

PERCHANCE

What Dreams May Come #1



HOLLY DENISE



PERCHANCE

“AND YOU’RE SURE this will work?” Buffy wrinkled her nose and brought the stone to eye level. It was kinda unremarkable, all told. A rather plump, onyx-colored marble made of whatever mineral Willow had mentioned. “Not that I doubt your spell-casting abilities, but it seems a bit...rocky.”

Also, she doubted Willow’s spell-casting abilities. And she felt she had good reason to, given the number of instances said spells had gone wonky. But it seemed unsportsmanlike to bring that up when her friend was just trying to help her out.

“Absolutely,” Willow said with a cocksure grin and a nod to match. “I followed all the instructions to the letter. The color comes from the treatment—moonstones are typically all transparent and ethereal. The black is actually how you know the spell worked. Otherwise, it would still be all light and stuff.” She held up a hand and began counting off fingers. “Essence of nightshade, the petals of a Queen of the Night cactus, and somnus spell for good measure. Whatever your sleeping problems are, this little guy will clear them right up.”

Buffy nodded, then lifted her gaze from the stone and tried for a smile of her own. “Thanks, Will. I appreciate it.”

“Anytime! It’s what I’m here for.”

And she was—and that was a good thing. A great thing. Wacky consequences aside, Willow’s spellwork had improved by leaps and bounds over the last year. Ever since the whole merging of the essences spell that had defeated Adam, her magic had yielded increasingly impressive results—no more flying attack pencils or mysterious green swarming bugs and, best of all, fewer unplanned explosions. And when Buffy had mentioned that what she really needed—post-breakup—was a way to fall asleep and stay asleep, Willow had piped up with the idea of the extra spiffed-up moonstone.

Which now lay cradled in her palm, all innocuous-like.

Buffy pressed her lips together. Worst case scenario, the thing exploded and burned down the house. Best case scenario, she got a full eight hours that left her feeling refreshed and rejuvenated, especially now that she wasn’t sharing her bed with anyone.

Yeah. Thinking about her sad bed was enough to push caution aside. Buffy needed her beauty rest. Desperate times called for desperate measures.

In the three days since Riley had made his big dramatic exit, Buffy had cycled through the stages of grief at top-notch speed, then started them over again, volleying most often between anger and denial, with a few crying jags thrown in there for good measure. A few, not many, because every time she thought about what had happened—the ultimatum, the accusations, even Xander’s “go get him” speech—she hit some inner button that left her feeling increasingly foolish. Foolish for having listened to the ultimatum without venting her feelings by means of punching her fist through a wall, or snapping at Xander that maybe her relationship with Riley had just looked different because she wasn’t the person she’d been in high school, and had he even thought of that?

Or hell, maybe Riley *had* been the rebound guy. Maybe that was what she’d needed. The once-in-a-lifetime romance had already happened to her and the impact had been devastating enough to span several lifetimes, thanks. Then she’d feel bad for thinking that, feel that perhaps Xander had had a point and she had been holding Riley at arm’s length, but then start the cycle all over again by analyzing every second of their relationship and wondering where she’d gone wrong,

where she'd treated Riley like he was expendable, where she'd made him feel less-than because he was human and not vampire, because he was Riley and not Angel.

At which point her mind would fill with images of Glory, and dread would shove aside everything Riley-related. She'd think about her mother lying in the hospital bed, about the times she had been given the privilege to feel the weight of all that fear and uncertainty—time that Riley had apparently thought was his and his alone. But he hadn't been there when she'd broken down because he'd been with his vampire whores. Getting his blood and probably more than his blood sucked just so he could feel needed, wanted, feel all the things he wasn't getting from Buffy because Buffy wasn't enough.

That would kick her anger back into overdrive.

She hadn't been sleeping well *before* Riley had decided to fly away from their relationship problems. Now that she had a headful of bitterness and resentment and sadness and downright loneliness to occupy her thoughts, finding and staying asleep was nigh impossible. At least, it had been over these last three days, and Buffy didn't have the luxury of waiting out her insomnia. The next Glory attack could come at any second and she needed to be ready. Rested. She needed to have her head in the game.

Enter Willow with her magical cure-all.

As long as the house remained all not-burned down, Buffy supposed this couldn't hurt.



WILLOW'S SLEEPING INSTRUCTIONS DIDN'T INSPIRE MUCH confidence. Apparently, in order for the stone to work its literal magic, Buffy needed to climb into bed, balance the stone on her brow, and close her eyes. It would do the rest.

That seemed unlikely, but hey, she'd been made to eat her words before.

That night, Buffy went through her normal bedtime ritual, starting with making sure all the doors were locked. Then she peeked in on Dawn, just to double-check her sister hadn't sneaked out of the house,

something she'd taken to doing as of late. And yeah, Buffy felt like the worst kind of hypocrite for finding this annoying, but at least when she'd been the one shimmying down the tree outside, it had been for sacred duty reasons, not whiny teenager reasons.

Also sometimes to make out with her boyfriend, but no one needed to mention that.

After ensuring the house was secure and all its occupants were where they needed to be, Buffy climbed into bed, turned to scowl at the moonstone on her nightstand, then plucked it up. There was absolutely no way it wasn't going to just roll off her forehead and, with her luck, thunk to the floor loud enough to wake up bat-eared Mom. But she needed to be able to tell Willow she'd at least given it a shot, so better to suck it up and get this over with so she could get on with the night's regularly scheduled tossing and turning.

She squared her shoulders, brought the stone to her forehead, and closed her eyes.

And almost immediately threw her head back with a gasp, a ripple of hard pleasure tearing through her without ceremony. The sort that began at the toes and swept its way inside and out until there was nothing to do but shudder and give in. Her legs were over his shoulders, her hands tangled in his hair, and his mouth was there at her center, lips wound around her clit as he pumped his fingers inside her in tempo with the hard gasps racking through her body. The hand not preoccupied with her pussy was under her ass, lifting her to a hungry mouth that ravaged and sucked and pulled and in general did things to her she hadn't known could feel even remotely like this.

"Oh my god." Hell, that voice didn't even sound like hers. It was all raw and panty and desperate. "Oh my god. Oh god, oh god, *oh god.*"

"Mmm." The lips around her clit had suddenly released her—she tried not to sob as she thrust her hips up in a wordless plea for whoever it was to continue the assault. He didn't, though, just chuckled and pressed his fingers up against her from the inside. "Could drink you all night, baby, if you ever give me the chance."

Buffy froze. That voice. Oh shit no, she knew that voice. She squeezed her eyes shut, counted to ten, then forced herself to peer down at the head perched between her legs. A very blond head

attached to a very familiar face that came with very familiar ocean-blue eyes, which were dancing with pure freaking delight.

Oh god. Her ears hadn't been playing the worst trick in the history of tricks on her. It was *Spike*.

"Want some more?" he asked, waggling his eyebrows at her. "Tell me what you want, Slayer. You know I'll give it to you."

Buffy stared at him for a beat. A very long, very confused beat, her mind racing and her chest—which was naked, she noticed, along with the rest of her—heaving along with the thunderous knocks of her heart. Sweat laced her skin, made her hair feel heavy, and there was Spike. Also naked, stretched out over...well, she couldn't exactly see what. It could have been a bed or the floor or something else—it could have been, but she didn't know for certain because apart from the very clear form that was Spike, nothing else was really solid. Maybe they were in a room. Maybe they were in his crypt. Maybe they were on the moon.

And then it hit her, what must be happening, and she could have sobbed her relief.

It was a dream. All of this was a dream. The moonstone had worked and Buffy had floated off to sleep the second her eyes had closed. That the dream had a side-effect of naked vampire with his tongue shoved inside her pussy was a point of contention she would have to take up with Willow, but it was safe here.

Hell, it was more than safe here. It was downright decadent. And...harmless, right? Indulging in a little dream action with the world's most annoying vampire seemed a perfectly fitting exchange for the boyfriend she'd lost, especially considering she never would have confronted Riley about his vampire hussies if Spike hadn't brought her to that damned warehouse.

If her subconscious decided this was the way Spike should make it up to her, who was she to argue?

"Spike," she said on a sigh, lifting her head to meet his eyes. His very blue, very piercing, very true-to-life eyes. Huh. She wouldn't have thought she knew him well enough to get his eyes that close to reality, but apparently she did.

"Ever tell you I love it when you say my name like that?" He

grinned, then dropped a kiss against her pelvis. “Almost as much as I love it when you come on my tongue.”

