

BAPTISM

A Spike/Buffy Romance



HOLLY DENISE



FOR THE FIRST TIME IN WEEKS, THE HOUSE WAS COMPLETELY QUIET. No pitter-patter of little slayer feet up and down the stairs, no giggling in the hallways, no giggling girls exchanging conspiratorial grins whenever he looked in Buffy's direction. No guarding his every word and move based on what was or wasn't appropriate for tender teenage ears. The would-be slayers were gone for the weekend on some mystical mind-trip with Giles and Willow.

To top all off, Dawn and Andrew had been elected as involuntary chaperones. Anya and Xander were off shagging somewhere, though they'd never own up to it. Buffy was upstairs.

Buffy was upstairs, and Spike was in the basement.

The tension between them, if anything, had intensified since the girls took off. They'd shared very few words since their conversation in the living room. When she'd told him that she wasn't ready for him to leave, that she wasn't ready for him to not be with her anymore, and that it had nothing to do with his value in battle.

The words she'd spoken only made the words she hadn't ring louder.

His journey from Africa to where he was now had been long and excruciating, compounded with heartache he hadn't anticipated and hurt that he'd foolishly thought he was strong enough to handle. Everything had seemed so clear before the demon had touched him. Earn a soul for Buffy. Be the sort of man she deserves. The sort of man she could love. The sort of man who would never hurt her. He'd thought he'd known what to expect, based on what he'd seen with Angel. The blood on his hands would burn, the screams of his victims would never quiet, and the things he'd done to the one he loved would never stop hurting. He'd known that.

He just hadn't understood. He hadn't thought of anyone but Buffy.

Nothing much had changed. Only, rather than his soulless delusions of Buffy being swept off her feet by the romanticism of his sacrifice, he knew exactly what would happen and what he was owed—bloody nothing. And being here—being in her home after what he'd done to her—was already more than he deserved.

It didn't stop him from loving her with everything that he was or

dreaming about her every night. Didn't stop him from craving the one thing he could never have.

There couldn't be any harm, he supposed, in seeing if she fancied a go at the cemeteries. An old-fashioned patrol, as it was, like those days that seemed so uncomplicated in hindsight. He might not deserve her company, but he wasn't going to deny it if she granted it.

Spike sighed and threw his legs over the edge of the cot, inhaling deeply.

There was no harm in asking.

For whatever reason, repeating the mantra to himself didn't help matters. His legs still wobbled with every step he took. And when he reached the main floor only to find it vacant, his nerve all but abandoned him. He turned his eyes to the second staircase—the stairs that led to Buffy's bedroom. To the bathroom where he'd committed the worst of his sins.

Where he had hurt the woman he loved.

Spike shivered, reaching tentatively for the banister. They hadn't been alone in the house since that terrible night. What would she think if she saw him up there now?

Nothing, he told himself, though the word sounded empty even in his mind. This wasn't a Buffy who saw his every move as layered in motive. This was a Buffy who could eventually trust him.

This was...something.

He knew if he didn't go up those stairs and take advantage of these precious moments of silence he'd never forgive himself. He'd never have what he truly wanted, and no matter how much knowing that hurt, he knew he could face it if she forgave him. If he had her trust and respect, he could live with never owning her heart.

It wasn't until his foot landed on the second floor that he realized his mistake. The door to Buffy's room was open, but she wasn't inside. The air was thick and scented with the hint of raspberry and ivory soap. She was in the bath. Spike willed his eyes shut and fought off a shudder. If he was wise, he would turn around now and head right back to the basement. Even thinking about Buffy in the bath opened the door to memories that made him wish for dust.

Turn around. Turn around now.

Spike released a ragged breath, unable to tear his eyes away from the bathroom door. It was open just a sliver—light spearing into the hallway. It wasn't hard to envision what lay beyond the threshold, and his overactive mind wasted no time in filling in the gaps. Buffy wet. Buffy naked. Buffy sitting in a tub filled with warm water and bubbles. Her hair would be pulled back, a few wayward strands grazing her cheeks. Her nipples would peak through soapy suds, two flawless roses buried in snow. Her warm pussy would be out of sight, of course, but he had no trouble imagining her perfectly trimmed curls, her blushing pink skin, and her succulent pearl of a clit. He knew just how to touch her. How to have her hot and writhing in easy seconds. He could almost hear her moans—almost feel her tongue flicking his earlobe. He imagined her stroking his achingly hard cock with a mixture of desire and affection—a look he'd never truly seen—and the sensation was so real that he could almost believe he wasn't imagining it at all.

The fact that he was rubbing his cock through his jeans did little to quell the fire behind the fantasy. And before his mind could catch up with his legs, he was moving forward. Fuck, he couldn't stop if he wanted to. The year-long drought had finally taken its toll, and he missed her. Forget the violence and the pain, there had been moments—not many, but enough—that were filled with smiles rather than screams. With soft caresses rather than punches. The time between her resurrection and their first unbelievable shag had been brilliant, just not the sort of brilliant he had appreciated at the time. She'd treated him like a friend. A confidant. And though being with her without touching her had been torture, he'd missed it like he'd never missed anything the second the friendly flirting ended and the hard fucking began.

Buffy's self-loathing had nearly destroyed them both. And without a soul, he hadn't known how to help her.

With a soul, he just missed her. He missed the warmth of her body and the kindness in her eyes. He missed talking with her. He missed her so bleeding much his insides ached.

Spike exhaled slowly, his eye level with the sliver in the doorway.

He thought she'd notice his presence immediately, and didn't know whether to be relieved or dismayed when she didn't. Buffy was reclined in the tub exactly as he'd pictured, though the reality was a thousand-fold better than his imagination. She was so gorgeous, and she was beyond reach. Her eyes were closed. Her breasts just barely poked above the water, and his first glance of her rosy nipples after a year without them between his fingers had his mouth watering.

