

~ The Halloween Hunter's Guide to Trick-or-Treating Tots, Ambling Apparitions And Porta-Potties ~ by Aurelia

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: This little tale is a mixture of two sets of characters of mine. The other Xena kids' tale can be found at:

http://www.academyofbards.org/fanfic/a/aurelia_xenaaintnodolly.html

while the Priory/Dylan stories can be found at:

http://xenafiction.net/scrolls/aurelia_tdiygtbfncmy.html

http://xenafiction.net/scrolls/aurelia_tphttdascidtwpbe.html

http://xenafiction.net/scrolls/aurelia_ayewtkabbssavdbwata.html

THANKS: To GreenMoon, who lets me go out and play in the sandpit while she does grownup Beta stuff. I think I've got to tell her that my sandpit has a hole in it. The sand is leaking out my ears...

FEEDBACK: I'm always open to comments, preferably nice ones, so let me know what you think at: aurelia_fan@yahoo.com.au

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"Nah ahhhh. I ain't going near there." Solari stood on the sidewalk with her fists planted on her tiny hips. "There... there's ghosts an' an' witches an' an' axe murderers." Her long, dark hair flicked around quickly as she shook her head briskly.

"Not even for a big store size Snickers?" Xena stood there holding her plastic jack-o-lantern in one hand and her little pal's hand in the other. "C'mon, Gabby."

"Do I hafta, Xeenie?" Pleading eyes looking up at her play buddy.

"Nah, I'll get them for you." Vibrant blue eyes caught each child in succession, asking the silent question. "Nobody? Not even **you**... Pee Pee?"

As always, Eponin rose to the taunt. "I ain't afraid!"

"Yeah?"

"Yeah!"

"You dare me to go?" Xena rose to her imposing height of four feet and glared at the tubby girl. Eponin's eyes dropped as she remembered the infamous bug-eating competition that Xena won. Xena always won.

Eponin's face turned to a dull shade of gray-green as she remembered. Oh yeah, she remembered. The sight of that bug disappearing into Xena's mouth and the crunching sound afterwards had sent her running for the bushes.

"Oh nnoooooo." Pee Pee wasn't going to fall for that one again. "You go first."

As the seven year old took her first step towards the walk leading to the local haunted house a tiny hand grabbed her wrist. "No, Xeenie. Plleeeeezzzzeee. Not here. I don't want no big store size Snickers." Xena looked down at her young friend dressed in her dour brown skirt and ugly green crop top. Feathers stuck out of her hair at all angles, lending an endearing quality to the little girl trying to look like an Amazon.

"I ain't seen no ghosts. You're making it up!" Xena took another few steps towards the front door but found that she was alone. "Then all the candy mine! All mine!"

"Yeah, sure, until that axe murderer chops you up in itty bitty pieces."

"I can run faster than him. I can run faster than anyone!" Xena said with confidence. If there was one thing the tall child was confident of it was her physical capabilities. She was good, and she knew it.

"I want a big ol' Snucker!" Amarice wasn't above claiming the prize, but her joy turned to tears when their leader walk towards that dreaded house. "Don't leave, Xeennaaaaaa...."

"Ammy, stop that. 'Zons don't cry." Ephiny punched the toddler gently in the arm, her blonde curls bouncing with the movement.

"Yeah... don't be a baby, Ammmmyyyyyyy...." The whine emanating from Eponin was like a chainsaw, piercing the general background noise of Halloween night.

"Xeenie?" Gabby whispered as her buddy walked right up to the door. She was trying so hard not to cry as she watched the little warrior approach the door. "I want my Xeenie...." The words disappeared like ghosts in the night.

The dark-haired child hesitated for a moment before knocking loud and long, the rap echoing like a death knell. She glanced over her shoulder at her quaking tribe of mini Amazons standing

on the sidewalk, all waiting to see her get eaten... or worse. Her sharp ears picked up the almost silent opening of the door. As she turned the leather petals on her Amazon skirt flared out around her. "Trick or treat!"

"Oooh, aren't you a cutie." The young woman smiled benevolently at the miniature warrior standing on her doorstep. "Hey Priory! Come and look at this!"

"Yeah?" The dark-haired woman stood next to the blonde, both gazing down at the child. "Awwwww, that's adorable."

"And who are you supposed to be?"

"Xeeennaaa."

"Of course." Jacey looked over the head of the child to the small tribe standing further back. "And there's Gabby..." She tried really hard not to laugh at the child who looked like a demented chicken was living in her hair sprouting feathers at will.

"How did'ja know?"

"Xena... from that TV show. Yeah, I know them." Ohhhh yeah, Jacey knew them well. How often had she sat there slaving over the beautiful asses working overtime on that particular little show? She had just wished that it had lasted another year or so. At the rate the costumes were shrinking it wouldn't have taken long before they were naked. *Oooh yeeeahhhh...*

Priory watched in amusement as Jacey's eyes glazed over, finally having to give her a nudge to bring her back to reality. "So why are your little friends standing way out there?"

"Cuz they're scaredy-cats."

"Really?" Priory inwardly sighed. Neighborhood gossip runs deep.

"They don't wanna be chopped up in little pieces."

"Chopped up...? Where are you getting these ideas?" Jacey tried to sound innocent, she really did, but it seemed their house was now the stuff of legends.

"My mama told me."

"Do we look like axe-murderers of little kids?" Priory plastered on her best smile.

"Nope. But she does." The miniature warrior pointed to something over Priory's shoulder.

Oh please, please, please... She was afraid to look because she knew what she would find. Priory's mind went into overdrive trying to think of some excuse to explain a see-through woman hovering on the staircase.

"Who?"

"The weird-lookin' lady on the stairs." Xena took an instant liking to her. The dapper suit appealed to her own sense of individuality and the fedora rakishly perched over the one eye was just way coool. Inexplicably she extended her hand out and felt it being filled with another. She always knew where her buddy was. Besides, she suspected Gabby's curiosity got the better of her.

Jacey watched in fascination as the little girl reached out blindly for her playmate and knew that she would be there. Could she do that? Would Priory fill her hand just as Gabby did with Xena's? She hunkered down to the kids' level. "So, you must be Gabby, huh?"

"Uh huh." The feathered blonde locks bobbed up and down, and errant feather or two falling to the ground. Jacey picked them up and pushed them back into the soft hair.

"Well, Gabby, since you were so brave to come to the door, here's your treats." Jacey grabbed a handful of candy in the bowl by the door and placed them in the shaking jack-o-lantern before returning for a second handful to place in Xena's bag. Priory tapped her shoulder and handed over a paper bag. "And here is some candy for your friends, but since they are scaredy-cats they don't get as much as you do."