Buffy released a hard breath, allowing herself to do the thing she never would in the waking hours—take a good look at him. Of course, in the waking hours, Spike didn’t look like this. Probably. Sure, he was lean and compact and had enough wiry strength to hold his own in a fight, but the sculpted chest and defined abs and really toned arm muscles—that was all Buffy fantasy land. Not to say she minded, but it was rather in her face, this leap of Spike-as-enemy to Spike-as-eye-candy. These were thoughts she hadn’t let herself think freely since he’d followed up his praise of her handling a fledgling vampire with the promise that he would kill her soon. And then maybe again a little bit during the spell last year where she’d spent half the night wiggling on his—

“Oh my god,” Buffy gasped, her eyes going wide as Spike shifted and began to crawl over her. Dream Spike was...big. Hard and straining for her, beads of precum slick across the head. Apparently, her subconscious had decided to be very forgiving tonight. Either that or she hadn’t been fooling herself last year after all.

“Always say the sweetest things to me, pet.” Spike preened a bit, wrapping one of his hands around his cock and starting to pump, and Buffy could do nothing but watch. She had never been the type of girl to ogle at a guy’s package—first due to embarrassment, and then because, well, they weren’t all that interesting. But this was the dream world, where the regular rules did not apply, and hot damn if watching Spike work his fist up and down the length of the most impressive cock she’d ever seen didn’t make her, well, interested.

“One of these days,” he said in a low voice, “gonna get your mouth around me.”

That wasn’t one of Buffy’s favorite things to do, but hell, she couldn’t say she hated the thought. At least here, in this place where it would never happen and where he looked like *that*—all thick and curved, the head poking through intact foreskin. Seriously detailed dream. Her subconscious had decided at some point that Spike wasn’t circumcised, which was a little weird, since the only penises she had seen in clear detail had been. “Okay,” she gasped, staring at the way

that extra flesh encircled the head of his cock before rolling back on the downstroke. Pictured herself pushing it back with her tongue, dipping and swirling and finding out just how many yummy sounds he could make when motivated.

“Want me inside you?”

She nodded before she could think about it—then nodded again after thinking about it. It was her dream, dammit. And yeah, she wanted whatever he had to offer.

The next thing she knew, Spike was over her, teasing the head of his cock up and down her soaked flesh, making sure to nudge her clit every few passes just for the pleasure of watching her whimper and melt. Buffy threw her head back, spreading her legs wider before wrapping one around his waist. And again, her dream was all about the details. His skin was cool to the touch, and damn if that wasn't soothing when she felt like she could burn up.

“Fuck, you're hot, Slayer.” Spike pressed his eyes closed, like he was fighting for control, then lowered his head and swirled his tongue around one of her nipples. Buffy gasped and arched, tearing her fingers through his surprisingly soft hair—there, at last, a part of the dream that couldn't be right—and gasping again when he growled at the feel of her nails against his scalp. She had never had a guy growl while teasing her nipples before and found the resulting vibrations were just this side of awesome. As was watching Spike—*Spike*—suck on her flesh like he couldn't get enough.

“You're different tonight,” he murmured once he released her, meeting her gaze as he pressed a series of wet kisses down the slope of her breast then across and up until he was tending to her neglected nipple with his mouth.

“Different?” Buffy asked, not sure why. It wasn't like it mattered.

“Feel different,” he replied, slipping a hand between them to grip himself, tease up and down her drenched flesh. And this time, when he pressed to her opening, she trembled her anticipation. Her pure want.

It was going to be near impossible to meet Spike's eyes the next time she saw him, but hell if it wasn't worth it.

Spike skated his teeth along her chin and waited for her to open her eyes and look at him head-on. Again, Buffy was taken by how well

she apparently knew him, for if she hadn't known it was a dream, she could have believed she was looking at him for real.

"That's it," he said as he began inching inside her. Buffy inhaled sharply, bit down on her lower lip hard enough to draw blood. Watched as those cerulean eyes flared and dropped, then he groaned and covered her mouth with his, sucking at the minute wound and slamming himself all the way home.

The sound that tore from her lips was the sort that would have embarrassed her if anyone heard her make it for real. It was raw and breathy at the same time, and it seemed to go on forever. Or rather turned into a hard hiss through her teeth as Spike lifted his head to favor her with a grin, like he knew what she was thinking. Which, good for him, because she had no idea what she was thinking, except *full* and *wow*. Buffy had had her share of dirty dreams—extremely vivid ones, Technicolor, even, with sensations beyond what she'd come to experience in her sexual encounters, heightened as everything else was in dreamland. But this was different. For one thing, she knew she was dreaming—that didn't happen often. For another, it felt real. And all the better because of it.

"Christ," he whispered against her lips, doing some kind of hip-swirly thing that had him pulling and pushing it seemed at the same time. Buffy made that sound again, the embarrassing one, but *god*, absolutely no one could blame her. "So hot. Gonna burn me up, you are."

She didn't care if he did burn up, so long as he kept moving his hips like that. The first few seconds seemed to last a long time, as though they were truly new lovers, basking in how the other felt, gathering their bearings as they attempted to adjust to sensation. Which was kinda weird, because the few times she'd allowed herself to think about Spike this way—and she would go to her grave denying any such times existed—it had been fast and angry, like they had finally used all the words possible to insult one another and there was nothing left to do but bruise each other with their bodies. Some of their fights, she had to admit, had seemed extra sexually charged. At least the fights of old, before the chip had taken that from them.

And there was a thought she would never admit to having. Thank

god this was a dream and she was likely to forget the whole damn thing.

Granted, if that was the case, there was no reason why she shouldn't have a lot of fun.

Buffy planted her hands on his chest and shoved hard enough that he was forced out of her, which made her make a sound somewhere between a whimper and a growl. Spike landed on his back a few feet away, snarling things that would get him staked in the waking world but in this one, just made her hotter. She was on all fours in an instant, prowling toward him with intent, the space around them still vague and shapeless, but that didn't matter—the only thing that mattered was him. And when he saw her coming toward him, his indignation faded almost instantly, replaced with a hot, desperate look that left her trembling with need.

"Fuck, yes," he rasped as she crawled between his legs. And hell, since she was here and it didn't count, there was no reason to *not* run her tongue from his balls to the tip of his cock. Especially not when it had him making all kinds of fun noises, moaning and lacing his fingers through her hair. Buffy grinned, closed her mouth around the head and sucked—harder than she would have were this real, the kind of hard that had made Riley yelp that one time. Spike just growled again, gasped something that sounded like her name, and fisted her hair hard enough to hurt.

"God, like that." He rolled his hips again, shoving himself deeper into her mouth. "So hot." He heaved out one of those deep breaths that he couldn't seem to keep contained.

"That good?" she asked before dipping her tongue under his fore-skin, making him gasp and arch again.

"Light me on fire, you do." He said it with such earnestness her chest tightened.

"I sound all kinds of hazy."

He laughed, and the sound tickled something deep inside her. A good tickle—hell, an amazing tickle. One that, dream or not, kinda wiggled her out. She decided to respond by closing her mouth around him and pulling hard, again the sort of hard that would have ended this part of foreplay with her ex-boyfriend, but just had Spike panting and

thrusting and babbling all sorts of things that made her cheeks go warm and her other parts go... Well, there was a reaction. And that was enough of that. Much as she enjoyed the sounds he made, this was typically the sort of thing she'd only do for a guy she liked, and dream or not, she very much did not like Spike.

While he whimpered when she released him, his eyes flashed with approval as she started to climb over him. He nipped at her mouth once it was within reach, his own quirked in a grin.

"Yeah, that's it, Slayer," he purred. Then he reached between them to tease her wet flesh with his cock again, one stroke, two strokes, before he notched himself at her opening. "Ride me till it hurts."

She braced her hands on his shoulders. "That what you want?"

"All I've ever wanted."

He locked eyes with her again, his voice ringing with more of that naked sincerity, and she didn't know how to respond except to sink onto him. He gasped and seized her hips, digging his fingers into her skin and holding on as she began to move.

Buffy braced her hands on his chest and closed her eyes—a weird thing to do in a dream and be aware of, but she did it all the same—and tried to picture someone else. Anyone else. But Spike had none of it. He was there to bring her back, pushing when she pulled, filling the air with his voice, rumbling all sorts of things that would earn him more than a punch to the nose in the real world. Even in her subconscious, Spike wouldn't shut the hell up.

"Oh, that's it, pet," he said, breathing in that stupid human way of his. "Such a good girl. Look at you, all stuffed full of me. Hurt me, Buffy. Know you want to. Can feel it. And you know I can take it."