Oh god.

She was so beautiful. So distant. So...

Not yours.

No, not his. She'd never been his.

Spike rubbed his palm against his denim-clad cock with a shuddering sigh. There was no hope for him. None whatsoever.

Especially with what happened next. Buffy bit her lips and spread her knees, sliding a hand under the water. Then her brow furrowed in a way that was all too familiar, a breathy little sigh rushed between her lips, and a scent that haunted him still filled the air. Watching Buffy bathe was bad enough. Watching as she stroked herself was beyond the bloody pale.

He wasn't allowed here. This wasn't his to see. He knew that, *knew* it, but his heart had joined forces with his cock, overriding his brain, and bade him to keep his eyes glued on her.

Fuck. Fuck.

He didn't know when he'd undone his jeans, or how long he'd been pulling at his dick. And god, his hand was a bleeding poor substitute for her hot, silky pussy walls. But for the first time in months, he was looking at exactly what he wanted, flickering his gaze from her face to her bubble-soaked breasts as he pumped his cock in time with her whimpers. He sighed whenever she sighed, thrust along with her arches. They were in sync in easy seconds—as though no time had passed since they'd last laid in each other's arms. And for the way she looked, the sounds she made, he could almost believe she was performing for him. That she knew he was there and she was fingering her pussy because she wanted him to watch. That the barriers between them had finally fallen and nothing stood in their way.

“Uhhh...” Buffy gasped, rolling her head back. “Oh god.”

Oh god. Spike tightened his grip on his cock. He wished the world would stop long enough for him to savor the moment. Once his senses returned, shame and horror would set in. He had no right. He had no bloody right at all. Buffy didn’t want him; if she did, she would have come downstairs. She would have had him stroke her. She knew he belonged to her, that if she wanted him, he was hers for the taking.

But she didn’t. She didn’t want him, and fuck, he couldn’t blame her. After what he had done to her, leaving him alive was already more than he deserved.

“Ohh...”

She gave him more than he deserved, and he stole the rest.

“Guh...” Buffy inhaled sharply, her mouth forming a perfect oval. Water swirled and splashed. Her breasts heaved under the weight of her gasps. She was beautiful—she was a fucking seraph, and she was so far from him that they might as well have been separated by lifetimes.

That was until she moaned something remarkable. Something he dared not believe.

Something that sounded very much like his name.

“Oh god,” she gasped. “Oh...Spike...”

Oh hell. Spike shook his head, stroking himself harder now, chasing down his orgasm.

She couldn’t have said that. She *couldn’t* have...

“Spike...yeah...like that.”

Tears stung his eyes. Bloody hell, this was unfair.

Buffy’s orgasm rode out on something between a gasp and a sob. She shuddered, arching a final time into her hand as the water swished around her. She said his name like a prayer, and shoved him over his own threshold without warning. His answering roar tore through the silence of the hallway as thick ropes of semen spilled into the waiting hem of his cotton tee. His head barely had time to stop spinning before he realized things inside the bathroom had become very still. Buffy’s eyes were now fixed on his shadow, locked on the thin outline of him that blocked the doorway.

Her eyes were large, her arms crossed over her breasts. Her

suddenly pale face was slack with astonishment. And she stared at him. Just stared.

“Oh god,” Spike gasped, shaking his head hard and stumbling back in horror. “Oh god.”

“Spike?”

“Fuck.” He couldn’t move away fast enough. The walls closed in at alarming speed. His vision blurred and the staircase disappeared. Shaking, he forced himself to tuck his cock back inside his jeans before jerking the zipper up so fast that it was a wonder it didn’t snap clean off. “No, no, no, no.”

The bathroom door flew open the next second, and then Buffy was there. In the hallway. She was wrapped in a towel, her hair now spilling over her shoulders like a waterfall. “Spike, what are you—”

“I didn’t mean to,” he blubbered, his eyes wide. “I know how it looks—”

“No, you really don’t.”

He shook his head miserably, tears raining down his cheeks. God, he was such a git. It’d bloody well serve him right if she decided to plunge a stake through his chest. Lord knows she’d given him chance after chance. There was absolutely no excuse for what he’d done now. No comforting lies he could tell himself about how he hadn’t known better. He had. He had a soul—there were no ghosts turning his head, no brain-washing trigger, and his sanity was intact. He was just a sick man, one she should have done in years ago.

“I wanted... Christ, I just wanted to see if you wanted to patrol or... or, fuck, or something.” Spike inhaled sharply and wiped at his eyes. “I’m so sorry, Buffy. I know I just... I heard you and I know I should’ve left it, but I’m weak and I just...miss you.” He paused but didn’t dare meet her gaze. “I know that’s not good enough, but it’s all I have. It’s the truth. Stake me if you like, god knows I deserve it. Won’t even put up a fight.”

He forced himself to stop there. None of it sounded right—all of it an excuse. What he’d done was irreparable and he knew it. And Buffy’s answering silence was almost worse than screams and threats. She just stood, staring at him, likely trying to decide which stake would hurt the most going in.

Then in a blink, everything changed. Everything.

Buffy whispered his name and stepped forward, tipping her fingers under his chin and forcing him to look up. He did not, could not, deny her. He owed her that much if she asked for it.

But something was wrong. Very wrong. There was no condemnation in her gaze. No hatred or repulsion. Even the anger that had been there just seconds before had vanished. Instead, her eyes swam in a pool of tears. She looked at him with something he'd never seen before. Not from anyone.

