

Kungai  
by Helen Raven

a novel in six parts

Part Six

Angel had had a vision on Saturday night while Gunn and Wesley were in San Diego. The vision was of a vampire killing a young man, with some connection to an all-night diner at Vermont and Wilshire. Two of the drawings had shown the man sitting in a booth, one from a viewpoint inside the diner a few booths away from the man, and the other from outside, across the street and from the second floor. Lilah's squad never found out the man's name, but he was a regular at the diner, came in most nights around three. On that Saturday night the vampire came down into the street at 3.20 and went to lie in wait by the man's car. It had been tracking other regulars, from things it said when the squad got it cornered: sounded like it had already taken at least two, but they hadn't found any proof, not from asking in the diner, not from the news, not from the vampire's apartment. The three in the squad were still arguing among themselves about whether that had been the vampire playing mind-games with them: what could be so special about the guy in the pictures, if he was worth a vision and there'd been others before who weren't?

Before the vision, they'd been able to tell when Angel was lucid: he was very wary of them, but he would talk to them, asking his questions about Wesley and Gunn, and answering most of their questions about his state of mind and his level of comfort. After the vision, though, he wouldn't respond to them at all. He knew they were there, but they were only sure of that because he'd never reach for the blood while they were in the room, always waited until they'd left.

They felt sorry for him, which Lilah and her interns had never managed. They'd noticed for themselves how often Lilah called him just "the seer" – like there was nothing to him except his visions. But never to think about the price he was paying for the visions... Did she think it was nothing, that he should be grateful? Or was she like that because he was a vampire? She'd never once thought of him as a person?

"Does it get easier? You get used to it?" Doug was the blackest of the two black fighters. Ex-army, and still held himself like he was on a parade-ground. He and Gunn were storing equipment in the trunk of his car.

Gunn shrugged. "Y'picked the wrong guy to ask. I'll get up in the mornin' thinkin', "OK, from now on in, I'm gonna have this attitude to him, just this one. That'll work. 'n' then I'll go to bed with the opposite, 'n' feel like I've been dragged through five others in between. You wouldn't do this job again, watchin' him? You had enough?"

No, Doug would watch Angel again, they all would, but they'd be lying awake nights wondering about Angel: what had happened to him, what would happen to him. And they hadn't expected that, for Angel to get under their skin, not from how Lilah and Gunn had talked about him in the briefings. Yeah, Doug would think about what warning Gunn could have given him that he would have believed.

The key was back on the hook and Wesley was standing in front of Angel's door, but Angel was asleep. Gunn put his arms around Wesley from behind and they both looked up at the screen.

Wesley said, "We should take him for a shower before we set him free. He needs clean clothes. I think we should let him wash himself, if he'll admit to hearing the order. Having one of us get in with him..."

"None of us are ready for that."

"No." Wesley turned to face Gunn, put his arm around Gunn's waist. "We're still on holiday. While there's nothing to be done with him, we're still on holiday. I want to cook... whatever you want to eat. And then watch a film and finish by beating you soundly at Yahtzee."

Gunn wanted pepperoni pizza and cherry pie with ice-cream. Wesley went out on his own to the grocery store, and Gunn unlocked their bedroom, unpacked for both of them, checked their email, and then patrolled the living-room and the kitchen looking for the signs of what Doug and the others had been doing during the days and nights. Reading about demons. Drinking coffee. Surfing the net. Looking at Angel's drawings of Wesley; that was after the vision, probably, which could have got them wondering how many pads Angel had filled with his drawings.

Gunn kept returning to the key on the hook. He didn't take it off, he wasn't going to open the door, but the second time he went back he put his hand over it, and held it to the wood, feeling the teeth against this palm and the end of the hook

hard between his knuckles and he started to get an erection. Control over Wesley. Wesley in that room and out of his control, and they could be doing anything and he'd never know. As long as Wesley came back to him without bruises, he could imagine anything and he'd never know. Maybe he should take it as something that happened to Wesley in another life. A life where Wesley didn't have that family, didn't get sent to that school, where Gunn could have and keep his fantasies about Wesley's hot, sweet first fuck. A different Wesley. Gunn closed his eyes, pulled his hand slowly down across the key, and whispered, "But he'd still love me. I'd be the one he dreamed about. Where he had to be."

He was waiting for the sound of the car, and he went straight down to help carry. In the kitchen he stopped Wesley from reaching for the kettle and said, "Will you leave it? Come to bed? Last half hour, can't think of anything 'cept you sucking me off."

Wesley looked at him, then down at the bulge in his pants. He started shaking his head, but that was only at the idea of bed: he was dropping to his knees and sliding his hand under Gunn's T-shirt to take hold of the waistband. Wesley didn't want anything, except a promise for later, in bed, and for Gunn to stop asking questions and give proper attention to the kiss.

Angelus was there for most of the evening, but very fractured, sounding like he'd just been shaken awake, or was just about to fall asleep. He did fall asleep around eleven, when they were starting their third, deciding round of Yahtzee, but his sleep was fractured too, and when he suddenly went quiet they didn't sigh with relief, but instead broke off their playful discussion of how Gunn was going to celebrate his victory, and started slowly getting to their feet and agreeing the details of getting Angel ready for the shower.

Angel had woken up lying on the mattress, facing into the room, but by the time Wesley opened the door Angel was on the floor, turning to hide against the base of the wall. He flinched and shivered when they pulled the mattress out of the way, and when Gunn took his left wrist to hold the padlock steady he went rigid, then started a slow movement away, like he was trying to pour all the rest of his body into a crack, leave his left arm behind.

After he'd freed the arm Gunn looked at Wesley, expecting him to order Angel to pull his sweater over his head and off his arm, but Wesley was frowning, and then shaking his head.

"I'm changing my mind about the shower. Let's wait. See if we can do better than this."

Gunn shrugged and nodded. "Couldn't do worse." Angel had given a strangled gasp when Wesley started speaking and now he was almost moaning, struggling with his whole body, dragging his head against the carpet, banging it against the wall, and fighting against the last chain harder than they'd seen from Angelus. Gunn moved back out of range, and they stood and looked down at Angel.

Gunn was thinking about what Doug had said, that all of them in the squad would be losing sleep over Angel. Was there anyone apart from Lilah who could see this and not feel sorry for him? What about Angel himself, back when he was lucid? Would he be purely horrified, or would he think it was justice? The toughest justice, but still what he deserved. And probably it was, but there was a big difference between thinking it was justice and being happy to watch it day after day. Gunn sighed then said, "We gotta have a better chance if we set him free now. I mean, of helpin' him get lucid."

Wesley nodded slowly, raised the bottle of holy water to move in again to cover Gunn, then stepped back as he got another idea. "I'll bring him in a change of clothes. We should be able to tell something by whether or not he uses them."

Wesley placed the clothes on the edge of the mattress, then got in position to reach Angel's neck and face with the water. Angel was still moaning, still struggling, but with a fraction of that first energy. "Angel?" Wesley's gentlest voice. "Could you hold your right arm back for Charles? Just for a few moments, so he can set you free." Again Angel gasped and held still. He curled up slightly, his left hand coming to cover his face, but at the same time he was slowly, slowly moving his right hand back towards Gunn; the chain rattled quietly as it was dragged across his thigh.

Wesley asked Angel if he was hungry, and if he got any response it was a shudder and a shake of the head, and so Wesley wished him a good night and they left him alone. When they came out of the bathroom he was in his corner, curled tight with both hands pressing his head down onto his knees.

Depressing, all damn depressing. But then they got their door shut, and Wesley reminded Gunn of his promise and his victory, and then made him forget everything else.

Lying awake after Wesley had fallen asleep, Gunn realised that the sounds were all traffic, that there was no wave about to break in time with his next breath. They'd been in San Diego just that morning but it felt like a month ago. And that wasn't... five minutes of Angel wiping out all the good that they'd got from their vacation. No. In fact, those minutes with Angel were the main reason he was wishing Wesley was awake, so he could say, "I'm glad you made us come home. It's good to be home." A difficult life and they were right back in it, and they needed to take better care of themselves. But important too, and he was proud, he was proud, to share the responsibility with his strange, skinny, fucked-up Englishman.

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Angel hadn't changed into the clean clothes: instead, he had thrown them or dropped them over near the books, and pushed the mattress across to half-cover both piles. When they got up he was asleep on the floor between the mattress and the far wall, and Gunn was the one who realised when he woke up: about half an hour into their review of Gunn's case files and their serious discussion of the future of Wyndham-Gunn.

"He's no better, is he?"

Gunn shook his head. "But we have to go in to feed him. Might as well give him the shower, too."

Angel didn't act terrified, no cringing or shaking, more like he was trying to pretend they weren't there, refusing to look at them.

"Angel? Could you get undressed? Get ready for a shower? You've been in the same clothes for weeks. We need to get you clean."

Angel had heard. He looked like he was holding his breath. Did he know he was doing it? Did he know he gasped sometimes, and he panted? Did he know he could hold his breath forever? Ten seconds now. Then twenty. "Please, Angel. Will you help us?" Thirty seconds, and Wesley and Gunn looked at each other in surprise as Angel slowly got to his feet, slowly pulled off his sweater, slowly stepped out of his pants, and then stood against the wall with his hands behind his back.

As far as Gunn could tell, Angel kept his eyes closed through the whole process: the walking, the chaining, the showering. Maybe he opened his eyes when he reached for the shampoo and the soap, or maybe he found them by smell. He was slumped, withdrawn, quietly hopeless.

Wesley had vacuumed the room, removed the long chain from the plate where Gunn had left it the night before, moved the mattress to its usual position against the far wall, straightened the books, and put the clothes back on the mattress.

"Get dressed now, Angel. When you're dressed I'll bring you in your food." Now Angel was definitely shaking his head but he was also pushing himself up to his knees on the mattress, reaching for the clothes – feeling them, smelling them – and then getting dressed even more slowly than he'd got undressed. By the time he got finished he was sitting on the edge of the mattress, the angle of his back blocking out Wesley, the angle of his head blocking out Gunn.

"You must be hungry, Angel. I think when I bring the blood in, you'll realise how hungry you are."

No, definitely no, and Angel scuttled over to near his corner and pressed himself sideways on to the wall. He was tense now, really uncomfortable, when he'd been too indifferent while he'd been in the shower with Gunn. Gunn remembered Wesley on the bed after Lilah had brought him home, the change that had come over him when he'd looked towards Angel's room.

"Angel. You can talk to Wesley now. He can talk to you. I won't do anything to either of you. I'm sorry I made you think I would. But everything's different now. Wesley'll tell you. He'll tell you how it's worked out."

Gunn was expecting surprise, mild distrust, but instead Angel jerked his head up, half-turned towards Gunn, and he was frightened, and he was angry. He stared at Gunn, teeth bared, spat out, "You say 'Wesley'!" – an order – and then he was purely frightened, and backed away from Gunn so fast that the whole room seemed to shudder when his back thudded up against the wall. He gasped, over and over, still staring at Gunn, then he turned his head with a jerk to look

at Wesley; just a second's glance and he gave a sound like a pleading moan and he was curled again with his arms up protecting his face.

Gunn backed off to the foot of the mattress. Wesley joined him and they stood and looked at Angel, both breathing heavily. After about a minute Wesley turned and handed the holy-water to Gunn, whispered, "Cover me," approached Angel to within four feet, and crouched down at his level.

"Angel. You shouldn't be frightened of Charles. You should believe him. He's a good man. He's a kind, brave man." A small, gentle smile. "Much better than we deserve. You can believe him when he says that everything's different."

Angel slowly let his arms drop, slowly raised his eyes to Wesley's, and this time his expression was pain, whereas Gunn had been expecting the fear. Did Angel think Wesley was lying, too, that Gunn had brainwashed him or something? But in that case there'd be anger, wouldn't there, not just this frozen anguish?

Very quietly: "Are you frightened of Charles?" A pause, then Angel shook his head, even mouthed a no. "Are you angry with him?" No. "What about me?" No. "Then what's wrong? Can you tell me what's wrong?"

Angel's body jerked, he opened his mouth, closed it, closed his eyes hard, then suddenly opened them and said in a thin voice, "I don't want to lose my mind."

Gunn gasped and saw Wesley flinch, but it couldn't be more than a couple of seconds before Wesley swallowed and said, "No. No, of course. But why are you thinking that? What have we done?"

An abrupt shake of the head. "You don't do anything. You're not here. You're from me. And... And... I'm making you say... I can't understand what I'm making you say."

"Ah." Wesley glanced up at Gunn. "You think we're a hallucination."

Angel nodded. "I know the dreams. I've heard it with the others. This must be how it starts."

Wesley started to reach out but Angel shrank back, and Wesley immediately apologised and folded his hand out of the way down by his knee. "Why can't we be real? Why don't you take us as real?"

"You're gone."

"Yes, we had to go away, Angel. I'm sorry we had to leave you, I know it must have been difficult. But we're back now. That's why we're saying things you don't understand: because we've only just got back, we haven't caught up with everything that's happened while we've been away."

Angel was shaking his head. "You're gone." A glance up at Gunn then back to Wesley. "You had to go."

"And then we had to come back. I couldn't leave you, could I? I want you to stop thinking about why I might be a hallucination and start thinking about how I could prove to you that I'm real. That I have come back."

Gunn wanted to say, "Apart from getting to fuck him through the mattress." But he couldn't say that, so he'd just have to trust in that recoil from Wesley's touch.

A long, long silence. Angel was thinking, and looking much calmer. Even if Wesley didn't convince him today, he should be easier the next time.

Eventually: "You could read with me. Something new. Something I don't know, that I couldn't make up."

Wesley nodded. "Do you know anything about the history of salt?" And his tone was: "And I'm hoping you don't, because I'm looking forward to reading about it with you" – which would have been proof enough for Gunn, if he'd been Angel.

They sat in their usual place by the wall, and Gunn brought his chair in and stood guard, in case Angel decided that Wesley wasn't real and turned to violence to banish his hallucination. They seemed to forget about him almost immediately. On about the fifth page Angel made his first comment, and soon he made his first joke and looked pleased when Wesley laughed. On the second page of the second chapter, he gave a long sigh and then slid his hand on top of

Wesley's. Wesley turned his head and they looked at one another, just for a second, and then they went back to reading, with Angel's other hand coming over ready to turn the page. Gunn stood up, picked up his chair, and left as quietly as he could.

He booted up the computer then put the kettle on and stood waiting for it to boil. Though why boil it now when Wesley's tea would just go cold? So he didn't make tea but instead he heated a pint of blood, and he went in and set it down at Angel's side.

"Thank you, Charles."

"You're welcome." So he was "Charles" now, not "the black one".

Angel suddenly lost interest in the book halfway through a sentence in Chapter Three, as Wesley told Gunn later, when Angel had fallen asleep again. Angel had closed the book and put it on the floor, and started asking Wesley questions about where they'd sent him, and how they'd let him come back, and what did Gunn mean and how was everything different?

Wesley had told Angel that he'd been ill, that he'd had to go away until he was well enough to come back. Angel thought they'd been away for years, and he didn't seem to have any clear memories of Lilah's squad.

"Though I couldn't ask any really direct question, to have him not understand what I was talking about. I don't want to give him any more reasons to worry about losing his mind."

Angel didn't remember about Wesley's mistake, wasn't interested in Wesley's illness as long as Wesley was better now. He remembered the sex, he remembered that Gunn had found out, and he thought that Gunn had made "them" take Wesley away because guards weren't ever supposed to have sex with prisoners, and Wesley had felt guilty about that all the time, Wesley had been tormented by it, but he hadn't been able to stop himself.

"What's he think now? If it wasn't 'them' findin' out, but you bein' sick? What's he expect now that you're back?"

Wesley shrugged. "That we'll restrain ourselves because it didn't make me happy. And he thinks you never told them, so they could still find out. It's not that I'm back because... they've suddenly got a new policy."

"So he doesn't remember me starvin' him, keepin' him chained? That threat?"

"He remembers you being angry. Upset. With every justification. Not the details. He asked a lot about you. About us. If we were together all the time I was ill. He's glad we were. He's glad we were able to get over everything."

Gunn snorted and shook his head. "Y'think he's gonna be hell, Full-time job t'keep him manageable. Turns out he's done all the work for us."

Wesley nodded. "Him and the vision. Though maybe we deserve a few points for experience."

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Wesley wanted to get back to work, or at least he wanted to get back out into the real world, do something useful. He had to figure out how to deal with demons again, how to keep going through his own guilt and shame, and through the anger and the contempt and the pity. Through anything.

But he couldn't just appear at Caritas one night with Gunn, like he was taking up where he'd left off. He'd lost that right, and it was for the demons (for the Kekulei, really), to decide when he'd earned it back. If he even could earn it back.

He'd go to see Swift, explain that he wanted to stop hiding, and ask how he could start to make amends. And he wanted to train again with the duals if they were still willing.

It would probably be months, though, before he could think about earning money from being back out in the real world. And he was scared of taking on more translation work – assuming Lilah would ever trust him with another manuscript – in case he got sucked in again to that state where it was just him and the language, shut away from all the rest of the

world. He'd make himself wear the suit, face a roomful of Kekulei, but he was going to avoid translation for as long as they could afford, because more than anything he was afraid of his own mind.

He arranged a meeting with Swift for the Friday and to take Lilah out to lunch on Monday, and he called Grouw and asked if Grouw could contact his sister about the training. Grouw was glad to hear from him, said his sister asked about him nearly as often as she asked about Piriti.

While Wesley was out having his meeting with Swift, Angel had a vision. He was awake when it hit, sitting with his drawing-pad, working on copying something from one of the books. Gunn heard him cry out, heard the thud of his head against the wall, and Gunn ran to unlock the door so he'd be there to catch every word.

Angel was still in the reverberation phase when Gunn got in the room: pressed back against the wall, looking like he was staring at something he couldn't believe, frozen with the shock except for his right hand trying to reach out for something across the carpet – maybe still trying to draw, or maybe getting ready to draw.

Gunn picked up the pad, and had just seen the crayon on top of the mattress when Angel cried out again, louder, tearing, and surged to his feet like someone had hauled him up by the armpits. A few seconds' pause, then he took a staggering step forward, hunching to the side, then seemed to catch himself and fall back against the wall; and then another step forward and falling back, and again. And all the time he was giving these choked, bitten-off almost-screams. Not words, nothing close to words, but with a change of tone with each gasp for breath, like each scream came from a different person, like there was a mob fighting over who got him next.

Was that it? He was having more than one vision? And he wouldn't speak, he wouldn't draw until one vision beat the others out? God, let it work like that, because... Two sets of clues mixed together, two places where they had to be at the same time. How in hell could they handle that?

He watched Angel, trying to read the fight, figure out how many were still in, if the end was getting close. Maybe a minute went by and he hadn't seen any patterns, and then Angel froze in mid-scream, mid-step, was held for one second, two, then crashed sideways to the floor.

