I Wish

by BiJane

Summary

Intent on fighting demons, and improving the world, Willow turned her attention to vengeance demons, only to find that the world she lives in is an alternate reality: and as she finds out about the previous world, she unearths a story she didn't expect. The story of a shy witch named Tara Maclay, and a vengeance demon named Willow Rosenberg.

Notes

This is probably the longest story I've done for this site. It's more or less finished, I'm just slowly going through and making edits. I wrote it bit-by-bit, over a long period of time, so there's plenty to check. Plus, I got a new laptop near the end, so the final third's probably riddled with typo's while I got used to the new keyboard. This is a story very much focused on the darker side to Willow's character, especially as it goes on. One chapter, in particular, is dark, though that's not for a while. I'll put a warning up at the start of it.

That's the general notes done. This chapter's a shorter opening. Don't expect it to be revisited for quite a while, but as a framing device, it's needed. Enjoy!
Prologue

There was still work to be done. First Evil dismissed, Wolfram and Hart’s power base shattered, several vampire armies knocked down… And still evil reared its ugly head in countless place.

Willow dealt with what she could; and, in turn, dealt with personal projects. Magical stuff, mostly: things she could better deal with. She’d stopped a couple of incursions from other dimensions, as well as delivered stern warnings to a handful of dark sorcerers.

She’d managed to get a name for herself among demon communities. Maybe not as feared as the Slayer yet, but give her time. Witchcraft had its uses.

There were several things Willow had on her to-do list, a whole host of things she wanted to deal with. Eventually she came to one she’d regarded with some trepidation. Alone, she set up the ritual on the tiled floor of the bathroom: sketched a rune, lit the candles, recited the chant.

A puff of distinctly sulphuric smoke, and a demon popped up. He spoke in a deep, rather theatric rumble.

“Behold! It is I, D’Hoffryn, Lord of Arashmaharr, he who-” a pause. D’Hoffryn lowered his arms: than, rather more normally, “Oh. Hello, lovely to see you again Miss Rosenberg. How can I help?”

“D’Hoffryn,” Willow said; quickly steeled herself.

D’Hoffryn always did a good job at hiding just how dangerous he was. Willow couldn’t afford to forget that; she still remembered how he’d hunted Anya. Regardless, she was dangerous too.

“I want you to set down some ground rules,” Willow said, hoping her attempt at authority didn’t sound fake. “For your vengeance demons: cans and can’ts.”

“Now, now,” D’Hoffryn said, “I’ve no control over the activities of my girls, they don’t ask permission. They just-”

“They listen to you,” Willow said: and called upon a little magic to make her voice drop. It was a tone she occasionally used when calling upon more intense magicks. Such power had a strange effect on her vocal cords.

It was a cheap attempt at intimidation, but a successful one. D’Hoffryn knew of her dark side. A couple of years ago he’d teleport in to present her with a medal for Warren’s flaying, which had apparently been voted on by some demonic committee as good quality.

She’d refused, of course, but the knowledge served her. D’Hoffryn jumped, just slightly, at her deepened words.

“Oh, ok then,” he said, “I’ll do my best. Any, uh, particular suggestions?”

And suddenly he was all ears. Quickly, trying to still appear suitably dramatic, Willow turned to fetch a roll of paper she’d left on the cistern.

She’d thought this through: there were several pages worth of thoughts on what changes and guidelines should be set down. Colour-coded, too. Green highlighted were the unquestionable statements, yellow were the ones she was willing to concede some ground on, blue were actions to be taken rather than rule changes…
“Here you go,” she said, handing the sheet. A slightly goofy smile; “Get back to me, k?”

“No need,” D’Hoffryn said, “I’m rather fond of contracts. You get used to them, as a demon,” he gave a remarkably casual shrug, before lifting the paper.

He flicked through it at astonishing speed. Still, Willow caught his eyes flicking to her occasionally. He was scared of her. It was useful, she had to admit, but never a comfortable feeling.

“It seems acceptable,” he said. “I can do most of this. I’ll get back to you in a week, tell you how it’s gone,” he paused, “Ah, quick question. What’s your stance on alternate universes?”

“Some good stories,” Willow said, “I like coffee shops- wait, what universes?”

“When sufficiently major wishes are made,” D’Hoffryn said, “The fabric of reality alters to compensate. Several such wishes are still in effect. Many were destroyed, such as one featuring a rather fetching vampire. I assume you don’t want me to do away with all those?”

He was right. There was no way to tell what would happen if those realities were ended: perhaps this conversation might never have happened. Perhaps those worlds were worse.

It was hard to say. Surely some people, sometime, had made good wishes?

“How many are active?”

“Three or four,” D’Hoffryn said: shrugged. He extended a hand, and a scroll appeared in a puff of smoke. “I’ve got the list here. Now, see… Laryania, 46 BC, Before Cerberus, granted the wish that some Julius would never have met her. Morestun, 1024 AC, client was impaled by a unicorn and wished they never existed. Dreadful, really. And lastly…”

There, D’Hoffryn paused.

“Interesting,” he said, slowly.

“What?” Willow said.

“The next wish,” he said. “It’s signed off by a vengeance demon of some success. From what I can gather, it caused quite a major change to the way things are.”

“What is it?” Willow said.

D’Hoffryn, wordlessly, turned the scroll around. Despite the antiquated medium, the style was an official-looking, easy to read grid.

The column entitled ‘vengeance demon responsible’ was filled with just a name. Two ancient-looking full names for Laryania and Morestun, and at the bottom, Willow Rosenberg.

She was a vengeance demon. Well, not her, but alternate-reality her. Willow paused; looked up. Started breathing.

“Where can I find the full story?” she said.

She needed to know. She needed to know the story of all the changes, actually; make sure none of them were actively causing harm. But this one… this one especially.

“Touch the scroll,” he said, “We demons are really quite advanced, you know. Where do you think humans got the idea for the internet from?” he shrugged: “You can keep it. I’ve got plenty.
Bureaucracy is something hell dimensions have plenty of.”

Willow nodded. Still a little stunned, she took the scroll from D’Hoffryn’s hand. Her finger brushed her name; immediately the text changed.

“You can go,” Willow said, far less imposingly. “Remember what I said.”

“Of course,” D’Hoffryn said. “It’s been a pleasure, Miss Rosenberg.”

He bowed his head, and vanished in yet more smoke. Just outside the door, Willow heard the fire alarm start wailing: idly, she hexed it off. She could deal with that later.

Not just yet. Willow returned to her room: hung a ‘do not disturb’ sign on the door, and sat herself up in her bed. It was a while before she’d be needed for anything. She’d set a lot of time aside, in case D’Hoffryn would want to negotiate.

That was good. It meant she could take her time: not miss anything.

And, slowly, Willow began to read.
W:

Willow had made a mistake: one mistake. Trying to get over Oz, she’d cast a spell and, accidentally, made it so what she said came true: even idle, non-literal turns of phrase.

With Giles losing his sight, with Spike and Buffy making out at any opportunity (some things hadn’t changed, a Willow from another world reflected), demons coming after Xander every second of the day, and Willow the cause, she’d been called. Well, abducted.

“The pain and suffering you’ve brought upon those you love has been inspired,” D’Hoffryn said.
“You are ready to join us here, in Arashmaharr.”

They were surrounded by darkness. Cloaked demons stood behind Willow, and darkness veiled the landscape. It was all rather melodramatic; it was too intense for Willow to notice, though. She couldn’t see an escape.

And, when all was explained, Willow spoke, voice shaking.

“I don’t want to be a demon,” she said, “I just want to go back and help my friends.”

“That is your answer?”

“I-it is,” Willow nodded, stumbling over her words.

And perhaps things should have happened differently: but here, they did not. D’Hoffryn regarded her. It would be a shame to let such potential go to waste.

“And if you could help your friends from here?” he spoke. “A wave of my hand, I could undo the troubles they face.”

“You could?”

“For a price,” D’Hoffryn said.

And it was obvious what the price would be. Willow stepped back: glanced at the hooded figures behind her, blocking her escape. They were still unmoving.

“I don’t know if…”

“It could be beneficial,” D’Hoffryn said. “Think of it as a power boost. Your witchcraft is hardly bad now, is it?”

“I use it to help,” Willow said, “I- Usually. I didn’t mean to hurt them.”
“The Patron Goddess of vengeance demons is Nemesis,” D’Hoffryn said, “Goddess of revenge. Before that, do you know how she was known?”

“How?”

“Goddess of Justice,” D’Hoffryn said. “Retribution is just a way of righting the balance. You kill demons all the time, is that wrong?”

Willow hesitated. She was sure there was a response to that, but this wasn’t the best setting for any kind of considered thought.

“I’ll cut you a special deal,” D’Hoffryn said, suddenly seeming far less intimidating. “You say yes, any harm done to your friends will be undone, and I’ll give you a special contract. You’ll have no quota, no reason to use the power of the Wish. It will all be down to you. You could act the same as normal. All I ask, is that you consider it.”

A pause. Willow couldn’t say what went through her mind; whether she was tempted, whether she just wanted to help Buffy, whether she just wanted to get out of there. Regardless, she answered, rushed.

“Yes,” Willow said. Her voice barely faltered.

The demon smiled: light flashed, and Willow found herself standing in the crypt, along with Buffy, Spike, Anya and Xander. She saw them with new eyes; well, not saw so much as sensed. A flare of anger from Buffy, quickly fading. A moment of soreness from Xander, which vanished as he truly saw her.

And for Spike, he wore it clearly: regret, resentfulness. The chip in his head made him seek revenge: it was that Willow felt.

So, it was that simple? Willow hoped she’d come to be able to ignore it: or, ideally, heal it. There had to be answers somewhere. Still, she didn’t worry. She was hardly going to grant Spike’s clearly broadcasted wish.

It was just a matter of waiting until she could work out a way to rid herself of this demon aspect. Unfortunately, D’Hoffryn had neglected to give her an amulet, or anything which held her power; which certainly made it more difficult.

Willow found herself lying. She couldn’t say exactly why: but when she recounted the story to Buffy, she said only she’d managed to escape. No need to share the fact she was a demon.

Willow couldn’t say where that spark of dishonesty had come from. Maybe being a demon had affected her more than she’d thought, maybe she was nervous around the person whose destined role was to slay demons, maybe she just didn’t want to worry anyone…

No matter, it wouldn’t be a problem.

As it turned out, vengeance demons didn’t need to sleep. After a particularly dull night spent tossing and turning, and the next day spent fresh as ever, Willow came to that realization quickly.

So Willow stayed up the next night. And the next. Though she roomed with Buffy, Buffy’s Slaying schedule ensured there was little criticism of not sleeping enough. Initially she’d been
nervous, waiting until Buffy was back and asleep before sneaking out, but soon she realized there was no need to be.

Willow spent whole nights wandering the campus. It was unsafe, technically speaking, but even as a witch she hadn’t really had to worry. As a demon, now, she just had to flit from human features, to the veiny, less-than-human features to frighten off would-be assailants.

Or, as the case could be, receive a “Sorry, mistaken identity,” from a vampire.

UC Sunnydale had its own night life, like most such establishments, even if a lot of it wasn’t really Willow’s ideal. Still, she could grow used to it. Her class average had already gone up from its already high status, and she didn’t need to spend all night locked in the library.

The other advantage of a demonic constitution was an impressively increased resistance to alcohol. Another aid in surviving the Sunnydale night life.

As much as Willow enjoyed the friends she made, however, there was another problem. The kinds of people who hung around at night tended to have their own troubles; problems that didn’t let them sleep, that haunted their minds.

It was that resentment that Willow could sense. Too close to vengeance.

After several nights spent trying to ignore it, Willow made a decision. She didn’t have to act as though she couldn’t sense that pain: didn’t have to pretend that she didn’t care. There were other ways to help.

She approached a woman by the side of the bar. Willow recognized her: someone who’d been in a few of her lectures. Probably best to start with people she knew. Willow couldn’t recall her name, offhand: they hadn’t really spoken.

“Hiya,” Willow said. “Looks like you’ve had a fun day,” she hoped her wryness was audible.


“Willow,” a smile: “Want to talk about it.”

“Not particularly,” she sipped from her glass. A moment of silence; she regarded Willow. “Wait a second, you’re that girl’s friend, aren’t you?”

“That girl?”

“Yeah,” Erika said: gestured somewhat tipsily with one hand. “Blonde, weird name.”

“Buffy?” Willow said.

She couldn’t have run into a demon on her first attempt, surely? Even her luck wasn’t that bad. Why was everyone so fixated on Buffy?

“Yeah, that’s her,” Erika said. Another sip.

“You know her?” Willow said.

“ Barely,” a shrug, “She stole my sandwich. You were there.”

Willow hesitated for a moment, mystified: then nearly laughed. The cave-Buffy incident, right. That would be why she recognized Erika. She did have to wonder how the strangeness of
Sunnydale seemed to everyone who wasn’t in on the secrets.

“Oh yeah,” Willow said: laughed. “Right. She’d had a bad day, you know how it goes.”

“Mine tend not to end in petty theft,” Erika said, but smiled nonetheless.

“I promise I’m not after your food,” Willow said.

“I’ll believe you,” another sip. “What are you after, then?”

“Conversation,” Willow said. “You looked like you’d had a bad day, that was all.”

And felt like it, too. Erika’s feelings of resentment weren’t the strongest in the room, but they were undeniably there. There was some anger, some bitterness, some frustration, some fear; a cocktail which ended up as a desire for revenge.

It was strange to sense such things so easily. It came to her, almost more easily than regular seeing did.

“It’s nothing anyone wants to hear about,” Erika said.

“I do,” Willow said: smiled as Erika glanced across to her. “If you want, I mean. If you think sharing it’ll help…”

So, Erika spoke. Financial difficulties, hassle from the accommodation staff: a story most people in UC Sunnydale could identify with, somewhat.

Even just venting, letting it all out, helped. Willow couldn’t do a great deal, but she could feel the relief, however minor, that outlining the problem offered. If nothing else, it was stress relief.

“I just wish it would all go away,” Erika said eventually, sighing, and finishing with a gulp to finish off her glass.

_I wish_. Willow closed her eyes: felt the compulsion to grant it, and let it pass. It was hardly vengeance, but who knew. A lightning bolt might strike down one of the staff members at the accommodation office.

No. Willow had promised herself, no wish granting.

That was how it was, for a few nights. Pick out the people whose desire for vengeance was greatest, that she felt able to talk to, and do so. Convince them to let it out: offer what aid she could. Lessen the desire for vengeance, without cursing anyone.

She even managed to garner a bit of a reputation. On some nights, people went to her, recognizing her either from speaking with her before, or hearing that she always lent an ear.

Occasionally the magic words, _I wish_, were uttered, but Willow was able to ignore them. She always felt the same compulsion, the automatic need to grant, but she dismissed it easily.

“Hey, new girl,” a voice, almost as soon as Willow walked into the bar.

“Um, hey?” Willow said, frowning, looking for who’d spoken.

It was a woman, but there was no indication that she felt any resentment. No need for her to approach Willow, then. She gestured for Willow to come with her; with plenty of time to kill, Willow followed, to a table by the side of the bar.
“Willow, right?” she said. “Call me Hallie.”

“Hi?” Willow said.

“Finally tracked you down,” Hallie said, to herself as much as anyone. “ Wouldn’t have thought to find you here.”

“You were looking for me?” Willow said.

“Unofficially,” Hallie said. “You’re a friend of a friend. Once I heard you’d joined us, I felt you deserved a few tips.”

“Us?” Willow said, “What do you- I’m not- um, I don’t know how to defend myself, sorry, I don’t know what you’re saying.”

“Please,” Hallie gave a quiet laugh.

Instead of replying, her face flickered. For a moment, skin was replaced by veins, and a design more akin to muscle tissue than a human face. Demon.

“Vengeance demon,” Willow said, quickly. She turned her head from side to side, afraid someone had seen.

“Don’t be scared,” Hallie said, “Dreadfully unobservant town, this. And it’s justice demon, FYI, much nicer name.”

“But why are you…”

It was hard not to be a little intimidated. The only such demon Willow had much experience with was Anya, and she’d been powerless for a while. Willow still didn’t really think of herself as one of them.

“Why am I here?” Hallie said, kindly, but in the same way one was kind to a child. “It’s like I said: a few tips.”

“I don’t need them,” Willow shook her head. “I’m not doing anything. I’m not going to hurt anyone.”

“Ah, yes, that,” Hallie said: she paused, regarded Willow rather patronizingly.

“D’Hoffryn says I don’t have to,” Willow said. “I- he’s expecting me to become so tempted I’ll have to hurt someone. It won’t happen.”

“My dear,” Hallie said, “You believe him?”

“I-”

Willow fell silent. Hallie smiled, in what was almost triumph.

“He’s a demon, dear,” she said. “Not just any demon, he oversees a group dedicated to getting people to say what they want them to. If he wants you to start granting wishes, believe me, you will start granting wishes.”

That wasn’t an encouraging thought. Willow hesitated, momentarily considering what that might mean. D’Hoffryn had never explicitly promised he wouldn’t intervene, directly or otherwise. Still, he couldn’t convince her to hurt anyone. That, she promised herself.
No matter what happened, she’d find a way. If she did have to hurt, she’d target only those that
seriously deserved it. Punishment to fit the crime. Nothing extreme, nothing absurd; no new
realities like Anya’s.

“That’s my tip,” Hallie said. “Start listening out. It’s better you grant wishes of your own accord,
rather than needing to be convinced.”

“I- I’ll remember,” Willow said.

“Be sure to,” Hallie said.

She looked out over the bar, then: Willow could guess where her eyes were going. There was a
woman sitting at the bar, alone, emanating enough pain Willow had sensed her from her dorm. Her
eyes were red: visibly sore.

“There’s your first,” Hallie said. “Good luck.”

“Wait, now?” Willow said.

“Of course now,” Hallie said, “She needs help, can’t you feel it? I thought you’d have been happy
to.”

Willow hesitated: then, unable to think of an excuse, nodded. Vengeance demons had some control
over how they interpreted the wish: she should be able to minimize any harm.

Fine. Slowly, Willow stood, suddenly as self-conscious as old, human-Willow had been. It was
hard not to feel a little worry. For as long as she’d come out here, maybe a week, this was the first
time she’d genuinely felt like she had to grant a wish.

Had to? Yes, by the sound of it. Still, granting a wish didn’t make her the same as most vengeance
demons. She could make sure no one got hurt.

She could. She promised herself that.

“Hi,” Willow said, unable to shake the impression she just looked awkward. “You look troubled.
I’m Willow.”

The woman looked sideways, a little taken aback. For a moment, Willow considered leaving; the
woman didn’t seem too used to talking with people. Still, she gave a shy smile.

“H- um, hi,” she said. “I’m Tara.”
First Wish

Willow sat beside the blonde, ready to listen. And hopefully get an ‘I wish’, one that she could interpret kindly. Looking at Tara, she didn’t seem like the kind of person who’d have any especially violent desires.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Willow said.

“About what?” Tara said.

“Whatever’s got you sleepless,” Willow said. “Sometimes talking about things can help.”

“You don’t care,” Tara said.

“I do,” Willow said. “I promise,” she paused. “It’s fine if you don’t want to talk.”

She almost found herself hoping Tara wouldn’t. Forget the consequences. Faced with the immediate prospect, granting a wish suddenly seemed intimidating.

Still, Willow felt a pang of guilt when Tara looked at her. They were kind eyes; perhaps even hopeful. It felt wrong to be talking for the sole purpose of getting a chance to grant a wish. How did vengeance demons abuse trust so?

But, then, it wasn’t for that sole purpose. At least, Willow hoped not. She could help: she kept repeating that in her head. She should be able to help.

“It’s fine,” Tara said, after a moment. “Just, why?”

“You looked sad,” Willow said, “Getting things off your chest can help. That’s all.”

Then again, strangers met at bars weren’t the most trustworthy of people. Willow did her best to never do anything threatening, however; even before she was a demon.

“I-it’s not much,” Tara said. She looked down. “I just thought coming here would get me away from my family.”

“Bad family?”

Tara nodded, rather than spoke.

It was strange. Willow could sense the pain she felt, just as she could sense similar echoes of resentment in everyone nearby. She’d also managed to work out what the various differences in each aura meant.

Tara was in pain, more than most: she was also one of the least vengeful people Willow had ever met. That, too, was encouraging. Willow could help lessen her pain, and Tara wouldn’t ask for anything too cruel.

Still, speaking of her family, the increase in fear was noticeable. Willow took her hand, sympathetically.

“T-too much to go into,” Tara said, still not meeting Willow’s eyes.

Willow smiled, offering only sympathy. She’d learned a little of how to better comfort, over the
past few days. Pushing people never helped.

“Th-thank you, though,” Tara said quickly, glancing across to Willow. “For listening, I mean.”

“Any time,” a smile, “I just wanted to help. It’s what anyone would do.”

“Not anyone,” Tara said. She shook her head: looked away.

There was pain, there. Willow squeezed her hand. It was never pleasant to see people lost in bad memories. A couple of nights, Willow had felt she was getting too used to such things, too desensitized: tonight had proven otherwise.

For the first time, she began to felt that she wanted to grant a wish. If she could do more than listen, if she could actually change matters…

“You can’t have met many nice people,” Willow said. She’d meant it as a quip: Tara’s downward sigh showed she took it as anything but. “I’m sorry.”

“D-don’t be,” Tara said. “It’s not- I- I don’t deserve it.”

There wasn’t much that could be said to that. Willow stared: frowned. Tara still seemed rather self-conscious.

“I mean,” Tara hurried on, after seeing Willow’s expression, “What they’re mad about, I- it’s kinda my fault. Well, it’s me. I don’t- they deserve to be.”

“I’m sure it’s nothing that bad,” Willow said. “I don’t think you could do anything like that.”

“You don’t know me.”

“I know a little,” Willow said: squeezed her hand. “You seem kind. Nice. And you’re feeling guilty; if they can’t see that, it’s their fault.”

A rote response. Without knowing more of Tara’s situation, she couldn’t say any more; but clichés were clichés for a reason. They worked.

A moment of silence. Tara swallowed, blinked. She still avoided Willow’s gaze.

“Do you- Do you believe in demons?” Tara said, soft, quick, after a moment.

Willow almost choked.


Another silence. Tara closed her eyes.

“I am one,” she said, quiet. “I- It sounds stupid, I know. I just- It’s in my family. Sooner or later, it… I just- I wish I wasn’t.”

I wish. Willow had precious seconds to contemplate the consequences. Perhaps this demonic aspect helped Tara, in some way? But, no: it clearly wasn’t dominant. If worst came to worse, Tara would no doubt wish away a negative side effect.

Once Willow started considering wishes, seriously, it became intoxicating. She hated it. She was the demon here.
But, no. She needed to grant a wish and this Tara, this wonderful Tara, was suffering. Willow closed her eyes, and inwardly breathed. *Wish granted.*

Nothing. Nothing happened; no exertion, no feeling of achievement. Surely vengeance demon magic couldn’t be that different to witchcraft? Uncertain, Willow regarded Tara.

Nothing seemed different. Tara still looked down, eyes still red, face still melancholy. No sign that she’d felt any weight lifted, or noticed any change whatsoever. Then that had to mean…

“You’re not a demon,” Willow said. She squeezed her hand, again.

A traitorous part of Willow’s mind felt cheated. She’d been *so close*, almost had a wish to grant. But no, that had been snatched from her. She’d need to wait a bit longer.

“Mm?” Tara looked sideways. “Y- How can you know?”

“I know,” Willow said. “Just trust me.”

Any bitterness she might have felt faded. She should be happy, for Tara: surely it was a good thing, one of her fears was unfounded.

Tara hesitated: and slowly, slightly, smiled in an odd kind of belief.

“I don- I think I believe you,” Tara said. “I don’t know why.”

“Because you’re not,” Willow said. “You don’t have to be afraid of it. I don’t know why they’d tell you that, but they’re lying. If they make you feel like this, they don’t deserve to be called family.”

Anger. That was a new feeling. Was it just her demonic side? Willow couldn’t say. Something about Tara had affected her, though, more than she’d expected. Even if she couldn’t say what, she knew Tara didn’t deserve this.

She could sense resentment, even if Tara wasn’t the kind of person who’d show it. You couldn’t control what you felt.

“I thought I’d get away,” Tara murmured. “C-coming here. I-it was meant to be a way out. Th- they’re still not leaving me a-alone.”

Another hand-squeeze. Tara shifted in her seat, facing Willow more fully. The slight contact seemed to help her, make her stronger. She lifted her eyes.

“I-is that bad?” she said. “They’re my family, I just…”

“You’re right,” Willow said. “They’re wrong. They’ve lied to you, they’ve- I don’t know all of what they’ve done, but it sounds like… You don’t owe them anything.”

A pause. Tara met Willow’s eyes; Willow felt a sudden, electric shiver.

Tara was different, to the others whose problems she’d heard. She couldn’t say how; she just connected with Tara, more. She just cared more; not that she hadn’t cared about the others. Tara was just… special.

“I just wish they’d stop bothering me,” Tara said, small.

*I wish.* Willow almost grinned: strange how something once feared could suddenly feel like a triumph. She could see why vengeance demons did this. After hearing of someone’s problems for
so long, it was just so satisfying to do something.

_Wish granted._ But how?

That was an open wish; it could be made to wish anything. Willow had no doubt of the various gory possibilities some other demons might seek out. She could almost imagine the ideas racing through Hallie’s mind, if the other demon was listening.

She could kill them. For a brief, terrifying moment, she was tempted. They’d been so cruel.

But, no. No one deserved that; no human, at least. It was something she’d heard from Buffy; let humans deal with human matters. They interfered only when demons came out.

And while this was a human matter, she could still help: however slightly. _I wish they’d stop bothering me._

Wish granted. Willow squeezed Tara’s hand: smiled encouragingly.

“I have a feeling things’ll get better,” Willow said.

“H-how?” Tara said.

“Magic,” Willow said, suddenly light-hearted. “The world has to be nice sometimes, right?”

The word gained a reaction from Tara. Magic. Willow hesitated, but when Tara didn’t say anything, didn’t press the point: regardless, Tara seemed almost pleased. Apparently she trusted Willow.

It made Willow feel a pang: but she hadn’t been just using Tara to get a wish. She hadn’t, Willow promised herself that. She refused to be a typical vengeance demon. She cared, truly: and she hoped she’d helped.

“I hope so,” Tara said. “Thank you, Willow.”

“All time,” Willow said, and found she meant it. After a few moments, it became apparent the conversation wasn’t going anywhere: “See you again?”

“I-I’d like that,” Tara said.

Wearing her relief clearly on her face, Willow stood up, and nearly fell over. Her body felt light: she’d almost sprung herself over. Quickly, she steadied herself on the bar, surprised.

“A-are you ok?” Tara said. Willow nodded instinctively.

“Fine,” she said: paused, surprised.

It reminded her a little of the feeling she had after witchcraft. Magic was always good for a thrill; this, though, was just more intense. No wonder, vengeance demon magic had to be powerful. Willow exhaled, suppressing the urge to just laugh.

Now she was standing, now she thought about it, she felt almost dizzy. And she’d helped; that thought went around her mind.

Maybe, just maybe, she could enjoy this.

Once she was sure she was steady, Willow began to move away. As she reached the exit of the bar,
deciding she deserved a break for now, Hallie approached her. Side by side, they departed.

“Did it go well?” Hallie said.

