

ROADS TRAVELLED

Part 3 - Road of Sacrifice

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Story rating

PG-13 – Hard R. The story contains hints/displays of violence, suggestive to crude language, mild to serious sexual situations and character deaths.

Timeline

Part 3 in Roads Travelled. A year and a half post the marauders last year at Hogwarts: the first war continues, spoilers for BTVS season 1-7 and ATS season 1-2 AU.

Story summary

BTVS/HP crossover. The war continues with more battles and losses. Caught up in the middle, Buffy and co. have to do their best to find light in the darkness. Buffy search for her roots and a balance in her life: what does it means to be the Slayer in the world she now calls home - but can answers be found anywhere but in Sunnydale? Voldemort's hold on Britain grows stronger and the Order weaker due to death and betrayal from within. Can a prophecy change the tide for the better or will its existence result in even more death?

Episode word count

Circa 6400 words divided on 13 pages.

Central pairing

Buffy/Remus

Other pairings

James/Lily, Sirius/OC, Severus/Dorcas, Frank/Alice.

Starring

Sarah Michelle Gellar	Buffy Summers
Bradley James	Remus Lupin
Isla Fisher	Lily Potter
Henry Cavill.....	James Potter
Johnny Depp	Sirius Black
Sam Troughton.....	Peter Pettigrew
Richard Armitage	Severus Snape

Online

<http://rt.visionary-web.net/>

<http://www.tthfanfic.org/Story-25312/>

<http://www.fanfiction.net/s/7133249/8/>

Episode 8 - Faith



Episode summary

The dimensional balance is once again threatened when the power of the Key is unleashed and the layer that keeps the different worlds separated is ripped apart. For Buffy, the collision of her past and present has begun...

Episode art

Eliza Dushku as Faith, Michelle Trachtenberg as Dawn, Clare Kramer as Glory, Sarah Michelle Gellar as Buffy Summers, Alexis Denisof as Wesley Wyndam-Pryce and James Marsters as Spike.

Guest starring

Amber Benson – Tara Maclay
David Boreanaz - Angel
Nicholas Brendon – Xander Harris
Emma Caulfield - Anya
Alexis Denisof - Wesley Wyndam-Pryce
Eliza Dushku – Faith
Joel Grey - Doc
Alyson Hannigan - Willow Rosenberg
Anthony Head - Rupert Giles
Clare Kramer – Glory
James Marsters - Spike
Juliet Stevenson - Diana Dormer
Michelle Trachtenberg - Dawn
Charlie Weber – Ben

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"I won't leave without her," the teenager stubbornly said and Diana Dormer sighed, glancing at the small child tightly gripping the hand of the leather clad girl. No, potential Slayer, Diana reminded herself. She was far from just a girl anymore.¹

"She will be safer here," the Watcher tried. She was here because she'd been chosen to watch over and guide one of next generation of potential Slayers. She would have her hands full without having to play baby-sitter to a problem child (even if she was cute) on top of that – and Faith clearly had an attitude problem.

Brown eyes narrowed. "It's both of us, or none," Faith said, the stubborn set of her jaw clearly saying she wouldn't give an inch on this. "Take your pick."

Diana sighed, knowing a battle lost when she saw one. "Very well. The child may come."

"My name is Dawn," the child whispered, looking up shyly with impossibly large, blue eyes and Diana couldn't help but melt.

"Dawn, then," Diana smiled.

Faith woke up from her dream with a gasp. It felt so real...but the memory was part fabricated, like so many others. The kid she'd been looking after ever since meeting her wasn't real. Only Faith had been taken from the Belmont Centre² that day by Diana, Dawn had never been there. She had been added to her memories long afterwards, in order to save her from being used by Glory as the key, trusted to be protected by Faith, the Slayer.³

But though Dawn's human existence was a lie, the connection Faith felt towards her wasn't. And she'd failed in protecting her. Glory had her now. Just as she'd failed in protecting Diana,⁴ and so many others, Dawn was now lost to her. How was she supposed to beat a friggin' God?! She might be the Slayer, but she was still only human.

Slowly getting up from the bed, Faith dressed and left her apartment, heading towards the Magic Shop.

