

Title: Alone With You

Author: Seductivembrace

Pairing, Characters: Spike/Buffy

Rating: R

Summary: Set during *What's My Line* and going A/U from there.

Warnings: Main character deaths.

Disclaimer: Joss said I could, so I am.

Chapter 1

Spike turned as he watched Willy burst in through the double doors leading into the main sanctum of the church.

"Are you tripping?! You bring her *here*? *Now*?" he roared as he came down from the pulpit and walked towards the small group surrounding the Slayer.

"You said you wanted her," Willy whined.

"In the *ground*, pinhead. I wanted her *dead*!" he growled, his fangs mere inches from the bartender's face.

"Now, that's not what I heard. Word was there was a bounty on her, dead or alive."

"You heard wrong, Willy." His amber gaze narrowed on the idiot that had brought the Slayer to him – right when he was trying to finish his revitalization spell.

"Angel?" Buffy whispered, horrified at seeing both him and Drusilla lashed together and suspended from the church ceiling, their arms held clasped together by the knife imbedded in both of their hands.

Spike turned away from contemplating the bartender's death to reply snarkily, "Yeah, it bugs me, too, seeing them like that. Another five minutes though, and Angel will be dead, so... I forebear. Don't feel bad for Angel, though, he's got something you don't have."

"What's that?" she asked, her face scrunching in a sneer.

"Five minutes."

Spike's gaze shifted to the red-haired woman from the Order of Taraka.

"Patrice."

The woman needed no further urging, quickly shoving the Slayer into the waiting arms of the minion standing next to her. Reaching into her holster, she extracted a pistol, prepared to finish her contractual obligation and kill the girl. Before the assassin had a chance to make good on her threat, a commotion sounded somewhere behind the group.

The two minions standing in back of the woman were kicked aside, and as everyone tumbled forward, Buffy was able to jerk free from their grasp. She quickly regrouped and both she and Kendra stood before Spike as he managed to regain his footing.

"Who the hell is *this*?" he demanded.

Kendra grabbed Spike by the lapels of his leather duster.

"It's your lucky day, Spike," Buffy announced from beside the girl, the sarcasm dripping from her voice like honey.

"Two slayers," Kendra added, just before she punched him. The power of her left cross sent Spike's head snapping to the side.

"No waiting," Buffy finished, delivering a sharp right jab to Spike's nose and he toppled to the floor. Then, she turned and confronted the red-haired woman decked out in police garb, leaving Kendra to deal with Spike.

Buffy mentally prepared herself as her opponent thrust her arms out to the side and two deadly blades slid free from their hiding place inside her police jacket. They eyed each other, assessing possible battle scenarios as a vampire slowly gained his feet near them. Buffy glanced at him out of the corner of her eye and watched as an arrow suddenly imbedded itself in the front of his chest where his heart lay, moments before turning to dust.

The cavalry had arrived.

Just then, the woman attacked. One hand followed the other as she attempted to gut her target.

Buffy blocked each attack, grabbing first one arm then the other then delivered a knee to the woman's stomach, following in quick succession with a swift kick that sent the woman flying back against the far wall.

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On the other side of the room, Kendra was engaged in a fierce battle with Spike. The two traded blows back and forth, neither able to gain the upper hand.

Unfortunately, Kendra was getting winded. And Spike was nowhere near being tired.

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Buffy easily sent the female assassin reeling into the wall over and over again, the woman no match against her slayer strength. She could sense Kendra weakening behind her, could hear Spike taunt the girl as his blows continued to connect with the other slayer's body.

Shoving the redheaded woman away from her once more, Buffy turned and called out, "Switch!"

Kendra, thankfully, needed no further urgings. Rolling over her sister slayer's back and confronting the female assassin, she delivered a kick to the woman that sent her flying back into the wall yet again.

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Once Kendra had cleared her back, Buffy stood and confronted Spike, arms poised before her in a defensive stance.

"I'd rather be fighting you anyway," Spike announced, his gaze narrowing on the blonde who now stood before him.

"Mutual."

Spike moved to attack, but Buffy sent him staggering back with a front kick to the face followed by a roundhouse to his stomach. It didn't stop him for long, and he rushed towards her, fists flying in a blur of motion that Buffy was just barely able to block. She faltered and Spike was able to deliver a jarring punch to her stomach momentarily knocking the wind from her. It didn't keep her down long however, and she countered with a punch that snapped his head back, followed by a quick backhanded blow to the face using the same hand. Grabbing the front of Spike's jacket, she twirled him around to gain momentum, before launching him into the air. His body sailed halfway across the room before landing with a thud among the rubble.

Spike recovered quickly enough, a growl emanating from deep within his chest. Turning, he caught sight of the traitorous bartender and moved to intercept his

escape. He was just about to bite the man when he noticed the Slayer trying to pull Angel down from his tether.

He rushed after her, throwing her away from the pair before she was able to get his grandsire free. As she started to rise, he backhanded her, sending her to the floor once more.

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Across the room, Kendra went flying over a pew. Her attacker vaulted over it, swinging her arms in an attempt to draw blood.

The dark-skinned girl wasn't on Patrice's current contract, but she didn't think the Order would mind too much. Her blade managed to connect with the Slayer's arms, tearing her sleeve and leaving a horizontal slash across her upper arm.

"That's me favorite shirt!" Kendra bellowed, anger rising in her voice as she took in the ruined item. "That's me only shirt!"

Furious, Kendra kicked the woman in the back of the leg, then grabbed the front of her coat and threw her into a support beam. The assassin struggled to her feet, kicking the debris off her as she lunged forward.

Kendra was waiting for the attack; as the woman launched herself forward, she used the woman's momentum to fling her across the room behind her. Unfortunately, Kendra didn't see where she was throwing the woman.

The assassin's arms flailed wide as she soared through the air towards the bound vampires.

Since Drusilla was slumped backwards, her back almost parallel to the floor, Patricia sailed between the two instead of into the pair as they dangled in the air. She tried to bring her arms together in front of her in an attempt to break her headlong rush into the far wall that was rapidly approaching. By some cruel twist of fate, the blades that extended from her arms sliced through the necks of the two bound vampires as she attempted to brace herself for impact. The sound of her slamming into the wall prevented her from hearing the two demons crumble to dust behind her.

It didn't prevent her from hearing the simultaneous bellows of rage behind her.

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Buffy had just regained her footing when she saw the woman, Patrice, fly through the air towards where Angel and Drusilla hung suspended from the ceiling. She ignored Spike as he moved to strike her again, instead remaining transfixed on the scene playing out in slow motion behind him. Her horror must have been evident on her face, because suddenly Spike stopped mid-attack to see what had happened to cause her to ignore him completely.

He turned just in time to watch the Order's female assassin sail between the two.

"Dru?" he managed to whisper. Vaguely, he thought he heard the Slayer behind him mumble Angel's name.

Then his world fell apart. He watched as the woman crashed into the wall moments before his sire and grandsire crumbled to dust.

"Drusilla!"

"Angel!"

The two cried out at the same time, staring aghast at the empty dangling ropes.

Buffy was the first to react, practically vaulting over Spike to reach the spot where Angel once hung. Spike wasn't that far behind her. The two stared down at the twin piles of dust on the raised, red platform. Neither acknowledged the other, both overcome by grief that quickly turned to a burning rage.

Their heads popped up, fixated on the moan emanating from the woman as she struggled to her feet. Twin pairs of eyes narrowed on the woman leaning heavily on the wall behind her, her labored breathing coming in shuddering gasps.

A low growl sounded near her, and the assassin looked up in time to see the blond vampire leap at her.

Furious beyond belief, Spike grabbed the woman by her throat and lifted her one-handed into the air.

"You killed my Dark Princess, you bloody bitch!" he raged and he slowly squeezed her neck, crushing her windpipe.

Buffy watched Spike as he slowly choked the life from the human, and she couldn't seem to make herself care. If he hadn't done it, she was sure that the redheaded assassin would have become her first human kill. Not that she really thought of the woman as human...

The woman was a member of the Order of Taraka, and that made her fair game.

She glanced back down at the two identical piles of dust. She couldn't leave them there like that. It just didn't seem right.

Turning away, she let her eyes roam over the dilapidated church, trying to find something to put the ashes in, and encountered the stunned faces of the Scoobies as they stood on the far side of steadily growing fire that had created a wall between them. She figured she had another five minutes at most before the blaze engulfed the entire church, so she forced herself to move.

Shouting for the others to leave and that she'd catch up with them later, Buffy turned away and began scanning the ruins for something to hold the two sets of ashes. Even in her pain, she wouldn't be so cruel as to grab Angel's and not Drusilla's. Her eyes finally lighted on two small, metal containers, and she hurried back to the piles as the flames work their way up the side of one wall.

Squatting down on the steps, she carefully brushed first one and then the other mound of dust into the two separate containers. She glanced up when she was finished to see Spike still dangling the helpless woman from his raised arm. He obviously had every intention of taking his time killing her, but unfortunately, time wasn't on their side.

"Spike?"

"Spike!"

His head swiveled at her shout, demon eyes narrowing on her face. He just now seemed to realize the blaze erupting behind him.

"We've got to get out of here. This place is going to go up any minute now. Kill her and let's go."

Her words shocked him, causing him to gape at her in astonishment. Then a reluctant half-smile played across his lips and he turned back to the woman he still held suspended in the air.

"You heard the lady. Time to die."

He let her slide down so her feet were barely touching the ground. In a practiced move, he brought his other hand up to her head, and with a quick twist he broke her neck, allowing her limp body to fall to the ground. He gazed down at her for a moment before he turned towards the Slayer.

"The side exit! Hurry!" she called, grabbing the two containers and making a mad dash for the door. Spike was right behind her, leery of the flames licking close to their heels.

The two burst through the door and into the night. Buffy stopped once she cleared the building to suck in some much-needed air into her lungs, her body bent over the two containers held protectively in her grasp.

Spike watched silently while the Slayer coughed repeatedly from all the smoke-filled air she had inhaled. He made no move to attack her, unable to do away with the girl while they were both reeling from their loss.

A brief smile lit his face recalling how she'd shouted for him to kill the woman already. He had to wonder what her watcher would say about that. Probably nothing good.

Honoring their unspoken truce, he turned to walk away, leaving the Slayer to make her way back to her friends. They could always resume their battle of wits tomorrow. Besides, he needed some time to lick his wounds in the aftermath of his sire's dusting.

Then he heard her voice softly call his name. He glanced over his shoulder, not bothering to turn around.

"A truce, Slayer," he told her tiredly. "Just for tonight. It won't ever happen again."