Willow grinned, still reeling a little. She’d never expect it would be so… thrilling. Being a vengeance demon, granting wishes: it just felt good.

Part of her mind was worried. Things had changed too fast, surely? She couldn’t have gone from fear to ecstasy so quickly, could she? But something that felt this good, it couldn’t be a crime. It was addictive. Incredible.

That part of her was silenced by the imagining of Tara’s smile, when she realized her family weren’t going to bother her.

“I take it that’s a yes,” Hallie said. “What did she wish for?”

“For her family to stop interfering in her life,” Willow said.

“Juicy wish for your first time,” Hallie raised her eyebrows. “What did you do?”

“Made them forget,” Willow said. She stumbled, still a little out of it. “They don’t know where she is, they lost her contact details. They can’t find her.”

A moment of silence. Willow found, even riding the exhilaration, she was content with the choice she’d made. Now, more than ever, it was tempting to have gone further: to have permanently ensured Tara’s family would never contact her again.

Maybe Tara would have smiled at that too. Her mood as it was, Willow couldn’t imagine any other outcome. Still, she’d done what she’d had to: that was good enough.

Hallie laughed, loudly.

“Do you know how many vengeance demons would give their right horn to get a vague wish like that?” Hallie said, “You could do anything, and you went for…” Hallie laughed, again.

“Was it too… kind?” Willow said.

Suddenly she was uncertain. Thought made the high dry up, swiftly.

“A little,” Hallie said. “Don’t worry, though. D’Hoffryn has a sense of humour. It’s one of the two ways to get on his good side.”

“The other?” Willow said.

“Imagination,” Hallie said, and left it at that.

It was too clear what she meant. Imaginative punishments. Somehow, they didn’t seem as unthinkable as they had before her first wish.

Maybe that was just the demon talking: or maybe Hallie was right. Justice demon, it had a good ring to it. Maybe it was possible to serve as vengeance demon, to grant wishes, and still be on the right side.

After all, Willow had enjoyed that. Helping fix one of Tara’s problems, no reason she couldn’t continue: especially if it was needed to keep D’Hoffryn off her back.
But helping, granting that wish: it wasn’t a bad thing. Willow felt sure of that. It had just felt too good.
Hastiness

Chapter Notes

It didn't feel right to completely ignore the episodes of series four, this chapter is my answer to several of them. Enjoy!

Willow found she enjoyed herself. Once she’d opened herself up to the possibilities, she found she savoured each *I wish*. Her resolutions didn’t need to be cruel, either; there was no reason she couldn’t try subtlety.

Someone wished an admirer could take the hint that they weren’t interested. Said admirer not only took the hint, but apologized profusely and lost the ability to be within ten metres of the wisher (and five metres of any other potential romantic interest) for the next few years.

It felt a little harsh but, as Willow told herself, it was necessary. She was doing good, bit by bit. She wouldn’t kill anyone, but that didn’t mean they should be given free rein to hurt others.

“I just wish he’d shut up!” one woman banged her fists on the table. Willow smiled, and someone lost their voice for a week.

Once she started granting wishes, she couldn’t stop. The sudden rush each gave her, it was thrilling. She sought it, every second. She told herself she could stop, if she wanted to, but why would she want that?

She was making people happy: she was punishing the guilty. And they were small things, that was all.

Apparently D’Hoffryn didn’t care about the mildness of her actions either. According to Hallie, the uniqueness of her granted wishes had accorded her a little respect. Poetry was to be as appreciated as degree, when it came to justice.

It gave her hope. There was no reason she couldn’t keep on with the gentler wishes.

There was another advantage: it helped her witchcraft along. She had access to a little more power, as a demon. Witchcraft was about more than just power, certainly, but it didn’t do harm: especially when it gave her access to more magicks.

She couldn’t work with the near-boundless potential of the Wish, not without someone to make the wish, but she didn’t have to. She was content to help with Slayings as she did, while spending the rest of her time on making life a little easier for those who suffered a need for revenge in UC Sunnydale.

The worst was when she was with her friends. She still didn’t feel comfortable sharing what she’d become, not with people whose duties revolved around slaying demons. Sometimes she toyed with speaking with Anya, who had the most experience with vengeance demons, but she didn’t trust Anya’s ability to keep anything a secret.

Lying didn’t come easily.
“You ok?” Willow said.

They were in class: Buffy seemed just as dazed as Willow often felt. It looked like she’d drifted off, again; nights spent out patrolling cemeteries would do that.

“Yes,” Buffy said, low, stretching her neck. “I’m fine.”

“Loud snores for someone who’s fine,” Willow teased.

“For real?” Buffy said, momentarily annoyed: and sighed when Willow chuckled. “Slayer probably-prophetic, cryptic-as-anything dream, you know how it is. There were nursery rhymes this time.”

“So we can expect an apocalypse?” Willow said.

“Didn’t feel like it. It was kinda intense though,” Buffy hesitated.

Willow could have sworn she’d seen the start of a blush. She’d gotten good at reading people, over the last week or so.

“Good-intense or bad-intense?”

“Probably bad,” Buffy said. “‘You’re gonna die screaming but you won’t be heard’, didn’t sound like one of those so-common cheerful prophecies.”

Nope, definitely not cheerful. Willow quickly packed away her things, as the lecture ended, standing along with Buffy.

“Long week ahead, I guess.”

“Yeah,” Buffy said. She sighed, again. “Sometimes I wish it could be just a dream. Severely creepy dream, but just a dream.”

_I wish_. Those magic words again; Willow bit back a smile. She could be helpful, even to Buffy, like this. Instinctively, Willow granted the wish, making it so whatever demons that caused the dream would never come.

It wasn’t easy. Most wishes could be done in a snap; very few things offered any form of resistance. Then again, most of Willow’s wishes were fairly small. This was the first time something had pushed back.

An image flashed before her eyes: a face, a hideous, contorted, demonic face. A suit, a twisted grin, a scalpel: and Willow focused, threw open a vault of power she hadn’t known she’d possessed, and pushed back.

The battle of wills lasted maybe a split-second. It ended when Willow completed her step, and she smiled. Those demons would never set foot in Sunnydale.

“You never know,” Willow said, chirpily.

“Appreciate the vote of confidence, Will,” Buffy said. “Somehow I still doubt it.”

They’d see. Willow couldn’t help a smile, both from the magic of wish-granting, and the knowledge she’d gotten Buffy out of what was probably quite a bit of trouble.

Sometimes the knowledge of what she’d done could weigh on her. In the heat of the moment,
sometimes she went what could feel like too far. It was moments like that which comforted her, though: she’d done real good. Protected Sunnydale from whatever those ‘die screaming but won’t be heard’ demons were.

She couldn’t deal with every threat that came their way: a little time later they still ended up stalking through the ruins of Sunnydale High to deal with a demonic cult with the suicidal dream of jumping into the hell-mouth, but a combination of Spike finding out his chip let him beat up demons, Buffy’s Slaying-skills, and a little Willow-magic dealt with them.

Still, if she could help with just one or two threats, she’d done good. Especially combined with all the people she’d helped on her nightly wanderings.

“W-Willow?”

She turned: and smiled as she recognized Tara. Apparently Tara didn’t frequent the bars on campus; still, the way back from the library was fair game.

“Tara,” Willow said: “Nice to see you again.”

“R-really?” Tara said. Willow slowed, to let Tara catch up.

“Always,” she couldn’t help it, her smile widened. She hadn’t realized how much she’d missed the blonde. “How are things? Are they, uh, better?”

The first wish she’d ever granted had been for Tara. That one had started all this.

Tara nodded, momentarily enthusiastic. “They stopped,” she said: smiled herself. “I don’t know why, I’m just… I’m glad.”

“Me too,” Willow said, now beside Tara. “You deserve to be happy.”

There was something special about Tara’s smile. Willow could never help but reciprocate.

She found herself looking at Tara: really looking. She hadn’t seen Tara in daylight; just a night-time discussion where they’d both been distracted by too many other problems. To see her, properly, it was an entirely different experience.

Radiant was the word that came to mind. Willow couldn’t say why; she seemed so unassuming. A book clutched to her chest, hunched a little, hurrying from place to place. She didn’t seem to like spending too much time out, wandering around.

“What’s the book?” Willow said, gesturing.

Tara blinked, distracted by the change of subject. She glanced backward, to the library: presumably where she’d picked it up from. Still, it was an unusually thick tome, for just a textbook.

Tara tilted it, rather than read the title aloud, flashing the front cover to Willow. It was plain, brown, with archaic, ornate lettering for the title. Willow didn’t have time to read all of it, before Tara pulled it closer again: still, she read a couple of key words. Magic. Spells.

“A magic book?” Willow said, surprised.

“Y-yeah,” Tara looked down, apparently ashamed.

Was that why she’d been drawn to Tara? Witch to witch? She’d read witches often stood out to one another, so that they could be recognized. Still, she’d never experienced it. She couldn’t say.
After a moment, Tara looked up again. She seemed surprised by the lack of criticism; Willow almost winced at that.

“You like witchcraft?” Willow said. Tara blinked.

“Y-yeah,” she said, “Do y-you?”

“I dabble,” Willow said. Yes.

They walked side by side, for a few moments more, until they came to a split in the path: Tara heading to where she stayed, Willow to a Scooby meeting.

“Oh,” Willow said, hesitating. “Guess this is bye, again.”

“I guess,” Tara said: paused. “There’s a Wicca club, on campus. They meet, um, tomorrow night. If you’re interested?”

Willow had thought about it: since becoming a vengeance demon, though, witchcraft interests hadn’t particularly lingered. She still practised, but not too often any more. She didn’t need to: all she needed was an ‘I wish’.

Still, she found she wanted to see Tara again: and it was for more reasons that just tracking how her first wish was going.

“I’d love to,” Willow said: grinned. “See you tomorrow?”

Tara hesitated, apparently surprised. Then, quickly, she nodded. “Y-yeah. Tomorrow.”

Far more overjoyed than she expected to feel, Willow headed back to Giles’ house, where such meetings tended to take place.

It was easy to feel happy. She was doing good, and it felt like she’d made a new friend. That, and the aftereffects of granting a wish lingered most of the day. It felt like she was thrumming.

She’d granted a harsher wish, too: but it was deserved. It was just. A teacher gave a student a hard time, so Willow had fired them. The net result could only be good, surely? Seeing how the student had been affected, vengeance felt right.

It was simple, too. And it had felt better: a little more exertion than some of her usual wishes. That had to mean it was a good thing.

Shaking of those thoughts, Willow knocked on the door, and waited to be let in.

It always felt a little weird to attend these meetings, now. She was to talk about the best ways to hunt down various demons; as much as she agreed that they were right in doing so, it nonetheless felt strange.

Disturbing, even. Not all demons were necessarily harmful: she’d promised that she’d become proof of that. Still, it was hard not to feel a little out of place in discussions of all the dangerous demons that had been spotted nearby.

Someday, they might hunt her. That thought came to her. It was unpleasant but, Willow told herself, untrue.

After all, Anya had been forgiven: accepted into the fold. And Willow was making sure she didn’t do anything quite like Anya had: she was concerned with justice, not vengeance. She worked
fairly. She’d helped.

That was all that mattered.

When the meeting was over, Willow wandered off. While, as a vengeance demon, she could theoretically teleport wherever she wanted, she preferred to walk. It was both less suspicious, and relaxing.

Night was coming on: time to seek out wishes.

The one thing Willow worried about, was how routine it was beginning to feel. Before, every story had stayed in her mind: every tale of woe, or pain, had been stark. Memorable. Now they blurred together; Tara was the only person she might have recognized again.

She heard a story of a friend who kept stealing belongings. Willow added poetry there: not only would everything be returned, but that friend would find themselves burgled.

One person was falling behind in class due to someone who’d promised them a ride never showing up. Willow arranged a car crash: non-fatal, non-serious of course, she wasn’t a monster.

For the life of her, Willow couldn’t have recalled any other details about the people who’d asked for those wishes. She knew she’d granted others, too: those were the only ones she could be sure she’d granted that night.

Most were fairly generic. Lover or class trouble.

“It’s like,” one student said, gesticulating wildly and rather drunkenly, “Walsh. What is she thinking? She never seems focused. Always daydreaming, like she wishes she was doing something else. What’s she working on? She teaches Psych, like, what’s so interesting about that? Wish she’d pay attention to her class for once.”

Not much of a wish, but Willow granted it. There was no harm in making sure a teacher did their job.

And somewhere far below, Maggie Walsh looked up from her gruesome project, thoughts of demon-machine fusion swiftly overcome by a new fascination with the human mind. She forgot to lock the door as she hurried away to do more lesson planning.

It still felt good. The rush of granting wishes, of casting magic, had lessened somewhat, had stopped lingering, but Willow still sought it out. It just meant she had to enact a little more vengeance. Or rather, a bit more justice.
Consequences

She’d agreed to attend the Wicca club with Tara. It made her stomach flutter when Tara saw her arrive: and she saw Tara smile.

Still, her mood fell as the rest of the club started trekking in. Too many of them just seemed pretentious: all-black, and vaguely mystical-looking (but magically meaningless) pendants seemed to make up a worrying amount of the club’s membership’s dress sense.

She shouldn’t have been so optimistic. Wiccan didn’t necessarily mean witch.

Hesitantly, Willow glanced towards Tara; tried to read the girl’s reaction. It wasn’t easy: Tara’s expressions closed off around strangers. Was she a witch? Was she just…?

Willow hoped the former. It would be good to have another magic-user around. Still the odds didn’t look good. Willow had picked up quite a lot of mystical knowledge, and there was nothing she’d heard of that needed a dozen or so people to sit in a circle, hands raised in what wasn’t any kind of mystical gesture, with their eyes closed.

Willow cracked her eyes open: everyone seemed to be buying it. That being said, Tara wore a look of some scepticism on her face, but she still played along. Maybe she didn’t want to stand out; Willow gladly did the same.

Besides, it was possible this was just something beyond her knowledge. She hadn’t had much cause to look up what could be done with larger groups of witches.

“We come together, daughters of Gaia, sisters to the moon. We walk with the darkness, the wolf…”

Then again, that chant left a lot to be desired. Even more so when the woman leading it started talking about bake sales and newsletters. Well, it was worth a try.

Uncertain, Willow looked across to Tara: she was playing with her sleeves, looking down. Though her expression was unreadable, Willow could sense disappointment: that was just one step from resentment. Just the kind of thing Willow was used to.

Still, at least it was an answer. The Wicca club wasn’t the place to come for spells, or any real magic: Tara, on the other hand, might just be.

Willow managed to get through the rest of the meeting, albeit getting quite bored. They didn’t know what they were talking about. But maybe, just maybe, Tara did.

"So," Willow said, a little nervously. "What did you think?"

Neither of them had stuck around for too long after; then again, they might just have wanted to talk in private. It might not mean anything, but Willow couldn't help but hope.

She wanted Tara to be a witch, an actual witch, like her. Willow couldn't put her finger on why, she just hoped she had that much in common.

"It was," Tara hesitated, "I-interesting."

Non-committal. Willow suppressed the urge to chuckle; it wasn't the easiest topic to broach.
Maybe Tara was shy, maybe she was struggling with the same question. Surely there had to be other magic-users out there? Non-rat magic users, at least.

"So," Willow said: paused.

Tara looked at her, maybe expectantly.

"Are you a witch?" Willow said: and caught herself. "I mean, I know you're a witch, but are you a witch-witch, or just a witch? Herbs and chants witch, or warts and broomstick witch? Not that you have warts, you actually have very nice skin, very, very nice actually, just- um..."

A moment of silence. Willow winced: apparently even becoming a demon didn't lessen how she spoke when nervous.

"Sorry for the babble," Willow said: and nearly flushed when she realized Tara was staring at her.

Good stare, or bad stare? She could only sense emotions related to vengeance: as it was, Tara wasn't feeling much of that. If Willow was going to try and guess from her expression, she'd say disbelief.

But that could be good, or bad. Did she disbelieve that she'd found another witch, or disbelieve that the nice redhead she'd met had turned out to be a bit mad?

"Tara?" Willow said, soft.

"I-it's ok," Tara said, just as soft. She still stared.

Uncertainly, she reached out with one hand. She was shaking: it might have been the cold. Willow took her hand: their fingers interlocked.

And she felt power, rushing into her, rushing through her. Intense. Breath-taking.

Well, that answered that. Willow couldn't hold back a grin. A witch, an honest-to-Hecate witch.

A furtive glance around, to make sure no one was staring, and Willow lifted one hand: let a few sparks of light shoot from her fingertips. A simple little spell, but enough to verify.

She looked at Tara: the blonde wore the same relieved, ecstatic smile.

"I-I'm glad I met you," Tara said. "S-since I saw you, everything feels like it's been... going right."

Wishes could be granted: even demons could do good.

"I kinda s-sensed something," Tara said, "When I saw you, I-I didn't know, but it felt like you were... I d-didn't know though. I was afraid you'd just be like th-them, like..."

Tara hesitated. It was the longest Willow had heard her speak for since they'd met; apparently excitement, gladness, had overcome her lack of confidence, however briefly.


""Y-yeah," Tara said. "I-it's just..."

"Good to have another," Willow finished.

There was a silence, as there often was when she spoke with Tara, but this time borne of too much
to say, rather than not enough. The air seemed to thrum with possibilities.

"How long have you been practising?" Willow said.

"S-since I was a child," Tara said, "My m-mother, she was... she taught me. I- I know I'm not as powerful as you, I..."

Tara's voice trailed off: Willow squeezed her hand. Their fingers had stayed interlocked, somehow; neither of them really wanted to let go, as if that would end the dream.

Willow wanted to tell her; tell her everything. Not now, though: she'd seen how scared Tara had been at the prospect of being a demon. If she found out she now stood hand-in-hand with one, it would only tarnish the memory.

But Tara didn't need to be worried, about anything. Willow knew she hadn't been anything special before: she also knew that had changed, since her upgrade.

"A-and you?" Tara said, "Do you have anyone..."

"Just books," Willow said. "It's... Sunnydale's that kind of place."

"I-I noticed," Tara laughed, again: an enchanting, chiming sound.

It was with that memory in her mind that Willow returned to her room, that night. Tara's smile, Tara's laugh, Tara's magic.

They hadn't wanted to part company, but it was getting late, and a nervous Buffy had brushed past Willow earlier, insisting they talk later. Willow didn't want to introduce Tara to that part of her life just yet, though.

She wanted something that was hers: just hers.

Tara had said she'd keep going to the Wicca club, even though Willow had no need to. It wasn't too surprising: Tara sought more witches, more people who'd understand.

After coming here from her family, and the sheltered existence they'd subjected her to, Willow wouldn't have expected Tara to do anything else. Willow had said she wouldn't turn up regularly; but she'd visit sometimes, to keep an eye on Tara.

For the duration of their time together, Willow had barely thought about Buffy: of what had made her friend look so worried. Now she was alone, however, even the memory of Tara didn't wipe it away completely.

It was with some trepidation that Willow arrived at her dorm room. Slowly, she entered.

“Hey Will,” Buffy said. It looked like she’d been pacing.

“Buffy?” Willow said. “What is it?”

Buffy sighed. “I’m not sure,” she said. “Something’s weird. Remember that dream I had in class?”

“You’ll have to be more specific,” Willow said, “You seem to doze off a lot.”

“Serious, Will,” Buffy said, but chuckled appreciatively. “The Slayer dream.”

“Yeah?” Willow said, “Did it come true?”
It couldn’t have: that was the wish Willow had granted. Buffy had wanted her dream to not be a prophecy: to just be a regular, human dream.

It had been more of a struggle, to resist tangible demonic force, but it had worked. They’d never set foot in Sunnydale; Willow had made that so.

“Kinda,” Buffy said.

“What happened?” Willow said, at once.

Coincidence, surely? Still, it was with bated breath that Willow watched as Buffy went to the TV, to retrieve a notepad.

“It was on the news,” Buffy said, “And Angel called me. Some epidemic claimed Los Angeles. They said it’s laryngitis: everyone lost their voices. I mean, everyone: the whole city,” Buffy paused. “Seven people died. Had their hearts cut out: obvious demon stuff.”

Willow hesitated. Tried not to shiver. “So?”

“It’s the dream,” Buffy said, “The rhyme in it. ‘Can’t even shout, can’t even cry.’ ‘They need seven,’ ‘you won’t be heard,’ it sounds like what happened. Seven hearts, and no one could shout. I think that was what my dream was about.”

“So a prophetic dream came true?” Willow said.

No. No, no, no, no.

“It’s not just that,” Buffy said. “The dreams, they’re meant to be for me. Slayer hotline, free tips. It’s meant to happen to me, I can fight it. Instead, it happened miles away. Somewhere completely different; I couldn’t have done anything about it. And-”

Buffy broke herself off: Willow felt a pang that smacked of vengeance. Buffy was furious.

“Buffy?” Willow said, “What is it?”

“It’s meant to happen to me,” Buffy said. Paused: swallowed. “Angel’s coming back to Sunnydale. He wants to help. And…”

“And?”

“He had a small team,” Buffy said. “Cordelia. Wesley. They tried to fight the demons. The Gentlemen, he called them. They didn’t want Angel’s heart, but they wanted-”

No.

Willow stepped back, as if physically struck. This was her fault. She’d forced the demons from Sunnydale, made the wish not come true; she hadn’t thought what the consequences might be. Hadn’t thought they’d attack elsewhere.

Stupid, stupid, stupid. She never thought she’d regret not being ruthless.

And now Wesley, Cordy…

She shouldn’t have granted that wish. She should have let these Gentlemen come to Sunnydale: Buffy could have fought them. Those commandoes that ran around the campus could have fought them: instead Angel and his fledgeling team had faced them, unprepared, and without the
necessary knowledge.

No. She should have granted the wish: people would have died, either away. But she should have been harsher. She shouldn’t have given them a second chance.

“It’s meant to take a lot to disrupt a Slayer dream,” Buffy said. “I asked Giles. He said he didn’t know. It’s something powerful, something that knew of the dream.”

It was me. Part of Willow wanted to say that, but no. Now wasn’t the time. Now definitely wasn’t the time, not after…

“Are you ok?” Willow said.

“No,” Buffy said, simply. She paused. “I don’t know. It’s just… it feels like I should have known, should have been able to help. Did I miss something in that dream, some clue?”

“You didn’t,” Willow said. “Don’t blame yourself,” It’s my fault. “I know things will be fine, you just have to- I’m sorry.”

She’d make one mistake. She wouldn’t again: she could learn. There were no second chances: let someone dangerous go, they’d only start hurting others. It was only justice.

Wesley Wyndam-Pryce. Cordelia Chase. I’m sorry. She’d remember them: she’d do this in memory of them. For them. No one else would die because of her mistakes.

No one. No one need get hurt.

It felt like a fire: something set aflame within her, sparking down her limbs, to the tips of her extremities. A burning, a promise. No.

“It’s not your fault,” Buffy said, sending another pang through Willow. “I know. It’s just- it’s everything. The army guys here, now those demons… I just wish things would start making sense.”

I wish. Willow would start using those wishes properly, now. She could only do so much, now wasn’t the time to come clean about taking up D’Hoffryn’s offer, but she could certainly help when it came to the commandoes.

Wish granted. And, seconds later, before either of them could speak, there was a knock at the door. Buffy hesitated, then sniffed, quickly rubbing her eyes dry, and hurried to the door.

It opened, and Riley stood there, head to toe in military fatigues.

“Buffy,” he said, “We need to talk.”

Willow blinked. Well, she hadn’t expected that.
Revelations

Chapter Notes

I hope you're enjoying!

There was a demon-hunting Initiative housed on the Sunnydale campus, and Angel was back in town. It had been a time of quite a few changes. While the Scoobies planned what they were going to do about the Initiative, Willow savoured the times she could transcend such worries.

The easiest was when she could wander around UC Sunnydale’s bars. She could make people feel better: no one had to go through what Wesley and Cordy had. An abusive boyfriend on the wrong side of a car and out of commission several months, a stalker-ex wrongfully (and rightfully) arrested.

She wasn’t a vengeance demon: she was a justice demon. Stopping people being hurt. That, Willow promised herself. This was good, this was all good.

Part of her insisted that was just the demon talking, the magic high. But, no: it couldn’t be. Why would a demon be glad that justice was being done?

One of Willow’s favourite punishments had been a coma. I wish he knew how it felt transformed to the ‘he’ in question locked in sleep, living every mistreatment he’d ever committed from the perspective of his victims. She’d awaken him, when she got around to it.

When she’d gotten to her room, D’Hoffryn had been there: he’d only lingered a few seconds to congratulate her on a well-chosen punishment, but it had felt… good. Satisfying even, to be recognized.

She didn’t want to come clean to the Scoobies. They wouldn’t understand: demons were bad news, and Wesley, and Cordy… But it was good to have some people she could be open with, some people who could appreciate her, even if it was a demon.

The other highlight had to be Tara. She didn’t know, but Willow enjoyed her company. A fellow witch, too: she liked that.

She liked magic, too. Ever since becoming a demon, she hadn’t had too much opportunity for much more than wish-granting. As intoxicating as that felt, it wasn’t the same. It was stronger, more intense, but it was the difference between baking and microwaving. It was always so much more satisfying when she’d put the spell together herself.

Or, when she and another crafted the spell. Hand in hand with Tara, the power might not compare with the Wish, but it was nonetheless breath-taking. Each of her hands held one of Tara’s, arms outstretched over a small pentacle drawn with powdered quartz. Laying across the rune was a single rose.

“Ok,” Willow inhaled, a little more nervous than she expected to be. “We’ll try this. Levitate the rose into the air and, while it’s there, pluck the petals off, one by one,” she exhaled, slowly. “Could be tricky. Our minds need to be perfectly attuned.
Tara nodded: “Ok.”

Willow smiled, and watched as Tara closed her eyes. Willow shut hers also, and let her magic flow out, to her fingertips: when there, it met Tara’s. Merged.

It was always hard to describe how magic worked; it was something that just needed to be felt. Her magic was some element of her, and it was her at the same time: when it mixed with Tara’s, she felt an echo of Tara’s presence.

They acted as one, reaching out. Though their eyes were close, they could nonetheless picture perfectly how the rose became aloft.

Willow opened her eyes: breathed out. “Look.”

The solitary rose hung in midair, floating steady. Tara gaze at it: a smile spread across her face. It was good to be able to practise magic with someone.

“It’s pretty,” Tara said.

Willow lowered her hands: felt the reluctance with which Tara released them. Her arms were beginning to ache, though.


Tara nodded.

Their magics were still one: enough that they could reach out as one entity. Perfect synchronicity, perfectly attuned: rotate the rose, turn it over. Pinpoint the outermost petal, pull.

One flake of red detached itself, spiralling slowly to the ground. Willow’s eyes left the bloom, meeting Tara’s: the blonde smiled, Willow suddenly felt lighter.

“Ready?” Willow said.

“Yeah,” Tara said.

They turned their focus back to the rose: as one turning, finding the next petal. Attuned, they applied pressure: began to pluck-

And something at the back of Willow’s mind prickled. A sudden wave of resentment, some argument over the other side of the campus. It was enough: she had no need to grant the wish, not now, but her demon side reacted. Revelled.

Just as they were beginning to pluck the petal, the rose as a whole began to twirl, wildly. At first it stayed in roughly the same place: then when the speed went fast enough that the petals were falling off in a steady rain, it jerked up.

The stem snapped, and the rose as a whole fell to the floor, two sticks of green atop a small blanket of the many red petals. Willow winced.

