

# QUAKE

*Enemies with Benefits #2*



HOLLY DENISE





THE WORLD WAS GOING TO END. THAT WAS ALL THERE WAS TO IT—that was how it happened. Earthquake then apocalypse, with a side helping of dead slayer. Nothing cool or fun or exciting about it, despite what certain towering Iowans thought. The world was going to end and Buffy was quite possibly going to die.

She had to do something about it. Like now.

On the list of things to do was certainly not track down Spike and finally satisfy this itch.

Well, a tickle, really.

There, pressing along the underside of her skin, or sometimes over it. Down her spine, between her shoulders, up her neck, and ultimately south until it settled in places that no Spike-inspired itches or tickles ought ever to settle.

But now, with the sun burning bright above, the awkwardness of that last conversation with Riley still clinging to her like really persistent body odor, the itch—the *tickle*—had matured into an all-out ache. The sort she couldn't ignore. Much like the apocalypse which was all kinds of imminent, even if Buffy was the only one who could see it. The apocalypse took precedence over itches, though, which was why she was here now, throwing open the door to Giles's house without ceremony and letting herself across the threshold.

Giles might not officially be a watcher anymore, but as a citizen of the world, certainly the inevitable and obvious apocalypse was his business.

Except when she stepped inside, it wasn't Giles she saw. It was Spike.

Spike, puttering around the kitchen, making himself a mug of blood.

"Watcher's not here, Slayer," he said without so much as turning in her direction. "Think this last bout of wackiness mighta been the death knell in his arrangement with his little fuck friend. He was escortin' her to the airport, last I heard."

It was a testament to both the seriousness of the situation and how bad that tickle had grown that mention of Giles's overseas bed-buddy wasn't enough to throw her off course. Yeah, she felt bad for Giles. A little. Despite the grossness that was thinking about him doing

anything remotely physical with anyone—and at least this time it hadn't been her mom—she knew that it had to be a blow.

Olivia apparently hadn't taken the whole waking-up-with-no-voice-and-heart-stealing-monsters-lurking-outside thing all that well. People were weird like that.

"What are you doing here?" Buffy said as Spike rounded the corner, mug of blood curled in his hand. "I...I thought Giles had sent you to stay with Xander."

"Yeah, well, seein' as he and demon girl have decided to celebrate havin' full range of their vocals, thought I'd scarper. Besides, no bloody way I was stayin' there all permanent like."

"So you came here. To Giles."

Spike arched an eyebrow, his expression carefully guarded in ways she still wasn't used to. Not that she'd tried to get used to it. If anything, these past couple of weeks, she'd tried more than anything to not look at Spike whenever possible.

Thankfully, no one had noticed.

"Long as those soldier boys are out and about, don't reckon it's a good idea for me to make myself an easy target." Spike dropped his gaze to study the contents of his mug, then sighed and placed the thing on the ledge of the kitchen's peek-a-boo window. "Less that's why you're here. You finally got some information to dish? Keep up your end of that bargain?"

It wasn't. She was here to talk to Giles about the bonafide apocalypse that was going to happen soon. Today, even. Maybe.

But Giles wasn't around at the moment, and Spike was. And there was that itch.

So Buffy nodded.

"Well?"

"Riley... He's one of the commando guys."

Spike stared at her, everything about him still maddeningly unreadable.

"I found out last night," Buffy went on, panicking only slightly when she felt the beginnings of what could only be a good ole Buffy-ramble teasing her tongue. "When I was on patrol, hunting the Gentlemen. He was there in military garb and he had this gun thingy

and smashed the box that gave us our voices back. A-and we talked. Earlier today. About the fact that he's army guy and now he knows that I'm the Slayer."

The second she stopped speaking, the room plunged into a painfully loud quiet. One that lasted forever in her head but likely only a breath or two in reality. But it wasn't natural, that quiet. Spike had never once held his tongue around her and having his gaze on her, against the quiet, feeling it like a caress was almost painful.

"So," he said at last, "that the full status update? Or do you need pointers?"

Buffy inhaled so quickly she nearly choked. "*Pointers?* I thought... I thought you said I didn't need any pointers. That everything was as... *pointy* as it needed to be."