He started to walk off again into the night, but she called his name again... a little louder this time.

He stopped where he was, gazing off into the distance.

"Here."

Spike turned and saw the Slayer carrying two containers, one held outstretched in her arm. The blaze, as it enveloped the church, illuminated her face, and he saw the telltale signs of her tears as they slipped unheeded down her face. He knew how she felt, and when he was alone, he'd probably give in to the emotions already evident on her features. His gaze slid from her face to take in the box she held out to him.

She didn't say anything. Just waited. When he still made no move to take it, she realized that he probably didn't know what it was. He'd been so intent on killed

the person that had murdered Angel and Drusilla, he hadn't noticed as she'd scooped their ashes into the containers.

His blue eyes shifted from the container back to her face. She was trying desperately not to break down completely, as if saying anything would make it more real, more final. She started forward, closing the distance between them.

"It's..." she tried to swallow around the lump in her throat. "It's... Drusilla."

Spike stared down at the box she had suddenly thrust into his hands. His eyes were fixated on the container as the Slayer turned and walked away. The tears he'd held at bay glimmered in his eyes; the realization that his sire was no more, her remains lying nestled within the confines of the box held dearly in his hands ripped violently through his body. In that brief moment, his Big Bad persona was gone. In his place stood the lost soul of William, beaten and broken by the society of long ago.

He didn't know what to say. He'd been so busy seeking his revenge, he'd never stopped to think about the pile of ashes his sire had become. But, the Slayer had. She'd not only scooped up her lost love's, she taken a moment to grab her mortal enemy's. He was at a loss.

That the Slayer would show that type of compassion...

Words escaped him.

In the end, he whispered a soft thank you to her retreating back. Watched as she paused momentarily in her tracks before giving him a sharp nod and then resumed her pace.

Spike, too, turned and made his way into the night.

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Chapter 2

Buffy wandered aimlessly throughout the remainder of the night, not wanting to meet up with her friends and see their forced looks of compassion. She thought about going home, but didn't want to have to deal with her mother right now. Then she remembered that she was out of town buying stuff for the gallery.

Still, she didn't want to go home; instead, she walked listlessly through the darkened streets, uncaring about anything or anyone.

She wasn't surprised when she found herself standing at the front door to Angel's apartment several hours later. It was here, after all, that she felt his presence the most. Sighing with resignation, she twisted the knob and opened the door, not surprised in the least that it turned easily in her hand.

Quietly, she slipped inside and closed door, then rested her forehead against the cool metal surface, not quite ready to turn around and face the eerie silence of Angel's home.

Silent sobs shook her tiny frame and she clutched Angel's ashes to her chest, knowing that he'd never come back. That she'd never watch his face light up when he opened the door and saw her standing there.

Time passed - minutes, hours, days... Buffy wasn't sure. She was bone weary and reluctantly pushed herself away from the door and forced herself to turn around.

Everything was as she had left it earlier: papers scattered on his desk off to the left, his chair pulled out like he had found out something important, stood up hurriedly, and left.

Her booted feet clicked softly on the hard flooring as she moved further into the room. She ran her hand lovingly along the arm of his couch as she made her way towards his bed. Nothing had changed here either. The covers were still thrown back from when she had awoken earlier, dazed and wondering why he hadn't returned home.

Buffy lay down on the bed, curling into a tight ball as she cradled the box holding Angel's remains close to her side. Feeling somewhat safe, she allowed her grief to overtake her and she poured out her heart into the pillow as she lay in his bed. Sobs wracked her body and she cried for what seemed like hours before finally falling into an exhausted slumber.

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She walked barefoot along the beach, her blonde hair and red sundress blowing softly in the wind. Eyes closed, she lifted her face to the breaking dawn, allowing the peace of the setting to envelop her. She felt strong arms slip around her waist, pulling her back against a hard frame. Her own hands slid down to wrap over his as he held her close.

His face leaned down over her shoulder, and she turned to see his dark features.

Her hand lifted to caress his cheek as she asked softly, "How did you find me here?"

"If I was blind I would see you."

She smiled softly at his fervently whispered promise, snuggling closer to him.

"Stay with me?"

"Forever...That's the whole point. I'll never leave."

Her eyes flew open as she was startled awake, pulled from her dream by some unknown noise... or sixth sense. It wasn't a vampire. No, this was something else. She lay there on the bed unmoving, her breathing deep and even as if she still slept on.

She didn't have long to wait before the battle cry reached her ears – her attacker's mistake – and she rolled to the far side of the bed just before the two axes imbedded deep in the mattress where her body once lay. A quick kick by her forced the attacker to release the weapons that remained stuck in the bed and he went flying out into the main living area. Holding tight to Angel's container, she vaulted off the bed and raced towards the door and out into the night.

Apparently, the Order of Taraka hadn't given up on her yet. She was going to have to have a word with Spike and get him to call off his goon squad.

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Spike looked at the container that held his sire's ashes. He was still in shock that the Slayer had done it, had given him some small piece of his Dru. He made his way through the various cemeteries of the hellmouth trying to find someplace to crash for the night. He didn't want to go back to the factory, see all the reminders of his sire: the frilly dresses she wore, her dolls, the empty birdcage. He needed some place where he could think... and grieve. For even though he was evil, he'd loved his Dark Princess.

His sire.

He finally came to a stop in front of a crypt, his eyes lifted to take in the name etched in the stone. Le Morte. How appropriate. He pushed his way inside, his sick sense of humor caused him to laugh at the name. Death, indeed, was the place he wanted to be tonight.

He wasn't sure how long he sat inside the crypt staring down at the container gripped tightly in his hands. His jaw worked and he allowed his rage to consume him. He was alone. Drusilla. Angelus. Darla. The Master. They were all gone now, leaving him the head of Aurelius. He smirked at that. The head of one. The once great Aurelius line was now reduced to a lone master. Oh, he was sure there were others in the line floating around the various continents, probably

even some other masters that he was unaware of. But, he was the direct descendent of the master's favored child... not that it mattered anymore.

His eyes narrowed as a sudden thought came to him. He'd make it matter. Make the Order regret ever killing his sire. He'd rebuild the Aurelius Empire and take on the Order of Taraka himself.

Spike cocked his head to the side as he sniffed the air. Someone was trying to sneak up on him. Well, weren't they in for a bit of a surprise.

He placed the container holding Dru's ashes behind the sarcophagus and listened as the crypt door creaked open. The person was obviously human, yet there was no hint of fear that he could smell. That had him slightly confused. What human would be out in the early hours of dawn and not have a trace of fear running through them? For a moment, he thought it might be the Slayer, but his vampiric senses didn't detect anything.

Shrugging, unconcerned, he waited for the human to make his presence known.

His eyes widened when he heard the crypt door shut behind the human. Brave git, wasn't he? Faint sounds of metal clinking could be heard as barely-there footsteps moved about the open space, and Spike's brow drew down in a frown before he suddenly figured out what it belonged to.

Right about the time he smelled the gas.

Bloody hell!

Peeking his head over the sarcophagus, he cursed under his breath as his suspicions were confirmed. Swathed from head to toe in black, a silver canister strapped to his back, stood a huge behemoth of a man. The ring on his left hand gleamed against his dark skin as the man scanned the surroundings for his quarry.

Bloody buggerin' hell! The bastard had a flamethrower!

He needed to get out of there. Vampires and flames did NOT go together. Decision made, he waited until the man had walked further into the crypt, away from the sarcophagus he was crouched behind. Grabbing Dru's container, he made a mad dash for the crypt door. He managed to pull it open, scramble through the opening, and slam it shut before the whoosh of the flamethrower resounded in his ears - the flames slamming harmlessly into the steel door.

He needed to get out of there, and fast. Spike had no destination in mind as he took off running deeper into the cemetery, determined to put as much distance between himself and his would-be stalker. It was probably better that way. By picking a random destination, someplace he'd never been before, whoever it was that wanted him dust would have no way of pinpointing his location.

Spike was so deep in thought that he never heard the footsteps on a collision course with his. Never felt the vampiric senses that were screaming "Slayer" in bold letters until she slammed into him.

"Bloody hell," he roared when the Slayer crashed into him like a rock, momentarily unbalancing him.

"Spike!" Buffy yelled, after she made sure the container she carried wasn't disrupted in their bone-crushing collision. "What are you doing here?"

"Could ask the same thing of you, Slayer."

Her eyes narrowed on him at his flippant response. Anger. Anger was good; it took her mind away from her heart-wrenching loss.

"I... uh... it's no business of yours what I'm doing. And where are you off to in such an all-fired hurry?"

"Just putting a little distance between me and the giant back there."

"Giant?"

"Yeah, some bloody wanker that thinks the Big Bad would make great target practice... and with a bloody flamethrower, no less. So, if you'll excuse me, I'll be shoving off."

"Wait! Before you go... you need to call off the Order." She watched as he turned around, a puzzled look on his face. "I think it's the least you could do..."

That's when the light bulb went off in his brain. The ring. The bloody ring! Looks like he'd just been placed on the Order's hit list. Great! This was just what he needed.

"I wish I could, Slayer." He cut her off before she could shout her protestations from her opened mouth. "I think yours truly just got added to that list."

"Crap." She moved and sat upon a headstone as she contemplated the downhill spiral her life had suddenly become.

"In a word, yeah."

Spike leaned against a tree and watched as the Slayer seemed to deflate before his eyes. His head whipped around at the sound of footsteps coming towards them. Apparently, he hadn't backtracked enough. He pushed himself away from the tree and crossed to the Slayer. Slipping a hand underneath her arm, he hauled her to her feet.

"Come on, Slayer, we've gotta get outta here. He's tracked me. And, I don't think he's gonna be too particular if he comes across you first."

"Huh?"

"Behemoth. Flamethrower. Ringin' any bells?" Not waiting for her mind to hear what he was saying, he hauled her after him, not letting go until she matched his pace.

"We need someplace to hide... and quick. Someplace no one would think to look for you, or me, for that matter. Sun's gonna be up soon, and as much as it pains me to say it... the two of us together are much better odds than us going it alone right now."

"What are you saying? That we form a truce?"

"I'm all you've got, Slayer. And, apparently, you're all I've got right now, too."

"Alright. Just for today. Come dusk, you're on your own. Giles will figure out a way to stop them..."

"You don't get it! They're never going to stop. They'll keep coming and coming, until the job is done." The two continued to run side by side, their gaze scanning over the area for possible hiding places. They'd managed to run back into town and still couldn't think of a place where they could go and be safe. And dawn was quickly approaching...

"I think we should hit the sewers." Buffy couldn't believe the words she'd just uttered.