"Yo, G," Faith greeted, much more calm now after a brisk jog and a short confrontation with a vampire right outside the shop – he hadn't been much of a challenge, but he'd given her the relief she needed to get through this meeting. And he hadn't recognised her as the Slayer, which always was a nice change. Though Faith had to admit, it was more fun killing vamps that knew who she was but were still certain they could take her.

"Faith, how many times do I have to tell you not to call me that?" Giles pulled off his glasses, and, predictably, began polishing them on his sweater.

Faith smirked. "Always at least once more." Nodding towards the books on the table, Faith grew serious again. "Any luck?"

Giles sighed. "Well...we...ah...while the books Spike and Xander brought from the demon's place were very helpful – "

"Hear that, Captain Forehead?" Spike nudged Angel teasingly. "I'm *helpful*. What are you again? Oh, that's right – a giant poof."

¹ Diana Dormer was Faith's first Watcher, making her first appearance in the original novel *Go Ask Malice: A Slayer's Diary*.

² In *Go Ask Malice*, the Belmont Center is a mental hospital Faith was taken to, from which she was later released into Diana's custody.

³ With Faith coming from a very different background than Buffy, unlike in canon, Dawn does not end up being made into Faith's actual sister by the monks, just someone she's taken under her wing.

⁴ Faith is referring to Diana's death at the hands of the vampire Kakistos: her death is described in detail in *Go Ask Malice*, though it is also given a quick mention in *BTVS 3x3: Faith, Hope & Trick*.

Angel sighed, wondering not for the first time why he hadn't stayed in LA. While Cordelia was annoying at times, at least she was only one person.¹ And he still couldn't wrap his head around that Spike – *SPIKE* – was now more or less one of the Scoobies. "Spike – "

" – Oh, shut it you two," Xander sighed. "We have an Apocalypse waiting, in case you haven't noticed. And if I'm not wrong, that possible-end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it thing is the reason we called you Angel, so more of the helping and less of the sensitivity..."

"Sensi – I'm not sensitive!" Angel protested. Something else he couldn't get used to – while Xander wasn't very fond of either of the vampires, if he had to pick one, he picked Spike. Everyone picked Spike, for some unfathomable reason. He didn't even have a soul, just a stupid chip in his head.²

"Do you want me to gag you three?" Faith asked with a raised eyebrow, looking from Spike, to Xander, to Angel, who crossed his arms, pointedly not looking at either of the men. Sensitive. Bah!

"Xander's got a point. He is kind of sensitive," Anya said helpfully out loud, and Angel's eyebrow twitched in badly held back annoyance.

"What did you find out?" Faith asked, turning her attention back to Giles, who, while not her official Watcher, was her unofficial one. Even after Wesley had arrived in Sunnydale to replace Giles who had been assigned to Faith temporarily after she had come to the Hellmouth with Dawn (Watcher-less and with a crazy, vengeance-thirsty vampire in the form of Kakistos on their tail)³ the librarian had stuck around, possibly in an attempt to keep the ties to his old Slayer. Buffy Summers had run away after she had to kill Angel and seemingly disappeared from the face of the earth. Faith doubted she was still alive, and so did everyone else, even if no one voiced it – it had been years after all, and there was no such thing as Slayer retirement. Even if Buffy didn't go looking for a fight, sooner or later, the fight would find her.

At first, the two Watchers had not gotten along – at all. Their opinions differed on everything. But now, Giles and Wesley were good friends, even if they still clashed sometimes: after realising that Wesley really wasn't as stuffy as he seemed to be, the older Watcher had taken him under his wing.

Giles had loosened Wesley out, brought out an actual personality from under the shell deeply ingrained by years of strict training and constant criticism at the hands of the Watchers Council and a belittling father. Wesley, in turn, had made Giles feel useful again, unknowingly helping him heal from the loss of his Slayer – not to mention giving him someone other than teenagers to spend time with.