That was true for multiple reasons. Buffy's eyes flew open and found his once more, the wild blue, darker than she'd ever seen it, his nostrils flared and a dare on his lips. So she gave him what he wanted—hell, what she wanted. Dug her fingers into the firm flesh at his chest and started riding him in earnest. Aware of him as she never had been before, and it was all right because it wasn't really happening, but it *felt* like it was happening and that was all right too. Spike beneath her, bucking and spearing into her again and again, doing things with his hips that made her doubt she was really in control here. And he

knew it too, the bastard. She saw the smirk flirt with his lips before she clenched her pussy around and chased it right back off again. Spike vamped, the change coming on so rapidly she wondered if she'd made him lose control. He tightened his grip on her, working her at a frantic, desperate pace up and down his cock. Then those demon amber eyes of his were open, staring into her, piercing into her, his tongue sliding down the length of one fang as he watched her and panted and pushed her harder onto him.

"You're amazing," he whispered. She trembled and clenched, earning a snarl, and he flipped her over so quickly she didn't register the world had done a cartwheel until it was too late. He pumped into her once, twice, then pulled out again.

"On your knees," he snarled, and god, she obeyed him. Felt her limbs shaking as she did, as she turned and presented him with her ass and then he was there again, filling her with his cock as his fingers danced through her folds to nudge her clit.

"God, what a picture," Spike grunted between the smack of flesh striking flesh. "Take it, Slayer. Take every fuckin' inch of me."

Buffy tore her teeth into her lower lip to keep from crying out. He pushed her head down so her cheek was flat against the nebulous surface, stroking the pads of his fingers over her at a rhythm that matched his thrusts. It wasn't something that typically worked for her—or maybe that was because no one had—tried, but this was really gonna work. Buffy felt it first in her knees, wobbling under the pressure of his assault, and if that was a strange place to feel an orgasm, then maybe that was the dream's fault too because that was where it started. Her knees, then up her legs, skating her inner thighs before focusing with intent on the place where he was stroking her. Cock, then fingers, then cock again.

Then his arm was around her stomach and he'd hauled her to him, her back to his chest, shifting the angle again, and she squeezed him and he moaned and she started to shudder, then his fangs were in her throat, a sharp stab of pain followed by an explosion of something beyond pleasure. Buffy full on screamed—something she never did during sex—as her pussy started to spasm and clench, and Spike roared into her skin and she tipped over again, and again, the pulls of his

mouth having a direct line to her clit, like he was stroking her from the inside even though that was impossible, but it didn't matter because it was happening. It was happening and there was nothing she could do but surrender.

Buffy collapsed in a sweaty tangle against him, wrecked. And still he was there, licking her where he'd bitten her, and the swipes of his tongue had her trembling all over again.

"Bloody hell," he murmured, stroking a hand down her stomach. "Never been like that before."

She agreed, but there were better things to do with her mouth than waste on words. So Buffy twisted in his arms, pulling away just long enough to shift so they were face-to-face before she started working herself up and down his cock again.

"Fuck, I love you," he whispered against her lips.

If that was an odd thing for Spike to say, she didn't mind. Anything in the dream world was fair game.

Plus, after everything that had gone down with Riley, that she was loved was nice to hear, even if only in her own head.



IT WAS HER BITTER MISFORTUNE TO RUN INTO SPIKE THE NEXT DAY. Even more so that it happened when she was off-guard, focused on something else—namely, a newly risen vampire who hadn't gotten the memo that this was the worst place to wake up without a pulse. Patrol had been slow, too, so Buffy was doing what she could to drag this out, certain that it would be the most action she'd get tonight. At least during the waking hours, and call her crazy, but she was a bit gun-shy about the non-waking.

What was worse, she couldn't avoid talking about it. Willow wanted to know how things had gone, if the moonstone had worked and she'd gotten any sleep. Even knowing to expect the question, Buffy found answering it difficult, at least without her skin going all hot. How could she tell her friend, her very best friend, that the stone had not only given her an express pass to dreamland, but filled her sleeping hours with the

most vivid dream she could remember having? A dream about *Spike*, no less. Naked Spike. Naked Spike doing things with his hands and mouth and other parts that were just wrong—all kinds of wrong. It didn't help that, for a second, Buffy had been certain Willow had known something, impossible as it was. Her questions had been a bit pointed, her brow doing the scrunchy thing it did when she was confused.

"So...that was it? Just passed out?"

"Uh huh!" Buffy had replied brightly, plastering on a smile so fake it hurt. "Put the stone in place and woke up all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. Really, it helped a lot. Thank you so much."

That had seemed to placate her, though the frown hadn't faded. Instead, Willow had offered a smile, told her to keep using the stone—apparently, it became more effective the more it was used—and thankfully dropped the subject.

A subject Buffy's mind had carefully danced around every second since then, only to be ushered away in favor of more important things than her depraved subconscious. Until now.

"You're droppin' your shoulder, Slayer!"

Buffy stumbled, her aim going wild and her fist—which had been ready for some serious face-busting—veering to the right, which had a rather predictable domino effect. The fledgling she'd been fighting whooped in glee, slammed his leg against her back and forced her to the ground on all fours. At which point her oh-so-unhelpful brain decided to bombard her with images of the last time it recalled being on all fours, even if that time hadn't been so much a time as a porn-tastic interlude that it had inflicted upon her in the first place. This meant that she was too distracted to care about the fledgling, who knocked his very pointed shoe into her gut, sending her back to the grassy ground with a hard *thump*.

"Just not your night, is it?" Somehow, she heard the metallic click of Spike's lighter over the other vampire's snarls. "Let me know if you need a hand."

Buffy gritted her teeth and planted her palms against the mossy earth. She wanted to snap out something witty, but the fledge had kicked all of her quips right out of her, so instead, she applied her

focus on getting off the damn ground and getting back to teaching this soon-to-be-dead vampire the ropes.

But she didn't get a chance to do any of that. By the time she had flipped herself back to her feet, the fledge was gone, and Spike was standing there in his place, grinning at her through the dust cloud.

"You're welcome," he said before wrapping his lips around his cigarette. Which put to mind him wrapping his lips around something else, and had all of her too flustered to so much as pop him in the nose for the audacity that was, well, Spike.

"What the hell was that?"

He arched an eyebrow. "Pretty sure that was me savin' your ungrateful arse as usual. That vamp was about to make you bloody kibble."

"I had it under control." And this was perfectly true. She *had* had it under control...right until he'd shown up and started moving that way-too-pretty mouth of his. "No one asked you to interfere, Spike."

Spike snorted, then dropped his gaze with unerring accuracy to the place where a fashion-victim vamp had impaled her with her own stake a few weeks back. The wound had healed—hell, the scar was barely visible—but there were times she would swear she still felt it. Times like now.

"Sorry," he said, making a show about dragging his eyes back up until they were locked on hers again. "Didn't realize you were as keen as I am to see you in the ground. Bit of advice, though. Predators like it when you wiggle. Makes the kill feel earned."

The command she had over her limbs returned with a vengeance. Buffy swung on instinct, her knuckles punching into his nose with a satisfying crack. And before he could do more than stagger back and sputter, she had turned on her heel and marched off, determined to put as much space between them as possible.

The last thing her sick, sick mind needed—the very last thing—was more Spike.



SHE WAS GREETED WITH A PUNCH TO THE FACE WHEN SHE FELL INTO the dream that night.

"Bloody hell, you can be a right bitch, you know that?" Spike took another swing at her without waiting for a response but grinned when she snapped an arm up to block the hit. "Tryin' to do you a favor," he said conversationally, like he hadn't just attempted to clobber her with one of those gaudy rings of his. She knew from experience they could leave a mark. "Tryin' to *look out* for you, and what good does it do?"

"What the hell are you talking about?" Buffy spat back before throwing a punch of her own. A tremor ran up her arm when her fist connected with his nose—a tremor remarkably similar to the one that had accompanied the real thing back in the graveyard. Like the night before, she knew she was dreaming here—could feel it in the slight otherworldliness that defined her every move, but it was close enough to reality to throw her off her game. And make her extraordinarily grateful that she hadn't fallen face-first into a weird sex dream starring her mortal enemy. This, at least, was status quo.

"Gettin' your righteous little arse handed to you tonight, you were," Spike replied, still in that oddly conversational tone, though they were fighting now. Not real fighting—not that it made any difference—but the way she used to fight with Riley when he'd been pumped with enough Initiative drugs to take her at slayer strength. "And we both know you have a death wish."

"Shut up." She aimed another blow to his nose, but he caught it this time. Caught it and leveraged his hold on her to drag her forward until she was flush against his chest.

