

Come As You Aren't

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Come As You Aren't

by [ProtoNeoRomantic](#)

Summary

A first kiss Willow and Giles might have shared in Season Two if they were not themselves when everyone else wasn't. (2 of 7)

Dr. Jones In the Library with the Hat

“What's this?” Giles asks, holding it up. Staring successively at the thing itself and the girl who has handed it to him.

“It's your costume,” Willow explains. As though it should have been obvious. “You know, for Halloween.”

“It's a hat,” Giles points out by way of rebuttal. What else is there to say? Except perhaps, 'Why the devil would I want to take part in your silly American tradition of carrying over the things of childhood well into middle age.' Which of course he cannot say. No one could, looking into those desperately hopeful eyes.

“It's an 'Indiana Jones hat',” she further clarifies, searching his face for a sign that this, at least, he is able to understand.

Giles smiles obligingly and puts the hat on his head. “Right then,” he says with a nod of acceptance. But after a moment, doubtfully, “Shouldn't there be more to it? Safari attire or a whip or something?”

Willow smiles, her eyes twinkling with just a hint of mischief, “Not in the library, Dr. Jones.”

And that's that. Off she scampers. Off to shepherd other, younger children safely through what is, in Sunnydale, perhaps the only safe evening of the year.

Giles reaches up a hand to remove his 'costume'. At the last second, he changes his mind. It has made her so happy to see him put it on. And it is a rather amusingly perceptive choice. Indiana Jones. Undeniably a genuine scholar, yet quintessentially something else altogether.

Evidently at least one of his young comrades in arms has gathered that he isn't, strictly speaking, an actual librarian, even if his Slayer hasn't. Unless, of course, he is reading too much in. As the desperately lonely and misunderstood are often wont to do.

Rupert sighs and reaches again for the hat. He leaves it on again. It's nice to pretend for a bit anyway.

Meet the Hidden Princess

For a second Buffy is too stunned to speak. The first thing she manages is, “Wow.” Which Willow finds some way of taking the wrong way; believing that Buffy is stunned by her ridiculousness rather than her beauty; because suddenly she looks horrified. Horrified and very pale. As if she might pass out, or just fade away into nothing. As if she might prefer that.

“You're a dish!” Buffy clarifies insistently, gently relieving Willow of the ghost costume she grabs to try and cover herself. “I mean, really.” And she does. There are no words. Or none Buffy is comfortable using. Best not to examine it too closely. Noticing beauty is one thing. Becoming the creepy-weird girl that no one wants to be in the showers with is something else.

“But this just isn't me!” Willow pleads. She sounds so desperate. So pitiful. And well... her body is very much exposed. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea. Or maybe that particular outfit is just too far. Surely there has to be some kind of middle ground between hiding under a sheet and letting it all hang out.

“You look good, though,” Willow says. Trying to reassure. Worried that she's offended Buffy. Doing her side-kicky, wind-beneath-my-wings, timid-but-supportive best friend thing. Just as Xander has trained her to do over nearly a dozen years. She fingers the material of Buffy's sleeve gently. Adoringly.

The idea hits Buffy like a ton of bricks. She swallows a groan because she knows she has to do it. Willow needs this so much more than she does. A chance to come out of the shadows. To let her beauty shine. To see herself the way Buffy and anyone who's really looking can. As a beautiful, smart, funny, talented, and frankly hot young woman who has everything, inside and out, that she needs stop being someone's little cinder girl and become her own Leading Lady.

“Buffy?” Willow asks worriedly, “Why are you looking at me like that?”

“Because you're right,” Buffy explains, grinning even wider, enamored of her own really awesome idea. “This...” she indicates Willow's skimpy outfit with a wave of her hand, “is not you. *This*,” Buffy sweeps both hands grandly down and outwards from her wide skirt, “Is you. Willow Rosenberg, it's time to meet your inner princess.”

The Ghost of What Exactly?

It had seemed like such a good idea at the time. Buffy had needed a costume; Willow's ghost-sheet thing had been available. So had the clothes to go under it. But now, as The Slayer looks down at her own shrouded and presumably dead body? Not so much.

“Hey,” she shouts skyward, addressing the Universe in general, “Seriously? This is happening? But it's Halloween! And, and, I have plans!”

But Buffy doesn't have time to argue with the Universe. She has to deal with the real life nightmare around her. Children in costumes have been turned into prey. And predators. Bizarre creatures run everywhere. In place of her four innocent charges, Buffy now sees a vampire feasting on a large, anthropomorphic aardvark while an enormous rabbit nibbles happily at a tall sunflower.

Fortunately they are all still kid sized... even if one of them is growing out of the suddenly very cracked sidewalk. Buffy reaches out with both hands to grab the vamp and the bunny each by an arm, to pull them off their victims. Already she is skipping to the next step in her mind, thinking of ways to keep all four of them as intact as possible while she finds and fixes whatever is wrong with the Universe this time.

But her planning is, once again, premature. Buffy curses aloud as her ghostly hands pass right through the two pint-sized marauders. Then curses again under her breath as the Li'llest Vampire looks up at her disapprovingly then goes back to feeding. Those are still little kids in there, deep, deep down. Innocent enough to be shocked by a four letter word. They are also killing each other, and none of the stern, mom-like words Buffy suddenly hears coming out of her mouth can stop them.

How real is this new reality anyway? Will everything reset to normal as soon as the cause is remedied and/or slain? Or will Mrs. Davis find the dead bodies of two little kids on her front walk in the morning, still in their Sunflower and Arthur costumes? With no way to know, Buffy can't take that risk. For the Aardvark in particular, time is running out. He's already crying more and screaming less.

“Hey, Mini Vamp!” The girl looks up at her uncertainly, then gives a low, defensive growl that sounds as much worried as angry to the trained ears of the Slayer. “Yeah, I'm talking to you!” Buffy says forcefully, hoping to bluff her with bluster. “How'd you like to get a hold of some real human blood?” The vamp child doesn't answer, but she stops feeding and look's cautiously interested.

Buffy feels a tiny wisp of relief amid the general suckatude. There are kids running everywhere, hurting and getting hurt, but she has to take care of these four first. And now at least, she has their attention. Even the rabbit stops nibbling and looks at her quizzically. He's only nibbled the plant a little really. Hopefully nowhere vital.

“Carry the Aardvark and the Big Bunny up to that door,” Buffy instructs, pointing, “while I go in and tell Mrs. Davis to let them in. Then I'll take you to the jail and let you feed on the

criminals.” It seems like the kind of thing an eight-year-old with no conscience would believe.

“You swear?” Mini Vamp demands guardedly, trying to hide her enthusiasm for the idea.

“If I could touch you, I’d pinky swear,” Buffy assures her with all the sincerity and confidence of someone who is either telling the truth or feeling pretty righteous about lying.

“No, You can’t,” Arthur protests weakly, pressing his furry little hand to his still bleeding wound. Buffy ignores him though it hurts to do so. There is no reassurance she can give him with Mini Vamp standing right there.

Instead she watches as the vampire hoists him over one shoulder while simultaneously reaching out and grabbing the suddenly very surprised and terrified bunny by its foreleg. Its cries of panic sound surprisingly human, minus the words. Is that how rabbits are supposed to sound? Maybe it is, who knows. Either way, it’s a shrill reminder of what is at stake, not only right here and now, but all over town.

“And no more snacking,” Buffy admonishes before turning to glide through Mrs. Davis’s front door. The poor woman’s startled yelp is even higher in pitch than the rabbit’s. For a moment, Buffy is afraid she will pass out, or flee in terror.

“Don’t be scared” Buffy pleads gently but urgently. “I’m just a ghost. And, uh, I’m a friendly ghost! I mean, not like Caspar, but...” Yeah, there really is no way to explain this.