"Spike," she said again, now with a watery smile. And the next thing he knew, she'd closed the space between them and brushed her lips tenderly against his. And at first touch, light poured through every cell in his body, dousing the burn of shame with the burn of something else. Something pure and radiant. Something that made his eyes go wide, something that had him trembling with awful hope. Her kiss was soft and exploratory, there against his upper lip, then his lower lip, his chin; her hands slid up his arms, palming his cheeks as her mouth found his again. The gentle invasion of her tongue into his mouth finally broke him out of his stunned silence, and he melted into her with a choked moan that rode out on a sob.

"Is this..." Spike willed his eyes shut again when she broke away to shower his face with burning kisses. "This isn't real."

"It's real," she replied. "It's real."

"God, it can't be."

She felt real, though. The sensation of her hands on his body brought to life memories of things that had never occurred—things he'd wanted but never experienced. Not from her. There was no anger in her touch.

He closed his hands around her waist. "This isn't—"

"It's very real, Spike." She pulled back just enough to make him whimper in protest, taking his right hand and bringing it to her chest. "Feel me?"

Her heart thrummed beneath his fingertips; her expression was open and vulnerable. Her eyes swallowed him. Her scent was in his nostrils and her taste was in his mouth. But it couldn't be real—she

couldn't be standing with him, allowing him to touch her after what she'd caught him doing. It wasn't real. It couldn't be.

"I'm dead," he said, shaking his head. "You've staked me."

"Spike—"

"Buffy, I—"

"I'm real." She linked her hands around his neck, and then she was in his arms. This time her kisses weren't soft and exploratory—they burned. She peeled his skin away without trying, drank him in as though she'd been the one parched. As though the distance between them had been slowly killing her as well. She swallowed his tongue with a moan that was pure Buffy, and all he could do was tremble.

Pure Buffy...

It was too much. Everything was too much. She was leading him backward, and he followed, helpless to do anything but. He'd follow her off the edge of the world.

"I'm real, Spike. I'm right here." She was peppering his face with kisses again. "I'm right here."

The scent of raspberries hit him hard. Spike opened his eyes as though awaking from a dream. The bathroom. She'd led him back into the bathroom.

Panic ripped his veins. "No—"

"It's okay."

"No, I can't. I can't. Please—"

"It's just you and me, Spike. Just you and me." Buffy smiled softly, and for the first time since she'd stepped into the hall, he truly saw her. There was no mistaking her now, standing there in a towel that looked seconds away from dropping. In here, of all bloody places. "It's just you and me."

She spoke as though she were making sense. She wasn't. Why bring him in here if it wasn't to punish him? It bloody amazed him that she was strong enough to stand where she was amid the echoes of what he'd nearly done, but maybe that was the point. Bring him full bloody circle—do him in at the place where he had truly died.

"What is this?" he asked, looking around.

"The bathroom."

"Buffy, you just caught me peekin' in on you while polishing my knob. Think this is the part where you dust me."

She arched an eyebrow, looking—of all things—amused. "Is it? Well, do you have any last words?"

Spike rolled his head back. She was making this difficult on purpose. "Just have at it, all right?"

"And what if I don't want to?"

"Then you're off your trolley. You know what I did."

"Yes, Spike, I know what you did." When he hazarded another look at her, he found she still seemed amused. "I'm not saying that it's okay, because way with the not, but... I'm not going to stake you over it."

Well, bugger. He was beginning to doubt her sanity in earnest. What did a man have to do to earn a night's death anymore? He'd attacked her as a monster and spied on her as a man. Buffy would slay neither of them.

"There isn't a sodding thing about you that I understand," he muttered.

"We're even." Buffy sighed and stepped back, the light in her eyes dying a little when she realized he didn't find this as funny as she did. "I'm not killing you because...screwed up as this is, it gave me a chance to do something I've been wanting to do for a while."

Spike arched an eyebrow, at a complete loss. She'd already said she wasn't staking him, after all.

"I've been trying to get up the courage to...talk to you," she said, then looked down and shifted as though she were the one who had been caught doing something she shouldn't. "I just didn't know how. God, Spike, you know me. Talking and Buffy aren't exactly two elements that mesh well."

"Slayer—"

"And to be fair, it's not like I haven't tried to get you to do the talking for me. It was so much easier when you were there to tell me the truth about what I was feeling. Figures the second that I'd actually listen is the second you stop talking." Buffy offered a broken smile. "You didn't jump on that whole 'I'm not ready for you to not be here' thing like I was hoping you would."

"I was supposed to jump on that?"

She snorted. "Figures. You never missed my cues before."

"I'm walkin' on eggshells, love. I can't—"

"Is there a part of *I believe in you* that I messed up in the big explanation downstairs?" She glanced down. "Look, as I said, Buffy plus the big conversations are so very much not compatible. But really, you've never failed at reading me. Never. Not once. I...I risked everything to bring you back. I practically insisted that you move in with me. I told everyone to get lost this weekend, and you still—"

"What?"

At that, she fidgeted. "That was a two-for-one, I guess. I get my house back and you all to myself."

Spike stared at her numbly. She wanted him to herself? She actually wanted him? Had the whole world gone barmy?

"Don't," Buffy said sharply.

"Don't what?"

"That look. Stop with the look."

He blinked.

"I know that look, so just stop what you're thinking. Do you really think I would've invited you in if I hadn't forgiven you?" She threw her hands up in frustration. "That's what I've been trying to tell you, Spike. I...I forgave you. I forgave you a long, long time ago." She paused again and wet her lips, gesturing to the floor, as though he needed a reminder. "For this. Forgiving you was one of the things I had to do before I forgave myself. Admitting that what happened here didn't happen in a vacuum. It was awful and it hurt but it wasn't the only awful thing that happened or the only thing that hurt. I hurt you a lot, too. But I needed to forgive you to forgive myself. And I did. I do, Spike."