Jacey glanced up and down the street. "Where's your grown-up, honey? Are you trick-or-treating alone?" She didn't like the idea of the kids wandering the streets without adult supervision.

"Uh huh." Again the blonde head nodded vigorously.

"That's not safe."

"I can take care of them," Xena announced proudly.

"She's our leader. She can take care of anything," Gabby said with utter conviction. So much trust in such a small body and mind.

"But still..." Jacey looked up at her partner standing behind her. "Let me get my keys."

"Uh uh. I want her." Xena pointed at Dylan who just looked stunned. She knew very well who the child was pointing at but she still couldn't help but look over her shoulder in case someone was behind her.

"She can't go, honey."

"Why not?" Those cornflower-blue eyes looked up at her pleadingly for an answer.

"She can't leave the house."

"Why not?"

Cause I got my butt kicked, kid, and I gotta stay put.

The deep voice touched something in the child. "No, you don't. You can come with me. I'll potec you."

Dylan stared disbelievingly at the little dark-haired midget.

You're gonna protect me, huh?

She let out a full-bellied laugh, the sound bouncing off the walls in agreement.

Sorry kiddo.

"You don't know til you try." It was a dare and they both knew it.

I have tried, kid. It ain't gonna happen. I'm stuck like a duck, Chuck.

"Xeennaaaaa."

Okay, Xeennaaaaa. I'm stuck here.

"I dare ya. Double-dare ya."

Ahhhhh crap!

"Hey, little ears!"

Sorry.

Dylan saw Priory snickering behind her hand.

You're getting' a kick outta this, aren't ya?

"Oh yeah." Dylan being outwitted by a seven year-old was an early Christmas present as far as she was concerned.

Well I ain't goin' without Rhea, so there.

You called?

The smaller ghost materialized then disappeared as abruptly.

Pssst! Dylan! What are you doing? They can see you!

Too late, Rhea. Get your can back here.

Almost shyly Rhea materialized again, looking nervously at the two children standing on the doorstep.

Hiya.

"Cooolllll." Xena was liking this Halloween more and more. Gabby tucked herself behind her little buddy but peeked around to get a better look just the same. Xena stepped through the door to stand just inside the house. "Hold my hand. I won't hurt ya."

Dylan eyed the proffered hand with some suspicion. Was this some sort of trick? She didn't like looking foolish and this was one situation where she could look a great big ol' idiot.

So, what's the catch?

"Huh?"

This is a joke, right?

"Nooooooo." The little hellion had meant it as a serious gesture, but after seeing the ghost nervous Xena just couldn't help herself.

Yeah, it is. Well, I ain't falling for it.

"Kay. Will you come with us?" Xena turned her attention to the smaller ghost.

I'm sorry, honey, but my partner is right. We can't leave this house.

"But it's Halloween." And that was that. "Gabby..." Xena turned to her little buddy, "Go on..." She nodded her head towards the ghost in the dress.

"But... but... Xeenie..." Gabby pleaded to be left out of whatever her playmate had in mind.

"She won't hurt ya." Xena's eyes shifted to Rhea. "Will ya?"

Why would I want to hurt you?

"See?"

"Hey, Xeeennnaaaaa! Hurry up."

The raven-haired child glared back at the children on the sidewalk. Ephiny was holding Amarice's hand while the toddler scratched her butt with the available fingers. Solari was enviously looking at the other kids merrily trick-or-treating up and down the street, while Eponin... well, her mother would be disgusted with where her daughter's finger was right at that

moment.

"Hold your horses! I'm comin'!"

Priory had watched the exchange with some fascination, finally deciding that some action was needed. "Come on. What have you got to lose?"

My pride? Half my body? My head? Take your pick.

"Really?"

Nah. Just taking ya for a ride. Why? Are you trying to get rid of us?

"You know. For someone who complains about being stuck here you sure are dragging your feet about actually leaving."

It's about that damned chicken, isn't it? I just knew you'd hold a grudge for that one!

Jacey stepped in. "Oh, for crying out loud just go, will ya! If it works, then you've got some freedom for a little while. If not, then you have lost nothing. If it were me..."

Yeah, well, it ain't you, short stuff.

"Hey!"

Stay out of this, Convent.

Hey, hey. What's the problem, Dylan?

Grr. Nuthin'.

"Come on, Gabby. They don't wanna come with us." Xena tugged on Gabby's hand and turned to leave the house.

"Hang on a minute." Jacey stopped the children with a hand. "Last chance, Dylan. If you don't go, then I will."

The tall ghost glanced down at her partner seeing a wistful look there.

Awww... Crappolla. Come on Rhea, before I change my mind.

The little warrior opened her tiny palm and allowed the ghost to place her transparent hand there. Gently she led Dylan towards the door. Bracing herself for that oh-so familiar invisible wall to slam her in the face she couldn't fully comprehend exactly what took place as she passed through the portal.

"Whooaaa.....!"

Dylan jerked her head around, looking the house up and down... from the other side.

"What hap...? Who...? Whoa...!"

A child's giggle drew her to study the rascalion standing beside her. "See? Told ya so!" Xena announced smugly.

"You make some kinda deal with Beelzebub or what?"

"Nah. Mr. Bubb moved. Mr. and Mrs. Davis live there now." Xena pointed to number 2740.

"You know what, kid? I like your spunk."

"Sorry, I had a cold." Xena swiped the back of her hand across her nose. "Can we go now?"

"Hey, Rhea, get your keister out here!"

Reluctantly the smaller ghost took the shaking little girl's hand, traveling those final few steps in terror before stepping across the forbidden line into the real world. It was a strangely familiar sensation, not unlike that of occupying Jacey's body except without someone else in her head.

"Good golly!" Rhea looked down at the blonde child quaking in her shoes. "Thank you sweetie."

"Now, let's go trick-or-treating!" Dylan yelled for the first time in many, many years. The kids erupted into wild yells as they started down the sidewalk towards the first house.

Priory just stood there. Suddenly the house felt... empty. She had always thought that if, or when, her two houseguests left she would breathe a sigh of relief. Now that it had actually happened she was wondering when they would be coming back.

Jacey stood up and looked around. "The house seems different."

"Yeah, I was just thinking that." But there was no smile accompanying that thought.

"I'm gonna get my keys and follow. You know, just in case they get into trouble." It was a weak excuse and they both knew it.

"What about the candy?"

Without a word Jacey lifted the bowl and placed it on the doorstep. "Any other questions?"

"I suppose not." It seemed her lover was as worried about the two ghosts in the modern world for the first time as much as she was. "You follow, I'll catch up."

"Where are you going?" Jacey called as Priory headed upstairs.

"To get my camera. If you think I'm going to miss this photo opportunity then you're crazy."

