

UNWRAPPED



HOLLY DENISE





IT HAD JOLTED HER AT FIRST, BUT BUFFY WAS NOW ACCUSTOMED TO seeing Spike's face the second she stepped out for patrol. He was a frequent visitor, even though he'd chalked it up to coincidence the first five or six times he'd just happened to be lingering outside her house after when she'd shut the door. Five or six coincidences that somehow melted into habit.

A habit she'd come to cherish.

Still, an opportunity to tease Spike missed was an opportunity wasted. It was one of life's simple pleasures, and one she'd ignored far too long. She'd never before known how playful he could be and had since decided she should make up for lost time.

"Lurk much?" she asked with a grin, tossing her hair over her shoulder. A quick twist of the front-door handle confirmed the house was properly secured. It was officially safe to patrol.

"It's not lurkin' when you know I'm here."

Buffy arched an eyebrow. "I think you just happen to be lurking around my house at the same time every night."

"When you tell me, 'See you tomorrow,' pet, it rings more as an invitation. You invited me to see you tomorrow." He paused, frowned, then clarified. "Or t'night, more properly. So here I am."

“Excuses.”

“Well, if you don’t want the company, I’ll just be on my merry way, then.”

Buffy rolled her eyes and seized his arm before he could perform what would have been the world’s most unconvincing storm-off. “Give it a rest.”

“I would, but you’re holding on to me.”

“And get over yourself.”

Spike just grinned and reached into his duster pocket for his cigarettes. It was another testament to how much she’d grown as a person in that she failed to grimace and pluck the cancer-stick from his lips. The first few nights he’d spontaneously shown up had featured a few play-wars over his smokes—wars that, to the innocent bystander, likely resembled one hell of a sloppy grope fest. Buffy had since come to appreciate the way Spike’s lips essentially had sex with whatever was between them. If she had to stomach watching him orally fornicate a cigarette, so be it. He certainly wasn’t orally fornicating anything else.

And he hadn’t made mention of it. Not once. Not his love for her, not naughty, naked aerobics, not anything that would pave the way toward the end of their song-and-dance. Which wasn’t his fault, really, considering he had no idea how radically her feelings about said song-and-dance had evolved.

It had started as a crush, really. A harmless little ‘okay, so Spike’s not nearly as grotesque as I thought he was’ crush. There had really been no other way to look at him after what he’d done for her. For Dawn. Of everyone to face Glory, Spike had certainly walked away with the most bruises. His stomach had been punctured open, his arm broken, and his face had looked like some Picasso knockoff. All for fighting a little toad of a man who hadn’t known how to die.

Buffy had been occupied with Glory; Spike had been on the Tower. Spike had saved Dawn nearly at the cost of his own life. He’d freed her, and she’d run. And then he and the Doc had fallen from the Tower’s plank and tumbled to the earth.

And the amazing thing was, after it was over, the first thing Spike had said to anyone was, “Are you all right?” while looking directly at Buffy. Like he wasn’t the one with a massive hole in his stomach.

So yeah, she'd admitted to herself afterward that she kinda had the hots for the vamp, and maybe had for a while now. At least since he'd allowed Glory to torture him in ways that made the Spanish Inquisition look like a Barbara Walters special.

It was a crush. Just a crush. A harmless, nothing-will-ever-come-of-it crush on Spike. She was a full-grown slayer. She was allowed the one naughty fantasy as long as it never became more than a crush.

Which, inevitably, it had. It had taken a while before she'd realized how much she smiled when she was around him. How often he made her laugh. How she looked forward to patrols in ways she hadn't since the dateage with Angel, though for reasons which struck her as thoroughly adult. There was nothing sordid or teenagery about her feelings for Spike. They were simply there. In her. Always. Developing. Sparking. Growing.

She didn't mind when he smoked.

She just wished she could be the cigarette.

And she had no idea how to tell him.

"Where we off to, kitten?" Spike asked in that way that told her he remained perfectly unaware of how every molecule in his body drove her absolutely insane with lust.

Typical.

"No suspicious deaths in the paper this morning."

He smirked. "Prob'ly because I took those demons to school last night."

"Excuse me?"

"You remember. You were there."

Buffy blinked at him. "I remember saving your ass before Tiny the Vamp made you someone's hay-fever."

"Anyone ever tell you that you got a god complex, Summers?"

"I have a vague recollection of you saying something to the same extent every time I save your ungrateful dead—"

"And here it comes," he murmured. "Some undoubtedly inventive story..."

"I do not tell stories!"

"Y'know, they'd sound a lot more impressive to a bloke who wasn't there and didn't know how the whole thing actually panned out, right?"

“Well, I’m not up for meeting other blokes right now, so you’re kinda it. And you will listen to my not-so-inventive stories about things that actually did happen, and you’ll like it.”

Ideally, this would be the part where Spike seized upon her admission that he was the only British-word-for-man in her life, tell her he was the *only* man who both loved and hadn’t fled from her when the going got rough. Then he’d leer, make with the eye-sex, and suggest they head somewhere cozy to consummate their new and exciting relationship.

That was ideally. Namely in the place where Buffy’s fairy-dream fantasies lived.

The real world wasn’t so accommodating, even with never-know-when-to-quit vampires and their sudden lack of anything resembling innuendo. Or a hint-detector.

“Think history’s shown I’ll do pretty much whatever you ask, pet,” Spike replied, meeting her gaze. And for a second—for a fleeting, shot in the dark second—she thought the love-drought might be over. He hadn’t as much as danced around the words since the night they’d saved the world. Since he’d opened his broken eyes and asked if she was all right.

Maybe tonight...

“I’m thinking Harper’s. Then Restfield. We didn’t hit Harper’s last night, and Restfield’s a bloody demon playground.” He grinned. “It’s why I like it so much. Never a dull moment.”

Buffy deflated. She really didn’t know what his problem was. Silver plate, much? She was practically handing herself over.

“Slayer?”

“Sounds good,” she replied, trying to mean it. It was difficult to sound jazzed about slayage when the only kind of violence she wanted involved no clothes and an Olympic-sized mattress. “Harper’s then the demon’s playground.”

Spike frowned as though sensing her mood, but made no comment. He, the walking mood-ring, made no comment.

Just when she wanted him to start hitting on her, he stopped.

Looked like the night would end with yet another cold shower.



"OF COURSE he doesn't get it!" Anya shouted over the could-be music roaring from the stage of The Bronze. "He's a man!"

Buffy blinked, certain she'd heard wrong as no one else she knew actually relied on clichés to explain behavior. "What?"

"He's a man. He doesn't know how to read the signs!" When Buffy's frown deepened, Anya rolled her eyes and slammed her drink onto the table. "Look, you spent most of last year telling him how there was no way in this world or the next that you would ever think of him as anything more than the annoying vampire against whom you couldn't get a restraining order because you can't take non-persons to court."

Willow giggled. "Restraining orders against vamps. That'd be fun to enforce."

"The point is," Anya said, "Spike doesn't know things have changed."

"I'm not hitting him like I used to," Buffy protested. "I don't call him disgusting or wipe my hand whenever he touches me—and, and the last time he offered me a drink from his flask, I took it." She made a face. "Not something I'm going to do again, but I was trying to make with the grand gesture."

Willow furrowed her brow, nibbling on her bottom lip. "Well, maybe that's it?" she suggested. "Maybe the signs stopped so he..."

"Signs meaning all the times I told him it would never happen. Yet now that I'm making with the nice, he's super dense?"

Her friend shrugged. "The fight was probably foreplay. He's a vampire."

"And a man," Anya agreed. "Don't forget the man part."

"I don't think that's possible," Buffy muttered, her treacherous mind wandering to the magical way Spike's lips massaged a cigarette. "So what are you saying?"

Anya arched her eyebrows. "Obviously, you need to step up."

"Step up?"

"Be more direct."

"Yeah, that sounds about right," Willow chimed in. "I haven't dated men in a while, but I do remember directness being an issue. Even

with the smart ones, like Oz. He was so quick and attentive, but there were things he'd only get if I literally waved it in front of his face." She froze, a blush spreading across her cheeks. "Not that I...not that there was ever any waving...of anything. At all."

Buffy nodded, smothering a grin. "Of course not."

"I believe Willow's vaguely sexual confession supports my original hypothesis," Anya declared. "Spike has obviously reached the conclusion that your relationship is at a stalemate. He's adapted to a situation he doesn't believe will ever benefit him personally."

"Benefit him personally?"

"He doesn't think you'll ever love him, which you've told me he actually said to you the night before the world didn't end," Willow observed. "And since the world didn't end and you did nothing to correct him in the many, many days thereafter, he's come to the conclusion that nothing will happen, but he'll take you any way he can get you because he loves you."

Anya blinked. "I believe I just said that using much more economic language."

"You're economic with language now?" Willow drawled.

"There's very little in which I am not economic."

Buffy smiled into her drink. "You can say that again."

The former demon frowned. "Why would I want to say that again? It wouldn't be particularly economic."

"It's an expression," Willow supplied helpfully. "Buffy was agreeing that you're very economic. But, point. I think we should get back to a general point." She turned to Buffy. "Spike doesn't think there's any chance you could love him. Ever. So he's stopped looking for things that would tell him otherwise."

Anya rolled her eyes. "Now we're just being redundant."

"But it's not like Spike to give up," Buffy replied. "He's the most annoyingly persistent not-dead guy I know. He's never just thrown in the towel and been all, 'Okay, mate! Done with that. How's about I pop in Passions an' toss back a few?'"

Willow and Anya exchanged a glance. "Is it possible he's heard you attempt an English accent?" the latter asked. "Because that could be a deal-breaker."

Buffy fought the urge to smack her forehead against the table several times in rapid succession. "This stinks," she moaned. "Why do I always fall for the bad boy?"

There was a long pause. "So you did?" Willow asked softly.

"Did what?"

"Fall for him. You're in love with Spike."

Buffy glanced up. "What? I didn't say that."

"Yes, you did. You just said 'why do I always fall for the bad boy?'" Willow stared at her. "You really did, didn't you? You fell in love with Spike."

"I—"

Anya shrugged. "It makes sense," she observed. "You're a vampire slayer. You're inherently drawn to the darker side of demonic forces. Spike has been there for you in many ways since he discovered he was in love with you, therefore you get the exciting vampire aspect as well as the loyal boyfriend for which you have been searching."

"Not searching! There has been no search!"

"Not really, since you had him on a very short leash," Willow muttered, grinning when Buffy poked her tongue out and aimed a kick at her under the table. "You're in love with Spike."

The words freaked her out, but not for the right reasons. Unbridled desire was one thing—liking Spike, enjoying his company, wanting him in her bed...those were all things she admitted easily now. To her friends, obviously, who had exhibited no surprise at her change of heart. Even Xander knew; Xander knew and to everyone's shock, he didn't care.

Hell, he'd encouraged it.

"The guy saved the world, Buff. No one asked him to do that. Not saying I approve, but if things were to develop..."

He'd never finished the sentence. He hadn't needed to. She knew what he would say. The unmitigated support she received was nothing short of astounding. Suddenly her very anti-Spike friends were rooting for a Buffy and Spike relationship. All because he'd saved the world.

As though they hadn't known he would all along.

Like Buffy had.

Buffy had known. She'd known if it had come down to saving her or

saving himself, Spike would save her every time. Not for the right reasons—not to save the world as much as to save her—but who was to say the motives behind doing the right thing were that important in the long run?

Spike had changed. He really had. Granted, not when he said he had, rather in the space between those stolen moments at the beginning and where they stood now. He wasn't a saint and he never would be, but he was a better man than many of the soulful men she knew. He'd saved the world and he'd done it for her.

He'd done it for her and he hadn't told her he loved her since.

And Buffy's feelings had changed. She wanted him in both a raw, naked sort of way and a hold-hands-on-patrol way. Those were the only ways in which she knew to want anyone anymore. For a year, she'd deluded herself into believing the combination equaled love, but Riley had taught her otherwise. Riley and the extreme way she'd cared without really caring about what happened to him or their relationship. Ever since Angel had literally turned his back on her and rode off in the non-sunset, she'd shut her heart down and refused to entertain the possibility of love. It hadn't been conscious—it hadn't even been something she'd wanted. It had taken saving the world two times, earning a sister, and realizing what love truly meant before she'd given up the girlish fantasy.

The things she felt for Angel now were warm but not hot. As in, she'd realized for the first time—the first real time—that she wasn't in love with him anymore. The girl who had been in love with him had grown into a woman when she hadn't been looking, and in the process, she'd fallen out of love.

Angel wasn't the issue, though. Not loving him didn't make it any easier to love Spike. It was the scars Angel had left behind. The way Buffy had been hurt so bitterly and how reluctant she was to make the leap, even with a sure thing. Though she knew Spike would never do anything to willfully hurt her, the fact remained she'd done the vampire thing before. She'd done the vampire thing with someone who wasn't supposed to be capable of hurting her and had been devastated in the process.

