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SacredEarth – A Buffy The Vampire Slayer Spin-off

SACREDEARTH INTO THE STORM



It should have been a relaxing weekend in the countryside for Rupert Giles, a chance to regain clarity after leaving the States. His plans change when he encounters Del' Pridwyn, the matriarch of a local weird, feared and slandered family. Something is driving the subterrestrials from their otherworldly home and Del' needs Giles' help to defeat the monster before it devours her friends

Beautiful Black Night
Precious White Moon
Sacred Silver Earth

The traffic was flowing freely along the A38. Clouds of battleship grey gathered in the west, smudging out the sunset. It was a relief to be driving on the correct side of the road in a car with a proper gear stick; he was in control, connected to the vehicle. Panoramas of flowing vales, farmland, forest, landscapes and seascapes paraded above the rough grass of the retaining banks as the road took him towards his retreat.

Into the sunset
Into the storm

Amber lights, clustered on hills, told of where towns and villages were settling into darkness, houses, churches, trees, pylons perfect shapes as if they were die-punched out of black paper. The traffic intensified as he passed through St Budeaux. He was obliged to use his windscreen wipers as the storm broke above him. Fresh rain washed the tarmac, until in the twilight, the road seemed to be made of obsidian. Ahead of him, the Tamar Bridge, slung across the waters that separated Devon and Cornwall, a skeleton of steel, gatekeeper to the ancient kingdom.

He had forgotten how quickly darkness fell in British winters. He felt a sudden longing for Sunnydale, for friends gone, for friends left behind, for sunshine. He wished that he had not had to send her home to California. He missed her, the bounciness in her voice, her kooky comments and her endearing, if slightly skewered world-view. She had not wanted to leave; and as he had watched the taxi pull away he had, not for the first time in his life, regretted doing the right thing. He had been right, of course; Rupert Giles knew he had a duty to do, even if it was personally perilous.

Buffy Summers had known it, although it was love rather than duty that had caused her to lay-down her life. Ever since her unnatural renaissance, she had become more introspective, capable of trusting her own judgement and relying on her own resources. The fact that she had been unwilling to do so was what had prompted him to leave the States in the first place. She was strong, yet wrapped in fragility as bone is wrapped in

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flesh.

Flesh protects bone

If it is cut

It bleeds

It heals

Bone gives strength to flesh

Blood gives life to both

He passed through a succession of fascinating towns. Low roofed, granite-fronted houses, twisted woodlands, narrowed roads. After living in the States, everything here seemed smaller somehow, discrete and unprocessed. On his right was the sandstone cathedral of Truro, a trinity of spires, ranks of saints, illuminated by the same amber light that settled like a halo around the city. When he had passed the outskirts, the farmland gave way to heath-land, to gorse, to heather, to the cragged remains of the engine houses that had once powered the machinery that took men down and took ore up from the mine shafts deep inside the earth. It was a scarred landscape.

He left the dual carriageway at Scorrier, through a woodland of rhododendrons, past a corrugated-clad industrial estate, up-along the hill to Mount Ambrose and down again into Redruth. He had chosen the town at the suggestion of the Devonian Coven, who had told him that the area was a centre of mystic energy and a good place for ghost hunting. The hotel was set in its own grounds, just outside of the town. It was a pale grey Georgian building, with portico, mouldings and supporting columns white like icing sugar.

He stepped into the porch and rang the bell. He looked down at his feet, at the colourful soggy mush that had once been confetti and was now trampled flat on the slate-tiled floor. His call was answered by a young woman in her early twenties. She was short but well rounded, strong arms, full hips. She was dressed in a polyester suit that had not been cut to flatter her broad figure, barefooted, her shoes tucked underneath one arm. On her left breast was a gold embossed nametag: 'Del' Pridwyn'. She had the longest, blackest hair that he had ever seen and unusually blue eyes. She smiled, despite her obvious weariness.

"Mr Giles?" she spoke in a soft West Country accent. "We 'ad almost given up on you, please do come in." She held open the door and they stepped into the foyer.

The hotel had a settled look, but it was tastefully decorated with faded furnishings, brass fittings and oil paintings as if it had been furnished once and furnished forever. The girl climbed under the counter hatch and opened the leather-bound register. She handed him a pen with an apologetic smile. "I was just finishing for the night," she explained, pointing down at her bare feet.

"That's quite alright," said Giles, a smile touching his lips. He signed the register and handed over his credit card. "Could you please send up some tea and a cheese sandwich?"

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“Most certainly,” said Del’ Pridwyn as she handed him his key. “I’m afraid you’re too late for a morning newspaper. Would you like an ‘and with they there bags?’”

Giles was not in the habit of travelling light and since the hotel did not have a lift he was not looking forward to dragging them up the narrow staircase. “Yes, if you would be so kind as to call the porter?”

Del’ gave a wry smile, jumped over the counter, took a suitcase in each hand and the holdall under one arm and proceeded up the stairs two at a time. She turned around mid-step. “Oh sorry,” she said having realised that she had let her professional persona slip. “If you would like to follow me to your room.”

Giles smiled, half in amazement, half in amusement. It was, he thought, just the kind of mischief that Buffy would delight in performing.

The next morning she was at the desk again, signing out the previous night’s guests. She smiled as they exchanged morning salutations. After breakfast she was cleaning the woodwork, yellow duster in hand, a mist of lemon scent hanging about her. She was talking to a youth of about fourteen who leaned against the counter in a most flippant manner. In contrast to her he was fair and lean. He once heard her call him 'Jago' as they engaged in a friendly kind of verbal sparring. Her replacement arrived at half nine, thanking Del’ for covering at such short notice.

“Miss Pridwyn,” Giles caught her as she was leaving. “I was contemplating a drive along the coast. Could you recommend somewhere where I might eat lunch?” Jago and Del’ exchanged glances.

“St Ives has many good restaurants and such like, if you’re thinking of visiting the Tate,” Del’ offered.

“And there’re some pub’s in and around Portreath and Gwithian if...ouch!” Jago started and stopped as Del’ thumped him in the stomach. “What the bloody ‘ell did ‘e do that fer?” Jago glared at her. Giles regarded the pair. He was missing something important. “Just stay away from they mine workings,” Jago finished. Giles enquired why.

Del’ leaned closer, a look of mystery about her face. “Because,” she whispered conspiratorially, “The Pixies might get you.” With a little laugh, she and Jago turned and were gone.

It was mid morning when Giles returned inland from his coastal excursion. He has taken the scenic route, through the villages of Bridge and Illogan. Calloused hawthorn bushes topped the hedgerows that lined the single-lane road. Here and there he passed huddles of houses, their bared gardens, hemmed with bark-chippings and garden centre ornaments that seemed to him to be offensive to the antiquity of their surroundings. The old world meets the new.

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Giles was part of both worlds and reconciling the two of them was not easy. Vampires, werewolves, demonic things, in his experience most people thought that they belonged to the dark ages; with all his heart he wished that they did.

The road widened as he drove towards Tehidy, modern bungalows, ancient woods, a housing estate and the river valley of Tuckingmill. He parked in a grit-surfaced car park that had been built alongside a footpath. The valley had been improved over the last few years, drainage ditches had been cleared, reed beds planted, top soil added, dumped cars and domestic appliances had been removed. He paused for a second, taking in the vista, breathing in the frost-pinched air and surveying the skyline. For the first time in a long while he felt at peace with the world.

He climbed over an algae slimed stile and found himself walking along a gravel path, between reed beds, wild ponds, thickets of brambles and sycamore. Ahead of him was a concreted area, part of a disused structure that had once been part of an arsenic works. In the centre was a group of about half a dozen young people, sitting crossed-legged, listening intently to a slightly older woman who sat with her back against him. She had long black hair. She turned around. "Mr Giles, have you come to spy on us?"

"Miss Pridwyn, I never..." Giles began.

"Tis' of no matter now," she dismissed his explanation with a wave. "Like attracts like. Take a seat," she pointed to a spot beside her. This was becoming surreal. He sat down, somewhat uncomfortable with his lowly position. "As I was saying, your average otherworldly finds it very difficult to 'ave a go at you in its non-corporeal form provided you 'ave a clean conscience."

"You mean they have no justification for attacking you?" Giles interrupted. All heads turned to face him. Del' gave him a scolding stare and continued.

"Indeed, which is why we must lead a good life," she surveyed her congregation with steady eyes. "And as for those that have a corporeal existence, Jago, 'Melza, 'Renza and I will be patrolling tonight, you lot continue training in your spare time and I will see you all outside of chapel this Sunday, especially if your name begins with a T," she addressed the last comment to a group of three siblings, all of the same age. They looked away – the rest of the gathering giggled at their shame.

"If their name begins with T?" Giles whispered to Jago.

"Tegan, Tegwyn and Talek, the triplets," Jago replied. Del' jumped to her feet, embracing each of the young people, kissing some, encouraging others, until just she, Giles and Jago were left.

"Those are err, quite deep concepts that you are teaching these children," Giles said as he cleaned his glasses. He replaced his spectacles. "Tell me, how did you learn of them?"

For a moment Del' did not respond. She studied him, blue eyes absorbing every detail.

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She licked her bottom lip as she considered what to say. “To me and mine,” she said measurably, “when you meditate deeply on these matters they are as clear as, as the dawn.”

“As the dawn?” he echoed her strange choice of phrase. “You are more than a girl with a bent towards the mystic.”

Jago stepped between them. “And you sir,” he declared. “Are more than a holiday maker with a bad sense of direction.”

The trio sat in Giles’ car, munching on the home-baked morsels that Del’ had packed for their lunch. The rain was in for the day, Del’ had said, as they looked out over the Atlantic. The ocean was grey, the colour of water in a jar that has been used to wash many colours from a child’s paintbrush. Strong winds punched and rocked the car, howling like a toddler throwing a tantrum. “These pasties, interesting concept,” Giles commented as he considered the bundle of pastry-wrapped meat and vegetables in his hands. “It must be the original food on-the-move.”

“Quite possibly,” Del’ agreed. “The idea is that they should be tough enough to hold their filling even if they get dropped down a mineshaft.”

“’Tis when you make the pastry,” Jago interjected.

“Please ignore my cousin,” Del’ returned. “He’s not as old as he looks.” Giles laughed. Jago opened his mouth to issue a stinging response but thought the better of it. Del’ paused for a moment, stopping, considering, deciding. “Jago, there’s an amusement arcade just down the road from ‘ere, why don’t you go play some shoot-em-ups?”

“Del’, look at it outside,” Jago protested, indicating with his thumb towards the rain-glazed windows. Del’ removed a five-pound note from her wallet and handed it to Jago. “Excellent,” his attitude changed immediately. He opened the door and hopped out.

“And I mean games only, no playing those bloody fruit machines. Jago do you ‘ear me?” she shouted after him. He gave her a jaunty wave and ran, his collar turned-up against the rain, towards the row of single-storey shops.

For a good half a minute they sat still and silent, holding their positions. The wind continued to blow, the rain continued to fall. “Mr Giles, were you sent here?” she let the question hang for a while. “I’m sorry to ‘ave to ask like this but I know because...” they locked eyes as if she was about to share something deeply personal. “I’ve read all your books,” she offered by way of a retraction.

It was as if she was accusing him of some wrongdoing – should he apologise, should he rationalise, should he do nothing? She dismissed his unvoiced concerns. “You may not realise it, but there’s a million nasty things below us, here and now, under the earth. Since the mines were left to flood they’ve been coming to the surface. I could do with an extra person, someone with a different perspective...” she was asking him to join her demon

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hunting club. “Something’s killin’ the Yemps, you know the friendlier kind of sub-terrestrials?” His quizzical expression told her that he had never before encountered a Yemp. “I owe it to them to find out what it is and to kill it before it gets the taste for human blood.”

They were interrupted by the sight of Jago running towards them, his urgency was not caused by the rain. A gust of cold air filled the car as Jago flung open the door and bundled himself into the back seats. “Del’,” he gasped. “Last night at Gwithian, they found the bodies of two surfers – partly eaten.”

“It’s started already,” Del’ proclaimed. She looked over at Giles. She was asking for his help, but could she really ask such a well-known author on the subject of the supernatural to spend a whole week with them? She need not have feared.

“Well then, Miss Pridwyn, we’d better get started.”

“You mean it, you’re in?” Del’ gasped with glee. She reached forward and kissed him, grabbing the scruff of his neck and pulling him into a rough but friendly embrace. “Excellent, let’s get going.”

The closer one gets to the coast the heavier the raindrops seem to fall, swollen with vapour from somewhere over the mid-ocean, carried by full-bellied clouds, bursting heavily against the high cliffs and hill tops. It was past six o’clock. The party of five stalked the unknown predator. Moody clouds ran past the segmented moon. A tin cross, an armful of stakes, salt, a Geiger counter and a bag of bread crusts, these were the tools of their work. The demons and monsters don’t mind the rain and gales, Del’ had said, they will be out tonight.

In front of them a tangle of bracken in brambles caught their attention. An adit, a small shaft compensating for the differences in airflow between the surface and the underworlds; there had once been a balance between the two, now it was down to Giles and a handful of Cornish cousins to compensate for those differences.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t get a better pair of Wellingtons,” said Del’ as Giles stepped awkwardly amongst the undulations of rabbit burrows, tufted grasses and occasional puddles of mud. She had to confess he looked amusingly out of his territory, dressed in oilskins, thick gloves, face smeared with petroleum jelly to stop the elements chafing his skin. “Are you still feeling cold?”

Giles shook his head, it was better than speaking a lie.

Jago’s sisters panned the area with their Geiger counters. Over the centuries the Yemps had absorbed radiation from the isotopes that leached from the granite. They signalled to Del’, pointing towards the tangle of bracken and brambles. “I think she’s waiting for us over there,” Del’ pointed towards the opening of the pressure vent. The vents were less steep than the shafts, cut from below, not sunk down from above, just a gentle slope, perfect as a means of entrance and egress for the smaller sub-terrestrials.

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Giles followed as Jago and Del' pulled back the bracken to reveal a small, cowering creature. She was half his height, tufts of hair all over her grey body, fingernails strong as horns and an odd habit of twitching like a rabbit or a wagtail. Jago held out the bag of scraps. The Yemp snatched them, secreting them in a fold of her raggedy tunic. "Said I'd be 'ere, did I not?" Del' teased with a small smile.

The Yemp tilted her head, gave a squeal that might have been outrage or glee, "North cliff car park, last I saw it, feeding, eating someone, I d'know – Dyw genes!" She uncurled herself and slipped away, chattering as she went.

The moon was setting as they drove into the car park. 'Renza had driven 'Melza home, as 'Renza had to start the night shift at the factory where she worked. Giles had felt that 'Melza was too young to risk taking part in the final act and Del' had reluctantly agreed. Jago stalked ahead of them, the Geiger counter chirping steadily. He stopped, crouched down, indicated that they should get close to him and do the same. A horrible shape had its back to them. At its feet were several dismembered Yemps and the lacerated remains of a wetsuit. It was eating with sickening crunches and grindings.

"Mogskenn monster," Giles identified the beast. "Part pig part..."

"Not important," Del' interrupted. "It's got teeth and it knows how to use them."

"That's what matters," Jago said.

Chastened, Giles sighed as he considered what to do. He need not have considered. Del' was running towards it. The Mogskenn turned, raised its arms and threw itself at her. Del' blocked a blow. It swept at her with its other claw. She took it on the elbow, yelped, composed herself and hopped back. It lurched again, heavy breath turning the night air to white vapour. Del' jumped, tucked her knees, got in close and landed a two-footed kick to its centre chest. It fell, she rolled, recovered, it kicked out, catching her on the thigh. She pivoted against the force of the blow, fell on its chest, snatched the tin cross from her belt and buried it in its heart. It squealed but did not die.

