

## Snapshot of the Mind

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# Snapshot of the Mind

by [zabjade](#)

## Summary

A look at Buffy and Spike during some of their therapy sessions with Ben. Takes place at various points during Thursday's Child.

## Notes

This chapter takes place between chapters 20 and 21 of Thursday's Child.

# Burnout

Kick. Punch. Block. Drop and leg sweep. Bounce back up and throw in an elbow strike. Make believe enemies fell before me while Ben waited patiently for me to talk to him. I felt bad about it, knowing I was wasting the guy's time, but going through the moves did help me get into the right frame of mind. I wondered if it had anything to do with the active meditation Spike had been teaching me. It wasn't actually all that important, really. It was just another distraction.

I sighed and turned to face Ben. Like usual, we were doing this in my training room in the Magic Box. Spike got my living room as his comfortable therapy place, and I got this. Kind of weird, considering he's a vampire and I'm an ex-cheerleader college girl. And yeah, okay, Slayer, but still....

"I'm going to be a mom," I finally said. "I'm not ready. I... I don't even really know *how* to be a mom. My mom, she's... well, she's great, really. Now, anyway, but...." I trailed off uncomfortably.

I loved my mom, and she really was great, but things had been rocky at times back in L.A., when Mom and Dad had been more into society and parties than anything else. And then the fights and drinking had started. In the middle of all that had come the whole Slayer gig and being chucked into the loony bin when I tried to tell them about it.

It had started after that. The secrets and lies. Being afraid to really talk. Well, I *talked*, I hadn't become, like, mute or all grunty Cave Buffy or anything, but the deep stuff? I started to shut down around then. I mean, my parents were constantly screaming at each other, and when I'd told them the truth, I'd been punished for it. How messed up was that?

How was I going to be as a mom? Obviously, I wasn't going to doubt my daughter about the supernatural, but what if Spike left us like Dad did, and she ended up with weird vampire stuff going on? Well, okay, logically, I knew Spike wasn't going to just up and leave – or least not without taking our kid with him, according to my Slayer dream – but what if he dusted? For as tough as they could be, vampires had a lot of weaknesses.

I shivered and hugged myself at that thought. My feelings about Spike were all tangly and weird, but the idea of him being gone? Not exactly a huge fan. I didn't think it was love, but maybe I was at least in like, or something. Was I even capable of that kind of love? Riley hadn't seemed to think so. I'd tried so hard to be what he wanted, but it hadn't been enough. *I* hadn't been enough. And then there was Angel.... My love had turned him into a monster.

"It's okay, Buffy," Ben said, interrupting my thoughts. "you can say whatever you want. Whatever you're feeling." His lips quirked up into a smile. "We're both adults, and I'm acting as your therapist. I'm not exactly going to run and tattle."

That got a little bit of a smile out of me. Ben was a really nice guy. I had no idea how he'd ended up knowing all he did about the weird world of demons and all that, but I was definitely glad of it.

“How do I know if I’m going to be any good at this motherhood stuff?” I asked, starting to pace. I felt kind of like I was a tape recorder or something. Movement was the play button that would let me actually talk about the important things. “I’ve... we’ve – me and Spike – we’ve been reading books, you know? And doing some practice stuff with this doll, but that’s not the same as a real live baby. Especially not a real live Slayer/vampire hybrid baby. I’m scared I’m going to mess everything up.”

“That’s a possibility.”

I stopped moving and blinked. Huh. Okay. Wasn’t expecting that answer, honestly, especially not delivered so calmly. It kind of pissed me off. “Gee, thanks for the support,” I said, letting sarcasm cover the hurt. “Good to know I can count on you for the pep talks.”

“Buffy, I’m your therapist, not your cheerleader,” he pointed out. “Everyone can fail. Everyone *will* fail at one time or another. It’s a fact of life, and sugarcoating it isn’t going to make anything better. Admitting it, though, *can* help. If you know it’s a possibility, you aren’t as likely to fall apart when it happens.”

