

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER

"Absolution"

by
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TEASER

FADE IN:

1 INT. RESTAURANT. NIGHT. 1

We're looking in on an upmarket Cleveland restaurant as the place winds down for the evening - there are only a few tables left and the waiters are hovering, ready to clean up and go home.

We pick up the closest couple, a stony-faced, middle-aged husband and wife, HENRY and DONNA, who look like tonight wasn't easy for either of them.

The wife gets her coat as the husband calls the waiter over and pays the bill.

2 EXT. STREET/RESTAURANT. NIGHT. 2

The couple leave, Donna pulling her coat tight against the chill evening air as Henry looks up and down the street for a cab. Donna huffs impatiently.

DONNA

Henry! Do you want me to freeze on the kerb here, or are you actually going to call me a cab?

HENRY

I'm trying, Donna, honey, be patient!

He waves frantically at a yellow cab that sails straight past them. Donna huffs and looks up and down the street.

From inside a small park a few dozen yards away, someone is looking out at the couple from behind a row of trees. The camera is shaky as the viewer tries to keep the couple in view, with heavy, ragged breathing.

There is a brief shot of a distinctly unfriendly-looking pair of eyes glaring out at us.

Back with the couple, Henry tries and fails again to flag down a cab, and with a grunt of annoyance Donna starts walking. Henry starts to jog after her.

HENRY (cont'd)

Donna? Where are you going?

DONNA

What does it look like I'm doing?
I'm walking home, and then I'm taking the cab fare I should have paid out of your wallet when I get there!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HENRY

Come on, just give me another-

DONNA

(icily)

Forget it! Good night, Henry.

Thanks for dinner.

Henry watches helplessly as Donna marches away, before rubbing the back of his balding head and staying on the kerb, watching the traffic.

Our mystery watcher starts to track Donna, slipping between the trees to keep her in sight. She's close enough to reach out and touch, but she's oblivious to the attention.

3

EXT. DARK STREET. NIGHT.

3

Turning off the main street and down a side avenue, Donna walks on, muttering under her breath about Henry.

She's not been walking long when she slows to a stop and looks round behind her, frowning - nothing but closed shop fronts and dark, empty buildings.

Donna starts again, looking a little more wary this time.

Close up with the watcher's eyes as he tracks Donna, sticking to the shadows and staying close to her. Donna stops at another street corner and tries to light a cigarette, cursing as her lighter flame splutters.

The stalker nears her, her back is turned and she doesn't see his hand reaching out to her - until she finally turns and YELLS in shock.

We see our stalker at last - a nondescript man in his late twenties, features shaded by a baseball cap. He steps back, hands up defensively.

MAN

Oh! Oh, gosh, sorry, ma'am, didn't mean to scare you!

DONNA

Well, you did scare me! What are you trying to do, sneaking up on people like that?

MAN

Oh, I just wanted to, uh, well, you looked like you needed, er...

DONNA

Needed what?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The man holds out a lighter, and after a suspicious glance at him, Donna leans forward as he sparks the lighter and gets her cigarette going.

His features are briefly illuminated by the flame, but only for a moment. He clicks the lighter off and starts to walk away from her.

DONNA (cont'd)

Thanks.

MAN

No problem, miss.

The man as he walks back up the avenue. In the background, Donna finally hails a cab and gets inside.

4

EXT. STREET. NIGHT.

4

A grumpy Henry walks down the street, pausing under a flickering street lamp overhead as he steps in something.

Muttering, he lifts his shoe to check the sole. He doesn't see the Man who was just stalking his wife standing silently only a few feet away.

Henry stands again and starts walking, but he only gets a few feet before the Man suddenly races up and grabs him, clamping one hand across his mouth as he yells.

We pull back and away as the Man drags Henry backwards, into a pitch black alleyway and out of sight.

There are the sounds of a struggle for another few moments, and then a strangled SCREAM from Henry, that is cut off suddenly.

BLACK OUT:

END OF TEASER

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

5 EXT. ALLEYWAY. MORNING.

5

The last resting place of Henry is displayed for us. The poor man is slumped on the alley floor, very much dead. Police crime scene tape cordons the alley off, and as the scene FLASHES from a forensics' camera, we pick up JACKSON and his partner DAN, the latter scribbling in his notebook as Jackson survey's the murder.

DAN

... and the last contact anyone had with him was when he left the restaurant with his wife at around eleven-fifteen last night.

Jackson squats down to take a closer look at Henry, who is managing to look startled even in death.

JACKSON

Why weren't they together?

DAN

Probably had a fight over something. The restaurant staff said they seemed pretty sombre all night. Proving that despite claims to the contrary about their intelligence, waiters can freely use words like 'sombre.'

Jackson doesn't grin at the joke, and Dan rolls his eyes and steps over.

DAN (cont'd)

Okay, that one sucked. But come on, Jacks, first kill of the day and it's not even donut o'clock yet!

JACKSON

(not listening)

Take a look at these wounds.

DAN

Very messy. So what? Killer was probably in a hurry. This whole scene doesn't exactly suggest a slow, methodical type.

JACKSON

(thoughtful)

Even so... there's something deliberate about this.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

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JACKSON(cont'd)

It looks like he just hacked away
and left him there, but there's
something else. There was a point
to it all.

Jackson stands, looking up at the wall behind the body.
Written crudely in blood are the words 'One by one, they all
shall open... and we all shall fall.' The wall FLASHES as a
photo is taken of it. Jackson taps the cameraman on the
shoulder.

JACKSON (cont'd)

Can I get a copy of that when
you're done? Thanks.

DAN

So what, we've got a killer who
watched too many episodes of
'Millennium' and is trying to make
a name for himself?

JACKSON

I'm not sure yet. Let's see what
the forensics pull up. Something
tells me if this guy hasn't killed
before, he will again. And soon.

His face serious, Jackson walks away, leaving Dan to puzzle
over the message on the wall.

6

INT. SUMMERS RESIDENCE - KITCHEN. MORNING.

6

It's breakfast time in BUFFY's house, and here's the girl
herself, coffee in one hand, toast in the other as she idly
watches the kitchen TV.

TV NEWS

In other news, police were
investigating the scene of a
gruesome murder today in downtown
Cleveland, which left local
businessman Henry Morecambe dead
after a vicious attack at around
eleven p.m. last night.

Buffy looks up as ANDREW enters the kitchen. They nod a
greeting as he heads for the fridge, before Andrew joins her
in watching the TV.

ANDREW

What happened?

BUFFY

Some guy got himself dead last
night. Looks pretty-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Buffy pauses, craning forward and squinting at the TV. Looking at the screen, we see that Buffy was trying to make out if she could see Jackson at the scene - and then there he is, giving a statement to the police.

JACKSON

This is a serious homicide, and will be given the full weight of the police's investigation accordingly. This guy won't get a chance to do something like this again.

Buffy nods, impressed.

BUFFY

Check out the big important police guy!