Bollocks. He was going to cry like a ninny. He sniffed and took a step back, not trusting himself to be near her—but also not trusting himself to be anywhere else. That she could say any of these things was more than he could have ever hoped, so much so he couldn't believe she meant a word. Not after the thing he'd done—and the thing she'd just caught him doing. It defied logic.

As though sensing his thoughts, she offered a small smile. "For...for what happened here. I forgave you almost... Well, almost immediately.

I didn't realize it until after the apocalypse was over, but the second that I really felt that you were gone...that's when I forgave you." She glanced down, trembling. "Spike, after what happened in here happened, Dawn asked me to take her to you to protect her from Willow, and it took me all of two seconds to agree."

He couldn't have been more stunned if she'd snogged him. His eyes burned and his chest crushed under the weight of his breaths. "Buffy..."

"Our relationship has never been normal. Never." Buffy licked her lips. "We live in a world where monsters are real."

"I am a monster, love."

"No, you're not."

"I tried—"

"You only hurt me when I hurt you. God, every time we were ever together, it started with violence. With me screaming no. We'd fight. I'd tell you how much I hated you, how much you disgusted me, then we'd fuck each other silly." She smiled dourly. "And—"

"Is that supposed to be an excuse?" Spike rasped. "Buffy, for Chrissake, I had you pinned under me. You were screaming and crying and somehow my nearly raping you is *your* fault? What, because Soulless Spike couldn't tell the difference between fighting and fucking? You're off your bird." He shook his head until the room spun. "Is that what you're telling yourself? You're fooling yourself, Slayer. I tried to rape you. With as much as I love you—then and now—I never thought myself capable of hurting you. Never. How can you tell me I'm not a monster for that? For tellin' me *no* and meanin' it and me bein' too selfish and lovesick to understand? All because you wanted to get your life back and that was inconvenient for me?"

"Spike—"

"All you wanted was a chance to get your—"

"And somehow that's an excuse?" she shot back, her voice stronger now. "I wanted to get my life back, and that gave me reason to kick the crap out of you for fun? Look, moral ambiguity aside, you did everything you could to help me. You didn't always know how or what was right, but you didn't have a soul. That wasn't your fault. I spat at every-

thing you tried to give me because I was holding you to standards that most people couldn't meet."

"And that gives me—"

"I never said it wasn't wrong. You hurt me. You did. Bad." She shivered. "I trusted you more than I even wanted to..."

The knocks kept coming. "You trusted me?"

Buffy nodded. "Yes."

"But you said you could never—"

"Hello? Front much? Spike, you know me better than anyone in the history of...people I've known. The fact that I did trust you is what really freaked me out."

"How could you trust me?"

"How could I not?" she countered. "You guarded the Hellmouth while I was gone. You protected Dawn every night. You nearly let Glory kill you to keep me from getting hurt. And then you were the only one I told about Heaven. The only one. If that isn't trust, I dunno what is." She wiped her eyes with a sniff. "I trusted you so much...and that what hurt more than anything. But it also doesn't change anything. I broke you over and over and over again. What happened in here was awful and it's still with me, but I also know you didn't mean it."

"Buffy—"

"I saw your eyes. Rapists don't look like that."

Spike choked a sob, shaking his head hard. "Buffy, please—"

"They don't."

"Fuck, Buffy, please—"

"I kicked you and beat you and when I was done, it made what Glory did to you look like a pillow fight. I hurt you over and over again. And even with what happened, you never meant to hurt me." She stepped forward and took his face in her hands again, then amazingly, brushed a soft kiss across his lips. "I know that. I know that, Spike. If you'd wanted to hurt me, you had every chance. The chip hasn't worked on me for a year and a half. If you wanted to hurt me, you would have. The only time you ever hurt me is when I hit you first. When I started it."

Words abandoned him. There was nothing to say—nothing to say

at all. Buffy was in his arms, caressing his cheeks with her fingers, pressing her brow to his. In this room, of all places.

"The point," she whispered, "is I forgave you. You hurt me, but I forgave you."

Spike shook and sighed. "Bloody hell, Slayer, I don't deserve this."

"My forgiveness is mine to give or not give. I decided to give it. And not just to you." Buffy inhaled a rattling breath, then pulled back again. "I had a lot of it to hand out, actually. I had to forgive myself for ignoring Dawn. For pretending Willow's problem was nonexistent. And it was hard. Forgiving myself. Forgiving my friends for tearing me out of Heaven. Forgiving Giles for deciding to hit the road when I needed him. Willow for nearly killing me and ending the world. When I got to the end of it, forgiving you was the easiest thing I've ever done."

He shook his head, hearing her just fine but still not believing. Unable to believe, because he doubted he'd ever get to the place where he could forgive himself. "That big heart of yours is one of the reasons I love you, Slayer. Forgive when it's least deserved. You love even when you don't."

Buffy grinned a little, glancing down again. "Do you know what I told Willow right before my date with Robin?"

Considering he hadn't seen that conversational turn coming at all, the answer was a quick no.

"She was hinting at something and I automatically leaped to the conclusion that she was talking about you and me, and how I wasn't ready to move on."

"Move on?"

Yeah, there was no bugging hope of keeping up with her, because what she'd said suggested something beyond impossible. That Buffy had actually needed time to move on from him. As though they'd actually had a relationship. What this had to do with her forgiving him, he didn't know, but all he could do was stand there and bear it.

"I asked Willow why everyone in the world thought that I was still in love with you."

Spike's heart gave a lurch. "But you..."

She smiled weakly. "Freudian slip much?"

