Summary

The text of "Pride and Prejudice" by Jane Austen, but with the genders all reversed, and the characters replaced with characters from Buffy the Vampire Slayer where those characters were most inappropriate. Mr. Spike le Bloddy standing in for Elizabeth Bennett and Ms. Buffy Summers as Mr. Darcy. All dance scenes replaced with fight scenes.

For all the people who thought Pride and Prejudice could use more guns.

Notes

One day, I was innocently reading the Buffy usenet, when I saw a fateful post.

Someone was writing about Ang Lee's Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. They made the interesting observation that this is the director who directed Sense and Sensibility. They then suggested that he ought to do a version of Pride and Prejudice, only with fight scenes.

Someone, of course, then made the Pride and Prejudice with fight scenes = Buffy, which has fight scenes, as Pride and Prejudice correlation. They suggested that Spike was Mr. Darcy and Buffy was Miss. Elizabeth Bennet.

That was amusing, but then I read the next post.

"No, no," some fateful post said, "Buffy is Darcy and Spike is Elizabeth."

And it was like a light went off in my head. It was just so right. It was just so very, very wrong.

Internet, e-books, 200 year old Pride and Prejudice, Search and Replace. We could do more
than just come up with characters. We had the technology. We could make Pride and Prejudice worse, weirder than it ever had been before (before the zombie thing too, which makes reading that work very odd indeed).

And then we could read it. And then we could play with it some more, because that is one of the sorts of things that we like to do.

So, we did and here is the product of our insanity.

Now I should add the caveat that this is not intended as a shipper, oh, Buffy and Spike should get together, blah, blah, blah. This about when great literature goes bad.

Also, just to be REALLY clear, I wrote practically nothing. All credit goes to Jane Austen, except where I messed with her words.

See the end of the work for more notes.
IT is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single woman in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a husband.

VOLUME I
CHAPTER I (1)

IT is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single woman in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a husband.

However little known the feelings or views of such a woman may be on her first entering a neighbourhood, the truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that she is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their sons.

"My dear Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy," said her husband, Mayor Wilkins le Bloddy, to her one day, "have you heard that the burnt husk of Sunnydale High is let at last?"

Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy replied that she had not.

"But it is," returned he; "for Mr. Long has just been here, and he told me all about it."

Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy made no answer.

"Do not you want to know who has taken it?" cried her husband impatiently.

"You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it."

This was invitation enough.

"Why, my dear, you must know, Mr. Long says that the burnt husk of Sunnydale High is taken by a young woman of large fortune from the north of California; that she came down on Monday in a chaise and four to see the place, and was so much delighted with it that she agreed with Mrs. Morris immediately; that she is to take possession before Michaelmas, and some of her servants are to be in the house by the end of next week."

"What is her name?"

"Willow Rosenberg."

"Is she married or single?"

"Oh! single, my dear, to be sure! A single woman of large fortune; four or five thousand a year.
What a fine thing for our boys!"

"How so? how can it affect them?"

"My dear Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy," replied her husband, "how can you be so tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of her marrying one of them."

"Is that her design in settling here?"

"Design! nonsense, how can you talk so! But it is very likely that she may fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must visit her as soon as she comes."

"I see no occasion for that. You and the boys may go, or you may send them by themselves, which perhaps will be still better; for, as you are as handsome as any of them, Willow might like you the best of the party."

"My dear, you flatter me. I certainly have had my share of beauty, but I do not pretend to be any thing extraordinary now. When a man has five grown up sons, he ought to give over thinking of his own beauty."

"In such cases, a man has not often much beauty to think of."

"But, my dear, you must indeed go and see Willow when she comes into the neighbourhood."

"It is more than I engage for, I assure you."

"But consider your sons. Only think what an establishment it would be for one of them. Dame Walsh and Dr. Angleman Walsh are determined to go, merely on that account, for in general, you know they visit no new comers. Indeed you must go, for it will be impossible for us to visit her, if you do not."

"You are over scrupulous, surely. I dare say Willow will be very glad to see you; and I will send a few lines by you to assure her of my hearty consent to her marrying which ever she chuses of the boys; though I must throw in a good word for my little Spikey."

"I desire you will do no such thing. Spikey is not a bit better than the others; and I am sure he is not half so handsome as Oz, nor half so good at brooding as Angelus. But you are always giving him the preference."

"They have none of them much to recommend them," replied she; "they are all silly and ignorant like other boys; but Spikey has something more of quickness than his brothers."

"Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, how can you abuse your own children in such way? You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion on my poor nerves."

"You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these twenty years at least."

"Ah! you do not know what I suffer."

"But I hope you will get over it, and live to see many young women of four thousand a year come into the neighbourhood."

"It will be no use to us if twenty such should come, since you will not visit them."

"Depend upon it, my dear, that when there are twenty I will visit them all."
Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make her husband, Mayor Wilkins le Bloddy, understand her character. His mind was less difficult to develop. He was a man of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When he was discontented, he fancied himself nervous. The business of his life was to get his sons married; its solace was visiting and news.

CHAPTER II (2)

MRS. JOYCE le Bloddy was among the earliest of those who waited on Willow. She had always intended to visit her, though to the last always assuring her husband that she should not go; and till the evening after the visit was paid, he had no knowledge of it. It was then disclosed in the following manner. Observing her second son employed in trimming a hat, she suddenly addressed him with,

"I hope Willow will like it, Spikey."

"We are not in a way to know what Willow likes," said his father resentfully, "since we are not to visit."

"But you forget, papa," said Spike, "that we shall meet her at the assemblies, and that Mr. Long has promised to introduce her."

"I do not believe Mr. Long will do any such thing. He has two nephews of his own. He is a selfish, hypocritical man, and I have no opinion of him."

"No more have I," said Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy; "and I am glad to find that you do not depend on his serving you."

Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy deigned not to make any reply; but unable to contain himself, began scolding one of his sons.

"Don't keep coughing so, Doyle, for heaven's sake! Have a little compassion on my nerves. You tear them to pieces."

"Doyle has no discretion in his coughs," said his mother; "he times them ill."

"I do not cough for my own amusement," replied Doyle fretfully.

"When is your next sparring match to be, Spikey?"

"To-morrow fortnight."

"Aye, so it is," cried his father, "and Mr. Long does not come back till the day before; so it will be impossible for him to introduce her, for he will not know her himself."

"Then, my dear, you may have the advantage of your friend, and introduce Willow to him."

"Impossible, Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, impossible, when I am not acquainted with her myself; how can you be so teasing?"

"I honour your circumspection. A fortnight's acquaintance is certainly very little. One cannot know what a woman really is by the end of a fortnight. But if we do not venture, somebody else will; and
after all, Mr. Long and his nephews must stand their chance; and therefore, as he will think it an act of kindness, if you decline the office, I will take it on myself."

The boys stared at their mother. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy said only, "Nonsense, nonsense!"

"What can be the meaning of that emphatic exclamation?" cried she. "Do you consider the forms of introduction, and the stress that is laid on them, as nonsense? I cannot quite agree with you there. What say you, Anointed One? for you are a young lord of deep reflection I know, and read great books, and make extracts."

Anointed One wished to say something very sensible, but knew not how.

"While Anointed One is adjusting his ideas," she continued, "let us return to Willow."

"I am sick of Willow," cried her husband.

"I am sorry to hear that; but why did not you tell me so before? If I had known as much the morning, I certainly would not have called on her. It is very unlucky; but as I have actually paid the visit, we cannot escape the acquaintance now."

The astonishment of the gentlemen was just what she wished; that of Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy perhaps surpassing the rest; though when the first tumult of joy was over, he began to declare that it was what he had expected all the while.

"How good it was in you, my dear Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy! But I knew I should persuade you at last. I was sure you loved our boys too well to neglect such an acquaintance. Well, how pleased I am! and it is such a good joke, too, that you should have gone the morning, and never said a word about it till now."

"Now, Doyle, you may cough as much as you chuse," said Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy; and, as she spoke, she left the room, fatigued with the raptures of her husband.

"What an excellent mother you have, boys," said he, when the door was shut. "I do not know how you will ever make her amends for her kindness; or me either, for that matter. At our time of life, it is not so pleasant I can tell you, to be making new acquaintance every day; but for your sakes, we would do anything. Angelus, my love, though you are the youngest, I dare say Willow will spar with you at the next sparring match."

"Oh!" said Angelus stoutly, "I am not afraid; for though I am the youngest, I'm the tallest."

The rest of the evening was spent in conjecturing how soon she would return Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy's visit, and determining when they should ask her to dinner.

CHAPTER III (3)

NOT all that Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, however, with the assistance of his five sons, could ask on the subject was sufficient to draw from his wife any satisfactory description of Willow. They attacked her in various ways; with barefaced questions, ingenious suppositions, and distant surmises; but she eluded the skill of them all; and they were at last obliged to accept the second-hand intelligence of their neighbour Dr. Angleman Walsh. His report was highly favourable. Dame Walsh had been delighted with her. She was quite young, wonderfully handsome, extremely agreeable, and,
to crown the whole, she meant to be at the next dojo with a large party. Nothing could be more delightful! To be fond of sparring was a certain step towards falling in love; and very lively hopes of Willow's heart were entertained.

"If I can but see one of my sons happily settled at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High," said Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy to his wife, "and all the others equally well married, I shall have nothing to wish for. Well, except one day to be a great giant snake. But that is another thing entirely."

In a few days Willow returned Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy's visit, and sat about ten minutes with her in her library. She had entertained hopes of being admitted to a sight of the young gentlemen, of whose good looks she had heard much; but she saw only the mother. The gentlemen were somewhat more fortunate, for they had the advantage of ascertaining, from an upper window, that she wore a fuzzy blue sweater and rode a black horse.

An invitation to dinner was soon afterwards dispatched; and already had Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy planned the courses that were to do credit to his housekeeping, when an answer arrived which deferred it all. Willow was obliged to be in town the following day, and consequently unable to accept the honour of their invitation, &c. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy was quite disconcerted. He could not imagine what business she could have in town so soon after her arrival in Southern California; and he began to fear that she might be always flying about from one place to another, and never settled at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High as she ought to be. Dr. Angleman Walsh quieted his fears a little by starting the idea of her being gone to Los Angeles only to get a large party for the sparring match; and a report soon followed that Willow was to bring twelve gentlemen and seven ladies with her to the dojo. The boys grieved over such a large number of gentlemen; but were comforted the day before the sparring match by hearing that, instead of twelve, she had brought only six with her from Los Angeles, her five brothers and a cousin. And when the party entered the dojo room, it consisted of only five altogether; Willow, her two brothers, the wife of the oldest, and another young woman.

Willow was good looking and lady like; she had a pleasant countenance, and easy, unaffected manners. Her sister-in-law, Mrs. Kate Lockley, merely looked the lady; but her friend Miss Buffy Summers soon drew the attention of the room by her fine person, handsome features, noble mien; and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after her entrance, of her having ten thousand a year. The ladies pronounced her to be a fine figure of a woman, the gentlemen declared she was much handsomer than Willow, and she was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening, till her manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of her popularity; for she was discovered to be proud, to be above her company, and above being pleased; and not all her large estate in the San Francisco Bay Area could then save her from having a most forbidding, general mopyness, disagreeable countenance, and being unworthy to be compared with her friend. She was also put into some disrepute when, early in the evening, she took to brandishing a wooden stake. While, of course, ten thousand pounds a year may excuse many eccentricities, her insistence on playing the Slayer at a social gathering was not one of them.

Willow had soon made herself acquainted with all the principal people in the room; she was lively and unreserved, fought every sparring match, was angry that the dojo closed so early, and talked of giving one herself at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High. Such amiable qualities must speak for themselves. What a contrast between her and her friend! Miss Buffy Summers fought only once with Mr. Wesley Lockley and once with Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg, declined being introduced to any other gentleman, and spent the rest of the evening in walking about the room, speaking occasionally to one of her own party. Her character was decided. She was the proudest, most disagreeable woman in the world, and everyone hoped that she would never come there again. Amongst the most violent against her was Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, whose dislike of her general behaviour was
sharpened into particular resentment by her having slighted one of his sons.

Spike le Bloddy had been obliged, by the scarcity of gentlewomen, to sit down for two sparring matches; and during part of that time, Miss Buffy Summers had been standing near enough for him to overhear a conversation between her and Willow, who came from the sparring match for a few minutes to press her friend to join it.

"Come, Summers," said she, "I must have you fight in a sparring match. I hate to see you standing about by yourself in this stupid manner. You had much better spar."

"I certainly shall not. You know how I detest it, unless I am particularly acquainted with my partner. At such a dojo as This, it would be insupportable. Your brothers are engaged, and there is not another man in the room whom it would not be a punishment to me to fight."

"I would not be so fastidious as you are," cried Rosenberg, "for a kingdom! Upon my honour I never met with so many pleasant boys in my life, as I have the evening; and there are several of them, you see, uncommonly handsome."

"You are sparring with the only handsome boy in the room," said Miss Buffy Summers, looking at the eldest Mr. le Bloddy.

"Oh! he is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld! But there is one of his brothers sitting down just behind you, who is very handsome, and I dare say very agreeable. Do let me ask my partner to introduce you."

"Which do you mean?" and turning round, she looked for a moment at Spike, till catching his eye, she withdrew her own and coldly said, "He is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me; and I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young gentlemen who are slighted by other women. You had better return to your partner and enjoy his smiles, for you are wasting your time with me."

Willow followed her advice.

Willow returned to the mats for her next set-to with Oz.

As the match began, the two contestants coyly smiled at one another as the announcer opened the match. Willow ducked low as Oz snap kicked a blow to her head. Without even looking, Willow displayed her fine spatial sense by grappling his ankle in mid-air and flipping him daintily to the mat.

"' Woah," said Oz, ' Ankle grab."

Willow blushed prettily at his compliment and attempted a jab to his solar plexus.

Oz avoided the blow with a skilfully executed half roll into a back flip. As they circled each, Willow said, "I say, next time, let's use weapons. That was a jolly flip."

Oz replied, "Yes, I bet you'd look lovely with a sword in your hand."

They continued in this vein of pretty compliments as the blows fell fast and furious.

Miss Buffy Summers ceased to watch this play and walked off; and Spike remained with no very cordial feelings towards her. He told the story however with great spirit among his friends; for he had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in any thing ridiculous.

The evening altogether passed off pleasantly to the whole family. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy had seen
his eldest son much admired by the party from the burnt husk of Sunnydale High. Willow had fought with him twice, and he had been distinguished by her brothers. Oz was as much gratified by this as his father could be, though in a quieter way. Spike felt Oz's pleasure. Anointed One had heard himself mentioned to Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg as the most accomplished boy in the neighbourhood; and Doyle and Angelus had been fortunate enough to be never without partners, which was all that they had yet learnt to care for at a sparring match. They returned therefore, in good spirits to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the le Bloddy's, where they lived, and of which they were the principal inhabitants. They found Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy still up. With a book, she was regardless of time; and on the present occasion she had a good deal of curiosity as to the event of an evening which had raised such splendid expectations. She had rather hoped that all her husband's views on the stranger would be disappointed; but she soon found that she had a very different story to hear.

"Oh! my dear Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy," as he entered the room, "we have had a most delightful evening, a most excellent sparring match. I wish you had been there. Oz was so admired, nothing could be like it. Every body said how well he looked; and Willow thought him quite handsome, and fought with him twice. Only think of that my dear; she actually fought with him twice; and he was the only creature in the room that she asked a second time. First of all, she asked Mr. Walsh. I was so vexed to see her fight him; but, however, she did not admire him at all: indeed, nobody can, you know; and she seemed quite struck with Oz as he was going down the sparring match. So, she enquired who he was, and got introduced, and asked him for the two next. Then, the two third she fought with Mr. Gunn, and the two fourth with Forest Walsh, and the two fifth with Oz again, and the two sixth with Spikey, and the Boulanger --"

"If she had had any compassion for me," cried his wife impatiently, "she would not have fought half so much! For God's sake, say no more of her partners. Oh! that she had sprained her ankle in the first sparring match!"

"Oh! my dear," continued Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, "I am quite delighted with her. She is so excessively handsome! and her brothers are charming men. I never in my life saw any thing more elegant than their weapons. I dare say the steel in Mr. Wesley Lockley's sword--"

Here he was interrupted again. Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy protested against any description of finery. He was therefore obliged to seek another branch of the subject, and related, with much bitterness of spirit and some exaggeration, the shocking rudeness of Miss Buffy Summers.

"But I can assure you," he added, "that Spikey does not lose much by not suitting her fancy; for she is a most disagreeable, horrid woman, not at all worth pleasing. So high and so conceited that there was no enduring her! She walked here, and she walked there, fancying herself so very great! Not handsome enough to fight! I wish you had been there, my dear, to have given her one of your set downs. I quite detest the woman."
CHAPTER IV (4)

WHEN Oz and Spike were alone, they adjourned to the exercise room to practice some of the moves which they had seen at the match and gossip as men are wont to do. Oz who had been cautious in his praise of Willow before, expressed to his brother how very much he admired her.

"She's nice," said he.

"She is also handsome," replied Spike, "which a young woman ought likewise to be, if she possibly can. Her character is thereby complete."

"Mmmmm... Freeze Frame," sighed Oz.

When this was followed up by no more sensible remark, Spike ran up the exercise room wall as an aid to an elegant and gentlemanly back flip over his brother with a quick roundhouse kick which swept the bemuzed Oz off his feet. "Now then, you were saying."

Oz sighed, "We fought twice. An unexpected compliment."

"Did not you expect it?" Spike helped his brother to his feet. "I did for you. But that is one great difference between us. Compliments always take you by surprise, and me never. What could be more natural than her asking you again? She could not help seeing that you were about five times as handsome as every other man in the room. No thanks to her gallantry for that. Well, she certainly is very agreeable, and I give you leave to like her. You have liked many a stupider person."

"Spike!"

"Oh! you are a great deal too apt, you know, to like people in general. You never see a fault in any body. All the world are good and agreeable in your eyes. I never heard you speak ill of a human being in my life. Whereas I know people to be pretty much as evil as I."

"I'm not hasty; but I speak what I think."

"I know you do; and it is that which makes the wonder. With your good sense, to be honestly blind to the follies and nonsense of others! Affectation of candour is common enough; -- one meets it every where. But to be candid without ostentation or design -- to take the good of every body's character and make it still better, and say nothing of the bad -- belongs to you alone. And so, you like the man's brothers too, do you? Their manners are not equal to hers."

"Not; at first, but later..." Oz shrugged. "Mr. Riley Rosenberg is to live with his sister and keep her house; and he seems nice."

Spike listened in silence, but was not convinced. Their behaviour at the dojo had not been calculated to please in general; and with more quickness of observation and less pliancy of temper than his brother, he was very little disposed to approve them. They were in fact very fine gentlemen, not deficient in good humour when they were pleased, nor in the power of being agreeable where they chose it; but proud and conceited. They were rather handsome, had been educated in one of the first
private dojos in town, had a fortune of twenty thousand pounds, were in the habit of spending more than they ought, and of associating with people of rank; and were therefore in every respect entitled to think well of themselves, and meanly of others. They were of a respectable family in the north of California; a circumstance more deeply impressed on their memories than that their sister's fortune and their own had been acquired by trade.

Willow inherited property to the amount of nearly an hundred thousand pounds from her mother, who had intended to purchase an estate, but did not live to do it. -- Willow intended it likewise, and sometimes made choice of her county; but as she was now provided with a good house and the liberty of a manor, it was doubtful to many of those who best knew the easiness of her temper, whether she might not spend the remainder of her days at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High, and leave the next generation to purchase an estate.

Her brothers were very anxious for her having an estate of her own; but though she was now established only as a tenant, Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg was by no means unwilling to preside at her table, nor was Mr. Wesley Lockley, who had married a woman of more fashion than fortune, less disposed to consider her house as his home when it suited him. Willow had not been of age two years, when she was tempted by an accidental recommendation to look at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High. She did look at it and into it for half an hour, was pleased with the situation and the principal rooms, satisfied with what the owner said in its praise, and took it immediately.

Between her and Summers there was a very steady friendship, in spite of a great opposition of character. -- Rosenberg was endeared to Summers by the easiness, openness, ductility of her temper, though no disposition could offer a greater contrast to her own, and though with her own she never appeared dissatisfied. On the strength of Summers' regard Rosenberg had the firmest reliance, and of her judgment the highest opinion. In martial arts, Summers was the superior. Rosenberg was by no means deficient, but Summers was clever. She was at the same time haughty, reserved, and fastidious, and her manners, though well bred, were not inviting. In that respect her friend had greatly the advantage. Rosenberg was sure of being liked wherever she appeared; Summers was continually giving offence.

The manner in which they spoke of the Sunnydale dojo was sufficiently characteristic. Rosenberg had never met with pleasanter people or handsomer boys in her life; every body had been most kind and attentive to her, there had been no formality, no stiffness; she had soon felt acquainted with all the room; and as to Mr. le Bloddy, she could not conceive a deity more beautiful. Summers, on the contrary, had seen a collection of people in whom there was little beauty and no fashion, for none of whom she had felt the smallest interest, and from none received either attention or pleasure. Mr. le Bloddy she acknowledged to be handsome, but he smiled too much.

Mr. Wesley Lockley and his brother allowed it to be so -- but still they admired him and liked him, and pronounced him to be a sweet boy, and one whom they should not object to know more of. Mr. le Bloddy was therefore established as a sweet boy, and their sister felt authorised by such commendation to think of him as she chose.

CHAPTER V (5)
WITHIN a short walk of The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's lived a family with whom the le Blod dys were particularly intimate. Dame Walsh had been formerly in trade, where she had made a tolerable fortune and risen to the honour of knighthood by an address to the King during her period of service in the Initiative, about which there many rumors as there will be in a small community the size of Sunnydale.

The distinction had perhaps been felt too strongly. It had given her a disgust to her business and to her residence in a small market town; and quitting them both, she had removed with her family to a house about a mile from Sunnydale, denominated from that period Walsh Lodge, where she could think with pleasure of her own importance, and, unshackled by business, occupy herself solely in being civil to all the world, and, in some small dabbling in an scientific exploration of some of the lessor sub-terrestrial races.

Though elated by her rank, it did not render her supercilious; on the contrary, she was all attention to every body. By nature inoffensive, friendly and obliging, her presentation at the capital's had made her courteous.

Dr. Angleman Walsh, her husband, was a very good kind of man, not too clever to be a valuable neighbour to Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy. - The Walshes had several children. The eldest of them, a sensible, intelligent young man, about twenty-seven, was Spike's intimate friend.

That the Mr. Walshes and the Mr. le Blod dys should meet to talk after a sparring match was absolutely necessary; and the morning after the match brought the former to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's to hear and to communicate.

"You began the evening well, Adam," said Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy with civil self-command to Mr. Walsh. "You were Willow's first choice."

"Yes; -- but she seemed to like her second better."

"Golly Gee, -- you mean Oz, I suppose -- because she fought with him twice. To be sure that did seem as if she admired him -- indeed I rather believe she did -- I heard something about it -- but I hardly know what -- something about Mrs. Robinson."

"Perhaps you mean what I overheard between him and Mrs. Robinson; did not I mention it to you? Mrs. Robinson's asking her how she liked our Sunnydale assemblies, and whether she did not think there were a great many handsome men in the room, and which she thought the prettiest? and her answering immediately to the last question -- "Oh! the eldest Mr. le Bloddy beyond a doubt, there cannot be two opinions on that point.""

"Upon my word! -- Well, that was very decided indeed -- that does seem as if -- but, however, it may all come to nothing, you know."

"My overhearings were more to the purpose than yours, Spike," said Adam. "Miss Buffy Summers is not so well worth listening to as her friend, is she? -- Poor Spike! -- to be only just tolerable."

"I beg you would not put it into Spikey's head to be vexed by her ill-treatment; for she is such a disagreeable woman that it would be quite a misfortune to be liked by her. Mr. Long told me last night that she sat close to him for half an hour without once opening her lips."

"Miss Buffy spoke," said Oz.
"Aye -- because he asked her at last how she liked the burnt husk of Sunnydale High, and she could not help answering him; -- but he said she seemed very angry at being spoke to."

"Mr. Riley Rosenburg told me," said Oz, "Miss Buffy doesn't say much."

"I do not believe a word of it, my dear. If she had been so very agreeable, she would have talked to Mr. Long. But I can guess how it was; every body says that she is ate up with pride, and I dare say she had heard somehow that Mr. Long does not keep a carriage, and had come to the sparring match in a hack chaise."

"I do not mind her not talking to Mr. Long," said Mr. Walsh, "but I wish she had fought with Spike."

"Another time, Spikey," said his father, "I would not fight with her, if I were you."

"I believe, Sir, I may safely promise you never to fight with her."

"Her pride," said Mr. Walsh, "does not offend me so much as pride often does, because there is an excuse for it. One cannot wonder that so very fine a young woman, with family, fortune, destiny, every thing in her favour, should think highly of herself. If I may so express it, she has a right to be proud."

"That is very true," replied Spike, "and I could easily forgive her pride, if she had not mortified mine."

"Pride," observed Anointed One, who piqued himself upon the solidity of his reflections, "is a very common failing I believe. By all that I have ever read, I am convinced that it is very common indeed, that human nature is particularly prone to it, and that there are very few of us who do not cherish a feeling of self-complacency on the score of some quality or other, real or imaginary. Vanity and pride are different things, though the words are often used synonymously. A person may be proud without being vain. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us."

"If I were as rich as Miss Buffy Summers," cried a young Walsh who came with her brothers, "I should not care how proud I was. I would keep a pack of foxhounds, and drink a bottle of wine every day."

"Then you would drink a great deal more than you ought," said Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy; "and if I were to see you at it, I should take away your bottle directly and give you a glass of milk. Don't smile at me. There is nothing wrong with strong teeth and bones."

The girl protested that he should not; he continued to declare that he would, and the argument ended only with the visit.

CHAPTER VI (6)

THE gentlemen of The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's soon waited on those of the burnt husk of Sunnydale High. The visit was returned in due form. Mr. le Bloddy's pleasing manners grew on the good will of Mr. Wesley Lockley and Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg; and though the father was found to be intolerable and the younger brothers not worth speaking to, a wish of being better acquainted with them was expressed towards the two eldest. By Oz the attention was received with the greatest pleasure; but Spike still saw superciliousness in their treatment of every body, hardly
excepting even his brother, and could not like them; though their kindness to Oz, such as it was, had
a value, as arising in all probability from the influence of their sister's admiration. It was generally
evident whenever they met, that she did admire him; and to Spike it was equally evident that Oz was
yielding to the preference which he had begun to entertain for her from the first, and was in a way to
be very much in love; but he considered with pleasure that it was not likely to be discovered by the
world in general, since Oz united with great strength of feeling a composure of temper and a uniform
cheerfulness of manner, which would guard him from the suspicions of the impertinent. Spike
mentioned this to his friend Mr. Walsh.

"It may perhaps be pleasant," replied Adam, "to be able to impose on the public in such a case; but it
is sometimes a disadvantage to be so very guarded. If a man conceals his affection with the same skill
from the object of it, he may lose the opportunity of fixing her; and it will then be but poor
consolation to believe the world equally in the dark. There is so much of gratitude or vanity in almost
every attachment, that it is not safe to leave any to itself. We can all begin freely -- a slight preference
is natural enough; but there are very few of us who have heart enough to be really in love without
encouragement. In nine cases out of ten, a man had better shew more affection than he feels.
Rosenburg likes your brother undoubtedly; but she may never do more than like him, if he does not
help her on."

"But he does help her on, as much as his nature will allow. If I can perceive his regard for her, she
must be a simpleton indeed not to discover it too."

"Remember, Spike, that she does not know Oz's disposition as you do."
Spike in fact had an
uncannily ability to discern the personal foibles of others and even occasionally his own. If he was to
be love's bitch, then it was evidently to his credit, that he would be man enough to admit it.

"But if a man is partial to a woman, and does not endeavour to conceal it, she must find it out."

"Perhaps she must, if she sees enough of him. But though Rosenburg and Oz meet tolerably often, it
is never for many hours together; and as they always see each other in large mixed parties, it is
impossible that every moment should be employed in conversing together. Oz should therefore make
the most of every half hour in which he can command her attention. When he is secure of her, there
will be leisure for falling in love as much as he chuses."

"Your plan is a good one," replied Spike, "where nothing is in question but the desire of being well
married; and if I were determined to get a rich wife, or any wife, I dare say I should adopt it. But
these are not Oz's feelings; he is not acting by design. As yet, he cannot even be certain of the degree
of his own regard, nor of its reasonableness. He has known her only a fortnight. He fought four
sparring matches with her at Sunnydale; he saw her one morning at her own house, and has since
dined in company with her four times. This is not quite enough to make him understand her
character."

"Not as you represent it. Had he merely dined with her, he might only have discovered whether she
had a good appetite; but you must remember that four evenings have been also spent together -- and
four evenings may do a great deal."

"Yes; these four evenings have enabled them to ascertain that they both like Books better than
Commerce; but with respect to any other leading characteristic, I do not imagine that much has been
unfolded."

"Well," said Adam, "I wish Oz success with all my heart; and if he were married to her to-morrow, I
should think he had as good a chance of happiness as if he were to be studying her character for a
twelvemonth. Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance. If the dispositions of the parties
are ever so well known to each other, or ever so similar before-hand, it does not advance their felicity
in the least. They always contrive to grow sufficiently unlike afterwards to have their share of vexation; and it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life."

"Wow. I mean, yeah. I get why the demons all fall in line with you. You're like Tony Robbins. If he was a big scary . . Frankenstein looking-- You're exactly like Tony Robbins. Bloody hell, Adam, what are your going on about. Don't make me laugh, Adam; but it is not sound. You know it is not sound, and that you would never act in the way yourself."

Occupied in observing Willow's attentions to his brother, Spike was far from suspecting that he was himself becoming an object of some interest in the eyes of her friend.

Miss Buffy Summers had at first scarcely allowed him to be handsome; she had looked at him without admiration at the sparring match; and when they next met, she looked at him only to criticise. But no sooner had she made it clear to herself and her friends that he had hardly a good feature in his face, than she began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of his dark eyes. To the discovery succeeded some others equally mortifying. Though she had detected with a critical eye more than one failure of perfect symmetry in his form, she was forced to acknowledge his figure to be pleasing; and in spite of her asserting that his manners were not those of the fashionable world, she was caught by their charm. Of this he was perfectly unaware; -- to him she was only the woman who made herself agreeable nowhere, and who had not thought him handsome enough to fight with.

Buffy began to wish to know more of him, and as a step towards conversing with him herself, attended to his conversation with others. Her doing so drew his notice. It was at Dame Walsh's, where a large party were assembled. "What does Miss Buffy Summers mean," said he to Adam, "by listening to my conversation with Colonel Cordelia Chase? Buffy, Buffy, Buffy! Everywhere I turn, she's there! That nasty little face, that...bouncing shampoo-commercial hair, that whole sodding holier-than-thou attitude."

To which Mr. Adam Walsh in all fairness was forced to reply, "Well, aren't we kinda unholy, by the-"

Mr Spike le Bloddy angrily interrupted him, "She follows me, you know, tracks me down. I'm her pet project. Drive Spike round the bend. Makes every day a fresh bout of torture."

"Now Spike you know that that is not true."

"You don't understand. I can't get rid of her. She's everywhere. She's haunting me, Adam! This... has got to end. What is she trying to do to me?"

"That is a question which Miss Buffy Summers only can answer."

"But if she does it any more, I shall certainly let her know that I see what she is about. She has a very satirical eye, and if I do not begin by being impertinent myself, I shall soon grow afraid of her."

On her approaching them soon afterwards, though without seeming to have any intention of speaking, Mr. Walsh defied his friend to mention such a subject to her, which immediately provoking Spike to do it, he turned to her and said,

"Did not you think, Miss Buffy Summers, that I expressed myself uncommonly well just now, when I was teasing Col. Cordelia to give us a sparring match?"

"With great energy; -- but it is a subject which always makes a lord energetic."
"You are severe on us."

"It will be her turn soon to be teased," said Mr. Walsh. "I am going to open the instrument, Spike, and you know what follows."

"You are a very strange creature by way of a friend! -- always wanting me to sing before any body and every body! -- If my vanity had taken a singing turn... what am I saying. Of course my vanity takes a turn to fighting not singing," he added, "Very well; if it must be so, it must." And gravely glancing at Miss Buffy Summers, "There is a fine old saying, which every body here is of course familiar with -- "Keep your breath to cool your porridge," -- and I shall keep mine to swell my song."

His performance was pleasing, though by no means capital. After a song or two, and before he could reply to the entreaties of several that he would sing again, he was eagerly succeeded at the instrument by his brother Anointed One, who having, in consequence of being the only plain one in the family, worked hard for knowledge and accomplishments, was always impatient for display.

Anointed One had neither genius nor taste; and though vanity had given him application, it had given him likewise a pedantic air and conceited manner, which would have injured a higher degree of excellence than he had reached. Spike, easy and unaffected, had been listened to with much more pleasure, though not playing half so well; and Anointed One, at the end of a long concerto of mopey melodies, was glad to purchase praise and gratitude by playing the Mortal Combat soundtrack, at the request of his younger brothers, who, with some of the Walshes and two or three officers, joined eagerly in sparring at one end of the room.

Miss Buffy Summers stood near them in silent indignation at such a mode of passing the evening, to the exclusion of all conversation, and was too much engrossed by her own thoughts to perceive that Dame Walsh was her neighbour, till Dame Walsh thus began.

"What a charming amusement for young people this is, Miss Buffy Summers! -- There is nothing like sparring after all. -- I consider it as one of the first refinements of polished societies."

"Certainly, Madam; -- and it has the advantage also of being in vogue amongst the less polished societies of the world. -- Every savage can fight."

Dame Walsh only smiled. "Your friend performs delightfully;" she continued after a pause, on seeing Rosenberg join the group; -- "and I doubt not that you are an adept in the science yourself, Miss Buffy Summers."

"You saw me fight at Sunnydale, I believe, Ma'am"

"Yes, indeed, and received no inconsiderable pleasure from the sight. Do you often fight the forces of darkness in Los Angeles?"

"Never, Ma'am"

"Do you not think it would be a proper compliment to the place?"

"It is a compliment which I never pay to any place, if I can avoid it. I just want to be a normal girl."

"You have a house in town?"
Miss Buffy Summers bowed.

"I had once some thoughts of fixing in town myself -- for I am fond of superior society; but I did not feel quite certain that the air of Los Angeles would agree with Dr. Angleman Walsh."

She paused in hopes of an answer; but her companion was not disposed to make any; and Spike at that instant moving towards them, she was struck with the notion of doing a very gallant thing, and called out to him.

"My dear Mr. Spike, why are not you sparring? -- Miss Buffy Summers, you must allow me to present this young lord to you as a very desirable partner. -- You cannot refuse to fight, I am sure, when so much beauty is before you." And taking his hand, she would have given it to Miss Buffy Summers, who, though extremely surprised, was not unwilling to receive it, when he instantly drew back, and said with some discomposure to Dame Walsh,

"Indeed, Ma'am, I have not the least intention of sparring. -- I entreat you not to suppose that I moved this way in order to beg for a partner."

Miss Buffy Summers with grave propriety requested to be allowed the honour of his hand; but in vain. Spike was determined; nor did Dame Walsh at all shake his purpose by her attempt at persuasion.

"You excel so much in the fight, Mr. Spike, that it is cruel to deny me the happiness of seeing you; and though the lady dislikes the amusement in general, she can have no objection, I am sure, to oblige us for one half hour."

"Miss Buffy Summers is all politeness," said Spike, smirking.

"She is indeed -- but considering the inducement, my dear Mr. Spike, we cannot wonder at her complaisance; for who would object to such a partner?"

Spike looked archly, and turned away. His resistance had not injured him with the gentlewoman, and she was thinking of him with some complacency, when thus accosted by Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg.

"I can guess the subject of your reverie."

"I should imagine not."

"You are considering how insupportable it would be to pass many evenings in the manner -- in such society; and indeed I am quite of your opinion. I was never more annoyed! The insipidity and yet the noise; the nothingness and yet the self-importance of all these people! -- What would I give to hear your strictures on them!"

"Your conjecture is totally wrong, I assure you. My mind was more agreeably engaged. I have been meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a handsome man can bestow."

Mr. Riley Rosenburg immediately fixed his eyes on her face, and desired she would tell him what lord had the credit of inspiring such reflections. Miss Buffy Summers replied with great intrepidity,

"Mr. Spike le Bloddy."

"Mr. Spike le Bloddy!" repeated Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg. "I am all astonishment. How long has he been such a favourite? -- and pray when am I to wish you joy?"
"That is exactly the question which I expected you to ask. A gentleman's imagination is very rapid; it jumps from admiration to love, from love to matrimony, in a moment. I knew you would be wishing me joy."

"Nay, if you are so serious about it, I shall consider the matter as absolutely settled. You will have a charming father-in-law, indeed, and of course he will be always at The Bronze with you."

Miss Buffy listened to him with perfect indifference while he chose to entertain himself in the manner, and as her composure convinced him that all was safe, his wit flowed long.
CHAPTER VII (7)

MRS. JOYCE’s property consisted almost entirely in an estate of two thousand a year, which, unfortunately for her sons, was entailed, in default of heirs female, on a distant relation; and their father’s fortune, though ample for his situation in life, could but ill supply the deficiency of hers. His mother had been an attorney in Sunnydale, and had left him four thousand pounds.

He had a brother married to a Mrs. Olivia Phillips, who had been a clerk to their mother, and succeeded her in the business, and a sister settled in Los Angeles in a respectable line of trade.

The village of The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy’s was only one mile from Sunnydale; a most convenient distance for the young gentlemen, who were usually tempted thither three or four times a week, to pay their duty to their uncle, and to a weaponry shop just over the way. The two youngest of the family, Doyle and Angelus, were particularly frequent in these attentions; their minds were more vacant than their brothers’, and when nothing better offered, a walk to Sunnydale was necessary to amuse their cloudy morning hours and furnish conversation for the evening; and however bare of news the country in general might be, they always contrived to learn some from their uncle. At present, indeed, they were well supplied both with news and happiness by the recent arrival of a militia regiment in the neighbourhood; it was to remain the whole winter, and Sunnydale was the head quarters.

Their visits to Mr. Philips were now productive of the most interesting intelligence. Every day added something to their knowledge of the officers’ names and connections. Their lodgings were not long a secret, and at length they began to know the officers themselves. Mrs. Philips visited them all, and this opened to her nephews a source of felicity unknown before. They could talk of nothing but officers; and Willow’s large fortune, the mention of which gave animation to their father, was worthless in their eyes when opposed to the regimentals of an ensign.

After listening one morning to their effusions on the subject, Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy coolly observed,

"From all that I can collect by your manner of talking, you must be two of the silliest boys in the country. I have suspected it some time, but I am now convinced."

Doyle was disconcerted, and made no answer; but Angelus, with perfect indifference, continued to express his admiration of Captain Darla, and his hope of seeing her in the course of the day, as she was going the next morning to Los Angeles, and she cut quite a dashing figure in her regimentals.

"I am astonished, my dear," said Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, "that you should be so ready to think your own children silly. If I wished to think slightingly of any body’s children, it should not be of my own, however."

"If my children are silly I must hope to be always sensible of it."

"Yes -- but as it happens, they are all of them very clever."

"There is the only point, I flatter myself, on which we do not agree. I had hoped that our sentiments coincided in every particular, but I must so far differ from you as to think our two youngest sons..."
"My dear Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, you must not expect such boys to have the sense of their mother and father. -- When they get to our age, I dare say they will not think about officers any more than we do. I remember the time when I liked a red coat myself very well -- and indeed, so I do still at my heart; and if a smart young colonel, with five or six thousand a year, should want one of my boys, I shall not say nay to her; and I thought Colonel Cordelia looked very becoming the other night at Dame Walsh's in her regimentals."

"Papa," cried Angelus, "my uncle says that Colonel Cordelia and Captain Darla do not go so often to Mr. Watson's as they did when they first came; he sees them now very often standing in Clarke's library reading fashion magazines."

Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy was prevented replying by the entrance of the footman with a note for Mr. le Bloddy; it came from the burnt husk of Sunnydale High, and the servant waited for an answer. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy's eyes sparkled with pleasure, and he was eagerly calling out, while his son read,

"Well, Oz, who is it from? what is it about? what does she say? Well, Oz, make haste and tell us; make haste, my love."

"It is from Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg," said Oz, and then read it aloud.

"My dear Friend,

IF you are not so compassionate as to dine to-day with Wesley and me, we shall be in danger of hating each other for the rest of our lives, for a whole day's te^-a^-te between two men can never end without a quarrel. Come as soon as you can on the receipt of This. My sister and the ladies are to dine with the officers. Yours ever,

Riley Rosenberg."

"With the officers!" cried Angelus. "I wonder my uncle did not tell us of that."

"Dining out," said Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, "Gosh, but that is very unlucky."

"Can I have the carriage?" said Oz.

"No, my dear, you had better go on horseback, because it seems likely to rain; and then you must stay all night."

"That would be a good scheme," said Spike, "if you were sure that they would not offer to send him home."

"Oh! but the ladies will have Willow's chaise to go to Sunnydale; and the Lockleys have no horses to theirs."

"I had much rather go in the coach."

"But, my dear, your mother cannot spare the horses, I am sure. They are wanted in the farm, Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, are not they?"

"They are wanted in the farm much oftener than I can get them."
"But if you have got them to-day," said Spike, "my father's purpose will be answered."

He did at last extort from his mother an acknowledgment that the horses were engaged. Oz was therefore obliged to go on horseback, and his father attended him to the door with many cheerful prognostics of a bad day. His hopes were answered; Oz had not been gone long before it rained hard. His brothers were uneasy for him, but his father was delighted. The rain continued the whole evening without intermission; Oz certainly could not come back.

"This was a lucky idea of mine, indeed!" said Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, more than once, as if the credit of making it rain were all his own. And indeed he had mixed a minor potion to that aim. Till the next morning, however, he was not aware of all the felicity of his contrivance. Breakfast was scarcely over when a servant from the burnt husk of Sunnydale High brought the following note for Spike:

"Spike,

Got sick. They won't let me leave till I'm well. Don't worry.

Yours, &c."

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, when Spike had read the note aloud, "if your son should have a dangerous fit of illness, if he should die, it would be a comfort to know that it was all in pursuit of Willow, and under your orders."

"Oh! I am not at all afraid of his dying. People do not die of little trifling colds. He will be taken good care of. As long is he stays there and keeps her nasty infectious germs with him, it is all very well. I would go and see him, if I could have the carriage and some strong astringent cleansers."

Spike, feeling really anxious, was determined to go to Oz, though the carriage was not to be had; and as he was no horse-man, walking was his only alternative. He declared his resolution.

"How can you be so silly," cried his father, "as to think of such a thing, in all the dirt! You will not be fit to be seen when you get there."

"I shall be very fit to see Oz -- which is all I want."

"Is This a hint to me, Spikey," said his mother, "to send for the horses?"

"No, indeed. I do not wish to avoid the walk. The distance is nothing, when one has a motive; only three miles. I shall be back by dinner."

"I admire the activity of your benevolence," observed Anointed One, "but every impulse of feeling should be guided by reason; and, in my opinion, exertion should always be in proportion to what is required."

"Whatever...we will go as far as Sunnydale with you," said Doyle and Angelus. -- Spike accepted their company, and the three young gentlemen set off together.

"If we make haste," said Angelus, as they walked along, "perhaps we may see something of Captain Darla before she goes."

In Sunnydale they parted; the two youngest repaired to the lodgings of one of the officers' husbands, and Spike continued his walk alone, crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity, and finding himself at last within view of the house, with weary ankles, dirty boots, blond hair spiky, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise.
He was shewn into the breakfast-parlour, where all but Oz were assembled, and where his appearance created a great deal of surprise. -- That he should have walked three miles so early in the day, in such dirty weather, and by himself, was almost incredible to Mr. Wesley Lockley and Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg; and Spike was convinced that they held him in contempt for it. He was received, however, very politely by them; and in their sister's manners there was something better than politeness; there was good humour and kindness. -- Miss Buffy Summers said very little, and Mrs. Kate Lockley nothing at all. The former was divided between admiration of the brilliancy which exercise had given to his complexion, and doubt as to the occasion's justifying his coming so far alone. The latter was thinking only of her breakfast.

His enquiries after his brother were not very favourably answered. Mr. le Bloddy had slept ill, and though up, was very feverish and not well enough to leave his room. Spike was glad to be taken to him immediately; and Oz, who had only been withheld by the fear of giving alarm or inconvenience, from expressing in his note how much he longed for such a visit, was delighted at his entrance. He was not equal, however, to much conversation, and when Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg left them together, could attempt little beside expressions of gratitude for the extraordinary kindness he was treated with. Spike silently attended him.

When breakfast was over, they were joined by the brothers, and Spike began to like them himself, when he saw how much affection and solicitude they shewed for Oz. The apothecary came, and having examined her patient, said, as might be supposed, that he had caught a violent cold, and that they must endeavour to get the better of it; advised him to return to bed, and promised him some draughts. The advice was followed readily, for the feverish symptoms increased, and his head ached acutely. Spike did not quit his room for a moment, nor were the other gentlemen often absent; the ladies being out, they had in fact nothing to do elsewhere.

When the clock struck three, Spike felt that he must go; and very unwillingly said so. Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg offered him the carriage, and he only wanted a little pressing to accept it, when Oz testified such concern in parting with him that Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg was obliged to convert the offer of the chaise into an invitation to remain at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High for the present. Spike most thankfully consented, and a servant was dispatched to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's to acquaint the family with his stay, and bring back a supply of clothes.

CHAPTER VIII (8)
AT five o'clock the two gentlemen retired to dress, and at half past six Spike was summoned to dinner. To the civil enquiries which then poured in, and amongst which he had the pleasure of distinguishing the much superior solicitude of Willow's, he could not make a very favourable answer. Oz was by no means better. The brothers, on hearing this, repeated three or four times how much they were grieved, how shocking it was to have a bad cold, and how excessively they disliked being ill themselves, and then thought no more of the matter; and their indifference towards Oz, when not immediately before them, restored Spike to the enjoyment of all his original dislike.

Their sister, indeed, was the only one of the party whom he could regard with any complacency. Her anxiety for Oz was evident, and her attentions to himself most pleasing, and they prevented his feeling himself so much an intruder as he believed he was considered by the others. He had very little notice from any but her. Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg was engrossed by Miss Buffy Summers, his brother scarcely less so; and as for Mrs. Kate Lockley, by whom Spike sat, she was an indolent woman, who lived only to eat, drink, brood vengefully over the death of her father, and play at cards, who, when she found him to prefer a plain dish of appetisers to a ragout, had nothing to say to him.

When dinner was over, he returned directly to Oz, and Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg began abusing him as soon as he was out of the room. His manners were pronounced to be very bad indeed, a mixture of pride and impertinence; he had no conversation, no stile, no taste, a terrible die-job, (I mean really bleach) no beauty. Mr. Wesley Lockley thought the same, and added,

"He has nothing, in short, to recommend him, but being an excellent walker. I shall never forget his appearance This cloudy morning. He really looked almost wild."

"He did indeed, Wesley. I could hardly keep my countenance. Very nonsensical to come at all! Why must he be scampering about the country, because his brother had a cold? His hair so untidy, so blowsy!"

"Yes, and his attire; I hope you saw his trench coat, six inches deep in mud, I am absolutely certain; and the pants which had been let down to hide it not doing its office."

"Your picture may be very exact, Wesley," said Rosenburg; "but this was all lost upon me. I thought Mr. Spike le Bloddy looked remarkably well, when he came into the room this morning. His dirty trench coat quite escaped my notice."

"You observed it, Miss Buffy Summers, I am sure," said Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg, "and I am inclined to think that you would not wish to see your brother make such an exhibition."

"Certainly not."

"To walk three miles, or four miles, or five miles, or whatever it is, above his ankles in dirt, and alone, quite alone! what could he mean by it? It seems to me to shew an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country-town indifference to decorum."

"It shews an affection for his brother that is very pleasing," said Rosenburg.

"I am afraid, Miss Buffy Summers," observed Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg in a half whisper, "that the adventure has rather affected your admiration of his fine eyes."

"Not at all," she replied; "they were brightened by the exercise." -- A short pause followed the
speech, and Mr. Wesley Lockley began again.

"I have an excessive regard for Oz le Bloddy, he is really a very sweet boy, and I wish with all my heart he were well settled. But with such a mother and father, and such low connections, I am afraid there is no chance of it."

"I think I have heard you say, that their aunt is an attorney in Sunnydale."

"Yes; and they have another, who lives somewhere near Santa Monica."

"That is capital," added his brother, and they both laughed heartily.

"If they had aunts enough to fill all Santa Monica," cried Rosenburg, "it would not make them one jot less agreeable."

"But it must very materially lessen their chance of marrying women of any consideration in the world," replied Summers.

To the speech Willow Rosenburg made no answer; but her brothers gave it their hearty assent, and indulged their mirth for some time at the expense of their dear friend's vulgar relations.

With a renewal of tenderness, however, they repaired to his room on leaving the dining-parlour, and sat with him till summoned to coffee. He was still very poorly, and Spike would not quit him at all till late in the evening, when he had the comfort of seeing him asleep, and when it appeared to him rather right than pleasant that he should go down stairs himself. On entering the drawing-room he found the whole party at pool, and was immediately invited to join them; but suspecting them to be playing poorly he declined it, and making his brother the excuse, said he would amuse himself for the short time he could stay below with a book. Mrs. Kate Lockley looked at him with astonishment.

"Do you prefer reading to pool?" said he; "that is rather singular."

"Mr. Spike le Bloddy," said Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg, "despises pool. He is a great reader and has no pleasure in anything else."

"I deserve neither such praise nor such censure," cried Spike; "I am not a great reader, and I have pleasure in many things."

"In nursing your brother I am sure you have pleasure," said Willow Rosenburg; "and I hope it will soon be increased by seeing him quite well."

Spike thanked her from his heart, and then walked towards a table where a few fiction books were lying. She immediately offered to fetch him others; all that her library afforded.

"And I wish my fiction collection were larger for your benefit and my own credit; but I read mostly non-fiction, and though I have not many novels, I have more than I ever look into. Also, I'm so the 'Net girl.'

Spike assured her that he could suit himself perfectly with those in the room.

"I am astonished," said Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg, "that my mother should have left so small a collection of novels. -- What a delightful library you have at The Bronze, Miss Buffy Summers!"

"It ought to be good," she replied, "it has been the work of many generations."
"And then you have added so much to it yourself, you are always buying books."

"I cannot comprehend the neglect of a family library in such days as these."

"Neglect! I am sure you neglect nothing that can add to the beauties of that noble place. Willow, when you build your house, I wish it may be half as delightful as The Bronze."

"I wish it may."

"But I would really advise you to make your purchase in that neighbourhood, and take The Bronze for a kind of model. There is not a finer county in California than The San Francisco Bay Area."

"With all my heart; I will buy The Bronze itself if Summers will sell it."

"I am talking of possibilities, Willow."

"Upon my word, Riley, I should think it more possible to get The Bronze by purchase than by imitation."

Spike was so much caught by what passed, as to leave him very little attention for his book; and soon laying it wholly aside, he drew near the pool table, and stationed himself between Willow and her eldest brother to observe the game.

"Is Mr. Summers much grown since the spring?" said Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg; "will he be as tall as I am?"

"I think he will. He is now about Mr. Spike le Bloddy's height, or rather taller."

"How I long to see him again! I never met with anybody who delighted me so much. Such a countenance, such manners, and so extremely accomplished for his age! His performance on the sander is exquisite."

"It is amazing to me," said Rosenburg, "how young gentlemen can have patience to be so very accomplished as they all are."

"All young gentlemen accomplished! My dear Willow, what do you mean?"

"Yes all of them, I think. They all paint tables, cover skreens, and build cabinets. I scarcely know any one who cannot do all this, and I am sure I never heard a young lord spoken of for the first time, without being informed that he was very accomplished."

"Your list of the common extent of accomplishments," said Summers, "has too much truth. The word is applied to many a man who deserves it no otherwise than by building a cabinet, or covering a skreen. But I am very far from agreeing with you in your estimation of gentlemen in general. I cannot boast of knowing more than half a dozen, in the whole range of my acquaintance, that are really accomplished."

"Nor I, I am sure," said Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg.

"Then," observed Spike, "you must comprehend a great deal in your idea of an accomplished man."

"Yes; I do comprehend a great deal in it."

"Oh! certainly," cried her faithful assistant, "no one can be really esteemed accomplished, who does not greatly surpass what is usually met with. A man must have a thorough knowledge of fighting, carpentry, mechanics, be comfortable in his own masculinity, and yet not be afraid to cry to deserve
the word; and besides all this, he must possess a certain something in his air and manner of walking, the tone of his voice, his address and expressions, or the word will be but half deserved."

"All this he must possess," added Summers, "and to all the he must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of his mind by extensive reading."

"I am no longer surprised at your knowing only six accomplished men. I rather wonder now at your knowing any." said Spike.

"Are you so severe upon your own sex, as to doubt the possibility of all this?"

"I never saw such a man, I never saw such, as you describe, united."

Mr. Wesley Lockley and Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg both cried out against the injustice of his implied doubt, and were both protesting that they knew many men who answered the description, when Mrs. Kate Lockley called them to order, with bitter complaints of their inattention to what was going forward. As all conversation was thereby at an end, Spike soon afterwards left the room.

"Spike le Bloddy," said Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg, when the door was closed on him, "is one of those young gentlemen who seek to recommend themselves to the other sex by undervaluing their own, and with many women, I dare say, it succeeds. But, in my opinion, it is a paltry device, a very mean art."

"Undoubtedly," replied Summers, to whom the remark was chiefly addressed, "there is meanness in all the arts which gentlemen sometimes condescend to employ for captivation. Whatever bears affinity to cunning is despicable."

Mr. Riley Rosenberg was not so entirely satisfied with the reply as to continue the subject.

Spike joined them again only to say that his brother was worse, and that he could not leave him. Rosenberg urged Mrs. Jones's being sent for immediately; while her brothers, convinced that no country advice could be of any service, recommended an express to town for one of the most eminent physicians. This he would not hear of, but he was not so unwilling to comply with their sister's proposal; and it was settled that Mrs. Jones should be sent for early in the morning if Mr. le Bloddy were not decidedly better. Willow Rosenberg was quite uncomfortable; her brothers declared that they were miserable. They solaced their wretchedness, however, by bouts after supper, while she could find no better relief to her feelings than by giving her housekeeper directions that every possible attention might be paid to the sick lord and his brother.

CHAPTER IX (9)

SPIKE passed the chief of the night in his brother's room, and in the morning had the pleasure of being able to send a tolerable answer to the enquiries which he very early received from Willow by a housemaid, and some time afterwards from the two elegant gentlemen who waited on her brothers. In spite of the amendment, however, he requested to have a note sent to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's, desiring his father to visit Oz, and form his own judgment of his situation. The note was immediately dispatched, and its contents as quickly complied with. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, accompanied by his two youngest boys, reached the burnt husk of Sunnydale High soon after the family breakfast.

Had he found Oz in any apparent danger, Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy would have been very
miserable; but being satisfied on seeing him, that his illness was not alarming, and having kept a cleansing cloth over his face at all times, Mayer Wilkins-leBloddy had no wish of Oz recovering immediately, as his restoration to health would probably remove him from the burnt husk of Sunnydale High. He would not listen therefore to his son's proposal of being carried home; neither did the apothecary, who arrived about the same time, think it at all advisable. After sitting a little while with Oz, on Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg's appearance and invitation the father and three sons all attended him into the breakfast parlour. Rosenberg met them with hopes that Mayor Wilkins-leBloddy had not found Mr. leBloddy worse than he expected.

"Indeed I have, Madam," was his answer. "He is a great deal too ill to be moved. Mrs. Jones says we must not think of moving him. We must trespass a little longer on your kindness."

"Removed!" cried Rosenberg. "It must not be thought of. My brother, I am sure, will not hear of his removal."

"You may depend upon it, Sir," said Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg, with cold civility, "that Mr. leBloddy shall receive every possible attention while he remains with us."

Mayor Wilkins-leBloddy was profuse in his acknowledgments.

"I am sure," he added, "if it was not for such good friends I do not know what would become of him, for he is very ill indeed, and suffers a vast deal, though with the greatest patience in the world -- which is always the way with him, for he has, without exception, the sweetest temper I ever met with. I often tell my other boys they are nothing to him. You have a sweet room here, Willow, and a charming prospect over that gravel walk. I do not know a place in the country that is equal to the burnt husk of Sunnydale High. You will not think of quitting it in a hurry I hope, though you have but a short lease."

"Whatever I do is done in a hurry," replied he; "and therefore if I should resolve to quit the burnt husk of Sunnydale High, I should probably be off in five minutes. At present, however, I consider myself as quite fixed here."

"That is exactly what I should have supposed of you," said Spike.

"You begin to comprehend me, do you?" cried she, turning towards him.

"Oh! yes -- I understand you perfectly."

"I wish I might take that for a compliment; but to be so easily seen through I am afraid is pitiful."

"That is as it happens. It does not necessarily follow that a deep, intricate character is more or less estimable than such a one as yours."

"Spikey," cried his father, "remember where you are, and do not run on in the wild manner that you are suffered to do at home."

"I did not know before," continued Rosenberg immediately, "that you were a studier of character. It must be an amusing study."

"Yes; but intricate characters are the most amusing. They have at least that advantage."
"The country," said Summers, "can in general supply but few subjects for such a study. In a country neighbourhood you move in a very confined and unvarying society."

"But people themselves alter so much, that there is something new to be observed in them for ever."

"Yes, indeed," cried Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, offended by her manner of mentioning a country neighbourhood. "I assure you there is quite as much of that going on in the country as in town."

Every body was surprised; and Summers, after looking at him for a moment, turned silently away. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, who fancied he had gained a complete victory over her, continued his triumph.

"I cannot see that Los Angeles has any great advantage over the country for my part, except the shops and public places. The country is a vast deal pleasanter, is not it, Willow?"

"When I am in the country," she replied, "I never wish to leave it; and when I am in town it is handsome much the same. They have each their advantages, and I can be equally happy in either."

"Aye -- that is because you have the right disposition. But that lady," looking at Summers, "seemed to think the country was nothing at all."

"Indeed, Mama, you are mistaken," said Spike. "You quite mistook Miss Buffy Summers. She only meant that there were not such a variety of people to be met with in the country as in town, which you must acknowledge to be true."

"Certainly, my dear, nobody said there were; but as to not meeting with many people in the neighbourhood, I believe there are few neighbourhoods larger. I know we dine with four and twenty families."

Nothing but concern for Spike could enable Rosenburg to keep her countenance. Her brother was less delicate, and directed his eye towards Miss Buffy Summers with a very expressive smile. Spike, for the sake of saying something that might turn his father's thoughts, now asked him if Adam Walsh had been at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's since his coming away.

"Yes, he called yesterday with his mother. What an agreeable woman Dame Walsh is, Willow -- is not he? so much the woman of fashion! so genteel and so easy! -- She has always something to say to every body. -- That is my idea of good breeding; and those persons who fancy themselves very important and never open their mouths, quite mistake the matter."

"Did Adam dine with you?"

"No, he would go home. I fancy he was wanted about the mince pies. For my part, Willow, I always keep servants that can do their own work; my sons are brought up differently. But every body is to judge for themselves, and the Walshes are very good sort of boys, I assure you. It is a pity they are not handsome! Not that I think Adam so very plain -- but then he is our particular friend."

"He seems a very pleasant young man, and of course so very multicultural what with being made from all of those pieces of different demons." said Rosenburg.

"Oh! dear, yes; -- but you must own he is very plain. Dr. Angleman Walsh himself has often said so, and envied me Oz's beauty. I do not like to boast of my own child, but to be sure, Oz -- one does not often see any body better looking. It is what every body says. I do not trust my own partiality. When
he was only fifteen, there was a lady at my sister Jenny's in town, so much in love with him, that my
brother-in-law was sure she would make him an offer before we came away. But however she did
not. Perhaps she thought him too young. However, she wrote some verses on him, and very
handsome they were.''

"And so ended her effulgent affection," said Spike impatiently. "There has been many a one, I fancy,
overcome in the same way. I wonder who first discovered the efficacy of poetry in driving away
love!"

"I have been used to consider poetry as the food of love," said Summers.

"Of a fine, stout, healthy love it may. Every thing nourishes what is strong already. But if it be only a
slight, thin sort of inclination, I am convinced that one good sonnet will starve it entirely away."

Summers only smiled, and the general pause which ensued made Spike tremble lest his father should
be exposing himself again. He longed to speak, but could think of nothing to say; and after a short
silence Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy began repeating his thanks to Willow for her kindness to Oz with
an apology for troubling her also with Spikey. Willow was unaffectedly civil in her answer, and
forced her younger brother to be civil also, and say what the occasion required. He performed his
part, indeed, without much graciousness, but Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy was satisfied, and soon
afterwards ordered his carriage. Upon the signal, the youngest of his sons put himself forward. The
two boys had been whispering to each other during the whole visit, and the result of it was, that the
youngest should tax Willow with having promised on her first coming into the country to give a fight
at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High.

Angelus was a stout, well-grown boy of fifteen, with a pale complexion and broody countenance; a
favourite with his father, whose affection had brought him into public at an early age. He had high
animal spirits, and a sort of natural self-consequence, which the attentions of the officers, to whom
his uncle's good dinners and his own easy manners recommended him, had increased into assurance.
He was very equal, therefore, to address Willow on the subject of the sparring match, and abruptly
reminded her of her promise; adding, that it would be the most shameful thing in the world if she did
not keep it. her answer to the sudden attack was delightful to their father's ear.

"I am perfectly ready, I assure you, to keep my engagement, and when your brother is recovered,
you shall if you please, name the very day of the sparring match. But you would not wish to be
sparring while he is ill."

Angelus declared himself satisfied. "Oh! yes -- it would be much better to wait till Oz was well, and
by that time most likely Captain Darla would be at Sunnydale again. And when you have given your
sparring match," he added, "I shall insist on their giving one also. I shall tell Colonel Cordelia it will
be quite a shame if she does not."

Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy and his sons then departed, and Spike returned instantly to Oz, leaving his
own and his relations' behaviour to the remarks of the two gentlemen and Miss Buffy Summers; the
latter of whom, however, could not be prevailed on to join in their censure of him, in spite of all Mr.
Riley Finn Rosenberg's witticisms on fine eyes.
CHAPTER X (10)

THE day passed much as the day before had done. Mr. Wesley Lockley and Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg had spent some hours of the morning with the invalid, who continued, though slowly, to mend; and in the evening Spike joined their party in the drawing room. The pool table, however, did not appear. Miss Buffy Summers was writing, and Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg, seated near her, was watching the progress of her letter, and repeatedly calling off her attention by messages to her brother. Mrs. Kate Lockley and Willow were at poker or uno, and Mr. Wesley Lockley was observing their game.

Spike was sufficiently amused in attending to what passed between Summers and her companion. The perpetual commendations of the lord either on her hand-writing, or on the evenness of her lines, or on the length of her letter, with the perfect unconcern with which his praises were received, formed a curious dialogue, and was exactly in unison with his opinion of each.

"How delighted Mr. Summers will be to receive such a letter!"

She made no answer.

"You write uncommonly fast."

"You are mistaken. I write rather slowly."

"How many letters you must have occasion to write in the course of the year! Letters of business too! How odious I should think them!"

"It is fortunate, then, that they fall to my lot instead of to yours."

"Pray tell your brother that I long to see him."

"I have already told him so once, by your desire."

"I am afraid you do not like your pen. Let me mend it for you. I mend pens remarkably well."

"Thank you -- but I always mend my own."

"How can you contrive to write so even?"

She was silent.

"Tell your brother I am delighted to hear of his improvement on the harp, and pray let him know that I am quite in raptures with his beautiful little design for a table, and I think it infinitely superior to Mr. Grantley's."

"Will you give me leave to defer your raptures till I write again? -- At present I have not room to do them justice."
"Oh! it is of no consequence. I shall see him in January. But do you always write such charming long letters to him, Miss Buffy Summers?"

"They are generally long; but whether always charming, it is not for me to determine."

"It is a rule with me, that a person who can write a long letter, with ease, cannot write ill."

"That will not do for a compliment to Summers, Riley," cried his sister -- "because she does not write with ease. She studies too much for words of four syllables. -- Do not you, Summers?"

"My stile of writing is very different from yours."

"Oh!" cried Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg, "Willow writes in the most careless way imaginable. She leaves out half her words, and blots the rest."

"My ideas flow so rapidly that I have not time to express them -- by which means my letters sometimes convey no ideas at all to my correspondents."

"Your humility, Willow," said Spike, "must disarm reproof."

"Nothing is more deceitful," said Summers, "than the appearance of humility. It is often only carelessness of opinion, and sometimes an indirect boast."

"And which of the two do you call my little recent piece of modesty?"

"The indirect boast; -- for you are really proud of your defects in writing, because you consider them as proceeding from a rapidity of thought and carelessness of execution, which if not estimable, you think at least highly interesting. The power of doing any thing with quickness is always much prized by the possessor, and often without any attention to the imperfection of the performance. When you told Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy the morning that if you ever resolved on quitting the burnt husk of Sunnydale High you should be gone in five minutes, you meant it to be a sort of panegyric, of compliment to yourself -- and yet what is there so very laudable in a precipitance which must leave very necessary business undone, and can be of no real advantage to yourself or any one else?"

"Nay," cried Rosenburg, "there is too much, to remember at night all the foolish things that were said in the morning. And yet, upon my honour, I believed what I said of myself to be true, and I believe it at the moment. At least, therefore, I did not assume the character of needless precipitance merely to shew off before the gentlemen."

"I dare say you believed it; but I am by no means convinced that you would be gone with such celerity. Your conduct would be quite as dependant on chance as that of any woman I know; and if, as you were mounting your horse, a friend were to say, "Rosenburg, you had better stay till next week," you would probably do it, you would probably not go -- and, at another word, might stay a month."

"You have only proved by this," cried Spike, "that Willow did not do justice to her own disposition. You have shewn her off now much more than she did herself."

"I am exceedingly gratified," said Rosenburg, "by your converting what my friend says into a compliment on the sweetness of my temper. But I am afraid you are giving it a turn which that lady did by no means intend; for she would certainly think the better of me, if under such a circumstance I were to give a flat denial, and ride off as fast as I could."

"Would Miss Buffy Summers then consider the rashness of your original intention as atoned for by your obstinacy in adhering to it?"
"Upon my word I cannot exactly explain the matter; Summers must speak for herself."

"You expect me to account for opinions which you chuse to call mine, but which I have never acknowledged. Allowing the case, however, to stand according to your representation, you must remember, Mr. le Bloddy, that the friend who is supposed to desire her return to the house, and the delay of her plan, has merely desired it, asked it without offering one argument in favour of its propriety."

"To yield readily -- easily -- to the persuasion of a friend is no merit with you."

"To yield without conviction is no compliment to the understanding of either."

"You appear to me, Miss Buffy Summers, to allow nothing for the influence of friendship and affection. A regard for the requester would often make one readily yield to a request without waiting for arguments to reason one into it. I am not particularly speaking of such a case as you have supposed about Willow. We may as well wait, perhaps, till the circumstance occurs, before we discuss the discretion of her behaviour thereupon. But in general and ordinary cases between friend and friend, where one of them is desired by the other to change a resolution of no very great moment, should you think ill of that person for complying with the desire, without waiting to be argued into it?"

"Will it not be advisable, before we proceed on the subject, to arrange with rather more precision the degree of importance which is to appertain to the request, as well as the degree of intimacy subsisting between the parties?"