ANDREW

Jackson?

BUFFY

Looks like he's not doing too bad for himself, good to see him getting on with the workload again. And speaking of workload...

(checks watch)

Time I headed off. Now, do you remember what you have to say?

ANDREW

Um... here's the scroll, it's a prophecy about the Slayer. Angel gave Buffy one.

Andrew doesn't notice his innuendo. Sadly, Buffy does.

BUFFY

Almost... Look, Giles should be getting here in a few hours, so you wait here and make sure he gets onto this as soon as he's through that door, okay? You know me and the prophecies, always like to keep one step ahead.

(beat)

Even though they're technically one step ahead of me... never mind.

Buffy grabs her briefcase and leaves, a half piece of toast clamped between her teeth as she pulls on her jacket.

Andrew settles down to watch some more TV, waiting until he hears the door close before surreptitiously flicking to a cheesy pop music channel.

7

INT. CHARLESTON & SMITHE - CORRIDOR. MORNING.

7

KANE is striding down the main corridor when Buffy barges into him, spilling the folders he was carrying to the ground. Buffy gasps and kneels to retrieve them.

BUFFY

Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Kane! I was just-

KANE

Running late and trying to dash to your office before I checked on you?

BUFFY

(grins)

Busted. There was this really bad truck, and he was-

KANE

Relax, Miss Summers. I'm not about to fire every employee who's a little late, I'd rapidly run out of staff and be forced to put people like your friend Anya into the counsellor positions.

BUFFY

And we wouldn't want that, huh?

Buffy has gathered up most of the files, when something catches her eye.

We get a brief shot of what look like blueprint schematics for some kind of armoured vehicle before Kane snatches them back up and tucks them into his folder.

KANE

Well! This little diversion notwithstanding, I'd better not keep you anymore. Your ten o'clock client is already here, I believe.

BUFFY

Uh, thanks.

Buffy watches him go, trying to work out what those plans could be about. After a moment, she frowns and leaves it till later, heading towards her office.

8

INT. CLEVELAND PD - JACKSON'S OFFICE. MORNING.

8

Jackson is on his computer, busily typing away as Dan enters, two coffees in his hands.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN
Espresso express, Officer Shaw!

Dan hands Jackson one cup and peers at his screen. Jackson is on the website for what looks like a conspiracy theorist's home page, scrolling down many photos of writing sprayed on walls, similar to the scene in the alley.

DAN (cont'd)
Alright, you got me. What's all this?

JACKSON
An idea I had. There's a few sites that collect information about stuff like this, you know, cryptic messages left at crime scenes. It's not ideal, but with a bit of luck I'll either find a match or at least something similar, maybe suggest a pattern.

Jackson scrolls a little further down the page before Dan suddenly points to something on screen.

DAN
Hey, wait, stop! Back up. That one, left hand side.

Jackson clicks on the smaller image to bring it up - it's another alley wall, and the same message, though this time spray-painted in white.

DAN (cont'd)
Whaddya know... looks like you're not as crazy as they all say after all!

JACKSON
(beat)
Who says I'm crazy?

DAN
Everyone does!

JACKSON
(shakes head)
Crazy or not, this is a lead. I've been on this thing for two hours, so let's save this and see if we can't track down where it came from.

As Jackson turns on his printer and starts to make a copy of the photo on screen, we cut back to:

9

INT. CHARLESTON & SMITHE - BUFFY'S OFFICE. MORNING.

9

Buffy looks thoroughly fed up as she sits on the couch in one corner of her office, with the constantly-chattering CHRISTINA opposite her.

Christina is short and dumpy with unflattering brown hair, and seems determined to talk regardless of whether Buffy is listening or not.

CHRISTINA

But she said, she said, like she did all the other times, she said, 'Hey, Christina!' and I was like 'what?' and she was all 'You're going down after class, freak!' and all her stupid friends, they were-

BUFFY

Christina, stop. Breathe. Okay? Look, we're here to help you try and work out why everyone calls you a freak, but for the last twenty minutes all you've done is reel off a list of what insults you've had thrown at you at school!

CHRISTINA

So... what, like, you think I'm the one with the problem?

BUFFY

No offence, kid, but you're the one on the couch.

Christina folds her arms and pouts for a moment, before rolling her eyes and sitting upright again.

BUFFY (cont'd)

I'm trying to help. You told me you don't know why everyone keeps hassling you, let's see if we can work out why. Then you've got something you understand about yourself that can't get bullied by petty-minded cheerleaders and jocks.

CHRISTINA

(sceptical)

Since when did you become an expert on high-school politics?

BUFFY

I did my time.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

As Buffy reclines in her seat, we dissolve to:

10

INT. PLANE - PASSENGER SECTION. MORNING.

10

We walk down the rows of occupied seats in this crowded flight before we meet GILES and MARIE, the first of the two Watchers not looking particularly comfortable.

A baby CRIES off camera, and Giles is struggling to open a packet of complimentary nuts, his efforts finally popping the bag and spilling its contents over him. Marie chuckles and Giles sighs wearily.

GILES

I see that expecting the Council's expenses department to book us two first class tickets back to Cleveland was a trifle optimistic...

MARIE

Oh, cheer up, Giles. This isn't so bad! If the Council's accountancy trolls had their way, we'd fly everywhere in the belly of a Bangkok Airlines cargo hold, sharing our in-flight meal with live poultry and livestock!

GILES

Yes, I suppose there are worse alternatives...

Marie beams at him and then looks across, out of the window. Giles takes a moment to look at her - his warm feelings towards her are on show, obvious to everyone, it seems, except Marie, who notices something and nudges his arm. Giles snaps out of his trance and peers across.

MARIE

Isn't that the coast coming up down there?

GILES

Yes, I believe it is. We should be getting to Buffy's in a few hours from now. Andrew mentioned something vague about a scroll that Angel had passed on to her, I'm reserving my judgement until I actually have the thing in my hands.

MARIE

You see one scroll, you've seen them all, right?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GILES

Just lately, looking at old scrolls and parchments and goodness knows what else seems to be all we've really done! I remember a time when being a Watcher meant actual field work, as opposed to endless meetings about correct investment procedures, and public relations strategies, and-

Giles realises Marie is throwing him a raised eyebrow. He coughs once and stops. She pats him on the arm.

MARIE

I know. Being the new leader of the pack is a big responsibility, Rupert, but I can't think of anyone in the Council who doesn't want you there.

GILES

Not even Bletchley?

MARIE

Bletchley's an idiot. I don't care how many Slayers he's got on his books now, doesn't change the fact that the man is a first class arrogant buffoon!

Giles grins and runs a hand through his hair as Marie rubs her growling belly.

MARIE (cont'd)

Actually, do you know what I fancy?

GILES

Ah, no, what?

MARIE

When we touch down, on the way to Miss Summers' house. Some real American food. It's one of the things I like most about this country! We'll have to find some steak house somewhere and get a bellyful of top grade red meat. All this airline food just makes me hungrier!