Measuring Spike to the barometer set by Angel was unfair. Her head knew it.

Her heart wasn't so easily convinced.

"I don't know," Buffy said at last. "I don't know if I'm in love with him or not."

Anya nodded, sucking on a lime-green straw and examining the lemon wedge hooked on the rim of her glass. "You just know you want him to give you lots of orgasms and call you the next day."

"Yes."

"You want a relationship with Spike that's not so much casual as it is permanent."

Buffy huffed a breath. "Yes."

A casual shrug. "That sounds like love to me."

"It would," Willow muttered.

Anya ignored her. "Look, you want Spike to take notice of you again, right?"

"Again implies he actually stopped taking notice," Willow interjected. "And there's no way of that. He's just in a place where he knows—rather thinks—things will always be this way between you. So you need to be forward."

Buffy swallowed. "Forward?"

"Tell him how you feel."

Anya nodded. "Spike would like that. He's very much attracted to power."

"Yeah," Buffy murmured. "Let's list the many ways that will not happen."

Willow sighed. "Buffy—"

"I'm not good at the forward thing. In fact, I'd go so far as to say I suck at the forward thing. Every time I've attempted the forward thing, it's involved me, a very red face, and contemplating certain memory spells." Buffy shuddered and averted her eyes again. "I can't be forward. I've done it. I tanked."

"You didn't tank," Willow protested.

"Okay, I bombed. Next question, please."

"Spike is different. He loves you. He's just waiting." Willow offered a soft smile. "He's always going to be waiting for you, Buffy. You just

need to tell him you're done with men who aren't him and he's the one you want."

Buffy licked her lips. "He's the one I want, huh?"

A long moan tumbled through Anya's lips. "My god, we've really been talking about this the whole time, haven't we?"

Willow tossed her a quick glare. "What else could we be doing?"

"Dancing? Calling Xander? I am wasting valuable orgasm-time with Xander discussing the pleasure-time Buffy could be having if she just sat up and grew a pair." Anya shook her head in disgust. "And Willow—you and Tara—"

"Tara's in Portland. Visiting her aunt and her aunt's cats."

"She take Miss Kitty Fantastico?" Buffy asked.

Willow nodded. "The dorm is very lonely."

"I could be having orgasms right now, but that doesn't seem to matter to anyone," Anya grumbled.

"How would I go about being direct, if direct was my intent?" Buffy asked. "If I was going to...do this thing?"

Anya mimed a phone with her hand. "Spike? This is Buffy. Let's have sex. Be at my house in five minutes. I'll be the naked one."

"And if sex was the only thing on her mind, that'd work. Buffy wants a relationship."

The former demon batted a dismissive hand. "Boring relationship talk can come in the post-coital lounging. We need them to uncork first."

Willow rolled her eyes. "Anya!"

"Fine!" The mime-phone returned. "Spike? This is Buffy. You know how I used to hate you and beat you up a lot? That's changed. Turns out I am indeed secretly in love with you, except it's not so much a secret now. How about we have sex and then discuss our future? I'll be the naked one when you come over."

"You managed to get that naked line in there again," Buffy observed dryly.

"It'll make sure he gets there in record time."

Willow snickered. "I think she could tell him she has an itch on her arm, and he'd get there in record time."

"You guys are having a lot of fun mocking my not-boyfriend, aren't you?"

Anya shrugged again. "Why not?"

"It's what friends are for," Willow agreed. "All joking aside, you really need to just put yourself out there. I know it's scary and stuff, but it's also Spike, who would die for you and in fact nearly did just that. Hell, he scored so many points last May that he has all of us—Xander included—rooting for him. Just tell him. He won't laugh. He'll proclaim his love for you and then we won't hear from you for a little while."

Buffy wrinkled her nose. "Why?"

"Lots of sex," Anya said.

Willow nodded. "There it is."

"And how do I bring this up?" Buffy held up a hand before the former demon could chime in with another imaginary phone call. "I mean in a way wherein I feel I'm controlling the situation."

There was a long pause before a devious grin stretched her best friend's lips. "How about some innocent misdirection?"

"Misdirection?"

"Invite him over. Tell him it's for a thing, but have it be for this instead."

"What thing?" Buffy asked.

"Christmas party," Anya suggested, brightening. "The Bronze Christmas party."

"...is suddenly at my house?"

Willow was nodding like she understood. "No. No, but you could tell him you need a sitter for Dawn."

"And in actuality?"

"Dawn's at Janice's."

"Are we going to tell Dawn this?"

"Dawn's only been wanting you and Spike to happen for the past ever, so I don't think having her see Janice for the sake of you and Spike getting together's going to be much of a stretch," Willow replied.

"And if Janice's parents don't want her over?"

"There's me and Tara. Don't think you can wiggle out of this, missy."

Buffy brought her hands up. "I'm not wiggling!"

"No, I think that's the problem," Anya noted.

"Have him come over and surprise him," Willow continued. "How... I'll leave it up to you, but you'll have the home turf, you'll have surprised him, and... God, Buffy, it's Spike. He's going to drool all over you and then he's going to do stuff I'm not interested in hearing about until it's actually happened so it's vicarious fun and not hypothetical."

A short pause. Music continued to blare. Buffy was silent for as long as she could reasonably stand, glancing between Anya and Willow for any sign of misgiving. There was none.

"This is the plan?" she asked.

"The plan," Willow concurred, nodding.

"We are agreed. The plan for many happy endings." Anya beamed. "I need another friend who likes penises."

Buffy frowned. "Just because I'm not having sex doesn't mean my fondness for penises is on hold...and I can't believe I just said that out loud."

Willow snickered. "Neither can I."

"I'm a good influence," Anya said. "And isn't the reason you wanted to talk to me to begin with was because of my unusual tendency to be frank and straightforward?"

Buffy grinned. No sense arguing with the truth.

Plus, she couldn't be bothered. Her mind was already racing toward other things.

Better things. Naked things. Things involving her and Spike, and lots of loving.

In every sense of the word.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

A few months ago, he'd nearly witnessed the death of the woman he loved. He still wasn't sure if anyone else knew just how close the Slayer had come to jumping that night. Had Dawn been cut, had Doc's knife sliced the girl's skin, Buffy wouldn't be here now. She wouldn't. The determination he'd seen in her eyes before they'd headed into the big fight had told him as much. Buffy would put herself between Dawn and death without a second thought. As long as Dawn survived, she was content.

Dawn had survived. So had Buffy.

Only she almost hadn't due to his own stupidity. Another second and everything would have been lost.

Not literally, of course. The world would have gone on.

But not for him.

It was bloody stupid, going over and over something that had come out all right. Another second and the world would have been lost.

Spike wasn't an idiot. He knew things had changed since the apocalypse-that-wasn't. Buffy didn't look at him with disgust anymore, nor did she make his face her own personal punching bag. Though most of her signals were clear as day, he was a vampire who had been told no

more times than any reasonable bloke could count. Buffy had all but drawn a diagram as to why she would never look at him the way he looked at her. She'd had more than enough opportunities to tell him that what he'd said the night of the non-apocalypse was wrong. That she could indeed love him.

Perhaps a year ago, looks would have been enough. God knows he'd read as much as he'd liked into them in the past. But things were different now. All cards were on the table and the dealer knew the hand of every player. And the dealer, in this instance, was Buffy.

She knew how he felt about her. She knew what lengths he would go to in order to ensure her happiness. She'd doctored him after he'd been tortured, defended him when none of her friends had wanted him around and had seen his eyes after he'd taken a dive off the Tower only to wind up with a hole in his gut. The look on her face—the awe, the gratitude, the something—would remain with him forever. But it wasn't enough. Not anymore. Not now that he'd faced an apocalypse and gotten a true taste of mortality. Not now when the woman he loved had yet to favor him with anything more than her company. She seemed happy enough to keep their relationship as it was. The late-night walks, the banter, the casual glances and sideways smiles. The way he flirted with her and the shameless manner in which she flirted back.

But that was the extent of it, and Spike certainly wasn't in a position to ask for more. Buffy had already given more than he'd thought possible. Perhaps in the fight for the end of the world, he'd earned the status of *friend*. Perhaps. Perhaps she wanted something more, though that thought was little more than a pipe dream, and he wasn't going to put himself through the shredder again. If this was all he got, fine. He'd sit down and shut up and do his damndest to be content with her smiles and her flirting. He'd try to be the friend she wanted him to be.

Regardless of how it hurt.

Regardless that nights like this. Nights where he'd been asked to babysit the love of his life's kid sister while she got dolled up to go chat up men who weren't him.

He'd smiled. He'd said it was fine. Love's bitch through and through.

Spike sighed and flicked his cigarette to the sidewalk, raising his head to the Summers' home. "Here we go," he murmured, and began the long death-march to her front door, hoping he wouldn't go dizzy with lust when he took in whatever strappy number she'd chosen to wear tonight.

Well, that much was a wash. Going dizzy with lust occurred no matter what Buffy wore. The hard part concerned clamping down his first instinct, which roughly involved shoving her against the nearest flat surface.

No different than any other day.

Now he was at her door. No more stalling. Spike drew in a fortifying breath and knocked.

"Yeah?" came a muffled voice from the other side.

He frowned, momentarily thrown. "Uhhh, yeah," he replied. "It's me."

"Oh! Good." The footsteps migrated away from the door rather than toward it. "Come on in! I need your help with something."

Spike swallowed hard. So much for a quick nod and a fake smile. Help meant engaging in conversation. Conversation meant gazing at her dress and fighting his primal instincts much longer than he was comfortable. "Yeah," he murmured, pushing the door open.

The entryway was dim, the white lights from the Christmas tree sprinkling across the floorboards like water. His gaze immediately fell to the small package he'd managed to sneak under her tree. It was where he'd left it.

"Up here!" she called.

He dragged his eyes to the stairway. Dawn had yet to tackle him with her patented bear hug, and all sound from the house drifted from the upper level. Something was off. Not wrong, but off. He didn't feel Dawn anywhere.

He did, however, feel Buffy.

Of course, he always felt Buffy. She was a part of him in ways even he didn't understand.

Doing his best to ignore how hard he was trembling, Spike pointed his feet to the stairway. Did she need him to help zip her up? God, the thought nearly had him wiping drool from his mouth. There was no

way he'd survive this. If this was a test, he might as well turn on his heel and march home. Better to continue this painful dance than be shut away because he couldn't keep his greedy hands to himself.

And yet, he couldn't deny her anything. It was why he was here, right? Because when it came to Buffy, Spike simply couldn't say no.

"Sure thing, love," he heard himself say, and made the trek up the stairs. His nose was immediately tickled with the mingled scents of vanilla, cinnamon, and peppermint, which wafted—almost seductively—from her bedroom. It was too soft to be perfume, yet he couldn't imagine what else she had to apply to make her smell better than she did already.

Her bedroom door—the master bedroom into which she'd moved over the summer—was open by just a sliver. Spike breathed hard and raised a hand.

"Buffy?"

"Come in."

Moments like these separated the men from the Men. Spike pushed the door open.

And froze.

The bedroom was scattered with a number of soft-glowing candles that did little more than accentuate the inherent softness of her green, endless eyes. A small tray stood beside the bed, equipped with a bottle of wine, two glasses, a bowl of strawberries, and a container of chocolate syrup. Candles, wine, and chocolate. And Buffy. God, Buffy. Spike was paralyzed. The room was just wrapping. Bows and pretty paper—the present stood beside the bed.

The present was Buffy.

And Christ, Buffy dominated everything. She stood at the edge of the bed, her eyes large and full of apprehension, and wearing a piece of red satin molded into a Santa teddy. Her breasts were supported by a built-in brassiere that did little to keep her rosy nipples from staring at him through the thin fabric. His gaze drew southward, past those soft, perfect globes and to the valley between her legs. She wore panties, though they were even thinner than the teddy—the teddy that was lined with white rabbit fur along the bottom hem and across the neckline. Panties that, like the brassiere, accentuated rather than

supported. Her clean-shaven pussy peeked through the thin fabric, and Spike found himself torn between tackling her to the bed or standing like an open-mouthed dolt who couldn't keep from staring. In the end, the latter won out. She was a wet dream come to life and all he could do was look at her. Stand and look at her, aching aware of the painful hardening of his cock and the way he couldn't seem to move his jaw from where it had landed on the floor.

Spike was going to embarrass himself. His jeans had pulled glaringly tight in record time and he couldn't drag his eyes from her breasts save to examine the scrap of nothing guarding her pussy. He couldn't meet her gaze, knowing he'd snap if he looked up and saw her looking back; if this wondrous break from reality became something tangible, something he could touch. Because there was no way he'd walked from his life and into this room. No way whatsoever.