The words should have been comforting. Everyone failed. It happened, and life went on. The only problem was, I wasn’t “everyone.” I was the Slayer. “If I fail, people tend to die,” I said quietly, pacing again. “Every time I take a night off, at least one person dies who wouldn’t have if I’d been out there doing my duty. Heck, even when I *am* out there, there’s only one of me. I can only stop one monster at a time.”

I could hear the bitterness in my own voice loud and clear. Even when I succeeded, I failed. What the hell was I doing, trying to have some kind of normal life? I was going to school and hanging out with my friends and having a major wiggins over the baby when I should have been focused on the Slaying.

“Exactly.” At first I thought Ben’s comment was in response to needing to focus on my calling, but then realized I hadn’t said any of that out loud. What exactly was he exactly-ing about? “You can only be in one place at a time. It’s something cops and doctors deal with all the time. For every life you save, there’s someone you *didn’t* save. But you *did* save someone, and if you don’t take time out for yourself, you’re going to burn out. And in the long run, that’s going to lead to more deaths, not fewer.”

I opened my mouth to say something in response to that, but couldn’t actually think of anything. I couldn’t exactly tell him he had no idea what he was talking about. Well, I mean, I *could*, but it’d be kind of a bitchy thing to say, especially since he’d brought up doctors.

“Think about it, Buffy,” he said insistently. “After you’ve had a break, don’t you feel more efficient when you slay?”

I had to stop and consider that for a minute. He was right. The times I’d just had enough and had declared a day off, I’d always felt bad because I hadn’t been doing my duty, but... well, when I got back to it, the burden of being the Slayer had always been a little lighter.

“Being the Slayer puts a lot of pressure on one single girl,” he continued. “That, even more than the things they face may be why most of you tend to die young. You hit burnout and just

can't do it anymore. That can happen to parents, too. In both cases, you have a job that has no real days off. But you can take short little breaks, and those breaks are going to help you do the best you can. Both as a Slayer and a mother. Does that make sense?"

I nodded slowly. There was still a voice inside of me shrieking that I was going to screw everything up and that I didn't deserve to have any kind of life outside of slaying. Maybe it would always be there. Either way, what Ben was saying *did* make a lot of sense. When this session was over, I'd get in another dose of therapy. Retail therapy. There was a pair of shoes at the mall I'd been eyeing, and, well, I could use a break.

# On the Cross

## Chapter Notes

This takes place between chapters 22 and 23 of Thursday's Child.

Almost hypnotic, it was, watching the little silver cross swing back and forth on its chain as I held it up. I'd nicked it from the little bit's jewelry box when I'd first gone all over soulful because of the sprog. There'd been a twinge of guilt about that, but it wasn't as if I was planning to keep it forever or anything. She never wore the bloody thing, and I... needed it.

Such a simple thing, a cross. In design, anyway. It was a device of torture and death that had been transformed into a symbol of sacrifice and selfless love. The Son of God had let himself be put to death on one to pay for our sins.

"Do you think it counts for my sins, as well? If I were properly sorry for them, an' all?" I asked, finally looking away from the cross to focus on Ben. We were in the Summers living room, him on a chair and me on the couch, huddled into my coat like it could protect me from all the confusing feelings flitting about due to the sprog's soul. "Quite a lot of 'em, you know? Over a century of gleeful evil and all that. Hardly seems possible it could be forgiven."

I paused to lightly poke at the still swinging cross before catching it in my right hand. It burned, trying to sear the evil and sin right out of me. Big job that, for such a tiny cross. Maybe if I found a bigger one and wrapped myself around it, it would sear me clean? Was that why vampires turned to dust? The impure in us went up in a puff of smoke, leaving just the more or less neutral bits behind?

"But then, that's a right piece of hubris there, innit? Thinkin' my sins must be so great that even the Almighty can't forgive 'em."

"Do you want to be forgiven?" Ben asked.

"Right at this mo'?" I knew the answer to that, but didn't spit it out right off. It was a complicated sort of thing, really. "Don't feel like I deserve it, honestly. But then, forgiveness isn't about deserving. I s'pose I *do* want it, but here's the thing. Once the sprog is born, I won't. So does how I feel right now even matter?"

