning Drusilla, Joyce had insisted on inviting the vampiress over at the house in order to meet her. Having realized that the 'new' Drusilla is pretty enjoyable company, the Slayer had readily agreed.

However, none of them had expected the dark-haired vampiress' reaction to Joyce. She had walked up to Joyce, looking hard into the older woman's eyes and proceeded to practically drag her across town to the hospital. She had ignored all Buffy's attempts to stop them. Instinct told her that Dru was not threatening her mother. Relying on that instinct, Buffy was reluctant to use violence on someone she had begun to think of as a friend. She felt that the most she could do was to follow along while attempting to calm her mother down. They should simply wait to see what the vampiress had in mind.

At the hospital, an unusually forceful Drusilla demanded that someone with experience immediately examine Joyce for after-effects of her recent surgery.

Shocked at Dru's demand, the two Summers' women had looked at each other and remembered at the same time, that Drusilla had the gift of foresight. Upon remembering Dru's seer ability, a very frantic Slayer all but bullied a doctor into performing every possible test on her panicked mother.

Afterwards, Buffy nearly fainted with relief upon learning there had been signs of an aneurism building. However, the doctors told her that they were able to catch it in time and that her mother would be fine now.

After searching for her mother's savior, Buffy found a smiling Drusilla calmly sitting in one of the waiting-room chairs. The Slayer had rushed over and given the vampiress a hug that would have crushed a human. Forever grateful that this vampiress had saved not only her mother but also herself, Buffy knew that losing her mother would have been so great a loss from which she would have never fully recovered.

Returning home from the hospital, they had calmed down a worried Dawn. Joyce had decided that Drusilla would remain as their guest as long as she was in

Sunnydale. No one – not even Giles nor Xander - attempted to make her change her mind.

Later the same week, the gang organized a party for Joyce celebrating her full recovery, naming Drusilla as the guest of honor. It turned out to be a lot of fun for everyone, at least after Joyce, having caught Xander making some of his insulting comments about the two vampires told him in no uncertain terms that she wouldn't tolerate this kind of behavior in her house, thus effectively shutting him up. The rest of the party went off without any further glitches.

Furthermore there had been an accident with a robot-girl. This robot girl was searching for her 'boyfriend', Warren, who had abandoned her. Luckily the Scoobies discovered April, as she called herself, shortly after her arrival in Sunnydale. April had shown up at the Bronze searching for Warren at the same time the girls had accompanied Spike and Drusilla, to show her a night out in town.

Thanks to their early discovery of this new threat, Buffy arrived just in time to save Warren's new human girlfriend from being suffocated by April. In the end, Buffy didn't even need to destroy the robot-girl as her batteries were running low anyway. She took the no longer active 'April' to the Magic-Box. After Willow announced that destroying such a complex electronic creation without first learning more about how it operates would be a shame, the Scoobies decided to store the robot girl in the basement.

So now, with Joyce completely recovered and the bot safely stored away in the basement, the Scoobies are preparing for the arrival of their friends from LA.

The whole gang is anxiously awaiting the LA's groups' arrival at the Magic-Box the next day. Confusion and tension plague each Scooby due Cordelia's reluctance to tell them what is happening with Angel. Cordelia arrives with Wesley and Gunn in tow. Gunn is introduced to all the Scoobies, since they had only heard about him from Cordy's conversations with Willow. With all the niceties and introductions out of the way, the Slayer's patience has worn thin, so she cuts to the chase and asks the former cheerleader why all the mystery and where is Angel.

The LA gang's answer shocks everyone – Angel is on his way to Sunnydale, but not because of the Drusilla-situation which he didn't show the slightest interest in, but because he is following Darla.

The news of the Darla being on her way to Sunnydale doesn't sit well with any of the Scoobies. They immediately begin to make plans on how they can return her to her former dusty state. And what can be done to make Angel see reason. Tired from their recent worries and the long drive from LA, Cordelia, Wesley and Gunn retire to their hotel to catch up on some much needed rest.

Later that night Buffy takes Spike with her on patrol, just as she has every night for the last two weeks.

This pattern began after Buffy accompanied Spike and Giles back to the watcher's apartment the first night the vampire spent there. Both the Slayer and vampire found themselves leaving, in search of a fight in the cemeteries, at the same time. Seeing as they both had the same goal in mind, they joined each other on patrol.

After that it just seemed logical that if they were going to do the same thing at the same time and place anyway, they should just do it together.

The vampire is of course elated by this turn of events, and even Buffy has found herself to be quite happy with this new arrangement. She realizes that Spike can be enjoyable company once they had ceased shooting barbs at each other and instead partook in some friendly banter. Patrol had been quite enjoyable at times - a definite change from doing it all by herself, not that she couldn't do it alone, but she much rather have a pal along to break up the boredom.

As Angel suddenly emerges from the bushes completely ignoring her presence and proceeds to viciously attack Spike, she is once again relieved that they are patrolling together because otherwise the blonde vampire would have been caught alone, with no back up.

She yells at Angel to stop as Spike tries to defend himself against the furious older vampire. Normally the two vampires would be well matched, but with Angel going in for the kill and Spike trying to avoid just that, the younger vamp is at a distinct disadvantage.

Finally grasping that all her attempts to get Angel's attention are having no effect, she grabs the dark-haired vampire by his shoulder and propels him off of Spike. Spike, by now is lying on the ground trying to roll away from his attacker.

She once again tries to talk sense into her former lover. However Angel continues to ignore her, instead attempts to avoid her and return to attacking Spike. His behavior causes her to lose her temper, so she knocks him out with a spinning kick to the head that nearly splits his skull.

Afterwards she pauses, standing above his prone form, hands on hips, glaring at the dark haired vampire in disbelief that, despite all her efforts, he had continued to ignore her presence; all the while swearing under her breath about stupid vampires, who should know better than to piss off a Slayer. She only stops glaring at her former lover once she remembers his intended victim. Hastily turning to Spike, in order to make sure he's alright, she finds him staring at her with a look of absolute awe and disbelief on his face.