"Okay. I'll go on ahead." Jacey closed the door and moved swiftly to a small bush. They would have to sneak around tonight because Dylan would be pissed at them for not trusting them to escort young children on Halloween night. Besides, if they knew they were being watched, well where was the fun in that?

* * *

"Okay, what's first?"

"You know..." Eponin didn't know why Xena asked the grown ups to come along. They were doing just fine on their own. Now they would have to behave.

"If I knew I wouldn't be asking now, would I?" *Sheesh... kids.*

"We knock on the door and yell 'trick-or-treat'."

"Geez, Even I know that."

"Well, you asked."

"Don't start with me, kid." Dylan growled. This human stuff was hard work. Now she remembered why she didn't want kids in the first place.

Rhea just ignored the whole debacle, instead allowing her senses to come to terms with where they were. Things looked so different from this angle. Life outside the house had centered around the attic window, giving them a view of the whole street from their lofty vantage point. But at ground level and at point blank range, the tiny things took her attention. What people wore. Motor cars. Letter boxes. Automatic garage doors. All the modern day things that people took for granted were like Disneyland to this first-time visitor.

"Trick-or-treat!" The chorus of young voices broke through the quagmire of new information in her brain. Rhea watched the tableau and noticed Dylan's enjoyment of the event as the kids scrambled to get their candy. The woman was a big kid at heart and she knew that Dylan would just shrug off the whole matter if Rhea ever brought it up.

The children started to wander off. "Hey! Get back here!" The little faces looked up expectantly at their adopted den mother. "What do you say?"

"Trick-or-treat," came the chorus.

"You've done that already. Geez, don't your mothers teach you nuthin'? This nice lady just gave you something. What do you say?"

"Fank you," Gabrielle's tiny voice was the first one to be heard, prompting the others to follow.

"That's better. Now let's go before she sics the dog on ya."

"By the way, I like the costume."

"Huh?" Dylan was about to say 'what costume' before realizing that she wasn't exactly dressed appropriately. Still, it was Halloween night and anything was allowed. "Oh, sure, thanks." She spread out her arms like she was herding chickens and shushed them down the pathway to the sidewalk.

A tiny hand tugged on her trouser leg. "I gotta go." Standing there looking up expectantly was Amarice, her tiny legs crossed.

"Go? Where?"

"She's gotta pee," Effie chimed in.

"Ah, errr..." Dylan started to panic.

Rhea took charge. "Come on, sweetie. Back to my house to use the bathroom."

"No! Not there!" The child was jumping up and down, increasing her urge to pee.

"She can come in here!" The woman they had just left called from her doorway.

"Oh, thank you so much. Off you go." Rhea was not risking entering any house at this point. Not knowing how this arrangement worked, she was staying outside until such time as the magic wore off. If it wore off. She was decidedly nervous about being out of the house. While it was a gift to be able to roam free anything could happen to them. She had just wished that this particular piece of magic had come with a set of rules so she would know what they could or couldn't do.

* * *

"About time you arrived. I was wondering what was taking you so long." Jacey heard the rustle as Priory approached with camera and jar of liquid in hand.

"Don't ask..." But it needed an explanation. She knew if Jacey had turned up with a glass jar with holes in the lid and filled with water, she would have to know. "Bova wanted to come along. Didn't you?" The jar erupted as the water bubbled gleefully.

"I don't believe this..." Jacey muttered under her breath. She looked back through the bushes at the group of mini- Amazons but they had moved on to the next house. "You know you could have just said 'no!'."

"You tell her that. She was crying and throwing a hissy-fit."

"One way to solve that..." The children moved out of sight. "Come on, let's go."

Before Priory had a chance to answer Jacey had stood up and snuck to the next tree. "Hey, it can't be any more stupid than sneaking around following two ghosts and a bunch of kids on Halloween."

"I heard that..." Jacey hissed. "Get over here!"

Priory crouched as she ran, precariously juggling the things in her hands. The sudden stop as the tree loomed large in her vision sent both camera and jar into the air. Jacey dove for the camera and caught it inches from the ground, while Priory tried to regain her balance to reach the jar. It hit the grass with a thud and both women held their breath.

"Bova?" Priory whispered tentatively. "Hey, honey, are you alright?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. Thanks for asking." The comment earned Jacey an aggravated frown from her partner, who was on her knees bent over the jar nestled in the blades of grass.

Priory poked at the glass. "Bova?" But there was no answer. "Are you alright?" Carefully she picked up the jar and examined it for cracks and leaks. "Speak to me." She gently shook the water. "Come on. No more funny business. You're scaring me here."

"Oh brother..." Jacey stuck her head around the tree trunk to find that the kids had moved out of sight. "Come on, we gotta go."

"Not until I know she's alright."

"Priory, you are talking to a jar of toilet water."

"She's more than that, and you know it!" The brunette was getting panicky now. There had still been no response. "You're just jealous."

"Jealous? Of what? Water?"

"Nah. You were always jealous of what Bova and I had." Hysteria tinged Priory's voice.

"Will you just listen to yourself?"

"I don't need to. I know what I'm saying." She had to do something, so Priory did the only thing her clouded judgment would let her do. She began CPR on the jar. She blew energetically in through the punctured holes in the lid twice before thumping the glass violently. When nothing happened, she did it again... and again.

"Just what do you think you are doing?"

"I'm giving her mouth-to-mouth..." Priory looked at Jacey who shook her head moments before pointing her finger skyward. "Errr...." It was one of their neighbors. "Oh, hi Mrs. Leggett!"

"Hello, Priory dear. And what, may I ask, are you doing?"

"We have some friends from out of town who are taking some kids..." "I'm just blowing... air... getting a drink..." Both tried to talk at once, fingers pointing and heads nodding in the confusion.

"Riiigghhht. Just don't let the police catch you doing that." Mrs. Leggett walked away shaking her head. It must be from living in **that** house.

* * *

"Xeeennnaaaaa!" The mournful wail stopped the hunting party in mid-step. Amarice wasn't exactly crying over spilt milk, but she was crying over spilt candy. The warrior walked back to the lagging child. "It broke, Xeenie." Wetness scudded down her cheeks as she looked at the candy on the ground.

"Hey kid, errr... Xeeennnaaa. You go look after the other kids. Rhea and me will help this one with her candy."

"Don't cry, Ammy." Piercing blue eyes looked deep into the watery hazel ones. "You can have my candy when it's over."

Dylan didn't understand. What was it with this kid? A gentle tug on her trouser leg drew her to the tiny blonde standing next to her.

"That's Xeenie. She does that." Gabby looked up into a dismayed face. Without another word, the child turned away and grabbed the extended hand of her buddy. Together they walked over to the rest of the kids.