Yet more proof Tara was no demon, no matter what her family had told her. The instant Willow’s thoughts turned demonic, whatever synchronicity they’d attained went out the window.

“I’m sorry,” Tara said, at once.

Willow turned quickly from the failed remnants of their spell, regarding Tara. The blonde was
looking down, resuming her usual shy posture; one she rarely had when they were alone. For a couple of seconds, Willow wasn’t sure what to say.

“It’s not your fault,” Willow said, with certainty.

A moment of silence. Tara slowly turned her head up: faced Willow. She gave an unsteady, wan smile.

“I think it—” Tara hesitated. “It was. We needed to be attuned, completely I mean. I think I- I kinda held something back.”

She hurried the end of her sentence, and swiftly looked away Willow frowned.

“Tara?” Willow said.

No response: Tara bit her lip. Willow reached out, to try and take her hand: Tara flinched at her touch, then relaxed, letting Willow hold it.

“Tara?” Willow said, again.

“She like you,” Tara said, barely a whisper, rushing through the words.

It took a second or so before Willow could play the words again in her head, interpreting the stumbled sentence.

“Thanks?” Willow said, unsure. “I like you too?”

Tara hastily shook her head: turned back to face Willow. Willow was surprised to see she was blushing.

“No, I— like— you,” Tara said. “Like you. Like-like you. I, um…”

Willow blinked, still not entirely certain.

“Like, um, gay-like-like?” Willow said.

Tara gave a slight giggle at Willow’s phrasing: and nodded, mutely. _Oh._

A long few seconds. Willow found herself quickly re-evaluating several memories. So Tara’s lingering gaze, her smiles, her eagerness… The times she was happy to spend time alone with Willow, in her room: the sheer intimacy of so much of their magic.

Then Willow shifted her focus: from Tara, to herself. She knew about Tara: about herself, she wasn’t entirely certain.

Amazing how even a demon could be surprised.

She liked to see Tara smile. Liked spending time with her, liked the closeness, the bonds struck through witchcraft. And she was beautiful, of course. Willow hadn’t thought about it. She just liked being near, liked the lightness she felt.

_Oh._ Well, it was possible. She remembered her vampire self. Was it just a demon thing, was it, well her? There was no way to be sure. But she was the demon now: no need to separate things.

The demon was meant to represent the person it had once been, though. So if she… then the original Willow would have. The old Willow. So it was nothing— it was something— She didn’t
know where her thoughts were going, speculation had just seemed suddenly easier.

So. That was something new.

“Um?” Tara said, breaking the silence. “Willow?”

Willow blinked. She’d been distracted.

“I-” Willow said. Paused. “I never thought about…”

“I know,” Tara said quickly. “I mean, I didn’t, but I didn’t think you’d… It’s fine. I just can’t keep holding it- Not if we’re going to do magic.”

“No,” Willow said, surprising herself. “It’s not- I didn’t think I- but- I haven’t. But I think I could. With you. If you-”

It’s was hard to utter a complete sentence. Not when she kept thinking, well, she didn’t know what she was thinking. Just that it was… good. Probably good.

“Do you mean?” Tara hesitated.

“I mean,” Willow said: and all the breath left her when Tara smiled.

Momentarily, she found herself captivated. Everything seemed to mean more, now: it was easy to read more into Tara’s gestures. Maintained eye contact, that quirk of her lips…

Willow realized she was staring. Quickly she coughed, blinked.

“So, um,” Willow said, with no idea how to continue her sentence, just feeling the need to break the silence.

“So,” Tara said, similarly lost.

“Want to try the spell again?” Willow said, hopefully. Tara nodded, quickly, anything to end the awkwardness.

They’d work more out, in future. Both of them knew that, promised that: but it’d be a little time before they could put it into words. Neither of them was particularly immune to awkwardness.

And, that time, the spell went better. Willow felt so giddy, so human, that she found it easy to attune herself with Tara. It was encouraging, too: surely that had to mean they felt similarly?

With no rose to disassemble, that time they attempted the far more painstaking task of putting it together. The two separate shards of stem were fused with an ugly lump, before the main challenge began. One by one, they levitated the petals: drew them closer. A small flash sealed the petal, with magic, back to the rose.

One at a time. Slow breaths. It should have ended up frustrating, tedious, but it never could. The sense of closeness, the sheer intimacy of synchronizing their minds, especially given what had just come to light, they could have kept going for hours.

It was almost a disappointment when, as one, they lifted the final petal, and added it to the rose. It was ruffled, a little patchy and imperfect, but whole. Each exhaled, marvelling at their achievement, and the bloom dropped into Willow’s lap.

She picked it up between two fingers: handed it to Tara. The blonde chuckled, and took it. Their
fingertips touched: each of them hesitated, there.

“It worked,” Tara said, quickly dropping her hand. She still clasped the rose.

“Yeah,” Willow said.

She couldn’t deny being surprised. Maybe the mind of a demon wasn’t always so incompatible. Or maybe Tara had been right, after all.

Secrets would make attuning their minds harder. Tara had that one, now exposed: and Willow had hers. It didn’t seem to matter though; Willow supposed that was because she didn’t often think about it. Yes she granted wishes, aided vengeance, but it didn’t feel different.

Perhaps she just didn’t care that she was hiding that part of her. She’d long since made her peace with the fact such concealment was necessary.

And she was doing it again. She babbled, audibly or otherwise, any time she was distracted. Any time she didn’t want to focus on what was before her. Then her thoughts went off the rails and she-

“Tara,” Willow said, soft.

Tara mumbled something inaudible; kept staring at Willow. She lifted her hands, then lowered them, unsure of what she wanted to do. Hesitantly, she put the rose down on her bed, shifting where she knelt.

Slow movement; Willow brought herself nearer to Tara, still on her knees. It was always hard to concentrate after intense magic; it had a way of distracting you. That, along with the awkwardness their earlier discussion had resulted in, made this difficult.

Still, when Tara leaned closer, and pressed her lips to Willow’s, Willow couldn’t help but exult. Eyes closed, lips parted: remember to breathe.

She was soft; her scent all-consuming. Incredible. Kissing Tara, it was… different. But a good different. If she hadn’t been kneeling, Willow felt certain her legs would have given way.

Tara withdrew, uncertain.

“Was that-” Tara said, quickly, immediately unsure. Willow responded by leaning closer, letting their lips meet again.

If nothing else, it was confirmation. She and Tara. Not what she’d expected when she’d gone to grant her first wish, but she found she didn’t have a moment’s regret.

And she could be a good girlfriend. She could do anything: Tara had only to wish it. And, Willow knew, she was good at getting people to utter those magic words. Anything Tara wanted, she’d do it.

It was with quite a lot of reluctance that Willow left Tara’s room.

She wanted to be with Buffy, tonight. Angel was due to arrive for Los Angeles; he had no one left there. That, and apparently there was some mystical disturbance: Cordelia usually got visions when some major threat was due, yet that time there was nothing. He’d spoken with representatives of some Powers, apparently some major force had influence matters: changed events.

Willow was fairly sure she knew who that force was. She’d been the one who granted Buffy’s
wish: barred the Gentlemen from Sunnydale, so they targeted Los Angeles instead.

Angel was coming there, for her. She needed to hear what he knew.

She took a path through the cemetery. Buffy should be done with patrolling by now, but in case she’d lingered, it was best to come here. Still, it looked empty.

Well, mostly empty. There was a shadow lumbering between rows of gravestones, a fair few metres from her. Willow sighed, mentally recounting a few anti-vampire spells. Another advantage of being a demon: she found certain kinds of magic came much more easily to her.

Might as well make it easier for Buffy. She wasn’t too worried; it took a lot to kill a vengeance demon, even one who wasn’t trusted with their own pendant.

She’d meant to ask D’Hoffryn about that. As best she could tell, he hadn’t wanted to give her one at the start, afraid she’d smash it at once. Now, though, she knew better. She liked the power it offered her. She liked granting justice.

Willow sighed, jogging the short distance until she was behind the creature. It felt ugly to have to engage in this so soon after leaving Tara, but she didn’t want to leave a vamp alive.

No mercy. She’d promised herself that, after Wesley and Cordy.

“Aine, potentia!” Willow cried: a simple piece of witchcraft, creating a mimicry of sunlight just over the vampire.

Or, as it turned out, non-vampire. Willow caught a glimpse of it: scarred flesh, demon skin sewn into human, with what looked like metal thrown in. The creature cried out at the brightness, lunging dumbly up at the light.

Willow said back: shock extinguishing the spell. A demon, then, but no kind of demon she’d seen before.

It was then she realized it was whispering. She’d heard a murmur, before, but had just assumed it was some groan. No: if she listened, she could pick up words, a steady stream of consciousness falling from its twisted lips.

“…not bright never bright dark before dark below alone below she said son I son but she not she left she gone she named and she gone she said Adam she left unfinished incomplete unfinished she said son she left incomplete need more need something need focus need prepare she said she help she gone she…”

Adam? Was that its name? And ‘unfinished’? What was that meant to mean?

Reasonably certain the gibbering creature was just insane, Willow took another step back, watching the dumb creature flail on the spot. She lifted one hand, calling forth enough energy for a more directly lethal spell.

She still needed to train more: such spells tended to exhaust her quickly. Still, this machine-demon-thing seemed worth getting rid of quickly.

The instant before she could, there was a blur of black. Another step back: and Willow waited, fairly patiently. A whirl of dark leather ramming into the demon, a scuffle lasting a few seconds, before the near-mindless creature slumped to the ground. Spike stood over it, revelling as he always did at the chance to fight with something, despite his chip.
He dropped a softly glowing object to the ground, shrugging, and giving a small ‘bleh’ of distaste. The creature had either been unwilling, or unable, to defend itself.

The Initiative could clean up the remains. They had to be good for something. Willow sighed, detouring, intending to walk around the mess on the field. At the same time, Spike turned around: walked forward into her.

Each rushed just a little too fast, paid a bit too little attention, both distracted by their own issues. Spike by the thrill, Willow by the memory of Tara. They bumped into each other, shoulders striking.

For maybe a second they continued moving on as normal. Then, Spike stopped: and Willow could almost hear his mind put the pieces together. He’d hit her, albeit accidentally: hurt her, however slightly. And he wasn’t in pain, despite the chip in his head.

“Hey,” Spike said: Willow turned, to face him, spell still crackling in her fingertips. “Wait a second.”

He lunged: just to grab her hand. Willow pulled back, but not quite fast enough: his nails brushed the back of her hand. His chip didn’t react, at all.

Quickly, Spike straightened: immediately on guard. “You’re a demon.”
You know who's fun to write? S4-Spike and his couldn't-care-less attitude.
And evil Willow.
Evil people are just always fun, apparently.

Willow and Spike stared at each other. The lifeless remains of the creature possibly called Adam went ignored, as, demon to demon, they regarded one another.

“You’re her, right?” Spike said. “Willow? Not just using her shape?”

Willow thought quickly. She could, technically just zap Spike. It wouldn’t be a particularly tricky spell. But, no, she didn’t want him to go missing. Angel was coming soon, and he might already be suspicious of her. She didn’t want to be found out, not until she’d worked out a better way to tell Buffy.

And if she denied it, Spike would likely just test matters the next time he saw the actual Willow. If Buffy was there, then… And there was no point in denying being a demon.

“I’m Willow,” she said.

“Figured,” Spike said: nodded. “Risky shape to take otherwise. You don’t smell like a vampire.”

“I’m not.”

“Then what?” Spike said, “Not too many transformations to demon available.”

“Vengeance demon,” Willow said. “Have been for a while.”

A moment of silence: Spike raised his eyebrows, apparently impressed. He must have made the association with the D’Hoffryn incident. Apparently the copious amount of… activities with Buffy hadn’t left his mind entirely.

“Don’t breathe a word,” Willow said.

Intimidation came surprisingly easy to her. Her initial reaction had been worry, but she’d let herself swiftly move past that: let the demon take over, the part of her that had sworn off mercy.

Perhaps she should have felt a little guilty, about that. She couldn’t bring herself too, however. Spike was a vampire: a demon, and though she knew she was one to talk, it did mean she was rather less sympathetic to him. Buffy slayed vampires daily.

Spike was harmless, that was the one reason for his continued life. If he was to stop being harmless…

“You kidding?” Spike said, “You’ve been a demon this whole time, hiding right next to the Slayer, this is bloody brilliant!”
He didn’t seem too bothered by Willow’s attempt at intimidation. More likely, he was used to it.

“Good on ya, Red,” Spike said.

That was encouraging. Before Willow could speak again, however, continued.

“Though,” he said, slowly, “If you’re a wish-granting demon now, there might be one or two things… I mean, it’s quite a secret you’re asking me to keep. A little incentive wouldn’t go amiss.”

Willow regarded him, for a moment. It was far from unexpected: Spike trying to twist events into his favour. It was almost a pity he wasn’t better at it.

“You’re trying to blackmail the person who could set you on fire” Willow said, in a monotone.

Spike blinked.

“Fair point,” he conceded, quickly.

Still, intimidation alone wouldn’t work. Willow knew that: both morally and practically. Part of her still blanched at the notion of getting what she wanted with nothing more than threats.

Though part of her found the idea thrilling. Shy, mousey Willow with big bad vampire doing as she asked.

She didn't, though. There was an alternative: there were many. And, knowing Spike, he'd probably fall over himself to prove a pain, no matter how entertained he was by the idea of Buffy's best friend being a demon.

"How's the chip?" Willow said.

"Bloody pain," Spike said, "How'd you think?"

"Would you like me to get rid of it?"

Spike paused: blinked. She'd caught him by surprise. That was good.

"Keep my secret," Willow said. "You don't have any other way, unless you want to get captured again and hope."

"You'd do that?" Spike said.

"I could," Willow said. "There are just things I want to get done first. Don't interfere, don't give me away, and I will."

More likely, he'd wish his chip to be gone, and she'd take his head along with it. Vengeance demons picked up the trick of inventive thinking. She was hardly going to let William the Bloody loose in Sunnydale again, no matter what she got in exchange.

But then, there was no harm in making him think she might. It would be too much of a risk to kill Spike, with Angel's curious eyes on the town.

Still, she felt Spike watching her.

"What?" Willow said.

"Nothing," Spike said, quickly, "You're... different, Red. That's all."
"Not really," Willow said.

Different? As if. The only change was ability: the old Willow would have been willing to do all of this, if she'd only thought about it: if she only considered. This, now, she was more Willow than ever: because she could actually do that which she thought about.

That was what she told herself, at least.

"I guess it's a deal," Spike said. He seemed perturbed. "I keep your little, demonic secret quiet, you think about getting this thing out of my head. Right?"

"Right," Willow said. "And don't breathe a word. You know I'm your best chance."

"Oh, I know," Spike said: grinned. "And this is going to be fun to watch, I know it."

Whatever had disturbed him had, apparently, gone now. The prospective drama had more potential for excitement, it seemed.

She'd need to remember him, at any rate: keep an eye on him.

Things were getting trickier than she'd meant.

The only reason she'd agreed to start with this, was to help people. She granted wishes: that could only be a good thing. She enacted justice; she helped people.

But, now, she felt like the villain. Bribing Spike into silence, watching her back: and she just knew she'd be blamed for what happened to Wesley and Cordy, if the truth came out.

So she'd make sure it didn't.

And she'd make things better for Tara, as she already had. She only wanted what was best.

Willow left the graveyard, back to where she was due to meet Buffy. It was hard not to feel a little nervous: still, even if Angel knew the source of whatever had diverted the heart-stealing demons from Sunnydale to LA was here, there was no way he'd blame her.

Buffy's room: well, hers and Buffy's. It didn't really feel like Willow's any more, she had to say, with how little time she spent there.

Buffy was sitting on her own bed: waiting. A textbook lay open, and discarded. Apparently she'd tried to pass the time reading; it hadn't worked.

"Hey Wills," she said, as Willow walked in.

"Hey," Willow said, smiling. She let her voice go a little higher than the tones she'd hoped intimidated Spike. "Nothing yet?"


"He's definitely staying?" Willow said.

"Sounds it," Buffy said. "I told him I could handle any demon, but he wants to be part of it."

He wanted revenge. Idly, Willow paid attention to her vengeance demon senses, curiously. There was always activity, always the occasional flare of resentment. She didn't normally seek it out; it was easier to ignore it, until it was time to start granting wishes.
The trick wasn't to find the people who registered for most, it was to find those that registered the longest. Everyone lost their temper, sought revenge for precious seconds. The people who stayed in that state, however, were the people that wished for the best things.

And Angel was there. He wasn't enraged: just... purposeful. Lucid enough to be thoughtful, angry enough that Willow knew he wouldn't give up until he'd found a culprit.

Well, that might be a problem. Still, she could sense him; that might give her power.

A pause.

Willow caught herself. What were those thoughts? They were cold, they were calculated, they were... inhuman. They weren't her.

But, as part of her brain reminded her, she was inhuman too. Why not have those thoughts? The greater good, justice, they were being impeded.

No. She'd just keep an eye on things: be part of things. Wait until things had calmed down, then she could confess; explain herself.

She wanted to tell Buffy: truly. Now just wasn't the time. Emotions were running high, and an avenging Angel was coming to Sunnydale.

"Any idea where he'll stay?" Willow said. "I'm not giving up my bed."

"He's not staying here," Buffy shook her head, rather quickly. "Probably be in his old crypt."

"Maybe we could room him with Spike?" Willow said, playfully.

"Yeah, that'll go down well," Buffy's morose expression cracked into a laugh.

Willow couldn't help but grin.

She was proud of herself, really. She'd made Buffy happy, despite the prospect of Angel's return. The two of them hard hardly left things on good terms. In addition, she'd ensured Buffy saw the idea of Angel getting near Spike as a joke.

It was small but, if Spike knew who she was, she definitely didn't want him getting near Angel.

So, she could be both: she could be the self-preserving justice demon, and a good-hearted friend.

"Do you want me to be bitter for you?" Willow said.

"Huh?" Buffy said. "To Angel?"

"Sure," Willow said: "I mean, it'd seem petty coming from you, but he did leave you very suddenly, you should be allowed to let it out somehow."

"So I live vicariously through your snark?" Buffy said.

"Exactly!" a grin. "Sound like a plan?"

"Sure," Buffy said. She laughed.

The door to their room opened, and Angel walked in. he looked the same as ever, if a little scruffier from the hurried journey: both Willow and Buffy turned to face him.
"Uh," he said, instinctively stumbling at the two pairs of eyes on him. "Hi?"

"Hiya," Willow chirped.

"Hi, Angel," Buffy said: stood up, and stopped midway through a move to hug him.

It was almost too awkward to watch. Then again, Willow had picked up a lot of knowledge of multiple bad and failing relationships, she could spot the signs.

The best thing to do was distract them. Stop them thinking about the problems, and former closeness, and think about something else entirely.

She'd never tried it with both parties there at once before, but it couldn't be any harder.

"So," Willow said, to break the silence. "Why are you here?"

The awkwardness faded: immediately, Angel stepped back, facing Willow with a brief flicker of gratitude. With something else to focus on Buffy, also, seemed glad.

Still, Willow rolled her eyes at Angel, for Buffy's sake: the brief display of cliche bitterness elicited a chuckle, as Angel began to speak.

"Demons, called the Gentlemen, came to Los Angeles," he said, hurrying. "They... killed. There are a few Powers out there, though, and I found out how to contact them while I was there. They told me it came from around here."

"It?" Willow said.

"Something diverted the Gentlemen," Angel said. "Something powerful. They meant to come to Sunnydale, but something prevented their entry: and because of that, they came to Los Angeles instead. I figured, if anyone would know of demonic activity here, it'd be..."

"Haven't heard anything," Buffy said. "I told you all we'd heard. Slayer dream didn’t come true."

And a Slayer dream could only be altered by someone who knew of it; that was how prophecy worked. You could only alter fate, if you knew what was fated. Anything else would be part of fate.

Maybe Willow should have thought twice: but, no. Her regret wasn’t in granting Buffy’s wish, it was in being too gentle. She’d never offer a second chance again. Preventing the dream from coming true, that could only be a good thing.

Then again, the consequences could have been better.

“And you’re sure there’s nothing that stands out?” Angel said.

“Nothing’s appeared in the last five seconds,” Buffy said. “Asked the Initiative as well, nothing’s changed all that much.”

“Initiative?”

“Government’s branched out to killing demons,” Buffy said: shrugged. “They’ve got more resources, I figured if anything had happened, they might’ve seen it. Nothing with demons.”

“Mm,” Angel said: paused.
He seemed momentarily distracted by the prospect of paid demon hunters. Well, he had cause to be worried, admittedly; he was still a vampire. He’d need to keep an eye out.

“I had a list of everything I knew that was powerful enough, or could be powerful enough, to disrupt a prophecy,” Angel said. “There’s not much. Prophecies are immutable.”

“This one seemed pretty mutey to me,” Buffy said.

“Yeah,” Angel said, distracted. “It takes a lot. Pure demons, something about the Order of Dagon, mostly things that you’d have noticed if they were in town.”

“Only mostly?” Buffy said.

“Only found a trace of two other possibilities,” Angel said. “Either the dream itself was faked, though I don’t know what could manage that. Or it’s someone with access to a lot of power: witch or vengeance demon are the most likely.”

Willow very narrowly avoided wincing. She was the double whammy, that was perfect.

Still, she thought quickly. It would take a bit for either of them to suspect her, she knew that. She was their friend: and they’d still be clinging to old, idealized notions. They’d need hard evidence before they accused her.

Still, she was a witch, and she’d met with the leader of vengeance demons.

“I know better than to say ‘I wish’ to strangers,” Buffy said, “Don’t worry.”

Willow could have kissed her. She didn’t remember their conversation; or, if she did, had brushed it off. Of course Buffy wouldn’t suspect her.

It almost made lying more painful. Almost: she still knew what the reaction would be.

“Should I go back to the Wicca club?” Willow said. “They’re not meeting at the moment, I heard something about a field trip, but if there’s a witch…”

And it was an excuse to spend more time with Tara. Willow smiled: she could do both, she liked reminded herself of that.

“Nice thought,” Buffy said. “And Angel, don’t suppose you’d do more research? Not safe to have you loose, there’s…”

Initiative. And Spike who’d probably relish the chance.

That was one hope. Sunnydale wasn’t the best place for Angel, he might decide to not stick around, especially if they didn’t get any leads.

For a moment, Willow considered stopping granting wishes, even if just temporarily. D’Hoffryn would understand that much, she was sure. But, no. She was a justice demon: it wouldn’t do to stop helping people.

Angel nodded. “I’ll keep locked up with the books,” he said. “I’ll let you know when I find anything.”

Buffy nodded: thanked him, just before Angel left. Almost as soon as he was gone, Buffy collapsed to the bed, as if exhausted. Willow moved beside her.
“You ok?” Willow said.


“Afraid he’ll find out you kissed Spike?” Willow teased.

Buffy made a fake retching motion, before chuckling. “Don’t remind me,” she said. “I’d rather forget that spell.”

Willow smiled: rested her arm over Buffy’s shoulder. Strange that Buffy saw that day so badly; when Willow remembered it, she remember her life changing. For the better, it seemed.

“Want me to start insulting him?” Willow tilted her head. “I could let it out for you.”

“Maybe later,” a chuckle.
Tara. Willow found herself smiling at just the thought of her.

It was hard to worry about Angel, about Buffy’s investigation, about Spike’s knowledge… Willow found she couldn’t dwell on much at all. Not when she knew Tara was waiting.

The unexpectedness only made it feel better. Almost as soon as she could, Willow found herself returning to Tara. Forget Angel, forget how he searched for the demon or witch that sent the Gentlemen to him.

She didn’t worry. She was sure, there was no way they could find her.

“Willow,” and there was the way Tara’s face lit up. Willow couldn’t believe she hadn’t seen it before. It was so obvious, now she knew how Tara felt.

She found herself returning the beaming expression, and wondering if she always had. Surprisingly little felt different. She still looked forward to their meetings, their magic, still felt the same lightness, still smiled from proximity alone.

Willow wondered whether that meant the depth of Tara’s feelings were unrequited, or had always been there. There was a lot she wasn’t sure of.

Even that was a comfort, however. When she was with Tara, she almost felt more human: which was odd, considering almost all of what they did was encouraged by her demon side.

“Tara,” Willow said, immediately, instinctively, closing the distance between them. She hesitated half a step away.

She wanted to kiss Tara again, she knew that; she’d been thinking about it for the last day. She also felt it wasn’t necessarily appropriate, not so soon.

The hesitation lingered, and the moment faded.

Together, they entered Tara’s room, both fairly slowly. It was hard to know just how to act; one opened their mouth to speak, hesitated, and closed it. It was almost a minute before either broke the silence.

“So,” Willow said, “I was thinking, I read something about invoking the elements, and it’s meant to be-”

She resorted to her default with Tara: talking about magic. It had summed up a lot of their interaction. Still, Tara’s face fell.

“Is that ok?” Willow said, at once.


A pause: then Willow’s eyes widened, it quick comprehension. Of course, this was more date than witchy gathering, now. She should’ve guessed.

“That’s fine,” Willow said, hurriedly. “I just wasn’t sure…”

“I’m happy to-”
“Dinner’s good,” Willow said.

A pause, then almost in unison, they started laughing at each other. Well, that was one way to avoid awkwardness, even if not embarrassment.

“So, um, anywhere in particular?” Willow said.

“No,” Tara shook her head: “I wasn’t sure if…”

“What do you like?” Willow said.

Somehow, she didn’t know too much about Tara: she didn’t like talking about herself. That, and they’d hadn’t had much opportunity for it. There’d been magic; intoxicating magic.

Hopefully they could get to that later.

“I don’t mind,” Tara said. “Anything’s good.”

“Want to cook?” Willow said. “Stay in. Nicer.”

“I—if you want,” Tara said.

“Your choice,” Willow said. “Do you want to?”

A blink: Tara hesitated, and Willow tried to smile, comfortingly.

“Ok,” Tara said: let a smile out. “The kitchen’s shared, but it’s usually quiet.”

“It’s a date,” Willow said, surprised at how natural the words felt.

Hand joined hand, and they went down the small corridor to the shared kitchen of Tara’s dorm. Idly, Willow scanned the cupboards, to see what they could make.

“I warn you now,” Willow said, “I’m not a great cook.”

“That’s ok,” Tara said. “I-I’ll help.”

A pause: Willow pulled a pot down from a higher shelf. “Do you like pasta?”

Tara nodded: “Y-yeah,” she said.

“Good, I know how to make that much,” Willow said, finding a bag of it: “What do you want with it?”

Tara approached, looking at the ingredients herself. She gestured, suggested a sauce, and it wasn’t long before she was stirring a pan.

“You’re good at that,” Willow said, measuring out the final few ingredients.

“Thanks,” Tara said.

Alone, she was a little more assertive: all the more when she was doing something she felt confident with. That seemed to just be witchcraft and cooking, however. When the process was just following a few instructions, and when she was sure of her abilities, Tara lost a lot of her shyness.

“Do you cook a lot?” Willow said.
“N-not really,” Tara said. “Normally eat later, and the others are back then. Don’t like cooking when they’re in here.”

“Prefer it alone?”

“It’s… relaxing,” Tara said. She scattered a few spices into the sauce. “Haven’t really had a chance since I came here. It’s nice.”

“You cooked at home?” Willow said.