It was this Wesley, the changed one, that Faith had learnt to appreciate: the person he'd been when he first arrived in Sunnydale wasn't one Faith would have touched with a ten-foot pole, and definitely not someone she could imagine taking orders from. But now, having lost the stick up his ass, not to mention his glasses, restrictive suits and wimpy attitude, things were very different.⁴ Faith had never expected they would be able to work with one another as well as they did, and neither had Wes. And when they did butt heads, that's when Giles stepped in.

¹ Angel still comes back to life in *BTVS* s. 3 and still ends up going to LA after graduation, just like Cordelia, though not because he thinks Buffy deserves a life in the sun like he does in canon, but because without her in Sunnydale, he had no reason to stay.

² Since Faith never finished High School, she does not enter university like Buffy did in *BTVS* s. 4. This means that Faith did not meet, or ended up in a relationship with, Riley or Maggie Walsh. She still eventually becomes aware of the Initiative through Spike after he escapes from them with a chip in his head, just like in canon.

³ In *BTVS* 3x3: Faith, Hope & Trick, Buffy and Faith work together to kill Kakistos. Here, she still survives the confrontation with Kakistos, presumably with help from the Scoobies, whom, without Buffy in the picture to compete with, she probably ends up bonding with easier.

⁴ Wesley never leaves Sunnydale after season three to become a 'rough demon hunter' and matures quicker than in canon.

On top of that, the two Watchers took turns in heading up to Los Angeles every now and then to help Angel with his cases, so there was always something for both of them to do.¹

"You don't want to wait for Wesley?" Giles questioned.

"Nah," Faith said. "He'll show. You know how it is, Giles – you Brits take ages to prepare your tea just right."

"Very well," Giles coughed, preferring to ignore Faith's comment. "But we have no new information, Faith. Nothing has changed since yesterday. The ritual is, uh..."

"Yeah, yeah, blood-letting, blah, blah, the Key is living energy that needs to be channeled, blah, blah, which will break down the dimensional walls between the worlds, resulting in catastrophic consequences, blah, blah. I *know* all that. What did you find out that's actually *new*?" Faith demanded to find out.

"Like I said, nothing has changed," the older Watcher repeated, slightly impatiently. "The only way for the walls between the dimensions to come back up again is if the energy is used up. If Dawn dies."

"And I've said it once, and I'm saying it again: that's not going to happen. I'm not gonna kill the one person in my life that's as good as my sister," Faith snarled, clenching her fists. "I've practically raised her."

"It's the only way," Giles sighed. "I don't like it, but I don't see another solution. Picking up one of the books, he read: *"The blood flows, the gates will open. The gates will close when it flows no more.* It's very straight forward. Once the blood is shed at a certain time and place, the fabric which separates all realities will be ripped apart. Dimensions will pour into one another, with no barriers to stop them. Reality as we know it will be destroyed, and chaos will reign on earth."

"Well, then we stop Glory before the ritual takes place," Faith said. "We still have a couple of hours, right?"

"How?" Willow asked silently, holding Tara's hand, as the pajama clad witch whimpered and rocked back and forth, the insanity brought on by Glory becoming more pronounced by the hour.² Faith inwardly winced. There was another person she hadn't been able to keep safe...

"I don't know," Faith said, frustrated. "You're supposed to be the brains in this group, Red. Figure it out!"

"I have places to be!" Tara yelled out, and they all looked over at her, before they returned to their conversation.

"It's a big chance, Faith," Giles warned. "And two hours isn't much. If the ritual starts, then every living creature in this and every other dimension imaginable will suffer unbearable torment and death...including Dawn. Are you going to be able to live with that?"

"If we fail, we won't be doing much living, so I don't really care. I'm gonna protect Dawn even if it's the last thing I ever do," Faith said grimly.

¹ Since Wesley stays in Sunnydale, he never ends up being permanently based with Angel Investigations after Doyle's death. Instead, he and Giles take turns helping Angel up in LA, with Angel occasionally travelling down to Sunnydale to help Faith in turn, like here, against Glory.

² In BTVS 5x19: Tough Love, Glory, mistakenly thinking Tara is the Key, ends up 'brain-sucking' her, leaving her insane.

"So...any ideas?" Willow asked, sounding defeated. "How do you kill a Hell God?"

