

Assignment Sunnydale

written by Calle Dybedahl

All irregularities will be handled by the forces controlling each dimension. Transuranic heavy elements may not be used where there is life. Medium atomic weights are available: Gold, Lead, Copper, Jet, Diamond, Radium, Sapphire, Silver and Steel. Sapphire and Steel have been assigned.

Featured fandoms: Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Sapphire and Steel

Featured pairings: Tara/Willow

A.S.S Story codes: gen

Story rating: PG

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"Your shirt..." the blonde girl between the window and the redhead says, before she falls to the floor. The redhead rushes towards her lover, her face transforming with shock.

"Tara?" she says, pulling her head into her lap. "Tara? Baby?"

There is no reaction.

"Baby, come on!" she says, desperation breaking her voice. "Get up!"

But her baby is still. Below her, blood stains the carpet.

Tears are trickling down the redhead's face. She cradles the blonde's head in her arms. She rocks back and forth, mumbling half-felt unbelieving negations that nobody hears.

She hunches down further, and suddenly it occurs to her that she's not feeling her lover's breath. Her beloved isn't breathing.

In her mind, something *snaps*.

She uncurls, looks straight up, seeing nothing. Her eyes are solid black. A faint red spark appears deep within the blackness. Quickly, so quickly, it swells, making her eyes glow brilliant pain-red. Magical forces gather around her. The air thickens, waves of power rippling through it. Barbarous names pour forth from the redheaded girl's throat, ancient and powerful names that hasn't been spoken for eons. She's working from instinct. She's not thinking at all. The many reasons that the names are never spoken don't occur to her. She wants her baby *back*. The forces gain substance. Lines of darkness dance around the girl. Just a moment more. Just a moment more, and she'll release them. Release them, and they'll bring her beloved back to her again.

Before she can speak the final word, a hand covers her mouth.

The lines of darkness scatter and disperse. The red-headed girl turns her head. A blonde woman in a blue dress is crouching behind her. Even crouched, she looks tall. Her eyes are glowing a cold sapphire blue. Slowly, she takes her hand from the redhead's tear-streaked face.

"You don't want to do that, dear," she says.

"But I must bring her back! I did it before!"

The woman in blue sits down and pulls the girl to her. The dead girl falls from the living girl's lap, lies still on the carpeted floor.

"No, you didn't," the woman says. "Not really. Not *her*." As she says it, her eyes glow brighter for a moment.

The redheaded girl collapses against the woman in blue and starts crying desperately, with huge lung-tearing sobs. The woman holds her in her arms, calmly doing her best to give comfort.

The gun fires once, twice and, after a second, a third time. A window breaks. A thin blonde girl lies bleeding on the grass. A young man is kneeling over her, staring in shock at the blood spreading over her blouse. A couple of steps behind him, a stern man in a dark gray suit watches.

Is it them? the man thinks.

At the entrance to the garden, where the shooter has just run away, a tall blonde woman dressed all in blue is standing. She's running her fingers through the leaves of a bush.

No, she thinks. *But we're close to the epicenter. These bushes have been through more loops than the coffee place had.*

The young man is vainly trying to stop the flow of blood from the girl's wound. The stern man watches, unperturbed.

Is there anyone else here?

The woman lets go of the bush, turns towards the stern man and smiles.

I don't know, she thinks. *Something is blocking me.*

We're close, then.

Yes.

The stern man walks up to the young man, grabs him by the shoulders and pulls him up as if he was weightless.

"What...? Who are you?" the young man says, distraught and confused.

"Is there anyone else here?" the stern man says, placing the youth firmly on his own feet.

The young man stares at him. "No. Maybe. I don't know, I've got to get an ambulance for Buffy, he... He *shot* her!"

"That is not a problem now," the stern man says. "I must know if there is someone else here, or if you have seen anything strange."

"Not a problem?! She's going to *die*!"

"That is not my business. Is there anyone else here?"

Steel, the woman in sapphire blue thinks, *He's too traumatized to think. And I think we're about to have another regression.*

In her room, Willow screams.

Willow buttons her white frilly blouse, in front of the mirror in her room. Tara's standing near her, smiling and looking happy.