Giles manages a half-hearted smile and tries to go back to reading his book, but his eyes keep drifting across to Marie, who is absently looking out through the window.

11 INT. CHARLESTON & SMITHE - BASEMENT. MORNING.

11

We're down in the plain-walled basement level of the office block, the distant hum of heating machinery our soundtrack as we see EMMA walking towards us. She's a young office girl sneaking down for a quick cigarette break, heading down a set of stairs and lighting up.

Her lighter is out of fuel and won't work despite her repeated attempts, until a HAND suddenly darts into flame, holding out a flaming lighter.

She looks up at its owner, then leans forward and lights her cigarette. She blows out the smoke and nods.

EMMA

Thanks. You hard at work down here?

We see who she's talking to - it's the Killer!

KILLER

Oh, you know. This and that.

As a grin slowly spreads across his face, we:

BLACK OUT:

END OF ACT ONE

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

12 EXT. CLEVELAND - PARK. NIGHT.

12

Buffy is out on patrol, taking Willow along for backup. Neither seems particularly alert - it's been a quiet night so far and shows no signs of changing.

WILLOW

All I'm saying is, Buffy, you could try to speak to him more.

BUFFY

You think?

WILLOW

Sure! I mean, there's no getting round the fact that, uh... stuff happened, but he's getting on with things just fine now, and every time he sees you, he seems to want to talk again. You know, like he did before. And, not wanting to sound all Oprah about this, but things are never going to stop being weird if you don't at least talk to him about it.

BUFFY

Jackson and I... it's gotten way more complicated. You would have thought spending a few months in an artificial dream world would have made me appreciate the way things are some more, but I just seem to end up being less tolerant of things now. Like, I've seen how good it can get, and then I came back here.

WILLOW

I disagree! I think the real version of Cleveland's got lots going for it. Xander and Anya getting married again, for one thing. The entertainment value of whatever horrible dresses Anya makes us wear should make up for-

The girls both FREEZE as there is a man's SCREAM off camera. They exchange a look, then Buffy draws a stake and they hurry towards the sound.

The girls come to an open section of the park and look around. There's nothing moving for a beat, until:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILLOW (cont'd)

There!

A shadow belts away from them, rushing through the trees at top speed. Buffy gives chase while Willow notices something else off screen and heads towards it.

We follow Buffy as she tears through the foliage for a few moments, before she comes to a stop, looking in every direction. She's lost him.

Rejoining Willow back out in the field, she heads over to see the wicca crouched next to something off screen.

As we draw closer, we see a pair of feet - jogging pants and trainers. Willow looks up, face full of sorrow.

WILLOW (cont'd)

We're too late...

Buffy kneels too - the body is of a man in his twenties, his Walkman still playing as his blank eyes stare up at the stars. Buffy reaches out and closes his eyes.

BUFFY

Poor guy. Guess he pushed one envelope too many.

WILLOW

Hey, check out these wounds, they're kinda... well, strange.

Buffy peers at his chest - the jogger's shirt is torn and bloody, and ugly gashes criss-cross his chest. Buffy looks at them from a few angles before seeing something and motioning for Willow to join her.

BUFFY

Does that say 'one by one' to you?

We get a brief shot of the jogger's chest - and the message 'one by one' is indeed there, carved awkwardly into him. It looks as though the killer was about to start a new word when he was disturbed.

WILLOW

Yeah, weird. What do you think?

BUFFY

No clue, but chances are it's not going to be pretty.

Buffy looks back at the trees all round and sighs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BUFFY (cont'd)
I lost our guy through the trees,
reckon you can find a trail?

WILLOW
Huh? You mean, with-

BUFFY
Magic, yes. Nothing major. Just a
low-level tracking spell or
something. We kinda need a head
start here.

WILLOW
Buffy, I...
(beat; sighs)
You know, encouraging me to get my
mojo back on, you know, yay! But
I'm trying to save my magic up for
big occasions, you know, so I don't
start getting too trigger happy
with it again, like when-

BUFFY
Willow. Look. Dead guy number one.
And over that way?
(points towards trees)
Possibly dead guys and girls
numbers two through two hundred.
The sooner we pick the trail up,
the better. And besides, whoever
heard of a wicca who didn't 'wic'
once in a while?

Willow bites her lip, considering this, then nods and stands,
looking around.

WILLOW
Okay. First, I'm gonna need to find
a footprint or something to start
the spell off, and then I need-

BUFFY
Jackson?

WILLOW
(confused)
I need Jackson?

BUFFY
No, look, over there.

And there he is - emerging from the trees, flashlight in
hand. He spots the two girls and heads over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

JACKSON

Hey girls.

Buffy tries not to tense up as Jackson walks over.

BUFFY

What brings you out on this cold,
distinctly un-police worklike
night?

JACKSON

Detective work. I was following up
a lead, see if I could-
(sees body)
Oh, no...

BUFFY

We just got here. Lost track of
someone making a quick getaway,
Will's gonna try and cook us up a
spell to locate him.

Jackson kneels by the body and takes the sheet he printed out
earlier from his jacket. He studies it under his flashlight
and then looks at the dead man's chest.

JACKSON

Here, take a look.

Buffy cranes over - and we see that the writing on the man's
chest matches the style of the message spray-painted on the
alley wall in the photo.

BUFFY

(off photo)
Where'd you get that?

JACKSON

Long story. Short version is, I'm
still on the trail of whoever
killed that guy last night, and a
message left at the crime scene was
a match to this photo. It was
written a few months ago on an
alley wall nearby, so I came to
look round the area, see if
anything turned up.

BUFFY

Does a dead jogger count as
'anything'?

JACKSON

I'm afraid so. I'll call this in,
you two go see if you can catch up
to that guy.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

JACKSON(cont'd)

But watch yourselves, I doubt this
is only his second kill.

BUFFY

We'll be fine. Come on, Willow.

WILLOW

You sure? You don't want to stay
and-

BUFFY

(firmly)

No, Willow, let's go.

With an awkward smile back to Jackson, Willow is led off
screen by Buffy. Jackson studies the body for a few more
moments before reaching for his walkie-talkie.

JACKSON

Dispatch, this is Shaw, over.

We pick up Buffy and Willow again as they start to head
through the trees, on the suspect's trail.

WILLOW

See? Right there. That's exactly
what I'm talking about.

BUFFY

What?

WILLOW

There he was, showing up out of
nowhere, all ready to help out and
be all Jackson and stuff, and you
just blow him off and drag me away
too!

BUFFY

Willow, I-

WILLOW

No, I get it. You don't want to
allow yourself to be friends with
him yet because 'it isn't the right
time,' but all I'll say is when is
gonna be the right time?

Buffy pauses, and Willow keeps on walking, leaving Buffy with
that thought.

13

INT. SUMMERS RESIDENCE. NIGHT.