And suddenly, everything was off-balance again. Buffy was breathing hard—way too hard, dragging in air that smelled and tasted of Spike.

"Mite too predictable, pet," he murmured, dropping his gaze to her mouth. "Makes a fella think things."

"Well, stop."

His lips twitched. "Seems the rabbit likes gettin' cornered by the big bad wolf," he said, and rolled his hips so she could feel him, just as hard and impressive as the night before. "Too much of that and the wolf might think the rabbit's sweet on him."

"You're disgusting."

"Mhmm. So why aren't you pullin' away then?" Spike flicked his eyebrows, ready when she started to tug on her hand. "Ah, ah. Too late to pretend now."

"Who's pretending?" she snapped, though even she had to admit that she wasn't putting as much muscle behind pulling away as she would in the real world, and she blamed that on the last dream she'd had. Plus, he was still grinding his erection against her, and that made it hard to think. Emphasis on hard. Really hard.

Spike lowered his face to hers so that when he spoke, his lips nudged her lips. "You are. Every time I see you, out there makin' like you don't feel it."

"Feel *what*?"

"This." He cupped the back of her head, tangling his fingers through her hair before forming a fist to hold her there, and smashed his mouth to hers.

And that was when it happened—when her brain broke. Her brain, that was all it was. Her tired, exhausted, stressed-to-the-max-and-still-reeling-from-her-breakup brain that had decided regular men sucked beyond the telling of it and since Riley had gone and left the freaking country, the only thing for a girl to do was screw the resident undead senseless in her dreams.

At least the sex here was good. Better than good. Even if it was with Spike.

Fuck it.

"That's it," Spike panted between kisses, as though he'd felt her give in. Maybe he had, being an extension of her in this place. He was grinning now, taking hot drags of her mouth and tugging at her clothes with enough urgency she could almost believe he was worried she'd change her mind. "Give it all to me, Slayer."

"This is wrong." It was only polite, reminding him and herself, even here as she shoved his duster off his shoulders before tugging at his belt.

"Fuck yes, it is." He gave a low growl, fisted the material of her shirt and ripped it down the middle. If that had been an actual shirt, she would've been pissed. Instead, she found she couldn't touch him

enough, insanely turned on by every sound he made, every time he shuddered, the way he rolled his eyes back when she stroked her fingers down his seriously cut abs—her imagination was so incredibly generous where Spike was concerned. Then the moan he fed her when her fingers wandered lower still, over the hard ridge of his cock, stroking him through the denim before finally taking pity on him and dragging down his zipper.

“God, yes.” Spike rolled his head back, thrusting into her hand and gasping. “Like that, Summers. Harder. *Harder*. Don’t be afraid to break me.”

Buffy grinned, skimmed her teeth along his chin. “That a dare?”

“It’s whatever you want it to be.”

That was certainly true. What happened here was whatever she wanted. Nothing else.

“I want,” she said, tightening her grip on his cock, “you to fuck me.”

Spike moaned again, a look of pure bliss flitting across his face.

Then he snarled and spun her around, tearing whatever it was she was wearing down her legs—she hadn’t bothered to check, not really with the caring—with such force and speed he nearly knocked her over.

“As my lady demands,” he whispered against the inside of her knee then nipped at her with his teeth. And before she could do more than squeak, he was on his feet again, bending her over, spreading her legs apart and pushing inside her.

Buffy decided this might be the best dream she’d ever had.



THE ODD REALITY OF GETTING IT ON WITH THE VAMPIRE SHE HATED in her dreams and also having to look that vampire in the eye during waking hours became easy to navigate in no time at all. After the first awful bungle, she knew what not to do, and that was enough to inform her behavior. So when the time came for Spike to cross her path once more, Buffy managed to look him in the eye, snap at him appropriately, and make it oh-so-very clear that he was disgusting and only walking

around because she hadn't yet gotten so bored that staking him was her only option. And she was reasonably certain that she pulled all this off without so much as flushing or thinking about the things he did to her with his hands and mouth and other impressive—at least in the dreamworld—parts.

Granted, the fact that she and Spike hadn't spoken much that time had been on account of the distraction. A good distraction. One that involved a troll and doling out some much-needed pain on a worthy opponent. The reality of her breakup with Riley had settled in by then, and though Buffy was not nearly as heartbroken as a woman who had just been dumped by Mr. Right should have been, there were feelings that needed to be pummeled out. A lot of feelings. And lucky her, a troll could take more than one punch. He could take a week's worth.

But that wasn't enough, she'd discovered. At some point over the last couple of years, Buffy had begrudgingly admitted that Faith had had it right. Slaying did leave her feeling hungry and horny, and not always in that order. The former was something she could address with one of her signature low-fat yogurts; the latter had become increasingly difficult to take care of the longer she and Riley had danced around each other. Especially after he'd lost his Initiative-sponsored super soldier strength, though she had been careful not to let on. If it hadn't been for the fact that her dreams were lately full of sweaty naked fun, she might have been tempted to actually take Anya's advice and go vibrator shopping.

The dreams, though, were managing what should be impossible. Maybe her brain was too overtired trying to rationalize how not-icky Spike was when she was asleep, but instead of leaving her aching and in need of action that wasn't pure subconscious fantasy, she found a smile on her face practically every morning. It was weird. Not at all natural.

Was she going to complain? Hard no.

Hell, by the time she actually hit the sack the night of the epic troll fight, Buffy was practically buzzing. She followed what had become her routine, right down to placing the stone on her forehead and was immediately tossed into the strange, shapeless world where the only thing around that had any definition was the vampire who was as hungry to see her as she was to be seen. This time, he pressed her

against a wall—or whatever passed for a wall in dreamland—told her to bite and scratch and claw all she wanted, he had some things he needed to vent, then pounded into her with a fury that would have definitely left some marks in the real world. And made her kinda sorry that it wasn't the real world—in a totally nothing-to-do-with-Spike-but-damn-that-would-be-better-in-person kind of way.

Still, she was somehow able to compartmentalize letting Dream Spike rock her world on multiple levels and not flinch when it came time to call him disgusting whenever they were unfortunate enough to be face-to-face. Yes, she wished in many ways that her dreams could be a little *less* detail-specific when it came to who it was doing the world-rocking—it was just her luck that everything *except* Spike was vague as all get-out, but if the payoff was waking up relaxed and refreshed, then she'd just have to accept it.

That was until Dawn dropped the biggest of all possible Spike-shaped bombs.

“Spike's totally in love with you.”

At first, Buffy had been determined to write this off as the latest tactic employed by her sister to get out of trouble. No grounding for mystical Keys for hanging around soulless vampires if they managed to completely upend their sister's worldview. And if the allegation just so happened to overlap with some very naughty dreams Buffy had been enjoying the hell out of, that was just a really well-timed coincidence. Nothing more to it.

Only Buffy couldn't quite believe it. She'd been careful every time she'd seen Spike since the dreams started to maintain the status quo. If anything, she might have overcorrected the last time, when he'd flashed her the puppy dog eyes and tried to score some points for not munching on disaster victims and *oh my god*, Spike was in love with her.

That night, Buffy paced around her bedroom, the moonstone curled in her hand as she tried to work up the courage to just toss the thing out her window. Because the moonstone *had* to be responsible, right? She hadn't started having these dreams until Willow had come up with the perfect cure for insomnia. And yeah, that had wiggled her out at first but she'd adjusted because the trade-off had been something just shy of amazing. A well-rested slayer was a happy slayer, and

Buffy had definitely been a happy slayer. Or happier than she had a right to be on this side of a breakup, with a hellgod hellbent on finding her sister and her mother still recovering from a medical scare. Willow's spells, as advanced as they were now, still sometimes went kablooeey. That this one had gone ker-sexy was probably the best possible side-effect she could have asked for.

But was it wrong to keep dreaming these things if Spike had a thing for her?

Buffy didn't know. All she knew was that she definitely did *not* want to throw the stone out the window. For starters, she would never be able to get to sleep with these thoughts running through her head. And...well, she'd miss it.

What Spike didn't know wouldn't hurt him. And hey, maybe while she was having her illicit sexy dreams, she could ask the Spike her mind manifested for some guidance. People had been known to have epiphanies while dreaming, right? It was worth a shot, either way. Her subconscious might be better prepared to deal with things than her conscious.

So Buffy didn't throw the stone out of the window. Part of her had known she never would. And when she climbed into bed, the fact that her heart was hammering extra hard had nothing to do with the fact that she would be seeing Spike in a handful of seconds. That would be silly. It wasn't like that was even really him.