Confused she asks him what is wrong, but he can only stutter his amazement at her hurting her former love to save him.

"What's the big? He was atta... ..pissing me off!" she stammers.

At the last moment she remembers what Dawn told her about Spike's feelings for her and decides not to tell him she knocked Angel out because he was attacking him.

The two of them had been getting along so well that she recognizes that she does not want anything to mess that up. The Slayer worries that if she tells him why she defended him from Angel that it would only encourage him. If she rejects him later, the fragile friendship might shatter. How things have changed since the last time she thought about this.

Although the tiny voice in the back of her mind, asking whether rejecting him would really be necessary, is something she decides it would be best to ignore for now. Bad voice, bad, wrong thoughts! So not going there!

Yet, seeing the disappointment on his face, she can't contain herself and blurts out a bit more of the truth.

"What? He thought he could attack my friends, and I'd do nothing?"

"And are we, Slayer? Friends, I mean." Spike asks in his soft voice.

"Maybe not yet, but I'd say we are on our way there, don't you think?"

Elated by her answer, Spike nods his agreement. Even though he may still dream of being more to her than just a friend, he now understands how completely she values her friendships. From spending so much time around her and her friends these last weeks, he is sure that becoming her friend first might be his best opportunity for ever becoming anything more.

Besides, he knows that just being a part of her life gives him more contentment than he has felt in a long time, and should they never be more than friends; he'd have at least that.

"Great, I'd like that! So what do you think Spike? Help me get this stupid, Slayer-ignoring idiot to the Magic-Box? I'd do it on my own, but people might get suspicious, if they see me carrying him across town."

Once again Spike agrees. Together they carry the still unconscious Angel to the shop, where they call the others, including the gang from LA, to meet them.

The rest of the gang arrives just as Angel starts to wake up. Everyone watches expectantly to see what he's going to do. Much to Buffy's disappointment, his first action is to once again try to attack Spike; but fortunately Giles steps in his way stopping him short.

Confused the older vampire takes in his surroundings, and the angry faces of the Scoobies and his former colleagues, for the first time. However, it is Drusilla's face amongst them that stuns him into silence.

Seeing Angel staring unbelievably at the vampiress, Cordelia can't hold back anymore.

"Why are you looking so surprised Angel? I told you she was here, soul and all. Not like you seemed interested at the time!"

"I, I thought it was just another plot to get me to listen to you. What happened?" Angel questions the group.

Turning to Buffy, he growls at her. "Was this your idea? Didn't you understand anything while I was here, you stupid little girl? The soul hurts like hell! How could you do that to her? Thought it'd be an easy way to avoid having to slay us? God...."

During his tirade, he seems to be completely unaware that the happy smile Drusilla was wearing upon his arrival is fading, only to be replaced by an angry frown. She opens her mouth to speak, but Spike cuts her off before she can utter a single word.

"Shut your stupid gob Peaches. Just who do you think you are to talk to the Slayer like this? You're worried about Dru? Right, the hell you are! You didn't even say a single bloody word to her yet. Shows just how fucking concerned you really are! Just so you know, you tosser, Dru showed up telling me **all** about your latest stunt in LA, and I had to turn her over to the Slayer if we wanted a chance of being prepared in case you went and lost your bloody soul again. Pratt that you are, you'd have been here faster than one can say fucking moron!"

When Spike confesses that Drusilla's souling had been his fault, Angel once again tries to attack him. Although he suddenly finds he is unable to move. Scanning the room with his eyes, he finally realizes what has happened when he notices the grim faces of Willow and the girl next to her. Right, the little redhead was a witch, maybe her friend too. They must have done this to him.

Buffy manages to shake off her shock from Angel insulting her and steps in front of the vampire, who is currently trying to glare at Willow and Tara, while frozen in place.

"That's enough Angel! Dru doesn't have any problems with having a soul so neither should you. If you'd just shut up for a second we'd be able to explain. But since you seem to be unable to do so, you'll have to stay this way till we're finished! Giles, Tara, could you, please?"

After Giles finishes explaining everything that had been happening since Drusilla's arrival, and Tara adds the information about the influence the vampiress' psychological condition has had. Ironically her insanity protected her from the torment that her soul would otherwise have visited upon her. At the end of their tales, the Slayer signals the two witches to release Angel from their spell.

To everyone's astonishment, he doesn't seem to care about anything they just told him. Instead he just growls that he has to go and find someone – obviously unaware they know about Darla's presence in Sunnydale – and hurries out the door before they can stop him.

"Wow, what the hell is wrong with him?" Anya pipes up.

The group is relieved when Anya's question breaks the uncomfortable silence, but no one is able to give her a satisfying answer. Neither are they able to think of a way to get through to the usually broody vampire, who seems to have entirely lost it.

Frustrated at their inability to do more, the LA-gang finally decides to return to their hotel, while the Scoobies decide not to trust that Angel is preoccupied enough not to try and attack **their** vampire again. Just to be on the safe side, they agree to accompany Spike and Giles back to the watcher's apartment. Spike, of course deems this to be completely unnecessary, but by now he has learned that to try talking the female Scoobies out of something, once they set their mind to it, is nearly impossible, so he decides to spare his energy and let them have their way.

To Anya's immense disappointment, Xander is the only one who refuses to 'waste his time by protecting the evil dead'. Her anger with her boyfriend's behavior has been rising steadily over the last two weeks, as her easy friendship with Drusilla has seen them bonding due to their common past as evil demons. So instead of agreeing to follow him home she calmly explains she will be checking on him, on his bed on the couch, once she returns from walking Spike and Giles home with her friends.