His eyes were open but he was completely still, and he looked very dead. Gunn stepped forward in range of Angel's feet, knelt down, and reached out slowly to touch his fingertips to Angel's ankle. He was ready to see the body fall in, sink to dust, but instead he felt the cold skin yield, he felt the bone underneath. Still solid. You couldn't say "still alive" but... still whole enough to be a home for a demon.

This must be the pause at the end of the reverberation phase, before he had to speak, had to draw, had to do something about what he'd seen. Longer than usual, deeper, because the vision had been different, was still working through?

Gunn stood up, stepped back, and waited. Should he call Wesley? No. Not yet. But he should get the tape recorder so Wesley could hear it in Angel's own words. He put the pad down by Angel's hand and went to get the recorder from Wesley's desk.

Five minutes, and now Gunn couldn't see Angel suddenly pulling out of this, sitting up desperate and urgent, too many seconds already gone. Whatever the next phase was, that would be different too, and there wasn't much point in Gunn staying here, when he could just as well watch while he was at the computer.

He'd watched Angel sleeping a hundred times, thought little of it except to wonder what he was dreaming about Wesley. But this wasn't sleep. Even in grainy black-and-white on the screen it looked nothing like sleep.

That body wasn't resting: it was abandoned. Like something thrown out in the street, a house left with the doors wide open. Felt wrong to be looking at it, like it was... the wreckage from an accident. There was a spare blanket in the bedroom and Gunn found it and spread it over Angel. Not his face because that would be saying that he would never come back. And of course he'd come back. He'd found his way back from hell, he'd learned Wesley's name again, of course he'd come back from this. Gunn left Angel's hand uncovered too, where it touched the pad, so if he woke and was looking for the pad, then it'd be there in front of him.

Wesley saw the open door as soon as he came home, and he was shocked by the empty eyes and had to do the same as Gunn: kneel down and press the skin. No, there would have been no point in Gunn calling. The blanket was a kindness, it was right. More than one vision? Poor Angel. There had been no warning of this in the books. Did other seers do so

much better? Or did they do so much worse that there was nothing to tell? They should get the weapons ready, though it had been hours now, they must already be too late.

Wesley got out all his books on seers, just in case there was something, and he hadn't known enough before to take it in. Gunn made tea and then asked what had happened with Swift.

Swift had thought that Wesley might do best to leave town for a while. Six months, maybe. A year. Enough time for other things to happen, push Wesley out of people's minds. Right now there was still enough of a jolt left to make people feel uncomfortable, especially if you caught them in public. Pretty much what Gunn had said to Anne, when he'd just left his crew: about how they'd need time to cool off, but they'd be ready to move on once they were sure that no one was watching any more.

But how could they move with Angel? Give up this apartment with the deaf, deaf neighbours, and take their chances in a city that none of them knew? And you had to know your city to have any chance of reading the clues in the visions. No, they couldn't leave L.A., because so much for them was tied up with Wesley's sick friend.

In that case, yes, they had to go for the opposite: do something drastic, and in public. Swift would meet with the Kekulei, ask them what they'd need to see from Wesley to be able to clear his account. Might take weeks before they'd agree, but she thought she knew how to keep things moving, make sure they didn't dig in and refuse to even see him.

When they checked on Angel before going to bed, they found that his eyes were closed, and in the morning his hand was turned so his palm was facing upwards. By the time they came back from training he was awake: lying just the same, but making small groaning sounds.

Angel's face was tense, held in a frown, eyes pushed half-closed. Wesley knelt down while Gunn covered him. "Angel? Do you know me?" Probably did. Not afraid, not puzzled, not angry. Just tense.

"Head." Tight, complaining.

A pause, then: "Your head hurts?"

Angel closed his eyes and gave the smallest possible nod. So the tension was pain.

Wesley put his hand on Angel's shoulder. "I'll get you something for that." Gunn heard Wesley in the bathroom, searching through the bottles in the cabinet, then in the kitchen, running water. As he was kneeling beside Angel again he put the glass down on the carpet, and then he pulled the blanket down to Angel's waist, placed the pills on the palm of Angel's left hand and folded Angel's fingers over them.

"I know it hurts you to move, but you'll feel better if you take these. Sit up slowly, and I'll hand you the water when you're ready."

Angel looked at Wesley, then at the glass. He looked for a few seconds like he was bracing himself to push himself up, but then he gave another of those groans, raised his hand quickly to his mouth, and swallowed the pills with a jerk.

The pills would take minutes to work, wouldn't they? (if they even would work on a vampire). But Angel seemed to show the effect after just a few breaths: he closed his eyes, lost about half the tension, and then slowly rolled onto his back. A few more breaths and he gave a long sigh and pushed his right hand across the carpet to find Wesley, and settle around the curve of Wesley's thigh. "Thank you"? "Stay"? Or just needing to touch him? Wesley laid his hand across Angel's. "Of course I'll stay"?

Gunn looked down at Angel, remembering the screams, the staggering steps, the fall. What would Angel think had happened to put him in this state? Quietly: "I'll leave you alone."

Without looking up, Wesley said, "Are you hungry, Angel? Would you like Charles to bring you some blood?"

No. Really no. Angel looked nauseous. Gunn was walking towards the door when Angel said, "Ice?" He was looking up at Wesley. "A cloth? Cold?" He lifted Wesley's hand and drew it across to hold it against his own forehead. "Please?"

"Your head feels too hot? You want me to cool it down?"

“Please.” And Angel shut his eyes again.

He did seem to know what he needed, because he managed to fall asleep after about half an hour, and he looked so much better that Gunn took away the blanket. Angel hadn’t spoken to Wesley, except to ask for more of what Wesley was doing, or to ask for less.

“Anything in the books about visions that just... get lost?”

Wesley shook his head and shrugged. “Maybe they can’t exist together if there’s more than one. They cancel each other out. With a violent implosion. It must be very rare. If –” A pause. “Do you think it’s sick to want to write an article about it? But then... I can hardly draw attention to the fact that I’m in close contact with a seer. A vampire seer.”

“Don’t hafta use y’r own name.”

Wesley laughed. “Then I’d feel as if I was writing for the National Enquirer.”

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On Saturday afternoon Wesley drove up to the nest looking for Piriti. It was a miserable day, grey and damp, but the brothers had still come up to work. Piriti hid at first, same as he had from Grouw, but then Solito shouted that it was Wesley and Piriti showed himself almost immediately. He came forward slowly, asking what had happened.

They talked in the car, while Solito made himself busy in the tunnels. Wesley told Piriti something of what he’d put himself through in the past months, how far the guilt and shame had taken him – including the collapse in the library – and he told him the reasons he’d recently found to try to put himself through something different. He wasn’t there to tell Piriti what he should do, more to remind him that there was more than one possible approach; and to listen, however Piriti needed him to listen.

Wesley wouldn’t tell Gunn the details of what they’d talked about. He wouldn’t have said anything about what he’d done with Angel, obviously, but he’d probably said something about how difficult he’d been to live with, some of the ways he’d turned away from pleasure. But wasn’t that one of the first things Gunn had noticed about Piriti – that he never gossiped about sex? Whatever Wesley had said, it would be safe with Piriti.

Piriti called Wesley on Sunday evening, and after a couple of sentences and a few seconds of listening and nodding, Wesley told Gunn that he was going to go down to the car. Gunn looked out of the window every ten minutes or so. One of those times Wesley was looking up at the window, maybe talking about him, and Wesley saw him and smiled slightly and nodded, but not trying to give any hint or promise about how long he would be. He was nearly forty minutes.

“How’s he doin’?”

Wesley shrugged and sighed. “He’s been having long imaginary conversations with almost everyone he knows. I think he just wanted to see what it would be like to call me. He didn’t have anything specific. I’m going to keep him informed about what happens with me and the Kekulei.

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Wesley and Lilah mostly talked about money: Wesley wanted to know why Lilah’s company was prepared to spend money on Angel, and Lilah wanted to know how long Wesley and Gunn could keep paying their bills if Wesley wasn’t doing any translation work.

Lilah could make a case for Angel as a research project in the mechanics of prediction, as an investment in goodwill with the Powers, as a curio with value for its potential to attract the attention of new clients, or as a tax-efficient charitable cause – but in fact it was many months since she’d had to make any case at all. Her boss, Holland Manners, had always taken an interest in Angel and had been happy for her to organise the interns. After the evening when he’d relieved young Newton and seen Angel for himself, he’d taken a much more active interest and had soon found Angel a champion in the form of a Senior Partner. So there was certainly sufficient budget to hire the squad for a long weekend every few months.



Wesley's answer to Lilah's question: they could pay their bills for about two months, assuming they were cheap months. He was going to ask around the bookstores, see if he could get a lead on some cataloguing work, or shelving, or anything. Lilah said she was going to start paying him a monthly retainer: she didn't want him taking on too much cataloguing, she needed him to keep himself available for her translations. The sum she suggested would be enough to cover their rent. Obviously it was charity – they both knew that he'd be lucky to get ten hours a week through the bookstores – and Wesley was just plain glad to have it.

Wesley put himself in charge of managing the damage to their bank balance. He made a spreadsheet to break down their expenses and decided that food was the only area where they could really cut costs, and then he spent hours checking out grocery stores, produce markets and butchers' shops to find out what items were cheapest and what were the best days and times to get clearance bargains, and spent many more hours building up a stock of recipes to give Gunn some chance of welcoming, say, liver and surplus cabbage, even for three dinners in a row. Wesley genuinely liked liver (and kidneys, and all the stuff you'd rather throw away) – which was an English thing, he said. Gunn gradually got so he didn't have to pretend; after a few weeks he didn't need Wesley to give it a French name, or hide it in a lot of sauce.

In the end, they weren't able to make use of the best of Gunn's experience in living cheap. The crew was already working the best angles for free food, and Wesley wasn't going to poach on their ground. Wesley wouldn't consider stealing food or power or anything else. The moral side didn't bother him, but he just couldn't afford any problems with the law; it might not be certain that they'd deport him for shoplifting, but he wasn't ever going to run that risk.

Wesley sold most of Angel's books and pawned Angel's jackets and coats. He raised nearly \$400 and he put it aside and called it their "beer money". It was for renting videos, too, for any luxury that they used for winding down; when Gunn went over to the beach house for the evening, he took \$20 from the beer money to pay for his share of the whatever the boys decided to order in. Sometimes Gunn felt like he was in some traditional white-folks marriage, back in the '50s, or maybe in the '30s, deep in the depression: him bringing in the money, and Wesley using every house-keeping trick he could find to make that money stretch far enough that Gunn could go out drinking with his buddies. But Wesley was so fierce about the savings, so focused. This was his way of keeping control and it wouldn't be forever, soon he would start earning again, and they'd be able to ease off.

They agreed early on that they wouldn't buy each other anything for Christmas. Gunn would roast a chicken and Wesley would make mince-pies, they'd have a full game of that role-playing card game that Gunn had bought for San Diego, and they'd each promise to try a new experience, whenever the other had decided what to ask for. On Christmas Eve, though, Wesley got a call that the Kekulei wanted to see him at a meeting to decide if he was worth the effort that they'd have to put into testing him. "The hearing", Wesley called it, about his "eligibility for rehabilitation", and they'd arranged it for two o'clock on the afternoon of Christmas Day. They wouldn't say exactly how long it would take: maybe two hours, maybe three. Wesley wouldn't be in a state to appreciate food beforehand, so they'd have their meal in the evening instead and then see what type of game Wesley was in the mood for.

Gunn wanted to drive Wesley to the meeting and wait for him but Wesley said no, though he did agree to call to ask Gunn to collect him if he felt even slightly shaky afterwards. While Wesley was gone, Gunn cleaned the kitchen and bathroom from top to bottom: scrubbed every surface, rearranged every cupboard; and then played Duke Nukem on the computer while he waited for the call. Wesley wasn't in danger. Swift would have called him if she'd heard any hint that Wesley might be in danger.

Wesley drove himself back, and he said he was fine but he wouldn't really answer any of Gunn's questions about what had happened. Gunn made tea, and Wesley lay on the couch and read while Gunn started dinner. Later, over the card game, Gunn asked if they couldn't think of any way of doing what Swift had suggested: get out of town for six months if the Kekulei still wanted Wesley out of sight.

Wesley shook his head. "I'm fairly sure we won't need to do that. I think they are going to give me a chance, though it sounded as if they'd need several more meetings amongst themselves to decide what they want me to do."

"It went OK, then?"

A shrug, and Wesley suddenly seemed to lose about four inches in height. Looking down at the coffee table: "Much as I expected, I suppose. The prosecution had done their research."

"Prosecution?" Gunn could feel his outrage building by the second. "They made it an actual trial? With you there on your own?"

“No. No.” Wesley sighed, sounding exhausted. “They just wanted to look at me. The hostile elements were in the minority. But they were noticeably organised.”

Sharply: “Who were they?” To be prepared.

Another sigh. “It doesn’t matter. I think they’ll... accept whatever the others decide.”

Going to bed, Wesley was very subdued, obviously not in the mood for sex. They lay and talked about the game: about fairy-tales and fantasy stories, about magic. Wesley’s mind was on the conversation, but it was also on something else: he acted like he was thinking at half his normal speed. Gunn was right almost to the minute about when the other thing would break the surface. With a sudden change of tone to quietly defeated: “I’ve never understood what women see when they look at me. Apart from the 99% who immediately assume I’m gay.”

God, where d’ you start with that one? “So who’s been lookin’ at you? We’re talkin’ human women, right?”

A shrug. “I doubt if it makes any difference. I can see them deciding something about me. No matter what I do.”

“ ‘Do’ , like what? What I seen, ‘s you always bein’ super-polite. ‘n’ Anne – or Yan or whoever – decidin’ that y’re very serious ‘n’ very English. Y’ know, cool in a weird sort of way. What you want them to decide? Gotta be a cover ‘bout you and me? You’re the straightest skinny white guy that ever lived?”

Wesley shook his head. “Not now. I don’t care now. I meant...” A deep sigh. “... the way I used to be.”

When he had two arms? “Y’mean, how y’used to be when Cordy had the hots for you?”

A brief snort, not really a laugh, then, flatly: “Yes. Exactly.”

“So she didn’t say what she saw? Wasn’t that kind of crush? Or you thinkin’ what you’d’ve ‘done’ differently?”

“I think she liked the accent. And the tailoring. While I liked the breasts and the confidence. She was good company but I have to wonder who we were. Who we thought we were. And the same for anyone who – With men, they just want to know how you fuck, what you’ll do. Women... you do have to wonder what they expect, why they’ve fixed on you.”

Eventually Gunn said, “You care if women like you. You don’t with men.”

A pause, then Wesley nodded. “I did the way I used to be. Now it’s the other way around. Or – Not with ‘men’ . With you.”

And with Angel. Wesley did care what Angel thought of him. Not about being liked, though. All about being trusted. Being trusted to be useful, back in the beginning. Now... Gunn thought Wesley needed Angel to trust that he would always be there, that he would always put Angel first.

\* \* \* \* \*

Angel took several days to get over that headache, and the first time they saw him do more than lie quietly – when he woke as Angelus, late that Saturday night – they realised that the strange, cancelled-out vision had caused some new and frightening damage. Angelus could stand up, he could manage more than one word at a time, but he kept on jumping between tracks, like a turntable set on a washing-machine. Or like that vision, but much less violent: speaking, not screaming, and with most jolts a minute or more apart. In all of the tracks he was Angelus, and he had a punishing headache, and he had strong opinions about that headache, but none of the tracks knew about the others, and there were some that repeated two or three times, almost word-for-word. It lasted for about half an hour, exhausting to watch. At the end Angelus acted like the needle had got stuck in the gap between tracks: just stood and juddered for a few seconds and then he slowly folded to the floor. Wesley could hardly sleep that night for imagining the same thing happening to Angel, imagining that this damage might be permanent.

The next day the headache seemed to have faded to an irritant, like a low sun right in your eyes. Angel was grouchy and groggy and making very little sense. He knew Wesley and there were none of those abrupt jumps between tracks; it was more like three or four tracks had been mixed together, all running at the same time, and the details of Wesley’s response didn’t matter to any of them. Gunn and Wesley only stayed for long enough to feed him, but he stayed awake, muttering and complaining, for nearly two hours.

Monday was the last day of the headache and he was lucid for most of the day. Wesley got him some migraine-strength Exedrin, and he said he felt as if he'd had the headache forever, and they talked about how drugs worked on vampires.

On Wednesday evening while they were out training with the crew, Angel had a second "multiple" vision. The sounds on the tape were just like Gunn had remembered the first, including the crash at the end like a felled tree. Angel had fallen face-down under the window, right in the range of the morning sun. They chained his hands and his feet, rolled him over to the mattress, unchained him and covered him with the blanket. When they'd rolled him onto his back, the first move away from the window, Gunn had half-expected to see that he'd been bleeding from his nose. The vision had been bad enough the first time, but knowing the damage it must have caused, hearing the sounds like a mauling... Something had been torn, or crushed under pressure. For an injury like that, there should be some outward sign.

Again, Angel took three days to recover. The stages in the recovery seemed about the same, though he spent most of his time in hell, barely speaking, and the details of the damage weren't so obvious. He didn't speak at all the first time they went in, but then he didn't need to because Wesley had the Exedrin and the ice-water right there.

Two of the self-cancelling visions in less than a week. Was that a sign of problems at the source? That the visions were never meant for Angel, should have gone to a three-ton Agodek demon in the Andes – or in another dimension entirely? It couldn't just be Angel suddenly getting worse, nothing could be that sudden. They'd seen how Angel got worse: through small steps, over weeks. Wesley tried not to build up any hopes on the Powers: that they'd notice soon, that it would serve their purpose to stop the visions going to Angel. Instead, he held to the proof that Angel was able to recover, that his mind did have its own strength.

On Saturday night, with the pain nearly gone, Angel had a normal vision about Furudal demons preying on homeless people in the Metro Rail tunnels at Union Station. They found two females prowling the tunnels, but Angel's drawings had shown a male, too. They lay in wait in the lair, but the male must have smelled the blood and they had no advantage of surprise – though the male was also too angry to think of flipping that advantage over against them. A very tough fight, in a confined space. As soon as they were home they stripped off their clothes and threw them in the trash, then took their turns in the shower and patched each other up.

Angel was still stuck in the vision, of course, muttering about "Union Station" and "getting out of the rain", tracing lines on the wall, over and over. But now he was also rolling his forehead against the wall and against his knee, and in among the mutterings there were moans of "Hurts. It hurts," and "Make it stop." They shared a beer on the couch and wondered about going in with the Exedrin and the ice-water but he wouldn't know they were there: he wouldn't take the pills, he wouldn't lie still for the cloth. Better to get another beer, go to bed, and find out the parts of their bodies that weren't aching or scraped or bruised.