"Well...you've gone up against her before, Willow. You weakened her pretty good," Anya suggested. "Maybe you can conjure up some mojo."¹

"And what about Ben?" Xander asked, suddenly hopeful. "He's sharing a body with Glory, and he's human² – we can kill him, right? I mean, I know he's innocent, but between him and Dawn...we could kill a regular guy, couldn't we?"

Faith felt bile rise in her throat, remembering the one time she'd killed an actual human being. Sure, it had been an honest mistake, she had thought it had been a vampire...but it had almost destroyed her. It had brought her so close to falling to the dark side...if it hadn't been for her friends and knowing she had a responsibility to Dawn, she probably would have.³

As if realizing what he'd just suggested, Xander bowed his head, looking sickened with himself. "God..."

"It's okay, Xan," Faith said softly. Despite the disgust she felt at herself for even considering taking the life of another human, she knew Xander's suggestion was a sound one, strategically wise – at least it was a plan, rather than just a half-developed idea. "We're all a little desperate right now."

"What about a distraction?" Wesley asked, entering the Magic Shop. "Glory only has one shot at the ritual, if we can keep her occupied...delay her somehow..."

"Bait?" Willow suggested. "I mean, like Anya said, I can work some magic. And we have two vampires at our disposal, that's got to count for something, right?"

"The Dagon sphere,"⁴ Angel said, turning to Faith. "You mentioned it was something you found, meant to repel Glory? Might buy us some more time."

Faith slowly nodded. "Yeah...it might work. That, and the troll hammer."⁵

"I was just about to suggest that," Anya said brightly. "You wanna fight a God, use the weapon of a God. See – we have a plan!"

"We still have no idea where to find her, though," Wesley pointed out.

"Big day. Oh, it calls me! I have to be there!" Tara exclaimed, and everyone turned to look at her.⁶

Xander raised an eyebrow at Wesley. "You were saying?"

"Big day!" Tara repeated.

¹ After Tara loses her mind at Glory's hands, Willow attacks the Hell Goddess and actually manages to cause her some pain with her spells.

² Ben is the human prison for Glory, though Glory has learnt to free herself for long periods of time. A spell prevents any human from realising Ben and Glory are one and the same, something that caused Spike endless frustration in 5x21: *The Weight of the World*, though as the power that separates Ben and Glory starts to fade, the rest of the Scoobies also remembers this.

³ Faith refers to the time when Faith accidentally kills the Mayor's assistant. In canon, it is the catalyst that turns Faith evil and to the Mayor's side. Here, with Dawn as her responsibility, two Watchers looking out for her and actual friends, she stays good.

⁴ The Dagon Sphere was a mystical crystal ball with the ability to repel Glory.

⁵ The troll hammer is an enchanted hammer Olaf wielded after Anya (as Anyanka) turned him into a Troll God and contains Olaf's Godly power. Spike was unable to lift it, but Buffy lifted it easily, which means Faith could as well.

⁶ The crazy people in Sunnydale, by this time including Tara, instinctively know where Glory will perform her ritual and are drawn there.

Outside time

The Fates were restless. In one of the dimensions things were changing so fast even they had trouble keeping up. So many different possibilities depended on the outcome of this battle. If the Hell God Glorificus succeeded in her goal, all that they were meant to prevail could be lost.

Only once before had the thin layer separating the many dimensions become fractured, then due to the actions of one of their own. They had barely been able to uphold the balance then – and that had been but a fraction of what could happen if Glorificus succeeded in opening her portal.

Currently, the Fates were in deep discussion: should they interfere? After all, if the Key began to bleed, the continued existence of the universe and the balance between the different dimensions were threatened. But it wasn't due to the choices made by humans, which was what the loop-hole that allowed interference said – it was due to the choice of a God, and so, the Fates were split.

One young Fate, in fact, the same one who had been the cause of the first rift,¹ thought that they should leave it alone. He had learnt his lesson well – interference could cause nothing but grief, and humans were resourceful creatures – they could manage just fine.

Looking into the well that allowed the Fates to see what was going on within the worlds, he saw the Slayer, Faith, had engaged Glory in a fight. She was clearly losing, even with the aid of two vampires. The Wiccan had managed to restore the mind of her girlfriend, and the younger Watcher was slowly climbing up the tower to which the Key was bound.