Mrs. Davis cocks her head and gives Buffy an odd look. Then her eyes widen and her cheeks turn red as she finally takes in the outfit. She actually does the look all the way down and all the way back up thing. “I’m dreaming,” she concludes, relieved.

Buffy raises an eye brow but this is no time to examine what Mrs. Davis dreams about. “Yeah,” Buffy agrees, just going with it. “But that doesn’t matter now. When the doorbell rings, let the rabbit and the aardvark in but not the vampire. They’re hurt. You have to take care of them until they turn back into real children.”

Mrs. Davis’s brow furrows. “I must have taken my afternoon medicine twice,” she mutters. But when the bell rings, she opens the door and lets Mini Vamp hand her furry charges over the threshold, examining them with real concern. Score one for the kind of person who worries about kid’s teeth on Halloween.

Either the kids will be all right or they won’t. Buffy has done all she can do in her present condition. Especially with Mini Vamp in tow. Buffy turns and hurries away, her undead companion at her heels, tossing a “thank you,” over her shoulder. And then, what the hell, “Happy Halloween!”

But it’s impossible to keep up that level of bravado as she nearly stumbles over her own dead body. And as she notices the thick, green stalk lying near it on the ground. It’s been trampled down in all the chaos of the wild, macabre game of hide and seek going on all around them. Buffy can’t think about that now. It’s too much. There’s no time.

Find the others. That's what she has to do. Find the others and fix this. All while keeping Mini Vamp convinced there is something in it for her. If she smells a rat, Buffy can do nothing to keep her in line. If only she had a real jail to lock the kid up in. An empty one.

If Buffy were walking, she would have stopped in her tracks. "This way!" she shouts taking a turn towards Sunnydale High. She may not have her own jail, but she know where she can find one cell, or rather, one cage.

Helpless

How this has happened, how she has come to be here; in this situation, or even in this place; is not at all clear to Lady Danielle. She has a vague memory of being sent for, of coming to the Colonies at the behest of her father, or her intended, or... or someone. But everything that has passed before the last quarter hour is a mere shadow in the back of her mind. She knows she is the daughter of a Noble British family with some financial interest in these parts. Beyond that, her past is without form and void.

The 'demons' outside this oddly misplaced farm house—presumably they are actually ruffians in fancy dress stirring up descent against the Crown as such troublemakers are wont to do—must be responsible in some way. Somehow they must have tainted the drinking water or released some noxious substance, something that interferes with the proper function of the mind and senses. Regardless of the means, they are responsible. That is all she knows for certain. For here she is.

Her sole companion—an elderly woman in a state of garishly unfashionable undress and with more paint on her face than a courtesan, in any sense of the word—seems to be the mistress of the house. Or hostel, or brothel or whatever it is. “Do you think that door will hold?” she whines in an unnaturally high pitched, selfconsciously feminine voice that is already beginning to grate on Danielle's nerves after a scant few minutes in her company.

“It's holding for now.” What else is there to say? Danielle is an English Lady, not a Gypsy Fortune teller. But the old woman is still looking at her intently, eyes begging for reassurance. “Look,” she tells the woman, firmly grasping both her hands and staring into her eyes, willing her to be calm, to think rationally and not to panic, just as she is repeatedly telling herself. “It only has to hold long enough for the Royal Guards to come and scatter these cowardly Rebels. How far is the nearest Garrison?”

“The what?” the strange old woman asks in her near falsetto, evidently as mystified as she is terrified, near tears. Her voice is so high and her clothes such a ridiculous riot of flora, that for a moment it occurs to Lady Danielle that 'she' might actually be a Molly or Nancy or whatever they are calling themselves nowadays. Not that it really matters.

Whether rendered so by nature or by art, the creature before her is soft, even for the softer sex. Helpless. Useless. If the Rebels do manage to breach the door and invade the house before His Majesty's local representatives are able to get the situation in hand, Danielle will be effectively on her own in defending both herself and her companion.

Of all the people in this village or city or whatever it is, why couldn't she have a gentleman for a companion, or failing that, a beefy London fishwife? Danielle is far from used to being the most masculine and capable person on hand in a crisis, and the thought of taking charge in such a chaotic situation is far from pleasing to her. Still, it appears that take charge she must.

“Alright now, Madam, stay with me,” Danielle urges Old Mother Whatsit as he/she begins to show signs of falling into hysterics again. “Are there any weapons in the house?”

“Weapons?” It's as though she's never heard the word before.

With an undisguised “Humph!” of impatience, Lady Danielle tries hurriedly to explain. “Muskets, swords, *cudgels*, anything!?!” The question is becoming more urgent by the second. Loud cracking sounds now accompany the persistent banging on the door. Soon it will accumulate enough small cracks that this blow, or the next will send it crashing inward.

“Ummmm.....” the strange woman somehow makes a speech of pauses and hesitations. “Now... well... let's just... ummm.”

“Have you any such thing or not?” Danielle all but shouts, exasperation masking fear imperfectly.

The woman actually cringes, as if from a lash. “I... I have a baseball bat,” she finally manages, voice quavering. Two thirds of the weapon's name are unintelligible to Lady Danielle, but 'bat' as in 'baton' is clear enough. Cudgels it is then.

And of course, when the thing itself is pulled from the small closet that opens off the entry way and placed in Danielle's hands, the name is demystified somewhat. The end of the rather longish wooden club is rounded like a ball and there is a grip at the base that looks almost made for standing the thing on end.

Danielle hefts the weight of this base/ball bat getting a feel for it. After a few moments of experimentation, she settles on a two handed rather than a one handed swing, which seem to give her at once more power and more control, but limits her range severely. Probably not a terribly effective weapon against skilled fighting men, but then, the masked Rebels do appear to be, for the most part, unarmed and disorganized. And judging by their height, most are boys rather than men.

Still, if—or rather when—they do break down the door, Danielle does not much like her chances. Especially with the added burden of looking out for her helpless companion as well. “Up the stairs with you,” she hisses quietly, all too aware of how near the Rebels are. “Hide yourself. I will hold them off as best I may. Which I hope will suffice until someone arrives who may do better.”

Dear Lord God, let that time be soon! Danielle adds silently. This isn't right. She is a proper lady. She shouldn't have to fight, alone, to defend her person and quite probably her virtue from heathens such as this. There ought to be some gentleman here to protect her. Still, she vows silently, as she hefts her club and holds it at the ready, the blood of Conquerors runs in her veins, and be they so bold, she will teach these ruffians what it means to assault a helpless noble woman of England!

Taking A Lot On Faith

A telephone, that's what he needs, Dr. Jones decides firmly. He needs to call the University... or someone. Someone who can tell him where these creatures came from—the Natzis and their ungodly experiments spring to mind, but since he seems to be in California he supposes it could just as easily be the Japanese—and give him some idea of the geographic scope of the problem. Even if they come from the depths of Hell itself, he's sure he can fight his way through them, and perhaps help others to do the same... if he can just determine which way *is* through them and where he is fighting his way to.

He sees it, a telephone, mounted on a wall on the other side of the library. But once again, he's intercepted by another creature crashing in through a window. It's different from the others. Larger. Hairier. Scarier. Like a cross between a wolf and an ape. It doesn't flee in terror when he shouts and cracks his whip at it the way the others did either.

Damn. He's actually going to have to fight this thing. Worse, he doesn't have a gun on him. Why would he in a library? Well, generally speaking, anyway. For a millisecond he wonders why he even has his bullwhip, but that is the least important issue on his mind right now.

Dr. Jones makes a 'tactical retreat', ducking down behind the circulation desk. This is a delaying tactic only. He already has the thing's undivided attention. But even a second or two of delay is a second or two to think. To try to find a way out of this mess.