Though when she was there the next instant, standing in the shapeless space that had somehow become theirs, looking into eyes that she hadn't known she knew as well as she did, it was hard to convince her brain that this was anything other than very real.

But it wasn't. Spike wouldn't be so at ease in front of her in the nude. And if he ever gave her *that* look while stroking himself, it would be the last thing he ever did. Probably.

"Thought I'd get started without you," he said by way of greeting, and no, she didn't miss the way his lips pulled into a smirk when her eyes immediately dropped, following the pumps of his hand up and down his shaft. Nothing about him ever changed, she realized, from dream to dream. Each time she saw him like this, his skin had the same contours, the same dips and texture, same scars, same small pattern of

freckles on his left hip, which was weird, right? Even by hellmouth standards. If there was one thing she could count on dreams to be, it was inconsistent. But not here. Not with Spike.

"All right, Slayer?" Spike asked, tilting his head, stilling the motions of his hand. "Lookin' a bit spooked."

"Dawn," Buffy blurted. "She said... She said you're in love with me."

He arched an eyebrow. "Yeah? And what do you think?"

"I don't know." Buffy's breaths were coming harder, faster, and she was aware of them too. She was aware of everything here in ways she never had been in dreams. "Though you said you were."

"When?"

"That night. The first night." She remembered thinking it was weird, but then, dreams were weird. Some of them had crazy cheese men, others had naked vampires professing their love. It didn't mean anything. Except maybe that she needed to cut back on dairy.

"It's crazy," Buffy muttered to herself before meeting his eyes again. "You'd be crazy to be in love with me."

"Off my bloody rocker," he agreed before prowling a step forward, eyeing her up and down with that lusty gleam in his eyes once more. "Thought as much myself."

"You did?"

"Still do."

"So you're not. You don't love me."

"Didn't say that, did I?"

Oh god, he couldn't be in love with her. He just couldn't.

"Spike, you're a vampire."

"Angel was a vampire."

"Angel was good." The excuse sounded lame even to her.

"I can be, too," Spike said, drawing nearer. "I've changed, Buffy."

"A chip isn't a soul." God, she'd *just* had this argument in real-world time. She should not be wasting dream-world time convincing herself of something she already knew.

He nodded, drawing nearer still. "Bloody right it's not. Somethin' better, yeah? Know if I ever do manage to get it out, I'm already just as bad as I wanna be. Not gonna go after your chums, off anyone's fish, or

snap any necks. Gonna be just the way I am right now, only with a bit more bite.”

“More bite’ meaning killing people. That’s the reason you can’t be in love with me.”

“That right?” He studied her in that inscrutable way of his, where she felt seen as she never had been, and by the last person in the world she wanted to let close. “Thought as much myself, gotta admit,” he continued a second later, taking a slow, sauntering step forward. “Course I did. You were in my head. Couldn’t get you out. Not all that unusual, mind. Had plenty of dreams about you before and I’d *done* plenty to you in those dreams. Sometimes I’d shag you until you couldn’t walk—other times I’d go for the throat. The best ones were a bit of both. I’d kill you, then you’d ride me blind. Squeeze me until I pop.”

Buffy’s legs started to tremble. “Isn’t that backwards? Killing then sex?”

“Doesn’t have to make sense if it’s a dream, does it?” He stopped when he was close enough to breathe in, which she did. Olfactory senses here were as acute as ever. There was the smoke and leather combined with the coppery hint of blood, and whatever soap he used to top off the Spike smell. Not that Buffy had ever thought about Spike using soap or cologne or whatever it was guys did to make themselves good-smelling for the opposite sex, but he did seem to rock it and that couldn’t be eau du vampire. She’d staked too many creatures that smelled very much like untended corpses.

Spike did not. He always smelled good. Here and out there. Both versions of him.

There *were* two versions, right?

“Though now that you ask,” he said, lifting a hand to drag her hair over her shoulder before skimming his fingers down her side, “it is a mite strange. Just another thing I managed to not see until it was obvious. Never stayed dead in my dreams. Wasn’t the way I wanted you.”

“It can’t be true,” she said, though the idea didn’t sound as absurd as it had when Dawn had first mentioned it, and she didn’t like that. “You can’t be in love with me.”

Spike chuckled and tugged her top over her head before she could

register what was happening. Then he lowered his mouth to her throat, and she felt a rush that shouldn't be there—one of evolutionary awareness, that a dangerous predator was near a place she was most vulnerable. He must have felt it too, for he chuckled again and clamped his mouth down hard around her skin and sucked. And Buffy sagged, her knees giving in and all of her collapsing forward, only not because he was there, holding her up, pulling her against him, tearing her pajama bottoms off her legs so that she was as naked as he was.

"Tried tellin' myself that," he said as he hiked her into his arms, rubbing his cock along her slick flesh in a way that was becoming familiar. Maybe too familiar—maybe she had been fooling herself from the start where all of this was concerned. The Spike in her head, the one who was technically *her*, wouldn't be trying to convince her that he could be good, that being in love with her was something other than ookie, would it? The thought that this was real—that *any* of it was real—had her more than a little freaked.

But god, she didn't want him to stop. She didn't want any of this to stop.

"Tried," he said again, holding her gaze as he thrust his cock deep inside of her. "Turns out it's too late. Bloody lost for you, Summers."

He kissed her before she could object or argue or think much at all. About what he'd said or what it meant, or the new, terrifying thought that maybe all of this wasn't just a dream after all. Impossible as it sounded. As it *had* to be.

But when he started pumping his hips, she decided those thoughts could wait for morning.



THERE WAS NO WAY WILLOW WOULD HAVE GIVEN BUFFY A STONE that took her to a magical, pocket reality where the sole purpose seemed to be getting naked with a vampire. That knowledge was pretty much the only thing keeping Buffy sane when she awoke the next morning.

First order of business: finding out how the damn moonstone worked.

Second order of business, as she discovered over breakfast: investigating what had almost assuredly been the work of a vampire at the train yard.

Third order of business: figure out how to get a good night's rest without any magical aids. Much as she loved how she spent her evenings, the entire Spike-love-scare had her too wigged to consider using it again.

So, after seeing Dawn off to school, Buffy booked it to Willow's dorm at the UC Sunnydale campus, hoping with everything she had in her that her friend didn't have an early morning class and wouldn't be too offended if she started off the day with a good old-fashioned interrogation.

"Buffy," Willow said when she opened the door, not bothering to hide her surprise—or her confusion as Buffy strong-armed her way inside. "Uhh, hi?"

"Sorry," Buffy replied, whirling around, twisting her fingers together to give her hands something to do. "I know it's early and you have class and I should have called but this is of the dire and it couldn't wait."

"Uh oh." Willow frowned and closed the door. "What's up? Is it Dawn? Something happen with—"

"It's the moonstone you gave me. I need to know..." She pressed her lips together, not sure that she could say all of it aloud. Confessing about sexy dreams was one thing—girl talk, and all, and it wasn't like Willow hadn't taken advantage of the girl code in the past. In fact, Willow had at one time regaled Buffy with graphic descriptions of naughty dreams in which Giles played a leading role. Which she so didn't need to remember now but did anyway.

Still, there was a big difference between dream-crushing on a very old but still very human man and enthusiastically getting naked with the undead every night.

"What is it?" Willow asked again, her already round eyes going even rounder. "Something go wrong?"

"Dreams," Buffy blurted before she could lose her nerve. "I've been having, uhh, dreams. Really vivid dreams. Ever since I started using the moonstone. Is that normal?"

A slow smile spread across Willow's face. "So it *did* work!"

God, this was so not good. It was the opposite of good. "What worked?"

"The spell I put on the stone!" Now Willow squealed—like an actual squeal—and clasped her hands together, bouncing slightly as though suddenly suffering from energy overload. "You didn't say anything so I thought maybe it was a dud, but *Buffy*, this is wonderful!"

Well, that was something. Apparently, her best friend in the whole world thought that she and Spike should be screwing like bunnies. "But why?" she blurted before she could help herself. "Did you know? Did he tell you? Did he put you up to it?"

"No," Willow said, furrowing her brow as her smile faded. "Of course not. I-I just thought that you two could stand to talk things out. You know."

"No, I really don't. What on *earth* would we have to talk out?"

"Uhh, the whole vampire thing?"

"Are you out of your mind? That's not something we can just..." Flustered, Buffy made some sort of spastic gesture with her hand. "I can't believe you would do that without telling me. It's been going on for *weeks* and now he says he's in love with me!"

Willow frowned harder. "Well, of course he's in love with you! You just needed to talk!"