The young Fate switched the view of the well, ending up looking at another scene, one involving the blonde Slayer – the one whose life the Fate had interfered with. He had kept close watch over her through the years, feeling responsible for everything that happened to her in the new dimension she was in, good and bad.

When he realised his actions had sent her to the world her soulmate resided in, he had felt such joy for her sake, even if he now knew he had been wrong to meddle – it was not his place, after all. He had grieved when she lost two of her friends; one to death, and one to amnesia, and he rejoiced that she had grown into a powerful, resourceful, beautiful woman.

Suddenly, the well slowly began to glow, and the young Fate had the horrible feeling of déjà vu – it was happening again.

Gradually, all planes of existence, including their own, began to shake. The blood of the Key had been unleashed and the universe trembled by the sudden lack of stability between the dimensions. In horror, he looked into the well, seeing the blonde Slayer caught up in the chaos...again.

22 May, 1980

"How are you feeling?" Buffy asked Remus worriedly.

"I feel fine," Remus repeated for the third time that day. "It was just a scratch."

Buffy snorted. "Just a scratch. You almost lost your arm!"

¹ The rift is the one that sends Buffy to the marauder's time and dimension (HP-verse), as seen in *Road of Innocence* chapter 1.

"Almost, being the key-word. It's perfectly attached now, see?" Remus lifted his carefully bandaged left arm several times to prove a point, only to wince in pain. "Ouch. Okay, so it's still sore. Anyway, you're one to talk – I'm not the one with the bruised eye."

Buffy rolled her eyes, quickly moving to adjust Remus' bandage, frowning as she saw she would probably need to put on some more anti-infection cream – it was beginning to seep with pus, and the area looked red and irritated. "Case in point: a *bruise*, not a near amputation."

"It wasn't a near amputation," Remus protested.

"Re, your arm was hanging by a thread!" Buffy laughed incredulously.

"But thanks to your quick healing in the field, and then at St. Mungo's, it is now firmly attached once again," Remus said. "Besides, what was I supposed to do? Let that woman die?"

Buffy sighed. "Of course not. But it's not like you owed her anything."

"I know I didn't," Remus said quietly. "But I wanted to save her anyway."

"And I love you for it," Buffy said, settling down beside him. "I just wish the full moon wouldn't have been yesterday as well. The damage your transformation did to an arm already in a bad shape will set back the healing progress by quite a lot."

"Well, look at it from the bright side: at least I have a job now!" Remus said. "Once the restoration on the library is done, anyway."

Buffy smiled slightly. "That's true. At least one good thing came from yesterday."

"And speaking of yesterday – I was surprised to see your arrival," Remus said. "I thought you'd decided to wait a bit longer before rejoining the fighting?"

"Yes, well...I changed my mind," Buffy shrugged. "Our conversation after I read the story about the Slayer's origins really helped me, and as I was sitting there, waiting with Lily for the battle to finish, I realised that's not me. I've never been one to be content with sitting on the sidelines, and I'm tired of being weak." Her eyes blazed with a determined fire that Remus had sorely missed. "I'm done holding myself back out of fear."

"How did it feel, then?" Remus asked. "Fighting humans again?"

Buffy shrugged again. "Honestly? I didn't even think about it. It just felt good to do good – to make a difference again, if you know what I mean."

"I do." Remus embraced her tightly. "I'm happy for you." Suddenly, the entire cottage began to shake, paintings and vases crashing to the floor in rapid speed. "What the - ?" Remus asked, quickly releasing Buffy and standing up. "Are we under attack? Buffy?"

But Buffy wasn't looking at him; rather, she had an eye on a point on the floor which was slowly breaking apart, along with the earth itself beneath it. There, a blue vortex was growing larger and larger. "It's worse," Buffy said, voice shaky, as she slowly backed away, only to stumble over a table decoration that had fallen down. "We have to get out of here. Now!" She stood back up.

"What are you talking about?" Remus demanded to know.

"A portal," Buffy said. "It looks exactly like the one that brought me here, only it's growing way faster than last time."