I dropped the cross to the floor and stared at the blackened marks along my palm and fingers. Hurt like a wicked bitch, it did. But that was passing, wasn't it? Just like the pain from the soul. Real and solid while it lasted.

"How long have you been doing that?"

“Hmm?” I looked back up at Ben. He was staring at my hand, looking concerned but not judgmental. I looked back down and shrugged. “It’s not punishment. Just gives me something else to focus on when it, uh, gets to be a bit much. The guilt and whatall.”

I scooped the silver necklace up by the chain – seemed disrespectful to just leave it on the floor, both to Dawn and the One it was meant to represent – and tucked it away in a pocket for later. I’d be needing it again. It wasn’t just the pain. If that were all I was after, could just poke myself with a knife or somesuch, couldn’t I? Was an odd sort of comfort to holding a cross.

“Spike, have you....” The doc trailed off with a slight frown, as he were trying to figure out how to say something and was coming up empty.

The fact that he *was* having a spot of trouble with it all clued me in to what he was trying to ask. “Thought of offin’ myself?” I asked bluntly. No point to dancing around the subject, was there? He winced and nodded.

Instead of answering right away, I slowly closed and opened my hand a few times, losing myself in the feeling of the burns being stretched. I *had* thought about it. Take myself out of this world before the sprog was born, and I became a monster again. Or, well, a bigger monster. I was still what I was, Thursday’s soul or no. Meant taking her out with me, but that was one life against all the lives I’d take if something happened to the chip.

That would be the good thing to do. The heroic thing. Hunt up some nasties, more than I could take on my own in my current condition, and go out in a blaze of glory. Sacrifice myself for the sake of others. Thing was, though, I wasn’t good, and I was sure as hell no bloody hero.

“No worries on that score, mate,” I told the doc. “Bit of a selfish sod, me. Maybe if the chip wasn’t there, I’d do it, but it is, so....” I shrugged and trailed off.

The chip *was* there, and would keep me honest. If it failed... well, I’d already promised, hadn’t I? Back at the watcher’s flat during Thanksgiving. If anything ever happened to the chip, I’d do my best not to hurt anyone. For Buffy. I’d do just about anything to be hers, even turn myself inside out and fight my nature for her sake. Figured I could even follow that path after she was... gone. If I lasted much past that, I could keep to it to honor her memory.

Maybe I’d fail, but then again, maybe I wouldn’t. It was enough to keep me from setting out to become a big pile of dust. God, I really was a selfish wanker, wasn’t I? I wanted some kind of... something with the Slayer. And I wanted my little girl to live. Enough that I was willing to gamble the lives of countless others just so she could have a chance at one.

I pulled the cross back out of my pocket and set it swaying on its chain again. Gambling was a sin, wasn’t it? Not really sure on that, honestly. It wasn’t against any of the Ten Commandments, was it? Either way, what was one more sin added to the pile?

I watched the cross. All gleaming and silver. Clean and pure with no sign of the blood that had been shed. God had let his only begotten son die for the world. Had sent him to it. I...

wasn't God. I slipped my injured hand under the baggy sweater I'd started wearing now that Thursday was starting to show.

Could feel her sometimes, moving around in there and kickin' with five or six of her little legs. Well, okay, according to the ultrasound, she'd only the normal two, but it sodding well felt like more than that when she got going. Scrappy little thing, she was. Came by that fairly, I s'pose, passed on from both me and her mum.

I couldn't do it. No matter how much the guilt of it all weighed on me, no matter the arguments on what I might or might not do, I couldn't deliberately make myself any deader than I already was. Not if it meant killing Thursday, as well.

I looked back at Ben. He was a good sort. Knew when to keep his gob shut and let me ruminate for a spell. He did look a mite worried, though.

"No worries," I repeated. "Taking a fella as charming and good looking as myself out of the world?" I smirked lazily. "That'd be a real sin, now wouldn't it?"



# Socks of Love

## Chapter Notes

This takes place between chapters 23 and 24 of Thursday's Child.