The two had come to a stop in deserted, downtown Sunnydale. The idea had come to her as she'd gazed across the street and glanced at the gutter.

Spike had to agree with her logic, and he found a reluctant smile cross his features.

“Right! They’ll provide us a means to move around and not allow us to get pinned in one place. Slayer, I *like* the way you think. I know of a couple different hideaways. We can spend a few hours in each place and take turns resting.”

Spike grabbed her free hand and hauled her towards the nearest access. His demon was hollering at him to get indoors, and quick. She didn’t say anything, just raced after him towards the entrance. Crouching by the manhole, he handed her his box, and easily lifted the lid back, exposing the dark, watery tunnels below.

“Gimme those and get down the stairs. I’ll drop them down to you once you’ve reached the bottom.”

Buffy nodded, handing him her container. She flew down the stairs and easily caught the metal boxes when Spike dropped them down to her. Watched as he came down the first few rungs before pulling the lid over top of him. She wasn’t surprised to see his game face when he descended the last few steps. It was dark down in the tunnels, and he’d need his enhanced vision to guide them until the sun was able to provide some feeble form of lighting.

She didn’t even protest when he took one of the containers from her, using his other to grasp her free hand in his. After all that had happened recently, holding hands with a killer didn’t seem the least bit strange.

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Chapter 3

They spent the daylight hours constantly on the move. Occasionally, the two would stop and rest, spending no more than two hours in one spot – one hour for him to sleep, the other hour for her to sleep.

Buffy hadn’t offered any protest when Spike stated that he would take the first watch upon reaching his first hideaway. She’d just lain down on the cold floor – her back against the wall to guard against a sneak attack – held Angel’s ashes clutched tightly in her hands and closed her eyes, almost instantly asleep.

Spike had to hand it to the Slayer. She had grit. He was surprised she hadn’t balked when he’d told her that he’d be the first one to stand guard. He’d been prepared for her argument. Instead, she’d blithely done as he’d suggested and gone right to sleep. If he wasn’t so worried about being a target of the Order, he just might be offended at her lack of fear in his presence.

He sat beside her and watched her as she slept. He knew she was sleeping too, her deep breathing and slowed heart rate a clear indication of her slumber. He marveled at all she'd endured, continued to endure, in her stint as the Slayer. He'd been captivated by her from the first moment he'd laid eyes on her and was no less amazed now. Even if she *was* the enemy.

Instead of being curled up in her nice, warm bed, she was sleeping in a dank alcove in the city's sewer system, a deadly vampire her temporary guardian. And she'd done it all with a minimum of fuss.

Spike inched his body closer towards her head, and lifted it so that he could slide his legs under her and provide her with some type of pillow. He wasn't sure why he did it, but the thought of seeing the girl huddled on the cold, damp floor just didn't sit well with him. She was a predator, a killer of his kind... the Slayer. She didn't deserve to be treated like a stray dog, seeking shelter in the least likely of places.

He reached down to tuck a stray lock of her sun-kissed hair behind her ear then rested his hand on her shoulder. His other arm cradled the container of Dru's ashes.

In the end, he gave her thirty of his allotted minutes. She'd seemed so exhausted, and his body could handle going for longer periods without sleep.

Buffy came awake, pulled from her restful sleep, when she felt her shoulder being shaken, her name... well, Spike's name for her, being called softly. Instead of feeling the cold ground beneath her cheek, she felt a hard thigh, warmed from her body heat. She sat up somewhat startled, trying to figure out how her head had found its way into the vampire's lap - all without her waking. Her hand flew automatically to her neck, seeking proof that he'd done nothing to her. Nope. No bite mark.

She turned to ask him what and maybe why, but he didn't give her a chance.

"Wake me in thirty minutes," he announced gruffly, stretching out in the empty space she'd just vacated. Her body heat had warmed the ground where she once lay, and Spike snuggled deeper into the remaining heat before he drifted off to sleep.

Buffy watched Spike, confused. Why would he offer himself as her pillow? And, why did he give her thirty minutes of his time? At least she assumed he had after his gruff announcement; they'd made a pact not to stay in one place longer than two hours.

Sighing in confusion, she leaned back against the wall and watched Spike sleep. For all appearance, he looked dead. Well, he was dead... or undead, or whatever.

Thirty minutes later, she leaned over and lightly caressed his face. The hard planes of his cheekbones were too much of a temptation for her to resist. She'd secretly thought he was gorgeous, even after she'd realized he was a vampire, a deadly killer. She used the excuse of waking him to finally get a chance to touch him.

"Spike? It's time to go," she whispered softly, her fingertips grazed lightly over his soft lips before pulling away.

He felt the butterfly caress along his face and lips and was just about to lean into it when her hand disappeared. Spike pushed himself away from the cold floor and stood. He reached a hand down to the Slayer and was surprised when she placed her hand in his and allowed him to pull her to her feet.

"Let's go," he announced, releasing her hand and moving back towards the tunnels. He paused for a moment and sniffed the air. Nothing. Good. He moved off into the tunnels towards their next two-hour reprieve.

For the next ten hours, the two kept to the plan, neither saying much the entire time. When dusk approached, they parted ways, carefully searching the shadows for any hidden threats.

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Buffy went to the school first. She needed to find Giles and get as much information as possible on the Order of Taraka. She rushed up the steps leading into the school; the hairs on the back of her neck were standing on end, as if someone... or some *thing* was watching her. She glanced back over her shoulder, searching the shadows for any sign, a hint of someone stalking her. Seeing nothing, she turned and rushed inside.

Her boots rang out loudly in the deserted hallways, the noise dying away once she stopped before the double doors leading into the library. They were all there: Giles, Willow, Xander... even Cordelia. She also noticed Kendra was pacing back and forth as Giles spoke to the group.

Buffy watched the other slayer stop suddenly; the two locked eyes when she glanced up to where Buffy stood gazing at the group.

'Ok, Buffy, you can do this,' she murmured to herself.

Using her empty hand, she pushed one of the doors inward and walked inside.

Willow was the first Scooby that noticed her. She jumped to her feet, a yelled "Buffy" leaving her lips as she rushed across the room to embrace her friend. After a quick hug, Willow pulled away to look at her friend's carefully blank face.

"Are you okay, Buffy?" she asked. "Of course you're not okay... you're..."

Buffy tuned out Willow as she stuttered and stumbled through her apologetic monologue. If she actually listened to her friend, the ice that had settled around her heart to deal with her pain would melt, and she'd be helpless to stop the tidal wave of emotions thinking about Angel's death would bring.

"I'm fine, Will," she answered, cutting short her friend's attempt to console her. She walked further into the room to escape the well-meaning girl.

"Buffy..." Xander began.

"It's alright, Xander. I'll be fine." There was that word again. Fine. Such a short, small word to cover such a big lie. Oh well.

Turning to her watcher she told him, "Giles, I need to know everything you can tell me about the Order. Anything that might be of any possible help in dealing with these assassins."

"I'm sorry, Buffy. What I told you earlier is all we really know about them. They're a deadly order of assassins dating back to King Solomon, and they won't stop until their target is eliminated."

It was what Buffy had figured, but she'd come here... *hoping*. There was no help for it. She was going to have to leave, handle this on her own. She wouldn't put her friends, her mom, in danger. They wanted her, and by God, they were only going to get her.

"Okay. I'm going to get home. I haven't been there all night and I need to shower and change. We'll meet back here in the morning and hit the books, see if there's anything else we can possibly figure out about these assassins."

"Buffy? Do you think that's wise? Going home alone?" Giles questioned.

"Oh, I won't be alone. I'm going to take Kendra with me." A look passed between the two slayers, and Kendra gave her an imperceptible nod in agreement.

"Yes... very good then. The rest of you go on home. We'll meet back here, say around nine?" Since tomorrow was Saturday, they didn't have to worry about classes.

"Good, then it's settled. I'll see you all tomorrow," Buffy told the gang with an even voice. Without another word, she turned and left the room, Kendra following in her wake.

~*~*~*~*~

The two waited until they reached Buffy's house before talking – both slayers were too busy scanning the shadows for signs of a possible ambush to engage in conversation.

"I'll watch over dem," Kendra told her, her accented voice the first to break the silence.

"Thanks. I couldn't leave knowing they weren't going to be looked after. And, they'll help you too, though, that may take some getting used to. I want you to stay here, keep an eye on my mom. She doesn't have a clue about any of this, and my disappearance is going to hit her hard. It'll be nice for her to have someone to mother."

"Very well."

"I'm just going to take a quick shower, get rid of some of this grime... then pack a bag and be gone. I don't think the Order would think I was crazy enough to come back here, so you should be pretty safe. Wait until tomorrow... to let the others know..." her voice trailed off as emotion welled in her throat. Tears filled her eyes at the thought of not seeing her friends or family again, but it was for the best.

She couldn't bear the thought of anyone getting hurt because someone was after her. Better for the Order to seek her out alone.

Buffy ascended the staircase and took a quick shower, washing off the dirt, grime, and ash that had settled into her skin during the past twenty-four hours. She wanted to take her time, not sure when she was going to get another chance to shower, but the urgency of the situation dictated otherwise. With a resigned sigh, she turned off the hot water and stepped from the shower.

Grabbing a towel, she quickly dried herself off. She bypassed the mirror not wanting to see the haunted face of the girl that would stare back at her. Instead,

wrapped in a fluffy towel, she moved to her bedroom to pack a few things before she disappeared for good.

She quickly dressed in a pair of loose-fitting jeans, a tank top with a flannel to wear over it. Grabbing the army-colored duffle bag from her closet, she threw several changes of clothes in it, a couple pairs of shoes, and as many weapons as she could carry but not have the weight hinder her. She also placed the container holding Angel's ashes inside. She couldn't carry them with her forever; she'd need to figure out a spot for his final resting place. For now, though, they would stay with her.

Buffy sat down on her bed and laced up her boots. Rising, she looked around the room for the last time. She took no personal mementos from her room, deciding to leave everything as it was for when - *if* - she made it back.

With resolve on her face she left her room, practically racing down the stairs in her haste to be off, away from her home. She stopped at the bottom of the stairs, glancing in to the living room to see Kendra looking around at the various decorations littering the room.

"Kendra... I..."

Kendra glanced up at the sound of her name. A moment of understanding passed between the two girls. Their life was destined to be short, even though they'd fight against their destiny with everything they had in them.

"Go'on, girl, ye bes be leevin'," Kendra replied.

"Yes." Buffy nodded and moved to the door. "Kendra?"

"Yes?"

"Thanks... be safe."

"You too, girl, you too."