Not in the world he knew.

"You're—umm..." he rasped, throat dry. "You're not wearing that to the party, are you?"

"Party?"

It was likely wrong to be comforted in the nerve-wracked voice of the woman he loved, but he was. The fact that her pulse had quickened didn't hurt matters, either. It helped make the fuzzy areas concrete. Helped convince him this might not be some vampiric version of a stroke.

If Buffy was nervous...

Spike took his chances and met her eyes. She was so open, so vulnerable, so hopeful, his throat closed and his heart threatened to thunder. She stood there and looked at him, dressed as she was, and he could barely remember not to breathe.

"God...Buffy, I—"

"Oh my god."

"What?" he demanded sharply.

Hope had faded to horror. "Oh my god. You... That's it, isn't it?"

Spike was no stranger to confusion; he simply wasn't accustomed to being confused while simultaneously burning inside-out with lust. "What's it?"

"I just thought you were being cool, but that's not it at all. God,

how dumb can I be?” Buffy shook her head and turned away from him. “I completely missed the signs. And I mean completely. The degree to which I have missed the signs on any other person would... Oh god...”

A nervous laugh tickled his throat. “Buffy, love, you’re not making any sense.”

“You don’t love me anymore.”

Spike couldn’t have been more astounded if she slapped him with a trout. “What?” he barked.

“You don’t,” she repeated. The words were so wrong he barely understood them. “I thought it was something else, but...”

Control fell away in a blink. The self-imposed shackles collapsed to the floor and the beast in his chest ripped toward freedom. With a growl on his lips and hope spearing his heart, Spike stormed forward and seized her, closing his hands around her forearms and drawing her hard against him. Then, those green eyes pulled him into oblivion and he surrendered completely. His fingers inched up, trailing a path on her skin until he had her face cradled in his palms. There wasn’t an inch of her that failed to burn. She was fire. She was fire too wild to be tamed, and he had her in his hands. All too aware of her. All too aware of her every, perfect inch. Of her molten center and how little stood between her bare flesh and his aching cock.

He was holding her. Spike was holding Buffy, the woman he loved, and she was wearing as little clothing as she ever intentionally had in his presence.

And then his lips were on hers and the world melted away. Buffy slumped against him, mewling and sucking his tongue into her mouth without awaiting invitation. Not that he would have stopped her—not that there was a part of him that wasn’t already hers. He was overthrown, conquered, all for her heavenly taste. Every sinful stroke of her tongue, every whisper of her lips, every sweet delicious kiss had him unraveling at the seams.

“Buffy,” he whimpered, thrusting his hips against her desperately. Her scent hung heavily in the air; if he dipped his hand into her knickers, he would sink in her wetness. Buffy was burning and it was because of him. She whimpered and clawed and ravaged his mouth, flooding him with lust. “Buffy...”

“Mnnauugh...”

Spike grinned. He didn't want to ever stop kissing her. Licking the inside of her mouth, engaging her tongue in erotic dance with his own. But he was convinced she'd forgotten she needed air, so he broke his lips from hers to worship her throat as she gasped and arched against him.

“You thought I didn't love you anymore?” he growled before worrying her tender skin between his blunt teeth and scaling a hand down to cradle one of her small, perfect breasts against his palm. “How could you think that? How could you ever—”

“I didn't!” Buffy replied, thrusting her hips against him. “I didn't!”

“You just said you did.”

“Okay...I did.” She claimed her teeth on his earlobe and sucked hard. “But just...for a second.”

He grumbled, peppering kisses down the side of her neck and scraping his teeth along her shoulder. “You're completely daft.”

“Hey!”

“My love for you absolutely tortures me. Guts me. You hear? I can't help but drown in you, no matter what I...” Spike nipped at the flimsy strap supporting her teddy before drawing her back to meet his eyes. “I love you forever. Longer than the sun will burn. When there's nothing left of me, my love for you will remain absolute. You get me?”

To his amazement, her eyes shone with tears. “But you haven't said it,” she whispered.

Spike blinked. “I just said it a dozen times.”

“I mean since the apocalypse. You haven't said it since Glory. Since the Tower.” Buffy averted her gaze, tucking a fallen lock of sunshine-hair behind her ear, blinking rapidly. “You jumped off the Tower and you nearly got killed...but you haven't said it since then.”

“I haven't told you I loved you since then.”

She nodded, still not looking at him. “I thought...I don't know. I thought you were tired of me.”

Just when he thought she couldn't get crazier. “Tired of you?”

“Or that you realized I wasn't worth it.”

“Not worth it?”

Her face crumbled. “I'm making it worse, aren't I?”

“Depends on your definition of worse.”

“Look, you jumped off the thing and had the massive hole in your stomach and you didn’t tell me you loved me again. I thought maybe you—”

“Decided you weren’t worth it?” He was torn between anger and amusement.

“Do you have to say it like that?” she whined pitifully.

“Like what?”

“Like I’m some moron-shaped moron?”

“Buffy, you just told me you thought I fell out of love with you because you didn’t die and the world didn’t end. How should I say it?” Laughter bubbled off his lips. Amusement had won out. “I put everything on the table that night, kitten. Everything. And I think I did a fairly good job of showin’ you what you mean to me.”

She licked her lips and nodded, still not looking at him. “I know.”

“A bloke can only take so many kicks.”

“I know.”

“What else could I have done to prove—”

“These are all things I know.”

Spike arched a cool brow. “Then how—”

“Because I was scared. It was me blaming you because I was scared. Me. Big ‘fraidy cat Buffy.’ A long pause then; she slowly raised her head and fixed her gaze on his. “It’s you, Spike.”

“I make this hard?”

“I think you know you do. It’s different with you.” Buffy smiled and raised her hand to his face. The warmth of her touch had his every nerve tingling. “I’m officially through with the dating thing. My life is too complicated and demon-infested. And I’ve spent a year telling you and, more importantly, myself how wrong you are for me.”

“I remember. I was there.” He blinked. “What do you mean, ‘more importantly?’”

“I mean I tried to convince myself, which was a harder sell, that you were wrong for me.” She shook her head. “You told me you knew it was wrong. Thing is, it never felt wrong. It needed to feel wrong, though, and it didn’t. I wanted it to. I even thought it did until you started becoming, you know, wonderful.”

Spike grinned, drumming his fingers along one of the velvet straps holding her teddy in place. "Wonderful, huh?" he murmured, lowering his mouth to the tempting column of flesh at her throat. "I'm wonderful?"

"You know you're wonderful."

"Bloke likes to hear it. Think I could stand to have you call me wonderful another dozen or so times to even the scales."

"What scales?"

"The 'Spike disgusts me' scales."

She giggled, and his heart sang at the sound. "I'm standing here wearing a see-through piece of practically nothing. That doesn't tip the scale?"

"I'm not saying it's not a step in the right direction."

She inched her fingers up his sides, dragging inches of T-shirt fabric along with her. "I'd hope not."

"I must admit, I do like your momentum." Spike paused, hazarded a glance to her face, then dipped his mouth down to nuzzle her breasts. "Mmm...you know how often I've fantasized about these luscious tits of yours?"

"Hope they don't disappoint," she whispered, trembling.

Spike arched a brow and slanted a look upward. "Disappoint?" he repeated and flicked his tongue over her hardened nipple. "You're perfection."

"You're blind."

"My eyes work just fine, thank you."

"Spike—"

"In fact, they're highly superior to yours."

"I'm not—"

"I think I'll be the judge of what you are and what you aren't." He skimmed his teeth over the sensitive peak, grinning madly when she gasped and thrust herself against his cock. "And what you are is gorgeous."

"Blind man."

"You might be the only woman on the planet who surpasses the fantasy."

Another giggle raced through her trembling body. "You know you

don't need to flatter me. I'm obviously not going anywhere"

"Yeah. It's what makes this not flattery." The grin tickling his lips broadened as he drew her soft flesh fully into his mouth. She even tasted good through satin, which he let her know by nibbling at her sweetly before releasing her with a reluctant sigh. "You're perfect, love."

"Spike—"

"I can't believe you thought I didn't love you," he muttered, then licked the underside of her breast.

"I didn't say that! I so didn't—except yes, I said that."

"Of course I love you."

"You hadn't said it for a while."

"You told me to stop telling you I love you."

Buffy froze, then jerked his head up with force he likely shouldn't have found sexy. "In your life, you've never done anything asked of you," she informed him matter-of-factly before sucking his lower lip into her mouth and whimpering as though he was the most delicious thing she'd ever tasted. It was almost embarrassing the way she managed to make him feel like he was something other than a centuries' old vampire. Then, upon pulling away, she expected him to actually remember what she was saying. "Why would you start now?"

"Start what?"

"Doing what was asked of you."

"Mmm," he murmured, dropping his hands to the fuzzy hem of her teddy. "And it's funny how you can come to that conclusion having known me just a few years."

"I think I've gotten to know you very well."

"I'd do anything you asked."

"History hasn't shown that."

"Well, a lot've what you asked has been stupid." Spike smiled, his eyes drawn to her face as his fingers inched toward the soaking crotch of her panties. Her heady scent intoxicating him. "You wanted me to leave."

Buffy gasped, lifting her hips and parting her thighs in an unmistakable invitation. "When?"

He slipped his index finger under the elastic and ran a gentle lap up

and down her slit without parting her lips. “Many times,” he breathed, a thrilling jolt seizing his insides. It hit him out of nowhere—stark realization. This was real. He was really standing in Buffy’s candle-lit room, her scantily clad body pressed against him, his hand between her legs.

“That was stupid of me.”

It took him a long second to process she’d spoken. “What?”

“Telling you to leave.”

His mind ran backward. “Didn’t take, though,” he reminded her, his mouth drawn again to her throat. “I’m right here.”

“Oh yes, you are.” She pushed him away without warning, offering a playful smile when he frowned. “And you’re doing your best to distract me.”

Spike paused and raked his eyes down her delicious body. “I’m not the one who looks like a fucking nymph.”

“Tonight was supposed to be about you.”

“About me?”

“You see the room, right? The candles, the chocolate, the—”

“Woman I love who’s gonna be naked and on her back?”

“Not yet.”

“Not yet?”

Buffy shook her head, but the grin didn’t vanish and she didn’t move away. Rather, she stepped forward and linked her arms around his neck, attacking his mouth in a furious, desperate kiss which she broke a maddening second later to tear his tee off his body. “Oh wow,” she said, blinking as she took him in. And perhaps, for the first time in all his unlife, he found himself completely aware of his body. Confidence was one thing—even ego. But standing before the woman who held his heart in her small but oh-so capable hands was almost terrifying.

Almost. But not quite.

Spike grinned, running his hand down his chest and across his abdomen. “See somethin’ you like, pet?” he asked, hooking his fingers through his belt loops with a very not-subtle thrust of his hips to draw her attention to the straining denim.

“How have I never noticed this before?”

“Noticed what?”

“That you’re all...statuesque.”

He barked a laugh. “Statuesque?”

Buffy met his eyes, all sincerity, and nodded, raising a hand to his chest and caressing one of his nipples. “You know...like those Greek statues.”

“Buffy...”

“Bet you taste better, though.” She didn’t give him a chance to prepare, rather dipped her head and sucked that nipple between her teeth.

“Oh Christ!” Spike practically roared, seizing her shoulders as his hips jerked upward and his cock struck her mound. “Buffy—”

“This looks painful,” she observed, her fingers finally dipping to explore his denim-clad erection. “I think someone wants out.”

“God...”

Buffy tossed him a coy, kittenish smile, deftly undoing the top button before turning her attention to his zipper. “See,” she murmured, raising herself on her tiptoes to lick his lips. “This is what I meant by making it all about you.”

“Our first time—”

“I’m your present.”

Spike opened one eye, not realizing both had fallen closed. “For tonight or always?” he asked.

“Always.”

The conviction in her voice nearly brought him to tears. “And...you’re my present.”

“Yes.”

He returned his attention to her breasts. “I can’t unwrap you?”

“Not yet. First I wanna do this.” Buffy kissed the corner of his mouth as his cock sprang into her hand. “Any objections?”

It amazed him how her warmth could flood him without reducing him to dust. A long moan hissed through his teeth, his hungry eyes drinking her in. She shuddered with him when her thumb tenderly rubbed his cock’s sensitive head. She trembled when he did as her fingers trailed the underside, then gasped with him when she lowered her other hand to caress his testicles.

She reacted as though she felt it.

"Tonight's about you," Buffy said again, her voice heady now with arousal. He'd never thought he'd hear her quiver with lust simply by touching him, and yet here they were, and her reaction nearly drove him to his knees.

"Buffy—"

"These pants really need to come off."