"That's a shame," Jago said to Giles. "Tin usually kills 'em." She punched it again, one more time. "Don't you just love the sound that makes?" Jago said with a wicked grin.

Giles regarded his response with some concern. Bracing himself, Giles ran to join the ruckus.

Del' removed the weapon from its heart and stabbed, this time in the eye, as far as the orbit, no further. Experience had taught her that extracting the blade from a shattered skull was a devil of a job. The creature flailed, beating down on her like it was thumping out bread dough. Giles was on top of them. He landed a knife blow to its snout. It wailed wildly, gurgled and was silent.

"As I was saying, Mogskenn monsters are best killed by a direct blow to the nose," Giles

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offered her a hand. “Try not to interrupt me when I’m explaining the nature of the unnatural.”

“I’ll try to remember,” said Del’ as she put her arms around both Giles and Jago. “It’s not daylight for another two hours.”

The group of three walked towards Giles’ car, leaving the bodies for the foxes and ravens.

SACREDEARTH BOOKS AND BLOOD

Rupert Giles agrees to spend a week with Jago and Del' Pridwyn. As he gets to know the rest of the family he becomes increasingly concerned with their interest in magic.



The house was long and low, tucked away in a scraggy piece of woodland around a hairpin bend on a dirt track. The hallway was carpeted in burnt orange, a relic from the 1970s. The walls were magnolia, the gloss-painted woodwork, yellow and pitted. On the wall, a pair of antlers, originally mounted as a sporting trophy had been pressed into service as a coat rack. There was a smell of damp and bleach, as if the occupants were fighting a losing battle against the mould and mildew. Jago led Giles into the kitchen. It was fitted with post-war utility cupboards, sky blue, chipped Formica tops, and bowed chrome handles. "Tis good of you to stay the week," Jago unhooked the holdall from his shoulder. "Cup of tea?"

"Please," Giles surveyed the kitchen. Despite its dilapidated state it was immaculately tidy and perfectly clean. "Jago," he asked, "When did you start demon hunting?"

The look on the Jago's face told Giles that it was an intrusive question. "It's a family thing, eldest son to eldest son, sacred bloodlines that kind'a stuff." He handed Giles a mug, blue and white banded with a chipped rim.

"So, is Del' your cousin?" Giles sampled the tea and winced when he tasted that Jago had added at least a quarter of a cupful of sugar.

"Kind'a," Jago turned his chair and sat astride it, facing Giles across the table. "She looked after us when Mum got herself killed." He looked down at his reflection in the mug of tea. "We lost our Dad six months ago. Five of them went down with that trawler, freak weather conditions, according to the inquest, if you can believe that."

"I'm sorry," Giles offered.

"Shit happens," Jago replied, "and it makes the roses grow."

"That's an interesting perspective," Giles complimented. "Would you say that Del' knows a lot about demonology?"

Jago ceased upon the chance to change the subject. "Well, yeah," said Jago. "A damned sight more than they soft 'eads at the Watchers' Council, I can tell you that fer nothing."

"Flattered, I'm sure," Giles was mildly insulted.

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“Listen, I didn’t mean... you know about the Watchers? Well I be bug- Del’ ‘ates them, they’ve really dissed her in the past. If they knew ‘alf the stuff she’s got in her library they would be ‘round ‘ere quicker than a damn.”

“Did you say that she had a library?” Giles looked up, his interest rekindled. Jago registered his glee at the prospect of a few hours’ reading.

“Well... yes, I’m sure Del’ won’t mind. Finish your tea and I’ll show you,” Jago downed his own mug in a few gulps. Forget about the tea, Giles thought as he jumped to his feet. “What are ‘e so keen about?” Jago asked as he led the way. “‘Tis only a roomful of old books.”

Giles swept the dust off the book with his cotton-gloved hands. Its English title was ‘The Book of Leinster’, a record of the stories and intrigues of ancient Ireland. The table at which he sat was neatly piled with such books, their leather covers softened with age, pages fraying and gold-leafed lettering flaking. Jago brought him a heavy oak box that had been studded with protective ironwork. He placed it in front of Giles. “Open it,” Jago encouraged. “It’s the only remaining copy in the world.”

Like a child unwrapping a long-anticipated Christmas present, Giles lifted the lid. He unfolded the acid-free tissue paper and removed the silicone sachets. He gasped at what was inside. The cover was gold plate, the parchments that it contained were written in the most beautiful script he had ever seen, the illuminated capitals still bright after the passing millennia, although the language was unfamiliar to him. “Jago is this...”

“It’s ‘The Annals of the Children of Danuna’,” a loud voice from the doorway confirmed Giles’ suspicions. It was ‘Renza, Jago’s older sister. She was dressed in blue overalls, her trouser legs tucked into her work boots. From her stance Giles could tell that she was very angry indeed. “Jago, what the bloody ‘ell are you doing letting ‘im in ‘ere like this?” She did not wait for him to reply. “These texts,” she swept her hand in the direction of the table, “contain the darkest kind of magic, dimension shattering stuff, and the Annals...” she paused, restraining herself. “It’s just lucky for you that Delayna never translated them.”

“Could err, *Delayna* translate them?” Giles asked. Her scowl told him that he should not have asked that question. “Miss Pridwyn, ‘Renza, I’m sorry if I have intruded but the information contained in these books is very important to our work.”

She stormed towards him. Giles moved to put the book back in its box, but decided against it, since he deduced that she would not hit him if he were holding such an important document. She stopped an arms length away from him and raised her hands.

“‘Renza stop it,” a new voice to his left caused ‘Renza to cease. Giles turned to thank his saviour and nearly choked on his own breath. It was Del’, her blue eyes now blood red, her skin deathly white, black feathers sprouted from her head like an unholy halo. Her fingernails had become claw-like, her teeth were black fangs that caused her to lisp slightly.

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Del's attention was fixed on 'Renza. "I wasn't going to 'urt 'im," 'Renza offered by way of explanation. "I was only going to wipe his memory. Come on Delayna be reasonable 'ere."

"'Tis no way to treat a guest in our house," Delayna rebuked her as she approached with measured steps; "and I told you not to call me Delayna when we've got company."

"Is Del', is Delayna a demon?" Giles whispered to Jago.

"Don't ask what you don't want to know," Jago advised Giles. "We do things a little bit differently in this part of the world."

Delayna had pronounced judgement on 'Renza by grounding her for a fortnight. Delayna, Jago, 'Renza and Giles sat around the library table. Delayna had reverted to her usual appearance, except for the black feathers hidden amongst her long hair. "I suppose you want to know what that was all about?" said Delayna as she ran her fingers through her tresses. "Have a feel," she offered him her upturned wrist. "I'm not a vampire, I'm warm blooded," Giles placed two fingers on her wrist. The fast but steady rhythm of a beating heart and her soft breath against his face put his worst fears to rest.

"But you are not part of this world." Giles insisted. Delayna withdrew her wrist and sadly shook her head, resigned to the fact that she would forever be the subject of such pronouncements.

"Whatever else I am, I am flesh and blood," Delayna said, rebuking him gently.

"So were that Mogskenn monster," 'Renza decided to inject some poison into the proceedings. The others scowled at her. "What? You said yourself that she's not a part of this world," her last comment was addressed at Giles. The silent staring continued. "Listen people," she tried to justify herself, "I didn't ask to be born, and if it weren't for Ms fangs and feathers 'ere".

"'Renza!" Jago banged his fist on the table. "Hold yer' peace fer I lam it to 'e one."

"You good-fur-nothin'-gate-pos-child'," 'Renza was on her feet, grabbing Jago by his shirt, pulling him out of his chair."

"Ush up the both of you!" Delayna clapped a firm hand on each shoulder. "You want me to get nasty or are the two of you gonna go up to your rooms right now?" She shoved the both of them in the direction of the door. The brother and sister exchanged a few more verbal snipes and barbs before Delayna threatened to bang their heads together.

Delayna flopped down into her chair, resting her head on her hands. She sighed, "I'm sorry you had to see that," she apologised to Giles.

"That's family life," he reassured with a wry smile.

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“Do you have any children, I mean, if that’s not too personal a question?” she rested her elbow on the arm of the chair, cupping one cheek and watching Giles’ reaction.

“Not of my own - but I was a Watcher to a Slayer for many years,” he leaned forward, smiling at the memories. “But after she died and got brought back...”

“You were assigned to the Summer’s girl?” Delayna was surprised. “Why aren’t you... err, watching her now?”

“Because,” he paused, aware that Delayna was listening intently. “It was time to let go,” he concluded.

“But you had to give her one ‘ell of a shove, right?” Delayna embroidered her words with a thread of mischief. Giles returned her smile with a knowing nod. “Have you ever read an original version of ‘The Book of Ballymote’?” Giles shook his head. Delayna went over to a merchant’s chest, unlocked one of the drawers and handed him a stack of dog-eared paper. “It is written in the Ogham script,” Delayna reminded him.

Giles’ face dropped. “Can you translate it?” he enquired.

Delayna tutted as she sat down beside him. “I am a little rusty on my pronunciation of fourteenth century Gallic,” she admitted.

“Well then,” said Giles briskly. “Maybe it’s time you practised.”

It was late evening when Delayna showed Giles to his guest room in the attic. She had apologised for its poor state of decoration, but he had assured her that he found the faded floral wallpaper quaint rather than scrappy and that the furniture was of historical interest, rather than fit for the dump.

Giles sat on the low bed and flipped open his mobile phone. The crystal-cut voice of Catherine Travers, research assistant at the Watchers' archives in London greeted him. She asked him how he was enjoying his stay in the West Country and other pleasantries before detailing the real purpose of her call. “Giles, about that name you gave us, ‘Pridwyn’; firstly, we are having problems with the translation, but it is probably Brythonic in origin.” Giles nodded and made a noise that could be taken for an acknowledgement or an agreement. “Secondly, I have found a few references to a Pridwyn family on microfiche,” she continued “just local newspaper cuttings from the hatches, matches and dispatches section, nothing of interest”.

“Yes, thank you for going to so much trouble,” said Giles. “Catherine, have you ever heard of a demon, goddess or monster called Delayna?”

“Delayna?” Catherine echoed. She paused for a moment. “No, never,” she denied. “Giles, is this connected with your original question?”

“Not at all,” he reassured. “I saw the name in a tourist guide book and wondered where I

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had heard it before. Thanks for your help.”

“It’s a pleasure,” Catherine terminated the call. For a few moments Giles sat on the bed, wondering about what it all meant and what he should do next. Still deep in contemplation, he went over to the attic window and looked out across the bleak but beautiful landscape. He could just make out the form of Delayna amongst the evening shadows. She was walking away from the house, her backpack slung over her shoulders. She stopped for a moment, getting her bearings and then carried on walking.

“Morning,” Jago greeted Giles with a tray of tea and toast. Jago was dressed in his school’s uniform, or rather Jago’s interpretation of his school’s uniform. It was true that he had to wear a black jumper or blazer, but that did not include the hooded skater top dubbed with the symbol for anarchy. “Sleep well?”

“Yes thank you,” Giles shifted himself into a sitting position and took the tray on to his lap. “Where was Del’ going last night?”

“You mean Delayna?” Jago replied, taking his own mug of tea off the tray. “Just doing an extra sweep of the area. It’s coming up to Samhain, and the Otherworld is getting restless.”

“I beg your pardon?” Giles rubbed his eyes as if he were still dreaming. “You mean Halloween? In my experience the vampires and ghosts treat it as a kind of bank holiday weekend.”

“Damn it Giles,” Jago chuckled. “The reason why the yellow-eyed-fangies and floaty-see-throughs go to ground during that week is cause they are scared witless,” Jago perched cross-legged on Giles’ bed. He pointed to the bubbles in his mug of tea. “You see, dimensions are like those bubbles, self contained spheres of something floating along in something else.” Jago blew softly, causing two of the larger bubbles to meet in the centre of the mug. “Sometimes, in certain places, those dimensions move close enough to touch,” he blew again, and the bubbles moved apart. “And then they separate again - until next year.”

“Yes, yes, I’m familiar with that idea,” Giles said, waving a piece of toast about. “You said the yellow-eyed-whatevers are scared of something. Are they scared of Delayna?”

Jago sniggered. “Eat your toast,” he patted Giles on the shoulder.

“Are you not going to school today?” Giles said as he chanced upon “Melza in the library. She was reading, curled up in an armchair as if she were a kitten.

“I don’t go to school,” said ‘Melza as she looked up and shut the book. He perceived that the subject was also closed.

“That book you’re reading,” Giles sat near her, indicating towards the text. “Where I used

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work, we kept our copy under lock and key.”

“Is that because there are evil people at the Watchers’ Council?” ‘Melza asked, her face a picture of innocence. Giles did not reply so ‘Melza continued. “Delayna wants me to know all about the Otherworld, what with the mines flooding and the prophecy about the Tutha De Danuna,” ‘Melza continued in the same light tone. “Of course, if Jago would do as Delayna suggested, it would make things a lot easier for all of us.” She stopped, “Mr Giles, why are you looking at me like that?”

“What, exactly are you talking about?” Giles leaned closer to her.

“I thought you Watchers are supposed to know everything that goes on in the realm of the super-unnatural,” ‘Melza quizzically crinkled her face. “Isn’t that why you were sent to spy on us?”

“I was not sent to spy on you. I came to Cornwall for a holiday,” Giles insisted.

“Then why were you phoning the Council last night? I heard you, your room is right above mine,” ‘Melza said, her voice soft but accusative.

“Does Delayna know about this?”

“She doesn’t. I didn’t tell her because they lied to you.” Uncurling herself, ‘Melza rose from the chair, her book in hand. “I’m going to lock the library door now. Perhaps you would like to visit some of the New Age shops in Camborne or Redruth,” ‘Melza showed him the way out. Giles followed the flowing skirted girl as she took a brass key from somewhere inside her coat and locked the library door. “I’ll be in my room if you need me.”

“Evening,” said Delayna as she slouched into the kitchen, closely followed by an injured ‘Renza. “Do you know who this belongs to?” She handed Giles a carrier bag. Inside was a bloodied knife. He went to pick it up. “Don’t,” Delayna lunged forward and grabbed his wrist. “Don’t touch the blood.”

Chastened, Giles continued his examination. Delayna listened as she attended to ‘Renza’s wounds. “It’s certainly antique, the design of the blade indicates that it was used for gutting animals, but it looks too ornate to have been used for that purpose.”

“You’re dammed right about the gutting,” ‘Renza interrupted as she unbuttoned her overalls to reveal a bleeding slash wound on one side of her belly. “It’s okay Giles, it’s only a scratch. Besides Del’ got a good look at the bastard as she was beating him to a pulp.” Delayna grinned at the complement. She placed a sterile pad over the wound to stem the bleeding, causing ‘Renza to wince and utter a string of expletives.

Giles went over to the sink and began to wash his hands. “Get her on the table,” he ordered. “I’ve got a suture kit upstairs.”

“Good,” Delayna agreed. “You take care of ‘Renza, I’m going after the others.”

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“I thought there was only one attacker?” Giles said as he helped ‘Renza onto the table.

“There’s always more,” Delayna snapped. Giles watched as Delayna morphed into her demonic form. Her head sprouted a mass of black feathers, her skin turned white and her blue eyes red. Delayna checked her fangs to make sure that they were good and sharp. “When I’ve finished with them, each one will be in several pieces.”