Spike tilted his head, at last a spark of *something* flaring in his eyes. "Meant about cozying up to the enemy—something yours truly has gotten rather good at, even if it wasn't my choice." He paused, then let his eyes do that full-body roam that she'd been immune to not long ago. The same one that now made her feel like she might as well be standing in front of him wearing nothing but a scowl. "Why, pet? Something on your mind?"

Great. Now her face was on fire and because he was a *vampire*, he knew intimately just how embarrassed she was.

"I kissed him," she blurted. "Riley. I kissed him. There was kissage."

It was likely—almost certainly—her imagination, but she could have sworn Spike's gaze darkened a bit.

"Bully for you, pet. Sounds like you don't need any pointers after all."

"I think I did it wrong."

And there it was—the other, non-apocalypse thing that had worried her all night and turned her Spike-shaped itch into something damn near unmanageable. Hell, if she was being honest, it had haunted her from the moment she'd pulled away from Riley, staring up into his warm eyes after a kiss that should have swept her off her feet. Or, at the very least, made it difficult to concentrate on her job, the way Angel's kisses used to.

The way Spike's had. Despite the fact that they'd agreed to no kissing—or, rather, she'd demanded it—during the night of which they were never to speak, every time he'd kissed her, the world had melted away and every otherwise rational impulse in her head had blinked out. And it had been nothing like when Angel had kissed her either—none of the careful restraint or softness. It had been raw and passionate and somewhat desperate, like he couldn't get enough of her. Of *her*.

It had made her feel something. Or lots of somethings. And as a result, given her the hope that she could feel lots of somethings with someone else. Someone who was not Angel, because there was no one more *not Angel* than Spike. If that existed with him, it had to exist somewhere else, didn't it?

But now Spike was staring at her like she'd sprouted an extra head. Or maybe wings and a tail. Anything was possible on the Hellmouth.

Also, there was an apocalypse coming.

"You think you kissed him wrong?" he said at length. "Thought snogging was one of those things you already did pretty well."

"Well, so did I." It was a lie. She *knew* she was a good kisser. Kissing was perhaps the one relationship-y thing she had confidence in—or had until the Riley kissage had failed to so much as give her the good kind of butterflies. The kind she had in spades anytime she knew she was about to see Spike these days.

Spike's gaze had dropped to her mouth. "That why you're still standing here? Need to test it out? See if it's you?"

That idea did not sound like the worst in the world, again on account of the apocalypse. After all, if there was no tomorrow, then what happened today didn't count, right?

*Wrong*. There would be a tomorrow. She was the Slayer, stopping the world from ending was kinda what she did. Even if she did have a habit of dying in the process.

Oh god, what if she died in the process and the last kiss of her entire existence had been one major letdown?

But no. *No*. Kissing Spike was not the way to go. He'd already been there and done that so he should be able to give it to her straight without needing to make out. "Not going there," she said, holding out a hand that so did *not* tremble. "B-but, since you're here, I will ask you

if there was anything wrong with the way I kiss. That I should keep in mind. For Riley.” Except not for Riley, because he was not the Joe Normal he’d advertised, never mind the fact that she might be dead soon. “Or whoever.”

“Hmm.” He was still staring at her mouth. “Could be I’ve forgotten. You *did* say that kissing was off the table, so I didn’t pay too much attention to it during your...evaluation.”

“You...you’re lying.”

“Oh?” Now he raised his eyes to hers again, arching an eyebrow. “How you figure?”

“I... Well, I just do. What? Do you *want* to kiss me again?”

At that, he shook his head and grimaced. “Ever seen a vamp vomit up blood? Not pretty. Ask me again if I want to snog you and you’ll catch yourself a show.”

There was absolutely zero reason for those words to hurt, but hurt they did. And it was the fact that her first instinct was hurt, not disgust at the image he’d put in her head, that startled Buffy into realizing just how idiotic she’d been to go down that road again. Hell, everything about her recent Spike-related decision-making was suspect, and she had more than her fair share of other things to worry about at the present.