“Buffy—”

“And I seem to recall you telling me that you always hurt the one you love.” She shivered and kissed him again, and the taste of her made every inch of him ache with yearning and split with near unbearable hope. “I’m so tired of running from this. I’m so tired.”

“What are you saying?” he asked. “I know I can’t... I don’t deserve anythin’, but please don’t muck with my head. I can’t bloody bear it. I love you too much, and I—”

“I love you, too.”

Of all the ways he’d envisioned Buffy whispering those words to him—rolling her hips against his as he pumped his cock in and out of her hot silky pussy, lovingly taking him into her arms once she knew the truth about the soul; hell, even in a screaming match—it had never been like this. Never after telling him how much she trusted him. Never after telling him that she’d forgiven him for how badly he’d hurt her. Never with her eyes level with his with wet cheeks and a tender smile on her face.

It was the most perfect moment of his life.

“You love me?” he whimpered, jerking her to him before she could reply and consuming her in a fierce, hungry kiss, loving her with his mouth for all she was worth. And just like that, the world around him vanished. The taste of Buffy was in his mouth again; her tears were in his throat, her tongue was wrapped around his. Her fingers tunneled through his hair as she nipped at his lips, trying to swallow him whole. And he was helpless to do anything but let her.

“You love me?” he demanded between kisses, though still not letting her go long enough to answer him. He didn’t want to give her the chance to clarify. He wanted to savor this. He wanted to freeze this moment. God, he wanted the world to end, because there was no possible way that life could get better than this. And yet he couldn’t stop asking her. The part of him that needed to know was stronger than the part that feared the truth. He needed to know. “You love me?”

And amazingly, Buffy nodded, tugging him back for another kiss. “I do,” she gasped. “I love you. I love you.”

“Oh Buffy...”

“I’m head over heels crazy in love with you.”

Every corner of his body seared with bliss. He couldn't stop touching her. It'd been too long. And before he could blink, the towel vanished and he had an armful of warm, aroused, naked Buffy. Buffy, who was sucking on his tongue like a woman starved. Buffy, who guided his hands to her breasts and gasped into his mouth when his eager fingers plucked at her thick nipples. Buffy, who was tugging at his fly and ravaging his lips.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Spike threw his head back as her mouth nibbled a wet path down his neck. "Why?"

"I tried," she replied as she scraped a biting kiss across his aged bite mark—the one that had made him a vampire. "Didn't you hear the Buffy plus talking is badness part?"

"You did not try."

"Yes, I did!"

"Liar."

"Well, you didn't try to tell me what I was really feeling."

Spike grinned in spite of himself and pinched her nipple, tugging at her earlobe with his teeth. "You hate it when I do that."

"Nuh uh."

"Tell me, Buffy." He pulled away, needing to see her eyes. "Tell me again."

"I love you."

His heart sang. "Again."

She smiled into his eyes as his hard cock sprang into her warm, waiting hand. "I love you," she whispered. "I love you."

"How much?" he whimpered, jerking his hips with a desperate moan. "Oh fuck, your hot little hand..."

"You know me better than anyone has ever known me," Buffy whispered, pumping the length of his cock in slow, tantalizing strokes. "You know me inside and out. And you've always been real. Always. You were my best enemy. My friend when I needed one. You're the only man who's never abandoned me." She kissed him softly. "Not even when I did everything I could to chase you away. I wanted you to hate me at least half as much as I hated myself, and you didn't. I hit you and you just loved me more."

"I couldn't help it," Spike moaned. "Love you. Love you so much."

"I love you, too. You're real to me. You always have been."

"Oh god..."

"And that's why you scare me so much. My life isn't real. It never has been. Not even pre-slayer." She squeezed his cock again and lapped at his jugular. "Look at me. I need to see your eyes for this part."

He shuddered but obeyed, unable to do deny her anything.

"I'm not gonna look away whenever we're together again," she said. "I've never thought of...anyone else when I was with you. Never. I just wanted you to think I did."

"It didn't take, pet." He'd known that was her goal, of course, but Buffy had never been able to hide anything from him. Before, at least. Before the soul—before he'd stopped trusting his instincts where she was concerned.

"I know. I just thought if I pretended, or tried, it wouldn't be real. Real scares me because it..." She caressed his cheek. "Because real is something you can't do over. You have to give real your all. Am I making any sense?"

"Not really."

Buffy scowled. "So I don't have the skill with words that you do. All I can say is what makes sense to me. I'm through trying to pretend. You're real to me—what we have is real. And...I love you."

"I'm never gonna get tired of hearing that."

"I dunno. I'm gonna say it quite a bit."

"Say it again now."

Buffy giggled, and fuck if it wasn't the most glorious sound that had ever tickled his ears. "Love you," she murmured, drawing his tee over his head. "You might wanna hold onto the counter."

It wasn't difficult, sussing out what she aimed to do, and his cock was completely on board. He wanted her eyes on him as she pulled him into her heavenly mouth. He wanted to thrust himself between those succulent lips of hers, watch himself fill her up. But he didn't want her to feel like she had to prove anything to him. She owed him nothing. Nothing. But it didn't stop him from wanting.

However, the sight of her dropping to her knees on the bathroom floor triggered the warning bells. He knew she was doing it deliberately—that if her intent wasn't to make a point, she would have

dragged him to her bedroom rather than stay another second in this godforsaken room.

“Buffy—”

She winked at him, and amazingly, there was no hesitation in her eyes. As though she wasn’t kneeling before him on the very floor where he’d nearly raped her not even a year earlier. The hand stroking his cock wasn’t even shaking. “No talking,” she warned, shifting his erection from her right to left hand. “Just enjoy.”

He laughed nervously. “Slayer, bloody hell. I want you so fucking much.”