Tara looked down: too late, Willow remembered the few details she’d heard of Tara’s family life. Of course they’d made her cook. Bad memories: not the kind she wanted to bring up.

“Sorry,” Willow said, quickly. “I didn’t mean-”

“It’s fine,” Tara said. “It wasn’t that bad.”

“You don’t need to defend them.”

“I- I know,” Tara said: hesitated. “I meant, I- They weren’t a… good family, but there were some bits. My mother, she was nice. She taught me. Witchcraft, I mean, and cooking. They made her teach the latter. Magic was our secret, she…”

Tara paused, momentarily distracted: a little sauce fell over the side of the pan, hissing on the hob. She blinked, and immediately began focusing on what she was doing.

“She sounds nice,” Willow said.

“She was,” Tara said, giving a rare, truly genuine smile.

A brief pause. Willow measured out two portions of dry pasta, before putting them in the pot, and filling it with water. She reached past Tara to start it boiling.

“They haven’t been trying to contact you any more, have they?” Willow said.

Tara shook her head: Willow smiled, relieved. She was fairly sure her wish had worked, but it was always good to be certain. She’d been too gentle, that first time.

Willow found she just had to look at Tara, to regret how lenient she’d been with her first wish. If they’d mistreat someone as wonderful as her, they deserved the worst.

But, no, this wasn’t the time for those kinds of thoughts.

“Sorry for prying,” Willow said.

“I-it’s fine,” Tara said: paused. “Wh-what about you?”

“What about me?” Willow said.

“Just… you,” Tara said. “Your family, your witchcraft… I want to know.”

_Born in Sunnydale, later became a demon, last night sent a frat to a hell dimension and I’m currently working out how to keep lying to my best friend until her vampire ex leaves town._

Willow wanted to tell the truth, but it never seemed the time. That, and Tara so often seemed gentle. She wouldn’t want to be a part of it.
Maybe she’d understand. Willow hoped Tara would understand justice: but there was no need to darken the mood. Tara wouldn’t enjoy a demon’s company.

“You know most of it,” Willow said. “Born in Sunnydale, went to school on a hellmouth, I just learned witchcraft to survive,” she paused. “I’ve only really been practising for a couple of years. I mean, there were a couple of spells before then, but nothing serious.”

Back to magic: but then, it was one of the main things they had in common. Though Willow had the feeling they might get along without it, there was no harm in an aid.

The pasta nearly boiled over. Willow jumped, but Tara beat her to lifting the pot off the heat for a few seconds.

“What was your first spell?” Willow said.

“W-why?” Tara said.

“Just curious,” Willow said, hesitated: “If you don’t want to…”

A pause. “It was when they found out I was a witch,” Tara said: paused. “It’s not a good memory.”

Almost instantly, Willow winced. She kept forgetting, Tara’s past wasn’t like hers. Magic wasn’t the escape for her: or rather, it was, but it was also what she had to escape from.

“What was yours?” Tara said.

Her voice was softer now, less open: it always was when the topic of her family came up. Willow lightly took her free hand: releasing it only to lift up the pasta again.

“Gave a vampire a soul,” Willow said.

Tara blinked.

“It’s a long story,” Willow said. “A lot of… things happen, in Sunnydale.”

“I know,” Tara said, “People just normally start with something… simpler.”

“There wasn’t much of a choice,” Willow said: paused. “Do you know many witches?”

“N-no,” Tara shook her head. “Just you. And mother. I just- it feels like people would start differently,” she paused. “Have you met any others?”

“One,” Willow said.

“Who was she?”

“Amy,” Willow said. “She turned into a rat,” a pause, “Sunnydale, again.”

“Oh,” Tara said: looked down.

“I could introduce you?”

“Th-that would be nice,” Tara said, uncertainly. “I’d like to meet others, even if…”

Even if they were four legged, furry, and couldn’t talk. It didn’t say a great deal for Tara’s quality of life: Willow felt another pang.
Willow didn’t know quite what to say for a moment. It was never easy to be sure what she wanted to say was right. Instead, she contented herself impaling a piece of pasta with a fork, drawing it out, and nibbling, testing its softness. She offered a second bit to Tara.

“What do you think?” Willow said: Tara opened her mouth, accepting it.

“Minute more,” Tara said: “Unless you prefer harder.”

“You’re the expert,” Willow said: lowered the fork to take Tara’s hand.

Tara smiled there, gratefully, and Willow found herself feeling butterflies. She couldn’t even say what caused that smile, she just knew it had to mean something.

“How’s the Wicca club?” Willow said. “Any actual witches show up?”

Somehow, she knew she’d said the wrong thing. Tara did her best to mask it, but her expression faltered.

“I-it’s fine,” Tara said. “No one, though.”

“Tara?”

“It’s ok,” Tara shook her head, a bit too quickly: and hurriedly changed the subject. “So, you told me about your magic, what about your family?”

Willow paused, unsure of whether or not she wanted to move on. Then again, Tara didn’t always like talking about things. She could share when she was ready.

“Not much to tell,” Willow said. “Usually well-meaning. Very religious dad, um, Jewish,” she paused. “This’ll be fun to tell them about. Mother might not notice. She’s… less observant. Distracted.”

“They’re nice?” Tara said: she seemed hopeful.

“Mostly,” Willow said: hesitated. “Did try to burn me at the stake one time.”

“Oh,” Tara said. “I’m sorry?”

“No,” Willow said: shook her head. “It’s the risks of a Sunnydale life.”

Tara chuckled at Willow’s bizarre levity: and Willow smiled.

A pause. The moment felt, somehow, strangely intimate. Nothing more than words, than shared stories, yet Willow somehow felt closer than when their minds had touched.

Suddenly unsure of what she should do, Willow straightened, and offered a piece of pasta to Tara.

“Is it…”

“It’s perfect,” Tara said.

They dished up: filled two bowls with pasta, and poured the sauce into each. A pot, pan and several glasses were left beside the sink, ready to be washed later. Instead, they returned to Tara’s room, each preferring to eat in privacy.

They talked while they ate, though there was little content there: it was just to avoid the
awkwardness of eating in silence. Schoolwork, idle observations, compliments about the food.

When they finished, Willow leaned across the table, and kissed Tara. When their lips met, Willow felt fireworks, felt a burning, surprised by its intensity. She knew she’d longed to feel Tara again, but not quite as much as she did.

“We were that-” Willow began: and Tara leant forwards to meet her lips again.

Scooby meetings had become less interesting than Willow remembered. Before, they'd been almost exciting: now, it was all rather overdone. Vampires to be staked, the occasional demon that needed a little more research.

Still, Willow listened: and found herself more engaged by the possibility that she might end up facing this, than with the idea of helping them.

Hopefully the day she'd have to worry was far off, though: and hopefully Buffy would understand. Angel was the one she was wary of.

He didn't always show up, thankfully: he followed his own leads, cashed in on the 'popularity' his soulless self had once possessed, and then came back with whatever he'd been able to find out.

So far, it was nothing. Vengeance demons were a normal feature of any town: even if Willow had introduced herself to the demon community, she wouldn't stand out.

Still, there was occasional entertainment, however. This time, as was most common, it was caused by Anya.

Willow, like Buffy and Giles, pointedly avoided making eye contact, feigning sudden interest in the endless bestiaries of Giles' collection. Still, Willow kept her ears open. A little more information never went amiss.

As best Willow could tell, Anya had learned of human relationships, initially, through the darker side vengeance demons all but lived in, and more recently through soap operas and TV drama. She'd decided any relationship that didn't have some argument at some point in a week just wasn't worth it.

"I just wish you'd pay attention to how I feel, sometimes!" Anya said, throwing her hands up in the air purely for dramatic effect.

Willow risked a glance sideways. Xander paused.

"Ok?" he said, uncertain.

"Good," Anya said, her apparent anger immediately fading. "Make-up sex time again?"

"Uh... sure?" Xander said.

Willow rolled her eyes. That was the other reason for Anya's apparently mandatory quarrels. She grabbed Xander's hand, and hurried out the room, and immediately everyone else let out a sigh of relief.

For her part, Willow bit back a smile. Anya had said those lovely words, I wish.
Well, she'd be helping their relationship, surely? Besides, there was nothing stopping her having a little bit of fun.
It had been a couple of weeks. Xander and Anya had become fully aware of the little spell Willow had placed on them. Nothing much, just something she found amusing; whatever Anya felt, Xander would feel.

Almost exactly what Anya had wished for. That, and poetic justice: it appealed to Willow.

"So, yeah," Xander said, a little uncertainly, to Angel. "I don't know if that's any help, but..."

Perhaps Willow should have thought twice about casting a spell on someone in the Scoobies, who'd likely be able to report back directly to Angel. She wasn't worried though, at least not yet.

How could anything possibly be tracked back to her?

Regardless, she kept on top of things: she listened.

"No rush," Anya said. "Take your time figuring it out, I don't mind."

She was grinning: it made Willow almost flush. She liked it when people were happy with her spells.

"I mind?" Xander said. Anya shrugged.

"At least give it a week," Anya said, before, with her typical bluntness: "My period should be starting tomorrow, I'm looking forward to see how he copes."

Xander looked almost scared. Willow did her best to feign a sympathetic expression.

"...Are you sure this is related?" Angel said. "I don't see what could tie this to the Gentlemen. There's not exactly... common ground."

"But it's weird, right?" Xander said.

Anya reached a hand under the table: pinched her own hip. Xander yelped.

Apparently Anya wasn't completely over the sadism of her vengeance demon days. Willow idly contemplated asking for tips: then decided against it.

Anya didn't really bear her any loyalty. For all she knew, she'd tell Buffy or Angel at the first opportunity.

"This is Sunnydale," Buffy said, "Weird isn't weird. Well it is, but something non-weird would be even weirder."

It was, Willow reflected, rather amazing how that actually made sense.

"Still," Angel said, "I'll look into it. I'll see if anything comes up."

Willow had the distinct feeling that was just a compromise, some way to shut Xander up, but she still resolved to be extra careful. Though she could see no way she could be found out, it was better safe than sorry.
Willow anticipated her meetings with Tara far more than those with the Scoobies, now. While, strictly speaking, she had to lie in both, she noticed it less with Tara.

And, while she'd long since accepted the necessity of her lies, it was still far more pleasant to be open.

She didn't need to feel judged, with Tara. There weren't potentially-threatening eyes on her, there was just love, and closeness. There was magic: something they had in common. Further, there were Tara's idle wishes: ones Willow took pleasure in making come true.

Tara might wish to do well in an upcoming test or piece of coursework: Willow obliged. She'd wish for something to come into stock at the Magic Box so they could perform some more obscure ritual: the next day they'd be drawn to the heights of magical ecstasy.

Willow enjoyed making sure Tara lead a charmed life. She didn't need to be thanked, she only needed to see Tara's smile.

And see it she did: so often. Almost every time she arrived in Tara's doorway, Tara would peer around: at first, nervous. Then she'd beam, and invite Willow in.

It never got old.

They managed to reconcile magic and intimacy: Tara appreciated how much Willow savoured their magical experiences, and it seemed Tara enjoyed the nostalgia brought forth by magic.

There were spells that could only be done by more than one witch. Some Tara had done with her mother, years ago, and never since.

Others were those Willow and Tara had, alone, dismissed as far too complex to try: and yet, with how much they'd experimented in recent weeks, such spells suddenly felt easy.

Tara had chosen the spell to practise, tonight.

"The f-fist time's the hardest," Tara said. "You need to think in a certain way, i-it's hard to say. I haven't done it since..."

She didn't finish the sentence, but Willow knew that look in her eyes. It was one of the pieces of witchcraft she'd learnt from her mother.

"What is it?" Willow said.

She reached across: took Tara's hand, to squeeze comfortingly.

"Telepathy," Tara said. "It's... nice. You can be close to someone. It's like a hug," she paused. "Only in your head."

"Head-hugs, got it," Willow said: smiled, then paused. "I don't think I liked that movie."

Still, that answered one question. No runes were drawn out, no herbs or spices or candles on the floor. There were only a few pieces of magic that needed nothing at all.

"How's it done?" Willow said.

"Y-you hold hands," Tara said: "You don't have to, it's just easier. Then, um, let me show you."
Tara reached across to take Willow's other hand, sitting cross-legged opposite her. She met Willow's eyes.

Willow couldn't describe what she felt next. There was another thought in her mind, which she knew instinctively wasn't one of her own, yet it didn't stand out.

Tara had done this before; she'd said that made it easier. Willow swallowed, and tried to mimic what she sensed.

It was hard to not be distracted. The warmth of each of Tara’s hands, interlocked with hers, the sensation of something just past her, just outside of her awareness. She found her mind wandering every time she was close to Tara.

*Like this.*

Tara’s voice chimed in her mind: Willow blinked, trying to interpret the thoughts she found herself thinking.

Suddenly, something clicked, and she found herself looking out of a new pair of eyes. She quirked her eyebrow, and watched herself make the motion as she thought it.

Then shock saw her back to her own mind, limited to her own body. She blinked, stretching her neck back.

“It takes a little getting used to,” Tara said, aloud that time. “I think I felt you.”

“Y-yeah,” Willow said: “That was a bit… intense.”

She’d been entirely contained in Tara, entirely surrounded by her. Immersed, or engulfed, it was hard to say which.

“Oh!” Tara said: “Sorry, I think that was me. I t-tried to make it easy for you, might have made it too easy for you to get in,” she paused. “Do you want to try again?”

Willow nodded, before thinking.

Strictly speaking, this was a risk. She doubted Tara would take too kindly if she knew Willow was a demon: and they were touching minds. If there was any way for that information to come out, it would be here.

Still, Willow hoped she could find a way to suppress it. She honestly wanted this; just the notion of it sent a shiver down her spine. She always liked to be close to Tara; this was like physical contact, with intimacy magnified a thousand-fold.

Willow shifted where she sat, getting more comfortable, and closed her eyes. It took her a few seconds to recall what she’d been doing before.

It was a matter of opening up, and focusing. Physical contact made it easier, though Willow sensed it wasn’t necessary: she let her awareness run down her arms, to her fingertips, and on to Tara beyond.

*Willow?*

It was utterly indescribable. She could *feel* Tara, really feel her: it was only then she understood Tara’s ‘head-hugs’. It was like being surrounded, completely: an all-consuming embrace.
“Tara,” Willow said, and thought, the word falling from her lips in a gasp.

It was hard to not smile. She could feel Tara; feel her joy at success, her love, a sudden surge of nostalgia.

For a moment, Willow felt like she was five. A small, cramped kitchen: the smell of something cooking, while her mother – not her mother – knelt by her. A warm smile, a comforting hand wiping away a tear: the sense that things would work out, even if she couldn’t see how-

And then Willow was back, sitting in her room, Tara’s hands in hers. She blinked.

“Sorry,” Tara said. “I got… overwhelmed.”

Still, Willow could guess what she would say, before she said it. There weren’t quite words in her mind, so much as ideas: a sense of being apologetic, of fondness.

Willow didn’t need to reply aloud. She just did her best to focus on the gladness she felt: the way her heart leapt any time she was with Tara, the butterflies, her captivation with anything Tara wanted to share.

All she needed to know Tara had felt it, was the way Tara’s eyes widened.

“I…” Tara said: fell silent.

Apparently Tara was more practised at keeping track of what was happening for real, and what was happening in her mind. Willow still found it tricky to focus on both, rather than just one.

It was good. On the whole, Willow seemed to be the better witch; but then, she wasn’t suffering from an ingrained fear of magic, and had a demonic upgrade. It was good to find something Tara surpassed her in.

Still, Willow winced at what she felt from Tara. Was that disbelief?

She squeezed Tara’s hands: and didn’t need to speak.

It was almost a pity Willow had to conceal part of herself back. Oh, how she longed to open herself up fully to Tara, demon and all. But, no: now, above all, wasn’t the time. She didn’t want to taint this memory for Tara.

“I love you,” Willow said: opened her mind as much as she could, intent on dispelling any disbelief from Tara’s mind.

Part of Willow burned. Yet another reason to regret her earlier mercy, the impotence of her first wishes. Tara’s family: the bits and pieces of memory and old emotion she could sense, how they’d made Tara underestimate herself. They deserved worse.

That anger Willow buried away, deep within the demonic kernel of her mind that she kept hidden. Everything else she bared to Tara.

The contact faded. Willow blinked: opened her eyes, to find herself staring at their joined hands. Turning her head up, she saw Tara was crying.

“Are you-”

“I-it’s fine,” Tara said, softly. “It’s… I didn’t think…”
“I didn’t mean-”

“N-no,” Tara said, “It’s- I…”

After a few more fractured sentences, Tara fell silent. She lifted one hand, reluctantly, from Willow’s, to rub at the corner of her eyes.

“It’s not too much?” Willow said, quiet.

She’d been so caught up in the intimacy, she’d forgot to consider that Tara might not have been ready: or might not have expected so much. She remembered reading something about that: couples didn’t always love each other to the same degree. 60/40 percent might be the best.

“N-no,” Tara said, quickly. “I hoped, I just…”

But, maybe, it could be 50/50.

“Caught me by surprise,” Tara said, after a moment. She was looking at the floor: when she looked up, Willow saw hope in her eyes.

Somehow an impromptu Scooby meeting had occurred in Buffy’s and Willow’s dorm. Xander was curled up with a heating pad, and Anya had left him at his request. Apparently stories of people she’d tortured far worse didn’t help him cope with pain.

While she was attempting what passed for socialization, in her mind, Giles had called. He’d been researching the various odd events going on.

“So, apparently, he’s narrowed the list down,” Buffy said. “The only pure demon that could possibly be in town would be if the Mayor had somehow survived, and there’s no sign of that. He called in a few favours, and apparently the Order of Dagon’s on the other side of the world. They don’t do too much beyond worship some Key. It’s not them either.”

“Oh,” and now Anya was raiding their fridge. “Still talking about the prophecy glitch?”

Anya sat beside Willow, and offered a bag of chips. When Willow shook her head, Anya started on the pack herself.

“It means there’s something big in Sunnydale,” Buffy said. “Wills, any sign of anything witchy?”

“Haven’t heard anything,” Willow said.

“Probably a vengeance demon, then,” Buffy said.

Buffy hesitated, and looked at Anya. Willow could guess what she was about to say, just from her expression.

Anya was a former demon. She was probably the closest they had to an expert on vengeance demons; and, above all, she probably knew others. Get Anya to call up an old friend, maybe they’d have word of a new, prolific vengeance demon.

It was clear Anya wasn’t particularly paying attention to the conversation. She ate another chip, crunching. Then, with her typical tact:
“Probably Willow, then,” she said, and took another chip.

Buffy hesitated with her mouth open. Willow stiffened, then tried to disguise fear as surprise.

“Huh?” Buffy said, far less eloquently than she’d expected her question to be.


Then she resumed munching.
Secrecy

Willow had never been the biggest fan of Anya. Recent events had done very little to change that perception.

She wasn’t ready to tell Buffy what she’d become. Especially not now, with Angel here, with all the unfortunate side-effects of her earlier mercy on display. She wanted to wait. And, instead, apparently Anya’s expertise with vengeance demons meant she’d already noticed.


And Anya didn’t even seem to be paying attention. Despite herself, Willow was almost impressed. Thankfully, Buffy was still pretty surprised. It gave Willow time to think: and it felt like her mind was going into overdrive.

This couldn’t end well. She suspected she could make Buffy reject the suggestion, but consciously or not, Buffy would pay attention. If she noticed a few oddities, made any connections, this would only get worse.

Buffy might even remember she’d wished the Gentlemen away, to Willow. That would settle it.

So, maybe letting Buffy hesitate wasn’t the best idea. Don’t let her dwell, don’t let her come to any realizations.

“I’m pretty sure I’m not a demon,” Willow said.

Start a conversation; a distraction. It was a delay, at the very least.

“Sure you are,” Anya said, absently. “Even I’ve heard you’re never around in your room. Plus I wished Xander would understand how I feel, now he’s at home with cramps,” Anya paused. “Should probably get more ibuprofen for him. Oh well, later.”

“Wait,” Willow said, “You think I did…”

Willow was almost glad she’d had so much practice at lying.

Buffy was looking at her curious. Willow tried not to wince, turning to face her friend, trying to act as openly as she could. For a moment, Willow half-thought her face had switched to its veiny, demon look.

“Don’t vengeance demons have pendants?” Buffy said. “I don’t see one.”

*Yes, thank you Buffy.* Willow smiled: nodded thanks, trying to hide her relief. Buffy was looking for reasons to not suspect her, that boded well.

“She doesn’t have to wear it,” Anya said: shrugged. “D’Hoffryn probably still has it. I’m guessing she was turned reluctantly, probably back when you were making out with Spike. D’Hoffryn wouldn’t give her the pendant, when she could just smash it and revert. Makes sense.”

*No thank you Anya.* Willow’s hand balled into a fist. So close.

“Ok,” Willow said, slowly. “Why do you think I’m a demon?”
Work bit by bit. Surely Anya couldn’t have pieced everything together? She might know more about vengeance demons than the others, but she was, well, she was Anya.

Still, it was best to be careful. Part of Willow’s mind ran over alternatives. Fake her death, move to Mexico: pretend she was a shape-shifter to have taken on Willow’s form… Plenty worked, all a bit unbelievable, none would work well. She needed something subtler.

“Good question,” Buffy said: and paused. “And seriously, if Will was a demon – sorry Wills – surely you could at least wait until she left the room?”

For once, Willow was glad of Anya’s lack of tact. That was a good point: at least she had a chance to defend herself.

“It’s nothing to be ashamed of,” Anya said. “Just thought it was obvious. If you’d say ‘I wish’ around anyone, who would it be? Someone you were safe around. How else could a vengeance demon respond to your dream?”

Anya took another chip. Buffy blinked: Willow tensed. Was Buffy really considering it?

“I used to do that all the time,” Anya said. “Did it to Cordy. Make friends with someone, they’re much more open with all their desires. So much easier to get a good wish.”

Ok, Anya had a point. This was a learning experience, at least. She’d have to be careful in future, if there ended up being a future.

There was no point in blustering, and denying all of that. That would only make her seem more suspicious. She knew how the old Willow would’ve acted.

“She’s got a point,” Willow said, to Buffy. “Just, um, don’t stake me quite yet?”

Buffy laughed, Willow exulted. Buffy wouldn’t let her guard down so if she was close to seriously suspecting Willow.

Still, it was only a matter of time before Buffy noticed that Anya’s proposal made sense. Willow would have to sort things out in that time.

The easiest way to allay suspicion would be to have something that was unquestionably vengeance demon activity going on outside, while she had an alibi. That would be tricky to arrange though; even if she could contact, say, Hallie, it was unlikely she’d help.

What demon would willingly come into eyesight of the Slayer?

Then the alternative was to allay suspicion more directly…

“There is an alternative,” Willow said, after a moment. “To the dream-thing, I mean. I might’ve mentioned I had a stressed-out friend. Wicca-club people, you know. One of them might have…”

“You didn’t mention you’d made any friends there,” Buffy said: curiously, not suspiciously, thankfully.

Willow almost laughed. That was the bit Buffy had a problem with? That bit was true.

“It didn’t come up,” Willow said: tried a shy smile. “I just wanted something that was, you know, mine.”

Buffy’s face softened. Willow didn’t even feel guilty, not for these lies. This was on Anya’s
shouders: all of this was necessary.

“Do you want us to investigate them?” Buffy said.

“N-no,” Willow said, quickly. “They’re not… I trust them. Mostly. There’s only one I spend time with, and she’s not… She’s good.”

She didn’t want to put Tara in Buffy’s crosshairs. Tara didn’t deserve that: especially given the stories her family had shared. If Buffy caught wind of Tara thinking herself a demon, that could be taken the wrong way.

Still, judging by Buffy’s expression, she was still considering Anya’s idle revelation. Willow definitely needed to find a way to put herself beyond suspicion. Most things, they were too crude, too tricky to set-up. She needed something more… elegant.

It came to her so quickly, so simply, she almost teleported from the room there and then. Spike. He owed her: she had only to have him make a wish. Then the power of the wish would do it all for her.

He wanted her to remove that chip in his head: let him be able to hurt people again. She had no desire to grant that wish, but she was his best chance at it. For the hope of it, Spike would be willing to do such a simple task as utter one mere wish.

Willow could have grinned.

Her initial flare of dislike for Anya faded. This was far from an irreparable situation.

“So it’s definitely someone at the Wicca club, though,” Buffy said.

Willow winced. That still put her uncomfortably close to being suspicious of Tara.

“I’ll keep an eye out,” Willow said. “Haven’t turned up all that regularly,” or at all, “after the first meeting, “But they shouldn’t find it odd.”

Anya laughed. Both Buffy and Willow turned to her.

“Don’t mind me,” she said, “It’s amusing, that’s all. The amount of times I was accused of murder or some such in the last few centuries, I never realized I just had to say ‘wasn’t me’,“ Anya paused. “They were generally right, of course. Still.”

Willow gritted her teeth. That particular interjection had made Buffy falter; and she’d been so close.

Of course Buffy was right to be suspicious. She’d be reluctant, but shrug it off as her duty. Plus the old Willow would have understood: probably have found the idea of being under suspicion kind of cool.

It would make it hard to go meet with Spike. The obvious thing to do would be just to teleport out, and risk it. There was too much that could go wrong, though.

“I’m a suspect now?” Willow said: cheerfully. “Can someone read me my rights? Always wondered what that’d be like.”

Her sudden perkiness apparently caught Anya off guard: and just made Buffy chuckle.

“You’re happy about that?” Anya said: cocked her head.
No. But there was nothing more to be done about it, now Anya had blurted it out. Besides, she could turn this to her advantage, if she was quick.

“Sure,” Willow said: grinned. “It’s like being on TV. Am I getting locked up?” she paused, “Do you even have a dungeon? Probably not,” she made sure to sound almost disappointed. “How about house arrest? That’s kind of cool, right?”

“Sure,” Buffy said, smiling: paused. “You don’t mind?”

“I get to catch up on sleep,” Willow said. “Let me know if I sprout horns, k?”

“Vengeance demons don’t have horns,” Anya interjected, helpfully. “They just have really wrinkly skin. Looks a bit like muscle tissue, speaking from experience.”

She still didn’t seem remotely perturbed. Willow suppressed a sigh.

“What?” Anya said. “Just helping. Insinuating all demons look the same is very hurtful, only a few demons actually have horns.”

“Well, let me know if I get wrinkly skin, or horns, or wings, or start breathing fire, or anything too demony,” Willow said, still chirping. “Or fangs. I guess I could be a vampire. Again.”

Willow wandered over to her bed, sitting down. Mentally, she did her best to recall the telepathy session she’d had with Tara: that seemed her best hope.

It’d be tricky, but she had a little time to practise. She could speak to Spike, and hopefully she’d be able to hear his responses, all without leaving the room. Presumably wishes heard that way also counted.

“Evil, skanky, kinda gay,” Buffy said, “That was the checklist to look out for, right?”

“Right,” Willow said: grinned.

One out of three. Well, by Buffy’s definition, probably two out of three. Wasn’t bad.

“Wake me up if the world ends,” Willow said: faked a yawn.

She could already guess the plan Buffy was formulating. She’d stand guard over Willow for a night, and then call Giles or Xander or Riley, to hear if any wishes had been granted overnight, or anything that seemed like a vengeance demon. If anything remotely suspicious happened, she’d happily let Willow go.

