

Apocalypsei

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Chapter 1

Caracas, Venezuela

Drucilla danced to the voices of the stars. The stars had been singing loudly all night, faster and faster, making her leap and spin. Then the music stopped abruptly. She turned her eyes to the stars and listened. Mrak, her boyfriend walked up to her side. He had been watching his lovely Drucilla dancing and became concerned at the serious shift in her mood. He saw emotions flying rapidly across her face and listened carefully when she started mumbling.

"...Mummy's little one is going to be a key..."

"...Daddy's going to help..." She said in wonder.

"...Mummy's kitten calls the dark..."

"...Two more, can't see..."

Then she turned and focused her gaze on Mrak's face. She said with uncharacteristic lucidity, "We need Spikey, and we need to go to the hellmouth. The stars were singing about things coming and they were afraid. Now the stars are silent. The things are going to kill everything, humans, demons, birds, the air, they could even kill the stars." She threw herself into Mrak's arms and he comforted her as he thought.

He led her to her bed and made sure that she had Miss Edith snuggled close to her before he left her to make a call.

[Translated from the Chaos Demon language, for your convenience.] "This is Mrak, remember that vamp I asked you to keep an eye on... Yeah, that one, I need him here... I don't care if he's sober, I don't care if you have to drag him or carry him, just get him here quickly, and arrange transport for three of us to the States, Sunnydale, California... I know, just make the arrangements through the underground, this is big and we need to be there... good, see you then... bye."

Then Mrak went to his beloved's side to wait.

* * * * *

San Francisco, California

Leo orbed into the house next to his wife; he looked pale and afraid. "Piper, where are your sisters? We need to go. There is something big coming, I mean really big. We need to leave now if we're going to stop it."

"Leo, calm down, what are you talking about?" Piper said with frustration.

"I just spoke with the elders and they are in a panic. The charmed ones will be needed to stop the portal to a hell dimension from opening onto the earth." Leo said in a rush, then continued, "Where are your sisters? We need to get the Book of Shadows and get going now!" Leo said in near hysteria.

"Paige is in the attic, Phoebe is at work." Piper said, beginning to worry. She had never seen her husband frightened like this... well, maybe once.

"Call Phoebe and tell her that we'll pick her up from work on our way out of town. We'll pack a bag for her."

"She's not going to go for that, she won't leave town when she has to work." Piper said, frustrated again.

"She'd better, because if she doesn't, there won't be any work, or any town or any world that you would want to live in left. Demons will flood the world and nothing will survive. The only way to stop them is to stop the door from opening. So let's go!"

* * * * *

Los Angeles, California

Doyle collapsed to the floor. Angel and Cordelia went to either side of him and waited for him to come out of his vision. After a few minutes it became obvious that something was wrong. The vision seemed to be getting worse, more intense. Blood started trickling from his ears and nose, and they could hear the sound of bone grinding against bone as his seizure contorted his body into impossible positions.

Finally, after ten minutes of agony, Doyle became conscious. Angel and Cordelia listened carefully for details of his vision. "All of us, Sunnydale, now." He said hoarsely before passing out.

* * * * *

Cave of the Fates, Greece

In the cave of the fates four gods appeared out of nothingness. They looked around at each other to determine who brought them here. Before any of them could speak, the daughters of Moira spoke in unison.

*The time has come,
The end is near,
The twilight of mortals,
The days of fear,
The end of mankind,*

*Forevermore,
The end will come,
Through an open door,*

*Witches come
to seal the gate,
Gods and keys
can alter fate,
God of dagger
God of dart,
God who fights
with bloody art,
God whose silence
makes us weep,
God whose absence
we must keep.*

Then they fell silent, eyes cast toward the floor. Ares asked, "What is the meaning of this? Why can't you just tell us what we need to do?"

The three lifted their eyes as one and looked at the gods with cold regard before the eldest of them, Atrapos, said, "Be gone!"

And they were.

* * * * *

Sunnydale, California

Giles had called the Scoobies for an emergency meeting. Something was happening; anyone with the ability to sense supernatural forces could feel it. Buffy and Willow were already on their way when Giles had tried to call them. Xander had shown up quickly but Oz had yet to arrive. When the phone rang, Giles answered.

"Hello, this is Rupert Giles."

"Hey Giles, this is Oz, I'm on the road out of Sunnydale." Oz said with more emotion than Giles had ever heard from the boy.

"You said that you would come here, what happened?" Giles asked curiously.

"I don't know, something is driving me away from Sunnydale. Turn on your radio, I'm not the only one. They're reporting that house pets are killing themselves trying to escape and run away. Animals are leaving the area, I think even the insects are leaving..." Oz trailed off. Giles could hear his engine racing through the cell-phone.

"Do what you must." Giles said absently, thinking that this was another portent of doom.

"Thanks Giles, tell Willow I'm sorry." Oz said quietly.

"I will. Be safe. Goodbye." Giles said before hanging up the phone. He turned to see that every eye in the room was focused on him.

"That was Oz, he won't be able to join us. Apparently, whatever is happening is causing creatures driven by instinct to flee the area." Giles said remotely as he considered what this meant.

"Don't we have a prophecy that covers this? I mean this looks big enough to deserve a prophecy." Buffy said from her spot at the table, looking up from her books.

"Yes, I imagine there is. Unfortunately, we don't have all the prophecies in one book, that would be too convenient." He said with a little frustration showing through his voice.

"This seems to be bigger than our usual apocalypse..." Giles was saying as he was interrupted.