Face to face with the handle of a large cabinet, Dr. Jones opens it. Maybe there is something inside that he can use for a weapon. Like weapons, for example. Knives. Axes. Daggers. Maces. Clubs. Swords. Crossbows. Wooden stakes, for God's sake? Even a few things the renowned Archeologist doesn't immediately recognize.

The Cabinet is full of weapons. Some old, some new. Some clearly too ancient to be left lying around like this anywhere besides the dusty back rooms of a large museum. Which means what he has taken for a school library might actually be a museum archive.

Except that everything about it that he can identify as belonging anywhere belongs in a school library. There are Text books. Encyclopedias. Card Catalogs. There's a sign jutting from a far shelf, near the monster, that reads 'Young Adult Fiction'. None of this makes any sense. Least of all that thing that seems to be the bastard child of a typewriter and a cathode ray tube.

None of that matters now. Keep your eye on the ball, Jones. The beast has made up it's alien mind and is barreling towards him, obviously aiming to either vault over the circulation desk or crash through it. "Hey, Hairy!" shouts the half dressed blonde (prostitute? Cocktail waitress? Show Girl?) who has inexplicably come to be standing behind the beast while Jones has been watching it and it only. "Why don't you try picking on someone my own size?"

The thing actually stops and turns around in response to her voice, as if it might actually understand what she is saying. At the very least it views her as a possible threat, and no

wonder. Her aggressive stance is textbook primate dominance posturing. Shoulders back, chest bowed out. Her movements are primal, instinctive. Executed with violently feminine, almost feline grace. As much proof of Darwin's theory as any good researcher could want.

Christ. She's going to get herself killed.

Before another thought can intervene, Jones is the one vaulting over the circulation desk and strait at the creature's back. He lands in a painful heap on the floor as the thing lurches for the girl, oblivious to him. He curses and his heart leaps into his throat, dreading the sight of the girl's mangled body. Dreading being mangled. Pissed off and ready to do some mangling of his own.

But the girl is not mangled. The creature is lying dead on the floor with its skull cracked open. Jones only realizes the girl is suddenly gone, not just obscured by another object, when she pops her head back into the room. Right. Through. The. Fucking. Wall.

Jones stops in the act of rising. The girl, still sticking halfway through the wall, and more than halfway out of her not-exactly-blouse, is peering worriedly, guiltily, down at the remains. "I never thought he'd hit the wall that hard," she half apologizes.

"Just lucky, I guess," Jones finally manages to speak, with a fair bluff of calm bravado, actually, as he scrambles to his feet at last.

"Yeah, I guess," the apparition mumbles pensively, finally stepping the rest of the way through the wall. This movement is only jarring for a moment. A moment that is easier to ignore now that she is no longer sticking through solid brick and mortar, but standing in front of him like a normal person.

"It was about to kill you," Jones points out, deciding to ignore the fact that her ability to walk through walls makes no sense until a less life-threatening time. But she isn't going to make it easy for him.

"He was about to kill you," she corrects him. "I just saved your life, Mister." It's true. But there doesn't seem to be anything to say about it. Dr. Jones is used to being the one who does the saving in these situations, but none of the things rescued people tend to say seems to fit inside his mouth. Maybe that's why he feels a slight, unwarranted stab of resentment towards his young benefactor.

But the wall walker is talkative enough for the both of them. "Look, it's done," she pronounces brusquely, as if he has censured her for killing the monster. "Let's just... Cliffnotes Version, everyone's turned into their costumes. I've got a little vampire outside and I'm going to lead her in here in a second. Just open the book cage and follow my lead."

Dr. Jones adjusts his glasses and opens his mouth to say... something... probably. But once again the lady vanishes through the wall. Vampires? As in Dracula? Nosferatu? Sure, why not.

'Knew it', Not In the Sense of Having the Slightest Idea

It is only when he is leaning breathlessly against the circulation desk, worrying aloud how long the door to the book cage will hold with Mini Vamp throwing herself so violently against it, that Buffy notices how strangely Giles is acting. He's still dressed like always, for the most part. But even though he looks the same, he looks different. He *moves* differently. Not more confidently, not exactly. But it's a different kind of confidence, less stiff upper lip, more understated swagger.

“What's with the hat?” she asks, having to pick someplace to start, “and what happened to your accent?”

He gives her the strangest look. “My accent? Wha—Do we know each other?” The question is absolutely straightforward. Not the slightest hint of irony.

“Oh God,” Buffy all but gasps. Giles isn't Giles anymore. Not good. Not good at all. Worse, he's still looking at her like he's watching for signs of some kind of episode. “I'm sorry,” she finally manages, covering just well enough for her brief moment of near catatonic shock to be politely ignored. “I... I must have mistaken you for... for someone else.”

There's no point trying to explain to him that he's not who he thinks he is, at least not until he gets a handle on what's happening, if he ever does. People are always pretty sure they're right about who they are, and arguing will only waste time. Instead, she asks him who he is by extending her hand and saying, “Hi. I'm Buffy.”

He blinks at her in surprise then laughs in relief as his face melts into disarming smile. He doesn't even smile like Giles. His new smile is... attractive. Somehow both boyishly and roguishly handsome. Charming. Sexy. Which is creepy.

He looks down at her hand and shakes his head. He starts to reach out with his own hand, just as Buffy selfconsciously retracts hers.

Giles, or whoever he is, runs his hand through his hair. Differently. How many ways can there be to run a few nervous fingers through exactly the same head of hair? And how can any of them be that damned cute?

And that's the moment she almost gets it, the little shove in the direction to not being entirely surprised when Giles says, “The name's Jones, Indiana Jones. But my friends, and beautiful women who save my life, call me Indy.”

Sympathy

“Attention civilians!” There it is again. The same words in the same voice. Distant, yet by some obscure means amplified. “Please remain inside your homes. The streets are being cleared for your protection. All subjects encountered will be presumed hostile and engaged accordingly.” This followed by a short, rapid volley of God-knows how many muskets. Being fired, it seemed, in succession rather than in unison. Again, seeming distant yet amplified.

Lady Danielle's frustration verges at once on anger and disrepair. Despite the odd turn of phrase, and the doubtful use of Latinate vocabulary, the import of the distant figure's words—punctuated as they are by musket fire—is unmistakable. The Kings Men, or more probably the local militia under His auspices, have arrived. Unfortunately, their priority is not the protection of the townspeople but the capture or elimination of the rebels.

Rather than encouraging the latter to disperse, they are driving them to cover the better to isolate and run them to ground. And it is entirely clear that they prefer that a few townspeople (or 'civilians' as they say) should die rather than let a few ruffian boys escape unharmed. Lord in Heaven, if that is the attitude of His Majesty's servant in these parts, no wonder the inhabitants can hardly tell nonsense from 'common sense'.

The Lady Danielle has never had an ounce of sympathy for republican schemes or egalitarian projects, in the colonies or elsewhere. Nor has she any particular sense of charity towards these lawless masqueraders, whom she has no doubt would as soon attack her as speak to her. And yet, this brutal, unfeeling, indiscriminately hostile stance which those in authority seem to be taking towards the people of this place... Being so used, over time, might turn almost anyone into a rebel.

But there is no time now for such thoughts. On the contrary, there is a very sudden lack of time. There is a heavy thump. And then another. And another. Someone or something is pounding slowly but steadily against Old Mother Whatsit's kitchen door.

Lady Danielle stares at the door, eyes wide. Momentarily frozen in terror. The banging continues. Not knocking. Neither asking nor demanding entry. Battering. Meaning to enter will she or no.

Heart pounding, she steadies herself, her club at the ready. Her fluttering woman's heart tells her to flee, but her rational being reminds there that she has nowhere to go except out into an uncertain nightscape, into the ranks of 'soldiers' who have made it quite clear that they will shoot her on sight. She wonders which will greet her as the door opens, a rebel or a soldier, and laughs at the realization of how idle a consideration that has come to be. Because in either case, she intends to greet him exactly the same.