She thought she could make out images of other places as she stared into the depths of the portal, people...a tower, a bleeding girl tied to it, crying, a man being stabbed by another man, and thrown down from it...

A dark haired girl, fighting a slutty looking blonde, crying out as she saw the man fall, losing her concentration and earned herself a fist to the face that sent her flying, before the curly blonde fury was on her again... The man never hit the ground, stopping, hovering a few inches from the asphalt, a red-headed woman holding out her hand, using magic to stop his deadly descent, another blonde dressed in grey holding her hand. "Willow," Buffy whispered, amazed at what she saw. And... "Angel..." she breathed out, not believing her eyes, and, while she had been backing away before, she was moving closer now.

"What are you doing?" Remus demanded, eyes wide as he tugged at her arm to try and get her to move. "Let's get out of here!"

But Buffy was frozen stiff, staring, transfixed at the scene she saw...and then, it was too late to leave...the portal was dragging her in, dragging them both in, to the place she had come from, so long ago now...back to Sunnydale.

22 May, 2001

As the battle went on below, Wesley had begun the slow climb up the tower, inwardly cursing himself for not being able to go faster. But he was only human, not a vampire, and Spike and Angel were both busy fighting of the minions and the people who had had their brains sucked out by Glory. "Don't look down," he muttered to himself. "Don't look down..." Wesley had never thought himself afraid of heights, but this was not just far above ground: it was a lot higher, and the tower didn't seem all that stable.¹

Wesley looked up instead, seeing Dawn tied to the edge of the constructions, and his eyes widened when he saw Doc,² the demon Spike and Xander had stolen the book about Glory's ritual from, take out a knife...and began to cut. Dawn's terrified cries made him climb faster, even as her blood – the Key's blood – began to drip. He reached the top, slowly heaving himself over the edge.

The Doc cocked his head. "Hello there."

"Aren't you supposed to be dead?"³ Wesley asked, slowly pulling out a gun from his back pocket. Doc just smiled serenely. In a quick motion, Wesley aimed his gun, but the demon was faster, an obscenely long tongue shooting out of his mouth, grabbing the gun and directing it away, off the tower, falling down to the depths below. "I really liked that gun," Wesley said pointedly, striding forward and engaging Doc in hand to hand, Dawn watching anxiously.

The Doc fainted, and Wesley tripped, coming precariously close to the edge, almost losing his balance. Smiling again, the Doc put both hands to Wesley chest – and pushed.

¹ Since he's not in love with Faith the way he was in love with Buffy in canon, Spike does not end up climbing the tower to save Dawn like in canon, so as her Watcher, Wesley ends up doing it instead. Also, because of this, there is no Buffy-bot.

² Doc is a powerful demon with a human appearance and reptilian characteristics, and a worshiper of Glory.

³ When Spike and Xander steal the book from Doc in BTVS 5x21: *The Weight of the World*, Xander end up impaling his chest with a sword, and they leave, mistakenly believing him to be dead.

Faith, engaged in battle with Glory, had just lifted the troll hammer for another blow, only to see something moving at a quick speed out of the corner of her eye. "NO!" She yelled when she realised it was Wesley, falling to his death, and she lost her focus. It was only for a split second, but long enough for Glory to regain the upper-hand: the God aimed a fist at the Slayer's face, and Faith was sent flying, landing several feet away, the troll hammer out of her reach now.

After another half of a second, Glory was there, pounding at the dazed Slayer with all her considerable strength. "Guess you lost your hammer, doe-eyes," the God mocked as she pounded her fist into the Slayer's face.

Faith hadn't been the only one to see Wesley fall. Willow had too. Reaching out with her magic, she managed to stop the Watcher's deadly descent, a now sane Tara holding her hand, lending her strength and confidence. In the meantime, Spike, Anya, Xander, Giles and Angel were holding the minions at bay. "Where is Faith?" Giles asked with a shout.

Angel looked around amidst the chaos, and finally spotted the dark haired girl on the ground, near unconsciousness as Glory slammed her head down onto the asphalt, again and again. "We have to help her!" He yelled and rushed towards the Slayer, Spike in tow. Together, the two vampires managed to pull Glory away, and engaged her in battle. But Glory was too strong, even for both of them, and soon, they went down.