13

There's a KNOCK at the front door, and Andrew goes to answer
it. It's Giles and Marie, looking thoroughly jetlagged but
glad to be here at last.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GILES

Ah, Andrew, hello.

ANDREW

Giles!

Andrew leaps forward to hug Giles like a long-lost father, and Giles rolls his eyes and pats Andrew on the shoulder as Marie squeezes past them.

When Andrew still hasn't let go after several moments, Giles clears his throat.

GILES

Andrew? I'd quite like to be able to breathe again now, if you don't mind...

Andrew lets go, beaming proudly up at Giles.

ANDREW

Sorry! It's just good to see you again. Come on in, Buffy and Willow are out on patrol but they'll be back soon. Did you have a good flight?

MARIE

I didn't mind, but Giles here didn't stop moaning from start to finish!

Giles sighs and lays his bags down, starting to unpack a few things as Andrew brings the scroll over.

GILES

Ah, would this be the offending article?

ANDREW

That's it. Angel gave this to Buffy last week, said it was important and that he hoped you could translate it.

GILES

Yes, I heard that he'd lost Wesley recently...

Giles trails off in thought, and Marie eases the scroll away from him to take a look.

MARIE

This won't be easy, but we'll get right on it. Come on, Giles, shake a leg and both if you've got them!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

She walks past and heads upstairs, breaking Giles out of his thoughts. He grabs his bag and follows her.

14

EXT. PARK. NIGHT.

14

Buffy watches Willow, who sits cross-legged on the floor, eyes closed. The trees rustle in the breeze around them, and all is quiet as Willow concentrates.

BUFFY

(beat)

Anything?

WILLOW

(opens eyes; pouts)

Nothing, sorry. I could probably tell you where every dog took a walk through the park today, but I can't pick out our guy.

BUFFY

Alright, there's not much else we can do tonight. Let's go get some sleep and try back here in the morning, see if we missed anything.

WILLOW

Okay. I think I'll go check in with the Circle when we get back, I've started going through the Library, and it's-

BUFFY

You have a library now?

WILLOW

Oh, yeah! It's neat, it's got these big comic book-style racks that stretch off into the ceiling, and all these books writing out the history of every single person on the planet, and...

(her smile drops)

And I've just realised how many of them I have to start reading now.

BUFFY

(raises eyebrow)

Sounds swell. Guess we'd better get you back, huh? The girls start to walk away.

We cut to the viewpoint of someone watching her from the cover of the trees, no prizes for guessing who!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

We watch Buffy walk on for a few moments, starting to move after her, before Buffy stops and slowly looks around.

Buffy's sharpened senses have noticed something, and she looks all around, her Slayerness kicking in.

BUFFY (cont'd)
Jackson? Is that you?

She waits a few moments longer, then starts to walk on. Back with her stalker as he closes in, using the noise of the trees flapping overhead to cover his approach.

He's closing in, and Buffy stops again, definitely hearing something.

She turns round, looking almost directly at us, and the stalker freezes, his breathing getting more nervous. Buffy takes one step towards us, when:

JACKSON (O.S.)
Buffy?

Buffy steps back and looks round as a flashlight beam heralds the arrival of Jackson, and the stalker backs away to watch.

Close up with the duo, Jackson looks relieved as he walks up to Buffy.

JACKSON (cont'd)
Good, there you are.

BUFFY
(raises eyebrow)
Worried about me?

JACKSON
A little. You know, demons and vampires, I can leave that sort of stuff to you. This is more my territory, so I'm just keeping an eye out, same way you would for me if I was on patrol with you.

BUFFY
What makes you so sure I would?

A beat - Jackson picks up on Buffy's stand-offishness and takes a step back, hands raised.

JACKSON
Hey, not trying to cramp your style, just doing my job. You're still a citizen round here, so that means it's my job to watch out for you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BUFFY

Yeah, well, I don't need anyone looking out for me, so you go carry on your side of the investigation, and I'll get on with mine.

Buffy turns and starts walking away.

JACKSON

(sighs)

What do you want me to say, Buffy? I'm trying to get on with things, and not be an ass and get in your face about it! Do you just want me to disappear or something?

BUFFY

It's not that, I...

(beat; turns round)

You know what? I don't know. Every time I've seen you since... since what happened, I've felt differently about it. At first, it made me feel sick. Then, it got better. But tonight, it just feels like we're two very bad ballroom dancers who keep stepping on each other's toes, so if it's all the same to you, I just... I need to go.

JACKSON

Okay. But will you be careful?

BUFFY

I always am. Doesn't seem to help that often, but I will.

JACKSON

I'd better get back to the scene, the meat wagon's already here so I've got to make my statement and stuff.

BUFFY

Alright.

After another beat, Jackson turns and leaves with a last smile at Buffy.

Buffy watches him go, then turns and walks off, angry with her body for the way it keeps making her feel each time he shows up.

And we get one more shot of the stalker, watching Buffy leave the park, his gaze locked on the Slayer.

15 EXT. CIRCLE - THE VILLAGE. DAY.

15

Willow emerges from the snow-frosted jungle that overlooks the Circle's village, the collection of huts and buildings that houses this place's occupants.

She starts to make her way down the footpath towards the first cluster of buildings, smiling as the energetic TATTLES runs up the path towards her.

Willow is almost bowled over as the young girl barrels into her, her hair in long braided pigtails which bounce as she wraps herself round Willow.

TATTLES
You're back! You're back!

WILLOW
Yep, sure am. How is everything?

TATTLES
Quiet. But kinda scary too.

WILLOW
Scary? What's wrong?

Tattles looks uncomfortable for a moment.

TATTLES
Um... better get Trinkets to tell you. Come on!

Her enthusiasm back in place, Tattles grabs one of Willow's hands and drags her towards the village.

16 INT. CIRCLE - TRINKET'S WORKSHOP. DAY.

16

Looking out from inside the wooden building at the approaching Willow and Tattles are TRINKETS and TALEDRAW, the other two inhabitants of this dimension.

TALEDRAW
Are you going to tell her?

TRINKETS
(nods)
Yes.

TALEDRAW
What are you going to say?

TRINKETS
(sighs)
I really don't know. But she needs to know it.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TRINKETS(cont'd)

The Big Bad is coming, and we need
the Teach to find out how to stop
it... Or he'll kill us all.

Off Trinkets' serious look, we:

BLACK OUT:

END OF ACT TWO

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

17 INT. CIRCLE - TRINKETS' WORKSHOP. DAY.

17

Tattles leads Willow up a spiral staircase that leads into Trinkets' clock workshop area. Benches and tables are covered with outlandish-looking devices all around, but Willow doesn't get chance to look as Trinkets grabs her and hugs her warmly.

TRINKETS

Teach! Good to have you back.

WILLOW

Yeah, uh, hi everyone. I just stopped by to-

TRINKETS

To hear the warning, we know.

WILLOW

No, I- warning? What warning?
There's a warning?

(beat)

Shouldn't I have been, uh, you
know, warned?