When at last the door gives, it is almost a relief. Lady Danielle jumps back as the heavy metal panel snaps its tiny hinges and falls inward. Upstairs, the Matron of the house screams, her voice as high and unintelligible as an opera diva's. The Lady makes as if to swing her club, but the young man's musket is already staring her in the face.

He might not get off a good shot in these tight quarters before she can brain him with her base/ball bat. But then, he very well might. The mechanism of the musket is totally unfamiliar to her, and strangely compact. As if made for just such an occasion.

Soon, it hardly matters. She hesitates, and in that moment of hesitation, he disarms her. He wrenches the bat from her grasp with one hand, easily, while he cradles his strange weapon to his side with the other hand and arm. The force of the wrenching sends Lady Danielle sprawling onto the floor, where she fully expects to be kicked and shouted at. Or worse.

Instead, the young rebel (for so his mottled green and brown work clothes declare him to be) all but whispers, his quiet voice none the less seething with frustration, “Jeez, Lady, what's your problem?” and then, half amused at himself, he adds the most peculiar statement she has ever heard. “Can't you tell I'm from the government? I'm here to help.”

You Go to War with the Scholar You Have

Okay, Buffy, think! Think! But she can't think. Not while he is looking at her like *that*. Grateful? Relieved? Impressed? Sure, all that's fine. But there is more to the look than that. There's ... mischief (or at least potential mischief) of a playful but not at all childish kind. And all she wants to do is to scream 'Giles! Quit it! You're creeping me out!'

But she doesn't. She can't. Because he's not Giles. Not right now.

And, he was supposed to help her. *Giles* was supposed to be here to help her. To tell her what to do, or at least to ask questions and look stuff up and help her figure out what to do. But who does she get instead? America's favorite creepy, cradle-robbing adventurer, Indiana Jones.

Oh! Oh! But! But! Indiana Jones! Natural with the supernatural. Capable of both genuine baddassery and serious looking stuff up! This can work, Buffy decides. She can work with this. She can make this work.

“Okay,” she says, then takes one last deep breath and dives in. “Two things you need to know. First, it's 1997, as in the *year* 1997—Halloween, 1997, to be exact—and there's like all this bizarre new technology stuff and everything that I can kind of use but don't have time to explain. That's real. I mean like really real.”

While she says this, Buffy watches Giles's face, trying to gauge 'Indy's' reaction. His expression seems to teeter unstably between alarmed and annoyed. Which probably means he thinks she's crazy, or maybe just a hysterical female. She sort of wishes he would say something, something hostile even, to give her a chance to defend the truth of what she's saying. But a second or two pass and he doesn't open his mouth to interrupt.

All Buffy knows to do now is to plow forward and wait for him to drop the other shoe. “Second,” she goes on with as much authority as she can manage under the weight of his silent skepticism, “all these ghouls and monsters and stuff? They're real, but not really real. I mean they're real right *now*... But not real real.”

He stares at her. His face almost totally blank. Just to the negative side of neutral. Giving her nothing, least of all encouragement.

“They're costumes,” Buffy tries to explain. “Halloween costumes. Or at least they were... but —” Indy doesn't have to say anything to interrupt. The look in his eyes shifts slightly towards impatience again, and that is enough.

Buffy looks down at her incorporeal feet, coloring deeply with embarrassment and frustration. Vaguely she realizes that it should not be possible for a ghost to blush, what with the not having any actual blood or skin or anything. But that thought verges on something too huge and terrifying to be addressed right now, and rather than go catatonic with horror Buffy slams the door on the whole subject and locks it tight.

This will all go away. Fix it. Fix the costume thing. Fix it and this will all go away. Everything will be like it was. Because it has to be. Because.... Because...

And so she has to make him understand. She opens her mouth and nothing comes out. He reaches out an arm instinctively, to steady her. But at the last second, he stops short even as she prepares to pull away.

“I’ll be damned!” Indy declares, eyes suddenly wide and not skeptical at all. “Let me guess, you dressed as a ghost for Halloween?”

Buffy nods actually laughing with relief. “And I thought this was going to be hard to explain!” she all but sighs. “Someway. Somehow... everyone’s been changed into whatever we were dressed up as.”

Indy’s eyes glance around at the total strangeness of the room, including MiniVamp in her cage and come to rest on the body of the dead werewolf. For a moment he actually pales slightly. “And now children are running a muck everywhere, tearing each other apart?”

Buffy nods and keeps nodding, finally finding the confidence to keep on with her explaining, all of which he is totally crediting now. Just to be safe, she carefully avoids any suggestion that he is not Indiana Jones. Because no one is that level headed, and they do not have time for him to start thinking she might be crazy again.

This is working. They are making it work. In moments, they are brainstorming ideas about what type of force, supernatural or otherwise, could cause this particular disaster. Buffy doesn’t know if the man in front of her is so quick to catch on because Giles is smart or because Indiana Jones is.

It almost doesn’t matter. This reality is what it is. And dealing with it the way it is is the only chance they have of getting it back the way it was.

Other Viewpoints than Yours May be Valid You Know

Private LaVelle contemplates his companion silently for a moment. She seems perfectly sane, actually. Surprisingly sane, in fact. For someone who insists that it is 1775. And who is, at this moment, in the middle of explaining that she has just come at him with a baseball bat to defend the stranger's house in which she happens to find herself from 'Republican Insurrectionists'.

Even while explaining her motives for trying to ambush him, she is reasonably calm. Level headed, even with a gun pointed at her head. So much so, that pretty soon, he stops pointing it altogether. Which makes her much more willing to listen to his explanation of who he actually is and what he's trying to do here.

She listens patiently, and doesn't contradict him, though she does ask a pointed question or two. Still, she is no less clear and consistent about who she is and why she still thinks that it is 1775 and that the U.S. Army is the illegal army of a pretend country made up by rebel colonists with delusions of grandeur, although she uses even fancier and more old-timey words than that.

But aside from the weird vocabulary, it's like talking to any other reasonable person. Expect for the fact that she believes things that can't possibly be true. The way a crazy person does. Which, LaVelle judges, is more or less exactly what she must be thinking about him.

"Look," he offers finally. "Here are a couple of things I think we can agree on. Those guys with a megaphones and the big shiny trucks are not U.S. Army. I know you think they work for King George, and I think they're some kind of home-grown terrorists or something; but either way, they don't have our best interests at heart, agreed?"

"Agreed," Danielle admitted, just a bit grudgingly.

"And I know you thought those monsters were kids in consumes playing lets-have-a-revolution; but I've been fighting my way through them, up close and personal; and I'm telling you that whoever, or whatever they are, they aren't kids and they aren't playing. Do you agree that that's true?"

"It seems to be," Danielle conceded.

"Okay," LaVelle continued. "The megaphone guys are moving our way, and we don't want to be here when they show up, agreed?"

"Yes, that much is true," Danielle half agreed, worriedly. "And yet, I would not that they should find us in the streets."

"I hear that," LaVelle admitted. "But they're going house to house. And God knows who they're looking for, but I've come across enough dead civilians—shot dead not, monster mauled—to know they aren't that picky. Which means we gotta get out of here, and quick."

Slowly, Lady Danielle nods her assent. And just like that, it is all settled. Straitening her posture and composing her features, she seems suddenly ready for anything. "If I may," she says politely as she reaches for her bat. But she doesn't pause in the act of retrieving it as she might if she really expected him to tell her no, which of course he doesn't.

None the less, a moment latter, Danielle's brow furrows as she looks doubtfully at the breached back door and asks, "But what about the... woman who lives here? Surely we cannot take her out there, and yet... to abandon her here..."