SACREDEARTH WITH THE FAIRIES

Rupert Giles agrees to spend a week with Jago and Delayna' Pridwyn. He finds himself caught up in the tears and tantrums of family life, but the Pridwyns are not an ordinary family.



It echoed around the corridors of the magical house. At certain times it would make its presence felt like a chill to the spine, at others times, like an unheard scream. It would catch its victim in the dream-state between sleep and the first waking moments of the morning. Sometimes it would call his name.

“Jago, Jago Pridwyn! Get your arse down ‘ere right now,” Delayna demanded. Jago awoke with a snap, patterns and colours fleeing before him as the daylight stung his eyes. He groaned to himself. What did that demented demon want now?

He flung his dressing gown around his shoulders and thudded down the stairs. Delayna, still blood soaked and ruffled from her night of slaying, was waiting for him. In her hand was a crumpled telephone bill. “Two hundred and forty bloody quid,” she yelled. “Look at this,” she shoved the bill at him. “Over fifty bleeding phone calls, to the same bloody mobile phone.” Jago scanned the itemised section.

“Well... okay,” he stuttered. “They’re all to Colette’s number but... there must be some mistake,” he turned over the page, only to find another column of the same numbers on the other side. Nausea, embarrassment and shame, all mixed with dose of panic, welled up in him. He swallowed hard. “You’ve always said that good communication is important in a relationship,” he offered, hoping to humour his way out of the situation.

“You see every day at school!” Delayna replied.

Jago accepted that he was not going to win this battle. “I’ll pay for it,” he offered. “I mean, I don’t know how but...”

“Forget it,” Delayna snapped. “I’ve spent the last ten, twelve years cleaning up after you lot, it’s not like it’s going to kill me.”

“I said, I’ll pay for it!” Jago yelled back at her. “I just made a mistake, okay? I didn’t know how much the bleeding calls would cost. Just get out of my face for once!” He shoved the paper at her and stormed up the stairs, nearly bashing into the cheese plant on his way.

Delayna lashed out, grabbed the plant and slammed it against the wall. The terracotta pot shattered, scattering pottery shards, compost and roots all over the burnt orange carpet. “I hated that plant,” she confessed.

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The noise had roused another sleeper; she clenched her teeth as the pain in her side also awoke. Someone knelt beside her. She reached out to him, but in a half-breath he had faded. She grasped into the air where he had been, over reached and tumbled out of bed. She swore as she untangled herself. The noise had attracted 'Melza's attention. She glided to her elder sister's side, helping her to stand. Delayna was not far behind.

"What the 'ell 'appened 'ere?" Delayna put an arm around 'Renza, supporting her efforts to get to her feet.

"Del'," 'Renza said in all seriousness. "I think I saw Dad."

"Are you going to be alright?" said Giles as he turned off the ignition. Jago sat beside him, looking out of the window towards the school.

"I'm doing my best," Jago replied as he watched huddles of his fellow pupils laugh and joke their way through the school gates. "It's just never good enough for her. How the hell am I going to pay it back?"

"Perhaps you could get a part-time job?" Giles suggested.

Jago looked at him incredulously. "Yeah right. Delayna wants me to train all the hours God sends. Not that it's going to do me any good."

"Well, your family situation is a very special one - sacred blood lines and that kind of stuff," Giles offered, echoing the phrase that Jago had used the day before to describe his family.

"I can't be what my Dad and Granddad were," Jago said with a heavy tone. "The source of our power... my Dad was wearing it when the boat went down... and all 'ell's about to break lose." Jago let the thought hang for a moment. "I've got to find a way to pay her back."

"Or all hell will break loose?" Giles said teasingly.

"I wasn't talking about the telephone bill," Jago gave a small laugh. He unfastened his seat belt and climbed out of the car.

"Jago," Giles called after him. Jago spun around. "About this 'Colette'." Jago looked puzzled. Giles explained. "You see, if she is worth all this trouble, she must be a very pretty girl. Did you say that her mother was divorced?"

"Yeah like I want you for a father-in-law," Jago teased. He gave a wicked grin "Her mum's not 'alf bad though. See you later."

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During morning break, Jago checked the school notice board. He had often wondered if he should take part in the after-school sports activities, although since getting a week's worth of detention for breaking Matthew Isaacs' nose during a rugby match he had to admit that he was avoiding the locker room as much as possible. Matthew had had it coming, he had told Delayna, always picking on the kids in the lower school, he had done the world a favour. It was a small victory against the forces of evil. Delayna had disapproved of his actions, but had neither punished or rewarded the deed.

Jago's attention was caught by a postcard-sized notice, half hidden under a poster advertising the Halloween disco. The handwriting was elegantly looped and tailed, it looked as if the author had used a fountain pen. It read:

Situation Vacant

"Baby Sitter" required for one young boy. Remuneration generous. Interested parties to meet at the Rosewarren Car Park at 3.30 pm.

Fantastic, thought Jago, how difficult can it be to look after one kid? He unpinned the notice and slipped it inside his backpack

At twenty five past three, Jago was waiting at the car park. It was already starting to get dark, but although the clouds looked menacing it was not raining. At exactly half past, a lady with wispy grey hair walked into the car park. She was dressed in a quilted jacket, with a long, pleated skirt. As she got closer she smiled at Jago. It was a warm smile, her eyes seemed to twinkle as she looked him up and down.

"Interested in the baby sitting position are you?" she enquired with a rich voice.

"I am," Jago replied. "I've looked after my younger sister and cousins loads of times."

The lady chuckled. "I have reasons enough for choosing you, Jago Pridwyn. I want my boy to know something of your world." Jago made a noise that sounded like a surprise on hearing the stranger call him by name. "We must go before nightfall, come quickly, come quickly," she turned and beckoned him to follow. Jago hesitated, wondering if he should phone Delayna and tell her what he was doing. It seemed as if the Lady Stranger had read his mind. "Don't worry about the folks at home, I will send them word in due course, let's go, let's go."

Jago found himself following the Lady Stranger. At first they travelled through the familiar streets of Camborne, the narrow terraces of stone-built cottages, the estates of local authority housing, the detached bungalows in the wooded outskirts that only those that had retired from 'up-the-country' could afford to own. They walked on into the countryside, past farm buildings guarded by collie dogs and fields full of patient cows waiting for their evening milking. They walked on into the woods. Jago had never been this way before. The trees became shadows of grey and brown as the forest enclosed around them. He found himself following the Lady down a muddy slope, the trees seemed to get larger and larger the deeper they descended. Brambles, bracken, bamboo

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and rhododendrons lined the path that seemed to get narrower and narrower the further they went.

The Lady Stranger stopped. Jago was a few steps behind her. Their way was blocked by a moss-covered tree, the largest tree that Jago had ever seen. It was a tree so large, that the point where the exposed roots met the trunk was higher than Jago and the Lady Stranger. She turned to him, her finger in front of her lips. "Are you ready?" She said conspiratorially as she reached out with her other hand towards the moss-covered tree. Jago nodded. "Then close your eyes and step into my world." She drew back a curtain of moss that had grown between the tree roots and beckoned Jago to follow her. Closing his eyes, Jago stepped between the roots. He felt sunlight warm his face as the curtain closed behind him, but still he kept his eyes shut. "This is my world," the Lady declared expecting a reaction. She gave him a nudge with her elbow. "You can look now Jago." Jago opened his eyes.

The sight that greeted him was something out of a book of fairy stories. The grass stretched out before him like a field of emeralds; the flowers that were set amongst them shone like gemstones. The fairy lords, in their velvet suits danced with their fairy ladies, whose dresses were no less colourful than the flowers. A river of clear icy water wandered its way between the hills and forests of the enchanted land. Every few minutes, spheres of gold and crystal would arise like bubbles from the river, rising into the sky to form pillow clouds of the purest white. The land was as beautiful to see as honey is sweet to taste.

Jago looked at the Lady Stranger beside him. She had shed her human clothes and was dressed in a gown of bluebells. She unfurled her fairy wings and returned Jago's glance. "Impressed are you?" she questioned with a small smile. Jago nodded. "I'm known as the Lady Harebell in these parts, so I suppose that's what you would do well to call me. Would you like to see where you are to live?"

"To live?" Jago echoed.

"Well, yes, my dear. It's the standard contract. You have to stay 'ere for a year and a day. Did your mother not tell you the stories about us?" Lady Harebell knitted her grey eyebrows and rested her fists on her hips. She sighed. "I'll see if I can arrange something, but in the time of this world, you will have to stay for a year and a day."

Jago rubbed his hands over his forehead. After the morning shouting match with Delayna he was not looking forward to returning home. A year and a day in this enchanted world would give him a rest from all that, a little room to breath, somewhere just to be without the demands and commitments of school, family, sacred bloodlines and that sort of thing. "You promise to tell Delayna where I am," said Jago in a serious tone. Lady Harebell agreed. "Then I'll stay".

Lady Harebell showed Jago the way to the house that was to become his home for the next year and a day. It was round, the walls were the colour of butter, with a roof of reeds that had been tied at the top like a tuft of hair. The inside of the house reminded him of the picture books he had looked at as a child. The furniture was handcrafted, the fabrics

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patchwork. In the kitchen, there was a black leaded kitchen range, a porcelain sink and a pine dresser displaying an impressive collection of pewter plates. Lady Harebell beckoned him to the nursery. In the centre of the room was an enormous clamshell. Tucked up in velvet bedclothes was the most beautiful child that Jago had ever seen. “This is my boy,” Lady Harebell said as she went over to her son.

“I know what I saw, and that was Dad’s ghost,” ‘Renza insisted as the four of them sat around the kitchen table discussing the morning’s apparition. “He died suddenly, he might not have passed over.”

“That’s impossible,” said Delayna. “The Seer is never wrong. She told me that he was at rest.”

“Could it have been a demonic apparition?” Giles asked. ‘Renza and ‘Melza looked at him, their expression told him that they had been insulted.

Finally ‘Melza spoke. “I’ve cast a protection spell over the property. Nothing can enter the grounds without our permission.” Her gentle tone was layered with such certainty that Giles was momentarily convinced.

“Actually, that’s not strictly true,” Delayna contradicted. She glanced at Giles, as if asking him to elaborate.

“A very powerful something could break the protections, especially if they had not been renewed for a few days,” Giles hypothesised. “But in doing so it would be breaking the laws of trespass, thus incurring the wrath of its Parthenon.” He removed his glasses and wiped the sweat from his face.

“So, should we call Wolfram and Hart and sue the bastard?” ‘Renza suggested, her face breaking out in a smile. Delayna shot her an angry glance to rebuke her for using bad language at the kitchen table.

“We don’t know what it is, or if it really cares about the laws, but we do know that it is powerful,” ‘Melza stated. She got up from her chair and closed the kitchen curtains against the evening sun. “Maybe it’s powerful enough not to care,” she said as she smoothed the curtains into even pleats.

“Look, whatever, I’ve got to get to work,” ‘Renza rose from her chair, her hand over her belly to prevent her recent battle injury from reopening.

“I would advise against it,” Giles said. “That’s quite a serious slash wound. You should at least wait until I’m able to take the stitches out.”

“Balls to that, I’m going,” said ‘Renza, before putting a whole biscuit in her mouth and strolling out of the door.

“I’m going with you,” Delayna said, following ‘Renza. ‘Renza protested, but Delayna

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insisted and Renza saw that it was useless to argue with her.

Back in his room, Giles turned on his mobile and responded to a text message from Catherine at the Watchers' Council. There was an anxious tone to her voice. "Giles, I've talked to Quentin. The Pridwyn family are notorious for their interference with our work. If you know anything about them it is so important that you tell us."

Giles shook his head. "I overheard a conversation about them in the local pub, I was just curious." He took a sharp breath. "It was nothing really."

"Very glad to hear it," Catherine replied. "Stay in touch," with that she terminated the conversation. In the Watchers' Headquarters, Catherine turned to Quentin and the other Council members who had been listening. "I think that he is lying to us," she ventured. Quentin nodded in agreement.

Delayna watched from a distance as Renza entered the gates of the factory where she worked. Renza swiped her security pass through the reader, allowing her to pass through the turnstile and into the building. As Delayna left she was confronted by a Yemp. The small creature was dressed in a carrier bag and held a scrap of paper in its hand. It gave Delayna the paper before scurrying back into the night. Delayna read the message:

Dear Delayna

Jago Pridwyn has agreed to work for me for the usual terms. I promise that I will take good care of him and reward him accordingly.

Yours truly

Lady Harebell

Delayna grunted and covered her face with her hands. That stupid, stupid, boy, she thought to herself. What kind of trouble has he got himself into now?

The days seemed to pass quickly in the fairy realm that was now Jago's home. He had very little work to do, except look after Lady Harebell's son, who was a delightful child and very easy to please. Every morning Jago would fetch milk to make the boy's breakfast, wash him in the warm waters of the wishing well, take him to play with the other children and teach him a little bit about the human world. In the afternoon when the child slept, he would tend to Lady Harebell's garden, collect the herbs and other ingredients that she required for her spells, before taking the boy for a long walk in the evening sunshine, reading him a story and putting him to bed.

One evening, Lady Harebell made a special request. Jago was to rise at midnight and collect a bunch of four leaf clovers in the light of the full moon. Jago did as he was asked

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and Lady Harebell was delighted with the specimens that he had selected.

The next morning, after Jago had finished feeding his little charge, he returned to the house to get a ball in order to teach the boy how to play catch. Lady Harebell had prepared several bars of green soap that she had left to set on the kitchen table. “Hello Jago,” she greeted him. “I was just looking for you. Before you take my son out to play, I would like you to wash him, using this soap.” Jago looked alarmed. “Oh don’t worry,” she reassured him “It will not hurt him at all.” She handed Jago a linen-wrapped bar of green soap. “But you must promise me,” she said leaning closer, “that you will never, ever wash with it yourself. This soap is very powerful but it is only made for fairy folk like my son and I”. Jago nodded in agreement.

The days continued in their usual pattern. The little boy was now able to eat porridge for breakfast and with Jago’s help, to read his own bedtime stories. Jago would wash the little boy using the magic soap. He would draw a pitcher of warm water from the magical wishing well, cut a sliver of soap using a silver knife, mix it with the water and pour it all over the little boy. The child would squeal with delight, as the bubbles would change his skin to every colour of the rainbow before disappearing in a shower of glittered snowflakes.

One day, however, Jago’s curiosity got the better of him. After the little boy had been bathed and left to dry in the morning sun, Jago took a little bit of the soap, mixed it with the water in the usual way, and poured it over himself. For a moment nothing happened. Then his skin began to tingle. His back began to itch. He scratched it. Then his arms and legs began to itch. He scratched them. Finally his whole body began to itch. Jago squealed and squirmed as he tried to scratch every inch of his skin at the same time. The commotion had attracted Lady Harebell’s attention. Jago’s skin began to feel hot, like it was about to catch fire. Sinking to his knees, he drew another pitcher of water from the wishing well and poured it over himself. When he looked up, Lady Harebell was standing above him, her hands on her hips. She was angry.

“Did I not treat you fairly?” She said. “All I asked is that you did not wash yourself with the fairy soap. You are lucky it did not catch you on fire.” The little boy ran towards his mother. He wrapped his arms around her legs and hung on tightly, burying his head in the folds of her skirt. He was frightened and confused by what he had just seen.

Jago looked sheepishly up at her. “I’m sorry, I was just curious.”

“At least you taught my son an important lesson,” she reached down and stroked her child’s soft hair. “That even the best of humans cannot be entirely trusted with our secrets.” She offered Jago a hand and helped him to his feet. “You will have to leave now,” she said, her voice full of regret. “Your time here is over.”