Nobody is surprised when Xander is suddenly all for walking the two men back. However, once his furious girlfriend tells him that his coming with them won't change her mind about the sleeping arrangements, he changes his mind again and without another word leaves the magic-box.

It is a subdued group that finally makes its way to the watcher's home. All of them have bonded with the ex-demoness in some way, over the last two weeks, and seeing how easily Xander could dismiss not only his friends' wishes and opinions, but his girlfriend's too, left them all with a sour taste in their mouths.

With the girls spending more time with Anya, each has learned to read her moods even when she covers them with inappropriate comments and an overly cheerful facade, so none of them are fooled that Xander's comments don't hurt her more deeply than just because of her friendship with Drusilla. Every time he mouths off against demons and vampires being disgusting, evil and un-redeemable, he is unwittingly insulting his own girlfriend.

More than anyone else, Willow is surprised to find herself sympathizing with Anya and cursing Xander for his refusal to see what he is doing. Her animosity towards the former demon is almost completely gone. While walking next to the hurting girl, who is trying so hard to keep her feelings to herself by making lewd comments about the effectiveness of banning men from the bedroom, she decides to have words with her oldest friend about his need to change his attitude, soon.

Chapter 5 - Payback

He is watching them from his spot behind the mausoleum. They are patrolling, the whole gang, including the two vampires, only the watcher is missing. Drusilla patrolling he could understand, since she is like him now. But how the Scoobies could accept that soulless monster into their company, he simply cannot fathom. He had tried to tell them the previous night, but none of them seemed willing to listen. Not even the watcher, and he is the one, who had personally experienced the consequences of letting a soulless vampire behind your guard.

In his anger, Angel is completely oblivious to the fact that Giles might blame him personally and not merely his soulless state for Jenny Calendar's death. To him his deeds as Angelus are the ultimate proof that nothing good can come from the Scoobies trusting Spike.

Irritated that he won't be able to get his hands on his grand-child tonight, Angel decides to continue what he had earlier planned on doing— finding Darla.

Despite Darla being the one to tell him about her plan to go to Sunnydale and check on what might be keeping Drusilla, he has not heard from her since his arrival. At first this didn't worry him too much. Even though she had just been recently returned to her vampiric state, she had hundreds of years of experience from her previous existence to use to take care of herself, even with a Slayer close by. However, knowing that Cordelia and his old gang are here changes that though. Thanks to his former employees, Buffy and her friends are now aware of Darla's presence and might decide to seek her out, while the blonde vampiress is still unaware of them even knowing of her resurrection.

Yet, even in his worry about his once sire, now grand-child, the dark vampire is unable to stop himself from watching the group some more when they finally find something to fight.

It is Buffy and Spike, who jump in, attacking the demon without any hesitation. And to Angel's chagrin, it is obvious that they are used to fighting together. Their moves are smooth and completely in sync with each other. Neither of the two wavering once, covering the other's back at all times. This he finds even more upsetting, especially since he is aware of their usual impatient, and sometimes reckless acts while fighting on their own.

The two fighters continue to play with the demon that they could have easily defeated at the beginning of the fight, meanwhile the others don't seem remotely worried about the ongoing struggle. Drusilla and the girl who helped Willow with the freezing-spell on him the previous night are chatting amiably with another blonde, while the aforementioned redheaded witch seems to be having a heated discussion with Xander, a little further off to the side.

Finally the fight is over and the demon is lying dead on the ground. After confirming that it is of the self-dissolving variety and no hiding of the body will be required, the group continues their patrol as if nothing major had happened.

Unable to comprehend that they appear not to take their duties too seriously, Angel decides not to follow them any further, instead he finally begins his search for Darla.

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While Angel is off stalking the Slayer and her friends, Darla, who is still blissfully unaware that anyone in Sunnydale knows of her return from death, has just decided on what she deems to be the best way to pay the Slayer back for the bitch's part in dusting her.

The blonde vampiress remembers well the circumstances that had led to her demise, including how she managed to get invited into the Slayer's home. She is sure no one ever thought to uninvite her, with her being dust and all, so testing this theory is the first step in tonight's plan.

To her delight she soon realizes she had been right, the invite is still intact.

After entering the Slayer's home through the back door as she had on her previous visit, Darla is now hiding carefully in the kitchen behind the island. The original plan had been to search the house, but voices from the living-room informed her of the presence of more than one person. She quickly thanks her vampiric hearing for preventing her from accidentally making them aware of her presence.

The sound of footsteps from a single person nearing the kitchen cause her to carefully glance over the counter, and Darla has to fight to suppress a giggle of delight at seeing that the person entering the kitchen is just the one she was waiting for.

She is aware that she has to be careful since the woman might very well recognize her – after all who forgets one's first encounter with a vampire. Darla slips behind her intended victim and presses her hand onto the other woman's mouth, while gripping her around the middle with her other arm, effectively silencing her.

Terrified Joyce turns her head as far as the hand covering her mouth will allow, only to look into the face of the vampiress who had already tried to kill her once.

After she had learned about vampires being real and her daughter being the Slayer, she had once asked Buffy about the accident in the kitchen. Realizing in the light of her new found knowledge that the barbeque-fork excuse sounded even stranger than it had before. Still trying to better her mother's opinion of the recently deceased Angel, Buffy had revealed everything about Darla, who exactly she was and how she met her end.

Luckily, Joyce had been informed of the blonde vampiress' resurrection as Buffy filled her in on the details of Drusilla's ensoulment, otherwise she might just have died from the shock.

"Hey Joyce, nice to meet you again, I just bet you didn't expect that." Darla snarls.

Despite her fear of being in the vampiress' clutches, Joyce feels relief that Darla doesn't seem to know about their awareness of her return and attempts a slight shake of her head. Determined that even should she not manage to make it out of this alive, she would still do everything in her power to make it easier for her daughter to destroy the blonde menace.