Private LaVelle almost laughs, but he manages to stop himself in time. "Don't worry, Princess," he assures her (slightly regretting the way it seems to rankle her to be so addressed), "I'm pretty sure none of us are gonna have to hoof it out there."

"But then how...?" Danielle starts to object, but LaVelle waives her to silence.

"Just follow me," he says with a grin, "and let's see what the old dear has in her garage." Danielle looks puzzled but stops short of actually asking him what he means, silently following him instead. Private LaVelle can feel his grin growing wider. If they find in this garage what is in nine out of ten garages, the thing garages are made for, she's going to have a hell of a time arguing that it is still 1775.

Indy-pendant Research

“Mother of God!” Indy curses aloud, then waits for Buffy to look up before adding, “The biggest, most bizarre collection of occult and supernatural books I’ve ever seen, and not one of them says a damned thing about the kind of transformation we’re seeing!”

“Keep looking,” Buffy says flatly, then, realizing how she sounds, “Look, I’d help but this is really more your bag. What with the scholariness of you. Plus I can’t get the books open.” If anything, Buffy thinks, her attempted apology seems to make Indy even more ill at ease. Even more uncomfortable with her.

“Okay,” she tries a different tack, “So the books are no help. Whatever this is, it’s not in the books. You’re a researcher; you’re one of the guys who writes the books, right?” Indy give her an apprehensive look, but also a very slight nod of acknowledgment, clearly wondering where she is going with this. “What do you do when you want to figure something out about archaeology or whatever that isn’t in the books cuz you haven’t written them yet?”

Of all the responses he could have to this, Indy grins his unGileslike grin. Forcing Buffy to contemplate her shoes... or the image of her former shoes anyway. “Has anyone ever told you that you sound like you’re trying to invent your own dialect from scratch?”

At this, Buffy can’t resist looking up at him with a wicked smile. “Welcome to the future, Rip VanWinkle; anachronistic much?” she says with gentle sarcasm. He looks uneasy again, but pleased also. Pleased in a way that actually makes Buffy kind of uneasy. “But seriously, though,” she presses, “You what? Dig for clues? Go to the source? Gather evidence, right?”

“Yes,” Indy admits hesitantly. “But what is the source? Where should we start digging. That’s the problem. That’s what I was hoping one of these books might tell me.”

“Oh!” Buffy shouts excitedly, suddenly having an idea. Words tumble out of her, rapidly and loudly, unaccountably in her excitement. “The costumes! We got them at a new place, somewhere that just opened. Ethan’s! This town is all Hellmouthy, by the way, which I know you don’t know what that means, but it’s a thing, an evil thing, actually, so I bet this Ethan guy is an evil, evil man sent here to do evil!”

Silence reins for much too long a moment. “With the costumes,” Buffy adds sheepishly, by way of either apology or explanation. She isn’t really sure which. Indy looks... flabbergasted. Out of his depth. Which is truly scary.

Which is when the car comes screeching down the hallway and crashes through the huge double doors, coming to rest half in and half out of the library. And there is Xander, toting an ever-loving machine gun or something. And Willow, pale as a ghost, holding on to the dashboard for dear life, what was her dark brown acrylic wig flying about her in such a mess it can be clearly seen to be rooted to her head for the sheer fact that it hasn’t tilted or fallen off.

And then there's the screaming. It's not Willow screaming, though Buffy thinks so at first. There is an old woman in the back of the car screaming her lung's out. "Who's she," Buffy asks, for getting for a moment that not everyone is who they should be or knows what they usually know.

"That's not important," Xander tells her with hilarious gravity. "What is important is that we are all in danger and we have to get back to the base and alert Colonel Newsom."

Brave New World

Nothing makes sense. Nothing is but sound and motion. Screaming. Always screaming. As trees and houses fly by at dizzying speed. Green blurs broken up by not-so-green blurs. Like riding a horse through the streets at full gallop, only much, much faster. The soldier 'LaVelle' is talking, talking constantly, but no sense can be made of what he's saying.

Danielle squeezes her eyes shut. It seems childish, ridiculous, but she can't help it. The twisted threads of reality streaming past her are not only dizzying but nauseating, and she will not endure the humiliation of vomiting in this enclosed space on top of everything else.

She tries to think about literally anything else. Like what under heaven is actually happening. The relative improbabilities of having been thrust forward in time to a golden age of technology and science (though not much else) versus the simple fact of one young woman having gone completely mad.

Perhaps I am still aboard ship, she thinks, laid up below with a fever. My dizzy, stomach turning sense of motion might be nothing more than a storm tossed sea. All of this screaming and babbling could be my own. My companions no more than the products of delirium.

Perhaps I never left home at all. Perhaps I am safe in my bed. If madness can be called safety. It seems more probable, and yet she feels that it is not so. As, she understands, madmen often do.

"...Okay, hold on to your tiara, Princess, I'm goin' in!" This loud, sudden announcement rises from the general babel of LaVelle's constant speech. Danielle opens her eyes in time to see that they are racing past small cadre's of horrid, disfigured creatures, like demons from the depths of hell itself. But even this does not prepare her for the sudden turn he takes out of the main thoroughfare, heading straight towards a rather formidable two-story building.

A pair of wide wooden doors crash inward as he must have know they would. And suddenly they are sailing down a polished corridor. There is a squeal of tortured machinery and the conveyance begins to slow, but can't slow fast enough.

Lavelle's cursing intensifies. The old woman's screaming remains steady. It is only after they have crashed through a second set of door and stopped miraculously short of burying themselves under dozens of plowed over bookcases that Danielle notices the whiteness of her knuckles or the marks her nails have made in the leathery material of the... whatever that thing she is holding onto is called.

LaVelle has already lighted from the conveyance; is already engaging with those he has found here. They seem to be just the type he has been looking for, public spirited folk trying to solve or at least alleviate this strange crisis. Found in just such a public building as he has identified as a likely place in which such people should be found. Blessed lord, it is a relief that at least one of their company understands this New World, even if Danielle doesn't.

All the World's a Stage

This girl, this civilian, this 'Buffy', her and that Dr. Jones; their theory is crazy. Preposterous. Among the craziest things Private LaVelle has ever heard. But it is the first thing he has heard all night that even might come close to explaining half of what he has seen. So he listens.

Danielle listens too, or tries her best. But she remains puzzled and agitated and no wonder. She comes from the 1700s, or thinks she does. Thinks *like* she does. The old lady is still curled in a ball in the backseat, weeping quietly. And presumably she has had the benefit of a good old twentieth century American education.

What effect must all of this be having on someone who probably barely knows enough about science to tell it apart from magic on a good day? There is a growling vampire in a cage for God's sake. But Danielle is still on her feet. Still trying to understand. Still trying to help. LaVelle is kind of in love with her for that. That and the fact that she is beautiful, obviously.

And maybe he's distracted by her beauty or her courage or whatever more than he realizes. Because 'Dr. Jones' is half way through explaining in detail about the costumes a second time when LaVelle suddenly realizes who he is. Or who he's supposed to be. Who he was dressed up as when the whole town or the whole world or whatever went completely off the rails. In exactly the way that their crazy theory says.

“Oh my God!” he can't help shouting, “You're Indiana Jones!”

The reply he gets is irritated. Impatient. “Yeah, kid, I've published a couple of papers. That's not important right now. What's important—”

Buffy steps up, physically steps between them, in fact. She holds up a hand to quiet the old guy and verbally throws LaVelle a rope. Which is good, because he can feel himself sinking, starting to drown.

Her words are calming, redirecting. She deftly short circuits the conversation before 'Dr. Jones' realizes his identity is under challenge and focuses them all instead on what's to be done next. Quietly, without insisting and despite her youth and tininess, she is in charge, name notwithstanding. LaVelle is kind of in love with her now, too.