"Weird..." Dylan looked at the basket and saw that the handle was broken.

"Honey, you're gonna have to carry the pumpkin now. The handle is busted." Rhea spoke softly to the hiccupping child. "Now, dry those tears."

* * *

"Hey! You! This is our side of the street." A burly eleven year-old muscled his way in front of the small group of friends. He was flanked by his two equally chunky friends.

"Who says?" Xena's defenses went up.

"I do. You want candy? Go over there." He pointed to the other side of the street and a vacant block.

"No."

"Did this girl just say no?" He looked side to side at his cohorts as if a mouse just squeaked at him.

"Xeenie..." Gabby tugged at the petaled dress.

"No!" The look on the brunette's face told the youngster that she was not going to back down. Xena turned to face her foe. "No. It's Halloween."

"Not tonight... or for you... it isn't." When the tall girl stepped towards him he backed away, drawing her away from the group. In the blink of an eye, the boy's two companions had circled around the child and each grabbed an arm, holding her steady while the bully punched her in the face. What nobody seemed to notice was a blinding flash.

"Hey! Get outta here you punks!" Dylan stepped quickly towards the fight.

"You a lezzie or sump'un?" He sneered at her, stopping her in her steps. "Come on, guys." As they sauntered away the ringleader's voice could be heard. "I think they understand now."

Rhea rushed up. "Oh, my. Are you alright, dear?"

But no answer came, only a brooding silence. There was no crying or wailing. Nothing. Gabby gently grabbed her playmate's hand and held it. Xena was hurting but she wasn't going to let anyone know it. But her little buddy knew that, content to lend her silent support and let the little warrior deal with it in her own way.

"What's a lezzie?" Ammy's high-pitched voice rang through the night air.

"Beats me..." Dylan murmured.

"A Lesbian." Eponin supplied. "'Cause you're dressed like a boy."

"So...? What do my clothes have to do with it?"

"He did not mean it as a nice thing." Solari was trying to hide behind Effie. "Can we go trick-or-treating now?"

Absently, Dylan herded the group together and steered them up the street while Rhea tended to Xena. "Honey? Do you want to go home?" She tilted up the child's head to see the reddening cheek. "Your mom should see to this."

"No!"

"But, honey..."

"Xena..." The little voice held a lot of determination and anger. "No. I gotta potec them. It's my job."

"We're here, honey. We can do that." Rhea couldn't fathom the depth of the child's protective nature.

"No!" Blazing blue eyes stared at her, ending the conversation promptly.

"Just make sure you let your mom know what happened, okay? I don't want her knocking down my door to kill me."

"No. No hurt."

"She won't hurt me?"

"She can't."

"She can't hurt me? How do you know?" What was the girl trying to say?

"Because I **know**." Xena said no more but her eyes passed the message moments before her eyes turned to Gabby.

"Oh. Why did you take us out tonight?" Rhea didn't understand it at all. The impossible was made possible by these two tiny children on a night full of miracles.

"Cause I could."

"But... but **how** did you know?"

The pint-sized raven-haired warrior just shrugged. She was one who lived life by her instincts and obviously her instincts told her what to do.

Rhea mimicked the little girl, shrugging her own shoulders. What was it about looking a gift horse in the mouth? She reached for the child's hand but the little girl refused. It must have been a warrior thing.

"Come on!" Xena called her posse together, starting off towards the next house on their route. No one questioned what had happened. Xena had been ambushed and she would bear her pain alone.

* * *

"Did you see that? Where does that little punk live?" Jacey was fuming.

"And you're gonna do what? Beat him into submission?" Priory held the jar closely. Bova was slowly coming around, gently bubbling at a slow simmer.

"He shouldn't get away with that!"

"Hey! You've got the picture to prove it. Relax!"

"Relax? That poor kid's gonna have a black eye!"

"And she'll wear it as a badge of honor. You weren't much of a tomboy, were you?"

"Sure, but then I didn't get beaten up often either."

"Beaten up? Jace, it was one punch."

"And a sucker punch at that!"

"What's got up your nose tonight?"

"You and that!" Jacey's finger pointed to the glass jar firmly tucked in the crook of her lover's arm.

"Come on then! Spit it out!"

"Not in front of..."

"I thought you didn't believe in all that stuff." Jacey clicked her tongue. "Alright." Priory put the jar on the ground. "Now what?"

"Over here..." Jacey grabbed the brunette's arm, pulling her forcefully away to the kerb. "What do you think you are doing?" she hissed. "This is not Disneyland."

"What do you care? After all, you said it was just water."

"And do you realize what an idiot you look carrying that thing around?"

"Why are you objecting now? It didn't worry you before. You're doing it to piss me off, aren't you?"

"Yeah I am. Talking to the toilet is one thing, but this Bova thing just keeps escalating. What's next, huh? You gonna take her to Niagara Falls or something?" Jacey gnawed at her lip. "Do I send out the wedding invitations now?"

"Oh, stop! You're just jealous."

"How can I be jealous of water for crying out loud!" But they both knew she was. Priory was showering affection on the quasi-demon and she didn't like it.

As the argument continued neither of them noticed the young punk swipe the jar. He tossed it between his two cohorts in playful recklessness.

The wicked chuckling finally drew Priory's attention. "Where did the jar go?" Her eyes narrowed at her partner.

"Why are you looking at me? I've been talking to you the whole time."

Priory's peripheral vision caught the three troublemakers a little way up the street or, more to the point, the jar sailing through the air. "NNnoooooo!!" She ran after them but they only teased her by staying just out of reach. "If you break that I'm gonna kill you!"

"Nah nah." The ringleader waved the jar in front of her face, tossing it aside as she lunged for it. "Come on. Let's go. I'm tired of this."

The glass hit with more than a dull thud this time. The tiny tinkling sound did not bode well.

"Oh God! Oh God!" Frantically she lifted the container and examined it. Her worst fears were realized when there was a tiny trickle of water escaping through a crack. "What do I do? What do I do?" Feverishly she looked around for help, not realizing that there wasn't any. The house was too far away and the kids had disappeared. Jacey was calmly walking up to her, or so she cattily told herself, unconcerned about her dilemma. Without thinking of the consequences she took the only avenue she thought was open to her. Unscrewing the lid she drank down the water.

"What the hell are you doing?" Jacey couldn't believe it. Priory was drinking down Bova, and it was toilet water to boot. Her face grimaced at the thought.

"The jar's broken. I'm saving my friend."

Jacey opened her mouth to say something but then closed it again. There were just no words to express what she was thinking right about now. The woman had completely lost it.

Priory waited for... something. She didn't know what to expect from her rash and impulsive act. Was Bova going to possess her, given the chance to occupy a new, more mobile, body? Would she know that the demon was there? Was she going to explode? Maybe drinking down the demon wasn't such a good idea after all. She just stood there, jar in hand, as she and Jacey eyeballed each other.