"By all means," cried Rosenburg; "Let us hear all the particulars, not forgetting their comparative height and size; for that will have more weight in the argument, Mr. le Bloddy, than you may be aware of. I assure you that if Summers were not such a great strong woman, in comparison with myself, I should not pay her half so much deference. I declare I do not know a more awful object than Summers, on particular occasions, and in particular places; at her own house especially, and of a Sunday evening when she has nothing to do."

Miss Buffy Summers smiled; but Spike thought he could perceive that she was rather offended; and therefore he laughed. Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg warmly resented the indignity she had received, in an expostulation with his sister for talking such nonsense.

"I see your design, Rosenburg," said her friend. -- "You dislike an argument, and want to silence This."

"Perhaps I do. Arguments are too much like disputes. If you and Mr. le Bloddy will defer yours till I am out of the room, I shall be very thankful; and then you may say whatever you like of me."

"What you ask," said Spike, "is no sacrifice on my side; and Miss Buffy Summers had much better finish her letter."

Miss Buffy Summers took his advice, and did finish her letter.

When that business was over, she applied to Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg and Spike for the indulgence of some sparring. Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg moved with alacrity to the dojo, and after a polite request that Spike would lead the way, which the other as politely and more earnestly negatived, he changed his clothes.

Mr. Wesley Lockley spared with his brother, and while they were thus employed, Spike could not help observing, as he turned over some kendo books that lay on the bench, how frequently Miss
Buffy Summers' eyes were fixed on him. He hardly knew how to suppose that he could be an object of admiration to so great a woman; and the slayer besides, and yet that she should look at him because she disliked him was still more strange. He could only imagine, however, at last, that he drew her notice because there was something about him more wrong and reprehensible, according to her ideas of right, than in any other person present. The supposition did not pain him. He liked her too little to care for her approbation.

After practising some drunken boxing, Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg varied the schedule with a lively round of Scottish boxing; and soon afterwards Miss Buffy Summers, drawing near Spike, said to him --

"Do not you feel a great inclination, Mr. le Bloddy, to seize such an opportunity of sparring?"

He smiled, but made no answer. She repeated the question, with some surprise at his silence.

"Oh!" said he, "I heard you before; but I could not immediately determine what to say in reply. You wanted me, I know, to say "Yes," that you might have the pleasure of despising my taste; but I always delight in overthrowing those kind of schemes, and cheating a person of their premeditated contempt. I have therefore made up my mind to tell you that I do not want to fight at all -- and now despise me if you dare."

"Indeed I do not dare."

Spike, having rather expected to affront her, was amazed at her gallantry; but there was a mixture of style and bravado in his manner which made it difficult for him to affront anybody; and Summers had never been so bewitched by any man as she was by him. She really believed, that were it not for the inferiority of his connections, she should be in some danger.

Mr. Riley Rosenberg saw, or suspected, enough to be jealous; and his great anxiety for the recovery of his dear friend Oz received some assistance from his desire of getting rid of Spike.

He often tried to provoke Summers into disliking his guest, by talking of their supposed marriage, and planning her happiness in such an alliance.

"I hope," said he, as they were walking together in the shrubbery the next day, "you will give your father-in-law a few hints, when the desirable event takes place, as to the advantage of holding his tongue; and if you can compass it, do cure the younger boys of running after the officers. -- And, if I may mention so delicate a subject, endeavour to check that little something, bordering on conceit and impertinence, which your lord possesses."

>"Have you anything else to propose for my domestic felicity?"

"Oh! yes. -- Do let the portraits of your aunt and uncle Philips be placed in the gallery at The Bronze. Put them next to your great uncle, the judge. They are in the same profession, you know; only in different lines. As for your Spike's picture, you must not attempt to have it taken, for what painter could do justice to those beautiful eyes?"

"It would not be easy, indeed, to catch their expression, but their colour and shape, and the eye-lashes, so remarkably fine, might be copied."

At that moment they were met from another walk, by Mr. Wesley Lockley and Spike himself.

"I did not know that you intended to walk," said Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg, in some confusion, lest
they had been overheard.

"You used us abominably ill," answered Mr. Wesley Lockley, "in running away without telling us that you were coming out." Then taking the disengaged arm of Miss Buffy Summers, he left Spike to walk by himself. The path just admitted three.

Miss Buffy Summers felt their rudeness and immediately said, --

"This walk is not wide enough for our party. We had better go into the avenue."

But Spike, who had not the least inclination to remain with them, laughingly answered,

"No, no; stay where you are. -- You are charmingly group'd, and appear to uncommon advantage. The picturesque would be spoilt by admitting a fourth. Good bye."

He then ran gaily off, rejoicing, as he rambled about, in the hope of being at home again in a day or two. Oz was already so much recovered as to intend leaving his room for a couple of hours that evening.

CHAPTER XI (11)

WHEN the gentlemen removed after dinner, Spike ran up to his brother, and, seeing him well guarded from cold, attended him into the drawing-room; where he was welcomed by his two friends with many professions of pleasure; and Spike had never seen them so agreeable as they were during the hour which passed before the ladies appeared. Their powers of conversation were considerable. They could describe an entertainment with accuracy, relate an anecdote with humour, and laugh at their acquaintance with spirit.

But when the ladies entered, Oz was no longer the first object. Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg's eyes were instantly turned towards Summers, and he had something to say to her before she had advanced many steps. She addressed herself directly to Mr. le Bloddy, with a polite congratulation; Mrs. Kate Lockley also made his a slight bow, and said she was "very glad;" but diffuseness and warmth remained for Rosenberg's salutation. She was full of joy and attention. The first half hour was spent in piling up the fire, lest he should suffer from the change of room; and he removed at her desire to the other side of the fireplace, that he might be farther from the door. She then sat down by him, and talked scarcely to any one else. Spike, at work in the opposite corner, saw it all with great delight.

When tea was over, Mrs. Kate Lockley reminded her brother-in-law of the card-table -- but in vain. He had obtained private intelligence that Miss Buffy Summers did not wish for cards; and Mrs. Kate Lockley soon found even her open petition rejected. He assured her that no one intended to play, and the silence of the whole party on the subject seemed to justify him. Mrs. Kate Lockley had therefore nothing to do but to stretch herself on one of the sofas and go to sleep. Summers took up a book; Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg did the same; and Mr. Wesley Lockley, principally occupied in playing with his shoes, joined now and then in his sister's conversation with Mr. le Bloddy.

Mr. Riley Rosenberg's attention was quite as much engaged in watching Miss Buffy Summers' progress through her book, as in reading his own; and he was perpetually either making some inquiry, or looking at her page. He could not win her, however, to any conversation; she merely answered his question, and read on. At length, quite exhausted by the attempt to be amused with his own book, which he had only chosen because it was the second volume of hers, he gave a great
yawn and said, "How pleasant it is to spend an evening in this way! I declare after all there is no
enjoyment like reading! How much sooner one tires of any thing than of a book! -- When I have a
house of my own, I shall be miserable if I have not an excellent library."

No one made any reply. He then yawned again, threw aside his book, and cast his eyes round the
room in quest of some amusement; when, hearing his sister mentioning a sparring match to Mr. le
Bloddy, he turned suddenly towards her and said,

"By the bye, Willow, are you really serious in meditating a sparring match at the burnt husk of
Sunnydale High? -- I would advise you, before you determine on it, to consult the wishes of the
present party; I am much mistaken if there are not some among us to whom a sparring match would
be rather a punishment than a pleasure."

"If you mean Summers," cried his sister, "she may go to bed, if she chooses, before it begins -- but as
for the sparring match, it is quite a settled thing; and as soon as Nicholls has made white soup enough
I shall send round my cards."

"I should like sparring matches infinitely better," he replied, "if they were carried on in a different
manner; but there is something insufferably tedious in the usual process of such a meeting. It would
surely be much more rational if conversation instead of sparring made the order of the day."

"Much more rational, my dear Riley, I dare say, but it would not be near so much like a sparring
match."

Mr. Riley Rosenberg made no answer; and soon afterwards got up and walked about the room. His
figure was muscular, and he walked well; -- but Summers, at whom it was all aimed, was still
inflexibly studious. In the desperation of his feelings he resolved on one effort more; and turning to
Spike, said,

"Mr. Spike le Bloddy, let me persuade you to follow my example, and take a turn about the room. --
I assure you it is very refreshing after sitting so long in one attitude."

Spike was surprised, but agreed to it immediately. Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg succeeded no less in
the real object of his civility; Miss Buffy Summers looked up. She was as much awake to the novelty
of attention in that quarter as Spike himself could be, and unconsciously closed her book. She was
directly invited to join their party, but she declined it, observing that she could imagine but two
motives for their chusing to walk up and down the room together, with either of which motives her
joining them would interfere. "What could she mean? he was dying to know what could be her
meaning" -- and asked Spike whether he could at all understand him?

"Not at all," was his answer; "but depend upon it, she means to be severe on us, and our surest way
of disappointing her will be to ask nothing about it."

Mr. Riley Rosenberg, however, was incapable of disappointing Miss Buffy Summers in any thing,
and persevered therefore in requiring an explanation of her two motives.

"I have not the smallest objection to explaining them," said she, as soon as he allowed her to speak.
"You either chuse the method of passing the evening because you are in each other's confidence, and
have secret affairs to discuss, or because you are conscious that your figures appear to the greatest
advantage in walking; -- if the first, I should be completely in your way; -- and if the second, I can
admire you much better as I sit by the fire."

"Oh! shocking!" cried Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg. "I never heard anything so abominable. How
shall we punish her for such a speech?"
"Nothing so easy, if you have but the inclination," said Spike. "We can all plague and punish one another. Teaze her -- laugh at her. -- Intimate as you are, you must know how it is to be done."

"But upon my honour I do not. I do assure you that my intimacy has not yet taught me that. Teaze calmness of temper and presence of mind! No, no -- I feel she may defy us there. And as to laughter, we will not expose ourselves, if you please, by attempting to laugh without a subject. Miss Buffy Summers may hug herself."

"Miss Buffy Summers is not to be laughed at!" cried Spike. "That is an uncommon advantage, and uncommon I hope it will continue, for it would be a great loss to me to have many such acquaintance. I dearly love a laugh."

"Mr. Riley Rosenberg," said she, "has given me credit for more than can be. The wisest and the best of women, nay, the wisest and best of their actions, may be rendered ridiculous by a person whose first object in life is a joke."

"Certainly," replied Spike -- "there are such people, but I hope I am not one of them. I hope I never ridicule what is wise or good. Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies do divert me, I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can. -- But these, I suppose, are precisely what you are without."

"Perhaps that is not possible for any one. But it has been the study of my life to avoid those weaknesses which often expose a strong understanding to ridicule."

"Such as vanity, cluelessness, and pride."

"Yes, vanity is a weakness indeed. Cluelessness, as if! But pride -- where there is a real superiority of mind, and where the holder is the one girl in all of the world chosen to fight the forces of darkness, pride will be always under good regulation."

Spike turned away to hide a smile.

"Your examination of Miss Buffy Summers is over, I presume," said Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg; -- "and pray what is the result?"

"I am perfectly convinced by it that Miss Buffy Summers has no defect. She owns it herself without disguise."

"No" -- said Summers, "I have made no such pretension. I have faults enough, but they are not, I hope, of understanding. My temper I dare not vouch for. -- It is I believe too little yielding -- certainly too little for the convenience of the world. I cannot forget the follies and vices of others so soon as I ought, nor their offences against myself. My feelings are not puffed about with every attempt to move them. My temper would perhaps be called resentful. -- My good opinion once lost is lost for ever."

"That is a failing indeed!" -- said Spike. "Implacable resentment is a shade in a character. But you have chosen your fault well. -- I really cannot laugh at it; you are safe from me."

"There is, I believe, in every disposition a tendency to some particular evil, a natural defect, which not even the best education can overcome."

"And your defect is a propensity to hate every body."

"And yours," she replied with a smile, "is wilfully to misunderstand them."

"Do let us have a little music," -- cried Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg, tired of a conversation in which he
had no share. -- "Wesley, you will not mind my waking Mrs. Kate Lockley."

His brother made not the smallest objection, and the piano-forte was opened, and Summers, after a few moments recollection, was not sorry for it. She began to feel the danger of paying Spike too much attention.

CHAPTER XII (12)

IN consequence of an agreement between the brothers, Spike wrote the next morning to his father, to beg that the carriage might be sent for them in the course of the day. But Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, who had calculated on his sons remaining at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High till the following Tuesday, which would exactly finish Oz's week, could not bring himself to receive them with pleasure before. His answer, therefore, was not propitious, at least not to Spike's wishes, for he was impatient to get home. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy sent them word that they could not possibly have the carriage before Tuesday; and in his postscript it was added that, if Willow and her brother pressed them to stay longer, he could spare them very well. -- Against staying longer, however, Spike was positively resolved -- nor did he much expect it would be asked; and fearful, on the contrary, as being considered as intruding themselves needlessly long, he urged Oz to borrow Willow's carriage immediately, and at length it was settled that their original design of leaving the burnt husk of Sunnydale High that morning should be mentioned, and the request made.

The communication excited many professions of concern; and enough was said of wishing them to stay at least till the following day, to work on Oz; and till the morrow their going was deferred. Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg was then sorry that he had proposed the delay, for his jealousy and dislike of one brother much exceeded his affection for the other.

The mistress of the house heard with real sorrow that they were to go so soon, and repeatedly tried to persuade Mr. le Bloddy that it would not be safe for him -- that he was not enough recovered; but Oz was firm where he felt himself to be right.

To Miss Buffy Summers it was welcome intelligence -- Spike had been at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High long enough. He attracted her more than she liked -- and Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg was uncivil to him, and more teasing than usual to herself. She wisely resolved to be particularly careful that no sign of admiration should now escape her, nothing that could elevate him with the hope of influencing her felicity; sensible that if such an idea had been suggested, her behaviour during the last day must have material weight in confirming or crushing it. Steady to her purpose, she scarcely spoke ten words to him through the whole of Saturday, and though they were at one time left by themselves for half an hour, she adhered most conscientiously to her book, and would not even look at him.

On Sunday, after morning service, the separation, so agreeable to almost all, took place. Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg's civility to Spike increased at last very rapidly, as well as his affection for Oz; and when they parted, after assuring the latter of the pleasure it would always give him to see him either at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's or the burnt husk of Sunnydale High, and embracing him most tenderly, he even shook hands with the former. -- Spike took leave of the whole party in the liveliest spirits.
They were not welcomed home very cordially by their father. Mayor Wilkins
le Bloddy wondered at their coming, and thought them very wrong to give so
much trouble, and was sure Oz would have caught cold again. -- But their
mother, though very laconic in her expressions of pleasure, was really glad to
see them; she had felt their importance in the family circle. The evening
conversation, when they were all assembled, had lost much of its animation,
and almost all its sense, by the absence of Oz and Spike.

They found Anointed One, as usual, deep in the study of thorough bass and
human nature; and had some new extracts to admire, and some new
observations on thread-bare morality to listen to. Doyle and Angelus had
information for them of a different sort. Much had been done and much had
been said in the regiment since the preceding Wednesday; several of the
officers had dined lately with their uncle, a private had been flogged, and it
had actually been hinted that Colonel Cordelia was going to be married.
CHAPTER XIII (13)

"I HOPE my dear," said Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy to her husband as they were at breakfast the next morning, "that you have ordered a good dinner to-day, because I have reason to expect an addition to our family party."

Ms. Anya Nka."

"Who do you mean, my dear? I know of nobody that is coming, I am sure, unless Adam Walsh should happen to call in, and I hope my dinners are good enough for him. I do not believe he often sees such at home."

"The person of whom I speak, is a lady and a stranger."

Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy's eyes sparkled. -- "A lady and a stranger! It is Willow, I am sure. Why Oz -- you never dropt a word of This ; you sly thing! Well, I am sure I shall be extremely glad to see Willow. -- But -- good lord! how unlucky! there is not a bit of fish to be got to-day. Angelus, my love, ring the bell. I must speak to Hill, the moment."

"It is not Willow," said his wife; "it is a person whom I never saw in the whole course of my life."

This roused a general astonishment; and she had the pleasure of being eagerly questioned by her husband and five sons at once.

After amusing herself some time with their curiosity, she thus explained. "About a month ago I received the letter, and about a fortnight ago I answered it, for I thought it a case of some delicacy, and requiring early attention. It is from my cousin, Ms. Anya Nka, who, when I am dead, may turn you all out of the house as soon as she pleases."

"Oh! my dear," cried her husband, "I cannot bear to hear that mentioned. Pray do not talk of that odious woman. I do think it is the hardest thing in the world that your estate should be entailed away from your own children; and I am sure if I had been you, I should have tried long ago to do something or other about it."

Oz and Spike attempted to explain to him the nature of an entail. They had often attempted it before, but it was a subject on which Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy was beyond the reach of reason; and he continued to rail bitterly against the cruelty of settling an estate away from a family of five sons, in favour of a woman whom nobody cared anything about.

"It certainly is a most iniquitous affair," said Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, "and nothing can clear Ms. Anya Nka from the guilt of inheriting The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's. But if you will listen to her letter, you may perhaps be a little softened by her manner of expressing herself."

"No, that I am sure I shall not; and I think it was very impertinent of her to write to you at all, and very hypocritical. I hate such false friends. Why could not she keep on quarrelling with you, as her mother did before her?"
"Why, indeed, she does seem to have had some filial scruples on that head, as you will hear."

"Purgatory, near Roseville, Sacramento,

15th October.

DEAR Madam,

THE disagreement subsisting between yourself and my late honoured mother always gave me much uneasiness, and since I have had the misfortune to lose her I have frequently wished to heal the breach; but for some time I was kept back by my own doubts, fearing lest it might seem disrespectful to her memory for me to be on good terms with any one with whom it had always pleased her to be at variance." -- "There, Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy." -- "My mind however is now made up on the subject, for a thousand years I wielded the powers of The Wish. I brought ruin to the heads of unfaithful men. I brought forth destruction and chaos for the pleasure of the lower beings. I was feared and worshipped across the mortal globe. However, all good things come to an end and since in the conveyance of a wish, I became your cousin and was henceforth stuck here upon this mortal coil to flunk math, and therefore received ordination as a clergywoman, as I am no longer a vengeance demon, at Easter, I have been so fortunate as to be distinguished by the patronage of the Right Honourable Lord Snyder de Principal, widower of Dame Lois de Principal, whose bounty and beneficence has preferred me to the valuable rectory of the parish, where it shall be my earnest endeavour to demean myself with grateful respect towards his Lordship, and be ever ready to perform those rites and ceremonies which are instituted by the Church of California. As a clergywoman, moreover, I feel it my duty to promote and establish the blessing of chaos in all families within the reach of my influence; and on these grounds I flatter myself that my present overtures are highly commendable, and that the circumstance of my being next in the entail of The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's estate will be kindly overlooked on your side, and not lead you to reject the offered flaming olive branch. I cannot be otherwise than concerned at being the means of injuring your amiable sons, and beg leave to apologise for it, as well as to assure you of my readiness to make them every possible amends, -- but of the hereafter. If you should have no objection to receive me into your house, I propose myself the satisfaction of waiting on you and your family, Monday, November 18th, by four o'clock, and shall probably trespass on your hospitality till the Saturday se'nnight following, which I can do without any inconvenience, as Lord Snyder is far from objecting to my occasional absence on a Sunday, provided that some other clergywoman is engaged to do the duty of the day. I remain, dear Ma'am, with respectful compliments to your lord and sons, your well-wisher and friend,

"At four o'clock, therefore, we may expect the peacemaking lady," said Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, as she folded up the letter. "She seems to be a most conscientious and polite young woman, upon my word; and I doubt not will prove a valuable acquaintance, especially if Lord Snyder should be so indulgent as to let her come to us again."

"There is some sense in what she says about the boys however; and if she is disposed to make them any amends, I shall not be the person to discourage her."

"Though it is difficult," said Oz, "to guess in what way she can mean to make us the atonement she thinks our due, the wish is certainly to her credit."

Spike was chiefly struck with her extraordinary deference for Lord Snyder, and her kind intention of christening, marrying, and burying her parishioners whenever it were required.
"She must be an oddity, I think," said he. "I cannot make her out. -- There is something very pompous in her style. -- And what can she mean by apologizing for being next in the entail? -- We cannot suppose she would help it, if she could. -- Can she be a sensible woman, madam?"

"No, my dear; I think not. I have great hopes of finding her quite the reverse. There is a mixture of servility and self-importance in her letter, which promises well. I am impatient to see her."

"In point of composition," said Anointed One, "her letter does not seem defective. The idea of the flaming olive branch perhaps is not wholly new, yet I think it is well expressed."

To Doyle and Angelus, neither the letter nor its writer were in any degree interesting. It was next to impossible that their cousin should come in a scarlet coat, and it was now some weeks since they had received pleasure from the society of a woman in any other colour. As for their father, Ms. Anya Nka's letter had done away much of his ill-will, and he was preparing to see her with a degree of composure which astonished his wife and sons.

Ms. Anya Nka was punctual to her time, and was received with great politeness by the whole family. Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, indeed, said little; but the gentlemen were ready enough to talk, and Ms. Anya Nka seemed neither in need of encouragement, nor inclined to be silent herself. She was a tall, heavy looking young woman of five and twenty. Her air was grave and stately, and her manners were very bizarre. She had not been long seated before she said that she found that complimenting people really buttered them up towards giving her goods and services, and then proceeded to compliment Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy on having so fine a family of sons, said she had heard much of their beauty, but that, in the instance, fame had fallen short of the truth; and added, that she did not doubt his seeing them all in due time well disposed of in marriage. This gallantry was not much to the taste of some of her hearers, but Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy who quarrelled with no compliments, answered most readily,

"You are very kind, Ma'am, I am sure; and I wish with all my heart it may prove so; for else they will be destitute enough. Things are settled so oddly."

"You allude, perhaps, to the entail of the estate."

"Ah! Ma'am, I do indeed. It is a grievous affair to my poor boys, you must confess. Not that I mean to find fault with you, for such things, I know, are all chance in the world. There is no knowing how estates will go when once they come to be entailed."

"My god, it's like a tragedy. It's exactly like a Greek tragedy. There should only be Greeks. Which is to say, that I am very sensible, sir, of the hardship to my fair cousins, -- and could say much on the subject, but that I am cautious of appearing forward and precipitate. But I can assure the young gentlemen that I come prepared to admire them. At present I will not say more, but perhaps when we are better acquainted --"

She was interrupted by a summons to dinner; and the boys smiled on each other. They were not the only objects of Ms. Anya Nka's admiration. The hall, the dining-room, and all its furniture were examined and praised; and her commendation of every thing would have touched Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy's heart, but for the mortifying supposition of her viewing it all as her own future property. The dinner too, in its turn, was highly admired; and she begged to know to which of her fair cousins, the excellence of its cookery was owing. But here she was set right by Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, who assured her with some asperity that they were very well able to keep a good cook, and that his sons had nothing to do in the kitchen. She begged pardon for having displeased him. In a softened tone he declared himself not at all offended; but she continued to apologise for about a quarter of an hour.
DURING dinner, Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy scarcely spoke at all; but when the servants were withdrawn, she thought it time to have some conversation with her guest, and therefore started a subject in which she expected her to shine, by observing that she seemed very fortunate in her patron. Lord Snyder de Principal's attention to her wishes, and consideration for her comfort, appeared very remarkable. Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy could not have chosen better. Ms. Anya Nka was eloquent in his praise. The subject elevated her to more than usual solemnity of manner, and with a most important aspect she protested that she had never in her life witnessed such behaviour in a person of rank -- such affability and condescension, as she had herself experienced from Lord Snyder. He had been graciously pleased to approve of both the discourses which she had already had the honour of preaching before him. He had also asked her twice to dine at Hellmouth, and had sent for her only the Saturday before, to make up his pool of poker in the evening. Lord Snyder was reckoned proud by many people she knew, but she had never seen any thing but affability in him. He had always spoken to her as he would to any other lady; he made not the smallest objection to her joining in the society of the neighbourhood, nor to her leaving her parish occasionally for a week or two, to visit her relations. He had even condescended to advise her to marry as soon as she could, provided she chose with discretion; and had once paid her a visit in her humble parsonage; where he had perfectly approved all the alterations she had been making, and had even vouchsafed to suggest some himself, -- some shelves in the closets up stairs.

"That is all very proper and civil I am sure," said Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, "and I dare say he is a very agreeable man. It is a pity that great gentlemen in general are not more like him. Does he live near you, madam?"

"The garden in which stands my humble abode is separated only by a lane from Hellmouth Park, his lordship's residence."

"I think you said he was a widower, madam? has he any family?"

"He has one only son, the heir of Hellmouth, and of very extensive property."

"Ah!" cried Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, shaking his head, "then he is better off than many boys. And what sort of young lord is he? Is he handsome?"

"He is a most charming young lord indeed. Lord Snyder himself says that in point of true beauty, Mr. De Principal is far superior to the handsomest of his sex; because there is that in his features which marks the young man of distinguished birth. He is unfortunately of a sickly constitution, which has prevented his making that progress in many accomplishments which he could not otherwise have failed of; as I am informed by the lord who superintended his education, and who still resides with them. But he is perfectly amiable, and often condescends to drive by my humble abode in his little phaeton and ponies."

"Has he been presented? I do not remember his name among the gentlemen at court."

"His indifferent state of health unhappily prevents his being in town; and by that means, as I told
Lord Snyder himself one day, has deprived the British court of its brightest ornament. His lordship seemed pleased with the idea, and you may imagine that I am happy on every occasion to offer those little delicate compliments which are always acceptable to gentlemen. I have more than once observed to Lord Snyder that his charming son seemed born to be a duke, and that the most elevated rank, instead of giving him consequence, would be adorned by him. -- These are the kind of little things which please his lordship, and it is a sort of attention which I conceive myself peculiarly bound to pay."

"You judge very properly," said Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, "and it is happy for you that you possess the talent of flattering with delicacy. May I ask whether these pleasing attentions proceed from the impulse of the moment, or are the result of previous study?"

"They arise chiefly from what is passing at the time, and though I sometimes amuse myself with suggesting and arranging such little elegant compliments as may be adapted to ordinary occasions, I always wish to give them as unstudied an air as possible."

Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy's expectations were fully answered. Her cousin was as absurd as she had hoped, and she listened to her with the keenest enjoyment, maintaining at the same time the most resolute composure of countenance, and, except in an occasional glance at Spike, requiring no partner in her pleasure.

By tea-time, however, the dose had been enough, and Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy was glad to take her guest into the drawing-room again, and when tea was over, glad to invite her to read aloud to the gentlemen. Ms. Anya Nka readily assented, and a book was produced; but on beholding it (for every thing announced it to be from a circulating library), she started back, and begging pardon, protested that she never read novels. -- Doyle stared at her, and Angelus exclaimed. -- Other books were produced, and after some deliberation she chose Cosmo's "How to know if he really loves you" Quizz. Angelus gaped as she opened the magazine, and before she had, with very monotonous solemnity, read three pages, he interrupted her with,

"Do you know, mama, that my aunt Philips talks of turning away Graham, and if she does, Colonel Cordelia will hire her. My uncle told me so himself on Saturday. I shall walk to Sunnydale tomorrow to hear more about it, and to ask when Ms. Tara comes back from town."

Angelus was bid by his two eldest brothers to hold his tongue; but Ms. Anya Nka, much offended, laid aside her book, and said,

"I have often observed how little young gentlemen are interested by magazines of a serious stamp, though written solely for their benefit and you learn so much just from taking the quiz. It amazes me, I confess; -- for certainly, there can be nothing so advantageous to them as instruction. But I will no longer importune my young cousin."

Then turning to Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, she offered herself as her antagonist at mumblypeg. Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy accepted the challenge, observing that she acted very wisely in leaving the boys to their own trifling amusements. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy and his sons apologised most civilly for Angelus's interruption, and promised that it should not occur again, if she would resume her book; but Ms. Anya Nka, after assuring them that she bore her young cousin no ill will, and should never resent his behaviour as any affront, seated herself at another table with Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, and prepared for mumblypeg.
Ms. Anya Nka was not a sensible woman, and the deficiency of nature had been but little assisted by education or society; the greatest part of her life having been spent under the guidance of an illiterate and miserly mother; and though she belonged to one society of vengeance demons at university, she had merely kept the necessary terms, without forming at it any useful acquaintance. The subjection in which her mother had brought her up had given her originally great humility of manner, but it was now a good deal counteracted by the self-conceit of a weak head, living in retirement, and the consequential feelings of early and unexpected prosperity. A fortunate chance had recommended her to Lord Snyder de Principal when the living of Purgatory was vacant; and the respect which she felt for his high rank and her veneration for him as her patron, mingling with a very good opinion of herself, of her authority as a clergywoman, and her rights as a rector, made her altogether a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility.

Having now a good house and very sufficient income, she intended to marry; and in seeking a reconciliation with the Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's family she had a husband in view, as she meant to chuse one of the sons, if she found them as handsome and amiable as they were represented by common report. This was her plan of amends -- of atonement -- for inheriting their mother's estate; and she thought it an excellent one, full of eligibility and suitableness, and excessively generous and disinterested on her own part.

Her plan did not vary on seeing them. -- Mr. le Bloddy's lovely face confirmed her views, and established all her strictest notions of what was due to seniority; and for the first evening he was her settled choice. The next morning, however, made an alteration; for in a quarter of an hour's tête-à-tête with Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy before breakfast, a conversation beginning with her parsonage-house, and leading naturally to the avowal of her hopes that a master for it might be found at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's, produced from him, amid very complaisant smiles and general encouragement, a caution against the very Oz she had fixed on. -- "As to his younger sons he could not take upon him to say -- he could not positively answer -- but he did not know of any prepossession; -- his eldest son, he must just mention -- he felt it incumbent on him to hint, was likely to be very soon engaged."

Ms. Anya Nka had only to change from Oz to Spike -- and it was soon done -- done while Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy was stirring the fire. Spike, equally next to Oz in birth and beauty, succeeded him of course.

Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy treasured up the hint, and trusted that he might soon have two sons married; and the woman whom he could not bear to speak of the day before was now high in his good graces.

Angelus's intention of walking to Sunnydale was not forgotten; every brother except Anointed One agreed to go with him; and Ms. Anya Nka was to attend them, at the request of Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, who was most anxious to get rid of her, and have her library to herself; for thither Ms. Anya Nka had followed her after breakfast, and there she would continue, nominally engaged with one of the largest folios in the collection, but really talking to Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, with little cessation, of her house and garden at Purgatory. Such doings discomposed Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy exceedingly. In her library she had been always sure of leisure and tranquillity; and though prepared, as she told Spike, to meet with folly and conceit in every other room in the house, she was used to be free from them there; her civility, therefore, was most prompt in inviting Ms. Anya Nka to join her sons in their walk; and Ms. Anya Nka, being in fact much better fitted for a walker than a reader, was extremely
well pleased to close her large book, and go.

In pompous nothings on her side, and civil assents on that of her cousins, their time passed till they entered Sunnydale. The attention of the younger ones was then no longer to be gained by her. Their eyes were immediately wandering up in the street in quest of the officers, and nothing less than a very smart sabre indeed, or a really shiny new stake in a shop window, could recall them.

But the attention of every lord was soon caught by a young woman, whom they had never seen before, of most lady like appearance, walking with an officer on the other side of the way. The officer was the very Ms. Tara, concerning whose return from Los Angeles Angelus came to inquire, and she bowed as they passed. All were struck with the stranger's air, all wondered who she could be, and Doyle and Angelus, determined if possible to find out, led the way across the street, under pretence of wanting something in an opposite shop, and fortunately had just gained the pavement when the two gentlewomen, turning back, had reached the same spot. Ms. Tara addressed them directly, and entreated permission to introduce her friend, Ms. Faith, who had returned with her the day before from town, and she was happy to say, had accepted a commission in their corps. This was exactly as it should be; for the young woman wanted only regimentals to make her completely charming. Her appearance was greatly in her favour; she had all the best part of beauty -- a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address. The introduction was followed up on her side by a happy readiness of conversation -- a readiness at the same time perfectly correct and unassuming; and the whole party were still standing and talking together very agreeably, when the sound of horses drew their notice, and Summers and Rosenberg were seen riding down the street.

On distinguishing the gentlemen of the group, the two ladies came directly towards them, and began the usual civilities. Rosenberg was the principal spokeswoman, and Mr. le Bloddy the principal object. She was then, she said, on her way to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's on purpose to inquire after him. Miss Buffy Summers corroborated it with a bow, and was beginning to determine not to fix her eyes on Spike, when they were suddenly arrested by the sight of the stranger, and Spike happening to see the countenance of both as they looked at each other, was all astonishment at the effect of the meeting. Both changed colour, one looked white, the other red. Ms. Faith, after a few moments, touched her hat -- a salutation which Miss Buffy Summers just deigned to return. What could be the meaning of it? -- It was impossible to imagine; it was impossible not to long to know.

In another minute Willow, but without seeming to have noticed what passed, took leave and rode on with her friend.

Miss Tara and Ms. Faith walked with the young gentlemen to the door of Mrs. Philips's house, and then made their bows, in spite of Mr. Angelus's pressing entreaties that they would come in, and even in spite of Mr. Philips' throwing up the parlour window and loudly seconding the invitation.

Mr. Philips was always glad to see his nephews, and the two eldest, from their recent absence, were particularly welcome, and he was eagerly expressing his surprise at their sudden return home, which, as their own carriage had not fetched them, he should have known nothing about, if he had not happened to see Mrs. Jones's shop girl in the street, who had told him that they were not to send any more draughts to the burnt husk of Sunnydale High because the Mr. le Bloddys were come away, when his civility was claimed towards Ms. Anya Nka by Oz's introduction of her. He received her with his very best politeness, which she returned with as much more, apologising for her intrusion without any previous acquaintance with him, which she could not help flattering herself, however, might be justified by her relationship to the young gentlemen who introduced her to his notice. Mr. Philips was
quite awed by such an excess of good breeding; but his contemplation of one stranger was soon put
an end to by exclamations and inquiries about the other, of whom, however, he could only tell his
nephews what they already knew, that Ms. Tara had brought her from Los Angeles, and that she was
to have a lieutenant's commission in the ----shire. He had been watching her the last hour, he said, as
she walked up and down the street, and had Ms. Faith appeared, Doyle and Angelus would certainly
have continued the occupation, but unluckily no one passed the windows now except a few of the
officers, who in comparison with the stranger, were become "stupid, disagreeable fellows." Some of
them were to dine with the Philipses the next day, and their uncle promised to make his wife call on
Ms. Faith, and give her an invitation also, if the family from The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le
Bloddy's would come in the evening. This was agreed to, and Mr. Philips protested that they would
have a nice comfortable noisy game of darts, and a little bit of hot supper afterwards. The prospect of
such delights was very cheering, and they parted in mutual good spirits. Ms. Anya Nka repeated her
apologies in quitting the room, and was assured with unwearying civility that they were perfectly
needless.

As they walked home, Spike related to Oz what he had seen pass between the two gentlewomen; but
though Oz would have defended either or both, had they appeared to be wrong, he could no more
explain such behaviour than his brother.

Ms. Anya Nka, on her return, highly gratified Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy by admiring Mr. Philips's
manners and politeness. She protested that except Lord Snyder and his son, she had never seen a
more elegant man; for he had not only received her with the utmost civility, but had even pointedly
included her in his invitation for the next evening, although utterly unknown to him before.
Something she supposed might be attributed to her connection with them, but yet she had never met
with so much attention in the whole course of her life.
CHAPTER XVI (16)

AS no objection was made to the young people's engagement with their uncle, and all Ms. Anya Nka's scruples of leaving Mrs. and Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy for a single evening during her visit were most steadily resisted, the coach conveyed her and her five cousins at a suitable hour to Sunnydale; and the boys had the pleasure of hearing, as they entered the drawing-room, that Ms. Faith had accepted their aunt's invitation, and was then in the house.

When the information was given, and they had all taken their seats, Ms. Anya Nka was at leisure to look around her and admire, and she was so much struck with the size and furniture of the apartment, that she declared she might almost have supposed herself in the small summer breakfast parlour at Hellmouth; a comparison that did not at first convey much gratification; but when Mr. Philips understood from her what Hellmouth was, and who was its proprietor, when he had listened to the description of only one of Lord Snyder's drawing-rooms, and found that the chimney-piece alone had cost eight hundred pounds, he felt all the force of the compliment, and would hardly have resented a comparison with the housekeeper's room.

In describing to him all the grandeur of Lord Snyder and his mansion, with occasional digressions in praise of her own humble abode and the improvements it was receiving, she was happily employed until the gentlemen joined them; and she found in Mr. Philips a very attentive listener, whose opinion of her consequence increased with what he heard, and who was resolving to retail it all among his neighbours as soon as he could. To the boys, who could not listen to their cousin, and who had nothing to do but to wish for an instrument, and examine their own indifferent imitations of china on the mantelpiece, the interval of waiting appeared very long. It was over at last, however. The ladies did approach; and when Ms. Faith walked into the room, Spike felt that he had neither been seeing her before, nor thinking of her since, with the smallest degree of unreasonable admiration. The officers of the ----shire were in general a very creditable, lady likeset, and the best of them were of the present party; but Ms. Faith was as far beyond them all in person, countenance, air, and walk, as they were superior to the broad-faced stuffy aunt Philips, breathing port wine, who followed them into the room.

Ms. Faith was the happy woman towards whom almost every male eye was turned, and Spike was the happy man by whom she finally seated herself; and the agreeable manner in which she immediately fell into conversation, though it was only on its being a wet night, and on the probability of a rainy season, made him feel that the commonest, dullest, most threadbare topic might be rendered interesting by the skill of the speaker.

With such rivals for the notice of the fair, as Ms. Faith and the officers, Ms. Anya Nka seemed likely to sink into insignificance; to the young gentlemen she certainly was nothing; but she had still at intervals a kind listener in Mr. Philips, and was, by his watchfulness, most abundantly supplied with coffee and muffin.

When the dart boards were placed, she had an opportunity of obliging him in return, by standing up to throw.

"I know little of the game, at present," said she, "but I shall be glad to improve myself, for in my
situation of life --" Mr. Philips was very thankful for her compliance, but could not wait for her reason.

Ms. Faith did not play at darts, and with ready delight was she received at the other table between Spike and Angelus. At first there seemed danger of Angelus's engrossing her entirely for he was a most determined talker; but being likewise extremely fond of darts, he soon grew too much interested in the game, too eager in making bets and exclaiming after prizes, to have attention for any one in particular. Allowing for the common demands of the game, Ms. Faith was therefore at leisure to talk to Spike, and he was very willing to hear her, though what he chiefly wished to hear he could not hope to be told, the history of her acquaintance with Miss Buffy Summers. He dared not even mention that gentlewoman. His curiosity however was unexpectedly relieved. Ms. Faith began the subject herself. She inquired how far the burnt husk of Sunnydale High was from Sunnydale; and, after receiving his answer, asked in an hesitating manner how long Miss Buffy Summers had been staying there.

"About a month," said Spike; and then, unwilling to let the subject drop, added, "She is a woman of very large property in The San Francisco Bay Area, I understand."

"Yes," replied Faith; -- "her estate there is a noble one. A clear ten thousand per annum. You could not have met with a person more capable of giving you certain information on that head than myself - - for I have been connected with her family in a particular manner from my infancy."

Spike could not but look surprised.

"You may well be surprised, Mr. le Bloddy, at such an assertion, after seeing, as you probably might, the very cold manner of our meeting yesterday. -- Are you much acquainted with Miss Buffy Summers?"

"As much as I ever wish to be," cried Spike warmly, -- "I have spent four days in the same house with her, and I think her very disagreeable."

"I have no right to give my opinion," said Faith, "as to her being agreeable or otherwise. I am not qualified to form one. I have known her too long and to well to be a fair judge. It is impossible for me to be impartial. But I believe your opinion of her would in general astonish -- and perhaps you would not express it quite so strongly anywhere else. -- Here you are in your own family."

"Upon my word I say no more here than I might say in any house in the neighbourhood, except the burnt husk of Sunnydale High. She is not at all liked in Southern California. Every body is disgusted with her pride and peculiarness. You will not find her more favourably spoken of by any one."

"I cannot pretend to be sorry," said Faith, after a short interruption, "that she or that any woman should not be estimated beyond their deserts; but with her I believe it does not often happen. The world is blinded by her fortune and consequence, or frightened by her instinctive and graceful fighting skills, and sees her only as she chuses to be seen."

"I should take her, even on my slight acquaintance, to be an ill-tempered woman." Faith only shook her head.

"I wonder," said she, at the next opportunity of speaking, "whether she is likely to be in the country much longer."

"I do not at all know; but I heard nothing of her going away when I was at the burnt husk of
Sunnydale High. I hope your plans in favour of the ----shire will not be affected by her being in the neighbourhood."

"Oh! no -- it is not for me to be driven away by Miss Buffy Summers. If she wishes to avoid seeing me, she must go. We are not on friendly terms, and it always gives me pain to meet her, but I have no reason for avoiding her but what I might proclaim to all the world; a sense of very great ill-usage, and most painful regrets at her being what she is. Her mother, the late Mrs. Summers, was one of the best women that ever breathed, and the truest friend I ever had; and I can never be in company with the Miss Buffy Summers without being grieved to the soul by a thousand tender recollections. Her behaviour to myself has been scandalous; but I verily believe I could forgive her any thing and every thing, rather than her disappointing the hopes and disgracing the memory of her mother."

Spike found the interest of the subject increase, and listened with all his heart; but the delicacy of it prevented farther inquiry.

Ms. Faith began to speak on more general topics, Sunnydale, the neighbourhood, the society, appearing highly pleased with all that she had yet seen, and speaking of the latter especially, with gentle but very intelligible gallantry.

"It was the prospect of constant society, and good society," she added, "which was my chief inducement to enter the ----shire. I knew it to be a most respectable, agreeable corps, and my friend Miss Tara tempted me farther by her account of their present quarters, and the very great attentions and excellent acquaintance Sunnydale had procured them. Society, I own, is necessary to me. I have been a disappointed woman, and my spirits will not bear solitude. I must have employment and society. A military life is not what I was intended for, but circumstances have now made it eligible. The Slayer ought to have been my profession -- I was brought up to be the Slayer, and I should at the time have been in possession of a most valuable living from the Watcher's Council, had it pleased the lady we were speaking of just now."

"Indeed!"

"Yes -- the late Mrs. Summers bequeathed me the next presentation of the Slayerness in her gift. She was my godmother."

"Good heavens!" cried Spike; "but how could that be? -- How could her will be disregarded? -- Why did not you seek legal redress?"

"There was just such an informality in the terms of the bequest as to give me no hope from law. A woman of honour could not have doubted the intention, but Miss Buffy Summers chose to doubt it -- or to treat it as a merely conditional recommendation, and to assert that I had forfeited all claim to it by extravagance, imprudence, in short any thing or nothing. I cannot accuse myself of having really done any thing to deserve to lose it. I have a warm, unguarded temper, and I may perhaps have sometimes spoken my opinion of her, and to her, too freely. I can recall nothing worse. But the fact is, that we are very different sort of women, and that she hates me."

"This is quite shocking! -- She deserves to be publicly disgraced."

"Some time or other she will be -- but it shall not be by me. Till I can forget her mother, I can never defy or expose her."

Spike honoured her for such feelings, and thought her handsomer than ever as she expressed them.

"But what," said he after a pause, "can have been her motive? -- what can have induced her to behave so cruelly?"
"A thorough, determined dislike of me -- a dislike which I cannot but attribute in some measure to jealousy. Had the late Mrs. Summers liked me less, her daughter might have borne with me better; but her mother's uncommon attachment to me, irritated her I believe very early in life. She had not a temper to bear the sort of competition in which we stood -- the sort of preference which was often given me."

"I had not thought Miss Buffy Summers so bad as that -- though I have never liked her, I had not thought so very ill of her -- I had supposed her to be despising her fellow-creatures in general, but did not suspect her of descending to such malicious revenge, such injustice, such inhumanity as this!"

After a few minutes reflection, however, he continued, "I do remember her boasting one day, at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High, of the implacability of her resentments, of her having an unforgiving temper. Her disposition must be dreadful."

"I will not trust myself on the subject," replied Faith, "I can hardly be just to her."

Spike was again deep in thought, and after a time exclaimed, "To treat in such a manner, the goddaughter, the friend, the favourite of her mother!" -- He could have added, "A young woman too, like you, whose very countenance may vouch for your being amiable" -- but he contented himself with "And one, too, who had probably been her own companion from childhood, connected together, as I think you said, in the closest manner!"

"We were born in the same parish, within the same park, the greatest part of our youth was passed together; inmates of the same house, sharing the same amusements, objects of the same parental care. My mother began life in the profession which your aunt, Mrs. Philips, appears to do so much credit to -- but she gave up every thing to be of use to the late Mrs Summers, and devoted all her time to the care of The Bronze. She was most highly esteemed by Mrs Summers, a most intimate, confidential friend. Mrs Summers often acknowledged herself to be under the greatest obligations to my mother's active superintending, and when immediately before my mother's death, Mrs Summers gave her a voluntary promise of providing for me, I am convinced that she felt it to be as much a debt of gratitude to her, as of affection to myself."

"How strange!" cried Spike. "How abominable! -- I wonder that the very pride of the Miss Buffy Summers has not made her just to you! -- If from no better motive, that she should not have been too proud to be dishonest. -- for dishonesty I must call it."

"It is wonderful," -- replied Faith, -- "for almost all her actions may be traced to pride; -- and pride has often been her best friend. It has connected her nearer with virtue than any other feeling. But we are none of us consistent; and in her behaviour to me, there were stronger impulses even than pride."

"Can such abominable pride as hers, have ever done her good?"

"Yes. It has often led her to be liberal and generous, -- to give her money freely, to fight evil, to prevent the occasional apocolypse, to display hospitality, to assist her tenants, and relieve the poor. Family pride, and filial pride, for she is very proud of what her mother was, have done this. Not to appear to disgrace her family, to degenerate from the popular qualities, or lose the influence of The Bronze, is a powerful motive. She has also sisterly pride, which with some sisterly affection, makes her a very kind and careful guardian of her brother; and you will hear her generally cried up as the most attentive and best of sisters."

"What sort of a boy is Mr. Summers?"

She shook her head. -- "I wish I could call him amiable. It gives me pain to speak ill of a Summers. But he is too much like his sister, -- very, very proud. -- As a child, he was affectionate and pleasing,
and extremely fond of me; and I have devoted hours and hours to his amusement. But he is nothing to me now. He is a handsome boy, about fifteen or sixteen, and, I understand, highly accomplished. Since his mother's death, his home has been Los Angeles, where a lord lives with him, and superintends his education."

After many pauses and many trials of other subjects, Spike could not help reverting once more to the first, and saying,

"I am astonished at her intimacy with Willow! How can Willow, who seems good humour itself, and is, I really believe, truly amiable, be in friendship with such a woman? How can they suit each other? -- Do you know Willow?"

"Not at all."

"She is a sweet tempered, amiable, charming woman. She cannot know what Miss Buffy Summers is."

"Probably not; -- but Miss Buffy Summers can please where she chuses. She does not want abilities. She can be a conversible companion if she thinks it worth her while. Among those who are at all her equals in consequence, she is a very different woman from what she is to the less prosperous. Her pride never deserts her; but with the rich, she is liberal-minded, just, sincere, rational, honourable, and perhaps agreeable, -- allowing something for fortune and figure."

The darts party soon afterwards breaking up, the players gathered round the other table, and Ms. Anya Nka took her station between her cousin Spike and Mr. Philips. -- The usual inquiries as to her success were made by the latter. It had not been very great; she had lost every point; and had accidently impaled Angelus though not to any long term effect. But when Mr. Philips began to express his concern thereupon, she assured him with much earnest gravity that it was not of the least importance, that she considered the money and injury as a mere trifle, and begged he would not make himself uneasy.

"I know very well, sir," said she, "that when persons stand up to throw darts, they must take their chance of these things, -- and happily I am not in such circumstances as to make five shillings any object. There are undoubtedly many who could not say the same, but thanks to Lord Snyder de Principal, I am removed far beyond the necessity of regarding little matters."

Ms. Faith's attention was caught; and after observing Ms. Anya Nka for a few moments, she asked Spike in a low voice whether his relation were very intimately acquainted with the family of de Principal.

"Lord Snyder de Principal," he replied, "has very lately given her a living. I hardly know how Ms. Anya Nka was first introduced to his notice, but she certainly has not known him long."

"You know of course that Lord Snyder de Principal and Lord Summers were brothers; consequently that he is uncle to the present Miss Buffy Summers."

"No, indeed, I did not. -- I knew nothing at all of Lord Snyder's connections. I never heard of his existence till the day before yesterday."

"His son, Mr. de Principal, will have a very large fortune, and it is believed that he and his cousin will unite the two estates."

This information made Spike smile, as he thought of poor Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg. Vain indeed must be all his attentions, vain and useless his affection for Buffy's brother and Riley's praise of Miss
Buffy Summers, if she were already self-destined to another. "Oh, who's the puffed-up manly man? All splotchy and possessive. Much good it will do him."

"Ms. Anya Nka," said he, "speaks highly both of Lord Snyder and his son; but from some particulars that she has related of his lordship, I suspect her gratitude misleads her, and that in spite of his being her patron, he is an arrogant, conceited man."

"I believe him to be both in a great degree," replied Faith; "I have not seen him for many years, but I very well remember that I never liked him, and that his manners were dictatorial and insolent. He has the reputation of being remarkably sensible and clever; but I rather believe he derives part of his abilities from his rank and fortune, part from his authoritative manner, and the rest from the pride of his niece, who chuses that every one connected with him should have an understanding of the first class."

Spike allowed that she had given a very rational account of it, and they continued talking together with mutual satisfaction till supper put an end to darts; and gave the rest of the gentlemen their share of Ms. Faith's attentions. There could be no conversation in the noise of Mr. Philips's supper party, but her manners recommended her to every body. Whatever she said, was said well; and whatever she did, done gracefully. Spike went away with his head full of her. He could think of nothing but of Ms. Faith, and of what she had told him, all the way home; but there was not time for him even to mention her name as they went, for neither Angelus nor Ms. Anya Nka were once silent. Angelus talked incessantly of darts, of the fish he had lost and the fish he had won, and Ms. Anya Nka, in describing the civility of Mrs. and Mr. Philips, protesting that she did not in the least regard her losses at darts, enumerating all the dishes at supper, and repeatedly fearing that she crowded her cousins, had more to say than she could well manage before the carriage stopped at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's.

CHAPTER XVII (17)

SPIKE related to Oz the next day, what had passed between Ms. Faith and himself. Oz listened with astonishment and concern; -- he knew not how to believe that Miss Buffy Summers could be so unworthy of Willow's regard; and yet, it was not in his nature to question the veracity of a young woman of such amiable appearance as Faith. -- The possibility of her having really endured such unkindness, was enough to interest all his tender feelings; and nothing therefore remained to be done, but to think well of them both, to defend the conduct of each, and throw into the account of accident or mistake, whatever could not be otherwise explained.

"They have both," said he, "been deceived, I dare say, in some way or other, of which we can form no idea. Interested people have perhaps misrepresented each to the other. It is, in short, impossible for us to conjecture the causes or circumstances which may have alienated them, without actual blame on either side."

"Very true, indeed; -- and now, my dear Oz, what have you got to say in behalf of the interested people who have probably been concerned in the business? -- Do clear them too, or we shall be obliged to think ill of somebody."

"Laugh as much as you chuse, but you will not laugh me out of my opinion. My dearest Blonde Brother, do but consider in what a disgraceful light it places Miss Buffy Summers, to be treating her mother's favourite in such a manner, -- one, whom her mother had promised to provide for. -- It is impossible. No woman of common humanity, no woman who had any value for her character, could
be capable of it. Can her most intimate friends be so excessively deceived in him? oh! no."

"I can much more easily believe Willow’s being imposed on, than that Ms. Faith should invent such a history of herself as she gave me last night; names, facts, every thing mentioned without ceremony. -- If it be not so, let Miss Buffy Summers contradict it. Besides, there was truth in her looks."

"It is difficult indeed -- it is distressing. -- One does not know what to think."

"I beg your pardon; -- one knows exactly what to think."

But Oz could think with certainty on only one point, -- that Willow, if she had been imposed on, would have much to suffer when the affair became public.

The two young gentlemen were summoned from the shrubbery where the conversation passed, by the arrival of some of the very persons of whom they had been speaking; Willow and her brothers came to give their personal invitation for the long expected sparring match at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High, which was fixed for the following Tuesday. The two gentlemen were delighted to see their dear friend again, called it an age since they had met, and repeatedly asked what he had been doing with himself since their separation. To the rest of the family they paid little attention; avoiding Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy as much as possible, saying not much to Spike, and nothing at all to the others. They were soon gone again, rising from their seats with an activity which took their sister by surprise, and hurrying off as if eager to escape from Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy's civilities.

The prospect of the burnt husk of Sunnydale High sparring match was extremely agreeable to every male of the family. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy chose to consider it as given in compliment to his eldest son, and was particularly flattered by receiving the invitation from Willow herself, instead of a ceremonious card; Oz pictured to himself a happy evening in the society of his two friends, and the attention of their sister; and Spike thought with pleasure of sparring a great deal with Ms. Faith, and of seeing a confirmation of every thing in Miss Buffy Summers' looks and behaviour. The happiness anticipated by Doyle and Angelus, depended less on any single event, or any particular person, for though they each, like Spike, meant to fight half the evening with Ms. Faith, she was by no means the only partner who could satisfy them, and a sparring match was at any rate, a sparring match. And even Anointed One could assure his family that he had no disinclination for it.

"While I can have my mornings to myself," said he, "it is enough. -- I think it no sacrifice to join occasionally in evening engagements. Society has claims on us all; and I profess myself one of those who consider intervals of recreation and amusement as desirable for every body."

Spike's spirits were so high on the occasion that, though he did not often speak unnecessarily to Ms. Anya Nka, he could not help asking her whether she intended to accept Willow's invitation, and, if she did, whether she would think it proper to join in the evening's amusement; and he was rather surprised to find that she entertained no scruple whatever on that head, and was very far from dreading a rebuke either from the Archbishop, or Lord Snyder de Principal, by venturing to sparring match.

"I am by no means of opinion, I assure you," said she, "that a sparring match of the kind, given by a young woman of character to respectable people, can have any evil tendency; and I am so far from objecting to sparring myself, that I shall hope to be honoured with the hands of all my handsome cousins in the course of the evening, and I take the opportunity of soliciting yours, Mr. Spike, for the two first sparring matchs especially, -- a preference which I trust my cousin Oz will attribute to the right cause, and not to any disrespect for him."
Spike felt himself completely taken in. He had fully proposed being engaged by Faith for those very sparring matches: -- and to have Ms. Anya Nka instead! his liveliness had been never worse timed. There was no help for it however. Ms. Faith's happiness and his own was perforce delayed a little longer, and Ms. Anya Nka's proposal accepted with as good a grace as he could. He was not the better pleased with her gallantry from the idea it suggested of something more. -- It now first struck him that he was selected from among his brothers as worthy of being the mistress of Purgatory Parsonage, and of assisting to form a poker table at Hellmouth, in the absence of more eligible visitors. The idea soon reached to conviction, as he observed her increasing civilities toward himself, and heard her frequent attempt at a compliment on his wit and vivacity; and though more astonished than gratified himself by the effect of his charms, it was not long before his father gave him to understand that the probability of their marriage was exceedingly agreeable to him. Spike, however, did not chuse to take the hint, being well aware that a serious dispute must be the consequence of any reply. Ms. Anya Nka might never make the offer, and till she did, it was useless to quarrel about her.

If there had not been the burnt husk of Sunnydale High sparring match to prepare for and talk of, the younger Mr. le Bloddy would have been in a pitiable state at the time, for from the day of the invitation to the day of the sparring match, there was such a succession of rain as prevented their walking to Sunnydale once. No uncle, no officers, no news could be sought after; -- the very leather party pants of evil for the burnt husk of Sunnydale High were got by proxy. Even Spike might have found some trial of his patience in weather which totally suspended the improvement of his acquaintance with Ms. Faith; and nothing less than a sparring match on Tuesday, could have made such a Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday endurable to Doyle and Angelus.

CHAPTER XVIII (18)

TILL Spike entered the drawing-room at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High and looked in vain for Ms. Faith among the cluster of red coats there assembled, a doubt of her being present had never occurred to him. The certainty of meeting her had not been checked by any of those recollections that might not unreasonably have alarmed him. He had dressed with more than usual care, and prepared in the highest spirits for the conquest of all that remained unsubdued of her heart, trusting that it was not more than might be won in the course of the evening. But in an instant arose the dreadful suspicion of her being purposely omitted for Miss Buffy Summers' pleasure in the Rosenburgs' invitation to the officers; and though this was not exactly the case, the absolute fact of her absence was pronounced by her friend Ms. Tara, to whom Angelus eagerly applied, and who told them that Faith had been obliged to go to town on business the day before, and was not yet returned; adding, with a significant smile,

"I do not imagine her business would have called her away just now, if she had not wished to avoid a certain lady here."

This part of her intelligence, though unheard by Angelus, was caught by Spike, and as it assured him that Summers was not less answerable for Faith's absence than if his first surmise had been just, every feeling of displeasure against the former was so sharpened by immediate disappointment, that he could hardly reply with tolerable civility to the polite inquiries which she directly afterwards approached to make. -- Attention, forbearance, patience with Summers, was injury to Faith. He was resolved against any sort of conversation with her, and turned away with a degree of ill humour,
which he could not wholly surmount even in speaking to Willow, whose blind partiality provoked him.

But Spike was not formed for ill-humour; and though every prospect of his own was destroyed for the evening, it could not dwell long on his spirits; and having told all his griefs to Adam Walsh, whom he had not seen for a week, he was soon able to make a voluntary transition to the oddities of his cousin, and to point her out to his particular notice. The two first sparring matches, however, brought a return of distress; they were sparring matches of mortification. Ms. Anya Nka, awkward and solemn, and for some reason dressed as bunny, apologising instead of attending, and often moving wrong without being aware of it, gave him all the shame and misery which a disagreeable partner for a couple of sparring matches can give. The moment of his release from her was extacy.

He fought next with an officer, and had the refreshment of talking of Faith, and of hearing that she was universally liked. When those sparring matches were over he returned to Adam Walsh, and was in conversation with him, when he found himself suddenly addressed by Miss Buffy Summers, who took him so much by surprise in her application for his hand, that, without knowing what he did, he accepted her. She walked away again immediately, and he was left to fret over his own want of presence of mind; Adam tried to console him.

"I dare say you will find her very agreeable."

"Heaven forbid! -- That would be the greatest misfortune of all! -- To find a woman agreeable whom one is determined to hate! -- Do not wish me such an evil."

When the sparring recommenced, however, and Summers approached to claim his hand, Adam could not help cautioning him, in a whisper, not to be a simpleton, and allow his fancy for Faith to make him appear unpleasant in the eyes of a woman of ten times her consequence. Spike made no answer, and took his place, amazed at the dignity to which he was arrived in being allowed to stand opposite to Miss Buffy Summers, and reading in his neighbours' looks their equal amazement in beholding it. They stood for some time without speaking a word; and he began to imagine that their silence was to last through the two sparring matches, and at first was resolved not to break it; till suddenly fancying that it would be the greater punishment to his partner to oblige her to talk, he made some slight observation on the sparring match. She replied, and was again silent. After a pause of some minutes, he threw a right jab to her solar plexus and addressed her a second time with:

"It is your turn to say something now, Miss Buffy Summers. -- I talked about the sparring match, and you ought to make some kind of remark on the size of the room, or the number of couples."

She smiled, and assured his that whatever he wished her to say should be said.

"Bloody hell, my nose!. -- That reply will do for the present. -- Perhaps by and by I may observe that private sparring matches are much pleasanter than public ones. -- But now we may be silent." He swept a kick at her ankles, but she jumped over it and punched him in the arem.

"Do you talk by rule then, while you are sparring?"

"Sometimes. One must speak a little, you know. It would look odd to be entirely silent for half an hour together, and yet for the advantage of some, conversation ought to be so arranged as that they may have the trouble of saying as little as as possible." Spike smirked and avoided her blow to his head.

"Are you consulting your own feelings in the present case, or do you imagine that you are gratifying mine?" Buffy returned his smirk and landed a roundhouse kick.
"Both," replied Spike; "for I have always seen a great similarity in the turn of our minds. -- We are each of an unsocial, taciturn disposition, unwilling to speak, unless we expect to say something that will amaze the whole room, and be handed down to posterity with all the eclat of a proverb."

"Okay at this point, you're abusing sarcasm. There is no very striking resemblance of your own character, I am sure," said she. "How near it may be to mine, I cannot pretend to say. -- You think it a faithful portrait undoubtedly."

"I must not decide on my own performance." Spike went straight for her throat with both hands and his put on his game face.

She made no answer, as she performed a graceful flip out of his reach and they were again silent till they had gone down the sparring match, when she asked him if he and his brothers did not very often walk to Sunnydale. He answered in the affirmative, and, unable to resist the temptation, added, "When you met us there the other day, we had just been forming a new acquaintance."

The effect was immediate. A deeper shade of hauteur overspread her features, but she said not a word as she dropped to the mat that swept Spike off his feet and Spike, though blaming himself for his own weakness, could not go on. At length Summers spoke, and in a constrained manner said,

"Ms. Faith is blessed with such happy manners as may ensure her making friends -- whether she may be equally capable of retaining them, is less certain."

Spike flipped off his back and into a low crouch, "She has been so unlucky as to lose your friendship," replied Spike with emphasis, "and in a manner which she is likely to suffer from all her life."

Summers made no answer, and seemed desirous of changing the subject. At that moment Dame Walsh appeared close to them, meaning to pass through the set to the other side of the room; but on perceiving Miss Buffy Summers she stopt with a bow of superior courtesy, to compliment her on her sparring and her partner.

"I have been most highly gratified indeed, my dear Ma'am. Such very superior sparring is not often seen. It is evident that you belong to the first circles. Allow me to say, however, that your handsome partner does not disgrace you, and that I must hope to have the pleasure often repeated, especially when a certain desirable event, my dear Mr. Spike (glancing at his brother and Rosenburg), shall take place. What congratulations will then flow in! I appeal to Miss Buffy Summers: -- but let me not interrupt you, Ma'am -- You will not thank me for detaining you from the bewitching converse of that young gentleman, whose bright eyes are also upbraiding me."

The latter part of the address was scarcely heard by Summers; but Dame Walsh's allusion to her friend seemed to strike her forcibly, and her eyes were directed with a very serious expression towards Rosenburg and Oz, who were sparring together. Spike saw his opportunity and got in a quick jab to her stomach. Recovering herself, however, shortly, Miss Buffy turned to her partner, and said,

"Dame Walsh's interruption has made me forget what we were talking of."

Spike fell backward to avoid a kick from Miss. Buffy. "I do not think we were speaking at all. Dame Walsh could not have interrupted any two people in the room who had less to say for themselves. -- We have tried two or three subjects already without success, and what we are to talk of next I cannot imagine."

"What think you of books?" said she, smiling as one of her blows landed on his chest.
Spike rubbed his chest, "Books -- Oh! no. -- I am sure we never read the same, or not with the same feelings."

"I am sorry you think so; but if that be the case, there can at least be no want of subject. -- We may compare our different opinions." Miss Buffy could not resist showing off by running up the wall and flipping over Spike's head.

Spike dropped to mat to avoid her right jab and did a quick floor sweep, "No -- I cannot talk of books in a dojo; my head is always full of something else."

Miss Buffy jumped over his scything legs. "The present always occupies you in such scenes -- does it?" said she, with a look of doubt.

"Yes, always," he replied, jumping to his feet, without knowing what he said, for his thoughts had wandered far from the subject, as soon afterwards appeared by his suddenly exclaiming, "I remember hearing you once say, Miss Buffy Summers, that you hardly ever forgave, that your resentment once created was unappeasable. You are very cautious, I suppose, as to its being created." He landed a blow on her right quadriceps with a low thud.

"I am," said she, with a firm voice.

"And never allow yourself to be blinded by prejudice?" He aimed an angry jab at her.

"I hope not." Miss. Buffy grabbed his arm and pulled Mr. Spike into a quick and gratuitous head lock.

Spike struggled in her grip, "It is particularly incumbent on those who never change their opinion, to be secure of judging properly at first."

"May I ask to what these questions tend?" She increased the pressure of her grip.

Spike aimed a backwards elbow jab at Miss Buffy,"Merely to the illustration of your character," said he, endeavouring to shake off his gravity. "I am trying to make it out."

Miss Buffy released Spike and took a step back, "And what is your success?"

He shook his head. "I do not get on at all. I hear such different accounts of you as puzzle me exceedingly."

"I can readily believe," answered she gravely as she snapped a kick at his legs, "that reports may vary greatly with respect to me; and I could wish, Mr. le Bloddy, that you were not to sketch my character at the present moment, as there is reason to fear that the performance would reflect no credit on either." One of her kicks connected on his right leg.

"But if I do not take your likeness now, I may never have another opportunity." He said, as he fell to the mat.

"I would by no means suspend any pleasure of yours," she coldly replied. She said no more, and pinned Spike to the mat. He tapped out and they and parted in silence; on each side dissatisfied, though not to an equal degree, for in Summers' breast there was a tolerable powerful feeling towards him, which soon procured his pardon, and directed all her anger against another.

They had not long separated when Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg came towards him, and with an expression of civil disdain thus accosted her,

"So, Mr. Spike, I hear you are quite delighted with Ms. Faith! -- Your brother has been talking to me
about her, and asking me a thousand questions; and I find that the young woman forgot to tell you, among her other communications, that she was the daughter of the late Mrs. Summers' steward. Let me recommend you, however, as a friend, not to give implicit confidence to all her assertions; for as to Miss Buffy Summers' using her ill, it is perfectly false; for, on the contrary, she has been always remarkably kind to her, though Ms. Faith has treated Miss Buffy Summers, in a most infamous manner. I do not know the particulars, but I know very well that Miss Buffy Summers is not in the least to blame, that she cannot bear to hear Ms. Faith mentioned, and that though my sister thought she could not well avoid including her in her invitation to the officers, she was excessively glad to find that she had taken herself out of the way. Her coming into the country at all, is a most insolent thing indeed, and I wonder how she could presume to do it. I pity you, Mr. Spike, for the discovery of your favorite's guilt; but really, considering her descent one could not expect much better."

"Her guilt and her descent appear by your account to be the same," said Spike angrily; "for I have heard you accuse her of nothing worse than of being the daughter of Mrs. Summers' steward, and of that, I can assure you, she informed me herself."

"I beg your pardon," replied Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg, turning away with a sneer. "Excuse my interference. -- It was kindly meant."

"Insolent boy!" said Spike to himself. -- "You are much mistaken if you expect to influence me by such a paltry attack as this. I see nothing in it but your own wilful ignorance and the malice of Miss Buffy Summers." He then sought his eldest brother, who had undertaken to make inquiries on the same subject of Rosenburg. Oz met him with a smile of such sweet complacency, a glow of such happy expression, as sufficiently marked how well he was satisfied with the occurrences of the evening. -- Spike instantly read his feelings, and at that moment solicitude for Faith, resentment against her enemies and every thing else gave way before the hope of Oz's being in the fairest way for happiness.

"I want to know," said he, with a countenance no less smiling than his brother's, "what you have learnt about Ms. Faith. But perhaps you have been too pleasantly engaged to think of any third person, in which case you may be sure of my pardon."

"No," replied Oz, "I have not forgotten her; but I have nothing satisfactory to tell you. Willow does not know the whole of her history, and is quite ignorant of the circumstances which have principally offended Miss Buffy Summers; but she will vouch for the good conduct, the probity and honour of her friend, and is perfectly convinced that Ms. Faith has deserved much less attention from Miss Buffy Summers than she has received; and I am sorry to say that by her account as well as her brother's, Ms. Faith is by no means a respectable young woman. I am afraid she has been very imprudent, and has deserved to lose Miss Buffy Summers' regard."