Without another word, Buffy slipped out into the night. She'd raided her mom's emergency cash fund, and now had a couple hundred dollars stashed in her pockets. Tomorrow, she'd go and withdraw the money from her college savings fund. Hers was about to become a cash and carry existence. She couldn't afford to be tracked electronically by the Order.

Her first stop would be to pay Willy a visit. The lowlife should be able to put her in touch with someone that could forge an ID and passport for her.

~*~*~*~*~

“Owww... hell, Slayer. I’ll tell you what you want to know. Just stop with the physical assault, alright?”

Buffy glared at Willy as she invaded his personal space, her hands fisted in the front of his shirt and held him pinned up against the wall.

“Fake papers... where can I get some? Good ones.”

“How much money you have?”

“What’s that matter? You’re going to be footing the bill for them... or did you think the crap you pulled last night was all forgiven by me?”

“Right... ah... no, no. Ah... Harry’ll be the one you want. He’s the best in the business, have a few... er, you don’t need to know about that.”

“Harry. Well, take me to this Harry. And, don’t try anything. After last night, I wouldn’t think twice about killing you.”

Willy swallowed hard, nodding vigorously.

An hour later, Buffy became Anne Winters, a twenty-one year old from New York. With a new identity in place, she made her way to the bus station. She needed to get to Los Angeles so she could close out her account tomorrow. After that, Buffy Summers was going to disappear for good.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Chapter 4

Spike watched as the Slayer moved towards the bus ticket booth. He wasn’t surprised to see that she was getting out of Sunnyhell; he couldn’t blame her. For some strange reason, he wanted to make sure she got off okay before he left town himself. The two had bonded momentarily while trapped in the sewer tunnels, and he had to see for himself that she was going to be alright on her own.

She had almost reached the ticket counter when a slight movement caught his eye. His features shifted and he watched as a figure dressed in black – to blend with the night, he was sure – slowly stalked towards the unsuspecting Slayer.

Spike opened the door and stepped out of the Desoto, starting forward, as if to intercept the assassin. Before he'd taken a handful of steps, he suddenly became aware of his own stalker.

"Slayer! Look out!" he shouted before flattening himself upon the ground as a burst of flames soared over where his head was just moments ago. He spared a quick glance at the Slayer to make sure she was all right before turning to confront the giant of a man that had managed to creep up behind him.

Another hiss of gas and a second spray was close to singeing his duster. Only preternatural reflexes managed to save him from the deadly flames.

Scrambling to his feet, Spike dashed off towards the Slayer, first, to lead the flame-wielding assassin away from his means of escape and, second, to make sure the second assassin didn't reach his target.

Evidently the Slayer hadn't heard his shout.

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"I'd like a ticket to Los Angeles, please," Buffy announced to the ticket agent.

"That'll be \$65.00, miss."

Buffy was just reaching into her pocket for her stash of cash when she felt the hairs on the nape of her neck stand on end; a vampire closing on her... and fast. She turned, her body easily sinking into a defensive pose, ready to confront her attacker and could only gape in amazement as a black-clad blur slammed into another figure with equally dark clothing on. The two disappeared into the alley.

Spike?

"I'll be right back," she told the agent, and stepped away from the window. Her duffle slapped against her back as she jogged after the pair.

She got there just in time to see Spike sink his fangs into her assailant, draining her quickly.

Spike quickly finished off the assassin and released her body to let it fall to the ground. His gaze pinned the Slayer in place.

"There's another one. Coming this way. The giant with the flamethrower. We've got to get out of here."

He strode quickly to the entrance of the alley, grabbed the stunned Slayer's hand, and tugged her after him, grateful that she put up no fuss. They made a circuitous path back to his Desoto, Spike's yellowed gaze scanning all around for signs of any other assassins that may be pursuing the two of them. Out of the corner of his eye, he watched the giant make his way towards the alley and his fallen comrade.

With a burst of speed, the two ran towards Spike's car, hopping inside before the huge man noticed them and gave chase. Spike started the engine, shifting the car into drive, then slammed his foot on the gas. The powerful car lurched forward, the tires spinning uselessly on the pavement before finally catching.

"Where to, Slayer?" he asked once they crossed the city limits.

"Los Angeles. I need to get some cash."

"Right." He didn't say another word, just drove in silence towards their destination.

Buffy sighed and leaned her head against the passenger side window as they left Sunnydale far behind. Exhaustion was quickly taking hold, and it wasn't long before she drifted off to sleep.

Spike glanced at the Slayer as her breathing and heart rate slowed. He frowned, wondering why in the world he'd bothered to rescue her. He was a demon, evil, for chrissakes. What did he care if she got herself killed? Another one would be along soon enough to take her place.

Rather than search for some hidden meaning to his actions, he rationalized then by telling himself that they would stand a better chance of surviving if they stuck together. A firm decisive nod. Yep, better the two of them together seeing to each other's back.

~*~*~*~*~

It was close to sunup when Spike pulled into the city, having taken a circuitous route to throw off anyone trying to follow them. They needed to find a place to crash for the day, make some type of plans about what they were going to do. With that in mind, Spike drove the streets looking for a cheap motel.

"Slayer?" He reached over and gently shook her shoulder once he found what he was looking for and pulled into a parking space.

"HMMMM--!" Buffy came awake with a start as her vampire radar went haywire. She sat up from the window then relaxed, her mind finally catching up with her body, realizing that Spike was the one kicking her slayer meter into overdrive.

"Where are we?" she asked once her heart rate settled down somewhat.

"L.A., like you said. I'm jus' gonna go get us a room to crash in before the sun comes up."

"Ok."

Just like that, she'd let him make the decision. She'd placed her fate into the hands of an evil, bloodsucking vampire who had made it clear in no uncertain terms that the next goal in his unlife had been to kill her and add one more dead slayer to his belt.

She watched as he slipped from the car and made his way to the tiny glass window to obtain a room. Leaning back against the headrest, she pondered the crazy upheaval her life had become.

It seemed like only a few moments had passed before Spike was back at the car and opening her door. She grabbed her duffel from the backseat and followed him towards their room. When he stopped in front of room thirteen, she cocked her brow at him.

"Wot? I'm evil," he smirked.

Buffy laughed. Exhausted as she was, she could see his perverse humor. Only an evil vampire would pick such an unlucky number for their room. Shaking her head at his foolishness, she followed him inside.

Even though it was just the one room, it still had two queen-sized beds. Buffy walked to the one furthest from the door and dropped her bag on it. Her feet kept moving towards the bathroom. She needed a moment alone, perhaps throw some water on her face.

Spike shut and locked the entry door, pulling the heavy drapes closed to block out the harmful rays that were going to be making an appearance all too soon. He walked over to the empty bed and dropped his bag beside it, then turned and shrugged out of his duster, laying it over one of the chairs that circled the small table in their room. His red button-down shirt and black t-shirt quickly followed the same path. His boots and socks weren't far behind, then he was stretched out on top of the bed.

He was asleep moments later.

Buffy came out of the bathroom and stopped dead in her tracks at the sight before her. Spike was curled on his side, his arms wrapped around a pillow, fast asleep. *'Whoa!'* Who knew what lay hidden beneath that bulky duster? Probably a good thing for her slayer peace of mind.

She opened her duffle and rummaged around for some sweats to wear in place of her jeans. A few minutes later, she was clad in just her tank top and sweats. She eyed her vacant bed, then slid her gaze back to the slumbering vampire.

After leaving everyone and everything she held dear behind in Sunnydale, the last thing she wanted to do was be alone. She'd just sleep on the edge of his bed; he was asleep already and would never even know she was there.

She needed some type of contact, even if it was from a deadly vampire. One who had just happened to have saved her...

And, what was up with that?

Shaking her head at the question she'd probably never get an answer to, Buffy slid into bed beside Spike, careful to keep close to the edge so as not to alert him to her presence. Oddly comforted by his nearness, she was soon fast asleep.

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A glance at the bedside clock showed that she'd slept for another four hours. It was just after nine and the banks had probably recently opened. She figured she'd get there first thing before anyone in Sunnydale was alerted to her disappearance and tried to guess her plans.

She attempted to sit up and ease out of bed unnoticed, but realized she couldn't. Sometime during the night – make that day – Spike had rolled over and curled up behind her. One arm draped possessively around her hip as he spooned against her backside. She lay there a moment frozen in shock, her mind trying to grasp the fact that Spike was snuggled up close to her... and sleeping.

'Ok, Buffy, leave that one for later. You need to get to the bank and get some money.'

Carefully, she tried not to wake Spike as she got out of bed and breathed a sigh of relief when he did nothing more than roll over onto his stomach and snuggle deeper into the pillows. She watched him for a moment before changing her

sweats for the jeans she'd had on yesterday. Grabbing her real identification and the room key, she let herself out of the motel room – mindful of the door.

Buffy walked to the nearest payphone and pulled the phonebook up by its metal cord, scanning the pages until she found the number to her bank and depositing the necessary change before dialing the main number. When the operator came over the line, she explained that she was staying at a motel, gave the woman the address and asked to be directed to the nearest branch. A smile came to her lips when the woman told her the nearest one was just three blocks away from her.

It made her feet very happy.

There was no way in the world that she was driving Spike's car.

At the bank, she was directed to the branch's manager when she explained that she wanted to close her account. Since it was in her name, they couldn't really deny her request. They also tried to urge against cash, since it was a large sum of money, but Buffy was adamant. Cash was untraceable. And, she needed to be untraceable. The manager hemmed and hawed for a bit, but in the end, he could do nothing but give in gracefully.

Thirty minutes later, Buffy made her way out of the bank, twenty five thousand dollars hidden inside the money belt strapped to her stomach, several hundred dollars were stuffed into her pocket so that she could pick up a few items from the various shops in the strip mall she had spotted on her brief walk to the bank.

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Buffy shifted her packages in one hand and used the other to open the motel door. She barely cracked the door and peeked inside to make sure the sunlight wouldn't hit Spike. Grateful for the westward position of their door – something he'd probably requested now that she thought about it – she slipped inside and closed the door softly behind her. The plastic bags holding her purchases crinkled loudly in the otherwise quiet room as she set them on the dresser next to the TV, and she glanced behind her to the vampire that still lay sleeping on the bed. She hadn't wanted to wake him, knowing that he needed his sleep if he were to take over guard duties later tonight.

She rummaged quietly through one of the bags and located the box of hair dye she had purchased. Buffy Summers was going to die a quick death in this room, leaving Anne Winters – complete with a whole new look – in her place. It was a good thing that the bartender had mentioned wearing a few wigs when she'd

had her picture taken. She'd even had the forger give her two different sets of identification; for now she would be Anne, she'd save the other identity for later.