Satisfied with her reply, and the woman's obvious fear of her, Darla continues to explain exactly how she hopes the Slayer will react upon finding her mother's dead body.

Joyce just keeps rigid hoping the vampiress will continue to prattle on, so there might be a chance that Rupert, who was waiting in the living-room for her return, would get worried and come to look for her. She'd never have thought to be grateful for her recent illness, but the chances of him coming after her, while everyone was still wary of a relapse, were much higher.

Suddenly there is a noise at the backdoor, followed by Angel looking helplessly through the window after discovering he is unable to enter the house.

Delighted at this new turn of events, Darla maneuvers Joyce over to open the door, so that she is able to talk to the dark vampire.

Joyce's relief at the arrival of potential help soon diminishes, as she realizes that instead of calling out to the other people in the house for help, Angel, instead, starts trying to talk the vampiress out of killing her, all the while taking care to keep his voice low so as not to alert anyone to the situation.

Joyce feels her anger rise as Angel droned a meaningless lecture on Darla's actions and how they endangered her chances of redemption. She suppresses the urge to scream at the futility of his words as he then tries to convince the blond, who still holds her firmly, that if she would go with him they could help each other to better themselves.

Unable to listen to his delusional prattling any longer, she rapidly nears the point where she would prefer being killed, if only to be spared this torture.

Suddenly the body at her back is gone and Angel's agonized screams rent the air. Confused Joyce turns to where the vampiress had stood mere seconds before, only to almost weep in relief at discovering Rupert, with a raised stake still in his hand.

The relief in the watcher's face at finding Joyce unharmed is soon replaced by anger, as he listens to Angel cursing and yelling at him. The dark-haired vampire seems to believe he could have talked Darla out of her plan and that Giles' inference robbed her of her chance at redemption and himself of someone with whom to spend eternity.

Unable to believe what she is hearing, Joyce turns back to the agitated vampire, staring at him in openmouthed shock.

Finally Giles is unable to take it anymore.

"SHUT UP! Are you even listening to what you are saying, you stupid prat? Her redemption? She was going to kill Joyce, and you were going to stand there and do nothing! That is what was going to happen, and you are either too blind or too stupid to realize it. If I'd only stake vampires who are unable to be redeemed – which you seem to believe is the automatic result of them having a soul, I would never stake one again. Every vampire can, theoretically been given back his soul. That's no reason to let them continue killing in the meantime." Giles removes his glasses and pinches the bridge of his nose. Exasperation at the vampire's logic, or lack thereof, is causing him the first stirrings of a headache.

"As for you loosing your preferred partner, I am assuming you do remember Drusilla? The woman you drove insane by killing off her family one by one, prior to turning her into a vampire? She is out there right now, helping my Slayer and clinging to the hope her '*daddy*' will care enough to take her back with him to Los Angeles."

Giles' eyes darken and his gaze harden, all traces of the mild, kindly watcher disappear leaving only the Ripper in his place, his voice dripping venom as he spoke, "I can't help but wonder, *Angel*, do you for one second truly believe I give a fuck about you being lonely? After what you did to Jenny? Or did you think I'd just forget who it was that killed her? If it weren't for Buffy, you'd have been nothing but a pile of dust a long time ago, souled or not. To tell the truth, it was rather satisfying to be able to show you what it is like to be unable to save the woman you love. Think of it as belated payback."

Having finished his rant, Giles violently closes the door in the shocked vampire's face. The enraged watcher draws a deep breath, calming himself before turning and drawing Joyce into a relieved hug.

Outside Angel is unsure how to react to the usually calm watcher's furious outburst. He had never truly considered the possibility of Giles resenting him for what he had done as Angelus. Understandably Jenny Calendar's death had hit the man hard, but Angel had been certain the watcher would make the same separation between his souled and soulless selves as Buffy had done.

Unsure what to make of this discovery, the vampire decides to ignore it for now, and instead focuses on what the older man said about Darla and Drusilla. He almost feels bad about preferring Darla as his lifetime companion instead of Drusilla. The dark-haired vampiress, however, **was** insane so it's not like he would be able to carry on a normal conversation with her. Why wouldn't he prefer his sane sire to her? Still, the option has been taken away from him once again, so he resolves himself to go to the Magic-Box the following night and talk to the darker of his two ladies. After all Giles was right, he was responsible for her.

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The moment Giles closes the door in Angels face Drusilla stops her conversation with Anya and Tara. Turing toward Buffy she begins clapping her hands in excitement, while informing the Slayer that everything is going to be alright now, as her daddy will come to his senses.

"You might want to return home now though. If we waste too much time, the bottle will be empty."

Confused, Drusilla shakes her head.

"After that I'm confused. There are a police-car and candy involved, but I don't understand...."

Instead of demanding further information on what the vampiress is talking about, Buffy blanches and hurries to declare the patrol to be over for the night. Not taking the time to answer her friends' questions, she gestures at the two vampires to follow her home and quickly takes off.

On the way to her house Spike tries to get her to tell him what is going on, but Buffy only throws him a breathless "Later" before speeding up even more.

Arriving at her house, she bursts into the living-room, followed shortly by the two vamps, only to find her mother and Giles well on their way to working through a bottle Scotch. Relieved to have arrived in time to spare herself a repeat of the embarrassment which followed the band-candy debacle, she snatches the bottle away from the two adults, and forcefully demands an explanation; while absently handing the bottle of Scotch to the blonde vampire behind her.

After a lot of giggling and yelling, she finally manages to figure out what happened at her house earlier that night. Numb from shock at the close call her mother had had with Darla, she silently holds her hand out for the, by now, virtually empty bottle. Spike, already having made good use of the alcohol during the conversation, hands it over without a word of protest. He to is too numb with shock to care.