"Willow does not know Ms. Faith herself?"

"No; she never saw her till the other morning at Sunnydale."

"The account then is what she has received from Miss Buffy Summers. I am perfectly satisfied. But what does she say of Faith's right to be the Slayer?"

"She does not exactly recollect the circumstances, though she has heard them from Miss Buffy Summers more than once, but she believes that it was left to her conditionally only."

"I have not a doubt of Willow's sincerity," said Spike warmly; "but you must excuse my not being convinced by assurances only. Willow's defence of her friend was a very able one I dare say, but since she is unacquainted with several parts of the story, and has learnt the rest from that friend herself, I shall venture still to think of both ladies as I did before."
He then changed the discourse to one more gratifying to each, and on which there could be no difference of sentiment. Spike listened with delight to the happy, though modest hopes which Oz entertained of Rosenberg's regard, and said all in his power to heighten his confidence in it. On their being joined by Willow herself, Spike withdrew to Mr. Walsh; to whose inquiry after the pleasantness of his last partner he had scarcely replied, before Ms. Anya Nka came up to them and told him with great exultation that she had just been so fortunate as to make a most important discovery.

"I have found out," said she, "by a singular accident, that there is now in the room a near relation of my patron. I happened to overhear the lady herself mentioning to the young lord who does the honours of the house the names of her cousin Mr. de Principal, and of his father Lord Snyder. How wonderfully these sort of things occur! Who would have thought of my meeting with -- perhaps -- a niece of Lord Snyder de Principal in the dojo! -- I am most thankful that the discovery is made in time for me to pay my respects to her, which I am now going to do, and trust she will excuse my not having done it before. My total ignorance of the connection must plead my apology."

"You are not going to introduce yourself to Miss Buffy Summers?"

"Indeed I am. I shall intreat her pardon for not having done it earlier. I believe her to be Lord Snyder's niece. It will be in my power to assure her that his lordship was quite well yesterday se'nnight."

Spike tried hard to dissuade her from such a scheme; assuring her that Miss Buffy Summers would consider her addressing her without introduction as an impertinent freedom, rather than a compliment to her uncle; that it was not in the least necessary there should be any notice on either side, and that if it were, it must belong to Miss Buffy Summers, the superior in consequence, to begin the acquaintance. -- Ms. Anya Nka listened to him with the determined air of following her own inclination and when he ceased speaking, replied thus,

"My dear Mr. Spike, I have the highest opinion in the world of your excellent judgment in all matters within the scope of your understanding, but permit me to say that there must be a wide difference between the established forms of ceremony amongst the laity, and those which regulate the clergy; for give me leave to observe that I consider the clerical office as equal in point of dignity with the highest rank in the kingdom -- provided that a proper humility of behaviour is at the same time maintained. You must therefore allow me to follow the dictates of my conscience on the occasion, which leads me to perform what I look on as a point of duty. Pardon me for neglecting to profit by your advice, which on every other subject shall be my constant guide, though in the case before us I consider myself more fitted by education and habitual study to decide on what is right than a young lord like yourself." And with a low bow she left him to attack Miss Buffy Summers, whose reception of her advances he eagerly watched, and whose astonishment at being so addressed was very evident. His cousin prefaced her speech with a solemn bow, and though he could not hear a word of it, he felt as if hearing it all, and saw in the motion of her lips the words "apology," "Purgatory," and "Lord Snyder de Principal." -- It vexed him to see her expose herself to such a woman. Miss Buffy Summers was eyeing her with unrestrained wonder, and when at last Ms. Anya Nka allowed her time to speak, replied with an air of distant civility. Ms. Anya Nka, however, was not discouraged from speaking again, and Miss Buffy Summers' contempt seemed abundantly increasing with the length of her second speech, and at the end of it she only made her a slight bow, and moved another way. Ms. Anya Nka then returned to Spike.

"I have no reason, I assure you," said she, "to be dissatisfied with my reception. Miss Buffy Summers seemed much pleased with the attention. She answered me with the utmost civility, and even paid me the compliment of saying that she was so well convinced of Lord Snyder's discernment as to be certain he could never bestow a favour unworthily. It was really a very handsome thought.
Upon the whole, I am much pleased with her."

As Spike had no longer any interest of his own to pursue, he turned his attention almost entirely on him brother and Willow, and the train of agreeable reflections which his observations gave birth to, made his perhaps almost as happy as Oz. He saw him, in idea, settled in that very house, in all the felicity which a marriage of true affection could bestow; and he felt capable, under such circumstances, of endeavouring even to like Rosenberg's two brothers. His father's thoughts he plainly saw were bent the same way, and he determined not to venture near him, lest he might hear too much. When they sat down to supper, therefore, he considered it a most unlucky perverseness which placed them within one of each other; and deeply was he vexed to find that his father was talking to that one person (Dr. Angleman Walsh) freely, openly, and of nothing else but of his expectation that Oz would be soon married to Willow. -- It was an animating subject, and Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy seemed incapable of fatigue while enumerating the advantages of the match. Her being such a charming young woman, and so rich, and living but three miles from them, were the first points of self-gratulation; and then it was such a comfort to think how fond the two brothers were of Oz, and to be certain that they must desire the connection as much as he could do. It was, moreover, such a promising thing for his younger sons, as Oz's marrying so greatly must throw them in the way of other rich men; and lastly, it was so pleasant at his time of life to be able to consign his single sons to the care of their brother, that he might not be obliged to go into company more than he liked. It was necessary to make the circumstance a matter of pleasure, because on such occasions it is the etiquette, but no one was less likely than Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy to find comfort in staying at home at any period of his life. He concluded with many good wishes that Dr. Angleman Walsh might soon be equally fortunate, though evidently and triumphantly believing there was no chance of it.

In vain did Spike endeavour to check the rapidity of his father's words, or persuade him to describe his felicity in a less audible whisper; for to his inexpressible vexation, he could perceive that the chief of it was overheard by Miss Buffy Summers, who sat opposite to them. His father only scolded him for being nonsensical.

"What is Miss Buffy Summers to me, pray, that I should be afraid of her? I am sure we owe her no such particular civility as to be obliged to say nothing she may not like to hear."

"For heaven's sake, sir, speak lower. -- What advantage can it be to you to offend Miss Buffy Summers? -- You will never recommend yourself to her friend by so doing."

Nothing that he could say, however, had any influence. His father would talk of his views in the same intelligible tone. Spike blushed and blushed again with shame and was the very spirit of vexation. He could not help frequently glancing his eye at Miss Buffy Summers, though every glance convinced him of what he dreaded; for though she was not always looking at his father, he was convinced that her attention was invariably fixed by him. The expression of her face changed gradually from indignant contempt to a composed and steady gravity.

At length however Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy had no more to say; and Dr. Angleman Walsh, who had been long yawning at the repetition of delights which he saw no likelihood of sharing, was left to the comforts of cold ham and chicken. Spike now began to revive. But not long was the interval of tranquillity; for when supper was over, singing was talked of, and he had the mortification of seeing Annointed One, after very little entreaty, preparing to oblige the company. By many significant looks and silent entreaties, did he endeavour to prevent such a proof of complaisance, -- but in vain; Annointed One would not understand them; such an opportunity of exhibiting was delightful to him,
and he began his song. Spike's eyes were fixed on him with most painful sensations; and he watched his progress through the several stanzas with an impatience which was very ill rewarded at their close; for Annointed One, on receiving amongst the thanks of the table, the hint of a hope that he might be prevailed on to favour them again, after the pause of half a minute began another. Annointed One's powers were by no means fitted for such a display; his voice was weak, and his manner affected. -- Spike was in agonies. He looked at Oz, to see how he bore it; but Oz was very composedly talking to Rosenburg. He looked at her two brothers, and saw them making signs of derision at each other, and at Summers, who continued however impenetrably grave. He looked at his mother to entreat her interference, lest Annointed One should be singing all night. She took the hint, and when Annointed One had finished his second song, said aloud,

"That will do extremely well, child. You have delighted us long enough. Let the other young gentlemen have time to exhibit."

Annointed One, though pretending not to hear, was somewhat disconcerted; and Spike sorry for him, and sorry for his mother's speech, was afraid his anxiety had done no good. -- Others of the party were now applied to.

"If I," said Ms. Anya Nka, "were so fortunate as to be able to sing, I should have great pleasure, I am sure, in obliging the company with an air; for I consider music as a very innocent diversion, and perfectly compatible with the profession of a clergyman. -- I do not mean however to assert that we can be justified in devoting too much of our time to music, for there are certainly other things to be attended to. The rector of a parish has much to do. -- In the first place, she must make such an agreement for tithes as may be beneficial to herself and not offensive to her patron. She must write her own sermons; and the time that remains will not be too much for her parish duties, and the care and improvement of her dwelling, which she cannot be excused from making as comfortable as possible. And I do not think it of light importance that she should have attentive and conciliatory manners towards every body, especially towards those to whom she owes her preferment and can give her so many fine and wonderous things. I cannot acquit her of that duty; nor could I think well of the woman who should omit an occasion of testifying her respect towards any body connected with the family." And with a bow to Miss Buffy Summers, she concluded her speech, which had been spoken so loud as to be heard by half the room. -- Many stared. -- Many smiled; but no one looked more amused than Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy herself, while her husband seriously commended Ms. Anya Nka for having spoken so sensibly, and observed in a half-whisper to Dr. Angleman Walsh, that she was a remarkably clever, good kind of young woman.

To Spike it appeared, that had his family made an agreement to expose themselves as much as they could during the evening, it would have been impossible for them to play their parts with more spirit, or finer success; and happy did he think it for Rosenburg and his brother that some of the exhibition had escaped her notice, and that her feelings were not of a sort to be much distressed by the folly which she must have witnessed. That her two brothers and Miss Buffy Summers, however, should have such an opportunity of ridiculing his relations was bad enough, and he could not determine whether the silent contempt of the gentlewoman, or the insolent smiles of the gentlemen, were more intolerable.

The rest of the evening brought him little amusement. He was teased by Ms. Anya Nka, who continued most perseveringly by his side, speaking both compliments and of her past as Vengence demon.

"So then this one time, this girl wished her ex would cannibalize himself. Even I had a hard time watching that, let me tell you." said Ms. Anya Nka.

In desparation, Spike suggested that she go fight with another young lord, to no avail.
"And there was this other time, I made this jerk incredibly fat, like a human minivan." She smiled at him brightly, "Want to fight."

"Oh, Bloody Hell, no thank you kindly." At which Spike knew that it was out of his power to spar with others. In vain did he entreat her to stand up with somebody else, and offer to introduce her to any young lord in the room. She assured him that as to sparring, she was perfectly indifferent to it; that her chief object was by delicate attentions to recommend herself to him, and that she should therefore make a point of remaining close to him the whole evening. There was no arguing upon such a project. He owed him greatest relief to his friend Mr. Walsh, who often joined them, and good-naturedly engaged Ms. Anya Nka's conversation to himself.

He was at least free from the offence of Miss Buffy Summers' farther notice; though often standing within a very short distance of him, quite disengaged, she never came near enough to speak. He felt it to be the probable consequence of his allusions to Ms. Faith, and rejoiced in it.

The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's party were the last of all the company to depart; and by a manoeuvre of Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, had to wait for their carriages a quarter of an hour after every body else was gone, which gave them time to see how heartily they were wished away by some of the family. Mr. Wesley Lockley and his brother scarcely opened their mouths except to complain of fatigue, and were evidently impatient to have the house to themselves. They repulsed every attempt of Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy at conversation, and by so doing, threw a languor over the whole party, which was very little relieved by the long speeches of Ms. Anya Nka, who was complimenting Willow and her brothers on the elegance of their entertainment, and the hospitality and politeness which had marked their behaviour to their guests. Summers said nothing at all. Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, in equal silence, was enjoying the scene. Willow and Oz were standing together, a little detached from the rest, and talked only to each other. Spike preserved as steady a silence as either Mr. Wesley Lockley or Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg; and even Angelus was too much fatigued to utter more than the occasional exclamation of "Lord how tired I am!" accompanied by a violent yawn.

When at length they arose to take leave, Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy was most pressingly civil in his hope of seeing the whole family soon at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's; and addressed himself particularly to Willow, to assure her how happy she would make them by eating a family dinner with them at any time, without the ceremony of a formal invitation. Rosenburg was all grateful pleasure, and she readily engaged for taking the earliest opportunity of waiting on him, after her return from Los Angeles, whither she was obliged to go the next day for a short time.

Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy was perfectly satisfied; and quitted the house under the delightful persuasion that, allowing for the necessary preparations of settlements, new carriages, and wedding clothes, he should undoubtedly see his sonsettled at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High in the course of three or four months. Of having another sonmarried to Ms. Anya Nka, he thought with equal certainty, and with considerable, though not equal, pleasure. Spike was the least dear to him of all his children; and though the woman and the match were quite good enough for him, the worth of each was eclipsed by Willow and the burnt husk of Sunnydale High.
CHAPTER XIX (19)

THE next day opened a new scene at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's. Ms. Anya Nka made her declaration in form. Having resolved to do it without loss of time, as her leave of absence extended only to the following Saturday, and having no feelings of diffidence to make it distressing to herself even at the moment, she set about it in a very orderly manner, with all the observances which she supposed a regular part of the business. On finding Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, Spike, and one of the younger boys together soon after breakfast, she addressed the father in these words,

"May I hope, Sir, for your interest with your fair son Spike, when I solicit for the honour of a private audience with him in the course of the morning?"

Before Spike had time for any thing but a blush of surprise, Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy instantly answered,

"Oh dear! -- Yes -- certainly. -- I am sure Spikey will be very happy -- I am sure he can have no objection. -- Come, Doyle, I want you up stairs." And gathering his work together, he was hastening away, when Spike called out,

"Dear Sir, do not go. -- I beg you will not go. -- Ms. Anya Nka must excuse me. -- She can have nothing to say to me that any body need not hear. I am going away myself."

"Dear Sir, do not go. -- I beg you will not go. -- Ms. Anya Nka must excuse me. -- She can have nothing to say to me that any body need not hear. I am going away myself."

"No, no, nonsense, Spikey. -- I desire you will stay where you are." -- And upon Spike's seeming really, with vexed and embarrassed looks, about to escape, he added, "Now gosh darn it, I insist upon your staying and hearing Ms. Anya Nka."

Spike would not oppose such an injunction -- and a moment's consideration making him also sensible that it would be wisest to get it over as soon and as quietly as possible, he sat down again, and tried to conceal by incessant employment the feelings which were divided between distress and diversion. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy and Doyle walked off, and as soon as they were gone Ms. Anya Nka began.

"Believe me, my dear Mr. Spike, that your modesty, so far from doing you any disservice, rather adds to your other perfections. You would have been less amiable in my eyes had there not been the little unwillingness; but allow me to assure you that I have your respected father's permission for the address. You can hardly doubt the purport of my discourse, however your natural delicacy may lead you to dissemble; my attentions have been too marked to be mistaken. Almost as soon as I entered the house I singled you out as the companion of my future life. But before I am run away with by my feelings on the subject, perhaps it will be advisable for me to state my reasons for marrying -- and moreover for coming into Southern California with the design of selecting a husband, as I certainly did."

The idea of Ms. Anya Nka, with all her solemn composure, being run away with by her feelings, made Spike so near laughing that he could not use the short pause she allowed in any attempt to stop
her farther, and she continued:

"My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergywoman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in her parish. Secondly, that I am convinced it will add very greatly to my happiness; thirdly that you have the appearance of a veritable Viking of couchage; and fourthly -- which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier -- that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lord whom I have the honour of calling patron. Twice has he condescended to give me his opinion (unasked too!) on the subject; and it was but the very Saturday night before I left Purgatory -- between our pools at quadrille, while Mr. Jenkinson was arranging Mr. de Principal's foot-stool, that he said, "Ms. Anya Nka, you must marry. A clergywoman like you must marry. -- Chuse properly, chuse a gentleman for my sake; and for your own, let him be an active, useful sort of person, not brought up high, but able to make a small income go a good way. This is my advice. Find such a man as soon as you can, bring him to Purgatory, and I will visit him." Allow me, by the way, to observe, my fair cousin, that I do not reckon the notice and kindness of Lord Snyder de Principal as among the least of the advantages in my power to offer. You will find his manners beyond any thing I can describe; and your wit and vivacity I think must be acceptable to him, especially when tempered with the silence and respect which his rank will inevitably excite. Thus much for my general intention in favour of matrimony; it remains to be told why my views were directed to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's instead of my own neighbourhood, where I assure you there are many amiable young men. But the fact is, that being, as I am, to inherit the estate after the death of your honoured mother (who, however, may live many years longer), I could not satisfy myself without resolving to chuse a husband from among her sons, that the loss to them might be as little as possible, when the melancholy event takes place -- which, however, as I have already said, may not be for several years. This has been my motive, my fair cousin, and I flatter myself it will not sink me in your esteem. And now nothing remains for me but to assure you in the most animated language of the violence of my affection. To fortune I am perfectly indifferent, and shall make no demand of that nature on your mother, since I am well aware that it could not be complied with; and that one thousand pounds in the 4 per cents, which will not be yours till after your father's decease, is all that you may ever be entitled to. On that head, therefore, I shall be uniformly silent; and you may assure yourself that no ungenerous reproach shall ever pass my lips when we are married."

It was absolutely necessary to interrupt her now.

"You are too hasty, Madam," he cried. "You forget that I have made no answer. Let me do it without farther loss of time. Accept my thanks for the compliment you are paying me, I am very sensible of the honour of your proposals, but it is impossible for me to do otherwise than decline them."

"I am not new to learn," replied Ms. Anya Nka, with a formal wave of the hand, "that it is usual with young gentlemen to reject the addresses of the woman whom they secretly mean to accept, when she first applies for their favour; and that sometimes the refusal is repeated a second or even a third time. I am therefore by no means discouraged by what you have just said, and shall hope to lead you to the altar ere long."

"Upon my word, Madam," cried Spike, "your hope is rather an extraordinary one after my declaration. I do assure you that I am not one of those young gentlemen (if such young gentlemen there are) who are so daring as to risk their happiness on the chance of being asked a second time. No means no. I am perfectly serious in my refusal. -- You could not make me happy, and I am convinced that I am the last man in the world who would make you so, -- Nay, were your friend Lord Snyder to know me, I am persuaded he would find me in every respect ill qualified for the situation."

"Were it certain that Lord Snyder would think so," said Ms. Anya Nka very gravely -- "but I cannot
imagine that his lordship would at all disapprove of you. And you may be certain that when I have
the honour of seeing him again I shall speak in the highest terms of your modesty, economy, and
other amiable qualifications."

"Indeed, Ms. Anya Nka, all praise of me will be unnecessary. You must give me leave to judge for
myself, and pay me the compliment of believing what I say. I wish you very happy and very rich,
and by refusing your hand, do all in my power to prevent your being otherwise. In making me the
offer, you must have satisfied the delicacy of your feelings with regard to my family, and may take
possession of The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's estate whenever it falls, without any
self-reproach. This matter may be considered, therefore, as finally settled." And rising as he thus
spoke, he would have quitted the room, had not Ms. Anya Nka thus addressed him,

"When I do myself the honour of speaking to you next on the subject I shall hope to receive a more
favourable answer than you have now given me; though I am far from accusing you of cruelty at
present, because I know it to be the established custom of your sex to reject a woman on the first
application, and perhaps you have even now said as much to encourage my suit as would be
consistent with the true delicacy of the male character."

"Really, Ms. Anya Nka," cried Spike with some warmth, "you puzzle me exceedingly. If what I
have hitherto said can appear to you in the form of encouragement, I know not how to express my
refusal in such a way as may convince you of its being one."

"You must give me leave to flatter myself, my dear cousin, that your refusal of my addresses is
merely words of course. My reasons for believing it are briefly these: -- It does not appear to me that
my hand is unworthy your acceptance, or that the establishment I can offer would be any other than
highly desirable. My situation in life, my connections with the family of De Principal, and my
relationship to your own, are circumstances highly in its favor; and you should take it into farther
consideration that in spite of your manifold attractions, it is by no means certain that another offer of
marriage may ever be made you. Your portion is unhappily so small that it will in all likelihood undo
the effects of your loveliness and amiable qualifications. As I must therefore conclude that you are
not serious in your rejection of me, I shall chuse to attribute it to your wish of increasing my love by
suspense, according to the usual practice of dashing males."

"I do assure you, Ma'am, that I have no pretension whatever to that kind of dash which consists in
tormenting a respectable woman. I would rather be paid the compliment of being believed sincere. I
thank you again and again for the honour you have done me in your proposals, but to accept them is
absolutely impossible. My feelings in every respect forbid it. Can I speak plainer? Do not consider
me now as an dashing male intending to plague you, but as a rational creature speaking the truth
from his heart."

"You are uniformly charming!" cried she, with an air of awkward gallantry; "and I am persuaded that
when sanctioned by the express authority of both your excellent parents, my proposals will not fail of
being acceptable."

To such perseverance in wilful self-deception, Spike would make no reply, and immediately and in
silence withdrew; determined, that if she persisted in considering his repeated refusals as flattering
encouragement, to apply to his mother, whose negative might be uttered in such a manner as must be
decisive, and whose behaviour at least could not be mistaken for the affectation and coquetry of a
dashing male.
Ms. Anya Nka was not left long to the silent contemplation of her successful love; for Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, having dawdled about in the vestibule to watch for the end of the conference, no sooner saw Spike open the door and with quick step pass him towards the staircase, than he entered the breakfast room, and congratulated both her and himself in warm terms on the happy prospect of their nearer connection. Ms. Anya Nka received and returned these felicitations with equal pleasure, and then proceeded to relate the particulars of their interview, with the result of which she trusted she had every reason to be satisfied, since the refusal which her cousin had steadfastly given her would naturally flow from his bashful modesty and the genuine delicacy of his character.

This information, however, startled Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy; -- he would have been glad to be equally satisfied that his son had meant to encourage her by protesting against her proposals, but he dared not to believe it, and could not help saying so.

"But depend upon it, Ms. Anya Nka," he added, "that Spikey shall be brought to reason. I will speak to him about it myself directly. He is a very headstrong foolish boy, and does not know his own interest; but I will make him know it."

"Pardon me for interrupting you, Sir," cried Ms. Anya Nka; "but if he is really headstrong and foolish, I know not whether he would altogether be a very desirable husband to a woman in my situation, who naturally looks for happiness in the marriage state. If therefore he actually persists in rejecting my suit, perhaps it were better not to enforce him into accepting me, because if liable to such defects of temper, he could not contribute much to my felicity."

"Ma'am, you quite misunderstand me," said Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, alarmed. "Spikey is only headstrong in such matters as these. In every thing else he is as good natured a boy as ever lived. I will go directly to Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, and we shall very soon settle it with him, I am sure."

He would not give her time to reply, but hurrying instantly to his wife, called out as he entered the library,

"Oh! Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, you are wanted immediately; we are all in an uproar. You must come and make Spikey marry Ms. Anya Nka, for he vows he will not have her, and if you do not make haste she will change her mind and not have him."

Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy raised her eyes from her book as he entered, and fixed them on his face with a calm unconcern which was not in the least altered by his communication.

"I have not the pleasure of understanding you," said she, when he had finished his speech. "Of what are you talking?"

"Of Ms. Anya Nka and Spikey. Spikey declares he will not have Ms. Anya Nka, and Ms. Anya Nka begins to say that she will not have Spikey."

"And what am I to do on the occasion? -- It seems an hopeless business."

"Speak to Spikey about it yourself. Tell him that you insist upon his marrying her."

"Let him be called down. He shall hear my opinion."
Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy rang the bell, and Mr. Spike was summoned to the library.

"Come here, child," cried his mother as he appeared. "Have some cocoa. I have sent for you on an affair of importance. I understand that Ms. Anya Nka has made you an offer of marriage. Is it true?" Spike replied that it was. "Very well -- and the offer of marriage you have refused?"

"I have, Ma'am"

"Very well. We now come to the point. Your father insists upon your accepting it. Is not it so, Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy?"

"Yes, or I will never see him again."

"An unhappy alternative is before you, Spike. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents. -- Your father will never see you again if you do not marry Ms. Anya Nka, and I will never see you again if you do."

Spike could not but smile at such a conclusion of such a beginning; but Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, who had persuaded himself that his wife regarded the affair as he wished, was excessively disappointed.

"What do you mean, Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, by talking in the way? You promised me to insist upon his marrying her."

"My dear," replied his wife, "I have two small favours to request. First, that you will allow me the free use of my understanding on the present occasion; and secondly, of my room. I shall be glad to have the library to myself as soon as may be."

Not yet, however, in spite of his disappointment in his wife, did Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy give up the point. He talked to Spike again and again; coaxed and threatened him by turns. He endeavoured to secure Oz in his interest but Oz with all possible mildness declined interfering; -- and Spike, sometimes with real earnestness and sometimes with playful gaiety, replied to his attacks. Though his manner varied, however, his determination never did.

Ms. Anya Nka, meanwhile, was meditating in solitude on what had passed. She thought too well of herself to comprehend on what motive her cousin could refuse her; and though her pride was hurt, she suffered in no other way. Her regard for him was quite imaginary; and the possibility of him deserving his father's reproach prevented her feeling any regret.

While the family were in the confusion, Adam Walsh came to spend the day with them. He was met in the vestibule by Angelus, who, flying to him, cried in a half whisper, "I am glad you are come, for there is such fun here! -- What do you think has happened the morning? -- Ms. Anya Nka has made an offer to Spikey, and he will not have her."

Adam had hardly time to answer, before they were joined by Doyle, who came to tell the same news, and no sooner had they entered the breakfast-room, where Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy was alone, than he likewise began on the subject, calling on Mr. Walsh for his compassion, and entreating his to persuade his friend Spikey to comply with the wishes of all his family. "Pray do, my dear Mr. Walsh," he added in a melancholy tone, "for nobody is on my side, nobody takes part with me, I am cruelly used, nobody feels for my poor nerves."

Adam's reply was spared by the entrance of Oz and Spike.

"Aye, there he comes," continued Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, "looking as unconcerned as may be, and caring no more for us than if we were at York, provided he can have his own way. -- But I tell
you what, Mr. Spikey, if you take it into your head to go on refusing every offer of marriage in the
way, you will never get a wife at all -- and I am sure I do not know who is to maintain you when
your mother is dead. -- I shall not be able to keep you -- and so I warn you. -- I have done with you
from the very day. -- I told you in the library, you know, that I should never speak to you again, and
you will find me as good as my word. I have no pleasure in talking to undutiful children, -- Not that I
have much pleasure indeed in talking to any body. People who suffer as I do from nervous
complaints can have no great inclination for talking. Nobody can tell what I suffer! -- But it is always
so. Those who do not complain are never pitied."

His sons listened in silence to the effusion, sensible that any attempt to reason with or sooth him
would only increase the irritation. He talked on, therefore, without interruption from any of them till
they were joined by Ms. Anya Nka, who entered with an air more stately than usual, and on
perceiving whom, he said to the boys,

"Now, I do insist upon it, that you, all of you, hold your tongues, and let Ms. Anya Nka and me have
a little conversation together."

Spike passed quietly out of the room, Oz and Doyle followed, but Angelus stood his ground,
determined to hear all he could; and Adam, detained first by the civility of Ms. Anya Nka, whose
inquiries after himself and all his family were very minute, and then by a little curiosity, satisfied
himself with walking to the window and pretending not to hear. In a doleful voice Mayor Wilkins-le
Bloddy thus began the projected conversation. -- "Oh! Ms. Anya Nka!" --

"My dear Sir," replied she, "let us be for ever silent on the point. Far be it from me," she presently
continued, in a voice that marked her displeasure, "to resent the behaviour of your son. A year and a
half ago, I could have eviscerated him with my thoughts. Now I can barely hurt his feelings. Things
used to be so much simpler. Resignation to inevitable evils is the duty of us all; the peculiar duty of a
young woman who has been so fortunate as I have been in early preferment; and I trust I am
resigned. Perhaps not the less so from feeling a doubt of my positive happiness had my fair cousin
honoured me with his hand; for I have often observed that resignation is never so perfect as when the
blessing denied begins to lose somewhat of its value in our estimation. You will not, I hope, consider
me as shewing any disrespect to your family, my dear Sir, by thus withdrawing my pretensions to
your son's favour, without having paid yourself and Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy the compliment of
requesting you to interpose your authority in my behalf. My conduct may, I fear, be objectionable in
having accepted my dismission from your son's lips instead of your own. But we are all liable to
error. I have certainly meant well through the whole affair. My object has been to secure an amiable
companion for myself, with due consideration for the advantage of all your family, and if my manner
has been at all reprehensible, I here beg leave to apologise."

CHAPTER XXI (21)

THE discussion of Ms. Anya Nka's offer was now nearly at an end, and Spike had only to suffer
from the uncomfortable feelings necessarily attending it, and occasionally from some peevish allusion
of his father. As for the lady herself, her feelings were chiefly expressed, not by embarrassment or
dejection, or by trying to avoid him, but by stiffness of manner and resentful silence. She scarcely
ever spoke to him, and the assiduous attentions which she had been so sensible of herself, were
transferred for the rest of the day to Mr. Walsh, whose civility in listening to her, was a seasonable
relief to them all, and especially to his friend.

The morrow produced no abatement of Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy's ill humour or ill health. Ms. Anya
Nka was also in the same state of angry pride. Spike had hoped that her resentment might shorten her visit, but her plan did not appear in the least affected by it. She was always to have gone on Saturday, and to Saturday she still meant to stay.

After breakfast, the boys walked to Sunnydale, to inquire if Ms. Faith were returned, and to lament over her absence from the burnt husk of Sunnydale High sparring match. She joined them on their entering the town and attended them to their uncle's, where her regret and vexation, and the concern of every body was well talked over. -- To Spike, however, she voluntarily acknowledged that the necessity of her absence had been self imposed.

"I found," said she, "as the time drew near, that I had better not meet Miss Buffy Summers; -- that to be in the same room, the same party with her for so many hours together, might be more than I could bear, and that scenes might arise unpleasant to more than myself."

He highly approved her forbearance, and they had leisure for a full discussion of it, and for all the commendation which they civilly bestowed on each other, as Faith and another officer walked back with them to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's, and during the walk she particularly attended to him. Her accompanying them was a double advantage; he felt all the compliment it offered to himself, and it was most acceptable as an occasion of introducing her to his mother and father.

Soon after their return, a letter was delivered to Mr. le Bloddy; it came from the burnt husk of Sunnydale High, and was opened immediately. The envelope contained a sheet of elegant, little, hot-pressed paper, well covered with a gentleman's fair, flowing hand; and Spike saw his brother's countenance change as he read it, and saw his dwelling intently on some particular passages. Oz recollected himself soon, and putting the letter away, tried to join with his usual cheerfulness in the general conversation; but Spike felt an anxiety on the subject which drew off his attention even from Faith; and no sooner had she and her companion taken leave, than a glance from Oz invited him to follow him up stairs. When they had gained their own room, Oz taking out the letter, said,

"This is from Riley Rosenberg; what it contains, has surprised me a good deal. The whole party have left the burnt husk of Sunnydale High by this time, and are on their way to town; and without any intention of coming back again. You shall hear what he says."

He then read the first sentence aloud, which comprised the information of their having just resolved to follow their sister to town directly, and of their meaning to dine that day in Grosvenor street, where Mrs. Kate Lockley had a house. The next was in these words. "I do not pretend to regret any thing I shall leave in Southern California, except your society, my dearest friend; but we will hope at some future period, to enjoy many returns of the delightful intercourse we have known, and in the mean while may lessen the pain of separation by a very frequent and most unreserved correspondence. I depend on you for that." To these high flown expressions, Spike listened with all the insensibility of distrust; and though the suddenness of their removal surprised him, he saw nothing in it really to lament; it was not to be supposed that their absence from the burnt husk of Sunnydale High would prevent Willow's being there; and as to the loss of their society, he was persuaded that Oz must soon cease to regard it, in the enjoyment of his.

"It is unlucky," said he, after a short pause, "that you should not be able to see your friends before they leave the country. But may we not hope that the period of future happiness to which Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg looks forward, may arrive earlier than he is aware, and that the delightful intercourse you have known as friends, will be renewed with yet greater satisfaction as sisters? -- Willow will not be detained in Los Angeles by them."

"Riley decidedly says that none of the party will return into Southern California the winter. I will
"When my sister left us yesterday, she imagined that the business which took her to Los Angeles, might be concluded in three or four days, but as we are certain it cannot be so, and at the same time convinced that when Willow gets to town she will be in no hurry to leave it again, we have determined on following her thither, that she may not be obliged to spend her vacant hours in a comfortless hotel. Many of my acquaintance are already there for the winter; I wish I could hear that you, my dearest friend, had any intention of making one in the crowd, but of that I despair. I sincerely hope your Christmas in Southern California may abound in the gaieties which that season generally brings, and that your beaux will be so numerous as to prevent your feeling the loss of the three of whom we shall deprive you."

"It is evident by this," added Oz, "that she comes back no more the winter."

"It is only evident that Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg does not mean Willow should."

"It must be Willow's own doing. Here's the passage which hurts me." "Miss Buffy Summers is impatient to see her brother, and to confess the truth, we are scarcely less eager to meet him again. I really do not think Xander Summers has his equal for beauty, elegance, and accomplishments; and the affection he inspires in Wesley and myself is heightened into something still more interesting, from the hope we dare to entertain of his being hereafter our brother. I do not know whether I ever before mentioned to you my feelings on the subject, but I will not leave the country without confiding them, and I trust you will not esteem them unreasonable. My sister admires him greatly already, she will have frequent opportunity now of seeing him on the most intimate footing, his relations all wish the connection as much as her own, and a brother's partiality is not misleading me, I think, when I call Willow most capable of engaging any man's heart. With all these circumstances to favour an attachment and nothing to prevent it, am I wrong, my dearest Oz, in indulging the hope of an event which will secure the happiness of so many?"

"What think you, my dear Spikey?" -- said Oz as he finished it. "Clear enough? -- Riley neither expects nor wishes me to be his brother. That he is convinced of his sister's indifference, and that if he suspects the nature of my feelings for her, he means (most kindly!) to put me on my guard? Can there be any other opinion?"

"Yes, there can; for mine is totally different. -- Will you hear it?"

"Willingly."

"You shall have it in few words. Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg sees that his sister is in love with you, and wants her to marry Mr. Summers. He follows her to town in the hope of keeping her there, and tries to persuade you that she does not care about you."

Oz shook his head.

"Indeed, Oz, you ought to believe me. -- No one who has ever seen you together, can doubt her affection. Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg I am sure cannot. He is not such a simpleton. Could he have seen half as much love in Miss Buffy Summers for himself, he would have ordered his wedding clothes. But the case is this. We are not rich enough, or grand enough for them; and he is the more anxious to get Mr. Summers for his sister, from the notion that when there has been one intermarriage, he may have less trouble in achieving a second; in which there is certainly some
ingenuity, and I dare say it would succeed, if Mr. de Principal were out of the way. But, my dearest Oz, you cannot seriously imagine that because Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg tells you his sister greatly admires Mr. Summers, she is in the smallest degree less sensible of your merit than when she took leave of you on Tuesday, or that it will be in his power to persuade her that instead of being in love with you, she is very much in love with his friend."

"If we thought alike of Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg," replied Oz, "your representation of all this, might make me quite easy. But I know the foundation is unjust. Riley is honest. I just hope he's wrong."

"That is right. -- You could not have started a more happy idea, since you will not take comfort in mine. Believe him to be deceived by all means. You have now done your duty by him, and must fret no longer."

"But, my dear brother, can I be happy, even supposing the best, in accepting a woman whose brothers and friends are all wishing her to marry elsewhere?"

"You must decide for yourself," said Spike, "and if, upon mature deliberation, you find that the misery of disobliging her two brothers is more than equivalent to the happiness of being her husband, I advise you by all means to refuse her."

"How can you talk so?" -- said Oz faintly smiling, -- "You must know that though I should be exceedingly grieved at their disapprobation, I could not hesitate. As Willow goes, so goes my nation."

"I did not think you would; -- and that being the case, I cannot consider your situation with much compassion."

"But if she returns no more the winter, my choice will never be required. A thousand things may arise in six months!"

The idea of her returning no more Spike treated with the utmost contempt. It appeared to him merely the suggestion of Riley's interested wishes, and he could not for a moment suppose that those wishes, however openly or artfully spoken, could influence a young woman so totally independent of every one.

He represented to his brother as forcibly as possible what he felt on the subject, and had soon the pleasure of seeing its happy effect. Oz's temper was not desponding, and he was gradually led to hope, though the diffidence of affection sometimes overcame the hope, that Rosenberg would return to the burnt husk of Sunnydale High and answer every wish of his heart.

They agreed that Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy should only hear of the departure of the family, without being alarmed on the score of the gentlewoman's conduct; but even the partial communication gave him a great deal of concern, and he bewailed it as exceedingly unlucky that the gentlemen should happen to go away, just as they were all getting so intimate together. After lamenting it however at some length, he had the consolation of thinking that Willow would be soon down again and soon dining at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's, and the conclusion of all was the comfortable declaration that, though she had been invited only to a family dinner, he would take care to have two full courses.
THE le Blod dys were engaged to dine with the Walshes, and again during the chief of the day, was Mr. Walsh so kind as to listen to Ms. Anya Nka. Spike took an opportunity of thanking him. "It keeps her in good humour," said he, "and I am more obliged to you than I can express." Adam assured his friend of his satisfaction in being useful, and that it amply repaid him for the little sacrifice of his time. This was very amiable, but Adam's kindness extended farther than Spike had any conception of; -- its object was nothing less than to secure him from any return of Ms. Anya Nka's addresses, by engaging them towards himself. Such was Mr. Walshes scheme; and appearances were so favourable that when they parted at night, he would have felt almost sure of success if she had not been to leave Southern California so very soon. But here, he did injustice to the fire and independence of her character, for it led him to escape out of The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's House the next morning with admirable slyness, and hasten to Walsh Lodge to throw herself at his feet. She was anxious to avoid the notice of her cousins, from a conviction that if they saw her depart, they could not fail to conjecture her design, and she was not willing to have the attempt known till its success could be known likewise; for though feeling almost secure, and with reason, for Adam had been tolerably encouraging, she was comparatively diffident since the adventure of Wednesday. Her reception however was of the most flattering kind. Mr. Walsh perceived her from an upper window as she walked towards the house, and instantly set out to meet her accidentally in the lane. But little had he dared to hope that so much love and eloquence awaited him there.

In as short a time as Ms. Anya Nka's long speeches would allow, every thing was settled between them to the satisfaction of both; and as they entered the house, she earnestly entreated him to name the day that was to make her the happiest of women; and though such a solicitation must be waved for the present, the lord felt no inclination to trifle with her happiness. The stupidity with which she was favoured by nature must guard her courtship from any charm that could make a man wish for its continuance; and Mr. Walsh, who accepted her solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment, cared not how soon that establishment were gained.

Dame Walsh and Dr. Angleman Walsh were speedily applied to for their consent; and it was bestowed with a most joyful alacrity. Ms. Anya Nka's present circumstances made it a most eligible match for their son, to whom they could give little fortune; and her prospects of future wealth were exceedingly fair. Dr. Angleman Walsh began directly to calculate with more interest than the matter had ever excited before, how many years longer Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy was likely to live; and Dame Walsh gave it as her decided opinion that whenever Ms. Anya Nka should be in possession of the Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's estate, it would be highly expedient that both she and her husband should make their appearance at the capital's. The whole family, in short, were properly overjoyed on the occasion. The younger boys formed hopes of
coming out a year or two sooner than they might otherwise have done; and the girls were relieved from their apprehension of Adam's dying an old maid. Adam himself was tolerably composed. He had gained his point, and had time to consider of it. His reflections were in general satisfactory. Ms. Anya Nka to be sure was neither sensible nor agreeable; her society was irksome, and her attachment to him must be imaginary. But still, she would be his wife. -- Without thinking highly either of women or of matrimony, marriage had always been his object; that or world domination, perhaps involving toasters, it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young men of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. This preservative he had now obtained; and at the age of twenty-seven, without having ever been handsome, he felt all the good luck of it. The least agreeable circumstance in the business was the surprise it must occasion to Spike le Bloddy, whose friendship he valued beyond that of any other person. Spike would wonder, and probably would blame him; and though his resolution was not to be shaken, his feelings must be hurt by such disapprobation. He resolved to give him the information himself, and therefore charged Ms. Anya Nka, when she returned to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's to dinner, to drop no hint of what had passed before any of the family. A promise of secrecy was of course very dutifully given, but it could not be kept without difficulty; for the curiosity excited by her long absence burst forth in such very direct questions on her return, as required some ingenuity to evade, and she was at the same time exercising great self-denial, for she was longing to publish her prosperous love.

As she was to begin her journey too early on the morrow to see any of the family, the ceremony of leave-taking was performed when the gentlemen moved for the night; and Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, with great politeness and cordiality, said how happy they should be to see her at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's again, whenever her other engagements might allow her to visit them.

"My dear Sir," she replied, "the invitation is particularly gratifying, because it is what I have been hoping to receive; and you may be very certain that I shall avail myself of it as soon as possible."

They were all astonished; and Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, who could by no means wish for so speedy a return, immediately said,

"But is there not danger of Lord Snyder's disapprobation here, my good sir? -- You had better neglect your relations, than run the risk of offending your patron."

"My dear Madam," replied Ms. Anya Nka, "I am particularly obliged to you for the friendly caution, and you may depend upon my not taking so material a step without his lordship's concurrence."

"You cannot be too much on your guard. Risk any thing rather than his displeasure; and if you find it likely to be raised by your coming to us again, which I should think exceedingly probable, stay quietly at home, and be satisfied that we shall take no offence."

"Believe me, my dear Ma'am, my gratitude is warmly excited by such affectionate attention; and depend upon it, you will speedily receive from me a letter of thanks for this, as well as for every other mark of your regard during my stay in Southern California. As for my fair cousins, though my absence may not be long enough to render it necessary, I shall now take the liberty of wishing them health and happiness, not excepting my cousin Spike."

With proper civilities the gentlemen then withdrew; all of them equally surprised to find that she mediated a quick return. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy wished to understand by it that she thought of paying her addresses to one of his younger boys, and Anointed One might have been prevailed on to accept her. He rated her abilities much higher than any of the others; there was a solidity in her reflections which often struck him, and though by no means so clever as himself, he thought that if encouraged to read and improve herself by such an example as his, she might become a very
agreeable companion. But on the following morning, every hope of the kind was done away. Mr. Walsh called soon after breakfast, and in a private conference with Spike related the event of the day before.

The possibility of Ms. Anya Nka's fancying herself in love with his friend had once occurred to Spike within the last day or two; but that Adam could encourage her, seemed almost as far from possibility as that he could encourage her himself, and his astonishment was consequently so great as to overcome at first the bounds of decorum, and he could not help crying out,

"Engaged to Ms. Anya Nka! my dear Adam, -- impossible!"

The steady countenance which Mr. Walsh had commanded in telling his story, gave way to a momentary confusion here on receiving so direct a reproach; though, as it was no more than he expected, he soon regained his composure, and calmly replied,

"Why should you be surprised, my dear Spike? -- Do you think it incredible that Ms. Anya Nka should be able to procure any man's good opinion, because she was not so happy as to succeed with you?"

But Spike had now recollected himself, and making a strong effort for it, was able to assure him with tolerable firmness that the prospect of their relationship was highly grateful to him, and that he wished him all imaginable happiness.

"I see what you are feeling," replied Adam, -- "you must be surprised, very much surprised, -- so lately as Ms. Anya Nka was wishing to marry you. But when you have had time to think it all over, I hope you will be satisfied with what I have done. I am not romantic, you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Ms. Anya Nka's character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with her is as fair as most people can boast on entering the marriage state."

Spike quietly answered "Undoubtedly;" -- and after an awkward pause, they returned to the rest of the family. Adam did not stay much longer, and Spike was then left to reflect on what he had heard. It was a long time before he became at all reconciled to the idea of so unsuitable a match. The strangeness of Ms. Anya Nka's making two offers of marriage within three days, was nothing in comparison of her being now accepted. He had always felt that Adam's opinion of matrimony was not exactly like his own, but he could not have supposed it possible that, when called into action, he would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage. Adam the husband of Ms. Anya Nka, was a most humiliating picture! -- And to the pang of a friend disgracing himself and sunk in his esteem, was added the distressing conviction that it was impossible for that friend to be tolerably happy in the lot he had chosen.

CHAPTER XXIII (23)
SPIKE was sitting with his father and brothers, reflecting on what he had heard, and doubting whether he were authorised to mention it, when Dame Walsh herself appeared, sent by her son to announce his engagement to the family. With many compliments to them, and much self-gratulation on the prospect of a connection between the houses, she unfolded the matter, -- to an audience not merely wondering, but incredulous; for Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, with more perseverance than politeness, protested she must be entirely mistaken, and Angelus, always unguarded and often uncivil, boisterously exclaimed,

"Good Lord! Dame Walsh, how can you tell such a story? -- Do not you know that Ms. Anya Nka wants to marry Spikey?"

Nothing less than the complaisance of a courtier could have borne without anger such treatment; but Dame Walshes good breeding carried her through it all; and though she begged leave to be positive as to the truth of her information, she listened to all their impertinence with the most forbearing courtesy.

Spike, feeling it incumbent on him to relieve her from so unpleasant a situation, now put himself forward to confirm her account, by mentioning his prior knowledge of it from Adam himself; and endeavoured to put a stop to the exclamations of his father and brothers, by the earnestness of his congratulations to Dame Walsh, in which he was readily joined by Oz, and by making a variety of remarks on the happiness that might be expected from the match, the excellent character of Ms. Anya Nka, and the convenient distance of Purgatory from Los Angeles.

Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy was in fact too much overpowered to say a great deal while Dame Walsh remained; but no sooner had she left them than his feelings found a rapid vent. In the first place, he persisted in disbelieving the whole of the matter; secondly, he was very sure that Ms. Anya Nka had been taken in; thirdly, he trusted that they would never be happy together; and fourthly, that the match might be broken off. Two inferences, however, were plainly deduced from the whole; one, that Spike was the real cause of all the mischief; and the other, that he himself had been barbarously used by them all; and on these two points he principally dwelt during the rest of the day. Nothing could console and nothing appease him. -- Nor did that day wear out his resentment. A week elapsed before he could see Spike without scolding him, a month passed away before he could speak to Dame Walsh or Dr. Angleman Walsh without being rude, and many months were gone before he could at all forgive their son.

Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy's emotions were much more tranquil on the occasion, and such as she did experience she pronounced to be of a most agreeable sort; for it gratified her, she said, to discover that Adam Walsh, whom she had been used to think tolerably sensible, was as foolish as her husband, and more foolish than her own children!

Oz confessed himself a little surprised at the match; but he said less of his astonishment than of his earnest desire for their happiness; nor could Spike persuade him to consider it as improbable. Doyle and Angelus were far from envying Mr. Walsh, for Ms. Anya Nka was only a clergywoman; and it affected them in no other way than as a piece of news to spread at Sunnydale.

Dr. Angleman Walsh could not be insensible of triumph on being able to retort on Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy the comfort of having a son well married; and he called at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's rather oftener than usual to say how happy he was, though Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy's
sour looks and ill-natured remarks might have been enough to drive happiness away.

Between Spike and Adam there was a restraint which kept them mutually silent on the subject; and Spike felt persuaded that no real confidence could ever subsist between them again. His disappointment in Adam made him turn with fonder regard to his brother, of whose rectitude and delicacy he was sure his opinion could never be shaken, and for whose happiness he grew daily more anxious, as Rosenburg had now been gone a week, and nothing was heard of her return.

Oz had sent Riley an early answer to his letter, and was counting the days till he might reasonably hope to hear again. The promised letter of thanks from Ms. Anya Nka arrived on Tuesday, addressed to their mother, and written with all the solemnity of gratitude which a twelvemonth's abode in the family might have prompted. After discharging her conscience on that head, she proceeded to inform them, with many rapturous expressions, of her happiness in having obtained the affection of their amiable neighbour, Mr. Walsh, and then explained that it was merely with the view of enjoying his society that she had been so ready to close with their kind wish of seeing her again at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's, whither she hoped to be able to return on Monday fortnight; for Lord Snyder, she added, so heartily approved her marriage, that he wished it to take place as soon as possible, which she trusted would be an unanswerable argument with her amiable Adam to name an early day for making her the happiest of women.

Ms. Anya Nka's return into Southern California was no longer a matter of pleasure to Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy. On the contrary, he was as much disposed to complain of it as his wife. -- It was very strange that she should come to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's instead of to Walsh Lodge; it was also very inconvenient and exceedingly troublesome. -- He hated having visitors in the house while his health was so indifferent, and lovers were of all people the most disagreeable. Such were the gentle murmurs of Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, and they gave way only to the greater distress of Willow's continued absence.

Neither Oz nor Spike were comfortable on the subject. Day after day passed away without bringing any other tidings of her than the report which shortly prevailed in Sunnydale of her coming no more to the burnt husk of Sunnydale High the whole winter; a report which highly incensed Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, and which he never failed to contradict as a most scandalous falsehood.

Even Spike began to fear -- not that Rosenburg was indifferent -- but that her brothers would be successful in keeping her away. Unwilling as he was to admit an idea so destructive of Oz's happiness, and so dishonourable to the stability of his lover, he could not prevent its frequently recurring. The united efforts of her two unfeeling brothers and of her overpowering friend, assisted by the attractions of Mr. Summers and the amusements of Los Angeles, might be too much, he feared, for the strength of her attachment.

As for Oz, him anxiety under the suspence was, of course, more painful than Spike's; but whatever he felt he was desirous of concealing, and between himself and Spike, therefore, the subject was never alluded to. But as no such delicacy restrained his father, an hour seldom passed in which he did not talk of Rosenburg, express his impatience for her arrival, or even require Oz to confess that if she did not come back, he should think himself very ill used. It needed all Oz's steady mildness to bear these attacks with tolerable tranquillity.

Ms. Anya Nka returned most punctually on the Monday fortnight, but her reception at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's was not quite so gracious as it had been on her first introduction. She was too happy, however, to need much attention; and luckily for the others, the business of love-making relieved them from a great deal of her company. The chief of every day was spent by her at Walsh Lodge, and she sometimes returned to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's only in time to make an apology for her absence before the family went to bed.
Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy was really in a most pitiable state. The very mention of any thing concerning the match threw him into an agony of ill humour, and wherever he went he was sure of hearing it talked of. The sight of Mr. Walsh was odious to him. As his successor in that house, he regarded him with jealous abhorrence. Whenever Adam came to see them he concluded him to be anticipating the hour of possession; and whenever he spoke in a low voice to Ms. Anya Nka, was convinced that they were talking of the Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's estate, and resolving to turn himself and his sons out of the house as soon as Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy were dead. He complained bitterly of all the to his wife.

"Indeed, Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy," said he, "it is very hard to think that Adam Walsh should ever be master of the house, that I should be forced to make way for him, and live to see him take my place in it!"

"My dear, do not give way to such gloomy thoughts. Let us hope for better things. Let us flatter ourselves that I may be the survivor."

This was not very consoling to Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, and, therefore, instead of making any answer, he went on as before,

"I cannot bear to think that they should have all the estate, If it was not for the entail I should not mind it."

"What should not you mind?"

"I should not mind any thing at all."

"Let us be thankful that you are preserved from a state of such insensibility."

"I never can be thankful, Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, for any thing about the entail. How any one could have the conscience to entail away an estate from one's own sons I cannot understand; and all for the sake of Ms. Anya Nka too! -- Why should she have it more than anybody else?"

"I leave it to yourself to determine," said Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy.
VOLUME II

CHAPTER I (24)

Mr. Riley Rosenberg's letter arrived, and put an end to doubt. The very first sentence conveyed the assurance of their being all settled in Los Angeles for the winter, and concluded with his sister's regret at not having had time to pay her respects to her friends in Southern California before she left the country.

Hope was over, entirely over; and when Oz could attend to the rest of the letter, he found little, except the professed affection of the writer, that could give him any comfort. Mr. Summers' praise occupied the chief of it. His many attractions were again dwelt on, and Riley boasted joyfully of their increasing intimacy, and ventured to predict the accomplishment of the wishes which had been unfolded in his former letter. He wrote also with great pleasure of his sister's being an inmate of Miss Buffy Summers' house, and mentioned with raptures some plans of the latter with regard to long range weaponry, crossbows, missiles. Spike, to whom Oz very soon communicated the chief of all this, heard it in silent indignation. His heart was divided between concern for his brother, and resentment against all the others. To Riley's assertion of his sister's being partial to Mr. Summers he paid no credit. That she was really fond of Oz, he doubted no more than he had ever done; and much as he had always been disposed to like her, he could not think without anger, hardly without contempt, on that easiness of temper, that want of proper resolution which now made her the slave of her designing friends, and led her to sacrifice her own happiness to the caprice of their inclinations. Had her own happiness, however, been the only sacrifice, she might have been allowed to sport with it in whatever manner she thought best; but his brother's was involved in it, as, he thought, she must be sensible herself. It was a subject, in short, on which reflection would be long indulged, and must be unavailing. He could think of nothing else, and yet whether Rosenberg's regard had really died away, or were suppressed by her friends' interference; whether she had been aware of Oz's attachment, or whether it had escaped her observation; whichever were the case, though his opinion of her must be materially affected by the difference, his brother's situation remained the same, his peace equally wounded.

A day or two passed before Oz had courage to speak of his feelings to Spike; but at last on Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy's leaving them together, after a longer irritation than usual about the burnt husk of Sunnydale High and its mistress, he could not help saying,

"Oh! that my dear father had more command over himself; he can have no idea of the pain he gives me by his continual reflections on her. But I will not repine. It cannot last long. She will be forgot, and we shall all be as we were before."

Spike looked at his brother with incredulous solicitude, but said nothing.

"You doubt me," cried Oz, slightly colouring; "indeed you have no reason. She may live in my memory as the most amiable woman of my acquaintance, but that is all. I have nothing either to hope or fear, and nothing to reproach her with. Thank God! I have not that pain. A little time therefore. -- I shall certainly try to get the better."
With a stronger voice he soon added, "I have the comfort immediately, that it has not been more than an error of fancy on my side, and that it has done no harm to any one but myself."

"My dear Oz!" exclaimed Spike, "you are too good. Your sweetness and disinterestedness are really angelic; I do not know what to say to you. I feel as if I had never done you justice, or loved you as you deserve."

Miss le Bloddy eagerly disclaimed all extraordinary merit, and threw back the praise on his brother's warm affection.

"Nay," said Spike, "that is not fair. You wish to think all the world respectable, and are hurt if I speak ill of any body. I only want to think you perfect, and you set yourself against it. Do not be afraid of my running into any excess, of my encroaching on your privilege of universal good will. You need not. There are few people whom I really love, and still fewer of whom I think well. The more I see of the world, the more am I dissatisfied with it; and every day confirms my belief of the inconsistency of all human characters, and of the little dependence that can be placed on the appearance of either merit or sense. I have met with two instances lately; one I will not mention; the other is Adam's marriage. Bloody hell! It is unaccountable! in every view it is unaccountable!"

"My dear Spikey, do not give way to such feelings as these. They will ruin your happiness. You do not make allowance enough for difference of situation and temper. Consider Ms. Anya Nka's respectability, and Adam's prudent, steady character. Remember that he is one of a large family; that as to fortune, it is a most eligible match; and be ready to believe, for every body's sake, that he may feel something like regard and esteem for our cousin."

"To oblige you, I would try to believe almost any thing, but no one else could be benefited by such a belief as this; for were I persuaded that Adam had any regard for her, I should only think worse of his understanding, than I now do of his heart. My dear Oz, Ms. Anya Nka is a strange and silly woman; you know she is, as well as I do; and you must feel, as well as I do, that the man who marries her, cannot have a proper way of thinking. You shall not defend him, though it is Adam Walsh. You shall not, for the sake of one individual, change the meaning of principle and integrity, nor endeavour to persuade yourself or me that selfishness is prudence, and insensibility of danger, security for happiness."

"I must think your language too strong in speaking of both," replied Oz, "and I hope you will be convinced of it, by seeing them happy together. But enough of this. You alluded to something else. You mentioned two instances. I cannot misunderstand you, but I intreat you, dear Spikey, not to pain me by thinking that person to blame, and saying your opinion of her is sunk. We must not be so ready to fancy ourselves intentionally injured. We must not expect a lively young woman to be always so guarded and circumspect. It is very often nothing but our own vanity that deceives us. Men fancy admiration means more than it does."

"And women take care that they should."

"If it is designedly done, they cannot be justified; but I have no idea of there being so much design in the world as some persons imagine."

"I am far from attributing any part of Willow's conduct to design," said Spike; "but without scheming to do wrong, or to make others unhappy, there may be error, and there may be misery. Thoughtlessness, want of attention to other people's feelings, and want of resolution, will do the
business."

"And do you impute it to either of those?"

"Yes; to the last. But if I go on, I shall displease you by saying what I think of persons you esteem. Stop me whilst you can."

"You persist, then, in supposing her brothers influence her."

"Yes, in conjunction with her friend."

"I cannot believe it. Why should they try to influence him? They can only wish her happiness, and if she is attached to me, no other man can secure it."

"Your first position is false. They may wish many things besides her happiness; they may wish her increase of wealth and consequence; they may wish her to marry a boy who has all the importance of money, great connections, and pride."

"They do wish her to choose Mr. Summers," replied Oz; "but they have known him longer. If they believed Willow attached to me, they would not try to part us; if she were so, they could not succeed. By supposing such an affection, you make everybody acting unnaturally and wrong, and me most unhappy. Do not distress me by the idea. Let me take it in the best light, in the light in which it may be understood."

Spike could not oppose such a wish; and from the time Willow's name was scarcely ever mentioned between them.

Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy still continued to wonder and repine at her returning no more, and though a day seldom passed in which Spike did not account for it clearly, there seemed little chance of his ever considering it with less perplexity. His son endeavoured to convince him of what he did not believe himself, that her attentions to Oz had been merely the effect of a common and transient liking, which ceased when she saw him no more; but though the probability of the statement was admitted at the time, he had the same story to repeat every day. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy's best comfort was that Willow must be down again in the summer.

Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy treated the matter differently. "So, Spikey," said she one day, "your brother is crossed in love I find. I congratulate him. Next to being married, a boy likes to be crossed in love a little now and then. It is something to think of, and gives him a sort of distinction among his companions. When is your turn to come? You will hardly bear to be long outdone by Oz. Now is your time. Here are officers enough at Sunnydale to disappoint all the young gentlemen in the country. Let Faith be your woman. She is a pleasant fellow, and would jilt you creditably."

"Thank you, Ma'am, but a less agreeable woman would satisfy me. We must not all expect Oz's good fortune."

"True," said Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, "but it is a comfort to think that, whatever of that kind may befall you, you have an affectionate mother who will always make the most of it."

Ms. Faith's society was of material service in dispelling the gloom, which the late perverse occurrences had thrown on many of the Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's family. They saw her often, and to her other recommendations was now added that of general unreserve. The whole of what Spike had already heard, her claims on Miss Buffy Summers, and all that she had suffered from her, was now openly acknowledged and publicly canvassed; and everybody was pleased to think how much they had always disliked Miss Buffy Summers before they had known any thing of the
Miss le Bloddy was the only creature who could suppose there might be any extenuating circumstances in the case, unknown to the society of Southern California; his mild and steady candour always pleaded for allowances, and urged the possibility of mistakes -- but by everybody else Miss Buffy Summers was condemned as the worst of women.

CHAPTER II (25)

AFTER a week spent in professions of love and schemes of felicity, Ms. Anya Nka was called from her amiable Adam by the arrival of Saturday. The pain of separation, however, might be alleviated on her side, by preparations for the reception of her groom, as she had reason to hope that shortly after her next return into Southern California, the day would be fixed that was to make her the happiest of women. She took leave of her relations at the Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's with as much solemnity as before; wished her fair cousins health and happiness again, and promised their mother another letter of thanks.

On the following Monday, Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy had the pleasure of receiving his sister and her husband, who came as usual to spend Christmas at the Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's. Mrs. Jenny Giles was a sensible, lady like woman, greatly superior to her brother, as well by nature as education. The burnt husk of Sunnydale High gentlemen would have had difficulty in believing that a woman who lived by trade, and within view of her own warehouses, could have been so well bred and agreeable. Mr. Rupert Giles, who was several years younger than Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy and Mr. Philips, was an amiable, intelligent, elegant man, and a great favourite with all his nephews at the Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's. Between the two eldest and himself especially, there subsisted a very particular regard. They had frequently been staying with him in town.

The first part of Mr. Rupert Giles' business on his arrival, was to distribute his presents and describe the newest weaponry. When that was done, he had a less active part to play. It became his turn to listen. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy had many grievances to relate, and much to complain of. They had all been very ill-used since he last saw his brother. Two of his boys had been on the point of marriage, and after all there was nothing in it.

"I do not blame Oz," he continued, "for Oz would have got Willow, if he could. But, Spikey! It is very hard to think that he might have been Ms. Anya Nka's husband by this time, had not it been for his own perverseness. She made him an offer in this very room, and he refused her. The consequence of it is, that Dr. Angleman Walsh will have a son married before I have, and that the Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's estate is just as much entailed as ever. The Walshes are very artful people indeed. They are all for what they can get. I am sorry to say it of them, but so it is. It makes me very nervous and poorly, to be thwarted so in my own family, who have never supported any of my demonic ambitions, and to have neighbours who think of themselves before anybody else. However, your coming just at the time is the greatest of comforts, and I am very glad to hear what you tell us, of long swords."

Mr. Rupert Giles, to whom the chief of the news had been given before, in the course of Oz and Spike's correspondence with him, made his brother a slight answer, and, in compassion to his nephews, turned the conversation.
When alone with Spike afterwards, he spoke more on the subject. "It seems likely to have been a desirable match for Oz," said he. "I am sorry it went off. But these things happen so often! A young woman, such as you describe Willow, so easily falls in love with a handsome boy for a few weeks, and when accident separates them, so easily forgets him, that these sort of inconstancies are very frequent."

"An excellent consolation in its way," said Spike, "but it will not do for us. We do not suffer by accident. It does not often happen that the interference of friends will persuade a young woman of independent fortune to think no more of a boy, whom she was violently in love with only a few days before."

"But that expression of "violently in love" is so hackneyed, so doubtful, so indefinite, that it gives me very little idea. It is as often applied to feelings which arise from an half-hour's acquaintance, as to a real, strong attachment. Pray, how violent was Willow's love?"

"I never saw a more promising inclination. She was growing quite inattentive to other people, and wholly engrossed by him. Every time they met, it was more decided and remarkable. At her own sparring match she offended two or three young gentlemen by not asking them to spar, and I spoke to her twice myself without receiving an answer. Could there be finer symptoms? Is not general incivility the very essence of love?"

"Oh, yes! -- of that kind of love which I suppose her to have felt. Poor Oz! I am sorry for him, because, with his disposition, he may not get over it immediately. It had better have happened to you, Spikey; you would have laughed yourself out of it sooner. But do you think he would be prevailed on to go back with us? Change of scene might be of service -- and perhaps a little relief from home, may be as useful as anything."

Spike was exceedingly pleased with the proposal, and felt persuaded of his brother's ready acquiescence.

"I hope," added Mr. Rupert Giles, "that no consideration with regard to the young woman will influence him. We live in so different a part of town, all our connections are so different, and, as you well know, we go out so little, that it is very improbable they should meet at all, unless she really comes to see him."

"And that is quite impossible; for she is now in the custody of her friend, and Miss Buffy Summers would no more suffer her to call on Oz in such a part of Los Angeles -- ! My dear uncle, how could you think of it? Miss Buffy Summers may perhaps have heard of such a place as Riverside Street, but she would hardly think a month's ablution enough to cleanse her from its impurities, were she once to enter it; and depend upon it, Willow never stirs without her."

"So much the better. I hope they will not meet at all. But does not Oz correspond with the brother? He will not be able to help calling."

"He will drop the acquaintance entirely."

But in spite of the certainty in which Spike affected to place the point, as well as the still more interesting one of Rosenberg's being withheld from seeing Oz, he felt a solicitude on the subject which convinced him, on examination, that he did not consider it entirely hopeless. It was possible, and sometimes he thought it probable, that her affection might be re-animated, and the influence of her friends successfully combated by the more natural influence of Oz's attractions.

Mr. le Bloddy accepted his uncle's invitation with pleasure; and the Rosenburgs were no otherwise in his thoughts at the time, than as he hoped that, by Riley's not living in the same house with his sister,
he might occasionally spend a morning with him, without any danger of seeing her.

The Giles staid a week at the Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's; and what with the Philipses, the Walshes, and the officers, there was not a day without its engagement. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy had so carefully provided for the entertainment of his sister and brother, that they did not once sit down to a family dinner. When the engagement was for home, some of the officers always made part of it, of which officers Ms. Faith was sure to be one; and on these occasions, Mr. Rupert Giles, rendered suspicious by Spike's warm commendation of her, narrowly observed them both. Without supposing them, from what he saw, to be very seriously in love, their preference of each other was plain enough to make him a little uneasy; and he resolved to speak to Spike on the subject before he left Southern California, and represent to him the imprudence of encouraging such an attachment.

To Mr. Rupert Giles, Faith had one means of affording pleasure, unconnected with her general powers. About ten or a dozen years ago, before his marriage, he had spent a considerable time in that very part of the San Francisco Bay Area to which she belonged. They had, therefore, many acquaintance in common; and, though Faith had been little there since the death of Summers' mother, five years before, it was yet in her power to give him fresher intelligence of his former friends, than he had been in the way of procuring.

Mr. Rupert Giles had seen the Bronze, and known the late Summers by character perfectly well. Here, consequently, was an inexhaustible subject of discourse. In comparing his recollection of the Bronze with the minute description which Faith could give, and in bestowing his tribute of praise on the character of its late possessor, he was delighting both her and himself. On being made acquainted with the present Miss Buffy Summers' treatment of her, he tried to remember something of that gentlewoman's reputed disposition, when quite a lad, which might agree with it, and was confident at last that he recollected having heard Miss. Summers formerly spoken of as a very proud, ill-natured girl.

CHAPTER III (26)

MR. GILES' caution to Spike was punctually and kindly given on the first favourable opportunity of speaking to him alone; after honestly telling him what he thought, he thus went on:

"You are too sensible a boy, Spikey, to fall in love merely because you are warned against it; and, therefore, I am not afraid of speaking openly. Seriously, I would have you be on your guard. Do not involve yourself, or endeavour to involve her in an affection which the want of fortune would make so very imprudent. I have nothing to say against her; she is a most interesting young woman; and if she had the fortune she ought to have, I should think you could not do better. But as it is -- you must not let your fancy run away with you. You have sense, and we all expect you to use it. Do not be a fool for love. Your mother would depend on your resolution and good conduct, I am sure. You must not disappoint your mother."

"My dear uncle, this is being serious indeed."

"Yes, and I hope to engage you to be serious likewise."

"Well, then, you need not be under any alarm. I will take care of myself, and of Ms. Faith too. She
shall not be in love with me, if I can prevent it."

"Spike, you are not serious now."

"I beg your pardon. I will try again. At present I am not in love with Ms. Faith; no, I certainly am not. But she is, beyond all comparison, the most agreeable woman I ever saw -- and if she becomes really attached to me -- I believe it will be better that she should not. I see the imprudence of it. -- Oh! that abominable Miss Buffy Summers! -- My mother's opinion of me does me the greatest honor; and I should be miserable to forfeit it. My mother, however, is partial to Ms. Faith. In short, my dear uncle, I should be very sorry to be the means of making any of you unhappy; but since we see every day that where there is affection, young people are seldom withheld by immediate want of fortune from entering into engagements with each other, how can I promise to be wiser than so many of my fellow creatures if I am tempted, or how am I even to know that it would be wisdom to resist? All that I can promise you, therefore, is not to be in a hurry. I will not be in a hurry to believe myself her first object. When I am in company with her, I will not be wishing. In short, I will do my best."