“I'm going to go check out Ethan's,” Buffy explains. “I need you to stay here and keep these civilian's safe until I get back.”

LaVelle nods solemnly, ready to accept nearly anything from someone who clearly knows what is going on and who is not a fictional character. But Jones objects, “Listen, Buffy, I think it's great you came up with a hypothesis that might explain all this, but if there is one thing I don't need it's for you to assign me a baby sitter. I should be out there with you—”

“Excuse me, are you immortal?” Buffy cut him off sharply. The look in Jones's eyes, and the equally fierce look from Buffy make LaVelle take an involuntary step back. Danielle takes several, but stops after a quick glance over her shoulder confirms that she is inching closer to

the book cage and the creature trapped inside. She looks queasy, and terrified, but she holds it together and keeps listening for something she can do to help.

Jones fumes for a moment, then tries again to assert himself. "I should go with you," he insists. "If you find any artifacts, or relics, or a talisman, or frankly anything that could wield this kind of power; you won't know what it is or what to do about it."

"Yes, and would you even..." the voice is small, almost apologetic, more striving to understand than asserting anything and yet... "I... forgive me but, if I understand... what you are; would you even be able to do anything about... well, whatever you might find? That is, you may be impervious to harm, but only because you are immaterial, is that not so?"

Awkward silence rains for a moment. "I'll go," Indy offers abruptly. "I can take care of myself. Lavelle, stay here and keep the women safe."

"No!" Buffy and Lavelle both shout at once. Jones keeps arguing insisting he's been in worse situations than this on his own before. Dear God, this guy really thinks he's Indiana Jones. But even if he were, no one would survive out there alone for long, especially not while trying to accomplish anything more than survival. This is the real world. He doesn't have George Lucas on his side out there. Just an indifferent Universe.

"We should stay together," Danielle says abruptly, but calmly, resolutely. "If this Ethan's place is the beginning of all this, or might be, we should all go there and do what we can to remedy all this. I believe we should all fit in that thing. Shouldn't we?"

"Considering that I don't actually take up space?" Buffy scrunches up her face to show her discomfort with that fact. "Yeah we should all fit, but you guys, there's no reason to risk—"

"Indeed there is!" Danielle insists stridently, getting her legs back under her and becoming more her pre-car-crashing-into-building self. "Only Dr. Jones and yourself seem to know what is happening and you cannot act upon anything you may find there. Therefore clearly Dr. Jones must go, and yet his knowledge and understanding are too great a loss to risk unguarded in this Bedlam, in this not so?"

"Yeah, I guess, but—" Buffy begins to object, reflexively, it seems, her obstinance clearly covering concern. Who was Danielle to her before she was turned into her costume?" LaVelle wonders. Buffy doesn't speak to Danielle or Jones as if they were strangers. Or LaVelle either come to that. Which is strange because for the life of him he has no memory of ever meeting this girl before. And she seems pretty memorable. You'd think of all the girl's he has ever met... of all the girls he's ever met before tonight... you'd think... you'd think he would remember at least one of them.

Oh God. Oh God no! LaVelle is frozen, rooted to the spot. No longer following the conversation around him. No longer doing anything but fighting panic and trying to remember anything. He knows that he dates girls. Plenty of girls. But he can't recall the name or face or freaking bar size, hell *hat* size, of a single one of them.

He knows everything a good soldier should learn in basic training, but the six weeks of his life that he must have spent learning those things are as elusive as the years he must have

spent in high school, God only knows where. Hell, it could have been here for all he knows. Dear God, it doesn't seem possible but none of this does. And it is clearly happening anyway.

Happening to him, specifically. The soldier without a mother or a blood type or a first name. Because clearly whoever has decided to dress up and play G.I. Joe this Halloween has given him less of a backstory than Lucas and the boys gave to Indiana Jones.

Follow the Leader

The shouting has started up again. “We can't both go!” Dr. Jones shouts at the young soldier. “Someone has to stay here and protect these girls.”

“So we don't both go. I go!” Private LaVelle shouts back.

“No!” Jones counter's fiercely. “You don't know the first thing—”

“None of us do,” Buffy points out, cutting through the shouting with quiet authority before it can begin another full circuit. “W—Danielle is right. We all have to go. So lets get going. Jones, grab any books you think we might need. Lavelle, get weapons. Danielle, go see if you can calm down Mrs. Weepy. We roll in five minutes.”

For a moment everyone stays where they are, looking around doubtfully as if for a counterpoint to fall from the sky. Buffy gives them the look. Her extra-specially-insistent and in charge look. The one with the arched eyebrows and the flared nostrils. Another heartbeat passes in tense silence, and then, as one, they move. They do as they have been told.

Buffy is just a bit pleased with herself. It's not every day you get to give orders to a soldier, a princess and Indiana Jones. But that thought only makes her even more anxious to get Xander, Willow, and especially Giles back. It's bad enough always having to be the point of the spear without having to be the brains and the leader too. If there is one thing she doesn't need in her young life it is yet more responsibility and even fewer people with half a clue what's going on to share it with.

It takes more like ten minutes than five to herd all these cats into one car, but soon enough they are rolling. Slowly at first, carefully backing out of the library and into the hallway. But within a few minutes, with Daredevil Jones behind the wheel, they are racing down city streets at frankly reckless speeds, dodging obstacles, monsters, Humvees, and pedestrians. It is enough to make Buffy long for the safety of Giles's trusty, rusty old Citroen.

Staying with them is an act of will, requiring huge concentration on her part. The way she moves through the world of the living; she doesn't understand it in any sense. But at a walking speed it feels natural. Effortless. Sitting 'still' in a vehicle that is moving neither slowly nor steadily? That takes a lot more effort, though for the... whatever... of her, she can't figure out exactly what she is straining or why it's actually working.

Between that mental feat and making sure 'Indy' remains headed in the general direction of Ethan's, Buffy's powers of concentration are pretty much exhausted. So it comes as a shock when 'LaVelle'—who is riding shotgun, more or less literally—suddenly curses a blue streak and shouts, “There's too many of them!”

“Shoot through the windshields! Aim for their damn heads!” Jones shouts back, exasperated. “They can keep coming long enough without tires. To long!”

“No!” Buffy starts to shout, but as she struggles to find words to explain, dividing her focus, she finds herself floating in the middle of the street, left behind as the vehicle moves on. She has every intention of fixing that. Of hurrying to catch up. But her moment of distraction stretches and keeps stretching. The scene unfolding around her is pretty distracting.

As the car full of everyone who knows anything about what's happening disappears into the night, having slipped the net just in time, two armies close on Sunnydale's main drag from either side and an honest to God battle begins. On one side, regular looking U.S. Army troupes in realistic military vehicles. On the other, a mob of monsters and maniacs, most but not all pint sized.

Costumes or no costumes, this is all much too real. Somebody has to stop this. *Buffy* has to stop this, she suddenly realizes. Otherwise, what's the point of turning everyone back? So they can wake up to a decimated town where blood runs in the gutters and the streets are littered with the bodies of dead children?

She has to find the leader. The Commanding Officer or whatever. Though what the hell she is going to tell him to get him to back down, especially when the other side won't; Buffy has no idea.

The Long Way Around

Danielle gasps, the kind of horrified gasp that makes Indy want to glance over his shoulder to see what is coming at them. But at the moment he has all he can do to watch the road ahead of him and try to keep his tires in contact with it. “What?” he shouts instead of looking.

LaVelle looks back and curses. “She's gone,” he explains. “Ghost girl, she... she's not here anymore.”

“It's as though she flew through the back window,” Danielle explains shakily.

Indy sneaks a backward glance. Buffy is gone alright. Without a sound, without a word. And no telling where. Heaven? Hell? Cleveland? The bottom of the River Styx? Who knows. Danielle is keeping it together impressively well. The old woman is still curled in a ball, her head in Danielle's lap, keening miserably while the young aristocrat strokes her hair absently.