As Jago and Lady Harebell stood by the tree roots she handed him a velvet bag. Lady Harebell had reverted to her appearance as the Lady Stranger, her wispy grey hair, tucked neatly in a bun and her quilted jacket drawn tightly around her. “Here,” she presented

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Jago with the velvet bag. “This is your payment for your work. Don’t open it until you get home.”

Jago took the bag, but was not enthusiastic about the payment. “Will I ever see you again?” He asked regretfully. “Will I ever be able to come back here?”

“I don’t know, and I’m not sure,” Lady Harebell replied. “You have taught my son so much and for that I’ll be forever thankful.” Jago looked down at his feet. There was a good two-inch gap between his trousers and socks. He had grown since he had been in the fairy world. “In your world you have only been away for a few hours,” Lady Harebell said with a smile. Jago looked confused. “It’s only magic,” she reminded him.

Jago examined his arms, which were also longer than he remembered them. “How did you...?” He started saying, but on looking up he realised that Lady Harebell had disappeared. He was alone in the woods. For a moment he looked around, getting his bearings. Through the trees, he saw the familiar sight of Carn Brea castle, illuminated high on the hilltop against the darkened sky. Clutching his payment, Jago wearily made his way towards home.

As he trundled along the footpath, Jago could have sworn that he was being followed.

‘Melza, Delayna and Giles were in the library when they heard Jago’s key turn in the door and his announcement that he was home. Delayna jumped to her feet. “Jago, Jago Pridwyn! Get your arse in ‘ere right now,” she demanded. Giles clapped a hand firmly on her upper arm. He shook his head disapprovingly, keeping up the pressure until she sat back down again.

“I’m home,” Jago repeated as he bounced his way into the library. He opened the velvet bag. Inside was a handful of gold coins. He poured them out onto the library table. “Is that enough to pay for the phone bill?” He asked with a certain smug satisfaction.

Giles picked up a coin and tested it by biting it between his teeth. “From now till kingdom come I should think,” Giles remarked as he set the coin down again.

“You’ve grown” ‘Melza observed as she looked up at Jago. “Exactly how long were you in the fairy realm?”

Delayna remained silent. She tilted her head to one side as if listening. Jago looked at her, puzzled. Delayna pointed towards the front of the house. The pair of them got to their feet to investigate the disturbance. Giles and ‘Melza had noticed their concern and followed them out of the library. The four of them peered out through the curtains of the front sitting room. In the darkness, beyond the boundaries of their property, they could see torchlight and the figures of at least two dozen people. In the distance, there were several vehicles, transit vans, people carriers, and armoured cars, some of which sported antenna and satellite dishes.

“It’s the Watchers’ Council,” Giles identified them. “What on Earth are they doing here?”

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“They’ve found us.” Delayna turned to look at Giles. “You told them where we live? How could you? We trusted you!”

“Miss Pridwyn, I assure you that I would never betray a confidence, not even to my employers,” Giles tried to reassure her, but deduced that nothing he could say would make a difference. Outside they could hear the barking of dogs and the chatter of short-range radios as the operatives from the Watchers’ Council, laid siege to the Pridwyn’s house.

“We could always invite them in for a cup of tea,” Jago said as he closed the curtain. “I think we could even stretch to a plate of biscuits.”

SACREDEARTH MY FOSTER MOM'S A DEMON



Rupert Giles has agreed to spend a week in Cornwall with a family of demon hunters known as the Pridwyns. He asks a friend at the Watchers' Council to do some research into the Pridwyn family, not realising that they are "notorious for their interference" with the Council's work. The Council have surrounded Delayna Pridwyn's house and have Giles, Jago, 'Melza and Delayna trapped inside.

Giles' mobile phone rang. He answered it. It was Crispin Cooper, someone that Giles had not spoken to since he had been assigned as Watcher to Buffy Anne Summers. "Rupert Giles?" Crispin's coarse voice sounded all the more harsh through the mobile. "You are ordered to leave the building and your companions are ordered to surrender to the Watchers' Council of Great Britain."

"Giss it 'ere," Delayna took the mobile from Giles. "Crispy," she greeted the caller. "Tell 'em to fall back and not to come housing without a proper invitation."

"Am I speaking to Delayna Pridwyn, of the Danuna Tribe?" Crispin enquired.

"You are," Delayna confirmed. "Although I've not been called that since that nasty business back in Longshank's day. Now, do us all a favour and bugger off."

"Delayna," Crispin spoke just as Delayna was about to terminate the conversation. "We have something that might interest you." The mobile's screen showed a picture. Jago, who had been sitting next to Delayna, snatched the phone from her.

"It's Dad's Torque," he identified it. "It's the source of our power. He was wearing it when the trawler went down. Those..."

"Tell Delayna," said Crispin, his tone ripe with rancour, "that the we have a Court Order that requires her to surrender custody of the children known as Jago James and Demelza Pridwyn." With that, Crispin Cooper ended the call.

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“No bloody way,” Delayna said as she got to her feet. “Get yourselves ready in case we have to fight our way out of here”, she ordered Jago and ‘Melza.

Giles followed as Delayna went into the kitchen. “You had better leave - and take that bloody cell phone with you,” she said as she gathered up the knives that she had been using to carve the Halloween jack-o-lanterns. “I’ve not a doubt that they bugged the damned thing so they can find out where you are - crafty buggers.”

“Delayna,” said Giles as he sat on the kitchen chair. “Why do the Council want custody of Jago and ‘Melza?”

“Why do you think?” Delayna snapped. “The Slayer is not enough for them. They want my children as well.”

“Your children?” Giles echoed looking up with renewed interest.

“It’s my blood in their veins,” Delayna threw a knife. It missed Giles, hitting the wall to his left. “My blood that gives them the strength,” she threw another, this time hitting the wall above Giles’ head. “My blood flowing through one generation to another of the Pridwyn family,” she threw the third knife, striking the wall just to the left of Giles. He did not flinch. She continued. “Amongst all the un-humans, my people were the only ones who lived good, civilised lives. We fought on the side of the just. Now Jago, ‘Melza, ‘Renza and all us Pridwyns do the same. We can do no other. The blood will not allow it.” Delayna stopped her tirade. She was looking directly at Giles, her breathing sharp and heavy.

“In that case I can only wonder that it took the Council so long to find you,” he admitted. His response surprised her. He elaborated. “As a Watcher, I was trained to subjugate the Slayer. On her eighteenth birthday, they made me perform the Cruciamentum. When her sister’s life was threatened, they withheld information about her assailant.”

“Yeah, well, there’s a war on,” said Delayna, with a spoonful of sarcasm.

“You sound like you’re defending them,” Giles observed.

“We’re supposed to be on the same side,” Delayna reminded him. “But my children are not tools to be wielded by the clumsy hand of an amoral institution.” She picked up another knife and held it like she was going to throw it. “But unlike your Council I respect human life. That’s why I’m making pumpkin lanterns instead of using human skulls.” She replaced the knife in its tray and closed the kitchen drawer. “If this does not work, I might

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have to hand Jago and 'Melza over to the Council. They don't spare the lives of errant Slayers, I'm certain they would sooner see them dead than out of their control."

Giles opened his mouth to say something, but Jago and 'Melza bounced into the kitchen, announcing that they had done everything that Delayna had asked.

"Okay, you three," Delayna said briskly. "I'm going to get my big brother to beat them up."

The four of them sat cross-legged in the library. It was five minutes to midnight. Around them was a circle of tea lights, between them, a circle of silver foil, at its centre, a crystal orb. Giles had been present at the opening of inter-dimensional portals before, but this time, more than any other, he was filled with a sense of apprehension. The veil between this world and the next was getting thinner, Delayna had said, I can open a portal and pull someone into our reality.

'Melza opened her book and started chanting:

Circle bright and circle high

Fall like lightning from the sky

Ring around this sacred space

Keep the all evil from this place

Summon those of bygone days

Open up the sacred ways

Listen to our good intentions

Make the path between dimensions

Nothing happened. 'Melza scanned the text again. "That should have worked," she shook her head in disappointment. "The rhyming was near perfect."

Delayna's impatience was all too evident. She took the crystal orb in both hands. "Delaney," she shouted. "Quit your gaming and get 'ere now!" Inside the orb, the crystalline structure began to move, spinning round and round like billowing smoke. The resulting glow reflected off the silver foil, producing a human-like form at its centre. He was dressed in animal skins and tinplate armour. He had a sword by his side and several other weapons strapped to his body. He had hair as dark as Delayna's and the same blue

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coloured eyes.

Jago punched the air in glee.

Giles realised that he had forgotten to breath.

‘Melza looked disappointed that she had been unable to open the portal by herself.

Delayna placed the orb on the ground and greeted her brother. “Delaney, welcome to sunny Cornwall!” Delaney looked stunned.

“What year’s this?” Delaney questioned, studying the gathering of strangely attired humans. “And who are these people?”

“It’s two thousand and two,” ‘Melza offered.

“Two thousand and two since what?” Delaney enquired. Delaney put an arm on Delayna’s shoulder. “Good to see you again dear sister,” he place a kiss on her cheek. “Now can you tell me exactly why you pulled me out of the Otherworld?”

“In good time,” Delayna reassured him. “Firstly we are going to have something to eat.”

“There’s a right storm brewing in the Egyptian Pantheon,” Delaney said through a mouthful of food. “What do you call this again?”

“Pizza,” Jago answered as he reached for another slice.

“Tastes good,” Delaney licked his fingers. “I’ll bring some back to the Otherworld and I certainly want one of they there ovens,” he indicated towards Delayna’s microwave oven. “So sister, what has this ‘Council of Watchers’ got against you?”

“They want the Pridwyn children,” Delayna replied.

“Everyone wants the Pridwyn children,” Delaney observed with a wry smile.

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Delayna was looking through the curtains at the assembly of unwelcome visitors. “It looks like they are setting up floodlights.”

Giles joined her at the window. “Sleep deprivation,” he announced. “It’s a standard psychological weapon. How’s ‘Melza?”

“She’s holding up,” Delayna reassured him. ‘Melza was sat on the kitchen floor in the lotus position, her eyes closed, her lips reciting an incantation to keep up the protective barrier that prevented the Watchers’ Council from getting too close to the house. “But I don’t think...”

A smash of glass and a hiss of vapour heralded the start of the attack.

“Tear gas!” Jago shouted. He climbed on top of his chair and drew his crossbow. Delaney threw himself on the canister as Giles picked ‘Melza up off the floor.

“Get them out of here,” Delayna shouted at Jago. “Get them out through the tunnels,” she began to cough. Jago protested vigorously, but she insisted that he had to take care of ‘Melza and Giles. “Go now!” Delayna ordered.

Jago, least affected by the gas, guided Giles and ‘Melza towards the cellar. Delaney and Delayna drew their weapons and faced the kitchen door. “It’ll be just like the battle of Blackheath,” Delaney said as he morphed into his battle fury form, blood red eyes streaming tears from the effect of the gas.

Delayna did likewise. “We lost that one,” she reminded him through gritted fangs.

“That’s what I meant,” Delaney chuckled. “Ladies first,” he swept his hand towards the kitchen door. Delayna poked her tongue out at his feigned chivalry. Side, by side, the brother and sister charged at the waiting soldiers, together facing their fate.

“It’s straight on from here,” ‘Melza led the way. The tunnel widened and Giles saw what appeared to be daylight ahead. They found themselves at the entrance to a vast cavern, the home of the Tinner people. Their way was blocked by two little people, both dressed in tinfoil armour and holding rough wooden clubs. ‘Melza spoke. “Fatla genes Feusik?” She addressed the slightly shorter of the two Tinner.

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“Demelza?” He opened his visor to get a better look at her. Feusik the Tinner turned to his companion. “Ottomma Demelza.”

“Demelza ap Pridwyn?” his companion asked for confirmation.

“Eus,” Feusik replied.

His companion’s jaw dropped, he screamed, threw aside his weapon and ran away like a scolded cat.

“I have that effect on some people,” ‘Melza explained to Giles. She unclipped a trinket from her key ring and presented it to Feusik. He took it, held it up to the light and nodded his head. The two of them exchanged information in their strange language, before Feusik indicated that the three of them should follow him.

“This ladder goes all the way to the surface,” ‘Melza translated as Giles and Jago looked up the shaft towards the night sky. “It will bring us out near the plastics factory.”

“And what happens if we fall off?” Giles questioned, evidently not liking the plan.

“Well, according to Newton, there’s this thing called gravity that...” Jago stopped explaining as Giles glared at him.

‘Melza was saying her goodbyes to Feusik, who spoke to her reassuringly. “He says, that if you fall the ground will catch you,” she translated. Giles was not reassured.

“Let’s get out of here,” Jago started up the ladder. He stopped and sniffed the air. “What is that bad smell?” he said, mostly to himself.

As they neared the surface they could hear the sound of fire engines and the chatter of police radios. Jago was the first to get out, fighting his way through the brambles, helping Giles to claw his way onto the surface and teasing ‘Melza that she should move quicker. The three of them brushed themselves down as they made their way towards the road. Several emergency vehicles were parked on the pavement and police riot vans were

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evacuating the workforce. An explosion in the distance and the acrid smell of burning told them that the plastics factory had caught fire.

Delayna and Delaney, fresh from their battle with the Council met them at the roadblock.

“What happened?” Jago shouted across to them.

“We were giving them a good kicking, and then they suddenly just retreated,” Delaney explained. “We heard the emergency sirens and followed the fire brigade ‘ere.”

Delayna accosted someone in the company’s uniform. He was speaking to the sergeant in charge of the operation. He had computer printouts on his clipboard and was discussing them with the sergeant.

“What do you mean ‘she never clocked in’?” Jago heard Delayna shout. The manager muttered inaudibly and pointed to a line on his printout sheet. “I saw her go in to the building, she had to use her security pass.” There was another explosion.

Someone put an arm on Jago’s shoulder. “You and your friends have to evacuate now,” said the fireman. “These fumes could be dangerous.” There was a third explosion, louder than the first two. Jago saw Delaney put a comforting arm around Delayna. She shrugged it off, but Delaney insisted on leading her towards the waiting police van. Jago, ‘Melza and Giles joined them in the back of the van. The doors were slammed shut, cutting them off from any hope of finding ‘Renza. They sat in silence as the van drove away.

Back at the house, Delaney said his goodbyes as the gateway opened taking him back to the Otherworld.

Giles found Delayna in the kitchen where she was fixing a tarpaulin over the broken window. “It was all a distraction,” Delayna said. “Fight, first think later, it’s always been our weakness. It was ‘Renza they wanted all along.”

“Can I do anything to help,” said Giles simply.

“You can find out if my sister’s still alive,” Jago said as he entered the kitchen.

“Jago, I’ll try but...” Giles began. It was enough to ignite Jago’s rage. He threw himself at

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Giles, knocking him to against the wall, encircling his throat with his hands, chocking the life-breath out of him.

“I’ll bloody well kill you for this. You Sowsnek come-by-chance,” Jago’s face was scarlet, his neck distended from the effort of holding his struggling victim, even his eyes seemed to flash red. Delayna was quick to act. She picked up a frying pan and whacked Jago across the back of the head. He barely flinched and continued his death-hold. Delayna sighed, raised her hands and released a stream of lightning from her fingertips. It hit Jago with its full force; the sudden shock caused him to release his grip. Delayna stepped up to him, and punched him squarely across the jaw. Jago stumbled and fell to his knees.

“Don’t you, ever, ever, attack someone like that without provocation or proof,” Delayna rasped as she caught her breath. Jago raised an arm over his face to protect himself. Delayna stepped over him, towards Giles, who was wheezing and clutching at his throat. “It’s time to pick your allies and your enemies, Mr Giles,” Delayna offered him her hand. “Because if, ‘Renza is still alive, we’re going to get her back.”