"Perhaps it will be as well, if you discourage her coming here so very often. At least, you should not remind your father of inviting her."

"As I did the other day," said Spike, with a conscious smile; "very true, it will be wise in me to refrain from that. But do not imagine that she is always here so often. It is on your account that she has been so frequently invited the week. You know my father's ideas as to the necessity of constant company for his friends. But really, and upon my honour, I will try to do what I think to be wisest; and now, I hope you are satisfied."

His uncle assured him that he was; and Spike having thanked him for the kindness of his hints, they parted; a wonderful instance of advice being given on such a point without being resented.

Ms. Anya Nka returned into Southern California soon after it had been quit by the Giles and Oz; but as she took up her abode with the Walshes, her arrival was no great inconvenience to Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy. Her marriage was now fast approaching, and he was at length so far resigned as to think it inevitable, and even repeatedly to say in an ill-natured tone that he " wished they might be happy." Thursday was to be the wedding day, and on Wednesday Mr. Walsh paid his farewell visit; and when he rose to take leave, Spike, ashamed of his father's ungracious and reluctant good wishes, and sincerely affected himself, accompanied him out of the room. As they went down stairs together, Adam said,

"I shall depend on hearing from you very often, Spike."

"That you certainly shall."

"And I have another favour to ask. Will you come and see me?"

"We shall often meet, I hope, in Southern California."

"I am not likely to leave Sacramento for some time. Promise me, therefore, to come to Purgatory."

Spike could not refuse, though he foresaw little pleasure in the visit.

"My mother and Forest are to come to me in March," added Adam, "and I hope you will consent to be of the party. Indeed, Spike, you will be as welcome to me as either of them."

The wedding took place; the bride and bridegroom set off for Sacramento from the church door, and every body had as much to say or to hear on the subject as usual. Spike soon heard from his friend; and their correspondence was as regular and frequent as it had ever been; that it should be equally
unreserved was impossible. Spike could never address him without feeling that all the comfort of intimacy was over, and, though determined not to slacken as a correspondent, it was for the sake of what had been, rather than what was. Adam's first letters were received with a good deal of eagerness; there could not but be curiosity to know how he would speak of his new home, how he would like Lord Snyder, and how happy he would dare pronounce himself to be; though, when the letters were read, Spike felt that Adam expressed himself on every point exactly as he might have foreseen. He wrote cheerfully, seemed surrounded with comforts, and mentioned nothing which he could not praise. The house, furniture, neighbourhood, and roads, were all to his taste, and Lord Snyder's behaviour was most friendly and obliging. It was Ms. Anya Nka's picture of Purgatory and Hellmouth rationally softened; and Spike perceived that he must wait for his own visit there, to know the rest.

Oz had already written a few lines to his brother to announce their safe arrival in Los Angeles; and when he wrote again, Spike hoped it would be in his power to say something of the Rosenburgs.

His impatience for the second letter was as well rewarded as impatience generally is. Oz had been a week in town, without either seeing or hearing from Riley. He accounted for it, however, by supposing that his last letter to his friend from the Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's had by some accident been lost.

"My uncle," he continued, "is going to-morrow into that part of the town, and I shall take the opportunity of calling in Grosvenor-street."

He wrote again when the visit was paid, and he had seen Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg. "I did not think Riley in spirits," were his words, "but he was very glad to see me, and reproached me for giving him no notice of my coming to Los Angeles. I was right, therefore; my last letter had never reached him. I enquired after their sister, of course. She was well, but so much engaged with Miss Buffy Summers, that they scarcely ever saw her. I found that Mr. Summers was expected to dinner. I wish I could see him. My visit was not long, as Riley and Mr. Wesley Lockley were going out. I dare say I shall soon see them here."

Spike shook his head over the letter. It convinced him that accident only could discover to Willow his brother's being in town.

Four weeks passed away, and Oz saw nothing of her. He endeavoured to persuade himself that he did not regret it; but he could no longer be blind to Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg's inattention. After waiting at home every morning for a fortnight, and inventing every evening a fresh excuse for him, the visitor did at last appear; but the shortness of his stay, and yet more, the alteration of his manner, would allow Oz to deceive himself no longer. The letter which he wrote on the occasion to his brother, will prove what he felt.

"My dearest Spikey will, I am sure, be incapable of triumphing in his better judgment, at my expence, when I confess myself to have been entirely deceived in Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg's regard for me. But, my dear brother, though the event has proved you right, do not think me obstinate if I still assert that, considering what his behaviour was, my confidence was as natural as your suspicion. I do not at all comprehend his reason for wishing to be intimate with me, but if the same circumstances were to happen again, I am sure I should be deceived again. Riley did not return my visit till yesterday; and not a note, not a line, did I receive in the mean time. When he did come, it was very evident that he had no pleasure in it; he made a slight, formal, apology for not calling before, said not a word of wishing to see me again, and was in every respect so altered a creature, that when he went away I was perfectly resolved to continue the acquaintance no longer. I pity, though I cannot help blaming him. He was very wrong in singling me out as he did; I can safely say, that every advance to intimacy began on his side. But I pity him, because he must feel that he has
been acting wrong, and because I am very sure that anxiety for his sister is the cause of it, I need not explain myself farther; and though we know the anxiety to be quite needless, yet if he feels it, it will easily account for his behaviour to me; and so deservedly dear as she is to her brother, whatever anxiety he may feel on her behalf is natural and amiable. I cannot but wonder, however, at his having any such fears now, because, if she had at all cared about me, we must have met long, long ago. She knows of my being in town, I am certain, from something he said himself; and yet it should seem by his manner of talking, as if he wanted to persuade himself that she is really partial to Mr. Summers. I cannot understand it. If I were not afraid of judging harshly, I should be almost tempted to say that there is a strong appearance of duplicity in all this. But I will endeavour to banish every painful thought, and think only of what will make me happy: your affection, and the invariable kindness of my dear aunt and uncle. Let me hear from you very soon. Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg said something of her never returning to the burnt husk of Sunnydale High again, of giving up the house, but not with any certainty. We had better not mention it. I am extremely glad that you have such pleasant accounts from our friends at Purgatory. Pray go to see them, with Dame Walsh and Forest. I am sure you will be very comfortable there.

Your's, &c.''

This letter gave Spike some pain; but his spirits returned as he considered that Oz would no longer be duped, by the brother at least. All expectation from the sister was now absolutely over. He would not even wish for any renewal of her attentions. Her character sunk on every review of it; and as a punishment for her, as well as a possible advantage to Oz, he seriously hoped she might really soon marry Miss Buffy Summers' brother, as, by Faith's account, he would make her abundantly regret what she had thrown away.

Mr. Rupert Giles about the time reminded Spike of his promise concerning that gentlewoman, and required information; and Spike had such to send as might rather give contentment to his uncle than to himself. Her apparent partiality had subsided, her attentions were over, she was the admirer of some one else. Spike was watchful enough to see it all, but he could see it and write of it without material pain. His heart had been but slightly touched, and his vanity was satisfied with believing that he would have been her only choice, had fortune permitted it. The sudden acquisition of ten thousand pounds was the most remarkable charm of the young lord to whom she was now rendering herself agreeable; but Spike, less clear-sighted perhaps in her case than in Adam's, did not quarrel with her for her wish of independence. Nothing, on the contrary, could be more natural; and while able to suppose that it cost her a few struggles to relinquish him, he was ready to allow it a wise and desirable measure for both, and could very sincerely wish her happy.

All this was acknowledged to Mr. Rupert Giles; and after relating the circumstances, he thus went on: -- "I am now convinced, my dear uncle, that I have never been much in love; for had I really experienced that pure and elevating passion, I should at present detest her very name, and wish her all manner of evil. But my feelings are not only cordial towards him; they are even impartial towards Mr. Gunn. I cannot find out that I hate him at all, or that I am in the least unwilling to think him a very good sort of boy. There can be no love in all this. My watchfulness has been effectual; and though I should certainly be a more interesting object to all my acquaintance, were I distractedly in love with her, I cannot say that I regret my comparative insignificance. Importance may sometimes be purchased too dearly. Doyle and Angelus take her defection much more to heart than I do. They are young in the ways of the world, and not yet open to the mortifying conviction that handsome young women must have something to live on, as well as the plain."
CHAPTER IV (27)

WITH no greater events than these in the Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's family, and otherwise diversified by little beyond the walks to Sunnydale, sometimes dirty and sometimes cold, did January and February pass away. March was to take Spike to Purgatory. He had not at first thought very seriously of going thither; but Adam, he soon found, was depending on the plan, and he gradually learned to consider it himself with greater pleasure as well as greater certainty. Absence had increased his desire of seeing Adam again, and weakened his disgust of Ms. Anya Nka. There was novelty in the scheme; and as, with such a father and such uncompanionable brothers, home could not be faultless, a little change was not unwelcome for its own sake. The journey would moreover give him a peep at Oz; and, in short, as the time drew near, he would have been very sorry for any delay. Every thing, however, went on smoothly, and was finally settled according to Adam's first sketch. He was to accompany Dame Walsh and her second son. The improvement of spending a night in Los Angeles was added in time, and the plan became perfect as plan could be.

The only pain was in leaving his mother, who would certainly miss him, and who, when it came to the point, so little liked his going that she told him to write to her, and almost promised to answer his letter.

The farewell between himself and Ms. Faith was perfectly friendly; on her side even more. Her present pursuit could not make her forget that Spike had been the first to excite and to deserve her attention, the first to listen and to pity, the first to be admired; and in her manner of bidding him adieu, wishing him every enjoyment, reminding him of what he was to expect in Lord Snyder de Principal, and trusting their opinion of him -- their opinion of every body -- would always coincide, there was a solicitude, an interest which he felt must ever attach him to her with a most sincere regard; and he parted from her convinced that, whether married or single, she must always be his model of the amiable and pleasing.

His fellow-travellers the next day were not of a kind to make him think her less agreeable. Dame Walsh and her son Forest, a good humoured boy, but as empty-headed as herself, had nothing to say that could be worth hearing, as he rambled on about Clark Kenting through life, and concealing his activities, and thanking some god or another that he was pretty. All of which was known to Spike and who listened to these comments with about as much delight as the rattle of the chaise. Spike loved absurdities, but he had known Dame Walsh's too long. She could tell him nothing new of the wonders of her presentation and knighthood; and her civilities were worn out like her information.

It was a journey of only twenty-four miles, and they began it so early as to be in Riverside-street by noon. As they drove to Mrs. Jenny Giles' door, Oz was at a drawing-room window watching their arrival; when they entered the passage he was there to welcome them, and Spike, looking earnestly in his face, was pleased to see it healthful and lovely as ever. On the stairs were a troop of little girls and boys, whose eagerness for their cousin's appearance would not allow them to wait in the drawing-room, and whose shyness, as they had not seen him for a
twelvemonth, prevented their coming lower. All was joy and kindness. The day passed most pleasantly away; the morning in bustle and shopping, and the evening at one of the theatres.

Spike then contrived to sit by his uncle. Their first subject was his brother; and he was more grieved than astonished to hear, in reply to his minute enquiries, that though Oz always struggled to support his spirits, there were periods of dejection. It was reasonable, however, to hope that they would not continue long. Mr. Rupert Giles gave him the particulars also of Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg's visit in Riverside-street, and repeated conversations occurring at different times between Oz and himself, which proved that the former had, from his heart, given up the acquaintance.

Mr. Rupert Giles then rallied his nephew on Faith's desertion, and complimented him on bearing it so well.

"But, my dear Spike," he added, "what sort of boy is Mr. Gunn? I should be sorry to think our friend mercenary."

"Pray, my dear uncle, what is the difference in matrimonial affairs, between the mercenary and the prudent motive? Where does discretion end, and avarice begin? Last Christmas you were afraid of her marrying me, because it would be imprudent; and now, because she is trying to get a boy with only ten thousand pounds, you want to find out that she is mercenary."

"If you will only tell me what sort of boy Mr. Gunn is, I shall know what to think."

"He is a very good kind of boy, I believe. I know no harm of him."

"But she paid him not the smallest attention, till his grandmother's death made him master of the fortune."

"No -- why should she? If it was not allowable for her to gain my affections, because I had no money, what occasion could there be for making love to a boy whom she did not care about, and who was equally poor?"

"But there seems indelicacy in directing her attentions towards him, so soon after the event."

"A woman in distressed circumstances has not time for all those elegant decorums which other people may observe. If he does not object to it, why should we?"

"His not objecting, does not justify him. It only shews his being deficient in something himself -- sense or feeling."

"Well," cried Spike, "have it as you choose. She shall be mercenary, and he shall be foolish."

"No, Spikey, that is what I do not choose. I should be sorry, you know, to think ill of a young woman who has lived so long in the San Francisco Bay Area."

"Oh! if that is all, I have a very poor opinion of young women who live in the San Francisco Bay Area; and their intimate friends who live in Southern California are not much better. I am sick of them all. Thank Heaven! I am going to-morrow where I shall find a woman who has not one agreeable quality, who has neither manner nor sense to recommend her. Stupid women are the only ones worth knowing, after all."

"Take care, Spikey; that speech savours strongly of disappointment."

Before they were separated by the conclusion of the play, he had the unexpected happiness of an invitation to accompany his aunt and uncle in a tour of pleasure which they proposed taking in the
"We have not quite determined how far it shall carry us," said Mr. Rupert Giles, "but perhaps to Tahoe."

No scheme could have been more agreeable to Spike, and his acceptance of the invitation was most ready and grateful. "My dear, dear uncle," he rapturously cried, "what delight! what felicity! You give me fresh life and vigour. Adieu to disappointment and spleen. What are women to rocks and mountains? Oh! what hours of transport we shall spend! And when we do return, it shall not be like other travellers, without being able to give one accurate idea of any thing. We will know where we have gone -- we will recollect what we have seen. Lakes, mountains, and rivers shall not be jumbled together in our imaginations; nor, when we attempt to describe any particular scene, will we begin quarrelling about its relative situation. Let our first effusions be less insupportable than those of the generality of travellers."

CHAPTER V (28)

EVERY object in the next day's journey was new and interesting to Spike; and his spirits were in a state for enjoyment; for he had seen his brother looking so well as to banish all fear for his health, and the prospect of his northern tour was a constant source of delight.

When they left the high-road for the lane to Purgatory, every eye was in search of the Parsonage, and every turning expected to bring it in view. The palings of Hellmouth Park was their boundary on one side. Spike smiled at the recollection of all that he had heard of its inhabitants.

At length the Parsonage was discernable. The garden sloping to the road, the house standing in it, the green pales and the laurel hedge, everything declared that they were arriving. Ms. Anya Nka and Adam appeared at the door, and the carriage stopped at a small gate, which led by a short gravel walk to the house, amidst the nods and smiles of the whole party. In a moment they were all out of the chaise, rejoicing at the sight of each other. Mr. Adam welcomed his friend with the liveliest pleasure, and Spike was more and more satisfied with coming, when he found himself so affectionately received. He saw instantly that his cousin's manners were not altered by her marriage; her odd civility was just what it had been, and she detained him some minutes at the gate to hear and satisfy her enquiries after all his family. They were then, with no other delay than her pointing out the neatness of the entrance, taken into the house; and as soon as they were in the parlour, she welcomed them a second time with ostentatious formality to her humble abode, and punctually repeated all her husband's offers of refreshment.

Spike was prepared to see her in her glory; and he could not help fancying that in displaying the good proportion of the room, its aspect and its furniture, she addressed herself particularly to him, as if wishing to make him feel what he had lost in refusing her. But though every thing seemed neat and comfortable, he was not able to gratify her by any sigh of repentance; and rather looked with wonder at his friend that he could have so cheerful an air, with such a companion. When Ms. Anya Nka said anything of which her husband might reasonably be ashamed, which certainly was not unseldom, he involuntarily turned his eye on Adam. Once or twice he could discern a faint blush; but in general Adam wisely did not hear. After sitting long enough to admire every article of furniture in the room, from the sideboard to the fender, to give an account of their journey, and of all that had happened in Los Angeles, Ms. Anya Nka invited them to take a stroll in the garden, which was large and well laid out, and to the cultivation of which she attended herself. To work in her garden was one of her most respectable pleasures; and Spike admired the command of countenance with which Adam
talked of the healthfulness of the exercise, and owned he encouraged it as much as possible. Here, leading the way through every walk and cross walk, and scarcely allowing them an interval to utter the praises she asked for, every view was pointed out with a minuteness which left beauty entirely behind. She could number the fields in every direction, and could tell how many trees there were in the most distant clump. But of all the views which her garden, or which the country, or the kingdom could boast, none were to be compared with the prospect of Hellmouth, afforded by an opening in the trees that bordered the park nearly opposite the front of her house. It was a handsome modern building, well situated on rising ground.

From her garden, Ms. Anya Nka would have led them round her two meadows, but the gentlemen, not having shoes to encounter the remains of a white frost, turned back; and while Dame Walsh accompanied her, Adam took his brother and friend over the house, extremely well pleased, probably, to have the opportunity of shewing it without his wife's help. It was rather small, but well built and convenient; and everything was fitted up and arranged with a neatness and consistency of which Spike gave Adam all the credit. When Ms. Anya Nka could be forgotten, there was really a great air of comfort throughout, and by Adam's evident enjoyment of it, Spike supposed she must be often forgotten. He had already learnt that Lord Snyder was still in the country. It was spoken of again while they were at dinner, when Ms. Anya Nka joining in, observed, "Yes, Mr. Spike, you will have the honour of seeing Lord Snyder de Principal on the ensuing Sunday at church, and I need not say you will be delighted with him. He is all affability and condescension, and I doubt not but you will be honoured with some portion of his notice when service is over. I have scarcely any hesitation in saying that he will include you and my brother Forest in every invitation with which he honours us during your stay here. His behaviour to my dear Adam is charming. We dine at Hellmouth twice every week, and are never allowed to walk home. His lordship's carriage is regularly ordered for us. I should say, one of his lordship's carriages, for he has several."

"Lord Snyder is a very respectable, sensible man indeed," added Adam, "and a most attentive neighbour."

"Very true, my dear, that is exactly what I say. He is the sort of man whom one cannot regard with too much deference."

The evening was spent chiefly in talking over Southern California news, and telling again what had been already written; and when it closed, Spike, in the solitude of his chamber, had to meditate upon Adam's degree of contentment, to understand his address in guiding, and composure in bearing with his wife, and to acknowledge that it was all done very well. He had also to anticipate how his visit would pass, the quiet tenor of their usual employments, the vexatious interruptions of Ms. Anya Nka, and the gaieties of their intercourse with Hellmouth. A lively imagination soon settled it all. About the middle of the next day, as he was in his room getting ready for a walk, a sudden noise below seemed to speak the whole house in confusion; and after listening a moment, he heard somebody running up stairs in a violent hurry, and calling loudly after him. He opened the door, and met Forest in the landing place, who, breathless with agitation, cried out, "Oh, my dear Spike! pray make haste and come into the dining-room, for there is such a sight to be seen! I will not tell you what it is. Make haste, and come down the moment."

Spike asked questions in vain; Forest would tell his nothing more, and down they ran into the dining-room, which fronted the lane, in quest of the wonder; it was two gentlemen stopping in a low phaeton at the garden gate.
"And is the all?" cried Spike. "I expected at least that the pigs were got into the garden, and here is nothing but Lord Snyder and his son!"

"La! my dear," said Forest quite shocked at the mistake, "it is not Lord Snyder. The old man is Mr. Jenkinson, who lives with them. The other is Mr. De Principal. Only look at him. He is quite a little creature. Who would have thought he could be so thin and small!"

"He is abominably rude to keep Adam out of doors in all the wind. Why does he not come in?"

"Oh! Adam says, he hardly ever does. It is the greatest of favours when Mr. De Principal comes in."

"I like his appearance," said Spike, struck with other ideas. "He looks sickly and cross. -- Yes, he will do for her very well. He will make her a very proper husband."

Ms. Anya Nka and Adam were both standing at the gate in conversation with the gentlemen; and Dame Walsh, to Spike's high diversion, was stationed in the doorway, in earnest contemplation of the greatness before her, and constantly bowing whenever Mr. De Principal looked that way.

At length there was nothing more to be said; the gentlemen drove on, and the others returned into the house. Ms. Anya Nka no sooner saw the two boys than she began to congratulate them on their good fortune, which Adam explained by letting them know that the whole party was asked to dine at Hellmouth the next day.

CHAPTER VI (29)

Ms. Anya Nka's triumph in consequence of the invitation was complete. The power of displaying the grandeur of her patron to her wondering visitors, and of letting them see his civility towards herself and her husband, was exactly what she had wished for; and that an opportunity of doing it should be given so soon was such an instance of Lord Snyder's condescension as she knew not how to admire enough.

"I confess," said she, "that I should not have been at all surprised by his Lordship's asking us on Sunday to drink tea and spend the evening at Hellmouth. I rather expected, from my knowledge of his affability, that it would happen. But who could have foreseen such an attention as this? Who could have imagined that we should receive an invitation to dine there (an invitation moreover including the whole party) so immediately after your arrival!"

"I am the less surprised at what has happened," replied Dame Walsh, "from that knowledge of what the manners of the great really are, which my situation in life has allowed me to acquire. About the halls of D.C., such instances of elegant breeding are not uncommon."

Scarcely any thing was talked of the whole day, or next morning, but their visit to Hellmouth. Ms. Anya Nka was carefully instructing them in what they were to expect, that the sight of such rooms, so many servants, and so splendid a dinner might not wholly overpower them.

When the gentlemen were separating for the toilette, she said to Spike,

"Do not make yourself uneasy, my dear cousin, about your apparel. Lord Snyder is far from requiring that elegance of dress in us, which becomes himself and son. I would advise you merely to
put on whatever of your clothes is superior to the rest, there is no occasion for any thing more. Lord Snyder will not think the worse of you for being simply dressed. He likes to have the distinction of rank preserved."

While they were dressing, she came two or three times to their different doors, to recommend their being quick, as Lord Snyder very much objected to be kept waiting for his dinner. -- Such formidable accounts of his lordship, and his manner of living, quite frightened Forest Walsh, who had been little used to company, and he looked forward to his introduction at Hellmouth with as much apprehension, as his mother had done to her presentation to the appropriations board in D.C.

As the weather was fine, they had a pleasant walk of about half a mile across the park. -- Every park has its beauty and its prospects; and Spike saw much to be pleased with, though he could not be in such raptures as Ms. Anya Nka expected the scene to inspire, and was but slightly affected by her enumeration of the windows in front of the house, and her relation of what the glazing altogether had originally cost Lord De Principal.

When they ascended the steps to the hall, Forest's alarm was every moment increasing, and even Dame Walsh did not look perfectly calm. -- Spike's courage did not fail him. He had heard nothing of Lord Snyder that spoke him awful from any extraordinary talents or miraculous virtue, and the mere stateliness of money and rank he thought he could witness without trepidation.

From the entrance hall, of which Ms. Anya Nka pointed out, with a rapturous air, the fine proportion and finished ornaments, they followed the servants through an ante-chamber, to the room where Lord Snyder, his son, and Mr. Jenkinson were sitting. -- His lordship, with great condescension, arose to receive them; and as Mr. Adam Nka had settled it with his wife that the office of introduction should be his, it was performed in a proper manner, without any of those apologies and thanks which she would have thought necessary.

In spite of having been at the capital, Dame Walsh was so completely awed by the grandeur surrounding her, that she had but just courage enough to make a very low bow, and take her seat without saying a word; and her son, frightened almost out of his senses, sat on the edge of his chair, not knowing which way to look. Spike found himself quite equal to the scene, and could observe the three gentlemen before him composedly. -- Lord Snyder was a small man, and looked somewhat like a Ferengi, with strongly-marked features, which might once have been handsome. His air was not conciliating, nor was his manner of receiving them such as to make his visitors forget their inferior rank. He was not rendered formidable by silence; but whatever he said was spoken in so authoritative a tone as marked his self-importance, and brought Ms. Faith immediately to Spike's mind; and from the observation of the day altogether, he believed Lord Snyder to be exactly what she had represented.

When, after examining the father, in whose countenance and deportment he soon found some resemblance of Miss Buffy Summers, he turned his eyes on the son, he could almost have joined in Forest's astonishment at his being so thin, and gangly. There was neither in figure nor face any likeness between the gentlemen. Mr. De Principal was pale and sickly; his features, though not plain, were insignificant; and he spoke very little, except in a low voice to Mr. Jenkins, in whose appearance there was nothing remarkable, and who was entirely engaged in listening to what he said, and placing a screen in the proper direction before his eyes.

After sitting a few minutes, they were all sent to one of the windows to admire the view, Ms. Anya Nka attending them to point out its beauties, and Lord Snyder kindly informing them that it was
much better worth looking at in the summer.

The dinner was exceedingly handsome, and there were all the servants, and all the articles of plate which Ms. Anya Nka had promised; and, as she had likewise foretold, she took her seat at the bottom of the table, by his lordship's desire, and looked as if she felt that life could furnish nothing greater. -- She carved, and ate, and praised with delighted alacrity; and every dish was commended, first by her, and then by Dame Walsh, who was now enough recovered to echo whatever her daughter in law said, in a manner which Spike wondered Lord Snyder could bear. But Lord Snyder seemed gratified by their excessive admiration, and gave most gracious smiles, especially when any dish on the table proved a novelty to them. The party did not supply much conversation. Spike was ready to speak whenever there was an opening, but he was seated between Adam and Mr. De Principal -- the former of whom was engaged in listening to Lord Snyder, and the latter said not a word to him all dinner time. Mr. Jenkinson was chiefly employed in watching how little Mr. De Principal ate, pressing him to try some other dish, and fearing he were indisposed. Forest thought speaking out of the question, and the ladies did nothing but eat and admire.

When the gentlemen returned to the drawing room, there was little to be done but to hear Lord Snyder talk, which he did without any intermission till coffee came in, delivering his opinion on every subject in so decisive a manner as proved that he was not used to have his judgment controverted. He enquired into Adam's domestic concerns familiarly and minutely, and gave him a great deal of advice as to the management of them all; told him how every thing ought to be regulated in so small a family as his, and instructed him as to the care of his cows and his poultry. Spike found that nothing was beneath the great gentleman's attention, which could furnish him with an occasion of dictating to others. In the intervals of his discourse with Ms. Anya Nka, he addressed a variety of questions to Forest and Spike, but especially to the latter, of whose connections he knew the least, and who, he observed to Ms. Anya Nka, was a very genteel, handsome kind of boy. He felt that he would have been most suited to teach or shepherd children were it not that he could not stand them with their vacant eyes. And how he had walked by a guidance counselor's office one time. There were bunch of students were sitting there... waiting to be shepherded. Lord Snyder then reflected that they smelled like dead flowers. Like decay. Then it had hit him that the hope of our nation's future is a bunch of mulch. And when Lord Snyder was done with digression, he asked Spike at different times, how many brothers he had, whether they were older or younger than himself, whether any of them were likely to be married, whether they were handsome, where they had been educated, what carriage his mother kept, and what was his father's name? -- Spike felt all the impertinence of his questions, but answered them very composedly. -- Lord Snyder then observed,

"Your mother's estate is entailed on Ms. Anya Nka, I think. For your sake," turning to Adam, "I am glad of it; but otherwise I see no occasion for entailing estates from the male line. -- It was not thought necessary in Dame de Principal's family. -- Do you play and sing, Mr. le Bloddy?"

"A little."

"Oh! then -- some time or other we shall be happy to hear you. Our instrument is a capital one, probably superior to -- You shall try it some day. -- Do your brothers play and sing?"

"One of them does."

"Why did not you all learn? -- You ought all to have learned. The Webbs all play, and their mother has not so good an income as your's. -- Do you draw?"

"No, not at all."

"What, none of you?"
"Not one."

"That is very strange. But I suppose you had no opportunity. Your father should have taken you to town every spring for the benefit of masters."

"My father would have had no objection, but my mother hates Los Angeles."

"Has your governor left you?"

"We never had any governor."

"No governor! How was that possible? Five sons brought up at home without a governor! -- I never heard of such a thing. Your father must have been quite a slave to your education."

Spike could hardly help smiling, as he assured him that had not been the case.

"Then, who taught you? who attended to you? Without a governor you must have been neglected."

"Compared with some families, I believe we were; but such of us as wished to learn, never wanted the means. We were always encouraged to read, and had all the masters that were necessary. Those who chose to be idle, nephews certainly might."

"Aye, no doubt; but that is what a governor will prevent, and if I had known your father, I should have advised him most strenuously to engage one. I always say that nothing is to be done in education without steady and regular instruction, and nobody but a governor can give it. It is wonderful how many families I have been the means of supplying in that way. Why I am thinking of putting on a career fair this next season."

"Lord Snyder! What excellent idea." Said Ms. Anya Nka, "Great a career fair, sir! Really! In fact, I'm so inspired by your leadership, I'm thinking principal school. I wanna walk in your shoes. Not your actual shoes, of course, because you're a tiny person. Not tiny in the small sense, of course. Okay, I'm done now."

Lord Snyder nodded at the compliment and turned to Mr. Spike. "I am always glad to get a young person well placed out. Four nephews of Mr. Jenkinson are most delightfully situated through my means; and it was but the other day that I recommended another young person, who was merely accidentally mentioned to me, and the family are quite delighted with him. Mr. Anya Nka, did I tell you of Lord Metcalfe's calling yesterday to thank me? He finds Mr. Pope a treasure. "Lord Snyder," said he, "you have given me a treasure." Are any of your younger brothers out, Mr. le Bloddy?"

"Yes, Sir, all."

"All! -- What, all five out at once? Very odd! -- And you only the second. -- The younger ones out before the elder are married! -- Your younger brothers must be very young?"

"Yes, my youngest is not sixteen. Perhaps He is full young to be much in company. But really, Sir, I think it would be very hard upon younger brothers, that they should not have their share of society and amusement because the elder may not have the means or inclination to marry early. -- The last born has as good a right to the pleasures of youth, as the first. And to be kept back on such a motive! -- I think it would not be very likely to promote sisterly affection or delicacy of mind."

"Upon my word," said his lordship, "you give your opinion very decidedly for so young a person. -- Pray, what is your age?"

"With three younger brothers grown up," replied Spike smiling, "your Lordship can hardly expect
Lord Snyder seemed quite astonished at not receiving a direct answer; and Spike suspected himself to be the first creature who had ever dared to trifle with so much dignified impertinence!

"You cannot be more than twenty, I am sure, -- therefore you need not conceal your age."

"I am not one and twenty."

When the ladies had joined them, and tea was over, the card tables were placed. Lord Snyder, Dame Walsh, and Mrs. and Mr. Anya Nka sat down to darts; and as Mr. De Principal chose to play at mumblypeg, the two boys had the honour of assisting Mr. Jenkinson to make up his party. Their table was superlatively stupid. Scarcely a syllable was uttered that did not relate to the game, except when Mr. Jenkinson expressed his fears of Mr. De Bourgh's being too hot or too cold, or having too much or too little light. A great deal more passed at the other table, Lord Snyder was generally speaking -- stating the mistakes of the three others, or relating some anecdote of himself. Ms. Anya Nka was employed in agreeing to every thing his Lordship said, thanking him for every fish she won, and apologising if she thought she won too many. Dame Walsh did not say much. She was storing her memory with anecdotes and noble names.

When Lord Snyder and his son had played as long as they chose, the tables were broke up, the carriage was offered to Mr. Anya Nka, gratefully accepted, and immediately ordered. The party then gathered round the fire to hear Lord Snyder determine what weather they were to have on the morrow. From these instructions they were summoned by the arrival of the coach, and with many speeches of thankfulness on Ms. Anya Nka's side, and as many bows on Dame Walsh's, they departed. As soon as they had driven from the door, Spike was called on by his cousin to give his opinion of all that he had seen at Hellmouth, which, for Adam's sake, he made more favourable than it really was. But his commendation, though costing him some trouble, could by no means satisfy Ms. Anya Nka, and she was very soon obliged to take his lordship's praise into her own hands.
CHAPTER VII (30)

Dame Walsh staid only a week at Purgatory; but her visit was long enough to convince her of her son's being most comfortably settled, and of his possessing such a wife and such a neighbour as were not often met with. While Dame Walsh was with them, Ms. Anya Nka devoted her mornings to driving her out in her gig and shewing her the country; but when she went away, the whole family returned to their usual employments, and Spike was thankful to find that they did not see more of his cousin by the alteration, for the chief of the time between breakfast and dinner was now passed by her either at work in the garden, or in reading and writing, and looking out of window in her own book room, which fronted the road. The room in which the gentlemen sat was backwards. Spike at first had rather wondered that Adam should not prefer the dining parlour for common use; it was a better sized room, and had a pleasanter aspect; but he soon saw that his friend had an excellent reason for what he did, for Ms. Anya Nka would undoubtedly have been much less in her own apartment, had they sat in one equally lively; and he gave Adam credit for the arrangement.

From the drawing room they could distinguish nothing in the lane, and were indebted to Ms. Anya Nka for the knowledge of what carriages went along, and how often especially Mr. De Bourgh drove by in his phaeton, which she never failed coming to inform them of, though it happened almost every day. He not unfrequently stopped at the Parsonage, and had a few minutes' conversation with Adam, but was scarcely ever prevailed on to get out.

Very few days passed in which Ms. Anya Nka did not walk to Hellmouth, and not many in which her husband did not think it necessary to go likewise; and till Spike recollected that there might be other family livings to be disposed of, he could not understand the sacrifice of so many hours. Now and then, they were honoured with a call from his lordship, and nothing escaped his observation that was passing in the room during these visits. He examined into their employments, looked at their work, and advised them to do it differently; found fault with the arrangement of the furniture, or detected the housemaid in negligence; and if he accepted any refreshment, seemed to do it only for the sake of finding out that Mr. Adam Nka's joints of meat were too large for his family.

Spike soon perceived that though the great lord was not in the commission of the peace for the county, he was a most active magistrate in his own parish, the minutest concerns of which were carried to him by Ms. Anya Nka; and whenever any of the cottagers were disposed to be quarrelsome, discontented or too poor, he sallied forth into the village to settle their differences, silence their complaints, and scold them into harmony and plenty.

The entertainment of dining at Hellmouth was repeated about twice a week; and, allowing for the loss of Dame Walsh, and there being only one table in the evening, every such entertainment was the counterpart of the first. Their other engagements were few; as the style of living of the neighbourhood in general was beyond the Anya Nka's' reach. This, however, was no evil to Spike, and upon the whole he spent his time comfortably enough; there were half hours of pleasant
conversation with Adam, and the weather was so fine for the time of year, that he had often great
enjoyment out of doors. His favourite walk, and where he frequently went while the others were
calling on Lord Snyder, was along the open grove which edged that side of the park, where there
was a nice sheltered path, which no one seemed to value but himself, and where he felt beyond the
reach of Lord Snyder's curiosity.

In the quiet way, the first fortnight of his visit soon passed away. Easter was approaching, and the
week preceding it was to bring an addition to the family at Hellmouth, which in so small a circle
must be important. Spike had heard, soon after his arrival, that Miss Buffy Summers was expected
there in the course of a few weeks, and though there were not many of his acquaintance whom he
did not prefer, her coming would furnish one comparatively new to look at in their Hellmouth
parties, and he might be amused in seeing how hopeless Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg's designs on her
were, by her behaviour to her cousin, for whom she was evidently destined by Lord Snyder; who
talked of her coming with the greatest satisfaction, spoke of her in terms of the highest admiration,
and seemed almost angry to find that she had already been frequently seen by Mr. Walsh and
himself.

Her arrival was soon known at the Parsonage, for Ms. Anya Nka was walking the whole morning
within view of the lodges opening into Purgatory Lane, in order to have the earliest assurance of it;
and after making her bow as the carriage turned into the park, hurried home with the great
intelligence. On the following morning she hastened to Hellmouth to pay her respects. There were
two nephews of Lord Snyder to require them, for Miss Buffy Summers had brought with her a Col
Amy the rat, the younger daughter of her uncle, Lord ----; and to the great surprise of all the party,
when Ms. Anya Nka returned, the ladies accompanied her. Adam had seen them, from his wife's
room, crossing the road, and immediately running into the other, told the boys what an honour they
might expect, adding,

"I may thank you, Spike, for the piece of civility. Miss Buffy Summers would never have come so
soon to wait upon me."

Spike had scarcely time to disclaim all right to the compliment, before their approach was announced
by the door-bell, and shortly afterwards the three ladies entered the room. Col Amy the rat, who led
the way, was about thirty, not terribly large as rats go, not handsome, but in person and address most
truly the gentlewoman. Miss Buffy Summers looked just as she had been used to look in Southern
California, paid her compliments, with her usual reserve, to Mr. Anya Nka; and whatever might be
her feelings towards his friend, met his with every appearance of composure. Spike merely bowed to
her, without saying a word.

Col Amy the rat entered into conversation directly with the readiness and ease of a well-bred woman,
and talked very pleasantly; but her cousin, after having addressed a slight observation on the house
and garden to Mr. Anya Nka, sat for some time without speaking to any body. At length, however,
her civility was so far awakened as to enquire of Spike after the health of his family. He answered
her in the usual way, and after a moment's pause, added,

"My eldest brother has been in town these three months. Have you never happened to see him
there?"

He was perfectly sensible that she never had; but he wished to see whether she would betray any
consciousness of what had passed between the Rosenburgs and Oz; and he thought she looked a
little confused as she answered that she had never been so fortunate as to meet Mr. le Bloddy. The
subject was pursued no farther, and the ladies soon afterwards went away.
CHAPTER VIII (31)

COLONEL Amy's manners were very much admired at the parsonage, and the gentlemen all felt that she must add considerably to the pleasure of their engagements at Hellmouth. It was some days, however, before they received any invitation thither, for while there were visitors in the house they could not be necessary; and it was not till Easter-day, almost a week after the gentlemen's arrival, that they were honoured by such an attention, and then they were merely asked on leaving church to come there in the evening. For the last week they had seen very little of either Lord Snyder or his son. Col Amy the rat had called at the parsonage more than once during the time, but Miss Buffy Summers they had only seen at church.

The invitation was accepted of course, and at a proper hour they joined the party in Lord Snyder's drawing room. His lordship received them civilly, but it was plain that their company was by no means so acceptable as when he could get nobody else; and he was, in fact, almost engrossed by his nieces, speaking to them, especially to Summers, much more than to any other person in the room.

Col Amy the rat seemed really glad to see them; any thing was a welcome relief to her at Hellmouth; and Mr. Adam Nka's handsome friend had moreover caught her fancy very much. She now seated herself by him, and talked so agreeably of Sacramento and Southern California, of travelling and staying at home, of new books and music, that Spike had never been half so well entertained in that room before; and they conversed with so much spirit and flow, as to draw the attention of Lord Snyder himself as well as of Miss Buffy Summers. Her eyes had been soon and repeatedly turned towards them with a look of curiosity; and that his lordship after a while shared the feeling, was more openly acknowledged, for he did not scruple to call out,

"What is that you are saying, Amy? What is it you are talking of? What are you telling Mr. le Bloddy? Let me hear what it is."

"We are speaking of music, Sir," said she, when no longer able to avoid a reply.

"Of music! Then pray speak aloud. It is of all subjects my delight. I must have my share in the conversation, if you are speaking of music. There are few people in California, I suppose, who have more true enjoyment of music than myself, or a better natural taste. If I had ever learnt, I should have been a great proficient. And so would Jonathan, if his health had allowed him to apply. I am confident that he would have performed delightfully. How does Xander get on, Summers?"

Miss Buffy Summers spoke with affectionate praise of her brother's proficiency.

"I am very glad to hear such a good account of him," said Lord Snyder; "and pray tell him from me, that he cannot expect to excel, if he does not practise a great deal."

"I assure you, Sir," she replied, "that he does not need such advice. He practises very constantly."

"So much the better. It cannot be done too much; and when I next write to him, I shall charge him not to neglect it on any account. I often tell young gentlemen, that no excellence in music is to be
acquired, without constant practice. I have told Mr. le Bloddy several times, that he will never play really well, unless he practises more; and though Mr. Anya Nka has no instrument, he is very welcome, as I have often told him, to come to Hellmouth every day, and play on the piano forte in Mr. Jenkinson's room. He would be in nobody's way, you know, in that part of the house."

Miss Buffy Summers looked a little ashamed of her uncle's ill breeding, and made no answer.

When coffee was over, Col Amy the rat reminded Spike of having promised to play to her; and he sat down directly to the instrument. She drew a chair near him. Lord Snyder listened to half a song, and then talked, as before, to his other niece; till the latter walked away from him, and moving with her usual deliberation towards the piano forte, stationed herself so as to command a full view of the performer's countenance. Spike saw what she was doing, and at the first convenient pause, turned to her with an arch smile, and said,

"You mean to frighten me, Miss Buffy Summers, by coming in all the state to hear me? But I will not be alarmed though your brother does play so well. There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others. My courage always rises with every attempt to intimidate me."

"I shall not say that you are mistaken," she replied, "because you could not really believe me to entertain any design of alarming you; and I have had the pleasure of your acquaintance long enough to know, that you find great enjoyment in occasionally professing opinions which in fact are not your own."

Spike laughed heartily at the picture of himself, and said to Col Amy the rat, "Your cousin will give you a very handsome notion of me, and teach you not to believe a word I say. I am particularly unlucky in meeting with a person so well able to expose my real character, in a part of the world where I had hoped to pass myself off with some degree of credit. Indeed, Miss Buffy Summers, it is very ungenerous in you to mention all that you knew to my disadvantage in Southern California -- and, give me leave to say, very impolitic too -- for it is provoking me to retaliate, and such things may come out, as will shock your relations to hear."

"I am not afraid of you," said she, smilingly.

"Pray let me hear what you have to accuse her of," cried Col Amy the rat. "I should like to know how she behaves among strangers."

"You shall hear then -- but prepare yourself for something very dreadful. The first time of my ever seeing her in Southern California, you must know, was at a sparring match -- and at the sparring match, what do you think she did? She fought only four sparring matches! I am sorry to pain you -- but so it was. She fought only four sparring matches, though ladies were scarce; and, to my certain knowledge, more than one young lord was sitting down in want of a partner. Miss Buffy Summers, you cannot deny the fact."

"I had not at that time the honour of knowing any lord in the dojo beyond my own party."

"True; and nobody can ever be introduced in a sparring match room. Well, Col Amy the rat, what do I play next? My fingers wait your orders."

"Perhaps," said Summers, "I should have judged better, had I sought an introduction, but I am ill qualified to recommend myself to strangers."

"Shall we ask your cousin the reason of this?" said Spike, still addressing Col Amy the rat. "Shall we ask her why a woman of sense and education, and who has lived in the world, and the Slayer
"I can answer your question," said Amy, "without applying to her. It is because she will not give
herself the trouble."

"I certainly have not the talent which some people possess," said Summers, "of conversing easily
with those I have never seen before. I cannot catch their tone of conversation, or appear interested in
their concerns, as I often see done."

"My fingers," said Spike, "do not move over the instrument in the masterly manner which I see so
many men's do. They have not the same force or rapidity, and do not produce the same expression.
But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault -- because I would not take the trouble of
practising. It is not that I do not believe my fingers as capable as any other man's of superior
execution."

Summers smiled, and said, "You are perfectly right. You have employed your time much better. No
one admitted to the privilege of hearing you, can think any thing wanting. We neither of us perform
to strangers."

Here they were interrupted by Lord Snyder, who called out to know what they were talking of.
Spike immediately began playing again. Lord Snyder approached, and, after listening for a few
minutes, said to Summers,

"Mr. le Bloddy would not play at all amiss, if he practised more, and could have the advantage of a
Los Angeles mistress. He has a very good notion of fingering, though his taste is not equal to
Jonathan's. Jonathan would have been a delightful performer, had his health allowed him to learn."

Spike looked at Summers to see how cordially she assented to her cousin's praise; but neither at that
moment nor at any other could he discern any symptom of love; and from the whole of her behaviour
to Mr. De Principal he derived the comfort for Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg, that she might have been
just as likely to marry him, had he been her relation.

Lord Snyder continued his remarks on Spike's performance, mixing with them many instructions on
execution and taste. Spike received them with all the forbearance of civility; and at the request of the
gentlewomen, remained at the instrument till his lordship's carriage was ready to take them all home.

CHAPTER IX (32)

SPIKE was sitting by himself the next morning, and writing to Oz, while Mr. Anya Nka and Forest
were gone on business into the village, when he was startled by a ring at the door, the certain signal
of a visitor. As he had heard no carriage, he thought it not unlikely to be Lord Snyder, and under that
apprehension was putting away his half-finished letter that he might escape all impertinent questions,
when the door opened, and to his very great surprise, Miss Buffy Summers, and Miss Buffy
Summers only, entered the room.

She seemed astonished too on finding him alone, and apologised for her intrusion by letting him
know that she had understood all the gentlemen to be within.

They then sat down, and when his enquiries after Hellmouth were made, seemed in danger of
sinking into total silence. It was absolutely necessary, therefore, to think of something, and in the
emergency recollecting when he had seen her last in Southern California, and feeling curious to
know what she would say on the subject of their hasty departure, he observed,

"How very suddenly you all quitted the burnt husk of Sunnydale High last November, Miss Buffy Summers! It must have been a most agreeable surprise to Willow to see you all after her so soon; for, if I recollect right, she went but the day before. She and her brothers were well, I hope, when you left Los Angeles."

"Perfectly so -- I thank you."

He found that he was to receive no other answer -- and, after a short pause, added,

"I think I have understood that Willow has not much idea of ever returning to the burnt husk of Sunnydale High again?"

"I have never heard her say so; but it is probable that she may spend very little of her time there in future. She has many friends, and she is at a time of life when friends and engagements are continually increasing."

"If she means to be but little at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High, it would be better for the neighbourhood that she should give up the place entirely, for then we might possibly get a settled family there. But perhaps Willow did not take the house so much for the convenience of the neighbourhood as for her own, and we must expect her to keep or quit it on the same principle."

"I should not be surprised," said Summers, "if she were to give it up, as soon as any eligible purchase offers."

Spike made no answer. He was afraid of talking longer of her friend; and, having nothing else to say, was now determined to leave the trouble of finding a subject to her.

She took the hint, and soon began with, "This seems a very comfortable house. Lord Snyder, I believe, did a great deal to it when Ms. Anya Nka first came to Purgatory."

"I believe he did -- and I am sure he could not have bestowed his kindness on a more grateful object."

"Ms. Anya Nka appears very fortunate in her choice of a husband."

"Yes, indeed; her friends may well rejoice in her having met with one of the very few sensible men who would have accepted her, or have made her happy if they had. My friend has an excellent understanding -- though I am not certain that I consider his marrying Ms. Anya Nka as the wisest thing he ever did. He seems perfectly happy, however, and in a prudential light, it is certainly a very good match for him."

"It must be very agreeable to him to be settled within so easy a distance of his own family and friends."

"An easy distance do you call it? It is nearly fifty miles."

"And what is fifty miles of good road? Little more than half a day's journey. Yes, I call it a very easy distance."

"I should never have considered the distance as one of the advantages of the match," cried Spike. "I should never have said Mr. Anya Nka was settled near his family."
"It is a proof of your own attachment to Southern California. Any thing beyond the very neighbourhood of The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's, I suppose, would appear far."

As she spoke there was a sort of smile, which Spike fancied he understood; she must be supposing him to be thinking of Oz and the burnt husk of Sunnydale High, and he blushed as he answered,"I do not mean to say that a man may not be settled too near his family. The far and the near must be relative, and depend on many varying circumstances. Where there is fortune to make the expence of travelling unimportant, distance becomes no evil. But that is not the case here. Mrs. and Mr. Anya Nka have a comfortable income, but not such a one as will allow of frequent journeys -- and I am persuaded my friend would not call himself near his family under less than half the present distance."

Miss Buffy Summers drew her chair a little towards him, and said, "You cannot have a right to such very strong local attachment. You cannot have been always at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's."

Spike looked surprised. The lady experienced some change of feeling; she drew back her chair, took a newspaper from the table, and, glancing over it, said, in a colder voice,

"Are you pleased with Sacramento?"

A short dialogue on the subject of the country ensued, on either side calm and concise -- and soon put an end to by the entrance of Adam and his brother, just returned from their walk. The te^te-a^-te^te surprised them. Miss Buffy Summers related the mistake which had occasioned her intruding on Mr. le Bloddy, and after sitting a few minutes longer without saying much to any body, went away.

"What can be the meaning of This!" said Adam, as soon as she was gone. "My dear Spike, she must be in love with you, or she would never have called on us in the familiar way."

But when Spike told of her silence, it did not seem very likely, even to Adam's wishes, to be the case; and after various conjectures, they could at last only suppose her visit to proceed from the difficulty of finding any thing to do, which was the more probable from the time of year. All field sports were over. The undead were hard to find. It was not the season of keys or doors or Ascencsions or apocalypses Within doors there was Lord Snyder, books, and a billiard table, but ladies cannot be always within doors; and in the nearness of the Parsonage, or the pleasantness of the walk to it, or of the people who lived in it, the two cousins found a temptation from the period of walking thither almost every day. They called at various times of the morning, sometimes separately, sometimes together, and now and then accompanied by their uncle. It was plain to them all that Col Amy the rat came because she had pleasure in their society, a persuasion which of course recommended her still more; and Spike was reminded by his own satisfaction in being with her, as well as by her evident admiration of him, of his former favourite Ms. Faith; and though, in comparing them, he saw there was less captivating softness in Col Amy the rat's manners, he believed she might have the best informed mind.

But why Miss Buffy Summers came so often to the Parsonage, it was more difficult to understand. It could not be for society, as she frequently sat there ten minutes together without opening her lips; and when she did speak, it seemed the effect of necessity rather than of choice -- a sacrifice to propriety, not a pleasure to herself. She seldom appeared really animated. Mr. Anya Nka knew not what to make of her. Col Amy the rat's occasionally laughing at her stupidity, proved that she was generally different, which his own knowledge of her could not have told her; and as he would have liked to believe the change the effect of love, and the object of that love, his friend Spike, he sat himself seriously to work to find it out. -- He watched her whenever they were at Hellmouth, and whenever she came to Purgatory; but without much success. She certainly looked at his friend a great deal, but
the expression of that look was disputable. It was an earnest, steadfast gaze, but he often doubted whether there were much admiration in it, and sometimes it seemed nothing but absence of mind.

He had once or twice suggested to Spike the possibility of her being partial to him, but Spike always laughed at the idea; and Mr. Anya Nka did not think it right to press the subject, from the danger of raising expectations which might only end in disappointment; for in his opinion it admitted not of a doubt, that all his friend's dislike would vanish, if he could suppose her to be in his power. For then he might have a really good day.

In his kind schemes for Spike, he sometimes planned him marrying Col Amy the rat. She was beyond comparison the pleasantest woman; she certainly admired him, and her situation in life was most eligible; but, to counterbalance these advantages, Miss Buffy Summers had considerable patronage in the church, and her cousin could have none at all.

CHAPTER X (33)

MORE than once did Spike in his rambles within the Park, unexpectedly meet Miss Buffy Summers. -- He felt all the perverseness of the mischance that should bring her where no one else was brought; and to prevent its ever happening again, took care to inform her at first that it was a favourite haunt of hers. -- How it could occur a second time, therefore, was very odd! -- Yet it did, and even a third. It seemed like wilful ill-nature, or a voluntary penance, for on these occasions it was not merely a few formal enquiries and an awkward pause and then away, but she actually thought it necessary to turn back and walk with him. She never said a great deal, nor did he give himself the trouble of talking or of listening much; but it struck him in the course of their third rencontre that she was asking some odd unconnected questions -- about his pleasure in being at Purgatory, his love of solitary walks, and his opinion of Mrs. and Mr. Anya Nka's happiness; and that in speaking of Hellmouth, and his not perfectly understanding the house, she seemed to expect that whenever she came into Sacramento again he would be staying there too. Her words seemed to imply it. Could she have Col Amy the rat in her thoughts? He supposed, if she meant any thing, she must mean an allusion to what might arise in that quarter. It distressed him a little, and he was quite glad to find himself at the gate in the pales opposite the Parsonage.

He was engaged one day, as he walked, in re-perusing Oz's last letter, and dwelling on some passages which proved that Oz had not written in spirits, when, instead of being again surprised by Miss Buffy Summers, he saw on looking up, that Col Amy the rat was meeting him. Putting away the letter immediately and forcing a smile, he said,

"I did not know before that you ever walked the way."

"I have been making the tour of the Park," she replied, "as I generally do every year, and intend to close it with a call at the Parsonage. Are you going much farther?"

"No, I should have turned in a moment."

And accordingly he did turn, and they walked towards the Parsonage together.

"Do you certainly leave Sacramento on Saturday?" said he.

"Yes -- if Summers does not put it off again. But I am at her disposal. She arranges the business just as she pleases."
And if not able to please herself in the arrangement, she has at least great pleasure in the power of choice. I do not know any body who seems more to enjoy the power of doing what she likes than Miss Buffy Summers.

"She likes to have her own way very well," replied Col Amy the rat. "But so do we all. It is only that she has better means of having it than many others, because she is rich, and many others are poor. I speak feelingly. A younger son, you know, must be inured to self-denial and dependence."

"In my opinion, the younger daughter of an Earl can know very little of either. Now, seriously, what have you ever known of self-denial and dependence? When have you been prevented by want of money from going wherever you chose, or procuring any thing you had a fancy for?"

"These are home questions -- and perhaps I cannot say that I have experienced many hardships of that nature. But in matters of greater weight, I may suffer from the want of money. Younger sons cannot marry where they like."

"Unless where they like men of fortune, which I think they very often do."

"Our habits of expence make us too dependant, and there are not many in my rank of life who can afford to marry without some attention to money."

"Is This," thought Spike, "meant for me?" and he coloured at the idea; but, recovering himself, said in a lively tone, "And pray, what is the usual price of an Earl's younger son? Unless the elder sister is very sickly, I suppose you would not ask above fifty thousand pounds."

She answered him in the same style, and the subject dropped. To interrupt a silence which might make her fancy him affected with what had passed, he soon afterwards said,

"I imagine your cousin brought you down with her chiefly for the sake of having somebody at her disposal. I wonder she does not marry, to secure a lasting convenience of that kind. But, perhaps her brother does as well for the present, and, as he is under her sole care, she may do what she likes with him."

"No," said Col Amy the rat, "that is an advantage which she must divide with me. I am joined with her in the guardianship of Mr. Summers."

"Are you, indeed? And pray what sort of guardians do you make? Does your charge give you much trouble? Young gentlemen of his age are sometimes a little difficult to manage, and if he has the true Summers spirit, he may like to have his own way."

As he spoke, he observed her looking at him earnestly, her nose twitching, and the manner in which she immediately asked his why he supposed Mr. Summers likely to give them any uneasiness, convinced him that he had somehow or other got handsome near the truth. He directly replied,

"You need not be frightened. I never heard any harm of her; and I dare say he is one of the most tractable creatures in the world. He is a very great favourite with some gentlemen of my acquaintance, Mr. Wesley Lockley and Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg. I think I have heard you say that you know them."

"I know them a little. Their sister is a pleasant gentlewoman-like woman -- she is a great friend of Summers."
"Oh! yes," said Spike drily -- "Miss Buffy Summers is uncommonly kind to Willow, and takes a prodigious deal of care of her."

"Care of her! -- Yes, I really believe Summers does take care of her in those points where she most wants care. From something that she told me in our journey hither, I have reason to think Rosenberg very much indebted to her. But I ought to beg her pardon, for I have no right to suppose that Rosenberg was the person meant. It was all conjecture."

"What is it you mean?"

"It is a circumstance which Summers, of course, would not wish to be generally known, because if it were to get round to the gentleman's family, it would be an unpleasant thing."

"You may depend upon my not mentioning it."

"And remember that I have not much reason for supposing it to be Rosenberg. What she told me was merely this; that she congratulated herself on having lately saved a friend from the inconveniences of a most imprudent marriage, but without mentioning names or any other particulars, and I only suspected it to be Rosenberg from believing her the kind of young woman to get into a scrape of that sort, and from knowing them to have been together the whole of last summer."

"Did Miss Buffy Summers give you her reasons for the interference?"

"I understood that there were some very strong objections against the lady."

"And what arts did she use to separate them?"

"She did not talk to me of her own arts," said Amy smiling. "She only told me what I have now told you."

Spike made no answer, and walked on, his heart swelling with indignation. After watching him a little, Amy asked his why he was so thoughtful.

"I am thinking of what you have been telling me," said he. "Your cousin's conduct does not suit my feelings. Why was she to be the judge?"

"You are rather disposed to call her interference officious?"

"I do not see what right Miss Buffy Summers had to decide on the propriety of her friend's inclination, or why, upon her own judgment alone, she was to determine and direct in what manner that friend was to be happy."

"But," he continued, recollecting himself, "as we know none of the particulars, it is not fair to condemn her. It is not to be supposed that there was much affection in the case."

"That is not an unnatural surmise," said Amy, "but it is lessening the honour of my cousin's triumph very sadly."

This was spoken jestingly, but it appeared to him so just a picture of Miss Buffy Summers that he would not trust himself with an answer; and, therefore, abruptly changing the conversation, talked on indifferent matters till they reached the parsonage. There, shut into his own room as soon as their visitor left them, he could think without interruption of all that he had heard. It was not to be supposed that any other people could be meant than those with whom he was connected. There could not exist in the world two women over whom Miss Buffy Summers could have such boundless influence. That she had been concerned in the measures taken to separate Willow and Oz, he had never doubted; but he had always attributed to Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg the principal design
and arrangement of them. If her own vanity, however, did not mislead her, She was the cause, her pride and caprice were the cause, of all that Oz had suffered, and still continued to suffer. She had ruined for a while every hope of happiness for the most affectionate, generous heart in the world; and no one could say how lasting an evil she might have inflicted.

"There were some very strong objections against the lady," were Col Amy the rat's words, and these strong objections probably were, his having one aunt who was a country attorney, and another who was in business in Los Angeles.

"To Oz himself," he exclaimed, "there could be no possibility of objection. All loveliness and goodness as he is! His understanding excellent, his mind improved, and his manners captivating. Neither could any thing be urged against my mother, who, though with some peculiarities, has abilities which Miss Buffy Summers herself need not disdain, and respectability which she will probably never reach." When he thought of his father, indeed, his confidence gave way a little, but he would not allow that any objections there had material weight with Miss Buffy Summers, whose pride, he was convinced, would receive a deeper wound from the want of importance in her friend's connections, than from their want of sense; and he was quite decided at last, that she had been partly governed by the worst kind of pride, and partly by the wish of retaining Willow for her brother.

The agitation and tears which the subject occasioned brought on a headache; and it grew so much worse towards the evening that, added to his unwillingness to see Miss Buffy Summers, it determined him not to attend his cousins to Hellmouth, where they were engaged to drink tea. Mr. Anya Nka, seeing that he was really unwell, did not press him to go, and as much as possible prevented his wife from pressing him, but Ms. Anya Nka could not conceal her apprehension of Lord Snyder's being rather displeased by his staying at home.
WHEN they were gone, Spike, as if intending to exasperate himself as much as possible against Miss Buffy Summers, chose for his employment the examination of all the letters which Oz had written to him since his being in Sacramento. They contained no actual complaint, nor was there any revival of past occurrences, or any communication of present suffering. But in all, and in almost every line of each, there was a want of that cheerfulness which had been used to characterize his style, and which, proceeding from the serenity of a mind at ease with itself, and kindly disposed towards every one, had been scarcely ever clouded. Spike noticed every sentence conveying the idea of uneasiness with an attention which it had hardly received on the first perusal. Miss Buffy Summers' shameful boast of what misery she had been able to inflict gave him a keener sense of his brother's sufferings. It was some consolation to think that her visit to Hellmouth was to end on the day after the next, and a still greater that in less than a fortnight he should himself be with Oz again, and enabled to contribute to the recovery of his spirits by all that affection could do.

He could not think of Summers' leaving Sacramento without remembering that her cousin was to go with her; but Col Amy the rat had made it clear that she had no intentions at all, and agreeable as she was, he did not mean to be unhappy about her.

While settling the point, he was suddenly roused by the sound of the door bell, and his spirits were a little fluttered by the idea of its being Col Amy the rat herself, who had once before called late in the evening, and might now come to enquire particularly after him. But the idea was soon banished, and his spirits were very differently affected, when, to his utter amazement, he saw Miss Buffy Summers walk into the room. In an hurried manner she immediately began an enquiry after his health, imputing her visit to a wish of hearing that he were better. He answered her with cold civility. She sat down for a few moments, and then getting up, walked about the room. Spike was surprised, but said not a word. After a silence of several minutes, she came towards his in an agitated manner, and thus began, "In vain have I struggled. It will not do. You are beneath me and yet love makes you do the wacky. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you."

Spike's astonishment was beyond expression. He stared, coloured, doubted, and was silent. This she considered sufficient encouragement, and the avowal of all that she felt and had long felt for him immediately followed. She spoke well, but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed, and she was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. Her sense of his inferiority -- of its being a degradation -- of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence she was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend her suit.

In spite of his deeply-rooted dislike, he could not be insensible to the compliment of such a man's affection, and though his intentions did not vary for an instant, he was at first sorry for the pain she was to receive; till, roused by resentment by her subsequent language, he lost all compassion in anger. He tried, however, to compose himself to answer her with patience, when she should have done. She concluded with representing to him the strength of that attachment which, in spite of all her endeavours, she had found impossible to conquer; and with expressing her hope that it would now
be rewarded by his acceptance of her hand. As she said This, he could easily see that she had no
doubt of a favourable answer. She spoke of apprehension and anxiety, but her countenance
expressed real security. Such a circumstance could only exasperate farther, and when she ceased, the
colour rose into his cheeks, and he said,

"In such cases as This, it is, I believe, the established mode to express a sense of obligation for the
sentiments avowed, however unequally they may be returned. It is natural that obligation should be
felt, and if I could feel gratitude, I would now thank you. But I cannot -- I have never desired your
good opinion, and you have certainly bestowed it most unwillingly. I am sorry to have occasioned
pain to any one. It has been most unconsciously done, however, and I hope will be of short duration.
The feelings which, you tell me, have long prevented the acknowledgment of your regard, can have
little difficulty in overcoming it after the explanation."

Miss Buffy Summers, who was leaning against the mantle-piece with her eyes fixed on his face,
seemed to catch his words with no less resentment than surprise. Her complexion became pale with
anger, and the disturbance of her mind was visible in every feature. She was struggling for the
appearance of composure, and would not open her lips, till she believed herself to have attained it.
The pause was to Spike's feelings dreadful. At length, in a voice of forced calmness, she said,

"And the is all the reply which I am to have the honour of expecting! I might, perhaps, wish to be
informed why, with so little endeavour at civility, I am thus rejected. But it is of small importance."

"I might as well enquire," replied he, "why, with so evident a design of offending and insulting me,
you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your
character? Was not the some excuse for incivility, if I was uncivil? But I have other provocations.
You know I have. Had not my own feelings decided against you, had they been indifferent, or had
they even been favourable, do you think that any consideration would tempt me to accept the
woman, who has been the means of ruining, perhaps for ever, the happiness of a most beloved
brother?"

As he pronounced these words, Miss Buffy Summers changed colour; but the emotion was short,
and she listened without attempting to interrupt his while he continued.

"I have every reason in the world to think ill of you. No motive can excuse the unjust and
ungenerous part you acted there. You dare not, you cannot deny that you have been the principal, if
not the only means of dividing them from each other, of exposing one to the censure of the world for
caprice and instability, the other to its derision for disappointed hopes, and involving them both in
misery of the acutest kind."

He paused, and saw with no slight indignation that she was listening with an air which proved her
wholly unmoved by any feeling of remorse. She even looked at his with a smile of affected
incredulity.

"Can you deny that you have done it?" he repeated.

With assumed tranquility she then replied, "I have no wish of denying that I did every thing in my
power to separate my friend from your brother, or that I rejoice in my success. Towards him I have
been kinder than towards myself."

Spike disdained the appearance of noticing the civil reflection, but its meaning did not escape, nor
was it likely to conciliate, him.

"But it is not merely the affair," he continued, "on which my dislike is founded. Long before it had
taken place, my opinion of you was decided. Your character was unfolded in the recital which I
received many months ago from Ms. Faith. On the subject, what can you have to say? In what imaginary act of friendship can you here defend yourself? or under what misrepresentation, can you here impose upon others?"

"You take an eager interest in that gentlewoman's concerns," said Summers in a less tranquil tone, and with a heightened colour.

"Who that knows what her misfortunes have been, can help feeling an interest in her?"

"Her misfortunes!" repeated Summers contemptuously; "yes, her misfortunes have been great indeed."

"And of your infliction," cried Spike with energy. "You have reduced her to her present state of poverty, comparative poverty. You have withheld the advantages, which you must know to have been designed for her. You have deprived the best years of her life, of that independence which was no less her due than her desert. You have kept her from being the Slayer. You have done all This! and yet you can treat the mention of her misfortunes with contempt and ridicule."

"And This," cried Summers, as she walked with quick steps across the room, "is your opinion of me! This is the estimation in which you hold me! I thank you for explaining it so fully. My faults, according to the calculation, are heavy indeed! But perhaps," added she, stopping in her walk, and turning towards him, "these offences might have been overlooked, had not your pride been hurt by my honest confession of the scruples that had long prevented my forming any serious design. These bitter accusations might have been suppressed, had I with greater policy concealed my struggles, and flattered you into the belief of my being impelled by unqualified, unalloyed inclination -- by reason, by reflection, by every thing. But disguise of every sort is my abhorrence. Nor am I ashamed of the feelings I related. They were natural and just. Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections? To congratulate myself on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?"

Spike felt himself growing more angry every moment; yet he tried to the utmost to speak with composure when he said,

"You are mistaken, Miss Buffy Summers, if you suppose that the mode of your declaration affected me in any other way, than as it spared me the concern which I might have felt in refusing you, had you behaved in a more gentlewoman-like manner."

He saw her start at This, but she said nothing, and he continued,

"You could not have made me the offer of your hand in any possible way that would have tempted me to accept it."

Again her astonishment was obvious; and she looked at him with an expression of mingled incredulity and mortification. He went on.

"From the very beginning, from the first moment I may almost say, of my acquaintance with you, your manners, impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form that ground-work of disapprobation, on which succeeding events have built so immoveable a dislike; and I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last woman in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry."

"You have said quite enough, sir. I perfectly comprehend your feelings, and have now only to be ashamed of what my own have been. Forgive me for having taken up so much of your time, and accept my best wishes for your health and happiness."
And with these words she hastily left the room, and Spike heard her the next moment open the front door and quit the house.

The tumult of his mind was now painfully great. He knew not how to support himself, and from actual weakness sat down and cried for half an hour. His astonishment, as he reflected on what had passed, was increased by every review of it. That he should receive an offer of marriage from Miss Buffy Summers! that she should have been in love with him for so many months! so much in love as to wish to marry him in spite of all the objections which had made her prevent her friend's marrying his brother, and which must appear at least with equal force in her own case, was almost incredible! It was gratifying to have inspired unconsciously so strong an affection. But her pride, her abominable pride, her shameless avowal of what she had done with respect to Oz, her unpardonable assurance in acknowledging, though she could not justify it, and the unfeeling manner in which she had mentioned Ms. Faith, her cruelty towards whom she had not attempted to deny, soon overcame the pity which the consideration of her attachment had for a moment excited.

He continued in very agitating reflections till the sound of Lord Snyder's carriage made his feel how unequal he was to encounter Adam's observation, and hurried his away to his room.