The headache from the normal vision lasted all of Sunday, bad enough that even Angelus hadn't the energy to do more than drag himself up to sitting and complain in a hoarse voice about where they must have found his latest victim, what the young idiot must have been drinking. When he was lucid he called for Wesley, and Gunn didn't bother standing guard, just helped Wesley with the door. Angel was lucid (and so was Angelus, in his way): making sense, keeping on a single track. The headache looked like an inflammation of the scar-tissue from the mis-sent visions. But that was all, there was no active damage.

Wesley stayed home from training with the crew in case Angel called for him, and for once Gunn was able to tell them the exact truth: that Wesley's friend had started having crippling headaches, and nothing seemed to help except Wesley sitting with him. Wesley kept the monitor by the side of the bed, but there was no call during the night and by morning Angel was completely recovered.

The next vision was a fake one, on Thursday afternoon while Gunn was out working. It was about Doyle; probably not about his death, more likely about one of his visions. The drawings showed Doyle clutching his head in pain, while the words – in an Irish accent – had been about a nest of vampires downtown, and a bar and a tattoo, and something that could never be satisfied. By the time Gunn got home Angel had fallen asleep (or shut down): curled up in his corner, with his arms wrapped tight around his head. Even a fake vision could give him a headache now, though Wesley said there'd been no signs of it for the first half hour. Maybe it took time to build, or maybe the force of a fresh vision drove everything else out. Gunn guessed they would never know.

Angel was still asleep when Gunn left for the beach-house that evening, but he was awake and vamped-up and very loud when Gunn got back. He had some hard object in there with him and was kicking it and throwing it against the door, and he was snarling about a "twisted little cocktease" and "sick games" and "making you crawl". Wesley was in

the bedroom with a book. He'd had earplugs in and Gunn's headphones on, but he'd heard Gunn at the door and he'd already put everything aside.

The thing Angelus was kicking had to be the bowl. Gunn sat on the edge of the bed, laid his arm across Wesley's knees to stop him getting up, and stared at him hard. After a few seconds Gunn swallowed and shook his head. "Lookin' at you, I just can't tell how close it was. You couldn't've... You couldn't've half-known when you went in?"

Wesley sighed, pulled a face, and dragged his hand back through his hair. "It's Angel. It has to be: he knows my name. He was saying it when he woke up and I..." Another sigh. "In retrospect I should have realised that he wasn't calling for me, he was swearing at me or about me. But then he did seem pleased to see me. I don't know. How close..." He swallowed hard. "I was just coaxing him to hold out his hand for the pills when he erupted. I've been trying not to guess what I might have been doing in his dream. Well... not the details, anyway. If it helps you sleep any better, I don't think he would have killed me."

Gunn closed his eyes tight, clenched his teeth so his jaw-muscles crackled, and dug his fingers deep into the meat of Wesley's thigh. With his eyes still closed: "Is this how he was before?" A deep breath, and then he was looking at Wesley. "I mean, the time when you covered it up?"

Wesley looked away for a few seconds, then put his hand over Gunn's. "The eruption was – But he was angry in a different way. With more hope. None of this vitriolic judgement."

Slowly: "We've all been through a lot since then. He – Jeez, there's a million things he could dream." Wesley just nodded. "How're you gonna sleep?"

Wesley took hold of Gunn's jacket near the collar, and started to tug it off his arm. "Better if you..." A smile. "... throw me across the bed right now and tear my clothes off and leave me distinctly sore."

"Wes, I –" Gunn put his hands on Wesley's shoulder and waist, very lightly, to steady, not control. "Listening to him, thinking about – It doesn't take me like that. More the opposite. I know you got ways of... usin' the bad stuff, turnin' it around but – But I can't."

Wesley was shaking his head. "It's not that it takes me like that, either. I'd have to act my part at first, we both would until we managed to forget about him. But forceful sex is good, when it's with a good man. And I want to relearn that immediately, before I leave this room and have to look at him again."

Forceful. Gunn liked that: for the excitement, the newness, and the trust. He changed his grip and pulled Wesley into a kiss – slow and deep, at first, like they were looking for something in each other. A promise, maybe, that they would be able to forget about Angel? When they were both gasping and Wesley's fingers were busy at the fastening of Gunn's pants, Gunn pulled back enough to say, "So what's my motivation? You said I'd be playing a part."

A slight pause, then Wesley laughed. "Um... you're a mattress salesman. You get very good commission. I've had disappointments before with this design of spring. So you insist I take the time for a thorough test."

Gunn just managed to keep a straight face. He knelt up with one foot on the ground and lifted Wesley a few inches off the bed. "Which would start with the throwing?"

"Yes. Oh, yes." Wes was so eager, not playing any part at all. Gunn kept on having to prompt him to show some resistance – which he did mostly by acting like Wesley was already fighting back hard – because he did want his chance to be forceful. He stayed with that ridiculous character as long as he possibly could, running it as a commentary in his own head long after Wesley had stopped forming words, had stopped showing any sign of hearing; not because the idea made him hot, but the opposite: because the silly joke gave him a distraction, a way to stay cool, so he could keep those sounds coming from Wesley's throat for five more breaths, ten more.

Angel had been trying not to listen. Or his headache had taken over. Or something. Wesley didn't look up at the screen when they went out to use the bathroom and get a beer, but Gunn did. Angel was over at the far wall, kneeling with his forehead against the wall and his forearms pressed flat on either side. You could see that as Angel covering his ears, or banging his head against the wall, or trying to claw his way through it. Or even praying. But desperate to be somewhere else. Yeah, desperate.

For a second Gunn thought, “You were better off when you were always in hell.” But that wasn’t true. Angel hadn’t been better off then, just Gunn, just Gunn’s imagination. Because Gunn’s imagination couldn’t stretch as far away as Angel’s hell, it couldn’t put flesh on the torments in Angel’s memory. But Angel having to listen to them, with all the hundreds of things he felt and thought about Wesley... Gunn’s imagination understood from the inside. Gunn pitched his voice low when they got back to bed, just above a whisper, and Wesley followed without making any comment.

Angel woke them up several times during the night: as Angelus, and with nightmares. He was lying on the mattress when they got up, looked deep asleep. Their first sign that he was awake came just after they’d settled to breakfast: a shout breaking across their conversation about that evening’s training with the duals. “I’m hungry! Wesley!” An impatient order. He was on his feet, with his arms folded; they hadn’t heard him move.

Wesley frowned hard, dragged the back of his hand across his lower lip, shouted back, “Yes, alright,” muttered, “Some people think it’s good form to say please,” then got up and went to open the fridge.

Angel wouldn’t look at them. He’d aimed his order straight at the door, but when Gunn slid the bolts he turned sharply away. When he held his right hand out for the beaker, it was almost behind his back.

“You can put your hand down, Angel, I’m not going to give this straight to you, I don’t trust your mood. Go and kneel in the far corner on the other side of the mattress. Facing the wall.”

The hand closed, rose inch by inch as a fist while Angel breathed tight and harsh and then he suddenly shook himself, gave a rasping sigh, and strode over to the corner. Every movement, every line saying, “Let’s get this over with.” Plus a subtext of: “Asshole!”

Wesley put the beaker on the floor about in the middle of the room. Angel drank the blood standing up, still turned away from them. When he was finished he threw the beaker towards them: not wanting to hit them, probably, just a flick of the wrist to get rid of the thing; and then he wandered slowly back to the far wall.

Wesley collected the beaker, the bowl and the cloth and placed them just outside the door. Three steps back into the room, then: “Is there something we need to talk about, Angel?” Angel’s whole back gave a violent shudder, then he hunched up. “You’re obviously very angry with me, but I don’t really understand why. This seems very sudden.” No response, nothing. Wesley looked at Gunn and shrugged. “Well... if you’re too angry to be able to talk about it, maybe you could write about it on your pad. Then you wouldn’t have to have me in here, you could slide the paper under the door.” Still no response, not even a jerk of the head to show he was thinking about where he’d find the pad. Gunn’s turn to shrug, and they left.

After a few minutes Angel moved to do his hunching on the mattress, and then after about half an hour he suddenly went over to take the pad, sat against the wall scrawling furiously – covering one, two, three pages – then gave one of his snarls, and threw the pad across the room. He sprang to his knees, lightning-fast, grabbed one of the books and destroyed it in five efficient movements. The same with the other book, and then he went back to the mattress.

They weren’t sure when he fell asleep, but just past midday he woke up in hell, and they decided it was safe to go in and get the pad. Page One had a drawing of Gunn angry, probably the way he’d looked when he’d first found out about them, when he’d written that threat about the gag. Yeah, very probably since the drawing had “VINDICTIVE” and “PETTY” and “SPITEFUL” slashed across it. Looked like Wes had got it wrong when he’d said that Angel didn’t remember the threat.

Page Two was Wesley lying on Angel’s mattress, naked except for the padding across his shoulder, looking relaxed, looking welcoming. But not hard: the cock was drawn clear, and it was lying soft on the curve of his thigh. The words were written along the margins, and much more lightly than with the picture of Gunn: “If it’s not because of him and you’re a coward, then it’s because you’re cruel. I try to believe you’re a coward,” and “You made me think I knew.”

Page Three had just words. “I don’t deserve that much.” – “It’s too hard for just wanting.” – “I KNOW it was wrong for him, I KNOW we won’t, you think I didn’t have time to learn?” – “You KNOW what you’re doing.” – “You MADE it like that. You won’t accept, so you’re making me pay.”

Gunn tore the pages out of the pad, spread them out on the table, and stood scratching his eyebrow and shaking his head. “Wha’ d’ you think? He’s having a flashback to when I was keepin’ him chained?”

Wesley was still staring at the pages like he'd never known that Angel could draw. After a few seconds: "Charles. I swear to you he's never seen me like that. It's never been like that."

Gunn shrugged and shook his head. "I wasn't even thinkin' that. So what about the flashback idea?"

A long sigh. "I don't know. Obviously he feels betrayed in some way to do with sex. I suppose there was a lot he felt at the time that he didn't show me. And now I've done something to trigger it. But – I've touched his hand almost every day since we came back. I thought it helped."

Gunn nodded. "Sure looked that way." Angel touched Wesley every day, too, and not for Wesley's practical reasons – the pills, the blood, the cloth – but just because he wanted to. "How's he been talkin' about it since we got back? Sex, I mean."

Wesley put his hand on the third page and flicked the edge with his thumb, over and over. "Um..." He swallowed. "In a positive way. Not as a problem."

"He still want you?"

A very brief nod.

"He gettin' you? 'n' I know it ain't my business but he's kinda makin' it a... y'know, a work-safety issue."

Wesley screwed his face up, dragged his hand down over it, then met Gunn's eyes, obviously struggling every second not to look away. "He's getting something. Not much but enough to keep him content. Or so I thought. It seemed a stable arrangement."

"How often?"

"Three or four times since we got back. With the headaches... the last time was nearly a week ago."

"Could be he thinks it was longer? You cut him off?"

"Maybe. I – But the way he reacted last night. And now calling you vindictive. Seeming more angry with you." Wesley shook his head. "Maybe it's an effect of the damage from the new visions. Not exactly a flashback but a collage. We shouldn't try to guess, our minds don't work like that."

Gunn thought that over. "So what d'we do? Chain him up so we don't need the two of us just to feed him? 'n' hope the next vision'll damage him back to somethin' we're used to?" Yeah, but what were they used to? Body-length burns in the middle of the night. Hard-ons in the showers, with confident invitations to group sex. Like Wesley had said, you could think you were ready but he kept on surprising you.

But there were always reasons, when he was in a state to explain. Some were a monster's reasons ("I'd break his neck."), some were a crazy man's, but the rest you could understand. And he usually understood your reasons ("He can't sleep in here, you're too dangerous.") – once you'd come up with a version that fitted in with what he needed to believe about his place in hell.

Wesley was looking up at the screen, frowning hard. Finally, with a sigh: "For now, I'd rather risk letting him go hungry than keep him chained up. We know the chains would give him more material for his collage. Keeping him hungry is... I think there's more room for manoeuvre."

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Angel wasn't lucid for the rest of Friday or any of Saturday, and they fed him when he seemed deepest in hell. At 6:12 on Sunday morning he had another mis-sent vision – his third. Gunn thought it was shorter than the others, not as violent, but it could be he'd gotten used to them already. They got Angel onto the mattress, covered him with the blanket, and went back to bed.

Angel started groaning in pain at 4:38 in the afternoon, definitely quicker to come round than after the last mis-sent vision, by at least two hours. He was not pleased to see them, shared the same suspicious glare between both of them while Gunn was standing guard on Wesley placing the bowl by the side of the mattress then pulling away the blanket.

When Wesley had taken himself out of the way, Gunn stepped forward to put the pills next to Angel's hand. "I'll leave these here, for you to take when you're ready." The glare got worse as he was bending down, and he was already poised to jump back when Angel let out a roar of outrage and flipped himself to his feet to throw himself at Gunn. Before they had even started sliding the bolts, Gunn knew that Angel had stopped his charge, but it wasn't until he stepped back to look at the screen that he could make sense of the changed sounds.

Angel was retching, sprawled on the floor with his hands clutching his head on all sides, like he was trying to keep it still while his body was convulsing. Or just like he was trying to hold his skull together, stop it cracking open. Or stop it melting. His moans were thin with disbelief, a helpless pleading.

"There's gotta be somethin' we can do." Gunn was whispering, he didn't know why. "Get him a doctor, get a message to the Powers. This isn't right."

Wesley was shaking his head. "We tried that when we first realised there was damage. The Powers... they won't accept any approach from our kind. There's no doctor who can make a difference to a seer. To any kind of seer."

"This isn't..." Gunn was getting a headache himself just from watching. He rubbed his hand hard over his face then squeezed the bridge of his nose. "This isn't what he signed up for. If he could've seen himself now, he'd've said a big 'yes' back when you offered him a way out."

Wesley sighed and swallowed. "We don't know that, Charles. And we can't ask him now, because he doesn't know the full situation. I'm not ruling out... But it's too early even to discuss this." Wesley turned away, went over to the bookshelf on the far side of his desk, and made like there was nothing else in his mind except looking for that one book.

"I'm sorry, Wes." Gunn had needed half a minute to decide to follow him. But he'd been right and Wesley's problem wasn't with him: Wesley turned immediately under the hand on his shoulder and held himself against Gunn.

Against Gunn's neck: "I don't know how many times I've thought, 'It's terrible that he's immortal. It's terrible.'"

"Yeah, it is." And they stayed like that in silence as the sounds from Angel's room got gradually slower and more and more exhausted. The last sound was his hand sliding off his head to land heavily on the floor. He didn't move in the time before they left for training with the crew, but while they were gone he managed to crawl backwards the four feet or so to the mattress, and he was lying on his back looking at least three fourths dead.

Gunn felt like a bath instead of the usual shower after training, and he lay and thought about Wesley's "collage" idea and why he didn't buy it. OK, maybe it was a mess of things stuck together, more than they'd seen from him before, but it wasn't random, not the way Wes had decided when he'd said they shouldn't bother to guess. Angel had been blazingly angry with Gunn, had held onto that even through a vision, and the same with the trigger of touching his hand. Wesley and sex... Feeling confused and betrayed about Wesley and sex, when he'd seemed "content" the day before (no, the week before).

Maybe Angel hid a lot from Wesley. Gunn could understand that. Angel saying to Gunn, "Don't leave him." Yeah, he'd had ideas of his own then about what was going on with Wesley. And when he'd needed to tell them, he'd told Gunn.

He'd hide things from Wesley because Wesley mattered to him, he had too much to lose there. And he might tell the truth to Gunn for the opposite reasons – might at any time but especially now when he was so angry.

If Gunn could get him on his own, manage to keep away from all of Angel's triggers, and convince Angel that he did want to understand... Or at least: make it more satisfying for Angel to keep on talking to him than to make a leap for his throat. No, he wasn't going to discuss this with Wesley. But he did want to get more prepared.

"Have you been sucking him off?" Just after they'd settled in bed. Totally matter-of-fact.

Wesley gave a start of surprise but recovered quickly, like he'd known to expect this. "No. I've been jerking him off. That's as far as I'd ever go. I decided that before... I went in the first time."

"He ask for more?"

Wesley shook his head. “Not after I’d explained that anything else would require too much involvement on my part. He’s not my lover. I’m glad to offer contact. Guaranteed release. But he mustn’t ask for anything that he knows is only for you.”

“So you just jerk each other off?”

Another shake. “He’s not allowed to see me naked. He’s not allowed to touch me like that. Maybe I’m his lover but it’s essential that he knows that he isn’t mine.”

Gunn remembered Wesley in the laundry room, the morning after that vision of the vamps at the UCLA dorm – (“I’d be happy to suck you off. But I couldn’t do it as a lover.”) – and he closed his eyes tight for two long, deep breaths. “Wes.” A sigh. “That would break my heart.”

“You think it’s cruel?”

Gunn gave a shrug; and then nodded several times.

Wesley looked thoughtful. “He really doesn’t - didn’t - seem to think so. There was... affection but with limits in the manner of expressing it.”

“You kiss?” Wesley nodded. “You roll around on the mattress?” Another nod. “You get him all-the-way undressed?”

A shrug. “It depends on his mood.”

Gunn frowned. “It’s gotta turn you on.”

“Yes, but... he’s not allowed to see me come. To do anything to try to make me. I only want that with you. I don’t try to pretend I’m indifferent to him. Well, I couldn’t. But you’re the one I’m involved with.”

Gunn rolled over onto his side, slid his hand onto Wesley’s stomach, and teased his two lowest fingers further and further along the line of hairs down to the groin. “Involved to the hilt.” They smiled at one another, and Wesley stroked the inside of Gunn’s arm with the back of his fingers.

“But it’s cruel?”

“No, I... I don’t know now. Cruel if you were doing it to Matt or someone. If he was really stuck on you. ‘cos it’d be keepin’ him stuck on you when he should’ve given up in a week and gone lookin’ for someone available. But for Angel it’s this or nothin’ and – yeah, like you said, sounds like a stable arrangement. Guess he has fantasies, but – He’s never acted, has he, like he wanted all of you?”

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On Monday, Wesley got a call from one of the bookstores, asking if he could go to Santa Barbara the next day to evaluate the library for an estate that was being sold. The bookstore guy had a family emergency, and he trusted Wesley’s eye. Forty bucks for the trip, plus expenses.

Wesley left at ten on Tuesday morning, when Angel had been lucid for about half an hour. The pain seemed to be gone, but Angel was still angry with them; he wouldn’t look at them or speak to them, but he was matter-of-fact about following Wesley’s instructions for keeping his distance at feeding time, and he didn’t throw the empty beaker at them but put it back on the carpet and then went to kneel by the wall.

