So Far Away
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Summary

Angel actually gets on the ship to take the Judge's arm to parts unknown.

Notes

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Could there be a worse birthday? She imagined there were people out there who would say yes. Right, now, though, as she and the others fought to keep Spike and Drusilla from figuring out what happened to the arm. Well, she thought it pretty well sucked. She was looking forward to a birthday with a hot boyfriend.

Now? She was wondering when, or even if, she'd see him again. It wasn't like Spike, or any other baddie out there, would drop a quarter on a pay phone and tell her they'd dusted him.

He would not get caught!

That was the plan anyway.

He'd be back. When she didn't know, but he would and she'd show him how much she'd missed him then. He'd given her a ring. The metal against her finger was a reminder of that. Not that she needed one. She had a bunch of rings, but none would ever mean to her what this one did. She was sure of that.

It was after sunrise when they all finally met up at Giles' place. She'd stayed hunkered down in some sewer tunnels. She didn't know where the others had gone. It hadn't been as crucial they stay out of sight. Spike wouldn't think twice about Buffy and Angel bailing on her birthday party after
everything that happened last night.

So it was imperative that Buffy avoid her usual haunts: The Bronze, Angel's apartment, school, Giles' house, or her house. That didn't leave a lot of places for her to go. There was no twenty-four hour diner or discount shopping center in Sunnydale.

Now, they'd just have to avoid Spike and Drusilla finding out for a few days at least that Angel was not in Sunnydale so he'd have as much of a head start as possible. The good thing? She had no idea where the freighter was headed or where Angel would go after he left it. So, even if she was asked she had no information.

"So, no word?" Willow asked after class?

"No," Buffy said with a shrug. "He didn't say I would either."

"Well, yeah, but he left when things were looking up for you two. I mean, he gave you a ring."

"I know, Will. I have to say I'm glad he gave it to me before he left. It makes it a little more bearable to know he bought it for me."

"So you don't feel guilty waiting for him, you mean?"

"I wouldn't have felt guilty without it, but I do feel better about it. Like he might actually come back."

"Of course he will, Buffy. He loves you. He'll be back."

"If he can."

"He will be able to." They walked into the library where Giles was behind the counter doing librarian things. "Hey Giles."

"How were classes?"

"Good, thanks," Willow said.

"The usual," Buffy replied. She'd never understand Willow's enthusiasm for school, but she couldn't deny it came in handy having a smart best friend.

"Buffy, may I see you for a moment in my office?"

"Sure," she said with a shrug in Willow's direction. It wasn't often anymore that he wouldn't say whatever he had to say in front of Willow and Xander. She set her books on the table and followed Giles into his office. He closed the door behind her.

"Uh oh. What did I do?"

"Do? I have no idea what you mean."

"You just shut the door. You never do that."

"Oh. Yes. That. This has to stay between us, Buffy. Can you promise me that?"

"Giles, you're scaring me. Is there something wrong?"

"I need your word, Buffy. No telling Willow or Xander. And what I'm about to show you will have
to get burned."

"Okay."

He unlocked and opened his desk drawer, pulling out an index card of some sort. He handed it to her and her eyes widened when she realized it was a postcard. She glanced at him and he removed his glasses, ducking his head a little.

He was giving her privacy.

It wasn't wordy. Simply said he was okay and missed her. He hoped to be back soon. No date. No saying where he'd been or where he was headed. There wasn't even a pretty picture on the other side.

"I don't understand," she said after the fifth reading of it. Ridiculous, because there was nothing overly personal aside from missing her.

"Don't understand what?"

"Why do you have this?" She glared at him, a thought occurring to her. "Are you going through our mail?"

"What?" He set his glasses on again. "I can assure you I am doing no such thing. This came here in an envelope addressed to me. I presume he figured it was the safest way to contact you and let you know he's all right."

"Oh," she said, glancing at the postcard again. "I'm sorry."

"It's all right, Buffy. I know you didn't actually think I would do that."

"So I can't keep it?"

"No, I'm sorry. I already burned the envelope. The card will have to be destroyed, too. It's for his protection as well as your own. Spike can't have an inkling you have information."

"But there's no mark on it. You know, the whatcha call it that is on all letters. The post office puts it on there."