Triumphant, Glory spun back around, only to be met by a hammer in the face: Faith had recovered from Glory's beating, and had grabbed the hammer again. Without waiting, Faith slammed the hammer in Glory's face repeated times, ignoring the God's pleas for mercy. "Stop it..."

"You're a god," Faith said, her eyes dark with anger as she slammed the hammer down again. "MAKE it stop."

Glory cried out, the pain overwhelming her, and she morphed back into the visage of Ben. Faith stared at him. Once, she had killed a man. She never wanted to do it again. But could she really let Ben live? Glory would return. She couldn't take that chance. She raised the hammer. "Please..." Ben begged, clearly in pain. "I'm sorry."

Faith looked down on him with an unreadable face, a thousand thoughts crossing her mind. Then, her eyes grew cold. She steeled herself. "So am I." She brought the hammer down. Ben was dead. Glory was gone.¹

Faith dropped the hammer, stumbling away from the corpse, feeling sick. She knew it had been a necessary evil, knew it had been for the greater good – Glory couldn't be allowed to return. But she felt ill. "Dawn..." She whispered, pushing away the feelings of guilt. She had to get to Dawn.

On top of the tower, Dawn was screaming as Doc cut into her stomach. "Shallow cuts...shallow cuts. Let the blood...flow....free..."

"Dawn!" Faith yelled, having reached the platform.

"Faith!" Dawn gasped, tears in her eyes, both from pain and relief.

"This should be interesting," Doc muttered, swirling around to face Faith, who kicked him between the legs before he could react, and then pushed him off the edge, not bothering to watch him fall. She quickly untied Dawn.

¹ In canon, Giles ended up killing Ben/Glory after Buffy spared their life, but as Faith is a lot more hardened, she does not do the same.

"It's gonna be alright," Faith told her. "You're gonna be okay." She took Dawn's arm, and began to lead the younger girl across the platform.

"Faith..." Dawn whispered, her eyes widening in terror as she saw her blood drip over the edge, creating a small circle of light that quickly began to grow into something much bigger: a portal. "It's started."

Faith swallowed, staring at the growing vortex, at loss. What was she supposed to do?

The portal was growing even larger, crackling and sending out huge bolts of lightning that wrecked destruction were they hit. "I'm sorry," Dawn whispered tearfully.

"It doesn't matter!" Faith tried to assure her, ignoring the giant dragon that flew out of the portal. Dawn tried to run past her, but Faith grabbed her shoulder in a tight grip. "What are you doing?" The Slayer demanded to know.

"I have to jump. The energy..."

"It will kill you!" Faith yelled.

Dawn smiled softly. "I know. But...I'm not real, Faith. Not really. And...I know about the ritual. About the blood. I have to stop it. I'm the only one who can. Faith..."

"I don't care!" Faith exclaimed. "Dawn, I won't lose you – "

"You have to! You have to let me go!" Dawn cried. The tower was shaking now, and they both stumbled. More lightning cracked as the portal grew even wider, and encompassed a large part of the dark sky. "Look at what's happening." Two shapes fell out of the portal, plummeting towards the ground. "Blood starts it, and until the blood stops flowing, it will never stop. You know you have to let me..." Dawn smiled at her sadly.

Faith shook her head in denial, even though she knew Dawn was right. "There has to be another way..."

Dawn smiled at her tearfully. "There isn't. It has to have the blood." And then, before Faith could react, she wrenched herself free from the Slayers grip and ran towards the edge.

"NOOO!" Faith screamed, throwing herself towards Dawn, but it was too late – she had already jumped, swan diving right out from the tower and down toward the ball of energy. The portal began to crackle and spit angrily around Dawn's body, the energy growing wild, intersected with green sparks that Dawn was emitting – she was glowing.