Gunn waited twenty minutes after Wesley left – enough time for Wesley to come back for anything he’d forgotten – and then he knocked on Angel’s door. “Angel, it’s Charles. I need to talk to you about what Wesley and I have done to make you so angry with us.” Angel was over in his corner, but Gunn could see him shaking his head. Not yelling at Gunn to go fuck himself, though, so a good start. Gunn opened the door.

“I know you don’t want to talk to me, but I’m here ‘cos I want things to get better. Man, what you got to lose by givin’ me some time?” Angel turned his head even further to the wall. Gunn walked slowly to the mid-point, where they put the beaker, and dropped down on one knee to be at Angel’s level.



“Guess you’ll think I’m lyin’ when I say I don’t know what I’ve done. Been told I’m bad for holdin’ grudges, but just, you know, ‘kinda bitter’. You goin’ ‘s far as ‘vindictive’... That’s a shock, man. ‘specially now when – Yeah, I’ve got weird in the past ‘bout you ‘n’ Wesley, got jealous ‘n’ done some things I shouldn’t. But I’m totally over that now. It’s good that you guys’re close. So I – You’re gonna have to tell me, what I’m doin’ that makes you say ‘vindictive’. ‘cos from what I’m feelin’, I ain’t got nothin’ to guess on.”

Angel hadn’t shown any reaction, except a few times to shift his head very slightly against the wall. A long, long pause, then he slowly turned his head to look at Gunn – to stare at him. His expression was suspicious and hostile, but with just enough shifts to give hope that there was puzzlement in there, some new questions about Gunn.

After maybe half a minute: “The headaches are bad.”

“Man! Understatement? Never heard of anything like that. God, I wish I knew something to do to help. Really help.”

Open puzzlement. Surprise. Doubt. Then, very quietly: “Trust me. Let me go.”

Gunn’s turn to be surprised. “Let you go where, Angel? You think there’s a place they can treat you?”

Angel shook his head and raised his hand to press his fingertips up past his hairline. Impatient: “Take this off me. Make them stop.”

Gunn reran the last few exchanges in his mind, then blinked hard and jabbed his finger onto his breastbone. “You think I’ve got the power to make your headaches stop? Angel, I –”

“You made them permanent?” Spat out.

They stared at one another, very different shades of disbelief.

“You think I laid them on you. In revenge or punishment or something. Because I don’t trust you?”

Angel nodded, very definite, the one who couldn’t be fooled. “It was the only way you’d agree to come back. After he got better. If it wouldn’t happen again because I’d never dare – I wouldn’t even think about...” He closed his eyes tight and swallowed, then sighed and looked at Gunn again. “And I know he’s yours but the headaches are too much. It’s not justice.” A whisper, dreading the answer: “Did you make them permanent?”

“Oh, Angel.” Gunn dragged his hand over his head. “You got it all wrong. I can see why but – You got it all wrong. I do, I do wish to god I knew where the headaches came from. Then I’d know where to start in gettin’ you free. But I don’t. I’m sorry. And, yeah, there’s some stuff between you two I don’t want to happen again, because it was a large part of how he got so sick. But –” A pause. “I guess I need to know what the headaches were supposed to stop you from thinking about. The way you’d figured it. Just about fuckin’ him hard enough to leave bruises? Or about normal things like kissin’ him ‘n’ havin’ him touch you?”

Angel closed his eyes and shook his head. “Anything. Wanting anything would.... The strongest thing I should ever be thinking about him was that he was yours. Wanting anything would mean that I hadn’t managed to respect... I had to respect – You.”

“Angel, I –” A long sigh. “There’s some things I gotta respect too. Had to learn that I gotta respect. You said he’s mine. He’s yours too, in a different way. Some ways, lots of ways, you’re more important to him than me. We’re here – him ‘n’ me – because he’s totally committed to taking care of you. If I turned around and said to him, ‘OK. I’ve had enough. I wanna get outta here ‘n’ live a normal life... Well, I know for a fact he wouldn’t leave you. He’d choose you. Every time.” A shrug. “I like the share we’ve got of him now. I wouldn’t change it.”

More staring. Eventually: “You’re telling the truth.” Shaking his head. “You never knew about the headaches. So he wasn’t trying to make me... It meant the same, it meant something good.” Pure relief.

“Uh – No, we didn’t know what you thought about the headaches. What was causin’ them. I guess you were angry with Wesley if you thought he was letting me do that to you?” Either a coward, or cruel, that’s what Angel had said.

Angel sighed. “He was still touching me. Being close. I thought he wanted to see the power he had over me. Or that you were making him. I thought I’d never known him.”

They'd been so busy with their own theories about the visions, they never wondered if Angel had a theory of his own – when all Angel knew was the headaches had started just after they got back, and that he'd seen Gunn plenty angry in the weeks before they left.

Gunn told Angel that Wesley might not be back that day, but he would definitely get to see him the next day. He offered to get Angel something to read, they cleared up the mess from the last books, and then Gunn took some of the beer money, went to Barnes and Noble, and bought another art book and another copy of the salt book.

Angel spent the next few hours sitting in his reading-place, sometimes reading, sometimes drawing, sometimes drifting off to stare across at nothing. When Wesley got home around five, Angel was asleep on the mattress having a good dream about Wesley and sex. Wesley looked surprised, said, "Now there's a flashback," and Gunn told him what had really been happening with Angel.

Wesley was so impressed with Gunn, so relieved, so grateful. Gunn didn't give it to Wesley word-for-word, nothing about how he knew Angel was more important to Wesley. He just said he'd managed to convince Angel that he'd got over being jealous, he knew Angel wasn't disrespecting him. They tore up Angel's angry drawings, then went to roll around on their own mattress.

Angel woke up while Wesley was starting the preparations for dinner, and he heard Wesley's voice and called for him, very confident, very eager.

"I'll be with you in a minute, Angel." Wesley was turning off the cooker and putting the liver and everything back in the fridge. Gunn got his jacket and cellphone, kissed Wesley a quick goodbye then went down to his truck; they'd already talked this through: how Gunn didn't want to see or hear any of it, how he'd go for a drive and Wesley would call him when it was over.

He went to Manhattan Beach, got a coffee, and sat in the truck and looked at the ocean. Last time he was here was a month ago, when Angel was chained up and Wesley wasn't talking to him. God, how did he even recognise himself?

He was OK with what they were doing, he really was. Yeah, it gave him a jolt; the idea of seeing them kiss sent a spike slamming through his heart and his gut. But then the idea of Angel trusting Wesley again, Wesley knowing he could give Angel that affection and that release, and not have to worry about hiding it from Gunn... A warm glow, that spread further than the jolt, and lasted much longer.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Kekulei demons had reached a decision: there was something Wesley could do to atone, and that was to redecorate the church and their other community spaces, from top to bottom. They'd supply all of the equipment and the materials, they'd arrange any repairs or any structural work that needed to be fitted around the redecoration; but they expected him to work to a very high standard, and he was going to have to work around their schedule, because the buildings were staying in use and the most they'd do would be to close off one room over a weekend if the fumes from the paint were going to be too bad. And, no, Gunn was not allowed to help, Wesley had to do everything himself.

They informed Wesley of the decision on the 30<sup>th</sup> of December, he spent two hours with them on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January looking over all of the rooms and discussing the schedule, and he started the work the next day. The first room on his list was used throughout the day, up to ten in the evening. He got there at a quarter to ten. The last people in the room helped him move the furniture, as agreed, and by eleven the caretaker had locked up, leaving him on his own. They'd given him a key to the back door so he was able to let himself out when he got finished just after four – with one coat of paint applied to the third-largest ceiling, and all of the equipment cleared away so the first group in would only have to move the furniture back. Gunn was woken by the sound of Wesley running a bath, and he got up and helped Wesley scrub the flecks of white paint out of his hair, off his glasses, and especially off his hand and arm. He was exhausted, and he also had a mass of bruises all down his right side. Most were from pushing the ladder around, but he admitted that the worst were from falling off the ladder, when he'd misjudged and overbalanced.

"It took me a while to accept how small the steps are that I have to take, not having that spare arm for support. I daren't really move more than about two feet at a time on either side. Which meant I had to move the ladder about six hundred times. And then go up and down it six hundred times – which was how I did most of the falling, before I got truly pathetically cautious. Fortunately the ceilings are relatively low. And the Kekulei aren't trying to set any deadline."

“The ceilings still sound high enough to be fucking dangerous! What’re they thinkin’? I mean, that’s what I’d call vindictive.”

Wesley was shaking his head. “No, it was good of them to choose something that they actually want done, that they’ll value and have with them for a long time. I thought they’d probably come up with some make-work, that wouldn’t benefit anyone and that they didn’t care about. Where the only point was to take up my time and have me on show. They didn’t choose this because it would be difficult for me, they chose it because they agreed that they wanted it. They know I’ll need help with some things. They’ve organised themselves to give it when I ask. And I found my rhythm eventually. The last two hours were much easier.”

The next night Wesley went to the church straight from training with the duals, and he was home by three. Before he could start the walls, he needed someone to mask off the edge of the ceiling for him; it was more convenient for the Kekulei to leave that until Sunday afternoon, which meant that Wesley had a night off.

Piriti had called Wesley several times checking for news about the Kekulei, but he hadn’t called since they made their decision so Wesley dropped by the nest on Saturday afternoon. When Piriti heard about the delay with masking the ceiling, he immediately said that he could do that, and Wesley agreed to ask the Kekulei if they could include Piriti in the rehabilitation program – just for the tasks that needed two arms, he’d say, not to take any of the work from Wesley that he could do himself.

The question of Piriti had to go to a council, but they had their answer by Tuesday and the answer was yes. They knew about Piriti, that he’d been Barney’s route to Wesley, so, yes, it was appropriate. But Wesley had to take all responsibility for him, they didn’t want to have to organise him too. Wesley and Piriti arranged that Piriti would get himself a new pager, and that Wesley would collect him from home each time, and take him back when he’d done his part.

Wesley’s schedule was very irregular, depending on the day’s bookings for his current room, and on whether or not Piriti was going to be able to sneak out of the house. The Kekulei were good about informing him of last-minute changes – and Piriti probably did as well as he could. Wesley could have made his life a lot easier if he’d decided just to start at eleven each night, but instead he usually started as early as possible, to increase the number of waking-hours he spent with Gunn.

The earlier he started, the more Kekulei demons would be in the building while he was working. If there were more than ten, he said, then he knew to expect some kind of display of hostility; he didn’t count what they said in their own language, because he was sure those people thought he couldn’t understand a word. There was never any real threat – they knew he was under strong protection – but they were determined to make their position clear. Wesley would agree with them (he made a stock of four or five standard replies), and then explain that he had to get back to work.

Otherwise nobody talked to him, not really, nothing beyond the organisation needed for his work. And he said that was how it should be, but Gunn could see him sliding back toward his “non-person” place, the place where the tape had put him, where he drank blood and could only watch a movie if there weren’t any words. He was spending more and more time in his thrift-shop clothes (all good painting clothes, he said), he was starting to give himself breaks from shaving, and he was talking in his sleep again, those long conversations that Gunn guessed were still in Dirkou. Gunn didn’t hassle him – he was in a tough situation, course it was gonna have an effect on him – but tried to give him good things to keep him anchored in the real world: making their shared evenings into “dates”, with Gunn doing the cooking and Wesley encouraged into his suit; and buying him a radio to keep him company during the long, boring hours of painting. This wouldn’t last forever. Months, with Wesley having to work so careful and slow, but not forever.

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A week or so after Wesley had started the painting, Gunn got a call from Grouw. “Have you... Did you know there’s this picture of Wesley being passed around?”

Gunn’s mind immediately went to Angel’s drawing of Wesley on the mattress, but they’d torn that up, and who could have got to it, anyway? “What picture?”

“Um... Be best if you come down here when I get off work. I got a copy I can show you.”

“It’s bad?”

“It’s not good. Gonna need some clever handling. I’ve been telling people it has to be a joke but – Really hoping there’s nothing more out there.”

The picture was a black-and-white glossy, like a publicity shot. The photo showed Wesley in motorbike leathers, all black, helmet in his left hand, resting on the saddle of the bike, crossbow in his right, down by his thigh. Background looked like an alley on the outskirts of some desert town. There wasn’t stubble as Gunn had come to know it, but Wesley was definitely going all-out for the look of “on the road for days solid, seen things you couldn’t ever imagine”. A transparent piece of posing, best kept between you and your bedroom mirror, but kind of understandable for a glasses-wearing English geek, all fired up about his first-ever road-trip, Hot, but like a stranger: you wouldn’t want him to talk, you’d never guess he had those half-smiles. You’d do it standing in some doorway. He’d pull your pants down quickly with those two hands, and he’d hold you with them, tight, and that wouldn’t mean anything, not to him, not to you.

But the picture wasn’t the problem. The picture was easy enough to pass off as a joke, or just to shrug off as proof that Wesley had watched the same movies as every other kid on the block. The problem was the words in the space beneath the picture. “Wesley Wyndham-Pryce. Rogue Demon Hunter.” With a cellphone number.

It was one thing to have macho fantasies. It was another thing to act them out, go vigilante. Yeah, everyone knew that Wesley had killed demons but that was knowing him as earnest, honourable, one-armed Wesley, who couldn’t tell any kind of lie, who killed only to protect, only when he had to. This Wesley in the picture, he killed for kicks, needed it for his fantasy, and you’d never get the truth for him about where he’d found the demon, what the demon had been doing.

“Oh, fuck!” Gunn dropped the photo on the seat and slammed the heel of his hand hard against his forehead.

“Yeah.”

“How long’s it been around?”

“Couple of days, I think. There’s hundreds of copies. What was he thinking?”

Gunn shook his head, over and over. “Long time ago. ‘nother lifetime, probably seems. Maybe it was a joke. Where’d it come from?”

A shrug. “The Kekulei, I guess. Barney, even? You’d better deal with this quick. I’d like to hear something from him, myself.”

Gunn nodded. “I’ll get on it. Thanks.” A pause. “You done a lot for us. Got into a lot for us. Guess you sometimes gotta wonder why.”

Grouw frowned, and took a long time to reply. “You’re my only friend where I never know what’s gonna happen next. Nine times out of ten that’s a good thing. Well. Eight times, maybe.”

Wesley was at the church, should be done in another hour. Gunn went home and started the dough and the sauce for the pizza. He’d put the photo face-down on the coffee-table, and he wasn’t going to look at it again until he had to, which would be as soon as Wesley got back.

Wesley didn’t look half as surprised as Gunn expected. Horrified and cringing with embarrassment, but not surprised.

“You knew this was out there?”

Wesley nodded. “At the hearing on Christmas Day. The prosecution presented it. They’d done some very thorough research.”

“So what’s the story? Wha’ d’ you tell them at the hearing? There’s a good explanation, right?”

Deep breath in, then gusted out. “No. Not really. This was taken about three weeks before I got to L.A. I was fired as a Watcher about three months before that. I couldn’t go home. I made a very clumsy attempt at reinventing myself. At not caring. When I picked up the Kungai’s trail, I thought –” He closed his eyes and swallowed. “Barney’s trail. Of course. I thought I should reward myself by making it official. So people could know who – The only mitigation I can offer is

that I was completely ineffectual. I did no good, but also no harm. Of course, I don't know how long that would have lasted if the Kungai hadn't ruled out the motorbike for me as a central prop."

Gunn looked at the photo for a long time, then back at Wesley. "That what you told the hearing?"

Wesley nodded. "The prosecution couldn't offer any evidence of harm. I think they were hoping that I'd be shocked into revealing my true character. Like the villain in a fairy-tale."

Slowly: "It was demons that Barney was hurting. You were trying to stop him." He should have remembered that immediately, but that picture had packed too much of a punch. "Who's gonna have a problem with that kind of demon-hunting?"

"The defence did make that point. But I know the man in that picture better than they do. He was truly a shell. There shouldn't be any excuses made for him."

Gunn reached out, ripped the photo across, and again, and dropped the pieces out of sight behind the arm of the couch. "OK, he's gone. But we need to say something about him. Someone's put hundreds of copies out there. Gotta be people workin' away right now, makin' up each others minds. We need to get in 'n' unmake 'em."

"What do you suggest?"

Gunn shrugged and pulled a face. "Grouw's been tellin' people it has to be a joke." Wesley was shaking his head, almost violently. "No, I know, wrong excuse. Stinks for anyone who knows you. But... What you just told me? That you'd just got fired? You were doin' the redefinition thing? This is L.A, that thing is what we do here. You give 'em that background, they'll take another look at the picture and go, 'Oh, yeah. That's three-months-fired alright. Like that summer I was gonna grow all my own food.' You mind that gettin' out? 'bout you bein' fired?"

Wesley shook his head. "What do we do? Put up posters? Organise a press-conference?"

Gunn couldn't tell if Wesley was joking. "I'll just do the rounds. Talk to people till they know there's no mileage in that picture. Shiny machine, but the tank's empty."

After they'd eaten Gunn called Grouw, and then he decided to get started on the rounds straight away: couldn't do better than Saturday night, and with the training and Wesley's schedule at the church, it would be days before he had another evening free. He made good progress, and also worked out the next places he needed to include in his rounds; some he could do during the day, but most were strictly evening.

Wesley was at his desk when Gunn got home, and he was reading a book in Aramaic (or something), that he'd bought that day on the way to the church.

"You're feeling ready to go back to translation? Thought it'd be another month. Maybe more." Gunn hadn't told Wesley how he was talking in his sleep. Would have felt like hassling him, but he should know in himself that he wasn't ready.

"I need some intellectual stimulation. Staring at one blank wall after another, for hour after hour, day after day. My mind is starting to cannibalise itself. I need to remind it what real food tastes like."

Cannibalise? No, Gunn wasn't going to ask. "Be careful, OK? I'm gonna be watchin' for you gettin' weird."

In bed, Wesley didn't want sex, didn't even want to be held. "It's the picture. The idea of you seeing me like that. I want to disown my whole body."

"You looked hot. Not hot like I'd fall in love with you, not your real way of bein' hot. But I got no problems with seein' you like that."

"You weren't..." A sigh. "I would have to seriously question the judgement of someone who wanted that."

"Oh, come on! You must've got hit on ten times a day. You turn 'em all down? Or just the women?" He grinned, showing it as a joke, but Wesley just got more uncomfortable. He'd been bad on Christmas Day too, hadn't he? Off sex,

and picking at something about women and Cordy and what did they see. Which would have been from the hearing, seeing the picture there.

“I decided in the first week that I was the type of demon hunter who was exclusively heterosexual. A complete redefinition. Which also meant not the type of heterosexual that I’d been before. The result probably looked very funny. Seen from a distance.”

A new type of heterosexual. We present another trick from Wesley’s brain. “Cordy didn’t know you then?”

“No, that was before. When I was still a Watcher. For which there are mercifully no photographs.”

Gunn nodded, and touched the back of his hand to Wesley’s cheek very lightly, for less than a second. “You gonna forgive me for thinkin’ you were hot?”