Okay, she was starting to think they were having two different conversations. Like in the movies when one character thought they were hashing something out with a friend only to discover their friend had been on the phone the entire time, and all their responses had been for someone else. Or something. Buffy gave her head a shake, hoping that would help clear up the situation. It did not. "Willow," she said slowly, "please tell me why you think I need to just *talk things out* with Spike?"

That did it. Willow screwed up her face. "Huh? Spike? What about Spike?"

"I was hoping you could tell me," Buffy said through her teeth. "Maybe start from the beginning? What did you do to the moonstone and why?"

There was a long pause in which Willow's expression went from confusion to realization before finally landing on horror. She turned

bright red, sputtered a bunch of nonsense words before seeming to find her footing. “Oh god. *Spike*? You’ve been seeing *Spike* this whole time? Oh. Oh, Buffy. Why didn’t you say something?”

That hardly seemed like the point and she was so not going to give Willow the satisfaction or the blackmail fodder that was knowing that she’d been screwing Spike sideways in her dreams for weeks now. “Just tell me.”

So she did. From the top—how it had started innocently enough. A magical sleep-aid since she knew Buffy could use the assist. How it had spiraled after a conversation with Tara in which they mutually bemoaned that Buffy and Riley hadn’t had a chance to really work through their issues. How Willow had gone to bed that night, her brain abuzz with thoughts of elements to use to inspire a good night’s sleep and fix Buffy’s relationship problems. How brilliance had struck.

“The idea was to let you guys talk when you slept,” Willow said miserably. “You know...foster communication, work through your issues.”

Buffy was in full pace mode by this point in the story, her mind running through a highlight reel of every single encounter she’d had with Spike. How it had started with her popping into some serious oral sex, Spike completely unruffled by her appearance. Enjoying it, even. Reveling in it. Telling her he *loved her*. He’d said that in the dream—he’d said it and she’d brushed it off because it was a dream and dreams were weird only this wasn’t just a dream and every night with Spike had been real.

“Oh my god.” She was going to be sick. Or sad. She felt much closer to sobbing than throwing up, and she didn’t care to explore the reasons why.

“Buffy?” Willow had on her patented worried-slash-forgive-me look. “I’m so sorry.”

Sorry. Great. Her best friend was sorry.

Only she didn’t know the half of it. Not even close.



TURNED OUT THE TRAINFUL OF DEAD ARRIVALS WAS DRUSILLA'S handiwork. Of course it was. In a world where Buffy was sharing dreams with Spike—and that was the tamest way to describe what they were doing—the only thing that could make all this more of a soap opera was the dramatic return of the mad vampire her would-be lover had been absolutely gaga over ever since he'd first blown into her life.

Buffy didn't like the way her stomach twisted when she learned that Drusilla was the baddie needing to be staked. Didn't like that her first thought, after she'd run into a furious Harmony who had been fuming about being kicked out because her boyfriend's ex had blown into town, was that Spike's apparent love for her was extremely conditional. Fine enough for him to whisper it where it didn't really count, in dreams he probably didn't realize were real, but the second Drusilla waltzed back into town, he was ready to dump his sure-thing—another thing Buffy didn't want to consider, that Spike had been fucking her after fucking Harmony—and get his monster back on. So much for the “already as evil as I'm going to get” nonsense. The original power couple was back together and wasn't that just swell?

At the very least, it simplified things up as little else could. Spike was back with Drusilla, which meant he was most certainly not pining after Buffy, which meant she could use the moonstone at least one more time to make sure he knew how very over this weird, creepy thing between them was. That was, if he bothered to show up. He might be too busy reuniting with the woman who had cheated on him with virtually every type of demon there was out there, if the stories were to be believed.

Not that Buffy cared, of course. She didn't. Not at all. Next question, please.

That night, she took an extra long patrol, half-hoping she'd run into the source of her problems and be able to deal with it with a stake—no dice—then busied herself with things around the house upon arriving home, before finally giving in and climbing into bed with the moonstone ready. Then she lay there for a long time, staring at her ceiling, hoping sleep would come without the need to get magical rocks involved. Not wanting to admit to anyone, least of all herself, that she was worried she would find herself alone in their strange

meeting place. Not knowing why she cared but knowing she did, and hating that she did, and hating him for making her worry, hating all of this so much she could choke with it.

Eventually, though, it became clear that sleep wouldn't come without a boost. So Buffy released a deep sigh, closed her eyes, and put the moonstone where it wanted to be.

He was there, waiting as always, only he didn't look like he normally did. Maybe that was her imagination, but she didn't think so. There was no fire in his eyes, no ready smirk, no rush toward her to divest her of her clothing so they could get to the good part. Like he knew that she knew and all pretending was over.

She released a deep breath—apparently, breath-holding was possible in the dreamworld—and stepped forward.

"Where's Drusilla?" she asked bluntly. No sense dancing around anything, right?

Spike arched an eyebrow. "Heard she was in town, did you?"

"Harmony caught you two fooling around."

He snorted. "Bully for Harm."

"So you were. Fooling around. With Drusilla."

"Would it matter to you if I was?"

Buffy pressed her lips together, shaking suddenly, trying to find the right combination of words to throw at him. There was what she knew she needed to say and what she wanted to say, and until this moment, she would have sworn the two speeches were identical. Spike was gross, Spike was evil, Spike was counting down the days until he ran out of free passes and she had to dust him for real. It was all there, memorized and ready for recitation. But something about seeing him here, about the way he was looking at her, about knowing it was all real, screwed with her head and changed her *shoulds* into question marks.

The fact remained that the dreams, screwed up as they were, had somehow become important to her. A place where she could well and truly let go of her worries and responsibilities, embrace the things she wanted and just, well, be free. No pressure from her friends or her watcher or her sister or, most importantly, herself. She liked who she was when she was here, liked how Spike saw her, how

he made her feel, and how she carried that energy with her the following day.

"Yeah," Buffy said at last. "It would matter to me."

"Mhmm." He took a step forward. "Why is that?"

"Well...you said you love me, for starters."

"Bloody curse is what it is, loving you."

The words themselves didn't hurt, but that he spoke them so plainly did. Like it was obvious.

But Buffy was nothing if not a glutton for punishment, so she had to ask. "What makes it a curse?"

"You mean besides the fact that it's wrong? Not enough that I got myself defanged with this bloody chip, had to go and fall in love with the sodding Slayer. At least I have an excuse with the chip, yeah? Was somethin' done to me." He shook his head, pressed the heel of his palm against his brow. "Turns out loving you is the reason, though. Reason I came back here in the first place. Thought it was to kill you proper, do it for her, prove to her that you were nothin' to me. Took me too bloody long to suss out why I needed to prove it at all. She knew, though. Always does. Then this started."

"What's *this*?"

"Dreams of you. Like this, like you are now."

She didn't know what to say to that, having not given much consideration as to how all had unfolded on Spike's end. "You know you're dreaming."

He snorted. "Of course I'm bloody dreaming. Not like you'd touch me out there, is it? Fuck, Slayer, I've been dreamin' about you for years, and was always the same. Fighting or fucking or both. But somethin' happened. Some switch in my head and suddenly it didn't feel like a dream anymore. Suddenly you started showin' up and actin' like you're really her. Makes a man..." But he didn't finish the thought, rather looked away, his jaw tightening. "Makes a man go a bit loopy upstairs. Enough to tell the woman who was once his salvation to bugger off when she came by to save him from himself."

Buffy's heart somersaulted. "You...told her to leave?"

"Did at that. Stern warning and all, that she better not come back, else my lady'll have words."

"But Harmony caught you making out."

Spike lifted a shoulder, not meeting her gaze. "Had to see, didn't I? Dru was my last chance. If anyone could knock the Slayer outta me, it's her. Didn't work for rot, though. Second I touched her I knew I was a bloody goner. More interested in chattin' up a dream than I was her."

"And..." Buffy swallowed, inching forward. "And what about being evil? The chip? You said before that if you get it out—"

"I get it out and it'll become right clear to everyone that I am the Slayer's lapdog." He laughed again, the sound fractured. "She's broken me. Bitch'll probably never know, wouldn't give a toss if she did figure it out, and there's nothin' I'd like more than to rip out these feelings and go back to the way things are supposed to be. Just my rotten luck to love her like I do."

"Spike."

"Sorry, pet. Apparently not very good company tonight. Didn't ever feature myself turnin' Dru away if she ever came to her senses and crawled back to me. Just drove home how bloody lost I am for the Slayer." He paused, snorted. "And how buggered I am because of it."