The three Circle members exchange glances, and Willow starts to look a little concerned.

WILLOW (cont'd)

Okay, don't all do that 'looking at each other' thing. That can only lead to bad things, and bad things lead to explosions, and dragons, and-

TRINKETS

It's okay, Teach. Nothing bad's happened.

TALEDRAW

Yet.

TATTLES

But... it might.

WILLOW

(wary)

Alright, you got my attention. What's up? I mean, I know that black stuff's still hanging around the back wall of the Library, but it hasn't moved for days now, so I thought maybe-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TALEDRAW
Something's coming.

TATTLES
Something bad.

TRINKETS
And it may pass through here before
it gets to your other home.

WILLOW
You mean Cleveland?

TALEDRAW
We can't tell you what it is, just
that it's bad.

TATTLES
And we need you to stop it.

WILLOW
Well, sure, but I don't really know
anything about it, so help me out
here! Are we talking about a demon?
Another big monster like that
dragon?
(beat)
Barney?

The Circle exchange looks again, and Willow huffs
impatiently.

WILLOW (cont'd)
Guys, stop doing that! Okay, can I
find anything about this whatever-
it-is in the Library?

TRINKETS
Yes. That's where you need to be.

Willow waits for any more information, but the Circle members
stay quiet.

WILLOW
Huh. Kind of going for that vague
thing today?

TATTLES
We can't-

TALEDRAW
Only you can do anything to stop
it. It is the Teach's job to
protect the Circle from those who
want to destroy it, but you'll find
everything you need in the Library.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WILLOW

So... guess I'd better get my reading glasses on, huh?

Willow stands and heads back down the spiral staircase, leaving the trio up in the workshop.

TATTLES

Why can't we tell her the rest?

TRINKETS

Because she'd do things wrong, that's why! She needs to decide for herself on how to stop it. If we try and push her one way, she may end up going another. Then she'd mess up what's been written.

TALEDRAW

I drew it. I had to burn the book, it was too scary. But then I ended up drawing it again.

Taledraw looks up at the others, the concern on his little face plain for them to see.

TALEDRAW (cont'd)

He's going to get us. It's been written.

Trinkets and Taledraw walk away, leaving a frightened looking Tattles, before we cut to:

18 INT. CLEVELAND PD - JACKSON'S OFFICE. NIGHT.

18

Jackson is at his desk, speaking on the phone.

JACKSON

Yeah... yeah, that was it. Okay, thanks.

He hangs up and starts typing at his PC as Dan enters.

DAN

They've got that jogger's body down in the pathology lab now, they'll call us within a few hours if they manage to lift any prints or hair fibres from it.

JACKSON

We might get lucky, he was disturbed this time.

DAN

Disturbed? How do you know that?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JACKSON

(beat; thinks of an
excuse)

When I found the body, I heard some
people walking around nearby,
chances are he thought somebody was
going to walk in on him and he ran.

DAN

Huh. Sorry, you just didn't mention
that in your report.

JACKSON

Didn't I? Must've forgotten.

Dan eyes Jackson, a little suspicious for a moment, then
shakes his head and dismisses the thought.

DAN

Anyway, we've identified the
victim, name was Joseph Hocking,
his partner was a girl called Emma
Darby, worked at your ex's place.

JACKSON

Charleston & Smithe?

DAN

Yeah, we've sent a car out to pick
her up, see if she saw anyone
suspicious. We got a statement from
the wife of the first victim to say
she spoke to someone just before
she got into a taxi home, which
we've logged as being about half an
hour or so before her husband
became a piece of modern art.

Jackson settles back in his chair, considering this.

DAN

You think there's some kind of
connection? Somebody the victims
all knew?

JACKSON

Maybe. Let's see what this Emma
girl tells us.

The two cops stand and leave the office.

19

INT. SUMMERS RESIDENCE - KITCHEN. NIGHT.

19

Half asleep, an exhausted-looking Buffy heads inside,
shrugging off her coat and yawning.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Buffy wanders over to the fridge and opens it, completely missing Giles, Marie and Andrew stood around. She grabs a juice carton and starts to head for the living room.

GILES

Er... hello?

BUFFY

(absently)

Hello, Giles.

She exits. Giles and Marie exchange a surprised look, before Buffy darts back into the door frame, registering surprise at last.

BUFFY (cont'd)

Oh my God, Giles!

She walks over and they embrace, with Marie giving Buffy a hug too.

MARIE

Hello, Buffy, good to see you again!

BUFFY

Yeah, sorry I'm so late, there was a thing, and then another thing... you know how it is.

Giles holds up the scroll, and from the piles of notes surrounding it on the kitchen table we can see he and Marie have already been hard at work with it.

GILES

So what can you tell me about this?

Buffy rolls her eyes.

BUFFY

Straight back to work, huh? Gee, I'd almost forgotten what you were like.

Giles blinks, not sure if she was joking. Buffy sighs.

BUFFY (cont'd)

Humour, Giles. Americans have that too, you know.

GILES

Ah, yes, sorry.

(rubs eyes)

It was a long, noisy flight.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MARIE

(tongue in cheek)

Was it, Rupert? You haven't really mentioned it.

BUFFY

Scroll. Right. Absolutely no idea what it is.

GILES

Oh, I was hoping Angel had told you a little more about it.

BUFFY

You know Angel. Tends to show up, give me some kind of locket, or gem, or something, then throws some cryptic lines at me about prophecies and slopes off again to work on his frown lines. All he said was that it mentioned a Slayer's death, which he thought was mine.

GILES

Yes, that would fit what we've worked out thus far.

Giles lays the scroll out across the kitchen counter as Buffy pulls up a chair and drinks more juice.

BUFFY

So what are we looking at, Operation Impending Doom For The Slayer, Part Two?

MARIE

That's the bit we haven't translated yet. It would indicate that it involves you, although-

ANDREW

(interrupts)

Or it could be Faith.

Buffy throws Andrew a dark look, and he blinks - then remembers why he isn't supposed to mention Faith's name. He lowers his head as Giles breaks the silence.

GILES

Well, we think so. It makes reference to a mature Slayer with many years experience of her powers, which would suggest you...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BUFFY

But could apply to Faith too. Got it. Where is she?

MARIE

We're not sure, Willow did her a little favour after she left here so we've had difficulty locating her.

BUFFY

Favour?

GILES

Willow managed to effectively remove Faith from existence.

BUFFY

Wow. Many have tried, few have succeeded.

(beat; off their looks)

I'm kidding! What, did you leave your humour glands in another time zone?

GILES

Sorry, it was-

BUFFY

A long flight, yeah, I get that.

MARIE

Willow hacked into as many national databases as she could and took Faith's name off every register she could. Faith was never one for a paper trail anyway so it wasn't too difficult, but after a few hours work, according to the great computer-system driven networks of this world, Faith does not exist.

BUFFY

When did all this happen?

MARIE

While you were, ah, shall we say, asleep.