And maybe it had been the situation that had made kissing Riley less-than-exciting. Sure, she’d gotten her groove on while patrolling before, but that had always been a planned groove. Or at least anticipated groove. She hadn’t left to do her sweep of downtown Sunnydale thinking she’d run into her maybe-sorta boyfriend. That had taken her by surprise.

The fact that she’d had a dream about making out with Spike in front of Professor Walsh’s class a couple of days prior was just...a coincidence. A coincidence brought on by thinking about That Night a bit too much. In an academic way, of course.

“Okay. Well, thanks for nothing,” Buffy said, then turned and started for the door.

The floor shook with the force of his steps. The next thing she knew, Spike had whirled her to face him, close now—so close—and her traitor belly started making with *all* the butterflies.

"Always knew I was a better liar than you," was all he said before crashing his mouth onto hers. And instantly, all the thinky thoughts she'd been preoccupied with vanished, her world narrowing until the only thing she could process was the feel of Spike against her. His hands sliding up her arms, along the sides of her neck, until he had his fingers tunneled in her hair, holding her there as he nipped and sucked and ravaged in all the ways she'd been trying to forget.

One thing was immediately apparent, as Spike slipped his tongue into her mouth and started doing things with it that had her knees going all wobbly. This was nothing like that kiss with Riley.

Which meant Buffy was in big, big trouble.

"What—" She managed to pull away from him long enough to gasp out the word, and he seized the opportunity to tug her top over her head. She might have protested had he not immediately begun nibbling a path down her throat as he teased her nipples through her bra. "What...doing?"

"Wager if you think you forgot how to snog, you mighta forgotten how to do other things too." The floor beneath her feet moved, and in a flash, she found herself perched on the edge of Giles's dining table. "You and me have an agreement, don't we? On me to make sure you remember how to shag. Just holding up my end, pet. Do you mind?"

Oh *god*, apocalypse or no apocalypse, this was such a bad idea. She knew it was a bad idea, felt it with every ragged breath she managed to drag into her lungs, but no matter how loudly her brain screamed it, the rest of her body apparently didn't care. Because she was whimpering into Spike's mouth the next second and tearing at his belt as he tugged her slacks and panties down her legs. It was by virtue of the fact that he seemed as desperate to touch her as she was desperate to be touched that she was able to shut down the oppressive harping in her head, because, well, he was right, wasn't he? They had had an agreement and letting Spike roam free, able to bite and kill humans was a huge price to pay for just one night of admittedly earth-shattering sex. If she'd sold her soul to the devil, she was at least going to get her money's worth.

Plus, there was the whole *she might die* thing. That earned her a little reprieve, didn't it?



It did, she decided. Which was how she found herself mostly naked in her Watcher's home, sitting on the edge of a table where she'd served Thanksgiving dinner not too long ago, with Spike pressed between her legs. He'd worked his jeans down to mid-thigh with her help and had one of his too-skillful hands wrapped around the base of his cock. And for long seconds, all Buffy could do was stare. She'd gotten more than eyeful of him that night in the motel, had stroked him until they'd been a panting, needy mess, but she hadn't explored him as thoroughly as she would have liked. Something that seemed a waste now because *holy god*, he looked downright edible.

And that there, folks, was a thought that Buffy Summers had never once had about a penis. But then she'd never really taken time to study her previous partners' anatomy. Everything with Angel had been in the shadows and under the covers—he hadn't even let her touch him for more than a few quick pumps before batting her hand away. And Parker had been the same. Well, he'd let her touch him a bit more but she hadn't taken time to really look.

With Spike, though, she looked. Hell, she gawked. There were things she knew from having had him inside her before—like the fact that he was long and thick, and slightly curved toward the tip. The skin there was bunched, too—foreskin, he'd told her the night they'd been together, because he was uncircumcised. The head of his cock was damp and glistened just a bit in the light; his skin seemed a few shades darker, too, and she wondered how that was, how it could be, when he rumbled a growl that had her eyes jerking back to his.

"Keep staring like that, Slayer, and I'll give you the lesson you're just begging for."