"Isn't it kind of sad that we have 'usual apocalypses'?" Xander asked seriously.

"Apocalypsei" Buffy said absently, still reading her book.

"Pardon?" Giles said, snapped out of his deep thoughts.

"Apocalypsei, the plural of Apocalypse. I figured that since we're the only ones who need to use a plural form of the word apocalypse that we would get to decide which one to use. I chose apocalypsei, cause I thought of it first." Buffy said to the group who were staring at her, disbelieving.

Giles was the first to come back to himself. "As I was saying..." he tried to continue, then asked, "What was I saying?"

"You were saying that Xander needs to get us a good supply of doughnuts and coffee because it's going to be a long day... and night." Buffy said with certainty.

"I know that's not what I was saying. However, it wouldn't be a bad idea. Would you mind?" Giles asked, turning to Xander.

"You buy, I'll fly." Xander said with his usual goofy smile.

"I'll take that as a yes." Giles said handing a few bills to Xander.

Doyle came awake to the sound of the engine racing. He looked up to find himself in the passenger seat of Angel's car with Cordelia driving.

"That was a bad one, I've never felt anything like it." He said, rearranging himself in the seat.

"Angel, he's awake." Cordelia called out over her shoulder.

"I heard." A muffled voice came from under a blanket in the back seat.

"Can you tell us what you remember?" The voice under the blanket asked.

"A door was opened. Demons flooded through it. They killed everything in their path. They didn't eat what they killed, and they didn't seem to enjoy it, they just killed... everything. There were millions, billions of them." Doyle said with pain in his voice.

"Did you recognize the demons?" The blanket asked seriously.

With a shudder, Doyle said, "Yeah, 'The Scourge'.

Chapter 2

Xander left the doughnut shop and stopped. Something was giving him a serious case of the wiggins. He looked around and noticed that there was no one else on the street. The sun's light seemed to be an unusual orange glow. Xander shifted his burden and hurried his pace back to Giles's apartment. This felt so absolutely wrong.

Entering the apartment, he sat down the coffee and doughnuts quickly. He went into the living room. "Giles, you need to look outside. Something majorly wiggy is going on." Xander said, out of breath.

Giles went to the window and looked out. The orange light was immediately noticeable. "Merciful Gods!" he said in exclamation, turning back to the room.

Four flashes of light gave way to four oddly dressed men, one of whom had wings. "Hows 'bout that fer an intraduction?" One of the men said.

Everyone in the room got into battle stance. Giles broke the ensuing silence by saying, "Who are you and what are you doing here?"

Three of the men looked toward the fourth who rolled his eyes, then spoke. "I am Ares, god of war. It seems something is going on here that requires our attention."

More silence flooded the room as the Scoobies processed what they had been told. Finally it was Buffy who broke this bout of silence. "Who are the rest of you and what do you need to do?" She said, giving an obvious leer toward Cupid.

Strife put his arm around Cupid possessively and said, "We was sent here ta stop sumthin from destroyin the world. Like he said, he's Ares, that's Joxer, I'm Strife and this is my Cupid."

Everyone in the room noticed the possessive 'my' that Strife used, except maybe Buffy. She had a habit of not hearing what she didn't want to.

"The fates gave us a riddle and said that we would be the ones needed to stop what was trying to enter this world." Ares said with tension in his voice.

Joxer took hold of Ares arm and he immediately calmed.

"Greek!" Giles shouted as he ran back to the table and started searching for a particular book.

Everyone else just watched while he dug, trying to put the pieces together and figure out what was going on.

"Here, I think I've found the prophecy that we're looking for. I didn't consider before that it could be Greek in origin." He started reading the page silently then looked up to see all eyes fixed on him expectantly.

He read the passage aloud.

*The time has come,
The end is near,
The twilight of mortals,
The days of fear,
The end of mankind,
Forevermore,
The end will come,
Through an open door,*

*Witches come
to seal the gate,
Gods and keys
can alter fate,
Key of mischief,
Key of heart,
Key who fights
and stands apart,
Key of darkness
sirens call,
Key of evil
saves us all.*

"Um." Strife said, drawing everyone's attention. "That ain't tha same as what tha Fates said ta us."

"And just what did the fates say?" Giles asked in full research mode.

The gods looked at each other questioningly until Joxer created a pen and paper.

Giles waited as he wrote down what the fates had said. When he was finished, Giles took the paper and compared it to the book.

While he was comparing, Buffy, being her usual tactful self, asked, "Can't he speak?"

An angry look crossed Ares' face but Joxer calmed him with a touch. Finally Strife spoke, "Jox was born a mortal, he use ta hang with these skanky

hoes, Xena and Gabrielle. They was in a religion call 'the way' an tried to make everyone round em follow it. When they heard Jox tellin someone bout how tha gods was good an helped people, they got pissed. They beat him up an left him fer dead. Gabrielle used this god killin thing that Xena had, to cut out his tongue, so it couldn't be healed. He was gonna die, but cause he was always loyal ta Ares and was defending tha gods, Ares decided ta make him immortal. Bout a hundred years latah, he was made a god."

"That sucks!" Xander said, then shrunk back when everyone turned to look at him.

Joxer cast a meaningful look toward Ares. A moment later Ares turned to the group and said, "Joxer wants you to know that he can communicate mentally, he just doesn't like to do it around a group of people, he feels it's impolite."

Giles cleared his throat, drawing attention back to himself. "I believe that I understand what we have here, but if I am correct, we are missing one part of the prophecy... the part regarding witches."