SACREDEARTH LATE TEENS EARLY TWENTIES



Rupert Giles has agreed to spend a week in Cornwall with a family of demon hunters known as the Pridwyns. He asks a friend at the Watchers' Council to do some research into the Pridwyn family, not realising that they are "notorious for their interference" with the Council's work. The Watchers' Council have attacked the Pridwyn's house and started a fire at the factory where 'Renza Pridwyn works. Giles has to discover if the fire was to hide 'Renza's kidnap, or her murder.

"I'm knackered," Delayna complained as she threw herself down on the sofa and kicked off her work shoes. It was too bad that she had to work a double shift on the day after the night that 'Renza had gone missing. The makeup that she had used to disguise the bruises from her battle with the minions of the Watchers' Council was starting to run with her sweat and the steam from the hotel's kitchen. It was too bad that the kitchen porter had not turned up for work and had left her to cover his breakfast and lunchtime duties. It was too bad that she had expended so much magical energy during the previous few days that she did not have enough to even conjure herself a glass of water. She had given her statements to the police and fire services during her lunch break, leaving out the part about the Watchers' Council. Who would believe her? The Council had enough influence to direct the decisions of any investigating authority. No, this was an unworldly matter and it was best not to go through the usual channels.

Her thoughts were interrupted by Jago, who stormed into the front sitting room and claimed the chair opposite her. He had a wad of tissues in his hand, which he was picking at so that the pieces fell into his lap and over the floor. Despite the mess that he was making, Delayna perceived that it was not a good time to reprimand him.

"Colette dumped me," he said finally. "I was supposed to walk her to school this morning but what with everything that happened," he paused, wiping his nose with his sleeve. "The bitch," he threw the tissues down on the floor and thudded his way out of the room, pushing his way past 'Melza who was standing in the doorway.

"Del', could you help me with this translation?" 'Melza asked cautiously as she offered the book to Delayna. She pointed at a photograph of a hand written page, a fragment from an ancient text. "The book says it's in Scott's Gaelic, but the translation is nonsensical."

Delayna ran her hand over her face and through her hair. She took the book and examined the photograph. "For crying out loud 'Melza, it's Manx, can't you tell the difference by now?" She handed the book back.

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“Oh,” said ‘Melza as she squinted at the picture. “But the book says it’s Scott’s Gaelic,” she protested. Delayna exhaled through clenched teeth and ‘Melza decided to retreat back to the library.

Delayna heard Giles enter the room. He sat alongside her on the sofa, waiting for her full attention. Delayna stopped staring into space and turned to him. “Well?” she questioned, waiting to see what crumbs of comfort he had to offer.

“I called in a few favours,” Giles said, but not as if he expected any gratitude from his listener. “Robson tells me they have found a new Potential. He’s seen her and from the description it’s definitely ‘Renza.”

“Is he sure?”

“Late teens, early twenties, dark hair, blue eyes, recent slash mark on her belly.”

“Same bad attitude?” Delayna asked hopefully.

“She put two members of the retrieval squad in hospital,” Giles offered.

“That’s my girl,” said Delayna quietly. “Thank you.” Giles patted her arm reassuringly. “Do you know what day it is?” Delayna said, abruptly changing the subject.

“Thursday,” Giles offered. “The thirty first of October, that’s...”

“Samhain,” Delayna completed his sentence. “We’re going out tonight, there’s something you have to see.”

Delayna, Jago and ‘Melza stepped out of the house. They had an assortment of weapons, slung, strapped and secreted about their bodies. All three were dressed in combat gear and wore protective amulets around their necks. In their hands, each one carried a lump of granite that had a hole bored halfway through it. Giles had arrived back from a trip to the supermarket. He drove up to the Pridwyns and wound down the window.

“Did you remember the milk?” Delayna asked, leaning into the car.

“Of course I did,” Giles replied, both indignant that she should have so little faith in him and curious as to why she had sent him shopping just before a fieldtrip. “They’re in the boot.”

“Then let’s go,” Delayna said as she opened the car door. Jago and ‘Melza followed her lead, strapping themselves into the back seats.

“Would it not be wise to put your groceries in the ‘fridge?” Giles suggested.

“No,” Delayna insisted. “Just follow the signs for Portreath.” Puzzled by her strange requests, Giles turned on the lights and drove down the rough lane towards the main road.

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The grass of the downs was short and flat, having been nibbled almost to the ground by the wild rabbits that now scampered out of the way of the car's headlights. Giles found a space in the sandy car park and turned off the engine. Delayna got out and put down her hollowed stone in front of the car. Jago did the same, putting his stone at the left side, and 'Melza put hers on the right. "Now for the milk," Delayna opened the boot of the car and unscrewed the bottle. She poured the milk, firstly into the hollow of her stone, secondly into Jago's and thirdly into 'Melza's stone. Giles was confused. As much as he appreciated these quaint little Cornish customs, he not heard of one for parking the car.

Jago went over to Giles and leaned against him. "Milk in a hollow stone," Jago explained. "It wards off the haemovores," Giles looked quizzically at Jago, "The Sugner-gos?" Jago tried to explain. Giles shook his head.

"Wait a minute," a sudden realisation hit Giles. "Haemo is blood, vores means to eater, so you mean..."

"Vampires," 'Melza interrupted. "Although, technically speaking, they drink blood rather than eat it."

"Calm down Giles," said Delayna as she pushed past him, crossbow in hand. "It's just a precaution. I don't think any vamp' will be foolish enough to be out tonight." She stopped and looked at him, carefully considering her next action. "I want to show you something," she said finally.

Her body felt heavy, like it was being sucked down into the hard bed. She was not sure if her immobility was due to the tranquillisers that they had fed her or the restraints that cut into her wrists and ankles. She had fought hard. She had bit, kicked, scratched, punched, blocked and head butted her assailants. There had been no knives, no monk-robed figures, just several burly men who stank of grease and body odour. The scar on her belly had been reopened during the struggle. It had been redressed and stitched, but she was acutely aware of the pain. She opened her eyes and tried to focus. An image, swan-like and bright came floating into vision. She startled, struggling against her restraints, trying to fight the apparition.

"It's okay, Karenza, you're in hospital." Karenza - her full name. Only her mother had ever called her Karenza. 'Renza Pridwyn squinted as the nurse who had spoken to her came into focus. She was brutally built, hard faced, with tight curls escaping from underneath her hat.

"Where the, where the 'ell am I?" 'Renza demanded as she raised her head and looked around. It a hospital, but not of the National Health Service variety. NHS hospitals do not have single rooms with widescreen televisions. NHS hospitals do not bind patients to their beds or draw chalk circles around them. Whoever was holding her knew about her reputation for using mind magic.

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Her attention was caught by a man strolling towards her. He was dressed in a suit with a starched collar and cufflinks. Was he going to a funeral? She put the thought from her head. He was not altogether unkindly looking, but seemed to have a manner of briskness about him.

“Miss Pridwyn, my name is Quentin Travers. I work for the Watchers’ Council of Great Britain,” he extended an arm by way of greeting but quickly realised that ‘Renza’s restraints would make a handshake impossible.

“Oh, I’m very glad for you,” said ‘Renza derisively. “I’m ‘Renza Pridwyn and I’m very pissed off to be here.”

Quentin made a noise that sounded like a suppressed chuckle. “I can see that we would have a problem with you, if you were ever called. It’s fortunate that we found you in time,” he sat down beside her and leant on the bed. “Do you know it is to be the Slayer?” Quentin asked, enthusiasm creeping into his voice.

“A death sentence?” ‘Renza responded.

“The Slayer is an instrument, a weapon against the evil forces that plague mankind. In every generation there is a chosen one,” Quentin explained.

“Yeah, yeah, she alone will stand against the demons, the vampires and the forces of darkness. She is the Slayer, ya-de-ya-de-ya-da. Heard it all already,” said ‘Renza sourly.

“Actually, the exact translation is ‘the vampires, the demons and the forces of darkness’”, Quentin corrected her. “You are a Potential Slayer and we are going to train you, so that should you be called, you will be able to realize your vocation.”

“I don’t want to sound ungrateful and such like but BUGGER THAT!” ‘Renza shouted. Her outburst startled Quentin, who was not accustomed to hearing such language from a ‘young lady’. “I’m a Pridwyn. We do things our way,” she insisted. “You know? Pridwyn? Sacred bloodlines? Children of Danuna? Descendants of Delayna and Pridwyn the Druid?”

“Yes, we’ve already read your DNA.” Quentin said. “You are fortunate that generations of cousin-to-cousin marriages have not resulted in any adverse affects. Nevertheless, demon DNA runs through your family line like a scar and we cannot allow it to pollute the human gene pool any further. As soon as we can make the arrangements you will be sterilised.”

“You bastard!” ‘Renza spat as she continued to struggle. “You don’t have the right.”

“We do,” Quentin insisted. “We have recovered the Torque that Danuna gave to your family. The dynasty of the Pridwyns ends here, in this generation. The Council will no longer tolerate the interference of amateurs.”

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“Delayna will kill you,” ‘Renza threatened.

“I don’t think so,” Quentin countered. “The Danuna people respect human life.”

“That’s why she will kill you,” ‘Renza insisted. “The Torque gives the wearer the strength and abilities of Danuna’s people. Without it Jago cannot fight the ‘forces of darkness’ that you talked about.” ‘Renza was hyperventilating and sweating profusely. The nurse took her pulse and shook her head at Quentin.

“We will discuss this when you are less hysterical,” Quentin smiled at her and patted her on the arm. ‘Renza swallowed hard, not sure if she had the strength to throw another insult at his patronising. She closed her eyes and bit her lip. For the first time in her life, she wished that she was back home in Cornwall.

After ensuring that the car doors were locked and that he had several stakes at hand, Giles followed the Pridwyns across the downs. They travelled for about ten minutes until they met a single-track road that took them almost as far as the cliffs. Hidden among a thicket of gorse bushes was a road sign. Delayna switched off her torch as she approached it and urged Giles to do the same. “Are you ready for this?” Delayna said to him as if he should brace himself. Giles nodded. Delayna raised her torch and illuminated the sign. Giles read the place name and choked on his own breath.

“Hellsmouth,” Giles read it aloud when he had recovered his breath. “Delayna, do you really mean...?”

“That there is a Hellmouth in Cornwall? Yes there is. It’s located under these downs, just before you reach the North Cliffs. The Hellmouth, the tin mines, the energies of this place, they are all connected,” Delayna said, sweeping her arm in the direction of the cliffs as if to illustrate her point.

“That’s what I meant, when I said all ‘ell’s about to break lose,” Jago said with a snigger. Delayna gave him a scolding look that told him it was not a laughing matter.

“It’s been dormant for a long time,” ‘Melza offered. “But over the last fifty years, our records show it’s been getting more active.”

“And it’s drawing them here,” Delayna continued. “As the waters in the abandoned mineshafts rise, they are pushing out all manner of nasty creatures to the surface. The energies are way out of balance. I’ve got reports of hauntings, possessions, vampire attacks, nasty creatures... that Mogsken we killed a few nights back is only the start of it.”

“And now you’ve lost ‘Renza you’re one person short,” Giles said, knowing that ‘Renza’s kidnap by the Watchers’ Council was more than a just a personal tragedy. “I’ll help in anyway I can.”

“That’s settled then,” said Jago clapping his hands and rubbing them together in glee. “So, can we go monster hunting now?” ‘Melza switched off her torch and loaded her

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crossbow, as if to support Jago's request.

"No we can't," Delayna snapped. "Some of the warriors from the Otherworld might be visiting tonight to hunt for vampires and we've got to leave food for them."

It was almost midnight when Jago and 'Melza laid out the groceries on the stone slab. It was the place where the visitors from the Otherworld might meet with their relatives on the special night of Samhain. Jago and 'Melza put the finishing touches to the banquet. Delayna watched from a distance as if she was waiting for someone, but not expecting him to arrive. Giles noted her mournful look but decided it would be better to remain silent.

The morning had arrived too quickly for 'Renza. She had been given a tracksuit; it was pink, but it was preferable to the hospital gowns that she had been wearing. Her long, dark hair had been cut short. Around her neck was a collar with an electronic device attached. Her bare feet felt cold as she walked along the corridor, escorted on either side by two brawny porters equipped with stun guns. She felt dull and heavy. The sedatives that she had been given the previous night were still in her system. They passed through a pair of doors and into what appeared to be a small gymnasium.

Quentin and another man that she did not recognise were waiting for her. The stranger was tall, thin and pale. He appeared to be in his early forties, although he was almost bald and had a nose that would be kindly described as unfortunate.

"Ah, Karenza," Quentin greeted her. "I would like to introduce you to the most important person in your life, your Watcher."

The stranger extended a hand by way of greeting. "Hello Karenza," he said, as if she could only understand simple English. "My name is Crispin Cooper."

"I'm 'Renza," she corrected him, ignoring his extended hand. "And as I'm not a dog, would you be so kind as to get this bleeding collar off my neck!"

"I cannot do that," Crispin said, without a hint of apology or regret. "And that reminds me," he found a small box that was attached to his belt and clicked a button. "Don't ever swear at me again."

A pulse of electric shot out of the collar and down 'Renza's spine. She shrieked, and clawed at the back of her neck. "Why did you?" she gasped.

Quentin inhaled in a way that conveyed his satisfaction with the arrangement and left the room.

"You will learn respect," Crispin said as he stepped closer. "I will not have a Slayer who disobeys the will of her Watcher." He clicked the button again, this time holding it for longer.

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'Renza's shrieks could be heard from far down the corridor, but neither Quentin, the porters or the nurses came to her rescue.

SACREDEARTH MOTHER'S DAUGHTER, FATHER'S SON



Rupert Giles has agreed to spend a week in Cornwall with a family of demon hunters known as the Pridwyns. The Watcher's Council of Great Britain have identified 'Renza Pridwyn as a Potential Slayer and have kidnapped her.

Another night, another nightmare.

Her father sat opposite her at the breakfast table. Her mother read aloud from the schoolbook. She placed the open book on the table and pointed at the line, indicating that the girl should read it. With near perfect recall, the girl repeated the line. Smiling, she looked at her parents for approval. Her father pointed to the book. "Now read the next line," he said. The girl blushed, tracing the letters with her fingertips as she tried to decipher the twisted and swirling symbols. Her parents exchanged concerned glances. Tears stung her eyes, making the letters seem all the more incomprehensible. In frustration she slammed the book shut, threw it to the floor and ran out of the room. Her younger brother, who had been playing with his cars, picked the book up off the floor. The noise had woken the baby who cried out from her cot. Her mother went over and picked up her youngest daughter.

"Daddy," the little boy presented the book to his father. "I can read it for you if you like." The father took his son onto his knee and opened the book. Hesitantly, the son began to read, splitting the more difficult words, with his cherubic fingers. The father ruffled the boy's hair affectionately.

"Come on, John," said the mother as she consoled her baby. "Let's take them out for the day". The father put a reassuring arm around the mother and baby, gathering them to him.

From the doorway, 'Renza watched the scene. Father, son, mother, daughter, where did she fit in? She did not.

"Are you ready to be more reasonable today?" Crispin asked as 'Renza entered the room, escorted, as always, by two guards.

"Are you?" she retorted. Crispin Cooper prowled towards her. The box that controlled the electrode collar that 'Renza wore around her neck was in his hand.

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“Would you like to talk to someone about these self-destructive tendencies of yours?” Crispin asked, although his concern was her intimidation not her welfare. ‘Renza shook her head. “Good, then we will begin with that kata I showed you yesterday.”