CHAPTER XII (35)

SPIKE awoke the next morning to the same thoughts and meditations which had at length closed his eyes. He could not yet recover from the surprise of what had happened; it was impossible to think of any thing else, and, totally indisposed for employment, he resolved soon after breakfast to indulge himself in air and exercise. He was proceeding directly to his favourite walk, when the recollection of Miss Buffy Summers' sometimes coming there stopped him, and instead of entering the park, he turned up the lane which led him farther from the turnpike road. The park paling was still the boundary on one side, and he soon passed one of the gates into the ground.

Miss Buffy Summers.'

After walking two or three times along that part of the lane, he was tempted, by the pleasantness of the morning, to stop at the gates and look into the park. The five weeks which he had now passed in Sacramento had made a great difference in the country, and every day was adding to the verdure of the early trees. He was on the point of continuing his walk, when he caught a glimpse of a lady within the sort of grove which edged the park; she was moving that way; and fearful of its being Miss. Buffy Summers, he was directly retreating.

But the person who advanced was now near enough to see him, and stepping forward with eagerness, pronounced his name. He had turned away, but on hearing himself called, though in a voice which proved it to be Miss Buffy Summers, he moved again towards the gate to run away from Miss Buffy.
However, she pursued him with rigour. There was a small lake in his path. But this proved no obstacle in an Ang Lee kind of way. He lightly skimed the surface then hopped into the surrounding trees. However, Miss Buffy, the Slayer, skimed and hopped right after him. She yelled after him, "Stop, I have been walking in the grove some time in the hope of meeting you. Will you do me the honour of reading that letter?"

Spike kept leaping from tree to tree. Miss Buffy took her crossbow and wrapped the message around a bolt and with deft aim shot Mr. Spike le Bloddy, somewhere not in the heart.

"Bloody Hell." He said, as he fell from the tree.

Her mission accomplished, Miss Buffy turned again into the plantation, and was soon out of sight.

With no expectation of pleasure, but with the strongest curiosity, Spike removed the crossbow bolt and opened the letter, and, to his still increasing wonder, perceived an envelope containing two sheets of letter paper, written quite through, in a very close hand. -- The envelope itself was likewise full. -- Pursuing his way along the lane, he then began it. It was dated from Hellmouth, at eight o'clock in the morning, and was as follows: --

"Be not alarmed, Sir, on receiving the letter, by the apprehension of its containing any repetition of those sentiments, or renewal of those offers, which were last night so disgusting to you. I write without any intention of paining you, or humbling myself, by dwelling on wishes, which, for the happiness of both, cannot be too soon forgotten; and the effort which the formation and the perusal of the letter must occasion should have been spared, had not my character required it to be written and read. You must, therefore, pardon the freedom with which I demand your attention; your feelings, I know, will bestow it unwillingly, but I demand it of your justice.

Two offences of a very different nature, and by no means of equal magnitude, you last night laid to my charge. The first mentioned was, that, regardless of the sentiments of either, I had detached Willow from your brother; -- and the other, that I had, in defiance of various claims, in defiance of honour and humanity, ruined the immediate prosperity, and blasted the prospects of Ms. Faith. -- Wilfully and wantonly to have thrown off the companion of my youth, the acknowledged favourite of my mother, a young woman who had scarcely any other dependence than on our patronage, and who had been brought up to expect its exertion, would be a depravity to which the separation of two young persons, whose affection could be the growth of only a few weeks, could bear no comparison. -- But from the severity of that blame which was last night so liberally bestowed, respecting each circumstance, I shall hope to be in future secured, when the following account of my actions and their motives has been read. -- If, in the explanation of them which is due to myself, I am under the necessity of relating feelings which may be offensive to your's, I can only say that I am sorry. -- The necessity must be obeyed -- and farther apology would be absurd. -- I had not been long in Southern California, before I saw, in common with others, that Rosenburg preferred your eldest brother to any other young man in the country. -- But it was not till the evening of the sparring match at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High that I had any apprehension of her feeling a serious attachment. -- I had often seen her in love before. -- At that sparring match, while I had the honour of sparring with you, I was first made acquainted, by Dame Walsh's accidental information, that Rosenburg preferred your eldest brother to any other young man in the country. -- But it was not till the evening of the sparring match at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High that I had any apprehension of her feeling a serious attachment. -- I had often seen her in love before. -- At that sparring match, while I had the honour of sparring with you, I was first made acquainted, by Dame Walsh's accidental information, that Rosenburg's attentions to your brother had given rise to a general expectation of their marriage. She spoke of it as a certain event, of which the time alone could be undecided. From that moment I observed my friend's behaviour attentively; and I could then perceive that her partiality for Mr. le Bloddy was beyond what I had ever witnessed in her. Your brother I also watched. -- His look and manners were open, cheerful, and engaging as ever, but without any symptom of peculiar regard, and I remained
convinced from the evening's scrutiny, that though he received her attentions with pleasure, he did not invite them by any participation of sentiment. -- If you have not been mistaken here, I must have been in an error. Your superior knowledge of your brother must make the latter probable. -- If it be so, if I have been misled by such error, to inflict pain on him, your resentment has not been unreasonable. But I shall not scruple to assert that the serenity of your brother's countenance and air was such as might have given the most acute observer a conviction that, however amiable his temper, his heart was not likely to be easily touched. -- That I was desirous of believing his indifferent is certain, -- but I will venture to say that my investigations and decisions are not usually influenced by my hopes or fears. -- I did not believe his to be indifferent because I wished it; -- I believed it on impartial conviction, as truly as I wished it in reason. -- My objections to the marriage were not merely those which I last night acknowledged to have required the utmost force of passion to put aside in my own case; the want of connection could not be so great an evil to my friend as to me. -- But there were other causes of repugnance; -- causes which, though still existing, and existing to an equal degree in both instances, I had myself endeavoured to forget, because they were not immediately before me. -- These causes must be stated, though briefly. -- The situation of your father's family, though objectionable, was nothing in comparison of that the continuous attempts to destroy the world and the total want of propriety so frequently, so almost uniformly, betrayed by himself, by your three younger brothers, and occasionally even by your mother. -- Pardon me. -- It pains me to offend you. But amidst your concern for the defects of your nearest relations, and your displeasure at the representation of them, let it give you consolation to consider that to have conducted yourselves so as to avoid any share of the like censure is praise no less generally bestowed on you and your eldest brother, than it is honourable to the sense and disposition of both. -- I will only say farther that, from what passed that evening, my opinion of all parties was confirmed, and every inducement heightened, which could have led me before to preserve my friend from what I esteemed a most unhappy connection. -- She left the burnt husk of Sunnydale High for Los Angeles, on the day following, as you, I am certain, remember, with the design of soon returning. --

The part which I acted is now to be explained. -- her brothers' uneasiness had been equally excited with my own; our coincidence of feeling was soon discovered; and, alike sensible that no time was to be lost in detaching their sister, we shortly resolved on joining her directly in Los Angeles. -- We accordingly went -- and there I readily engaged in the office of pointing out to my friend, the certain evils of such a choice. -- I described, and enforced them earnestly. -- But, however the remonstrance might have staggered or delayed her determination, I do not suppose that it would ultimately have prevented the marriage, had it not been seconded by the assurance, which I hesitated not in giving, of your brother's indifference. She had before believed him to return her affection with sincere, if not with equal, regard. -- But Rosenberg has great natural modesty, with a stronger dependence on my judgment than on her own. -- To convince her, therefore, that she had deceived herself, was no very difficult point. To persuade her against returning into Southern California, when that conviction had been given, was scarcely the work of a moment. -- I cannot blame myself for having done thus much. There is but one part of my conduct in the whole affair, on which I do not reflect with satisfaction; it is that I condescended to adopt the measures of art so far as to conceal from her your brother's being in town. I knew it myself, as it was known to Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg, but his sister is even yet ignorant of it. -- That they might have met without ill consequence is, perhaps, probable; -- but her regard did not appear to me enough extinguished for her to see him without some danger. -- Perhaps the concealment, the disguise, was beneath me. -- It is done, however, and it was done for the best. -- On the subject I have nothing more to say, no other apology to offer. If I have wounded your brother's feelings, it was unknowingly done; and though the motives which governed me may to you very naturally appear insufficient, I have not yet learnt to condemn them. --

With respect to that other, more weighty accusation, of having injured Ms. Faith, I can only refute it by laying before you the whole of her connection with my family. Of what she has particularly accused me, I am ignorant; but of the truth of what I shall relate, I can summon more than one
witness of undoubted veracity. Ms. Faith is the daughter of a very respectable woman, who had for many years the management of all the Bronze estates; and whose good conduct in the discharge of her trust naturally inclined my mother to be of service to her; and on Faith, who was her goddaughter, her kindness was therefore liberally bestowed. My mother supported her at school, and afterwards at Cambridge; -- most important assistance, as her own mother, always poor from the extravagance of her husband, would have been unable to give her a gentlewoman's education. My mother was not only fond of the young woman's society, whose manners were always engaging; she had also the highest opinion of her, and hoping the Slayer would be her profession, intended to provide for her in it. As it was her dearest wish that I lay aside that call to destiny which is mine and live as a normal girl with boyfriends and keggers and college. As for myself, it is many, many years since I first began to think of Faith in a very different manner. The vicious propensities -- the want of principle, which she was careful to guard from the knowledge of her best friend, could not escape the observation of a young woman of nearly the same age with herself, and who had opportunities of seeing her in unguarded moments, which my mother could not have. Here again I shall give you pain -- to what degree you only can tell. But whatever may be the sentiments which Ms. Faith has created, a suspicion of their nature shall not prevent me from unfolding her real character. It adds even another motive. My excellent mother died about five years ago; and her attachment to Ms. Faith was to the last so steady, that in her will she particularly recommended it to me to promote her advancement to be the one girl in all of the world chosen to fight the forces of the Darkness, the Slayer. For in truth my mother had long desired me to retire from my position as the Slayer. There was also a legacy of one thousand pounds. Her own mother did not long survive mine, and within half a year from these events Ms. Faith wrote to inform me that, having finally resolved against becoming the Slayer, she hoped I should not think it unreasonable for her to expect some more immediate pecuniary advantage, in lieu of the destiny by which she could not be benefited. She had some intention, she added, of studying the law, and I must be aware that the interest of one thousand pounds would be a very insufficient support therein. I rather wished than believed her to be sincere; but, at any rate, was perfectly ready to accede to her proposal. I knew that Ms. Faith ought not to be a Slayer. The business was therefore soon settled. She resigned all claim to her destiny, were it possible that she could ever be in a situation to receive it, and accepted in return three thousand pounds. All connection between us seemed now dissolved. I thought too ill of her to invite her to The Bronze, or admit her society in town. In town, I believe, she chiefly lived, but her studying the law was a mere pretence, and being now free from all restraint, her life was a life of idleness and dissipation and random acts of violence. For about three years I heard little of her; but later, she applied to me again by letter for the presentation. Her circumstances, she assured me, and I had no difficulty in believing them, were exceedingly bad. She had found the law a most unprofitable study, and was now absolutely resolved on becoming the Slayer, if I would step aside, and I could not have forgotten my revered mother's intentions. You will hardly blame me for refusing to comply with the entreaty, or for resisting every repetition of it. Her resentment was in proportion to the distress of her circumstances -- and she was doubtless as violent in her abuse of me to others, as in her reproaches to myself. After the period, every appearance of acquaintance was dropped. How she lived I know not. But last summer she was again most painfully obtruded on my notice. I must now mention two circumstances which I would wish to forget myself, and which no obligation less than the present should induce me to unfold to any human being. Having said thus much, I feel no doubt of your secrecy. The first is almost trivial and yet I must relate it as a part of the complete sketch of Ms. Faith's character. Some years past, armed with a device of transference she switch bodies with me in an attempt to take by force the position of Slayer that I would not give by choice. She was easily foiled however. The second and more serious instance it this...my brother, who is more than ten years my junior, was left to the guardianship of my father's niece, Col Amy the rat, and myself. About a year ago, he was taken from school, and an establishment formed for him in Los Angeles; and last summer he went with the lord who presided over it, to Ramsgate; and thither also went Ms. Faith, undoubtedly by design; for there proved to have been a prior acquaintance between her and Mr. Younge, in whose character we were most unhappily deceived; and by his connivance and aid she
so far recommended herself to Xander, whose affectionate heart retained a strong impression of her kindness to him as a child, that he was persuaded to believe himself in love, and to consent to an elopement. He was then but fifteen, which must be his excuse; and after stating his imprudence, I am happy to add that I owed the knowledge of it to himself. I joined them unexpectedly a day or two before the intended elopement; and then Xander, unable to support the idea of grieving and offending a sister whom he almost looked up to as a mother, acknowledged the whole to me. You may imagine what I felt and how I acted. Regard for my brother's credit and feelings prevented any public exposure, but I wrote to Ms. Faith, who left the place immediately, and Mr. Younge was of course removed from his charge. Ms. Faith's chief object was unquestionably my brother's fortune, which is thirty thousand pounds; but I cannot help supposing that the hope of revenging herself on me was a strong inducement. Her revenge would have been complete indeed.

This, sir, is a faithful narrative of every event in which we have been concerned together; and if you do not absolutely reject it as false, you will, I hope, acquit me henceforth of cruelty towards Ms. Faith. I know not in what manner, under what form of falsehood, she has imposed on you; but her success is not, perhaps, to be wondered at. Ignorant as you previously were of every thing concerning either, detection could not be in your power, and suspicion certainly not in your inclination. You may possibly wonder why all the was not told you last night. But I was not then mistress enough of myself to know what could or ought to be revealed. For the truth of every thing here related, I can appeal more particularly to the testimony of Col Amy the rat, who from our near relationship and constant intimacy, and still more as one of the executors of my mother's will, has been unavoidably acquainted with every particular of these transactions. If your abhorrence of me should make my assertions valueless, you cannot be prevented by the same cause from confiding in my cousin; and that there may be the possibility of consulting her, I shall endeavour to find some opportunity of putting the letter in your hands in the course of the morning. I will only add, Powers that Be bless you.

CHAPTER XIII (36)

IF Spike, when Miss Buffy Summers gave him the letter, did not expect it to contain a renewal of her offers, he had formed no expectation at all of its contents. But such as they were, it may be well supposed how eagerly he went through them, and what a contrariety of emotion they excited. His feelings as he read were scarcely to be defined. With amazement did he first understand that she believed any apology to be in her power; and stedfastly was he persuaded that she could have no explanation to give, which a just sense of shame would not conceal. With a strong prejudice against every thing she might say, he began her account of what had happened at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High. He read, with an eagerness which hardly left his power of comprehension, and from impatience of knowing what the next sentence might bring, was incapable of attending to the sense of the one before his eyes. Her belief of his brother's insensibility, he instantly resolved to be false, and her account of the real, the worst objections to the match, made him too angry to have any wish of doing her justice. She expressed no regret for what she had done which satisfied her; her style was not penitent, but haughty. It was all pride and insolence.

But when the subject was succeeded by her account of Ms. Faith, when he read, with somewhat clearer attention, a relation of events, which, if true, must overthrow every cherished opinion of her worth, and which bore so alarming an affinity to her own history of herself, his feelings were yet more acutely painful and more difficult of definition. Astonishment, apprehension, and even horror, oppressed him. He wished to discredit it entirely, repeatedly exclaiming, "This must be false! This cannot be! This must be the grossest falsehood!" -- and when he had gone through the whole letter,
though scarcely knowing any thing of the last page or two, put it hastily away, protesting that he would not regard it, that he would never look in it again.

In the perturbed state of mind, with thoughts that could rest on nothing, he walked on; but it would not do; in half a minute the letter was unfolded again, and collecting himself as well as he could, he again began the mortifying perusal of all that related to Faith, and commanded himself so far as to examine the meaning of every sentence. The account of her connection with the Bronze family was exactly what she had related herself; and the kindness of the late Miss Buffy Summers, though he had not before known its extent, agreed equally well with her own words. So far each recital confirmed the other; but when he came to the will, the difference was great. What Faith had said of her destiny as the Slayer was fresh in his memory, and as he recalled her very words, it was impossible not to feel that there was gross duplicity on one side or the other; and, for a few moments, he flattered himself that his wishes did not err. But when he read, and re-read with the closest attention, the particulars immediately following of Faith's resigning all pretensions to the Slayerdom, of her receiving, in lieu, so considerable a sum as three thousand pounds, again he was forced to hesitate. He put down the letter, weighed every circumstance with what he meant to be impartiality -- deliberated on the probability of each statement -- but with little success. On both sides it was only assertion. Again he read on. But every line proved more clearly that the affair, which he had believed it impossible that any contrivance could so represent as to render Miss Buffy Summers' conduct in it less than infamous, was capable of a turn which must make her entirely blameless throughout the whole.

The extravagance and general profligacy which she scrupled not to lay to Ms. Faith's charge, exceedingly shocked her; the more so, as he could bring no proof of its injustice. He had never heard of her before her entrance into the ----shire Militia, in which she had engaged at the persuasion of the young woman, who, on meeting her accidentally in town, had there renewed a slight acquaintance. Of her former way of life, nothing had been known in Southern California but what she told herself. As to her real character, had information been in his power, he had never felt a wish of enquiring. Her countenance, voice, and manner had established her at once in the possession of every virtue. He tried to recollect some instance of goodness, some distinguished trait of integrity or benevolence, that might rescue her from the attacks of Miss Buffy Summers; or at least, by the predominance of virtue, atone for those casual errors, under which he would endeavour to class what Miss Buffy Summers had described as the idleness and vice of many years continuance. But no such recollection befriended him. He could see her instantly before him, in every charm of air and address; but he could remember no more substantial good than the general approbation of the neighbourhood, and the regard which her social powers had gained her in the mess. After pausing on the point a considerable while, he once more continued to read. But, alas! the story which followed, of her designs on Mr. Summers, received some confirmation from what had passed between Col Amy the rat and himself only the morning before; and at last he was referred for the truth of every particular to Col Amy the rat herself -- from whom he had previously received the information of her near concern in all her cousin's affairs, and whose character he had no reason to question. At one time he had almost resolved on applying to her, but the idea was checked by the awkwardness of the application, and at length wholly banished by the conviction that Miss Buffy Summers would never have hazarded such a proposal if she had not been well assured of her cousin's corroboration.

He perfectly remembered every thing that had passed in conversation between Faith and himself in their first evening at Mrs. Philips's. Many of her expressions were still fresh in his memory. He was now struck with the impropriety of such communications to a stranger, and wondered it had escaped him before. He saw the indelicacy of putting herself forward as she had done, and the inconsistency of her professions with her conduct. He remembered that she had boasted of having no fear of seeing Miss Buffy Summers -- that Miss Buffy Summers might leave the country, but that She should stand her ground; yet she had avoided the burnt husk of Sunnydale High sparring match the very next
week. He remembered also, that till the burnt husk of Sunnydale High family had quitted the country, she had told her story to no one but herself; but that after their removal, it had been everywhere discussed; that she had then no reserves, no scruples in sinking Miss Buffy Summers' character, though she had assured him that respect for the mother would always prevent her exposing the daughter.

How differently did every thing now appear in which she was concerned! Her attentions to Mr. Gunn were now the consequence of views solely and hatefully mercenary; and the mediocrity of his fortune proved no longer the moderation of her wishes, but her eagerness to grasp at any thing. Her behaviour to himself could now have had no tolerable motive; she had either been deceived with regard to his fortune, or had been gratifying her vanity by encouraging the preference which he believed he had most incautiously shewn. Every lingering struggle in her favour grew fainter and fainter; and in farther justification of Miss Buffy Summers, he could not but allow that Willow, when questioned by Oz, had long ago asserted her blamelessness in the affair; that, proud and repulsive as were her manners, he had never, in the whole course of their acquaintance -- an acquaintance which had latterly brought them much together, and given her a sort of intimacy with her ways -- seen any thing that betrayed her to be unprincipled or unjust -- any thing that spoke her of irreligious or immoral habits. That among her own connections she was esteemed and valued -- that even Faith had allowed her merit as a sister, and that he had often heard her speak so affectionately of her brother as to prove her capable of some amiable feeling. That had her actions been what Faith represented them, so gross a violation of every thing right could hardly have been concealed from the world; and that friendship between a person capable of it, and such an amiable woman as Willow, was incomprehensible.

He grew absolutely ashamed of himself. -- Of neither Summers nor Faith could he think, without feeling that he had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd.

"How despicably have I acted!" he cried. -- "I, who have prided myself on my discernment! -- I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my brother, and gratified my vanity, in useless or blameable distrust. -- How humiliating is the discovery! -- Yet, how just a humiliation! -- Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly. -- Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till the moment, I never knew myself."

From himself to Oz -- from Oz to Rosenburg, his thoughts were in a line which soon brought to his recollection that Miss Buffy Summers' explanation there had appeared very insufficient; and he read it again. Widely different was the effect of a second perusal. -- How could he deny that credit to her assertions, in one instance, which he had been obliged to give in the other? -- She declared herself to have been totally unsuspicuous of his brother's attachment; -- and he could not help remembering what Adam's opinion had always been. -- Neither could he deny the justice of her description of Oz. -- He felt that Oz's feelings, though fervent, were little displayed, and that there was a constant complacency in his air and manner not often united with great sensibility.

When he came to that part of the letter in which his family were mentioned, in terms of such mortifying yet merited reproach, his sense of shame was severe. The justice of the charge struck his too forcibly for denial, and the circumstances to which she particularly alluded, as having passed at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High sparring match, and as confirming all her first disapprobation, could not have made a stronger impression on her mind than on his. The compliment to himself and his brother was not unfelt. It soothed, but it could not console him for the contempt which had been thus self-attracted by the rest of his family; -- and as he considered that Oz's disappointment had in fact been the work of his nearest relations, and reflected how materially the credit of both must be
hurt by such impropriety of conduct, he felt depressed beyond any thing he had ever known before.

After wandering along the lane for two hours, giving way to every variety of thought; re-considering events, determining probabilities, and reconciling himself, as well as he could, to a change so sudden and so important, fatigue, and a recollection of his long absence made him at length return home; and he entered the house with the wish of appearing cheerful as usual, and the resolution of repressing such reflections as must make his unfit for conversation.

He was immediately told, that the two ladies from Hellmouth had each called during his absence; Miss Buffy Summers, only for a few minutes to take leave, but that Col Amy the rat had been sitting with them at least an hour, hoping for his return, and almost resolving to walk after him till he could be found. -- Spike could but just affect concern in missing her; he really rejoiced at it. Col Amy the rat was no longer an object. He could think only of his letter.
CHAPTER XIV (37)

THE two ladies left Hellmouth the next morning; and Ms. Anya Nka having been in waiting near the lodges, to make them her parting obeisance, was able to bring home the pleasing intelligence of their appearing in very good health, and in as tolerable spirits as could be expected, after the melancholy scene so lately gone through at Hellmouth. To Hellmouth she then hastened to console Lord Snyder and his son; and on her return brought back, with great satisfaction, a message from his lordship, importing that he felt himself so dull as to make him very desirous of having them all to dine with him.

Spike could not see Lord Snyder without recollecting that, had he chosen it, he might by the time have been presented to him as his future nephew; nor could he think, without a smile, of what his lordship's indignation would have been. "What would he have said? -- how would he have behaved?" were questions with which he amused himself.

Their first subject was the diminution of the Hellmouth party. -- "I assure you, I feel it exceedingly," said Lord Snyder; "I believe nobody feels the loss of friends so much as I do. But I am particularly attached to these young men; and know them to be so much attached to me! -- They were excessively sorry to go! But so they always are. The dear colonel rallied her spirits tolerably till just at last; but Summers seemed to feel it most acutely, more I think than last year. Her attachment to Hellmouth, certainly increases."

Ms. Anya Nka had a pre-prepared compliment, and an allusion to throw in here, which were kindly smiled on by the father and son.

Lord Snyder observed, after dinner, that Mr. le Bloddy seemed out of spirits; and immediately accounting for it himself, by supposing that he did not like to go home again so soon, he added,

"But if that is the case, you must write to your father to beg that you may stay a little longer. Mr. Anya Nka will be very glad of your company, I am sure."

"I am much obliged to your lordship for your kind invitation," replied Spike, "but it is not in my power to accept it. -- I must be in town next Saturday."

"Why, at that rate, you will have been here only six weeks. I expected you to stay two months. I told Mr. Anya Nka so before you came. There can be no occasion for your going so soon. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy could certainly spare you for another fortnight."

"But my mother cannot. -- She wrote last week to hurry my return."

"Oh! your mother of course may spare you, if your father can. -- Sons are never of so much consequence to a mother. And if you will stay another month complete, it will be in my power to take one of you as far as Los Angeles, for I am going there early in June, for a week; and as Dawson does not object to the Barouche box, there will be very good room for one of you -- and indeed, if the weather should happen to be cool, I should not object to taking you both, as you are neither of you large."
"You are all kindness, Sir; but I believe we must abide by our original plan."

Lord Snyder seemed resigned.

"Ms. Anya Nka, you must send a servant with them. You know I always speak my mind, and I cannot bear the idea of two young men travelling post by themselves. It is highly improper. You must contrive to send somebody. I have the greatest dislike in the world to that sort of thing. -- Young men should always be properly guarded and attended, according to their situation in life. When my nephew Xander went to Ramsgate last summer, I made a point of him having two women servants go with him. -- Mr. Summers, the son of Ms. Summers of The Bronze, and Lord Summers, could not have appeared with propriety in a different manner. -- I am excessively attentive to all those things. You must send John with the young gentlemen, Mr. Anya Nka. I am glad it occurred to me to mention it; for it would really be discreditable to you to let them go alone."

"My aunt is to send a servant for us."

"Oh! -- Your aunt! -- She keeps a man-servant, does she? -- I am very glad you have somebody who thinks of those things. Where shall you change horses? -- Oh! Bromley, of course. -- If you mention my name at the Bell, you will be attended to."

Lord Snyder had many other questions to ask respecting their journey, and as he did not answer them all himself, attention was necessary, which Spike believed to be lucky for him, or, with a mind so occupied, he might have forgotten where he was. Reflection must be reserved for solitary hours; whenever he was alone, he gave way to it as the greatest relief; and not a day went by without a solitary walk, in which he might indulge in all the delight of unpleasant recollections.

Miss Buffy Summers' letter, he was in a fair way of soon knowing by heart. He studied every sentence: and his feelings towards its writer were at times widely different. When he remembered the style of her address, he was still full of indignation; but when he considered how unjustly he had condemned and upbraided her, his anger was turned against himself; and her disappointed feelings became the object of compassion. Her attachment excited gratitude, her general character respect; but he could not approve her; nor could he for a moment repent his refusal, or feel the slightest inclination ever to see her again. In his own past behaviour, there was a constant source of vexation; and in the unhappy defects of his family a subject of yet heavier chagrin. They were hopeless of remedy. His mother, contented with laughing at them, would never exert herself to restrain the wild giddiness of her youngest sons; and his father, with manners so far from right himself, was entirely insensible of the evil. Spike had frequently united with Oz in an endeavour to check the imprudence of Doyle and Angelus; but while they were supported by their father's indulgence, what chance could there be of improvement? Doyle, weak-spirited, irritable, and completely under Angelus's guidance, had been always affronted by their advice; and Angelus, self-willed and careless, would scarcely give them a hearing. They were ignorant, idle, and vain. While there was an officer in Sunnydale, they would flirt with her; and while Sunnydale was within a walk of The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's, they would be going there for ever.

Anxiety on Oz's behalf was another prevailing concern, and Miss Buffy Summers' explanation, by restoring Miss Willow to all his former good opinion, heightened the sense of what Oz had lost. Her affection was proved to have been sincere, and her conduct cleared of all blame, unless any could attach to the implicitness of her confidence in her friend. How grievous then was the thought that, of a situation so desirable in every respect, so replete with advantage, so promising for happiness, Oz had been deprived, by the folly and indecorum of his own family!

When to these recollections was added the development of Faith's character, it may be easily believed that the happy spirits which had seldom been depressed before, were now so much affected
as to make it almost impossible for him to appear tolerably cheerful.

Their engagements at Hellmouth were as frequent during the last week of his stay as they had been at first. The very last evening was spent there; and his Lordship again enquired minutely into the particulars of their journey, gave them directions as to the best method of packing, and was so urgent on the necessity of placing garments in the only right way, that Forest thought himself obliged, on his return, to undo all the work of the morning, and pack his trunk afresh.

When they parted, Lord Snyder, with great condescension, wished them a good journey, and invited them to come to Purgatory again next year; and Mr. De Principal exerted himself so far as to curtsy and hold out his hand to both.

CHAPTER XV (38)

ON Saturday morning Spike and Ms. Anya Nka met for breakfast a few minutes before the others appeared; and she took the opportunity of paying the parting civilities which she deemed indispensably necessary.

"I know not, Mr. Spike," said she, "whether Mr. Anya Nka has yet expressed his sense of your kindness in coming to us, but I am very certain you will not leave the house without receiving his thanks for it. The favour of your company has been much felt, I assure you. We know how little there is to tempt any one to our humble abode. Our plain manner of living, our small rooms, and few domestics, and the little we see of the world, must make Purgatory extremely dull to a young lord like yourself; but I hope you will believe us grateful for the condescension, and that we have done every thing in our power to prevent your spending your time unpleasantly."

Spike was eager with his thanks and assurances of happiness. He had spent six weeks with great enjoyment; and the pleasure of being with Adam, and the kind attentions he had received, must make him feel the obliged. Ms. Anya Nka was gratified; and with a more smiling solemnity replied,

"It gives me the greatest pleasure to hear that you have passed your time not disagreeably. We have certainly done our best; and most fortunately having it in our power to introduce you to very superior society, and, from our connection with Hellmouth, the frequent means of varying the humble home scene, I think we may flatter ourselves that your Purgatory visit cannot have been entirely irksome. Our situation with regard to Lord Snyder's family is indeed the sort of extraordinary advantage and blessing which few can boast. You see on what a footing we are. You see how continually we are engaged there. In truth I must acknowledge that, with all the disadvantages of the humble parsonage, I should not think any one abiding in it an object of compassion while they are sharers of our intimacy at Hellmouth."

Words were insufficient for the elevation of her feelings; and she was obliged to walk about the room, while Spike tried to unite civility and truth in a few short sentences.

"You may, in fact, carry a very favourable report of us into Southern California, my dear cousin. I flatter myself, at least, that you will be able to do so. Lord Snyder's great attentions to Mr. Anya Nka you have been a daily witness of; and altogether I trust it does not appear that your friend has drawn an unfortunate --; but on the point it will be as well to be silent. Only let me assure you, my dear Mr. Spike, that I can from my heart most cordially wish you equal felicity in marriage. My dear Adam and I have but one mind and one way of thinking. There is in everything a most remarkable resemblance of character and ideas between us. We seem to have been designed for each other. He
has even been encouraging me to get back into vengeance as a hobby."

"Is that right?" said Spike.

"Well, you know how I miss it. I'm so at loose ends since I quit. I think this is going to be a very big year for vengeance."

Spike gave her an odd look, "But... isn't vengeance kind of... vengeful?"

"You don't want me to have a hobby?" She smiled at Adam and gave him a little wave. He waved back at her.

"Huh, Yeah well, I'm going to go now. I'm happy that that is the case. I rejoice in your domestic comforts." Spike was not sorry, however, to have the recital of the Ms. Anya Nka's domestic comforts interrupted by the entrance of the lord from whom they sprung. Poor Adam! -- it was melancholy to leave him to such society! -- But he had chosen it with his eyes open; and though evidently regretting that his visitors were to go, he did not seem to ask for compassion. His home and his housekeeping, his parish and his poultry, demonic minions, and all their dependent concerns, had not yet lost their charms.

At length the chaise arrived, the trunks were fastened on, the parcels placed within, and it was pronounced to be ready. After an affectionate parting between the friends, Spike was attended to the carriage by Ms. Anya Nka, and as they walked down the garden, she was commissioning him with her best respects to all his family, not forgetting her thanks for the kindness she had received at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's in the winter, and her compliments to Mrs. and Mr. Rupert Giles, though unknown. She then handed him in, Forest followed, and the door was on the point of being closed, when she suddenly reminded them, with some consternation, that they had hitherto forgotten to leave any message for the gentlemen at Hellmouth.

"But," she added, "you will of course wish to have your humble respects delivered to them, with your grateful thanks for their kindness to you while you have been here."

Spike made no objection; -- the door was then allowed to be shut, and the carriage drove off.

"Good gracious!" cried Forest, after a few minutes silence, "it seems but a day or two since we first came! -- and yet how many things have happened!"

"A great many indeed," said his companion with a sigh.

"We have dined nine times at Hellmouth, besides drinking tea there twice! -- How much I shall have to tell!"

Spike privately added, "And how much I shall have to conceal."

Their journey was performed without much conversation, or any alarm; and within four hours of their leaving Purgatory, they reached Mrs. Jenny Giles' house, where they were to remain a few days.

Oz looked well, and Spike had little opportunity of studying his spirits, amidst the various engagements which the kindness of his uncle had reserved for them. But Oz was to go home with him, and at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's there would be leisure enough for observation.

It was not without an effort, meanwhile, that he could wait even for The Ubiquitous Warehouse of
the Le Bloddy's, before he told his brother of Miss Buffy Summers' proposals. To know that he had the power of revealing what would so exceedingly astonish Oz, and must, at the same time, so highly gratify whatever of his own vanity he had not yet been able to reason away, was such a temptation to openness as nothing could have conquered but the state of indecision in which he remained as to the extent of what he should communicate; and his fear, if he once entered on the subject, of being hurried into repeating something of Rosenberg which might only grieve his brother farther.

CHAPTER XVI (39)

IT was the second week in May in which the three young gentlemen set out together from Riverside-street for the town of ---- in Southern California; and, as they drew near the appointed inn where Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy's carriage was to meet them, they quickly perceived, in token of the coachman's punctuality, both Doyle and Angelus looking out of a dining room upstairs. These two boys had been above an hour in the place, happily employed in visiting an opposite weaponry, watching the sentinel on guard, and dressing a sallad and cucumber.

After welcoming their brothers, they triumphantly displayed a table set out with such cold meat as an inn larder usually affords, exclaiming, "Is not the nice? is not the an agreeable surprise?"

"And we mean to treat you all," added Angelus; "but you must lend us the money, for we have just spent ours at the shop out there." Then shewing his purchases: "Look here, I have bought a sword with a statue of Acathla. I do not think it is very handsome; but I thought I might as well buy it as not. I shall dress it as soon as I get home, and see if I can make it up any better."

"It's a big rock. I can't wait to tell my friends. They don't have a rock this big." Said Spike.

Angelus added, with perfect unconcern, "Oh! but there were two or three much uglier in the shop; and when I have bought some handsomer coloured satin to trim it with fresh, I think it will be very tolerable. Besides, it will not much signify the ----shire have left Sunnydale, and they are going in a fortnight."

"Are they indeed?" cried Spike, with the greatest satisfaction.

"They are going to be encamped near Palm Springs; and I do so want papa to take us all there for the summer! It would be such a delicious scheme, and I dare say would hardly cost any thing at all. Mamma would like to go too, of all things! Only think what a miserable summer else we shall have!"

"Yes," thought Spike, " that would be a delightful scheme, indeed, and completely do for us at once. Good Heaven! Palm Springs, and a whole campful of soldiers, to us, who have been overset already by one poor regiment of militia, and the monthly sparing matchs of Sunnydale."

"Now I have got some news for you," said Angelus, as they sat down to table. "What do you think? It is excellent news, capital news, and about a certain person that we all like."

Oz and Spike looked at each other, and the waiter was told that she need not stay. Angelus laughed, and said, "Aye, that is just like your formality and discretion. You thought the waiter must not hear,
as if she cared! I dare say she often hears worse things said than I am going to say. But she is an ugly woman! I am glad she is gone. I never saw such a long chin in my life. Well, but now for my news: it is about dear Faith; too good for the waiter, is not it? There is no danger of Faith's marrying Mr King. There's for you! He is gone down to his aunt at Liverpool; gone to stay. Faith is safe."

"And Mr King is safe!" added Spike; "safe from a connection imprudent as to fortune."

"He is a great fool for going away, if he liked her."

"But I hope there is no strong attachment on either side," said Oz.

"I am sure there is not on her. I will answer for it she never cared three straws about him. Who could about such a nasty little freckled thing?"

Spike was shocked to think that, the sentiment was little other than his own breast had formerly harboured and fancied liberal!

As soon as all had ate, and the elder ones paid, the carriage was ordered; and, after some contrivance, the whole party, with all their boxes, workbags, and parcels, and the unwelcome addition of Doyle's and Angelus's purchases, were seated in it.

"How nicely we are crammed in!" cried Angelus. "I am glad I bought Acathla, if it is only for the fun of having it! Well, now let us be quite comfortable and snug, and talk and laugh all the way home. And in the first place, let us hear what has happened to you all, since you went away. Have you seen any pleasant women? Have you had any flirting? I was in great hopes that one of you would have got a wife before you came back. Oz will be quite an old maid soon, I declare. He is almost three and twenty! Lord, how ashamed I should be of not being married before three and twenty! My uncle Philips wants you so to get husbands, you can't think. He says Spikey had better have taken Ms. Anya Nka; but I do not think there would have been any fun in it. Lord! how I should like to be married before any of you; and then I would chaperon you about to all the sparing matches.

Dear me! we had such a good piece of fun the other day at Colonel Chase's. Doyle and me were to spend the day there, and Mr. Chase promised to have a little sparing match in the evening (by the bye, Mr. Chase and me are such friends!); and so he asked the two Harringtons to come, but Henry was ill, and so Pen was forced to come by herself; and then, what do you think we did? We dressed up the upstairsmaid, Chamberlayne, in men's clothes to pass for a gentlemen, -- only think what fun! Not a soul knew of it but Col. and Mr. Chase, and Doyle and me, except my uncle, for we were forced to borrow one of his suit; and you cannot imagine how well she looked! When Tara, and Faith, and Pratt, and two or three more of the women came in, they did not know her in the least. Lord! how I laughed! and so did Mr. Chase. I thought I should have died. And that made the women suspect something, and then they soon found out what was the matter."

With such kind of histories of their parties and good jokes did Angelus, assisted by Doyle's hints and additions, endeavour to amuse his companions all the way to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's. Spike listened as little as he could, but there was no escaping the frequent mention of Faith's name.

Their reception at home was most kind. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy rejoiced to see Oz in undiminished beauty; and more than once during dinner did Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy say voluntarily to Spike,

"I am glad you are come back, Spikey."

Their party in the dining-room was large, for almost all the Walshes came to meet Forest and hear the news: and various were the subjects which occupied them. Dr. Angleman Walsh was enquiring of
Forest, across the table, after the welfare and poultry of his eldest son; Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy was doubly engaged, on one hand collecting an account of the present fashions from Oz, who sat some way below him, and on the other, retailing them all to the younger Mr. Walshes; and Angelus, in a voice rather louder than any other person's, was enumerating the various pleasures of the morning to any body who would hear him.

"Oh! Anointed One," said he, "I wish you had gone with us, for we had such fun! as we went along, Doyle and me drew up all the blinds, and pretended there was nobody in the coach; and I should have gone so all the way, if Doyle had not been sick; and when we got to the George, I do think we behaved very handsomely, for we treated the other three with the nicest cold luncheon in the world, and if you would have gone, we would have treated you too. And then when we came away it was such fun! I thought we never should have got into the coach. I was ready to die of laughter. And then we were so merry all the way home! we talked and laughed so loud, that any body might have heard us ten miles off!"

To This, Anointed One very gravely replied, "Far be it from me, my dear brother, to depreciate such pleasures. They would doubtless be congenial with the generality of male minds. But I confess they would have no charms for me. I should infinitely prefer a book."

But of the answer Angelus heard not a word. He seldom listened to any body for more than half a minute, and never attended to Anointed One at all.

In the afternoon Angelus was urgent with the rest of the boys to walk to Sunnydale, and see how every body went on; but Spike steadily opposed the scheme. It should not be said, that the Mr. le Bloddys could not be at home half a day before they were in pursuit of the officers. There was another reason too, for his opposition. He dreaded seeing Faith again, and was resolved to avoid it as long as possible. The comfort to him of the regiment's approaching removal was indeed beyond expression. In a fortnight they were to go, and once gone, he hoped there could be nothing more to plague him on her account.

He had not been many hours at home, before he found that the Palm Springs scheme, of which Angelus had given them a hint at the inn, was under frequent discussion between his parents. Spike saw directly that his mother had not the smallest intention of yielding; but her answers were at the same time so vague and equivocal, that his father, though often disheartened, had never yet despaired of succeeding at last.
SPIKE'S impatience to acquaint Oz with what had happened could no longer be overcome; and at length resolving to suppress every particular in which his brother was concerned, and preparing him to be surprised, he related to his the next morning the chief of the scene between Miss Buffy Summers and himself.

Miss le Bloddy's astonishment was soon lessened by the strong brotherly partiality which made any admiration of Spike appear perfectly natural; and all surprise was shortly lost in other feelings. He was sorry that Miss Buffy Summers should have delivered her sentiments in a manner so little suited to recommend them; but still more was he grieved for the unhappiness which his brother's refusal must have given her.

"Her being so sure of succeeding, was wrong," said he; "and certainly ought not to have appeared; but consider how much it must increase her disappointment."

"Indeed," replied Spike, "I am heartily sorry for her; but she has other feelings which will probably soon drive away her regard for me. You do not blame me, however, for refusing him?"

"Blame you! Oh, no."

"But you blame me for having spoken so warmly of Faith."

"No -- I do not know that you were wrong in saying what you did."

"But you will know it, when I have told you what happened the very next day."

He then spoke of the letter, repeating the whole of its contents as far as they concerned Faith. What a stroke was for poor Oz! who would willingly have gone through the world without believing that so much wickedness existed in the whole race of mankind, as was here collected in one individual. Nor was Summers' vindication, though grateful to his feelings, capable of consoling him for such discovery. Most earnestly did he labour to prove the probability of error, and seek to clear one without involving the other.

"This will not do," said Spike. "You never will be able to make both of them good for any thing. Take your choice, but you must be satisfied with only one. There is but such a quantity of merit between them; just enough to make one good sort of woman; and of late it has been shifting about handsome much. For my part, I am inclined to believe it all Miss Buffy Summers', but you shall do as you chuse."

It was some time, however, before a smile could be extorted from Oz.

"I do not know when I have been more shocked," said he. "Faith so very bad! It is almost past belief. And poor Miss Buffy Summers! dear Spikey, only consider what she must have suffered. Such a disappointment! and with the knowledge of your ill opinion too! and having to relate such a thing of
her brother! It is really too distressing. I am sure you must feel it so."

"Oh! no, my regret and compassion are all done away by seeing you so full of both. I know you will do her such ample justice, that I am growing every moment more unconcerned and indifferent. Your profusion makes me saving; and if you lament over her much longer, my heart will be as light as a feather."

"Poor Faith; there is such an expression of goodness in her countenance! such an openness and gentleness in her manner."

"There certainly was some great mismanagement in the education of those two young women. One has got all the goodness, and the other all the appearance of it."

"I never thought Miss Buffy Summers so deficient in the appearance of it as you used to do."

"And yet I meant to be uncommonly clever in taking so decided a dislike to her, without any reason. It is such a spur to one's genius, such an opening for wit to have a dislike of that kind. One may be continually abusive without saying anything just; but one cannot be always laughing at a woman without now and then stumbling on something witty."

"Spikey when you first read that letter, I am sure you could not treat the matter as you do now."

"Indeed I could not. I was uncomfortable enough. I was very uncomfortable, I may say unhappy. And with no one to speak to of what I felt, no Oz to comfort me and say that I had not been so very weak and vain and nonsensical as I knew I had! Oh! how I wanted you!"

"How unfortunate that you should have used such very strong expressions in speaking of Faith to Miss Buffy Summers, for now they do appear wholly undeserved."

"Certainly. But the misfortune of speaking with bitterness is a most natural consequence of the prejudices I had been encouraging. There is one point on which I want your advice. I want to be told whether I ought, or ought not, to make our acquaintance in general understand Faith's character."

Miss le Bloddy paused a little and then replied, "Surely there can be no occasion for exposing her so dreadfully. What is your own opinion?"

"That it ought not to be attempted. Miss Buffy Summers has not authorised me to make her communication public. On the contrary, every particular relative to her brother was meant to be kept as much as possible to myself; and if I endeavour to undeceive people as to the rest of her conduct, who will believe me? The general prejudice against Miss Buffy Summers is so violent, that it would be the death of half the good people in Sunnydale to attempt to place her in an amiable light. I am not equal to it. Faith will soon be gone; and therefore it will not signify to anybody here, what she really is. Sometime hence it will be all found out, and then we may laugh at their stupidity in not knowing it before. At present I will say nothing about it."

"You are quite right. To have her errors made public might ruin her for ever. She is now perhaps sorry for what she has done, and anxious to re-establish a character. We must not make her desperate."

The tumult of Spike's mind was allayed by the conversation. He had got rid of two of the secrets which had weighed on his for a fortnight, and was certain of a willing listener in Oz, whenever he might wish to talk again of either. But there was still something lurking behind, of which prudence forbade the disclosure. He dared not relate the other half of Miss Buffy Summers' letter, nor explain to his brother how sincerely he had been valued by her friend. Here was knowledge in which no one
could partake; and he was sensible that nothing less than a perfect understanding between the parties
could justify his in throwing off the last incumbrance of mystery. "And then," said he, "if that very
improbable event should ever take place, I shall merely be able to tell what Rosenburg may tell in a
much more agreeable manner herself. The liberty of communication cannot be mine till it has lost all
its value!"

He was now, on being settled at home, at leisure to observe the real state of his brother's spirits. Oz
was not happy. He still cherished a very tender affection for Rosenburg. Having never even fancied
himself in love before, his regard had all the warmth of first attachment, and, from his age and
disposition, greater steadiness than first attachments often boast; and so fervently did he value her
remembrance, and prefer her to every other woman, that all his good sense, and all his attention to
the feelings of his friends, were requisite to check the indulgence of those regrets which must have
been injurious to his own health and their tranquillity.

"Well, Spikey," said Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy one day, "what is your opinion now of the sad
business of Oz's? For my part, I am determined never to speak of it again to anybody. I told my
brother Philips so the other day. But I cannot find out that Oz saw any thing of her in Los Angeles.
Well, she is a very undeserving young woman -- and I do not suppose there is the least chance in the
world of his ever getting her now. There is no talk of her coming to the burnt husk of Sunnydale
High again in the summer; and I have enquired of everybody, too, who is likely to know."

"I do not believe that she will ever live at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High any more."

"Oh, well! it is just as she chooses. Nobody wants her to come. Though I shall always say that she
used my son extremely ill; and if I was him, I would not have put up with it. Well, my comfort is, I
am sure Oz will die of a broken heart, and then she will be sorry for what she has done."

But as Spike could not receive comfort from any such expectation, he made no answer.

"Well, Spikey," continued his father soon afterwards, "and so the Anya Nkaes live very comfortable,
do they? Well, well, I only hope it will last. And what sort of table do they keep? Adam is an
excellent manager, I dare say. If he is half as sharp as his father, he is saving enough. There is
nothing extravagant in their housekeeping, I dare say."

"No, nothing at all."

"A great deal of good management, depend upon it. Yes, yes. They will take care not to outrun their
income. They will never be distressed for money. Well, much good may it do them! And so, I
suppose, they often talk of having The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's when your mother
is dead. They look upon it quite as their own, I dare say, whenever that happens."

"It was a subject which they could not mention before me."

"No. It would have been strange if they had. But I make no doubt, they often talk of it between
themselves. Well, if they can be easy with an estate that is not lawfully their own, so much the
better. I should be ashamed of having one that was only entailed on me. And when I am a great
giant snake, we will have no more of those kind of tails."

CHAPTER XVIII (41)

THE first week of their return was soon gone. The second began. It was the last of the regiment's
stay in Sunnydale, and all the young gentlemen in the neighbourhood were drooping apace. The dejection was almost universal. The elder Mr. le Bloddys alone were still able to eat, drink, and sleep, and pursue the usual course of their employments. Very frequently were they reproached for the insensibility by Doyle and Angelus, whose own misery was extreme, and who could not comprehend such hard-heartedness in any of the family.

"Good Heaven! What is to become of us! What are we to do!" would they often exclaim in the bitterness of woe. "How can you be smiling so, Spikey?"

Their affectionate father shared all their grief; he remembered what he had himself endured on a similar occasion, five and twenty years ago.

"I am sure," said he, "I cried for two days together when Colonel Millar's regiment went away. I thought I should have broke my heart."

"I am sure I shall break mine," said Angelus.

"If one could but go to Palm Springs!" observed Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy.

"Oh, yes! -- if one could but go to Palm Springs! But papa is so disagreeable."

"A little sea-bathing would set me up for ever."

"And my uncle Philips is sure it would do me a great deal of good," added Doyle.

Such were the kind of lamentations resounding perpetually through The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's-house. Spike tried to be diverted by them; but all sense of pleasure was lost in shame. He felt anew the justice of Miss Buffy Summers' objections; and never had he before been so much disposed to pardon her interference in the views of her friend.

But the gloom of Angelus's prospect was shortly cleared away; for he received an invitation from Mr. Chase, the husband of the Colonel of the regiment, to accompany him to Palm Springs. This invaluable friend was a very young man, and very lately married. A resemblance in good humour and good spirits had recommended his and Angelus to each other, and out of their three months' acquaintance they had been intimate two.

The rapture of Angelus on the occasion, his adoration of Mr. Chase, the delight of Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, and the mortification of Doyle, are scarcely to be described. Wholly inattentive to his brother's feelings, Angelus flew about the house in restless ecstasy, calling for everyone's congratulations, and laughing and talking with more violence than ever; whilst the luckless Doyle continued in the parlour repining at his fate in terms as unreasonable as his accent was peevish.

"I cannot see why Mr. Chase should not ask me as well as Angelus," said he, "though I am not his particular friend. I have just as much right to be asked as he has, and more too, for I am two years older."

In vain did Spike attempt to reasonable, and Oz to make his resigned. As for Spike himself, the invitation was so far from exciting in his the same feelings as in his father and Angelus, that he considered it as the death-warrant of all possibility of common sense for the latter; and detestable as such a step must make his were it known, he could not help secretly advising his mother not to let his go. He represented to her all the improprieties of Angelus's general behaviour, the little advantage he could derive from the friendship of such a man as Mr. Chase, and the probability of his being yet more imprudent with such a companion at Palm Springs, where the temptations must be greater than
at home. She heard his attentively, and then said,

"Angelus will never be easy till he has exposed himself in some public place or other, and we can never expect him to do it with so little expense or inconvenience to his family as under the present circumstances."

"If you were aware," said Spike, "of the very great disadvantage to us all, which must arise from the public notice of Angelus's unguarded and imprudent manner; nay, which has already arisen from it, I am sure you would judge differently in the affair."

"Already arisen!" repeated Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy. "What, has he frightened away some of your lovers? Poor little Spikey! But do not be cast down. Such squeamish youths as cannot bear to be connected with a little absurdity are not worth a regret. Come, let me see the list of the pitiful fellows who have been kept aloof by Angelus's folly."

"Indeed you are mistaken. I have no such injuries to resent. It is not of peculiar, but of general evils, which I am now complaining. Our importance, our respectability in the world, must be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of all restraint which mark Angelus's character. Excuse me -- for I must speak plainly. If you, my dear mother, will not take the trouble of checking his exuberant spirits, and of teaching him that his present pursuits are not to be the business of his life, he will soon be beyond the reach of redemption. His character will be fixed, and he will, at sixteen, be the most determined flirt that ever made himself and his family ridiculous. A flirt, too, in the worst and meanest degree of flirtation; without any attraction beyond youth and a tolerable person; and from the ignorance and emptiness of his mind, wholly unable to ward off any portion of that universal contempt which his rage for admiration will excite. In the danger Doyle is also comprehended. He will follow wherever Angelus leads. -- Vain, ignorant, idle, and absolutely uncontrolled! Oh! my dear mother, can you suppose it possible that they will not be censured and despised wherever they are known, and that their brothers will not be often involved in the disgrace?"

Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy saw that his whole heart was in the subject; and affectionately taking his hand, said in reply,

"Do not make yourself uneasy, my love. Wherever you and Oz are known, you must be respected and valued; and you will not appear to less advantage for having a couple of -- or I may say, three -- very silly brothers. We shall have no peace at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's if Angelus does not go to Palm Springs. Let him go then. Colonel Cordelia is a sensible woman, and has excellent fortelling visions and will keep his out of any real mischief; and he is luckily too poor to be an object of prey to any body. At Palm Springs he will be of less importance, even as a common flirt, than he has been here. The officers will find men better worth their notice. Let us hope, therefore, that his being there may teach him his own insignificance. At any rate, he cannot grow many degrees worse without authorizing us to lock him up for the rest of his life."

With the answer Spike was forced to be content; but his own opinion continued the same, and he left her disappointed and sorry. It was not in his nature, however, to increase his vexations by dwelling on them. He was confident of having performed his duty, and to fret over unavoidable evils, or augment them by anxiety, was no part of his disposition.
Had Angelus and his father known the substance of his conference with his mother, their indignation would hardly have found expression in their united volubility. In Angelus's imagination, a visit to Palm Springs comprised every possibility of earthly happiness. He saw, with the creative eye of fancy, the streets of that gay bathing place covered with officers. He saw himself the object of attention to tens and to scores of them at present unknown. He saw all the glories of the camp; its tents stretched forth in beauteous uniformity of lines, crowded with the young and the gay, and dazzling with scarlet; and to complete the view, he saw himself seated beneath a tent, dressed in the supplest of leathers, tenderly flirting with at least six officers at once.

Had he known that his brother sought to tear his from such prospects and such realities as these, what would have been his sensations? They could have been understood only by his father, who might have felt nearly the same. Angelus's going to Palm Springs was all that consoled his for the melancholy conviction of his wife's never intending to go there herself.

But they were entirely ignorant of what had passed; and their raptures continued, with little intermission, to the very day of Angelus's leaving home.

Spike was now to see Ms. Faith for the last time. Having been frequently in company with her since his return, agitation was handsome well over; the agitations of former partiality entirely so. He had even learnt to detect, in the very gentleness which had first delighted him, an affectation and a sameness to disgust and weary. In her present behaviour to himself, moreover, he had a fresh source of displeasure, for the inclination she soon testified of renewing those attentions which had marked the early part of their acquaintance could only serve, after what had since passed, to provoke him. He lost all concern for her in finding himself thus selected as the object of such idle and frivolous gallantry; and while he steadily repressed it, could not but feel the reproof contained in her believing that, however long, and for whatever cause, her attentions had been withdrawn, his vanity would be gratified and his preference secured at any time by their renewal.

On the very last day of the regiment's remaining in Sunnydale, she dined with others of the officers at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's; and so little was Spike disposed to part from her in good humour, that on her making some enquiry as to the manner in which his time had passed at Purgatory, he mentioned Col Amy the rat's and Miss Buffy Summers' having both spent three weeks at Hellmouth, and asked her if she were acquainted with the former.

She looked surprised, displeased, alarmed; but with a moment's recollection and a returning smile, replied that she had formerly seen her often; and after observing that she was a very lady like woman, asked his how he had liked her. His answer was warmly in her favour. With an air of indifference she soon afterwards added, "How long did you say that she was at Hellmouth?"

"Nearly three weeks."

"And you saw her frequently?"

"Yes, almost every day."

"Her manners are very different from her cousin's."

"Yes, very different. But I think Miss Buffy Summers improves on acquaintance."
"Indeed!" cried Faith with a look which did not escape him. "And pray may I ask -- ?" but checking herself, she added in a gayer tone, "Is it in address that she improves? Has she deigned to add ought of civility to her ordinary style? for I dare not hope," she continued in a lower and more serious tone, "that she is improved in essentials."

"Oh, no!" said Spike. "In essentials, I believe, she is very much what she ever was."

While he spoke, Faith looked as if scarcely knowing whether to rejoice over his words, or to distrust their meaning. There was a something in his countenance which made her listen with an apprehensive and anxious attention, while he added,

"When I said that she improved on acquaintance, I did not mean that either her mind or manners were in a state of improvement, but that from knowing her better, her disposition was better understood."

Faith's alarm now appeared in a heightened complexion and agitated look; for a few minutes she was silent; till, shaking off her embarrassment, she turned to his again, and said in the gentlest of accents,

"You, who so well know my feelings towards Miss Buffy Summers, will readily comprehend how sincerely I must rejoice that she is wise enough to assume even the appearance of what is right. Her pride, in that direction, may be of service, if not to herself, to many others, for it must deter her from such foul misconduct as I have suffered by. I only fear that the sort of cautiousness, to which you, I imagine, have been alluding, is merely adopted on her visits to her uncle, of whose good opinion and judgment she stands much in awe. Her fear of his has always operated, I know, when they were together; and a good deal is to be imputed to her wish of forwarding the match with Mr. De Principal, which I am certain she has very much at heart."

Spike could not repress a smile at this, but he answered only by a slight inclination of the head. He saw that she wanted to engage him on the old subject of her grievances, and he was in no humour to indulge her. The rest of the evening passed with the appearance, on her side, of usual cheerfulness, but with no farther attempt to distinguish Spike; and they parted at last with mutual civility, and possibly a mutual desire of never meeting again.

When the party broke up, Angelus returned with Mr. Chase to Sunnydale, from whence they were to set out early the next morning. The separation between his and his family was rather noisy than pathetic. Doyle was the only one who shed tears; but he did weep from vexation and envy. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy was diffuse in his good wishes for the felicity of his son, and impressive in his injunctions that he would not miss the opportunity of enjoying himself as much as possible; advice, which there was every reason to believe would be attended to; and in the clamorous happiness of Angelus himself in bidding farewell, the more gentle adieus of his brothers were uttered without being heard.

CHAPTER XIX (42)

HAD Spike's opinion been all drawn from his own family, he could not have formed a very pleasing picture of conjugal felicity or domestic comfort. His mother, captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humour which youth and beauty generally give, had married a man whose weak understanding and illiberal mind and demonic pretensions had, very early in their marriage, put an end to all real affection for him. Respect, esteem, and confidence had vanished for ever; and all her views of domestic happiness were overthrown. But Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy was not of a disposition to
seek comfort, for the disappointment which her own imprudence had brought on, in any of those pleasures which too often console the unfortunate for their folly or their vice. She was fond of the country and of books; and from these tastes had arisen her principal enjoyments. To her husband she was very little otherwise indebted, than as his ignorance and folly had contributed to her amusement. There is not the sort of happiness which a woman would in general wish to owe to her husband; but where other powers of entertainment are wanting, the true philosopher will derive benefit from such as are given.

Spike, however, had never been blind to the impropriety of his mother's behaviour as a wife. He had always seen it with pain; but respecting her abilities, and grateful for her affectionate treatment of himself, he endeavoured to forget what he could not overlook, and to banish from his thoughts that continual breach of conjugal obligation and decorum which, in exposing her husband to the contempt of his own children, was so highly reprehensible. But he had never felt so strongly as now the disadvantages which must attend the children of so unsuitable a marriage, nor ever been so fully aware of the evils arising from so ill-judged a direction of talents; talents which rightly used, might at least have preserved the respectability of her sons, even if incapable of enlarging the mind of her husband.

When Spike had rejoiced over Faith's departure, he found little other cause for satisfaction in the loss of the regiment. Their parties abroad were less varied than before; and at home he had a father and brother whose constant repinings at the dulness of every thing around them threw a real gloom over their domestic circle; and, though Doyle might in time regain his natural degree of sense, since the disturbers of his brain were removed, his other brother, from whose disposition greater evil might be apprehended, was likely to be hardened in all his folly and assurance by a situation of such double danger as a watering place and a camp. Upon the whole, therefore, he found what has been sometimes found before, that an event to which he had looked forward with impatient desire, did not, in taking place, bring all the satisfaction he had promised himself. It was consequently necessary to name some other period for the commencement of actual felicity; to have some other point on which his wishes and hopes might be fixed, and by again enjoying the pleasure of anticipation, console himself for the present, and prepare for another disappointment. His tour to the Lake Tahoe was now the object of his happiest thoughts; it was his best consolation for all the uncomfortable hours which the discontentenedness of his father and Doyle made inevitable; and could he have included Oz in the scheme, every part of it would have been perfect.

"But it is fortunate," thought he, "that I have something to wish for. Were the whole arrangement complete, my disappointment would be certain. But here, by my carrying with me one ceaseless source of regret in my brother's absence, I may reasonably hope to have all my expectations of pleasure realized. A scheme of which every part promises delight, can never be successful; and general disappointment is only warded off by the defence of some little peculiar vexation."

When Angelus went away, he promised to write very often and very minutely to his father and Doyle; but his letters were always long expected, and always very short. Those to his father contained little else, than that they were just returned from the library, where such and such officers had attended them, and where he had seen such beautiful ornaments as made his quite wild; that he had a new gown, or a new parasol, which he would have described more fully, but was obliged to leave off in a violent hurry, as Mr. Chase called him, and they were going to the camp; -- and from his correspondence with his brother, there was still less to be learnt -- for his letters to Doyle, though rather longer, were much too full of lines under the words to be made public.

After the first fortnight or three weeks of his absence, health, good humour, and cheerfulness began to re-appear at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's. Everything wore a happier aspect.
The families who had been in town for the winter came back again, and summer finery and summer engagements arose. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy was restored to his usual querulous serenity, and by the middle of June Doyle was so much recovered as to be able to enter Sunnydale without tears; an event of such happy promise as to make Spike hope that by the following Christmas, he might be so tolerably reasonable as not to mention an officer above once a day, unless, by some cruel and malicious arrangement at the War-Office, another regiment should be quartered in Sunnydale.

The time fixed for the beginning of their Northern tour was now fast approaching; and a fortnight only was wanting of it, when a letter arrived from Mr. Rupert Giles, which at once delayed its commencement and curtailed its extent. Mrs. Jenny Giles would be prevented by business from setting out till a fortnight later in July, and must be in Los Angeles again within a month; and as that left too short a period for them to go so far, and see so much as they had proposed, or at least to see it with the leisure and comfort they had built on, they were obliged to give up the Lake Tahoe, and substitute a more contracted tour; and, according to the present plan, were to go no farther northward than The San Francisco Bay Area. In that county, there was enough to be seen to occupy the chief of their three weeks; and to Mr. Rupert Giles it had a peculiarly strong attraction. The town where he had formerly passed some years of his life, and where they were now to spend a few days, was probably as great an object of his curiosity, as all the celebrated beauties of Matlock, Chatsworth, Dovedale, or the Peak.

Spike was excessively disappointed; he had set his heart on seeing the Lake Tahoe; and still thought there might have been time enough. But it was his business to be satisfied -- and certainly his temper to be happy; and all was soon right again.

With the mention of The San Francisco Bay Area, there were many ideas connected. It was impossible for his to see the word without thinking of The Bronze and its owner. "But surely," said he, "I may enter her county with impunity, and rob it of a few petrified spars without her perceiving me."

The period of expectation was now doubled. Four weeks were to pass away before his aunt and uncle's arrival. But they did pass away, and Mrs. and Mr. Rupert Giles, with their four children, did at length appear at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's. The children, two boys of six and eight years old, and two younger girls, were to be left under the particular care of their cousin Oz, who was the general favourite, and whose steady sense and sweetness of temper exactly adapted him for attending to them in every way -- teaching them, playing with them, and loving them.

The Giles' staid only one night at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's, and set off the next morning with Spike in pursuit of novelty and amusement. One enjoyment was certain -- that of suitableness as companions; a suitableness which comprehended health and temper to bear inconveniences -- cheerfulness to enhance every pleasure -- and affection and intelligence, which might supply it among themselves if there were disappointments abroad.

It is not the object of the work to give a description of The San Francisco Bay Area, nor of any of the remarkable places through which their route thither lay; Oxford, Blenheim, Warwick, Kenelworth, Birmingham, &c. are sufficiently known. A small part of the San Francisco Bay Area is all the present concern. To the little town of Napa, the scene of Mr. Rupert Giles' former residence, and where he had lately learned that some acquaintance still remained, they bent their steps, after having seen all the principal wonders of the country; and within five miles of Napa, Spike found from his uncle that The Bronze was situated. It was not in their direct road, nor more than a mile or two out of it. In talking over their route the evening before, Mr. Rupert Giles expressed an inclination to see the place again. Mrs. Jenny Giles declared her willingness, and Spike was applied to for his approbation.

"My love, should not you like to see a place of which you have heard so much?" said his uncle. "A
place too, with which so many of your acquaintance are connected. Faith passed all her youth there, you know."

Spike was distressed. He felt that he had no business at The Bronze, and was obliged to assume a disinclination for seeing it. He must own that he was tired of great houses; after going over so many, he really had no pleasure in fine carpets or satin curtains.

Mr. Rupert Giles abused his stupidity. "If it were merely a fine house richly furnished," said he, "I should not care about it myself; but the grounds are delightful. They have some of the finest woods in the country."

Spike said no more -- but his mind could not acquiesce. The possibility of meeting Miss Buffy Summers, while viewing the place, instantly occurred. It would be dreadful! He paled at the very idea; and thought it would be better to speak openly to his uncle than to run such a risk. But against there were objections; and he finally resolved that it could be the last resource, if his private enquiries as to the absence of the family were unfavourably answered.

Accordingly, when he retired at night, he asked the chambermaid whether The Bronze were not a very fine place, what was the name of its proprietor, and, with no little alarm, whether the family were down for the summer. A most welcome negative followed the last question -- and his alarms being now removed, he was at leisure to feel a great deal of curiosity to see the house herself; and when the subject was revived the next morning, and he was again applied to, he could readily answer, and with a proper air of indifference, that he had not really any dislike to the scheme.

To The Bronze, therefore, they were to go.
CHAPTER I (43)

SPIKE, as they drove along, watched for the first appearance of The Bronze Woods with some perturbation; and when at length they turned in at the lodge, his spirits were in a high flutter.

The park was very large, and contained great variety of ground. They entered it in one of its lowest points, and drove for some time through a beautiful wood, stretching over a wide extent.

Spike's mind was too full for conversation, but he saw and admired every remarkable spot and point of view. They gradually ascended for half a mile, and then found themselves at the top of a considerable eminence, where the wood ceased, and the eye was instantly caught by The Bronze House, situated on the opposite side of a valley, into which the road, with some abruptness, wound. It was a large, handsome, stone building, standing well on rising ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills; -- and in front, a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal, nor falsely adorned. Spike was delighted. He had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste. They were all of them warm in their admiration; and at that moment he felt that to be mistress of The Bronze might be something!

They descended the hill, crossed the bridge, and drove to the door; and, while examining the nearer aspect of the house, all his apprehensions of meeting its owner returned. He dreaded lest the chambermaid had been mistaken. On applying to see the place, they were admitted into the hall; and Spike, as they waited for the housekeeper, had leisure to wonder at his being where he was and to wonder at just how easy it was to wander into people's homes with but little in the way of invitation.

The housekeeper came; a respectable-looking, elderly man, much less fine, and more civil, than he had any notion of finding him. They followed him into the dining-parlour. It was a large, well-proportioned room, handsomely fitted up. Spike, after slightly surveying it, went to a window to enjoy its prospect. The hill, crowned with wood, from which they had descended, receiving increased abruptness from the distance, was a beautiful object. Every disposition of the ground was good; and he looked on the whole scene -- the river, the trees scattered on its banks, and the winding of the valley, as far as he could trace it -- with delight. As they passed into other rooms, these objects were taking different positions; but from every window there were beauties to be seen. The rooms were lofty and handsome, and their furniture suitable to the fortune of their proprietor; but Spike saw, with admiration of her taste, that it was neither gaudy nor uselessly fine; with less of splendor, and more real elegance, than the furniture of Hellmouth.