BUFFY

So where is she?

A beat as Marie and Giles exchange looks, and Buffy smirks and nods as she catches up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

BUFFY (cont'd)
Don't tell me, Willow did such a
good job of hiding her-

GILES
That we can't find her, yes. We're,
ah, working on it.

BUFFY
And in the meantime?

GILES
I'd suggest you shake down a few
local contacts, see if the name
'Sych'Rya' rings any bells.

BUFFY
I heard that Tammazel bought up a
bar somewhere, I'll go check that
out.

GILES
I thought Xander and Faith took
care of her? At least, that's what
Xander's been proudly telling
everyone who'll listen, so Andrew
tells me.

BUFFY
Yeah, I kinda didn't want to burst
his bubble of heroics, but
Tammazel, she's... different. After
Xander took her out, she just
crawled right out of that building,
dragging her legs with her, until
she could stitch herself back
together again later. Seems she
survived the explosion in the base,
but I don't think she's especially
happy about the whole thing.

MARIE
My word...

BUFFY
Yeah, I know, they'll let anyone
run a bar in this town, huh?

Buffy drains the juice carton and places it back on the
table, yawns and stretches out.

MARIE
You look more tired than Rupert
does!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

BUFFY

Long day. Longer night.

GILES

I think we should all get some rest, this prophecy hasn't mentioned any specific kind of urgency yet, so I doubt one night longer will kill us!

BUFFY

Speak for yourself, you're not the one who had people thousands of years ago drawing lots about when you were gonna die!

GILES

(beat)

Point taken.

BUFFY

You guys can use Dawn's...

(beat)

The spare room. It's big enough for two, there's a sofa bed so you won't have to share.

Marie nods at Giles, who looks almost relieved that he's been spared potentially sleeping next to the woman he's so obviously pining after. As the gang break up and slope up to their respective rooms, we cut to:

20

INT. CLEVELAND PD - JACKSON'S OFFICE. NIGHT.

20

A uniformed cop brings Emma into the office and sits her down, and after a beat Jackson and Dan enter.

JACKSON

Hi there, you must be Emma Darby?

EMMA

Yeah, that's me. What's all this about? I was working over, we've got some kind of system error, the whole network's acting like it's the 1950's, and...

She trails off as she picks up on the serious vibe in the room. Nervously taking a gulp of the coffee before her, she looks back up at Jackson.

EMMA (cont'd)

What's... what's happened? Is it-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JACKSON

I'm afraid it's your partner,
Joseph. He was found dead earlier
this evening.

EMMA

(hands over mouth)
Oh, my God...

JACKSON

We believe he's the victim of a
serial killer currently active in
this area, so we're going to need
you to stay here tonight so we can
keep an eye on you.

Emma nods, but tears are already running down her face. A sob
escapes her lips, and Dan is over there to put a comforting
arm round her.

She buries her face in his shoulder and BAWLS, moaning
loudly. Jackson waits a few moments for her to calm down.

JACKSON (cont'd)

Emma, I know this is difficult, but
we need your help. Our best chance
of catching the bastard who did
this could be something you know.
Can you help us by answering a few
questions?

Emma nods, shaking.

JACKSON (cont'd)

Have you spoken to anyone strange,
or seen anyone out of the ordinary
past few days? Possibly at work,
maybe when you were out round the
city?

EMMA

(sniffs)
No, I haven't...
(beat; thinks)
There was one guy. Looked like a
janitor at work, but I didn't
recognise him. He... he lit a
cigarette for me today.

Jackson and Dan exchange a look.

DAN

Do you think you could work with a
sketch artist to get us a picture
of him? It could be important.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Emma nods again, and Dan disappears to find one. Jackson follows him out.

21 INT. CLEVELAND PD - CORRIDOR. NIGHT.

21

The two detectives walk along.

JACKSON

The other victim's wife, Donna Morecambe, she reported talking to a guy who lit a cigarette for her, right?

DAN

Sure did, not long before her husband got diced. Reckon we'll find a pattern if we match the jogger's time of death to Miss Darby's meeting with our mystery smoker?

JACKSON

If we don't, you can take Buffy out for dinner.

DAN

(smirks)

Really? 'Cause, you know, she is pretty hot, and you two did kinda break up-

JACKSON

Dan. Real important that you don't finish that thought.

They disappear into another office, before we cut to:

22 INT. CIRCLE - GRAND LIBRARY. DAY.

22

Willow steps cautiously into the impossibly-high ceilinged Library room, peering up at the rows of bookcases stretching off into the distance all around.

Some movement over at the far wall catches her attention, and she walks towards it.

The back wall is still home to the DARKNESS settled there, black tendrils snaking through the cracks in the Library wall, almost like a separate night sky.

Willow stands before it, not looking too pleased to see it again, before she takes a deep breath and raises one hand, aiming it towards the darkness.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILLOW

Okay, time to see what you're
really doing here...

Willow murmurs an incantation, and a thin sliver of white light unravels from her palm, stretching out towards the darkness.

As it connects, there is a sudden FLASH, and Willow GASPS - and for one instant, her red hair turns a deep, jet black, before returning to normal.

Willow stumbles backwards, gasping for breath, alarmed. As she regains her composure, a dawning look of horror crosses her face.

WILLOW (cont'd)

What... what was that?

Off her extremely worried expression, we:

BLACK OUT:

END OF ACT THREE

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

23 EXT. CITY STREET. DAY.

23

Buffy, dressed in her smart work outfit, steps up to the front of a run-down looking club, aptly named 'Dive.'

With a glance up and down the street, she pushes the main door open and steps inside.

24 INT. THE DIVE. DAY.

24

The club lives up to its name - it looks mid-renovation, with peeling paint and crumbling furniture all around. Loud, aggressive metal music blasts over a tinny speaker system, and Buffy eyes the garish neon lights flickering behind the bar.

After a beat, the blue-skinned demon TAMMAZEL raises her head into view from behind the counter, reading the labels on two bottles and not seeing Buffy.

Tammazel has a long, ugly red scar stretching round her waist, with what looks like industrial cable holding her two halves together.

BUFFY

A-hem.

Tammazel spins round, and her eyes widen with shock as she registers the Slayer. She drops the bottles with a SMASH and tenses up defensively.

TAMMAZEL

You! What do you want? I haven't even opened this place yet, and you come waltzing in here to smash it up already?

BUFFY

What? No, I'm just here for-

TAMMAZEL

Protection money? Well, forget it! As you humans say, Tammazel is nobody's bitch, least of all some blonde 'Law And Order' wannabe like you!

BUFFY

(offended)

Hey! Look, are you gonna shut up for a minute and let me speak, or just throw vague threats my way?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Tammazel GROWLS but calms down, hands on hips defiantly.

TAMMAZEL

Alright, you have my attention.
What do you want?

BUFFY

What can you tell me about this
serial killer working the streets
round here?