That wouldn’t remove the idea though. Further, it was unlikely to happen: and if wishes suddenly stopped as soon as Willow was captive, she’d have no choice but to seriously consider the possibility.

Which made this necessary. It wasn’t time for Buffy to know: not while it was a hunt. Willow closed her eyes, focused.

Spike?

It was hard to say just how it felt. Her last experience with telepathy had been contained in just a room: now she was reaching out outside of campus, her awareness centred in two places at once.

She couldn’t see, so much as feel. Spike jumped awake, still in his crypt.
“Red?” he said, aloud: looked around the room. “No one. Bloody wind, need to…”

*Spike. It’s telepathy. I need you to do something for me.*

Willow felt a pang, just behind her eyes. This was more of a strain than she’d expected: she drew upon the strength of her demon half, hoping it would help maintain the connection.

It seemed to. The ache lingered, but it was manageable.

“You need my help?” Spike said. “Say it, go on.”

Willow exhaled, slowly.

*I don’t have time for this. Buffy’s been told what I am. I need you to wish for her, and any Scoobies, to forget.*

It was easier to go for a general wish, rather than name Anya specifically: plus, something had occurred to Willow. She’d always been free to interpret wishes fairly liberally.

“So you do need my help,” Spike said: grinned cockily. “Have to say, I’m liking this.”

*Wish, Spike. I’m your only hope for getting rid of that chip in your head. If I get caught, you lose that chance.*

“Nah,” Spike said. “I don’t think so.”

Willow faltered. He was joking, right?

“I’ve been thinking,” Spike said, “I don’t think you’re gonna pay up: and right now, you need me. I don’t like being strung along.”

*What are you saying?*

Willow began thinking quickly, again. There were alternatives to just Spike, if he wasn’t going to help. She could get Tara to wish for a happy ending; still, it felt heartless to manipulate her. She was special.

She could teleport out and get Spike to wish the hard way, if need be.

“I’m saying, new deal,” Spike said. “You’re going to get this chip out of my head right now. No promises for the future: here and now, or good luck getting out of this one.”

*Wish for them to forget, I’ll grant that after.*

“Nuh-uh,” Spike said: shook his head. “I don’t trust you. Be a bloody miracle if I did, you’re lying to your best friend. You get this chip out: then, if I’m feeling nice, I’ll help. You scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours. What do you say, Red?”

Willow shifted, feigning sleep. She needed a moment to think.

She didn’t want to set Spike loose. She wasn’t adverse to a bit of harm: but what she did was ordered. What she did was justice: he was just a murderer.

But, she’d be prevented from continuing doling out justice if the Scoobies found out about her. That couldn’t be ignored either. And it would just hurt Buffy, if she found out: and hurt Tara.
No, they didn’t deserve that.

*One condition,* Willow sent the thought, *if you don’t make your second wish quickly, I’m telling* *Buffy you’ve lost your chip. That little thing’s all that’s stopped her staking you. That, and I could teleport behind you right now, before you could even blink.*

She could feel Spike stagger under the force with which she sent those words. Enjoying the thrill of power, Willow smiled.

*Don’t cross me, Spike.*

“Yeah, got that, Red,” Spike said: straightened. Then, clearing his throat: “So, deal?”

*Deal.*

Spike smiled. He puffed up his chest, and enunciated clearly: “I wish the Initiative’s chip was no longer in my head.”

Wish granted.

Still, Spike wasn’t as clever as he thought he was. No doubt he was congratulating himself for manipulating Willow into this. Vengeance demons could take liberties, however: interpret wishes however they wanted.

Willow called on the power of the wish, doing just as Spike said: precisely what Spike said, and nothing more. The tiny chip that prevented him hurting people appeared, slightly corroded, on his table: and thanks to a little spell-work, its effect nonetheless remained perfectly intact.

She’d made it worse for him. He still wouldn’t be able to hurt any non-demon, but now there was no chip that could be removed. It was all pure magic.

That’d teach him to try and cheat her.

Still, it seemed like Spike could feel some difference. He stretched his arms: grinned, fiercely, picking up the chip and crushing it between two fingers. His face shifted to its demonic visage.

“Good to be back,” he said.

If only he knew. Willow smirked.

*Time to uphold your end.*

“Yeah, right,” Spike said: shrugged. “I wish your Scooby friends hadn’t figured out you’re a demon. Happy?”

*It’ll do.*

Willow withdrew, focusing on shaping that second wish. It wasn’t technically vengeance, but it seemed to be enough: she could grant the wishes like normal.

And, this one, she altered. There was no harm in making it a little more extreme. First, she plucked the realization from Anya’s mind, the consideration in Buffy’s, wiping those memories clean.

And then she kept going. She’d ensure she’d stay safe; she had the opportunity to do so, and it wouldn’t do any harm. She could undo the wish when she wanted to, when she felt it was safe to come clean to Buffy. Until then…
The thought would be anathema. If Buffy heard or noticed anything that implied Willow’s true nature, she’d forget in seconds. Willow could probably turn veiny in front of her, and Buffy would blink, and shrug.

She tried to force a similar spell on Spike, but it didn’t quite work. Maybe he hadn’t been around long enough to qualify as ‘Scooby’, maybe it was something about an undead mind. Willow didn’t particularly mind; he wasn’t too scary.

Focusing, Willow held the spell, the wish, ready, a breath away from granting; and she paused, froze it there.

Might as well be sure. She yawned, stretched, and sat up: faced Buffy.

Anyahad left, at some point. Apparently she’d decided watching Willow sleeping wasn’t very interesting.

“Hey, Buff?” Willow said.

“Wills?”

“What would you think if it was true?” Willow said.

A pause.

“Huh?” Buffy said.

“If I was a demon,” Willow said. “I promise. I just wanted to help, to stop your dream coming true, I didn’t know it would-”

“Stop it, Will,” Buffy said: stood to move closer. “You’re not a-”

“If I was,” Willow said: “Wouldn’t it be good? I could help people. They wish, I grant. How wouldn’t that be a good thing? I learn from my mistakes.”

“Vengeance isn’t a good thing,” Buffy said, “You wouldn’t be help-” she paused. “Willow. Are you saying…”

There was a flash in Buffy’s eyes: a surge Willow’s demon side could sense. Fear, betrayal, and a rush of anger so very close to revenge. She was angry, even if much of that fury was cloaked in pain.

“You hate me,” Willow said, resigned.

“No, Wills,” Buffy shook her head: “Never. Because I know you wouldn’t do anything like that, not if you were still you. You know what good is.”

“And helping people isn’t good?”

“Vengeance isn’t,” Buffy said. Then, softer: “Willow. You’re joking. Tell me you are, please.”

“Buffy-”
“Tell me you’re joking.”

A momentary silence. Willow met Buffy’s eyes: almost shrank back at what she saw there. Pain, rage and restraint all in one. Not a glimmer of gratitude, or thankfulness.

For an instant, Willow felt almost disappointed. Couldn’t Buffy see?

“I thought so,” Willow said, dispassionate. She sighed.

Buffy tensed. Apparently the truth had finally sunk in: and then Willow released the spell, and resolve was replaced by a haze, and then an absent smile.

Perfectly done. Willow stood.

“Got to go,” Willow said. She couldn’t bear to be around her friend, not now: “See you later?”

“Sure, Wills,” Buffy said, as if nothing had happened: impromptu house arrest forgotten.

Willow blinked back tears as she left her room.
Darkness

It took about four hours for Spike to figure out what Willow had done to him. At that point, Willow was on her way to her nightly lurking in the Sunnydale bars, prepared to grant wishes of all the pained souls she could feel.

It was night, she was alone, and an enraged vampire was planning to use every inch of his ability to hurt demons, and demons alone. Willow almost found it amusing. She could sense his lust for revenge the instant he figured her trick out.

He thought he’d lost the chip: and no such thing had happened.

Spike lunged, Willow teleported, appearing behind him. He span around, guided by scent, and leapt. Willow puffed away again.

“Bitch,” he spat. “You said you’d-”

“And you didn’t want to wait,” Willow said, playfully.

It was hard to take any of this seriously; so she’d decided not to. Might as well have some fun: as if Spike could really hurt her.

Her lunged again, clearly guided more by anger than any thought. He didn’t make any effort at a second swipe, a random lash-out in hope Willow would have reappeared near him.

She simply teleported away, to just a few metres’ distance. Waited until he attacked again, and vanished. It took very little energy to teleport: meanwhile, he was exhausting even his vampiric stamina with repeated lunges.

“Are you finished?” Willow said, after a few minutes. “This is getting very dull.”

It was hard not to feel the high, the rush, from being able to so easily evade such a feared vampire. If being able to help others wasn’t reason enough, this more than anything convinced her not to regret becoming a vengeance demon.

Spike slowed: straightened. Oh, if looks could kill.

“I’m going to get you,” Spike said: snarled. “I promise that. Just you wait.”

Willow smiled, waved, and turned her back. She could feel Spike weighing up whether or not to attack again: and felt him decide otherwise. Unpursued, Willow returned to her nightly business of granting wishes.

It just felt good. And it made others feel good: she remembered that. Despite Buffy’s unwillingness to see, Willow couldn’t understand why this could be seen as wrong.

At the Scooby meeting the next afternoon, a flaming blanket smashed through the window. Willow sighed, tiredly: and in full view of Buffy, Anya, Xander and Giles, she switched to her veiny, demonic form.

Spike’s exclamation died in his throat. No doubt he’d planned some grand speech: Willow, their
closest ally, was a demon, was the creature they were hunting, etc, etc.

Instead, he managed a “Huh?”

Buffy’s eyes glazed over, just like the rest of them: their minds, their memories rebelled at what they beheld. It was as if nothing had happened.

After a few seconds, Spike recovered; turned to look around the room. He lifted his arms in what was no doubt intended to be a threatening gesture: no one so much as blinked.

“Is everyone here very stoned?” he said.

Willow chuckled. Her friends’ inability to acknowledge what she was had a few useful side-effects; ones it was easy to exploit.

“That wish you granted for me was quite handy,” Willow said. “I guess I should thank you. They’re not going to know what I am, until I’m ready.”

She smiled. Spike’s once-triumph, now-confusion gave way to yet more anger: Willow raised a finger.

“Uh-uh,” she said: wagged it. “Imagine I turn back. Imagine Buffy caught sight of you attacking her very close, very human friend. Your chip is all that’s stopping her from Slaying you. If she thinks you’ve lost it, you’re dead,” Willow smiled: “Deader. And you can’t fight back, not against her.”

Spike slowed. Willow exulted. This was fun.

“Buh-bye.”

She didn’t hear much from Spike, after that. Apparently he’d curled up to plot. She found herself almost looking forward to what entertainment he could provide.

Still, after window-smashing was added to the abilities of the nebulous threat the Scoobies were pursuing, Willow returned to Tara’s room, only to find Tara in bed, cocooned in her duvet. It was only as she approached that she heard Tara’s heavy breathing.

“Tara?” Willow said, softly.

No immediate reply.

“Are you ok?” Willow said, unsure of what would be better to ask.

“I thought-” Tara said: hesitated. “I thought I was safe.”

A pause. Tara inhaled, turning to face Willow, but still staying wrapped in her duvet. Willow sat beside her, on part of the bed left bare.

She hadn’t seen Tara like this: not once. Tara seemed used to dealing with pain, to pushing it down or coping while feeling it. She’d never come this close to being overwhelmed, for as long as Willow had known her.

“Tara?” Willow said, “Is everything…”
“They found me,” Tara said, quietly.

Willow’s mind immediately went wild. Possibilities and plans whirled past: was it Buffy? The Initiative? Angel?

“Who?” Willow said.

“My family,” Tara said.

She said the word as though it were hollow: it might as well have been, for what Willow knew of the people who called themselves Tara’s kin. Immediately, Willow felt a familiar burning: a sense of injustice, of something that needed to be done.

Her family? Willow tensed. She’d tried to get rid of them, tried to ensure they’d never bother Tara. It was the very first wish she’d granted.

“I don’t know why I’m so…” Tara said: inhaled. “I should be used to it. Expected it, I-I just thought… I thought they’d gone. S-stopped. A-and…”

A pause. Willow felt the body under the duvet: tried to find Tara’s hand, and rest her own over it.

“What happened?”

“I-I don’t know,” Tara said. “Apparently they… forgot. Lost me. I don’t u-understand it, but they f-found me again. Asked friends, retraced… They sent me a… th-they said they’re on their w-way.”

Tara was stuttering more than usual: much more than she ever did, normally, with Willow. That just intensified the burning.

“Why?” Willow said, “They don’t- What do they want from you?”

“I’m a d-demon,” Tara said, echoing the old lie. “It’s- if I turn, i-it’s not safe for-”


“I-” Tara began: hesitated. “I don’t know.”

Willow had hoped Tara would have moved on: lost the fear instilled in her. Apparently not. Still, Willow harboured no blame for Tara: all her rage was directed towards the Maclay family. They didn’t deserve to share her name.

And Tara was too nice. She wouldn’t wish for them to leave, not now. She was resigned: Willow knew that look.

Willow might be able to coax an ‘I wish’ from her: but it wasn’t worth it. The process would just put Tara in more pain. Comfort was the priority. And, Willow reflected, she was a witch as much as a demon. She had other ways of stopping vermin.

“Know,” Willow said: shifted, to rest her hand on Tara’s side.

This was her fault. She should have been harsher: that thought kept coming back to her. So much would have been avoided if she’d only ensured the right people suffered. Vengeance wasn’t vengeance unless it ensured the perpetrators wouldn’t hurt anyone again.

If they hurt Tara, they deserved to be hurt in turn. That was justice.
And Tara had given her free reign with her first wish. Willow could remember it clearly: *I just wish they’d stop bothering me.* A small house-fire would have fulfilled that just fine, or a permanent vacation to one of millions of hells.

And that would not only be more deserved, but it would stop what was happening now.

For long, savoured seconds, Willow entertained herself with all the possibilities that might have presented themselves, if she had only been less lenient. Not one felt undeserved.

“You’re good,” Willow said. “I know what you are, and it’s human. I know who you are, and it’s wonderful. Don’t believe a word they’ve said to you, Tara.”

A pause. Tara shifted under her sheets, uncurling just slightly. Her eyes were red, sore.


“It’s not bad,” Willow said.

“It’s not normal.”

“It’s not common,” Willow said: “Why does that mean not normal?”

Tara loved magic. They’d corrupted even that. Willow suppressed the urge to teleport away, to scour her family from the face of the world. It wasn’t easy.

“I-I know,” Tara said: hesitated. “I-I know that, I d-don’t believe it. Why don’t I believe it?” For a moment, her voice was desperate.

“Because they lied to you,” Willow said: lifted her hand to Tara’s hair. “That’s all. It’s on them. It’s all on them.”

Another pang. She hated seeing Tara like this: and, above all, she hated feeling useless.

“Do you know when they’ll be here?” Willow said, soft.

Be prepared. Keep them away from Tara: don’t let her set eyes on them, don’t let another poisoned word reach her. It took Willow a moment to remember to breathe.

“N-no,” Tara said. “A while. Maybe s-sooner.”

Tara shifted, again: rolling onto her back, to peer up at Willow. Tara couldn’t quite suppress a smile: it looked strange on her far from happy face.

“Thank you,” Tara said.

“For what?”

“Staying,” Tara said. Willow smiled: and lay down beside her.

“It’s the least I can do,” Willow said. *And I promise to do more. If you wish it, or when they come.*

She didn’t voice those thoughts. This wasn’t the time for anger, at least not anger to be shared with Tara. She needed a reason to feel happy; she had more than enough pain.

“I’ll stay with you,” Willow said, after a moment. “From now, until they’ve been and gone. Is that
Tara blinked: regarded Willow, uncertain.

“I mean it,” Willow said. “You don’t have to deal with them alone, if they even come. If, for some reason, I’m not there,”*call me* she sent, connecting to Tara’s mind with ease. “I mean it. Don’t worry, Tara. About anything.”

A moment of silence: Tara stared. Willow shuffled, suddenly self-conscious; then Tara smiled.

“Thank you,” she said, again. “Y-you don’t have to.”

“I want to,” Willow said.

Tara lifted her arm, out from under the duvet: pulled Willow closer. It was a few seconds before Willow realized the embrace was just a way for her to hide her face.

Tara was at her best when she believed in herself; when she realized she was as strong as anyone. Willow had seen some of that side of her, though usually when they were alone. A confident Tara, a Tara who found the idea of being wanted pleasant, rather than surprising.

The threat of her family had stolen all that. Maybe it was the loss of hope, the realization that they hadn’t truly left her, as she’d thought.

Willow had made it worse: she felt that keenly. If she’d expected them, Tara might have been able to better cope. Instead, she’d been caught off-guard.

Yet another tragedy brought forth by mercy.

“You always manage to make me happy,” Tara said, soft. “Even when I’m… Even when I’m about to break. Y-you know what to say, you d-do anything… I don’t know how you do it.”

“Magic,” Willow said: smiled, turning her head to kiss Tara’s cheek.

A chuckle that might have been a sob. Tara curled her head: pressed herself closer to Willow, suddenly clinging, as if afraid Willow might vanish.

“D-did you meant that?” Tara said.

“Mean what?” Willow said

“That you’d s-stay with me.”

“Of course,” Willow said. “Keep you safe, keep you company,” another kiss. “I don’t want you to have to worry. About anything: or anyone.”

Her tone darkened at that last word: she couldn’t help it. Just the thought of the Maclay family and all they’d done made her boil.

She supposed that was why she made a good vengeance demon. She’d learned to loathe injustice: and so sought to right it. Enact justice, enact vengeance. All the power she had didn’t mean a thing, if she wasn’t willing to use it.

But willing was something she definitely was.

“I love you,” Willow said, like an explanation. She could feel Tara smile; feel how much she
appreciated the reminder.

Closeness alone made Willow feel light. Just being near Tara achieved so much, made her feel like she could float away. She didn’t want anyone to dampen that light.

Anything that tried, Willow promised herself, she would stop.
Tara attended the Wicca club: and so, for tonight, Willow did too. Willow couldn’t pretend to be enthralled by the prospect of spending an hour or so with people who wouldn’t know a witch if she turned them into a toad, but she’d promised to stay with Tara.

Tara seemed tentative, as they approached the meeting. They slowed: Willow took her hand, uncertain.

“Are you ok?” Willow said.

Tara nodded: looked down. Willow couldn’t help but feel a pang of guilt. Maybe Tara wanted privacy; something that was just hers. Willow could sympathize with that.

“Do you mind if I come?” Willow said, still unsure of why Tara seemed so distracted. “It’s ok if you want to be alone, you look…”

“Just worried,” Tara said.

Willow wasn’t convinced. She disliked doubting Tara, but Tara’s nervousness was readily apparent: and it was something entirely different to the fear with which she regarded her family.

Still, apparently Tara didn’t mind her attending this meeting. Willow resolved to just keep her eye out.

They arrived at the door; entered, a little early. There were a few people already there, groups beginning to fill in the circle of chairs.

“Anyone you want to sit with?” Willow said.

“N-no,” Tara said, quickly; surprised. She moved to sit in the most isolated chair available. A little uncertain, Willow sat beside her.

Didn’t Tara have any friends here? She hadn’t looked for anyone: just found the loneliest spot she could. Willow felt a pang. Surely there was a reason Tara came to these meetings?

Willow reaches across: offered her hand. Gratefully, Tara took it, and looked up from the floor.

“Are these meetings good?” Willow said.

“A-a little,” Tara said. “It’s not that d-different from the first.”

“You like it?” Willow said.

Tara hesitated. Willow waited.

“It’s magic,” Tara said, quietly, “N-not properly, but… That’s nice. I’d like if one of them was… more, but…”

She shook her head. Apparently even Tara had lost hope of that happening. Resigned to spending a few hours with a group who were definitely not witches, Willow relaxed: sat back.

A few more were already beginning to trickle in. A couple gave Willow a second glance; either surprised at a new face, or vaguely recalling she’d been there before. None approached them. One
woman sat beside Willow, as the seats started to fill, but no one sat near Tara.

It didn’t necessarily seem to be an active dislike; clearly Tara hadn’t made any friends here. The one who sat beside Willow engaged in animated conversation with those she knew, always facing away from Willow.

Willow tried to ignore the sudden flare of loathing she immediately felt. Instead she shifted in her chair, facing Tara more fully: smiling.

She didn’t need to be alone. At least, not this time.

The last person to enter kept her head high: claiming one of the last empty seats, still several chairs away from Tara. Everyone’s conversations started to quieten as she sat. Willow glanced at Tara, curious.

“Who’s she?” Willow said, quiet. She’d forgotten a lot, since her first attendance.

“Emma,” Tara said. “She’s, um, in charge. Kinda. Arranges everything.”

So Emma arranged things at the Wicca club. Willow regarded her, curiously. From what she’d heard, the society arranged bake sales more than it did magic; still, Emma’s role wasn’t exactly easy.

Willow regarded her, uncertainly, as the other conversations petered out. Emma waited, patiently, but expectantly. When everyone had stopped talking for maybe five seconds she inhaled, and began.

Willow tuned out after a little while. It was a similar pretentious speech to what she’d heard before; a handful of poetic-sounding words and ideas thrown together into a nonsensical mishmash, to act as a greeting, and a meditation.

Noting that Tara was going along with it too, Willow closed her eyes when instructed. Still, she didn’t imagine any of the pathways or scenes requested: one advantage of knowing actual magic, was that you could easily spot the difference between real magic and pseudo-magic.

This was very much in the latter camp. Willow had the urge to laugh. Still, she did have some tact, as well as manners. That, and she didn’t want to offend Tara.

She doubted Tara was taking this seriously, but she was going along with it, even if it was just to humour the club. Willow might as well, too.

Willow cracked one eye open when it became apparent the meditation wasn’t going to be over any time soon. Emma recounted something about a wolf, and lunar strength: Willow couldn’t help but wonder why they expected moonlight to be particularly potent. The moon was just reflected sunlight, by that logic daylight should be the power-boost.

Well, magic was rarely so logical, but Willow felt fairly sure a magical breakthrough wouldn’t happen here, of all place.

With one eye, she scanned the circle. Everyone seemed enthralled: well, Emma was a good speaker, Willow could give her that. She painted a good picture.

As it became apparent the introduction was coming to an end (a mention of Gaia, and the first vestiges of actual witchy knowledge), Willow reclosed her eyes: only to open them moments later, to the conclusion of the speech.
“Welcome all, to the circle,” Emma said, “And blessed be.”

“Blessed be,” the rest of the circle echoed. Willow managed to join in on the ‘be’.

For a moment, there was solemnity; and Willow dared hope something serious might occur. The moment passed, however, and the mask of wisdom Emma wore dropped to almost childish excitement.

“Oh,” she said, “Now, for our stall on the 22nd, I think it’d be good to have a variety, don’t you? Di, your chocolate chip cookies were amazing, do you think you could make any more to add?”

‘Di’ nodded, noting something on the back of her hand.

“Excellent,” Emma gave a grin so wide Willow almost wanted it to be fake. “The rest of you, please bring anything you can. Do good, and good will come back to you. I expect to see at least some cupcake, Sharon,” she glanced across the circle, to someone else: a someone who nodded.

Emma knew everyone’s names, it seemed. Willow was grudgingly impressed; there were a surprising number of people in attendance, and Emma hadn’t faltered in naming or recalling facts about those two.

“Now, music,” Emma said. “Who wants to supply the-” one person eagerly raised a hand. Emma effortless segues, giving saccharine smile: “No, Ada, we want softer music. Something more melodic, empowering, not like last time.”

Ada lowered her hand: her head drooped. Still, Emma kept talking, and Ada soon paid attention again.

And so it went. Emma did most of the talking, suggesting various things for a bake sale: and, later, they started discussing an ‘orientation’ at the full moon. A ‘Nicole’ suggested various things, then.

Willow’s ears perked up at a mention of a ritual, but she soon realized it was just more play than magic. Once Nicole started talking about a dance recital, Willow zoned out again. Curiously, she looked across at Tara.

Tara didn’t seem particularly enthralled either: still, she was smiling.

It was the belonging: the thought hit Willow at once. It was being part of something; Tara had never had much of a chance for that, from what she’d heard. Of course she’d be glad of the chance to join a larger group, to have more than one person in her life.

Even if it was something as pretentious as this.

With that realization came, unfortunately, the observation that Emma had never once addressed Tara. She’d spoken to almost everyone in the circle, by name, recalling some detail about them, except the one real witch who’d been in the club.

Suddenly Willow’s already low opinion of the society plummeted.

“Um,” Willow said: spoke up, when there was a lull. “I’m new, sorry. Is there, well, anything you do other than bake sales?”

“There’s a newsletter,” one person said, cheerfully.

“Cheryl’s right,” Emma said. “Why, is there anything you’d like to suggest?”
“Yeah, actual magic.” “No,” Willow said, voice dropping. “I was just… curious.”

Emma raised her eyebrows, but didn’t say anything. Instead, she paused, apparently waiting for any more interruptions. There were a couple of murmurs as friends talked among themselves, but no additions: until Tara, hesitantly, interjected.

“Um,” she said, “I-I think…”

Her voice was quiet. Immediately Emma spoke over her, hushing the rest of the society, rather patronizingly. In a moment, all eyes were on Tara.

And Willow burned. Anyone with eyes could tell Tara didn’t cope well talking to relative strangers; and the fact these people were still strangers with how long Tara had been coming was a matter in itself.

Still, both that and how Emma has purposefully drawn attention to Tara’s quietness made Willow feel an anger she usually reserved for when she was granting wishes.

She needed to be angry, then: she needed rage to overpower compassion, it was the only way she could ensure true justice was done, rather than dangerous mercy. Now, anger felt worse: now, she couldn’t satisfy it. She could just sit, watch, and suppress the urge to show them just what a real witch could do.

“Yes, Tara?” Emma said. “Is there anything you wanted to add?”

Tara flushed, the confidence that had made her speak up fleeing. She looked down: shook her head.

“N-n-” she stumbled, “No,” Tara said.

Willow winced, and overlapped her hands in her lap. For the rest of the society meeting, her lower hand was balled into a tight fist. Suddenly every word Emma, or any of them, uttered just managed to irritate.

When the Wicca club meeting was over, Willow was grateful. As soon as she and Tara were outside, she spoke.

“Do…” Willow said: paused. “Do they always treat you like that?”

Tara ducked her head, shy. It was almost painful to see Tara retreat back into her shell, after how open she usually was around Willow.

Still, the anger seething under every word Willow uttered probably didn’t help. Tara had been ignored completely: until she’d drawn attention to herself, then she’d been mocked. Willow was fairly sure she’d heard someone parody Tara’s stutter as they’d left.

It had taken all her self control not to intervene then. However, she knew Tara didn’t want to be the centre of attention.

“A-a little,” Tara said. “I-it’s ok. I’m used to it.”

*You shouldn’t be.* Willow winced at how casually Tara said that. After everything she’d had to experience at home, she at least deserved an escape here.

“Tara…” Willow said, voice trailing off.

Tara couldn’t quiet look up: couldn’t quite meet Willow’s eyes. Willow hated that. She didn’t like
the idea that she might be scaring Tara, or embarrassing her, or anything. She wanted only the best.

Willow’s pace slowed; Tara’s did also, and she looked sideways at Willow. Willow smiled at her, trying to coax a little light into her eyes.

“You can vent,” Willow said. “You can talk to me. You know that, right? Anything you want to say. I won’t judge.”