A flash of radiant green light spread from Dawn and the portal. For a moment, it covered the entire sky, casting a green sheen on the people on the ground, demonstrating what she truly was – pure energy. And then, the portal exploded, contracting out of existence, taking Dawn – the Key - with it, leaving only coldness in its wake, even as the sun began to rise.¹

From below, Faith heard faint voices yell out in disbelief. She slowly began her climb down, even slower she approached the Scoobies who were standing in a circle around something – lying on the ground. "Dawn?" Faith whispered, but Wesley shook his head, placing a hand on her shoulder in comfort.

¹ Since Faith and Dawn are not related by blood, Faith can't take Dawn's place when it becomes necessary to close the portal like Buffy does in canon. That Dawn is the one jumping is actually what happens in the original fake script for the ending of 5x22: The Gift, to prevent the true end with Buffy's death from being leaked to the public.

"No...there was no body...but..." He glanced towards the others, and they slowly parted, allowing Faith to see what held their attention. A small blonde girl, and a blonde man, lying side by side on the scorched asphalt. And suddenly, Faith recognized her, from pictures Willow, Xander and Giles had showed her. "They fell from the portal," Wesley muttered. "I don't understand how they're not wounded at all..."

"Buffy..." Angel was whispering, staring in disbelief at the blonde. The rest of the Scoobies who had recognized her could only stare in shock. Faith stared too, the grief she felt for the loss of Dawn slowly dissipating: the memory of her felt like something out of a dream now, just a shadow in her mind.

Absently, Faith wondered if it was part of the magic that had brought Dawn to her - were the memories that had been built to hide the Key disappearing, now when there was nothing left to protect?¹ But then, that thought was gone too, and all her focus was on the two strangers lying on the ground. "So that's Buffy..." she muttered, a frown on her face. "And...?"

"Werewolf," Spike, Angel and Willow echoed, the vampires being able to smell it, and Willow recognizing the distinctive supernatural aura that had always surrounded Oz.

"She's kind of short," Anya, in Xander's arms, noted in her usual no-nonsense way. "Older looking than in your photos, though."

"But is she really Buffy?" Giles asked, barely daring to hope his Slayer - his actual Slayer - was back.

"It's Buffy," Angel said, certain, still staring, transfixed. Her hair was longer, more wavy, and more golden blonde than the last time he had seen her. And her facial features had matured, from that of a teenager to that of a young woman. But it was definitely Buffy, even more beautiful than he remembered. He decided not to mention that her smell, while familiar, was also different - stronger. And she fairly reeked of the same smell as the werewolf emitted, like they had been...intimate recently or at least lived together in very close quarters. He didn't want to think about what that might mean, at all.

"How do you know this isn't some kind of trick?" Willow asked, wanting to believe, but not convinced this wasn't a cruel twist of some kind. "I've done so many scrying spells for her over the years, and I always come up empty, even with Tara to help me..."

"I imagine your spells were all centered on Earth," Spike said dryly. "This Earth."

Wesley nodded slowly as he understood why Willow's spells had had no effect. "Did you ever try other planes - other universes?"

Willow shook her head. "It never crossed my mind. Goddess, why didn't I consider that? What if she's been in some sort of Hell dimension, or - "

"She looks pretty fine if that's the case," Faith interrupted, slightly jealous of the attention the other Slayer was getting.

"Either way, we left her," Xander muttered guiltily. "We should have tried harder..."

"Oh, bloody hell!" Spike exclaimed. "Can it already! We can continue this conversation somewhere else, preferably somewhere with a roof." He looked up at the rapidly lightening sky worriedly.

¹ Faith's theory is meant to be correct, meaning that the emotional impact Dawn's death would have on Faith is a lot lessened, leaving her free from the depression that would doubtlessly take hold of her otherwise.

"I'll carry Buffy," Angel immediately offered, and picked up the blonde in his arms, treating her as though she was made of glass.

"Of course you will," Spike muttered with a roll of his eyes and picked up the other man, the werewolf, swinging him across one shoulder nonchalantly, ignoring Wesley's disapproving look at this treatment.

"Let's go," Giles said, his eyes locked on Buffy's unconscious form. She was back...she was really back.

Faith's eyes were also locked on Buffy's still body, but for a different reason entirely. She couldn't help but feel things were going to be very different from now on...and not necessarily in a good way.