I always put two chairs in the training room before my sessions with Ben, but I rarely ever used mine. This time, though, I was sitting in it backwards, chin resting on my crossed arms. Usually, I was kind of nervous during these things. Like I'd reveal too much of myself and be declared a completely defective human being who needed to be locked away. That's why I was always training. Trying to sweat out the nerves and distract myself from my fears.

Today, though, I was all thinky Buffy instead of stinky Buffy. I'd turned twenty only a couple of days ago, and it had honestly been the best birthday I'd had in years. Mostly because of a vampire who I should have hated, but didn't.

When had things gotten so complicated? It used to be easy. Or, well, *easier*, I guess. Find vampire, throw witty one-liner at vampire, stake vampire. Lather, rinse, repeat. Add nausea. Ad nauseam. Whatever. And now I was having a kid with a temporarily souled vampire that I'd started to feel... *something* for even before our baby's soul had started affecting him.

Before my parents got divorced, I would have called it love. After, I'd have hesitated a bit, but would have ultimately declared it all romantic and beautiful. A soulless demon defying his nature out of love. I'd have fallen right into Spike's arms with no problem and would have called it love. Then had come Angel and all that baggage. Going from that to Parker and then Riley? I wasn't even sure what love *was*, anymore.

The door between the shop and my training room opened, and Ben came in. He was a smart guy. Maybe he knew the answer. "What's love?" I asked before he could even say hello.

Ben blinked. "Wow. You don't ask the easy ones, do you?" He sat down across from me, then took a deep breath and let it out all at once before answering. "There are a lot of different types of love. Family love, friend love, romantic love, all kinds of mixes and matches."

"Yeah, okay, so it comes in different packages, but what *is* it? How... how do you know when that's what you're feeling?"

Was I in love with Spike? I'd discovered I liked being around him, but I liked being around Xander, too, and I was pretty sure I didn't love him. Romantically anyway. There was much love for Xander as a friend. I was attracted to Spike, but that didn't mean it was love. I'd learned *that* lesson with Parker.

"Well, how do you feel when you're around Spike?" Ben asked. "This *is* about Spike, right?"

“Yeah, it’s about Spike.” I sighed and stood up, needing to pace. “It’s all... complicated, you know? He’s all... oniony. With the layers and everything. You’ve got this bad boy British punk and this kinda shy poet, and they’re *both* equally him. He’s a jerk sometimes, but also really super sweet and romantic. So sometimes I wanna hit him, and sometimes I just want to melt into his arms.... Or have him melt into mine. Is that... is that weird?”

I glanced at Ben, feeling nervous. Riley had never really liked that. He’d always wanted to be the one holding me. I kind of liked it both ways, and Spike seemed to be the same. Did that make us deviants? I blinked as I realized where my thoughts had headed. I regularly chained my... my boyfriend to my bed for kinky sexy fun times, and I was worried that switch cuddling meant there was something wrong with me.

“It’s perfectly normal, Buffy,” Ben said reassuringly. “Just because you love someone doesn’t mean you can’t be mad at them sometimes.”

Oh, right. He’d gone with the more normal worry in what I’d said. Stupid Buffy brain getting all hung up on the weirdest things.

He gave me a thoughtful look and started talking again. “Love.... I guess, for me anyway, it breaks down to this. It helps bring out our best and forgives us for our worst. It’s wanting to do stuff for each other and taking joy in the simple things.” He shrugged self-consciously. “Or that’s how it seems to me.”

Huh. When put that way, love kind of sounded like... I glanced down at my feet, at the wool socks I was wearing. One pink and the other mint green... like hand knitted socks. Spike had taken the time and effort to make both pairs for me. And when I’d gotten them, it had felt... nice. I’d been all warm and tingly over them. Maybe that was the answer. I smiled at the thought. Maybe love was socks.

# Empty

## Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place between chapters 32 and 33 of Thursday's Child

“You don’t really notice the loss, you know?” I said, not even looking at the man I was talking to.

Didn’t blame the poor sod for being the host of the crazy hellbitch, or anything. Not exactly his fault, was it? He’d been just a wee sprog when Glory had been stuffed inside of him. Still, it was kind of odd, getting back into these sessions after a few weeks. That wasn’t the reason I wasn’t looking at him though. It was just hard to focus on anyone else when holding a little bundle of perfection, yeah?