Padding softly to the bathroom, she stepped inside and shut the door. Stood there a moment before opening the box to take out the hair dye that would give her a whole new look. Her sun-kissed locks were going away; she was about to complement Spike's punk look. She'd even picked up a few "accessories" to complete the whole Goth persona she was trying to achieve. She figured black hair was a complete turnaround from her normal look, and she hoped it would provide her with some leverage against the assassins bent on killing her.

Twenty minutes later, she turned on the hot water in the tub and pulled the lever to engage the shower. Naked, she pushed the curtain aside and stepped under the spray. The black dye was rinsed from her hair, sliding in rivulets down her body to the drain below. Buffy stayed under the shower for a while letting the pounding spray ease the tension in her aching muscles.

When she felt the water start to lose its heat, she opened the small bar of soap the motel provided, grumbling to herself about forgetting to buy some shower gel. She quickly lathered her body, rinsed, and then cut off the rapidly cooling water. Through the shower curtain, her hands groped blindly for a towel, using it to twist turban-style into her hair then grabbed another to wrap around her body.

The mirror was fogged over, and she used a hand to wipe it down, then unwound the towel in her hair. Her lips parted in a silent "o" at her startling transformation. She almost didn't recognize herself and she peered closer to get a better look. Took a moment to add some hair dye to her eyebrows.

Pleased with the final results after rinsing the dye from her brows, she stepped from the bathroom clad in only a towel. Holding it in one hand, she used the other to grab fresh underwear out of her duffel as well as a clean pair of jeans and a t-shirt. She scampered back to the bathroom and quickly donned her clothes.

It had been over an hour since she'd left the bank and she was starting to get antsy. Something, some sixth sense was telling her to leave... like *now*.

Going with that thought, she grabbed the new boots she had purchased and pulled them on. She caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror as she bent over to tie the laces and cringed. She looked nothing like the cheery California girl she used to be. Hazel eyes tinged with pain gazed back at her. Lack of food and sleep, as well as the constant anxiety she had been feeling had made her face

appear paler than usual. Combined with the black hair and brows, as well as the equally dark shirt, she looked like a completely different person.

Her eyes searched out Spike's in the mirror before realizing that he didn't cast a reflection. Glancing over her shoulder, she started when she realized that he was awake – and staring. He was propped up on his elbow eyeing her transformation in the mirror.

Man, he was gorgeous with his bed head hair and bare chest! His blue eyes were gazing into her own as if he could see right through her.

Bad thoughts, Buffy! Focus.

Shaking herself mentally, she concentrated on her rising trepidation.

"I think we should get out of here, Spike."

He cocked a brow at her.

"Bit of a problem, that. Daylight. Vampire here."

"I know, but I left the bank almost two hours ago. The withdrawal I made is bound to draw someone's notice. I say we put as much distance between here and L.A. as possible."

Spike sat up and swung his legs over the side of the bed.

"You're serious." It wasn't a question.

"Yes. Something's telling me to get the hell outta dodge, and I'm not going to ignore it. You with me?"

"Do I have time for a shower?"

"Yeah. You shower. I'll get everything packed up and loaded in the car."

She turned to begin packing up their meager belongings as Spike made his way to the bathroom. Just before he stepped inside, he stopped.

"Slayer?"

She stopped what she was doing to look up at him. Spike eyes roamed appreciatively over her frame from head to toe.

"Nice look."

Then he dipped inside the bathroom and shut the door.

Buffy's eyes remained fixed on the spot where he once stood. Her body was still tingling from the heated look he had given her after his gaze had traveled the length of her body. Her mouth gaped open in astonishment. Had that been desire that had lit his eyes?

Focusing once more on her task, she made quick work of packing their belongings.

She had just finished her last load to the car when she heard the water turn off. When Spike stepped out of the bathroom clad only in a towel, Buffy tried desperately to look anywhere but at his hard, bare chest. Frantically, she set about distracting herself from watching the tiny water droplets as they rolled down his skin towards the knot that held his towel in place.

Seeing nothing else she could grab to make herself busy, she mumbled a quick, "I'm gonna grab some food," and raced out the door, careful not to let any sunlight in the room.

Spike, who had been using a towel on his wet hair to dry it off, couldn't see the Slayer's agitation. He could, however, detect a marked increase in her heart rate. And, as he heard the front door slam, he lowered the towel from his head, a slight smirk on his features.

'This is gonna be interesting,' he thought and made quick work of getting dressed. He eyed the clothes laid out on the bed, and his smile grew wide as a thought suddenly occurred to him.

He just wished he'd seen the look on the Slayer's face when she didn't come across any soddin' underwear in his bag.

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Chapter 5

Kendra walked into the library alone. All eyes turned towards the swinging double doors at the sound of her approach. She'd stayed at Buffy's house for as long as she dared before finally making her way over to the school. She'd ignored the ringing phone - not that she'd answer it anyway - but she'd figured it was the watcher calling to find out where the two were.

"Where's Buffy?" Giles asked as Kendra came to stand by their table.

"She ees gone."

"Gone? What do you mean... *gone*?" Xander asked, confused.

"When's she going to be back?" Willow asked almost at the same time as Xander. Her naïve mind hadn't grasped that when Kendra had said gone, she had meant for good.

"She ees not comin back," Kendra announced in her heavily accented voice. "She t'ought it would be for de best. Better her alone, den her family and her friends too, she said. I will stay 'ere in her place."

Giles took off his glasses as he leaned back in his chair.

"She shouldn't have gone off alone. I can't believe you would be so irresponsible as to let her leave. We would have figured something out... we could..." His voice trailed off as he caught the look Kendra gave him. She was right. As much research as they could have done, nothing would have been enough. By staying here, Buffy would have announced her location to the Order of Taraka and practically begged them to come after her.

"Buffy," Willow whimpered softly. "She's out there all alone, Giles. Oh God! What are we gonna tell her mother?"

"I don't know, Willow. I don't know."

~*~*~*~*~

It was quiet inside the blackened-out Desoto as they drove along Highway 10 out of the city. They'd been driving for several hours, no clear destination in mind. It was probably for the best – if they didn't know where they were going, there was no way the Order's assassins would know where they were either.

"Spike?" she called his name in a soft voice, her eyes fixed on the road in front of them.

"Yeah, pet."

"Where would...? That is... uh..." her voice trailed off.

Spike continued to drive down the road. He knew what she wanted to say, to ask; he just didn't know if he was ready to talk about it yet.

"Where was his most favorite place?" The question was asked almost ten minutes later in a voice barely above a whisper. Neither looked at the other, both thinking back to that moment when they'd watched as the two vampires had turned to dust before their eyes.

"Don't rightly know," he answered softly.

"Ok." If it weren't for his enhanced vampiric hearing, he wouldn't have heard her.

They were almost to Phoenix when she spoke again.

"What about Drusilla? Where will you take her?" She didn't know why she asked and didn't think he'd even answer her. She was just trying to get some sort of idea for a final resting place for Angel. As much as she might want to, she couldn't keep lugging his ashes with her - something was bound to happen to them. Better for his final resting place to be someplace that Angel might have called home.

Spike surprised himself by answering the slayer.

"She was destined for the convent before she was turned. It's only fittin' that she return there."

Buffy turned to look at him. His jaw was working furiously, trying to keep his emotions in check. She could see his hands fisted around the steering wheel; she just hoped he didn't pull the thing off in his anger.

She lifted her hand as if to place it on his shoulder, possibly offer him some small type of comfort. He must have caught the motion out of the corner of his eye, because he turned away from the slit in the front window to glance at her.

Pain burned in the depths of his deep blue eyes. Buffy knew it because she was sure the same was reflected in her own.

"I... thanks," she murmured, dropping her hand without touching him. A half smile played about his lips before he turned back to the road.

~*~*~*~*~

When the sun finally set, Spike pulled into the first motel he could find. He was starting to get hungry but wanted to get the Slayer settled for the night before hunting for food.

"Hungry?" he asked her when he came back to the car with their key.

She just shook her head and climbed out of the car, grabbing her duffle from the back seat. He'd picked a corner ground floor unit this time, not that they'd had to worry about too many neighbors at this rundown hellhole. But as long as the sheets were clean and the water was hot, she didn't care.

"I'm going to take a shower," she said, not bothering to look back to see if he came in or not. She knew he was hungry, and she just didn't have it in her to stop him.

She dropped her bag on the bed and continued walking towards the bathroom.

Spike watched the Slayer for a moment. She looked defeated, her shoulders slumped as if she carried the weight of the world on them. Shaking off his concern, he turned and made his way to the door. Her whispered words haunted him as he opened the door to leave.

"Don't prey on the innocent."

Spike stayed out for several hours. Each time he saw an easy meal, he held back – her words whispering through his head in a silent plea. Frustrated at himself, he finally scoped out a seedy bar to engage in a little sport to ease some of the tension pervading his body. And he could just as easily find dinner here as well. Smiling for the first time in hours, he made his way across the street to where two men were engaging in a knife fight outside the front door.

An evil chuckle escaped his mouth upon spying the name of the bar: Hellraisers.

Oh yeah, he'd fit right in here.

~*~*~*~*~

Spike let himself back into their room around 1 a.m., his body slightly warmed by the fresh blood he'd recently consumed. He'd even listened to the Slayer, choosing two men with evil streaks a mile wide. Or so they'd thought until encountering him. He'd gloried in their fear as he'd drained first one and then the other in the alley behind the bar.

He locked the door behind him, securing the chain. Pulling off his duster, he let it fall over the back of a chair. Checked the curtains to make sure that no stray beam could peek through and burn him in the morning. Satisfied, he sat down on the vacant bed and pulled off his boots and socks before removing his shirts.

Naked but for the jeans riding low on his hips, he moved to pull back the covers on his own bed, but stopped.

His head cocked to the side as he listened.

There it was again. A soft sound, almost like a moan. His eyes narrowed on the Slayer as she lay curled in a ball on the other bed. He frowned when he noticed her slight frame shake. Then he figured out what she was doing.

She was crying. In her sleep.

He walked towards the other bed and gazed down at her. Tears were falling from beneath her closed lids in wet streaks down her face. In her arms, she held a container close to her. Angel. She must be having a nightmare.

Realizing he wouldn't get any sleep with her crying all night, he reached down and gently pulled the box from her hands. He walked over to the dresser and set the container aside. Calling himself all kinds of fools, he slipped under the covers in bed next to her. He tried not to wake her as he pulled her back into his arms and held her close.