* * * * *

Piper was driving furiously, trying to get them to Sunnydale as quickly as possible. Leo was in a state of near panic, but not from what the elder's had said, it was Piper's driving. He never liked driving anyway, but his wife made the experience like a carnival ride.

Paige spoke up from the back seat, "I think we found it. It says..."

And before she could continue Phoebe broke in. "Paraphrase, Paige. We can read it all once we get the general idea."

"Fine." Paige said with a glare at her sister. Then she continued, "Basically it says what Leo said, demons will open the door... they will kill every living thing, they will kill the earth itself. They believe that they are superior to all other things and only they deserve to survive. This thing reads like it's a sure thing that the door will open. The only clue how to stop it is in a rhyme."

She looked inquisitively at her sisters and Leo, silently asking if they wanted to hear it. After a moment she began to read.

*The time has come,
The end is near,
The twilight of mortals,
The days of fear,
The end of mankind,*

*Forevermore,
The end will come,
Through an open door,*

*Witches come
to seal the gate,
Gods and keys
can alter fate,
Witch of laughter,
Witch of love,
Witch who fights
to stay above,
Witch who longs
to find her own,
Witch who dreams
the dreams unknown.*

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" Asked Piper from the driver's seat.

"I didn't write it. I think it's a clue on how to seal the door so it can't be opened." Paige said defensively.

"Sorry, these things just upset me when they get all cryptic. I don't know why they can't just spell it out." Piper said, irritated.

"Does anyone know what we're going to do when we get to Sunnydale? I mean, where do we look for this door thing?" Phoebe asked.

"I have an idea where to start, I mean the book talks about five witches and we have three. I'm guessing that we need to find local witches to find the other two. They will probably have an idea of where to look." Leo said, proud of himself before he flinched and took another death-grip on the dashboard as Piper swerved past a semi-truck.

"So do we look in the yellow pages under 'Witches' or 'Black Arts'?" Paige asked, watching Leo's face scrunch up as Piper passed another truck.

"This would be a lot easier if you could just orb us there." Paige said conversationally, trying to take Leo's mind off the drive.

"It would, but I've never been there and I don't have anyone there calling me to orb to." Leo said, feeling useless.

"Don't worry about it, I was just saying..." Paige drifted off, letting silence fall over the occupants of the car.

"Bloody 'ell woman! First you leave me for the bloke with the snot covered antlers, then you kidnap me and drag me back to the bleedin States? What in hells name is goin on with you Drew?" Spike asked while trying to work loose from his ropes.

"Shhhh. Mummy's gonna make everything all right. We just have to close the door and then Spikey can go and play wherever he wants." Drucilla said from Mrak's arms.

"What door are you talking about, you bloody loon?" Spike asked furiously.

Mrak carefully moved Dru aside and walked over to Spike. He took hold of Spike by his duster, lifted him, and said, "The stars told her that you were needed to close the hellmouth, but they didn't say every piece of you was needed. So. shut. up."

Spike wisely shut his gob. He knew that Mrak had the ability and the will to leave pieces of him scattered across the Americas. It was only by Dru's goodwill that Mrak hadn't dusted him months ago.

The flight continued in silence, except for some cooing noises coming from Dru as she snuggled Mrak.

* * * * *

The sun had set an hour ago and they had finally reached Sunnydale. Piper drove slowly down the main street of the town, much to Leo's relief. There was no one. The town seemed to be abandoned. The eerie silence of the town carried into the car as no one could find a word to speak. All they could do was listen in hopes that some sign of life would make itself known.

Finally they got their wish, but not exactly the way that they would have wanted. A group of some twenty men and women, obviously not of the human variety walked out into the street. Piper stopped the car reflexively so as not to hit them and the car was quickly surrounded.

As Piper was about to try exploding one of the creatures, another car pulled up behind them and the creatures turned to see who else had joined them.

The doors of the second car flew open and two men got out. One tall and dark, the other small and skinny. The group in the first car witnessed that after saying something, the tall one threw himself into the largest concentration of creatures and started to fight with a vengeance. The smaller man defended himself against any creature that attacked him.

Finally Piper came to her senses and opened her car door, ignoring the shouts of the others in her car. As a creature turned to attack her, she lifted her hands and it exploded into dust. A moment later Phoebe was beside her. There were eight creatures still fighting. Phoebe went to the nearest creature and began... basically kicking its ass. Piper exploded three more before the strangers finished off the remaining four.

When the fighting was finished, the remaining occupants of both cars got out and everyone stood around looking at each other dumbly.

Finally Cordelia spoke, "Wow, that was really impressive, I mean that exploding thing, I see how that could come in real handy. I'm Cordelia, this is Angel and that's Doyle." Angel looked at the group, when he came to Leo, he averted his eyes.

"What were those things?" Paige asked in awe.

"Those were vampires, and you are?" Doyle asked, with obvious interest.

"Paige, these are my sisters Piper and Phoebe, and that guy is my brother-in-law Leo." She said with a flirtatious look at Doyle.

Cordelia took Doyle's arm possessively and asked, "So what are you guys doing in Sunnydale, I mean it looks like everyone but the vamps have left."

The witches looked at each other and Leo finally answered, "We got a message that we were needed here. But since we don't know anyone here, we're kind of lost."

"This message wouldn't have anything to do with an open door, by chance?" Doyle asked, receiving disapproving glances from Angel and Cordelia.

"That's the one." Paige said simply.

"Let's go, I know a place where we can talk more safely than in the street." Angel said with authority.

"Okay, you lead, we'll follow." Piper said, getting back into the car. She had no desire to stand in the street anymore than necessary.