“You got me,” she whispered, and that magnificent tongue of hers licked sweetly at his swollen head. The moan that ripped through his throat made her fingers tremble against him, which only coaxed another moan. “You got me, Spike.”

There had never been sweeter words. “You don’t... We don’t have to do this here.”

She didn’t play dumb with him, and he appreciated that. “Yes, we really do.”

“Please.” He paused and swallowed hard. “Not for me.”

“I’m not doing it for you.”

“Oh Buffy, please don’t—”

“I’m not doing it for me, either, Spike.” She licked the tip of his cock again, her eyes fluttering shut as though she were savoring his taste. “It’s for us. I plan on living for a long, long, long time—maybe stupidly long. So me? I’m a done deal. And I want to live with you.”

Spike threw his head back and moaned. “Buffy...”

“And I figure we’re pretty much married to the job, so we’ll be living here.”

“Oh, baby...”

“Though I’m not above taking very, very extended vacations and letting others handle world-saveage every now and then.” Buffy brushed her lips just slightly below the tip of his length. “I want the bathroom to be safe for us again.”

He whimpered, words halting in his throat.

“I want you to remember this when we come in here. Not what happened.”

God, he was crying again in earnest. He was such a sodding ninny. “Buffy...” he moaned. “Bleeding hell, I don’t deserve you. Never bloody did.”

“Think that’s for me to decide,” she said before taking him fully into her mouth, bobbing her head with slow leisure that, at the slightest touch, had him seeing stars. She had his balls cradled in her palm, her fingers gently massaging the base of his erection as her mouth trailed the length of him back and forth. Then she released him and leaned back. “And I’ve decided I deserve what *I* want. And that’s you.”

Spike shook his head furiously, torn between ecstasy and guilt. The things she was saying and the heavenly strokes of her warm mouth were nothing short of pure bliss, but even if he couldn’t believe it. Wishing that he wasn’t a monster didn’t make it so. Saying he deserved her—deserved anything close to her—didn’t make it reality. Life didn’t work that way. Not even for slayers and the vampires that loved them.

But Buffy was with him now. Buffy had her succulent lips were his cock. She was working him in and out of her mouth in here—*here* of all places—and he couldn’t keep from trembling. Couldn’t tear his eyes away, either. The sight was one he’d always loved, his cock, slick with her saliva, disappearing between her lips again and again as she stroked what she couldn’t take with one hand and cupped one of her breasts with the other.

Fuck, there had never been a more glorious sight.

“I want you,” she whispered again, as though sensing he couldn’t believe it. She lifted his cock and lapped at the underside with her hot, pink tongue, then slid her mouth back along his skin until he was pressed against the seam of her lips again.

In all his years, he’d never been caressed like this—like he was worth something more than his body’s value.

“Buffy, *fuck*.”

“No more.”

“Buffy!”

“My god...”

“Mmmm...”

Bloody hell, she sounded like she was enjoying this more than he

was. Like she couldn't get enough of the taste of him. "You're a goddess," he gasped. "My hot, glorious goddess."

Buffy grinned and pressed his cock to his stomach as she dropped her mouth to his testicles. "I've missed you," she whispered. "I didn't want to, but I did. Over the summer... God, I went through so much and you weren't here. I felt like I shouldn't but I did."

He was still half-convinced she had staked him—that he was actually in some form of limbo wherein his body was worshipped in ways he could never truly earn. No matter how many souls he fought for, no matter how many tears he shed, no matter how many times he fell to his knees and begged for forgiveness, he never believed this possible. The idea that Buffy could ever be his was so far beyond anything he'd ever dreamt of touching.

And yet here she was, pumping his cock in time with her mouth's sucks, lapping at him, pressing kisses against his balls. She touched him as she'd never touched him before. Like she wanted to commit him to memory, and it was driving him out of his sodding skull.

"Love you," he whimpered. Every stroke whispered like fire against his skin. Her scent flooded his nostrils—the rich allure of Buffy-wet. Buffy-aroused. Buffy-anything, and it was so real. So real his insides bled. "I love you...so much. And I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry for everything. I—"

Buffy licked her way back to his tip. "It's okay," she whispered, before engulfing him all over again. She measured the length of him in long strokes, her tongue swirling around him as though she was devouring an ice-pop. "I forgave you. It's over now."

"B-Buffy—"

"I'm sorry, too." She flicked her tongue along the sensitive slit at his tip. "For everything."

He whimpered and wove his fingers through her hair. "Nothin'...to..."

Buffy opened her eyes long enough to give them a good, incredulous roll. "Uh huh."

"I'm the one—"

Something that sounded suspiciously like a growl rumbled through her throat. "Stop."

It was bloody difficult, fighting the temptation to fist her hair and hold her to him. To drive his hips forward with brutal need and fuck her mouth so that she'd taste him for months. "Fucking..."

"Stop apologizing to me," she demanded.

"What?"

"Stop. Apologizing." Buffy leaned back on her legs, pumping her fist up and down his cock in the absence of her mouth. "I've never known anything to defeat you, Spike. Never."

"Buffy—"

"We can't redo what's been done. We can't. But we're here now, and I love you." She paused and leaned in again, licking him from balls to tip and suckling his head once more into her mouth. Then she pulled away again and said, "We hurt each other. But that's over. It's over."

Spike released her head, his hands falling to her wrists. "Up," he demanded harshly. "Need you up here."

She gave his cock a parting kiss, and was in his arms the next second, their mouths ravaging each other with hunger beyond hunger. Her tongue had a mind to conquer, and he was hopeless to offer anything but complete surrender. Bugger the rest, she was right. No amount of apologizing could ever erase what he'd done to her—could ever mend what they'd destroyed while trying to destroy each other. Buffy trying to destroy him with her hatred—Spike trying to destroy her with his love. Over and over again, they had fought.