Thursday was cradled against my chest, her fragile little lids with their long lashes covering her eyes. Her tiny pink lips twitched in her sleep, no doubt in response to sweet dreams of all the milk she could drink with the occasional spot of blood.

“When you become a vampire,” I clarified. “You sort of *know* your soul isn’t there anymore, but it’s not something you really think about. You don’t really feel that loss. Maybe that time when you’re just a plain old corpse is to give your... your *self* time to adjust to it being gone.”

I’d never really given it much thought before. I was turned, spent a bit of time literally dead to the world, then came back. Still dead, but able to move about and have a grand time of it. I’d felt more alive than when I actually had been, strength and power flowing through me. I hadn’t really felt like I was missing anything.

I was vaguely aware of Ben talking – something about feeling different this time with Thursday’s soul – but my focus was on my girl again. I lightly stroked the soft skin of her cheek with my finger. She turned her head towards the gentle pressure without waking, her perfect little rosebud of a mouth opening and closing around my fingertip.

I tilted my head down slightly, eyes closing halfway as I breathed in her scent. Warm and sweet like fresh made caramel along with a touch of baby powder and the mild soap used to wash her. Woven through it all, the earthiness of vampire and the spice of slayer. Other bits were all mixed in, most without words in any human language. All thrown together, they made the unique scent that was Thursday.

“Spike?”

I looked up at Ben. What had we been on about again? Oh, right. How it felt to have a soul ripped right out of you. I shuddered slightly, remembering that night, Dru coming at me with

a great bloody knife and me unable to do much about it, being chained up to a bed and all. Not the first she'd ever attacked me, mind, but definitely the most traumatic. I'd gotten used to the weight and feel of both sprog and soul, and then they were just... gone. Stolen away, leaving me feeling....

"Empty," I murmured, looking back down at Thursday and reassuring myself she was still there, that the comfortable weight in my arms was really her. I could see, feel, and smell her. Could hear her heartbeat, strong and steady.

I'd nightmares at times that instead of giving her back, Dru had hidden her away or just eaten her. Drank her down to a husk and left her cold, tiny form in a heap next to the girl I'd drained. God, that whole thing was still confusing. I remembered being horrified by it, feeling like it was some kind of violation to take her blood. Complete bollocks, that.

She'd been *dead*, and not even by my hand. So what if I ate her? Not like she needed the blood for anything. It had just been there, perfectly good human going to waste. At the time, though, I had recognized it as something bad, even if I couldn't quite wrap my lobes around it now. A live girl, yeah. Most humans got upset about even random arse strangers kickin' it, just like I would be upset if one of my personal humans were killed. But someone what was already dead? No sense at all in that. Like crying over spilt milk and having a fit over the pussy lapping it up.

"You have to die to become a vampire," I said. "The soul just sort of flutters off to wherever souls go, like it's meant to. And mayhap during the time of being truly dead, you get sort of reset. Like being born blind. You don't realize you're missing anything unless someone tells you." I paused and just stared at Thursday for a moment, trying to puzzle it all out. "With her soul... I could see, and then it was taken away all at once. Not natural at all. Just... gone. Like having your eyes ripped out their sockets."

"Do you miss it?"

I sighed and closed my eyes for a moment. "That's the question, now, innit?"

I felt tired suddenly. When had everything gotten so bloody complicated? Used to be all about blood, violence, and my dark princess. I'd cut a bloody swath through most of Europe with Dru, laughing and reveling in murder and mayhem. Now I was helping the Slayer all regular like and changing nappies. I'd gone from being a bad dog to having a kid and trying to be a sodding white hat of all things. And... I bloody well *did* miss the soul.

"It's *completely* sack of hammers," I muttered, then snorted and shook my head. "'Course, so's a vampire falling for the bloody Slayer, and that doesn't seem to've stopped me there."

It felt like there was a hole somewhere inside of me. I'd been... *more* with the soul, and now that more was gone. Like a melon with the seeds all scooped out. There'd been pain and all sorts of self-loathing, but there had also been a deeper understanding of some things. And... my poetry had been better. I wanted that back. And I wanted to understand what Thursday would be going through when she got older.