"So, now what?"

"I dunno." Her stomach growled loudly. "Sorry..." Priory wasn't sure whether that was Bova or the Mexican food they had for dinner.

"sokay." Jacey smiled benevolently. What could she say? Sometimes the damned woman was completely Looney Tunes but she loved her just the same. Now who was the idiot?

Bbrrrruuuummmmmmmmm

"What was that?"

"Oh God!" Priory's stomach was doing flip-flops, churning away towards a violent eruption.

"What? What?" Jacey started to hop from one foot to the other.

GGuurrrgllleeee vvrrooooooggggg gggllluurrrggg.....

"She's saying 'Get me the hell outta here!'" Priory's hands grabbed her stomach. "And I agree."

"It's probably all that stomach acid."

"Oh, don't go putting ideas in her head." It wasn't painful, not really, but the demon wasn't happy. She twisted and turned inside trying to find some comfort. An almighty belch escaped her pursed lips, echoing down the crowded street. Priory's hands slapped across her mouth in the hope of stopping any further verbal expression from her visitor inside.

"Ooohh, that was great!" Six cherub-faced kids stood in a group behind her. "Can you do this?" Xena let out a belch that rounded out to a howl.

"Nah, I can do better." Eponin let out a burp that sounded more like a fart.

"Ewww, Pee Pee," Amarice expressed what they all thought of that.

"Yeah, Pee Pee did a wee wee," Xena crowed triumphantly, sending the rest of the group into peels of laughter.

"Never mind, honey." Rhea came up next to the chubby girl and patted her on the shoulder. The sad look was nearly her undoing.

"Yeah, come on, Pony. Time's a wastin'." Solari had been surreptitiously glancing into Eponin's pumpkin, eyeing one or two candies she wished she had. Maybe some bartering was in order later on. The group skipped down to the next house, bravely knocking on the door.

"And what do you think you are doing?" Dylan finally caught up with the fact that their house-sitters were following them.

Jacey took a picture of the disgruntled Dylan before another word was spoken. "Errr... taking pictures?" She held up the camera tentatively to illustrate her point.

"You're following us, aren't you? Couldn't trust us with the kids, huh?" Dylan was hurt. She

thought they had gotten past the mistrust stage, but obviously not.

"No! No! We just..."

"... couldn't wait to get some photos of you gettin' into trouble, that's all. Casper and kids... heh, heh. Who would have thought?"

"You won't be able to re-visit this, Dylan. Wouldn't you like something to remember it by?"

"Ooooh, nice side-stepping....," Priory mumbled out the side of her mouth.

Rhea had stood to one side and watched the argument. It didn't surprise her that they were followed and she harbored no resentment for them doing so. After all, they had been dead for seventy years and this was a whole different ballgame to their day. She would have done the same thing.

GGgrrroowwwwwlllll pop pop pop.... errrrrrrrrrr.....

"What the hell was that??!!!?"

"Don't ask..." Priory grumbled, regretting drinking the water more and more with every moment.

"She drank Bova."

"She... drank.... our.... pesky.... demon??!?" Rhea tried hard, really hard, not to smirk but it was just too much. Her lips widened until white teeth could be seen, just before a laugh escaped her. "Oh Lord!"

"What? You razzing us again, aren't you Convent?" Dylan looked accusingly at the three of them. "I got your number now!"

"She just doesn't get it."

"You're tellin' me."

"What? Stop it!" The whine was nearly as annoying as Eponin's earlier exclamation. "It's a constipation, I tell ya, a constipation!"

"Huh?"

"She means conspiracy....," Jacey murmured.

"Conspiracy... constipation... it all means the same. Crap! Unadulterated crap."

"Unadulterated..."

"I got that one, Jace." Priory's stomach protested. "But I think she's right about the crap. I gotta go..." Snatching the keys from Jacey's back pocket she walked briskly towards their home, breaking into a jog and then a run as she closed in on the front door.

"Looks like you're with us now, Jacey." Rhea smiled. "I could use some adult company."

"Hey, what about me?"

"Like I said, **adult** company."

* * *

"Come on," Xena rallied her little group. "Old man Kirby is good for M & Ms."

"Yeah..." Eponin' mouth salivated at the thought.

"An... an... Jawbreakers!" Solari offered.

"Yeah..."

"And Nerds!" Ephiny remembered last year's haul fondly.

"Yeah..."

"And Sweet Tarts!" Gabby chimed in.

"Yeah..."

"Well, what are we waiting for?" The six children ran screaming up the path to the familiar front door.

"Trick-or-treat!" they yelled as one.

The door squeaked open. "Oh, hi there girls." The elderly man smiled benevolently.

"Hi Mr. Kirby!" Xena bestowed one of her genuine smiles on the old man. "Trick-or-treat!"

"Is it? Oh dear, I forgot this year." His crestfallen face spread like measles amongst the tribe.

"Awwww....," they whined, mentally watching their candy sprout wings and fly away.

"Looks like I'm gonna have to take the 'trick' this year..."

They hadn't had the chance to 'trick' anyone yet, so this was a nice second prize. "kay. But you can't watch..." Xena warned him. He chuckled as the door closed softly. "Let's get busy." Ephiny had a small trickster's bag in the shape of a backpack. Xena extracted the cans of shaving

cream. "You guys have the windows," she ordered as she handed out the cans.

"Where are you going?" Eponin was afraid that Xena would have all the fun.

"I got the letterbox." Merrily she shoved the nozzle into the slot and pushed the button, listening to the whoosh of the cream as it came out the top. Xena studied her cohorts' handiwork on the windows. Ghosts and stars and a little sheep adorned every window on the front of the building. "Okay. Next house!" she yelled.

The door opened again and Mr. Kirby yelled for them to stop. "Don't you want your candy?"

"But... but..."

He bestowed a fatherly smile. "I was just giving you a chance to do some 'tricking' this year." He came out and inspected the windows. "Very nice. I especially like this one." He pointed at the swirly blob with four white sticks coming out of the bottom of it. "Who did that?" Gabby reluctantly raised her hand. "And it's a..." Well, he didn't know what it was. It could be anything from an animal to four lollypops stuck together.

"It's a lamb..." Gabby said shyly, ducking behind the bigger body of her buddy.

Mr. Kirby gazed at the shy child, her angelic face looking up at him hopefully. *Awww...* "Well, I think it deserves a prize. Now, let me see..." His mind wandered off along with his body, disappearing inside to find something to give the child. Moments later he returned, handing over a small wooden lamb. The kids gathered around Gabby, straining to see what it was.

"Baaaa.... Baaaa...."