There was no need to tell him twice. His boots found themselves in opposite corners of her room, his jeans rapidly following suit. The power of her smile had him dangerously close to tears. She looked happy. Genuinely happy.

And she was smiling at him.

Then she was pressed against him, wresting hungry, needy kisses from his mouth. He closed his arms around her waist, a growl rumbling through his chest. There was no part of her he didn't want to taste. Consume. He needed the heat of her flesh against him and the liquid fire of her arousal drenching his cock. He wanted her cunt in his mouth and her hair curled around his fingers. He wanted her.

"I love you," he swore.

Buffy grinned and nipped at him. "You told me."

"You thought I didn't."

"Yeah, well, I'm over it." She pressed another kiss to his lips, then abruptly turned and shoved him onto the mattress. Her eyes flickered meaningfully as she glanced from his swollen cock to his face with a mixture of amused hunger. "Wow. That looks painful."

Spike arched an eyebrow and wrapped his hand around his erection. "I need something soft to dip into," he replied with a cheeky swirl of his hips. "Any suggestions?"

"You're trying to make me forget my plans, aren't you?"

"Well, I'm havin' a nice plan or two of my own."

"How do you know my plan isn't better?"

"Because you're over there, I'm over here, and you're still dressed."

She cupped her barely covered breasts and tossed him a look that ought to be outlawed. "You call this dressed?" she repeated.

"As dressed as I ever want you to be."

"It'll make for an interesting slayage outfit."

Bugger that. "I'd like to see you try."

She wrinkled her nose wrinkled. "Yeah, me too. It's uncomfortable enough as it is."

"Uncomfortable?"

"Yeah. News flash—a girl wears something like this for you? It means she has it bad." Buffy grinned and raised the hem of her teddy, baring her soaked, satin panties to his starving eyes. "Sorry these aren't kinkier."

Spike forced himself to meet her gaze, and considering how drawn he was to the pooling moisture at the thin fabric protecting her center, it was quite the accomplishment. "Kinkier?" he repeated. "They're driving me wild."

"Yeah, but it's not a thong."

"A thong?"

"I don't do thongs."

"Okay."

"I figure it actually needs to cover your ass to constitute underwear."

"Buffy, do you hear me complaining?"

She turned a charming shade of red and wiggled. "Ummm, no. I just... It's kinda hard to...you know, do this? I mean, I don't know what you've wanted. I mean beyond...this. You just told me you've fantasized about my boobs."

"Mmm..." He raked his eyes downwards again, pumping his cock harder. "Not just your—"

"But that's just it! You've fantasized and I don't wanna be... I don't want to let you down."

"You think you can?" he demanded, his throat suddenly tight. "Oh Buffy... Sweetheart, in your life, you could never let me down."

"You say that now—"

"I—"

"I want to make it good for you."

"It's you. It's you, Buffy..." He dragged his fingers over the head of his cock, shuddering. "I love you."

"You might not love sex with me."

"You're completely off your tree."

She shrugged. "Just saying."

"Is this your plan? Your 'making it about Spike' plan? Get me naked, hard enough to smash bricks, and tell me you think I'm such a berk I'd actually—"

"No, this part you're getting for free." Buffy shrugged, but fear betrayed her airiness. "It's the crazy. It comes along with the package."

"I love your package."

"Spike—"

"I love you, Buffy. I love every part of you."

She poked out her lip. Had she been within reaching distance, he would have sucked it into his mouth. "Even the crazy?" she asked.

"Sweetheart, I think it's safe to say your brand of crazy's gonna be the sanest thing I've ever had." Spike smiled and reached for her hand. "Buffy...if you need... If you wanna wait, I'll wait. I'll wait forever. I'll prob'ly go outta my bloody head in the process, but we don't need to do anything tonight."

"Seriously?"

"Could have myself a nice wank right here if you like. Either that or my balls turn stone blue."

Buffy's eyes dropped to the balls in question. "I wouldn't want that to happen."

"You look at my bits like that and I'm not gonna be so gentlemanly."

"Yes, you are."

He wagged his brows. "Yeah? How you figure?"

"Because tonight is based on my plan and what I say goes. It's about you."

"I don't need that."

"I wanna give it to you." After freeing her fingers from his, she reached up and slipped the straps holding up her teddy off her shoulders. "You really want to say no?"

Spike's head began to fog. "It's not a matter of what I want, baby," he all but growled. "But what you need."

"I need you."

Everything froze, and for the second time that night, he could have sworn his useless heart twitched. Wildest fantasies aside, he'd never

envisioned those words actually taking shape. The days of longing for Buffy's realization that they were molded to fit together—that loving each other was something for which they were made—had ended long ago. Now he was on her bed, naked, his hands inching upward to strip her lingerie off her body. To take her completely.

Because she needed him.

"You do?" he replied hoarsely, hope and fear colliding in a deadly rush. "You need me?"

There was no hesitation. Buffy's eyes shone with truth. With affection. With need. With...something.

Oh god.

"Yes," she whispered. "Spike...I... Oh god." Her breath caught and her eyes went wide. "Oh my god."

He inhaled sharply. "What?"

And then there were tears. She blinked rapidly, panting hard, heavy gasps. "It's just...I just now...I just realized something."

"What?"

"I love you."

She was on him before he could break with euphoria, consuming his in furious, endless kisses. Her hands scrambled across his body as though she feared he would melt into nothing before she could touch him. She was astride him, her wet crotch rubbing his cock, her lips demanding and her tongue in his mouth, and she loved him.

Buffy loved him.

And he couldn't speak for fear of sobbing.



BUFFY COULD HAVE KISSED HIM FOREVER. HIS KISSES WERE THE things of which fantasies were made. It was quite possible her mouth would no longer know what to do with itself when not warring his. He had her inebriated, and every silky caress only further secured her fall. He tasted pure male, flavored with nicotine and leather and she wanted to inhale him. How strange that she should hate everything about cigarettes but love the way he tasted? The more he gave, the more she wanted, and she couldn't pull herself away to save the world.

"I love you," she gasped again, hard thrills rolling down her spine. "I love you. I love you. I love you."

How it had happened, she didn't know, only she'd been standing before him, swelling with some explosive emotion she could barely identify before light speared her veins and she realized what it was. Love. Love unlike anything she'd touched. The walls had crumbled and there was nothing standing between her and what had been right in front of her and ignored far too long.

"Bloody hell..."

Buffy pulled back just far enough to take in his gorgeous, astonished face. "I love you."

"You love me," Spike repeated and swallowed hard. His hands were on her hips, fingers digging into her skin. "Buffy..."

"I do."

"When?"

"Just now."

"You...you didn't know you loved me before you wanted this?" Spike dropped his eyes to the teddy she hadn't quite managed to remove. "You didn't know?"

"No."

"You didn't love me—"

"No, I did love you. I just didn't know it." Buffy shook her head. "I felt things. Big things. Scary big, actually. I thought they were going to overtake me and that would be bad...or scary, at least. It didn't occur to me that it was love because, wow it's been a long time and I don't remember it feeling like this." She cupped his cheek. "Are you upset?"

There was a long, stunned pause. "Upset?" he barked. "Buffy—"

"You sounded upset."

"That you love me? Try bloody bowled over, sweetheart. Sod it, I'm half-convinced I'm gonna wake up."

"So...not upset."

"You're completely daft, you know that?"

"And *that* has you upset?"

"Oh, lay off, you know exactly I'm talking about." Spike shook his head, a high-pitched titter tumbling across his lips. "You love me. I can't even wrap my mind around it."

"Yeah, but I didn't know it until just a second ago."

His eyes narrowed. "I don't care when you knew. I just...do you have any bloody idea what this means to me? What any of this means to me?"

Before she could answer, he had her cheeks between his hands and was mauling her lips. "You're really here," he murmured between kisses. "You're really with me."

"It's my room," she replied, melting into his kiss.

"Mmm." Spike purred against her, and it felt heavenly. "But you're with me."

"I love you." Buffy broke away from his mouth, giggling at his

dazed, lusty eyes and shivering with the reality that this was the sort of man she could giggle with. She could love and laugh all at once, and the knowledge was wonderful. "I do, Spike."

The grin that tickled his lips made every inch of her rattle. "God, how I love you," he whispered, his hands shaking as they trailed down her shoulders until they were cradling her breasts. "It consumes me."

"And tonight is about you." Buffy shivered, then moaned when he flicked his thumbs over her nipples. "But ooohhh...I like that."

Spike growled and thrust his hips against her, his cock hitting the apex of her thighs. "Like what?" he asked. "What do you like?"

"You touching me."

"Bloody fortunate, because I don't think I'll ever stop."

"But...I need you to...stop..."

The smile on his face turned rakish. "I thought you liked me touching you."

"I love it, but..." Worrying a lip between her teeth, Buffy wrapped her hands around Spike's wrists and gently lowered his hands back to the mattress. "Don't you want me to get out of this?" she asked, sliding to her feet and edging the red satin down her body.

Spike nodded and sat up, taking his cock into his left hand and resuming his tantalizing strokes as his eyes soaked her in. "You're keepin' it, aren't you?" he asked. "I love it."

"You do?"

"God, yes. Never seen..." His voice cut off abruptly the second her breasts touched the air, his jaw going a bit slack. A lesser woman would assume he'd never seen a naked woman before by the way he visually gobbled her up. "Oh fuck."

The thin fabric pooled around her feet, and then she was standing before him only in red satin panties. "Spike...?"

"You're perfect."

"I—"

"Come here."

Buffy swallowed hard. "I would, but you have this look about you that leads me to believe you're going to try to take control and make this time about me."

“Doesn’t matter, does it? As long as you’re naked and against me I’m gonna be satisfied.”

She frowned. “Well, I’m not.”

“You think I can’t satisfy you?”

“No, I think you can satisfy me until I can’t walk, but I wanna do this first.” Buffy reached over him to the small tray she’d set up beside the bed and seized the bottle of chocolate. “This is something I’ve never tried before. I never got inventive when... You know, with sex.”

Spike was threatening to swallow her with his eyes again. “Inventive?”

“It’s just chocolate,” she said, almost defensive.

“Buffy—”

“But I need to start somewhere—” She really would have continued had he not taken advantage of her proximity and flustered attempts to explain her sexual shortcomings to suck most of her right breast into his mouth. Without warning, Buffy whimpered and made like heated wax. “Ohhh...not fair.”

His tongue swirled around her nipple. “Mmm.”

“Spike...”

“Mmm.” He kept one hand around his cock, the other edging down her abdomen until he had her pussy against his palm, again making her achingly aware of how wet she was. Spike’s mouth stretched into a wide grin, his fingers slipping under the elastic at the crotch to tease her drenched flesh once more. “Christ,” he whispered. “How you feel...”

“Ohhh...”

“I wanna eat you up, Buffy. Wanna fuck you with my mouth. Wanna bury my tongue so deep inside you I’ll be able to taste you even when we’re apart.” Spike met her eyes, holding her gaze as he took a long, pointed lick of her nipple. “Let me?”

There was nothing to do but nod numbly, though it took a few seconds to realize his intention when he began edging back, his hands dragging her with him. When it occurred to her all her plans were about to be forfeit, Buffy snapped upward and shook her head.

“No.”

“No?”

“You can...ummm—with the eating... You can do that later. As much as you want.” The thought alone had her legs wobbly. “But for now, I wanna play.” She swallowed hard and held up the bottle of chocolate. “Lay back for me?”

He’d flopped onto his back before she could blink, and this time, she didn’t stall. If she stalled, he’d take control again and she wanted to be the one behind the wheel. She wanted to be the one calling the shots, especially since it’d taken enough courage to talk herself into being assertive. Adventurous. Adding chocolate to her sex life was something she’d never before considered, but as she took in his swollen cock, she couldn’t wait to taste him.

“Okay,” Buffy whispered, edging her knees back onto the bed. “Be still for me.”

Spike lifted his head and arched a brow. “Are you gonna be touchin’ me?”

“Survey says yes.”

“And your mouth...?”

“It’s gonna be very well-occupied.”

“Then I can say with certainty there’s no bloody way I can be still, even for you.”

Buffy grinned and poked out her tongue, aimed the bottle over his stomach and squeezed a stream of chocolate onto his chest. “Well,” she replied, her eyes following the dark line she drew down his abs and around his belly-button. “Try.”

He rocked hard with the weight of unneeded gasps. “Why should I?”

“Cause I love you and you love me and I asked you to.”

“Fair enough.”

The light in his eyes was something she didn’t get to see often—something that had been practically nonexistent since the night he’d chained her up and proclaimed his love for her. He looked happy. Really happy. And it was because of her.

Every part of her trembled.

“I made a mess,” she observed, capping the bottle and setting it back onto the tray as she took in the rather scrumptious sight of Spike’s naked, chocolate-smears chest.