"Spike." Buffy stepped forward again, her heart hammering. All the things she'd told herself she'd say to him, the horror of discovering how real these dreams were, what and how she felt. It didn't make sense, her and Spike. At all. But it also kinda did in a weird *maybe-this-is-why-I-can-never-have-normal* sort of way. Her world was always in crisis, no clear path to victory, no certainty to speak of. The only constant the past few years had given her, aside from her friends, was the one vampire she could never shake off.

It was crazy. God, she knew how crazy it was. How crazy *she* was for even considering the things she was suddenly considering. The fact remained, though, that she knew Spike. Knew how he was when he loved, when he believed in something, when he went after what he wanted. All that power and cunning—and yeah, penchant for making bad choices, sure—suddenly hers. He would fight for her, protect for her, love for her. He would give himself over entirely because that was the person he was. Had always been.

The only thing was she wouldn't be able to move forward, see if

this went somewhere, without first asking herself if she thought it possible that she could love Spike back. If she were to try this with him, it had to be for the right reasons. It had to be because she wanted him, too.

Buffy bit her lip, and when he met her eyes again, something inside of her locked into place.

They would be chaotic and messy and passionate and probably a complete disaster. But they would also be fun. Perhaps the most fun she'd ever had.

"Spike, you need to know something," she said, again strangely aware of how hard her heart was hammering. "Willow did a spell."

He studied her for a moment, arched an eyebrow. "Yeah, and?"

"She gave me something called a moonstone. I haven't been sleeping well and she... Well, she thought she could help." Buffy wetted her lips. "She also thought she might be able to put me in contact with Riley. Through dreams. So we could talk things out. Suffice to say, in the great tradition of Willow's spells, something went wrong."

Spike was still staring at her, though a bit of understanding had leaked into his eyes. After a long beat, he huffed a little laugh and stepped forward. "Tryin' to tell me you're really here, is that it? Not so soft in the head that I'll believe anything."

"Well, believe it. This is really me."

"Mmhmm. Prove it."

She rolled her eyes. "How am I supposed to do that? Hello, still sleeping."

"How long's this been goin' on?"

"A few weeks. R-really ever since Riley left."

Spike nodded, eyed her up and down in a way that had become intimately familiar over that stretch of time. "So when I've had you here," he said, edging closer still, "under me, around me..." Suddenly he was close enough to touch, and demonstrated this by cupping her chin and running his thumb over her mouth. "Suckin' on me, it's really been you?"

Buffy shoved him back—more instinct than anything else—and felt the normal rush of excitement along with the *gross*. Normal enough that when she recognized that was what it was, she was more surprised

to realize that it had always been there, tagging along after her indignation. Every nasty thing he'd said or lobbed at her, part of her had been excited.

"I thought it was a dream, too," she said. "Just a dream. So it didn't matter what I did here. Even if it was you."

Spike breathed out, tilted his head, the gleam in his eyes softening a smidge and allowing in a glimpse of what she knew was belief. "Bloody hell," he said, stepping back now. "Slayer..."

"Yeah."

He dropped his arms to his sides, worked his throat. "Since he left?"

"Yeah. I put this stone on my head and I'm here."

"And you kept doin' it. Kept comin' here."

She shrugged, looking away now. "Like I said, I didn't know it was real. I didn't think it hurt. Dreams being, you know, dreams. Always woke up with extra perk to spare, which was a big plus. And..." Buffy inhaled, steeling herself. Once she admitted this, she knew there was no going back. "I liked it."

Spike made a soft sound that might have been a growl or a moan. Maybe both. Then he was against her, his hands on her face, tilting her head back so that she had no choice but to look at him. He searched her eyes for what felt like forever, flicked his gaze to her lips, then up again. "Liked it, did you?"

"Please don't make me regret telling you that."

The corner of his mouth ticked up. "Like it enough to get the real treatment, love?"

"I... I think I want to. As long as you're not obnoxious."

"That so?"

"You know what I mean."

He nodded, grinning still, and nipped at her lips. "I know what you mean," he whispered. "Think it's time we have this out in person."

"In person?"

"You say you're real. This is real?" Spike cupped her cheek, his face growing serious. "I want you to tell me when we're awake. Come and look me in the eye and tell me this hasn't been all in my head."

"A-and then what happens?"

But she knew, of course. She knew and he knew, and now things were real. The ball was in her court. This was the last time they would see each other in dreams. It was on her to decide what that meant.

"Guess we'll see," Spike said, and kissed her.



THE FACT THAT HE PROBABLY KNEW SHE WAS HERE MADE IT WORSE, she thought. Standing outside his crypt, trying to work up the nerve to do what she'd come here to do. It wasn't a matter of want—she had already had that conversation with herself a time or twelve hundred since she'd come out of the last dream. Sometimes sleep revelations remained in sleep-land, leaving the conscious mind perplexed but otherwise unchanged. But Buffy had known as she was having it that her sleep revelation was a mold-breaker, as real as everything else had been inside those dreams. The second she'd opened her eyes and seen that it was still dark out, she'd leaped to her feet and started tugging on clothes, determined to prove to him that everything she'd said was true. Him and herself.

Still, it was a big step, opening the door. Big. Huge. Terrifying. Her head was full of cautionary tales she'd already lived through once. All the ways this could and probably would go wrong with him—with *them*—because they made the kind of sense that didn't.

But still, those other persistent thoughts remained—what if it *didn't* go wrong? What if they actually *did* make sense? What if, despite all odds, this was where her path had been leading her all along?

That last thought seemed a bit too wishful to be real, but the fact that she did *wish* it meant something.

The scrape of metal against stone tore through the air before her brain could drag her down another rabbit hole. Apparently, Spike had gotten tired of her one-woman production of *Hamletta*, for he was there the next second, standing in the doorway wearing jeans and an open long-sleeved shirt, nothing underneath. Nothing but miles of skin she had explored at length in a place that wasn't real, even if the experience had been.

"Slayer," Spike said in an oddly formal tone. "Bit late for you, innit? Thought you'd be tucked up in your beddy-bye, all safe and sound. Or did you need something?"

It was in his voice as well as his eyes—the question. Eyes she had looked into so many times now, like this but also never like this.

"I need something," she said.

He arched an eyebrow. "Night's not gettin' any younger."

No, it wasn't. Especially for someone who had already made the choice that mattered.

"I need you to kiss me," Buffy replied in a hurry, the words almost tripping over themselves in her rush to get them out.

This was the part she hated. The vulnerable part. The part where the ball left her court and took up space in someone else's. That he didn't move at once—didn't swoop in and claim her mouth as he had so often in the dreams—gave Buffy license to panic for a few really long seconds that perhaps she had completely lost her mind after all. It would be some sort of hellmouth justice, wouldn't it, if she decided to go for it with Spike based on a version of him that didn't exist.

But then his expression softened and he stepped forward so she could see his eyes clearly. And again, she thought of how well she knew those eyes, and all doubt flashed away.

"Be certain, Slayer," Spike said thickly. "I kiss you and it all changes."

She inhaled and edged a step closer. "I know. I thought about it."

"Mmhmm. And what'd you think?"

Did he really want to have a conversation and not make with the smoochies? Here she had been preparing herself to be seized and perhaps thrown against a wall or something as he ripped off her clothes and turned her dreams into reality—only literally and not just a cheesy line she heard in bad infomercials. Spike stopping to philosophize over what this meant for them hadn't been in the brochure. The guy couldn't do anything the easy way.

"I'm standing here, aren't I?"

The corner of Spike's mouth kicked up like he was fighting a grin. Which he likely was, the ass. "You are," he agreed, closing another space between them. "Just wanna make sure you knew that. All real

here. No dreams. I kiss you, touch you, it doesn't go away when you wake up."

"What do you want, Spike?"

"Believe you know what's at stake for me here."

She didn't—and then she did. Of course she did.

"I don't love you," she said, hating the way her voice shook with the words. "Not—not today. Not right now. I have no idea if this will work or last. It makes no sense."

"You know just what to say to get a bloke hot, you know?"

"But I wouldn't be here if I didn't think it was possible." The words came out in a rush, like she was afraid her brain would realize what it was she was saying and try to stop her before it could get out. Truth of the matter was, it took saying those words to realize just how much she meant them. That she had to have thought it, believed it on some gut level, to gather the strength and desire to see this through. Come here and ask for a chance outside of dreams.

Spike's eyes softened. "Yeah?"

"I-I have a bit of catch-up to do," she said. "If you can wait."

A beat. "For you, Slayer, I can wait until the end of the bloody world."

"For the love," she blurted. "Just for the love, right? We don't have to wait to—"

"Fuck no."