Tara nodded, mute. Glad, Willow began to walk again, Tara beside her. She was silent, until they reached Tara’s room again. Then, Tara exhaled.

“I don’t know,” she said. “I… It’s witchcraft. Kind of. I li- I should like that, right?”

_Not with how they treat you._ Still, Willow let Tara continue. She was used to listening; she was good at listening, and she knew that letting someone put their thoughts into words could do good.

Still, they were inside Tara’s room before she managed to continue.

“They’re nice,” Tara said: paused. “To e-each other. I d-don’t know why I thought it would g-get better, I just thought… It should. I thought when I was part of the group, p-properly, then… I just never was.”

Tara looked down. Willow took her hand, sympathetic: Tara couldn’t quite meet her eyes.

“I’m not angry,” Tara said. “Is that- is that weird? I’d stopped noticing, until you… I don’t blame them, I-I think. It’s my fault for not- for being-”

“It’s not,” Willow said, at once.

“I know,” Tara said: hesitated, and looked up. “Sometimes it’s hard to remember… Still, it’s… I got used to it.”

Even Tara’s voice sounded sceptical. Apparently she believed those words as much as Willow did. Still, Willow didn’t say anything: just held her hand, comforting with her presence alone.

She didn’t want to force anything from Tara’s lips: this was for her benefit. And, eventually, Tara sighed.

“Sometimes I wish they’d just stop,” Tara said.

Willow bit back a grin: she didn’t want to have to explain that. But _I wish_, those delightful words. She hadn’t been trying to prise such a request from Tara’s lips, not now, but she wasn’t going to complain now it had been given to her.

In the space of a heartbeat, Willow channelled all the frustration, all her rage, all the burning she’d been suppressing throughout the Wicca club meeting, all into one piece of wish-granting. A blink, and in that instant Willow sent magic out.

For a split second, she felt everyone who had been part of the society: all those who had sat in the circle, guilty by action or inaction. Willow recognized some, and hated all.

It was a crueller spell, Willow had to admit. Perhaps her cruellest. No matter, it was justice.

And then she opened her eyes: and smiled at Tara. “Don’t worry,” Willow said, honestly. “I get the feeling things will improve.”
I wish they’d just stop.

And all across the UC Sunnydale campus, they did. It would be several hours until morning, before they were found. Every single attendee of the Wicca club would seem asleep: and when shaken, they wouldn’t awake. Maybe, in a couple of days, they’d be examined.

Doctors would have to conclude coma, or some such thing. They’d prise eyes open, and spot a glimmer of consciousness, and a spark of awareness, unable to do anything but wait and experience the rest of their lives in agonizingly slow, excruciating time: unable to move, or intervene, or alter a thing.

Each one of them, stopped.
Chapter Summary

I got a new laptop at around this point in writing the story: while I got used to the keyboard, there will be quite a few typos. I fixed all those I saw in edits, but some may have slipped through.

Enjoy!

When Willow returned to her room, she found Buffy out slaying, and a demon sitting on her bed, idly flicking through one of her textbooks. As soon as Willow walked in, D’Hoffryn stood, and turned to face her: beamed.

Tara had wanted a little time alone; Willow had acquiesced. She was glad, if D’Hoffryn wanted to see her. A meeting with an open demon probably wasn’t what Tara wanted.

“Ah, Miss Rosenberg,” D’Hoffryn said, amiably, spreading his arms either side of his body, “Wonderful to see you again.”

Willow stumbled, and froze. It was hard to do anything else. Still, D’Hoffryn didn’t seem threatening: didn’t seem to even be trying for intimidation. Though Willow knew that wasn’t necessarily a reliable gauge, that he was generally adept at hiding darker intentions, Willow trusted he meant well.

Besides, she hadn’t done anything that could earn his ire: at least, not recently. Momentarily uncertain, Willow scanned her memories and past behaviour.

“Oh, don’t worry,” D’Hoffryn said, apparently reading her expression. “I’m here for a good reason. Two good reasons, actually. Is now a good time?”

“I guess so,” Willow said. Buffy wasn’t due back for a while: and D’Hoffryn would be the only one in danger if she came back early.

D’Hoffryn didn’t seem too worried about that possibility: but, then again, he could probably teleport out at a moment’s notice.

“Wonderful!” D’Hoffryn said, “Now, first of all, I believe this is yours.”

He lifted a hand: and from it, a thin silver chain dropped. Willow’s initial reaction was to say she’d never seen it before; just as her lips parted, however, she recognized it. She’d only seen it in illustrations, but still.

It was a pendant: that of a vengeance demon. The kind of thing she’d been denied ever since ascending. Within it were her powers: and if it broke, she would revert to being human, her spells shattered.

It was a few seconds before Willow stepped closer. She lifted her hand, half-expecting it to be snatched away: instead it was dropped into her open palm.
The metal was cool, but its touch set her nerves alight. She could feel the incredible power within it: feel the Wish, aching to get out.

D’Hoffryn looked almost proud, as Willow lifted the chain, and fastened it around the back of her neck. She slipped the pendant into her top, not wanting to draw too much attention to it. Angel was still a problem: if Spike was immune to the spell she’d cast to ensure the Scoobies would never know what she was, it was possible Angel would share that.

Willow found herself feeling almost flattered. She’d long since come to terms with being a vengeance demon, long since grown proud of what she could do. To now have the chance to wear the symbol, it felt good.

“Why?” Willow said, lowering her hands and looking up.

The metal of the chain was still cool against her skin. She found herself constantly aware of it: its power, its weight.

“It’s about time,” D’Hoffryn said, waving his hand. “It’s a dreadful pain, really, connecting a pendant’s power to someone who isn’t wearing it. Much easier to have it this way.”

“Why not give it to me at the start?” Willow said.

“Oh, come now,” D’Hoffryn said, “You’d have crushed it in less than a minute, if we had.”

“And you think I won’t now?” Willow said.

“I trust you,” D’Hoffryn said. “By all means, prove me wrong: that’s in your power now. I don’t think you will: you’re smart enough to see the advantages.”

Willow felt a slight flush at the compliment. When had she started caring what a demon thought of her?

But then, there was no denying her first meeting with D’Hoffryn was important. It had shaped her life: her yes had ensured she’d have the power to right so many wrongs. She’d made mistakes, but she was fixing them.

Still, it was good to be appreciated. She had so little opportunity for people to acknowledge what she was, and the good she’d done.

Though she didn’t grant wishes for thanks, they were still nice.

“Thank you,” Willow said, surprised at just how much she meant it.

It could still catch her by surprised, just what it meant to be a demon. Befriending those she’d once have helped Buffy kill: as if there weren’t humans that did far worse. She knew the old Willow would have felt guilty, or mistaken.

The new Willow, though, she knew that what she did was right: was just.

Almost unconsciously, Willow lifted a hand: ran it across the cool metal of the pendant’s chain.

D’Hoffryn smiled.

“Now,” he said, “The second thing.”

There was a pause, and his voice suddenly deepened. In a typically over-dramatic fashion, sulphuric smoke started to billow from the folds of his cloak, there was one flash of lightning, and
he rumbled:

“In recognition of all you have done in the pursuit of vengeance, and of justice, I, D’Hoffryn, Lord of Arashmaharr, bestow upon you the Order of Nemesis, Third Class.”

The smoke faded, the room returned to its normal illumination, and D’Hoffryn coughed, clearing his throat. He continued in a far more normal voice.

“Sorry about that,” he said, “Demons are sticklers for ritual. Anyway, one of your wishes won an award, congratulations!”

He beamed, apparently genuinely proud. He withdrew what looked like a small, hand-sized grey-bronze shield from within his cloak: offered it to Willow. Surprised, Willow took it.

“Do I, uh, need to make a speech?” Willow said.

“Not until you reach Order of Nemesis, First Class,” D’Hoffryn said. “There’s only one of those assigned a year. I’m sure you’ll manage at least one though, you’ve got real ability. I’m glad you decided to join us.”

“Me too,” Willow said: smiled. She tilted her head, regarding the shield.

Willow hadn’t doubted herself for quite some time. Now, more than ever, though, she felt certain that she was on the right path. She was doing good, and she was being appreciated: if not by her usual friends.

“I wish they’d just stop,” D’Hoffryn said, quoting. “I believe it was that wish that earned you that reward. Wonderfully poetic, good job,” he rested a hand on her shoulder: “My philosophy is to never go for the kill, when you can go for the pain. Masterful work.”

“Thank you,” Willow said, again.

And it was because of Tara. She felt all the more glad, at that: she was a successful vengeance demon, as well as a good friend and girlfriend. There was nothing to stop her being human.

“Well, anyway, I ought to be going,” D’Hoffryn said, stepping back. “Keep up the good work.”

“I will,” Willow said: smiled.

A puff of smoke, and the demon had departed. Willow quickly wove a cleaning spell, purging the room of the scent of sulphur and brimstone; no need to raise Buffy’s suspicions unnecessarily.

Though it still shouldn’t be possible for Buffy to really find out what she’d become, there was no need to take risks.

Buffy did come back after an hour or so: and didn’t react to anything. She nodded a hello to Willow, and complimented her new pendant. She didn’t seem to have noticed anything amiss. Instead, she went to bed.

That, more than anything, convinced Willow that she was safe. If Buffy had any worried at all, she wouldn’t be going to sleep in the same room as a demon.

Putting down the book she’d been pretending to read, Willow lay back, momentarily feigning sleep. Instead, she sent out her mind, seeking out Tara.

Are you ok? Willow sent the thought, her first instinct being worry.
Tara’s were family were still expected in Sunnydale, sometime. She didn’t like being apart from Tara when they might be due. Willow tensed even more, when Willow didn’t reply immediately. Then:

"Fine, she felt Tara’s thoughts. Willow found she enjoyed telepathy. Just shaken.

Shaken? Willow reacted at once, It’s not…

Communicating via telepathy was strange: she didn’t need to explicitly finish sentences. What she meant was imparted by impression if not by word.

Not my family, Tara thought. She hesitated: The Wicca club. Did you hear?

Oh. It was Willow who paused, then.

She didn’t regret what she’d done, didn’t feel any guilt for he wish she’d granted. Willow felt sure Tara felt little sympathy: Tara wouldn’t want to put up with the club any more, given the choice. Willow had just made it easier.

Still, Tara was gentle. Even the people she hated the most, she didn’t necessarily wish ill for them. That was just Tara.

She’d be uncomfortable with any suffering, even if it was deserved: that was what Willow told herself. It didn’t change the fact she’d done what was best for Tara. The wish she’d granted, it would make Tara happy, in the end. That was all there was to it.

I heard, Willow said, keeping vague. She couldn’t be sure how many details of her curse had spread. I’m sure you’re- we’re safe.

It’s not that. It’s… them, Tara’s thoughts were, as expected, tinged with sympathy. Something put them in a coma. All of them. I just…

Tara felt bad. Willow paused: it probably wasn’t the best time to point out what she’d hear would only get worse. They weren’t just rendered paralyzed: they were made fully aware, inescapably conscious.

You don’t feel sorry for them, Tara sent: a statement of fact. Willow winced, momentarily surprised at Tara’s keen observation.

No, Willow said. Then, opting to play human: Is that weird? It’s just, with how they treated you…

There were a few seconds for silence. Buffy snored loudly in the background, momentarily distracting Willow.

See you tomorrow, the thought was Tara’s.

There was an air to finality about it. Apparently Tara wanted to be alone, at least for now: Willow hoped her coolness hadn’t been too much for Tara’s empathy. She honestly couldn’t see how anyone could react differently, though.

The Wicca club, they deserved what they got. All of them were guilty of cruelty, or of letting cruelty occur. For action or for inaction, they needed to be punished. Every one of them.

Willow wouldn’t deny it. Far from guilt, she felt pride.

Still, if Tara needed time to process, she’d grant it. They’d meet again tomorrow morning; maybe
Tara would see things more clearly then.

Stretching, Willow stood up. Just because she’d received a commendation didn’t mean there wasn’t more wishing to be done: and it was night, the best time for vengeance demons. Smiling to herself, instinctively feeling that this would be a good night, Willow left the room.

There were wishes to be granted.

When morning came, Willow’s only detour was to freshen up at her dorm. After that, she went straight to Tara. A knock on the door, she was invited in.

Tara was nervous; Willow could sense a little unfocused resentment from her. It was an odd feeling, from Tara: still, it wasn’t unheard of. The first time Willow met Tara, it was due to feeling the bitterness she felt towards her family.

Willow assumed it was the same thing, this time. Tara’s family were still expected, any time.

There was a thick tome lying open on Tara’s bed: unmistakably a magic book. Leather covers, ancient, yellowed paper; there weren’t too many of that kind of book available.

“Hi,” Willow said, and nodded at the book: “Are you doing something?”

“Two person spell,” Tara said. She shook her head, and looked down: “I was thinking we could…”

“What is it?” Willow said.

Unusual. Willow tended to be the one who suggested what spells they could try: Tara was often content to just share company. Neither minded the other’s alternative, but it was rare for Tara to suggest a spell.

“F-finder spell,” Tara said. “It- It finds centres of emotion. Um, things that you care about, or could- A-anything that causes a lot of…” her voice trailed off.

Willow hesitated. It was an... interesting spell.

“I-I was thinking,” Tara said, stumbling over her words, “We could- you could- It might let you work out how far… they are.”

Willow raised her eyebrows. It might not be the intended use of such a spell, but that did make sense. Tara would want to be able to track down her family. Advance warning never hurt.

“Of course,” Willow said, at once. “You know I’d do anything.”

“I-I know,” Tara said, soft: she couldn’t quite meet Willow’s eyes, instead turning around, to pick up the book, and bring it closer.

Something was off, certainly. Still, Willow put it down to worry, helping Tara set up the basics for the spell. They sketched a circle out on a notepad, set candles into a specific pattern, and improvised a number of the more inaccessible implements.

It was rare that old magic books were completely accurate: a lot of the time they were written with tradition, more than practicality, in mind. There was no need to use chalk and stone when pen and paper could do just as well.
They didn’t talk, during the set-up. Willow wasn’t sure whether that was good or bad. Maybe they were just synced up, or maybe Tara was distracted. Was she still bothered by the fact Willow wasn’t too affected by what happened to the Wicca club?

Each referring to the book, the spell was set up in just a couple of minutes.

“Are you-” Willow began.

“Let’s do it,” Tara interrupted.

A little surprised, Willow obliged. She sat the opposite side of the circle to Tara, and lit the candle in the centre.

“Th-think about my parents,” Tara said, “The s-spell, if you want to know about them, i-it will let you feel the location of who or w-what can give you that information. That would be th-them.”

“Would it be better if you thought about them?” Willow said, “You know them better than me, it might…”

“N-no,” Tara said quickly: “It- I’d get distracted. It- it needs to be you.”

A moment’s pause. Something was wrong. Willow frowned: then nodded. Whatever it was, she could help Tara deal with it when her family was no longer a problem.

“Ok,” Willow said. “Want to start?”

There was a moderately lengthy incantation to recite, before the spell would take effect. The hardest thing was pronouncing a few of the more unwieldy sentences. Still, together, Willow and Tara made it through.

By instinct, Willow closed her eyes, feeling the unmistakable, overwhelming flow of magic rise around her. She did as Tara had asked: focused on the idea of Tara’s family, and their location.

It took a few seconds to get her bearings: the spell was more than willing to show her where the Maclays were, it was just much harder to work out how to get there. Still, after a few seconds, Willow determined the general distance: and, after a moment more, the direction.

They were close. Almost on the borders of Sunnydale: they’d reach the town by late afternoon. Willow could guess their routine, from that: they’d rent a room for the night, then dedicate tomorrow to finding Tara on campus. Some time tomorrow, Tara’s family would find her.

At least, that was what they hoped.

Willow opened her eyes: to see Tara’s closed.

She rested, instead. There was no need to hurry. No doubt Tara found the feel of magic as comforting as Willow did; so Willow was content to just watch. A few twitches marred what was otherwise serenity.

Then Tara opened her eyes, jumping just slightly when she saw Willow staring so intently. Willow smiled.

“A-anything?” Tara said.

“They’re not coming,” Willow said. “I don’t know why they told you they were, but they must be lying. They’re not even close.”
A pause. Tara’s eyes widened, just slightly; there might have been a glimmer of hope. Willow relished the sight.

She didn’t need a wish: she was still a witch: being a demon just afforded a few more perks. One way or another, Willow promised, Tara wouldn’t need to worry about her family.

Then Tara’s expression turned to a frown, and Willow realized what could be a problem. There was no reason Tara couldn’t have done the same spell: she might have asked, and reached the same response Willow had.

Well, it wouldn’t be hard to come up with a lie. She might have focused on the wrong thing, after all.

“What about you?” Willow said, trying to seem casual. “Did you find out anything?”

“What? N-no,” Tara said. She tugged at a strand of her hair. “I didn’t ask.”

That was a relief. Tara had no cause to worry, then. This time tomorrow, everything that scared Tara would be out of the picture.

“The world has to give you a break sometime, right?” Willow said, smiling, beneficent.

“Y-yeah,” Tara said. Somehow, Willow sensed she didn’t quite believe it. Well, Willow promised herself, she would.
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

This is the chapter I mentioned at the start. Think of it as Dark Willow meets the Maclays. It needed to be done, to not just be skimmed over, but this is your advance warning for people who might not feel able to read that. It's obvious when it's starting, and it goes most of the way to the end of the chapter.
Anyway, thank you for all the kudos and comments, it means a lot. I'm glad you're all enjoying this story.

In a couple of hours, Willow would manage a quick search of the Sunnydale hotels and motels. There weren’t too many; for some unfathomable reason, Sunnydale’s high mortality rate wasn’t a huge tourist draw.

The Maclay family would be here by then. They’d be staying, and Willow intended to ensure they wouldn’t be leaving. She’d put right her old mistake, her early mercy.

Until then, Angel wanted to speak to the Scoobies. He was sharing the results of his investigation, or some such thing. Willow didn’t have high hopes. She just hoped to get through it either without wincing at how wrong he was, or being revealed.

Even if Angel did work it out, however, Buffy and the rest of them wouldn’t be able to remember. Willow had ensured that, with an earlier wish. It was possible, too, Angel would be affected: Willow wasn’t certain. Being both undead, and having left Sunnydale for what was meant to be for good, the spell might not have affected him.

There shouldn’t be any reason to worry, though. It was day: if Angel had, by some miracle, figured it out, she only needed to open the curtains.

Willow sat beside Buffy. Xander and Anya were around the table too, while Giles was providing snacks. Angel had roomed with him, during the day, so they had to meet at Giles’ house.

Soon everyone was eagerly snacking, so much so Angel had to clear his throat rather noisily before talking.

“Well, I’ve done a lot of research,” he said: and paused, “A lot of research, and there isn’t much to narrow it down. When I started, it looked like it was either the work of a witch or vengeance demon. A lot of the odd events have looked like vengeance, but there’s no reason a witch couldn’t be intervening too.”

“Don’t we know this?” Buffy said. “I’m as happy for an excuse for donuts as anyone, but it sounded like you’d had a breakthrough.”

“I have,” Angel said: paused. “Kind of. There’s a witch club. Something’s happened to them.”

That wish again, Willow felt as though she should regret making it: it had made several things awkward for her. Still, those people, they had it coming.

If the others couldn’t see that, if they couldn’t understand justice, it wasn’t her problem.
Still, Willow reacted as she knew Angel would expect her too: wide eyes, sudden shock. There was no need to pretend she didn’t know what they were talking about.

“I heard about that,” Willow said: Angel nodded.

“All but two of the people who were at the last meeting are in comas,” Angel said.

“All but two?” Xander said. “Now that’s not suspicious at all. Who’re the suspects?”

Willow raised a hand, biting back a laugh at how Xander almost choked on his pastry. She smiled, a little self-consciously: Angel glanced at her, surprised.

“I was going to look up names tonight,” he said, “Or ask Buffy to. You were there? Do you know who the other was?”

Willow nodded, and hesitated. “It’s not her,” Willow said.

“You’re sure?” Angel said. “It’s… suspicious, you have to admit. The entire club is afflicted, except for two people. She might be-”

Willow shook her head: hands balled into fists. She hated it when they turned their suspicions to Tara, even if they didn’t know who she was.

Apparently proximity to Willow wasn’t a good thing. Willow paused, thinking quickly. There was always a way out: a red herring she could use, to distract. She was tired of having to evade Angel.

It was tempting to find a scapegoat. Maybe she could figure out a way to pin the blame on Spike: though vengeance demons typically seemed to be women, there probably wasn’t a direct prohibition on men joining.

That would be a kind of justice. He’d threatened to out her as a demon, so she could pin the blame on him instead. Then Angel would find him, assume he’d killed Wesley and Cordelia for some kind of revenge, and Angel would leave Sunnydale.

That could work, but she couldn’t put it into action just yet.

“She’s a witch,” Willow said, an excuse occurring. “A real witch, same as me. The only one there, I think: that might be what excused us from whatever happened to the rest.”

Real witches might dislike pretenders: Willow knew she felt that kind of bitterness sometimes. It was a motivation: still, she’d let Angel realize it. If she gave him all the answers, it might seem suspicious.

“That means she has the power to do something like this,” Angel said.

“But she’s been with them since the start,” Willow said. “If she was going to do something before now, she would have. I haven’t been attending too regularly, but I know she has.”

And that would imply Tara’s innocence, and suggest that there was at least one other witch in Sunnydale who was either responsible, or who wished to a vengeance demon. Either way, the course of action was clear.

The way to find the culprit, was to find the witch. They’d either be responsible, or might recall who was. It didn’t matter, that would leave Angel chasing a ghost.

Angel took a step back: paused, contemplative. After a few seconds, he regarded Willow, and
“That narrows it down,” he said, slowly. “If the perpetrator doesn’t like non-witch Wiccans…”

His voice trailed off. Willow kept her expression blank while, inwardly, she exulted. There was no need to worry too much about Angel, any more. He’d be off staking out magic shops.

She’d sensed him a couple of times, outside campus bars. Recognizing him, she’d always been able to flee before she was noticed. It was to be expected, if he suspected a vengeance demon. If he’d turned his focus towards a non-existent witch, however…

“’It’s a witch,’” Angel said. “I don’t know who, but it looks like a witch has to be responsible. They would spare Willow, and the other, because they weren’t pretending. And if that’s true…”

“So, definitely a wicked witch?” Buffy said.

“That’s a relief,” Giles said, softly, before wincing as everyone look at him. He hesitated: cleaned his glasses. “I just mean, finding a vengeance demon is nearly impossible. You need to have them reveal themselves, or run into the person who made the wish and hope they have an abnormally good memory. All of that requires a great deal of luck.”

There was a pause. Angel seemed to be speaking far more slowly now, thoughtful.

“Exactly,” he said, eventually. “But a witch we can trace, if we work out what spells they’ve done, and what ingredients they’d require. Follow those…”

“And we find who’s responsible,” Buffy said.

Buffy was grinning. Relieved, Willow joined her. This was going perfectly.

The Maclays were in Sunnydale. Willow had attuned her mind, and she could feel their rage. It was close enough to vengeance to be accessible to her: they weren’t angry at anything in particular, just at the world, and at whatever had stopped them finding Tara sooner.

There were three. A young man, unshaven, who showed the most dislike on his face. There was a woman, a similar age, who seemed far less certain, but no more pleasant.

The oldest was the one Willow could sense the most rage from, and she could recognize him at a glance. He’d have to be Tara’s father, Mr Maclay.

The Maclay family, come to collect Tara. They wouldn’t know what hit them.

Still, Willow watched a while: waited. Being able to teleport made hiding and pursuit easy. She knew where Tara was, so she could be sure they wouldn’t be finding her any time soon.

Instead, she could have her fun. Willow promised herself that: this was justice. She didn’t need someone to make a wish, to want to do good.

This was no different to what Buffy did all the time. Finding monsters, hunting them down: these people qualified. Still, a stake through the heart was too simple, too easy for them.

Willow remembered Tara’s stories. They told her she was a demon: made her believe it. Willow laughed at the recollection: the sound echoing. As the Maclays turned, she teleported away. Oh,
how would they react when faced with a real demon?

Bored, Willow shrugged. From the top of a building, she ensured the streets were empty: that was to be expected at this hour. Sunnydale locals generally knew not to go out at night, especially on these streets. If she left them alone, they’d probably be attacked by a vamp.

That was still too easy.

Unable to sense anything except the three Maclays below, Willow teleported down into a side-alley, and walked out into the street.

“Hi!” Willow said, waving.

She felt power, suddenly was more than just magic, more than just being demonic. It was the realization that she could use that power. It felt… good.

“If I asked you to leave Sunnydale, would you?” Willow said, tilting her head.

The three stopped. The oldest, Mr Maclay, frowned at her.

“How?” he said.

“You heard,” Willow said.

“Mr Maclay said, “You know who you are,” Willow said. “I know why you’re here. Donny,” she gestured at the young man, “Beth,” she gestured at the woman, “And you. You’re her father.”

“You know Tara?” Mr Maclay said.

There was a flicker of something in his eyes. It wasn’t fear, at least not yet, but he seemed to slowly be becoming aware that this journey might not be so simple. Willow sensed he wasn’t used to people saying no to him.

“I know what you said to her,” Willow said. “I know how you treated her. Do you really think she’d want to go back to you?”

“If you know that,” Mr Maclay said, “You’ll know what she is.”


“She’s a witch,” Mr Maclay said, pronouncing the word like a curse.

“So?” Willow said.

A moment of silence. Neither Beth nor Donny had spoken, merely watching the exchange: still, Willow wasn’t ignoring them. Three people, and they’d all stopped for her: Willow relished having that power.

It was different; new. So often, people walked over her, ignored her. Witchcraft had been her first step away from that, her first step towards making a difference. This, this was just more of the same, and oh she liked it when people paid attention to her.

“Evil is evil,” Mr Maclay said, “Witches-”
“Get burned at the stake, is that it?” Willow said: tilted her head.

She might be a vengeance demon, but she was a witch first, and there was one simple little spell she used to light candles. Calling on a little more power, however, tapping into her demonic abilities, Willow did more.

She lifted a hand, and the one she assumed was Donny cried out. Clothes, hair, beard went up in flame, searing skin: he fell to his knees, and to the ground, still burning, still wailing.

Immediately, Beth and Mr Maclay moved away from him, jumping. It was Mr Maclay who first turned to face Willow again.

“Tara told me something else,” Willow said, smiling, unaffected. “She-” a pause: she glanced at the still screaming Donny. “Pipe down.”

She flicked her hand: there was a crack, and Donny stopped wailing. Beth let out a cry.

“You told her she was a demon,” Willow said. “I’ve got news for you. She’s not,” Willow let her features shift, skin replaced by twisted veins. “I am.”

The two Maclays ran, Donny forgotten. Mr Maclay went one way, Beth went the other.

She probably could drag both back, deal with them slowly, but it wasn’t worth it. It was the father Willow felt the most rage for: meeting him did nothing to abate it. Standing in the same spot, Willow looked in the direction Beth was running. She was halfway down the street already.

Willow clicked her fingers. Flames. Then, slowly, she turned her head again: and teleported.

“Running?” Willow said: tilted her head, as she appeared right in front of Mr Maclay. He almost tripped as he tried to stop. “You’re not letting her run from you. Why should I let you run from me?”

The almost arrogant assurance Mr Maclay had once possessed had fled from him. Staring into a demon’s face could have that effect.