Centring herself, ‘Renza performed the sequence of Ju-jitsu movements, although Crispin thought she used far more force for the kicks, thrusts and blocks than was really necessary for the practice.

“Can’t you do any better than this?” The teacher threw the smudged and dog-eared book at her. ‘Renza caught the book in one hand, although she had to stretch almost off balance to do so. Angry red lines had been struck through her work, corrections, comments, her mistakes highlighted for all to see. The work was bad. She was bad. When did achievement replace morality as a measure of self worth? It had happened long ago for her, right from the time she had first been told to pick up a pencil. A pencil, a point, a stake, a weapon to be used against her. She wasn’t trying hard enough, she was lazy, she was spoilt, she just needed to be pushed harder, she was too soft. After all, everyone else in the class was keeping up, what was wrong with her?

“Sod off,” she had said throwing the book back at the teacher. She slung her backpack over her shoulder and stormed towards the door. The teacher tried to block her way but ‘Renza had shoved her to one side. She had gotten the hell out of that classroom, out of that school, out of the system. It had hurt her and she had hit out.

She hit out again, her forearm smashing against Crispin Cooper’s face. Saliva and blood spewed from his astonished mouth as she followed with a kick to his chest. His battered body skimmed across the floor as she towered over him, adding kicks and punches as he curled up like an insect about to be crushed. Reaching down, she retrieved the box that controlled the electrode collar; for a moment she considered destroying it, but decided that it would be too useful. ‘Renza searched her victim, taking his shoes, wallet, security pass and coat. She bound him with a skipping rope and gagged him with his own silk handkerchief. She dragged him into the cleaner’s cupboard and raced down the corridor.

‘Renza found herself dangling out of a second floor window, above the Potential’s dormitory. It was a dilapidated wooden structure with a flat roof that leaked through the plastic skylights. She could hear screams coming from below her. Were those stupid girls having another play fight? She had met the other Potentials only briefly; Crispin had felt her bad attitude might contaminate them. She dropped heavily onto the roof. It flexed with her weight but it held fast. She felt her way along the creaking roof towards one of the skylights. The plastic had deteriorated with age and was now almost opaque. She could make out the forms of two dark clothed figures, breaking down a door, followed by a scream as a knife was raised and plunged into its prey.

Where were the Watchers? Who was watching over these girls? Had the assumption that all was peaceful and safe in their lair lead them to believe that such violence could never happen between their walls? The figures were working their way along the corridor. The girls had been locked into their rooms, Slayers-in-waiting for their bloody fate.

‘Renza had broken free of reason. There was no reason not to join the fight. With a

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primal cry she crashed through the skylight. She landed on top of one of the assailants, teeth, fists, nails and feet tearing into it's flesh until all became red as the bloodlust and battle fury swallowed her whole.

"Is it your day off today?" Giles asked as Delayna, dressed in a bathrobe yawned and stretched her way into the kitchen.

She nodded. "I should get you some breakfast," she said as she opened the cupboard and found the frying pan. "French style or full English?" she asked.

"I beg your pardon?" said Giles, most indignant at her proposition.

"Breakfast," Delayna enunciated. "Croissants and coffee or bacon and eggs?" she translated. "What did you think I was going on about?"

"Sorry I... I did not hear you correctly," Giles apologised as he continued to read the morning paper. "There's an article about the fire," he informed her pointing to the paper. "But nothing about a missing person." He folded the paper and leaned back in his chair. Delayna decided to cook him a full English breakfast with bacon, eggs, fried bread, fried tomatoes, fried mushrooms and croquettes. As an immortal being, she was not, herself, concerned about cholesterol, but she had forgotten that her friends needed to have more regard for their health.

"Good morning Mr Giles," said 'Melza as she glided into the kitchen, a book clasped to her chest. "Can you read Sanskrit?" 'Melza asked hopefully as she put the book on the table. "I've always wanted to get a better understanding of the Dashawn Manuscript, the academic translation is so mechanical."

"I'm familiar with the rudiments of the language," Giles said a dry smile touching his lips. The girl had an intellect and understanding beyond her years. If circumstances had been different he would have suggested that she apply to the Council for a scholarship. She was hungry for understanding, yet half the time she seemed so caught up in her own thoughts that it was as if no one could reach her.

Knowledge is power, his father had said. Giles laughed as he put another record on the turntable and lowered the needle. Traditions, vocations and duties had meant very little to him back then.

They meant the world to him in the here and now.

His reminiscing was interrupted by Delayna who presented him with a platter piled high with breakfast. He found the knife and fork and began to eat. He realised that 'Melza was studying him. He looked up and she looked away, embarrassed.

"I'm sorry to stare," 'Melza said with a sprinkling of embarrassment. "It's just that the way you eat is different to the way most people eat."

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“With a knife and folk?” Giles teased.

“No, you keep your elbows tucked into your sides and you hold your folk with the prongs down,” ‘Melza giggled at her unnecessary observation. She left the book on the table and glided out of the room. Has she never been in polite company? Giles thought to himself.

“Rupert, keep your elbows off the table”, his father had said. “You eat like a starving savage”, he continued. Rupert picked up the plate, slammed it down on the table and pushed his way out of the room. He heard his mother and father arguing, arguing over him, over what was to be done, over where he was to go, over where they had gone wrong.

“Cup of tea?” Delayna presented him with a massive mug of bark coloured drink.

“Yes, thank you,” Giles said as he swallowed hard on a piece of fried bread.

Jago was not in any hurry to get out of bed. The previous evening he had succeeded in purchasing a bottle of white cider from the local off-licence and had consumed at least half of it. He believed in fairies, not just because he had spent a year living with them, but because his mouth felt so dry it was as if the pixies had replaced his tongue with a doormat. Finally he hauled himself to his feet and attempted to get dressed. He looked in the mirror and prodded at the crimson eruption on the tip of his nose that had appeared overnight. For a moment he considered a career as a circus clown. A sudden chill entered the room, like a cloud covering the sun although the level of illumination remained constant. He turned around and regarded the apparition.

“Kind of ironic, isn’t it?” the apparition spoke. “You gave me a broken nose and today you get a zit on yours.” It was Matthew Isaacs, the leader of the gang that terrorised the children in the lower school.

“You are...” Jago raised his eyebrows in puzzlement.

“Yes, I’m dead,” Matthew said, as if he was proud of the fact. “You are supposed to be wearing that Torque, the protector of the people, sacred bloodlines and that sort of thing.” He pulled his collar aside to reveal two evil looking puncture marks. “While you were busy on your little booze cruise last night I was getting it on with a lady vampire,” he walked towards Jago. “Don’t feel bad about it Jago, she was a very tasty vampire, believe me I know, I drank her blood.”

“Well, that’s one perversion I’ve not tried,” Jago said with a twist of irony. “Bit of an extreme way of getting a date, though.”

“Not at all,” the apparition contradicted. It seemed to collapse down a little, to reform into another being. “I took Colette with me.”

“Colette?” Jago recognised her.

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The apparition's new, feminine form smiled at him cruelly. "A girl's got to get her kicks from somewhere, Jago," the apparition in the form of Jago's former girlfriend teased. "And Matthew was a better kisser, less tongue more bite." She gave a snarl, like a hungry dog.

"Jago," 'Melza called as she burst into his room. As she entered the apparition disappeared. "Jago who were you talking to?" she asked, hand on hip.

"I don't know," said Jago, more than a little puzzled. "Do vampires 'ave ghosts?"

The four of them sat around the library table. Delayna had spent the day catching up on the household chores and tending to the garden. Jago and Giles had been to Bodmin Moor, as Giles had expresses a wish to see the stone circles and other ancient monuments. Giles, Delayna and 'Melza were having a heated debate about the metaphysical; Jago sat back and picked at his guitar.

"Vampires can't just appear out of thin air," Giles insisted. "And they cannot enter a dwelling without an invitation," he slapped his hand down on the table as if to add weight to his argument.

"Depends on how you define 'Vampire'," Delayna said sulkily. "I've been around for a lot longer than you, 'ell I've been around a lot longer than your species and I'm telling you, I've known of Vampires that can shape-shift and enter a 'ouse without the owner's say so."

"I don't think it were a Vampire," Melza broke into the argument. "I think it's the same phenomenon that 'Renza saw. You know the one that looked like Dad?"

"The what-you-may-call-it, had Vampire marks on its neck," Jago reminded them. A thought occurred to him, "That means that Matthew Isaacs really could be dead," it was not an altogether unpleasant thought and Jago grinned at the realisation. Delayna noticed his glee and gave him a look that said he should not feel that way about the death of a human being. Jago decided to keep his feelings in check.

"So it, looks like a dead person, it does not need an invitation and does not care if it trespasses into a protected house," Giles summed up the group's findings.

"I think it's time I did some research," said 'Melza as she rose from her chair and went over to her desk. Giles volunteered to help her and 'Melza readily accepted.

"Okay now," said Jago briskly as he unstrapped his guitar and put it to one side. "Down to the real business. How the 'ell are we going to rescue 'Renza." Delayna shrugged in a way that said she had no idea.

"Don't bother," 'Renza, rain soaked and ragged, limped into the library. "I've brought some friends," 'Renza beckoned for her unseen companions to follow her. "This is Annabelle, Kennedy, Molly, they're Slayers-in-waiting, or something like that." The three Potentials, as dishevelled and weary as 'Renza bundled into the room. "I figure you know what to do with this thing," 'Renza threw the collar's control box at Giles. Fumblingly, he caught it and

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studied the dials.

“I thought they’d stopped using these years ago,” Giles recognised the device that nestled in the palm of his hand.

“I brought the débutantes ‘ere for their own safety,” ‘Renza threw herself onto the sofa. “We got chased out of London by the same bunch of stitch eyed monks who tried to kebab me.” Annabelle gave ‘Renza a furious look before sitting down beside her, knees together, back straight.

“Surely the Council will come looking for them. Are you sure you were not followed?” Giles blustered as he slipped his hands into his waistcoat pocket.

“She saved my life,” Kennedy said. “These guys in the most heinous Halloween outfits broke into the dormitory,” she turned to Annabelle and Molly. “They were just like the one’s I told you about, that’s why Mummy and Daddy brought me to London.”

Molly continued the story. “They were working their way from room to room, next thing we know, ‘Renza had broken our door down and the whole building was on fire.”

“I got the embroidery eyes trapped behind a fire door,” ‘Renza explained. “The flamethrower thing was a little innovation of mine, that I used to practice during science lessons.”

“I remember that incident all too well,” said Delayna with the weary reminiscence of the time when ‘Renza had nearly killed herself by attaching a fire hose to her school’s gas supply.

“We should have assembled by the Council building,” Annabelle insisted, interrupting the story. “By running away like this, we are neglecting our training.”

“Oh sod the training,” ‘Renza heaved herself up off the couch. “If we were so damned important why did they not ‘ave CCTV cameras watching our dormitory? As far as they’re concerned we’re dead and that’s the way I want it to stay.” With that, ‘Renza left the room.

“If you need a Watcher, Mr Giles, can help,” ‘Melza offered. “He’s been a real Watcher to a real Slayer.”

“Cool,” said Jago, as he looked the girls up and down. “Can I show you ladies some of the Judo holds that I know?”

Delayna looked at Giles and Giles looked at Delayna. They gave a collective sigh as they considered how in the world they were going to cope with so many young people with so many destinies.

“You okay?” Jago found ‘Renza sitting on the back porch. She had an open bottle of lager

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in her hand and two or three more empty ones at her feet.

“Am I ever?” ‘Renza replied, staring into the twilight. “Ave they gone yet?”

“They’re leaving in five minutes. Giles ‘as got a place up in Wiltshire where he’s taking them for a while, give ‘im time to decide his next move.” Jago sat down beside her. She offered him a drink, but the previous night’s run-in with a bottle of cider had left him with a nasty hangover and he declined the invitation.

“Do you think Delayna knew, about me being a Potential Slayer?” said ‘Renza, her thoughts far from the present place.

“I dunno, most of ‘em never get called anyway,” Jago tucked his knees under his chin and wrapped his arms around his legs. “Our mum never got called.”

‘Renza smiled as she remembered the stories of how her parents had met, fallen in love and how her father had helped her mother escape from her Watcher. “You know Jago,” she said, finally turning towards him. “All the time we were growing up it was, like – you know, you had this great destiny to guard humanity against the demons, ‘Melza was some kind’a precocious genius, and I was, well... just the big sister who bunked off school and got into trouble. Now I find out I’m a Potential Slayer and it’s like, what do I do now?”

“You’re asking me?” Jago said, laughing at the irony. “The source of my power is locked in some safe at the Watchers’ HQ and Del’s only solution is to make me a Danuna demon like herself,” Jago made a slurping noise and bared his teeth, ‘Renza joined in the joke by offering him her neck as if he were a vampire.

“Seriously,” ‘Renza called time on the fooling around and got back to the discussion. “When I was in London, this psycho Watcher guy taught me some Ju-jitsu moves. I used them to beat the crap out of him, but I found the discipline really useful.”

“Kinky,” said Jago with a naughty grin.

“Shut up,” ‘Renza gave him a sisterly slap around the shoulders. “I’m gonna join a class. Not that I’ll ever get called, but if I do get Slayer strength I want to be able to use it.”

“Well, you rescued those girls without it.”

“That was something else, best fight of my life, you should have been there,” ‘Renza put the bottle on the step and illustrated the fight with jabs and punches directed at the night air.

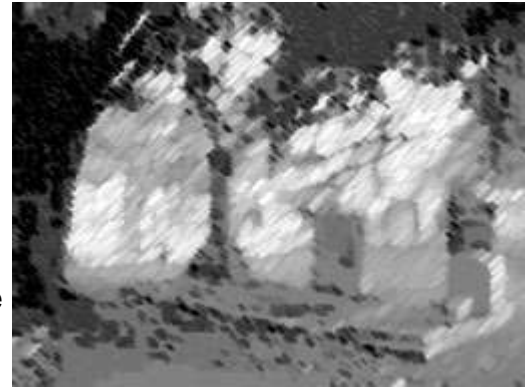
“You’re right, I should have been there,” Jago took her last comment out of context, but it had made him think. “I’m gonna get Dad’s Torque back from the Council. Just as soon as I’ve got the results of my SATs tests, and finishes my GCSEs... then maybe I’ll go to college.” The sound of Giles revving his car told them that it was time to say goodbye. They left their perch on the back porch and ran around to the front of the house.

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Jago, Karenza, Demelza and Delayna Pridwyn watched the car disappear down the dirt track that led from their home. It had been less than a week since Rupert Giles had come into their lives. They had turned each other's worlds upside down. A red glow in the west betrayed where the sun had set as the last light of day gave way to the night. "It looks like we're on our own again," Jago remarked. He sighed deeply. "Whose turn is it to patrol tonight?"

SACREDEARTH – AFTER THE STORM



The graveyard of a country church can be a beautiful place in summertime. He traced the black embossed letters with his fingertips. They felt warm in the sunshine of late afternoon, the granite returning the warmth that it had received during the day. This week he had brought her lilies, white with a sprinkling of pink spots. She had liked flowers, especially pink ones. She would have loved the lilies, but she would have been a little sad that they had not been left in the garden. If you cut the flowers, it means that the bulbs will not be able to reabsorb the nutrients in the stem and you will not get so many flowers next year - she had told him that. A flower cut from the plant will die. Today there will be lilies, next week they will have faded, the following week they will be dead.

All life is short, all life is beautiful.

Leaning forward, he planted a kiss on the silent headstone. He got up, gathering the dead flowers and wiping away the grass cuttings that had become stuck to his trousers. He paused for a moment, looking back at the memorial, checking to see that all was as it should be.