The others followed suit and soon both cars were headed toward the house of the watcher.

* * * * *

"If I understand this correctly, there will need to be at least fourteen people involved in closing the hellmouth. Probably more if they have to be defended while they close it." Giles said with exasperation.

"Well let's look at this thing and see if we can figure out the keys, I mean the gods is pretty obvious." Willow said then shrunk timidly.

"Quite." Giles added as he read the relevant passage aloud.

"Key of mischief." Giles said absently, "Lord Strife, are any of those in this room aligned with mischief?"

Strife looked at each person in the room and stopped when facing Giles. "You're tha only one what carries mischief in his heart, but it's dormant. Damned shame. Ah don't think it's you."

"Right then, moving along. 'Key of heart', " Giles cast a questioning look at Cupid who just shook his head.

"'Key who fights and stands apart.' What do you suppose that means?" Giles asked the group in general.

"A fighter who's a loner. Someone who keeps his own counsel." Ares said, then with a glare from Buffy he added with a smirk, "or her own counsel."

"Deadboy." Xander said, and all eyes turned to him. "Angel is a fighter who keeps to himself."

"That doesn't do us any good if he isn't here." Buffy said snottily as there was a knock on the door.

"Angel?" Willow said as she opened the door.

"Speak of the devil." Xander said with a sour look.

"...and in he walks." Giles finished with his own sour look.

Chapter 3

Angel was invited in, then the others followed him into the room. Giles spoke quietly with Cordelia for a moment about the strangers. Hearing what had happened, he realized that everyone there probably had some stake in the prophecy.

"Please, please, do be quiet." Giles screamed over the din. "For the sake of expediency, please let's go around the room and each of us will introduce ourselves. And as we all seem to have some stake in this prophecy, don't be shy, this will go along much easier if we're all honest."

Everyone seemed to agree so he began, "I am Rupert Giles, watcher to the active vampire slayer and a chaos mage... retired."

Next was Buffy, she said, "Buffy, Vampire Slayer."

Willow quietly said, "Willow, Witch."

Xander realized it was his turn and thought furiously, "I'm Xander, the guy who gets the doughnuts."

Willow nudged him and whispered at him. Then he added, "And I've been possessed by a hyena."

Willow nudged and whispered again, "And a soldier."

Ares waited a moment to be assured that Xander was done and said, "Ares, God of War. And this is my consort, Joxer God of Peace and Protector of Innocence."

Cupid said, "Cupid, God of Love." and put his arm around Strife, looking directly at Buffy he continued, "And this is my husband Strife, the God of Mischief."

Piper was next, for the sake of time she decided to introduce her group. "I'm Piper, these are my sisters Phoebe and Paige, we are witches..."

"A triumvirate." Giles whispered, yet everyone heard.

"Yes, we are the charmed ones. And this is my husband Leo, he is our white-lighter." She finished in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Angel." Leo said for clarification.

"What?" Angel said from across the room, confused.

"I'm an angel. What did you think I meant." Leo asked, equally confused.

"Leo, his name IS Angel, remember?" Piper said, taking Leo's hand.

"Oh, sorry. Go ahead." Leo said embarrassed.

"Angel, Vampire." Angel said simply.

Leo looked shocked and Angel started to explain when Cordelia cut in. "Don't get him started, he's got a soul, now he's sorry, doesn't bite anymore."

Then she continued, "Cordelia Chase, I'm... his secretary."

"Doyle, I'm a seer for the powers that be and..." he looked at Cordelia and decided that he had to tell her sometime, might as well be now. "A half-Bracken demon."

"If that's everyone, let's get to deciphering some prophecies." Giles said with enthusiasm.

* * * * *

Everyone broke into groups, keeping to the groups they arrived in. Everyone at some point had gotten copies of all three prophecies and they were all trying to decide who was who.

"A moment of your time, please." Giles yelled over the conflicting voices.

The chatter quieted and he asked, "Let's pool our information. Put your ideas out for everyone, and maybe we can figure this out."

Everyone seemed to agree.

"The key of mischief? Has anyone figured out who that is?" He asked hopefully.

Strife shook his head and no one else indicated that they had anything.

"The key of heart?" Giles called out.

"I think it's Leo." Cupid said to the room in general.

Giles nodded and made a note.

"Key who fights and stands apart?" Giles said.

"Angel!" said a chorus of voices.

"Why do you think it's me?" Angel asked defensively.

"Puh-leeze, it just screams broodiness, it's you." Cordelia said with finality.

Giles nodded and made another note, then said, "Key of darkness sirens call?"

"I don't think I know what that means." said Phoebe.

"I believe it means someone who summons dark forces or beings?" Giles finished uncertainly.

"Demon magnet." Buffy said triumphantly looking at Xander.

"Of course." Giles said and made a note.

"Key of evil saves us all?" Giles said, obviously not having a clue himself.

A chorus of headshaking proved to him that he wasn't the only one.

"Witch of laughter?" He said to the group in general.

"Paige." "Paige." "Paige." Piper, Phoebe and Leo said simultaneously.

Everyone looked at Paige who blushed. "So I like to have a good time."

"Witch of love?" He said, beginning to tire.

"Piper" Leo said, expecting her sisters to speak up as quickly.

Giles looked to Cupid for confirmation before noting it on his paper.

"Witch who fights to stay above." He asked, looking directly at Phoebe.

She nodded and raised her hand.

"Would you care to explain?" Giles asked, wanting to be sure of the placements.