TAMMAZEL

Human problem. Therefore, none of
my business. Next. Oh, and you only
get three questions, because in
case you haven't noticed...

(indicates bar)

I'm trying to run a business here!
I need to pay off the work that was
done to me after your...

(spits the word out)

... friend did this to me!

Tammazel points to her war wound, but Buffy marches calmly up
to the counter, grabs a screwdriver out of a toolbox on the
counter and IMPALES Tammazel's hand to the counter. As the
demon HOWLS in pain, Buffy leans in closer.

BUFFY

(patiently)

Let's try this conversation again,
only this time, you answer my
questions with a hundred per cent
less attitude, or the next
screwdriver I stick in you won't be
so easy to pull out. Okay?

Tammazel's eyes throw murder at the Slayer, but reluctantly
the demon nods and Buffy removes the screwdriver. Tammazel
rubs her wounded hand.

BUFFY (cont'd)

Serial killer. Start talking.

TAMMAZEL

Like I said, human. Nothing to do
with us demons. What I did hear is
that the killer has some kind of
divine inspiration, seems to think
he's prophesising the next
apocalypse or something.

BUFFY

He left a message on his last
victim, 'one by one.' What does
that mean?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

TAMMAZEL

I don't know, perhaps he likes that band, the Foo Fighters?

Buffy raises the screwdriver again, and Tammazel YELPS in fear and jumps back.

BUFFY

As I just said, 'one by one.' What does it mean?

TAMMAZEL

Nobody knows except him. My advice, find him, ask him then tell me, I know of people who'll pay good money to find that out.

BUFFY

Any idea where I could find him?

TAMMAZEL

None whatsoever. And I think that's your cue to leave me now, Slayer. I may not be able to fight at my best but I pay plenty of people here who will.

BUFFY

(beat; smiles)

Sure!

Buffy turns to go - then spins round and SPIKES the screwdriver back into Tammazel's hand. Tammazel HOWLS again as Buffy steps back towards her.

BUFFY (cont'd)

(Columbo style)

Just one more question...

TAMMAZEL

(through gritted teeth)

What?!?

BUFFY

Does the name 'Sych'Rya' mean anything to you?

Tammazel glares cold, bloody murder at Buffy, but takes a deep breath and collects herself before she answers.

TAMMAZEL

(in obvious pain)

Demon cult, very accurate with their prophecies, seemed to know more than anyone else about the future of the Slayer line.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

TAMMAZEL(cont'd)

(beat)

Satisfied?

Tammazel YANKS the screwdriver free of her hand and shakes with barely suppressed rage.

BUFFY

Okay. Well, gotta split. See ya.

With that, she turns and leaves as Tammazel explodes into a volley of demonic curses.

25

EXT. CHARLESTON & SMITHE/STREET. DAY.

25

Jackson's car pulls up outside the counselling firm's offices, and he and Dan step out.

DAN

So what, you're just gonna march in there and interview their whole janitorial staff?

JACKSON

(nods)

It's a start. We've got a sketch of the guy, if we show it to a few people we'll either get led straight to him or he'll get wigged and make a run for it.

DAN

Assuming this is our guy. We're operating on a vague recollection by some office worker who just needed a light! Last time I checked, that's not the kind of thing that looks so good in your report.

JACKSON

Same M.O. as the guy who spoke to the first victim's wife. It's the best lead we've got until the forensics finish up.

The two detectives head inside. We look upwards, towards the fifteenth floor, before a cut to:

26

INT. BUFFY'S OFFICE. DAY.

26

Cell phone in one hand, briefcase in the other, Buffy nudges her door open and steps inside.

BUFFY

No, she didn't know anything.

(beat; listens)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BUFFY(cont'd)

I didn't have times, Giles, I was late for work! Listen, call me if you hear anything, I'll see if I can sneak away early today. Bye.

Buffy sits at her desk as the intercom buzzes.

BUFFY (cont'd)

Yes, Anya?

ANYA

(filtered; through
intercom)

It's a man!

BUFFY

Huh?

ANYA

A man! On the phone! For you! I'm very pleased for you, we were all starting to get worried that you'd never speak to another man again. Maybe he-

BUFFY

Anya! Who is it?

ANYA

Let me ask.

(beat)

Oh, it's only Jackson. Shall I scare him off with some very descriptive threats, or do you want to abuse him yourself?

BUFFY

(beat; sighs)

Just put him through. I'd better see what he wants.

The phone RINGS and Buffy answers it.

27

INT. CHARLESTON & SMITHE - LOBBY. DAY.

27

Jackson is leaning across the counter, using the phone, as Dan flirts with the receptionist.

JACKSON

Buffy? Hi. It's Jackson.

(beat)

Are you there?

BUFFY

(filtered; through phone)

I'm here. What is it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JACKSON

Just wanted to let you know, we've got a lead that the suspect was seen in your building, Dan and I are here to check it out.

BUFFY

Oh. Good. You know, because, that's what cops do. Check people out.

JACKSON

Did you want to meet up with us? You know your way round this place better than I do, maybe you could-

BUFFY

No, I'd better... You guys do your thing. Call me if you find anything, I'll stay in my office.

JACKSON

Will do.

He hangs up and nods to Dan, and after Dan disengages from the receptionist, the two head towards a 'Staff Only' door.

28 INT. BUFFY'S OFFICE. DAY.

28

She hangs up, then stares at the phone for a beat. She closes her eyes, and with a sigh stands and buzzes Anya.

BUFFY

Anya? I've got to head out for a minute. I won't be long.

ANYA

Are you sure? You don't normally sneak away this early, except when-

BUFFY

(hisses)

Anya! I'll be back soon.

Buffy heads out of her office by the back door.

29 INT. CHARLESTON & SMITHE - BASEMENT. DAY.

29

Jackson walks down a set of stairs into the grey-walled basement level, eyes scanning the corridors. Dan walks into frame, nodding to his partner.

JACKSON

Anything?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN

Two people ID'd the guy, said he's only been here a few weeks. Keeps to himself, mostly, said he's got the old maintenance office by the heating systems.

JACKSON

Let's go. You carrying?

Dan pats his jacket pocket and follows Jackson as they head down the corridor.

30 INT. MAINTENANCE AREA. DAY.

30

Buffy opens a door and steps into the noisy room, a large space filled with clanking and hissing machinery, the physical heart of the building. Alert, she paces forward.

BUFFY

Jackson? Are you down here? They told me you-

She's suddenly GRABBED from behind and cut off, and with a muffled YELP yanked backwards, off screen.

KILLER (O.S.)

(sinister)

You shouldn't be here...

31 INT. BASEMENT CORRIDOR. DAY.

31

Jackson's head whips round as though he's heard something. He quickens his pace, with Dan following.

DAN

What is it?

JACKSON

I think I heard something. Watch your step, follow me.

DAN

You did? I didn't hear a thing...

They both draw their handguns as they reach the edge of the maintenance area.