"Oh, yes. That was on the envelope. It's called a postmark."

"So you have information?"

"Outdated. Assuming Spike would think Angel would contact you through me. I don't know how he got there or where he's going. But if either of us has physical evidence that contact has been made there's nothing saying they won't start to monitor my mail."

"I know. Okay. I just. She clutched the card to her chest, crumpling it a little. "I wasn't sure I'd hear from him, so it's a huge surprise."

"I suspect when he returns you'll have more surprises."

She smiled a little. "Thank you. Why are you being so nice and understanding about this?"

"Why wouldn't I be?"

"I assumed you'd be happy he was gone, you know? Focus on slaying. Homework. No boy drama
"Of course all of those things are true."

"Plus, well, I know you don't like him."

"I never said that."

"You don't like him with me."

"I didn't at first. He was too old, and then really too old."

She couldn't help but laugh.

"He's proven himself, though, and that postcard proves he's concerned enough about your feelings to let you know he's okay."

"I know."

"So, I'll destroy it. Come by before your patrol, okay?"

"Yeah, sure," she said. She read it one last time before handing it to him. Her hand shook a little and his lips tightened into a forced smile.

"See you then, Buffy. And remember, you must not tell anyone else. You could endanger them."

"Yeah, I get it. Buffy, has to not share with her best friend that her boyfriend sent her a postcard."

"Precisely, and I'm sorry it has to be this way for now."

"I get it." She walked to the door leading to the library. She stopped sort of opening it, though.

"We're done?"

"Yes, until later."

"Right."

"Don't forget, before patrol."

"I won't."

She opened the door then. Willow looked up from her homework. Buffy nodded at Willow's implied question of everything being all right.

"Let's go. I have to come back."

"Okay," Willow said, glancing from Buffy to Giles' office. "Bye Giles."

"Bye Willow."

"So everything okay?"

"Yes, he's just researching something and wants me to come by later."

"Some baddie?"

"No. Some hoop I have to jump through for the Council. It's always something."
"Oh right. Okay. Because if you needed my help."

"You'd know before I did I bet."

"So your house?"

"Sure. Until sunset. I think Mom bought a couple of pizzas, too."

"What's this about pizzas?" Xander asked, joining them.

"We're going to my house. Wanna come?"

"Sure. Can Cordelia come?"

"If she wants to. I'm sure she has better stuff to eat at her house."

"Maybe so, but I realized we haven't really just hung out in a while."

"Well, you've been busy."

"Not that busy," he replied.

"Maybe I just don't like seeing you with Cordelia."

"Come on. If I can get over you making out with your mortal enemy surely you can cut me some slack."

"And Cordelia wasn't yours for years?"

"She's not evil, Buffy."

"I think the verdict is still out on that. But, hey, you're asking the wrong one of us for permission."

"What? It's your house and pizza."

Buffy rolled her eyes. Was he really so clueless? She wondered sometimes.

"Willow? Is it okay?"

"Sure. It's fine."

"Okay then. It's fine."

"Okay," Xander said, still sounding confused.

He didn't get it! It wasn't about whether Willow had Oz before she found out about Xander and Cordelia. It was the fact, well Cordelia aside, that he'd hidden it so completely from her. Buffy felt betrayed, sure, but for Willow it went way deeper than that. Their entire existence was now off kilter. It was going to take her a while to get back to normal.

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"Giles," Buffy called out to the apparently empty library. "He's probably back in the stacks. Found some musty old volume filled with pictures of demons."

The phone in his office started ringing.
"Buffy, would you get that please?"

"Sure," she said, confused at the request. She walked into his office, hoping they wouldn't hang up because she was so slow.

"Hello," she said. Then added, "Rupert Giles' office," realizing it wasn't her house phone.

'Buffy?'

"Hi," she said, heart pounding at the sound of his voice after weeks of just dreams. "How did you?"

'I told Giles I'd start calling his office at the same time every night until he answered.'

"You told him?"

'Yeah, in my letter to him with your postcard. I assumed you got it.'

"I did. It's just he said it was just the postcard."

'Probably in case I couldn't call. I only have a few days then I'm off again on another ship.'

"Where? No, never, mind," she said. He wouldn't give her an answer anyway. She'd pout and their conversation would end badly. "I miss you," she said softly before she could censor her thoughts.