Thanks to the Slayer being unused to alcoholic beverages, it doesn't take much for her to become as intoxicated as the adults. So in the end it is Drusilla, who ushers Joyce off to her room and prepares the couch as a bed for Giles. Buffy and Spike move into the kitchen, intent on finding something else to drink and drown their guilt at not being there to help the older woman.

Upon her return, Drusilla is satisfied to find them still there, drinking in comfortable silence, so she moves back upstairs, checking on the nice glowing girl before getting ready for bed herself.

She knows her two new friends downstairs will be able to take care of each other, even if they might both end up with horrible headaches in the morning.

Slowly the house on Revello Drive turns quiet, interrupted only occasionally by the blonde vampires' laughter when he finally gets the Slayer to tell the tale of Ethan Rayne's second visit to Sunnydale.

Chapter 6 – Daddy You Ain't My Father

With the exception of Drusilla and the youngest member of the Summer's household, the morning following Darla's demise is not a good one. The other four are rudely woken by the sound of energetic teenage-feet clomping down the stairs. Their nearly simultaneous groans would have been funny, had each not been the result of the loud sounds being imposed on already splitting headaches.

Much to his chagrin it is Giles who suffers the most, as he is in closest proximity to Dawn when she lets out a frightened shriek at her discovery of a strange man occupying the space where the dark-haired vampiress should be.

She quiets as soon as the still sleepy watcher attempts to sit up, in the process revealing his identity.

Before Dawn has time to ask Giles what is going on, they are interrupted by the sound of hurried steps on the stairs leading from the basement, followed seconds later by the sight of a disheveled Buffy tearing through the door and an equally ruffled looking Spike, clad in nothing but his jeans, following not far behind. Both instantly assume fighting positions, scanning the room for the suspected threat.

Dawn takes in the sight of the grumpy watcher on the couch, as well as her sister and friend, both of whom, although ready to defeat whatever nasty had caused her to cry out, are clearly having difficulties staying upright. The teenager stares at them for a few moments and then dissolves into hysterical laughter that has everyone covering their ears in post all-night-drinking pain.

Irritated to have panicked over nothing, Buffy glares daggers at her laughing sister, while at the same time searching for the nearest available space to sit down. In the end she simply follows the blonde vampire's lead and sinks to the floor, leaning against the nearest wall for support.

"What the hell did you three do last night? Have a party at our house? Ooh, wait till mom finds out, she's so gonna...."

To the relief of everyone present, Dawn's tirade is interrupted by the sound of someone clearing their throat behind her. Turning, the girl is surprised to discover her rather sheepish looking mother at the foot of the stairs.

"Well, you see Dawnie, I actually knew that already. You might even say I started the whole thing."

The last part Joyce says so quietly that no one can hear, but then, everyone but Dawn already knew that she had brought out the Scotch to help Rupert calm down. Not that it had been her intention to get him drunk in the process, much less everyone else. Still she was going to have a word with her oldest daughter about scolding her and Rupert for drinking, only to then proceed doing the same with Spike as soon as her mother was in bed.

Dawn wisely decides upon hearing her mother's admission combined with everyone's disheveled appearance to hold her tongue for now and try to pry out the details from someone later, after the risk of being physically harmed has passed. Besides by being silent now, she may gain some valuable 'get Dawnie out of jail free' passes for the future.

Hoping to avoid further questions from her youngest, Joyce hands the girl some money to buy breakfast at school, and offering an apology that adults can sometimes act stupid too, ushers her out of the door. Once Dawn has left, she turns back to her companions and blushes slightly, before fixing on Buffy and Spike with a mock angry glare.

"Do I want to know what the two of you were doing in the basement?"

"Uhm, it seems like I somehow managed to remember that we still have some sleeping-bags down there. At least we woke up in them. I know I remember thinking you would worry about Spike with Angel still wandering about, and so I thought he could...yeah...he could stay in the basement, I don't.."

Buffy explains, while turning bright red and growing steadily quieter.

Joyce is just about to yell at her daughter for drinking too much, when it hits her that she has no idea how she got to bed either. Embarrassed that she has set such a bad example for her children, she quickly drops the topic, declaring instead that it might be the best course of action if they all go ahead and get some more sleep.

Nodding gratefully, the others agree.

Back in the basement, Spike stares at their sleeping accommodations in disgust.

"So Slayer, gonna tell me, how the bloody hell you managed to convince me to spend the night in **that**?"

Seeing him pointing at Dawn's Barbie-pink sleeping bag, Buffy burst out in laughter; only to be painfully reminded seconds later just why loud noises were a very bad idea right now. Shaking her head at the irritated vampire, she ignores his cursing and motions for him to go back to bed. Still grumbling, he decides to save his disgust at his 'bed' for later and follow her example in getting some more sleep, for now.

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When the inhabitants of the Summers' house reawaken in the late afternoon, most of them seem to have gotten over the worst of their hangovers. They agree to get ready to meet the others at the Magic Box after sunset.

Looks of understanding pass between the four. After a few mumbled promises, each come to the agreement to never mention neither the Band Candy incident nor any of the previous night's sleeping arrangements ever again. In particular, Giles feels thankful for this tacit understanding, especially since he awoke to discover Drusilla having a tea-party at the table in front of him without him noticing anything out the

ordinary despite his watcher training. Spike thanks Dru's stars his 'Big Bad' image will not be tarnished by word of his not only sharing basement space with the Slayer but also sleeping in a the pink Barbie bag from hell. Neither Buffy nor Joyce wants anyone to know about the Band Candy incident, so that secret is safe as houses.

Soon the group makes their way to the shop, stopping only to eat some light sandwiches. Since none of the humans are sure how well their stomachs would react to anything more than a sandwich, each are wary of ordering anything heavier, and they grab a pack of blood each for Spike and Drusilla.