32 INT. MAINTENANCE AREA. DAY.

32

Stepping slowly out into the large space, guns raised, eyes flicking between the rattling machines, Jackson and Dan fan out, looking for activity.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They haven't got to wait long, as the Killer bustles into frame, holding Buffy in front of him with a large knife pressed firmly into her neck - it's already drawn blood.

JACKSON

Dan! Over here!

His eyes locked on the Killer, Jackson trains his gun on him as Dan hustles into frame.

JACKSON (cont'd)

Buffy, you okay?

BUFFY

I'm fine, I'm fine!

KILLER

Quiet! You've made me do this all wrong, don't you see that? You were supposed to be next... I needed one with power! But not here, not like this!

JACKSON

Alright, it's okay, nobody needs to get hurt.

KILLER

She's just another one of their pawns, don't you see? A piece on their game board! They try to make them jump up, to the higher levels... but they always fall back down!

JACKSON

Whatever you say, pal. How about you lower the knife so we can talk?

Slowly and carefully, Jackson lowers his gun and raises his hands. Jackson takes a deep breath and continues.

JACKSON (cont'd)

No gun. See? Let the girl go.

BUFFY

Jackson, I don't need-

KILLER

Quiet!

His hand twitches, and Buffy GASPS as the blade digs into her neck.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JACKSON

It was you those two women saw
before their partners were killed,
wasn't it? Why did you do that? It
just made it easier to find you.

KILLER

I... I just wanted to...

JACKSON

To get close? To see how far you
could push it? Come on, man, help
me understand you.

KILLER

It was... I just needed to see my
reflection, to make sure I still
had a soul after the terrible
things I'd done, to look into the
eyes of the people I was about to
kill on the inside...

JACKSON

(nods)

To try and share their pain, right?
So why pick on this girl? What does
she have to do with your plan?

KILLER

I saw you. Both of you. Together.
You may try to hide it, but the
energy, the feelings you two have,
it flows off you both like steam,
it's everywhere you look!

A beat as Jackson and Buffy's gazes meet.

JACKSON

(slowly)

Listen, I don't know what you think
you know, but me and her? We're not
together. Do you only pick on
people in love to try to see how it
feels to break someone's heart?

KILLER

(suddenly incensed)

No! It isn't like that! You could
never understand! The things I
know... the things I've been told!
It's too much! I can't... I can't
keep it all locked inside me!

His hand starts to shake again, and a trickle of fresh blood
rolls down Buffy's neck. Jackson tries to control his urge to
pounce.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

JACKSON

Hey! Don't make this worse for
yourself, man. Don't hurt the girl
and we'll-

KILLER

I'm just trying to leave a message...
something that people will see, so
they'll know that the End is
coming!

JACKSON

The End? What have you seen? What's
going to happen?

KILLER

(increasingly manic)

Nothing can turn back what has
begun, the countdown has started!
One by one, they all shall open,
and we all shall fall!

Dan is circling round behind the Killer, who looks ready to
snap. Buffy is waiting for an opening but can't move while
the knife is that close to her jugular.

JACKSON

I saw your message. I don't
understand what it means - what's
going to open?

KILLER

You can't stop them! No man can
stop them! It is inevitable!

He points the knife at Jackson.

KILLER (cont'd)

Only I can-

That's Buffy's chance - she swings an elbow into the Killer's
gut, and with one deft judo throw has the guy flat on his
back.

She WRENCHES his wrist round and he drops the knife, before
she CHOPS his chest once, and the Killer doubles up, winded.

Jackson and Dan race over, Dan getting the handcuffs ready as
Buffy presses a hand to the cut on her neck.

JACKSON

Are you alright?

BUFFY

(irritated)

I'm fine!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

BUFFY(cont'd)

I just hate people getting the drop on me...

(kicks Killer)

Especially low-budget crazies like this guy right here!

DAN

Feisty, ain't she?

JACKSON

Just cuff the guy, will you?

DAN

Sure, sure...

Dan drags the struggling Killer to his feet as he grabs his radio with his other hand.

DAN (cont'd)

All units, this is Detective Radcliffe, suspect apprehended at the Charleston & Smithe office, get me some backup, over!

(to Killer)

Nice moves, genius, getting taken down by a girl! Can't wait to hear you tell your new cellmates that one...

Dan and the Killer head off screen, leaving Buffy with Jackson as he reaches out a hand to her wound. She hesitates, then moves her hand so he can take a look.

JACKSON

Doesn't look too bad.

BUFFY

It'll heal up. I told you, I'm fine.

JACKSON

Did you understand any of that stuff he said?

BUFFY

Not really. You hear one psycho, you've heard 'em all.

JACKSON

You think something's coming to Cleveland again? Like-

BUFFY

I don't know, maybe. Listen, I should get back to Giles, he may be able to make some sense out of this.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

JACKSON

Giles is back?

(beat)

Okay, right. I should go, help Dan out, get this guy taken away.

BUFFY

(beat)

Yeah.

A long beat. Then with, awkwardly lowered faces, the couple turn away from each other and head separate ways off screen. We dissolve to:

33

INT. SUMMERS RESIDENCE - KITCHEN. DAY.

33

Giles is quietly reading a newspaper when Willow rushes down the stairs and into the kitchen, her eyes wide.

GILES

Willow? What's the matter with-

WILLOW

(jittery)

Long story. Giles, we've got trouble. I mean big, huge, bigger than all the 'Godzilla' movies big kinda trouble.

Giles picks up on Willow's nervousness and puts the paper down, standing up and nodding for her to continue.

WILLOW (cont'd)

I saw a...

(beat)

Wait, how long have I been gone? To the Circle, I mean. As in not conscious.

GILES

Most of the day. Why?

WILLOW

Serious? I thought I'd only been away a few hours...

(shakes head; changes subject)

Anyway, I saw something, and I could tell it wasn't friendly.

GILES

How so?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILLOW

There's this thing, like, this black stuff, in the Library, against the far wall? And at first, I thought, 'huh,' you know, 'just something else weird,' but then, all the Circle kids are scared of it, so I just tried to go connect with it, so I could see if, uh, see if it led me to anything or spoke to me or something, and I... it said...

GILES

Willow, you're not making much sense!

WILLOW

(serious)

A Big Bad, Giles. It's coming this way and I don't think anything's going to be able to stop it.

GILES

I see. Well, first, we should start to make-

BUFFY (O.S.)

Hey.

Giles and Willow turn as Buffy enters the kitchen, a bandage on her wounded neck.

GILES

(concerned)

Buffy? What happened?

BUFFY

Serial killer, or at least he would have been. The police got him. No big. What's up with you two? You look like they just cancelled The Simpsons and replaced it with a Roseanne marathon...

Giles and Willow exchange a look. And Buffy knows that look. She groans.

BUFFY (cont'd)

Don't tell me...

Giles nods, and Buffy closes her eyes as she knows what's coming next.

GILES

We may have a problem.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

From his serious look, we:

BLACK OUT:

END OF SHOW