'Miss you, too. I can't talk long, but'

"But what?" she asked after he was quiet for too long.

'I just wanted to hear your voice.'

"I'm glad. Me, too."

'How's school?'

"Fine. The same. Principal Snyder is still riding me."

'Sorry.'

'I'll deal.'

'Good.'

"Are you okay?"

'Yes.'

"Have enough blood?"

'Yes," he said, sounding hesitant. He hated talking about his diet.

"You sure?"

'Yes, it's not the stuff from the butcher, but I survived years on fresh non-human blood.'

'I know," she said, hating that side of him. One hundred years before meeting her. 'I'm sorry.'

'Not your fault.'
"Still."

'Listen, I should go.'

"Okay." What she really wanted to say was that she never wanted to hang up.

'You're, uh, wearing the ring I gave you?'

"Yes," she said.

'Good. I sleep better at night knowing you're wearing it.'

"Me, too."

'I'll see you soon.'

"Okay."

'I'll call Giles' apartment a month from Friday.'

"Okay," she said, glancing at the calendar Giles had in his office.

'Talk to you then.'

"Good night."

'You, too.'

She hung up after the line went dead. Where was he? A month longer. How many more months would go by before she saw him again? How long did it take someone to sail around the world anyway? Of course, he was covering his tracks, making it impossible to follow his path and find the arm. He could be down in LA tonight for all she knew.

"Everything all right in here?" Giles asked softly from the doorway.

"Yep. Thanks for asking and thanks."

"You're welcome. I hope it eased your mind some."

"Some."

"All right. Go patrol. I'll see you in the morning. Try and let it act as a balm instead of hurting you further."

"I just wish Spike and Dru would leave Sunnydale altogether."

"They may once they realize Angel's really gone."

Her eyes shot up to meet his. Until then she'd been getting patrol supplies ready.

"Not for good, but they may think he is if they believe communication between you is severed. Really that was why they stayed, I'm sure. Antagonizing him."

"A Slayer being here certainly helped."

"Of course. Well, anyway. Go slay some vampires."
"Sure."

"And report activity to me tomorrow morning."

"Got it! Check in before class so you know I didn't become Spike's third slayer."

"That's not remotely funny, and not at all what I meant. I, like other watchers before me, keep journals of your activities."

"Yeah, I know. It's okay. I think about it, too."

"You do?"

"Yes, I probably wouldn't be human if I didn't."

"Well, good. Good. Just keep your mind clear so you're not distracted. And again, sometimes part of your calling is keeping secrets."

"I know," she said. Of course, she'd love to tell Willow about the postcard and phone call. She couldn't, though.

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The month went by entirely too slowly for Buffy. There was the love spell Xander tried to have cast on Cordelia. Buffy's encounter with a werewolf hunter. Buffy discovering she rubbed elbows with one every day for weeks now.

Other than Xander and Cordelia being the normal relationship of the three of them as couples went. Well, it was a pretty routine time. Until she started getting sick.

Only thing since becoming the Slayer, she didn't get real sick. She wasn't sure why, never really noticed until she was suddenly so ill.

Chicken soup, rest, and medicine would do the trick. It had to. Just a few days and she'd get to talk to Angel again. She wouldn't miss it for anything.

Patrolling was harder than she could remember it having been since she first started. She was burning up and tonight she was sure she was delusional.

Angel.

Delirious. It was the fever. She was already planning on staying home tomorrow.

"Just let me get through this patrol." She was always on the lookout for one of Spike's disgruntled minions to give her information. He'd been oddly quiet lately. Still in Sunnydale, she knew that much.

She was. Well, she was no longer sure where she was. A cemetery? Her world was spinning too drastically now. So fast. She couldn't keep her eyes focused on anything. Not even the ground to walk herself somewhere safe.

"Oh God," she murmured. She was going to die.

It wasn't going to be a fight to the death to take her down. Instead, just the flu, leaving her weak and so disoriented. Dizzy. To the point she collapsed, ripe for the picking by any vamp, demon, or
lycanthrope around.