*Lessons.* Yes, this was about learning. About being taught. And also possibly ending this life on a sexual high note. "What lesson is that?"

Spike's gaze flickered to her lips. "The one where you learn just how to use that tongue of yours."

The fog in her head dissipated. "And here I thought I was quite clear before. I am so not putting *that* in my mouth."

He met her eyes again, his own harsher now. "Well, then stop eyeballing my prick like it's a fucking lolly, all right?" he snapped, and seized her hips and pulled her forward so she was practically hanging

off the table. Then he was there, dragging the head of his cock up and down her drenched flesh, and it felt like her body had come awake. "More's the pity to the bloke who does end up landing you all official-like."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"Just that for a girl who enjoys getting eaten out the way you do, seems a waste if you're not gonna return the favor."

That should have been it—what snapped her back to herself. What made her realize just what the hell she was doing and with whom, and *where* in such a way that she shoved Spike into the nearest wall, dressed in a hurry and ran for the door. But Spike didn't give her brain enough time to fire the appropriate synapses before swallowing her mouth in another kiss, and then it wasn't her fault, because his mouth on hers was a surefire way to get her to forget things. Important things like the fact that he hated her, she hated him, and she was a moron for having come up with this idea in the first place.

Maybe she had been kissing wrong this entire time, though, because she was pretty certain it had never been like this. Room temperature be damned—Spike was somehow impossibly hot against her lips, tearing at them, nipping, sucking, chasing her tongue with his and groaning into her mouth as he rubbed his cock along the seam of her pussy. And she was on fire, or maybe she *was* fire, she didn't know. All she knew at that moment was that if she didn't feel him inside of her, she was going to combust.

"Bloody hell," Spike growled against her lips. "Why'd you have to taste so good, Slayer?"

"Was wondering...the same thing."

He grinned. "Like the flavor of me, do you?"

Buffy linked her legs around his waist, locking her ankles over his ass and leveraging that hold to pull him into her. Then he was there, parting her flesh with his, his cock sinking into her at a pace almost desperately slow for as hot as she was. Slow would not do it for her—she needed the sort of hard and fast that he'd given her that night at the motel. A pace that would make her forget her birthday, her name, who was president, and all of the above, because then she wouldn't

have to dwell on the fact that Spike was the only one who seemed to bring her to life these days.

"Fuck, Slayer, you're so hot." Spike buried his face into the crook of her neck as he swirled his hips and dragged his cock back out of her. The pull was torture—exquisite torture, but torture nonetheless—and then he was there again, hard and thick and so deep she wanted to cry. Because this wasn't fair. It wasn't any fair that Spike could make her feel this way, that she'd been aching for him since their night together, that all of her confidence as a woman seemed to be tied to the sounds he made when he was touching her, pumping into her, when the ragged breaths he *so* didn't need to take were crashing against her skin.

"So wrong," Buffy said before capturing his cheeks and pulling his mouth back to hers. He tasted like he fucked—like sin incarnate, cigarettes and liquor and leather and all the things that should turn off good girls like her. "So wrong. This is so wrong."

Spike smiled against her lips, waggling his eyebrows and giving her a hard thrust that nearly knocked her onto her back. "Yeah, I know," he purred before ramming into her again. "All part of the fun, eh, Slayer?"

No, no. That was not what this was about. That wasn't who she was. It couldn't be.

But there was no one else here but Buffy. Buffy clawing at his chest, raking her nails through his hair, holding onto his hips for dear life as he fucked her. That's what it was, too. Fucking. A word she'd never thought she'd associate with her sex life, but there was nothing sweet or polite in the way Spike touched her, and she didn't want there to be. She needed it hard and brutal, needed the cadence of the table below her rocking on its legs, the hard slap of skin slapping skin, punctuated by his rough, deep grunts and the animal look in his eyes.

"So wrong," she whimpered again. "Everything...so wrong."

Something in Spike's face changed at that, the grin melting away in place of a snarl that had her clenching her pussy tighter on instinct. Then his hands were on her shoulders and her back hit the table with a hard crack.