That is all that Indy has time to see before his attention is jerked forward again. The drive demands his full attention, to the exclusion of everything else, including navigation. Soon he has no idea where he is and even the shaky idea he once had about where he was going is gone. Even without considering the darkness and chaos, he is searching a strange town for a modest storefront that he has never seen.

Indy curses silently while LaVelle curses loudly, trying to think of what makes sense to do next. “We should get to the Base,” the young soldier supplies. Indy finds it easy to agree. On one condition.

“Just as long as it's not back the way we just came.”

“It is, actually!” LaVelle admits over the sound of his carbine blasting away at some unknown target in the darkness. “But not if we go the long way around.”

“And you're sure that's not where these guys are coming from?” Indy feels like he has to ask.

“Not positive,” LaVelle admits, turning back towards Indy, worry etched on his face. “But I don't think so. They'd be better organized. And more worried about civilians.”

Indy, who has actually seen a bit of what goes on in real wars, frankly doubts the kid's optimistic assessment. LaVelle is obviously green. Tonight is the closest he has ever been to combat. Any fool can see that. Still, for lack of any other objective that makes more sense than driving aimlessly through the night...

“Oh! Oh! Oh my!” Danielle suddenly shouts. Strangely, she doesn't sound distressed. She sounds excited. And she is. “There! Just there! Look! Look at that sign. Ethan's!!! Ethan's Costume Shop. We're here!”

Small Latin

Danielle sees it before either of the two men. They round a corner in the tightly packed warren of overstuffed shelving and garish finery that is Ethan's, nose their way cautiously through a parted curtain into a back store room, and there it is. A bust of Janus, the two headed Roman god of duality, transition, and transformation.

A chill runs through her to think, even for a moment, that the ghost-woman's theory, could be correct. That each of them might be, at one an the same time, masquerading and yet truly transformed into something other than themselves. To entertain, even for a moment that she is not the Lady Danielle but some other, utterly alien daughter of this renegade republic, this ersatz Rome... It is too much even to think on. And so she doesn't.

Instead, she nudges Dr. Jones ever so slightly with her elbow, catches his eye and leads it down to the statuette. One glance into his eyes tells her he is indeed seeing what she is seeing and interpreting it in much the same way. The bust of Janus sits upon a small, lavishly draped hexagonal stand. It is surrounded by concentric circles of candles so recently burned down to nubs that the air still smells of wax and soot. In short, it is displayed not as an artifact of historical significance or aesthetic appeal, but as an object of veneration. A source of divine power.

"Pagans," Dr. Jones pronounces very definitely, very distastefully, as any good Christian might when faced with extant rather than extinct worshipers of a false god. Then adds, "This has Himmler's fingerprints all over it." Despite the curious imagery and the unfamiliar surname, she can tell from his tone and the conviction with which he speaks that Dr. Jones now has at least some notion of what is happening and who is responsible.

Danielle's breast swells with a surge of relief and gratitude. At last, the project of discovering what has gone wrong with the world and of trying to put it right again progresses. And if she is nettled by an uneasy feeling that if and when all is 'put right again' she will not exist, at least, not as herself? Danielle pushes it down. A cowardly insistence upon ones own survival in such a time of general crisis is beneath the dignity of an aristocrat, mere woman though she might be.

"Uhhhhhhmmm?" the soldier LaVelle utters, his eye caught up along with theirs and now resting on the selfsame piece of bone-white statuary, nothing more than that one wordless interrogative.

"The Natzis," Dr. Jones explains patiently. "They've unleashed some kind of supernatural power or, preternatural at least. And that goddamned statue is the key to the whole thing. One way or another."

There is a moment of heavy silence. Then LaVelle bursts out laughing. Danielle and Jones stand a long moment amazed, staring at him. Danielle wonder's if he has gone mad, but Jones seems merely impatient with him. "What's so damned funny," he asks finally. To which LaVelle bursts out laughing again.

Then a new voice, a cold, smooth, almost serpentine voice that has been lurking in the shadows all the while, freezes Danielle where she stands and sends a chill through her very soul. "He's laughing because Himmler and the Nazis have been dead for nearly fifty years old man. And because he may not know who you are, but he knows who you aren't well enough.

"But I don't," the man adds cryptically, stepping into the light. He is tall but not as tall as Jones, leaner and less substantial somehow, with the dark coloring of a Gypsy and a strange accent that might be from the North of England but isn't quite. For all Danielle knows of the speech of these colonists, he might be a local, but only if Jones and LaVelle are not.

Danielle finds herself inching closer and closer to Jones. The warmth and solidity of his body make her feel safer somehow. The obvious keenness of his intellect is also a comfort. Whatever is happening, whatever is about to happen next, she feels certain that Dr. Jones will know what to do, or at least, that he is clever enough to figure something out.

Regardless, the sinister stranger keeps on speaking in his simi-snaky way, "Tell me, dear boy, who is this swaggering, carefully disheveled rogue supposed to be?" He seems to be addressing LaVelle alone now. Is it because he judges him most likely to be his true, untransfigured self? Or perhaps there are other reasons. The heavy-lidded looks that he keeps giving the younger man as he speaks are positively lascivious, not that LaVelle seems to notice.

For him, it seems the confrontation is more straightforward. "Listen, pal!" he barks loudly, leveling his weapon at the scoundrel, "I'm the one with the gun, so how about I get to ask the first question?"

"As you wish," the dark-eyed stranger says something between purrs and hisses. "Ask me anything you like."

Less Greek

“Ask me anything you like,” says the slight yet imposing figure. LaVelle is flooded with relief and, frankly, joy. For the first time since this bizarre conflict began, he finally has a sense that somehow or other they might be winning, or at least that there is something to win. Finally the real enemy is in sight and the whole thing feels cleaner, clearer. More war less earthquake.

So what does he do now? That's a less joyful thought. *Ask me anything you like*. LaVelle has no idea what he likes. Should he shoot the guy? No probably not. He doesn't technically have his hands up, but he also doesn't seem to be armed, and his body language suggests no intention of resisting, or of exertion of any kind really.

“What did you do and how do I stop it?” Jones demands in his too familiar tone of surly, world-weary impatience. Again relief. Let the grown-ups do the talking. Guilty relief, though. LaVelle is (presumably) over eighteen. He is a man. With a gun. A soldier. He should be able to do his own talking.

It doesn't matter. Jones and 'Ethan' are talking now, exchanging witty if slightly grim repartee like two movie characters having their final showdown. Hell, maybe that's exactly what they are. LaVelle doesn't remember an Ethan in any of the Indiana Jones movies, but then, there's a lot he doesn't remember, apparently.

“Oh dear, sweet friend,” Ethan is saying. His syrupy tone on the edge of open mockery, “If only you knew. This isn't about what I've done nearly so much as it is about what you've done.”

Danielle starts at this and cocks her head at Jones worriedly. “What is he saying?” She demands. “Dr. Jones, do you know this man?”

Indy shakes his head slightly as he opens his mouth to speak, but Ethan's tongue is quicker. His eyes light up with mirth as never before. “Seriously?” he crows, seemingly aside to no one in particular. “'Dr. Jones' *Indiana* Jones? Priceless. Absolutely buggering priceless.”

“So you know my name,” Jones lobs back, his show of indifference is brittle and spider-webbed with cracks, but in a split second he is back to business. “Who do you work for? Who sent you? Do you even understand what you've done?”

It's not that he doesn't care, isn't rattled by this strange enemy who seems to know him personally, LaVelle realizes. The immediate back-to-businessness of him is a coping thing. He tables emotions and questions and gets down to dealing with new business. Like a soldier. LaVelle Respects that. He is a soldier himself, after all. He knows that if nothing else.