He had no business being here yet. He had the arm stashed somewhere temporarily. He wanted to be sure his trail was cold, that Spike hadn't sent an army of vamps to scour the earth for him and the arm. Of course, Dru was probably keeping him busy. Even confined to a wheelchair, Angel knew Spike could be crafty.

He hadn't called or anything, just taken the chance he'd catch a glimpse of her on patrol. He'd do that for a few days, assure himself she was doing well and be on his way again.

The time away had given him nothing but time to think. He had over two hundred years' worth of stuff to think about.

Strangely, it wasn't his acts before his soul was restored that dominated his thoughts. It was Buffy.

He hadn't meant to be so clumsy about giving her the ring the night of her birthday. The idea of possibly never seeing her again left him feeling hopeless. A new feeling for him when it came to people. It'd been over a century since he'd had a real relationship with anyone.

He hadn't forgotten the effect she had on him since he'd been gone, but he was once again feeling sucker-punched by the sight of her. He thought he was over feeling like that. Helpless. Weak.

He'd loved her from afar for too long before finally giving in. Only to be separated again because of Spike.

"Spike," he muttered under his breath. All thoughts of the younger vampire were pushed to the back of his mind when he saw Buffy collapse.

He could smell the illness in her body as he got to her. It didn't take him but a few seconds thanks to his enhanced speed. She was burning up. He carried her to the hospital not knowing what else to do with her. Unconscious. Feverish.

Why was she out patrolling if she was so sick? He knew he'd have to leave her while her friends visited. They couldn't know he was back, even briefly. They'd ask too many questions, and he didn't trust Cordelia to keep her mouth shut if questioned by Spike or Dru.

He lurked, pacing various hallways of the hospital while her visitors came and went. Once visiting hours were finished he returned to her room discreetly.

She had a couple IV lines going. Antibiotics and fluids to keep her hydrated he noticed. He felt her forehead with the back of his hand as he regarded the monitor beeping to indicate her heartbeat and blood pressure.

"Feels nice," she murmured.

He chuckled a little, taken by surprise by a nurse entering the room.

"Excuse me, but visiting hours are over."

"I know I was just making sure she was all right."

"She'll be fine with rest."

"Okay."

"I'm afraid I have to ask you to go now. Sorry."
"It's all right."

He cursed his stupidity and carelessness at allowing a nurse to sneak up on him. He made his way down to the basement. He had no intention of leaving until he knew for sure she would be all right.

He'd found an old apparently unused room earlier. Some blankets and a bed from a storage area completed his sleeping arrangements for the night. It was certainly better than the cement floor.

Even sick to the point of requiring hospitalization he still found her beautiful. Irresistible. Amazing. He'd never seen a slayer up close and personal before her. He'd been in the same area as more than a couple over the years, but avoided them.

Unlike Spike, he did not care to take the chance he would be bested. He loved a good game of cat and mouse, a good fight, but he preferred his human victims easier to beat than a slayer.

He slept fitfully, checking on Buffy a few times but always careful not to stay too long. He kissed her each time, hating that she couldn't respond. He missed her kisses.

More than her kisses, really. He missed the ache she left him with after hours of kissing. He longed to feel her body pressed against his, lithe and aroused. Aroused because of and for him.

Only him.

If he had anything to say about it, it would always only be him.

He vowed when she got better and he was able to come back to Sunnydale for good he would spend hours familiarizing himself with every inch of her, and help her do the same to him. Hours may not be enough time.

Days.

God. Days of being alone with her. In every way he could be. He'd never get enough of her, and would be sure she didn't think she'd get enough of him either.

He didn't stay once she was out of the woods and having visitors. He listened at the door while they talked about her adventure there. She couldn't even get a break from slaying while sick.

He left a rose on her meal tray, hoping she'd know it was from him. They'd missed their call, but seeing her was better. For him anyway.

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She hadn't heard from him in weeks. He'd been to see her at the hospital. How humiliating was that? Seeing her feverish and delusional. Sweaty. She was kind of mad, but it was sweet in a way. She just wished she remembered seeing him.

Giles insisted he hadn't heard from him either. She only hoped he was okay and would be home soon. The one good thing that had happened out of the deal, Spike and Dru had finally left town. Rumor was they got word on some evil do-hickey in South America. Plans to assemble The Judge foiled, they'd set their sights on other forms of mayhem. Away from Sunnydale.