A small smile. “I’m halfway there. But can you keep from reminding me for a couple of days?”

They woke up close against one another the next morning, and Wesley was happy to stay like that as they lay and talked. No hint of sex, but enough to stop Gunn from thinking about counting the days.

\* \* \* \* \*

Angel got a vision around nine of Tuesday evening, while Wesley was at home and Gunn was out doing the rounds for that damn picture. Very straightforward vision, couldn’t be clearer: a girl in danger from a Gogomol demon at 171 Oak, out in Reseda; looked like some magic was involved, some ritual. Gunn got there about ten minutes before Wesley, saw the girl moving around in the front room, no sign of panic or anything, and no chanting so the spell mustn’t’ve started yet. He knocked on the door and yelled, “My name’s Charles Gunn. And if you’re about to cast a spell I’m here to tell you it’s a bad idea. It’s gonna turn really dangerous, unless you let me help you.”

A long, long silence. He’d heard her go to the door and she had to be looking through the spyhole – at the last type of person she’d ever open the door to at night. Yeah, but he didn’t know if they could afford the luxury of waiting for Wesley.

“How’d you know that?” Not a challenge, just freaked out.

“We’ve got people who keep track. For the whole of L.A. You buy the books, you buy the equipment, you ask questions – they know.”

“Oh my God!” And the door was open, and she was telling him the whole history of this idea she’d had to bring her father back. She was still talking when Wesley arrived, though by that time the circle was dismantled and she was ditzing around collecting every candle in the house and asking Gunn about every jar of herbs in the kitchen, whether she needed to get Gunn to take it away to be really safe. One look at Wesley and she went quiet; could have been the arm, could have been the grimness and the stubble, could have been the bursting in with a sword. Wesley showed her Angel’s drawing of the demon, told her exactly which herbs, got her to carry everything out to the truck for them, and really hardly needed to give her the warning that they’d find out if she made any move to do it again.

Wesley’s glasses were broken: the right side-piece was missing, so they were balanced just on his left ear and his nose. Gunn had noticed immediately, but he couldn’t say anything until they were finished with the girl and they were on their own outside the house.

“What happened to your glasses?”

A sigh. “Angel fell on them. When he had the vision.”

“You were in with him?”

Wesley nodded. “An inch the other way and I think he would have smashed them to pieces. As it was, I couldn’t find them for at least a minute. We could have lost thirty minutes if I’d had to ask you to come and pick me up. Not that you needed me there, but...”

“Hey, you stopped her talkin’! Where I’m standin’, I owe you one rescue.” They laughed, and then Wesley said he ought to be setting off for the church; the caretaker would be expecting him.

“With your glasses like that? Come home ‘n’ let’s try ‘n’ mend ‘em first. They fall off when you’re on the ladder... Y’just don’t need another thing to put you off-balance.” Wesley took his point, and Gunn led the way home.

About four blocks away from the girl’s house, a sports car shot past the truck, and the glimpse Gunn caught of the driver looked so much like Cordy. He laughed and looked in the rearview to watch the car pass Wesley, half a block behind. Cordy in Reseda. Yeah, right. Her name comes up twice in three weeks, and that’s enough to have him imagine he’s seen her in Reseda. He mentioned it when they got home, expecting Wes to say, “What sports car?” but Wes had seen her and had thought exactly the same as Gunn.

They patched the glasses together with tape – good enough for one night’s painting – and the next morning, while Wesley was still asleep, Gunn took them and went to see about getting them mended properly. The side-piece was broken off near the joint; very difficult to solder back together, and it would probably break again within a month. But the optician had some spare side-pieces and they chose the closest match, which was a fraction of the price of a new set of frames.

“You should have a spare pair.”

“This is my spare pair. If anyone shows you the picture again, you can admire my ‘cool’ frames. They disappeared at some point during the fight with the Kungai. Since then...” A shrug. “There have always been other priorities.”

“Soon’s you get earnin’ again.” Gunn was stern. “I’ll be in charge of the envelope that says, ‘Money for Wesley’s Spare Glasses’.”

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Life was getting easier. Wesley would be earning soon, and Gunn was already picking up more work on his own – probably because of what people were hearing about Wesley. The displays of hostility at the church were steadily becoming rarer, though when they came they were still bad. The other side of that: people had started talking to him, and to Piriti. Piriti said that Wesley was so shy (and that was Solito’s brother talking there!): he never presumed, he hardly smiled; but he seemed to remember every word he’d exchanged with each of the Kekulei, and he brought that to each new exchange.

Piriti was back in touch with Matt and Grouw, and they were meeting at the beach-house at least once a week, with Gunn included about one session in three. No singing, though, no talk about returning to Caritas; that part of their friendship definitely seemed to be over.

Angel was having much less trouble with the headaches. He was still getting the mis-sent visions, about once a week, was still left so bad afterwards that he’d be sick to his stomach if he tried to stand up, and was still showing the damage with the multiple tracks. But he recovered more quickly each time, like maybe the scar-tissue was getting thicker. Or tougher. Giving him some protection, anyway. And he wasn’t fighting the pain any more, he just waited it out and the waiting seemed halved if Wesley was with him.

Gunn had no idea how often Wesley and Angel were having sex. Two times a week? Three? Some times were obvious, like when he got back from the beach-house and Angel was sitting there reading, and Wesley was horny-as-hell. Probably obvious, too, when Gunn woke up in the middle of the night and realised that Wesley had got home and was in with Angel, and then Wesley would have a long shower before he’d come to bed. Gunn never pretended to be asleep, and by the third time he’d decided that, no, he didn’t need to say anything to reassure Wesley about his privacy with Angel, so he could stop puzzling over how to raise the subject, how far he really wanted to go.

Wesley stopped talking in his sleep – or anyway he stopped talking in the way that worried Gunn. Wesley was thinking about normal things during the long hours of painting – or for a lot of them, he said, not thinking at all, just lulled by the rhythm into an easy trance. Still, no signs of anything being cannibalised, and when Wesley started wondering about the chances of Lilah having a piece of work that would fit in with his three-or-four spare hours a day, Gunn passed him the phone and told him there was only one way to find out. The work from Lilah didn’t quite put Wesley into “earning” (or not as Wesley’s spreadsheet would define it), since it was all done in hours that he owed her under the retainer, but felt like climbing out from massive debt and they decided they could start to rent movies with the beer money.

\* \* \* \* \*

On the first Monday in March, Angel had a vision late in the evening as Gunn and Wesley were getting ready for bed. A Laclar demon above an alley at Alameda and 6th, Downtown, with a net laid as a trap down on the ground, set to hoist the victim straight up to the third floor and through the shutters into its lair. Fishing for humans.

Gunn didn't like their chances of dealing with it in its lair. Even if they were quiet enough about finding the way in, why would it stay and fight when it could just jump out through those shutters? They'd do better if they could get it down onto the street and surprise it there. What if they triggered the trap in a way that looked like an accident? Wouldn't it come down to reset the trap? Hard to arrange an accident, though, at midnight in a quiet alley, when the Laclar could probably see everything happening for half a block around. Why would a skateboard be rolling around on its own? If they even had a skateboard. Gunn got the idea when they were nearly turned onto 6th: they'd drive the truck over the trap; and then circle around and come at the Laclar on foot, from behind it, if it was looking the way the truck had gone.

The Laclar was already down on the street when they got into position. Wesley stepped out with the crossbow, Gunn heard the thud and the howl, and in the next second Gunn was taking the bow and handing Wesley a fresh one. He was listening for the next thud as he started to reload the first bow, but instead there was the crack of a gunshot, and Wesley cried out and fell to the ground. Gunn dropped to his knees, and grabbed the third crossbow to keep the Laclar off while he started to pull Wesley behind the cover of the wall. But the Laclar was running away, fast like it was panicked, and Gunn put down the bow and looked properly at Wesley.

He was hit in the chest, on his right side. Gunn leaned over him to take hold of his ankle and push his left leg up to an angle, and then used his bent knee as a lever to roll him over onto his right side. Give the blood a way out of his lungs, make sure he wouldn't drown in it.

"The phone's in the truck, Wes. You hang on." He ran around the block to where they'd left the truck, the sword and the axe slamming against his back. He got through to 911, dumped the weapons on the front seat, and ran back to Wesley.

Wesley was fighting to breathe. The sucking sounds from his chest as he breathed in, the bubbling as he breathed out, the dragging, the rasping in his throat, the effort in his face. Nothing else that Gunn could read in his face: just the effort. Gunn knelt in blood, soaking cold to his skin, and folded both his hands around Wesley's hand where it was pinned to the ground up by his chest.

"They're on their way, Wes. They're on their way."

Wesley arched his neck back, rolled his head slowly against the ground. Effort. " 'ngel." Arching back again as he breathed in, shoulders working harder even than his neck. " 'ngel."

Did he think it was Angel with him? Thrown back to that day with the Kungai? "Angel's at home, Wes. When I've seen you settled in the hospital I'll get back to him. Help him if the headache's bad this time."

A fight now to keep his eyes open. His head jerked to the left, then back. " 'gel. 'gel."

"Don't you worry about Angel."

Gunn wanted to think he'd heard, and heard what he'd needed to hear, and that was why he let his eyes close then, and let his shoulders and his neck relax. But it only looked like that, and just for a second, and then his body slumped low, so low, and a sound came from his chest that was like the sucking and the bubbling combined, but slow, and far too long, longer than he ever breathed out in the deepest sleep. Gunn knew there was only one sound like that, he'd heard it before too many times: the death rattle. The eyes closing, the shoulders slumping: that was Wesley dying.

Gunn was thinking... No, he didn't know what he was thinking, or for how long. He was looking at Wesley, he had Wesley's hand held tight, and maybe he was thinking that the ambulance would be there soon, that the paramedics shouldn't see the crossbows. And then Wesley breathed in, a shallow gasp that made his head rock back slightly, and the breathing out was the same long, slow slump under gravity. The rattle was different: quiet and short, almost a murmur.



Gunn had gasped with Wesley, and he held his breath as Wesley breathed out, and kept on holding it, waiting for Wesley to breathe again. Twenty heartbeats, maybe thirty, before he had to give up, but then when he took his next breath, Wesley breathed with him.

Another long, long wait, and another breath, and then more waiting, through all the time before the sirens approached. Gunn stroked Wesley's hand over and over, coaxing him, willing him to take another breath. Knowing that Wesley had died some short time after that third breath, maybe even at the end of that third gasp. But waiting, not able to stop waiting, because Wesley had looked this still, this empty before each of those breaths. There was no difference yet, no difference that was sure enough to let Gunn stop waiting.

There was still no difference by the time he heard the sirens, but he knew there was something else he had to do now. Something Wesley would expect him to do. He got up, found all the crossbows, and hid them under a dumpster that was halfway back to the truck. They'd been driving home and they'd thought they'd heard someone in the alley calling for help. There'd been two guys and one had pulled a gun and then they'd both run off. And no, Gunn hadn't got any kind of look at either of them.

He wouldn't ride in the ambulance, he'd come after in his truck. Yes, he knew him, he hadn't just found him there.

He watched the ambulance out of sight, then collected the crossbows on the way back to the truck. Hide all of the weapons in the space behind the seat, in case the cops wanted to walk him to the truck. Or followed him with another question. Or something.

He stripped off his jacket with the blood all up the cuffs, and his sweatshirt under that, down to his T-shirt. The blood on his hands was drying sticky between his fingers, stiff over the sides and the backs. He wet the sweatshirt with water from the bottle in the side of the door, and wiped them off before he'd put them on the steering wheel. His pants were dark, you couldn't see the stains, or not for what they were. He could still feel them, though, cold and clinging, from his knees all down his shins.

At the hospital he helped them with their forms. Next of kin? "I – I – His family's in England. I'm his partner. He's got no one else here." They helped him, told him straight away that he didn't need to do anything, not here; just find a funeral director, because then they'd take care of all the arrangements. Was there a firm that his family...? No, then maybe he knew someone who'd recently... who might recommend...? Though if the funeral was going to be in England, then there were rules and procedures, and he'd have to ask for a firm that knew all the special arrangements.

He waited for the police. Told them the story, how "it all happened so fast". The guys were white, mid-20s, street clothes, but that was all, he was never gonna remember anythin' else. They went in to see Wesley while Gunn waited outside, and then they asked about Wesley's arm and how long he'd been in L.A. and what he did for a living ("He knows a lot of languages."). They said the slug might tell them something if they could recover it, but probably not enough. They had his address, he took their cards, and they walked him to the truck.

Angel was still in the vision, but far enough along that the worst of the noise was complaints about his head. Nearly three o'clock. What time would it be in England? Gunn booted up the computer and looked online. Eight hours ahead. OK. So he should call now. He couldn't find the number in Wesley's card-file (why would he, when Wesley knew it by heart?), but it would be in their phone records. Yes. Back in July. His mother's birthday?

The longest number he had ever dialled in his life.

"Chichester 40305." A man's voice. Very brisk.

"Is that Mister Wyndham-Pryce?"

"It is. Who is this?"

"My name is Charles Gunn. I'm a friend of Wesley's. I work with him in Los Angeles. I – I'm sorry but I'm calling with bad news."

A brief pause. "You're telling me that he's got himself killed. What happened?"

Gunn swallowed. "It was three hours ago. He was shot in the chest when we were out in the street. I called 911 but he never made it to the hospital. I'm so sorry."

“Who shot him? Was it a human? Is this a matter for the police?”

Well of course he knew about demons. That was how Wes had grown up. “No, it was a Laclar demon. Wesley had hit it with a bolt from a crossbow, but it got away.” And then he explained what he had told the police.

A grunt. “I suppose there’ll be an autopsy but after that they should agree to release the body for transport. Even if they had any prospect of obtaining a suspect, they couldn’t claim that it constituted evidence. In this situations it’s unwise to set a date for the funeral until the body is in the country, but one likes to know the likely range. You’ll have your undertaker keep in regular contact with ours?”

“I – Yeah. I’ll find one tomorrow. He’ll take care of all those arrangements.”

“Good. I’ll give you the number of the firm we’ll be using.” Then he shouted away from the phone: “Sylvia. Get me the number for Albins, will you? It’s for the boy.” Another voice, sounding shocked but Gunn couldn’t hear the words. No longer shouting: “Yes, a few hours ago. He was still in Los Angeles. Have you got it?”

Gunn wrote the name and number – on the phone bill, not on Wesley’s pad with the notes for his translation, and not using Wesley’s good pen – and he read it back for the father.

“Good. What was your name again?”

“Charles Gunn.”

“And your telephone number?” Gunn gave it. “Well, thank you for calling, Mister Gunn. We’ll call Albin’s now to tell them to expect the information from America. Goodbye, then.”

“Goodbye.” Gunn hung up then sat back with a thud, with his eyes closed and feeling cold, so cold. The boy. It’s for the boy. Shock. And stiff-upper-lip. And a bad father for Wesley anyway, so Wes had been glad to be sent away to that school. Gunn had known that. He’d already known that. And he’d called half-expecting them to want Wesley sent home, and he hadn’t prepared any arguments, he hadn’t been any way ready.

What did Wesley want? Had he left a will saying he wanted to stay, or saying it was Gunn’s decision? And if he hadn’t, was Gunn going to fight? Would Wesley have hated to go back? He didn’t want to be deported but... There were things that he missed about his home, there were times he’d been happy there. He’d been happier with Gunn, though. Much happier. But he didn’t trust the landscape, he thought the landscape didn’t want him.

The will. It all depended on the will. Gunn was about to kneel to look through the bottom drawer of Wesley’s desk when he realised that he was still wearing the same pants. They were dry now, but kneeling in them... No. Never again. He stripped them off right there, then went to the bathroom and washed his legs where they’d touched the clothing, washed his hands again, over and over, and high up his arms. Into the bedroom. Their bedroom. With their bed. Pain crashed over him, where he’d been numb before. He couldn’t deal with that, this wasn’t the time for that. He kept his back to the bed and he got a clean pair of pants and a clean jacket, and he took them back to the living-room and he got dressed. He took the other pants and he went down to the truck, and he got the jacket and the sweatshirt from the passenger seat and he threw them all in the nearest dumpster. Then he got the weapons from the truck and carried them up to the apartment. And then he went looking for the will.

There wasn’t one. He looked everywhere there could be paper, and there wasn’t one.

No. Well. Why would there be? He and Wes had never talked like that, about Angel as immortal and them as mortal and what that meant. They would have. They would have. In time. A year’s time, maybe, if the year was easier like it looked, if they could plan. But with Angel how he’d been, and Wesley... No, they’d never talked.

So he wouldn’t fight it. In the morning, when he went looking for a funeral director, the first question he’d ask was if they knew how to get Wesley home.

What now? So what now? It was 4:18 and Angel was finally asleep, and everyone that he needed to talk to was asleep now. He should sleep. He should try to sleep. Because the next day was going to be hard.

He couldn't go back in the bedroom. He got Angel's blanket from the weapons closet, and he turned out the lights and kicked off his shoes and lay down on the couch.

He didn't want to think. About what had happened. About the next day. The next week. The next month. And he didn't think. He managed to empty his mind, make the air in there too thin. Thoughts did step up, they launched themselves, but there was nothing to carry them. No drama, no wreckage, they just disappeared, like a vampire hitting a wall of sunlight.

No thoughts, nothing with any notion of direction. But images. Sounds. Feelings against his skin. All there, already there. Not needing air, nowhere to go. He couldn't control anything about the way they showed themselves to him, like his mind was a spotlight swinging loose in a storm.

At 5:00 on the VCR, with no change in what his mind was doing, he accepted that he was not going to sleep. He booted the computer again and played Duke Nukem, and that took him past dawn and through till it was time to make coffee. When he turned away from the refrigerator holding the milk, he saw that he'd put out two mugs, and then he looked at the level in the jug and realised that he'd made coffee for two. He put the second mug back.

He had to tell people. He should make a list.

Lilah Morgan. The Kekulei. Piriti, in case he was expecting a page. Grouw, to get a message to the duals. So was he going to stop training? No, he'd always be training, it was part of his life, but... just him with two duals... Four against one, what would that be for? Until he knew, until he could imagine it, he'd be wasting their time.

Matt? Not for any reason but because otherwise he'd hear it from Grouw. Made more sense for all the boys to hear it the same way. And then Matt wouldn't have to figure out how to make his call ("Oh, Gunn, man, I just heard..."?).

So Anne, then, as well as Rondell. Because she'd hear it from the crew. He would keep the training with the crew, same two nights a week. He'd done it before without Wesley. Done it long before he knew Wesley.

The bookstores? Guess they wouldn't expect it, not in the same way, but if they'd got talkin' Wes up for some catalogin' work... They'd look stupid if they had to get back to the guy and say no, it wasn't gonna happen. Not real stupid, 'cos how could the guy get angry? But he didn't want anyone, when they heard, to be thinking, "Damn! That's gonna be a pain." He wanted them to be thinking first of Wesley, not themselves.