“Nothing to say?” Willow said.

“I- I-” he began: froze, terrified.

It was gratifying. Willow felt no guilt at thinking that. These people, by action or inaction, they had happily been part of cruelties done to Tara. It was only justice, to let them know what pain was like. To let them, truly, understand helplessness.

He lashed out, suddenly. The strike caught Willow by surprised, but demon flesh was surprisingly resilient. She caught his wrist before he could pull it away: lowered her head, met his eyes.

Slowly, Mr Maclay, straightened his back: too proud to beg, apparently. Or maybe he just knew it wouldn’t help. He lowered his hand, apparently realizing brute force wouldn’t work here.

Hands by his side, posture an attempt at bluster, he spoke, doing a remarkable job at hiding the tremor in his voice.

“I wish to see my daughter,” he said, each syllable clipped, precise.

And Willow grinned.
“Oh,” she said, “You really shouldn’t have said that.”

*I wish*, how she loved those words. She could shape the wishes she granted, however she wanted. Though she had only precious seconds to craft the wish, before the opportunity was lost, those moments were enough.

Willow obliged. She seared the image of Tara’s face into his optic nerves: a sight he’d never be able to look away from, never be able to ignore. Even if he closed his eyes, she would be there. It was too kind a sight for him, but it was also to remind him of why Willow was doing this.

And, in payment for that little spell, his eyes fell from their sockets, crushed on the ground as he stumbled. He only wished to see Tara: not a word about seeing anything else, ever again.

Oh, how he cried out.

“Now,” Willow said, taking a step forward to the flailing Mr Maclay, “It’s time to talk.”

She took a step forwards: lifted a hand to his forehead, a couple of fingers brushing the now-vacant sockets. He cried out again: and Willow pushed, knocking him onto his back.

Magic was all well and good, but there was no reason she need fear a little physical contact.

Though he could not see her, Willow remained standing above him, looking down into the pits that slowly filled with blood, which were once eyes. He looked pathetic.

“You tried to hit me,” Willow said, conversationally. “Do you do that often? Hit people? It felt practised.”

He didn’t respond. Willow’s expression set: and she walked around him, to the arm he’d struck with. It lay, uselessly, on the cool ground as he cried out. She placed the ball of her foot on his wrist: gently, for now.

“This will be simple,” Willow said, voice lower now. “I’m going to ask you to say some things: make some wishes. When you’re done, I’ll kill you. If you don’t make those wishes, you’ll live, and you’ll hurt.”

Mr Maclay whimpered. After a moment, Willow realized it was an attempt at a *why?*

“I care about justice,” Willow said.

Mr Maclay laughed, scornfully: Willow pressed down with more weight. At the sudden pressure on his wrist, Mr Maclay gasped, and quickly fell silent.

“First,” Willow said. “You’re going to wish to feel everything you did to Tara. Everything she felt because of you, you’re going to experience the same. The exact same.”

The holes that had once been eyes widened: Willow quickly put an end to his flailing with a little more pressure from her foot.

Still, he remained silent.

“Say it,” Willow said, firmly. “Wish it.”

Mr Maclay’s eyelids closed over red pits, and his jaw set. Willow exhaled, and pushed down with more force against his wrist: there was a crack, and a hoarse voice crying out.
“I-I- I wish,” Mr Maclay said, inhaling, desperately.

Willow smiled: reduced the force.

“I wish to feel what I’ve done to Tara,” he said, hurrying over the last few words. He tensed, resigned.

Willow’s smile widened, and she granted the wish: watched, without flinching. He convulsed, shouted; bruises started appearing over his body, a pearl of blood trickled from his lip, injuries he’d inflicted coming back to haunt him.

Something inside Willow flickered: something that might have been human. She squashed that sympathy: all he was feeling, was what he’d inflicted. This was the definition of justice.

When his convulsions lessened, when his cries gave way to laboured breathing, Willow refocused.

“Now,” Willow said, “Wish to feel everything you made Tara’s mother feel.”

“P-please,” Mr Maclay said.

Now, apparently, pride had given way to pleading. Willow didn’t listen, certain what she was doing what just: she applied the slightest bit of pressure to his broken wrist.

Immediately, he reacted, reciting the wish Willow had requested, and gritting his teeth. Coldly, Willow watched; tension gave way to a scream. The only flicker in Willow’s otherwise impassive mask, was when she wondered just what he’d done, that this pain was a reaction.

The more she saw, the more justified she felt.

Willow stared, and savoured the moments of power. She could probably get him to do anything.

“Wish for Tara to know the truth,” Willow said. “Wish her to know that she’s not a demon.”

She probably should have asked that first. No matter, Mr Maclay gasped out the words, greedy for the momentary respite. It was a wish Willow granted, gladly.

A pause: Willow turned her head up, hearing a few footsteps. Vampires: she could sense a few. No doubt they’d smelt the blood. Still, none approached: afraid, no doubt. Willow didn’t blame them.

The man beneath her was far more of a monster. She didn’t need to concern herself with vamps.

Still, the distraction made her sigh. She’d done the obvious wishes, enacted justice. She could do more, could gladly do more, but at this point it was just getting tedious.

“Bored now,” Willow said, idly. She moved her foot from his arms: crouched down. “Wish to escape.”

Mr Maclay twitched, curiously twisting towards the sound of Willow’s voice. She sighed again.

“You heard me,” she said. “Wish to leave.”

“I-” Mr Maclay said, hurriedly. He cleared his throat: “I wish to be gone. I wish to be out of this god-forsaken place.”

“Wish granted,” Willow said.
She stood up, exhaled, and sent Mr Maclay to the first hell dimension she could think of. She wondered how long it would be before he realized just where he was. Blindness was a bad thing to have in any hell.

Now Tara didn’t have to worry. Willow gave a soft, almost tender smile to herself, content in the knowledge that things could only improve without those three people in the world.

She turned, intending to find Tara: to spend the night basking in her company. She’d have to be happier now she’d feel what her family had taught her was a lie.

And as Willow turned, a figure stepped out from an alley. Immediately, Willow froze: she took in his expression. Eyes wide, forehead creased, wearing an expression of abhorrence, and a betrayal that made Willow cringe.

“All right?” Willow said, his name falling from her mouth.

All the clichés whirled through her mind. *How long have you been standing there?* (Long enough). *It’s not what it looks like.* (What the hell else could it be?) *Let me explain.* (What’s there to explain?)

Instead, she let her face revert to its original, human form, and met his eyes, utterly unashamed.
“Willow,” Angel said, and said no more.

The word was enough. There was betrayal, there was revulsion, there was sickness: two syllables that brimmed with what was almost hate. Almost: but not quite.

It was Willow. Quiet, mousey Willow. She’d come out of her shell in recent months, sure, but she was Willow. Angel looked at her, and saw the girl who’d made him laugh: and saw the demon which had the Angelus in him applauding.

“I had to be sure,” Angel said, slowly.

Maybe voicing his thoughts could make something make sense.

“Only two witches around. I didn’t think it was you, it couldn’t be you…” Angel couldn’t stop staring. “I needed to be certain, I owed them that, though.”

Oh god, Wesley and Cordy. It was Willow who’d…

And she didn’t even look ashamed. She might have been irate, but that was all. No guilt, no self-consciousness: not even any serious anger. Fury might have been preferable: at least then he could pretend it, somehow, wasn’t Willow.

Instead, she just regarded him, the same way one might regard an insect. It was… chilling.

“Willow,” Angel said again, eventually. Hoarse. “What have you done?”

“Helped,” Willow said.

“You call that helping?” Angel said.

His eyes drifted. The streaks of blood, the ash on the ground.

“You don’t know what they’ve done,” Willow said: her voice rose, just slightly. Shook. “They deserved worse.”

And there was the fury. It somehow didn’t make it easier.

He’d expected anger to seem alien on Willow’s face. Though she might dislike certain things, rage was not something Angel associated with Willow; yet, somehow, wrath seemed to suit her features perfectly.

What had he missed? How had he missed it?
It might have been encouraging Willow, apparently, genuinely thought those people had done wrong. It would be easy to snatch that as the easy way out, to hope she'd been justified.

But nothing could justify that degree of sadism, no matter what they’d done. That, and it wasn’t their place to deal with strictly human crimes: there were already things in place for that. They couldn’t deal with every wrong.


And Willow was a demon. He’d seen that; seen her inhuman face contort in joy at the suffering she’d caused.

“A while,” Willow said. “I’ve been helping people. What’s wrong with that?”

Angel’s eyes drifted, again, to the same remains. There was a scent of blood in the air: one it was hard to ignore.

“Them, again?” Willow said, catching where Angel was looking. “Believe me, getting rid of them was doing the world a favour.”

“Really?”

“Really,” Willow said, firmly.

“And Cordelia?” Angel said, “And Wesley? Were you doing the world a favour then too?”

Willow faltered, surprising him. She closed her eyes momentarily: exhaled. When she spoke, her voice was almost muted.

“That- That was a mistake,” Willow said: hesitated. “I was helping Buffy. I stopped her dream coming true: I forced the demons away. They just ended up elsewhere.”

Willow seemed so human, for those seconds. It was easy to forget she’d become a vengeance demon. It was a long few seconds before she met Angel’s eyes again.

“Then why keep at it?” Angel said. “You have to know it’s wrong, in everything. Motive, consequence…”

“No,” Willow interrupted: “What’s wrong was giving them a second chance. If I’d been firmer, if I’d done more than force them off, the Gentlemen wouldn’t have hurt anyone.”

“In that case,” Angel said, “Not every time. The people you just- Don’t you think they knew others? Had friends? Family?”

“Oh, they had family,” Willow laughed to herself. “Who do you think wanted to be rid of them?”

“Do they know you’ve done it?” Angel said: “How do you think they’ll react? Wanting to be rid of someone, that doesn’t mean wanting them dead. And vengeance, it’s not-”

“Vengeance isn’t right? Vengeance is always bad?” Willow said.

Her features shifted back to her demonic visage: her tone became almost mocking with the transition. Angel took a step back, instinctively.

“I thought you, of all people, would know that’s not true,” Willow said. “Whatever happened to Angelus?”
“What I did before, that’s not-”

“Before what?” Willow said: “Before you killed that girl, and her family cursed you with a soul? What’s that, if not vengeance?”

A moment of silence: Angel hesitated, caught by surprise. In those seconds, Willow smiled.

“Wish to be rid of it, and I’ll help,” Willow said. “If you hate vengeance so much, you must hate being the result of it. Don’t you want to lose your soul? No, wait: you fled from Sunnydale because you wanted to keep it. You ran from Buffy, the woman you loved, because you didn’t want to risk that moment of happiness, and break the curse again.”

She was still riding the thrill of dealing with the Maclays: the rush, both of adrenaline, and of magic. It coursed through her, and maybe she was being harsher than she would have been otherwise.

Still, Willow couldn’t quite bring herself to regret a word. It was good to be out, good to challenge Angel at last. She was almost glad he’d proven immune to her earlier spell, meaning he could remember the fact she was a demon: it meant she could talk to him, properly. Let out the frustration that had been building up, after multiple meetings with him being insufferable, insulting her and her actions while she sat right beside him.

“Hypocrite,” Willow said.

“No,” Angel said. “What happened then, it was- a punishment. Justice. What you just did- what you’ve been doing, it’s past that.”

“No,” Willow said, insistent: “What I do is justice. You know me, Angel. You know what I’m like, I’d never-”

“I thought I did,” Angel said.

Willow’s voice ground to a halt: she gritted her teeth. Why couldn’t he see? She’d already had Buffy reject her on principle, it was starting to hurt.

Did no one understand? They were her friends, they had to know she was a good person. What she did, it was good. It was justice. She talked to those who hurt, and did as they wished; how was that bad?

“You put the Wiccans in a coma,” Angel said, “For what? For not being real witches? How is that-”

“No,” Willow said. “That was for- something else. They were cruel. They deserved it.”


“Tara,” Willow said. Her voice softened, a gentleness brought forth by the name alone.

A pause. She couldn’t quite tell how much Angel had worked out. She’d have thought, the more he considered, the more he’d understand. She was beginning to doubt it.

And if he wasn’t going to understand, she’d need to work out another course of action. He knew what she was, and she could feel the anger emanating from him: he resented, and she could sense that, despite his protestations against vengeance.
She disliked hypocrites.

“Tara,” Angel said, “The club, that was for her?”

“Of course,” Willow said.

“Does she know what you did for her?”

“Does it matter?” Willow said.

“She’s your friend, right?” Angel said. “If you did all that for her, and the way you sound when you talk about her… You care about her.”

“I love her.”

If Angel was surprised, he didn’t show it: “Then why lie to her?” he said. “The Willow I know— you have to know there’s something wrong, if you can’t even tell the truth.”

The Willow he knew had tried to help, and had killed Cordy and Wesley, and left Tara’s family alive and willing to find their way here. She’d improved, since then.

Angel would probably find that disappointing, as if not wanting more friends to be hurt was selfish. She couldn’t understand why he was struggling with who she was: she’d kept things hidden, but only from necessity. No one thought this was a fun conversation to have.

Surely he could see?

“Hypocrite,” Willow said, again: voice raising just slightly in pitch.

“Pardon?”

“Did you tell Buffy you were a vampire?” Willow said, “Back when you first met, you lied to her.”

“I didn’t lie,” Angel said: “I- It was a unique case, vampires don’t have souls, and I never expected to—”

“And you were afraid people wouldn’t listen long enough to make up their minds,” Willow said, “Afraid they’d only see you for what you were, instead of who. Sound about right?”

She hadn’t intended to let her tone become so loud, so emotional: it had the desired effect, however. Angel faltered, apparently not off-guard.

Justice demon. She preferred that to vengeance demon; it was a far better description. She wasn’t interested in pain for the sake of pain, she was interested in righting the balance. Those that inflicted hurt, were hurt in turn.

What was wrong with that?

“Do you think I’ve enjoyed lying?” Willow said. “I’ve heard Buffy call me a monster. Tara’s terrified of my kind. I’ve listened to you talking about how I deserve to die for the last few months.”

She took a step forwards: Angel took a step back. She hoped that was a sign of surprise, rather than fear.

“Angel,” she said, “Don’t you dare stand there and lecture me. You’ve been where I am. You I
deserve a chance. You know me.”

“I knew a Willow who wouldn’t kill people,” Angel said.

Willow rolled her eyes, weight falling onto her back foot. She exhaled, more from exasperation than any regret: she could see Angel wince at that.

“They, again?” Willow said. “They’re barely people.”

Something shifted, then. She had the distinct impression Angel had made up his mind: the emanations she could feel from him felt somehow more set, more resolute. And she could feel it wasn’t good.

“Tell me you understand,” Willow said, momentarily desperate.

Couldn’t anyone see? Buffy hadn’t, and now even a vampire didn’t understand what she was doing. For a long few seconds, Willow felt painfully alone.

But, no. There was Tara: there was always Tara. It was strange how a person could begin to feel like home; but that was who Tara was now. A voice to listen to, a pair of arms to hold her, a person to connect with.

Part of Willow wanted more. It was hard to admit any connection to her old friends had been severed, but it seemed an inescapable conclusion, now.

She knew that look in Angel’s eyes. She’d seen it in Buffy’s, that night.

“No,” Angel said. “I don’t understand. Anything. Why you would do this, how you could become this- Willow. Please don’t make this…”

There was pain in his eyes: real pain. Willow felt a pang, and it was a moment before she realized what she felt wasn’t sympathy, wasn’t guilt.

It was rage: frustration. He didn’t understand. She’d explained herself, and he’d refused to see.

“Your pendant,” Angel said, suddenly, eyes widening: “I’ve read about vengeance demons. Do you have one?”

Too predictable. Willow sighed, reached around her neck, and unclipping the silver chain: dangling it from her hand.

“This?” she said.

“Break it,” Angel said. “Be human again. Please, we can move past this.”

“Why?” Willow said.

“Why?”

“Why break it?” Willow said: “Why lose this? Do you have any idea what good I’ve done?”

Angel’s expression fell. For a moment, Willow could see him consider leaping: consider snatching it from her.

Apparently, he decided not to. It was a good choice. He couldn’t have succeeded: they were facing each other, and she could teleport, like all vengeance demons. It would be the easiest thing to get
out the way: and if he did lunge, then she’d know for certain what he’d decided.

When she was done here, she’d return to Tara. To a place where she was cared about, where she
wouldn’t be judged like this. She trusted Tara to not hurt her.

First, though, there was Angel. It was, by now, too clear he simply didn’t, couldn’t, understand her. Because of that, he was a problem.

“I’m sorry, Angel,” she said.

“Don’t be sorry,” Angel said. “Power corrupts, even for the best of us,” there was a flicker of hope in his eyes. “Just-”

“I’m not sorry for that,” Willow said, voice soft. Her features shifted back to human. “What I’ve done has been justice. I’m sorry you can’t see.”

“Willow-”

“Sorry, Angel,” Willow said.

For a moment, there was genuine regret in her tone: then a flash, and she was gone, departing the street in the usual way of vengeance demons. Mute, Angel took a step forwards, towards the empty space where she had been: looked from side to side.

Her scent was lost to him. The street was empty, now: empty of life, at least. Angel swallowed, the lump in his throat surprising him.

He had to tell Buffy. How could he even begin to-

And then Willow returned to the street, bearing a stick snapped from some tree somewhere in Sunnydale. She was back for maybe half a second: and Angel felt the wood slide into his back, piercing his heart with too much ease.

Willow watched him turn to dust, her eyes dry, her expression unchanging. Acceptance, resignation, reluctance: and just the tiniest bit of regret.

She couldn’t say how long she stood there, watching as the dust was dispersed in a quiet breeze. She dropped her improvised stake, let it clatter. Breathed in.

There was death in the air: she could smell it. Ash, dust, blood. Though she was used to death by now, being so close to so much was a different experience.

She hadn’t used her hands before. Not until Angel. It was… different.

Willow closed her eyes; turned her head. She walked, instead of relying on any magic. Her step might be unsteady, but it afforded her time to think.

What she needed, really needed, was quiet. An opportunity to think.

If nothing else, she had that. There were no worries, for her, any more. The risk of being discovered was all but gone: Angel could no longer lead the investigation, and Buffy and the Scoobies would never be able to know.

Tara, too, had nothing to be afraid of. Her family would never bother her, the Wicca club would never hurt her: and Willow was still there, to help.
Things were going well.

Still, Willow struggled to not feel a little regret. She’d have liked it if her friends could have understood: if she could be open with them. After Angel, it seemed like that wasn’t an option.

She’d just need to content herself with lying. The people she’d helped outweighed that small crime.

Willow found herself, by instinct, returning to Tara’s room. It felt more like home than the one she shared with Buffy, now.

Even if she couldn’t share everything with Tara, Tara was always able to comfort. Willow found she sought that. The rush of magic was fading, the high brought on from the wishes and spells that had rid the world of the Maclay family leaving her.

The real world barely compared, most of the time.

A knock, and she let herself into Tara’s room, smiling to see Tara still awake. She opened her mouth, to utter a weary greeting-

And Tara spoke first: a string of Latin that was over before Willow had any chance to understand it: and, still before she could react, Tara blew on her own hand, scattering a white powder.

It took maybe half a second. There was barely time for Willow to feel puzzled: the powder found her skin, and immediately sparked. It didn’t sting: there was, however, the unmistakable impression of something altering. Something shifting.

Veins criss-crossing over skin, flesh thickening, darkening in vivid lines, wherever the powder touched her. A spell: one to reveal her face. Her demon aspect: Willow instinctively shrunk back, and found she had no desire to flee.

Where could she go?

_Tara knew, how could Tara-

The resolution that had been in Tara’s expression when she cast the spell evaporated, the instant she saw Willow’s true, inhuman face. A step back, and she almost collapsed onto her bed.

“I knew it,” Tara said. Her voice was soft: resigned. “I d-didn’t want to, but I…”

Willow could only stare as Tara’s eyes filled with revulsion. Fear.
Tara

Chapter Notes

If any of you were wondering about Tara's side of the story, here you go. Plus if I'm leaving you with a cliffhanger like the last one, I'm milking it. Enjoy!

Tara had known her family were returning for quite some time. There had only been a week when she'd harboured any hope of freedom: when that week was up, one of her few friends from what she'd called home warned her.

Something had made her family forget her. They blamed her, of course: thought she'd done some spell, some witchcraft, to evade them.

If she'd had the capability, she might have. Tara wasn't sure.

She hadn't told Willow, though. For all she knew, Willow might have cast that spell, after the night they'd met. If that was true, she was grateful. In part of Tara's mind, she believed that was the case, even if Willow never admitted to it.

Who knew why? Everyone had secrets. Perhaps Willow simply didn't want gratitude; she'd rejected Tara's thanks often enough.

Just as Willow never said she'd cast the spell, Tara never shared that it wasn't good enough. Though it might be weeks, if not months, before her family found a way to track her down again, she knew they'd find her.

She always knew. She wasn’t lucky enough to stay free. Maybe she didn’t deserve to.

She hadn't wanted to worry Willow. She could see that Willow felt protective. Besides, when she was with Willow, it was often easy to forget.

It was quite some time after that, that she first met Spike. She didn’t know his name, the first time: she just saw a blur of black, a leather jacket, and a human face emanating the unmistakable aura of a vampire.

Being able to tell the difference was always useful, in Sunnydale.

“She comes to you, doesn’t she?” the vampire had said, eyes darting from side to side.

Tara barely listened. She took in his bleached blonde hair, then began to look for a way to flee. She had no desire to stay in his presence, to listen to any word a vampire had to say to her.

“She betrayed me,” he was saying, slurring as if he’d been drinking, “She lied to me, I figured I’d hurt her back.”

He lunged for her, Tara ducked as quickly as she could. His hand clipped her head, and she heard a yowl of pain, before she started running as fast and as far as she could. Behind her, she heard swearing, and ranting about some ‘chip’.
Still, she was shaken, even as she made it back to her room. Though she knew she should be safe there, as she’d never invite him in, she couldn’t erase the memory from her mind. Fear was never easy to cope with: she knew fear, and in her experience what she feared so often happened.

That, and his words replayed in her mind. She never meant to put much thought into them, but she always found herself replaying bad memories. That was just one of many.

It sounded like he’d been looking for her particularly. It didn’t bode well.

Some ‘she’ had earned his anger. Tara didn’t know many people; she’d never been particularly social. She’d grown used to little more than her own company. Willow was the only person she knew, really. Was it her the vampire was talking about?

Tara curled up under her sheets, still shivering. Shock: she knew the symptoms well.

That was the first time she seriously considered that there might be something big Willow wasn’t telling her. Still, Willow was kind; she trusted Willow to not keep any dangerous secrets.

The Slayer was in Sunnydale, for example. Willow might be connected to that; it would explain one way to earn a vampire’s ire.

Besides, she’d kept a few secrets herself. It was impossible to share a life’s worth of events with someone, and maybe some stories weren’t Willow’s to tell. Tara was content.

She considered asking Willow: and decided against it. The vampire hadn’t been a major threat; and such creatures were an inescapable part of life in Sunnydale. If he was a problem again, then Tara might speak up, but until then, there was no point.

Regardless, Tara still felt shaken. Knowing such demons walked was a different experience to such a close encounter.

She was still shaking when Willow came by.

“Are you ok?” Willow said, quickly approaching: standing over Tara.

Tara stayed rolled up in her sheets. For a short time, she hesitated: debated what to say. Lying and saying everything was fine, that never achieved anything.

Still, there was no point in making Willow feel guilty. It was obvious that would be her reaction, if she heard a vampire angry at her had targeted Tara. If there was no serious threat, as there didn’t seem to be, there was no need to cause Willow any pain.

“I thought-” Tara said, pausing.

She didn’t know what to say. She would never lie: she just didn’t need to worry Willow.

“I thought I was safe,” Tara said, and told an abridged story of how she’d heard her family were looking for her; how they’d find her again.

It was the truth: and Willow held her, comforted her. The protection was something she was glad of; even not needing to mention the vampire, Willow had promised to be in her presence. She’d be safe.

It wasn’t long before Tara found out how right she was: a letter from a neighbour confirming her family had left for Sunnydale. Beth, Donny, and her father. Tara almost didn’t sleep at all, that
night.

Being with Willow, though, it made everything easier. She still worried, still felt scared; but she also had someone she could trust to always be there, no matter her mood.

She forgot about Willow’s secrets. Tara trusted there was nothing important there, believed Willow incapable of concealing anything she might want to know. Everything she knew about Willow gave her the impression Willow wanted only the best.

It was strange, Tara reflected. By rights, she had more reason than most people to be paranoid. She knew first-hand that the people you should be close to might be rather less benevolent than they ought to be. She knew the cruelties people were capable of.

And still, Tara trusted Willow, and Tara was happy. She barely noticed how many of her idle wishes came true, or how she’d never seen Willow sleep. Willow was always awake before her, perhaps making her breakfast, and always seemed to be conscious as Tara drifted off to sleep.

She didn’t give any heed to Willow’s fascination with magic, or how enthralled Willow seemed to be whenever she proposed witchcraft. Tara understood enjoying magic, even if it wasn’t first on the list of things she wanted to do.

When their minds touched, and she sensed that a fraction of Willow’s mind was kept away from her, she concluded that couldn’t be anything. It might be her mistake, or Willow might merely be nervous.

She was lucky. Tara told herself that.

There was no way the first person she’d truly become close with, the Willow she loved, had any dark secrets, any evil to them. Tara didn’t even want to consider that.

She rejected small observations. The vampire who’d sought her, the way her family had forgotten about her. Coincidence, or paranoia. They might not be tied to Willow: and if they were, she would have good reasons.

And then, together, they attended the Wicca club.

Tara had been self-conscious, at first, though she couldn’t say why. She had very little stake in the club; very little to do with it. Whether Willow liked or disliked it, it shouldn’t matter to her.

It was during the meeting, that she saw Willow’s expression (bored, initially: Tara couldn’t blame her) harden. It was a fury Willow was no doubt trying to hide, but Tara knew her too well for that to work.

It was then, when loving Willow turned harsh, that Tara realized what she felt wasn’t self-consciousness. She was afraid.

Willow was protective. Tara had known that. She might be overprotective, but she’d never known Willow to be stifling; Willow only ever wanted to spare her pain. After the childhood Tara’d had, it was appreciated.

The Wicca club, however, they could be cruel. Tara was used to it, and used to far worse. Maybe that was bad: but she could live with their jibes, their mocking.

Willow, on the other hand. Tara found she wasn’t at all sure how Willow would react.
Tara let herself hope, when they spoke after the meeting. Willow had seemed happy with just comforting her. Listening to her. Whatever worry had seized Willow seemed to fade after very little time.

Then, the next day, she’d heard that some people hadn’t shown up to anything: heard several students had been taken to hospital after not waking up. She’d recognized the names.

Tara hated to be suspicious. It felt too much like paranoia: but by that point it was just too obvious. She’d have to be blind to deny the possibility that Willow had something to do with everything happening around her.

And Willow hadn’t sounded sorry. There wasn’t the tiniest bit of regret, or sadness, or sympathy, when they’d spoken about the fates of the Wicca club.

Willow had been so kind to her, it felt cruel to consider she might be responsible. After that, however, it became too apparent she’d either missed something, or that Willow had changed.

She’d needed time alone, after that. Time to think.

She might be wrong, of course. It might just be coincidence. She still wasn’t sure how Willow could be so cold, but that didn’t make her responsible. It just meant Willow was more protective than she thought: and, while that might be too close to stifling, it wasn’t functionally murder.