"How did you do that, Gabby?" "Hey, get out of the way!" "I can't see!" "Can I hold it?" Suddenly the small blonde was everyone's friend, all clamoring to hold her prize. Xena stood behind her buddy ready to push anyone out of the way who got too enthusiastic. The pale blue jewels that were her eyes tracked up to the old man's face, glittering with gratitude and respect.

"Where did you get it?" Pony asked, hoping the old man's generosity had not run out just quite yet.

"Why, I made it," he said proudly. "Do you like it?"

"It's great!"

"Yeah... yahoooo!" Amarice cried, caught up in the excitement.

Mr. Kirby could see he had backed himself into a corner by handing over the lamb. Now he had to make five more. Not lambs. No, that was the little blonde's prize. Maybe a dog or a lion. Yeah, a lion for Xena. He had never seen such a wild child, tempered only by Gabby's steady friendship and love. They were certainly an interesting couple of girls, one balancing the other so

they were complete. The best of buddies that promised to last a lifetime.

"It's the only one I have..."

"Awwwww..." The communal whine drew out a smile.

"...for now." He chuckled as the anguish turned to joy one by one, starting with Xena and ending with Eponin. "In the meantime, there is a bowl of candy just inside the door. Help yourselves." He always got a kick out of Halloween.

"Yeah..."

The bigger kids swarmed around the bowl like bees to honey, hands grabbing their favorite candy in a frenzy of sugar lust.

"Hey! Ammy and Gabby first!" Xena glared at each and every one, telling them in no uncertain terms the rules of this particular game. Eponin whimpered as her favorites disappeared into the pumpkin bags.

"Ammy, that's enough." The small child was shoveling the candy into her pumpkin at an amazing speed, not knowing when enough was enough. As usual, Gabby took too little and Xena grabbed another handful and placed it in her buddy's bag. "Okay." Xena stood back as the frenzy continued, finally calling a halt to the rampant greed before the bowl was empty. It wasn't until she appealed to them to put some back that the excitement abated.

"Thanks, Mr. Kirby."

"Yeah..."

"We can count on you."

"Yeah..."

"See ya next year!"

"Yeah... thanks." Eponin finally found another word in her vocabulary.

"Fank you," Gabby mumbled.

With effort, he lowered himself to one knee to be eye to eye with the young child. "You are most welcome, little one." His hand patted her head in affection.

"Come on. We got more houses!" Xena led her little rag-tag band down the path to the sidewalk, eager hands running through the booty in their pumpkin bags. As they reached the front fence they turned around as one and waved. He lifted his hand before disappearing back into the house.

* * *

"Baaa... baaa..." Every few seconds the child pulled the little tail, making the toy bleat.

"If she doesn't stop that bleating noise I'm gonna bleating rip its bleating head off!" Dylan's patience was at an end. For the last five minutes it was 'baaa...' this and 'baaa...' that. Wasn't the kid tired of playing with it yet?

"Now, now..." Rhea patted her partner's arm in comfort. "I'm sure you did the same thing when you were young."

"I was **never** young, Rhea. I was born old."

"Of course. You were beating nickels and dimes out of kids when you were three."

"How did ya know?" Dylan tried to look surprised but mischief touched her lips. "Sorry, I'm not very tolerant tonight."

Tolerant? Dylan knew the word tolerant? Rhea's face presented an outward calm. Sometimes, just sometimes, Dylan could surprise her... just not very often. "I know, Dylan. You're just not the 'mothering' type."

"I'm not even the 'fathering' type." Her attention was drawn downwards with the tug of her pants leg.

"This is for you..." Gabby held up a brightly colored jawbreaker in her sweaty hand, the color already smearing all over her palm.

"Who?" Dylan looked around.

"You, miss."

"Miss? I ain't no miss. Call me Dylan."

"Dylan," Xena replied.

"Yeah. Just Dylan, like chair."

"Chair?"

Jacey chuckled. "I think she means 'Cher', honey."

"Yeah, like I said... chair."

"Who's Cher?" Amarice piped in.

"Sort of the Barney of my generation except she's not purple." "Barney? Where?"

"He's not here, honey."

"I want Barney."

"I can't... oh never mind." What were these parents teaching their kids these days? No Cher? Suddenly she felt very old. Not knowing who Cher was was like... like... not knowing who the President of the United States was. No, that was a bad example. She wanted to forget him all the time. Well, whoever it was she was trying to compare Cher to... it was unconstitutional.

"Gabby, not that one..." Xena plucked the candy out of her playmate's sticky palm. She knew Dylan would never get through it in one night so she substituted a Three Musketeers in its place. Besides, it was her favorite and she was not going to waste it on a ghost. After last year, the little warrior had vowed to slow down and savor her horde, never again to suffer the indignity of a sugar hangover from Halloween. And she would make damned sure that Gabby didn't either. What a waste that was. One moment of insanity scoffing down their booty ended up with two days of throwing up. No, she had learned her lesson even if her fellow Amazons didn't. She was looking forward to facing them the next day as they moaned and groaned about their aching stomachs.

Dylan held the offending candy between her thumb and forefinger. "What do I do with this?"

"You eat it of course, silly!" Xena giggled at the look of distaste on the ghost's face. She looked just like that with the smell of dog poo.

Dylan shrugged. "If you say so..." The packet went into her mouth and she bit down. "Ewww..."

The kids laughed at her expense. "You gotta take the paper off first!" Eponin squealed glad to see someone else as stupid as she was.

"Paper?" Dylan examined the wrapper. "Don't look like no paper I've seen."

"It's plastic." Jacey snatched away the chocolate bar and ripped it open. "See?" She handed it back to the inquisitive woman.

Dylan sniffed it, the aroma of chocolate tantalizing her nostrils for the first time in seventy years. "Mmmmm..." The bar disappeared into her mouth and she bit down. "Oooohhh..."

"What? What?" Rhea watched on anxiously.

"That is so... so... mmmm..." Dylan took another bite, allowing the chocolate and fudge to squish around in her mouth, painting her taste buds in hedonistic delight.

Rhea looked hopefully at her partner, who seemed to be pointedly ignoring her. "Hey! What about me?"

Quickly Dylan popped the last piece in before Rhea could complain any more. "Sorry. No more." As she grinned the chocolate marked her visible teeth.

"That's not very nice..." Jacey was mad. *Selfish bitch...* her mind muttered.

"Here." Xena was feeling in a particularly generous mood and offered one of her own Three Musketeers to the smaller woman.

"Thank you so much, sweetie... err, Xena." Thunderclouds crossed her brow as she glared at Dylan. "Unlike some people, you are a perfect lady." Without even trying, Rhea handed over the bar for Jacey to open.