She seemed to calm somewhat at his touch, and the silent sobs wracking her body eventually stopped. A contented sigh escaped Spike's lips as he snuggled close to the Slayer's warm body and allowed the slow, even beat of her heart lull him to sleep.

~*~*~*~*~

Buffy woke to the feel of a cool, bare chest beneath her cheek, her bare legs entangled with a pair encased in denim. Arms wrapped around her back holding her close, almost in a protective gesture. Still half asleep, she snuggled closer to the body entwined with hers and let out a sigh as he tightened his hold on her, pulling her closer.

It felt so good to be held like that. She felt safe.

Tilting her head back, she opened her eyes and wasn't surprised to see blue eyes gazing down at her. She watched him watching her, lost in their depths.

She couldn't be quite sure who made the first move, or if it was by some mutual understanding. His head dipped as hers rose, and then their lips were touching.

'His lips are so soft,' was the vague thought circling in her brain as his lips roamed back and forth across hers. When he began nibbling on her lower lip, her eyes

fluttered closed and she allowed herself to be swept away by the unexpected desire that flooded her body at his touch.

His tongue flicked out to tease her lips, silently begging entrance. She hesitated and he stopped the trail of his tongue and went back to nibbling at her lower lip.

'God, he's good at this.' Then he sucked the lip he'd been teasing into his mouth. She couldn't prevent the soft moan that rumbled forth from somewhere in the back of her throat.

Her lips parted with a hitched breath and Spike took advantage of her brief lapse, slipping his tongue inside to see how good she tasted. Her heat was intoxicating and he answered her low moan with a growl of his own. One of his hands slipped from behind her back to cup her jaw, his thumb sliding idly back and forth along her skin as his tongue plundered her mouth.

When he felt her tentative response, Spike was lost. Her innocence captivated him and he found the tenuous hold on his control slip.

Her shyness quickly gave way and she tore her lips from his so she could use her tongue to mimic what he had done to her. The pink tip darted out to circle his parted lips. Then she grew bolder, worrying his retracted canines, unknowingly hitting on one of his most erogenous zones. Spike couldn't prevent the growl that erupted from him at her touch, and he wondered briefly if she had any idea how erotic it was to have her tongue trace his teeth like that.

He needed to feel the weight of her body against him. Using the arm still molded around her back, he held her tight as he rolled to his back, allowing her body to drape over the top of his. His chest seemed to burn where her hardened nipples bore into him through the thin material of her nightshirt. He let her set the pace, not wanting to scare her off... but, god, she was driving him crazy. He needed to take control, devour her like she was slowly devouring him.

His fingers fisted in her new raven-colored hair and gently tugged her head back, breaking their kiss and exposing the long column of her neck to his gaze. His lips whispered along her jaw and down her neck. He felt her breath hitch and he began lightly nibbling up and down her throat.

When she offered no signs of protest, he gave into the lust that was consuming him and rolled them over so that he lay on top of her. His lips blazed a trail to her ear, his teeth gently nibbling on her lobe. The tip of his tongue traced a path along the shell of her ear.

Buffy moaned as Spike alternately nipped and sucked at her earlobe. His cool breath as it whispered over the wet trail he was leaving was doing crazy things to her sensory circuits. She felt like she was about to spontaneously combust at the heat generating through her body.

"God... Spike," she whimpered and tried to pull him even closer.

"Mmmmm, pet, you taste so good," he whispered hoarsely.

Suddenly he stopped, his whole body going rigid as he lay on top of her. Her eyes fluttered open in confusion, just in time to see his blue eyes give way to amber, ridges on his brow forming as his demonic features slipped into place. Before Buffy had time to react, Spike launched himself off her... just as the motel door burst open and two assassins stormed inside.

Buffy, clad in only a t-shirt and panties, scrambled off the bed as one of the assassins charged her. Spike had engaged the other, but he was hampered by the sunlight streaming in through the open door. She darted around the foot of the bed and quickly kicked the door shut before rushing to her bag and grabbing the first weapon she put her hand on.

She remained crouched on the floor next to her bag as the second assassin charged her again. Just before he reached her, she came up swinging with her axe. Her attacker managed to duck at the last moment and avoid the blow aimed at his head. The Order apparently knew its business, sending humans after her. But they were sadly mistaken if they thought that she wouldn't kill one to save her own life. Her slayer honor code only stretched so far.

She was too concentrated on her fight with her attacker to pay much attention to Spike and how he was handling his, but she nearly faltered when she heard him cry out in pain, right before he roared in agony. The bastard had just sprayed him with holy water and followed it up with a stake that landed just wide of its intended target. His attacker was leaning over him with a second stake aimed straight at his heart, and Buffy saw red.

In a blink of an eye, the axe in her hand soared through the air to imbed itself in the assassin's back. She watched as he crumpled beside Spike before turning back to confront the remaining assassin.

The other had paused, momentarily perplexed that she had killed a human bent on destroying a vampire. Seeing his confusion, she smirked at him.

"What? Didn't think I'd kill a human because I'm the slayer?" she asked rhetorically, sarcasm dripping heavily from her voice. She watched his eyes

widen when he realized that it was the Slayer standing before him, not some vamp meal. A smile touched her lips that her disguise seemed to be working. Good thing this assassin wasn't going to live long enough to enlighten the Order as to her changed appearance.

"Oh, I'm sorry... you're get-out-of-jail card expired the moment your Order tried to kill me. Human, demon... makes no difference to me who you guys send. You're one and the same."

To prove her point, she cart-wheeled in the slight aisle at the foot of the bed towards the fallen assassin and ripped the axe from his back as she came to her feet. The axe left her hand before the remaining attacker had time to prepare, and his eyes widened in amazement before glazing over as he too slumped to the floor in a heap, the axe buried deep in his chest.

Once assured he was dead, Buffy turned to where Spike lay on the ground desperately trying to pull the stake from his chest. His torso was crimson from the blood pouring out of the wound; angry welts arced across his chest, arms, and face from where the holy water was thrown on him.

"Spike," she called softly as she cradled his head in her lap.

"Slayer... hurts... pull it out..." he whimpered, before he passed out from the pain.

She eyed the stake protruding from his chest as blood seeped out around it. If she pulled it out now, she'd have to concentrate on stemming the flow and they wouldn't be able to get out of there. Reaching a decision, she laid his head back on the floor. She grabbed her jeans and drew them on.

Racing around the room, she packed as quickly as possible and loaded their stuff in the car. Back in the motel room, she grabbed a sheet from the bed and started ripping it into strips. She knelt down by Spike and yanked the stake out in one quick pull. Immediately, blood welled from the gaping hole in his chest and she grabbed the strips she had made and set about wrapping them around his wound.

When she was finished, she pulled and prodded and finally managed to get him on the bed. Rushing back outside, she opened the passenger door of his Desoto only to hurry back to the room and wrap Spike in the comforter. It was a good thing he didn't need to breathe because he was wrapped tight, allowing no room for the harmful rays of the sun to sneak inside.

She lifted him fireman-style over her shoulder and walked out the open door to the car, careful not to jar him too much and start his wound bleeding again.

'This is going to be an adventure,' she thought as she got him settled and eased behind the steering wheel to start the engine. She wasn't the best driver in the world... oh, who was she kidding? She was probably the worst driver in the world. But they needed to get away from there as quickly as possible. They couldn't wait for nightfall to come so that Spike... shoot, she wasn't even sure *if* Spike could drive. It was up to her to get some distance between them and their old motel room.

She wondered how the Order had found them. Swinging onto the road, she gunned the Desoto. It was amazing what she could do when she put her mind to it. She hadn't panicked and now seemed to be doing fairly well with this whole driving thing.

Driving.

Desoto.

Spike's Desoto.

They needed to ditch the car. Crap. That wasn't going to make Spike too happy.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Chapter 6

Stealing a car was never an easy thing. Doing it in broad daylight was damn near impossible. Buffy knew she needed to find something that would provide decent cover for Spike during the day, but still be manageable for her to drive. Campers and RV's were out. She'd settle for a pickup truck, but only if it had a bedcover.

Driving Spike's Desoto with its blackened out windows was sure to draw attention, especially driving it through suburban Phoenix. She needed to find a car, and damn soon.

As she drove around a corner, it seemed as if the fates were suddenly smiling down on her. She pulled over and watched as a woman got out of her idling SUV parked at the curb to dart back inside her house.

It was now or never.

Leaving the Desoto running, Buffy slipped out of the driver's seat and raced to the woman's SUV. Two seconds later, she calmly slipped behind the wheel and drove the car a few blocks over, mindful to take the keys with her as she darted back to Spike and the Desoto.

Buffy was on the interstate inside fifteen minutes and she even remembered to swap out the license plates with those she'd lifted from another vehicle. She couldn't help grinning at the thought of her being considered a criminal. Spike was sure to have a field day with her tumble from her righteous perch. She sobered suddenly as her thoughts turned to the vampire; she just prayed he didn't kill her when he found out she'd ditched his car.

In Tucson, Arizona, she finally broke down and stopped. She would have driven further, tried to put more distance between them and their last known location, but was deeply worried about Spike. She was going to need him to help find the Order; plus, she'd come to rely on his presence over the last couple of days.

The motel she chose looked like it was falling down around the owner's ears: the sign had several letters missing from the name, the building was in desperate need of a paint job. It was just the place Buffy was looking for. A perfect place to get lost.

She snagged the key that had been slammed down on the countertop by the clerk after she filled out the registration form with bogus information; she paid cash for the room. She muttered what passed for an acknowledgment as the man hollered out, "Checkout's at noon!" as she stepped out of the office. Her mind was already on the vampire.

Buffy brought all their belongings in the room first before carefully retrieving Spike from the front seat. As she hoisted him onto her shoulder, she heard him let out a muffled groan and was torn between going slow and prolonging his agony, or hurrying and getting it over with. In the end, she just hurried.

She eased Spike down onto the single queen-sized bed. When she got a look at the comforter wrapped around his body, she let out a gasp. The thing was covered in blood. Suddenly anxious, her hands worked frantically to uncoil Spike, and she could feel tears well up in her eyes once the extent of his injuries was exposed.

His face was unusually pale, as if all of his blood had seeped out of him, leaving behind a washed-out husk. His face, arms, and torso still bore the signs of the holy water he'd been sprayed with; the red angry welts stood out in stark

contrast to his pale skin. He lay deathly still on the bed and she was at a loss as to what to do.

Buffy knew he needed blood to heal but couldn't see herself scouring about for his next meal – no matter how desperate things were. She hadn't said a word when he left last night, had turned a blind eye to what he was about to do. However, actively seeking a body for him to drain went against her moral code.