But it was over now. It was over. And God, she was right above everything. The past couldn't be touched—couldn't be redone. There was nothing to gain from looking back but appreciation for what he had right now. What the present had yet to take away. Buffy was in his arms. She was sucking his tongue into her mouth as her legs fought to shove his jeans completely off his legs.

"Back," she gasped into his mouth. In a blink, she had her legs around his waist, he was gripping her ass, and she was motioning for the tub. The tub that was still somewhat full of bathwater and dissipating raspberry bubbles. "In there."

He burned with absolution, taking in the sight of her. Her flushed, creamy skin, the way her eyes had gone dark, the way she studied him as she stroked his cock, the heat of her pussy so bloody close. Yeah,

he'd take her wherever she wanted. Restraint was gone—reservation chucked successfully out the window. Because she was right. Because wallowing in the past never did anyone any good. He'd hurt her, she hurt him, but they were still together.

And she loved him.

Buffy loved him.

"Bloody hell, baby, gotta have you..."

She released his cock and linked an arm around his neck, her free hand fumbling behind her for the faucet. "I love you," she whispered. "Spike, I really do. I love you."

White clarity burst through every cell, his lips falling to her skin. And when he whispered, "I know," it was the truth. He'd felt it in every stroke of her mouth. In every caress of her hand. In the infinite warmth of her eyes. Water poured from the shower nozzle, and for the first time—for the first real time since he'd crawled out of that pit in Africa—he felt truly cleansed. He felt blessed.

"Touch me," she whimpered, thrusting against him. "I need—"

"Know what you need, kitten," he murmured as his hand slipped between them. He parted the folds of her pussy slowly, rubbed her wet, dripping flesh before dragging a finger up to land on her swollen clit. "Christ, you burn me up."

"Oh god!"

"Yeah, there she is." He grinned in spite of himself, his body knowing this dance. Knowing how she trembled and moaned and came apart beneath him. Christ, he knew it all so well, and he'd never thought to have it again. "You're glorious."

"Still?"

At this, he outright chuckled. "Any doubt, pet?"

"Well, again with the not making of any moves—"

"It was never my move to make, Slayer. You have to know that."

"Buffy stupid," she moaned into his shoulder, thrusting her hips against his hand. "Buffy very stupid."

"I told you it's always been you. I told you."

"Hearing it and knowing it are two different things, buster." The scowl she leveled his way was so adorable he couldn't help but pinch her clit just to watch her melt. "As you should know."

“My feelings for you have never been—”

“Spike, please!” She bucked wildly. “Do you wanna argue about silly things, or do you wanna fuck me?”

“No fucking.” He was through fucking her. He’d spent too many nights wanting desperately to make love to her only to end up giving her the hard fucking she wanted. No more. Not for a while, anyway—not until their scars were fully healed. “I’m not gonna *fuck* you, Buffy.”

Her eyes softened a bit. “Sorry. My bad.”

“Don’t mean to be a ponce, but—”

“I meant love me. Love me,” she whispered, her lips brushing his. “Please.”

Any lingering reservations vanished. Her heart was open to him. The heat of her pussy licked the head of his cock in ways that would drive any sane man mad. He was with the woman he loved, and for the first time, she was with him too.

“Always,” Spike murmured. He wrapped an arm around her, holding her to him as he took hold of his cock in his other hand. He spent several delicious seconds teasing her, rubbing his head along her folds and teasing her clit until he was wound so tight it was a wonder he hadn’t yet popped.

“Spike! Please!”

“I love you. I always sodding have.”

“Then show me.”

Fuck, he could deny her nothing. Especially not when she was looking at him like that, when those words were on her lips. Spike kissed her hard, his brain again stuck on record. Not because he thought this would vanish once it was over, but because he knew it wouldn’t. He felt it now, the love she was giving him, and it was too pure, too radiant, too beyond anything he’d ever dreamed up. His wildest fantasies could never hope to touch anything like this. And with a long, strangled moan of completion, he pushed his cock inside her, and the walls of Jericho finally collapsed. Fire blazed across his wet skin. The shadow that had followed him from Africa finally parted. There with Buffy in his arms, with her pussy wrapped tightly around his prick, with her heat scorching him, every splash of red washed away for good. She cried out and bit his shoulders, her nails digging

tunnels into his flesh. In all his years, he'd never had a sweeter homecoming.

"Oh Buffy," he whimpered, again fighting the urge to cry. "I've missed you so much."

"Ohhh..." She tossed her head back, clutching him tighter. "Yes. Missed you."

"Never leavin' again," he swore, lifting her just slightly off his cock before surging within her again. "God, you're so tight. So tight. How long has it—"

"No one since you."

A part of him had known that all along, but the larger part had always thought she'd do everything she could to purge the memory of him. To forget what he'd done to her, and the mock relationship that had preceded his crime.

Then again, that was before. That was before tonight. Before she'd told him she loved him.

She braced the back of his neck and wove her fingers through his hair, burying her face against his throat. This was new. Buffy exploring him when he was inside her, teasing him with soft licks and softer kisses, nibbling along his sire's mark as she bucked and thrust and squeezed her pussy around him, coating him with her juices.

"Please," Buffy whispered. "Need..."

"I know, baby. Just...trying to get over the shock."

"Shock?"

"Being inside you after so long." He turned so that her back was pressed against the long stretch of tiled-wall. "Don't want this to be over before it even starts."