He gave another of those low, sexy growls. "Better clean it up, then."

She'd thought it would be bizarre, settling next to Spike on her bed. In the bed where she planned to keep him occupied until the world ended for real. For as often as she'd entertained thoughts of their sex life, the prospect of stepping from fantasy into the unpredictable realm of reality had done a number on her nerves. A part of her had worried admitting her feelings would shift the power between them, and Spike would lord it over her until she had no choice but to stake him. Now that it was between them—now that he knew it—she didn't know how or why she'd ever expected anything else. The power hadn't changed; it simply wasn't hers anymore.

It was theirs.

Buffy smiled and raised her head to his face, unable to keep from stealing a kiss from his lips, yet careful to keep from getting any chocolate on herself. One kiss inevitably became two, then three, and before she allowed him to distract her again, she broke away from his mouth and took to exploring his neck.

A long, pleased sigh rumbled through his throat as he flexed and arched under her. "Fuck," he murmured. "Buffy..."

She slipped a hand across his chest until she was playing with one of his nipples, and the gasp she earned jolted a thrill directly to her core. Never had it occurred to her that a man's chest might be even marginally as sensitive as a woman's, but it seemed right she would discover certain things with Spike. Things she wasn't meant to discover with anyone else. Things like the joys of sex mixed with chocolate and strawberries. She was meant to learn things from and with him.

Spike moaned again, thrusting his hips off the bed in a silent plea to take mercy on his poor cock, but she ignored him, having much too much fun playing with his nipples and smearing chocolate across his chest. She wasn't ready to touch him yet.

"You know," she whispered, and licked his neck, smiling when he moaned harder, "you are very yummy."

"You're...killin' me," Spike gasped, arching up again. "Fuck..."

"I'm barely touching you."

"Vamp's neck, pet. You're... Fuck, now with teeth."

Buffy giggled, gently biting him again. “You like my teeth?”

“I love your teeth. I love your mouth. I love your pinky finger.” As though to prove just how much, he seized the hand playing with his chest and raised it to his mouth to draw the finger in question between his lips. And god, the feeling of him sucking on her—even slightly—had the pulse between her legs escalating almost beyond the point she could stand. “Buffy...”

She reclaimed her finger before he could make with further Buffy-hand porn and immediately lowered her mouth to his chest. Her tongue landed on a long ribbon of chocolate and she wasted no time licking it up.

“Fuck!”

“Mmm...chocolate Spike.”

He gasped. “Buffy...oh god...”

“See? This is what I meant...” Her lips found one of his nipples and she sucked him tenderly between her teeth. The sigh she earned had her blood singing. “You taste delicious.”

“Slayer...”

“I could play with your nipples a while. I didn’t know man-nipples could be so much fun.”

“Neither did I,” he replied, his voice so strained it sounded close to snapping.

Buffy paused. “Really?”

“You...you’re the...only woman who’s ever really...” Spike hissed and arched upward again. “Sweetheart, please.”

His admission had her flummoxed. The only woman. The *only* woman? No one else had ever explored him like this? The idea alone dwarfed her comprehension. In over a century with more sexual experience than she wanted to consider, Spike had had no one else explore him like this? She’d thought Dru would have at the least, but maybe Dru was a selfish lover. Or only into pain or something. Like she’d explore him but with a mind to make it hurt.

Whatever the case, it was a crying shame. Buffy fisted his cock and began to stroke, determined to give him more of this thing he’d never had.

“Fuck, yes. Your hand...” Spike bowed upward again. “Buffy...”

Questions pounded her brain but she didn't want him to distract her with another long discussion. She resumed exploring him with her mouth, trailing further south and sucking up every delicious drop of chocolate she had spilled across his alabaster skin. His whimpers had her heart threatening to leap to freedom, but in a way she found exhilarating rather than terrifying.

There was no more chocolate when she reached his cock. There was nothing but Spike.

A small, nervous smile spread across her lips. "You look even bigger down here," she whispered, gently caressing the head of his penis.

"God..."

"I guess that's because I'm closer."

"Buffy..."

Her past experience with blowjobs wasn't exactly something to sing about. She wasn't good or bad, always very aware of what she was doing while her mouth was occupied. Very aware of how men loved to have their dicks appraised and determined not to become a locker room horror story. And with as nervous as she was to live up to his fantasies, a part of her was also pacified by knowing he would love her regardless of her bedroom expertise.

It was with this mentality that she leaned forward, teasing the tender skin between his cock and his testicles with her tongue. The first taste surprised her with how unsurprising it was. He tasted like skin. Like flesh. Like male, musky Spike. In fact, his yelp was the only thing to indicate where her mouth was, and even then, with as responsive as her vampire had proven, that was a bit of a stretch.

Never before had she experienced this beyond the performance, and immediately she found herself addicted.

"Uhhh... Slayer..."

She replied with a wink, the tip of her tongue tracing the underside of his cock until her lips had wrapped seductively around the mushroom-shaped head. Then she drew him in, cupping his balls with her left hand and wrapping her right around his shaft. The feel of his skin sliding against her tongue, flavored with the heady gasps tearing through his chest, had her captivated. It took half a second for his fingers to wind through her hair, and he caressed her scalp

with loving encouragement as unintelligible adorations rolled off his lips.

She loved the way he filled her mouth. Loved wrapping her tongue around him, exploring every vein; loved how she could elicit such reactions by doing so little.

“Bloody hell, your mouth,” Spike gasped, lifting his hips and slipping deeper inside her. “Buffy—”

She began pumping him with her hand as her mouth worked him as far into her throat as possible, keeping her eyes locked on him, hoping that he saw what she felt—hoping her feelings were as obvious as his. There was no accounting for it; once upon a time, she’d been able to look in the mirror and identify herself as being in love, but so much had changed. The girl she’d been didn’t exist anymore.

She wanted her eyes to tell him everything.

Spike rolled his head. “Bloody dream come bloody true,” he gasped.

She laughed, which only made him moan harder, and drew him in until his head brushed the soft wall of her throat and put her gag reflex to the test—deep-throating wasn’t something she had a lot of experience with, but she found it much simpler than magazines made it sound. Developing a rhythm, she slipped her mouth up and down his length, caressing his balls every time his head hit her throat and squeezing his base every time he left her mouth.

“That’s it, baby,” Spike purred, locking eyes with her. “Look at you. Mouth full of my cock. You suck me so good. So fucking good.”

“Scchike?”

A pause. His lips quirked into a small grin. “Did you...did you just try to say my name?”

“Mhmm,” she replied, squeezing his testicles.

“I love you.”

Heat rose to her cheeks. She smiled shyly around him, drawing him to the back of her throat again until there was nothing to do but swallow.

“*Fuck!*”

That was a reaction she could definitely get used to, so she did it again.

“Buffy! Oh...”

The hand curled around his cock offered him one more caress before inching up to gently rub his stomach. And before he could say another word, she let his cock slip from her lips and dipped down to taste his balls.

“Fuck, Buffy, touch me. Need you around my cock.”

Buffy complied immediately, taking his erection in hand again and squeezing as she drew one testicle into her mouth.

“Bloody hell!”

“Mmm,” she murmured around him. Her fingers danced through a thatch of pubic hair, slipping up his cock and massaging its head before roaming downward again. Then she released him and tapped his sac with her tongue, enjoying the way he bounced against her. “I love the way you taste.”

No one had ever panted like Spike. Not any of the living men she’d invited into her bed, and certainly not Angel. He clamored for oxygen like a man suffocated, the rhythmic rise and fall of his chest mesmerizing, thrilling, making her wet enough to drown them both. Her clit throbbed and her skin tingled; she wanted him inside her like she’d wanted nothing before.

But she also wanted this. She wanted to watch her hand pump his length as she explored his balls with her tongue. She wanted to watch his face as she made his cock disappear inside her mouth. As she clenched and swallowed and proved to him how serious she was about where the future would take them.

“Buffy...”

She lifted her head and brushed a kiss across the tip of his cock. “Do you want to...you know?”

“You know...?”

“You know... In my... Do you want... Do you—”

Spike’s eyes went wide. “Come in your mouth? God yes. But not now.”

“Not now? Then when?”

It was rather amusing, watching him battle lust to locate coherent thought. “You’re gonna love me when we leave the room, right?”

Buffy smiled. “Duh.”

"Then you won't stake me if I ask you to..." He gestured to his cock. "Give me another blow sometime?"

"I'm never staking you, Spike. Get used to the thought."

"I'll try. But as much as I want to come in your mouth... The first time? Our first time? I want to come in your pussy. With you coming hard around me. I wanna feel you squeeze and clench me...drench me. I want you screaming my name when I come. I want you with me."

There were no words. No words whatsoever. And before her mind caught up with her, she found herself crawling upward. She was painfully aware of every move of her arm. Every stride up the mattress. Every breath on her lips. Every flash of his eyes. Everything.

Spike cupped her cheeks and dragged her mouth to his before she could pace herself. And god, his lips had her melting in his arms. He kissed her with a passion she'd never touched, mewling with every seductive nip, every stolen taste. Then his hands were at her panties and pulling until the material was nothing more than two pieces of useless fabric.

Buffy tossed her head back, her eyes nearly crossing at the sinful feel of his cock rubbing her drenched flesh. "Spike..."

His teeth skimmed her throat. "You're burning me up," he whispered. "You're fire, Slayer. You're pure fire."

"Spike..."

He seized her mouth again and rolled over. "Gonna fuck you till we both can't walk."

"No, I'm supposed to be—"

"What? In charge? Givin' me—"

"I told you—"

"Sweetheart, if tonight's about me, what do you say you let me do this how I want?" Spike smiled against her lips before dipping southward to tease one of her nipples with his tongue. "Had plenty of time thinkin' this out, and our first time, I wanted this."

"This?"

"You under me."

Buffy didn't bother hiding her astonishment. Spike was a guy who favored kinky chains and who-knows-what-else in the bedroom. Who would have thought he fantasized about basic missionary?

As though reading her mind, he chuckled, rolling her nipple between his teeth. “Gonna nasty you up every way you can imagine,” he promised before pressing a kiss against her flesh. “Just wanted this first. Want your eyes on me. Want you under me. Let me have it?”

He looked up then, his eyes sincere and open, warm with love. The fears she’d entertained seemed so silly under the power of his supernova. He loved her. She’d always known he loved her—ever since he’d said the words—but until that second, it truly hadn’t sunk in. It hadn’t resonated in her bones. It hadn’t seized her.

Spike smiled softly and kissed her. “Stun you speechless, love?”

“Huh?”

“You’ve been starin’ at me for a mo’ now. Not that I blame you, but—”

She smirked and seized the back of his head, dragging him down to consume him in another kiss. God, the way his tongue danced against hers sent shivers across her skin. “Conceited, much?”

He shrugged and reached between them, taking his cock in his hand and rubbing himself against her drenched flesh. A wicked grin stretched his lips. “You were the one staring.”

“Mmm.”

“Mmm?”

She arched her hips. “You gonna tease me all night or are you gonna make with the loving? ‘Cause I can take back control any time I like.”

The head of his cock brushed her clit and every inch of her vibrated; she didn’t even realize she’d moaned until he chuckled and teased her again, tapping her flesh with himself and making her feel more exposed than she had in all her life. More so than the first time she’d been naked in front of a man. More so than the night she’d lost her virginity. He was teasing her pussy with the tip of his cock, grinning when she moaned, and she was more aware of herself than she’d ever been.

“I don’t think so, pet,” Spike replied, at last positioning himself at her opening. “I think you’re pretty much at my mercy.” Then, pushing just slightly inside her, he lowered his mouth and whispered, “I love you,” against her lips.

And then she was split apart.



HE'D NEVER FELT anything like this.

Her pussy clamped around him almost instantly, hugging his cock, pulling his flesh as though he'd always been made to be a part of her. As though her body identified him as a missing piece and was eager to invite him home. She was molten. She was fire. Her soft, silky walls, slick with liquid fire, parted like a whisper. He was bathed in warmth, and in those seconds felt he at last knew himself.

"Ahh," Buffy gasped, her nails digging into his back.

Spike shivered and pressed his brow to hers. "You all right?" he asked, unable to stop his hips from pushing forward. His body was too hungry for hers and she felt too fucking good to deny himself anything.

She nodded, panting. The sight near drove him over. "Just... you're...big."

"Need me to stop?" he asked even as he pushed forward. Deeper and deeper. He needed to be fully inside her. There was no stopping now.

"No."

"Thank fuck, I don't think I can."

"It's just... It's been a while for me."

Spike couldn't help it; he grinned. "That and you're not used to anythin' on this grand a scale, are you, Slayer?"

Buffy blinked, then scowled. "You'd like...to think so."

