A Slayer's Work Is Never Done
by Gryphonrhi

Summary

Buffy didn't think the ghost was going to be much help with the snow demons, but it would be nice to be wrong.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.

"So I dove into that river, boots and all, with the ice chunks still going downstream and Buck holding onto the rope because he always was bigger than I was-- Am I boring you?"

Buffy never looked up from the axe she was honing, her hands remarkably steady considering how cold she was. Her leather armor was intact, but it was covered with a borrowed, outsized, partially holed sweater and too-large wool pants that she'd finally rolled up and tied to her boots. She really wasn't sure when they'd find her, and tripping over her own (borrowed) pants would just be bad. "Nope. River, boots, is Buck still alive?"

"Of course he is," the ghost said indignantly, hands on his leather and fur-covered hips. He looked a lot warmer than she felt, lucky guy. Well, as lucky as 'already dead' got. "Or he'd be right here arguing with my version of the story. This is his cabin."

"Is he going to mind you leading me here? But nope, not bored. I don't suppose Buck's still in the RCMP?" Buffy asked, dropping a hair over the axe blade. It drifted down in two pieces and she put the axe next to the closed, shuttered, not-draft-sealed enough-to-suit-her window and went to work on the next weapon. She'd lost a few in the snow two valleys over. (She'd had to leave one in the body, actually. It shouldn't be a problem, though; she'd had gloves on.)

"Of course Buck won't mind. That's why he leaves the door unlocked and fuel and dried goods in the pantry. If the Jasper park rangers have to swing wide, they stay here. Buck's still a Mountie, all
right, but he's three hundred miles north and west of here; he'd never make it in time. My son might, but there's no sense getting overconfident of backup."

Buffy looked up to glare at him. "You yelled for your son? Are you trying to get him killed?"

"Of course not. Ben'll be coming by dog sled, which means he's got the dogs, the wolf, and his two Yanks who were up vacationing. Vecchio'll have brought in a dozen weapons Ben won't say a word about now and Kowalski's turned out to be a fine hand up here."

Buffy bit back several words she wasn't about to say, not with snow demons out there somewhere. Finally she said, "Can you tell them to stay clear? These are snow demons. Your son's probably a great Mountie--"

"Benton is... an exceptional officer. And he knows all the old stories, missy. If you'll tell me which kind of snow demons--"

Buffy kept digging through the cupboard masquerading as an odds and ends repository. She pulled out something solid wood and with a nice sturdy handle. "What is this?"

"Cricket bat. Just like a Yank not to know that..."

"Just so we're clear? I'm not a Yank." She hammered a nail through the center, sighed in relief when the wood didn't split, and put another nail through on a different line of the grain. "I'm a California girl, and I'm a Slayer. I'm not from New England, or I wouldn't feel like I'm freezing to death."

"Oh, it's only -5 or so--"

"In my degrees or your degrees? And how do you even know that as a ghost?"

"Fahrenheit and Celsius are about the same at this point," the ghost said mildly. "This is a nice mild night. You won't freeze to death, not with me here to remind you about building up the fire and drinking tea now and then." He ignored the 'ghost' thing, or maybe saved it for more story grist later.

"Tea leads to more trips to the outhouse in the freezing, snow-filled, demon-y cold." Buffy shook her head. "Yes, I know, you're going to tell me I'm lucky this place has windows that close and a door that hadn't rusted off the hinges." He'd have a point, too. She'd heard some of Oz's stories about his wanderings... "Okay. Fine. The demons. I haven't seen this kind before but there were three of them. Now two. One's half again my height, the other was twice my size--"

"Three meters and some?" For a ghost, he was starting to look worried.

Buffy put the studded bat by the front door, nails up. "Warn me if your son gets close, okay? Or he'd better be up on his tetanus booster. When I say they were skin and bones, I mean exactly that. Worse than current fashion models. Fast, green glowy eyes, long sharp claws or maybe sharpened finger bones, and they stank like corpses ten days buried and headed towards the gooey end of decomp."

The ghost was pacing in front of the fire, his clothes shifting from the furs he'd been in (including a silly-looking, warm-looking hat Buffy kind of wished she could steal) to a sensible brown uniform with hiking boots, Smokey the Bear hat, and a pistol, a knife the length of his arm, and a rifle. He looked reassuringly familiar with all of the weapons.

He turned abruptly, kindly (batty) old man routine turned to sharp-eyed, sharp-edged professional.
Buffy actually started to be a little reassured about his son coming with reinforcements. "Did they try to bite you?"

Buffy blinked. Or not so reassured. "They didn't go for my neck--"

"Not vampires," he said impatiently. "You said snow demons. Did they try to claw you and then lick the claws?" he asked bluntly. "It's important. Maybe more important, did they succeed?"

"Yes, they tried; no, I'm not cut." She shrugged a little, tamping down the annoyance for the moment. "My sweater's dead, and my good down coat isn't so downy anymore. The leather under them, though, it's fine."

He nodded once, face relaxing a little. "That's all right, then. We'll have to check later to be sure; they're contagious. Here's what we're going to do--"

"We?" Buffy asked dryly. "You're looking a little bodiless."

"That's to the good for this. I'm going to find Ben--" Snow shoes appeared on his feet. "He'll be driving hard, but that doesn't help you, I'm afraid; he's going to have to swing out for a shaman. You stay here. If they try to bring the cabin down around your ears, go under that bench, there's a trap door down into the foundations. It's properly insulated down there, you won't completely freeze, and with luck you'll have air. We'll dig you out as fast as we can after they're dead. But you've got three of them to deal with--"

"Killed one," Buffy pointed out.

"It's a wendigo. They don't like to stay dead."

Buffy nodded. "Yup. That's why I left the stake in its heart, took off the head, and took off the hands while I was at it." She wrinkled her nose. "I think the other two stopped to eat it. Which, I'm just saying? Eewww. I didn't have a chance to burn it, though..."

In full professional mode, he made a sound that reminded her of Giles, sort of a 'tsk' with a faint edge of nausea. Buffy gave him a puzzled look. "What? I'm a Slayer. This is what we do. Or does everyone just talk to you and not worry about the whole 'not entirely here' thing?"

Sergeant Fraser shook his head. "Dear God. Yanks and... well, not overkill in this case. Good work. Be careful, stay awake and stay alert. I'll be back as soon as I can. You're not dying on my watch."

Buffy was pretty sure he vanished while saying something about, "I'd never manage to explain you to Caroline."

End Notes

Thanks to Raine for the quick beta! Any mistakes are of course mine, and I'll correct them if you let me know about them.

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