Arriving at their destination, Buffy, Spike, and Drusilla are instantly surrounded by the remaining Scoobies who are anxious to find out what happened the night before. Buffy explains all about what happened with Darla and Angel. She further tells them about the Scotch, which leaves the others at first shocked, but later in fits of laughter.

When Angel finally arrives, Giles and Joyce find themselves to be quite relieved at his timing. As much as they both might hate the dark vampire, even his presence is better than being questioned by the children about their drinking the night before.

Unlike his last visit to the shop, Angel acknowledges Drusilla's presence this time, walking right up to the vampiress and greeting her. Although judging by the seething looks he shoots at Buffy and Spike out of the corner of his eyes, his anger at them has not diminished.

Deciding to ignore the blatant way her daddy divides his attention between her and the Slayer, Drusilla beams happily at him. Still distinctly aware of how the others are closely watching them, she discretely maneuvers him into a secluded corner where the shelves grant them at least some privacy.

Unwilling to spend any more time than is absolutely necessary in the presence of the man who killed his sire, or the people who seem to prefer the company of a soulless vampire over him, Angel willingly allows Drusilla to pull him into the stacks. Impatient as always, Angel decides to come straight to the point. Without preamble he asks Drusilla if she is willing to return to Los Angeles with him. Upon witnessing her enthusiastic agreement, he is once again reminded of how strangely he thinks she is reacting to having her soul returned.

Had he bothered to listen to Giles' and Tara's explanations during his last visit to the Magic Box, he wouldn't have to wonder about the vampiress' calmness; but since he didn't, it only serves to confuse him.

Still feeling slightly guilty about his willingness to ignore his child in favor of his sire, Angel resolves that he will help her get over the state of shock her new soul has obviously put her in. But first he has to settle his own worries and find out if she is truly able to differentiate between him and Angelus.

"Dru darling, can you tell me how it is that you still want to stay with me after you are now aware what my soulless self did to you?"

"You are my daddy. You couldn't stay with Princess before, since we were so different. Now we are the same once more, so where else would I want to go?" Drusilla replies, cocking her head curiously at him.

"So it doesn't bother you then that this is the same body that made you into a monster?"

"It doesn't matter."

"How can it not matter? These are the very hands that destroyed you and your family!" Confusion tears at Angel's mind. Drusilla has always been cryptic, which was one of Angelus' favorite things about her, but the way she is acting now totally perplexes him. Her calm replies to his questions are beginning to make him lose his temper.

Smiling slyly to herself, Drusilla ponders how similar his reaction to her is, so like how he would react as 'Angelus'. He should be thankful that she is willing to help him rid himself of the delusion that he has two separate personalities.

"It doesn't matter, because even though there are different doors, they are all locked now. Have been ever since you made me your Princess. My William tried so hard to break them down, but he never could understand that it was too late. Now there exists only one path for me to follow. Only daddy's door can be opened."

More confused than before, Angel continues to stare at Drusilla until a timid voice from behind him shakes him out of his musings.

"Love. She's talking about love, Angel. When you destroyed her mind, you also destroyed her ability to ever harbor these feelings for anyone else."

Turning, the dark brooding vampire is surprised to see the blonde witch standing behind him. Just as he is about to ask her how someone he never even met would know this, he remembers that this girl is the one who assisted the watcher in explaining earlier about Drusilla. Unwilling to let her know that he didn't listen to their explanations; Angel only nods vaguely at the blonde before turning back to Drusilla.

Despite his previous ignorance of Tara's presence, Angel does think her comments have some merit and he decides to believe that she may be right, at least until he learns differently. Upon noticing that Dru's earlier good mood is still intact, Angel suggests they now return to the others. He hopes that he can convince her and his former employees to leave shortly for LA. Being in Sunnydale is making him extremely uncomfortable, and the present company is something he could definitely do without.

As they return from the stacks, the female Scoobies instantly surround Drusilla.

Angel notices that Xander seems to be sulking in a corner while his own crew eyes him wearily. *Surely they will come around once he explains that he is willing to give them their jobs back.* Thus assured, he boldly makes his way over to them.

Angel meets disappointment on all fronts.

First, Drusilla shows no reaction whatsoever to his motioning her over. Instead she continues to chatter excitedly with the blonde girl he vaguely remembers meeting during the Ascension. Then the friendly greeting he offers Cordy, Gunn and Wesley, is met only with icy glares. Confused he tries again, but soon regrets it when Cordelia launches into one of her rants.

As usual he blocks out most of it. However, when he realizes her shrieking has attracted the attention of everyone in the shop, he has no choice but to pay at least some attention to her.

"I mean, what were you thinking? Darla! And did you forget about your curse? I bet you slept with her. What if you lost your soul again? Angelus would have killed us all in a heartbeat; did you even stop long enough to think about that? We're supposed to be your friends, and you couldn't keep it in your pants to save our lives!"

Trying to calm the former cheerleader, Angel instantly denies having slept with Darla, but Drusilla's unusually strong voice stops him in the tracks.

"Do not lie, daddy! That's not nice."

Shocked at his usually diminutive child scolding him, he turns to face her, only to be met with her unwavering gaze. Angered at her change in behavior, the dark vampire tries staring her down, but unlike past occasions, she doesn't back down.

Having experienced only kindness since her ensouling, Drusilla has managed to build up a self-confidence she had never previously possessed. Adding this to her awareness of the role she is soon to play, she knows that if she bows to her sire's every wish she won't be able to do anyone any good. Her purpose in life is now to be her Angel's guide. Making sure he stops bending reality to his wishes has to be her first goal.

Irritated beyond belief, Angel turns his furious gaze upon Buffy, as his chosen scapegoat. *Someone has to be responsible for this unfortunate change in Dru. Buffy, she's to blame.* The Slayer used to rebel against her calling, it seems clear to him that she has to be the culprit. Furious he makes his thoughts be known.