He knows that if nothing else. LaVelle is a soldier. And so, when Ethan does a particularly stupid thing, LaVelle's reaction, what it will be, what it must be, is perfectly clear. It doesn't require thought, let alone discussion.

There is an instant of warning. One twitchy little movement of Ethan's eye towards the door beyond the three interlopers, and then he is barreling at them, head lowered like a running back charging through a line of defenders.

LaVelle squeezes his trigger before he even knows that he has taken his finger off the trigger guard, before he has even taken a moment to adjust his aim downward. The round goes wide and high. Something shatters. The floor falls out from under Lavelle's feet and comes up to hit him in the back. For an instant one foot, Ethan's foot, is standing on his chest.

Danielle screams. The old lady, still sitting on the floor by the front door, hugging her knees, screams louder. Even Indy makes some kind of manly exclamation of unpleasant surprise. Either Ethan or LaVelle let's out a somewhat less manly exclamation. LaVelle honestly doesn't know which.

However it happened, within a few seconds, LaVelle rises to his feet to find that Ethan is on the floor bleeding and groaning in pain, the gun is in Jones's hand, still tangled up with the bullwhip, and Danielle is in Jones arms, flushed and beaming. Man that guy works fast!

Hero

It all seems to happen in an instant. The report of Private LaVelle's weapon sounds in Indy's ears as the accompaniment rather than the response to Ethan's assault. The screaming reads as the response. Danielle's and everyone else's.

Indy moves instinctively, sweeping Danielle up into his arms and out of harm's way without any conscious thought or planning. Which is a damned good thing, because there is no time for any of that. Ethan has knocked Lavelle to the floor and is literally running right over him, stooping as he goes to retrieve the ultra-modern looking light-weight carbine that he's just knocked from the kid's hands.

Thinking on his feet (which is what he does best, after all) Indy strikes out with his bullwhip, ripping the gun from Ethan's grasp and knocking him to the ground all in one deft move. Then he wrangles the weapon, with the whip still tangled around the stock and the barrel, into his free hand (the one not attached to the arm that is wrapped around the lovely young lady) and points it at Ethan, finger on the trigger, just in case.

"Ah, bugger," Ethan curses, in a tone that suggests admitting defeat. But Indy isn't taking any chances. Ethan is a good liar, supporting his deceptions with more than words. Even his eyes hadn't betrayed him just now until the instant he was in motion.

Indy makes a show of cocking the gun, just so that his position on Ethan moving or doing anything else without being told is crystal clear. Ethan gets the message and stays down, looking more annoyed than frightened. Lavelle is already on his feet, but he makes no move to retrieve his weapon, seeming to approve of its current use.

But the sound of the gun cocking sends different signals to different people. Danielle shutters and presses closer to Indy's side, making it feel natural to wrap his arm around her all the more tightly. He looks into her eyes, ready to comfort her, to reassure her that she is safe, that he will protect her.

But the look in her eyes, her shy smile, the flushing of her cheeks, every single thing about the beautiful face that confronts him tells Indy that Danielle is not afraid. She is relieved and excited, grateful and pleased. She does feel safe in his embrace. She also feels warm and excitingly feminine, especially with the thrill of being attacked and handily defeating his attacker still coursing through his veins.

There are probably a million reasons not to do what he thinks of doing next. Danielle is young, though obviously a woman, half his age probably. She could just as easily be one of the few female students in his Archaeology classes. For that matter, it's clear by now that the whole world has gone even madder than usual and that either of them could be anyone else, underneath it all.

What's more, he hasn't exactly been invited. Hell they've barely been introduced. But that look in her eyes! The slight tilt of her head; her body leaned ever so slightly against his. Willingly under his protection. It all seems inviting enough.

Oh, what the hell! If the world keeps going the way it's been going, the whole thing will be blown to smithereens in a few years anyway. "Hear kid, hold this," he says nonchalantly, shoving the carbine back into LaVelle's surprised but quickly ready hands. Dimly, he is aware that the soldier's interrogation of his prisoner has resumed. But he and the lady are miles away in their own little world, their own little universe.

As he leans in, longing no doubt burning in his eyes; Danielle tilts her head and parts her lips slightly, the blush on her cheeks doing nothing to hide the desire in her own eyes. She may be young, but she know what he is doing. She knows what she is doing too. She wants to do it. Badly. Which Indy is all too aware, given her stated class, time period, and nationality, only means he stands a slightly less than 50/50 chance of getting a backhand across the face for giving her exactly what she wants.

That doesn't matter now. Nothing matters now. His lips meet hers and passion flares between them. As he explores her mouth with his own, as he drinks in the taste of her; she responds in kind. The pressure and modulation of her kiss is variable, inexperienced, artless; but by no means hesitant or in any way unsatisfying.

It's as though she has never been kissed before; and yet, it is also as though she were made to be kissed and for no other reason. Her passion is raw and instinctive, and what she lacks in experience, she more than makes up for in eagerness to please.

She is pressed tightly against him now. He can feel the curves of her breasts rising and falling against his chest with her deep and increasingly rapid breathing. His hand is pressed into the small of her back and he almost forgets himself enough to let it wander lower. But she is a lady. And they have only known each other a few hours, though those few ridiculously eventful hours may feel like days.

Besides, they are not alone. Somewhere between the third kiss and the kisses that are no longer counted, Indy is reminded of that fact by the sound of LaVelle's weapon firing another shot, and then another. Amidst the gunfire and Ethan's cursing, there is a faint, almost inaudible sound, a slight tinkling noise, the noise of pottery shards or something similar breaking and falling to the ground.

Suddenly, Willow's eyes (the eyes Giles is looking directly into, has been looking into all along) widen with shock, bordering on panic. For a fraction of a second, they are both frozen, perfectly still. Their lips are still pressed firmly together. Her tongue is in his mouth, which is something she has just learned to do by his eager example in the last minute and a half. The process of that tutelage is something he still clearly, viscerally remembers. Along with his desire for her.

If remember is even the word for a feeling that is still coursing through your veins. It isn't. But in this case it has to be. Moving his hands from Willow's back to her arms, a old trick for increasing his distance from someone without giving the impression of pushing her forcefully away, Giles pulls away and their mouth are their own again. Completely separate. As they should be.

It's all yelling after that. Xander demands answers of everyone while Ethan Rayne rudely continues to exist. Giles entertains an idle thought of doing something about that. If they

were alone, it might be more than idle. But they're not alone, and so he settled for storming out of the shop with his entourage in tow after darkly declaring that if Ethan knows what is good for him, he will leave town tonight and never come back.

The old woman and her car are long gone already. As they hurry along through the moderately reduced chaos in the streets outside Xander is still asking invasive questions, which Giles does his best to deflect without providing any actual information. The boy is a gnat, an annoyance. He bothers Giles far more than he did Indiana Jones, who is more seasoned in bearing fools gladly, apparently

More importantly, Willow is crying. Giles wishes he could put his arm around her, but he doesn't dare. He squeezes her hand instead and she squeezes his back. Her crying eases a little and she gives him a sort of commiserating half smile.

An apology sticks in his throat. There has been enough masquerading for one night. And though he is embarrassed, perhaps even a bit ashamed, Giles is not sorry. What's more, he has a sneaking suspicion that, deep down, neither is Willow.

It's over of course. As of now they are themselves again. Which means they can be nothing but mentor and pupil to each other. Even were not Ethan hanging about to complicate things. But over is not the same as never happened.

Tonight and forever, it will always be true that on this one very rare occasion Rupert Giles was the hero of the piece and not some bit player meant to dole out inspiration, exposition, and useful gadgets. He did save the day, he did get the girl. And that was pretty good for an English librarian. Even if he wasn't himself.

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