"Bloke can't help but think things when you're quiverin' around me like a virgin." He kissed the corner of her mouth before she could rebuke him and slipped a hand between them, finding her clit and with his fingers and gently stroking her as he slid all the way home. Buffy gasped and clenched him, digging her nails deeper into his upper-arms and thrusting upward almost clumsily.

"God, but you feel good," Spike whispered. The words were an understatement. There had never been pleasure like this. Pleasure so rampant he felt dangerously close to spilling just at the feel of her. And beyond the physical awaited the knowledge that it was Buffy. Buffy beneath him. Buffy's heart thundering against his chest. Buffy's nails scoring into his skin. Buffy's pussy tightening around his prick. Buffy's

juices on his skin. It had taken forever to get here, but Buffy was with him.

Buffy loved him.

If he thought about it too much, he'd lose control. And his fantasies had always featured him in control.

His fantasies had always alluded to fucking her so good she never wanted to leave. Only now she loved him, so his goal shifted from earning her to keeping her. He had her now—he just had to prove he was worthy of the trust she'd given him.

"Spike. I need you to..."

He nodded and kissed her again as he began to move. If sliding into her body was torture, then the slip from her flesh and the plunge inside again would drive him to madness. He kept his fingers at her clit, pressing her there to make up for any discomfort, though her eyes betrayed none. She was paradise and she made him feel new. She made him feel things he hadn't known he could feel. Things he hadn't known there were to feel.

He looked at her and knew he was loved. It was nothing he'd ever had.

"Is that good, baby?" he whispered, pumping shallow thrusts, allowing her to grow accustomed to the feel of him sliding in and out of her pussy. "Ahhh..."

"Y-yes."

Spike kissed her, rumbling a soft sigh against her lips, drawing a bit further out of her body and again pushing inside until he felt his balls rest against her flesh. "Never felt anythin' like this."

There was no sense denying the rush of male pride that rolled down his back at the tremor in her voice. "You haven't?" she murmured.

He licked her throat and purred, need overpowering tenderness. She was so hot and tight and wet and he wanted to pound her into the mattress—he wanted to bruise her with his body, tattoo his skin onto hers. He wanted her squeezing and straining and drenching his cock; he wanted her coming so hard she made him pop. "Never," he promised, pinching her clit. "Buffy...I need..."

"Do it."

“Do it?”

“Hard. Hard fast. Hard now.” She hooked her knee over his leg and drew him in tighter. “I need you. Please.”

Her whisper was all he needed. Burying his head in the crook of her throat, he abandoned her clit, his hands scaling up her body until their fingers were linked. Then he guided her hands above her head. “Hold on to the post for me, love,” he said, indicating the small bars along the headboard.

Buffy kissed his brow, and the touch rattled his foundation. It was so honest, so tender, and all his.

She was all his.

A low, possessive growl tore through his throat. He hooked his hands under her shoulders, the rocks of his hips growing harder. More desperate. Her pussy seized him in a strangle-hold every time he slid home, and he couldn't get enough. Every thrust furthered his addiction.

“Buffy..”

“Ahhh...”

“You're perfect. You're so perfect.”

She gasped and arched, her wet flesh molding around him, her body rolling under him with every thrust. Her own demands were becoming more boisterous. She smashed her hips upward, chasing his cock, mewling every time he pulled away, seemingly determined his flesh not touch air. Heavy breaths raced through his chest, his eyes fastened on hers. And watching her writhe, watching her while he was inside, was perhaps the single most erotic experience in all his life.

“More,” she pleaded, tightening her grip around the bedpost. “Spike—God, I need—”

“I know what you need,” he growled, nipping her lips, pounding harder into her. And again. And again. Until nothing existed but her small gasps and the scorching heat of her cunt. Until his body wrought tight with ecstasy, his cock drenched in her juice. Until the room around them blinked away. Until there was nothing but the illicit wet smacks of their bodies and the heavy crash of her breaths against his lips. Until he saw only the brilliant flash of her eyes before she lifted

her head to seize his lips, consuming him, swallowing him, dragging him deeper into her.

“Mine,” he growled suddenly. “You’re mine, Buffy.”

She didn’t respond save to nod rapidly. Then his cock struck home and met a squeeze of muscles he’d never before felt.

“Bloody hell!”

A kittenish smile crossed her lips. “You like that?”

Spike nodded hard, smashing her into the mattress. “Fuck, fuck, fuck. Again. Again. Do it again!”

His cock struck hard, and she didn’t disappoint. Her muscles wrapped, claimed, and squeezed. And everything came apart. His eyes went wide and a howl slashed his lungs as fangs burst into his mouth. Control fumbled away. He shouted again and again, words that had no meaning, words he didn’t hear, plunging in and out of her heat. Growling as her pussy tightened with every exquisite squeeze.

“Mine mine mine!” he snarled, fangs skimming her breast. He slid a hand between their battling bodies again and found her clit, treating her to an onslaught. “You’re mine, Buffy.”

“Oh my god!”

His fangs slid across her flesh again, and this time he tasted blood. “You’re mine!”

“Yes, yes, yes, yes.”

The words were his unmaking. Before he could help himself, he bit her breast, rubbing her clit hard, and the walls around him tumbled. Her pussy clamped and drenched him as she spasmed hard, a long cry tearing off her lips. With her blood in his mouth and her cunt squeezing his cock into a new world, he was gone, emptying himself inside her, filling her up. He kept rocking, kept pumping, kept pushing into her, unwilling to stop. Unwilling to let go. He wanted as much of her as she could give—more than she could give. He wanted everything.

He wanted *everything*.

“Mine,” he growled again and licked her bloodied flesh. “You’re mine.”

It took a few seconds for her to respond. She released the death-

grip she had on the bedposts and wound her arms around his neck. "Okay," she agreed dazedly.

"Okay?"

"Yes, I mean. Yes. I'm all yours."

He swallowed hard and lowered his mouth to hers. "You mean it?"

"Uh huh ..." She nodded. "I...oh god, what are you doing?"

Spike grinned and thrust deeper within her, wiggling his hips and stroking her clit. "Don't tell me I wore you out," he purred. "I'm just getting started, kitten."

Buffy moaned in protest. "I can't."

"Liar. I stood beneath your window too many a night while Captain Cardboard was in your bed." He kissed the indignation right off her lips, faint though it was, and more amused than anything. "Had to listen to you two shag like deranged rabbits."

"Ewww."

"You're tellin' me."

"Well, you have no one to blame but yourself for that, you perv."

He shrugged, the fingers still at her clit offering her a pinch. "Wanted you. Didn't think I'd ever get you."

"So you turned voyeur."

"You could say it like that."

She arched an eyebrow, thrusting her hips hard against his, flexing those muscles that had been his undoing. "How else could I say it?"

He whimpered, then conceded, "That's the only way."

"I thought so."

"Buffy..."

"And I'd think you, of all people, would be able to tell real orgasms from fake ones." She raised her head to kiss him, and in a blink had him on his back. And then she was astride him, her perfect breasts waving above his face, her pussy squeezing him into a new afterlife. "I never had many of the real kind with...him."

"What you get for wasting time with a tosser like that."

"But I believe that's something we can make up for now." The mask of fatigue had fallen off her face with no warning. She looked positively devious, and fuck if it didn't make him hard. Buffy straddling him,

HOLLY DENISE

bouncing slowly on his cock, her pink pussy lips wrapped around him.
She was a goddess; a goddess who'd fallen into his arms.

And she was his.

Spike fixed his eyes on the bite he'd left on her breast.

Mine.

His now. His always.

Now that he'd touched her, there was no letting go.

“YOU’RE TRYING TO KILL ME, AREN’T YOU?”

The mewl only broadened Spike’s grin as he spilled another drop of wine onto her stomach. “Thought you figured out I prefer you warm and wiggling, love,” he practically purred before taking a long, indulgent lap of her succulent skin. She was delicious—warm and delicious and oh so his, and he felt it with every caress. His flesh hummed every time he touched her. His fangs itched. His blood sparked. He didn’t know what it was, only it was wonderful and he wanted it for always. He never wanted to not feel like this again.

“I do not wiggle,” Buffy protested, squirming under his wandering mouth.

Spike chuckled. “Is that right?” he whispered, peppering kisses across her taut belly. “This isn’t wigglin’?”

“No. I’m...ahhh...” She moaned and lifted her hips in offering as his tongue wandered over her mound. “I’m...strata...strategizing...”

“Mmhmm...”

“Cocky bastard.”

He smirked, spilling another stream of wine onto her skin and watching hungrily as it rolled over her pelvis and drenched her pussy. “Gotta say, you give me a lot to be cocky about.”

“Ass.”

“Mmm.” He dipped quickly between her legs and playfully bit at her ass. “Yeah, that’s right tasty, too.”

Buffy squealed. Loudly. “Spike!”

He blinked, all innocence. “What?”

“You bit me!”

Spike arched an eyebrow and waved. “Errr, vampire.”

“That was my ass!”

“And it happens to be very biteable,” he replied reasonably. “Should I show you again?”

“Spike!”

Another long chuckle rumbled through his chest. He parted her pussy lips and poured a waterfall of wine over her pink flesh with a groan. “You are the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen,” he whispered, burying his face in her and inhaling. “Such a sweet little quim.”

Her protests came to an abrupt end as she rolled her hips. “Ohhh...”

“You always been like this, baby?” he asked, running his fingers over her plump, hairless mound.

“Since I started slaying,” she confessed. “At first...’cause short skirts...and then...”

Spike trembled, took a swig of wine, then placed the bottle on the floor. “And then?” he coaxed softly, eying the half-empty container of chocolate sauce. He’d already used a good quantity on her tits. For his first taste of her cunt, though, he figured he’d keep to just the wine.

“And then...I...I got...used to it.”

The thought of her patrolling in those criminally short skirts and a pair of sinfully seductive knickers had him dangerously close to busting a nut like a virgin fledgling. He wasn’t worried, though, considering he’d made her scream herself hoarse. In every way except this. In every way save for tasting her, and certainly not for lack of trying. Every time he’d tried to dip between her legs, she’d eluded him by taking his cock into her hand or mouth and distracting him so well, he didn’t remember what it was he wanted until it was time for her to distract him again.

Spike, however, was parched for her pussy, and damn if she would keep it from him. He decided to divert her in turn. His method was simple: make her come blind and then do whatever the hell he wanted until she recuperated.

And fuck, if it wasn't fun trying to wear her out. Spike had always known they'd be brilliant together, but he hadn't known just how brilliant.

There was nothing in this world that could have prepared him for this.

Prepared him for Buffy.

"Spike," she gasped, arching her hips again. "You don't...you don't have to..."

"No, I really do," he replied before drawing a circle around her clit.

Her head flew back to the pillow, an inhuman cry peeling through the air. "Ohmigod!"

He winked and nibbled, taking one of her perfect breasts into one hand as the other joined his mouth. "You're a slow drink of whiskey, you are," he growled, leaving her clit with a parting lick as his tongue ventured to her opening. "So bloody rich."

"Am...not..."

"Don't think you're in a position to judge, pet."

Buffy whimpered, thrusting her hips against him with a need she likely didn't recognize. It amazed him that a creature as innately sensual as the Slayer would remain ignorant of her own allure. She blinked in wonder every time he whispered how beautiful she was or how good she felt. Her taste had him drunk, but she didn't know why. She looked at him with saucer-wide eyes and told him he was wrong, and believed it.

Though it broke his heart that no one had abolished these fears long before he stepped in, a very real part of him was grateful to be the first. It meant he was the only man to truly know what he had. To know exactly how wonderful she was.

"You taste so good," Spike whispered, dipping his tongue inside her. "Could eat you for hours."

"Unh..."

"I mean it, kitten, this pussy—"

"Spike—"

He grinned. "You love this, don't you?"

Buffy nodded hard and thrust upward, her eyes wild. "Yes," she agreed. "More."

"More?"

"Inside. Tongue. Please."

What my lady demands... Spike growled and plunged his tongue inside her sweet hole, licking and sucking and swallowing mouthfuls of Buffy-concentrate. He rubbed his thumb over her clit, massaging and pressing down every time she thrust against him. Every time she pushed herself harder against his mouth.

"Oh...Spike..."

Hearing his name whimpered in her breathy, sex-hoarse voice had every inch of him hardening. Spike growled into her flesh and drove his straining cock against the mattress. "Never gonna get tired of that," he whispered.

"Tired...what?"

He grinned and nipped at her. "Hearing you moan for me."

"I don't moan."

Spike arched an eyebrow, indulging in a long lick of her pussy before answering. "Sweetheart...when you said that, you moaned."

She gulped and curved upward again. "Less talky, more tasty."

"I see I made a believer of you," he observed, grinning.

"Wha...?"