"My ex-husband was an arch-demon and tried everything to make me live in the underworld with him." she said with pain in her voice.

"You divorced an arch-demon?" Giles asked in amazement, never having heard of it being done.

"Actually, I vanquished him," At the blank looks she whispered, "killed."

"Oh." was all Giles said before making his note.

"Witch who longs to find her own." Giles said looking at Willow.

"Yeah, it sounds like me, but I still wanna know, my own what?" she said petulantly.

Giles noted and finally said, "Witch who dreams the dreams unknown?"

"It sounds like a seer to me, but Doyle isn't a witch... are you? I mean, it's not like you would HIDE something from me, now is it?" she asked with anger in her voice.

"No, no witch, the half-demon thing was my big secret." he said, trying to give her a convincing smile.

She wasn't buying it.

* * * * *

Mrak, Dru and Spike were walking through the streets of Sunnydale. There wasn't another being in sight. Mrak had convinced Spike to follow along without complaint. Spike rubbed his jaw absently, still feeling the aftereffects of Mrak's convincing.

"Town's no bleedin' fun without the happy-meals walking around." Spike said to no one in particular.

"We need to join the others, it's coming soon." Dru said and began walking faster.

It wasn't until they were on the block that Spike realized where she was leading them.

"Bloody 'ell"

* * * * *

There was a knock on the door. Since he was closest and Giles probably couldn't hear it over the voices, Leo went to answer the door. When he opened it he found himself looking straight into the chest of something, he looked up to see that it wasn't something human. The antlers dripping goo was a good clue. "You gonna let us in? We're supposed to close a door or sumthin."

"Mister Giles! Some... thing is at the door for you." Leo called, not wanting to have to fight this thing.

Giles came to the door, followed by most of the people in the house. "Merciful Gods!" he exclaimed. "Nah, were back here." could be heard from Strife in the background.

"Excuse me, can I help you?" Giles asked the big... thing, trying to be polite.

"I hope so, we came from South America to close a damned door. Are you gonna let us in or what?" Mrak asked irritably.

"Yes, of course, do come in." Giles said, his manners finally asserting themselves.

"Make that thing go away!" Spike said from outside, shielding his eyes and pointing at Leo.

"It burns! It burns!" Drucilla whimpered. Mrak was immediately at her side.

"Leo, would you please go to the other side of the room. Vampires are susceptible to holy objects... er... you get the idea." Giles said as Leo made his way to the other side of the room.

"You're here to help close the door? Why?" Giles asked Spike, not trusting him for a moment.

"These two kidnapped me, tied me up and brought me here, you might want to ask them." Spike said waspishly.

"Come inside and we'll talk." Giles said.

The room fell silent as the two vampires and the chaos demon walked into the house. Giles flinched when he saw the mucous dripping from the demon's antlers. He just knew he wouldn't be able to get it out of his carpet.

"That's him!" Said Strife as soon as Spike walked in the room.

"What's him?" Spike asked with big guilty eyes.

"That's the key of mischief." Strife declared.

"Very well, that makes sense." Giles said, elbowing his way through the crowd back to the table where he left his notebook.

"And Drucilla would be the witch who dreams the dreams unknown." Giles said absently as he wrote.

"And you are?" Giles asked the chaos demon politely.

"Mrak." he said shortly.

Giles decided to just accept that Mrak was the 'key of evil who can save us all', without provoking him by asking.

"Witches! Do we need any supplies to perform the ritual?" Giles asked in as loud a speaking voice as he could manage.

"We need the words, all of us to say the words." Drucilla said to him, unusually sane.

"Which words, we have three different versions of the prophecy." Giles said irritated.

She walked over and took the notebook from him and started to write. When he made a move to look over her shoulder, Mrak took a step forward and Giles knew he was just fine not knowing until she was done.

Leo and the gods all felt a shudder and realized as one what was happening.

"We have to go now. Giles, you know where the door is?" Ares asked.

Giles nodded.

Ares looked into Giles mind and saw the location. He sent the information to the other gods, then to Leo and Paige.

Ares looked around the room and said, "Everyone who can transport, grab a mortal and let's get moving. The thing could open any minute."

And each divinity took hold of someone and flashed out of the house. It took a few trips, but within minutes the house was empty and blessedly silent.

Chapter 4

The occupants of the room looked around. "Didn't that thing used to be a lot smaller?" Buffy asked, pointing at the hellmouth portal that was twelve feet across and glowing with a sickening brown malignant power.

"Yes, the power being used on the other side to open it is causing it to grow. We must stop it now." Giles said, holding the spell that Drucilla had written for him.

"Spikey, you need to go over there, that horn of the pentagram is yours." Drucilla said, indicating a point of the star.

"The bright one goes over there." She said pointing but keeping her eyes turned away.

"Daddy goes here and kitten goes there." And then she took her own point of the star.

Each of the gods automatically fell into place behind their key, likewise each witch fell into their place.

"Doesn't Mrak need to go to your point Drucilla?" Giles asked, confused.

"No, silly. Mrak isn't evil. He's just cranky. Flying does that to him." Drucilla said with a laugh.

Giles was carefully tearing the paper that Drucilla gave him into sections. When he finished, he walked to each witch and gave each her section of the spell.

Doyle heard a noise from the hall. He went stealthily to investigate. After investigating a few hallways away from the hellmouth chamber he could see the things that figured most prominently in his nightmares. The Scourge. They were walking in a military style line in pairs down the hall.

Doyle discretely made his way back into the room and quietly walked up to Giles, since he seemed to have taken on the role of leader, and since Angel was a little busy with being a Key and all.