She yawned as I looked down at her, little face scrunching up as her mouth opened wide and revealed her pink tongue. God, she was adorable. How the bloody hell had something that pure and innocent come out of me? Fair boggled the mind, it did.

Her eyes fluttered open, and I'd swear I could almost feel her again. She'd been my soul for a time, snuggled into that empty place being turned had created. Sometimes, looking into those baby blues, I could feel it. Like a distant echo, it was, but there. Even now, she was my soul, just on the outside instead of in.

"Maybe that curse that was used on Angel?" Ben suggested, interrupting my thoughts. I'd told him some about my tosser of a grandsire and suspected Buffy had told a bit as well.

"A few problems with that route, mate," I pointed out. "For one, don't really fancy the idea of my soul being a curse. Seems kind of, I don't know, disrespectful or somesuch. Secondly, there's the happiness clause. First time I sit down for some telly and watch Man U score a goal, the sodding thing'll be headed back from whence it came."

Ben didn't dignify that with words. He just gave me a look that clearly said we both knew I was shortchanging myself with that.

"Yeah, okay, so it wouldn't be quite that easy to lose the thing, but the fact remains: Angel kept his for as long as he did the first go 'round because he's addicted to brooding. I can get mooney at times, yeah, but not really one for brooding, me. More of a roll with the punches and look for the silver lining of it all type."

"So, you're pretty sure that at some point, you'd end up perfectly happy, even with the knowledge that being that happy would undo the curse?"

I nodded. I'd Thursday and Buffy in my life. Of *course* I was going to end up perfectly sodding happy at some point. "Not the end of the world like Angel's big happy almost was, but it wouldn't be easy to get back, or to even get in the first place. Orbs of Thessulah are everywhere – hell, I think the Slayer's mum even has one as a bookend – but Willow is the only one who knows how to do the spell, and she's not exactly my biggest fan at the mo'."

That was a bit of an understatement. Red figured I'd stolen her friends from her and somehow blamed me for what had happened to her arm. Fair enough on the first point, I supposed, but how the bloody hell was I meant to be responsible for some crazy hellgod deciding Thursday was a mystical key she was after?

"She *might* do it if she thought it were some kind of punishment, but..." I shrugged and trailed off. "I've, uh... I've heard rumors of this demon bloke. Over in Uganda. S'posedly, if you go through his trials, he can get your soul back for you. No strings attached since you have to bloody well *earn* the thing."

"Are you going to do it?" Ben asked. No pushing yay or nay, just asking a simple question. Not a judgmental sort, Ben. I liked that about him.

"Not sure yet," I admitted honestly. "At least going to dig more into it, though."

I'd give it some time. Getting a soul was a big decision, not something to rush. For all I knew, the empty feeling could go away after a spell as I got used to being soulless again. I'd feel right silly if that happened in the middle of the demon's trials. 'Course, there were other reasons I wanted it, and those reasons weren't likely to go away, even if the emptiness did.

The biggest reason of all began fussing, her tone the one I'd started associating with hunger. Unlike the sessions before the sprog had been forcibly removed, Buffy was in the house, upstairs doing some of her coursework so she'd be on hand if our girl needed to nurse.

"Gonna have to cut this one short, doc," I said, balancing Thursday carefully as I stood up.

I'd a lot to think on, pros and cons to weigh, but matters of figurative and literal soul searching would have to wait. I was thinking of getting a new one – or old one, I s'pose, since I wanted the one I'd had as a human – but the sweet little soul I'd kept safe inside for so many months came first. My girl needed her mum, and right now, that was the most important thing of all.

# Family

## Chapter Notes

This takes place between chapter 33 of Thursday's Child and chapter one of Friday's Child.

"Any tips for while we're in Africa?" The noises came out of Comfy Food's face as self had Sweet Yummy from the Soft Things.

Comfy Food's face wasn't pointed at self, though, so they weren't self's noises. Self wanted Yummy more than face noises, so that was okay. Sweet Yummy was warm and good and filled the empty Sweet Yummy places.