Swift? Yeah. And she should know before he called the Kekulei.

Who else? Was there anyone else?

There was Angel.

Gunn felt like he'd got taken out of time, like he'd spent five minutes maybe with nothing in him. Or like a statue, just solid cold. Telling Angel. Dealing with Angel. Trying to be ready for what Angel might do.

He should chain him first, before he told him, because Angel might turn violent. And Gunn had to be able to tell him from close to, the way he'd want to be told. Not be shouting it from the doorway.

("Sylvia!")

It's for the boy.

No. No. But he would chain Angel. He had to. And, really, would Angel even notice the chains compared to the knowing that Wesley was gone?

Grouw and Lilah got into work the earliest that Gunn knew of, around half past eight. He called Lilah first because she'd be the easiest, she'd know what to say; and they could make arrangements for returning the manuscript, they could keep it just business.

She was shocked, she was sorry, so sorry. Wesley was a remarkable man, she had always looked forward to their meetings. She could collect the manuscript directly from the apartment. Maybe that evening, around eight?

Grouw didn't know what to say. A lot of "Oh, God"s and then "Is there anything I can do?" Gunn just asked him not to call Matt, or not until the evening because Gunn should have got through to Matt by then. And yeah, he was going to page Piriti right now.

Swift asked about the funeral. She expected the ceremony would be humans-only, but if there was a gathering afterwards... She knew many people who would want to pay their respects.

"No, it'll be in England. The funeral. With his family."

Then just a gathering? Something separate for L.A.? Gunn didn't know, he hadn't thought, he had to find a funeral director first. But he'd let her know, of course he'd let her know.

Wesley's main contact with the Kekulei was a music teacher called Leeth. A deep, quiet shock, like he'd be staring at the wall and thinking about this all the rest of the day.

"I admit there were times when I regarded him as an exceptionally inconvenient fact. But he was a truly brave man."

No hint that he'd even started to think about the room half-painted or the three or four still untouched; and the idea first came to Gunn out of gratitude and then was obvious in seconds as a thing that he needed to do, for Wesley: "I know you didn't want me helping him. But would you let me finish what he started?" Leeth would have to talk to some people – not to get approval, just to inform them – and then he'd get back to Gunn and they'd arrange a time to meet at the church.

Not even 9:30. Oh, God. None of the bookstores opened till ten, best time to get Matt was lunchtime. He'd tell the crew at training tomorrow, and call Anne just before or just after.

A funeral director. They'd probably be open by now. If they ever closed. First of all, he had to get a handle on how much more was involved since Wesley was going back home, how much further he'd have to look.

He got the Yellow Pages, picked a local firm, and explained to them what he needed. What he needed was called "repatriation", and no they weren't able to offer that service but they gave him the number of some firms who did, including an English firm with an agent in L.A. He called the English agent first, and she was able to meet with him that afternoon, so he'd start with that.

Repatriation. So what made it so complicated? What was involved? He went online to search, and it was weird but most of the sites that he found were English. If he added "L.A." to the search then he got news articles about bones and things in museums, where the tribe wanted them back in New Zealand. But no sites for any firms – or not high in the list – whereas take out "L.A." and the top twenty had six sites for English firms. They must really travel a lot. (Or die, when they travelled?)

One of the sites was for the firm he was meeting that afternoon, and he was starting to read their details of the paperwork when he heard a quiet groaning from Angel's room. Lucid, almost certainly, and with one of those headaches where he had to lie still. As good as chains. Better since it would go away on its own, should be almost gone the next time he woke up. But to tell him when he was in that much pain...

Gunn gave a long, shaking sigh, closed his eyes, and covered his face with his hands. There would never be a good time to tell him. Headache. Or chains. And Gunn would have to go in with the Exedrin and the ice-water – because that was what they did, that was how they tried to help him – and he couldn't go in and not tell him, leave him thinking that Wesley might be back any moment.

He got up and went to the kitchen for the bowl and everything, and Angel stopped groaning and started calling for Wesley.

"No, Angel. It's me. It's Charles." Shouted towards the door, so the disappointment would already be over by the time he went in.

Angel seemed glad to see him, managed a nod and a fractional smile as he held his head up for the pills. After he'd taken them Gunn said, "How bad is your headache, Angel? Is it bad enough that you can't move, you couldn't stand up?" Another nod.

Gunn moved back slightly, held himself poised on the balls of his feet, ready to run. “Angel, I have to tell you something terrible. About Wesley. He’s dead. He died last night. I’m so sorry.” Angel was looking hard at him, but showing no reaction. After about ten seconds, a slight, puzzled frown, but then that quickly eased. Angel wasn’t even breathing. “Angel? Did you hear me?”

A slow, slow blink, then: “What happened?” Faint curiosity, no more.

“You know we go out and fight sometimes? To help people who are in trouble.”

A nod. “He fights with a sword.”

“Most of the time. Well, he was hurt very badly. And he died before help could reach him.”

More silence, some deeper frowning. Eventually: “What have they told you?”

Couldn’t be less of a clue what he was thinking. Gunn wasn’t going to make anything up: he wouldn’t know where to start. “What do you think they should tell me?”

But Angel just looked away, towards the door. After maybe a minute, back to Gunn: “Do they know where he is?”

In the nearest morgue, but of course he didn’t mean that. “I think probably... he isn’t anywhere.”

Angel closed his eyes, then gave a slow nod, and another, and opened his eyes again. “But you’re still here.”

“Yeah. I’m not goin’ anywhere.”

“That’s good.” A long sigh. “It will be different without him. We will want him back.”

Understatement. Or maybe it wasn’t with Angel. What the hell did this mean? How did he go from being so protective and fixated when Wesley cut his hand, to – To this nothing. Maybe he’d seen this happening. Every day he’d known that this could happen. A vampire, looking at a mortal.

“I have some things I ought to do, Angel. Is it OK if I leave you on your own? There’s the ice and the cloth there, for your head.”

A nod, with Angel already closing his eyes and turning his head away from the bowl and the door.

Gunn sat down again at the computer then found that he was shaking. Adrenaline. Got so keyed up about telling Angel, imagining so hard on his behalf. Wasted effort. Total wasted effort. What had Wes said once? Laughing, because he’d planned something for Angel and then Angel was all “Yeah? So?” Saying that would teach him to forget how “He’s not sane. He’s not human. And he’s not me.” Wes laughing. But Gunn was still shaking.

No sleep. Too much coffee. He could lie on the couch and try to get a couple of hours. But he was waiting for Piriti to return the page, and what good would two hours really do? Should do something about eating soon, or the shakes’d get worse all day.

Get out, go to the park or something. Walk. Sit. Things being green, being quiet. Look out for a diner on the way.

The diner was almost empty, still serving breakfast. He had pancakes, bacon, eggs. Orange juice, not coffee. He sat and stared out of the window. The world out there, and Wesley not in it. He couldn’t let himself think about what that really meant for him. Not yet. Not now. He could feel the gathering inside him, a breath being drawn deeper and deeper and he was terrified of the scream that was coming, how he would ever make it stop.

Piriti called when Gunn was halfway through his second transit of the park. Gunn had thought Piriti was going to be worse than Grouw and he was right. Grouw had taken it in enough to start thinking that he should be saying something, he should be doing this better. Piriti was raw reaction, not aware of what he was saying. “But he –”, “But he –”, over and over, and “No”. Finally, full-force: “But what are you going to do?”

“I’m going to finish the painting. I think he’d want it finished. I – Probably be easier on my own. Just workin’ straight through.” Cold, but he didn’t need Piriti’s help, not like Wesley. And he didn’t want him, not in this state, not to be locked in alone with him for hours every night. Should be Solito’s job, not Gunn’s.

Matt was the first one to mention Angel. “You – You – Know nothin’ll help but if you’re ever feelin’ like you want company... Y’just call. Any time. Know there’s Wes’s sick friend but... You’ve never talked like he got to be your friend.”

“I – Yeah. Yeah, thanks.” He might. He might call. Matt had been good, really good in those first few days after Barney. The only person he’d told about how Wesley was then, how he wouldn’t let Gunn near.

Gunn went back to the apartment to get the phone bill where he’d written that English number. Angel was still lying the same as Gunn had left him: half on his front, with his face buried in the crook of his arm. Not his usual way when his head was that bad: he usually lay flat on his back. But then usually Wesley would be with him, talking quietly to him and keeping his forehead cool.

Gunn had some time before the meeting so he read the rest of the firm’s website. Airline regulations said he had to be embalmed, he had to be in a coffin with a zinc lining. Special paperwork for the British Embassy, to get permission for the journey. Special paperwork for the airline. More once he was home, maybe another autopsy. No prices, nothing for anything. But a warning in bold at the bottom of every page, saying that payment must be made in full before the repatriation could proceed. How much would a coffin be with a zinc lining? How much was airfare to England? More than they had, obviously more than they had. But how much more?

The agent was a tall woman all in black, chestnut hair in a thick plait down her back, held herself like a ballet-dancer – or maybe just like an undertaker, always on duty to be still and respectful. First-off she asked Gunn about his connection to the deceased.

“We were partners.”

“Business partners?”

Gunn paused, shrugged slightly, then nodded.

“Mister Wyndham-Pryce had been living here in the States? For some time?”

“ ‘bout three years.”

“Who is the next-of-kin?”

“His parents. Dunno whereabouts they are, exactly. But they gave the number of the funeral director that they want to use.”

She nodded. “Have you met his parents? Did they ever visit?” Gunn shook his head. “Will you be going to England for the funeral?” Definitely not. She nodded again and started going into the details of regulations and paperwork and what she could do herself, and what she would arrange with the L.A. funeral director. There were three or four L.A. firms that she used regularly, all excellent for price and service; she would recommend choosing the one closest to LAX in the direction of the hospital.

“How much is this gonna cost? It’s gotta be thousands, right?”

“For a death in these circumstances, depending on the choice of coffin, it would be between three thousand and four thousand dollars.”

Gunn couldn’t help himself: he flinched then shut his eyes hard, frowning and gritting his teeth as he tried to figure out how the hell he would get that. Borrow it, but... Who did he know who might have it to spare? Lilah Morgan, but he couldn’t do that. It would be out-and-out begging and he just couldn’t. Anne? If she hadn’t spent all of the money that Wolfram and Hart had raised for her, and he was pretty sure she hadn’t. He could manage to ask Anne, because she knew from the inside what it was like to have to ask. He’d go to the shelter straight after this.

“Mister Gunn?” Gently.

Gunn snapped straight back, saw a look like real concern. He smiled, shook his head, and said, “Was a rough year for us, last year. Guess I’ll hafta sell one of the racehorses.”

“You don’t have to do anything. The costs are met by the next-of-kin. The remains belong to them. In legal terms, the repatriation is a service that they have chosen.”

Gunn blinked, then took four heavy breaths. “I can’t ask them.” She’d probably think it was guilt, not knowing what to say to the poor parents. If only. He’d borrow ten thousand, and from Lilah Morgan, rather than have to speak to Wesley’s father again.

“You don’t have to. We will. The financial side is handled by the main office in England. I just make the arrangements here. We’d contact them at the start, via the people at Albins, to explain how the process will work. That is, if you decide to recommend us to them.”

Gunn looked down at the floor. After about ten seconds: “Would I be able to see him? Before he leaves?”

“Of course.”

He swallowed. “I don’t know what clothes of his they’ve got over there. If he left any. Could I – I’d like to see him in this one suit. I’d like to remember him like that. Can I choose what he’s wearing?”

“For the repatriation. Yes. It would be very good if you did. But they –”

Gunn interrupted, shaking his head. “That doesn’t matter. What they do. I’m never gonna know.” Then nodding: “Yeah. Yeah, please. I want you to do it.”

She explained to him what would happen over the next few days, what contact she’d have with him. When they were finished she walked him to the door and she shook his hand.

“I’m very sorry for your loss.”

Standard words. She must say them ten times a day. But she said it like she meant it, like she saw him. She’d never known Wesley – not like Lilah or Piriti or Swift. All she’d seen was Gunn: Gunn how he was without Wesley.

Tears were suddenly stinging Gunn’s eyes, and he blinked them away hard, and shook his head and grunted something, and pulled his hand away and walked fast, fast down the corridor, ran down the stairs.

Ten minutes sitting in the truck thinking about selling Angel’s car, about who owned Wesley’s books, and he was back in control. He decided he’d call Anne now, call Rondell too.

They weren’t shocked. Sad, asking Gunn what they could do, but not shocked because they’d had this too many times before. This was what happened. Friends died by violence in the street.

Back to the apartment. He was tired now, really tired, his brain feeling full of sand, trying hard to turn into cement. Leeth probably wouldn’t call back until the evening. He could sleep until Lilah was due to collect the manuscript.

Angel was lying on his back now: with his pants halfway down his thighs, busy having a happy wet-dream about Wesley. Gunn shouted, “Oh, you... fucker!”, unplugged the screen with a yank, and was one move away from grabbing the heaviest book within reach and throwing it through the screen.

“Monster. Fucking monster.” Under his breath as he was walking away from the door. But where was he going? Still to the couch to sleep? He did need to sleep. But with Angel next door doing that?

The bedroom. He sat on the edge of the bed and took his shoes off, but then he just couldn’t lie down.

The bathroom floor, with Angel’s blanket and then half the towels. Yeah, he could sleep there the way he felt now. He set his watch for 7:30 and then turned out the light. Of course Angel was a monster. He should have been prepared. Angel got turned on by the idea of killing Wesley. He’d lived with that for months, he shouldn’t still be shocked. That was how it was. Deal with it.

He slept.

Lilah had brought him a lasagne, a couple of Chinese dishes and some egg-fried rice, and a pack of beers, all from Trader Joe's. "Just in case you didn't have anything. Or anything that required this little effort. If you've already eaten, they'll keep."

Gunn had been rescued: from either plain pasta-with-olive-oil, or from his first attempt to cook liver.

Lilah had a special envelope for the manuscript. Gunn gave her Wesley's notes and she put them in a separate folder. She asked how he was, offered help. He shrugged, said he'd told most people who needed to be told, he'd found an undertaker.

"Does he know?" Nodding towards Angel's door. Gunn hadn't yet plugged the screen back in. Angel was quiet.

Gunn nodded. "Doesn't seem to care. I thought he'd turn violent. Dangerous. But he was almost bored."

"Why would he be violent? Would he see it as a chance to escape?"

"They were close. Much as you can be with him. He trusted Wesley. But y'can't predict him. Waste of time."

She looked at the door, expression very serious, then sighed and turned back to Gunn. "If you think of anything I can do. I know you've got so much to deal with. I've spoken to Gavin Parks, so he knows the situation and you needn't worry about eviction. He'll give you indefinite extensions on the rent. I vouched for you."

She wanted to keep Angel in L.A. But she was thinking of Gunn, too. She was imagining. Gunn thanked her, and then she left.

Gunn plugged the screen in and found that Angel was sitting reading the salt book. When had Wesley last fed him? Thirty hours ago, at least.

Angel had got up onto his knees at the sounds from the door and for the first half-second he was radiating welcome but then he slumped, he looked hollowed out. He thanked Gunn for the blood, polite but barely glancing at him: all of his attention was on the doorway, and he was so anxious, and so hopeful. Oh, God. Have to tell him again. And with the chains this time.

When Angel saw the chains he started to pull his sweater off. It would probably be easier to let him think the chains were for the shower, but Gunn didn't want to be with him naked. Or lie to him. "No, Angel, keep your clothes on. This is for something else. Shouldn't be for long. 'n' no one's gonna hurt you." Angel nodded, looked alert and curious.

"Angel, I have something terrible to tell you about Wesley. He died last night. I'm so sorry."

And there it was: disbelief. Closest to Piriti's reaction: pure, stunned disbelief. Gunn gave him maybe half a minute to take it in, then: "I am so sorry."

Five second more staring, then Angel frowned, shook his head sharply and said, "Again?" Puzzled, demanding, impatient.

"Yeah, I—" Gunn sighed. "I'll always be sorry. But I won't say it again if it's gonna bother you. Guess y' don't need t'hear it."

Even more puzzled. "What?"

They stared at one another, both breathing audibly. Finally: "Angel... I know there ain't a right thing to say. It's just fillin' in. You tell me there's anythin' you need. Like... need to know. Need to hear."

A beat, then Angel growled, and surged against the chains. "Why's he dead again? It's too. Fucking. Soon."

Jesus! Gunn lurched backwards from where he'd been kneeling and nearly lost his balance. "Dead again? He — Angel, you know he wasn't a vampire. He died last night. I saw it. I was there. That's it. That's it."



Fierce, shaking his head over and over. “They can’t keep him away from me. He has to be with me. They gave him to me.”

Gunn clutched his head and shook it so his teeth rattled. “No. No. You and your fucking ‘them’ ! He gave himself to you. And he knew all along it would kill him and now it has. Shut the fuck up about ‘them’ and – and – Face the fact that he’s gone.”

Angel had been listening, and listening seriously, but it was clear from his expression that he was hearing something else. He left a pause then said gently, like the undertaker women, “They don’t tell you anything, do they? It won’t be long. And he’ll be just the same, he’ll love you just the same.”

Gunn gave a strangled cry and threw himself toward the door. He wasn’t going to cry, he wasn’t, he just had to – he just had to –

In the laundry-room, face forced against the back of his arm over the seat of the chair, hands gripping the edge of the frame, feeling it bend and fight. He was crying. Not sobbing, no noise at all, but his eyes were weak, they made him cry. He dragged them over and over against the sleeve of his jacket, trying to force the tears back in, but now his mouth was opening, wide, wide, and his throat was rising, and he was going to howl.

Just in time he lunged forward and his jaws closed around his wrist, and the pain gave him something else to hold onto.

He washed his face at the sink, dried it on the other sleeve, then went upstairs to take Angel out of the chains.

“Thank you.”

“Yeah.”

“I’m sorry.” Looking like he wanted to touch: a hand on Gunn’s shoulder, at least.

“Yeah, I know.” And Gunn stood up and was gone.

Leeth called when Gunn was about to eat. He’d now informed all of the relevant people and could Gunn meet him at the church at 1 p.m. the next day? Also, was Gunn able to find Wesley’s copies of the keys to the church? If not, then Leeth would get another set made before their meeting. Gunn found the keys in the bowl, labelled “Church” in Wesley’s handwriting. Wesley was so organised. So consistent in the ways he was organised. If he had left a will, Gunn would have been able to find it in ten minutes.

Gunn put some music on and ate at the table, then drank beer and watched TV until it was nearly midnight and he thought he was ready to sleep again.

Midnight. By the clock in the truck Wesley had died sometime between 12:10 and 12:35. Probably 12:20? That time, those times, would have a weight for him now for the rest of his life. He lay with his back to the VCR, and then he suddenly got off the couch and went over and unplugged the VCR. They never taped anything, anyway – who cared if the clock wasn’t set?