Climbing up onto the bed, she tried to wake him up.

"Spike? Spike? Wake up!" she practically yelled as she shook him.

Nothing.

"Come on, Spike. Wake up, dammit! You can't die on me... I need your help!" Tears gathered and eventually fell, grief-stricken over his continued unresponsiveness. "If you don't help me – Dammit, Spike! I can't do this on my own... Wake up!" Her voice rose frantically; she was shaking him so hard yet he wasn't budging, and she feared that he was dead. That she was going to have to go it alone.

"Spike!"

Spike's eyes flew open, and he snarled as his demon burst forth. Then he attacked.

Bolting upright, one hand instinctively grasped the Slayer's hair and pulled her head to the side. The other yanked her black t-shirt out of his way, exposing her neck and the vessels beating away so close to the surface... his fangs found their mark unerringly.

The powerful blood hit his tongue and Spike purred his pleasure. He took several hard pulls as he thrust up against her. His dick hardened, both from the friction and the taste of her in his mouth. It didn't help matters that she was squirming above him, her fingers in his hair, clenching and unclenching – unsure what to do.

The sudden burst of pheromones was nearly his undoing...

"Spike," Buffy whimpered, and tried to clamber closer to his body. His fangs had stung, fiercely so, when they first pierced her flesh. But as he pulled her blood into his mouth, she could feel it deep within her core. A steady throbbing that increased the more he drank. It was sensuous. Wicked. And, oh God! It felt so good.

Then her body started to relax as the loss of blood began to get to her. Arms that had been holding Spike close, loosened and eventually lay limp at her side. Her head lolled to the side, better exposing her throat; her eyes rolled back just before her eyes closed and she fell into unconsciousness.

Through the haze of his bloodlust and desire, Spike realized that the Slayer had gone slack in his arms. He abruptly released her neck, his human mask returning as his gaze raked over her features.

“Slayer?” he called softly as he lifted her up against his chest. “Pet? Are you ok?”

One hand lifted to smooth her dark hair back from her face. Her eyelids fluttered, and Spike found himself heaving a sigh of relief. He’d not taken too much.

“Come on, luv. Wake up.”

Her eyes finally opened and blue eyes locked with hazel.

“All better?” she asked with a slur in her voice, the recent blood loss weighing her limbs down so that she started to sag against him. The slight smile that played about her lips gave her a drunk-like appearance.

“Uh huh... all better,” he grinned back.

“Good,” she whispered before she fell forward onto his chest and sleep overcame her.

Spike held the Slayer close as he leaned back against the pillows. His feelings for the slip of a girl he held in his arms had changed over the last couple of days. No longer did he want to kill her outright. They’d become reluctant allies, bound together by mutual tragedy and a common enemy. Destined to travel together to fight for their survival.

As he stroked her hair and listened to the steady beat of her heart, Spike vowed silently that nothing would ever take her from him.

~*~*~*~*~

Spike woke first, the Slayer’s body still sprawled out on top of him. The gaping hole in his torso had closed over, thanks to the swift healing properties of her potent blood. His eyes softened as he watched her sleeping so peacefully. Her warm breath skated over his bare chest as she exhaled; the soft currents wafted over his skin and skimmed across his bare nipple, causing it to harden in

response. He muffled a groan as his cock was quick to respond, swelling uncomfortably within the tight confines of his jeans.

She stirred in his arms, unknowingly rubbing against his aching cock and Spike slowly counted to ten, praying for a bit of divine intervention. Ironic, though it was.

“Hi,” she whispered as she lifted her head from his chest; her voice was slightly husky, not yet completely recovered from the blood Spike had consumed.

“Hey there yourself, pet,” he murmured back. “How do you feel?”

“Tired... but I’ll be ok. How ‘bout you? All healed up?” As she asked this, her eyes drifted down to the scar decorating his chest where the stake had once pierced his flesh. Her hand ran over the mark, astonished at how quickly he’d healed.

“Wow! You heal almost faster than I do,” she murmured amazed.

Spike’s eyes closed as her fingers continued to roam over his chest, scalding him with their heat. *‘Bloody chit doesn’t even know what she’s doing to me.’* He needed to distract her, had to get his mind back on developing a plan of action. But her hands... oh God, her hands were driving him crazy.

Buffy couldn’t look away from Spike’s chest as her hands roved over taut flesh. She was amazed at the coolness of his flesh beneath her palms, in awe at the smoothness of his pale skin as her fingers continued to caress him. His duster had done a good job of concealing a body that was damn near perfect. His lean frame was comprised of sleek muscle and Buffy couldn’t seem to take her eyes – or hands, for that matter – away from it.

Spike dared not move as the Slayer’s hands continued their gentle exploration. When they started a downward path, he couldn’t prevent the growl that erupted from the back of his throat. Her hand stilled at the sound, and her head lifted to gaze at his face.

Buffy froze and started to remove her hand, unsure as to why Spike was suddenly growling at her, but he moved like lightning and gripped her wrists in his hand, holding them in place on his stomach.

“I... I,” she stammered.

“No... don’t stop,” he whispered and slowly released his hold on her wrists.

"I... I don't know what to do..." her voice trailed off in embarrassment.

Buffy remained transfixed as Spike reached up and tucked a stray lock of her hair behind her ear. His fingers trailed down along her jaw, causing her to gasp in surprise at his gentleness. She leaned into the caress, and moments later, felt his other hand cup the other side of her jaw. He coaxed her head down toward his and she allowed him to do it, knowing that he was going to kiss her.

He brushed his lips back and forth across her slightly parted lips, and Buffy was shocked at how soft they were. Over and over it went, until she was sure she was going to die from frustration if he didn't take things further. As if reading her thoughts, his tongue was suddenly there, tiny little flicks here and there, then tracing the contours of her lips. A groan of pleasure sounded in her ears, hoarse and needy, and Buffy realized that it was her. She should make him stop, was her vague thought. And she would have, if he had been hurried in his quest to taste her. But she was helpless to do nothing but submit to his gentle, but thorough, exploration of her mouth. To lean into him and beg for more. Finally his mouth settled over hers, and she practically screamed with delight as his tongued delved within the recess of her mouth to lightly duel with hers.

Her body shuddered above his and Buffy could do nothing but follow along as he kissed her with almost lazy strokes of his tongue. He seemed in no hurry either, content to hold her head within his hands as his tongue worked its delicious magic. Endless minutes of torture as she writhed above him. Wanting... needing... something. More. She wanted more. Now. And oh god, his mouth—

She whimpered as Spike withdrew, then moaned outright as he licked and nibbled at her skin, making a circuitous route along her throat to her ear. Blunt teeth closed over the lobe and worried the flesh, teasing the stud in her ear. Another shudder went through her; she may have whispered Spike's name. Or please.

Just when Buffy thought she couldn't stand it any longer, Spike moved away from her ear, back down her neck, treating her to a repeat of the delicious torment he'd given her before. Somehow she ended up on her back. When Spike's mouth closed around the bite marks he'd left and his tongue laved at the barely closed-over holes, she could have sworn she saw stars – and not from pain.

No, it was pleasure, unlike anything she'd ever imagined.

Over and over, his tongue bathed her neck. Until Buffy thought she'd go mad with the pleasure he was giving her. Her body bucked and writhed; her hands

tore at his hair, pressing him closer, pulling him back... unsure what, exactly, she wanted him to do.

"Spike..."

Spike wanted nothing more than to rip the shirt from the Slayer's body, to lick and taste every inch of her flesh hidden from his gaze. But he wanted this, their first time together, to be special. Comfort and solace, rather than a hard emotionless fuck. He forced himself to sit back on his heels, taking deep, calming breaths he no longer needed. If nothing else, it gave him a moment to get his demon under control, and to ascertain that this was what the Slayer wanted.

When she continued to stare at him, lust and need making her eyes more green than hazel, Spike pulled her to a seated position and lifted her shirt over her head and tossed it aside. She wasn't wearing a bra, and he got a glimpse of perfectly formed breasts, pointed nipples, and dusky areolas before she crossed her arms over her chest and covered herself.

"Let me look at you," he murmured, hands closing over her wrists to pull her arms away from her body. Surprisingly, she offered no resistance to his softly spoken plea, though her face flamed a becoming shade of red. "Beautiful..."

She smiled then. The first he'd ever seen. It transformed her features, banishing the pain and heartache that had been a constant since that night.

Their clothes fell away beneath eager hands and fumbling touches until the two were naked and stretched out on top of the bed. Hands ran almost lovingly over bare flesh, cataloging strengths and weaknesses, sleek muscles and soft, yielding curves. There was a moment of pain when Spike finally took her, but it was gone in an instant. What came after more than made up for it to Buffy's way of thinking.

Then she wasn't thinking at all... only feeling. Her mind and body focused solely on the creature driving her higher and higher. To some place she'd never been but craved desperately. Her climax caught her unawares. The fangs in her throat made it go on and on, until she was faint from the intensity.

Spike's muffled growl signaled his own release. His heavy weight settled on top of her, pushing her deeper into the mattress, covering her from head to toe. It felt good, so much so, that when he tried to move off and settle at her side, her arms tightened around his back and held him close.

They stayed like that for endless minutes. Until their bodies recovered enough and Buffy began to feel the slight chill in the room. She sighed and reluctantly

relaxed her grip. Frowning when Spike pulled free and flopped onto his back beside her.

Buffy went willingly when Spike pulled her close and wrapped his arms around her. Somehow he managed to get the covers up around them. They snuggled together for a time, neither of them saying a word, both hesitant to break the peaceful silence.

An hour passed, and then another.

Finally, Spike spoke.

“Slayer?” he called softly in the dark.

“Hmmm?” she mumbled, the sound more of a hum in her throat than an actual word that left her lips. She was so relaxed that she didn’t even object to the name he had called her. His hands gliding along her skin weren’t helping.

“We should think about getting out of here. We need to stay on the move so the Order can’t track us. How long have we been here anyway? I was a little out of it when I was dragged in here.”

“What time is it?” she asked as she tried to push off from his chest and rise.

Spike felt her sit up as she tried to see over him to the clock on the bedside table behind him. He turned to the side and read the digital display to her.

“Ten o’clock.” Apparently, he’d slept longer than normal as his body repaired itself from its last attack.

“Oh, ok. Look, uh... Spike...I gotta tell you something,” she began as she crossed her legs and clutched the cover to her chest.

‘That doesn’t sound good,’ he thought. He quirked his brow at her, waiting.

“Well... you see... uh... I figured out why the Order was able to track us so quickly. And... uh... well...”