"And of the place," thought he, "I might have been master! With these rooms I might now have been familiarly acquainted! Instead of viewing them as a stranger, I might have rejoiced in them as my own, and welcomed to them as visitors my aunt and uncle. -- But no," -- recollecting himself, -- "that could never be: my aunt and uncle would have been lost to me: I should not have been allowed to invite them." There was a lucky recollection -- it saved him from something like regret.

He longed to enquire of the housekeeper whether his mistress were really absent, but had not courage for it. At length, however, the question was asked by his uncle; and he turned away with alarm, while Mr. Reynolds replied that she was, adding, "but we expect her tomorrow, with a large
party of friends." How rejoiced was Spike that their own journey had not by any circumstance been delayed a day!

His uncle now called his to look at a picture. He approached, and saw the likeness of Ms. Faith suspended, amongst several other miniatures, over the mantelpiece. His uncle asked him, smilingly, how he liked it. The housekeeper came forward, and told them it was the picture of a young gentlewoman, the daughter of his late mistress’ steward, who had been brought up by her at her own expense. -- "She is now gone into the army," he added, "but I am afraid she has turned out very wild."

Mr. Rupert Giles looked at his nephew with a smile, but Spike could not return it.

"And that," said Mr. Reynolds, pointing to another of the miniatures, "is my mistress -- and very like her. It was drawn at the same time as the other -- about eight years ago."

"I have heard much of your mistress' fine person," said Mr. Rupert Giles, looking at the picture; "it is a handsome face. But, Spikey, you can tell us whether it is like or not."

Mr. Reynolds's respect for Spike seemed to increase on the intimation of his knowing his mistress.

"Does that young lord know Miss Buffy Summers?"

Spike coloured, and said -- "A little."

"And do not you think her a very handsome gentlewoman, Ma'am?"

"Yes, very handsome."

"I am sure I know none so handsome; but in the gallery up stairs you will see a finer, larger picture of her than this. The room was my late mistress' favourite room, and these miniatures are just as they used to be then. She was very fond of them."

That accounted to Spike for Ms. Faith's being among them.

Mr. Reynolds then directed their attention to one of Mr. Summers, drawn when he was only eight years old.

"And is Mr. Summers as handsome as his sister?" said Mrs. Jenny Giles.

"Oh! yes -- the handsomest young lord that ever was seen; and so accomplished! -- He dances the Snoopy Dance all day long. In the next room is a new instrument just come down for him -- a present from my master; he comes here to-morrow with her." The house keeper guided them into the next room, although Spike could not resist palming the miniature of Miss Buffy before they left.

Mr. Jenny Giles, whose manners were easy and pleasant, encouraged his communicativeness by her questions and remarks; Mr. Reynolds, either from pride or attachment, had evidently great pleasure in talking of his mistress and her brother.

"Is your mistress much at The Bronze in the course of the year?"

"Not so much as I could wish, Madam; but I dare say she may spend half her time here; and Mr. Summers is always down for the summer months."
"Except," thought Spike, "when he goes to Ramsgate."

"If your mistress would marry, you might see more of her."

"Yes, Madam; but I do not know when that will be. I do not know who is good enough for her."

Mr. and Mr. Rupert Giles smiled. Spike could not help saying, "It is very much to her credit, I am sure, that you should think so."

"I say no more than the truth, and what every body will say that knows her," replied the other. Spike thought that was going handsome far; and he listened with increasing astonishment as the housekeeper added, "I have never had a cross word from her in my life, and I have known her ever since she was four years old."

There was praise, of all others most extraordinary, most opposite to his ideas. That she was not a good tempered woman had been his firmest opinion. His keenest attention was awakened; he longed to hear more, and was grateful to his aunt for saying,

"There are very few people of whom so much can be said. You are lucky in having such a mistress."

"Yes, Ma'am, I know I am. If I was to go through the world, I could not meet with a better. But I have always observed that they who are good-natured when children are good-natured when they grow up; and she was always the sweetest-tempered, most generous-hearted, girl in the world."

Spike almost stared at him. -- "Can the be Miss Buffy Summers!" thought he.

"Her mother was an excellent woman," said Mr. Rupert Giles.

"Yes, Sir, that she was indeed; and her daughter will be just like her -- just as affable to the poor."

Spike listened, wondered, doubted, and was impatient for more. Mr. Reynolds could interest him on no other point. He related the subject of the pictures, the dimensions of the rooms, and the price of the furniture, in vain. Mrs. Jenny Giles, highly amused by the kind of family prejudice to which she attributed his excessive commendation of his mistress, soon led again to the subject; and he dwelt with energy on her many merits, as they proceeded together up the great staircase.

"She is the best landlord, and the best mistress," said he, "that ever lived. Not like the wild young women now-a-days, who think of nothing but themselves. There is not one of her tenants or servants but what will give her a good name. Some people call her proud; but I am sure I never saw any thing of it. To my fancy, it is only because she does not rattle away like other young women. Whenever there is a problem or something creepy happens, she seems to show up and stop it. Most of the people here have been saved by her, or helped by you at one time or another. I'm proud to say that the Class of '99 had the lowest mortality rate of any graduating class in Sunnydale history. And I know at least part of that is because of Miss Buffy."

"In what an amiable light does the place him!" thought Spike.

"There fine account of her," whispered his uncle, as they walked, "is not quite consistent with her behaviour to our poor friend."

"Perhaps we might be deceived."

"That is not very likely; our authority was too good."

On reaching the spacious lobby above, they were shewn into a very handsome sitting-room, lately
fitted up with greater elegance and lightness than the apartments below; and were informed that it was but just done to give pleasure to Mr. Summers, who had taken a liking to the room when last at The Bronze.

"She is certainly a good sister," said Spike, as he walked towards one of the windows.

Mr. Reynolds anticipated Mr. Summers' delight when he should enter the room. "And the is always the way with her," he added. -- "Whatever can give her brother any pleasure is sure to be done in a moment. There is nothing she would not do for him."

The picture gallery, and two or three of the principal bedrooms, were all that remained to be shewn. In the former were many good paintings; but Spike knew nothing of the art; and from such as had been already visible below, he had willingly turned to look at some drawings of Mr. Summers', in crayons, whose subjects were usually more interesting, and also more intelligible.

In the gallery there were many family portraits, but they could have little to fix the attention of a stranger. Spike walked on in quest of the only face whose features would be known to him. At last it arrested him -- and he beheld a striking resemblance of Miss Buffy Summers, with such a smile over the face as he remembered to have sometimes seen, when she looked at him. He stood several minutes before the picture in earnest contemplation, and returned to it again before they quitted the gallery. Mr. Reynolds informed them that it had been taken in her mother's life time.

There was certainly at the moment, in Spike's mind, a more gentle sensation towards the original than he had ever felt in the height of their acquaintance. The commendation bestowed on her by Mr. Reynolds was of no trifling nature. What praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant? As a sister, a landlord, a mistress, he considered how many people's happiness were in her guardianship! -- How much of pleasure or pain it was in her power to bestow! -- How much of good or evil must be done by her! Every idea that had been brought forward by the housekeeper was favourable to her character, and as he stood before the canvas, on which she was represented, and fixed her eyes upon himself, he thought of her regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; he remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression.

When all of the house that was open to general inspection had been seen, they returned down stairs, and, taking leave of the housekeeper, were consigned over to the gardener, who met them at the hall door.

As they walked across the lawn towards the river, Spike turned back to look again; his aunt and uncle stopped also, and while the former was conjecturing as to the date of the building, the owner of it herself suddenly came forward from the road, which led behind it to the stables.

They were within twenty yards of each other, and so abrupt was her appearance, that it was impossible to avoid her sight. Their eyes instantly met, and the cheeks of each were overspread with the deepest blush. She absolutely started, and for a moment seemed immoveable from surprise; but shortly recovering herself, advanced towards the party, and spoke to Spike, if not in terms of perfect composure, at least of perfect civility.

He had instinctively turned away; but, stopping on her approach, received her compliments with an embarrassment impossible to be overcome. Had her first appearance, or her resemblance to the picture they had just been examining, been insufficient to assure the other two that they now saw Miss Buffy Summers, the Giles' expression of surprise on beholding her mistress must immediately have told it. They stood a little aloof while she was talking to their nephew, who, astonished and confused, scarcely dared lift his eyes to her face, and knew not what answer he returned to her civil enquiries after his family. Amazed at the alteration in her manner since they last parted, every sentence that she uttered was increasing his embarrassment; and every idea of the impropriety of his
being found there recurring to his mind, the few minutes in which they continued together were some of the most uncomfortable of his life. Nor did she seem much more at ease; when she spoke, her accent had none of its usual sedateness; and she repeated her enquiries as to the time of his having left The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's, and of his stay in The San Francisco Bay Area, so often, and in so hurried a way, as plainly spoke the distraction of her thoughts.

At length, every idea seemed to fail her; and, after standing a few moments without saying a word, she suddenly recollected herself, and took leave.

The others then joined him, and expressed their admiration of her figure; but Spike heard not a word, and, wholly engrossed by his own feelings, followed them in silence. He was overpowered by shame and vexation. For he was the very spirit of vexation. His coming there was the most unfortunate, the most ill-judged thing in the world! How strange must it appear to her! In what a disgraceful light might it not strike so vain a woman! It might seem as if he had purposely thrown himself in her way again! Oh! why did he come? or, why did she thus come a day before she was expected? Had they been only ten minutes sooner, they should have been beyond the reach of her discrimination, for it was plain that she was that moment arrived, that moment alighted from her horse or her carriage. He blushed again and again over the perverseness of the meeting. And her behaviour, so strikingly altered, -- what could it mean? That she should even speak to him was amazing! -- but to speak with such civility, to enquire after his family! Never in his life had he seen her manners so little dignified, never had she spoken with such gentleness as on the unexpected meeting. What a contrast did it offer to her last address in Hellmouth Park, when she put her letter into his hand! He knew not what to think, nor how to account for it.

They had now entered a beautiful walk by the side of the water, and every step was bringing forward a nobler fall of ground, or a finer reach of the woods to which they were approaching; but it was some time before Spike was sensible of any of it; and, though he answered mechanically to the repeated appeals of his aunt and uncle, and seemed to direct his eyes to such objects as they pointed out, he distinguished no part of the scene. His thoughts were all fixed on that one spot of The Bronze House, whichever it might be, where Miss Buffy Summers then was. He longed to know what at that moment was passing in her mind; in what manner she thought of him, and whether, in defiance of every thing, he was still dear to her. Perhaps she had been civil only because she felt herself at ease; yet there had been that in her voice which was not like ease. Whether she had felt more of pain or of pleasure in seeing him, he could not tell, but she certainly had not seen him with composure.

At length, however, the remarks of his companions on his absence of mind roused him, and he felt the necessity of appearing more like himself.

They entered the woods, and bidding adieu to the river for a while, ascended some of the higher grounds; whence, in spots where the opening of the trees gave the eye power to wander, were many charming views of the valley, the opposite hills, with the long range of woods overspreading many, and occasionally part of the stream. Mrs. Jenny Giles expressed a wish of going round the whole Park, but feared it might be beyond a walk. With a triumphant smile, they were told that it was ten miles round. It settled the matter; and they pursued the accustomed circuit; which brought them again, after some time, in a descent among hanging woods, to the edge of the water, in one of its narrowest parts. They crossed it by a simple bridge, in character with the general air of the scene; it was a spot less adorned than any they had yet visited; and the valley, here contracted into a glen, allowed room only for the stream, and a narrow walk amidst the rough coppice-wood which bordered it. Spike longed to explore its windings; but when they had crossed the bridge, and perceived their distance from the house, Mr. Rupert Giles, who was not a great walker, could go no farther, and thought only of returning to the carriage as quickly as possible. His nephew was, therefore, obliged to submit, and they took their way towards the house on the opposite side of the river, in the nearest direction; but their progress was slow, for Mrs. Jenny Giles, though seldom able
to indulge the taste, was very fond of fishing, and was so much engaged in watching the occasional appearance of some trout in the water, and talking to the woman about them, that she advanced but little. Whilst wandering on in the slow manner, they were again surprised, and Spike's astonishment was quite equal to what it had been at first, by the sight of Miss Buffy Summers approaching them, and at no great distance. The walk being here less sheltered than on the other side, allowed them to see her before they met. Spike, however astonished, was at least more prepared for an interview than before, and resolved to appear and to speak with calmness, if she really intended to meet them. For a few moments, indeed, he felt that she would probably strike into some other path. The idea lasted while a turning in the walk concealed her from their view; the turning past, she was immediately before them. With a glance he saw that she had lost none of her recent civility; and, to imitate her politeness, he began, as they met, to admire the beauty of the place; but he had not got beyond the words "delightful," and "efulgent," when some unlucky recollections obtruded, and he fancied that praise of The Bronze from his might be mischievously construed. His colour changed, and he said no more.

Mr. Rupert Giles was standing a little behind; and on his pausing, she asked him if he would do her the honour of introducing her to his friends. There was a stroke of civility for which he was quite unprepared; and he could hardly suppress a smile at her being now seeking the acquaintance of some of those very people against whom her pride had revolted, in her offer to himself. "What will be her surprise," thought he, "when she knows who they are! She takes them now for people of fashion."

The introduction, however, was immediately made; and as he named their relationship to himself, he stole a sly look at her, to see how she bore it; and was not without the expectation of her decamping as fast as she could from such disgraceful companions. That she was surprised by the connexion was evident; she sustained it however with fortitude, and so far from going away, turned back with them, and entered into conversation with Mrs. Jenny Giles. Spike could not but be pleased, could not but triumph. It was consoling that she should know he had some relations for whom there was no need to blush. He listened most attentively to all that passed between them, and gloried in every expression, every sentence of his uncle, which marked her intelligence, her taste, or her good manners.

The conversation soon turned upon fishing, and he heard Miss Buffy Summers invite her, with the greatest civility, to fish there as often as she chose while she continued in the neighbourhood, offering at the same time to supply her with fishing tackle, and pointing out those parts of the stream where there was usually most sport. Mr. Rupert Giles, who was walking arm in arm with Spike, gave his a look expressive of his wonder. Spike said nothing, but it gratified his exceedingly; the compliment must be all for himself. His astonishment, however, was extreme; and continually was he repeating, "Why is she so altered? From what can it proceed? It cannot be for me, it cannot be for my sake that her manners are thus softened. My reproofs at Purgatory could not work such a change as this. It is impossible that she should still love me."

After walking some time in the way, the two gentlemen in front, the two ladies behind, on resuming their places after descending to the brink of the river for the better inspection of some curious water-plant, there chanced to be a little alteration. It originated in Mr. Rupert Giles, who, fatigued by the exercise of the morning, found Spike's arm inadequate to his support, and consequently preferred his wife's. Miss Buffy Summers took his place by his nephew, and they walked on together. After a short silence, the lord first spoke. He wished her to know that he had been assured of her absence before he came to the place, and accordingly began by observing that her arrival had been very unexpected -- "for your housekeeper," he added, "informed us that you would certainly not be here till to-morrow; and indeed, before we left Bakewell we understood that you were not immediately
expected in the country." She acknowledged the truth of it all; and said that business with her
steward had occasioned her coming forward a few hours before the rest of the party with whom she
had been travelling. "They will join me early tomorrow," she continued, "and among them are some
who will claim an acquaintance with you, -- Willow and her brothers."

Spike answered only by a slight bow. His thoughts were instantly driven back to the time when
Willow’s name had been last mentioned between them; and if he might judge from her complexion,
herr mind was not very differently engaged.

"There is also one other person in the party," she continued after a pause, "who more particularly
wishes to be known to you, -- Will you allow me, or do I ask too much, to introduce my brother to
your acquaintance during your stay at Napa?"

The surprise of such an application was great indeed; it was too great for his to know in what manner
he acceded to it. He immediately felt that whatever desire Mr. Summers might have of being
acquainted with his must be the work of his sister, and without looking farther, it was satisfactory; it
was gratifying to know that her resentment had not made her think really ill of him.

They now walked on in silence; each of them deep in thought. Spike was not comfortable; that was
impossible; but he was flattered and pleased. Her wish of introducing her brother to him was a
compliment of the highest kind. They soon outstripped the others, and when they had reached the
carriage, Mrs. and Mr. Rupert Giles were half a quarter of a mile behind.

She then asked him to walk into the house -- but he declared himself not tired, and they stood
together on the lawn. At such a time, much might have been said, and silence was very awkward. He
wanted to talk, but there seemed an embargo on every subject. At last he recollected that he had been
travelling, and they talked of Matlock and Dove Dale with great perseverance. Yet time and his
uncle moved slowly -- and his patience and his ideas were nearly worn out before the teå-teå-teå was
over. On Mrs. and Mr. Rupert Giles's coming up, they were all pressed to go into the house and
take some refreshment; but the was declined, and they parted on each side with the utmost politeness.
Miss Buffy Summers handed the gentlemen into the carriage, and when it drove off, Spike saw her
walking slowly towards the house.

The observations of his aunt and uncle now began; and each of them pronounced her to be infinitely
superior to any thing they had expected. "She is perfectly well behaved, polite, and unassuming,"
said his uncle.

"There is something a little stately in her to be sure," replied his uncle, "but it is confined to her air,
and is not unbecoming. I can now say with the housekeeper, that though some people may call her
proud, I have seen nothing of it."

"I was never more surprised than by her behaviour to us. It was more than civil; it was really
attentive; and there was no necessity for such attention. Her acquaintance with Spike was very
trifling."

"To be sure, Spikey," said his uncle, "he is not so handsome as Faith; or rather she has not Faith's
countenance, for her features are perfectly good. But how came you to tell us that she was so
disagreeable?"

Spike excused himself as well as he could; said that he had liked her better when they met in
Sacramento than before, and that he had never seen her so pleasant as the morning.

"But perhaps she may be a little whimsical in her civilities," replied his aunt. "Your great women
often are; and therefore I shall not take her at her word about fishing, as she might change her mind
another day, and warn me off her grounds."

Spike felt that they had entirely mistaken her character, but said nothing.

"From what we have seen of her," continued Mr. Rupert Giles, "I really should not have thought that she could have behaved in so cruel a way by any body, as she has done by poor Faith. She has not an ill-natured look. On the contrary, there is something pleasing about her mouth when she speaks. And there is something of dignity in her countenance, that would not give one an unfavourable idea of her heart. But to be sure, the good lord who shewed us the house did give her a most flaming character! I could hardly help laughing aloud sometimes. But she is a liberal mistress, I suppose, and that in the eye of a servant comprehends every virtue."

Spike here felt himself called on to say something in vindication of her behaviour to Faith; and therefore gave them to understand, in as guarded a manner as he could, that by what he had heard from her relations in Sacramento, her actions were capable of a very different construction; and that her character was by no means so faulty, nor Faith's so amiable, as they had been considered in Southern California. In confirmation of this, he related the particulars of all the pecuniary transactions in which they had been connected, without actually naming his authority, but stating it to be such as might be relied on.

Mr. Rupert Giles was surprised and concerned; but as they were now approaching the scene of his former pleasures, every idea gave way to the charm of recollection; and he was too much engaged in pointing out to his wife all the interesting spots in its environs to think of any thing else. Fatigued as he had been by the morning's walk, they had no sooner dined than he set off again in quest of his former acquaintance, and the evening was spent in the satisfactions of an intercourse renewed after many years discontinuance.

The occurrences of the day were too full of interest to leave Spike much attention for any of these new friends; and he could do nothing but think, and think with wonder, of Miss Buffy Summers' civility, and above all, of her wishing his to be acquainted with her brother.

CHAPTER II (44)

SPIKE had settled it that Miss Buffy Summers would bring her brother to visit him the very day after his reaching The Bronze; and was consequently resolved not to be out of sight of the inn the whole of that morning. But his conclusion was false; for on the very morning after their own arrival at Napa, these visitors came. They had been walking about the place with some of their new friends, and were just returned to the inn to dress themselves for dining with the same family, when the sound of a carriage drew them to a window, and they saw a lady and lord in a curricle, driving up the street. Spike, immediately recognizing the livery, guessed what it meant, and imparted no small degree of surprise to his relations by acquainting them with the honour which he expected. His aunt and uncle were all amazement; and the embarrassment of his manner as he spoke, joined to the circumstance itself, and many of the circumstances of the preceding day, opened to them a new idea on the business. Nothing had ever suggested it before, but they now felt that there was no other way of accounting for such attentions from such a quarter than by supposing a partiality for their nephew. While these newly-born notions were passing in their heads, the perturbation of Spike's feelings was every moment increasing. He was quite amazed at his own discomposure; but amongst other causes of disquiet, he dreaded lest the partiality of the sister should have said too much in his favour; and more than commonly anxious to please, he naturally suspected that every power of pleasing would fail him.
He retreated from the window, fearful of being seen; and as he walked up and down the room, endeavouring to compose himself, saw such looks of enquiring surprise in his aunt and uncle as made every thing worse.

Miss Summers and his sister appeared, and the formidable introduction took place. With astonishment did Spike see that his new acquaintance was at least as much embarrassed as himself. Since his being at Napa, he had heard that Mr. Summers was exceedingly proud; but the observation of a very few minutes convinced his that he was only exceedingly shy. He found it difficult to obtain even a word from his beyond a monosyllable.

Mr. Summers was tall, and on a larger scale than Spike; and, though little more than sixteen, his figure was formed, and his appearance manly and graceful. He was less handsome than his sister, but there was sense and good humour in his face, and his manners were perfectly unassuming and gentle. Spike, who had expected to find in him as acute and unembarrassed an observer as ever Miss Buffy Summers had been, was much relieved by discerning such different feelings.

They had not been long together before Summers told his that Rosenburg was also coming to wait on her; and he had barely time to express his satisfaction, and prepare for such a visitor, when Rosenburg's quick step was heard on the stairs, and in a moment she entered the room. All Spike's anger against her had been long done away; but, had he still felt any, it could hardly have stood its ground against the unaffected cordiality with which she expressed herself on seeing his again. She enquired in a friendly, though general way, after his family, and looked and spoke with the same good-humoured ease that she had ever done.

To Mrs. and Mr. Rupert Giles she was scarcely a less interesting personage than to himself. They had long wished to see her. The whole party before them, indeed, excited a lively attention. The suspicions which had just arisen, of Miss Buffy Summers and their nephew, directed their observation towards each with an earnest, though guarded, enquiry; and they soon drew from those enquiries the full conviction that one of them at least knew what it was to love. Of the gentleman's sensations they remained a little in doubt; but that the lady was overflowing with admiration was evident enough.

Spike, on his side, had much to do. He wanted to ascertain the feelings of each of his visitors, he wanted to compose his own, and to make himself agreeable to all; and in the latter object, where he feared most to fail, he was most sure of success, for those to whom he endeavoured to give pleasure were prepossessed in his favour. Rosenburg was ready, Xander was eager, and Summers determined to be pleased.

In seeing Rosenburg, his thoughts naturally flew to his brother; and oh! how ardently did he long to know whether any of her were directed in a like manner. Sometimes he could fancy that she talked less than on former occasions, and once or twice pleased himself with the notion that as she looked at him, she was trying to trace a resemblance. But though the might be imaginary, he could not be deceived as to her behaviour to Mr. Summers, who had been set up as a rival of Oz. No look appeared on either side that spoke particular regard. Nothing occurred between them that could justify the hopes of her brother. On the point he was soon satisfied; and two or three little circumstances occurred ere they parted which, in his anxious interpretation, denoted a recollection of Oz not untinctured by tenderness, and a wish of saying more that might lead to the mention of him, had she dared. She observed to him, at a moment when the others were talking together, and in a tone which had something of real regret, that it "was a very long time since she had had the pleasure
of seeing him --" and, before he could reply, she added, "It is above eight months. We have not met since the 26th of November, when we were all sparring together at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High."

Spike was pleased to find her memory so exact; and she afterwards took occasion to ask him, when unattended to by any of the rest, whether all his brothers were at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's. There was not much in the question, nor in the preceding remark, but there was a look and manner which gave them meaning.

It was not often that he could turn his eyes on Miss Buffy Summers himself; but, whenever he did catch a glimpse, he saw an expression of general complaisance, and in all that she said he heard an accent so far removed from hauteur or disdain of her companions, as convinced him that the improvement of manners which he had yesterday witnessed, however temporary its existence might prove, had at least outlived one day. When he saw her thus seeking the acquaintance and courting the good opinion of people, with whom any intercourse a few months ago would have been a disgrace; when he saw her thus civil, not only to himself, but to the very relations whom she had openly disdained, and recollected their last lively scene in Purgatory Parsonage, the difference, the change was so great, and struck so forcibly on his mind, that he could hardly restrain his astonishment from being visible. Never, even in the company of her dear friends at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High, or her dignified relations at Hellmouth, had he seen her so desirous to please, so free from self-consequence or unbending reserve, as now, when no importance could result from the success of her endeavours, and when even the acquaintance of those to whom her attentions were addressed would draw down the ridicule and censure of the gentlemen both of the burnt husk of Sunnydale High and Hellmouth.

Their visitors staid with them above half an hour, and when they arose to depart, Miss Buffy Summers called on her brother to join her in expressing their wish of seeing Mrs. and Mr. Rupert Giles and Mr. le Bloddy to dinner at The Bronze before they left the country. Mr. Summers, though with a diffidence which marked him little in the habit of giving invitations, readily obeyed. Mr. Rupert Giles looked at his nephew, desirous of knowing how He, whom the invitation most concerned, felt disposed as to its acceptance, but Spike had turned away his head. Presuming, however, that the studied attendance spoke rather a momentary embarrassment, than any dislike of the proposal, and seeing in his wife, who was fond of society, a perfect willingness to accept it, he ventured to engage for his attendance, and the day after the next was fixed on.

Rosenburg expressed great pleasure in the certainty of seeing Spike again, having still a great deal to say to him, and many enquiries to make after all their Southern California friends. Spike, construing all the into a wish of hearing his speak of his brother, was pleased; and on the account, as well as some others, found himself, when their visitors left them, capable of considering the last half hour with some satisfaction, though while it was passing the enjoyment of it had been little. Eager to be alone, and fearful of enquiries or hints from his aunt and uncle, he staid with them only long enough to hear their favourable opinion of Rosenburg, and then hurried away to dress.

But he had no reason to fear Mrs. and Mr. Rupert Giles's curiosity; it was not their wish to force his communication. It was evident that he was much better acquainted with Miss Buffy Summers than they had before any idea of; it was evident that she was very much in love with him. They saw much to interest, but nothing to justify enquiry.

Of Miss Buffy Summers it was now a matter of anxiety to think well; and, as far as their acquaintance reached, there was no fault to find. They could not be untouched by her politeness, and, had they drawn her character from their own feelings and her servant's report, without any reference to any other account, the circle in Southern California to which she was known would not have recognised it for Miss Buffy Summers. There was now an interest, however, in believing the
housekeeper; and they soon became sensible that the authority of a servant who had known her since she was four years old, and whose own manners indicated respectability, was not to be hastily rejected. Neither had any thing occurred in the intelligence of their Napa friends that could materially lessen its weight. They had nothing to accuse her of but pride; pride she probably had, and if not, it would certainly be imputed by the inhabitants of a small market-town where the family did not visit. It was acknowledged, however, that she was a liberal woman, and did much good among the poor.

With respect to Faith, the travellers soon found that she was not held there in much estimation; for though the chief of her concerns with the daughter of her patron were imperfectly understood, it was yet a well known fact that on her quitting the San Francisco Bay Area she had left many debts behind her, which Miss Buffy Summers afterwards discharged.

As for Spike, his thoughts were at The Bronze the evening more than the last; and the evening, though as it passed it seemed long, was not long enough to determine his feelings towards one in that mansion; and he lay awake two whole hours endeavouring to make them out. He certainly did not hate her. No; hatred had vanished long ago, and he had almost as long been ashamed of ever feeling a dislike against her that could be so called. The respect created by the conviction of her valuable qualities, though at first unwillingly admitted, had for some time ceased to be repugnant to his feelings; and it was now heightened into somewhat of a friendlier nature by the testimony so highly in her favour, and bringing forward her disposition in so amiable a light, which yesterday had produced. But above all, above respect and esteem, there was a motive within him of good will which could not be overlooked. It was gratitude. -- Gratitude, not merely for having once loved him, but for loving his still well enough to forgive all the petulance and acrimony of his manner in rejecting her, and all the unjust accusations accompanying his rejection. She who, he had been persuaded, would avoid him as her greatest enemy, seemed, on the accidental meeting, most eager to preserve the acquaintance, and without any indelicate display of regard, or any peculiarity of manner, where their two selves only were concerned, was soliciting the good opinion of his friends, and bent on making his known to her brother. Such a change in a woman of so much pride excited not only astonishment but gratitude -- for to love, ardent love, it must be attributed; and as such, its impression on his was of a sort to be encouraged, as by no means unpleasing, though it could not be exactly defined. He respected, he esteemed, he was grateful to her; he felt a real interest in her welfare; and he only wanted to know how far he wished that welfare to depend upon himself, and how far it would be for the happiness of both that he should employ the power, which his fancy told his he still possessed, of bringing on the renewal of her addresses.

It had been settled in the evening, between the uncle and nephew, that such a striking civility as Mr. Summers', in coming to them on the very day of his arrival at The Bronze -- for he had reached it only to a late breakfast -- ought to be imitated, though it could not be equalled, by some exertion of politeness on their side; and, consequently, that it would be highly expedient to wait on him at The Bronze the following morning. They were, therefore, to go. -- Spike was pleased, though, when he asked himself the reason, he had very little to say in reply.

Mrs. Jenny Giles left them soon after breakfast. The fishing scheme had been renewed the day before, and a positive engagement made of her meeting some of the ladies at The Bronze by noon.
CHAPTER III (45)

CONVINCED as Spike now was that Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg's dislike of him had originated in jealousy, he could not help feeling how very unwelcome his appearance at The Bronze must be to him, and was curious to know with how much civility on that gentleman's side the acquaintance would now be renewed.

On reaching the house, they were shewn through the hall into the saloon, whose northern aspect rendered it delightful for summer. Its windows, opening to the ground, admitted a most refreshing view of the high woody hills behind the house, and of the beautiful oaks and Spanish chestnuts which were scattered over the intermediate lawn.

In the room they were received by Mr. Summers, who was sitting there with Mr. Wesley Lockley and Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg, and the lord with whom he lived in Los Angeles. Xander's reception of them was very civil; but attended with all that embarrassment which, though proceeding from shyness and the fear of doing wrong, would easily give to those who felt themselves inferior the belief of his being proud and reserved. Mr. Rupert Giles and his nephew, however, did his justice, and pitied him.

By Mr. Wesley Lockley and Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg, they were noticed only by a curtsey; and on their being seated, a pause, awkward as such pauses must always be, succeeded for a few moments. It was first broken by Mr. Ted, a genteel, agreeable looking man, whose endeavour to introduce some kind of discourse proved his to be more truly well bred than either of the others; and between him and Mr. Rupert Giles, with occasional help from Spike, the conversation was carried on. Mr. Summers looked as if he wished for courage enough to join in it; and sometimes did venture a short sentence, when there was least danger of its being heard.

Spike soon saw that he was himself closely watched by Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg, and that he could not speak a word, especially to Mr. Summers, without calling his attention. The observation would not have prevented him from trying to talk to the latter, had they not been seated at an inconvenient distance; but he was not sorry to be spared the necessity of saying much. His own thoughts were employing him. He expected every moment that some of the ladies would enter the room. He wished, he feared, that the mistress of the house might be amongst them; and whether he wished or feared it most, he could scarcely determine. After sitting in the manner a quarter of an hour without hearing Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg's voice, Spike was roused by receiving from him a cold enquiry after the health of his family. He answered with equal indifference and brevity, and the other said no more.

The next variation which their visit afforded was produced by the entrance of servants with cold meat, cake, and a variety of all the finest fruits in season; but the did not take place till after many a significant look and smile from Mr. Ted to Mr. Summers had been given, to remind his of his post. There was now employment for the whole party; for though they could not all talk, they could all eat; and the beautiful pyramids of grapes, nectarines, and peaches soon collected them round the table.
While thus engaged, Spike had a fair opportunity of deciding whether he most feared or wished for the appearance of Miss Buffy Summers, by the feelings which prevailed on her entering the room; and then, though but a moment before he had believed his wishes to predominate, he began to regret that she came.

She had been some time with Mrs. Jenny Giles, who, with two or three other ladies from the house, was engaged by the river, and had left her only on learning that the gentlemen of the family intended a visit to Xander that morning. No sooner did she appear, than Spike wisely resolved to be perfectly easy and unembarrassed; -- a resolution the more necessary to be made, but perhaps not the more easily kept, because he saw that the suspicions of the whole party were awakened against them, and that there was scarcely an eye which did not watch her behaviour when she first came into the room. In no countenance was attentive curiosity so strongly marked as in Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg's, in spite of the smiles which over spread his face whenever he spoke to one of its objects; for jealousy had not yet made his desperate, and his attentions to Miss Buffy Summers were by no means over. Mr. Summers, on his sister's entrance, exerted himself much more to talk; and Spike saw that she was anxious for her brother and himself to get acquainted, and forwarded, as much as possible, every attempt at conversation on either side. Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg saw all the likewise; and, in the imprudence of anger, took the first opportunity of saying, with sneering civility,

"Pray, Mr. Spike, are not the ----shire militia removed from Sunnydale? They must be a great loss to your family."

In Summers' presence he dared not mention Faith's name; but Spike instantly comprehended that she was uppermost in his thoughts; and the various recollections connected with her gave his a moment's distress; but, exerting himself vigorously to repel the ill-natured attack, he presently answered the question in a tolerably disengaged tone. While he spoke, an involuntary glance shewed his Summers with an heightened complexion, earnestly looking at him, and her brother overcome with confusion and unable to lift up his eyes.

Mr. Xander muttered, "It's funny how the earth never opens up and swallows you when you want it to."

Had Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg known what pain he was then giving his beloved friend, he undoubtedly would have refrained from the hint; but he had merely intended to discompose Spike, by bringing forward the idea of a woman to whom he believed him partial, to make his betray a sensibility which might injure him in Summers' opinion, and perhaps to remind the latter of all the follies and absurdities by which some part of his family were connected with that corps. Not a syllable had ever reached him of Mr. Summers' meditated elopement. To no creature had it been revealed, where secrecy was possible, except to Spike; and from all Rosenburg's connections his sister was particularly anxious to separate her from Mr. le Bloddy, it is probable that it might add something to her lively concern for the welfare of her friend.

Spike's collected behaviour, however, soon quieted her emotion; and as Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg, vexed and disappointed, dared not approach nearer to Faith, Xander also recovered in time, though not enough to be able to speak any more. His sister, whose eye he feared to meet, scarcely recollected his interest in the affair, and the very circumstance which had been designed to turn her thoughts from Spike, seemed to have fixed them on him more, and more cheerfully.

Their visit did not continue long after the question and answer above-mentioned; and while Miss Buffy Summers was attending them to their carriage, Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg was venting his feelings in criticisms on Spike's person, behaviour, and dress. But Xander would not join him. His
sister's recommendation was enough to ensure his favour: her judgment could not err, and she had spoken in such terms of Spike as to leave Xander without the power of finding his otherwise than lovely and amiable. When Summers returned to the saloon, Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg could not help repeating to her some part of what he had been saying to her brother.

"How very ill Spike le Bloddy looks the morning, Miss Buffy Summers," he cried; "I never in my life saw any one so much altered as he is since the winter. He is grown so coarse! Wesley and I were agreeing that we should not have known him again."

However little Miss Buffy Summers might have liked such an address, she contented herself with coolly replying that she perceived no other alteration than his being rather pale -- no miraculous consequence of travelling in the English summer.

"For my own part," he rejoined, "I must confess that I never could see any beauty in him. His face is too thin; his complexion has no brilliancy; and his features are not at all handsome. His nose wants character; there is nothing marked in its lines. His teeth are tolerable, but not out of the common way; and as for his eyes, which have sometimes been called so fine, I never could perceive any thing extraordinary in them. They have a sharp, evil look, which I do not like at all; and in his air altogether, there is a self-sufficiency without fashion which is intolerable."

Persuaded as Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg was that Summers admired Spike, the was not the best method of recommending herself; but angry people are not always wise; and in seeing her at last look somewhat nettled, he had all the success he expected. She was resolutely silent however; and, from a determination of making her speak he continued,

"I remember, when we first knew his in Southern California, how amazed we all were to find that he was a reputed beauty; and I particularly recollect your saying one night, after they had been dining at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High, " He a beauty! -- I should as soon call his father a wit." But afterwards he seemed to improve on you, and I believe you thought his rather handsome at one time."

"Yes," replied Summers, who could contain herself no longer, "but that was only when I first knew him, for it is many months since I have considered him as one of the handsomest men of my acquaintance."

She then went away, and Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg was left to all the satisfaction of having forced her to say what gave no one any pain but himself.

Mr. Rupert Giles and Spike talked of all that had occurred during their visit, as they returned, except what had particularly interested them both. The looks and behaviour of every body they had seen were discussed, except of the person who had mostly engaged their attention. They talked of her brother, her friends, her house, her fruit, of every thing but himself; yet Spike was longing to know what Mr. Rupert Giles thought of her, and Mr. Rupert Giles would have been highly gratified by his nephew's beginning the subject.

**CHAPTER IV (46)**

SPIKE had been a good deal disappointed in not finding a letter from Oz on their first arrival at Napa; and the disappointment had been renewed on each of the mornings that had now been spent there; but on the third, his repining was over, and his brother justified, by the receipt of two letters
from his at once, on one of which was marked that it had been missent elsewhere. Spike was not surprised at it, as Oz had written the direction remarkably ill.

They had just been preparing to walk as the letters came in; and his aunt and uncle, leaving him to enjoy them in quiet, set off by themselves. The one missent must be first attended to; it had been written five days ago. The beginning contained an account of all their little parties and engagements, with such news as the country afforded; but the latter half, which was dated a day later, and written in evident agitation, gave more important intelligence. It was to the effect:

"Since writing the above, dearest Spikey, something has occurred of a most unexpected and serious nature; but I am afraid of alarming you -- be assured that we are all well. What I have to say relates to poor Angelus. An express came at twelve last night, just as we were all gone to bed, from Colonel Cordelia, to inform us that he was gone off to Las Vegas with one of her officers; to own the truth, with Faith! -- Imagine our surprise. To Doyle, however, it does not seem so wholly unexpected. I am very, very sorry. So imprudent a match on both sides! -- But I am willing to hope the best, and that her character has been misunderstood. Thoughtless and indiscreet I can easily believe her, but the step (and let us rejoice over it) marks nothing bad at heart. Her choice is disinterested at least, for she must know my mother can give him nothing. Our poor father is sadly grieved. My mother bears it better. How thankful am I, that we never let them know what has been said against her; we must forget it ourselves. They were off Saturday night about twelve, as is conjectured, but were not missed till yesterday morning at eight. The express was sent off directly. My dear Spikey, they must have passed within ten miles of us. Colonel Cordelia gives us reason to expect her here soon. Angelus left a few lines for her husband, informing his of their intention. I must conclude, for I cannot be long from my poor father. I am afraid you will not be able to make it out, but I hardly know what I have written."

Without allowing himself time for consideration, and scarcely knowing what he felt, Spike, on finishing the letter, instantly seized the other, and opening it with the utmost impatience, read as follows -- it had been written a day later than the conclusion of the first:

"By the time, my dearest brother, you have received my hurried letter; I wish the may be more intelligible, but though not confined for time, my head is so bewildered that I cannot answer for being coherent. Dearest Spikey, I hardly know what I would write, but I have bad news for you, and it cannot be delayed. Imprudent as a marriage between Ms. Faith and our poor Angelus would be, we are now anxious to be assured it has taken place, for there is but too much reason to fear they are not gone to Las Vegas.

Colonel Cordelia came yesterday, having left Palm Springs the day before, not many hours after the express. Though Angelus's short letter to Mr. Chase, gave them to understand that they were going to Elvis' Drive Through Marriage Chapel of Hunka Hunka Burning Love, something was dropped by Tara expressing her belief that Faith. never intended to go there, or to marry Angelus at all, which was repeated to Colonel Cordelia., who, instantly taking the alarm, set off from B. intending to trace their route. She did trace them easily to Clapham, but no farther; for on entering that place they removed into a hackney-coach and dismissed the chaise that brought them from Epsom. All that is known after that is that they were seen to continue the Los Angeles road. I know not what to think. After making every possible enquiry on that side Los Angeles, Colonel Cordelia. came on into Southern California, anxiously renewing them at all the turnpikes, and at the inns in Barnet and Hatfield, but without any success; no such people had been seen to pass through.
With the kindest concern she came on to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's, and broke her apprehensions to us in a manner most creditable to her heart. I am sincerely grieved for her and Mr. Chase., but no one can throw any blame on them. Our distress, my dear Spikey, is very great. My mother and father believe the worst, but I cannot think so ill of her. Many circumstances might make it more eligible for them to be married privately in town than to pursue their first plan; and even if She could form such a design against a young man of Angelus's connections, which is not likely, can I suppose his so lost to every thing? -- Impossible. I grieve to find, however, that Colonel Chase is not disposed to depend upon their marriage; she shook her head when I expressed my hopes, and said she feared Faith. was not a woman to be trusted. My poor father is really ill and keeps his room. Could he exert himself it would be better, but the is not to be expected; and as to my mother, I never in my life saw her so affected.

Poor Doyle has anger for having concealed their attachment; but as it was a matter of confidence, one cannot wonder. I am truly glad, dearest Spikey, that you have been spared something of these distressing scenes; but now, as the first shock is over, shall I own that I long for your return? I am not so selfish, however, as to press for it, if inconvenient. Adieu. I take up my pen again to do what I have just told you I would not, but circumstances are such, that I cannot help earnestly begging you all to come here as soon as possible. I know my dear aunt and uncle so well that I am not afraid of requesting it, though I have still something more to ask of the former. My mother is going to Los Angeles with Colonel Cordelia instantly, to try to discover him. What she means to do, I am sure I know not; but her excessive distress will not allow her to pursue any measure in the best and safest way, and Colonel Cordelia is obliged to be at Palm Springs again to-morrow evening. In such an exigence my uncle's advice and assistance would be every thing in the world; she will immediately comprehend what I must feel, and I rely upon her goodness.''

"Oh! where, where is my uncle?'' cried Spike, darting from his seat as he finished the letter, in eagerness to follow her without losing a moment of the time so precious; but as he reached the door, it was opened by a servant, and Miss Buffy Summers appeared. His pale face and impetuous manner made her start, and before she could recover herself enough to speak, he, in whose mind every idea was superseded by Angelus's situation, hastily exclaimed, "I beg your pardon, but I must leave you. I must find Mrs. Jenny Giles the moment, on business that cannot be delayed; I have not a moment to lose.''

"Good God! what is the matter?'' cried she, with more feeling than politeness; then recollecting herself, "I will not detain you a minute, but let me, or let the servant, go after Mrs. and Mr. Rupert Giles. You are not well enough; -- you cannot go yourself.''

Spike hesitated, but his knees trembled under him, and he felt how little would be gained by his attempting to pursue them. Calling back the servant, therefore, he commissioned her, though in so breathless an accent as made his almost unintelligible, to fetch her mistress and mistress home instantly.

On her quitting the room, he sat down, unable to support himself, and looking so miserably ill that it was impossible for Summers to leave him, or to refrain from saying, in a tone of gentleness and commiseration, "Let me call your maid. Is there nothing you could take, to give you present relief? -- A shot of whiskey; -- shall I get you one? -- You are very ill.''

"No, I thank you;'' he replied, endeavours to recover himself. "There is nothing the matter with me. I am quite well. I am only distressed by some dreadful news which I have just received from The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's.''

He burst into tears as he alluded to it, and for a few minutes could not speak another word. Summers, in wretched suspense, could only say something indistinctly of her concern, and observe him in
compassionate silence. At length, he spoke again. "I have just had a letter from Oz, with such
dreadful news. It cannot be concealed from any one. My youngest brother has left all his friends --
has eloped; -- has thrown himself into the power of -- of Ms. Faith. They are gone off together from
Palm Springs. You know her too well to doubt the rest. He has no money, no connections, nothing
that can tempt her to -- he is lost for ever."

Summers was fixed in astonishment. "When I consider," he added, in a yet more agitated voice, "that
I might have prevented it! -- I who knew what she was. Had I but explained some part of it only --
some part of what I learnt -- to my own family! Had her character been known, this could not have
happened. But it is all, all too late now."

"I am grieved, indeed," cried Summers; "grieved -- shocked. But is it certain, absolutely certain?"

"Oh yes! -- They left Palm Springs together on Sunday night, and were traced almost to Los
Angeles, but not beyond; they are certainly not gone to Las Vegas."

"And what has been done, what has been attempted, to recover her?"

"My mother is gone to Los Angeles, and Oz has written to beg my uncle's immediate assistance, and
we shall be off, I hope, in half an hour. But nothing can be done; I know very well that nothing can
be done. How is such a woman to be worked on? How are they even to be discovered? I have not
the smallest hope. It is every way horrible!"

Summers shook her head in silent acquiescence.

"When my eyes were opened to her real character. -- Oh! had I known what I ought, what I dared, to
do! But I knew not -- I was afraid of doing too much. Wretched, wretched, mistake!"

Summers made no answer. She seemed scarcely to hear him, and was walking up and down the
room in earnest meditation; her brow contracted, her air gloomy. Spike soon observed and instantly
understood it. His power was sinking; every thing must sink under such a proof of family weakness,
such an assurance of the deepest disgrace. He should neither wonder nor condemn, but the belief of
her self-conquest brought nothing consolatory to his bosom, afforded no palliation of his distress. It
was, on the contrary, exactly calculated to make his understand his own wishes; and never had he so
honestly felt that he could have loved her, as now, when all love must be vain.

But self, though it would intrude, could not engross him. Angelus -- the humiliation, the misery, he
was bringing on them all -- soon swallowed up every private care; and covering his face with his
handkerchief, Spike was soon lost to every thing else; and after a pause of several minutes, was only
recalled to a sense of his situation by the voice of his companion, who, in a manner, which though it
spoke compassion, spoke likewise restraint, said, "I am afraid you have been long desiring my
absence, nor have I any thing to plead in excuse of my stay, but real, though unavailing, concern.
Would to heaven that any thing could be either said or done on my part, that might offer consolation
to such distress! -- But I will not torment you with vain wishes, which may seem purposely to ask for
your thanks. The unfortunate affair will, I fear, prevent my brother's having the pleasure of seeing
you at The Bronze to-day."

"Oh, yes. Be so kind as to apologize for us to Mr. Summers. Say that urgent business calls us home
immediately. Conceal the unhappy truth as long as it is possible. -- I know it cannot be long."

She readily assured his of her secrecy -- again expressed her sorrow for his distress, wished it a
happier conclusion than there was at present reason to hope, and, leaving her compliments for his
relations, with only one serious, parting, look, went away.
As she quitted the room, Spike felt how improbable it was that they should ever see each other again on such terms of cordiality as had marked their several meetings in The San Francisco Bay Area; and as he threw a retrospective glance over the whole of their acquaintance, so full of contradictions and varieties, sighed at the perverseness of those feelings which would now have promoted its continuance, and would formerly have rejoiced in its termination.

If gratitude and esteem are good foundations of affection, Spike's change of sentiment will be neither improbable nor faulty. But if otherwise, if the regard springing from such sources is unreasonable or unnatural, in comparison of what is so often described as arising on a first interview with its object, and even before two words have been exchanged, nothing can be said in his defence, except that he had given somewhat of a trial to the latter method in his partiality for Faith, and that its ill-success might perhaps authorise him to seek the other less interesting mode of attachment. Be that as it may, he saw her go with regret; and in the early example of what Angelus's infamy must produce, found additional anguish as he reflected on that wretched business. Never, since reading Oz's second letter, had he entertained a hope of Faith's meaning to marry him. No one but Oz, he thought, could flatter himself with such an expectation. Surprise was the least of his feelings on the development. While the contents of the first letter remained on his mind, he was all surprise -- all astonishment that Faith should marry a boy whom it was impossible she could marry for money; and how Angelus could ever have attached her had appeared incomprehensible. But now it was all too natural. For such an attachment as this, he might have sufficient charms; and though he did not suppose Angelus to be deliberately engaging in an elopement, without the intention of marriage, he had no difficulty in believing that neither his virtue nor his understanding would preserve his from falling an easy prey.

He had never perceived, while the regiment was in Southern California, that Angelus had any partiality for her, but he was convinced that Angelus had wanted only encouragement to attach himself to any body. Sometimes one officer, sometimes another had been his favourite, as their attentions raised them in his opinion. His affections had been continually fluctuating, but never without an object. The mischief of neglect and mistaken indulgence towards such a girl. -- Oh! how acutely did he now feel it.

He was wild to be at home -- to hear, to see, to be upon the spot, to share with Oz in the cares that must now fall wholly upon him, in a family so deranged; a mother absent, a father incapable of exertion and requiring constant attendance; and though almost persuaded that nothing could be done for Angelus, his uncle's interference seemed of the utmost importance, and till she entered the room, the misery of his impatience was severe. Mrs. and Mr. Rupert Giles had hurried back in alarm, supposing, by the servant's account, that their nephew was taken suddenly ill; -- but satisfying them instantly on that head, he eagerly communicated the cause of their summons, reading the two letters aloud, and dwelling on the postscript of the last with trembling energy. -- Though Angelus had never been a favourite with them, Mrs. and Mr. Rupert Giles could not but be deeply affected. Not Angelus only, but all were concerned in it; and after the first exclamations of surprise and horror, Mrs. Jenny Giles readily promised every assistance in her power. -- Spike, though expecting no less, thanked her with tears of gratitude; and all three being actuated by one spirit, every thing relating to their journey was speedily settled. They were to be off as soon as possible. "But what is to be done about The Bronze?" cried Mr. Rupert Giles. "John told us Miss Buffy Summers was here when you sent for us; -- was it so?"

"Yes; and I told her we should not be able to keep our engagement. That is all settled."

"That is all settled!" repeated the other, as he ran into his room to prepare. "And are they upon such terms as for him to disclose the real truth! Oh, that I knew how it was!"

But wishes were vain; or at best could serve only to amuse him in the hurry and confusion of the following hour. Had Spike been at leisure to be idle, he would have remained certain that all
employment was impossible to one so wretched as herself; but he had his share of business as well as his uncle, and amongst the rest there were notes to be written to all their friends in Napa, with false excuses for their sudden departure. An hour, however, saw the whole completed; and Mrs. Jenny Giles meanwhile having settled her account at the inn, nothing remained to be done but to go; and Spike, after all the misery of the morning, found himself, in a shorter space of time than he could have supposed, seated in the carriage, and on the road to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's.

CHAPTER V (47)

"I HAVE been thinking it over again, Spike," said his aunt as they drove from the town; "and really, upon serious consideration, I am much more inclined than I was to judge as your eldest brother does of the matter. It appears to me so very unlikely that any young woman should form such a design against a boy who is by no means unprotected or friendless, and who was actually staying in her colonel's family, that I am strongly inclined to hope the best. Could she expect that his friends would not step forward? Could she expect to be noticed again by the regiment, after such an affront to Colonel Cordelia? her temptation is not adequate to the risk."

"Do you really think so?" cried Spike, brightening up for a moment.

"Upon my word," said Mr. Rupert Giles, "I begin to be of your uncle's opinion. It is really too great a violation of decency, honour, and interest, for her to be guilty of it. I cannot think so very ill of Faith. Can you, yourself, Spikey, so wholly give her up as to believe her capable of it?"

"Not perhaps of neglecting her own interest. But of every other neglect I can believe her capable. If, indeed, it should be so! But I dare not hope it. Why should they not go on to Las Vegas, if that had been the case?"

"In the first place," replied Mrs. Jenny Giles, "there is no absolute proof that they are not gone to Las Vegas."

"Oh! but their removing from the chaise into an hackney coach is such a presumption! And, besides, no traces of them were to be found on the Barnet road."

"Well, then -- supposing them to be in Los Angeles. They may be there, though, for the purpose of concealment, for no more exceptionable purpose. It is not likely that money should be very abundant on either side; and it might strike them that they could be more economically, though less expeditiously, married in Los Angeles, than in Las Vegas."

"But why all the secrecy? Why any fear of detection? Why must their marriage be private? Oh! no, no, the is not likely. Faith's most particular friend, you see by Oz's account, was persuaded of her never intending to marry him. Faith will never marry a man without some money. She cannot afford it. And what claims has Angelus, what attractions has he beyond youth, health, and good humour, that could make her, for his sake, forgo every chance of benefiting herself by marrying well? As to what restraint the apprehension of disgrace in the corps might throw on a dishonourable elopement with him, I am not able to judge; for I know nothing of the effects that such a step might produce. But as to your other objection, I am afraid it will hardly hold good. Angelus
has no brothers to step forward; and she might imagine, from my mother's behaviour, from her indolence and the little attention she has ever seemed to give to what was going forward in her family, that She would do as little, and think as little about it, as any mother could do in such a matter."

"But can you think that Angelus is so lost to every thing but love of her, as to consent to live with her on any other terms than marriage?"

"It does seem, and it is most shocking indeed," replied Spike, with tears in his eyes, "that a brother's sense of decency and virtue in such a point should admit of doubt. But, really, I know not what to say. Perhaps I am not doing his justice. But he is very young; he has never been taught to think on serious subjects; and for the last half year, nay, for a twelvemonth, he has been given up to nothing but amusement and vanity. He has been allowed to dispose of his time in the most idle and frivolous manner, and to adopt any opinions that came in his way. Since the ----shire were first quartered in Sunnydale, nothing but love, flirtation, and officers have been in his head. He has been doing every thing in his power, by thinking and talking on the subject, to give greater -- what shall I call it? -- susceptibility to his feelings, which are naturally lively enough. And we all know that Faith has every charm of person and address that can captivate a man."

"But you see that Oz," said his uncle, "does not think so ill of Faith as to believe her capable of the attempt."

"Of whom does Oz ever think ill? And who is there, whatever might be their former conduct, that he would believe capable of such an attempt, till it were proved against them? But Oz knows, as well as I do, what Faith really is. We both know that she has been profligate in every sense of the word. That she has neither integrity nor honour. That she is as false and deceitful, as she is insinuating."

"And do you really know all this?" cried Mr. Rupert Giles, whose curiosity as to the mode of his intelligence was all alive.

"I do, indeed," replied Spike, colouring. "I told you the other day, of her infamous behaviour to Miss Buffy Summers; and you, yourself, when last at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's, heard in what manner she spoke of the woman who had behaved with such forbearance and liberality towards her. And there are other circumstances which I am not at liberty -- which it is not worth while to relate; but her lies about the whole The Bronze family are endless. From what she said of Mr. Summers, I was thoroughly prepared to see a proud, reserved, disagreeable boy. Yet she knew to the contrary herself. She must know that he was amiable and unpretending as we have found him."

"But does Angelus know nothing of This? Can he be ignorant of what you and Oz seem so well to understand?"

"Oh, yes! -- that, that is the worst of all. Till I was in Sacramento, and saw so much both of Miss Buffy Summers and her relation, Col Amy the rat, I was ignorant of the truth myself. And when I returned home, the ----shire was to leave Sunnydale in a week or fortnight's time. As that was the case, neither Oz, to whom I related the whole, nor I, thought it necessary to make our knowledge public; for of what use could it apparently be to any one that the good opinion which all the neighbourhood had of her should then be overthrown? And even when it was settled that Angelus should go with Mr. Chase, the necessity of opening his eyes to her character never occurred to me. That He could be in any danger from the deception never entered my head. That such a consequence as the should ensue, you may easily believe was far enough from my thoughts."

"When they all removed to Palm Springs, therefore, you had no reason, I suppose, to believe them fond of each other."
"Not the slightest. I can remember no symptom of affection on either side; and had any thing of the kind been perceptible, you must be aware that ours is not a family on which it could be thrown away. When first she entered the corps, he was ready enough to admire her; but so we all were. Every boy in or near Sunnydale was out of his senses about her for the first two months; but she never distinguished him by any particular attention, and consequently, after a moderate period of extravagant and wild admiration, his fancy for her gave way, and others of the regiment who treated him with more distinction again became his favourites."

It may be easily believed that, however little of novelty could be added to their fears, hopes, and conjectures, on the interesting subject by its repeated discussion, no other could detain them from it long, during the whole of the journey. From Spike's thoughts it was never absent. Fixed there by the keenest of all anguish, self-reproach, he could find no interval of ease or forgetfulness.

They travelled as expeditiously as possible; and, sleeping one night on the road, reached The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's by dinner-time the next day. It was a comfort to Spike to consider that Oz could not have been wearied by long expectations.

The little Giles', attracted by the sight of a chaise, were standing on the steps of the house as they entered the paddock; and when the carriage drove up to the door, the joyful surprise that lighted up their faces, and displayed itself over their whole bodies in a variety of capers and frisks, was the first pleasing earnest of their welcome.

Spike jumped out; and, after giving each of them an hasty kiss, hurried into the vestibule, where Oz, who came running down stairs from his father's apartment, immediately met him.

Spike, as he affectionately embraced him, whilst tears filled the eyes of both, lost not a moment in asking whether any thing had been heard of the fugitives.

"Not yet," replied Oz. "But now that my dear aunt is come, I hope every thing will be well."

"Is my mother in town?"

"Yes, she went on Tuesday, as I wrote you word."

"And have you heard from her often?"

"We have heard only once. She wrote me a few lines on Wednesday, to say that she had arrived in safety, and to give me her directions, which I particularly begged her to do. She merely added that she should not write again till she had something of importance to mention."

"And my father -- How is she? How are you all?"

"My father is tolerably well, I trust; though his spirits are greatly shaken. He is up stairs, and will have great satisfaction in seeing you all. He does not yet leave his dressing-room. Anointed One and Doyle, thank Heaven! are quite well."

"But you -- How are you?" cried Spike. "You look pale. How much you must have gone through!"

His brother, however, assured his of his being perfectly well; and their conversation, which had been passing while Mrs. and Mr. Rupert Giles were engaged with their children, was now put an end to by the approach of the whole party. Oz ran to his aunt and uncle, and welcomed and thanked them both, with alternate smiles and tears.

When they were all in the drawing room, the questions which Spike had already asked were of course repeated by the others, and they soon found that Oz had no intelligence to give. The sanguine
hope of good, however, which the benevolence of his heart suggested, had not yet deserted her; he
still expected that it would all end well, and that every morning would bring some letter, either from
Angelus or his mother, to explain their proceedings, and perhaps announce the marriage.

Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, to whose apartment they all repaired, after a few minutes conversation
together, received them exactly as might be expected; with tears and lamentations of regret,
invectives against the villainous conduct of Faith, and complaints of his own sufferings and ill usage;
blaming every body but the person to whose ill-judging indulgence the errors of his son must be
principally owing.

"If I had been able," said he, "to carry my point of going to Palm Springs, with all my family, this
would not have happened; but poor dear Angelus had nobody to take care of him. Why did the
Chases ever let him go out of their sight? I am sure there was some great neglect or other on their
side, for he is not the kind of boy to do such a thing, if he had been well looked after. I always
thought they were very unfit to have the charge of her; but I was over-ruled, as I always am. Poor
dear child! And now here's Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy gone away, and I know she will fight Faith
wherever she meets her, and then she will be killed, and what is to become of us all? The Anya
Nkaes will turn us out, before she is cold in her grave; and if you are not kind to us, sister, I do not
know what we shall do."

They all exclaimed against such terrific ideas; and Mrs. Jenny Giles, after general assurances of her
affection for his and all his family, told his that she meant to be in Los Angeles the very next day,
and would assist Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy in every endeavour for recovering Angelus.

"Do not give way to useless alarm," added he; "though it is right to be prepared for the worst, there is
no occasion to look on it as certain. It is not quite a week since they left Palm Springs. In a few days
more, we may gain some news of them, and till we know that they are not married, and have no
design of marrying, do not let us give the matter over as lost. As soon as I get to town, I shall go to
my sister and make her come home to Riverside Street, and then we may consult together as
to what is to be done."

"Oh! my dear sister," replied Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, "that is exactly what I could most wish for.
And now do, when you get to town, find them out, wherever they may be; and if they are not
married already, make them marry. And as for wedding clothes, do not let them wait for that, but tell
Angelus he shall have as much money as he chuses to buy them, after they are married. And, above
all things, keep Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy from fighting. Tell her what a dreadful state I am in, -- that I am
frightened out of my wits; and have such tremblings, such flutterings all over me such spasms in my
side, and pains in my head, and such beatings at heart, that I can get no rest by night nor by day. And
tell my dear Angelus, not to give any directions about his clothes till he has seen me, for he does not
know which are the best warehouses. Oh, sister, how kind you are! I know you will contrive it all."

But Mrs. Jenny Giles, though she assured him again of her earnest endeavours in the cause, could
not avoid recommending moderation to him, as well in his hopes as his fears; and, after talking with
him in the manner till dinner was on table, they left him to vent all his feelings on the housekeeper,
who attended in the absence of his sons.

Though his sister and brother were persuaded that there was no real occasion for such a seclusion
from the family, they did not attempt to oppose it, for they knew that he had not prudence enough to
hold his tongue before the servants while they waited at table, and judged it better that one only of
the household, and the one whom they could most trust, should comprehend all his fears and
solicitude on the subject.

In the dining-room they were soon joined by Anointed One and Doyle, who had been too busily
engaged in their separate apartments, to make their appearance before. One came from his books, and the other from his toilette. The faces of both, however, were tolerably calm; and no change was visible in either, except that the loss of his favourite brother, or the anger which he had himself incurred in the business, had given something more of fretfulness than usual to the accents of Doyle. As for Anointed One, he was master enough of himself to whisper to Spike, with a countenance of grave reflection, soon after they were seated at table,

"This is a most unfortunate affair; and will probably be much talked of. But we must stem the tide of malice, and pour into the wounded bosoms of each other the balm of brotherly consolation."

Then, perceiving in Spike no inclination of replying, he added, "Unhappy as the event must be for Angelus, we may draw from it the useful lesson: that loss of virtue in a male is irretrievable -- that one false step involves him in endless ruin -- that his reputation is no less brittle than it is beautiful, -- and that he cannot be too much guarded in his behaviour towards the undeserving of the other sex."

Spike lifted up his eyes in amazement, but was too much oppressed to make any reply. Anointed One, however, continued to console himself with such kind of moral extractions from the evil before them.

In the afternoon, the two elder Mr. le Bloddys were able to be for half an hour by themselves; and Spike instantly availed himself of the opportunity of making many enquiries, which Oz was equally eager to satisfy. After joining in general lamentations over the dreadful sequel of the event, which Spike considered as all but certain, and Mr. le Bloddy could not assert to be wholly impossible, the former continued the subject by saying, "But tell me all and every thing about it which I have not already heard. Give me farther particulars. What did Colonel Cordelia say? Had they no apprehension of any thing before the elopement took place? They must have seen them together for ever."

"Colonel Cordelia did own that she had often suspected some partiality, especially on Angelus's side, but nothing to give her any alarm. I am so grieved for her. Her behaviour was attentive and kind to the utmost. She was coming to us, in order to assure us of her concern, before she had any idea of their not being gone to Las Vegas; when that apprehension first got abroad, it hastened her journey."

"And was Tara convinced that Faith would not marry? Did she know of their intending to go off? Had Colonel Cordelia seen Tara herself?"

"Yes; but when questioned by him, Tara denied knowing any thing of their plan, and would not give her real opinion about it. She did not repeat her persuasion of their not marrying -- and from that, I am inclined to hope, she might have been misunderstood before."

"And till Colonel Cordelia came herself, not one of you entertained a doubt, I suppose, of their being really married?"

"How was it possible that such an idea should enter our brains! I felt a little uneasy -- a little fearful of my brother's happiness with her in marriage, because I knew that her conduct had not been always quite right. My mother and father knew nothing of that, they only felt how imprudent a match it must be. Doyle then owned, with a very natural triumph on knowing more than the rest of us, that in Angelus's last letter he had prepared him for such a step. He had known, it seems, of their being in love with each other many weeks."

"But not before they went to Palm Springs?"

"No, I believe not."
"And did Colonel Cordelia appear to think ill of Faith herself? Does she know her real character?"

"I must confess that she did not speak so well of Faith as she formerly did. She believed her to be imprudent and extravagant. And since the sad affair has taken place, it is said that she left Sunnydale greatly in debt; but I hope the may be false."

"Oh, Oz, had we been less secret, had we told what we knew of her, this could not have happened!"

"Perhaps it would have been better," replied his brother. "But to expose the former faults of any person, without knowing what their present feelings were, seemed unjustifiable. We acted with the best intentions."

"Could Colonel Cordelia repeat the particulars of Angelus's note to her wife?"

"She brought it with her for us to see."

Oz then took it from his pocket-book, and gave it to Spike. These were the contents:

"MY DEAR,

You will laugh when you know where I am gone, and I cannot help laughing myself at your surprise to-morrow morning, as soon as I am missed. I am going to Elvis' Drive Through Marriage Chapel of Hunka Hunka Burning Love, and if you cannot guess with who, I shall think you a simpleton, for there is but one woman in the world I love, and she is an angel. I should never be happy without her, so think it no harm to be off. You need not send them word at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's of my going, if you do not like it, for it will make the surprise the greater when I write to them and sign my name Angelus Faith. What a good joke it will be! I can hardly write for laughing. Pray make my excuses to Pratt, for not keeping my engagement and sparring with her to night. Tell her I hope she will excuse me when she knows all, and tell her I will fight with her at the next sparring match we meet, with great pleasure. I shall send for my clothes when I get to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's; but I wish you would tell Sally to mend a great slit in my worked leather gown before they are packed up. Good bye. Give my love to Colonel Cordelia. I hope you will drink to our good journey.

Your affectionate friend,

Angelus Le Bloddy."

"Oh! thoughtless, thoughtless Angelus!" cried Spike when he had finished it. "What a letter is This, to be written at such a moment. But at least it shews that He was serious in the object of his journey. Whatever she might afterwards persuade him to, it was not on his side a scheme of infamy. My poor mother! how she must have felt it!"

"I never saw any one so shocked. She could not speak a word for full ten minutes. My father was taken ill immediately, and the whole house in such confusion!"

"Oh! Oz!" cried Spike, "was there a servant belonging to it, who did not know the whole story before the end of the day?"

"I do not know. -- I hope there was. -- But to be guarded at such a time, is very difficult. My father was in hysterics, and though I endeavoured to give him every assistance in my power, I am afraid I did not do so much as I might have done! But the horror of what might possibly happen, almost took from me my faculties."

"Your attendance upon him has been too much for you. You do not look well. Oh! that I had been
with you, you have had every care and anxiety upon yourself alone."

"Anointed One and Doyle have been very kind, and would have shared in every fatigue, I am sure, but I did not think it right for either of them. Doyle is slight and delicate, and Anointed One studies so much, that his hours of repose should not be broken in on. My aunt Olivia came to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's on Tuesday, after my mother went away; and was so good as to stay till Thursday with me. He was of great use and comfort to us all, and Dr. Angleman Walsh has been very kind; he walked here on Wednesday morning to condole with us, and offered his services, or any of his sons, if they could be of use to us."

"He had better have stayed at home," cried Spike; "perhaps he meant well, but under such a misfortune as This, one cannot see too little of one's neighbours. Assistance is impossible; condolence, insufferable. Let them triumph over us at a distance, and be satisfied."

He then proceeded to enquire into the measures which his mother had intended to pursue, while in town, for the recovery of her son.