He accuses the blonde Slayer of playing with Drusilla's head simply because she can't get over him leaving her, and a screaming match commences. Angel, Buffy, Spike, and Giles, with even Joyce voicing her opinion, face off in a showdown to end all showdowns. The watcher and the blonde vampire had wasted no time in rushing to the Slayers defense, however the older vampire simply dismissed Spike, and decided that Giles' anger is merely the residue of the previous night's happenings. With such justifications, he has no difficulty in disregarding everything they say.

Once again, it is Drusilla's voice that stops them all. Now furious herself, the vampiress marches up to her sire.

"Will you stop it already! No one put any ideas in my head! I'm well able to think on my own, even if you don't always understand the results. All of you would do well to remember that I'm more than some insane child. I have already averted two prophecies all on my own, and you..." She shoves her pointed finger right into Angel's chest.

"... Stop blaming everyone else for your faults. I'm here to help you. I'm going to save your seer, and I've already spared you a lot of pain by the actions I have taken since they changed me. If you don't stop complaining and start thinking soon, I'm gonna take your reward since **you** are not doing anything to deserve it!"

While everyone stares at her in shock, floored by the completely lucid way the vampiress just behaved, she begins to sway and only Gunn's fast reflexes save her from hitting the ground in a dead faint.

Concern for the dark-haired girl stops all possible questions that her rant might otherwise have brought up. Even while making a mental note to later ask her about the prophecies she mentioned, Giles motions for Gunn to follow him back into the training-room, where they carefully place the unconscious vampiress on the couch.

Unsure what to do next, everyone gathers around the couch. It's still glaringly obvious, that no one wants to stand next to Angel. Luckily they don't have to wait long, as Drusilla soon begins to awaken.

Confused, she stares at the people surrounding her for a moment, before rewarding them with one of her beaming smiles. Proudly she focuses on Spike.

"Princess did good, didn't I? Put daddy in his place I did."

Turning to Angel, she continues as if she hadn't been yelling at him just minutes ago.

"I'm done daddy, can we go now?"

Realizing she is back to her usual self, Giles resolves to keep his questions to himself for the time being. He might be able to have Wesley question her once she recovered from her fainting spell.

Drained, the others agree to end the meeting, and it is decided that the LA-gang will leave that very night. After exchanging promises to call and keep the Scoobies informed of the Angel and Drusilla situation, Angel's crew hurriedly begins gathering their stuff, all of them anxious to return to their own homes.

Just before Angel and the LA gang are ready to leave, Drusilla, who had been talking with Buffy and Joyce about where they should send her clothes, excuses herself and wanders through the store, coming to a stop in front of Giles.

“When he asks I will answer as well as I can, but not everything can be revealed yet. Some things - maybe never. I like you and don't want you to be unable to rest, so I will tell you one thing. You needn't worry about the one you call Glory anymore. Don't let your guard down though. Where once one enemy contained the power of many, now many enemies possess the power of one. Be wary of those confusing their century.”

Smiling reassuringly she kisses his cheek, causing the watcher to blush as he does every time she does something like this.

Although he's extremely curious to learn what the vampiress' message means, Giles is by now used to her cryptic behavior and knows he won't be able to get any more information out of her until such time as she is ready. So he simply smiles at the frail girl in return and wishes her a nice drive, and good luck in Los Angeles.

Had anyone told them weeks before that they'd be sad to see Drusilla, of all people, leave town, the Scoobies would have laughed in their face. It is yet further proof of how fast things can change on the Hellmouth, that they are now huddling together in a rather subdued group in front of the Magic Box, waving after the car carrying the vampiress off to LA.

Chapter 7 – Knights In Rusty Armor

The next evening finds the whole Scooby-gang as well as Spike assembled at the Magic Box once again.

Even though he has not yet received word from Wesley, Giles decides to share Drusilla's message with the others in the hope of deciphering it despite the lack of further information. The first part seems fairly easy - somehow Glory is no longer a threat. And while it is clear that the second part warns about some new danger, the watcher has, as yet, been unable to make any sense of it.

"I believe it's safe to assume that we are about to face more than one enemy, but none with strengths anywhere near that of Glory. I also believe the last sentence is a hint as to who exactly this new enemy is. I can't think, however, of any demons that bring 'confusing one's century' to mind. I suggest we go through my books on demonic species and see if one of us is able to discover something useful."

Collective groans from Buffy, Spike and Xander greet the watcher's suggestion.

"Come on Giles. I don't wanna hit the books again, just cause the batty vampire told you that Captain Kirk would pay us a visit!" Xander whines, unwilling to start the much-hated research again - especially with one of the undead being the reason. To him Drusilla is no more than an insane formerly-evil creature who should have been staked on sight.

Before anyone can reply to his complaint, Willow's face suddenly lights up in understanding.

"I don't think you'll need to Xan, you just solved the riddle."

"Huh? How did I do that, are you saying it's really Captain Kirk? But he's not evil!"

"No, but you translated 'confusing one's century' into being from a different one – and more importantly looking the part! Buffy, remember when you told us how those guys in knight's-armor attacked you? You said their goal was to destroy the key." Willow beams happily at having just solved at least one part of the puzzle.

"She's right," Tara agrees. "Men running around in chain-mail and armor; sure sounds to me like they have their centuries confused."

Looking around the two girls can see understanding begin to dawn on their friend's faces.

"It would explain the 'power of one' part too, they are human," Buffy pipes up in support of the witches theory, happy that for once she has something important to add to a research session. Her face, however, soon falls when she realizes that this might force her to have to decide between taking a human life, and protecting her sister.

Forcing herself not to think about that right now, the Slayer returns her focus to her friends and declares that they have to find a way to get rid of the knights as soon as possible.

After nearly an hour of fruitless discussion, Anya has finally had enough of all the talk and decides to voice the idea she has been debating over in silence for some time now.