“Thought I'd find you 'ere”, he startled at his elder sister's voice. She stepped alongside him and admired his work. “I've put some more flowers on Mum and Dad's grave,” she indicated with her thumb towards an older part of the cemetery. “Plastic ones, of course. Mum always said that the only flowers she liked were cauliflowers, 'cause they're the only ones you can eat.”

He smiled to himself. At just over seventeen years of age he felt that he had seen enough of death, funerals and gravestones to last a lifetime. He had yet to decide if his family was destined or doomed to fight the darker forces of this world, but he was beginning to think that it was a bit of both. “Everything we love dies,” he uttered, never taking his eyes off the gravestone. His sister could think of half a dozen ways to reply, but she was wise enough to know that all of them would sound stupid. He continued, “even those who were supposed to be immortal.”

“Delayna will be back,” she reassured him. “I'm not saying that she won't be a little singed 'round the edges after getting sucked into that hell dimension, but she's a Danunite demon, they're tough little buggers. But that's not why I'm here, we've got a visitor.” He looked up with interest. “He's got an offer for us.”

“Is it Mr Giles?” Jago Pridwyn asked. “I thought that he was going 'round Europe or something.”

“'Tis,” Renza Pridwyn confirmed. “Melza's filling 'im in on what's been going on with us

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these last few years. I said I would bring you along,” 'Renza picked up the empty watering can. “Come-us-on boy, let's see what 'e 'as to say fer 'imself.”

“Renza's a second Dan?”

“Well, yes. She's a Slayer now,” 'Melza furrowed her eyebrows, puzzled at his disbelief.

“Renza's a Slayer?”

“Well, yes. She was called back in two thousand and two, along with all the other Potentials,” 'Melza tilted her head to one side, giving him the gentle, quizzical look that was so much a part of her enquiring personality. “You knew she was a Potential, right?”

“I hoped that she would not be called,” he admitted. Just then Jago and 'Renza burst into the kitchen.

“Giles!” Jago greeted him loudly. “Where 'ave you been? We've been trying to get to you for ages,” Jago nearly pulled Giles out of his chair in an enthusiastic embrace. “Real good to see you old man!”

Giles blanched at being referred to as an 'old man'. “It's been a busy few years,” he offered by way of apology and explanation. 'Melza rose from her chair and began to prepare tea for 'Renza and Jago.

Jago turned his chair around so that the back faced the kitchen table and sat astride it, just like he always did. “So tell me, what brings you back to Cornwall?”

Giles took another sip from his mug of tea and considered how he would answer. “Before I answer that question,” he decided “I would like you to tell me what you three have been doing since I left.” 'Melza presented her siblings with a mug of tea each and sat down with them at the kitchen table.

“Melza,” Jago said. “You're the book person, why don't you tell the tale?”

“I can do better than that,” 'Melza unhooked a chain from around the back of her neck to reveal a pendant had been hidden underneath her dress. She pulled it out from under the velvet material and held it in front of Giles' face. The pendant appeared to be made of rose quartz. “I can show you,” 'Melza swung the crystal gently to and fro. “Look into the crystal and you will see all that you need to know.”

Captivated by the gentle swaying, Giles' expression began to glaze over, the room seemed to be filled with a golden glow as his eyes fluttered shut.

“Jago, are you going to school today or no?” Delayna stood outside his bedroom door, shouting loudly. Jago groaned, turned over and pulled the duvet over his head. There

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was no way in hell he was going. He'd been cheated on and humiliated. Colette had been seeing Matthew Issacs behind his back, had tittle tattled to all her friends and the whole school knew about it. Now the two of them had disappeared, killed by a vampire; although everyone else assumed that they had eloped. How very bloody romantic, Jago thought as he drew his knees up to stop his feet getting cold. Either the duvet had shrunk or he had grown taller. "Jago!" Delayna bellowed again, this time banging at the door. "I'm going to break this door down in a moment!" Jago knew that Delayna, his foster mother, meant what she said. He threw off the bed covers and stepped on to the cold carpet.

'Renza sat at the kitchen table scanning the jobs section of the morning newspaper. Without looking up, she leaned across the table and took the last piece of toast from the serving platter. Jago entered the kitchen, just in time to see his breakfast disappear into 'Renza's oversized mouth. She did not look up, "serves you right for getting up so late," 'Renza said, almost reading his thoughts.

"Bitch," he replied. He went over to the biscuit tin. "Did you eat the last of the cereal bars?" he asked.

"Yep'," 'Renza replied as she licked the marmalade off her finger tips. "Very tasty they were to," she folded the newspaper and threw it across the table in his general direction. "You wanna see the personal adds'?" 'Renza said, mischievously.

Jago's father had told him that he should never hit a woman, not a human one in any case, but his older sister was really winding him up. Still fuming, he pushed past 'Melza in the hallway as he collected his jacket and school bags.

"Are you teasing him about Colette?" 'Melza interrogated, standing over her elder sister. "Because if you are, it's not a very nice thing to do."

"I'm doing him a favour," 'Renza protested. "He's not ready for the battle of the sexes. Hell, he can't even take down a bloodsucker without me or Del's help." 'Renza chuckled.

"He's right about one thing," 'Melza said. 'Renza looked up with interest. "You really are a bitch." Leaving her older sister to consider her actions, 'Melza took the newspaper off the table and retired to the library.

"Hiya Jago," Flint, Jago's study partner and best friend greeted him loudly with a friendly punch to the shoulder. Flint's family were a strange mix. His great great grandfather had gone to South Africa to find work, married a Zulu princess, struck gold and returned to Cornwall to raise a family. Flint had inherited her caramel skin, dark eyes and hair that he 'could not do a damned thing with'. "How's your sister?"

"Renza? I wish she'd stayed in London," Jago let his backpack slide off his shoulder and dumped it in front of his locker. "Sometimes I wish I were an only child." Their attention was caught by the approach of the new girl in the class. Isobella was small for her age, some would say scrawny. Her hair was wavy and tied with a ribbon, unlike the other girls

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in her class she had not attempted to straighten it. She wore gold rings in her ears and on her fingers. A silver charm bracelet dangled from around her right wrist.

“Hello Jago,” she greeted him shyly. “I’m glad to hear that your sister decided to return home safely,” Isobella smiled, unsure of what to say next. Jago and Flint said nothing. “You seem to be doing a lot of wishing, wishing your sister were in London, wishing you were an only child.”

“Yeah, but I don’t mean it like, do I Flint?” Jago stuttered, looking to Flint for support. Flint said nothing.

“I’ve got to go,” Isobella apologised. “I’ve got maths in ten minutes and I don’t want to be late.” She walked away, clutching her folder to her chest as if it were a suit of armour.

“You should shag her.”

“What?”

“You should shag her,” Flint repeated. “Man, she is so into you. You should do her and dump her, it will help you forget about Colette.”

“Giss on,” Jago said his embarrassment all too obvious. “She’s only being friendly.”

“That’s the kind of ‘friendly’ that every bloke wants,” Flint said with a wicked grin. “You going to maths?”

“Like hell,” Jago replied. “I’m bunking off.”

“Me to,” Flint said, “I’m gasping for a fag”

On the edge of the school grounds was a spinney of fir trees, the kind that are tall, wide and perfect for hiding under. Flint lit another roll-up cigarette that was more paper than tobacco. Jago sat reading the latest lads’ mag’, Flint sat next to him, looking at the pictures. Sometimes, playing truant was almost as boring as attending the lesson, but when the lesson was maths, bunking off seemed to be a necessary evil. Jago looked at his watch, “it’s lunch time,” he informed Flint. Already, the more studious pupils were streaming out of their classes towards the dinner hall. Flint had been distracted by activity at the other end of the field where a group of students had gathered. He pushed the branches aside to get a better view. “Looks like someone’s getting a good hiding,” Flint said, “wanna go see?”

“Hell, yeah,” said Jago as he got to his feet.

Together they ran across the sports field towards the gathering. The onlookers were shouting and clapping. As Jago and Flint got closer they could hear what was being said; chants of ‘gipsy bitch’, ‘traveller scum’ and ‘kick the witch’. Jago and Flint pushed their way through the outer members of the crowd toward the middle where Isobella, curled into

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a ball, was being kicked, punched and spat at from all sides.

Jago was furious. He shouted at them to leave her alone, when his demands went unheeded, he tried to pull them off. Someone threw a punch at him, catching him on the shoulder. Jago retaliated by whacking him and sending him sprawling into the crowd. Flint joined in although they were helplessly outnumbered. The next few moments passed in a whirl of shouts, flailing limbs, mud, blood, punches and pain. The bodies seemed to enclose in around them, until a teacher parted the way, letting in daylight once more, and grabbing Flint and Jago by the shirt collars.

Being out numbered in a fight has two disadvantages:

1. You are likely to get hurt a lot more badly than your enemies
2. When it comes to explaining what you are doing the teachers, it's the word of a lot of them against the two of you

"I just don't know who to believe," Mr Master, the Head of Jago's year shook his head. "It's not the first time you've been in a fight, is it Jago?" He leaned back, lacing his fingers together.

"No sir," Jago replied, trying to look as sorry as he could. "But sir, they were hurting Isobella."

"Then you should have got an adult. I know things have been difficult for you this past year, but Jago, you can't solve every problem by violence," Mr Masters shook his head and reached for a pile of forms. "I'm sorry Flint, I'm going to have to put you on report," he signed one of the forms in front of him, and handed it to Flint. "And as for you Jago Pridwyn, because this is a second offence, I'm going to recommend that you are excluded until next term."

"You can't do that, what about my education?" Jago protested.

"I have to consider the safety of others. I can't have you starting fights just because you hear someone being called a nasty name," Mr Master was emphatic. "Sticks and stones may break my bones as they say," he added.

"But words can really hurt me," Jago completed the rhyme, adding his own take on the narrative.

"I'll inform you're foster mother on your behalf," Mr Masters said. "I'll let her know that you're on your way home."

Delayna, 'Renza and 'Melza were waiting for him around the kitchen table. Jago's blood ran cold. Pins and needles seemed to rise from the pit of his stomach, gripping him around the throat as if they were about to choke him. "I can explain everything," Jago

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began.

“We know all about it,” said Delayna. From behind the door stepped two men, the younger of the two looked about forty, his face was weathered like worn leather and his clothes seemed just as tired as his face. The older man looked like he had seen too many baking summers and freezing winters, yet his eyes twinkled blue as the summer sky and his hair was white as the driven snow. “This is Glynn and Tom Innis of the Chirgwyn Clan,” Delayna introduced them. “They are camping on the Crofty site for the winter.”

Tom, the older man, spoke, “We’re here to thank you for saving Isobella from taking a beating.”

“Isobella?” Jago exclaimed. “Where is she? Is she alright?”

“Her grandmother is looking after her,” Glynn reassured him. “She’s got a few bruises but she’ll do alright,”

“Are you absolutely sure you don’t want me to find out who started it?” Renza offered, grinning as she formed a fist and pressed it into the palm of her other hand.

“No thank you,” Tom declined the offer. “We Chirgwyns will deal with them in our own good time.”

“I almost feel sorry for them,” Melza added.

Tom walked around the table and rested his hands on the back of Melza’s chair. “Your younger sister has agreed to tutor Isobella for the rest of the term, the poor girl is too frightened to go back to school and it’s time she learnt about the old ways.” Melza smiled shyly, feeling a little nervous at the prospect of having to teach someone who was older than her.

Glynn stepped forward. “We’ve also come to show you this,” he pulled a cloth wrapped bundle from out of his rucksack and placed it between Delayna and Melza. Melza untied the string and unwrapped the damp material.

“Oh yuck!” exclaimed Melza. She put her hand over her mouth as she gagged at the sight.

Delayna examined the severed head. “Jevon Mor,” she identified it.

“Sea demon,” Melza translated.

“One of my folks shot several of them,” Glynn explained. “A whole swarm came out of the sea near Marazion and attacked a group of children. Do you have any idea why?”

“They were most probably just hungry,” Delayna said as she looked the dead creature in the eyes. “These ones aren’t too smart, they used to do grunt work for other demons – until the sensible ones returned to the Otherworld,” she folded the cloth back around the

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head to hide the offensive sight.

“It was carrying this,” Tom handed 'Melza a piece of coloured cloth.

'Melza unfolded it and held it up to the light. “It's a Formorrian family crest,” she identified it. “It's got to be a couple of thousand years old”

“Don't be daft,” Jago protested. “It's like new.”

“It can't be,” 'Melza protested. “Delayna's people drove the Formorria into the sea and they all drowned, any student of Irish mythology could tell you that.”

“Let's skip the history lesson,” Delayna called a stop to the discussion and snatched the cloth from 'Melza. “They were probably summoned by some Druid wannabes, got hungry, went ashore to feed and got shot by the Chirgwyns. I really don't think we've got anything to be worrying about.”

“I'm very pleased to hear it,” Tom Innis said. “It's not the kind of thing you can take to the police now is it?”

Later that evening, after Tom and Glynn had gone back to their camp, Jago found Delayna sitting alone in the kitchen. She was examining the cloth that they had left for her. She did not look up. Jago sat opposite her. “It's the Formorria, isn't it?” Jago asked. Delayna fondled the cloth between her fingers, her thoughts so far away that his words did not reach her. “Delayna?” Jago tried again. She startled, looking up at him with wild eyes. He noticed that she had been crying, something he had never seen her do before.

She got to her feet. “It was all a long time ago,” she said enigmatically. “I've moved on from then.” She dumped the cloth down on the table and left the room without another word.

“What was all that about?” Jago said to the thin air. “It must be a girl thing.”

Jago stood up to his knees in river water, his clothes barely protecting his feet from going numb in the November cold. He was wielding a net, catching salmon that were weak from their winter spawning. It was illegal to be fishing here without a proper licence, but Jago had decided that the rewards of a fridge full of salmon were worth the risk of getting caught. He scooped up another unfortunate struggling victim, turned it out into the holding net that he had hidden under the foot bridge and continued to sweep the waters.

“You should use a wicker trap,” a voice from behind caused him to spin round, nearly throwing him off balance. “My brothers could show you how to make one.” It was Isobella. She sat on the foot bridge, dangling her legs just inches above the water.

“Err, hello, Isobella, how are you?” Jago stuttered.

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She gave a little laugh, and pulled up her sleeve to reveal a rash of bruises running right up her arm. “You don't look so good either.”

“I've been better,” Jago rubbed his lower lip that had been split open in the fight. It was healing quickly, one of the advantages of having a little demon DNA in his genome.

“I've brought you some lunch,” Isobella offered. Jago hid the net under the foot bridge and climbed up next to her. She smiled shyly as she handed him a sandwich. “Melza said I would find you here. She let me take a break from studying.” Jago took the sandwich and parted the bread to see what Del' had used for the filling. Salmon, it must be her idea of a joke. With a little sigh he took a bite. “Do you really kill vampires?”

The shock of her question caused Jago to gag, spitting his food into the air and all over his clothes. “Urgh, I'm sorry,” he apologised, wiping himself down. She laughed at how flustered he had become. “I just, I don't talk about it much.”

“Sacred duties and that sort of thing?” Isobella teased.

“That sort of thing,” Jago echoed. He took a new bite from his sandwich, surveying the scenery. He decided it was time to take action. “Isobella, would you like to go to the bonfire tomorrow?”

“Guy Fawkes night?” Isobella exclaimed. “I don't think my Grandfather would be very happy?”

“Why, don't he like me or somethin'?” Jago said with concern.

“No. It's just that - hello, Irish, Catholic and...”