As long as they weren't hunting Angel or trying to recreate his footsteps she really didn't care where they went.
Then it was summer and time for her to go to her dad's. Giles assured her he'd give Angel her number there and tell him it was safe to return. She just hoped she wouldn't be stuck at her dad's for weeks after that happened.

She hated her summers here. Not because she hated spending time with her dad. It was her friends from Hemry that made her hate it.

The guys weren't so bad, the girls were another story. Nice to her face, but behind her back they probably talked a bunch of shit about her.

And then there was Tyler. Last summer she'd exaggerated her relationship with Angel so no one particularly him would think she was pining away for him. Or that she was a loser incapable of getting a boyfriend in a town as small as Sunnydale. This year, she didn't have to embellish on anything, but he wasn't around to call, write, or even visit. Sunnydale wasn't that far from LA after all so a visit wasn't unreasonable if they'd been together for over a year now. He was older and busy got to be redundant. How busy could he be if he found time to date her? Never mind a date took less time than two hours of driving one way.

No pictures of them together? Or even just him? Another thing to explain. Always forgetting to bring one made her seem like an idiot.

She was at one of the all-ages clubs everyone liked to go to. After so much time at The Bronze she'd forgotten what a real club was like. There was so much talent or want to be talent in LA that finding bands was never an issue.

"Buffy," her friend Nicki said. "I think someone's got his eye on you."

Buffy grimaced. The idea of getting hit on here just held no appeal. It didn't help that Tyler was kind of flirting with her. It'd been so long since a normal, clueless guy had shown interest in her. Owen, she imagined was the last. That had ended badly. Still friends, sure, but he'd come too close to seeing things he shouldn't have.

"You can dance with him, Nicki. I'm really not interested tonight."

Hands at her shoulders made her pause. Big, strong hands that were touching her far more familiarly than she should allow.

Too big to be Tyler's. Besides, he didn't ever touch her like this. He also had never made her body hyperaware as it was now.

It couldn't be?

Yet no one, absolutely no one, made her feel like he did.

"Angel," she said, turning on her stool to face him.

He didn't answer her, but instead slid his hands from her shoulders to her waist.

Possessive.

If she didn't know better she'd say he was staking his claim. She should hate that, but knowing that all of her friends probably doubted his very existence she didn't mind so much.

"Hi," he finally said. "It's nice to see you out of a hospital bed this time."
"It's nice to see you period."

"It's not my fault you were sick."

"I know," she said with a pout.

He kissed her then. It started out slow, simple. It didn't stay that way for long, though. More quickly than she imagined lips parted, tongues met, her legs spread just enough for him to settle closer against her. His hands skimmed lower from her waist, to her ass, tugging her even closer to him.

She loved this. Her heart was pounding. Her blood pumping.

"Can you feel that?" she whispered, needing to take a breath.

"Yes," he whispered in her ear. "I love that I do that to you."

"Me, too."

"I could do more."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yes," he practically hissed.

"Let's get out of here then."

"You sure?" he asked.

"Yes, I'd rather see you."

"I don't want your friends to hate me."

"My real friends don't."

"Okay," he said, offering her his hand.

"Night guys," she said as she took his hand and slid from the stool. She hadn't introduced him, but guessed she didn't need to.

"Missed you," he said when they were in a cab.

"You, too."

They didn't talk for a long time after that, mouths busy kissing.

In his room, he quickly made riddance of her top and bra. They'd never gotten quite this far, her bra off. She bit her lower lip, stopping herself from crying out too loud as he touched her.

Bare hand to bare breast for the first time. It felt so good. He knew just how to touch her to make her body tingle from head to toe, too.

A hand slid to her waist, lower to the hem of her skirt.

"Too fast," she whispered. She wanted to so badly, but not tonight when she had a curfew.

"Sorry," he murmured.
"S'okay." His mouth closed over a peak and this time she couldn't stifle the groan.

His shirt joined hers on the floor and she touched and kissed him back eagerly. Months of not seeing him left her practically starving for him.

She knew it would be much better with all of their clothes off. She was ready, that wasn't the issue. Another night. For now, he brought her over the edge while holding off on his own release.

"Buffy," he whispered.

"Huh?"