"Lady? Xena?" Ephiny had snuck out a Treasures from her pumpkin since everyone seemed to be eating candy. "Uh uh," she said with finality.

"Well, she certainly is generous."

"Gend-er-ous?" Amarice squealed in Rhea's ear.

"Yeah, honey. She does nice things by giving stuff to people. Like this bar she gave to me."

"Just don't tell boys and stuff, okay?" Xena whispered.

"Okay..." Rhea whispered back.

* * *

"Baaa.... Baaaa....."

"Isn't the kid sick of it yet? I sure am." That lamb was about two seconds away from being a roast dinner. "Come on... errr, Ammy. Stop dragging your feet!" The young child was tired and sleepy and way past her bedtime.

"Maybe we should be looking for their homes. I think she's had enough."

"My feet hurt. I never thought I'd ever say that again."

"Yeah. Tonight's been pretty special."

"Maybe if we can ditch the kids, we can play patty cake for real." Dylan waggled her eyebrows in invitation.

To make love to Dylan in Dylan's body? How could she miss that? She had been too busy wrapped up in the kids' fun that she forgot her own. Still, Rhea couldn't make it too easy for her partner. "Welllll... I don't know. All this excitement has worn me out."

"You're kidding... right?" she asked tentatively. Their one opportunity and Rhea was tired? She just knew she should have ditched the kids earlier.

Rhea and Jacey walked away hand-in-hand with Amarice in between them, turning left into a small cul-de-sac.

"Hey!" Dylan called after her partner. "That's not a definite no, is it?" She sure hoped not. Rhea's silence was ominous. "Awww, come on Rhee. Stop foolin' around. I got some hope tonight, don't I?"

"We'll see..." Rhea decided to keep her partner dangling for just a little while longer. If the woman had been thinking she would realize that Rhea wouldn't waste the opportunity either. Still, a little ego stroking from one so desperate for her company didn't go astray.

"What...?" Twenty yards up the street were the little band of Amazons once again being confronted by the bullies from earlier in the night.

"Why those..." Jacey was not amused. She broke into a run to reach the group before violence broke out. Camera at the ready, she pulled up quickly and began snapping the confrontation.

* * *

"You know, I don't think these kids got the message." The bully's threats grated on the little warrior's nerves.

"This is our street. Get lost!" Eponin tried her own brand of bluster, valiantly taunting them from behind their leader.

"I think this one needs another lesson." He backed up to draw the raven-haired girl away from the little group while his two sidekicks circled around her like hungry wolves.

"We should stop this..." Jacey interceded.

"No... it's her fight. Let her be." Dylan understood what drove the little girl. She had lost face in the previous encounter and she needed to get it back; for her, for the tribe and especially for Gabby. She needed to prove her worth in the little blonde's eyes. Dylan knew that drive perfectly well, just as she needed to prove her worth to Rhea.

"Uh uh..." The deep voice stopped the boys in their tracks. "Don't even think about it." Dylan had removed her hat and coat and was rolling the sleeves up on her crisp white shirt.

The two boys just stood there... staring.

"What?"

"You could poke an eye out with those things." Jacey could understand the raging hormones flowing through the impressionable lads. Dylan's breasts were... impressive.

"What things? Make sense will ya?"

"Look down..." muttered Rhea.

"What?"

"Your breasts, honey."

"What about my breasts? You got breasts, Jacey's got breasts. So what?"

"Well, there's breasts and then there's **breasts**. You've got quite a pair there, Lani."

"Oh. Never noticed them before."

"Yes you have, you liar." The smaller ghost's smile drew a wicked grin from Dylan.

"Yeah... I have. They look like they've never seen them before."

Rhea could imagine the image the boys were getting right now. The braces keeping Dylan's trousers up had been pushed aside by her ample chest measurement. Oh yeah, those kids were getting an eyeful alright, so much so that Jacey turned her camera on Dylan and began clicking, the flash blinding them every few seconds.

"Stop that will ya? I ain't no movie star."

"That's a matter of opinion. I bet you'd be the centerfold pinup in Specter Monthly. Hell, I'd even buy a copy for that."

"Meanwhile, little Xeennaaa there is getting the crap beaten out of her."

"She is? Shit! Where?" Jacey turned to the uneasy standoff. "She is not!"

"She could be. Just... just... worry about them."

"Maybe you should put your coat back on." Rhea had decided that Dylan's display had gone on long enough.

"You know I can't fight with it on."

"And you're making a scene with it off."

"I could always take off my shirt as well..."

"It wouldn't worry me," Rhea replied impishly.

"Sure it would. But that's for later..."

* * *

"So, what's this thing then?" The bully grabbed the little lamb out of Gabby's fingers.

"GIVE IT BACK!!" Xena's temper rose at the lack of disrespect he had for them. Of course, snatching the toy out of her buddy's hands launched her protective streak into the stratosphere.

"Make me!" The boy hadn't realized that his two accomplices were no longer assisting him. His bravado was fueled by what he thought was his superior manpower.

Xena charged at him, shoving her shoulder into his midsection and sending him crashing onto the grass verge. Before he could recover she was on top of him, tiny fists raining down on his body. He could do little else but raise his arms to defend himself. The little warrior was everywhere, punching and kicking any available piece of body she could find. "You get out of here you... you... punk!" she screamed into his ear, pleased to see his face scrunch up in pain. Flashes of white broke the night as the fight continued, the little seven year-old besting the much bigger eleven year-old.

The bully managed to get a knee up between them and flung off the energetic ball of muscle on top of him. It was painful. For such a young kid she sure packed a wallop, not that he was going to admit that any time soon. He ached. From head to foot he was one big bruise.

A war cry split the air. "Ay yi yi yi yi!" He searched around frantically for the source but he couldn't see his adversary. Where had she gone?

"Watch out!" One of the other boys tried to warn him but he couldn't see the danger. A moment later she somersaulted over his head and came crashing down on top of him.

"Oooohh. That's gonna leave a mark..." Dylan couldn't believe it. The little warrior came down on top of him with both feet and with great force. Or more to the point, with both feet and with great force... on his groin.

"I think puberty just got pushed back a few years." Jacey kept snapping the camera, getting every single agonizing moment of it.

"I didn't know a boy could scream like that." Rhea just felt plain sorry for the boy.

Xena calmly walked over to the fallen lamb and picked it up, retuning it to her hero-worshipping buddy. Nothing was said. There was no need to. It all passed between them silently. It was the most intimate of moments, especially for little kids, but it was who they were. They were more than friends, bound not by blood but a higher calling.

"You're gonna pay for that!" But the bully was less than enthusiastic about starting another fight. He could barely stand up, let alone defend himself. His voice modulated between falsetto and bass.