"You didn't think I'd like this, did you?" He dragged his fingers to the mouth of her sex, pried her open and sank into her wet flesh as his lips moved back to her sweet button. "Didn't think I'd enjoy lickin' you from head to toe."

He capped the sentence with a tap of his tongue against her clit.

A hard gasp clawed at her throat. "Oh!" she cried. "Again. More. More of that."

"More of what?" he replied.

"You know damn well what!" She fisted a handful of his hair and shoved his face against herself so demandingly he would have collapsed with laughter were he not so turned on. Buffy by herself was a force

with which to be reckoned; a Buffy who took what she wanted was nothing short of a sex goddess. "My...my...your mouth...there."

He kissed her clit, evading a jerky thrust with a chuckle. "Where?"

Buffy glowered down at him. Well, she tried. She was panting hard, and the effect was lost with the rise and fall of her sweat-laced breasts. He couldn't resist favoring one perky nipple with a pinch, and again when he earned another moan.

"I mean it, love. Gotta tell me where."

The scowl deepened. "I didn't...make you...tell me where."

"Well, that's because tellin' you I want my dick sucked didn't make me blush like a virgin."

"That's because...ooohhh...you're a...vulgar, bad..." She jerked upward again. "Bad...man."

"I want you to tell me."

"I want you to bite me."

She didn't mean in the fun way, though for the breathy note on which the words rode out, it didn't matter.

"Not the sort've jibe you wanna aim at a bloke with fangs."

"Spike! Just...do it."

Soft chuckles met every needy thrust of her hips. "Do what?"

The glare she shot his way was feisty and serious, and all it did was further his lust. It fell, however, incredibly short of her words. Words she all but growled. Words she punctuated by tugging on his head with one hand and fingering her clit with the other.

Words he'd never expected to hear her say.

"Eat me."

Spike stared blankly at her for a long moment, then moaned and fell forward, pulling her clit between his teeth and sucking hard. He lapped. He pulled. He fucked her with his tongue, worried her with his lips and shook his head to make her vibrate. He devoured her, pumping his fingers steadily in and out of her pussy, hungry eyes absorbing the way her body moved. The way she gyrated. The way she pushed herself against his mouth. Every whimper made his bones vibrate. She was a song he wanted to memorize, only the words kept changing. With Buffy, they always did.

"*Spike!*"

Growls fought through his throat. “Love this clit,” he whispered before drawing her into his mouth again.

“Ohmi...”

“Mmm...”

“So good. So...oh god.”

He slipped his fingers out of her just long enough to take her clit again. She was close. He felt how close she was, and he wanted his tongue inside her when she came. Therefore he dove into her cunt again without ceremony, slurping her up. He licked every inch he could reach, and she consumed him. She drenched him. She drew him in and still left him wanting more. And when she finally triggered, trembling and coming hard, there was nothing left of him to take.

No. Buffy had claimed every bit.

It seemed hours passed before she moved, which was fine with him. The night had only truly opened. Had only now given him insight into what the future held. No matter her assurances—no matter how much he felt she loved him—a part of him had expected to walk away from this without her.

Until now.

Buffy was with him. Her warm, sated body lay under his. His cheek was pillowed against her belly, her skin scented with sweat and wine and the aroma that was solely hers. Her fingers ran through his hair. She was with him now—she really was.

He knew then. He knew what he truly couldn't have known before.

This wasn't over. It was only beginning.

Buffy had been more vulnerable with him than he'd thought possible—even allowing him to do what he'd just done took trust. The fact that his fangs had been against her pussy—that she'd allowed him access to the heart of her softness—spoke for all the things remaining unsaid between them.

“You really do, don't you?”

Buffy paused. “I really do what?”

Spike inhaled sharply, lifting his head and resting his chin against her. “Love me.”

There was no hesitation, even if the words weren't immediate. Instead, he watched as warmth filled her eyes.

No words were needed, but he wanted them anyway.

"I love you, Spike."

Then she coaxed him up her body so she could reach his mouth, and as he melted into her kiss, the weight that had burdened his heart for what felt like centuries finally dissolved.

"I love you," she whispered again. "I'm sorry it took so long, Spike. I'm so sorry."

He kissed the corner of her mouth. "Shhh..."

"I've been dumb."

"It's all right."

"Don't doubt what I tell you. Please?"

Spike smiled and took her face between his hands and kissed her. "I don't doubt you, love. I never have. It's me. Yeah?"

"Well, don't you doubt, either."

"I love you."

Tears swelled in her eyes. "Oh, Spike..."

"What? Like you've never heard that before."

She made a face and thwacked his arm. "It's different now and you know it."

He grinned but didn't reply; there was nothing to say. He did know it. He really did. He had Buffy's love. Buffy was his.

The world was brand new.



UNASHAMED LOVE for gifts was something most, if not all, her friends had outgrown. Buffy's enthusiasm for presents, however, remained as persistent as it had since childhood. She still circled her birthday in red ink on her personal calendar. She still awoke ecstatic and impatient on Christmas morning. This year, her first without her mother, she'd still jotted down the Christmas-list Joyce had asked her to make every fall, and together, she and Dawn had placed their respective copies on their mother's grave. It had been somber but almost therapeutic—a nod to the cosmos that even though Joyce was gone, they were still a family.

Still, Buffy had been apprehensive about Christmas. It was her first

as head of the family, and she wanted to make it good for Dawn. A calm, traditional, quiet Christmas.

She wanted to make it good for herself, too.

This didn't stop her from squealing at the top of her lungs, tossing off the covers, and racing downstairs the moment Spike let it slip he'd left her a present under the tree.

Patience, thy name is not Buffy.

This was a bit weird to be doing naked, but she was here and not about to wait long enough to go find clothes. Buffy collapsed to her knees before the Christmas tree, clapping and searching through the sloppily wrapped boxes to find the aforementioned red package.

"Here's somethin' I never thought I'd see."

Buffy glanced up, meeting Spike's amused eyes. He looked particularly nummy, cross-armed and leaning in the entryway. "You're naked," she said.

"Not one to point fingers, love, but..."

"Yes, well, I have a prezzie." She rocked on her legs, blushing when his eyes followed the bounce of her breasts. For someone who had so little to bounce, she seemed to do an admirable job of keeping Spike's attention. "What's your excuse?"

The bouncing had him occupied. "Hmmm?"

"For the naked?"

He glanced up lazily. "My excuse?"

"Yes."

"You're naked. It's criminal for me not to not be naked, too." He watched her a minute longer, his grin broadening when she located her present and squealed again. "Christ, you're adorable."

Buffy perked an eyebrow, picking at the wrapping. "Adorable?"

"Mhmmm." Spike's gaze roamed lower, following the curve of her stomach. "And edible."

The reminder only deepened her blush. Never had she envisioned any man being so—err—receptive to her girly parts. While she certainly was no novice to cunnilingus, she'd always received it as a sort of thank-you for blowjobs. Once from Parker, and a handful of times from Riley. Never enthusiastically, and rarely with the outcome of a not-faked orgasm.

Never with someone who loved her as Spike loved her.

Granted, she supposed it was only fair. Her efforts at giving oral sex had been, pre-Spike, craptastic at best. Always laced with fear and feelings of inadequacy. Always coupled with the knowledge there was no way she was going to be any good, but she should try because that was what good girlfriends did.

With Spike, though, it wasn't obligation. It was desire. Something she knew she wanted to do because she loved him—because she wanted his eyes to go wide as his chest heaved with air he didn't need. She wanted to unmake him because realizing she loved him had completely unmade her.

Perhaps it was the same realization that made him like to explore her girly parts. Riley had never battled her for the right to lick her clit; if she said he didn't need to touch her, he didn't. The end.

Spike was different. Spike objected and overruled her. Spike wanted to taste her, and taste her he did. He'd told her he would before she'd even taken his cock into her mouth, and while she'd wanted it, a part of her had resisted.

Not now. They were completely open together. She was in her living room, naked, because it felt right. Never before had she just wandered around naked with her boyfriends.

Spike changed everything and she loved it.

"Buffy?"

She blinked and glanced up. While thinking, she'd lowered her eyes to his cock, which now stood proudly at attention. "Mmm?"

"You're staring again."

She fidgeted. "Well...so are you."

Spike grinned. "Better hurry now, pet, unless you want me to shag you under the tree."

Ignoring him, she pointed to his erection. "Doesn't that thing have an off-switch?"

He arched an eyebrow and took himself into his hand, long fingers running a tantalizing lap up his length. "Around you?"

She squirmed and turned her attention back to her present. "Now you're just trying to distract me."

"You're the one who was starin' at my bits."

"I was not staring!"

"Buffy..."

"I wasn't! I was...*thinking*, and that's where my eyes naturally fell."

He chuckled and pushed himself off the entryway to find a seat beside her on the floor. "Tell yourself whatever you like, Slayer. I know the better of it." Spike leaned in and sucked her earlobe between his teeth. "You want me."

She rolled her eyes, not even convincing herself. "Whatev."

"It's all right to want me."

"You are so full of it."

He took her hand and placed it on his cock, which ended up costing him the advantage, as there was nothing to do then but give him exactly what he wanted. "You wish you were...ahhh..."

"Yeah, that's right," Buffy replied, sticking up her nose in mock superiority and squeezing him again. "Now let me open my prezzie so you can get back to making me bedridden."

"Bedridden?"

"Ridden so hard I have to stay in bed. That kinda bedridden." She pulled her hand back but answered his whimper by offering him a soft kiss.

"I love you," he whispered when their lips parted.

"I love you, too." Buffy beamed at him. Then, without further delay, she returned to her present, ripping the red-wrapping to shreds.

"Patience is a virtue," Spike murmured playfully, nipping at her ear again.

"I must have missed that day in school." She didn't even give herself time to *oooh* and *abbb* appropriately at the unmistakably jewelry-shaped box. It was impossible to go slow with her heart thundering and the shrieky bells in her head going off prematurely. She didn't even pause to consider how she knew it would be something sweet and melt-worthy and oh so romantic. She just knew.

It was Spike. He was a softie. Beneath the hard—erm, *extremely* hard—shell of the Big Bad, he was very romantic. Passionate. Loving. And he seized every opportunity to show her just how much.

In small gestures. Gestures that meant the world.

"I couldn't live, her being in that much pain. I'd let Glory kill me first. Nearly bloody did."

"I know you'll never love me. I know that I'm a monster, but you treat me like a man."

"Are you all right?"

And now this. With Spike at her side, teasing her ear with soft little nibbles, with the bond between them and the future at their feet. Seated naked on her living room floor with the man she loved, and his present to her in her lap.

"Don't let anyone tell you that you kill suspense," Spike said, his voice oddly high. Like he was nervous. It occurred to her a second later, though, that she'd again faded off and had yet to open the box. Not like she could help it—he gave a girl a lot to think about.

Like everything.

"I know. Big overture." She grinned. "I'm wrapping paper's worst nightmare."

"Yeah, and then you sit and stare at it for six weeks while the rest of us age."

"Okay, there were about ten things wrong with that sentence."

Spike fidgeted. "I only counted two, but okay."

"It's been thirty seconds at best."

"That's one..."

"And you don't age."

"That'd be two." He nudged her impatiently. "Open it or I'll open it for you."

Buffy gasped, clutching the package to her chest. "And spoil my surprise? I don't think so, Fang Face. It's mine." She smiled brightly, kissed him again, then popped the lid open without further delay.

The air between them grew thick. Words filled her yet she said nothing. There was nothing she could say. Her jaw fell slack, her heart thundered, and though she tried to look away, no force on the planet could move her eyes.

"Wanted to make a statement, I guess," Spike said quickly. "Couldn't think of a way to do it...that I'm yours. Thought you knew it already but...after the Tower..."

Buffy placed the pendant of the necklace against her palm and

lifted it toward the string of Christmas lights. It was a heart, small and red, a bit cartoony but in a classy way, comprised of small ruby gemstones. Through the heart was a perfect mini stake made out of, if she had to guess, solid gold.

"The statement is kill you?"

He chuckled, though the sound was high-pitched. "No, pet. Statement is you did." He swallowed when she looked at him. "Killed who I was. What I thought I wanted. The part of me that... You killed the Spike who came here to kill you. Put your stake so deep in my heart I'm never gettin' it out. And I don't want to. Want that part of you with me always."

Buffy didn't realize she was crying until he leaned forward to kiss her damp cheek. "Spike, that's..."

"Got a bit of poet in me still, I suppose." He offered a watery smile, kissed her cheek. "These are happy tears, yeah? I've made chits cry over my poetry before, so I can't—"

Buffy pulled him to her and proceeded to maul his lips, sucking his tongue greedily into her mouth. The emotion-thing was something that required attention, as her ability to properly express her thoughts had abandoned her years ago. There was so much she wanted to say, though. So much he needed to know. And until she learned how to play the part of wordsmith, she would have to rely on other forms of communication.