"I've got to get you back to your dad's."

"I know," she whispered.

"You're going to be late."

"Okay."

He slid his hand along her stomach, an arm, and chest. He wasn't going for seduction this time, just touching. It still affected her, though.

"Feels good."

"Next time."

"Next time?"

"I'm not sure about stopping."

"I don't want you to! Just not here, in a cheap motel when I have to be at my dad's later."

"I get it."

"I really do want to."

"Me, too."

She laughed a little at that.

"If I said I didn't know yet?"

He shrugged. "Then we'd wait. I'm not going to force you, Buffy."

"I know it's just you said you weren't sure about stopping." She found her bra and top, putting them on. He watched while she did and she felt a little weird but not enough to cover up or go into the bathroom instead.

"I meant from being able to touch and taste all of you. I won't force you. I just thought you were ready."

She sat on his lap, straddling him. Her arms went around him.

"I am. You're not wrong. At all. If we were in Sunnydale I may have let you take my skirt off. It's just I haven't seen you in months. I can't jump right back to where we were."
"I understand. I'm not trying to push."

"Thank you."

"You're welcome, but if you keep doing that thing with your hips I won't need your skirt off."

"Oh," she said. "God, I'm so sorry, Angel."

"Don't be sorry for turning me on. Ever. I enjoy it. It's new for me, too, believe it or not."

"I love you," she whispered.

"Love you, too."

"Meet me again tomorrow night?"

"Sure."

"Count on sticking around for a while. I want to dance with you."

He lifted her off his lap, settling her on her feet before he stood.

"We could dance right here."

"Not the same."

"Okay, okay. This once. Only because I missed you."

"You're the best."

"Now let's get you to your dad's so you don't get in trouble and can't go out."

He'd planned on seeing her, letting her know he was back, and heading out again. This time back to Sunnydale to ensure Spike and Dru were truly, in fact, gone for the reason of being time to move on. Angel had been extremely careful in covering his tracks, but he had to be certain. No doubt both vampires left more than just a few disgruntled minions behind who would be willing to talk.

He should have known better than to assume anything would go as planned.

The knock on his room's door surprised him. He had set the DO NOT DISTURB sign out after coming back from dropping Buffy at her dad's. It was possible it had been knocked off, though.

Buffy standing there when he opened it was an even bigger surprise. He'd sort of assumed she wouldn't want to be alone with him again for a while. If ever. They'd gone further than ever before and he knew it was all new to her.

"Buffy," he said hoarsely. "Is everything all right?"

He eyed her a little wearily. She looked all right, better than that really. She wore a dress he'd never seen before and it looked new, so he guessed her dad bought it recently.

"Um, hi."

He smiled a little at her apparent shyness.

"Do you want to come in?"
"Sure."

"Everything all right?"

"Yes, fine. I just," she shrugged as he shut the door, locking it after she came in.

She walked to the curtains, pushing them aside a little.

"Buff?"

"I was thinking about last night."

"Oh," he said, walking toward her. He set a hand on either shoulder. He drew her against him, breathing in her scent. "If I scared you."

"No, that's not it at all."

"Okay," he said cautiously. What then? It was her summer vacation and she was here before nine o'clock in the morning. That couldn't be good.

She turned in his arms, stepping away a little. Just enough, he had to set his arms at his sides or look like an idiot.

"Close your eyes."

"Okay," he said softly, doing as instructed. He heard her heart start to race. What was that about? After a minute or two she walked past him.

She was leaving? That thought scared him more than he cared to admit.

"Buffy?"

No response, but she was still there. He could sense her.

"You can look now."

Look? He thought as he turned around.

Stare was more like it.

He'd pictured her naked in his bed many times, most frustratingly during his time away.

He was happy to know that in this, his imagination and years of experience failed to do the real thing justice.

Buffy.

Naked.

In.

His.

Bed.

Waiting.
Waiting for him.

He must have been staring too long without acting because she started to grab for the blanket.

"No, don't," he said quickly.

Her hand stilled, but remained on the blanket.

"Please tell me you don't have to be anywhere for a while."

"If a while means by curfew."

"All day?"

She smiled a little at that.

"And all night."