“You know guys; maybe it would be best if we send Dawn away.”

The shocked gasps and Buffy’s instant refusal to let her sister out of her sight are exactly what the former demon had expected. She is sure she has thought of an answer to every argument they might bring up though, and her idea still sounds, to her, like the perfect solution. She just needs to get the others to see how right she is.

“I know you think you have to be there to protect her Buffy, but just listen for a moment. You have to agree that you can’t be with her 24/7, especially if you don’t want the knights to find out she is the key. You accompanying her everywhere would only tip them off. But still if they found out anyway, they could just grab her while she is in school, seeing as they are human

Seeing the dawn of understanding creep across the Slayer’s face, Anya smiles to herself and continues.

“If we make up a good reason for her leaving Sunnydale though, we wouldn’t have to fear them grabbing her off the street. We could, for example, use your mom’s recent illness as the reason why she would leave town. Dawn is young enough that even her school would have to agree that she has to go with your mom in that case. It’d look like it’s not related to you and slaying in any way.”

After discussing all possible flaws Anya’s idea may have, and coming up with nothing of any significance, the group instead turns its attention to thinking of a possible destination for the two Summer’s women. In the end, Giles comes up with the perfect solution. He offers to take them with him to England, where they can all pretend that Joyce has decided to take a vacation; her doctor having advised her that a stay in the fresh in the country air would be beneficial in helping her to recover from her recent operation. This way the knights will be unable to follow them without anyone noticing.

While the others are not too happy at the idea of Giles leaving in the middle of this crisis, they all agree that it is the most sensible plan they have. It means that Joyce and Dawn will have the watcher as added protection without arising suspicions; as it will only seem logical that he would accompany them as they will stay at his home upon arriving in England.

To further protect Dawn’s secret, the others agree to try and confuse the knights by leaving misleading hints about the identity of the key. This way they hope to buy

some time until they figure out a way to approach them and hopefully convince the knights that destroying the key is redundant now that Glory no longer poses a threat.

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Surprisingly, when they explain their plan to her Joyce agrees quite readily to leave Sunnydale with Dawn and Giles. She even admits to having thought of it herself, but she feared that Buffy's overwhelming need to protect them herself would prevent her daughter from agreeing.

With Joyce and Giles working together, they have no problem convincing the school to allow Dawn to take an early leave. The school even offers that should Dawn return in time to take summer-classes, she would be able to continue her next year as usual.

Having easily overcome this hurdle, the three of them are able to leave for England only a week later. Luckily the knights have yet to make an appearance, so everyone is greatly relieved that their plan seems to be working.

While everyone is happy that the knights have been absent, that same absence has caused the only downside, as the gang has been unable to find the knights so far. Willow and Tara tried every location-spell they knew, but without having anything of the knights' on which to focus the spells, they had so far been unsuccessful.

Sadly this also stopped them from setting their plan of distracting the knights into motion. Since none of them knows whether the enemy is aware of the key's human status, the gang couldn't risk dropping hints for fear of their plan being discovered.

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Two more weeks pass before the Scoobies are able to establish contact. If one can call Buffy and Spike being ambushed during their patrol establishing contact.

Even while fighting off their attack, Buffy tries her hardest to convince the knights to agree to set up a meeting between their leader and herself.

When they finally recede, they leave behind a frustrated Slayer and a fuming vampire. Turning to her companion, Buffy realizes for the first time how rigidly Spike is holding himself.

"Spike, what's wrong?" she asks, confusion clouding her face.

Spike only growls, his jaw tensely locked. Buffy sees sparks of rage dancing in his eyes before he shuts them tightly. Spike is too furious to form words. Anger radiates from his rigid form.

Studying him for a moment Buffy finally realizes that his anger is not directed at her or even the knights, but at his inability to help her during the fight. This was the first time they had to go up against humans together, and his chip had stopped the blonde vampire from doing anything more than watching her fight.

Trying to calm the fuming vampire she places a tentative hand on his arm, hoping the contact will soothe him. Her touch does have an immediate effect on Spike, as he quickly calms and opens his tightly closed eyes to look at the small blonde girl at his side. Seeing her smile sadly at him, he realizes she understands exactly what is upsetting him so much.

This unexpected understanding from his once sworn enemy finally gives him the strength to fight through his anger, thus allowing the vampire to begin to think rationally. With a clearer mind comes the realization that their first priority at the moment should not be his wounded pride but informing the others about what just happened. Still, the fact that the Slayer seems willing to post-pone the trip back to the Magic Box in favor of reassuring him feels nice. As a matter of fact, it makes getting his priorities straight easier somehow.

So instead of taking the Slayer up on her unspoken offer of comfort, the blonde vampire shakes his head to clear it, and suggests they return to the shop and tell the others about their encounter.

As Buffy and Spike make their way back to the Magic Box, they discuss the knights' behavior. Agreeing that for some unknown reason the knights had seemed to be more aggressive than before and that it would be best if the Scoobies be more careful about going out on their own.

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Unfortunately only a few days later, the group learns in the worst possible way that they are completely unprepared to deal with human.

Buffy and Xander arrive at the Magic Box in the afternoon about three days after the ambush, and are shocked to find it closed. Xander immediately gets upset, because Anya would never close the shop during the day - not when there were profits to be made! Worried about Anya's whereabouts, Buffy is just about to unlock the door and enter when they hear the sound of someone running. Turning around Xander and Buffy's concerns grow as they see a very distressed Willow hurrying towards them.

"Buffy, Xander, thank God you are here! You have to help me, I can't find Tara anywhere! We were supposed to meet after our classes, but she wasn't there. I asked some of her class-mates, and she never showed up today. Something must have happened to her after we split this morning. Oh Goddess, where could she be?"

Looking briefly at the frazzled redhead before turning to each other and quickly back to the closed shop, Buffy and Xander feel panic begin to creep up on them.