"Hey, clothes," Willow says.

"Better not get used to them," Tara says.

Willow smiles. This is the way it should be. This is right.

"Yes, ma'am," she says.

She should be happy. She tries to make herself be happy. She grabs Tara by the belt, pulls her in close and kisses her passionately.

"Mmm... You know they're coming, right?" Tara says.

"Not quite the reaction I was aiming for," Willow says.

"I'm sorry," Tara says. "But there's not much time."

She looks like she's bathed in darkness, although the room is perfectly bright.

"You'll have to do it again," Tara says. "Before they stop you."

Willow crosses her arms protectively over her chest and sits down on the bed.

"Tara, I don't want to," she says. "Can't you just stay? Just move away from the window. Let's go to another room. Let's go eat!"

She stands up again, suddenly filled with hope that she's solved the problem, that she can avoid the pain. She takes Tara's hands.

"You must be hungry," she says. "Let's go down to the kitchen and I'll make you pancakes, ok?"

Tara shakes her head. "Not yet, love," she says. "Not yet. A few more times, and then I'll be with you forever."

Her eyes are dark, so very dark.

Willow looks pleadingly at her. "I'm afraid," she whispers. "It hurts."

Tara moves in front of the window, her back turned towards it.

"Be brave," she says. A gunshot rings out. The window splinters into a million tiny sharp crystals.

Blood splatters over Willow's white frilly blouse.

The stern man and the woman in blue are walking down a Sunnydale street. They have left the center of the town behind them, and are a fair way into the more residential areas. The woman stops.

The man stops as well, turns and looks questioningly at her.

Sapphire? he thinks.

She tilts her head a little. Steel, can you remember how we got here?

He frowns. How we got here? We walked, I... No, you're right, I can't. Time-slip?

She shakes her head. More like a regression, she thinks. We're repeating time we've already been through.

What's doing it? he thinks. Something from outside?

She shakes her head again. No, it feels like it's the work of a human. There may still be an outside force making the human do it, of course.

Either way, we have to find whatever is doing it and make it stop.

Yes, she thinks.

In the distance, shots are fired.

"I made it," Willow says, smiling.

"You sure did," Tara says. "And now we have a long time to play before I get shot."

Willow blinks. "You remember that? I thought I'd be the only one to remember."

"We were both at the center of the magic," Tara says. "I remember. And I know we're moving back to that time."

"I can bring you back again," Willow says.

"I know you can."

Willow frowns. "But then I'll just have to do it again. And again and again and again..."

Tara hushes her. "No, you won't," she says, and the shadows play over her face. "I didn't come back fully this time. A few more times and I will. Then we can break the cycle and be together forever."

"Forever?" Willow asks, not sure that she likes the sound of that. Forever sounds very, very *long*. But then, she can't imagine ever wanting to leave Tara, so she guesses it's OK.

"Forever," Tara says, and for some reason a chill goes through Willow when she does.

"I'm cold," she says.

Tara pulls playfully on her hair.

"So come here and let me warm you up," she says.

Willow eagerly falls into her lover's embrace. As she closes in to kiss her beloved, she pretends not to see the darkness moving in her eyes.

Sapphire carries two large cups of coffee over to the small round table in the Espresso Pump where Steel is waiting, puts them down and sits across from him.

So why have we been called here? he thinks. *What date is it anyway?*

The seventh of May two-thousand and two, Sapphire replies. *Again,* she adds.

Steel looks at her. *Again?*

She languidly sips her coffee, as if she had all the time in the world.

Again, she thinks when Steel looks properly annoyed. *It's been this day once before.*

Well, that explains why we were sent, he thinks. He doesn't touch his coffee. *Do we know what caused it?*

Sapphire shakes her head. *Let's go look,* she thinks.

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She can feel the forces gather in her. The pain and the frustration and the loss and the sadness combine into a huge night-black *thing*, a thing of tremendous destructive power. She can feel it clawing at the walls around it, trying to tear down the walls of her mind and the walls of reality itself. Some small part within her knows that she shouldn't let it lose, that it'll just bring grief. But that small part is quickly shouted down. If she's been hurt, why shouldn't they be?

Screwing her eyes shut, Willow *screams*.