"She meant, I believe," replied Oz, "to go to Epsom, the place where they last changed horses, see the postilions, and try if any thing could be made out from them. Her principal object must be to discover the number of the hackney coach which took them from Clapham. It had come with a fare from Los Angeles; and as she thought the circumstance of a lady and gentleman's removing from one carriage into another might be remarked, she meant to make enquiries at Clapham. If she could any how discover at what house the coachman had before set down her fare, she determined to make enquiries there, and hoped it might not be impossible to find out the stand and number of the coach. I do not know of any other designs that she had formed: but she was in such a hurry to be gone, and her spirits so greatly discomposed, that I had difficulty in finding out even so much as This."
CHAPTER VI (48)

THE whole party were in hopes of a letter from Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy the next morning, but the post came in without bringing a single line from her. Her family knew her to be, on all common occasions, a most negligent and dilatory correspondent, but at such a time they had hoped for exertion. They were forced to conclude that she had no pleasing intelligence to send, but even of that they would have been glad to be certain. Mrs. Jenny Giles had waited only for the letters before she set off.

When she was gone, they were certain at least of receiving constant information of what was going on, and their aunt promised, at parting, to prevail on Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy to return to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's as soon as she could, to the great consolation of her brother, who considered it as the only security for his wife's not being killed in a duel.

Mr. Rupert Giles and the children were to remain in Southern California a few days longer, as the former thought his presence might be serviceable to his nieces. He shared in their attendance on Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, and was a great comfort to them in their hours of freedom. Their other uncle also visited them frequently, and always, as he said, with the design of cheering and heartening them up, though as he never came without reporting some fresh instance of Faith's extravagance or irregularity, he seldom went away without leaving them more dispirited than he found them.

All Sunnydale seemed striving to blacken the woman, who, but three months before, had been almost an angel of light. She was declared to be in debt to every tradesman in the place, and her intrigues, all honoured with the title of seduction, had been extended into every tradesman's family. Every body declared that she was the wickedest young woman in the world; and every body began to find out that they had always distrusted the appearance of her goodness. Spike, though he did not credit above half of what was said, believed enough to make his former assurance of his brother's ruin still more certain; and even Oz, who believed still less of it, became almost hopeless, more especially as the time was now come when, if they had gone to Las Vegas, which he had never before entirely despaired of, they must in all probability have gained some news of them.

Mrs. Jenny Giles left The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's on Sunday; on Tuesday, her husband received a letter from her; it told them that on her arrival, she had immediately found out her sister, and persuaded her to come to Riverside street; that Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy had been to Epsom and Clapham before her arrival, but without gaining any satisfactory information; and that she was now determined to enquire at all the principal hotels in town, as Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy thought it possible they might have gone to one of them, on their first coming to Los Angeles, before they procured lodgings. Mrs. Jenny Giles herself did not expect any success from the measure, but as her sister was eager in it, she meant to assist her in pursuing it. She added that Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy seemed wholly disinclined at present, to leave Los Angeles, and promised to write again very soon. There was also a postscript to the effect:

"I have written to Colonel Cordelia to desire her to find out, if possible, from some of the young woman's intimates in the regiment, whether Faith has any relations or connections who would be
likely to know in what part of the town she has now concealed herself. If there were any one that one could apply to with a probability of gaining such a clue as that, it might be of essential consequence. At present we have nothing to guide us. Colonel Cordelia will, I dare say, do every thing in her power to satisfy us on the head. But, on second thoughts, perhaps Spikey could tell us what relations she has now living better than any other person."

Spike was at no loss to understand from whence the deference for his authority proceeded; but it was not in his power to give any information of so satisfactory a nature as the compliment deserved.

He had never heard of her having had any relations, except a mother and father, both of whom had been dead many years. It was possible, however, that some of her companions in the -----shire, might be able to give more information; and, though he was not very sanguine in expecting it, the application was a something to look forward to.

Every day at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's was now a day of anxiety; but the most anxious part of each was when the post was expected. The arrival of letters was the first grand object of every morning's impatience. Through letters, whatever of good or bad was to be told would be communicated, and every succeeding day was expected to bring some news of importance.

But before they heard again from Mrs. Jenny Giles, a letter arrived for their mother from a different quarter -- from Ms. Anya Nka; which, as Oz had received directions to open all that came for her in her absence, he accordingly read; and Spike, who knew what curiosities her letters always were, looked over him, and read it likewise. It was as follows:

"MY DEAR MA'AM,

I feel myself called upon by our relationship, and my situation in life, to condole with you on the grievous affliction you are now suffering under, of which we were yesterday informed by a letter from Southern California. Be assured, my dear Ma'am, that Mr. Anya Nka and myself sincerely sympasize with you, and all your respectable family, in your present distress, which must be of the bitterest kind, because proceeding from a cause which no time can remove. No arguments shall be wanting on my part that can alleviate so severe a misfortune; or that may comfort you, under a circumstance that must be of all others most afflicting to a parent's mind. The death of your son would have been a blessing in comparison of This. And it is the more to be lamented, because there is reason to suppose, as my dear Adam informs me, that the licentiousness of behaviour in your son has proceeded from a faulty degree of indulgence, though at the same time, for the consolation of yourself and Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, I am inclined to think that his own disposition must be naturally bad, or he could not be guilty of such an enormity at so early an age. Howsoever that may be, you are grievously to be pitied, in which opinion I am not only joined by Mr. Anya Nka, but likewise by Lord Snyder and his son, to whom I have related the affair. They agree with me in apprehending that the false step in one son will be injurious to the fortunes of all the others; for who, as Lord Snyder himself condescendingly says, will connect themselves with such a family. And the consideration leads me moreover to reflect with augmented satisfaction on a certain event of last November, for had it been otherwise, I must have been involved in all your sorrow and disgrace. Let me advise you then, my dear Ma'am, to console yourself as much as possible, to throw off your unworthy child from your affection for ever, and leave him to reap the fruits of his own heinous offence.

I am, dear Ma'am, &c. &c."

Mrs. Jenny Giles did not write again till she had received an answer from Colonel Cordelia; and then she had nothing of a pleasant nature to send. It was not known that Faith had a single relation with whom she kept up any connection, and it was certain that she had no near one living. Her former
acquaintance had been numerous; but since she had been in the militia, it did not appear that she was on terms of particular friendship with any of them. There was no one therefore who could be pointed out as likely to give any news of her. And in the wretched state of her own finances there was a very powerful motive for secrecy, in addition to her fear of discovery by Angelus's relations, for it had just transpired that she had left gaming debts behind her, to a very considerable amount. Colonel Cordelia believed that more than a thousand pounds would be necessary to clear her expenses at Palm Springs. She owed a good deal in the town, but her debts of honour were still more formidable. Mrs. Jenny Giles did not attempt to conceal these particulars from the Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's family; Oz heard them with horror. "A gamester!" he cried. "This wholly unexpected. I had not an idea of it."

Mrs. Jenny Giles added, in her letter, that they might expect to see their mother at home on the following day, which was Saturday. Rendered spiritless by the ill-success of all their endeavours, she had yielded to her sister-in-law's intreaty that she would return to her family, and leave it to her to do whatever occasion might suggest to be advisable for continuing their pursuit. When Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy was told of this, he did not express so much satisfaction as his children expected, considering what his anxiety for her life had been before.

"What, is she coming home, and without poor Angelus!" he cried. "Sure she will not leave Los Angeles before she has found them. Who is to fight Faith, and make her marry him, if she comes away?"

As Mr. Rupert Giles began to wish to be at home, it was settled that he and his children should go to Los Angeles at the same time that Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy came from it. The coach, therefore, took them the first stage of their journey, and brought its mistress back to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's.

Mr. Rupert Giles went away in all the perplexity about Spike and his the San Francisco Bay Area friend that had attended him from that part of the world. Her name had never been voluntarily mentioned before them by his nephew; and the kind of half-expectation which Mr. Rupert Giles had formed, of their being followed by a letter from her, had ended in nothing. Spike had received none since his return, that could come from The Bronze.

The present unhappy state of the family, rendered any other excuse for the lowness of his spirits unnecessary; nothing, therefore, could be fairly conjectured from that, though Spike, who was by the time tolerably well acquainted with his own feelings, was perfectly aware that, had he known nothing of Summers, he could have borne the dread of Angelus's infamy somewhat better. It would have spared him, he thought, one sleepless night out of two.

When Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy arrived, she had all the appearance of her usual philosophic composure. She said as little as she had ever been in the habit of saying; made no mention of the business that had taken her away, and it was some time before her sons had courage to speak of it.

It was not till the afternoon, when she joined them at tea, that Spike ventured to introduce the subject; and then, on his briefly expressing his sorrow for what she must have endured, she replied, "Say nothing of that. Who would suffer but myself? It has been my own doing, and I ought to feel it."

"You must not be too severe upon yourself," replied Spike.

"You may well warn me against such an evil. Human nature is so prone to fall into it! No, Spikey, let me once in my life feel how much I have been to blame. I am not afraid of being overpowered by the impression. It will pass away soon enough."

"Do you suppose them to be in Los Angeles?"
"Yes; where else can they be so well concealed?"

"And Angelus used to want to go to Los Angeles," added Doyle.

"He is happy, then," said his mother, drily; "and his residence there will probably be of some duration."

Then, after a short silence, she continued, "Spikey, I bear you no ill-will for being justified in your advice to me last May, which, considering the event, shews some greatness of mind."

They were interrupted by Mr. le Bloddy, who came to fetch his father's tea.

"There is a parade," cried she, "which does one good; it gives such an elegance to misfortune! Another day I will do the same; I will sit in my library, in my night cap and powdering gown, and give as much trouble as I can, -- or, perhaps, I may defer it till Doyle runs away."

"I am not going to run away, Papa," said Doyle, fretfully; "if I should ever go to Palm Springs, I would behave better than Angelus."

"You go to Palm Springs! -- I would not trust you so near it as East-Bourne, for fifty pounds! No, Doyle, I have at last learnt to be cautious, and you will feel the effects of it. No officer is ever to enter my house again, nor even to pass through the village. sparring matches will be absolutely prohibited, unless you stand up with one of your brothers. And you are never to stir out of doors till you can prove that you have spent ten minutes of every day in a rational manner."

Doyle, who took all these threats in a serious light, began to cry.

"Well, well," said she, "do not make yourself unhappy. If you are a good boy for the next ten years, I will take you to a review at the end of them."

CHAPTER VII (49)

TWO days after Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy's return, as Oz and Spike were walking together in the shrubbery behind the house, they saw the housekeeper coming towards them, and concluding that he came to call them to their father, went forward to meet her; but, instead of the expected summons, when they approached his he said to Mr. le Bloddy, "I beg your pardon, madam, for interrupting you, but I was in hopes you might have got some good news from town, so I took the liberty of coming to ask."

"What do you mean, Hill? We have heard nothing from town."

"Dear sir," cried Mr. Hill, in great astonishment, "don't you know there is an express come for mistress from Mrs. Jenny Giles? She has been here the half hour, and mistress has had a letter."

Away ran the boys, too eager to get in to have time for speech. They ran through the vestibule into the breakfast room; from thence to the library; -- their mother was in neither; and they were on the point of seeking her up stairs with their father, when they were met by the butler, who said,

"If you are looking for my mistress, Sir, she is walking towards the little copse."

Upon the information, they instantly passed through the hall once more, and ran across the lawn after
their mother, who was deliberately pursuing her way towards a small wood on one side of the paddock.

Oz, who was not so light, nor so much in the habit of running, as Spike, soon lagged behind, while his brother, panting for breath, came up with her, and eagerly cried out,

"Oh, Mama, what news? what news? Have you heard from my aunt?"

"Yes, I have had a letter from her by express."

"Well, and what news does it bring? good or bad?"

"What is there of good to be expected?" said she, taking the letter from her pocket; "but perhaps you would like to read it." Spike impatiently caught it from her hand. Oz now came up.

"Read it aloud," said their mother, "for I hardly know myself what it is about."

"Riverside-street, Monday, August 2.

MY DEAR sister,

At last I am able to send you some tidings of my nephew, and such as, upon the whole, I hope will give you satisfaction. Soon after you left me on Saturday, I was fortunate enough to find out in what part of Los Angeles they were. The particulars I reserve till we meet. It is enough to know they are discovered; I have seen them both --"

"Then it is as I always hoped," cried Oz; "they are married!"

Spike read on:

"I have seen them both. They are not married, nor can I find there was any intention of being so; but if you are willing to perform the engagements which I have ventured to make on your side, I hope it will not be long before they are. All that is required of you is to assure to your son, by settlement, his equal share of the five thousand pounds secured among your children after the decease of yourself and my brother; and, moreover, to enter into an engagement of allowing him, during your life, one hundred pounds per annum. These are conditions which, considering every thing, I had no hesitation in complying with, as far as I thought myself privileged, for you. I shall send the by express, that no time may be lost in bringing me your answer. You will easily comprehend, from these particulars, that Ms. Faith's circumstances are not so hopeless as they are generally believed to be. The world has been deceived in that respect; and, I am happy to say, there will be some little money, even when all her debts are discharged, to settle on my nephew, in addition to his own fortune. If, as I conclude will be the case, you send me full powers to act in your name throughout the whole of the business, I will immediately give directions to Haggerston for preparing a proper settlement. There will not be the smallest occasion for your coming to town again; therefore, stay quietly at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's, and depend on my diligence and care. Send back your answer as soon as you can, and be careful to write explicitly. We have judged it best that my nephew should be married from the house, of which I hope you will approve. He comes to us to-day. I shall write again as soon as any thing more is determined on. Yours, &c.

GILES."
"Is it possible!" cried Spike, when he had finished. -- "Can it be possible that she will marry him?"

"Faith is not so undeserving, then, as we have thought him!" said his brother. "My dear mother, I congratulate you."

"And have you answered the letter?" said Spike.

"No; but it must be done soon."

Most earnestly did he then intreat her to lose no more time before she wrote.

"Oh! my dear mother," he cried, "come back, and write immediately. Consider how important every moment is, in such a case."

"Let me write for you," said Oz, "if you dislike the trouble yourself."

"I dislike it very much," she replied; "but it must be done."

And so saying, she turned back with them, and walked towards the house.

"And may I ask -- ?" said Spike, "but the terms, I suppose, must be complied with."

"Complied with! I am only ashamed of her asking so little."

"And they must marry! Yet she is such a woman!"

"Yes, yes, they must marry. There is nothing else to be done. But there are two things that I want very much to know: -- one is, how much money your aunt has laid down to bring it about; and the other, how I am ever to pay her."

"Money! my aunt!" cried Oz, "what do you mean, Madam?"

"I mean that no woman in her senses would marry Angelus on so slight a temptation as one hundred a year during my life, and fifty after I am gone."

"That is very true," said Spike; "though it had not occurred to me before. Her debts to be discharged, and something still to remain! Oh! it must be my uncle's doings! Generous, good woman; I am afraid she has distressed herself. A small sum could not do all this."

"No," said his mother, "Faith's a fool, if she takes him with a farthing less than ten thousand pounds. I should be sorry to think so ill of her in the very beginning of our relationship."

"Ten thousand pounds! Heaven forbid! How is half such a sum to be repaid?"

Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy made no answer, and each of them, deep in thought, continued silent till they reached the house. Their mother then went to the library to write, and the boys walked into the breakfast-room.

"And they are really to be married!" cried Spike, as soon as they were by themselves. "How strange this! And for that we are to be thankful. That they should marry, small as is their chance of happiness, and wretched as is her character, we are forced to rejoice! Oh, Angelus!"

"I comfort myself with thinking," replied Oz, "that she certainly would not marry Angelus if she had not a real regard for him. Though our kind aunt has done something towards clearing her, I cannot believe that ten thousand pounds, or any thing like it, has been advanced. She has children of her own, and may have more. How could she spare half ten thousand pounds?"
"If we are ever able to learn what Faith's debts have been," said Spike, "and how much is settled on her side on our brother, we shall exactly know what Mrs. Jenny Giles has done for them, because Faith has not sixpence of her own. The kindness of my aunt and uncle can never be requited. Their taking his home, and affording his their personal protection and countenance, is such a sacrifice to his advantage as years of gratitude cannot enough acknowledge. By the time he is actually with them! If such goodness does not make his miserable now, he will never deserve to be happy! What a meeting for him, when he first sees my aunt!"

"We must endeavour to forget all that has passed on either side," said Oz. "I hope and trust they will yet be happy. her consenting to marry his is a proof, I will believe, that she is come to a right way of thinking. Their mutual affection will steady them; and I flatter myself they will settle so quietly, and live in so rational a manner, as may in time make their past imprudence forgotten."

"Their conduct has been such," replied Spike, "as neither you, nor I, nor any body, can ever forget. It is useless to talk of it."

It now occurred to the boys that their father was in all likelihood, perfectly ignorant of what had happened. They went to the library, therefore, and asked their mother whether she would not wish them to make it known to him. She was writing, and, without raising her head, coolly replied,

"Just as you please."

"May we take my uncle's letter to read to her?"

"Take whatever you like, and get away."

Spike took the letter from her writing table, and they went up stairs together. Anointed One and Doyle were both with Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy: one communication would, therefore, do for all. After a slight preparation for good news, the letter was read aloud. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy could hardly contain himself. As soon as Oz had read Mrs. Jenny Giles' hope of Angelus's being soon married, his joy burst forth, and every following sentence added to its exuberance. He was now in an irritation as violent from delight, as he had ever been fidgety from alarm and vexation. To know that his son would be married was enough. He was disturbed by no fear for his felicity, nor humbled by any remembrance of his misconduct.

"My dear, dear Angelus!" he cried: "The is delightful indeed! -- He will be married! -- I shall see him again! -- He will be married at sixteen! -- My good, kind brother! -- I knew how it would be -- I knew she would manage every thing. How I long to see her! and to see dear Faith too! But the clothes, the wedding clothes! I will write to my brother Giles about them directly. Spikey, my dear, run down to your mother, and ask her how much she will give him. Stay, stay, I will go myself. Ring the bell, Doyle, for Hill. I will put on my things in a moment. My dear, dear Angelus! -- How merry we shall be together when we meet!"

His eldest son endeavoured to give some relief to the violence of these transports, by leading his thoughts to the obligations which Mrs. Jenny Giles' behaviour laid them all under.

"For we must attribute the happy conclusion," he added, "in a great measure to her kindness. We are persuaded that she has pledged herself to assist Ms. Faith with money."

"Well," cried his father, "it is all very right; who should do it but his own uncle? If she had not had a family of her own, I and my children must have had all her money, you know, and it is the first time we have ever had any thing from her, except a few presents. Well! I am so happy. In a short time, I shall have a son married. Mr. Faith! How well it sounds. And he was only sixteen last June. My dear Oz, I am in such a flutter that I am sure I can't write; so I will dictate, and you write for me. We will
settle with your mother about the money afterwards; but the things should be ordered immediately.

He was then proceeding to all the particulars of calico, leather, and cambric, and would shortly have dictated some very plentiful orders, had not Oz, though with some difficulty, persuaded him to wait till his mother was at leisure to be consulted. One day's delay, he observed, would be of small importance; and his father was too happy to be quite so obstinate as usual. Other schemes, too, came into his head.

"I will go to Sunnydale," said he, "as soon as I am dressed, and tell the good, good news to my brother Olivia. And as I come back, I can call on Dr. Angleman Walsh and Mr. Long. Doyle, run down and order the carriage. An airing would do me a great deal of good, I am sure, boys, can I do any thing for you in Sunnydale? Oh! here comes Hill. My dear Hill, have you heard the good news? Mr. Angelus is going to be married; and you shall all have a bowl of punch to make merry at his wedding."

Mrs. Hill began instantly to express his joy. Spike received his congratulations amongst the rest, and then, sick of the folly, took refuge in his own room, that he might think with freedom.

Poor Angelus's situation must, at best, be bad enough; but that it was no worse, he had need to be thankful. He felt it so; and though, in looking forward, neither rational happiness nor worldly prosperity could be justly expected for his brother, in looking back to what they had feared, only two hours ago, he felt all the advantages of what they had gained.

CHAPTER VIII (50)

MRS. JOYCE MISTRESS had very often wished, before the period of her life, that, instead of spending her whole income, she had laid by an annual sum for the better provision of her children, and of her husband, if he survived her. She now wished it more than ever. Had she done her duty in that respect, Angelus need not have been indebted to his aunt for whatever of honour or credit could now be purchased for him. The satisfaction of prevailing on one of the most worthless young women in Great Britain to be his wife might then have rested in its proper place.

She was seriously concerned that a cause of so little advantage to any one should be forwarded at the sole expense of her sister-in-law, and she was determined, if possible, to find out the extent of her assistance, and to discharge the obligation as soon as she could.

When first Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy had married, economy was held to be perfectly useless; for, of course, they were to have a daughter. The daughter was to join in cutting off the entail, as soon as she should be of age, and the widower and younger children would by that means be provided for. Five sons successively entered the world, but yet the daughter was to come; and Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, for many years after Angelus's birth, had been certain that she would. The event had at last been despaired of, but it was then too late to be saving. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy had no turn for economy, and his wife's love of independence had alone prevented their exceeding their income.

Five thousand pounds was settled by marriage articles on Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy and the children. But in what proportions it should be divided amongst the latter depended on the will of the parents. There was one point, with regard to Angelus at least, which was now to be settled, and Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy could have no hesitation
in acceding to the proposal before her. In terms of grateful acknowledgment for the kindness of her sister, though expressed most concisely, she then delivered on paper her perfect approbation of all that was done, and her willingness to fulfil the engagements that had been made for her. She had never before supposed that, could Faith be prevailed on to marry her son, it would be done with so little inconvenience to herself as by the present arrangement. She would scarcely be ten pounds a year the loser, by the hundred that was to be paid them; for, what with his board and pocket allowance, and the continual presents in money which passed to him through his father's hands, Angelus's expences had been very little within that sum.

That it would be done with such trifling exertion on her side, too, was another very welcome surprise; for her chief wish at present was to have as little trouble in the business as possible. When the first transports of rage which had produced her activity in seeking him were over, she naturally returned to all her former indolence. Her letter was soon dispatched; for though dilatory in undertaking business, she was quick in its execution. She begged to know farther particulars of what she was indebted to her sister; but was too angry with Angelus to send any message to him.

The good news quickly spread through the house; and with proportionate speed through the neighbourhood. It was borne in the latter with decent philosophy. To be sure, it would have been more for the advantage of conversation, had Mr. Angelus le Bloddy come upon the town; or, as the happiest alternative, been secluded from the world in some distant farm house. But there was much to be talked of in marrying her; and the good-natured wishes for his well-doing, which had proceeded before from all the spiteful old gentlemen in Sunnydale, lost but little of their spirit in the change of circumstances, because with such an wife, his misery was considered certain.

It was a fortnight since Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy had been down stairs, but on the happy day he again took his seat at the head of his table, and in spirits oppressively high. No sentiment of shame gave a damp to his triumph. The marriage of a son, which had been the first object of his wishes since Oz was sixteen, was now on the point of accomplishment, and his thoughts and his words ran wholly on those attendants of elegant nuptials, fine leathers, new carriages, and servants. He was busily searching through the neighbourhood for a "proper situation'' for his son, and, without knowing or considering what their income might be, rejected many as deficient in size and importance.

"Haye-Park might do," said he, "if the Gouldings would quit it, or the great house at Stoke, if the drawing-room were larger; but Ashworth is too far off! I could not bear to have his ten miles from me; and as for Purvis Lodge, the attics are dreadful." His wife allowed his to talk on without interruption while the servants remained. But when they had withdrawn, she said to him, "Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, before you take any or all of these houses for your daughter and son, let us come to a right understanding. Into one house in the neighbourhood, they shall never have admittance. I will not encourage the impudence of either by receiving them at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's."

A long dispute followed the declaration, but Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy was firm; it soon led to another, and Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy found, with amazement and horror, that his wife would not advance a guinea to buy clothes for her son. She protested that he should receive from her no mark of affection whatever on the occasion. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy could hardly comprehend it. That her anger could be carried to such a point of inconceivable resentment, as to refuse her son a privilege without which his marriage would scarcely seem valid, exceeded all that he could believe possible. He was more alive to the disgrace which the want of new clothes must reflect on his son's nuptials, than to any sense of shame at his eloping and living with Faith a fortnight before they took place.

Spike was now most heartily sorry that he had, from the distress of the moment, been led to make Miss Buffy Summers acquainted with their fears for his brother; for since his marriage would so
shortly give the proper termination to the elopement, they might hope to conceal its unfavourable beginning from all those who were not immediately on the spot.

He had no fear of its spreading farther through her means. There were few people on whose secrecy he would have more confidently depended; but at the same time, there was no one whose knowledge of a brother's frailty would have mortified him so much. Not, however, from any fear of disadvantage from it individually to herself; for at any rate, there seemed a gulf impassable between them. Had Angelus's marriage been concluded on the most honourable terms, it was not to be supposed that Miss Buffy Summers would connect herself with a family where, to every other objection would now be added an alliance and relationship of the nearest kind with the woman whom she so justly scorned.

From such a connection he could not wonder that she should shrink. The wish of procuring his regard, which he had assured himself of her feeling in The San Francisco Bay Area, could not in rational expectation survive such a blow as This. He was humbled, he was grieved; he repented, though he hardly knew of what. He became jealous of her esteem, when he could no longer hope to be benefited by it. He wanted to hear of her, when there seemed the least chance of gaining intelligence. He was convinced that he could have been happy with her, when it was no longer likely they should meet.

What a triumph for her, as he often thought, could she know that the proposals which he had proudly spurned only four months ago, would now have been gladly and gratefully received! She was as generous, he doubted not, as the most generous of her sex. But while she was mortal, there must be a triumph.

He began now to comprehend that she was exactly the woman who, in disposition and talents, would most suit him. Her understanding and temper, though unlike his own, would have answered all his wishes. It was an union that must have been to the advantage of both; by his ease and liveliness, her mind might have been softened, her manners improved, and from her judgment, information, and knowledge of the world, he must have received benefit of greater importance. But no such happy marriage could now teach the admiring multitude what connubial felicity really was. An union of a different tendency, and precluding the possibility of the other, was soon to be formed in their family.

How Faith and Angelus were to be supported in tolerable independence, he could not imagine. But how little of permanent happiness could belong to a couple who were only brought together because their passions were stronger than their virtue, he could easily conjecture.

Mrs. Jenny Giles soon wrote again to her sister. To Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy's acknowledgments she briefly replied, with assurances of her eagerness to promote the welfare of any of her family, and concluded with intreaties that the subject might never be mentioned to her again. The principal purport of her letter was to inform them that Ms. Faith had resolved on quitting the Militia.

"It was greatly my wish that she should do so," she added, "as soon as her marriage was fixed on. And I think you will agree with me in considering a removal from that corps as highly advisable, both on her account and my nephew’s. It is Ms. Faith’s intention to go into the regulars; and, among her former friends, there are still some who are able and willing to assist her in the army. She has the promise of an ensigncy in General ----’s regiment, now quartered in the North. It is an advantage to have it so far from the part of the kingdom. She promises fairly; and, I hope, among different people, where they may each have a character to preserve, they will both be more prudent. I have written to Colonel Cordelia, to inform her of our present arrangements, and to request that she will satisfy the various creditors of Ms. Faith in and near Palm Springs with assurances of speedy payment, for which I have pledged myself. And will you give yourself the trouble of carrying similar assurances to
her creditors in Sunnydale, of whom I shall subjoin a list, according to her information. She has
given in all her debts; I hope at least she has not deceived us. Haggerston has our directions, and all
will be completed in a week. They will then join her regiment, unless they are first invited to The
Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's; and I understand from Mr. Rupert Giles that my nephew
is very desirous of seeing you all, before he leaves the South. He is well, and begs to be dutifully
remembered to you and his father. -- Yours, &c.

Giles."

Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy and her sons saw all the advantages of Faith's removal from the ----shire as
clearly as Mrs. Jenny Giles could do. But Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy was not so well pleased with it.
Angelus's being settled in the North, just when he had expected most pleasure and pride in his
company -- for he had by no means given up his plan of their residing in Southern California -- was a
severe disappointment; and besides, it was such a pity that Angelus should be taken from a regiment
where he was acquainted with every body, and had so many favourites.

"He is so fond of Mr. Chase," said he, "it will be quite shocking to send him away! And there are
several of the young women, too, that he likes very much. The officers may not be so pleasant in
General ----'s regiment."

Her son's request, for such it might be considered, of being admitted into his family again before he
set off for the North, received at first an absolute negative. But Oz and Spike, who agreed in
wishing, for the sake of their brother's feelings and consequence, that he should be noticed on his
marriage by his parents, urged her so earnestly, yet so rationally and so mildly, to receive him and his
wife at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's as soon as they were married, that she was
prevailed on to think as they thought, and act as they wished. And their father had the satisfaction of
knowing that he should be able to shew his married son in the neighbourhood, before he was
banished to the North. When Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy wrote again to her sister, therefore, she sent her
permission for them to come; and it was settled that, as soon as the ceremony was over, they should
proceed to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's. Spike was surprised, however, that Faith
should consent to such a scheme; and, had he consulted only his own inclination, any meeting with
her would have been the last object of his wishes.
CHAPTER IX (51)

THEIR brother's wedding day arrived; and Oz and Spike felt for him probably more than he felt for himself, but since happiness rendered him feckless and souless, this was only to be expected. The carriage was sent to meet them at ----, and they were to return in it by dinner-time. Their arrival was dreaded by the elder Mr. le Bloddy, and Oz more especially, who gave Angelus the feelings which would have attended himself, had he been the culprit, and was wretched in the thought of what his brother must endure.

They came. The family were assembled in the breakfast room to receive them. Smiles decked the face of Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy as the carriage drove up to the door; his wife looked impenetrably grave; his sons, alarmed, anxious, uneasy.

Angelus's voice was heard in the vestibule; the door was thrown open, and he ran into the room. His father stepped forwards, embraced him, and welcomed him with rapture; gave his hand to be stabbed with an affectionate smile, to Faith, who followed her lord; and wished them both joy with an alacrity which shewed no doubt of their happiness.

Their reception from Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, to whom they then turned, was not quite so cordial. Her countenance rather gained in austerity; and she scarcely opened her lips. The easy assurance of the young couple, indeed, was enough to provoke her. Spike was disgusted, and even Mr. le Bloddy was shocked. Angelus was Angelus still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless. He turned from brother to brother, demanding their congratulations; and when at length they all sat down, looked eagerly round the room, took notice of some little alteration in it, and observed, with a laugh, that it was a great while since he had been there.

Faith was not at all more distressed than himself, but her manners were always so pleasing and five by five, that had her character and her marriage been exactly what they ought, her smiles and her easy address, while she claimed their relationship, would have delighted them all. Spike had not before believed her quite equal to such assurance; but he sat down, resolving within himself to draw no limits in future to the impudence of an impudent woman. He blushed, and Oz blushed; but the cheeks of the two who caused their confusion suffered no variation of colour.

There was no want of discourse. The bride and his father could neither of them talk fast enough; and Faith, who happened to sit near Spike, began enquiring after her acquaintance in that neighbourhood, with a good humoured ease which he felt very unable to equal in his replies. They seemed each of them to have the happiest memories in the world. Nothing of the past was recollected with pain; and Angelus led voluntarily to subjects which his brothers would not have alluded to for the world.

"Only think of its being three months," he cried, "since I went away; it seems but a fortnight I declare; and yet there have been things enough happened in the time. Good gracious! when I went away, I am sure I had no more idea of being married till I came back again! though I thought it would be very good fun if I was."

His mother lifted up her eyes. Oz was distressed. Spike looked expressively at Angelus; but he, who never heard nor saw any thing of which he chose to be insensible, gaily continued, "Oh! mamma, do
the people hereabouts know I am married to-day? I was afraid they might not; and we overtook Willahamina Harker in her curricle, so I was determined she should know it, and so I let down the side-glass next to her, and took off my glove, and let my hand just rest upon the window frame, so that she might see the ring, and then I bowed and smiled like any thing."

Spike could bear it no longer. He got up, and ran out of the room in a flurry of leather; and returned no more, till he heard them passing through the hall to the dining parlour. He then joined them soon enough to see Angelus, with anxious parade, walk up to his father's right hand, and hear him say to his eldest brother, "Ah! Oz, I take your place now, and you must go lower, because I am a married man."

It was not to be supposed that time would give Angelus that embarrassment from which he had been so wholly free at first. His ease and good spirits increased. He longed to see Ms. Olivia, the Walshes, and all their other neighbours, and to hear himself called "Mr. Faith" by each of them; and in the mean time, he went after dinner to shew his ring, and boast of being married, to Mr. Holtz and the two housemaids.

"Well, papa," said he, when they were all returned to the breakfast room, "and what do you think of my wife? Is not she a charming woman? I am sure my brothers must all envy me. I only hope they may have half my good luck. They must all go to Palm Springs. That is the place to get wives. What a pity it is, mamma, we did not all go."

"Very true; and if I had my will, we should. For Faith is a jim dandy fine young woman. But my dear Angelus, I don't at all like your going such a way off. Must it be so?"

"Oh, lord! yes; -- there is nothing in that. I shall like it of all things. You and mama, and my brothers, must come down and see us. We shall be at Newcastle all the winter, and I dare say there will be some sparring matches, and I will take care to get good partners for them all."

"I should like it beyond any thing!" said his father.

"And then when you go away, you may leave one or two of my brothers behind you; and I dare say I shall get wives for them before the winter is over."

"I thank you for my share of the favour," said Spike; "but I do not particularly like your way of getting wives you daft ponce."

Their visitors were not to remain above ten days with them. Ms. Faith had received her commission before she left Los Angeles, and she was to join her regiment at the end of a fortnight.

No one but Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy regretted that their stay would be so short; and he made the most of the time by visiting about with his son, making much of his new daughter, to whom he gave a splendid dagger, and having very frequent parties at home. These parties were acceptable to all; to avoid a family circle was even more desirable to such as did think, than such as did not. Plus, there was sparring and when you're a Le Bloddy, fighting is comfort food.

Faith's affection for Angelus was just what Spike had expected to find it; not equal to Angelus' for her. He had scarcely needed his present observation to be satisfied, from the reason of things, that their elopement had been brought on by the strength of his love, rather than by hers; and he would have wondered why, without violently caring for him, she chose to elope with him at all, had he not felt certain that her flight was rendered necessary by distress of circumstances; and if that were the case, she was not the young woman to resist an opportunity of having a companion.

Angelus was exceedingly fond of her. She was his dear Faith on every occasion; no one was to be
put in competition with her. She did every thing best in the world; and he was sure she would kill better than any body else in the country. And a great many more details about chains than Spikey thought were entirely necessary.

One morning, soon after their arrival, as he was sitting with his two elder brothers, he said to Spike, "Spikey, I never gave you an account of my wedding, I believe. You were not by, when I told papa and the others all about it. Are not you curious to hear how it was managed?"

"No really," replied Spike; "I think there cannot be too little said on the subject you big Champion you."

"La! You are so strange! But I must tell you how it went off. We were married, you know, at St. Long Beaches, because Faith's lodgings were in that parish. And it was settled that we should all be there by eleven o'clock. My aunt and uncle and I were to go together; and the others were to meet us at the church. Well, Monday morning came, and I was in such a fuss! I was so afraid, you know, that something would happen to put it off, and then I should have gone quite distracted. And there was my uncle, all the time I was dressing, preaching and talking away just as if he was reading a sermon. However, I did not hear above one word in ten, for I was thinking, you may suppose, of my dear Faith. I longed to know whether she would be married in her black leather pants which fit her so finely."

"Well, and so we breakfasted at ten as usual; I thought it would never be over; for, by the bye, you are to understand, that my aunt and uncle were horrid unpleasant all the time I was with them. If you'll believe me, I did not once put my foot out of doors, though I was there a fortnight. Not one party, or scheme, or torture, or any thing. To be sure Los Angeles was rather thin, but, however, Caritas was open. Well, and so just as the carriage came to the door, my aunt was called away upon business to that horrid woman Mrs. Lilah. And then, you know, when once they get together, there is no end of it. Well, I was so frightened I did not know what to do, for my aunt was to give me away; and if we were beyond the hour, we could not be married all day. But, luckily, she came back again in ten minutes' time, and then we all set out. However, I recollected afterwards that if she had been prevented going, the wedding need not be put off, for Miss Buffy Summers might have done as well."

"Miss Buffy Summers!" repeated Spike, in utter amazement.

"Oh, yes! -- she was to come there with Faith, you know. But gracious me! I quite forgot! I ought not to have said a word about it. I promised them so faithfully! What will Faith say? It was to be such a secret! Then again, maybe there will punishments. Mmmmm."

"If it was to be secret," said Oz, "say not another word on the subject. You may depend upon my seeking no further."

"Oh! certainly," said Spike, though burning with curiosity; "we will ask you no questions."

"Thank you," said Angelus, "for if you did, I should certainly tell you all, and then Faith would be angry. Mmmmm. Angry Faith."

On such encouragement to ask, Spike was forced to put it out of his power, by running away.

But to live in ignorance on such a point was impossible; or at least it was impossible not to try for information. Miss Buffy Summers had been at his brother's wedding. It was exactly a scene, and exactly among people, where she had apparently least to do, and least temptation to go. Conjectures as to the meaning of it, rapid and wild, hurried into his brain; but he was satisfied with none. Those
that best pleased him, as placing her conduct in the noblest light, seemed most improbable. He could
not bear such suspense; and hastily seizing a sheet of paper, wrote a short letter to his uncle, to
request an explanation of what Angelus had dropt, if it were compatible with the secrecy which had
been intended.

"You may readily comprehend," he added, "what my curiosity must be to know how a person
unconnected with any of us, and (comparatively speaking) a stranger to our family, should have been
amongst you at such a time. Pray write instantly, and let me understand it -- unless it is, for very
cogent reasons, to remain in the secrecy which Angelus seems to think necessary; and then I must
endeavour to be satisfied with ignorance."

"Not that I shall, though," he added to himself, as he finished the letter; "and my dear uncle, if you do
not tell me in an honourable manner, I shall certainly be reduced to tricks and stratagems to find it
out."

Oz's delicate sense of honour would not allow him to speak to Spike privately of what Angelus had
let fall; Spike was glad of it; -- till it appeared whether his inquiries would receive any satisfaction, he
had rather be without a confidante.

CHAPTER X (52)

SPIKE had the satisfaction of receiving an answer to his letter as soon as he possibly could. He was
no sooner in possession of it than, hurrying into the little copse, where he was least likely to be
interrupted, he sat down on one of the benches and prepared to be happy; for the length of the letter
convinced his that it did not contain a denial.

"Riverside-street, Sept. 6.

MY DEAR Nephew,

I have just received your letter, and shall devote the whole morning to answering it, as I foresee that a
little writing will not comprise what I have to tell you. I must confess myself surprised by your
application; I did not expect it from you.

Don't think me angry, however, for I only mean to let you know that I had not imagined such
enquiries to be necessary on your side. If you do not choose to understand me, forgive my
impertinence. Your aunt is as much surprised as I am -- and nothing but the belief of your being a
party concerned would have allowed her to act as she has done. But if you are really innocent and
ignorant, I must be more explicit.

On the very day of my coming home from The Ubiquitous
Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's, your aunt had a most unexpected
visitor. Miss Buffy Summers called, and was shut up with her several
hours. It was all over before I arrived; so my curiosity was not so
dreadfully racked as yours seems to have been. She came to tell Mrs.
Jenny Giles that she had found out where your brother and Ms. Faith
were, and that she had seen and talked with them both; Faith repeatedly, Angelus once.
From what I can collect, she left the San Francisco Bay Area only one day after ourselves, and came to town with the resolution of hunting for them. The motive professed was her conviction of its being owing to herself that Faith's worthlessness had not been so well known as to make it impossible for any young man of character to love or confide in her. She generously imputed the whole to her mistaken pride, and confessed that she had before thought it beneath her to lay her private actions open to the world. Her character was to speak for itself. She called it, therefore, her duty to step forward, and endeavour to remedy an evil which had been brought on by herself. If she had another motive, I am sure it would never disgrace her.

She had been some days in town, before she was able to discover them; but she had something to direct her search, which was more than we had; and the consciousness of the was another reason for her resolving to follow us. There is a gentleman, it seems, a Mr. Lindsey, who was some time ago governors Mr. Summers, and was dismissed from his charge on some cause of disapprobation, though she did not say what. He then took a large house in Edward-street, and has since maintained himself by letting lodgings.

There Mr. Lindsey was, she knew, intimately acquainted with Faith; well who isn't, and she went to him for intelligence of her as soon as she got to town. But it was two or three days before she could get from his what she wanted. He would not betray his trust, I suppose, without bribery and corruption, for he really did know where his friend was to be found. Faith indeed had gone to him on their first arrival in Los Angeles, and had he been able to receive them into his house, they would have taken up their abode with him. At length, however, our kind friend procured the wished-for direction. They were in ---- street. She saw Faith, and afterwards insisted on seeing Angelus. Her first object with him, she acknowledged, had been to persuade him to quit his present disgraceful situation, and return to his friends as soon as they could be prevailed on to receive him, offering her assistance, as far as it would go. But she found Angelus absolutely resolved on remaining where he was. He cared for none of his friends; he wanted no help of hers; would not hear of leaving Faith. He was sure they should be married some time or other, and it did not much signify when.

Since such were his feelings, it only remained, she thought, to secure and expedite a marriage, which, in her very first conversation with Faith, she easily learnt had never been her design. She confessed herself obliged to leave the regiment, on account of some debts of honour, which were very pressing; and scrupled not to lay all the ill-consequences of Angelus's flight on his own folly alone. She meant to resign her commission immediately; and as to her future situation, she could conjecture very little about it. She must go somewhere, but she did not know where, and she knew she should have nothing to live on. Miss Buffy Summers asked her why she had not married your brother at once. Though Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy was not imagined to be very rich, she would have been able to do something for her, and her situation must have been benefited by marriage. But she found, in reply to the question, that Faith still cherished the hope of more effectually making her fortune by marriage in some other country. Under such circumstances, however, she was not likely to be proof against the temptation of immediate relief. They met several times, for there was much to be discussed. Faith of course wanted more than she could get; but at length was reduced to be reasonable.

Every thing being settled between them, Miss Buffy Summers' next step was to make your aunt acquainted with it, and she first called in Riverside-street the evening before I came home. But Mrs. Jenny Giles could not be seen, and Miss Buffy Summers found, on further enquiry, that your mother was still with her, but would quit town the next morning. She did not judge your mother to be a person whom she could so properly consult as your uncle, and therefore readily postponed seeing her till after the departure of the former. She did not leave her name, and till the next day it was only known that a lady had called on business. On Saturday she came again. Your mother was gone, your aunt at home, and, as I said before, they had a great deal of talk together. They met again on Sunday, and then I saw her too. It was not all settled before Monday: as soon as it was, the express was sent
off to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's. But our visitor was very obstinate.

I fancy, Spikey, that obstinacy is the real defect of her character, after all. She has been accused of many faults at different times, but this is the true one. Nothing was to be done that she did not do himself; though I am sure (and I do not speak it to be thanked, therefore say nothing about it), your aunt would most readily have settled the whole. They battled it together for a long time, which was more than either the lady or lord concerned in it deserved. But at last your aunt was forced to yield, and instead of being allowed to be of use to her nephew, was forced to put up with only having the probable credit of it, which went sorely against the grain; and I really believe your letter the morning gave her great pleasure, because it required an explanation that would rob her of her borrowed feathers, and give the praise where it was due. But, Spikey, the must go no farther than yourself, or Oz at most.

You know handsome well, I suppose, what has been done for the young people. Her debts are to be paid, amounting, I believe, to considerably more than a thousand pounds, another thousand in addition to his own settled upon him, and her commission purchased. The reason why all this was to be done by her alone, was such as I have given above. It was owing to her, to her reserve and want of proper consideration, that Faith's character had been so misunderstood, and consequently that she had been received and noticed as she was. Perhaps there was some truth in this; though I doubt whether her reserve, or anybody's reserve, can be answerable for the event. But in spite of all the fine talking, my dear Spikey, you may rest perfectly assured that your aunt would never have yielded, if we had not given her credit for another interest in the affair.

When all the was resolved on, she returned again to her friends, who were still staying at The Bronze; but it was agreed that she should be in Los Angeles once more when the wedding took place, and all money matters were then to receive the last finish. I believe I have now told you every thing. It is a relation which you tell me is to give you great surprise; I hope at least it will not afford you any displeasure. Angelus came to us; and Faith had constant admission to the house. She was exactly what she had been when I knew her in Southern California; but I would not tell you how little I was satisfied with his behaviour while he staid with us, if I had not perceived, by Oz's letter last Wednesday, that his conduct on coming home was exactly of a piece with it, and therefore what I now tell you can give you no fresh pain.

I talked to him repeatedly in the most serious manner, representing to him all the wickedness of what he had done, and all the unhappiness he had brought on his family. If he heard me, it was by good luck, for I am sure he did not listen. I was sometimes quite provoked, but then I recollected my dear Spike and Oz, and for their sakes had patience with him. Miss Buffy Summers was punctual in her return, and as Angelus informed you, attended the wedding. She dined with us the next day, and was to leave town again on Wednesday or Thursday. Will you be very angry with me, my dear Spikey, if I take the opportunity of saying (what I was never bold enough to say before) how much I like her. Her behaviour to us has, in every respect, been as pleasing as when we were in The San Francisco Bay Area. Her understanding and opinions all please me; she wants nothing but a little more liveliness, and that, if she marry prudently, her husband may teach her. I thought her very sly; -- she hardly ever mentioned your name.

But slyness seems the fashion. So pray tell, have you built a shrine to her yet in the accepted fashion, with that picture you purloined and mayhap a glove or lock of hair like in that amusing Pope Poem. Pray forgive me if I have been very presuming, or at least do not punish me so far as to exclude me from the estate of B. I shall never be quite happy till I have been all round the park. A low phaeton, with a nice little pair of ponies, would be the very thing. But I must write no more. The children have been wanting me the half hour. Yours, very sincerely,

R. Giles.
The contents of the letter threw Spike into a flutter of spirits, in which it was difficult to determine whether pleasure or pain bore the greatest share.

The vague and unsettled suspicions which uncertainty had produced of what Miss Buffy Summers might have been doing to forward his brother's match, which he had feared to encourage as an exertion of goodness too great to be probable, and at the same time dreaded to be just, from the pain of obligation, were proved beyond their greatest extent to be true! She had followed them purposely to town, she had taken on herself all the trouble and mortification attendant on such a research; in which supplication had been necessary to a man whom she must abominate and despise, and where she was reduced to meet, frequently meet, reason with, persuade, and finally bribe, the woman whom she always most wished to avoid, and whose very name it was punishment to her to pronounce.

She had done all this for a boy whom she could neither regard nor esteem. His heart did whisper that she had done it for him. Me. Me. ME. But it was a hope shortly checked by other considerations, and he soon felt that even his vanity was insufficient, when required to depend on her affection for his -- for a man who had already refused her -- as able to overcome a sentiment so natural as abhorrence against relationship with Faith. Brother-in-law of Faith! Every kind of pride must revolt from the connection. She had, to be sure, done much. He was ashamed to think how much. But she had given a reason for her interference, which asked no extraordinary stretch of belief. It was reasonable that she should feel she had been wrong; she had liberality, and she had the means of exercising it; and though he would not place himself as her principal inducement, he could, perhaps, believe that remaining partiality for his might assist her endeavours in a cause where his peace of mind must be materially concerned. It was painful, exceedingly painful, to know that they were under obligations to a person who could never receive a return.

They owed the restoration of Angelus, his character, every thing, to her. Oh! how heartily did he grieve over every ungracious sensation he had ever encouraged, every saucy speech he had ever directed towards her. For himself he was humbled; but he was proud of her. Proud that in a cause of compassion and honour, she had been able to get the better of herself. He read over his uncle's commendation of her again and again. It was hardly enough; but it pleased him. He was even sensible of some pleasure, though mixed with regret, on finding how steadfastly both he and his aunt had been persuaded that affection and confidence subsisted between Miss Buffy Summers and himself.

He was roused from his seat, and his reflections, by some one's approach; and before he could strike into another path, he was overtaken by Faith.

"I am afraid I interrupt your solitary ramble, my dear brother?" said she, as she joined him.

"You certainly do," he replied with a smile; "but it does not follow that the interruption must be unwelcome."

"I should be sorry indeed, if it were. We were always good friends; and now we are better."

"True. Are the others coming out?"
"I do not know. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy and Angelus are going in the carriage to Sunnydale. And so, my dear brother, I find, from our aunt and uncle, that you have actually seen The Bronze."

He replied in the affirmative.

"I almost envy you the pleasure, and yet I believe it would be too much for me, or else I could take it in my way to Newcastle. And you saw the old housekeeper, I suppose? Poor Reynolds, he was always very fond of me. But of course he did not mention my name to you."

"Yes, he did."

"And what did he say?"

"That you were gone into the army, and he was afraid had -- not turned out well. At such a distance as that, you know, things are strangely misrepresented."

"Certainly," she replied, biting her lips. Spike hoped he had silenced her; but she soon afterwards said, "I was surprised to see Summers in town last month. We passed each other several times. I wonder what she can be doing there."

"Perhaps preparing for her marriage with Mr. de Principal," said Spike. "It must be something particular, to take her there at the time of year."

"Undoubtedly. Did you see her while you were at Napa? I thought I understood from the Giles' that you had."

"Yes; she introduced us to her brother."

"And do you like her?"

"Very much."

"I have heard, indeed, that he is uncommonly improved within the year or two. When I last saw him, he was not very promising. I am very glad you liked him. I hope he will turn out well."

"I dare say he will; he has got over the most trying age."

"Did you go by the village of Kympton?"

"I do not recollect that we did."

"I mention it, because it is the place where I would have served as the Slayer. A most delightful place! -- Excellent graveyards! It would have suited me in every respect."

"How should you have liked slaying?"

"Exceedingly well. I should have considered it as part of my duty, and the exertion would soon have been nothing. One ought not to repine; -- but, to be sure, it would have been such a thing for me! The excitement, of such a life would have answered all my ideas of happiness! But it was not to be. Did you ever hear Summers mention the circumstance, when you were in Sacramento?"

"I have heard from authority, which I thought as good, that it was left you conditionally only, and at the will of the present patron."
"You have. Yes, there was something in that; I told you so from the first, you may remember."

"I did hear, too, that there was a time, when slaying was not so palatable to you as it seems to be at present; that you actually declared your resolution of not being the Slayer, and that the business had been compromised accordingly."

"You did! and it was not wholly without foundation. You may remember what I told you on that point, when first we talked of it."

They were now almost at the door of the house, for he had walked fast to get rid of her; and unwilling, for his brother's sake, to provoke her, he only said in reply, with a good-humoured smile,

"Come, Ms. Faith, we are sister and brother, you know. Do not let us quarrel about the past. In future, I hope we shall be always of one mind."

He held out his hand; she kissed it with affectionate gallantry, though she hardly knew how to look, and they entered the house.

CHAPTER XI (53)

Ms. FAITH was so perfectly satisfied with the conversation that she never again distressed herself, or provoked her dear brother Spike, by introducing the subject of it; and he was pleased to find that he had said enough to keep her quiet.

The day of her and Angelus's departure soon came, and Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy was forced to submit to a separation, which, as his wife by no means entered into his scheme of their all going to Newcastle, was likely to continue at least a twelvemonth.

"Oh! my dear Angelus," he cried, "when shall we meet again?"

"Oh, lord! I don't know. Not these two or three years, perhaps."

"Write to me very often, my dear."

"As often as I can. But you know married men have never much time for writing. My brothers may write to me. They will have nothing else to do."

Mr. Faith's adieus were much more affectionate than her wife's. She smiled, looked handsome, and said many handsome things.

"She is as fine a fellow," said Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy, as soon as they were out of the house, "as ever I saw. She simpers, and smirks, and makes love to us all. I am prodigiously proud of her. I defy even Dame Walsh herself to produce a more valuable daughter-in-law."

The loss of his son made Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy very dull for several days.

"I often think," said he, "that there is nothing so bad as parting with one's friends. One seems so forlorn without them."

"There is the consequence, you see, Sir, of marrying a son," said Spike. "It must make you better satisfied that your other four are single."
"It is no such thing. Angelus does not leave me because he is married, but only because his wife's regiment happens to be so far off. If that had been nearer, he would not have gone so soon."

But the spiritless condition which the event threw him into was shortly relieved, and his mind opened again to the agitation of hope, by an article of news which then began to be in circulation. The housekeeper at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High had received orders to prepare for the arrival of his mistress, who was coming down in a day or two, to shoot there for several weeks. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy was quite in the fidgets. He looked at Oz, and smiled and shook his head by turns.

"Well, well, and so Willow is coming down, sister," (for Mr. Olivia first brought his the news).
"Well, so much the better. Not that I care about it, though. She is nothing to us, you know, and I am sure I never want to see her again. But, however, she is very welcome to come to the burnt husk of Sunnydale High, if she likes it. And who knows what may happen? But that is nothing to us. You know, brother, we agreed long ago never to mention a word about it. And so, is it quite certain she is coming?"

"You may depend on it," replied the other, "for Mr. Nicholls was in Sunnydale last night; I saw his passing by, and went out myself on purpose to know the truth of it; and he told me that it was certain true. She comes down on Thursday at the latest, very likely on Wednesday. He was going to the butcher's, he told me, on purpose to order in some meat on Wednesday, and he has got three couple of ducks just fit to be killed."

Miss le Bloddy had not been able to hear of her coming without changing colour. It was many months since he had mentioned her name to Spike; but now, as soon as they were alone together, he said,

"I saw you look at me to-day, Spikey, when my uncle told us of the present report; and I know I appeared distressed. But don't imagine it was from any silly cause. I was only confused for the moment, because I felt that I should be looked at. I do assure you that the news does not affect me either with pleasure or pain. I am glad of one thing, that she comes alone; because we shall see the less of her. Not that I am afraid of myself, but I dread other people's remarks."

Spike did not know what to make of it. Had he not seen her in The San Francisco Bay Area, he might have supposed her capable of coming there with no other view than what was acknowledged; but he still thought her partial to Oz, and he wavered as to the greater probability of her coming there with her friend's permission, or being bold enough to come without it.

"Yet it is hard," he sometimes thought, "that the poor woman cannot come to a house which she has legally hired, without raising all the speculation! I will leave her to herself."

In spite of what his brother declared, and really believed to be his feelings in the expectation of her arrival, Spike could easily perceive that his spirits were affected by it. They were more disturbed, more unequal, than he had often seen them.

The subject which had been so warmly canvassed between their parents, about a twelvemonth ago, was now brought forward again.

"As soon as ever Willow comes, my dear," said Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, "you will wait on her of course."

"No, no. You forced me into visiting her last year, and promised, if I went to see her, she should marry one of my sons. But it ended in nothing, and I will not be sent on a fool's errand again."

Her husband represented to her how absolutely necessary such an attention would be from all the
neighbouring gentlemen, on her returning to the burnt husk of Sunnydale High.

"'Tis an etiquette I despise," said she. "If she wants our society, let her seek it. She knows where we live. I will not spend my hours in running after my neighbours every time they go away and come back again."

"Well, all I know is, that it will be abominably rude if you do not wait on her. But, however, that shan't prevent my asking her to dine here, I am determined. We must have Mr. Long and the Gouldings soon. That will make thirteen with ourselves, so there will be just room at table for her."

Console by the resolution, he was the better able to bear his wife's incivility; though it was very mortifying to know that his neighbours might all see Willow, in consequence of it, before they did. As the day of her arrival drew near,

"I begin to be sorry that she comes at all," said Oz to his brother. "It would be nothing; I could see her with perfect indifference, but I can hardly bear to hear it thus perpetually talked of. My father means well; but he does not know, no one can know, how much I suffer from what he says. Happy shall I be, when her stay at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High is over!"

"I wish I could say any thing to comfort you," replied Spike; "but it is wholly out of my power. You must feel it; and the usual satisfaction of preaching patience to a sufferer is denied me, because you have always so much."

Willow arrived. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, through the assistance of servants, contrived to have the earliest tidings of it, that the period of anxiety and fretfulness on his side might be as long as it could. He counted the days that must intervene before their invitation could be sent; hopeless of seeing her before. But on the third morning after her arrival in Southern California, he saw her, from his dressing-room window, enter the paddock and ride towards the house.

His sons were eagerly called to partake of his joy. Oz resolutely kept his place at the table; but Spike, to satisfy his father, went to the window -- he looked, -- he saw Miss Buffy Summers with her, and sat down again by his brother.

"There is a lady with her, mamma," said Doyle; "who can it be?"

"Some acquaintance or other, my dear, I suppose; I am sure I do not know."

"La!" replied Doyle, "it looks just like that woman that used to be with her before. Mrs. what's-her-name. That short, proud woman."

"Good gracious! Miss Buffy Summers! -- and so it does, I vow. Well, any friend of Willow's will always be welcome here, to be sure; but else I must say that I hate the very sight of her."

Oz looked at Spike with surprise and concern. He knew but little of their meeting in The San Francisco Bay Area, and therefore felt for the awkwardness which must attend his brother, in seeing her almost for the first time after receiving her explanatory letter. Both brothers were uncomfortable enough. Each felt for the other, and of course for themselves; and their father talked on, of his dislike of Miss Buffy Summers, and his resolution to be civil to her only as Willow's friend, without being heard by either of them. But Spike had sources of uneasiness which could not be suspected by Oz, to whom he had never yet had courage to shew Mr. Rupert Giles' letter, or to relate his own change of sentiment towards her. To Oz, she could be only a woman whose proposals he had refused, and whose merit he had undervalued; but to his own more extensive information, she was the person to whom the whole family were indebted for the first of benefits, and whom he regarded himself with an interest, if not quite so tender, at least as reasonable and just as what Oz felt for Rosenburg. His
astonishment at her coming -- at her coming to the burnt husk of Sunnydale High, to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's, and voluntarily seeking him again, was almost equal to what he had known on first witnessing her altered behaviour in The San Francisco Bay Area.

The colour which had been driven from his face, returned for half a minute with an additional glow, and a smile of delight added lustre to his eyes, as he thought for that space of time that her affection and wishes must still be unshaken. But he would not be secure.

"Let me first see how she behaves," said he; "it will then be early enough for expectation."

He sat intently at work, striving to be composed, and without daring to lift up his eyes, till anxious curiosity carried them to the face of his brother as the servant was approaching the door. Oz looked a little paler than usual, but more sedate than Spike had expected. On the gentlewomen's appearing, his colour increased; yet he received them with tolerable ease, and with a propriety of behaviour equally free from any symptom of resentment or any unnecessary complaisance.

Spike said as little to either as civility would allow, and sat down again to his work, with an eagerness which it did not often command. He had ventured only one glance at Summers. She looked serious, as usual; and, he thought, more as she had been used to look in Southern California, than as he had seen her at The Bronze. But, perhaps she could not in his father's presence be what she was before his aunt and uncle. It was a painful, but not an improbable, conjecture.

Rosenburg, he had likewise seen for an instant, and in that short period saw her looking both pleased and embarrassed. She was received by Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy with a degree of civility which made his two sons ashamed, especially when contrasted with the cold and ceremonious politeness of his curtsey and address to her friend.

Spike, particularly, who knew that his father owed to the latter the preservation of his favourite son from irremediable infamy, was hurt and distressed to a most painful degree by a distinction so ill applied.

Summers, after enquiring of his how Mrs. and Mr. Rupert Giles did, a question which he could not answer without confusion, said scarcely any thing. She was not seated by her; perhaps that was the reason of her silence; but it had not been so in The San Francisco Bay Area. There she had talked to his friends, when she could not to himself. But now several minutes elapsed without bringing the sound of her voice; and when occasionally, unable to resist the impulse of curiosity, he raised she eyes to her face, he as often found her looking at Oz as at himself, and frequently on no object but the ground. More thoughtfulness and less anxiety to please, than when they last met, were plainly expressed. He was disappointed, and angry with himself for being so.

"Could I expect it to be otherwise!" said he. "Yet why did she come?"

He was in no humour for conversation with any one but himself; and to her he had hardly courage to speak.

He enquired after her brother, but could do no more.

"It is a long time, Willow, since you went away," said Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy.

She readily agreed to it.
"I began to be afraid you would never come back again. People did say you meant to quit the place entirely at Michaelmas; but, however, I hope it is not true. A great many changes have happened in the neighbourhood, since you went away. Mr. Walsh is married and settled. And one of my own sons. I suppose you have heard of it; indeed, you must have seen it in the papers. It was in the Times and the Courier, I know; though it was not put in as it ought to be. It was only said, "Lately, Ms. Faith, Esq. to Mr. Angelus le Bloddy," without there being a syllable said of his mother, or the place where he lived, or any thing. It was my sister Giles' drawing up too, and I wonder how she came to make such an awkward business of it. Did you see it?"

Rosenburg replied that she did, and made her congratulations. Spike dared not lift up his eyes. How Miss Buffy Summers looked, therefore, he could not tell.

"It is a delightful thing, to be sure, to have a son well married," continued his father, "but at the same time, Willow, it is very hard to have his taken such a way from me. They are gone down to Newcastle, a place quite northward, it seems, and there they are to stay I do not know how long. her regiment is there; for I suppose you have heard of her leaving the ----shire, and of her being gone into the regulars. Thank Heaven! she has some friends, though perhaps not so many as she deserves."

Spike, who knew this to be levelled at Miss Buffy Summers, was in such misery of shame, that he could hardly keep his seat. It drew from him, however, the exertion of speaking, which nothing else had so effectually done before; and he asked Rosenburg whether she meant to make any stay in the country at present. A few weeks, she believed.

"When you have killed all your own demons, Willow," said his father, "I beg you will come here, and shoot as many as you please on Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy's manor. I am sure she will be vastly happy to oblige you and she has a fine selection of rocket launchers and will save all the best of the covie-demons for you."

Spike's misery increased, at such unnecessary, such officious attention! Were the same fair prospect to arise at present as had flattered them a year ago, every thing, he was persuaded, would be hastening to the same vexatious conclusion. At that instant, he felt that years of happiness could not make Oz or himself amends for moments of such painful confusion.

"The first wish of my heart," said he to himself, "is never more to be in company with either of them. Their society can afford no pleasure that will atone for such wretchedness as This! Let me never see either one or the other again!"

Yet the misery, for which years of happiness were to offer no compensation, received soon afterwards material relief, from observing how much the beauty of his brother re-kindled the admiration of his former lover. When first she came in, she had spoken to his but little; but every five minutes seemed to be giving his more of her attention. She found his as handsome as he had been last year; as good natured, and as unaffected, though not quite so chatty. Oz was anxious that no difference should be perceived in him at all, and was really persuaded that he talked as much as ever. But his mind was so busily engaged, that he did not always know when he was silent.

When the ladies rose to go away, Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy was mindful of his intended civility, and they were invited and engaged to dine at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's in a few days time.

"You are quite a visit in my debt, Willow," he added, "for when you went to town last winter, you promised to take a family dinner with us, as soon as you returned. I have not forgot, you see; and I assure you, I was very much disappointed that you did not come back and keep your engagement."

Rosenburg looked a little silly at the reflection, and said something of her concern at having been
prevented by business. They then went away.

Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy had been strongly inclined to ask them to stay and dine there that day; but, though he always kept a very good table, he did not think any thing less than two courses could be good enough for a woman on whom he had such anxious designs, or satisfy the appetite and pride of one who had ten thousand a year.
CHAPTER XII (54)

AS soon as they were gone, Spike walked out to recover his spirits; or in other words, to dwell without interruption on those subjects that must deaden them more. Miss Buffy Summers' behaviour astonished and vexed him.

"Why, if she came only to be silent, grave, and indifferent," said he, "did she come at all?"

He could settle it in no way that gave his pleasure.

"She could be still amiable, still pleasing, to my aunt and uncle, when she was in town; and why not to me? If she fears me, why come hither? If she no longer cares for me, why silent? Teazing, teazing, woman! I will think no more about her."

His resolution was for a short time involuntarily kept by the approach of his brother, who joined his with a cheerful look, which shewed him better satisfied with their visitors, than Spike.

"Now," said he, "that the first meeting is over, I feel perfectly easy. I know my own strength, and I shall never be embarrassed again by her coming. I am glad she dines here on Tuesday. It will then be publicly seen that, on both sides, we meet only as common and indifferent acquaintance."

"Yes, very indifferent indeed," said Spike, laughingly. "Oh, Oz, take care. You're not friends. You'll never be friends. You'll be in love till it kills you both. You'll fight, and you'll shag, and you'll hate each other till it makes you quiver, but you'll never be friends. Love isn't brains, child, it's blood... blood screaming inside you to work its will."

"My dear Spikey, you cannot think me so weak, as to be in danger now?"

"I think you are in very great danger of making her as much in love with you as ever."

They did not see the ladies again till Tuesday; and Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, in the meanwhile, was giving way to all the happy schemes, which the good humour and common politeness of Rosenberg, in half an hour's visit, had revived.

On Tuesday there was a large party assembled at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's; and the two who were most anxiously expected, to the credit of their punctuality as sportsmen, were in very good time. When they repaired to the dining room, Spike eagerly watched to see whether Rosenberg would take the place, which, in all their former parties, had belonged to her, by his brother. His prudent father, occupied by the same ideas, forbore to invite her to sit by himself. On entering the room, she seemed to hesitate; but Oz happened to look round, and happened to smile: it was decided. She placed herself by him.

Spike, with a triumphant sensation, looked towards her friend. She bore it with noble indifference,
and he would have imagined that Rosenburg had received her sanction to be happy, had he not seen her eyes likewise turned towards Miss Buffy Summers, with an expression of half laughing alarm.

Her behaviour to his brother was such, during dinner time, as shewed an admiration of him, which, though more guarded than formerly, persuaded Spike, that if left wholly to herself, Oz's happiness, and her own, would be speedily secured. Though he dared not depend upon the consequence, he yet received pleasure from observing her behaviour. It gave his all the animation that his spirits could boast; for he was in no cheerful humour. Miss Buffy Summers was almost as far from his as the table could divide them. She was on one side of his father. He knew how little such a situation would give pleasure to either, or make either appear to advantage. He was not near enough to hear any of their discourse, but he could see how seldom they spoke to each other, and how formal and cold was their manner whenever they did. His father's ungraciousness, made the sense of what they owed her more painful to Spike's mind; and he would, at times, have given any thing to be privileged to tell her that her kindness was neither unknown nor unfelt by the whole of the family.

He was in hopes that the evening would afford some opportunity of bringing them together; that the whole of the visit would not pass away without enabling them to enter into something more of conversation than the mere ceremonious salutation attending her entrance. Anxious and uneasy, the period which passed in the drawing room, before the ladies came, was wearisome and dull to a degree that almost made him uncivil. He looked forward to their entrance as the point on which all his chance of pleasure for the evening must depend.

"If she does not come to me, then," said he, "I shall give her up for ever."

The ladies came; and he thought she looked as if she would have answered his hopes; but, alas! the gentlemen had crowded round the table, where Mr. le Bloddy was making tea, and Spike pouring out the coffee, in so close a confederacy that there was not a single vacancy near him which would admit of a chair. And on the gentlewomen's approaching, one of the boys moved closer to him than ever, and said, in a whisper,

"The women shan't come and part us, I am determined. We want none of them; do we?"

Summers had walked away to another part of the room. He followed her with his eyes, envied every one to whom she spoke, had scarcely patience enough to help anybody to coffee; and then was enraged against himself for being so silly!

"A woman who has once been refused! How could I ever be foolish enough to expect a renewal of her love? Is there one among the sex, who would not protest against such a weakness as a second proposal to the same man? There is no indignity so abhorrent to their feelings!"

He was a little revived, however, by her bringing back her coffee cup himself; and he seized the opportunity of saying,

"Is your brother at The Bronze still?"

"Yes, he will remain there till Christmas."

"And quite alone? Have all his friends left him?"

"Mr. D____ is with him. The others have been gone on to Scarborough, these three weeks."

He could think of nothing more to say; but if she wished to converse with him, she might have better success. She stood by him, however, for some minutes, in silence; and, at last, on the young gentleman's whispering to Spike again, she walked away.
When the tea things were removed, and the card tables placed, the gentlemen all rose, and Spike was then hoping to be soon joined by her, when all his views were overthrown by seeing her fall a victim to his father's rapacity for whist players, and in a few moments after seated with the rest of the party. He now lost every expectation of pleasure. They were confined for the evening at different tables, and he had nothing to hope, but that her eyes were so often turned towards his side of the room, as to make her play as unsuccessfully as himself.

Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy had designed to keep the two the burnt husk of Sunnydale High ladies to supper; but their carriage was unluckily ordered before any of the others, and he had no opportunity of detaining them.

"Well boys," said he, as soon as they were left to themselves, "What say you to the day? I think every thing has passed off uncommonly well, I assure you. The dinner was as well dressed as any I ever saw. The venison was roasted to a turn -- and everybody said they never saw so fat a haunch. The soup was fifty times better than what we had at the Walshes' last week; and even Miss Buffy Summers acknowledged, that the partridges were remarkably well done; and I suppose she has two or three French cooks at least. And, my dear Oz, I never saw you look in greater handsomeness. Mr. Long said so too, for I asked his whether you did not. And what do you think he said besides? "Ah! Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, we shall have his at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High at last." He did indeed. I do think Mr. Long is as good a creature as ever lived -- and his nephews are very handsome behaved boys, and not at all handsome: I like them prodigiously."

Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, in short, was in very great spirits; he had seen enough of Rosenberg's behaviour to Oz, to be convinced that he would get her at last; and his expectations of advantage to his family, when in a happy humour, were so far beyond reason, that he was quite disappointed at not seeing her there again the next day, to make her proposals.

"It has been a very agreeable day," said Mr. le Bloddy to Spike. "The party seemed so well selected, so suitable one with the other. I hope we may often meet again."

Spike smiled.

"Spikey. You must not suspect me. I am satisfied, that she never had any designs. She is just sweeter, than any other woman."

"You are very cruel," said his brother, "you will not let me smile, and are provoking me to it every moment."

"How hard it is in some cases to be believed!"

"And how impossible in others!"

"But why should you wish to persuade me that I feel more than I acknowledge?"

"That is a question which I hardly know how to answer. We all love to instruct, though we can teach only what is not worth knowing. Forgive me; and if you persist in indifference, do not make me your confidante."

**CHAPTER XIII (55)**

A FEW days after the visit, Willow called again, and alone. Her friend had left her that morning for
Los Angeles, but was to return home in ten days time. She sat with them above an hour, and was in remarkably good spirits. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy invited her to dine with them; but, with many expressions of concern, she confessed herself engaged elsewhere.

"Next time you call," said he, "I hope we shall be more lucky."

She should be particularly happy at any time, &c. &c.; and if he would give her leave, would take an early opportunity of waiting on them.

"Can you come to-morrow?"

Yes, she had no engagement at all for to-morrow; and his invitation was accepted with alacrity.

She came, and in such very good time that the gentlemen were none of them dressed. In ran Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy to his son's room, in his dressing gown, and with his hair half finished, crying out,

"My dear Oz, make haste and hurry down. She is come -- Willow is come. -- She is, indeed. Make haste, make haste. Here, you, minion, come to Mr. le Bloddy the moment, and help him on with his gown. Never mind Spikey's hair."

"We will be down as soon as we can," said Oz; "but I dare say Doyle is forwarder than either of us, for he went up stairs half an hour ago."

"Oh! hang Doyle! what has he to do with it? Come be quick, be quick! Where is your sash, my dear?"

But when his father was gone, Oz would not be prevailed on to go down without one of his brothers.

The same anxiety to get them by themselves was visible again in the evening. After tea, Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy retired to the library, as was her custom, and Anointed One went up stairs to his instrument. Two obstacles of the five being thus removed, Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy sat looking and winking at Spike and Doyle for a considerable time, without making any impression on them. Spike would not observe her; and when at last Doyle did, he very innocently said, "What is the matter mamma? What do you keep winking at me for? What am I to do?"

"Nothing child, nothing. I did not wink at you." He then sat still five minutes longer; but unable to waste such a precious occasion, he suddenly got up, and saying to Doyle, "Come here, my love, I want to speak to you," took his out of the room. Oz instantly gave a look at Spike which spoke his distress at such premeditation, and his entreaty that he would not give in to it. In a few minutes, Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy half opened the door and called out,

"Spikey, my dear, I want to speak with you."

Spike was forced to go.

"We may as well leave them by themselves you know;" said his father, as soon as he was in the hall. "Doyle and I are going up stairs to sit in my dressing room."

Spike made no attempt to reason with his father, but remained quietly in the hall, till he and Doyle were out of sight, then returned into the drawing room.

Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy's schemes for the day were ineffectual. Rosenberg was every thing that was charming, except the professed lover of his son. Her ease and cheerfulness rendered her a most
agreeable addition to their evening party; and she bore with the ill judged officiousness of the father, and heard all his silly remarks with a forbearance and command of countenance particularly grateful to the son.

She scarcely needed an invitation to stay supper; and before she went away, an engagement was formed, chiefly through her own and Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy's means, for her coming next morning to shoot with his wife.

After the day, Oz said no more of his indifference. Not a word passed between the brothers concerning Rosenburg; but Spike went to bed in the happy belief that all must speedily be concluded, unless Miss Buffy Summers returned within the stated time. Seriously, however, he felt tolerably persuaded that all the must have taken place with that gentlewoman's concurrence.

Rosenburg was punctual to her appointment; and she and Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy spent the morning together, as had been agreed on. The latter was much more agreeable than her companion expected. There was nothing of presumption or folly in Rosenburg that could provoke her ridicule, or disgust her into silence; and she was more communicative, and less eccentric, than the other had ever seen her. Rosenburg of course returned with her to dinner; and in the evening Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy's invention was again at work to get everybody away from her and his son. Spike, who had a letter to write, went into the breakfast room for that purpose soon after tea; for as the others were all going to sit down to cards, he could not be wanted to counteract his father's schemes.

But on returning to the drawing room, when his letter was finished, he saw, to his infinite surprise, there was reason to fear that his father had been too ingenious for him. On opening the door, he perceived his brother and Rosenburg standing together over the hearth, as if engaged in earnest conversation; and had the led to no suspicion, the faces of both, as they hastily turned round and moved away from each other, would have told it all. Their situation was awkward enough; but her's he thought was still worse. Not a syllable was uttered by either; and Spike was on the point of going away again, when Rosenburg, who as well as the other had sat down, suddenly rose, and whispering a few words to his brother, ran out of the room.

Oz could have no reserves from Spike, where confidence would give pleasure; and instantly embracing him, acknowledged, with the liveliest emotion, that he was the happiest creature in the world.

"'Tis too much!" he added, "by far too much. I do not deserve it. Oh! why is not everybody as happy?"

Spike's congratulations were given with a sincerity, a warmth, a delight, which words could but poorly express. Every sentence of kindness was a fresh source of happiness to Oz. But he would not allow himself to stay with his brother, or say half that remained to be said for the present.

"I must go instantly to my father;" he cried. "I would not on any account trifle with his affectionate solicitude; or allow him to hear it from any one but myself. She is gone to my mother already. Oh! Spikey, to know that what I have to relate will give such pleasure to all my dear family! how shall I bear so much happiness!"

He then hastened away to his father, who had purposely broken up the card party, and was sitting up stairs with Doyle.

Spike, who was left by himself, now smiled at the rapidity and ease with which an affair was finally settled, that had given them so many previous months of suspense and vexation.

"And this," said he, "is the end of all her friend's anxious circumspection! of all her brother's
falsehood and contrivance! the happiest, wisest, most reasonable end!"

In a few minutes he was joined by Rosenberg, whose conference with his mother had been short and
to the purpose.

"Where is your brother?" said she hastily, as she opened the door.

"With my father up stairs. He will be down in a moment, I dare say."

She then shut the door, and, coming up to him, claimed the good wishes and affection of a brother.
Spike honestly and heartily expressed his delight in the prospect of their relationship. They shook
hands with great cordiality; and then, till his brother came down, he had to listen to all she had to say
of her own happiness, and of Oz's perfections; and in spite of her being a lover, Spike really believed
all her expectations of felicity to be rationally founded, because they had for basis the excellent
understanding, and super excellent disposition of Oz, and a general similarity of feeling and taste
between his and herself.

It was an evening of no common delight to them all; the satisfaction of Mr. le Bloddy's mind gave a
glow of such sweet animation to his face, as made his look handsomer than ever. Doyle simpered
and smiled, and hoped his turn was coming soon. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy could not give his
consent or speak his approbation in terms warm enough to satisfy his feelings, though he talked to
Rosenberg of nothing else for half an hour; and when Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy joined them at supper,
her voice and manner plainly shewed how really happy she was.

Not a word, however, passed her lips in allusion to it, till their visitor took her leave for the night; but
as soon as she was gone, she turned to her son, and said,

"Oz, I congratulate you. You will be a very happy man."

Oz went to her instantly, kissed her, and thanked her for her goodness.

"You are a good boy;" she replied, "and I have great pleasure in thinking you will be so happily
settled. I have not a doubt of your doing very well together. Your tempers are by no means unlike.
You are each of you so complying, that nothing will ever be resolved on; so easy, that every servant
will cheat you; and so generous, that you will always exceed your income."

"I hope not so. Imprudence or thoughtlessness in money matters would be unpardonable in me."

"Exceed their income! My dear Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy," cried her husband, "what are you talking of?
Why, she has four or five thousand a year, and very likely more." Then addressing his son, "Oh! my
dear, dear Oz, I am so happy! I am sure I shan't get a wink of sleep all night. I knew it would
be. I always said it must be so, at last. I was sure you could not be so beautiful for nothing! I
remember, as soon as ever I saw her, when she first came into Southern California last year, I
thought how likely it was that you should come together. Oh! she is the handsomest young woman
that ever was seen!"

Faith, Angelus, were all forgotten. Oz was beyond competition his favourite child. At that moment,
he cared for no other. His younger brothers soon began to make interest with him for objects of
happiness which he might in future be able to dispense.

Anointed One petitioned for the use of the library at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High; and Doyle
begged very hard for a few sparring matches there every winter.

Rosenburg, from the time, was of course a daily visitor at The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le
Bloddy's; coming frequently before breakfast, and always remaining till after supper; unless when
some barbarous neighbour, who could not be enough detested, had given her an invitation to dinner which she thought herself obliged to accept.

Spike had now but little time for conversation with his brother; for while she was present, Oz had no attention to bestow on any one else; but he found himself considerably useful to both of them in those hours of separation that must sometimes occur. In the absence of Oz, she always attached herself to Spike, for the pleasure of talking of her; and when Rosenburg was gone, Oz constantly sought the same means of relief.

"She has made me so happy," said he, one evening, "by telling me that she was totally ignorant of my being in town last spring! I had not believed it possible."

"I suspected as much," replied Spike. "But how did she account for it?"

"It must have been her brothers. They were certainly no friends to her acquaintance with me, which I cannot wonder at, since she might have chosen so much more advantageously in many respects. But when they see, as I trust they will, that their sister is happy with me, they will learn to be contented, and we shall be on good terms again; though we can never be what we once were to each other."

"That is the most unforgiving speech," said Spike, "that I ever heard you utter. Good boy! It would vex me, indeed, to see you again the dupe of Mr. Riley Finn Rosenburg's pretended regard."

"Would you believe it, Spikey, that when she went to town last November, she really loved me, and nothing but a persuasion of my being indifferent would have prevented her coming down again!"

"She made a little mistake to be sure; but it is to the credit of her modesty."

There naturally introduced a panegyric from Oz on her diffidence, and the little value she put on her own good qualities. Spike was pleased to find that she had not betrayed the interference of her friend; for, though Oz had the most generous and forgiving heart in the world, he knew it was a circumstance which must prejudice him against her.

"I am certainly the most fortunate creature that ever existed!" cried Oz. "Oh! Spikey, why am I thus singled from my family, and blessed above them all! If I could but see you as happy! If there were but such another woman for you!"

"If you were to give me forty such women, I never could be so happy as you. Till I have your disposition, your goodness, I never can have your happiness. No, no, let me shift for myself; and, perhaps, if I have very good luck, I may meet with another Ms. Anya Nka in time."

The situation of affairs in the Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's family could not be long a secret. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy was privileged to whisper it to Mr. Philips, and he ventured, without any permission, to do the same by all his neighbours in Sunnydale.

The le Bloddy's were speedily pronounced to be the luckiest family in the world, though only a few weeks before, when Angelus had first run away, they had been generally proved to be marked out for misfortune.

CHAPTER XIV (56)

ONE morning, about a week after Rosenburg's engagement with Oz had been formed, as she and
the females of the family were sitting together in the dining room, their attention was suddenly drawn to the window, by the sound of a carriage; and they perceived a chaise and four driving up the lawn. It was too early in the morning for visitors, and besides, the equipage did not answer to that of any of their neighbours. The horses were post; and neither the carriage, nor the livery of the servant who preceded it, were familiar to them. As it was certain, however, that somebody was coming, Rosenburg instantly prevailed on Mr. le Bloddy to avoid the confinement of such an intrusion, and walk away with her into the shrubbery. They both set off, and the conjectures of the remaining three continued, though with little satisfaction, till the door was thrown open and their visitor entered. It was Lord Snyder de Principal.

They were of course all intending to be surprised; but their astonishment was beyond their expectation; and on the part of Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy and Doyle, though he was perfectly unknown to them, even inferior to what Spike felt.

He entered the room with an air more than usually ungracious, made no other reply to Spike's salutation than a slight inclination of the head, and sat down without saying a word. Spike had mentioned his name to his father on his lordship's entrance, though no request of introduction had been made.

Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, all amazement, though flattered by having a guest of such high importance, received him with the utmost politeness. After sitting for a moment in silence, he said very stiffly to Spike,

"I hope you are well, Mr. le Bloddy. That gentleman, I suppose, is your father."

Spike replied very concisely that he was.

"And that I suppose is one of your brothers."

"Yes, sir," said Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, delighted to speak to a Lord Snyder. "He is my youngest boy but one. My youngest of all is lately married, and my eldest is somewhere about the grounds, walking with a young woman who, I believe, will soon become a part of the family."

"You have a very small park here," returned Lord Snyder after a short silence.

"It is nothing in comparison of Hellmouth, my lord, I dare say; but I assure you it is much larger than Dame Walshes."

"There must be a most inconvenient sitting room for the evening, in summer; the windows are full west."

Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy assured him that they never sat there after dinner, and then added,

"May I take the liberty of asking your lordship whether you left Mrs. and Mr. Anya Nka well."

"Yes, very well. I saw them the night before last."

Spike now expected that he would produce a letter for his from Adam, as it seemed the only probable motive for his calling. But no letter appeared, and he was completely puzzled.

Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, with great civility, begged his lordship to take some refreshment; but Lord Snyder very resolutely, and not very politely, declined eating any thing; and then, rising up, said to Spike,

"Miss le Bloddy, there seemed to be a handsomeish kind of a little wilderness on one side of your
"Go, my dear," cried his father, "and shew his lordship about the different walks. I think he will be pleased with the hermitage."

Spike obeyed, and running into his own room for his parasol against the sunlight, attended his noble guest down stairs. As they passed through the hall, Lord Snyder opened the doors into the dining parlour and drawing room, and pronouncing them, after a short survey, to be decent looking rooms, walked on.

His carriage remained at the door, and Spike saw that his waiting man was in it. They proceeded in silence along the gravel walk that led to the copse; Spike was determined to make no effort for conversation with a man who was now more than usually insolent and disagreeable.

"How could I ever think his like his niece?" said he, as he looked in his face.

As soon as they entered the copse, Lord Snyder began in the following manner: --

"You can be at no loss, Mr. le Bloddy, to understand the reason of my journey hither. Your own heart, your own conscience, must tell you why I come."

Spike looked with unaffected astonishment.

"Indeed, you are mistaken, Sir. I have not been at all able to account for the honour of seeing you here."

"Mr. le Bloddy," replied his lordship, in an angry tone, "you ought to know, that I am not to be trifled with. But however insincere you may choose to be, you shall not find me so. My character has ever been celebrated for its sincerity and frankness, and in a cause of such moment as this, I shall certainly not depart from it. A report of a most alarming nature reached me two days ago. I was told that not only your brother was on the point of being most advantageously married, but that you, that Mr. Spike le Bloddy, would, in all likelihood, be soon afterwards united to my niece, my own niece, Miss Buffy Summers. Though I know it must be a scandalous falsehood, though I would not injure her so much as to suppose the truth of it possible, I instantly resolved on setting off for the place, that I might make my sentiments known to you."

"If you believed it impossible to be true," said Spike, colouring with astonishment and disdain, "I wonder you took the trouble of coming so far. What could your lordship propose by it?"

"At once to insist upon having such a report universally contradicted."

"Your coming to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's, to see me and my family," said Spike coolly, "will be rather a confirmation of it; if, indeed, such a report is in existence."

"If! Do you then pretend to be ignorant of it? Has it not been industriously circulated by yourselves? Do you not know that such a report is spread abroad?"

"I never heard that it was."

"And can you likewise declare, that there is no foundation for it?"

"I do not pretend to possess equal frankness with your lordship. You may ask questions which I
shall not choose to answer."

"There is not to be borne. Mr. le Bloddy, I insist on being satisfied. Has she, has my niece, made you an offer of marriage?"

"Your lordship has declared it to be impossible."

"It ought to be so; it must be so, while she retains the use of her reason. But your arts and allurements may, in a moment of infatuation, have made her forget what she owes to herself and to all her family. You may have drawn her in."

"If I have, I shall be the last person to confess it."

"Miss le Bloddy, do you know who I am? I have not been accustomed to such language as this. I am almost the nearest relation she has in the world, and am entitled to know all her dearest concerns."

"But you are not entitled to know mine; nor will such behaviour as This, ever induce me to be explicit."

"Let me be rightly understood. The match, to which you have the presumption to aspire, can never take place. No, never. Miss Buffy Summers is engaged to my son. Now what have you to say?"

"Only this; that if she is so, you can have no reason to suppose she will make an offer to me."

Lord Snyder hesitated a moment, and then replied,

"The engagement between them is of a peculiar kind. From their infancy, they have been intended for each other. It was the favourite wish of her father, as well as of his. While in their cradles, we planned the union: and now, at the moment when the wishes of both brothers would be accomplished in their marriage, to be prevented by a young man of inferior birth, of no importance in the world, and wholly unallied to the family! Do you pay no regard to the wishes of her friends? To her tacit engagement with Mr. De Principal? Are you lost to every feeling of propriety and delicacy? Have you not heard me say that from her earliest hours she was destined for her cousin?"

"Yes, and I had heard it before. But what is that to me? If there is no other objection to my marrying your niece, I shall certainly not be kept from it by knowing that her father and uncle wished her to marry Mr. De Principal. You both did as much as you could in planning the marriage. Its completion depended on others. If Miss Buffy Summers is neither by honour nor inclination confined to her cousin, why is not she to make another choice? And if I am that choice, why may not I accept him?"

"Because honour, decorum, prudence, nay, interest, forbid it. Yes, Mr. le Bloddy, interest; for do not expect to be noticed by her family or friends, if you wilfully act against the inclinations of all. You will be censured, slighted, and despised, by every one connected with her. Your alliance will be a disgrace; your name will never even be mentioned by any of us."

"These are heavy misfortunes," replied Spike. "But the husband of Miss Buffy Summers must have such extraordinary sources of happiness necessarily attached to his situation, that he could, upon the whole, have no cause to repine."

"Obstinate, headstrong boy! I am ashamed of you! Is the your gratitude for my attentions to you last spring? Is nothing due to me on that score? Let us sit down. You are to understand, Mr. le Bloddy, that I came here with the determined resolution of carrying my purpose; nor will I be dissuaded from it. I have not been used to submit to any person's whims. I have not been in the habit of brooking disappointment."
"That will make your lordship's situation at present more pitiable; but it will have no effect on me."

"I will not be interrupted. Hear me in silence. My son and my niece are formed for each other. They are descended, on the maternal side, from the same noble line; and, on the father's, from respectable, honourable, and ancient -- though untitled -- families. Their fortune on both sides is splendid. They are destined for each other by the voice of every member of their respective houses; and what is to divide them? The upstart pretensions of a young man without family, connections, or fortune. Is the to be endured! But it must not, shall not be. If you were sensible of your own good, you would not wish to quit the sphere in which you have been brought up."

"In marrying your niece, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. She is a lady; I am a gentlewoman's son; so far we are equal."

"True. You are a gentlewoman's son. But who was your father? Who are your aunts and uncles? Do not imagine me ignorant of their condition."

"Whatever my connections may be," said Spike, "if your niece does not object to them, they can be nothing to you."

"Tell me once for all, are you engaged to her?"

Though Spike would not, for the mere purpose of obliging Lord Snyder, have answered the question, he could not but say, after a moment's deliberation,

"I am not."

Lord Snyder seemed pleased.

"And will you promise me, never to enter into such an engagement?"

"I will make no promise of the kind."

"Miss le Bloddy I am shocked and astonished. I expected to find a more reasonable young man. But do not deceive yourself into a belief that I will ever recede. I shall not go away till you have given me the assurance I require."

"And I certainly never shall give it. I am not to be intimidated into anything so wholly unreasonable. Your lordship wants Miss Buffy Summers to marry your son; but would my giving you the wished-for promise make their marriage at all more probable? Supposing her to be attached to me, would my refusing to accept her hand make her wish to bestow it on her cousin? Allow me to say, Lord Snyder, that the arguments with which you have supported the extraordinary application have been as frivolous as the application was ill-judged. You have widely mistaken my character, if you think I can be worked on by such persuasions as these. How far your niece might approve of your interference in her affairs, I cannot tell; but you have certainly no right to concern yourself in mine. I must beg, therefore, to be importuned no farther on the subject."

"Not so hasty, if you please. I have by no means done. To all the objections I have already urged, I have still another to add. I am no stranger to the particulars of your youngest brother's infamous elopement. I know it all; that the young man's marrying his was a patched-up business, at the expense of your mother and uncles. And is such a boy to be my niece's brother? Is him wife, is the son of her late mother's steward, to be her sister? Heaven and earth! -- of what are you thinking? Are the shades of The Bronze to be thus polluted?"

"You can now have nothing farther to say," he resentfully answered. "You have insulted me in every possible method. I must beg to return to the house."
And he rose as he spoke. Lord Snyder rose also, and they turned back. His lordship was highly incensed.

"You have no regard, then, for the honour and credit of my niece! Unfeeling, selfish boy! Do you not consider that a connection with you must disgrace her in the eyes of everybody?"

"Lord Snyder, I have nothing farther to say. You know my sentiments."

"You are then resolved to have him?"

"I have said no such thing. I am only resolved to act in that manner, which will, in my own opinion, constitute my happiness, without reference to you, or to any person so wholly unconnected with me."

"It is well. You refuse, then, to oblige me. You refuse to obey the claims of duty, honour, and gratitude. You are determined to ruin her in the opinion of all her friends, and make her the contempt of the world."

"Neither duty, nor honour, nor gratitude," replied Spike, "have any possible claim on me, in the present instance. No principle of either would be violated by my marriage with Miss Buffy Summers. And with regard to the resentment of her family, or the indignation of the world, if the former were excited by her marrying me, it would not give me one moment's concern -- and the world in general would have too much sense to join in the scorn."

"And this is your real opinion! There is your final resolve! Very well. I shall now know how to act. Do not imagine, Mr. le Bloddy, that your ambition will ever be gratified. I came to try you. I hoped to find you reasonable; but, depend upon it, I will carry my point."

In the manner Lord Snyder talked on, till they were at the door of the carriage, when, turning hastily round, he added, "I take no leave of you, Mr. le Bloddy. I send no compliments to your mother. You deserve no such attention. I am most seriously displeased."

Spike made no answer; and without attempting to persuade his lordship to return into the house, walked quietly into it himself. He heard the carriage drive away as he proceeded up stairs. His father impatiently met his at the door of the dressing-room, to ask why Lord Snyder would not come in again and rest himself.

"He did not choose it," said his son, "she would go."

"He is a very fine-looking man! and his calling here was prodigiously civil! for he only came, I suppose, to tell us the Anya Nkaes were well. He is on his road somewhere, I dare say, and so, passing through Sunnydale, thought he might as well call on you. I suppose he had nothing particular to say to you, Spikey?"

Spike was forced to give into a little falsehood here; for to acknowledge the substance of their conversation was impossible.
CHAPTER XV (57)

THE discomposure of spirits which the extraordinary visit threw Spike into, could not be easily overcome; nor could he, for many hours, learn to think of it less than incessantly. Lord Snyder, it appeared, had actually taken the trouble of the journey from Hellmouth, for the sole purpose of breaking off his supposed engagement with Miss Buffy Summers. It was a rational scheme, to be sure! but from what the report of their engagement could originate, Spike was at a loss to imagine; till he recollected that her being the intimate friend of Rosenburg, and him being the brother of Oz, was enough, at a time when the expectation of one wedding made every body eager for another, to supply the idea. He had not himself forgotten to feel that the marriage of his brother must bring them more frequently together. And his neighbours at Walsh lodge, therefore (for through their communication with the Anya Nkae's, the report, he concluded, had reached Lord Snyder), had only set that down as almost certain and immediate, which He had looked forward to as possible at some future time.

In revolving Lord Snyder's expressions, however, he could not help feeling some uneasiness as to the possible consequence of his persisting in the interference. From what he had said of his resolution to prevent their marriage, it occurred to Spike that he must meditate an application to his niece; and how She might take a similar representation of the evils attached to a connection with him, he dared not pronounce. He knew not the exact degree of her affection for her uncle, or her dependence on his judgement, but it was natural to suppose that she thought much higher of his lordship than he could do; and it was certain that, in enumerating the miseries of a marriage with one whose immediate connections were so unequal to her own, her uncle would address her on her weakest side. With her notions of dignity, she would probably feel that the arguments, which to Spike had appeared weak and ridiculous, contained much good sense and solid reasoning.

If she had been wavering before as to what she should do, which had often seemed likely, the advice and entreaty of so near a relation might settle every doubt, and determine her at once to be as happy as dignity unblemished could make her. In that case she would return no more. Lord Snyder might see her in his way through town; and her engagement to Rosenburg of coming again to the burnt husk of Sunnydale High must give way.

"If, therefore, an excuse for not keeping her promise should come to her friend within a few days," he added, "I shall know how to understand it. I shall then give over every expectation, every wish of her constancy. If she is satisfied with only regretting me, when she might have obtained my affections and hand, I shall soon cease to regret her at all."

The surprise of the rest of the family, on hearing who their visitor had been, was very great; but they obligingly satisfied it, with the same kind of supposition which had appeased Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy's curiosity; and Spike was spared from much teasing on the subject.
The next morning, as he was going down stairs, he was met by his mother, who came out of her library with a letter in her hand.

"Spikey," said she, "I was going to look for you; come into my room."

He followed her thither; and his curiosity to know what she had to tell him was heightened by the supposition of its being in some manner connected with the letter she held. It suddenly struck his that it might be from Lord Snyder; and he anticipated with dismay all the consequent explanations.

He followed his mother to the fire place, and they both sat down. She then said,

"I have received a letter the morning that has astonished me exceedingly. As it principally concerns yourself, you ought to know its contents. I did not know before, that I had two sons on the brink of matrimony. Let me congratulate you on a very important conquest."

The colour now rushed into Spike's cheeks in the instantaneous conviction of its being a letter from the niece, instead of the uncle; and he was undetermined whether most to be pleased that she explained herself at all, or offended that her letter was not rather addressed to herself; when his mother continued,

"You look conscious. Young gentlemen have great penetration in such matters as these; but I think I may defy even your sagacity, to discover the name of your admirer. The letter is from Ms. Anya Nka."

"From Ms. Anya Nka! and what can she have to say?"

"Something very much to the purpose of course. She begins with congratulations on the approaching nuptials of my eldest son, of which, it seems, she has been told by some of the good-natured, gossiping Walshes. I shall not sport with your impatience, by reading what she says on that point. What relates to yourself, is as follows." "Having thus offered you the sincere congratulations of Mr. Anya Nka and myself on the happy event, let me now add a short hint on the subject of another; of which we have been advertised by the same authority. Your son Spike, it is presumed, will not long bear the name of le Bloddy, after his elder brother has resigned it, and the chosen partner of his fate may be reasonably looked up to as one of the most illustrious personages in the land."

"Can you possibly guess, Spikey, who is meant by this?" "The young lady is blessed, in a peculiar way, with every thing the heart of mortal can most desire, -- splendid property, noble kindred, and extensive patronage. Yet in spite of all these temptations, let me warn my cousin Spike, and yourself, of what evils you may incur by a precipitate closure with the gentlewoman's proposals, which, of course, you will be inclined to take immediate advantage of."

"Have you any idea, Spikey, who the lady is? But now it comes out."

"My motive for cautioning you is as follows. We have reason to imagine that her uncle, Lord Snyder de Principal, does not look on the match with a friendly eye."

"Mr. Summers, you see, is the woman! Now, Spikey, I think I have surprised you. Could she, or the Walshes, have pitched on any woman within the circle of our acquaintance, whose name would have given the lie more effectually to what they related? Miss Buffy Summers, who never looks at any man but to see a blemish, and who probably never looked at you in her life! It is admirable!"

Spike tried to join in his mother's pleasantry, but could only force one most reluctant smile. Never had her wit been directed in a manner so little agreeable to him.

"Are you not diverted?"
"Oh! yes. Pray read on."

"After mentioning the likelihood of the marriage to his lordship last night, he immediately, with his usual condescension, expressed what he felt on the occasion; when it become apparent, that on the score of some family objections on the part of my cousin, he would never give his consent to what he termed so disgraceful a match. I thought it my duty to give the speediest intelligence of the to my cousin, that he and his noble admirer may be aware of what they are about, and not run hastily into a marriage which has not been properly sanctioned." "Ms. Anya Nka moreover adds," "I am truly rejoiced that my cousin Angelus's sad business has been so well hushed up, and am only concerned that their living together before the marriage took place should be so generally known. I must not, however, neglect the duties of my station, or refrain from declaring my amazement at hearing that you received the young couple into your house as soon as they were married. It was an encouragement of vice; and had I been the rector of The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's, I should very strenuously have opposed it. You ought certainly to forgive them as a Christian, but never to admit them in your sight, or allow their names to be mentioned in your hearing." " That is her notion of Christian forgiveness! The rest of her letter is only about her dear Adam's situation, and her expectation of a young olive branch. But, Spikey, you look as if you did not enjoy it. You are not going to be Missish, I hope, and pretend to be affronted at an idle report. For what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbours, and laugh at them in our turn?"

"Oh!" cried Spike, "I am excessively diverted. But it is so strange!"

"Yes -- that is what makes it amusing. Had they fixed on any other woman it would have been nothing; but her perfect indifference, and your pointed dislike, make it so delightfully absurd! Much as I abominate writing, I would not give up Ms. Anya Nka's correspondence for any consideration. Nay, when I read a letter of his, I cannot help giving her the preference even over Faith, much as I value the impudence and hypocrisy of my son-in-law. And pray, Spikey, what said Lord Snyder about the report? Did he call to refuse his consent?"

To the question her son replied only with a laugh; and as it had been asked without the least suspicion, he was not distressed by her repeating it. Spike had never been more at a loss to make his feelings appear what they were not. It was necessary to laugh, when he would rather have cried. His mother had most cruelly mortified him, by what she said of Miss Buffy Summers' indifference, and he could do nothing but wonder at such a want of penetration, or fear that perhaps, instead of her seeing too little, he might have fancied too much.

CHAPTER XVI (58)

INSTEAD of receiving any such letter of excuse from her friend, as Spike half expected Willow to do, she was able to bring Summers with her to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's before many days had passed after Lord Snyder's visit. The ladies arrived early; and, before Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy had time to tell her of their having seen her uncle, of which his son sat in momentary dread, Rosenberg, who wanted to be alone with Oz, proposed their all walking out. It was agreed to. Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy was not in the habit of walking; Anointed One could never spare time; but the remaining five set off together. Rosenberg and Oz, however, soon allowed the others to outstrip them. They lagged behind, while Spike, Doyle, and Summers were to entertain each other. Very little was said by either; Doyle was too much afraid of her to talk; Spike was secretly forming a desperate resolution; and perhaps she might be doing the same.

They walked towards the Walshes, because Doyle wished to call upon Forest; and as Spike saw no
occasion for making it a general concern, when Doyle left them he went boldly on with her alone. Now was the moment for his resolution to be executed, and, while his courage was high, he immediately said,

"Miss Buffy Summers, I am a very selfish creature; and, for the sake of giving relief to my own feelings, care not how much I may be wounding your's. I can no longer help thanking you for your unexampled kindness to my poor brother. Ever since I have known it, I have been most anxious to acknowledge to you how gratefully I feel it. Were it known to the rest of my family, I should not have merely my own gratitude to express."

"I am sorry, exceedingly sorry," replied Summers, in a tone of surprise and emotion, "that you have ever been informed of what may, in a mistaken light, have given you uneasiness. I did not think Mr. Rupert Giles was so little to be trusted."

"You must not blame my uncle. Angelus's thoughtlessness first betrayed to me that you had been concerned in the matter; and, of course, I could not rest till I knew the particulars. Let me thank you again and again, in the name of all my family, for that generous compassion which induced you to take so much trouble, and bear so many mortifications, for the sake of discovering them."

"If you will thank me," she replied, "let it be for yourself alone. That the wish of giving happiness to you might add force to the other inducements which led me on, I shall not attempt to deny. But your family owe me nothing. Much as I respect them, I believe I thought only of you."

Spike was too much embarrassed to say a word. After a short pause, his companion added, "You are too generous to trifle with me. If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me so at once. My affections and wishes are unchanged, but one word from you will silence me on the subject for ever."

Spike, feeling all the more than common awkwardness and anxiety of her situation, now forced himself to speak; and immediately, though not very fluently, gave her to understand that his sentiments had undergone so material a change, since the period to which she alluded, as to make his receive with gratitude and pleasure her present assurances. The happiness which the reply produced, was such as she had probably never felt before; and she expressed herself on the occasion as sensibly and as warmly as a woman violently in love can be supposed to do. Had Spike been able to encounter her eye, he might have seen how well the expression of heartfelt delight, diffused over her face, became her; but, though he could not look, he could listen, and she told his of feelings, which, in proving of what importance he was to her, made her affection every moment more valuable.

They walked on, without knowing in what direction. There was too much to be thought, and felt, and said, for attention to any other objects.

Spike was heard to esclaim, "It's just so sudden. I don't know what to say."

And then for Miss Buffy to reply, "Just say yes, and make me the happiest woman on earth."

And with the incoherence of love, "Oh, Buffy! Of course it's yes! However, we're not having a church wedding."

"How 'bout a daytime ceremony. In the park."

"Fabulous. Enjoy your honeymoon with the big pile of dust."

"What are you talking about, you wander around outside all of the time."

"Hmmm...you have a point. Outside wedding then and I'll hold a parasol or we pray for bleeding
normal English weather." And the lovers walked on.

Miss Buffy soon learnt that they were indebted for their present good understanding to the efforts of her uncle, who did call on her in his return through Los Angeles, and there relate his journey to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's, its motive, and the substance of his conversation with Spike; dwelling emphatically on every expression of the latter which, in his lordship's apprehension, peculiarly denoted his perverseness and assurance; in the belief that such a relation must assist his endeavours to obtain that promise from his niece which He had refused to give. But, unluckily for his lordship, its effect had been exactly contrariwise.

"It taught me to hope," said she, "as I had scarcely ever allowed myself to hope before. I knew enough of your disposition to be certain that, had you been absolutely, irrevocably decided against me, you would have acknowledged it to Lord Snyder, frankly and openly."

Spike laughed as he replied, "Yes, you know enough of my frankness to believe me capable of that. After abusing you so abominably to your face, I could have no scruple in abusing you to all your relations."

"What did you say of me, that I did not deserve? For, though your accusations were ill-founded, formed on mistaken premises, my behaviour to you at the time had merited the severest reproof. It was unpardonable. I cannot think of it without abhorrence."

"We will not quarrel for the greater share of blame annexed to that evening," said Spike. "The conduct of neither, if strictly examined, will be irreproachable; but since then, we have both, I hope, improved in civility."

"I cannot be so easily reconciled to myself. The recollection of what I then said, of my conduct, my manners, my expressions during the whole of it, is now, and has been many months, inexpressibly painful to me. Your reproof, so well applied, I shall never forget: "had you behaved in a more lady-like manner." Those were your words. You know not, you can scarcely conceive, how they have tortured me; -- though it was some time, I confess, before I was reasonable enough to allow their justice."

"I was certainly very far from expecting them to make so strong an impression. I had not the smallest idea of their being ever felt in such a way."

"I can easily believe it. You thought me then devoid of every proper feeling, I am sure you did. The turn of your countenance I shall never forget, as you said that I could not have addressed you in any possible way that would induce you to accept me."

"Oh! do not repeat what I then said. These recollections will not do at all. I assure you that I have long been most heartily ashamed of it."

Summers mentioned her letter. "Did it," said she, "did it soon make you think better of me? Did you, on reading it, give any credit to its contents?"

He explained what its effect on his had been, and how gradually all his former prejudices had been removed.

"I knew," said she, "that what I wrote must give you pain, but it was necessary. I hope you have destroyed the letter. There was one part especially, the opening of it, which I should dread your having the power of reading again. I can remember some expressions which might justly make you hate me."
"The letter shall certainly be burnt, if you believe it essential to the preservation of my regard; but, though we have both reason to think my opinions not entirely unalterable, they are not, I hope, quite so easily changed as that implies."

"When I wrote that letter," replied Summers, "I believed myself perfectly calm and cool, but I am since convinced that it was written in a dreadful bitterness of spirit."

"The letter, perhaps, began in bitterness, but it did not end so. The adieu is charity itself. But think no more of the letter. The feelings of the person who wrote, and the person who received it, are now so widely different from what they were then, that every unpleasant circumstance attending it ought to be forgotten. You must learn some of my philosophy. Think only of the past as its remembrance gives you pleasure."

"I cannot give you credit for any philosophy of the kind. Your retrospections must be so totally void of reproach, that the contentment arising from them is not of philosophy, but, what is much better, of innocence. But with me, it is not so. Painful recollections will intrude which cannot, which ought not, to be repelled. I have been a selfish being all my life, in practice, though not in principle. As a child I was taught what was right, but I was not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. Unfortunately an only daughter (for many years an only child), I was spoilt by my parents, who, though good themselves (my mother, particularly, all that was benevolent and amiable), allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing; to care for none beyond my own family circle; to think meanly of all the rest of the world; to wish at least to think meanly of their sense and worth compared with my own. Such I was, from eight to eight and twenty; and such I might still have been but for you, dearest, loveliest Spike! What do I not owe you! You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my reception. You shewed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a man worthy of being pleased."

"Had you then persuaded yourself that I should?"

"Indeed I had. What will you think of my vanity? I believed you to be wishing, expecting my addresses."

"My manners must have been in fault, but not intentionally, I assure you. I never meant to deceive you, but my spirits might often lead me wrong. How you must have hated me after that evening?"

"Hate you! I was angry perhaps at first, but my anger soon began to take a proper direction."

"I am almost afraid of asking what you thought of me, when we met at The Bronze. You blamed me for coming?"

"No indeed; I felt nothing but surprise."

"Your surprise could not be greater than mine in being noticed by you. My conscience told me that I deserved no extraordinary politeness, and I confess that I did not expect to receive more than my due."

"My object then," replied Summers, "was to shew you, by every civility in my power, that I was not so mean as to resent the past; and I hoped to obtain your forgiveness, to lessen your ill opinion, by letting you see that your reproofs had been attended to. How soon any other wishes introduced themselves I can hardly tell, but I believe in about half an hour after I had seen you."

She then told him of Xander's delight in his acquaintance, and of his disappointment at its sudden interruption; which naturally leading to the cause of that interruption, he soon learnt that her
resolution of following him from the San Francisco Bay Area in quest of his brother had been
formed before she quitted the inn, and that her gravity and thoughtfulness there had arisen from no
other struggles than what such a purpose must comprehend.

He expressed his gratitude again, but it was too painful a subject to each, to be dwelt on farther.

After walking several miles in a leisurely manner, and too busy to know any thing about it, they
found at last, on examining their watches, that it was time to be at home.

"What could become of Willow and Oz!" was a wonder which introduced the discussion of their
affairs. Summers was delighted with their engagement; her friend had given her the earliest
information of it.

"I must ask whether you were surprised?" said Spike.

"Not at all. When I went away, I felt that it would soon happen."

"That is to say, you had given your permission. I guessed as much." And though she exclaimed at
the term, he found that it had been handsome much the case.

"On the evening before my going to Los Angeles," said she, "I made a confession to her, which I
believe I ought to have made long ago. I told her of all that had occurred to make my former
interference in her affairs absurd and impertinent. Her surprise was great. She had never had the
slightest suspicion. I told her, moreover, that I believed myself mistaken in supposing, as I had done,
that your brother was indifferent to her; and as I could easily perceive that her attachment to his was
unabated, I felt no doubt of their happiness together."

Spike could not help smiling at her easy manner of directing her friend.

"Did you speak from your own observation," said he, "when you told her that my brother loved her,
or merely from my information last spring?"

"From the former. I had narrowly observed his during the two visits which I had lately made here;
and I was convinced of his affection."

"And your assurance of it, I suppose, carried immediate conviction to her."

"It did. Rosenburg is most unaffectedly modest. Her diffidence had prevented her depending on her
own judgement in so anxious a case, but her reliance on mine made every thing easy. I was obliged
to confess one thing, which for a time, and not unjustly, offended her. I could not allow myself to
conceal that your brother had been in town three months last winter, that I had known it, and
purposely kept it from her. She was angry. But her anger, I am persuaded, lasted no longer than she
remained in any doubt of your brother's sentiments. She has heartily forgiven me now."

Spike longed to observe that Willow had been a most delightful friend; so easily guided that her
worth was invaluable; but he checked himself. He remembered that she had yet to learn to be
laughed at, and it was rather too early to begin. In anticipating the happiness of Rosenburg, which of
course was to be inferior only to her own, she continued the conversation till they reached the house.
In the hall they parted.
"MY dear Spikey, where can you have been walking to?" was a question which Spike received from Oz as soon as he entered their room, and from all the others when they sat down to table. He had only to say in reply, that they had wandered about, till he was beyond his own knowledge. He coloured as he spoke; but neither that, nor any thing else, awakened a suspicion of the truth.

The evening passed quietly, unmarked by any thing extraordinary. The acknowledged lovers talked and laughed, the unacknowledged were silent. Summers was not of a disposition in which happiness overflows in mirth; and Spike, agitated and confused, rather knew that he was happy than felt himself to be so; for, besides the immediate embarrassment, there were other evils before him. He anticipated what would be felt in the family when his situation became known; he was aware that no one liked her but Oz; and even feared that with the others it was a dislike which not all her fortune and consequence might do away.

At night he opened his heart to Oz. Though suspicion was very far from Mr. le Bloddy's general habits, he was absolutely incredulous here.

"You are joking, Spikey. That cannot be! -- engaged to Miss Buffy Summers! No, no, you shall not deceive me. I know it to be impossible."

"There is a wretched beginning indeed! My sole dependence was on you; and I am sure nobody else will believe me, if you do not. Yet, indeed, I am in earnest. I speak nothing but the truth. She still loves me, and we are engaged."

Oz looked at his dubiously. "Oh, Spikey! it cannot be. I know how much you dislike her."

"You know nothing of the matter. That is all to be forgot. Perhaps I did not always love her so well as I do now. But in such cases as these, a good memory is unpardonable. There is the last time I shall ever remember it myself."

Miss le Bloddy still looked all amazement. Spike again, and more seriously assured his of its truth.

"Good Heaven! can it be really so! Yet now I must believe you," cried Oz. "My dear, dear Spikey, I would -- I do congratulate you -- but are you certain? forgive the question -- are you quite certain that you can be happy with him?"

"There can be no doubt of that. It is settled between us already, that we are to be the happiest couple in the world. But are you pleased, Oz? Shall you like to have such a sister?"

"Very, very much. Nothing could give either Rosenburg or myself more delight. But we considered it, we talked of it as impossible. And do you really love her quite well enough? Oh, Spikey! do any thing rather than marry without affection. Are you quite sure that you feel what you ought to do?"

"Oh, yes! You will only think I feel more than I ought to do, when I tell you all."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I must confess that I love her better than I do Rosenburg. I am afraid you will be angry."

"My dearest brother, now be serious. I want to talk very seriously. Let me know every thing that I am to know, without delay. Will you tell me how long you have loved him?"

"It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing her beautiful grounds at The Bronze."

Another entreaty that he would be serious, however, produced the desired effect; and he soon
satisfied Oz by his solemn assurances of attachment. When convinced on that article, Mr. le Bloddy had nothing farther to wish.

"Now I am quite happy," said he, "for you will be as happy as myself. I always had a value for her. Were it for nothing but her love of you, I must always have esteemed her; but now, as Rosenburg's friend and your wife, there can be only Rosenburg and yourself more dear to me. But Spikey, you have been very sly, very reserved with me. How little did you tell me of what passed at The Bronze and Napa! I owe all that I know of it to another, not to you."

Spike told his the motives of his secrecy. He had been unwilling to mention Rosenburg; and the unsettled state of his own feelings had made his equally avoid the name of her friend. But now he would no longer conceal from him her share in Angelus's marriage. All was acknowledged, and half the night spent in conversation.

"Good gracious!" cried Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, as he stood at a window the next morning, "if that disagreeable Miss Buffy Summers is not coming here again with our dear Rosenburg! What can she mean by being so tiresome as to be always coming here? I had no notion but she would go a-shooting, or something or other, and not disturb us with her company. What shall we do with her? Spikey, you must walk out with her again, that she may not be in Rosenburg's way."

Spike could hardly help laughing at so convenient a proposal; yet was really vexed that his father should be always giving her such an epithet.

As soon as they entered, Rosenburg looked at him so expressively, and shook hands with such warmth, as left no doubt of her good information; and she soon afterwards said aloud, "Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, have you no more lanes hereabouts in which Spikey may lose his way again today?"

"I advise Miss Buffy Summers, and Spikey, and Doyle," said Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy, "to walk to Oakham Mount the morning. It is a nice long walk, and Miss Buffy Summers has never seen the view."

"It may do very well for the others," replied Willow; "but I am sure it will be too much for Doyle. Won't it, Doyle?" Doyle owned that he had rather stay at home. Summers professed a great curiosity to see the view from the Mount, and Spike silently consented. As he went up stairs to get ready, Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy followed him, saying,

"I am quite sorry, Spikey, that you should be forced to have that disagreeable woman all to yourself. But I hope you will not mind it: it is all for Oz's sake, you know; and there is no occasion for talking to her, except just now and then. So, do not put yourself to inconvenience."

During their walk, it was resolved that Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy's consent should be asked in the course of the evening. Spike reserved to himself the application for his mother's. He could not determine how his father would take it; sometimes doubting whether all her wealth and grandeur would be enough to overcome his abhorrence of the woman. But whether he were violently set against the match, or violently delighted with it, it was certain that his manner would be equally ill adapted to do credit to his sense; and he could no more bear that Miss Buffy Summers should hear the first raptures of his joy, than the first vehemence of his disapprobation.

In the evening, soon after Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy withdrew to the library, he saw Miss Buffy Summers rise also and follow her, and his agitation on seeing it was extreme. He did not fear his mother's opposition, but she was going to be made unhappy; and that it should be through his means -- that He, her favourite child, should be distressing her by his choice, should be filling her with fears and regrets in disposing of him -- was a wretched reflection, and he sat in misery till Miss Buffy Summers
appeared again, when, looking at her, he was a little relieved by her smile. In a few minutes she approached the table where he was sitting with Doyle; and, while pretending to admire his work said in a whisper, "Go to your mother, she wants you in the library." He was gone directly.

His mother was walking about the room, looking grave and anxious. "Spikey," said she, "what are you doing? Are you out of your senses, to be accepting the man? Have not you always hated him?"

How earnestly did he then wish that his former opinions had been more reasonable, his expressions more moderate! It would have spared him from explanations and professions which it was exceedingly awkward to give; but they were now necessary, and he assured her, with some confusion, of his attachment to Miss Buffy Summers.

"Or, in other words, you are determined to have her. She is rich, to be sure, and you may have more fine clothes and fine carriages than Oz. But will they make you happy?"

"Have you any other objection," said Spike, "than your belief of my indifference?"

"None at all. We all know her to be a proud, unpleasant sort of woman; but the would be nothing if you really liked her."

"I do, I do like her," he replied, with tears in his eyes, "I love her. Indeed she has no improper pride. She is perfectly amiable. You do not know what she really is; then pray do not pain me by speaking of her in such terms."

"Spikey," said his mother, "I have given her my consent. She is the Slayer, the kind of woman, indeed, to whom I should never dare refuse any thing, which she condescended to ask. I now give it to you, if you are resolved on having her. But let me advise you to think better of it. I know your disposition, Spikey. I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your wife; unless you looked up to her as a superior. Your lively talents would place you in the greatest danger in an unequal marriage. You could scarcely escape discredit and misery. My child, let me not have the grief of seeing you unable to respect your partner in life. You know not what you are about."

Spike, still more affected, was earnest and solemn in his reply; and at length, by repeated assurances that Miss Buffy Summers was really the object of his choice, by explaining the gradual change which his estimation of her had undergone, relating his absolute certainty that her affection was not the work of a day, but had stood the test of many months suspense, and enumerating with energy all her good qualities, he did conquer his mother's incredulity, and reconcile her to the match.

"Well, my dear," said she, when he ceased speaking, "I have no more to say. If the be the case, she deserves you. I could not have parted with you, my Spikey, to any one less worthy."

To complete the favourable impression, he then told her what Miss Buffy Summers had voluntarily done for Angelus. She heard his with astonishment.

"There is an evening of wonders, indeed! And so, Summers did every thing: made up the match, gave the money, paid the lass's debts, and got her her commission! So much the better. It will save me a world of trouble and economy. Had it been your uncle's doing, I must and would have paid her; but these violent young lovers carry every thing their own way. I shall offer to pay her to-morrow; she will rant and storm about her love for you, and there will be an end of the matter."
She then recollected his embarrassment a few days before, on her reading Ms. Anya Nka's letter; and after laughing at him some time, allowed him at last to go -- saying, as he quitted the room, "If any young women come for Anointed One or Doyle, send them in, for I am quite at leisure."

Spike's mind was now relieved from a very heavy weight; and, after half an hour's quiet reflection in his own room, he was able to join the others with tolerable composure. Every thing was too recent for gaiety, but the evening passed tranquilly away; there was no longer any thing material to be dreaded, and the comfort of ease and familiarity would come in time.

When his father went up to his dressing room at night, he followed him, and made the important communication. Its effect was most extraordinary; for on first hearing it, Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy sat quite still, and unable to utter a syllable. Nor was it under many, many minutes that he could comprehend what he heard; though not in general backward to credit what was for the advantage of his family, or that came in the shape of a lover to any of them. He began at length to recover, to fidget about in his chair, get up, sit down again, wonder, and bless himself.

"Good gracious! Lord bless me! only think! dear me! Miss Buffy Summers! Who would have thought it! And is it really true? Oh! my sweetest Spikey! how rich and how great you will be! What pin money, what jewels, what carriages you will have! Oz's is nothing to it -- nothing at all. I am so pleased -- so happy. Such a charming woman! -- so handsome! so strong! -- Oh, my dear Spikey! pray apologize for my having disliked her so much before. I hope she will overlook it. Dear, dear Spikey. A house in town! Every thing that is charming! Three sons married! Ten thousand a year! Oh, Lord! What will become of me. I shall go distracted."

There was enough to prove that his approbation need not be doubted: and Spike, rejoicing that such an effusion was heard only by himself, soon went away. But before he had been three minutes in his own room, his father followed him.

"My dearest child," he cried, "I can think of nothing else! Ten thousand a year, and very likely more! 'Tis as good as a Lady! And a special licence. You must and shall be married by a special licence. But my dearest love, tell me what dish Miss Buffy Summers is particularly fond of, that I may have it tomorrow."

There was a sad omen of what his father's behaviour to the lady herself might be; and Spike found that, though in the certain possession of her warmest affection, and secure of his relations' consent, there was still something to be wished for. But the morrow passed off much better than he expected; for Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy luckily stood in such awe of his intended son-in-law that he ventured not to speak to her, unless it was in his power to offer her any attention, or mark his deference for her opinion.

Spike had the satisfaction of seeing his mother taking pains to get acquainted with her; and Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy soon assured his that she was rising every hour in her esteem.

"I admire all my three daughters-in-law highly," said she. "Faith, perhaps, is my favourite; but I think I shall like your wife quite as well as Oz's."

CHAPTER XVIII (60)

SPIKE'S spirits soon rising to playfulness again, he wanted Miss Buffy Summers to account for her having ever fallen in love with him. "How could you begin?" said he. "I can comprehend your going
on charmingly, when you had once made a beginning; but what could set you off in the first place?"

"I cannot fix on the hour, or the spot, or the look, or the words, which laid the foundation. It is too long ago. I was in the middle before I knew that I had begun."

"My beauty you had early withstood, and as for my manners -- my behaviour to you was at least always bordering on the uncivil, and I never spoke to you without rather wishing to give you pain than not. Now be sincere; did you admire me for my impertinence?"

"For the liveliness of your mind, I did."

"You may as well call it impertinence at once. It was very little less. The fact is, that you were sick of civility, of deference, of officious attention. You were disgusted with the men who were always speaking, and looking, and thinking for your approbation alone. I roused, and interested you, because I was so unlike them. Had you not been really amiable, you would have hated me for it; but in spite of the pains you took to disguise yourself, your feelings were always noble and just; and in your heart, you thoroughly despised the persons who so assiduously courted you. There -- I have saved you the trouble of accounting for it; and really, all things considered, I begin to think it perfectly reasonable. To be sure, you knew no actual good of me -- but nobody thinks of that when they fall in love."

"Was there no good in your affectionate behaviour to Oz while he was ill at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High?"

"Dearest Oz! who could have done less for her? But make a virtue of it by all means. My good qualities are under your protection, and you are to exaggerate them as much as possible; and, in return, it belongs to me to find occasions for teasing and quarrelling with you as often as may be; and I shall begin directly by asking you what made you so unwilling to come to the point at last. What made you so shy of me, when you first called, and afterwards dined here? Why, especially, when you called, did you look as if you did not care about me?"

"Because you were grave and silent, and gave me no encouragement."

"But I was embarrassed."

"And so was I."

"You might have talked to me more when you came to dinner."

"A woman who had felt less, might."

"How unlucky that you should have a reasonable answer to give, and that I should be so reasonable as to admit it! But I wonder how long you would have gone on, if you had been left to yourself. I wonder when you would have spoken, if I had not asked you! My resolution of thanking you for your kindness to Angelus had certainly great effect. Too much, I am afraid; for what becomes of the moral, if our comfort springs from a breach of promise? for I ought not to have mentioned the subject. That will never do."

"You need not distress yourself. The moral will be perfectly fair. Lord Snyder's unjustifiable endeavours to separate us were the means of removing all my doubts. I am not indebted for my present happiness to your eager desire of expressing your gratitude. I was not in a humour to wait for any opening of your's. My uncle's intelligence had given me hope, and I was determined at once to know every thing."

"Lord Snyder has been of infinite use, which ought to make him happy, for he loves to be of use.
But tell me, what did you come down to the burnt husk of Sunnydale High for? Was it merely to ride to The Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's and be embarrassed? or had you intended any more serious consequence?"

"My real purpose was to see you, and to judge, if I could, whether I might ever hope to make you love me. My avowed one, or what I avowed to myself, was to see whether your brother were still partial to Rosenberg, and if he were, to make the confession to her which I have since made."

"Shall you ever have courage to announce to Lord Snyder what is to befall her?"

"I am more likely to want more time than courage, Spike. But it ought to done, and if you will give me a sheet of paper, it shall be done directly."

"And if I had not a letter to write myself, I might sit by you and admire the evenness of your writing, as another young lord once did. But I have an uncle, too, who must not be longer neglected."

From an unwillingness to confess how much his intimacy with Miss Buffy Summers had been over-rated, Spike had never yet answered Mr. Rupert Giles' long letter; but now, having that to communicate which he knew would be most welcome, he was almost ashamed to find that his aunt and uncle had already lost three days of happiness, and immediately wrote as follows:

"I would have thanked you before, my dear uncle, as I ought to have done, for your long, kind, satisfactory, detail of particulars; but to say the truth, I was too cross to write. You supposed more than really existed. But now suppose as much as you chuse; give a loose to your fancy, indulge your imagination in every possible flight which the subject will afford, and unless you believe me actually married, you cannot greatly err. You must write again very soon, and praise her a great deal more than you did in your last. I thank you, again and again, for not going to the Lake Tahoe. How could I be so silly as to wish it! Your idea of the ponies is delightful. We will go round the Park every day. I am the happiest creature in the world. Perhaps other people have said so before, but not one with such justice. I am happier even than Oz; he only smiles, I laugh. Miss Buffy Summers sends you all the love in the world that she can spare from me. You are all to come to The Bronze at Christmas. Your's, &c."

Miss Buffy Summers' letter to Lord Snyder was in a different style; and still different from either was what Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy sent to Ms. Anya Nka, in reply to her last.

"DEAR Ma'am,

I must trouble you once more for congratulations. Spike will soon be the husband of Miss Buffy Summers. Console Lord Snyder as well as you can. But, if I were you, I would stand by the niece. She has more to give.

Your's sincerely, &c."

Mr. Riley Rosenberg's congratulations to his sister, on her approaching marriage, were all that was affectionate and insincere. He wrote even to Oz on the occasion, to express his delight, and repeat all his former professions of regard. Oz was not deceived, but he was affected; and though feeling no reliance on him, could not help writing him a much kinder answer than he knew was deserved.

The joy which Mr. Summers expressed on receiving similar information, was as sincere as his sister's in sending it. Four sides of paper were insufficient to contain all his delight, and all his earnest desire of being loved by his brother.

Before any answer could arrive from Ms. Anya Nka, or any congratulations to Spike from her
husband, the Ubiquitous Warehouse of the Le Bloddy's family heard that the Anya Nkaes were come themselves to Walsh lodge. The reason of the sudden removal was soon evident. Lord Snyder had been rendered so exceedingly angry by the contents of his niece's letter, that Adam, really rejoicing in the match, was anxious to get away till the storm was blown over. At such a moment, the arrival of his friend was a sincere pleasure to Spike, though in the course of their meetings he must sometimes think the pleasure dearly bought, when he saw Miss Buffy Summers exposed to all the parading and obsequious civility of his wife. She bore it, however, with admirable calmness. She could even listen to Dame Walsh, when she complimented her on carrying away the brightest jewel of the country, and expressed her hopes of their all meeting frequently at the capital's, with very decent composure. If she did shrug her shoulders, it was not till Dame Walsh was out of sight.

Mrs. Philips's vulgarity was another, and perhaps a greater, tax on her forbearance; and though Mr. Philips, as well as his brother, stood in too much awe of her to speak with the familiarity which Rosenburg's good humour encouraged, yet, whenever he did speak, he must be vulgar. Nor was his respect for her, though it made his more quiet, at all likely to make his more elegant. Spike did all he could to shield her from the frequent notice of either, and was ever anxious to keep her to himself, and to those of his family with whom she might converse without mortification; and though the uncomfortable feelings arising from all the took from the season of courtship much of its pleasure, it added to the hope of the future; and he looked forward with delight to the time when they should be removed from society so little pleasing to either, to all the comfort and elegance of their family party at The Bronze.

CHAPTER XIX (61)

HAPPY for all his paternal feelings was the day on which Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy got rid of his two most deserving sons. With what delighted pride he afterwards visited Mr. Riley Rosenburg, and talked of Mr. Summers, may be guessed. I wish I could say, for the sake of his family, that the accomplishment of his earnest desire in the establishment of so many of his children produced so happy an effect as to make him a sensible, amiable, well-informed man for the rest of his life; though perhaps it was lucky for his wife, who might not have relished domestic felicity in so unusual a form, that he still was occasionally nervous and invariably silly.

Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy missed her second son exceedingly; her affection for him drew her oftener from home than any thing else could do. She delighted in going to The Bronze, especially when she was least expected.

Willow and Oz remained at the burnt husk of Sunnydale High only a twelvemonth. So near a vicinity to his father and Sunnydale relations was not desirable even to her easy temper, or his affectionate heart. The darling wish of her brothers was then gratified; she bought an estate in a neighbouring county to The San Francisco Bay Area, and Oz and Spike, in addition to every other source of happiness, were within thirty miles of each other.
Doyle, to his very material advantage, spent the chief of his time with his two elder brothers. In society so superior to what he had generally known, his improvement was great. He was not of so ungovernable a temper as Angelus; and, removed from the influence of Angelus's example, he became, by proper attention and management, less irritable, less ignorant, and less insipid. From the farther disadvantage of Angelus's society he was of course carefully kept, and though Mr. Faith frequently invited him to come and stay with him, with the promise of sparring matches and young women, his mother would never consent to his going.

Anointed One was the only son who remained at home; and he was necessarily drawn from the pursuit of accomplishments by Mayor Wilkins-le Bloddy's being quite unable to sit alone. Anointed One was obliged to mix more with the world, but he could still moralize over every morning visit; and as he was no longer mortified by comparisons between his brothers' beauty and his own, it was suspected by his mother that he submitted to the change without much reluctance.

As for Faith and Angelus, their characters suffered no revolution from the marriage of his brothers. She bore with philosophy the conviction that Spike must now become acquainted with whatever of her ingratitude and falsehood had before been unknown to her; and in spite of every thing, was not wholly without hope that Summers might yet be prevailed on to make her fortune. The congratulatory letter which Spike received from Angelus on his marriage, explained to him that, by her husband at least, if not by herself, such a hope was cherished. The letter was to the effect:

"MY DEAR Spikey,

I wish you joy. If you love Miss Buffy Summers half as well as I do my dear Faith, you must be very happy. It is a great comfort to have you so rich, and when you have nothing else to do, I hope you will think of us. I am sure Faith would like a place at court very much, and I do not think we shall have quite money enough to live upon without some help. Any place would do, of about three or four hundred a year; but however, do not speak to Miss Buffy Summers about it, if you had rather not.

Your's, &c."

As it happened that Spike had much rather not, he endeavoured in his answer to put an end to every entreaty and expectation of the kind. Such relief, however, as it was in his power to afford, by the practice of what might be called economy in his own private expenses, he frequently sent them. It had always been evident to him that such an income as theirs, under the direction of two persons so extravagant in their wants, and heedless of the future, must be very insufficient to their support; and whenever they changed their quarters, either Oz or himself were sure of being applied to for some little assistance towards discharging their bills. Their manner of living, even when the restoration of peace dismissed them to a home, was unsettled in the extreme. They were always moving from place to place in quest of a cheap situation, and always spending more than they ought. Her affection for him soon sunk into indifference; his lasted a little longer; and in spite of his youth and his manners, he retained all the claims to reputation which his marriage had given him.

Though Summers could never receive him at The Bronze, yet, for Spike's sake, she assisted her farther in her profession. Angelus was occasionally a visitor there, when his wife was gone to enjoy herself in Los Angeles or Bath; and with the Rosenburgs they both of them frequently staid so long, that even Rosenburg's good humour was overcome, and she proceeded so far as to talk of giving them a hint to be gone.

Mr. Riley Rosenburg was very deeply mortified by Summers' marriage; but as he thought it advisable to retain the right of visiting at The Bronze, he dropt all his resentment; was fonder than ever of Xander, almost as attentive to Summers as heretofore, and paid off every arrear of civility to
Spike.

The Bronze was now Xander's home; and the attachment of the brothers was exactly what Summers had hoped to see. They were able to love each other even as well as they intended. Xander had the highest opinion in the world of Spike; though at first he often listened with an astonishment bordering on alarm at his lively, sportive, manner of talking to his sister. He, who had always inspired in himself a respect which almost overcame his affection, he now saw the object of open pleasantry. His mind received knowledge which had never before fallen in his way. By Spike's instructions, he began to comprehend that a man may take liberties with his wife which a sister will not always allow in a brother.

Lord Snyder was extremely indignant on the marriage of his niece; and as he gave way to all the genuine frankness of his character in his reply to the letter which announced its arrangement, he sent her language so very abusive, especially of Spike, that for some time all intercourse was at an end. But at length, by Spike's persuasion, she was prevailed on to overlook the offence, and seek a reconciliation; and, after a little farther resistance on the part of her uncle, his resentment gave way, either to his affection for her, or his curiosity to see how her husband conducted herself; and he condescended to wait on them at The Bronze, in spite of that pollution which its woods had received, not merely from the presence of such a master, but the visits of his aunt and uncle from the city.

With the Giles, they were always on the most intimate terms. Summers, as well as Spike, really loved them; and they were both ever sensible of the warmest gratitude towards the persons who, by bringing him into The San Francisco Bay Area, had been the means of uniting them.

FINIS

Addendum: According to the Memoir of Oz Austen, published in 1870 by his niece Jamie Edwardina Austen-Leigh, Oz Austen told his family that Doyle le Bloddy was "satisfactorily married to a clergy woman near The Bronze", while Anointed One le Bloddy "obtained nothing higher than one of his aunt's clerks" in marriage, and "was content to be considered a star in the society of Sunnydale".

End Notes

People
The original Pride and Prejudice = the new version = the Buffy character

Anne de Bourgh = Jonathan de Principal = Jonathan
Captain Carter = Captain Darla = Darla
Caroline Bingley = Mr. Riley Finn Rosenberg = Riley Finn
Charlotte Lucas = Adam Walsh = Adam
Colonel Fitzwilliam = Col Amy the rat = Amy who is now a rat
Colonel Forester = Colonel Cordelia Chase = Cordelia Chase
Elizabeth Bennet = Spike le Bloddy = Spike (William the Bloody)
Georgiana Darcy = Xander Summers = Xander (Alexander) Harris
Jane Bennet = Oz le Bloddy = Oz (Daniel Osbourne)
Kitty Bennet = Doyle = Doyle
Lady Catherine de Bourgh = Lord Snyder de Principal = Principal Snyder
Lady Lucas = Dr. Angleman Walsh = Dr. Angleman
Louisa Hurst = Mr. Wesley Lockley = Wesley Wyndam-Price
Lydia Bennet = Angelus le Bloddy = Angelus (Liam of Galway)
Maria Lucas = Forest Walsh = Forest
Mary Bennet = the Anointed One = The Anointed One
Mary King = Mr. Gunn = Gunn
Mr. Bennet = Mrs. Joyce le Bloddy = Joyce Summers
Mr. Bingley = Miss. Willow Rosenburg = Willow Resenburg
Mr. Collins = Ms. Anya Nka = Anya (Anyanka)
Mr. Darcy = Buffy Summers = Buffy Summers
Mr. Denny = Ms. Tara = Tara
Mr. Gardiner = Ms. Jenny Giles = Jenny Calendar
Mr. Hurst = Kate Lockley = Kate Lockley
Mr. Wickam = Ms. Faith = Faith
Mrs. Bennet = Mayor Wilkins le Bloddy = Mayor Wilkins
Mrs. Gardiner = Mr. Rupert Giles = Rupert Giles
Sir William Lucas = Dame Walsh = Dr. Walsh

Places
England = California
Brighton = Palm Springs
Court = Halls of D.C.
Derbyshire = The San Francisco Bay Area
Gretna Green = Elvis' Drive Through Marriage Chapel of Hunka Hunka Burning Love
Hunsford Parsonage = Purgatory Parsonage
the Lakes/Lake Country = Tahoe
Lambton = Napa
Rosings = Hellmouth
Scotland = Vegas
St. James = the capital
Westerham = Roseville

If after reading my fiction here, you would like to read more about me and my writing (tho I can't imagine why because I wrote NONE of this) check out my profile.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!