"There are demons in the building. I think they're protecting the hellmouth from anyone trying to do what we're trying to do." He said then tilted his head trying to decide if that made any sense at all.

"They're probably defending the portal, thinking we would be coming in from outside." Giles said.

"So, what do you want me to do?" Doyle asked nervously.

"I need for you to gather everyone who is capable of fighting and not involved in the ritual. This ritual will not be quiet and will probably cause some tremors, at least, during the spell." Giles said, thinking over strategy.

"We'll be fine, I've been wanting to see the slayer in action." Doyle said with enthusiasm.

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Doyle went to Buffy and Mrak and drew them away from the others. It was a toss up as to which seemed more delighted to have something to fight. Doyle led them out of the hellmouth chamber and into the hallway.

"What's up with these guys anyway?" Buffy asked while they made their way quietly through the basement of the old high school.

"They hate humans... and half-humans like me... and vampires... they pretty much hate anyone who isn't a pure-blooded one of them." he said definitely.

"So they're like demon nazis?" She asked with wide eyes.

"Exactly." He responded.

"Good, that just makes 'em better to kill." she said in her too perky way.

Mrak just nodded in agreement.

When they turned the next corner, the battle was on.

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There was a blur of darkness and a man appeared. "Cole!" Phoebe said with shock.

"Phoebe, you need to get out of here. Come with me and you'll be safe." Cole said, pleading.

"Why are you not dead?" Phoebe asked, becoming angry.

"I'm the source of all evil, I can't die." he said, thinking it was obvious.

"No, I found a way to kill you. The vanquishing spell was specifically made for you, I even used your own blood to bind it to you. It HAD to work. How did you come back?" She asked, now fully angry.

"Okay, okay. When I saw what you were doing, I tweaked reality so that your vanquishing spell wouldn't kill me." he said guiltily.

"Tweaked reality?" Giles asked.

"Come on Phoeb, we need to get out of here, this things going to open and nothing is going to stop it." he said, beginning to panic.

"If you tweaked reality to prevent her vanquishing evil, then you are responsible for the hellmouth opening. Your 'Tweak' thinned the world walls enough to allow this to happen." Giles said with anger.

Phoebe looked at Cole and could tell that Giles had figured it out. She began to cry bitter tears. The world was going to end because of her.

"Phoebe, I just wanted to be with you. Is that so terrible?" Cole asked, honestly not understanding.

"Cole, because of us, because of our fight, the world is going to end. I don't want to survive if all this happened because of me." she said seriously.

Cole nodded his head in understanding. Then he asked, "If I could make it better, would you try to talk to me? I'm not asking you to come back to me, just talk to me and see if we can't at least be friends."

Phoebe realized what he was offering and couldn't refuse. He would give up his power to seal the hellmouth.

"Yes. You stop this and I will listen to you... really listen and try to understand and maybe work it out." she said seriously.

He nodded and took his place at the fifth point of the pentagram in front of Drucilla.

Giles began to speak the words of the ritual.

*Fates and Elders and Powers that Be
Give aid to witch and god and key,
Childe of dark,
Child of light,
Childe who walks
in eternal night,
Child with darkness
sirens call,
Child most evil
save us all.*

Each of the keys stood exactly on their points of the pentagram. Each of the gods walked up to their key and embraced them from behind. In a multicolored flash of light four of the keys had become children and the gods were nowhere to be seen. Giles stopped his part of the ritual and Paige began to speak, casting the spell on the hellmouth through the child Spike/Strife,

*Child of Laughter,
Childe of night,
Child is lowly,
Childe of flight,
Childe reborn and soul restore,
Childe will bind the evil door.*

And a blue glow passed from Paige, through the child Spike/Strife and covered the hellmouth portal. Piper began to speak next.

*Child of passion,
Childe of love,
Child of heaven,
Childe above,
Childe undying unable to heal,
Childe will bind the evil seal.*

A red glow passed from Piper through the child Leo/Cupid and covered the hellmouth portal. Phoebe began to speak next.

*Child of violence,
Childe of pain,
Child so lonely,
Childe restrain,
Childe who cannot walk in day,
Childe will bind the evil way.*

A yellow glow passed from Phoebe through the child Angel/Ares and covered the hellmouth portal. Willow began to speak next.

*Child of nightmares,
Childe of dreams,
Child was never
what he seems,
Child who can't release his wrath,
Childe will bind the evil path.*

A green glow passed from Willow through the child Xander/Joxer and covered the hellmouth portal. Drucilla began to speak next.

*Child of evil,
Child of dark,
Child will never
feel life's spark,
Child with love that flares irate,
Child will bind the evil gate*

And darkness flowed out of Drucilla and through Cole. The spell continued to run, powers flowing from all five directions. In a flash of dark power, Cole was made into a child, completing the five, then an instant later he was adult again. The power flowed until Cole collapsed. When he fell out of his position, all the magics stopped simultaneously. There were sixteen bodies scattered around the room in a circle. But the hellmouth was back to it's normal size, not glowing at all.

Chapter 5

Buffy and Doyle were leaning against a wall, taking a well-deserved rest. They both watched admiringly as Mrak literally tore a Scourge demon in half, the hard way.

"I really needed this." Buffy said mopping sweat off her brow.

"Me too, haven't had a good fight in a while. And these guys aren't that tough when you can face them a few at a time. They get kind of scary when you have a thousand of them staring at you." Doyle said absently, from a place of memory.