So Tara had resorted to magic. There was a finder spell: one to find anything you sought, so long as it aroused some strong emotion. The problem was, it required two people.

She hated lying to Willow, but it had been necessary. If she was wrong, she’d come clean, apologize: ask forgiveness. If she was right, she’d have to live with dishonesty: and she wouldn’t be the only liar.

While, as Tara had asked, Willow appealed to the spell to find out the location of Tara’s family, Tara had thought about Willow.

There was no denying Willow made her feel. Love was not the emotion she focused on, however: she might love Willow, she did not love the prospect of finding out some unfortunate truth.

And then Willow had lied. She’d said Tara’s family were not near: and Tara knew that had to be wrong. Her family, they wouldn’t give up, and she knew they’d left for Sunnydale. She knew that, they couldn’t still be ages away.

The worst part was, for a few seconds, Tara let herself hope: let herself believe.

Then, she realized what it meant if Willow was lying. It meant something was to happen, that would ensure her family never reached her. Tara didn’t want to think about that.

She’d needed to be alone. When Willow went out that night, so did Tara: only Tara followed the route the spell had given her. She found herself crossing Sunnydale, coming to a graveyard: and, to a crypt within the graveyard.

She hesitated outside the door. She thought she’d find a person at the end of this trail: someone to talk to. Instead, apparently, her goal was a corpse. Tara hoped, at the very least, there’d be some convenient book or tablet.

Uncertain, Tara knocked, not sure what she was expecting.
She certainly wasn’t expecting a voice announcing: “Come in!”

Frowning, Tara pushed on the door: watched it swing open. The other side, she saw a vampire. It was mere seconds before she recognized the leather jacket, the bleached blonde hair.

“Oh,” he said, apparently just as shocked as she was. “Well, hi. Didn’t expect to run into you.”

Tara took a step back. Maybe the spell had just made a mistake. There had to be another way to-

“Bloody hell, don’t run,” he said, taking half a step towards her: freezing, then shrugging. “Look, I was pissed off last time, not at you, but… Besides, couldn’t hurt you if I wanted to,” he tapped the side of his head. “You know Willow, right. She must have told you about the chip before she sent you over?”

“Chip?” Tara said, finding her voice. “I- Willow didn’t send me.”

“Oh,” the vampire said. He blinked. “Why’re you here, then?” a pause, “Scratch that, how’d you even find me? Hardly thought you’d want to come looking.”

“I- It was a spell,” Tara said. “I- it- I think you’re meant to tell me about Willow.”

“Magic,” he said, muttering the word like it was a curse. Then: “Why not?”

He turned, shrugging, sitting down on a slab, wearily. Uncertain, Tara took a step inside: he didn’t seem threatening. If he was, he could have already hurt her.

“Name’s Spike,” he said, “So, what kind of spell brought you here?”

“It’s… complicated,” Tara said. “I- I think Willow’s h-hiding something. Something big, the spell was meant to c-confirm it.”

“Hiding, huh?” Spike said.

He paused. Tara still didn’t approach him, preferring to keep near the exit, but Spike still made no effort to lunge after him.

She wondered whether he was telling the truth about being unable to hurt her. She recalled a mention of some ‘chip’ before, too.

“I’d say,” Spike said: chuckled. “Have you heard of vengeance demons?”

And so, the story came out. There were just bits and pieces; Spike explained his chip, meaning he was unable to hurt humans without feeling pain, and that Willow apparently didn’t qualify as human. He explained, too, how Willow had revealed herself.

With markedly more venom, he explained how she’d promised to remove his chip, and betrayed him: taking the physical chip out, but somehow leaving the effects, maintained by magic, and so far more immovable.

Tara should have fled, then. If he could hurt non-humans, demons, safely… Her family’s story, that she had demon in her, came back to her.

Somehow, that story lacked the persuasiveness it had once possessed, now. She, truly, felt safe.

Shaken, Tara returned to her room. She trembled, she paced, she felt like vomiting: and, eventually, she picked up a magic book.
There were a handful of simple spells she could do. They’d be a distraction, if nothing else. One spell stood out to her, however. She grinded a powder, tried not to collapse, and followed a recipe.

It was meant to dispel glamours. If Willow was really a demon, the powder would show it.

Tara couldn’t believe she was seriously considering it. She was listening to a vampire. By rights, she should have just ignored everything he had to say. His words made sense, though.

She’d just be sure. She’d apologize after, powder wouldn’t cause much of a mess. She just needed to rid herself of this doubt.

She had to be wrong, she had to be.

And, when Willow walked through the door, and Tara activated the powder, Tara found out that she was right.

She’d never wanted to be mistaken more. She could barely speak, barely think: could only stare as the woman she loved’s face dissolved to reveal a demon’s glower. Her ears rang, her legs shook and felt as though they’d give way.

The worst was her heart. Tara could feel it break, as cleanly as Willow’s glamour.
Demon and witch regarded one another. Their expressions were almost identical: betrayal. Pain. Disbelief.

Tara was standing, shaking, one hand on a bedpost. Willow was in the open doorway, barely remembering to push it shut. She wasn’t blinking, or moving: she was barely thinking.

“Tara…”

Tara’s chest was heaving. It might have been breathlessness, anger or fear, or might have been no more than the urge to be sick. She couldn’t tear her eyes from Willow’s face, desperately trying to piece together the features, to recognize the Willow she’d known.

Willow could do nothing other than watch as she did so. Her mind had been wiped clean. There wasn’t a word to say.

“Y-you lied to me,” Tara said, soft. “I th-thought you were-”

“No,” Willow said: “No, Tara, never. I wouldn’t lie to you. I didn’t- I didn’t tell you, because…”

“You didn’t lie?”

“Never.”

“Did my family really never come to Sunnydale?” Tara said.

Willow’s words froze in her throat.

She hadn’t lied, not really: Willow told herself that. She’d omitted a few details, to make sure Tara was happier. Everyone had preconceptions about demons; Tara, who feared being one, would have those biases more than most.

Willow had been truthful though, whenever she could. She refused to admit otherwise.

“They’re not coming after you,” Willow said. “They won’t find you- won’t hurt you again. That’s the truth, I promise.”

Far from looking comforted, Tara’s eyes widened.

“What did you do?” Tara said: soft, appalled. Her voice barely rose.

A moment of silence. Willow suddenly felt a pang: guilt, shame, she couldn’t say. She only wanted the best: and yet Tara was looking at her like that. Like she was a-

“Willow, what did you do?” Tara said, again.

“I stopped them,” Willow said. “Th-that’s all. They won’t hurt you. That’s all I wanted. I was just making you happy.”

“Stopped?” Tara said, “Stopped how?”

Another pause. Willow remembered fire, screams: blinding Mr Maclay, tormenting him with wishes, and finally banishing him to a hell.
“Willow?”

“I just stopped them,” Willow said.

“Are they-” Tara said: paused, gulped. “Did you kill them?”

Willow looked down. Tara shook: her forehead creased, her lips parted, a look that could only be called abhorrence. Willow couldn’t meet her eyes: it was rare to see Tara furious. Her quiet anger was unique; Willow had never seen it to this extent.

To be the cause of such disgust…

“‘To make me happy,’ you said,” Tara said, quoting: “Is that- Is that why?”

“You didn’t want them to find you,” Willow said. “I just- I helped. I didn’t mean-”

“To kill them? You think that would be what I wanted?” Tara’s voice raised ever-so-slightly. Willow flinched.

Willow had always expected judgement, if her nature was to be outed. Everything she’d experienced had only encouraged that impression.

Angel’s criticism had bared a nerve, but had scarcely stung. Buffy’s disbelief, that had hurt: both together didn’t compare to this. It was Tara, and she was…

“You know what I am,” Willow said.

“Vengeance demon,” Tara said, flatly.

“Ye- no- Kind of,” Willow said, “It’s not as simple as vengeance, it’s… It’s justice. We don’t just go out doing whatever appeals, we grant wishes. That’s it, that’s all. What people wish for, what people want.”

“I didn’t want this,” Tara said.

That simple statement, and Willow was struck dumb. That couldn’t be right. Maybe Tara was distracted, angry- She’d done this for Tara, always adhered to Tara’s whim.

Maybe she’d gone a little further than Tara would have, but Tara was gentle. She’d have gone easy on them, given the chance; if Willow was to be just, she’d need to go a little further. Surely Tara could understand justice?

“Wishes- Maybe that’s how it started. I don’t know,” Tara said. “But… The Wicca club, th-that was you, wasn’t it? That’s not…”

“They were cruel,” Willow said.

“You were crueller,” Tara said.

“You wanted them to stop,” Willow said, “I was only- It’s what you wished for.”

Far from joyful, Tara looked revolted. Anything else Willow said died in her throat.

Tara’s opinion meant something to her, especially when the wishes she’d granted were Tara’s. She always expected Tara would struggle, at first: always believed Tara would be shocked.
This level of rejection, however… She trusted Tara’s judgement, but what was it Tara thought of her?

Tara mouthed ‘me’, more to herself than anyone. She trembled, for a moment, again: responsibility, guilt, ran through her. When she turned her eyes back to Willow, her voice was shaking.

“I- I met Spike,” Tara said.

So, Spike had told her. Willow gritted her teeth: so, her mercy had come back to haunt her yet again. She’d win Tara’s forgiveness, and then deal with that loose end.

“Don’t trust him,” Willow said. “He’s-

“A vampire,” Tara said. “I know. A-and he’s been more honest with me than you.”

“He hates me,” Willow said. “That’s all, that’s why. Anything else- I’m not as bad as what he told you. Know that. Tara, you know me, don’t trust his-”

“He told me you were a demon,” Tara said. “That was true. That’s- That was the worst part. It meant- It meant I was right. When I kept telling myself it was coincidence, that it couldn’t be you, I- It-”

“I was only helping,” Willow said.

“N-no,” Tara shook her head. “He said- He said you betrayed him.”

“Of course,” Willow said. “He- It’s a long story, but he can’t hurt people any more-”

“He told me,” Tara said.

“Good,” Willow said: “He wanted me to make it so he could. Before, he was… bad. I wasn’t going to set him free again. That’s not- Believe me, Tara, I had good reasons."

“I- I do,” Tara said. “That wasn’t- You made him wish for you. You used his wish. Was that for anyone other than you?”

Willow paused, mouth open. It was-

She could see where everything Tara was saying came from. She could understand how this looked, how everything would look, to her. Still, Willow couldn’t accept her conclusions.

She’d been doing good. Vengeance demon, justice demon, either moniker: it all came down to granting wishes. Doing what people wanted. She couldn’t have been-

Besides, even selfishness had a value. She was granting wishes: if she stopped, that would mean several people would remain unhappy, remain longing. It would mean her friends, Buffy, Tara, it would mean they’d lose her, or have their memory of her shattered.

That could only bring pain. Preventing pain, surely that was a good thing?

“I loved you,” Tara said. “When I first met you, I think. You were… you were so nice. So kind. You listened to me. Back then, were you still-”

Willow nodded.
“Did you even care?” Tara said. “Were you- You granted a wish then, I know you did. Was that…”

“No,” Willow said, instantly. “No, Tara, no. I never- I wouldn’t lie to you, not like that. Not about that.”

“But you approached me,” Tara said. “You granted a wish. Wh-why me? Why did you…”

_Because I needed to._ That would be true, but not the whole truth. Willow had approached so many people; and she’d listened to every one of them. She cared, always, no matter her motive.

Or, she had. Looking back, Willow realized that with a pang. Maybe she’d become desensitized, maybe she’d just become focused. Before, she’d hung onto every word: before she sought wishes to grant, she’d had to listen hard. Come up with advice, or just lend an ear.

After that, she’d had a tool to help. What mattered wasn’t their problems, it was their wish. So long as Willow got a wish, that was all that mattered.

It sounded cold, but- No, it wasn’t cold. It made sense. A proper solution was more important than a temporary, imagined aid.

She had changed.

“Because you were hurting,” Willow said. “That’s- That’s all. I did care. You had to have believed that: trust yourself. It’s just- You made a wish. Why _wouldn’t_ I grant it? I wanted to help.”

Willow cast her mind back, remembering all she could about that night. It was the first wish she’d ever granted; it had stayed with her. Magic was always like that.

“You were the first person I helped,” Willow said. “It’s- I granted the wish, because I care. That’s what- It’s about caring. It’s about what others want, it’s not…”

“I didn’t want my family to find me,” Tara said, soft. “I- I remember.”

A pause. Tara brought herself to look at Willow, still visibly uncomfortably by the demonic visage, the vein-like flesh that took the place of skin.

“You made them forget me,” Tara said.

“Forget where to find you,” Willow said: nodded.

“You didn’t k- you didn’t do what- what you’ve just done,” Tara said.

“Not then,” Willow said.

She still couldn’t bring herself to sound regretful. They deserved that, and worse.

And yet, when Tara had spoken of her family, she’d been pained: she hadn’t been repulsed, surprised. She’d been hurt, but it was skin-deep. When Tara looked at Willow, now, there was pain: and there was more. Something deeper.

A silent _I trusted you_ raged behind Tara’s eyes.


“It didn’t work,” Willow said. “You saw that, they- I made them lose track of you, and they just found you again. The… kinder wishes, the nice ones, they don’t work. They don’t help anyone.”
“So you killed them,” Tara said, flat.

“What else would work?” Willow said. “I just wanted to keep you safe. Happy. It was for you.”

“No,” Tara said. “No- No, Willow. It wasn’t for me. If- If it was, wouldn’t you have told me? You know I don’t want this.”

Willow had been angry, when Angel had spoken to her like this. So angry. She could still remember how it had felt, when he’d turned to dust before her. She’d disliked considering that option; but when he’d spoken to her, insulted her, it had felt like the best respite.

Now Tara was saying such similar things, and Willow never considered that possibility. She wouldn’t do that, not to Tara.

Surely that meant she was good? Tara didn’t seem afraid of her, not beyond her initial reaction.

“Mercy’s dangerous,” Willow said. “I had- two friends. And I stopped demons coming to Sunnydale: I didn’t kill them, just kept them away. And the next- the next thing I knew, they were dead. Because I’d been too kind.”

Willow paused: exhaled, her voice turning brittle just from the memory. All the while, Tara watched her; for a moment, it seemed like she thought Willow was just acting. Then, her expression softened, apparently accepting truth.

“Some things just don’t deserve a second chance,” Willow said.

Tara closed her eyes, for just a moment.

“What happened to you?” she said, so soft Willow wasn’t sure she was meant to have heard.

And Willow didn’t know what to say, to that. She felt certain she’d improved. The old Willow, they might not have been able to stop her family interfering with Tara’s life again, and might only have sat by while Tara was mocked.

There were so many wishes she’d granted, that the old Willow would never have touched. She refused to admit that they could all be mistakes.

Tara looked down: away.

“I love you, Tara,” Willow said. “Please- believe that. I know I lied. It- It wasn’t easy, I just needed to. Everything else, though. That was the truth. I promise.”

At that declaration, Tara shrunk back, still repulsed by the knowledge of just what Willow was, and what she’d become.

Willow took half a step towards Tara, intending to offer comfort: and she stopped herself, freezing on the spot. Tara wouldn’t want her comfort, that was clear. Too clear.

So she hesitated, awkwardly frozen, unable and unwilling to do any more than watch. Tara didn’t see her: didn’t look up.

“I think I could love you,” Tara said, voice faltering. “I thought I did. It just- it wasn’t you,” a pause: a hasty inhalation. “If I’d met you before, if you weren’t… Then I think I would.”

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“A pause. Any anger, any fear, any bitterness had faded, for each of them. Now there was just
exhaustion: physical, and emotional. Tara still wasn’t standing, and Willow was barely moving.

Tara’s spell to remove Willow’s human glamour had long since lost its effect: Willow had barely noticed. Even if she had, she might not have changed faces. It felt so pointless. Now, Willow just felt drained.

Slowly, Tara looked up: looked at Willow. Her eyes were red, her cheeks stained with tears.

“You can grant wishes?” Tara said.

Her voice was slow. She wasn’t stuttering. She spoke with a firmness so many people assumed she wasn’t capable of, just because she was shy. Willow knew better.

“Grant this one,” Tara said: wiped one eye. “I wish I’d never met you.”

“Tara-”

“Not like this,” Tara said. “I wish you’d said no. I wish you’d never become a demon. I wish that we’d meet, if we’d meet, on normal terms, human and human. I wish I never remembered seeing you like this.”

Willow could feel the urge to grant the wish build up: and she faltered.

She’d lose Tara. Either way. If she didn’t grant the wish, Tara would never forgive her. And Buffy was no friend to her, not now: no matter what Buffy felt, Willow knew it was based on a lie.

That didn’t feel good enough, any more. She couldn’t be open among her friends, and her one hope was Tara. And Willow didn’t want to start anew.

But, if she granted the wish, what then? What of all she’d done? It would be wiped clean. Forgotten. Surely it would be selfish to do that, to undo all she’d done for the people she’d met?

Was she that kind of person?

One look at Tara’s tearful face, and Willow knew the answer. Yes. She was: or at least, she was now, in this time, and in this place. For Tara, she would be.

“Are you sure?” Willow said.

“Completely,” Tara said.

A pause. Willow clung to the wish: wove it, taking all the time she could. This was without a doubt the most complex wish she’d ever had to grant; she was rewriting reality. More than throwing someone to another dimension, or plucking a memory or two, she was undoing what had been done: remaking her own life.

And giving it away. Some other Willow, some old Willow. That Willow would have a chance at what she never could have.

There was a pang of jealousy, there.

“I wish I could love you,” Tara said: and there, for the first time, her voice cracked.

Willow had to look away. Her eyes stung, at that sound, at those words.

So, in this world, that was impossible. Tara wanted another world, another Willow.
And Willow would give it to her. But, still, the envy she felt for that other Willow was building. A chance she didn’t have: a life she couldn’t lead.

The spell was complete. Willow paused, focused on every word Tara had said, weaving together a whole new world.

Then, so slowly, she turned her head back to face Tara: wished she could move closer. Hold her, kiss her, just touch her, a last time. Anything.

But there was still that maddening disgust in Tara’s eyes. A complete lack of any acceptance for all Willow had done, as a vengeance demon. Willow swallowed the urge, and spoke, equal parts sorrow and magical ecstasy.

“Wish granted,” Willow said, and cast the spell.
A world away, Willow lay back. Her body ached from lying in the same position for so long, but she didn’t want to stop, or drag her eyes from the page for even a moment.

She held D’Hoffryn’s scroll, having long since grown used to using it, updating the text. According to a bar at the bottom, she was almost finished: and she didn’t know what to think.

It was her: and Willow knew she was capable of awful things. Sometimes she still caught a glimpse of dark eyes in the mirror, though everyone insisted she imagined it. Still, reading about it, or remembering it, was far from pleasant.

She recognized part of herself; and could understand her alternate demon self’s path, far more than she liked to admit.

And then she came to the final page, and Tara’s wish, and almost dropped the scroll.

*I wish I’d never met you. Not like this. I wish you’d said no. I wish you’d never become a demon. I wish that we’d meet, if we’d meet, on normal terms, human and human. I wish I never remembered seeing you like this.*

Too soon, it was done, and Willow found her eyes drifting back up. Rereading.

*I wish I never remembered seeing you like this.*

There were painful memories, there. Willow had made mistakes, no question. She’d used magic, overused it; and when Tara had noticed her growing obsession, Willow had made her forget.

Looking back, Willow still hated that fact.

And Willow paused. Reread. Her demon-self had been bitter: unwilling to give up so easily. She’d hated what Willow would be, in this world.

*I wish I never remembered seeing you like this.*

Surely it couldn’t be that simple?

Tara had asked not to remember the times when Willow was selfish, magic-obsessed: and so, her memories had been taken. It fit together almost too neatly. Painfully neatly.

Trying to control her breathing, Willow put the scroll down. She paused: considered.

The ritual to summon D’Hoffryn was still more or less prepared. It would be easy to repeat it. She probably should be sleepy, by now, but her mind was more awake, more active, than ever.
With the absence of the vengeance demon who cast the wish, it would fall to him if any alterations were to be made.

It was very hard not to want to make changes. She couldn’t be sure, but at the very least, it was possible. This reality depended on Tara’s wish: and much of the wish Willow was glad of. She had no desire to be a vengeance demon, much less the one portrayed.

There was more to it than that, though.

I wish I never remembered seeing you like this.

If that was true, and was part of the wish that was granted, then it was to blame for what had happened to Tara. Willow knew she had darkness in her, the same as everyone did. She could hardly deny her own, both after that tale, and after nearly ending the world.

Even so, Willow felt stealing Tara’s memory was too much. She’d made excuses, and she recalled feeling justified, but looking back, she felt only guilt.

It was a relief to think that it wasn’t her fault.

No. That wasn’t right. It was her fault; this her, at least, had still been responsible. The demon Willow had cast the spell, in bitterness making it so she’d hurt Tara. And that was still Willow, still her, even if the life she’d lead was different.

She couldn’t ignore responsibility. What she could do, however, was make it right.

A whirl of possibilities suggested themselves to her. Maybe nothing would change, maybe she’d always be destined for this path. Willow hoped not.

Or maybe she wouldn’t steal Tara’s memories. Maybe they would quarrel; and make up, or not. Either way, maybe, just maybe, Tara wouldn’t be standing in front of the window on that one day.

She could hope.

Willow stood, quickly: hurried to the bathroom, where the ritual was still set up. She relit the candles, murmured a chant, and waited.

About five seconds later, D’Hoffryn appeared in a puff of sulphuric smoke. He didn’t even attempt his usual, overly dramatic opening monologue, curtailed by raised eyebrows from Willow.

“Miss Rosenberg,” D’Hoffryn said, rather subdued. “How can I help? Any further changes to make to your earlier, ah, requests?”

It took her a moment to realize what he was saying. Right: she’d asked him to limit the activities of vengeance demons. That was what had caused this.

She hesitated, for a moment. What if that meeting never took place, if Tara survived? Some chain of events, the butterfly effect, and everything…

No, that was just paranoia. Changes didn’t mean changes for the worse; the change from the old world, with her demon side roaming free, to this one, was just proof of that. This world was better: and the one she sought, hopefully, was even better.

The future was always uncertain. This was no different.

“The alternate realities,” Willow said. She lifted the scroll she’d been given: “I want you to change
“To undo?” D’Hoffryn said.

“No,” Willow said. “To change. The wish, it was a big one. Keep most of it, remove a few details. Is that doable?”

She kept her tone firm; she’d learnt to adopt it when she spoke with demons. Allow no disagreement.

“Tricky,” D’Hoffryn said, slowly. “The easiest way would be if the vengeance demon responsible was available, but if you are talking about the alternate reality I believe you are…”

“Mine,” Willow said: hesitated. “Well, other-me’s.”

“Well, if you were to consent to join the ranks of my girls, I am sure you would quickly gain control over your own-”

“Not an option,” Willow said.

She’d seen how that power could corrupt her. Even knowing the pitfalls, she didn’t trust herself. D’Hoffryn didn’t push the matter, either accepting her answer, or being unwilling to antagonize her.

D’Hoffryn always seemed afraid of her. Then again, he dealt with vengeance; the most of Willow he’d be familiar with, would be her darker side. The crimes she’d committed that still gave her nightmares. It was no wonder he was intimidated.

“Very well,” D’Hoffryn said, “There may still be a… way. I’ll see what I can do. What change are you requesting?”

“Here,” Willow said: lifted the scroll. “There were two parts to the wish. There was, uh,” she skimmed the page: “T-Tara wished I wouldn’t become a demon. Keep that. Then, she wished she wouldn’t remember me when I was ‘like that’. I think- The way that was interpreted, I think that had more of an effect than she wanted.”

D’Hoffryn summoned up a copy of the scroll Willow held: glanced at it for a few seconds. Then, as she watched, he called up a second scroll, this one seemingly written on ashen, burnt paper.

“I see what you mean,” he said: low, thoughtful. “‘To cause her to forget any similarity even in the resultant universe’. That’s what it says here. Dreadfully tedious language, but you know how bureaucracy is.”

“Right,” Willow said, relieved to be right. “That’s it. That’s what I want gone.”

D’Hoffryn looked up. For a moment, she thought he’d ask for some price. Then, whatever reluctance he had faded. Either his fear of Willow had kicked in, or he had some other reason to want to help.

“Very well,” he said, slowly. “May I have a drop of blood?”

“Excuse me?” Willow said: blinked.

Meanwhile, he’d placed each of his scrolls delicately on the toilet cistern, and called forth an inky black quill. With the nib, he pricked his wrist.
“It’s for the spell,” he said, casually. “I’ll enchant this quill to possess the necessary abilities of a vengeance demon: then you can strike out what you wish to be undone. Simply say the magic words, and voila!”

He flourished, and handed both the quill, and blackened paper to her.

Willow hesitated, before taking them. Instead of pricking herself, however, not wanting to mix her blood with the demon’s, she instead let a bead of red drop from her fingertip. There was a spark: and D’Hoffryn took the quill back, murmuring some spell over it.

Willow didn’t pay much attention, instead reading the new scroll she’d been given. It was several paragraphs of legalese, detailing the wish her demon self had granted, to create this universe.

Willow would refuse D’Hoffryn’s offer: remain as a human, live as normal. If she returned to darkness, however, or became too obsessed with using magic to solve her problems, or anything her demon self had done and that Tara had rejected, then Tara would forget.

Willow wondered, had her old self meant this as a curse, or was it yet more of her twisted way of helping Tara?

She wasn’t sure she wanted to know.

“Excellent,” D’Hoffryn said, handing the quill back. “It’s done. I wish you luck, Miss Rosenberg,” he paused: “I know you won’t remember this conversation, but do try to remain open-minded in our future dealings. You make an excellent vengeance demon, it seems. Do consider it.”

*When hell freezes over.*

“Of course,” Willow said: beamed. This wasn’t the time to offend him. Then, more seriously: “I just strike out what I don’t want to happen?”

“Or write what you do,” D’Hoffryn said, “Then say the magic words. Clear?”

The magic words? Oh: Willow almost smiled. Of course. She was dealing with vengeance demons, after all.

“Very,” Willow said.

“Wonderful,” a grin. “Goodbye, Miss Rosenberg.”

Before she could say farewell in response, D’Hoffryn vanished. Willow sighed, then sat atop the toilet seat, resting the scroll over her knee.

It might not be the most dignified place to change the world, but at least no one would know. She chuckled to herself, and inhaled, murmuring the words as she struck them out.

Carefully, she removed the offending sentence, being sure not to so much as smudge any other letter. Her fingertips tingled as each word was brushed: and the quill glowed, momentarily, when the sentence was removed.

Just the magic words left.

Willow paused: reread the spell, making sure there was no more wiggle-room, no more mistakes. Satisfied, she leant back, and smiled, trying to ignore the butterflies building in her stomach.

*See you soon, Tara.*
She could understand the thrill her demon self had experienced, at the very least. It was power: and it certainly felt like doing good. She knew, too well, that if she used it too much, she might end up at its mercy.

But once: she could handle once.

In that other world, the other Willow had believed in no second chances. It was one of the differences between her, and the current Willow. This was a second chance, in the truest sense; maybe even a third chance, after the story she’d just read.

Hopefully she’d get it right this time.

Willow lifted the paper, close to her lips. She smiled, closed her eyes, and she whispered:

“I wish.”

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