"It's wrong, all right." Spike had one of her legs splayed across his shoulder the next instant, not once breaking rhythm. She gasped and

squeezed around him again, watched as his eyes flashed yellow before he stretched her other leg up and across his free shoulder. "And you love it, don't you? You love how wrong it is. How Spike can make you scream."

And *god*, if she'd thought he was deep before, she had to redefine exactly what that word meant. The world around her had blanked out of existence, which was fortunate because being there just made everything in her head harder to navigate. Instead, she focused on Spike, taking in the hard line of his jaw, the flare of his nostrils, the sneer twisting his lips as he pounded into her without care or calm, without freaking mercy.

"You love how wrong it is," he rasped again. "You love getting fucked by this cock. Been starvin' for it, haven't you? Diddlin' yourself in your pretty little dorm room while imagining all the naughty things I can do to you."

No, no, no, no, she wouldn't give him that. Buffy slammed her teeth onto her lower lip before any of the words swarming in her head could think to make a break for it, focusing instead on the way the table trembled under the power of his thrusts, the slight ache in her legs, the wet sound of him slamming into her again and again. Somewhere, in the back of her mind, the thought that Giles might return home at any moment burst forth, and alongside the shiver of panic was something else. Something just as sick and wrong as what Spike was doing to her now. The things he was saying...

"Tell me. Tell me how much you love this."

God, she hated him. Buffy shook her head, arching off the table with a cry. "Wrong," she managed to snarl. "So. Wrong."

The sneer stretched wider, and Spike gave his hips a swirl. "Being inside this pussy is wrong," he agreed before turning to bite at her calf, and Buffy felt her body betray her further. Felt the tightening in her belly and the way her pussy clenched around his cock, how watching him bring those vicious teeth in contact with her flesh set her on fire. "Should never know how hot you are. How wet you get. How much you make it hurt."

Spike seized one of her hands and tugged it to where they were joined. It wasn't until she felt her own fingers skate across her soaked

flesh and press against her clit that she realized his intent, and another hoarse cry came tumbling through her lips.

"Show me how you do it, Slayer." He was staring at her pussy now, and she stared too, as his cock, slick and wet from her, pistoning in and out of her. "Show me how you touch yourself thinkin' about that night."

"I don't."

Spike didn't so much as look up, his face didn't twitch, but the next second, he'd slapped her thigh hard enough that he should have thrown his head back in pain. Except he didn't, because it hadn't hurt.

"Good little girls don't tell lies. Now..." This time he did look up at her, his expression stormy and dangerous, and *oh god*, she again clenched around him on instinct. "You better show me how you do it, how you get yourself off, 'cause I'm not finishing until you do. Don't care who walks in."

There was that surge of panic again, one she knew he felt. But his eyes remained fixed, serious, and it struck her that he meant every word. So Buffy, trembling, began massaging her clit in the way she'd taught herself over the past couple of week in her many attempts to recreate whatever it was Spike had done to her that night. And the second her hand started moving, Spike's attention was between them again.

"Just like that, kitten," he cooed in a voice so low she shouldn't have been able to hear him over the slaps of their bodies, but did anyway. "You get yourself off thinkin' about this."

Buffy wasn't sure if it was a question or an observation—either way, she answered. "Yes."

Spike grinned, smacked her again, though not as hard as the first. "That it's wrong is what gets you hot, isn't it?"

"Oh god."

"It is. You lyin' in bed, thinkin' about how my cock feels inside of you. How I stretch you wide. How I fill you up. You lie there, achin' for me, needy, soaked through because it's so bloody wrong."

A thrill raced down her spine, making her sweat-drenched skin tingle. And it was there, the fire she'd spent every night since the motel trying to build, forming deep inside of her again. Buffy panted,

her fingers working at a frenzy now, every nudge of her clit making her skin zing with pleasure. Spike's grunts were coming faster too, timed perfectly with his hard thrusts and the rocking tempo of the table rattling beneath them.

"You love bein' wrong, don't you?" he demanded. "Love how I make you come."

"Spike... *Spike*..."

"Yeah, that's it. Scream it, Slayer. Tell the world whose pussy this is."