"This is just right for me. I didn't get to have a workout today and this hit the spot... Hey Mrak! You've torn him into enough pieces that I think he's going to stay dead." Buffy said laughing.

Mrak looked over at Buffy and rolled his eyes, then his head turned quickly as he saw some more Scourge. Within a second, all three of them were on the hunt.

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Cordelia moved from one person to another, trying to turn them so they would be comfortable. She was the only one left conscious in the room. All of those with heartbeats to begin with, had steady heartbeats now.

When she came to Angel she was surprised. There were two Angels lying side by side. They were exactly the same but somehow opposite. One of the Angels was wearing a white shirt and tan pants. The other was dressed in Angel's usual black ensemble.

She had kind of expected two Spikes when she got to him in the circle, but there was just the one, probably for the best.

Finally she heard a groan as Ares began to wake. He immediately went to Joxer and took him into his arms. Ares just held him close and gently rocked. Strife was next to awaken, he did, move for move, exactly the same thing as Ares.

Leo awoke and went immediately to Piper. He looked at Ares and Joxer then to Strife and Cupid. He scooted himself behind Piper and pulled her close and began to rock her too.

Xander woke next. His head hurt and he felt confused. On second thought, he felt that he could see more clearly than ever before. His life up to this day had been confused. He surveyed the room, when his eyes fell on Spike,

lying alone and unconscious he forced himself up and went to Spike's side. He pulled Spike into his lap and petted his hair.

Joxer came awake to a wonderful sensation. His beloved was holding him close and protecting him. He snuggled into Ares chest and sighed in contentment. Then he noticed something different. A flash of panic flew through his body because this couldn't happen. He checked again, it was still there. With a sly smile he decided to test it out. Joxer turned himself so that his mouth was by Ares' ear.

"I love you, Ares" he said quietly.

The rocking stopped. Ares sat, shocked. He turned to face Joxer and with a grin Joxer stuck his tongue out at Ares.

Ares pulled him close and began to cry.

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Giles came to wakefulness and saw the fallout of the spells that had been cast. He recalled the words of some of the individual spells and what he was seeing began to make sense.

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Angel woke up feeling like he had been torn apart. As he looked to his right he thought that perhaps he had because he saw himself. He tried to understand what he was looking at when he realized that he really did feel different than before. He could feel weakness and hunger and something else that he couldn't remember.

The figure next to him woke up and groaned. When their eyes met there was confusion before the first Angel spoke. "Are you Angelus?"

The second Angel examined himself and said, "I think maybe I am. But I don't feel insane... or evil. I just feel like I was before, but lighter."

"I think I'm human." The first Angel said in wonder as he tried to feel his own pulse.

"Then that means that you are Liam not Angel. I mean, we were Angel, isn't that how it worked?"

"Yes, I think it is." Liam said with a smile at his counterpart.

* * * * *

Doyle, Mrak, and Buffy came back into the hellmouth chamber. They were all feeling pretty good after some cathartic violence. When they saw their

friends laying around the floor Buffy went to Giles, Mrak went to Drucilla, and Doyle leaned against the wall watching, wistfully.

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Spike woke up to a wonderful sensation. He was being held and petted and loved. A warm body was holding him tight like he was precious. Then it registered, 'A warm body?' Spike's eyes snapped open. His eyes met Xander's and he understood. The boy had finally let loose of his masks and decided to be himself, and he loved Spike. That was perfectly fine with Spike. He had known he liked the boy since he lived in his basement. But as long as the whelp was hiding who he was behind that goofy act, Spike wasn't interested in dodging the theatrics.

"Do you mind?" Xander asked Spike seriously.

"Not at all love, took you bloody long enough." Spike said with a smile to take any sting out of the words.

Xander pulled Spike's face close so they could share a kiss. Xander was surprised by the cold wet sensation of Spike's mouth. He knew Spike didn't have body heat but hadn't considered what it would be like to kiss him. The sensation wasn't unpleasant, or unwelcome, just unexpected.

Spike was honestly surprised by the boy's kiss. He never would have credited the whelp with being able to kiss like an adult. But the boy was slow and steady, taking what he wanted without forcing at all. Spike was usually one to be in control but this he approved of.

* * * * *

Cole woke to find himself lying beside Mrak who was soothing Drucilla. He looked over and saw Phoebe laying unconscious a few feet away. He slowly made his way over to her and cradled her head in his lap.

He gently smoothed her hair and took inventory of himself. The power of the source of all evil was gone. But he still had his own power. He hadn't expected that.

"You're not evil anymore?" Phoebe asked weakly from his lap.

"No, I'm just me. The me that I was born to be." he said with a smile.

"But you were born a half-demon." she said in a tone that made it a question.

"Yes, I am a half-demon. Like I said, I am what I was born to be. I'm asking you to accept me like this." he said with assurance.

"No, I will not be with someone who is evil." she said with permanence.

He understood now. She was a bigot. She didn't want him. She wanted what she could make of him. Without any anger toward her he understood that they could never have had a chance. She always wanted him to be something other than what he was.

Cole looked around the room and noticed Doyle leaning on the wall and obviously feeling alone and left out with all the romance in the room.

"Phoebe, you're right. I'm a half-demon and you could never accept my demon half. And no matter how much I would try to change, ultimately I can only be what I am. You don't have to worry. I won't be stalking you or trying to get you back anymore. But I might still come by sometime and invite you to lunch or something." he said with a friendly smile.

"I... I'd like that." she said disbelieving.

Cole helped her to her feet and went to lean on the wall.

* * * * *

Buffy was looking around the room in wonderment at the people behaving so differently. "What happened to them? Did the hellmouth change them?" Buffy asked, concerned.