Every inch of her vibrated.

"Thank you," she whispered, resuming her bear-hug when her lousy need for oxygen forced their lips apart again. "Spike...."

"Happy tears, then?"

"The best." She sniffed, a smile fighting to break across her lips. "I killed you?"

"In the best bloody way possible," Spike murmured into her hair. "I've never felt anything like this before. Not once in all my life. You understand? And since we... I feel everything you do. And it's amazing."

"Mmm. I'll say."

"I mean it. I've never... Every time you breathe, I feel it."

She smiled and kissed his shoulder. "You too. Anyone ever tell you that for a vamp, you breathe a lot?"

"Matter of fact...wait." He paused and pulled back, his eyes going comically wide. "No...I...I really haven't felt anything like this before."

Buffy huffed. "Getting kinda redundant now, not gonna lie."

Whatever bend he'd taken, she clearly hadn't followed. His expression went from confused to contemplative then alarmed. It happened so quickly she barely had time to blink—the next thing she knew, he'd inhaled deeply and pulled himself to his feet, shaking hard. "Oh bollocks."

"Spike?"

"I'm such a dolt."

Alarm shot through her veins. "What?" she demanded, doing her best to keep calm.

"I just—"

"Well?"

"Upstairs...when we..." He met her eyes, his heavy, then turned away and shook his head, running a hand through his hair. "I didn't know what I was doing, sweetheart. I wanted you and I...I lost it. I made you..."

Buffy bade herself not to panic. "What are you talking about?"

When he looked at her again, it was with fear and regret, which made her heart twist. "I...I think I claimed you."

A pause. "You what me?"

"Claimed. Upstairs. I didn't...when I bit you, and I said you were mine. I think that's a claim. Old vampire stuff. But it's—"

The weight that had settled in her chest lifted just as quickly. "That's what you're wiggling about?"

"You don't understand. I—"

"Oh no. I understand. I understand a lot." Buffy climbed to her feet. "Claims are...what? Like the vampire equivalent of matrimony? You married me upstairs."

Spike frowned defensively. "It's a lot more complicated than that."

"It takes a bite and an exchange of two monosyllabic words. Not too complicated, from where I'm standing."

“Buffy—”

She perked a brow. “Is claiming me a bad thing?”

He looked offended at the suggestion, which was one-hundred-percent the right reaction. “What? Are you off your bird? Sweetheart, bein’ claimed with you’s the best thing...but you don’t understand. You can’t understand. Not what it means.”

“Why?” Buffy demanded, crossing her arms. “Am I in any way learning impaired?”

“No. But—”

“Spike, I got it. I know what it means. I actually kinda figured we’d do it eventually.” She shrugged. “Maybe not, you know, *tonight*, but I’d definitely considered this. I mean, even before I knew I loved you, I knew I was done. I knew you were the one I wanted to spend my life with. And if my life should have a few extra years, so be it.”

“A few extra...”

“I’ve known about claims a long time, Spike.”

There was a pause, then a numb nod. “How?” he asked hoarsely. “I...didn’t think mating rituals of the undead were anythin’ Rupes would have you—”

“He didn’t.” Buffy wet her lips. He wasn’t going to like her answer in the slightest, but it was the truth, and she was determined not to withhold it. “You’re not my first...vampire boyfriend.”

The reaction was nothing less than she’d expected. Spike’s blue eyes burned yellow and for a second, it looked as though his demon was about to come out swinging. “That wanker actually tried—”

“No. Let’s be perfectly clear. He did not try—”

“I’ll rip his throat out.”

“Spike—”

“You’re mine, Buffy. *Mine*. You understand?”

She swallowed his lips in a quick kiss before his temper flew completely out of control. “Told you so already,” she agreed. “And once we do the claim all proper like, we’ll make it so you’re mine, too.”

“Buffy...”

“It was after the mayor gave us the whole immortality-doesn’t-work pep talk. I was wondering about ways that we could stay together...ways that didn’t involve turning Buffy all fangy. Angel told me...reluc-

tantly...but said he'd never do it 'cause I didn't know what it meant and all that jazz." Buffy rolled her eyes and batted a dismissive hand. "What the hell did he know?"

"Ahh..."

"I *did* know what it meant. And if I didn't then, I sure as hell do now. I've been thinking about it for a long, long time. And yeah, not always with you in mind, but this is what I want." She kissed him again before he could say a word. "I don't even know when it happened... when your image just kinda...took over Angel's in my little fantasy world of forever. But it did. Sometime like...last year, even."

The storm in his eyes began to fade, and suddenly there was nothing but the awe she knew and loved so much. There was no accounting for her balance when Spike looked at her like that. "Really?" he asked softly; needing, imploring. Breaking her apart for how lost he looked. For how much of himself buried beneath the surface. It would take centuries to undo the hurt inflicted in his past, but she was more than up for the task.

"I told you, my feelings changed a long time ago. I just didn't... I didn't know it until tonight."

There was nothing for a long minute. Nothing but the endless abyss of his ocean-like eyes.

"This is real," he said.

"Oh yeah. Very real."

"Buffy..."

The front door crashed open without ceremony, effectively shattering their moment. And in the two seconds it took to remember she was naked, Spike had shoved her behind him, aiming a growl at the sudden crowd of intruders.

Very noisy, unwelcome intruders.

"If I know anything about vampire stamina," Anya was saying loudly, "they're still at it. I tell you, we're interrupting invaluable happy time."

Willow, however, had already seen them. So had Tara.

"Eeep!" the redhead cried, shielding her eyes. "Ummm...hi guys."

Spike scowled and pushed Buffy further behind him, totally mindless of his own nudity.

“Oh, there they are,” Anya said, offering a wave and a bright smile. “Greetings, sexually satisfied friends!”

Xander was the last to walk through the door. When he saw Spike, he tripped and slapped a hand across his face. “Ahh! I’m blinded by the whiteness!”

It took a few seconds, but eventually, the rigid possessiveness of Spike’s stance faded into something more grounded—something resembling stark awareness. And it wasn’t until he began babbling that Buffy realized she hadn’t told him her friends already knew pretty much everything. There was, therefore, no need to assure anyone that this wasn’t what it looked like and there was a perfectly rational explanation. Nor could she save him from the narrowed glances and amused smirks her friends inevitably aimed his way.

Well, she could have had she not been busy trying to stifle her giggles against his back.

Spike tossed her a careless glance. “Not helpin’, love.”

“I’m sorry. I can’t think of any explanations that involve us naked in our living room.”

Anya raised her hand. “Fornication is involved, obviously.”

Willow seized the former demon’s wrist and forced it down again, flashing an apologetic smile. “It’s okay, Spike,” she said in a steady, calm voice. “We know.”

A pause. “You know?”

Spike tossed Buffy another glance. “They know?” he repeated.

“We know,” the group verified in unison.

“Though I could have done without the visual,” Xander added and then mimed puking into his hands.

“Willow and I helped Buffy plan your night of sex,” Anya announced.

“Plan?” Spike echoed. “You...” He twisted again, likely giving the group a nice visual of at least one ass-cheek. “You discussed this with your mates?”

For as casual as he was, Buffy couldn’t be as nonchalant about the fact that her friends were two steps to the right away from seeing her in the full buff. As much as she figured she would laugh about this in about a gazillion years, for the moment, she wanted something around

her. Something preferably in the shape of clothing. “Spike, vampire of mine,” she said, plastering on a fake smile, “maybe we should discuss this when you and I are less...indisposed.”

“You are very naked,” Tara added, then flushed and aimed her gaze downward. “I just... I can’t be the only one to have noticed that...”

“Yeah,” Spike agreed, “and I’m in a room with two birds who like other birds, a demon who dreams in pornography, and a bloke who’s either very gay or havin’ size issues.”

Xander shrieked, averting his eyes again.

“So unless—”

“Dawn’s on her way up the drive,” Tara said quickly.

That did the trick. Spike yelped and grabbed the nearest throw-pillow off the sofa and covered himself with only seconds to spare before the youngest Summers made her entry.

“Hey guys, sorry, I—eeeeaaahhhooowww, why are there naked people in the living room?”

Buffy moaned in defeat and buried her face in Spike’s back. “Hey, Dawn.”

“Oh my god,” her sister cried, “I am so going into therapy for this.”

“We were just dropping by,” Willow said miserably. “It...it didn’t seem like such a horrendously bad idea at the time. We wanted to see how it was going.”

“I explained it was ridiculous,” Anya said. “Combine vampire stamina with slayer stamina, and—”

Tara squeaked and quickly made to cover Dawn’s ears, though Dawn beat her to it, screwing her eyes shut and clamping her hands on either side of her head. Then, she announced loudly, “I—AM—GOING—BACK—TO—WILLOW—AND—TARA’S—WHERE—THERE—BETTER—BE—NO—NAKED—PEOPLE. HAVE—A—GOOD—NIGHT—PLAYING—CHECKERS—AND—I—WILL—SEE—YOU—TOMORROW—FOR—A—VERY—CLOTHED—CHRISTMAS!”

And with that, Dawn spun on her heel and marched out the front door, bumping once into the coat-rack, but everyone was still too stunned to cough up even a slight laugh at her expense.

“I guess Janice was a no-go, then?” Buffy asked, voice small.

Willow shrugged. "Something about Christmas Eve being solely about families."

"Whoever heard of such things?" Xander asked.

"We're taking care of her," Tara added helpfully.

Buffy nodded and said, "So I noticed," before resuming her method of maybe-they-will-disappear-if-I-hide-my-face-in-Spike's-back-long-enough. She hoped said method would be recognized and supported by her vampire, who was likely as eager to get her friends out of the house so they could return to the naked-goodness they'd been enjoying before the untimely interruption.

No such luck. Instead, Spike arched an eyebrow. "Playing checkers?" he asked.

Tara waved. "Yeah...that's something I...I'll explain later."

"We needed something to tell her about the Buffybot," Willow said.

"And that's what you came up with?"

"Again with this not being the right time?" Buffy said through her teeth. "Could you guys—I dunno how to say this nicely—get the hell out? Spike and I are... Well, we're busy. And I'd like to get back to our night. I'd also like for him to stop molesting the pillow made by my Great Aunt Mildred."

Spike glanced down. "Oh right. Guess I can—"

"No, keep it up!" Xander barked. "Keep it well up until we're very much gone."

"Don't worry, mate. I know how to keep it up."

Buffy giggled again, then again when Xander went bright red.

"Buffy, Spike..." He drew in a deep breath. "It's been ahhh... ummm...mortifying." He offered an awkward wave, then tumbled out the front door.

"I'll follow him," Anya said. "We haven't had any naked time of our own tonight. Hopefully, he'll be able to keep it up, too. Good night, guys! See you tomorrow." Then, with a careless shrug, she turned and calmly followed her boyfriend.

Buffy moaned, hooking her chin over Spike's shoulder. "Will? Can we...tomorrow..."

"Pretend this never happened?" Willow asked, grabbing Tara's arm

and making her hurried way to the door.

"That'd be nice."

"Consider it done," she said.

"Mum's the word," Tara agreed, zipping her lips. Then they were gone, and the house again fell silent.

Buffy and Spike stood railroaded.

"Well," Buffy said. "I'm gonna...ummm...lock the door."

"Good thinkin'," Spike said, tossing the pillow back to the sofa and whirling to face her. "I'll meet you upstairs."

"Upstairs?"

"Yeah...near as I can figure it, one of us here is a little more claimed than the other." He grinned and cupped her cheeks, kissing her softly. "Needs fixin', if you ask me."

Buffy had no idea how he could erase the image of her friends' horrified faces with a simple kiss, but she loved it. He reclaimed the mood with a blink.

And he was right. They did have unfinished business.

Business that simply, when put it in terms of Spike's kisses, couldn't wait.



THE LAST TIME it snowed in Sunnydale, it had been the Powers' way of assuring one of its Champions that he was still needed. That death wasn't the way out. That he had a role yet to play. Buffy remembered that night well—it had been snow that saved Angel. It had been snow, not love, that had convinced him to walk away from the bluff. To go home. Snow had stepped in when her word wasn't enough. Snow had prevented him from dust.

But it wasn't snow that saved Spike. Buffy knew it by the way he whispered to her. Murmured how he loved her. Caressed her when he thought she wasn't paying attention. Tonight when it snowed, it meant something different. She didn't know what; she didn't even know if it was her snow. All she knew was what it meant for her. What it meant in standing next to Spike beside the bedroom window, leaning against the sill, absently stroking the mark she'd given him.

What it meant in the moments following the largest change of her life.

The path she'd chosen was the one she was meant to choose. The others would be lost under a blanket of pure white. The ground was a blank slate awaiting their footsteps.

The ones they would take together.