Oh god, she hated him. She hated everything about him. His sneering lips and his dancing eyes, his marble-sculpted chest and impossible cheekbones. She hated how he gripped her, hated how her body betrayed her, how she trembled and moaned and all the things she wanted to scream at him died in her throat. Hated that she was touching herself for him, that she could feel herself trembling precariously close to an edge she hadn't known existed before he'd shoved her over it the first time.

"Say it!" Spike snarled. "Tell me—"

Buffy reared, uncurling her legs from over his shoulders and sitting up, moving entirely on instinct, departed from her brain. It surprised her—surprised *him*—but nothing quite as much as what she did next. Somehow, she found herself tangled around him, pulling him down to assault his mouth as she tucked her legs around his hips and leveraged her hold to pull him even closer.

She meant for it to be an attack, meant to bruise him with her mouth, but then he moaned. Spike moaned, and all of him seemed to melt, and she was lost to that sensation. The way he felt against her, inside of her, how he tasted. How he pushed and pulled and sucked and licked and moaned all the while, into her, through her, like she was something delicious that he couldn't get enough of. There was a reason, she thought, that kissing had initially been off the table. It was too intimate—way more intimate than sex. She couldn't screw her eyes shut and pretend she was kissing someone else because no one kissed like Spike. Absolutely no one.

At last, Spike broke his lips from hers. "Buffy," he whispered.

That was what did it. Buffy wrapped her arms around his neck and

shuddered into orgasm. And she felt him, too. Felt the way he tensed and gripped her, holding her to him as he jerked and pulsed inside. Then his mouth was at her ear, his voice low and raspy, and almost enough on its own to send her over the edge a second time even before she made out what he was saying.

“Such a tight pussy, Slayer, and you squeeze my cock so nice. Could stay inside you forever. Could feel this forever and never get enough. So tight. So fucking hot. So wet for me. Wet for your Spike.”

Buffy gasped, pulling him closer without meaning to, so they both groaned. And Spike kept talking.

“Smell like bloody heaven.” He tugged on her earlobe with his teeth, sending another shock of pleasure through her. “Oh, yeah. Such a good girl. Sweet. Hot. *Buffy*.”

She could have listened to that all night, she realized after she'd crashed against his chest, heaving in breaths like the room might run out of oxygen. It surprised her because she'd never figured herself to be the type to enjoy dirty talk. Her sexual experience outside of Spike had been with men who barely spoke at all in the during. Granted, her sexual experience outside of Spike had been kinda tame all over. He was right in that regard, loath as she was to admit it. Part of the reason it was so good with him was the fight. Knowing that they shouldn't, that they hated each other, that it was *wrong* but not being able to help themselves, anyway. At least that was how she felt.

Kissing Riley had been a major fail in the sparkage department, which seemed so wrong because *he* was so right and the last guy she'd kissed had lit her up inside and out.

“Suppose this is the part where you tell me to shove off good and proper,” Spike murmured into her hair. “Tell me this can't happen again...”

“It can't happen again.” It was bad enough it had happened now. Still, that didn't account for the way the words hurt, knowing they were true. “But thanks...for the lesson.”

It was the wrong thing to say. *Way* the wrong thing to say. Spike immediately tensed against her, then pulled back, his eyes hard and his jaw harder. And when he spoke, it was with a harsh, cold disregard that completely negated the way he'd practically been nuzzling her seconds

before. "Course, baby," he murmured and dragged his tongue over his teeth. "Anytime you need a brush-up, you just let ole Spike know. Any excuse to get my dick wet."

Buffy planted her hands on his chest and thrust him back so forcibly he fell out of her, back onto his ass on the floor, and she didn't waste any time. The next second, she was tugging on clothes that should never have been removed in the first place, wiggling into her pants and fumbling with the shirt Spike had peeled off her to turn it right-side-out again.

"Oh, there it is," Spike drawled, tugging his own jeans up his slender, pale hips. "The fluttering virgin has returned."

"I can't tell you how much I hate you."

"Cause you don't, pet."

Whatever she'd been expecting, it wasn't that—the words nor the calm certainty with which they were spoken. Buffy whipped her head around to glare at Spike. "What?"