"Just the same sort of things I've been telling you all along. You both have insecurities and abandonment issues, so there *will* be misunderstandings. Talk things out, don't just assume."

Sweet Yummy places were full, but Salty Yummy place was empty. Self let go of Soft Thing and made face noises at Comfy Food. Comfy Food's face went wrinkly.

"What is it? What's wrong, kiddo?"

Self didn't want face noises. Self wanted Salty Yummy. Maybe Comfy Food couldn't hear the face noises? Self made them louder. Comfy noise tried to give self Soft Thing again, but Self didn't want Soft Thing. Self flailed grabby things and tried to push Soft Thing away.

"Ouch!" Comfy Food rubbed Soft Thing and made grumbly sounds.

"Think it's about time for some blood, love."

"Oh, right."

Self was taken from Comfy Food's arms and cuddled against World. World didn't have Soft Things and wasn't Warm, but World was World. World went swish-swish instead of thump-thump and smelled like liquid snuggle place. Self missed liquid snuggle place, but Outside was good, too. Outside had Sweet Yummy, Salty Yummy, and Comfy Food. And World, but World *was* snuggle place. Self's nose said so.

World was good. World was Love. But where was Salty Yummy? Self wanted Salty Yummy. Now. Self didn't have Salty Yummy.

Self was shifted and patted on the back by World until a tickle bubble came up and out of self's mouth. Self's tummy was happy after, all except for Salty Yummy place. Self made

more face noises at World about the empty tummy place. There had been no want of Salty Yummy in liquid snuggle place. Outside was awful. Self howled self's want of Salty Yummy.

"Hush now, love, not long."

Self was tucked into a cloth against World's chest. Then self could smell cold Salty Yummy. Warm Salty Yummy would come soon. Self wanted it now. Now was better than Soon. Self made more noises.

"I'll keep seeing you about Slayer issues and other supernatural themed stuff, but I think you might also want to see a licensed therapist when you get back. For the abandonment issues and lingering trauma over what happened with your parents. It'd be good for Dawn, too, I think."

Self heard the beep-beep noise that meant warm Salty Yummy. Self quieted, self's mouth sucking at the air in anticipation. Why wasn't Salty Yummy in self's mouth already? Where was Salty Yummy? Self made unhappy noise as self was carried back to where Comfy Food and Other were. World sat down, and Salty Yummy was finally put in self's mouth. All was good. Sleepy crept up as Salty Yummy was sucked from World's finger. Good Yummy. Good World and good Comfy Food.

"Good idea, that. Little bit could definitely use someone to talk to. Think the monks gave her a few of those insecurities of yours when they made her."

Comfy Food made heavy breath sound. "Yeah. Dawn didn't exactly win the family lottery, did she?"

"Hey, now! That's bloody well enough of that."

"No weird British curse words in front of the baby!"

Self didn't like the sounds World and Comfy Food were making, and there was no more Salty Yummy. She wanted more Salty Yummy.

"Oh, for.... Sprog's two-months-old. She's not going to start swearing like a sailor anytime soon."

Self made noises until World made soft noises back and put more Salty Yummy in self's mouth.

"Buffy, why would you think your family is a bad one for Dawn?"

"I just... I don't know." Another heavy breath sound from Comfy Food. "Look at us. This isn't exactly a traditional household."

"What exactly would you change about it, then? Toss me out on my arse? Maybe Thursday, too?"

The Salty Yummy was gone again, but World gave self more before self could complain.



“Of course not! I don’t want either of you gone, you dope! It’s just... our family is kind of weird.”

“Weird family is better than no family. Or abusive family. Dawn’s got your mum, you, and even me. We’ll get her all sorted, and she’ll be fine.... Thursday, too. We’ll be here for ‘em both.”

“We do seem to be doing okay with Thursday.” Comfy Food’s face noises were softer now. “She looks happy.”

The face noises continued back and forth as the sleepy overtook self. Self gave in to it, feeling safe and loved. There would always be Yummies and Cuddles with Comfy Food and World. Because Comfy Food and World were everything. They were family.

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