\* \* \* \* \*

Gunn spent all the hours that he could at the church. He didn’t need the demons to move furniture for him, so he didn’t have to stop when he was waiting for the paint to dry in the one room, but could move on to the next. A hundred times a night, when he was using the ladder, he’d imagine doing this with only one arm. Endurance. Silent, solitary endurance. He’d seen that in Wesley from the start, and he knew now that Wesley had been forced to it, most of his life. To keep going when every day was a grinding effort, because you knew it was right.

The Kekulei were kind to him. They didn’t talk to him but someone was leaving soda and snacks for him, and as soon as they saw that he was working on more than one room in a night, Leeth called and asked how they could give him most help with the furniture.

He was getting home exhausted around seven or eight. He’d have a bath, feed Angel if Angel could be fed, and then fall into sleep for a solid six or seven hours.

He wasn't dreaming, not about anything, but Angel was dreaming a lot about Wesley, and sometimes about Gunn – or about someone, anyway, who was raging with grief. When he was lucid he'd try to be so subtle about how he was waiting for Wesley, and so tactful with Gunn. He never tried to say anything, but he always stood up and went over to take the beaker, getting right up close and radiating waves of "support". Gunn didn't try to argue with him again, he just couldn't face it.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wesley's body had been released to the mortuary, but the paperwork was still going through the consulate and the flight probably wouldn't be for at least another week. The woman called and gave Gunn a contact for arranging the suite and the viewing.

"Mister Gunn, you should be aware... The services that have been ordered on this side do not include preparation. That will be done in England for the viewing there. That means... that his face won't have the colour that you might be expecting."

Lady, I live with a corpse. But no, Angel only looked what he was if you starved him for two weeks. He thanked her for the warning, and asked what the English firm was like, if they had anyone who'd done this before: cutting open the zinc box. Yes, they'd last done it just a month ago, and she talked some more about the firm: the history, things about them that had impressed her. In the process Gunn learned that Wesley was going to be buried, not cremated, and that they were expecting to have to move him to a different casket.

Gunn had finally told Swift that there wouldn't be any gathering in L.A. He had several reasons, thought he didn't give her any of them. One: the people who'd expect to be there couldn't be allowed to meet – if the crew was put in the same room with Swift and Piriti and Leeth, then remembering Wesley would drop right off the list. Two: they'd never had anything for Alonna, never for anyone in the crew - and he had to deal with that idea in his own way, on his own. And Three: Angel could never have been there. Two people in the world who loved Wesley. Made no difference that one of them was so crazy he might never accept what had happened. If they couldn't both be there, then there would be no point: it would be empty, and a lie.

On the day before Gunn had arranged to take the suit to the mortuary, he went into Angel's room with a pair of nail-clippers, and he cut off a lock of Angel's hair, close to the temples. He'd wondered if the hair would turn to dust, but it didn't, and he wrapped it securely in a square of Angel's drawing paper, and he put the packet deep in the inside pocket of Wesley's jacket. So Wesley had that from Angel, and the ring from Gunn; he wouldn't be going home alone. Angel had asked what Gunn was doing and Gunn had said, "It's for Wesley," knowing that Angel would see that as a promise, and hardened now to those looks on Angel's face.

He took all of the beer money along with him to the mortuary, and after he'd passed over the clothes and seen them handled with care, he said, "I know they're not paying you for preparation. The family. But with that suit..." He took the roll of bills out of his pocket. "He should be clean-shaven. The colour doesn't matter but he should be clean-shaven with that suit. Do you know how much –"

The mortician raised his hand to block out the sight of the money. "I'll see to it. I know. You want things right."

\* \* \* \* \*

The next morning, Gunn came home for the church to find Angelus there, stuck in a vision. Might be a real vision, might be a fake vision – hard to say anything except that the cursing of the headache suggested it was at least two hours old. And Gunn didn't care, he really didn't care. It might be different if it was Angel and there were drawings of the actual person. The eyes showing the terror, the pleading, the praying that this couldn't really be happening. But then it might not.

If he'd been in the apartment when it hit, if he'd managed to figure it out, then he'd've called the crew and yeah, great to make a difference. But he'd missed it and, y' know, he really didn't care. Not like Wesley would have. Or Angel, when he was sane.

In the bath, with Angelus drowned out by the running water and the rush-hour traffic, Gunn thought, "I can't see myself doin' this alone. Can't see anyone, comes to that." Been different back when Wesley was on his own: Angel knew about his own visions back then, he didn't need babysitting, he could go out and do most of the fighting. Now you

needed two, at the least: to watch him in shifts, to go out and earn the money, to fight with some chance of surviving. And to keep each other going.

But he couldn't bring someone into this. How could he do that to anyone? It was no life, it was hell. More: it was close to being murder – spending time with Angel could kill you. Doyle: six months. Wesley: two years. Those weren't good numbers.

Not that Wesley had “brought” Gunn into it, not like Gunn was thinking now. He'd thrown himself into it, not given Wesley much choice. Where he was meant to be. Always. But for anyone else... He'd say, “Run. You don't want this. You don't want to know if you could handle it.”

The crew. Yeah, he'd thought about that. Safety in numbers for the visions. Share the watching over so many people you'd hardly notice it. But asking them to take in a vampire, feed it, help ease its headaches... Even if he explained about the soul like Wesley had, that wouldn't be enough. Angelus spoke for himself, and they'd kill him for it the first time they saw him. Be murder again. Two weeks for Angel, max.

What, then? Who? A group like the crew, but demons? Didn't exist – or he'd have met it on his rounds – but he'd put together one crew, he knew he could make another one.

And offer them what? A life off the streets, yeah, but then risking that life to rescue humans from other demons (stupid humans, a lot of 'em, who should never have gone down that street in the first place). If they had any sense, this crew, then once they'd learned his style and his tricks they'd ditch him and Angel and strike out for themselves. 'cos he wouldn't really be there for them, not doin' it for them. For Angel. And for Wesley. That's what Wesley had been trying to say, wasn't it, when he was dying? “Look after Angel.”

No, as far as Gunn could see, the only people who'd take it on would either be crazy or would have some weird reason of their own, enough to make it balance out. Like... voyeurs. Or keen on the chance for bondage. Not for love. Please. Please. Do anything but send him a man who would do it for love.

Maybe that was it, though. The Powers would send him someone? If they had sent Wesley as a gift to Angel. Or even sent Gunn to Wesley, so it was all arranged, that they'd meet at the thrift shop? Maybe. Maybe. But they'd made their choices too, him and Wesley.

That morning he went to the bedroom to sleep for the first time since it happened. Partly wanting another door between him and Angelus. Partly feeling Wesley was near him again somehow, because of the suit. He lay awake for a while, going round the same thoughts about Angel, and then the thoughts crowded him too, in his dreams.

When he woke up he was lying on his left side, facing the empty space, and he was solid hard, aching with it. Not just his cock aching. His skin, too many ways to count. And inside him, like begging. His hand: to slide flat over Wesley's stomach and then fit to the curve of Wesley's waist. His thighs: for Wesley's knee pushing between them. Wesley's knuckles on his throat, Wesley's mouth opening to him with a sigh. He pulled at himself, rough, wanting no pleasure, wanting this over. He wasn't asking his mind for anything, would want it blank, but it gave him the first time he'd ever woken up in this bed, with Wesley in his robe sitting up beside him.

He could go back to the couch. Or to the bathroom floor. But he wouldn't. It was going to be like this for him. For years, maybe for years. Not one thing he could do to change it.

\* \* \* \* \*

The flight was booked for Tuesday the 19<sup>th</sup> of March, 5 p.m. with Virgin Atlantic out of LAX. They'd be sealing the box on Monday evening, and Gunn went late on Monday afternoon.

Carefully shaved, and his hair combed and neat, but no colour. You couldn't think for a second that he might breathe again. Two weeks dead. Nothing to think except he was two weeks dead.

Gunn stood looking down for a long, long time. Then he drew a deep, slow breath, and laid the back of his fingers, so lightly, against that beautiful hand. He moved his middle finger from side to side over the ring, feeling the edge, the pattern. Then still for another breath, a gentle stroke down to the fingertips, and lifting away. Lips to his cheek, just for a moment, “Goodbye, English,” whispered in his ear, and Gunn straightened up and left without looking back.

Gunn finished the work on the church that night, and he had a last meeting with Leeth at lunchtime to hand back the keys and explain anything they wanted explaining. The three priests must've been told about the meeting, because they all came in together and thanked him, and said some right things about Wesley. As the meeting was winding up, Leeth gave a sort of awkward cough, reached around the side of the desk and brought out a large bag, the type you get from the fancier stores, made of thick card with a flat bottom, and with glossy cord for handles.

"We.. Uh – We know you've ruined at least one set of clothes doing this. That is, so you can't wear them outside the house. We think these are... Well, they're similar to our eyes. And the fit... shouldn't be too small."

They'd bought him new clothes. Sweet, and weird, and maybe kinda creepy. The money would've been more useful, but for this work, no, he couldn't ever accept money from them. And they must've felt that too. Leeth obviously didn't want him to take out the clothes then and there, so Gunn was able to imagine the best while he was saying what a surprise, and how thoughtful. (Could be the perfect clothes in there, exactly his style. Could be.) And it was thoughtful. Wesley would have been so proud, so happy.

Turned out they were good clothes. More plain than he would have picked out for himself (no lettering, no pictures), but no kind of chore to wear. White T-shirt, long-sleeved orange top, dark-green denim jacket, and loose-fitting black pants. Sizes all looked right, too, though he wasn't going to try them on yet. Wesley's last day in L.A., Gunn was staying in this outfit, the one Wesley had liked best.

He got to Manhattan Beach around 4:45, found a bench just above the beach near El Segundo, and stayed there until 5:30, watching each jet as it came rising into view and headed out across the ocean. So regular, clockwork almost; the last one shrunk to just such a size when the next one would power itself out. He couldn't read the logos, not really, just as a smear of colour, but the red at 5:20, that was probably it. He didn't feel much: calm and sad, like he'd felt since he'd said goodbye.

He spent the evening at the beach-house, which he'd planned with Matt since the day the flight got booked. They went out to rent a movie and get take-out from the curry place in Santa Monica, but they didn't watch the movie in the end, just played some Nintendo and talked. Gunn told Matt more than he expected to about the last few weeks, even as far as Wesley's family, and Angel so sure that Wesley would come back.

Matt was horrified at the thought of Angel. "Y' can't be left with him! He's gotta have some family. Somewhere? Right?"

"They're all dead."

"What you gonna do?"

Gunn shrugged. "Take care of him. Like Wes did."

Matt already knew most about the church, from Piriti, and on one thing he'd known more than Gunn, 'cos Piriti had passed Leeth on to him for advice from a young human male on what clothes to buy and where and what sizes.

Woah! Now there was "thoughtful", and there was "too much thinking". How many meetings had they had over this? "Can't believe they'd go round half my friends. Could've just –" Going to be: Could've just asked Wesley. That was gonna keep happening. Like putting out two mugs. Feeling six times a day like he should be making tea.

He switched to soda early, after two beers. Matt said he could stay the night, but Gunn had been keeping such bad hours, he'd be better off at home, trying to get back to normal.

In the morning he dressed in his new clothes, and they did fit, and they looked even better on. Wesley would have loved them – and shown it by wanting to get him out of them.

Angel was awake and lucid, so Gunn went in immediately to feed him. Angel came up close, as usual, and he was slow with his drinking because he was in the mood to tell Gunn what he'd been reading about salt. But after four mouthfuls he suddenly stopped, and his expression turned mistrustful and threatening, and his head pushed forward and moved from side to side like a snake's. His breathing was building to a snarl and Gunn was heading for the door, but Angel was too quick and there was a smash to Gunn's jaw and a crack to the back of his head, and then darkness.

Gunn guessed afterwards that he was probably out for three or four minutes. As soon as he'd surfaced enough to remember what had happened he struggled to his feet, fighting against the nausea from the blow to his head. The door was wide open and Angel was gone.

He needed a crossbow. The net, chains, a pike – in case he managed to take Angel alive. If Angel had just run out into the street, then he was already dust. But if he'd managed to find his way underground... Couldn't ask the crew to help search, but Angel was so strange, so damn loud, some demon down there was gonna notice him and talk about it – and Gunn would be listening everywhere he knew.

The front door was closed. But the door to the bedroom was open and they always left it shut.

Angel was stretched out face-down on Wesley's side of the bed, and he'd pulled most of Wesley's clothes out of the closet and piled them on the bed, and he was holding onto them like he'd never let go, pressing his face into Wesley's shirts like he wanted to drown in them. Moaning very low, and rocking his head and shoulders in time with the moans.

Gunn went over and sat on the edge of the bed, and put his hand on Angel's shoulder and made soothing noises. Eventually Angel became still, then quiet, and then he slowly rolled over onto his side and looked up at Gunn. Reaching up to touch Gunn's jaw: "I'm sorry."

Gunn wasn't going to tell him it was OK. "Is this because I don't have his smell on me?"

A nod. "I know I should be patient. You're – You're so patient. They have to find him or bring him out. It's not... But it's – There's a space where he'd supposed to be. It's worse than – It hurts to touch it. I know I should be patient, not think... 'It could be today.' Because when it's not.... I – I – I almost wish I could stop thinking about him. Until he's back."

Tell him again? But he wouldn't believe. He knew, deeper than Gunn could ever reach, that Wesley had been taken from him before – and always brought back.

"You can't be in here, Angel. Come on. Come back to your room."

When Angel got up, some of Wesley's clothes got dragged off the bed onto the floor, and Angel stood and looked at them, then closed his eyes like he was going to start moaning again. Gunn grabbed the nearest shirt from the bed (the blue one, from the first time they'd kissed), unfastened the pin from the sleeve, and pushed the shirt into Angel's hand. "You should have that. To be patient, yeah?"

They cleaned up the spilled blood together, and then Gunn brought another pint. Angel didn't stand close to drink it but took it back to the wall with the books, where he'd folded the shirt. When he was alone again he took the shirt over to the mattress, and curled up over it, and rocked again.

\* \* \* \* \*

Gunn got back to his Wyndham Gunn work. But it was lonely, even out talking to people half the day, and he didn't have a chance with the languages, and he didn't really know his way around the books, and it never felt like anything more than a chore. He could manage the cases he had now: he'd been sure enough of that when he'd taken them on, and besides he'd talked them all over with Wesley. But looking for more... He'd feel like a fraud.

And he wasn't made to be on his own. He'd never thought he might be but this was the first time he'd ever done it and God, was he not! He had to find some other way of working, some other way of living, but what? Every day he was saying it to himself now: "What are you going to do?"

On the Saturday after Wesley left, Gunn got a call during breakfast from Lilah Morgan. Could she come over, in half an hour perhaps? She had a proposition to put to him.

Her firm wanted to take over the care of Angel. She knew the task had been hard enough with two people, it must be nearly impossible with just one. She would have approached him immediately – probably should have – but she'd decided to wait until she had something concrete to show him. Would he come with her for a short ride downtown?

She turned in to a large parking garage, and parked in the lowest level. In the elevator, she brought out a key for the control panel, turned it one way, then back the other, and the elevator went down. The doors opened on a bright space at

least the size of Gunn's apartment. One main room, twice the size of Gunn's living room, with major renovation work going on: wiring everywhere, and plumbing over in the far corner, and partitions going up, and boards and boxes and wrapped shapes stacked in marked-off, numbered areas against the wall.

She took him over to a large trestle-table in the middle of the room, with a hanging-rack of drawings next to it. The drawings on the table were the designer's drawing, of the finished room, but Lilah would pull out the working drawings from the rack when Gunn asked questions about any of the details. Angel would have a shower area, right there in his room. And a chair and a table that folded out of the wall, and the mattress up on a platform. And shelves for his books and a closet for his clothes, and transparent areas built into the walls so they could give him pictures. And everything could be shut tight and locked down when Angelus was there – just with the flick of one switch – so he had no props, nothing to use as a weapon; but when Angel was back then another flick and everything was returned to him.

Four cameras. Total coverage. And they could feed him without going into the room, just put the beaker through a special hole in the wall. In fact, all of Angel's storage spaces could be reached from both sides; they could give him things, take them away, without putting anyone at risk or scaring Angel. And they'd set everything up so they could monitor him from a distance, though they wouldn't make full use of that until they were sure that he'd use the electronic drawing-blocks that they were building into all the walls, always use them to draw out his visions.

The rest of the space would be set up with the assumption that there might be up to three people on duty, sometimes for hours at a time, sometimes overnight: with a bank of monitors (with built-in VCRs), racks of weapons, a reference library, internet access and all the normal facilities of an apartment.

"You gonna keep him in solitary, then? Everything remote. Just a few minutes each day to give him the blood through the wall. Like someone in to water the plants."

Lilah shook her head. "We've designed it so we can do that. If it's easier for him. But we're hoping you'll help us to make contact with him. And to understand him. If you could be here during some core hours for the first few months, and maybe hold a two-hour clinic once a week to discuss problems or options. And be on-call to help us interpret the visions." A small smile. "I won't quite say, 'Name your rate,' but I think you'll be happy with the range that the senior partner has approved. It will be strange, I know, taking a different responsibility."

"Can I come and... just see him?"

"Of course. You'll have the highest rights of access. Though we'll have to agree on the limits of your authority."

Gunn nodded slowly, looked all around him, then walked very slowly to the far end, into Angel's space. He paced it from one side to the other, his hands brushing the walls, imagining the table, the bed, the pictures, the gleaming shower-room with Angel's shampoo and soap and washcloth all laid out.

He went back to Lilah, who had waited by the drawings. "When will it be finished?"

"In a week. I sent the contractors on a break. They'll be back and working as soon as we've left. We can move him any night after that. When you're satisfied with the training of his staff." Another smile. "You'll know most of them from December."

Gunn took a deep breath. "He'll be terrified. He was a wreck last time we moved him and he was halfway sane then and he had Wesley to see him through. Anchor him. I'll have to work out something to tell him 'bout what's happenin'. Christ. He'll probably think we're takin' him to find Wesley."

Lilah nodded, pulled a sympathetic face. "But it has to be done. And he does adjust. Doesn't he?"

"Yeah. Yeah, he does."

They went back up in the elevator, and arranged their next meeting for 10 a.m. on Monday, with Lilah coming to the apartment to discuss the details of Gunn's contract and the plans for the training and the move. She dropped Gunn off at the kerb and he immediately got in the truck and went to the park and ran and ran until he'd thrown off enough of the blaze of bubbling energy that he felt small enough to be able to fit into the apartment. He put music on loud, and attacked the rest of his breakfast like a wolf thrown a steak, and then danced around the apartment like he was boxing.