"You," he said, holding her gaze as he dragged up the zipper to his jeans. "Don't." He fiddled with the button before sliding it through the hole. "Hate." He pulled on his belt, looping the end through the flap without breaking eye-contact. "Me."

And she stood there like an idiot and watched the whole thing, her mouth hanging open. It took a second to register that he'd stopped speaking, but when her brain finally clued in, she gave her head a shake and barked out a laugh that sounded much more confident and derisive than she felt at the moment.

"You're deluded."

"Face it, Slayer. If you hated me half as much as you say you do, you wouldn't have thrown yourself at me just to get the taste of what's-his-death outta your mouth." Now that awful, snide smirk was stretching across his lips, making his eyes sparkle. "Plenty of other blokes around to snog. To fuck. Yet you keep comin' to me."

"You're sick."

"And you love it. You love every sick thing about bein' with me. Love my hands and my tongue, and you can't get enough of my cock. First bit of exciting you've ever had and you're a sodding addict."

God, at that moment, she *did* hate him. Completely, thoroughly,



every last egotistical inch of him. But that was the problem—that it took *that* moment for the hate to feel real. For her to be certain that she was shaking with fury rather than something else. And what was worse, she knew he knew it. Whatever else, Buffy had never been good at keeping things from Spike. He always seemed to have a read on her, no matter how desperately she tried to keep herself boxed up. Lying to him had never been one of her strengths, even when she could lie to others. Even when she could lie to herself.

“No shame in it,” Spike continued, taking a swaggering step forward. “Can’t seem to shake you outta my head, either. So why bother fighting it?”

“What?”

“You want me. I want you. We know we’re bloody brilliant together. How about we ride this out?”

“Ride... What the *hell* are you talking about?”

But she knew—of course she knew. Part of her had been able to think of nothing but since that night they’d shared in the motel. Lying awake and staring at her ceiling, imagining all the things Spike had done to her, trying to relive them and put them in a proper light—or bury them under disgust and shame where they belonged. Wondering if he thought of her half as much as she thought of him, thinking he had to because the things he’d done to her that night had to come from somewhere, but also being so damn uncertain every time they were together since he seemed so damned unaffected by her proximity.

“The itch’ll go away eventually,” Spike reasoned, shrugging. “Novelty of fucking the enemy’ll wear off, and all that. I’ll get bored, you’ll lose your dainty heart to some Angel-approved tosser, and we’ll go our separate ways. Until then, Slayer, we can either fight what we want or enjoy every rotten second of it.”

“That’s insanity.”

“What’s insanity is you thinkin’ you can crook your little finger to me every time you get a dose of reality and expect me to keep giving you what you want.”

“I do *not* want—”

Then he was against her—one second across the room, then he was next all she could see, gripping her shoulders and holding her to him.

Forcing her to stare into his heated gaze as he gritted his teeth and shook her like an errant child.

"Yes, you bloody well do," he snarled. "Sooner you stop fighting it and accept that *I'm* what you want, the happier we'll both be."

"You're bent."

"Just the way you like it, baby," Spike replied, smirking, then claimed her mouth and swallowed whatever she'd been ready to throw back at him. And she hated him again, mostly because the second his lips were on hers, the second his tongue was in her mouth, she didn't hate him at all. Like a switch flipped in her brain and all she could do was claw at him like some untamed thing. There was fire in the way he kissed her, *every* time he kissed her. Maybe it was because, before Spike, she'd never kissed anyone who hated her before. Maybe it was the natural flip-side of what she'd experienced with Angel—only Angel hadn't been fire like this. It hadn't lit her up from the inside, made her feel like she was tearing at her own skin to get free. That she could throw him on the table and climb into his lap and lose herself the way she wanted to Spike.

It should be over. It *had* to be over.

Then his voice was at her ear again, raspy and raw.

"Feel that, Slayer? The way your body responds? We both know what you really crave, and you'll only get it with me."

No. *No*. This stopped now. Buffy flattened her hands on his chest and *thank god*, they listened to her brain this time rather than acting of their own accord. Spike stumbled back a few steps, scowling but looking not-all-that-surprised. And those few steps were what she needed to clear her head, get back to the place she should have been from the start.