Then he was in her space, around her, one hand on her ass and the other twining through her hair, and his mouth was on hers. Fierce and passionate, damn near fiery, everything it had been in the dreams and more than that. It was the sort of kiss she associated with a version of herself she'd thought no longer in reach, but nope, had been right here the whole time. Buffy was wrapped around him in a blink, chasing his tongue with hers, moaning when he moaned, stumbling after him when he tugged her back, back, before deciding it would be easier to do this if he could do the walking for the both of them.

He must have read her mind, for he hauled her against his chest, growled his approval when her legs curled around his hips, and then they were moving. Through the dark of the crypt—stopping a few times to admire the stone walls, which she admitted was kinda hard to

do with her back pressed against them—and deeper still. Somehow, they had managed to make their way down—this place had a whole other level, who knew?—and Spike had a bed there. Only her vampire would think about hauling a mattress into a cemetery.

“Got lots I want to do to you, pet,” he said against her lips, shoving her jacket down her arms. “Any requests before we get started?”

Buffy worked her throat. “Define *lots*.”

“Enough to keep till the end of the world in the hopes you’ll love me by the time we get there.” He grinned when he said it, as though to pass it off as a joke. But he wasn’t joking, and something in her chest wrenched.

Maybe it won’t take until the end of the world.

The thought was heady, almost too large for her, but the sort she knew better than to try to fight. She knew herself, knew what it felt like when she started to fall. Knew how futile it was to stand in the way, even when it didn’t make sense. Perhaps especially when it didn’t make sense.

She and Spike didn’t make sense, but the fall would come. Buffy realized she was fine with that.

“I’m okay with lots,” she said, trailing her fingers along his chest. “I just want you.”

Spike stared at her long enough she worried she might have broken him, then growled and took her mouth again.

And she was fine with that, too.



OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS, THERE WERE A LOT OF LITTLE moments. Plenty of big ones, too, but the little ones were what stuck with her.

The first came when she told him she wanted to keep what was happening between them, well, between *them*. She didn’t really have a good reason, except that going twelve rounds of Litigating Buffy’s Love Life was the last thing she needed at the moment. *After* became her mantra. After Glory was gone, after they knew Dawn was safe and the world secure, that was when they would tell the others. Right now,

Buffy didn't have the emotional mileage to put behind defending a relationship no one would understand. Not even to her mom, who liked Spike just fine as a cocoa buddy, probably not as a vampire boyfriend.

"But more than she liked Angel, right?" Spike had asked, earning a well-deserved thwack with his pillow. They spent a lot of time post-patrol at his place. It was nice, discreet, and she could make all kinds of sounds without worrying about disturbing the neighbors. Or, in her case, her family. And Spike definitely liked putting that to the test—just how loud he could make her scream. Or moan. Or, well, any sound she made, he was generally a fan of.

Though he had been disappointed about keeping their relationship private for the time being, he'd said he understood. Big adjustment, from enemies to mad about each other, after all. No sense making things hard for her. All he cared about was he got to love her. And that they came up with a good enough reason to include him in the Scooby meetings, as this fight was as much his as it was hers.

The second moment came the day she found her mom on the couch. The day her world changed forever.

In truth, Buffy didn't remember a whole lot of what had followed then. The time between arriving home and going to pick Dawn up felt detached from her somehow—she knew she'd lived it, had conversations, made phone calls, and had all kinds of thoughts that should have scared her but hadn't. The entire business of death had never hit her before then, how awful it was. Clinical, detached. Things the EMTs said that made it sound like her mom wasn't a person at all, just a thing that had broken at the house. She hadn't cried until after slaying the vampire in the morgue, and even then only a little. Losing her shit hadn't been an option.

Spike had shown up that night. She'd been on the back porch, trying to think—or not think—and there he'd been. To share her silence as he had on another night like this. She'd missed patrol and he'd been worried, but then he'd seen her eyes and known. And like that night not too far back, he had settled beside her. Unlike that night, he'd put an arm around her and tugged her into him, and she'd cried for real. A hard cry, all snot and tears and an awful, chest-crushing

sound she hadn't realized she could make. And time had whirled on by, unforgiving in that way it had, and somehow she'd ended up in her bedroom. When she'd awakened, it had been to an empty bed, but a lived-in sort of empty that made her think Spike had stayed until sunrise. The note he'd left on her nightstand, along with a glass of water and some aspirin, told her she was right.

The third moment had been not long after that one. The funeral, which had been the requisite necessary and terrible, full of pretty words spoken by a preacher who hadn't known her mother, and overflowing with people lining up to give Buffy their sorrys and platitudes and meaning well, she knew, but somehow more intolerable because of it. Once the crowd had thinned, she'd stood at the graveside for hours, wondering what to do next. How a *next* could even exist. Eventually, night had fallen and Angel had shown up. He'd said some things, the usual things. He'd touched her, hugged her, and for a second she'd wanted to go back to the girl she'd been when a hug from Angel had been all she needed to feel whole and right. She'd even thought about kissing him, see if that could set the world back the way it needed to be. Then she'd felt awful for having the thought, more so when she realized she sensed Spike nearby. Something inside of her had switched, and she'd realized before Angel left that she'd buried part of herself in that grave, too.

She'd gone to see Spike afterward, prepared for his jealousy—jealousy she couldn't say was entirely unearned. And yeah, he'd been a bit distant. Smiles a bit strained, answers shorter than she'd grown accustomed to. But when she'd decided the best way to get past the Angel thing was to face it head-on, he'd folded and buried his face in his hands.

"I'm a wanker," he'd said. "I'm sorry, love. Whatever you need now. Even if it's him, no matter how much I hate it. Can't promise I'll be a good boy about it—will probably get nice and sloshed, might say some things I'll regret—but I won't love you any less."

Buffy's heart, which had taken far too many blows, had cracked even further, though she hadn't told him that. Just kissed him, assured him that she was with the person she wanted to be with, and that

Angel was gone. There had been more she'd wanted to articulate, but the words hadn't come. Maybe they would someday.

The fourth moment had been Glory—after Spike had been nabbed under suspicion of being the Key, given the amount of time he and Buffy had been spending together. It had culminated in seeing the hell-god's handiwork, the amount of physical abuse Spike had endured to protect Dawn. That Buffy hadn't been surprised *had* surprised her. That she'd known, without needing reassurances from him or anyone else, that her sister's secret was safe with him. That when she'd mounted up to go get her vampire back, it had been for that purpose and that purpose alone. She hadn't had an explanation for the others as to why rescuing Spike was so important, aside from the obvious reasons, nor had she had an explanation ready for the state he was in. Too banged up for anyone to believe he'd given Glory anything of value. And the others hadn't known why. It wasn't like Spike had any reason not to blab.

The final moment was this one.

"Till the end of the world," Spike was saying, looking at her with such love and devotion it was almost a physical ache. "Even if that happens to be tonight."

He would. He really would. He would give all of himself and more to protect Dawn, to fight this fight, to spare her the pain of losing someone else she loved.

And that was when it hit—a lightning bolt of perfect clarity, the things she knew and the things she thought and the things she felt becoming one. The future she hoped to live in past tonight was one she needed Spike to be a part of.

"Spike," she said in a hurry, seizing his arm as he made his way toward the door. "I need to tell you something."

He turned to her, his eyes soft and warm. And she saw he knew.

"After," he said. "Tell me after."

Buffy swallowed, fighting back the burn of tears, the rush of sudden terrible dread of what came next. "There might not be an after, you know. This might be it."

He nodded. "Might be, yeah. Still, gotta give you incentive to give me one, don't I?"

"I'll try."

"No *try* about it, Slayer. I'm holding you to it. Not gettin' away from me that easy." Spike grinned, drew close and brushed a kiss across her lips. "I love you."

"Now you're not being fair."

"Not my fault you waited till now to say it, sweets."

"Still with the unfair."

"I am evil, you remember. Fair's not exactly in my nature."

"Well, you know that thing I said about not all of us making it? You're officially not allowed to dust on me. You die tonight and I'm kicking your ass."

"No intention of dyin' tonight. Got too much to live for." He kissed her again, pressed his brow to hers and inhaled deeply. "So let's get us to the other side of this, yeah?"

Buffy nodded, trembling, and reached for his free hand to lace her fingers through his. "Deal."

And together, they set off to face the apocalypse. Her friends might give them some weird looks when they showed up hand-in-hand, but she found she couldn't be too bothered to care right now. Assuming they made it to tomorrow, the questions would come, as would the judgments and predictions of doom, but she had what she needed now. And who knew? Maybe she was selling them short and they would understand.

She could dream.