But Angel was in hell, and anything new was bad, especially new and loud. So Gunn stopped after his second-favourite track and went to have a shower. He did sing in the shower, but once he was dressed again (in his new clothes), he threw himself backwards across the width of the bed, and stared up at the ceiling and tried to get calmed down.

Lilah was right, the change would be strange. He'd been thinking, as he paced Angel's space, "If only Wesley could have seen this." But Wesley would have turned it down, because his duty to Angel was completely his. He would never have surrendered that responsibility, not while the task was on the right side between "possible" and "impossible".

Wesley would understand, though, wouldn't he? That it was impossible, now, and this was taking care of Angel. Much better care. And the visions would be covered, really covered; so Angel's pain, the damage, it wouldn't be wasted, it would go to the purpose that they knew Angel wanted. Yeah, Wes would understand.

A movie. He wanted to see a movie. Something just opened, whatever there was. Maybe Matt'd be up for that, too. He went out again to get a paper, read the reviews and the listings there in the truck, then called Matt and they were soon settled on "Panic Room", 12.30 in Redondo Beach.

The moment Matt saw him, his eyes went wide and he said, "Something's happened. Something good?"

Gunn nodded, over and over. "Turns out Angel does have family. Here in L.A. And rich. God, what they're setting up for him... He's gonna be – Near's he c'n get to a life."

After the movie they went to a coffee-house. Matt was meeting Holly at four, but she'd be totally cool if he cancelled, or if Gunn was there too. He hadn't been telling her much about Gunn and Wesley (and Angel), but, yeah, enough.

Nah, time Gunn went home. His brain was already racin' away, workin' on plans for helpin' Angel settle. He'd just be starin' into space half the evenin', Matt and Holly having to talk round him. Out on the street they hugged goodbye, a tight hug, happy.

Gunn took the paper up to the apartment and sat on the couch with a beer, kind of reading, but not really. He'd have to have some story for Lilah's squad about Angel and sex. Be obvious Angel was jerkin' off over Wesley, but could Gunn keep it so they never even wondered...? Tricky, with Angel treating Wesley's shirt like it was... Well, most days like it was the only thing in the world.

They'd have to watch out for the scent wearing off, be ready to catch the signs. Keep the other clothes sealed tight, deep under ice. Make them last as long as possible. Would that be years? Or just months? They'd see it coming, anyway.

Or maybe he'd forget Wesley. The visions would wipe Wesley out, bit by bit, if Wesley wasn't there every day. Making Angel trust him again, every day. Maybe. Maybe. And they'd see that coming, too, like Wesley and Gunn had seen it coming the last time. Which was just a year ago.

Gunn sighed and swallowed, and focussed on the paper and found that he was holding the business section. Hah! Rich people. Never thought he'd be sayin' this but thank God for rich people. Hey, did Lilah ever make the news? Or... Now what was her boss? Holland Manners?

He scanned the section but of course there wasn't anything – would've been way too much of a coincidence, gettin' somethin' today. Online though... The computer was already on. He took his beer over and brought up Google and typed in "Lilah Morgan".

Wolfram and Hart.

What?

Oh, this must be from three, four years ago. Course she hadn't been with the investment firm forever.

No. First story was from just December. She was joint chief of Special Projects, just got promoted. And there was a picture: Lilah, and her boss Holland Manners. And the other chief, this Lindsey McDonald... Yeah, that pretty white boy had to be Anne's expensive suit.

Oh, Christ.

Search for “Gavin Parks”.

Wolfram and Hart Real Estate Division.

Gunn shivered so hard the mouse skidded off the mat and nearly knocked over his beer. He was inside a piece of Wolfram and Hart property. He had been for over a year. He had to press his hands flat on the table to stop himself from looking round, up at the ceiling. Surveillance. Remote surveillance. Oh God, oh God. Oh, Wesley. Angel. God, what had they seen?

The interns. Now what were those fuckers into? But there was only one name he remembered: “Newton Robbins”.

Not business news, but police: missing since the evening of June 5th 2001. Last seen leaving the offices of Wolfram and Hart, where he really had been an intern. June 5th? Now...

Gunn couldn't remember to the date, but Wesley kept a desk diary, and the one from last year was right there on the shelf. June 5th had been a Tuesday, and, yeah, Gunn did remember that it had been one of the midweek training sessions when they'd got back to find Newton gone and Lilah's boss there instead. And look, the week after, Wesley taking Lilah and the interns out to lunch to thank them because that night had been the last one. And Newton not there for the lunch because “his mother was still sick in hospital”.

Angelus was there that night. Gunn remembered Manners commenting on him, Angelus being so wild that he was burning himself against the door. He'd had blood down his chin, splashes on his shirt, and Wes had said they had to stop using the interns, Angel was just getting worse with the smell of new people. They'd thought he'd bitten himself. He'd got to the point then of refusing the animal blood; he wanted human, he was aching for it.

Oh, they'd been stupid, him and Wesley. They had, hadn't they? It was obvious, it was all there laid out. But they'd believed it, they'd believed that Angel was worth it because he was unique, because if you saw him once you're remember him for the rest of your life. Worth all the time, all the money. Believed it because to them he was worth it. And they'd never imagined someone seeing him and thinking only, “I can use that.”

Use him for what, though? Use him for what? What were they trying to do when they'd picked the lock and gone in and fed him human blood? Did they want Angelus? Was Newton an accident or had Manners thrown him in and locked the door?

And December. December. When they'd had him for nearly a week. What had they done that got Lilah that promotion?

They'd given him the new visions. They'd done something, hadn't they, to open him up? Make him pick up messages that were never meant for him. Had it worked? When they watched him now, did they see what they wanted? Gunn could never know; but he could be sure they had more like that planned. He closed his eyes, and opened his mouth to whisper, “Angel. I'm sorry.” But they'd hear it. He had to guess that they'd hear it.

Had Angel even had that vision? The vampire and the guy in the diner, while he and Wesley were away? They'd seen the drawings but those could've been faked. All to make them trust Lilah more.

He didn't want to think about Wesley's translations. What they'd really been used for. Make-work. Say they were make-work. Keep a route open to the seer. Let Wes earn enough that he'd stay in easy reach.

So why hadn't they just come in and taken Angel, if they wanted him that much? It had suited them before, to have Gunn and Wesley doing all the work? Suited them now, to have Gunn's co-operation? But they'd be gone, wouldn't they, the day after the move? No, 'cos then Gunn would go looking for them. They'd play it smarter. Two, three months in they'd call and tell Gunn that Angelus had managed to trick them, they'd had to stake him to save themselves. They'd show it to Gunn on the tapes – Angelus turning to dust - and the CGI would be so good Gunn wouldn't ever think to question what he'd seen. He'd mourn Angel, in his way, and he'd wonder how much was his fault, what he could have told them about Angelus that would have let them see through the trick. But then he'd move on, he'd find another way to make a difference. And Angel would be somewhere screaming, would still be there when Gunn died of old age.

But... Was there any way they were genuine? There was another explanation, they'd had good reasons to lie? Swift would be the best person to ask. Ask her what was the worst she knew about Wolfram and Hart. And, yeah, the best she knew too. Ask what would be so special to them about a vampire seer that they'd make him a project.



But Gunn couldn't call her from the apartment, or from out in the hallway on his cellphone. Right now he had to assume the worst: that they'd be listening. He could go out to find a payphone, but that would mean leaving Angel. And assuming the worst, then... They had tracking on the computer, too, they knew exactly what he'd just found out. Or they could tell just from their cameras that something had suddenly killed the buzz he'd had from getting the good news about Angel, and the first thing they were thinking was he'd changed his mind. So he couldn't leave Angel to go and call Swift, because he had to guess they were already on their way to take Angel. He was on his own. Whatever he was going to decide here, he had to do it on his own. And he had to do it fast, before Lilah's squad broke down the door and took the thing they must think they'd already paid for.

Was he really that sure the squad was on its way? He'd been going to ask Swift the best she knew about Wolfram and Hart. So what could she have told him that would have made everything look different? Explained why they'd lied, why Angel was worth so much to them. A seer and a finance firm, Gunn could understand, he could see how they'd have budget every year for "predictions" – not charity, not some partner's hobby-of-the-month, but a solid part of their business, that kept its place because it kept on earning it, year after year after year. For a law firm, though, it just didn't make sense. And that was why Lilah had given Wesley the story about the finance firm, why she'd been lying to him right from the start – because she didn't want Wesley asking those questions, because she didn't have any story that would be good enough to convince Wesley that Wolfram and Hart was a normal law firm.

Gunn couldn't guess what they really were, why they really wanted Angel, but what could you do with Angel the way he was now, except try to keep him together, or try to take him apart? The headaches. That was all the proof Gunn needed. The headaches and the blood on Angelus that last night with Newton. They'd been waiting for over a year (waiting for Wesley to die?), and that patience said even more to Gunn than the headaches about how much they planned to get from Angel.

No. They couldn't get Angel. No doubt now for Gunn. With a normal law firm, maybe he'd say, "No. I'm sorry. I've changed my mind. I should have been thinking about what Wesley would want. And he'd want Angel to stay with me. It'll be tough. But it's what I gotta do." Not like he'd asked them to do all that work, get that space ready for Angel – they'd taken that on themselves.

A normal law firm would take no for an answer, maybe even wait a few months before making the first move to evict him. With this law firm... It'd just be days after he'd told them no that he'd come home to find Angel gone, maybe with a bag of burglar's tools set down by the front door, and a guy dead in Angel's room with his throat ripped out. Would they find a real burglar? Or just use another intern? Or maybe they wouldn't bother making it look like anything – because who could Gunn tell, what could he possibly do?

He could get Angel out now, go on the run to... To where? Taking Angelus out of that room, trying to deal with him in the truck. Trying to keep himself safe, to keep other people safe – when Angel was damn-well going to get noticed, have people coming to check out those noises. Kids, especially. And they'd be so fucking easy to track, him and Angel, easier every day. Lilah's squad would find them. And then Gunn would have to kill Angel, because he'd know by then that it was the only way he could save Angel from this thing they had planned for him.

Gunn turned around in his chair and looked up at the screen. Angel was asleep on his mattress, curled up with his back to the camera – probably curled up around Wesley's shirt.

Killing Angel. Killing him now. It was the only way. He had to assume the worst: that the headaches were only the start, a five-day measure of what they'd do when they had Angel forever. Wesley would want Gunn to save Angel from that. He would. And Angel would want it too. Even if Wolfram and Hart were planning to look after the real visions, to pick up the mission... Well, Gunn was deciding here and now that Angel was already paying too high a price for those rescues. He'd been brave for long enough, accepted his punishment for long enough. Been a danger for long enough. He shouldn't be asked to risk anything more. It was time for the Powers to find someone else.

First, Gunn was going to get ready to run; he was planning to survive this. He would be willing to die if that was the only way to save Angel – and he'd risked his life before to save people from less – but from what he could see, he still had options. He was going to pack first, so he'd be ready to run as soon as he'd killed Angel. Run and get a safe distance, and run and see if anyone was following. Maybe Wolfram and Hart wouldn't bother with revenge, maybe that wasn't their style; but he didn't know and he was keeping on with assuming the worst.

Gunn got the big bag from their weapons closet and emptied it out in the middle of the living-room floor, like maybe he was going round to the crew to do some serious training. He loaded a crossbow and put it on his desk, then grabbed a

couple of stakes and put them next to the crossbow – to be in easy reach of Angel’s room in case the squad was already on its way.

He sat down at the computer to delete the History information from his browser, so they couldn’t know exactly what he’d searched for, but then he decided that he wanted them to know – he wanted them to know why he’d killed Angel, that it was for normal, rational reasons, not some crazy, guilt-ridden outburst. He wanted them to know that he was thinking clearly, that he was a quantity that they could reckon with. He left the computer on, and did the next thing on his list: finding the pad on the bookshelves, the one with Angel’s drawings of Wesley. He took the pad into the bedroom and packed it at the bottom of his sports-bag with two weeks of clothes, then put the bag on Wesley’s desk and went to the bathroom to get his toothbrush, his toothpaste and his shaving kit. Back in the living-room he got all the beer money, packed Wesley’s index file, and that was it: all he really needed from the apartment, no reason left why he’d ever come back.

Angel was still asleep, didn’t know any sign of waking up when Gunn opened the door. Gunn went about six feet into the room to take aim with the crossbow, but keeping his distance in case Angel suddenly woke up as Angelus.

The bolt went through Wesley’s shirt, pinned it to the mattress. The dust didn’t rise up, it just sank down – like it wasn’t surprised, like it had been waiting. Gunn did look back from the doorway, just for a second, wondered what he would have said if Angel had been awake, how he would have handled Angelus.

He put the crossbow on Wesley’s desk, picked up his bag, and then he was gone. He called Lilah once he was down in the truck: it was terrible, it was tragic, he’d never know what it was he’d said, but Angel had attacked him, knocked him to the ground, and escaped. Gunn had run after, but Angel was too quick. Angel must not even have known it was a real street, real sunlight when he’d run out, left the shadow of the building. Minutes ago, just minutes ago. First thing he’d thought of: get the work stopped.

Yes, it was a tragedy. What an end. After everything. She – So much more to say, but yes he was right, the first thing she had to do now was get the work stopped.

A quick sign-off, then Gunn threw the phone out into the street. He started the truck, and he drove north, watching all the time for signs he was being followed.

How far north was he going to head, and for how long? Maybe as far as Oregon. Depended how far he had to go to find a place he could blend in, get enough work to keep him comfortable, so he wasn’t taking the type of stupid chances that’d get him noticed. Somewhere not too small, probably, but small enough that he might get enough warning that the squad was closing in.

He’d have to get new plates for the truck. There was a place he’d heard of near Glendale, and no reason he could think for the squad to know he’d heard of it. Should buy him enough time to get a feel for the type of town where he might be able to stop, how difficult it was going to be.

Should he act like he’d come to settle, or act like he was drifting? Drifting. Simplest to tell the truth. Had a rough year in L.A. and he’d taking some time to clear his head, but L.A.’s his home, of course he’s gonna go back. Maybe after three months. Maybe six. However long it would take for him to convince Wolfram and Hart that he wasn’t gonna make problems for them. Who would he even tell, for God’s sake? The worst he could do would be nothing more than a scratch to something the size of Wolfram and Hart. And he could still manage to be grateful to them for all the ways they’d helped Wesley, kept Wesley from the deepest kind of trouble: paying him enough to support himself and Angel, making him a place to live where he’d never be evicted, and giving him those days in San Diego. Didn’t matter that it was all part of their plan for Angel. They’d done more good than harm, and not just for Wesley but for the people in the visions, who’d been rescued because Wesley and Angel had been able to stay in L.A. No, Gunn thought they were even, him and Wolfram and Hart.

He’d start by calling Swift, who still seemed the best person to ask. Ask just how far they were from being a normal law firm, where they stood on revenge, if she knew anyone who’d needed to reach an agreement with them, who could tell Gunn where to start. He’d call her on Monday, not try to guess now what she’d say.

Would he ask her why Wolfram and Hart would want a vampire seer? Tell her about Angel? Too late now, wasn’t it? Probably safest for her if she didn’t know. And if he was trying to convince Wolfram and Hart that this thing between them was contained, then he couldn’t have it getting back to them that he’d been talking across half the town. So he’d

keep it vague with Swift and anyone else, what this thing was with him and Wolfram and Hart, tell them outright they didn't need to know.

Not tell anyone that Angel was dead. Was that what he'd decided? Only a handful of people now who'd even heard of him, and for most of them he didn't even have a name, he was just "Wesley's sick friend". Swift would ask, though, wouldn't she? Wesley had told her he couldn't do what he suggested, he couldn't get out of town for six months until people forgot about Barney – because he had this sick friend who couldn't be moved. So where was this sick friend now, when Gunn was calling from Salinas?

Well, he got sicker, and he died.

Got sicker because Wesley was gone? If he'd died so soon after Wesley...

Yes. Yes. Wesley was the reason he'd lasted so long. Wesley hadn't known that, none of them had, but once Wesley was gone then it was just a matter of time. Nothing Gunn could do. Except... Except take care of him through to the end, try to make it easy.

Gunn couldn't imagine that he'd ever tell anyone how he'd killed Angel. To understand it, to hear it and still think of Gunn the same way, you'd have to know that Angel was a vampire, and what sort of vampire – and who needed to know all that now?

Gunn found he was wanting to do something to remember Angel by. Get his name written somewhere, if it wasn't going to be spoken. If Angel had been awake, what would Gunn have said when he'd gone in with the crossbow? Or what would he have wanted to say, if he could still say it and be able to do what he had to do?

I'm sorry. Thank you for loving him. I should have told you before... that you were all he was thinking about at the end.

Yes, he'd get a stone put up somewhere, as soon as he could afford it. He owed it to Angel, and the stone would give him something simple to focus on in the times (like now) when he was thinking ten different things about Angel. About Angel and Wesley. Same idea as when he'd bought the ring for Wesley. And that'd helped, that'd helped, for the type of jealous he'd been feeling back then. A way of keeping himself close to Wesley, being with him all the time. And it still helped, for the feelings he was left with now.

Was he glad, that Angel was dead? No. No. Not glad. He was sad, he was sorry, he truly was. But relieved...? Well... how could he not notice that he'd just got his life back? And that morning he'd been dancing around the apartment singing because he'd found someone who wanted to take it off him: the burden of looking after Angel. It was an impossible burden for one man alone. It was, it was. And it frightened him to think the state they'd've gotten to six months from now, him and Angel, if they'd just been left to themselves.

But he hadn't killed Angel to get his life back. He hadn't. And he never would have thought of that six months down the line, or six years, no matter if it got worse than the worst time with the crew. He hadn't killed Angel for the times he'd been angry or been jealous or been scared or had to listen to Angelus – or for anything to do with himself. He'd killed Angel because he'd finally run out of choices. Angel had finally reached the end of his time. Stolen time, most of it, and Angel had known that. Like Wesley had been made to feel that his own time was an always-resented loan, like he'd never had any right to it. So every day when he knew in his heart he was useful, when he knew he was loved... that had felt like a gift to him, from the other end of time. They'd neither of them be wanting to call it a tragedy, be wanting to yell that they should have had more. They'd had more than they'd expected – and there were tragedies in that to Gunn's eyes, there were crimes, and they'd be part of Gunn's thoughts for the rest of his life.

But for today... For his first day as the survivor. He was wondering what they'd say, Wesley and Angel, about the place he'd had in their lives, the changes he'd brought when he joined them. Had he ever made things so wrong that they'd wanted him different, they'd thought about him gone? And the answer came straight back: no. No, he'd been their Gunn, right from the start, before he'd even known that Angel was a vampire. They'd accepted him, they'd adjusted to him – the things they'd understood, the things they didn't – and they'd never wanted him different. They'd want him to be here, now: heading out of town with everything he needed, knowing he'd kept the mission, knowing he'd kept the worst from happening, and planning all the time to survive.

THE END