Away. Far away. She was an idiot for coming here.

She was an idiot for so many reasons.

"So you gonna scarper on back to your soldier boy?" Spike asked, his eyes hard. "Think he'll be able to keep you satisfied?"

"Why do you even care?"

He blinked and frowned as though startled she'd made a good point.

"Riley's not *normal*," Buffy continued, her voice shaking. "Not...not the normal I want or—or need."

At that, Spike rolled his eyes. "Christ, back to this."

"But he's—he's a commando guy and I said I'd help you figure out what they did to you, so he might be useful."

"Oh, gonna use the lad? Cold, even for you, Summers."

Well, she hadn't thought that far ahead. Hadn't had a chance to, given the fact that the second the truth had been laid out, the earth had started to shake and she'd hit the panic button. But standing in front of Spike right then, imagining what her world might look like if she managed to get to the other side of the newest apocalypse without losing her life, the answer was no. Whatever was going on with her and Riley had to end now. Right now. For one thing, his kiss had literally sent her into the arms of another man—her mortal enemy, to boot. That was not the best start to a relationship. The second, and more important thing, was that he wasn't what she wanted. He had a foot in her world and that was one foot too many.

"I don't use anyone," Buffy replied, crossing her arms.

"Cept me, apparently."

"You don't count! And it's not *using* if you're getting something out of it. The ability to be a serial killer is a big honking something!"

Spike snickered, shook his head. Only it looked wrong, that head shake, and the accompanying snicker. The mean twist of his lips was right, but there was something missing when he met her gaze. The meanness that lived there, burned there, had always reflected back at her—for the first time, she couldn't see it.

No, it wasn't the first time, she realized. Just the first time he'd tried to fake it.

"Toddle on off, then. You got what you came for."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" But Buffy knew what it meant. "You know what? Fine. I'm gone."

And she was. Gone. So with the gone, back on the other side of Giles's door and in the sunlight where she belonged, a new to-do list already forming—one she'd tackle immediately after the world didn't end. While she and Riley were definitely over, she had to be smart about this—had to stay close and see if she could figure out anything

useful regarding Spike's condition. Because the sooner she got answers, the sooner she'd be able to have whatever had been done to him reversed, and then he'd be out of her life for good.

Which was what she wanted. Really. Him gone—long gone, far away, where he couldn't invade her thoughts or tempt her with offers like *riding it out*. Where he couldn't touch her at all.

Where she wouldn't have to think of the not-mean way he'd looked at her, or how it made her want to cry. Where she wouldn't have to think of him at all.

That was what she wanted. All she wanted.



LATER, after Riley had helped her save the world, Buffy reconsidered the virtues of normal.

Today had been an anomaly—a hiccup brought on by stress, shock, and fear of imminent death. Put like that, her temporary insanity was perfectly understandable. After all, her world had literally quaked, and when that happened, the natural response was to cling to anyone. *Anything*.

But that was over now. The floor was solid and stationary again. She and Spike, whatever they were doing, whatever she'd thought she'd experienced that afternoon, were in the past. And with Riley's help, she'd find out what had been done to Spike's head, get it undone, and never see the platinum pest ever again.

There was a lot of potential with Riley. Potential she shouldn't ignore just because it didn't fit entirely with the script Angel had left behind. So her new kinda-boyfriend wasn't just an Average Joe. He still wasn't a creature of the night, and they did have demon-fighting in common.

He was nice. Tall. And he liked her. Really liked her. And if he could hold his own in a fight, all the better. Wasn't it Spike who had observed how pointless the whole *normal* thing was, anyway? Well, maybe he'd had a point. A broken clock was right twice a day, so Spike could be right once every five hundred years or so.

About normal. Not about him and her or how he made her feel or anything else.

So Buffy decided to do it. Leap in, not run away, not let Riley's otherness scare her from something that could be amazing.

And when she went to his dorm to tell him just that—that she was ready to leap in the deep end with him—she managed to get her point across with a nice, long kiss. One during which she didn't think of Spike at all.

Well, much.