“It can’t be as bad as all that, Slayer. Spit it out already.”

“I ditched the Desoto.”

Bloody hell!

The silence was deafening and she waited for him to explode. Instinctively, she cringed, ready for him to blast her with “bloody hell’s” and “sod it all’s.”

Spike sighed. The Slayer was right. His car had stuck out like a sore thumb, providing an easy target for the Order to track.

“So, tell me, Slayer... how in the bloody hell did we get here?”

“I stole a car.”

“You *nicked* a car?!” he exclaimed, incredulous.

Buffy nodded, blushing slightly.

“I don’t believe it! The bloody Slayer *nicked* a car!” A wide grin split his face and he looked up at the girl staring down at him. She gave him a tentative smile in return.

“What kind of car? How did you get it? Spill, girl!”

“Well, it was just parked at the curb. The woman left it running and went inside, so I jumped out and drove it around the block. Then, I ran back to the Desoto... easy. We’re now the proud owner of an SUV. I even stole a new set of license plates to put on it.”

Spike continued to stare at the girl, feeling somewhat foolish because he felt so proud of her recent criminal activities.

“Bloody marvelous,” he murmured as he sat up in bed. His hand slipped around the back of her neck, and he hauled her close for a lip-bruising kiss. He felt her melt into him, her hands coming up to rest against his chest.

As quick as it began, it was over. Spike released her mouth, lifting his head to gaze down at her upturned face.

“Come on, pet. Let’s get dressed and get outta here. We don’t want a repeat performance of earlier today.”

Buffy’s eyes fluttered open. Silently, she nodded at him. She stood up, allowing the cover to fall back to the bed as she quickly scooped up the clothes she’d been wearing earlier and high-tailed it to the bathroom.

Spike watched her disappear from sight. He stood and dressed, gathering their things together while the Slayer got dressed. A few minutes later, they were back in their newly acquired vehicle and driving off into the darkness.

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Chapter 7

“What can you tell me about the Order?” Buffy asked several hours later as Spike drove along the nearly deserted highway.

“Assassins. Deadly. Human and demon, alike.”

“Anything else? Giles said...” Her voice trailed off as she thought about her watcher back in Sunnydale. Shaking her head at the girl she had left behind, her voice hardened as she continued. “Giles said they date back to the times of King Solomon.”

“That sounds about right.”

“Do you know where they’re based, how you get in contact with them?”

“No, Dru... Drusilla was the one that knew how to initiate the contract.” he answered. “But, I bet you I know who would.”

“Who?”

“Your Council of Wankers.”

He took his eyes off the road to glance over at the Slayer. She was watching him and he could practically see the wheels turning in her head as she attempted to decide on a course of action.

“I guess we’re going to England,” she said finally. “Where’s the nearest airport? No sense driving when we could be flying.”

“Just saw a sign that said El Paso was about 50 miles away. I guess they’d have an airport there.”

“Ok.”

Buffy’s eyes turned to the darkened scenery and she leaned her head against the window and attempted to get some rest. If she was going to stay sharp and watch Spike’s back during the daylight hours, she needed her rest.

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It seemed only moments later that she was being shaken awake by Spike. Her head jerked away from the glass and attempted to rub the kink out of her neck.

"Where are we?" she asked sleepily.

"El Paso. I just wanted to wake you... let you know I was gonna step out for a minute. Didn't want you to worry."

"Where are you going?"

At his pointed look, her eyes widened in understanding; she lowered her head, not wanting him to see the pain in her eyes.

"Oh..."

"I'll be back, pet."

She bit her tongue as he let himself out of the vehicle. He needed to feed, much like she did. That he was snacking on humans while she ate burgers and fries was where she was having the problem. She would have offered, but, like him, she needed to keep her wits about her – eyes and ears attuned for the assassins that had been dogging their heels. And running a few pints short would dull her senses, making her a liability.

Instead, she watched as he ambled towards the biker bar. Harleys lined the curb and people in leather loitered about smoking and drinking. Spike quickly disappeared into the crowd, and Buffy leaned her head back against the rest and waited for him to return.

The pounding on the driver's side window startled her from her silent musings. She glanced over, expecting to see a cop. No... no cop. Just two big, burly guys bent on a little destruction... and possibly a little car theft.

'Sorry, guys. This one's mine,' she thought as she watched one of the two slowly circle around to her side. 'I worked hard to steal my first car. No one's gonna steal from this stealer.'

She waited until the guy was close enough to catch the backlash from the door, then struck. As the guy drew near, she cracked the door open. When he was close enough, she leaned back and planted both feet on the door, using her slayer strength to slam it into the man. He fell to the ground in a dazed heap, allowing

her to jump out and confront him. She made sure to divide her attention between the man on the ground and his friend who was circling the car to come help.

“You guys picked the wrong car and the wrong girl to mess with. I’ll go easy on you if you just leave... now.” As she spoke, she settled into a defensive pose. The second man came around and stopped by his friend, checking to see if he was alive.

“You’re gonna pay for that, bitch,” he snarled, raising the crowbar he held in his hands menacingly.

Buffy just rolled her eyes at him. True he was human, which meant she couldn’t kill him. But that didn’t mean she couldn’t pound on him a little. He was threatening her with bodily harm, after all.

“I’d like to see you...” her voice trailed off. *‘Oh shit,’* she thought moments before she heard the third guy strike. The last thing Buffy saw before her world faded to black was the evil leer of the third man standing over her.

‘Spike...’

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Spike knew something was wrong the moment he stepped out of rowdy bar. His eyes zeroed in on the SUV and noticed the dome light on. As he got closer, he could smell the Slayer’s blood in the air and took off running.

A growl erupted from his throat upon noticing three guys standing over her huddled body, each taking turns kicking her unmoving form. He practically sailed through the air for the last twenty feet and slammed into them. All four fell to the ground in a heap, but Spike was quick to recover, rolling in a smooth motion on the sidewalk and vaulting to his feet.

He didn’t waste time toying with the three men... he was too angry. And he allowed his rage free rein as he dealt with the Slayer’s attackers. His fangs sunk into the neck of the first opponent he grabbed. The demon inside crowed over the squeals of fright that burst forth from the man’s lips. Screams that soon petered out as his life’s blood was quickly drained. The other two could only stare in horror at the monster before them, frozen and unable to move.

Spike let the carcass fall to the ground at his feet; his eyes pinned the remaining two in place as he slowly advanced on them.

They gazed in horrified fascination at the blood dripping from the monster's elongated teeth. It was the last thing the two saw.

Suddenly, Spike was upon them, attacking with fists and fangs the two that had dared to touch his slayer.

He left them where they lay and strode quickly to the huddled form of the Slayer. Carefully, he turned her over and lifted her in his arms, wincing at the bruises that marred her features. Berated himself for leaving her alone.

The uneasy moan that rumbled from her lips was the sweetest sound he'd ever heard and Spike held his breath as her lids fluttered and finally opened.

"You came," she whispered. A tremulous smile graced her lips at seeing his demonic features, the blood of his recent kills still coating his lips. She lifted her hand and cupped his cheek.

Spike leaned into her touch, pulling her body closer to his.

"Come on, luv. Let's get out of here."

He deposited her back in the SUV, taking extra care not to compound her injuries. Then he circled around the back and climbed into the driver's side.

Two hours later they were in the air.

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Buffy woke to the sound of the captain's voice droning over the intercom about final approach. Beside her, she felt Spike stir, felt the light kiss he dropped on her head before he sat up. Another twenty minutes and she was standing on foreign soil for the first time in her life. Spike slipped his hand in hers and together they made their way towards customs - their matching duffle bags slung over their shoulders.

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Customs was fairly easy to move through. Since they only had the one bag each, and the agent was exceedingly tired, they didn't bother to do a thorough examination of their bags. Spike's evil scowl probably had a lot to do with it as well.

Neither had bothered with weapons, figuring they could raid the Council's stash once they got to London. Having heard Giles go on about the place often enough, Buffy was eager to see what the hubbub was all about.

Now that they were in England, they were one step closer in their quest to take out the Order of Taraka. They just had one more thing to do before they could embark on their new adventure, unencumbered with their past.

It was time to lay old ghosts to rest.

~*~*~*~*~

They made a striking pair as they walked side by side, each carrying a small box in their hands. The nuns at the Sisters of Mercy Convent paused to stare at the figures whose solemn features were in sharp contrast to their gothic appearance. The male, his shocking white hair standing on end, was attired head to toe in black. His counterpart, her severe black hair framing a pale face, was also dressed all in black. But it was their eyes that held the nuns motionless.

Such pain they contained.

Suddenly the woman stopped walking, pausing in front of a statue of the Virgin Mary that was surrounded by a small garden of flowers. The man came to stand beside her, nodding at something she said.

The nuns were openly gawking now, making no pretense of hurrying about their duties.

Mother Superior was walking down the hallway and decided to take a stroll through the open courtyard. She noticed several of the nuns standing still, gazing out into the courtyard. She stepped out through the open double doors and looked around.

She noticed the black-clad couple standing by the Virgin Mary statue and made her way over to them. It wasn't often they had visitors to their convent, and none such as these. She clucked disapprovingly at the gaping nuns and shooed them back to their chores.

"Hello, my children. It's a beautiful evening, is it not?"

Buffy glanced up at the nun.

"Yes."

"Is there something I can help you with? The sun has gone down and it's time for us to close the gates for the evening."

"We'll just be a moment. We just want to say our goodbyes."

"Good...? Ahhh, yes. Of course," the Mother Superior replied, just then noticing the boxes the two were carrying. "Take your time. I always thought this was the loveliest spot in our courtyard. It gets the morning sun and just seems to make our Mary shine with welcome."

Buffy nodded, not saying anything. Beside her, Spike didn't move, just stared at the box in his hands then at the ground below them.

"Yes... well... I'll leave you two alone now. Just shut the gate as you leave."

Again Buffy nodded, the nun already forgotten.

"Spike?"

"Yeah, pet?"

"Will he be... will he be happy here? With Dru, I mean?"

"Yeah, pet. I think he will. I knew he regretted turning her once he got his soul. This way, he can be with her, ya know. Look out for her... I think she would have liked that, knowing her sire was with her at the end."

A few moments later he opened the box, scattering his sire's ashes amongst the flowerbed at the statue's feet. Buffy copied his movements, releasing the dust that was all that remained of Angel to lie mingled with his child.

When they were finished, the two set the containers by the flowerbed and left.

It was time for them to begin a new life, one that involved dealing with the Order of Taraka.

No matter how long it took, the Order was going to pay.

Buffy and Spike demanded it.