"Not precisely. The spell that we used to close the hellmouth was written in such a way that it gave each key the possibility to gain something that they need. And the power of the gods amplified the effects to go beyond the wording of the spells." Giles said, figuring it out as he spoke.

"So spill, what did it do to Xander and Spike?" she asked curiously.

"I believe it restored Spike's soul, not in the way that Angel's was. Angel's was cursed with a thrice damned conscience. Spike's is just a normal human soul. Spike may choose to become something other than what he was, the option is his."

"What about Xander?" She asked while watching Xander and Spike tenderly kiss.

"Xander has the opportunity to be himself, whoever that may be." Giles said succinctly.

"And Leo?"

"I don't know him well enough to say more than there is some pain in his past that he hasn't been able to deal with. Now he has the opportunity to deal with it."

"I can see what happened to Angel. But why?" she asked while watching the two forms of Angel talking.

"I believe that this is partly the result of the curse. Because the demon and soul were both cursed to enhance their emotions, it had the effect of putting two angry dogs into a pit. The curse prevented soul and demon from fusing as Spike did, so the body split instead. The human Angel has the opportunity to live his life and make something of it. The vampire Angel has the opportunity to be good, if he chooses."

"Who was the fifth key?" she asked.

"Cole, he held the power of the source of all evil. The power was used to close the hellmouth. As I understand it, he has the opportunity to be what he was born to be." Giles said with thought.

"And what's that?" Buffy prompted.

"I have no idea, whatever he chooses to be, using whatever abilities he has." Giles said, getting to his feet.

"So what was the deal with the gods, why did we need them?" Buffy asked, honestly curious.

"The gods provided the power to support the keys. The witches cast the spells they needed, if the gods hadn't been there, the keys would have been drained of life energy and probably killed. And the spells wouldn't be powerful enough to bind the hellmouth closed." Giles said in lecture mode.

"But what's the deal with the keys? I mean, why couldn't the witches and gods cast the spells without them?"

"Because they truly are keys. Their essences were used to form the magical bonds that seal the hellmouth. Without the keys, the spells would be like setting the combination on your luggage to 000. The keys create an effective binding."

"This mumbo jumbo is too much for me. I'll stick to slaying if you don't mind." Buffy said, back into perky mode.

"I wouldn't have it any other way." Giles said with a grin.

* * * * *

Ares finally separated from Joxer and made his way to Giles, he didn't have a great understanding of witchcraft and wanted to know what had been done to his beloved.

"Giles, do you have a moment?" Ares asked, but it sounded more like a command.

"Of course Lord Ares, how may I help you?" Giles asked in full polite mode.

"I want to understand what the spell did to Joxer. It changed him and I want to know why." Ares said with concern.

"As I understand the spell, it actually took the keys and the gods back to their childhood forms and rebuilt them. The effects of certain traumas in earlier life were negated or altered as an effect of the spell." Giles said in lecture mode.

"Then that's why he grew his tongue back?" Ares said in wonder.

"He did? Remarkable. I hadn't considered that effect. I mean, I knew that each of the keys was altered but I hadn't considered how the gods would be effected. Did the experience change you at all?"

"I don't think so."

"Perhaps it's because he was born a mortal. A child god would be able to deal with traumas as they happened." Giles said, thinking aloud.

"I'm going to go back to Joxer now, thank you for your help."

* * * * *

Cole made his way to the wall beside Doyle. "Do you mind if I join you?" he asked timidly.

"Naw, don't mind at all. M' name's Doyle, you're Cole?" Doyle asked, extending a hand.

"Yeah." Cole replied.

"I couldn't help but overhear what happened between you and your girl. I'm sorry, I just told Cordelia that I'm a half-demon today and got about the same reaction... except she didn't try to kill me."

"I'm beginning to think that I don't belong with humans, but what other choice is there? Demons treat us like we're filth because we have human blood." Cole said despondently.

"What we do is stick together. There's a lot of us halfie's running around. We just need to be good to each other. An it's a damned site better than being looked down on by humans AND demons." Doyle said with some fire.

"I think you're right, what say we get out of here and have a drink? I know a really nice place in San Francisco." Cole asked pleasantly.

"Sounds like a good idea, I'm just gonna let Angel... the Angels know I'm going so he... they don't worry." Doyle said before bouncing off to talk to Angel.

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Doyle walked up to the Angels and asked, "Angel, can I talk to you for a second." His gaze shifted from one to the other, not knowing which was his boss.

"Don't worry Doyle, I'm Angelus, he's Liam. We've decided that I'll be using the name Angel because... well..." Angelus stammered.

"The name Angelus comes with a lot of baggage." Liam said from behind Angel.

"Right. Anyway, it's me you probably need to talk to. What did you want?" Angel said.

"Uh... I'm leaving with Cole, just didn't want you to think that I got lost or sumthin. If any visions come, I'll call you on the cell." Doyle said before turning to leave.

Angel and Liam watched as Doyle talked with Cole for a few seconds before they disappeared in a dark blur.

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Leo walked up to Giles and said, "We are going to be leaving. Phoebe want's to get home so she can go to work in the morning."

"I understand but do you think you can wait for just a few moments before you leave?" Giles asked casually.

"I suppose..." Leo began to say when Giles whistled to gain the crowd's attention.

Giles spoke to the group, "Now that we are all awake, what say we go back to my place to have a celebratory drink before we go our separate ways?"

There was mass agreement as the divinities began to flash people out of the chamber.

The End