“Oh, Right, Sorry, Guy Fawkes, gun powder plot, English oppressors...”

“I would love to go,” Isobella interrupted. Just then, the sound of a four-by-four stopping on the nearby road caused them to panic. Jago glimpsed it through the trees. It belonged to the gamekeeper of the estate.

“Oh, damn it!” Jago gathered up their packed lunch and put it in his rucksack. “Come on,” he jumped in the water, urging her to follow. Isobella hesitated.

“It's freezing cold in there,” she protested.

“You want to explain to the game keeper what we are doing on private land?” Jago said, the panic raising his voice louder than he would of liked. With a sigh, Isobella slid off the bridge and into Jago's waiting arms. The near freezing waters caused her to gasp, but she kept quiet as he lead her under the bridge. There were footsteps, and two men talking about someone with a net being reported in the area. She was shivering now, despite her thick winter dress. Jago held her close, warming her with his own body.

“Your lip is bleeding,” she whispered. In the scuffle, Jago had reopened the scar that he

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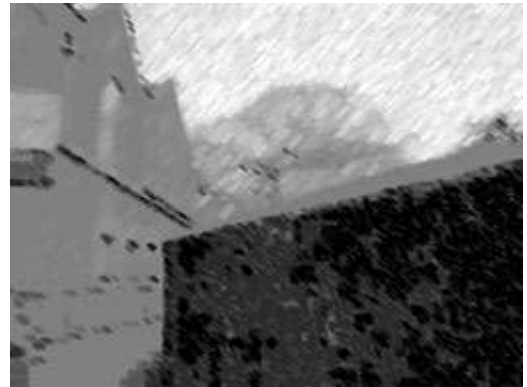
had suffered by defending her.

“You wanna kiss it better?” Jago replied in the same hushed tones. She nodded, or was she just shivering in the cold dark light? He leaned in closer to her, pressing his mouth against her trembling blue lips. She responded by lapping her tongue against the salty blood that trickled from the wound. Above them, the footsteps faded into the distance. The vehicle was started and driven away, but they did not notice.

They finally parted, breathless, wet and nearly frozen. Isobella averted her eyes and tried to disengage herself from his embrace. “I should not have done that,” she said, in a sad, small voice.

“Are you sorry?” Jago asked, stroking her hair with a soft smile. She shook her head. “Well then,” he guided her face towards his waiting lips. “Why stop now?”

SACREDEARTH – WAKING MOMENTS



Lot's of people wondering about the countryside, looking for a firework display in some distant field in the dark.

Vampire fodder.

Jago and Isobella sneaked over the stone and earth wall and ran two wards the crowd of people that stood around an enormous bonfire. Another rocket soared into the sky, trailing sparks and flashes. It exploded in a shower of red light, causing Isobella to squeal in delight. Jago put his arm around her waist. She should not be here. She had lied to her father and grandfather, telling them that she was staying overnight with 'Melza. They had not been very happy, but they trusted her and they trusted Delayna. They were not to know that Delayna knew nothing about the arrangement.

Jago's attention was caught by a group of burly looking men hanging back from the main crowd. They did not seem to be interested in the display. They were drinking from plastic beer mugs and laughing amongst themselves, but it was just wrong somehow. Leaving Isobella by the hot dog stand, Jago dodged his way towards them. He recognised their leader.

One Fang – the leader of the Wrinkly Gang.

One Fang had spotted Jago. He turned to him. "I would offer you a drink, but you are not old enough," One Fang's teasing brought a rapturous laughter from his followers. "Go home little Pridwyn, there's not enough blood in you for a good meal." Again the Wrinkly gang exploded into hysterical laughter.

Jago stood his ground. "I'm not going to fight you," he said. From his pocket he produced a mobile phone. "But one press of a button will bring Delayna hear, and she is more than a match for the whole lot of you."

"Hiding behind a woman? Since your Father is resting in Davy Jones' locker I guess you've been lacking a male influence in your life. It can make a young man effeminate don't you know?" With that One Fang threw his drink in Jago's face. Enraged, Jago threw a punch. One Fang blocked it. He did not see Jago's leg rise up and kick him squarely in the shin. One Fang yelled in pain, regained his composure and started laughing again. "Come on boys," One Fang said, backing down. "This little one is not worth fighting." The Vampires downed their drinks, threw the glasses on the floor and skulked away. One Fang stopped and turned. "Maybe in a year or two's time boy," he said, half in humour half with menace.

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“Nice people,” Isobella said as she linked arms with Jago. “Friends of yours?”

“Hell no,” said Jago. “Listen, I want you to have something,” he reached down into his jacket pocket and produced his spare mobile phone. “It’s got all of our numbers in it, you just have to recharge it every few days.” He handed it to Isobella.

“Thank you,” she said, examining the device. “I’m not sure if I will ever use it.”

“Cornwall can be a dangerous place,” said Jago teasingly. “The night is full of monsters,” he raised his hands in a claw like pose, baring his teeth and growling. Isobella played along with the joke, squealing at him not to bite her and pretending to fight him off. He pulled her closer to him, stealing a kiss as the fireworks continued to explode.

The back streets of the old town were narrow, jumbled and dark. One such alleyway boasted a graveyard on one side and the town’s only nightclub on the other. It was the perfect hunting ground for vampires. 'Renza was out alone. It was past midnight and she was returning home from her new job as a barmaid. The sky above was a beautiful deep blue, the silver moon placed as a perfect sphere high above the rooftops. She heard something behind her. It sounded like a boot scraping across the tarmac as it was withdrawn into one of the doorways. She continued walking. It was better not to show fear. This was her town. They were the outsiders. The shadows ahead of her seemed to slouch into life as a brick wall of a man emerged from the darkness. He was flanked by two similarly ugly beings, the three of them blocking the alleyway. 'Renza stopped. She put her hands on her hips and looked at them contemptuously.

“You’re father never tell you it’s bad manners to get in the way of a lady?” she said mockingly. He hissed heavily and moved towards her. “Oh, sorry,” she grinned. “Don’t know who your father is, do you? I thought as much.” She lashed out, staking the vampire that had been trying to sneak up behind her. These were the big dumb sort, she had concluded. They fall easily. She unzipped her coat, exposing her impressive, if tightly squeezed chest. Seductively she stroked her neck and looked at the lead vampire through lowered eyes. “Wanna come and get me, big boy?”

It was an offer that the leader could not refuse. He again moved towards her. 'Renza did likewise, wrapping herself around him, letting him touch her. Unsheathing his fangs, he moved in for the meal. His companions could not believe what they were seeing and stood in open mouthed fixation. His teeth pierced her skin and he tasted her for the first time. It chocked him. He withdrew from her and stumbled backwards.

'Renza stood over him, covering the scar to prevent blood loss. “That’s Pridwyn blood that you’ve just tasted,” she informed in. “In a few days time you will start to feel unwell. You will start to see and hear things. And slowly, and did I mention, painfully, you will waste away over one or two hundred years.” His look of horror and fear gave her power. Already his companions were backing away.

“If you live that long,” 'Renza looked up to see Delayna. On each arm she held a crossbow. She raised them, fired and his companions exploded in a cloud of dust.

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Delayna's expression was stony. Dropping her crossbows she produced a sword from inside her coat. The vampire spun around, just in time to see the blade whirling towards his neck and separating it from his body.

Delayna stood over 'Renza. "You are playing with fire," she said emphatically. 'Renza tutted, got to her feet and dusted herself down.

"It was just a bit of fun," she protested.

"You are going to get burnt," Delayna said, though it was more of a warning than a prophesy.

"Maybe I want to burn," 'Renza said. Her statement caused Delayna to lunge at her, grabbing her by the wrist.

"You stop that right now!" Delayna demanded. "I'm not going to lose you Karenza, I've lost too many already." Something flashed in Delayna's eyes. It was not battle fury. It was something that 'Renza had never seen before.

"Get over it," 'Renza snapped, her mind having touched Delayna's and snatched a handful of her thoughts and emotions.

For a moment, the warring parties locked each other's gaze. Delayna decide to back down. "We had better get home," she said, her tone one of reconciliation. 'Renza resisted for a moment, but she was tired and did not want to continue the fight.

Delayna slept fitfully. It was the sleep of an immortal being, rich in memories, emotions and regrets. She woke to find herself in unfamiliar surroundings. She looked around. It was a lying in room, the place where a new born mother and baby would retreat for weeks after the birth. The mother's face was radiant, the baby in her arms, as soft and tender as a newly picked peach. She could not see the detail of the mother's face, nor that of her baby, just a shadow of light that quickly swallowed them and left the room dark and cold. The room changed again, from cold and dark to light, grassy, with a powder blue sky. A child with wild curly hair, dressed in a sailor suit, ran through the meadow, his strong legs carrying him further than his mother would have liked. His mother ran after him, calling his name; but her voice was distorted as if the wind had taken her words. She caught up with the boy just as the scene changed again. This time it was a drawing room. It was a place that Delayna recognised. She was standing in front of the child's mother. The mother was enraged, flaying her arms about and raising her thin voice.

The mother spoke, "You will not turn my son into a killer."

"He is already a killer," Delayna had protested. "It's in his blood, he's a Pridwyn."

The mother stopped and exhaled, her rage building into a new indignation. "Don't you ever, ever say that again," the mother waved a finger in Delayna's face.

"He was your cousin," Delayna reminded her. "You could have kept your legs shut, but

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no, you had to play the whore, and now it's he is the new Night Guardian.”

“Get out!” the mother screamed, pointing her arm towards the door to illustrate the direction in which she wished Delayna to go. “If you return I will have you thrown in jail.”

“You cannot stop him,” Delayna reminded her. “He will want it, he will burn for it, you will not be able to stop him.”

The mother gained her composure. “We will see,” she said, serenity returning to her face.

Picking up her bag, Delayna turned and left. The little boy was standing in the door way, looking up fondly at his 'Aunt'. Delayna knelt down to him, stroking his curly brown hair out of his eyes. She spoke softly to him.

“Resist the devil, Bibbin,” she said, cupping his cheek with her hand. “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

Delayna woke with the words on her lips. It was still dark. She sighed, reached for the bowl of salt beside her bed and threw a handful of it into the air. That should keep the nasties out of her room. She would deal with the rest of the house in the morning.

'Melza peered over at the book, checked a reference in another and wrote something down in the third. She had never been very good at sleeping during the day. Her back was aching a little and her stomach was rumbling. She decided to get up to stretch her legs and get something to eat. When she returned, someone was sitting at her desk.

“Excuse me,” 'Melza said, interrupting the intruder. The intruder turned around. It was 'Melza's double. 'Melza thought, tilted her head, first one way, then the other. She spoke, “Well this can't be good.”

'Melza sat opposite the intruder, studying her, wondering what type of apparition she was witnessing. 'Melza spoke, “Excuse me, are you a corporal or non corporal entity.”

“Oh, strictly non corporal,” the intruder said in a voice that sounded like 'Melza. “But I am ambitious.” The intruder got up and walked around. “There is more in your veins than Pridwyn blood,” 'Melza followed the intruder's progress around the room.

“I know that,” 'Melza said softly.

“It's going to poison you,” the intruder stated.

“No one can say that for certain,” 'Melza returned. The intruder continued to walk around the room, her footsteps made no sound. “Who are you any way?”

“I am you,” the intruder said.

“No you're not,” 'Melza said with a nervous smile.

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“I am you. I was with you when you were squirming in your mother's belly, I was born with you, I was there and waiting when they came for you,” the intruder threw back her head and laughed. “I am your soul twin, you're evil one, you're Taish.”

“You are my vampire,” 'Melza said in realisation.

“I was denied my rightful vessel, but don't worry, sooner or later I will be able to get into you, to suck that filthy soul from out of you're heart and be made flesh, it is just a matter of time.”

“Never!” 'Melza sank to her knees, bowing her head and clasping her hands in prayer. Her lips recited a Psalm but she never took her eyes off the intruder.

“My work here is done,” with a resigned smile, the intruder faded as 'Melza continued her recital. Eventually the room was clear. 'Melza got to her feet and closed up her books. She stopped, thought, reopened one of them and scanned the page with widened eyes.

“Del' has got to read this,” 'Melza said out loud to herself.

Jago was awake, still basking in the remembrance of Isobella's embrace. He felt warm and light. Was this love? It certainly felt good. He got up and went over to the dressing table, placing both his hands on the polished surface and staring at his half-illuminated reflection in the mirror.

“Did you use precautions.”

A voice, half forgotten yet familiar caused him to spin around.

“Dad?” Jago said through the darkness. “You're dead,” he exclaimed.

“Forever dead, forever alive,” Jago's father stepped out of the shadows and into the moonlight. “And resting in the Summerland,” the ghostly presence sat down on Jago's bed. Jago noticed that it did not leave an indentation or cause the springs to creak. “So, her name is Isobella?”

“Yes,” Jago smiled and blushed. “I think that I love her.” Jago sat on the bed next to him.

“You love her, yes?” Jago's father echoed. Jago nodded. “But Jago, I've come to warn you. Isobella is now in danger and you cannot protect her,” his father's voice was sincere and serious. Jago had heard warnings like this before, from Delayna. You cannot protect them all, she had said, sometimes you have to make a choice. “Unless...” his father hesitated.

“What?” said Jago, fear rising in his voice. “What must I do?”

His father sighed and looked heavenward towards the ceiling. “Jago, you have to give up

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this notion of being a demon hunter.” There it was, a simple statement to make not so simple to do. “I know it's not going to be easy of you to give up being the Night Guardian,” his father continues. “Heaven knows, that's what I always wanted for you, but more than that, I want you to have a life Jago, to have a family and to watch them grow up. I don't want you to die young like we did.”

“I can't do that Dad,” Jago protested.

Jago's father shook his head. “You have to chose between being the Night Guardian and protecting Isobella. You have to take her away, from here, if you want your daughter to be born alive,” his father raised two ghostly arms and placed them on Jago's shoulders. Despite not feeling their pressure, Jago could have sworn he felt a ghostly presence where his father's hands met his skin.

“My daughter?” Jago echoed. The realisation hit Jago like a punch in the chest.

“Remember,” Jago's father said as he faded. “You cannot protect them all.”

Another moment and Jago was alone again. Isobella. The girl that he loved. She was going to have a baby; and he was the father.

“They're called Bringers,” 'Melza said as she placed the open book in front of 'Renza.

“Yeah, that's them,” 'Renza pointed at the page. “Their eyes were all like stitched up.” 'Renza reached down and felt the scar on her belly. She had healed quickly. Good stuff this Pridwyn blood, she thought to herself.

“The First is back?” Jago said with some surprise. “I thought your folks sent it to Hell a few millennium ago,” Jago turned to Delayna for an answer.

“We did,” Delayna confirmed. “There was a massive battle, tens of thousands died and we threw it into the Hellmouth.”

“Would this be the same Hellmouth, that is getting all awakey?” said 'Renza as she took another piece of toast and pushed it into her mouth in one gulp.

“Oh dear,” Jago exclaimed. “Hellmouth opens a bit, the First Evil slips out, and the fun and games begin,” said Jago, whooshing his hands through the air to illustrate the point. “Where is it now?”

“It's not the First you have to worry about, at the moment it's bodily form is stuck in a hell dimension, but it's conscience self is out and about directing it's followers. It's the followers that you have to worry about,” Delayna turned another page to reveal a set of drawings showing the various demons that the First had made alliances with. “The First can only taunt us, at night, in our dreams, in the first waking moments of the morning. We should all be on our guard.”

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“All Hell really is about to break loose,” said Jago, cupping his head in his hands.

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Loads of Love

Cybermintz and Happyme