He worked the buttons on his shirt, letting it fall open. He joined her then, hand skimming along her silky smooth leg to her hip as he leaned in to kiss her.

All day, he reminded himself when he felt the need to rush come over him. They didn't get all day together in Sunnydale.

He was as slow as he could be.

Thorough.

He didn't know if she'd change her mind, or stop him at some point. He wanted to enjoy every minute of this time with her.

God, he loved her, every lithe inch of her. She touched him, too, but he didn't encourage or guide her to do more than she was comfortable with.

He'd died and gone to heaven. That was all there was to it. He could come up with no other explanation for why he had been given the chance to be with her completely.

She'd been a little shy, uncertain, at first, but had overcome that after a while.

All day gave him plenty of time to ensure she was sated and happy, content and pleased. He didn't want regrets, especially since they'd be separated once more until she returned to her mom's for the school year.

"Hmm," she asked sleepily.

"Why now?"

"You complaining?"

He chuckled. She liked the feel of his chest under her hand when he did that.

"No."

She shrugged, trying to put it into words.

"I wanted to, and I realized I didn't want our first time my first time to be after a hunt, or in between chasing the bad guys. I didn't want to be rushed, pressured to leave right away."
"Makes sense."
"I thought so."

He gathered her onto his chest.

"I found something out while I was away."

"Oh?" she asked, kind of puzzled at the subject change.

"I returned to the area I was first cursed. Not exactly, generally."

"Okay." She didn't like thinking about him soulless. Evil. Angelus.

"Did you know that your Watcher's girlfriend is one of them?"

"What? No. Why would I?"

"I don't know. I stopped to see her when I was in Sunnydale to see you."

"When I was sick and unconscious, you mean."

"It still counts."

"I suppose," she said with a pout. She shivered a little as he slid his hand along her back and ass gently.

"She said something that made me find out more about the curse."

"Okay."

"The point of the curse was for me to suffer eternally with my sins."

"Right."

"They weren't counting on my meeting you."

"Okay."

"I'm not supposed to be happy, Buffy. To forget. Not just about their clan member, but the others before her."

"Right," she said, eyes closing. She hated this topic. She'd much rather know nothing about his life pre-Sunnydale.

"Turns out, being with you may have caused the curse to fail."

"What?" She was alert now. Curse meant soul. No curse meant no soul. Evil vampire.

"It's okay. I took care of it."

"And you expect me to believe that? Angel, this is your soul we're playing with."

"I didn't have to tell you at all, Buffy. I'm trying to be honest. I visited someone, a shaman, who knows the clan and most importantly their history, the ways and spells that have died. He helped me ensure it was bound. Secure."
"Okay."

"I knew last night that it worked."

"Last night? How?"

"At the club you were at."

"Oh yeah, how?"

"Yeah. I couldn't remember being happier than in the moment I spotted you."

"Really?"

"Really. I knew I was back for good, that I wouldn't have to leave you again. You were wearing my ring."

"Of course I was. I haven't taken it off."

"I'm glad, but I didn't notice when I saw you at the hospital and I didn't get to see it on you for more than a minute or two the night of your birthday when I gave it to you."

"And that made you happy?"

He positioned them so he could enter her from beneath her. She gasped a little, but he hadn't surprised her completely so she was prepared anyway.

"I guess so."

"Knowing you're wearing it, not afraid to let the world know you're mine. Belong with and to me."

"Of course I'm not."

"That you accept me, past and present so completely."

"Oh God," she whispered. "You know I do. I hate hearing about your past, but I accept it. And you."

"That is how I knew."

"Why didn't she say anything?" Buffy asked later.

"I'm not sure she really knew, just that she was to keep an eye on things. Us. Me."

"I'm glad you looked into it."

"Me, too."

He slid his hand into hers, lacing their fingers together so he could bring her hand to his mouth for a kiss. She let out a soft mumble, almost a hum really, as he darted his tongue along the band.

"Mine," he whispered.

Her heart took flight at that simple word. Claiming her.

"Always," she replied.
She'd have it no other way. She wasn't sure there was another way to be. She didn't want to think about it either.

"Love me," she whispered.

"Gladly," he murmured, shifting them so he was on top this time.

The sun was going down now. It was their time. Both creatures of the night, neither needing to be alone during that time anymore.

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