And for the heat ripping across his cock, it was a wonder he'd lasted this long as it was. The way she caressed his skin. The way her mouth danced across aged scars. The way her eyes swallowed his. God, he'd never had her eyes before. Not once. Not once had she looked at him. Not beyond a flickered glance before she twisted her head from his. Looking at Buffy now only to have her look back—even as he began pumping his hips, as his cock began the slow slip and slide from her pussy—made him feel, for all their past, that they finally had a first.

“Oh my god.”

“Spike...”

“You...God, Buffy, you feel so good.” The words were cheap but true. “So good.”

A small smile touched her face and her lips found his, her muscles contracting around him as he helped her rise off his cock and sink down again. “You too,” she whispered. “So good.”

Spike pressed his brow to hers and tightened his hold on her hips. A few agonizing seconds passed, and he remembered what he was supposed to be doing. Hard and rough would come later—when he felt more in control of himself. More capable of loving her while smashing inside her at the same time than he did right now. Right now, he wanted to savor everything. The flesh that burned him every time he drew out of her pussy and the warmth that welcomed him inside. The way she arched her pelvis into him with need, fighting to recapture his cock each time he pulled away. Her eyes were wide and her heart was open, and she belonged to him.

At long last.

A sentiment he didn’t register that he had vocalized until she licked at his neck and squeezed her slayer muscles around him.

“Yes,” she breathed. “Oh yes. I’m yours.”

“Buffy...”

“So yours.”

His eyes fell shut and his thrusts grew harder. His. She was his. It was there. Right there in the open for anyone to hear. He was driving himself inside her pussy. Her breasts were pressed against his chest and her teeth were clamped at his ear. And she was his. She’d said it—she was his.

His fangs itched to make it permanent, but he held his demon at bay. Instead, he buried his face between her breasts and growled, sucking a nipple between his lips and pounding into her harder now, harder than he’d intended, but one didn’t simply go around and throw those words at vampires. Not unless they knew what they meant—or how dangerous they could be if not taken seriously.

His plans never lasted, anyway. Not when Buffy was involved.

Fuck, *especially* not when she was moaning like that and wiggling

against him. Not when her nails scratched his arms and those wondrous slayer muscles of hers tightened to the brink where pleasure and pain were a combined force. He drove into her with fury, months of repression and need coursing through him unchecked. Her flesh molded around him. Her heady moans tickled his ears, and she was perfect and this was perfect and everything, for the first time, was perfect. The place, the moment, and this. Her pussy thrust against his cock and her body tightened in recognition.

“Oh god!” she cried, her eyes meeting his. “Oh...Spike!”

He growled and quickened his thrusts. She was so fucking glorious and she didn’t even know it.

“Touch...touch me.”

He flicked his tongue along her nipple, surging with sensations that he thought the world had ripped away for good. He never wanted her to recover from him as he would never recover from her. He rocked her against the wall as the water beat down on them, so lost in her warmth that the sun could peel his skin away and he wouldn’t notice.

And he loved seeing what he did to her. After years of fantasizing about her, after the miserable months he’d actually had her in his bed, watching her eyes grow wide with need and pleas tear off her lips meshed a world of endless fantasy with the hard lines of reality. Only fantasy couldn’t hope to compare.

“Spike, please!” Buffy slid her own hand between their rocking bodies. “Please...”

“You need to come, baby?”

She nodded desperately. “Oh god, yes.”

Spike grinned and batted her wrist aside. As much as he loved watching her stroke herself, he’d waited too long to have her to not do the honors himself. Later, he wanted her clit between his lips and her thighs around his face. He wanted to lap up her juice and dip his tongue so deep inside her that she’d wonder how she’d managed to survive without him. But for now, he’d settle with stroking her so good that she lost feeling in her legs.

He brushed along her clit as his thrusts grew harder, and the euphoric gasp that touched the air was so damn addictive he resolved to bring it out as often as possible. “You like that?” he growled.

Buffy choked a sob, bucking wildly. "Oh yes. Oh yes."

"You feel so fucking wonderful, baby."

"Spike..."

He favored her breast with a long lick, then took her mouth with his. He wanted to feel her tongue against his as she cried out and drenched his cock. As she gripped his arms and squeezed him into oblivion. "Come for me, kitten," he panted. "Wanna feel you come for me."

"Unh!"

It happened then. Him slamming her into the wall, consuming her in a hot, searing kiss. She poured a moan into his mouth and her pussy clamped hard around him, tremors riding through her body that had the ground quaking beneath his feet. The heavens opened and the roar in his ears died at last. She seized and contracted even as waves of orgasm washed over her, squeezing his cock so tight he could bloody bawl, digging bruises into his arms with her fingers as she sucked at his tongue and came back for more. Her explosion was sudden but complete, but he didn't allow her reprieve. He kept thrusting, massaging her slippery clit, determined to milk this moment for all its worth.

"Spike. Oh god. Oh my god!"

"Oh, Buffy..." He whimpered, kissing his way to her temple. "I love you so much."

With a last, trembling sigh, he spilled himself inside her. And it was perfect. He had her in his arms, her legs still around his waist, her hands caressing whatever they could reach as she whispered his name and told him she loved him and brought her mouth to his again. And when her glossy, sated eyes met his, he could have sworn he'd kissed the sun.

Hours later, that night, naked, they turned down her bed together.

"Our bed," she whispered. "Ours. From now on."

"Ours," he echoed. "Buffy..."

"I'm not hiding, Spike. I lost you once before because I hid from you. From my friends. Really, from me. I hid from me the most." She paused. "Not again. I love you too much to lose you again."

Then she was in his arms, kissing him with that sweetness that had his eyes filling with tears all over again.

He didn't know how it had happened, but he would never question it. Never. Not with Buffy in his arms.

The screams had finally silenced. His hands were finally clean.

And now, at last, he was home.