Xena held her gaze for a moment longer before turning to face her enemy. "Go away and don't come back." There was no shouting or demonstrative moves...nothing. The little warrior said it calmly right in his face. She had drawn the line in the sand and he was **not** going to cross it, no matter what ideas he had to the contrary.

The boy looked down at the smaller girl and knew he had lost. "Let's go. It's boring here." The girls snickered as his voice continued to crack. Xena had left her mark on him.

"Yeah! Go away!" Amarice chimed in, her tiny voice breaking the tense standoff.

As they walked away, Xena led her group in a victory call, crowing to the night sky.

"I think it's time to call it a night." Rhea suggested.

The rooster call died down and turned into a plaintive 'awwwww'.

Jacey looked at her watch. "She's right. It's ten o'clock and this little one is very tired." She glanced into the pumpkin bags and saw candy aplenty. "It looks like you've got more than enough candy to last you a week."

"A week? Nah." Eponin was going to make sure it didn't last the night.

"Where do you live?"

"We're here," Xena replied.

"This street?"

"Uh huh."

Dylan felt a tug on her trouser leg. "Fank you," Gabby looked up, no longer terrified of who they were.

The tall woman hunkered down to face the midget. "You're welcome... and *thank you*."

"kay." The little blonde skipped off towards her house, standing at the front gate to wait for her buddy. The other kids finally gave in, calling and waving before wandering off and disappearing into houses up the street. Little Amarice moved closer and gave Dylan a peck on the cheek before giggling and running into the arms of her mother.

Finally, the little warrior took Amarice's place in front of Dylan. "It was fun." The girl's face lit up with joy, the pale purple bruise crinkling up with the grin.

"Yeah, it certainly was," murmured Dylan. "I bet the best part was clobbering that kid, huh?"

"Yeeaaahhh," she breathed. Hearing his voice crack after she jumped on him was the best present of all. No, she took that back. It was Gabby's look that made it all worthwhile. Yeah, she lived for that look of adoration that shone in those pale green eyes.

"Look, I ain't good with 'thank you's but you don't know what you did for us tonight."

"Yeah, I do."

"No you don't. You have given us something that we never thought we could have, you know?"

"Yep. You got to have some fun. Like us."

"Yeah, I did kid." Dylan's large hand came up to touch the raven-colored hair in affection.

"Can I come over and visit?"

"Sure." Jacey interceded. "Miss McAllister and I work during the week, and I'm sure you've got schoolwork then. But the weekends are okay." She smiled. "I'm sure Dylan could use a playmate or two." She suspected that wherever Xena went Gabby did too.

"Can I have the pictures you took?"

"Sure thing. I think I got some nice ones too."

"And the one from before."

"Which one is that?" Xena didn't answer but pointed to her eye. "Oh..." How did she know about that one? "Sure. No problem."

"Bye." The little warrior didn't skip, because warriors didn't do such stuff, but walked up to join Gabby waiting patiently at the gate. She escorted her to the front door and waited until Gabby's mother opened the door.

Dylan couldn't hear what was said but she knew Gabby's mom was asking about the black eye, the woman glancing up suspiciously to where they were standing. "Are we in trouble?"

"Nah. I'm sure Xena will explain." That old head on young shoulders was sensible beyond her meager years. "Well...", Jacey feigned tiredness. "I'm going back home. You two can check out the neighborhood if you want. I'll leave the back door unlocked. Don't be late kids."

Rhea knew what Jacey was doing and was grateful for some time alone with Dylan. Now that the excitement had died down, they could spend some time together to do ordinary things. "Come on, let's go for a walk."

"A walk? Now?" Dylan knew the seconds were ticking by, eating up precious time for her to ravage her lover. "Couldn't we... you know." Her head eagerly nodded in the direction that Jacey was walking.

"If we go back in that house..."

"Where else can we go?"

"Nowhere really, but I just want to spend some time with you doing normal things like walking, breathing in air, looking at our neighborhood." Rhea wished she had more time to investigate modern day living but she knew this wouldn't last. It was not meant to be.

Dylan resigned herself that maybe holding hands was all she was going to get out of the night. She was not a happy camper. She supposed she could have forced the issue but that wasn't who she was. Something as beautiful as making love was always a mutual choice between them.

"Okay, let's go." Dylan reached out and watched as Rhea placed her hand in her palm. Slowly, she closed her fingers to grasp the warmth of her partner. She closed her eyes and allowed the sensation to be experienced to its fullest in touch. She had not held Rhea's hand in seventy years and she knew she would never feel it again. But besides that certainty here they were, absorbing the touch as a miracle. Dylan could feel the time ticking by with every beat of her heart, and it was running out for them.

Rhea sensed the agitation through their joined hands. Her partner had said nothing, content to walk along side her as they wandered the streets. Skillfully, she steered them back towards home, feeling the urgency in her bones. It took moments for Dylan to realize what she was doing.

"Come on, let's go home."

Even though it meant they would lose their mortality 43 Victory Avenue was their home. "Sure," Dylan mumbled. There would be no doubt when the time came to take up their former mantle. She could feel it within her.

Older kids still roamed the streets, trying to take possession of the dregs of Halloween candy from houses still willing to hand it out. Their own home stood in front of them, gently calling.

"How much time have we got?"

"I dunno. Midnight maybe."

"How do you know?"

"Midnight ends Halloween, so I suppose that's it." Deep indigo pools looked at her lover. "We'll know."

They walked silently around to the back door, vainly prolonging the inevitable. Sitting on the

back porch was a tray with a bottle of champagne, two glasses and strawberries dipped in chocolate. A squat candle burned brightly, enough to illuminate the hand-written message resting against the bottle. "Happy Anniversary!"

"Awww...." Dylan moaned. She had to say something to stop her crying. However, Rhea had no qualms about spilling tears, moisture dotting her cheeks with emotion.

"Yeah," she gasped, barely able to breathe out the word. "So sweet..." In the dimness also lay a blanket and pillow, seductively hinting as to what use Jacey had left it for. *At least be comfortable...* it whispered.

"So now what?" Dylan was just about pleading to be put out of her misery.

Rhea reached down and plucked a moist strawberry from its nest, slowly painting her lover's lips with the chocolate. "We enjoy ourselves."

"C'mere." Dylan closed the gap between them, dragging the warm body so close to her into her embrace. "Let's not waste time then." Her lips descended to the willing ones below her, sliding the chocolate over the moist skin. Her tongue followed the same path, licking away the hedonistic food. "Mmmmm... I always knew you tasted nice."

"I could say the same thing." Rhea's eyes glistened in the low light from the kitchen. "I wonder how much time we have." Instinctively her eyes followed her mind to the kitchen clock on the wall.

"Don't think about it..."

"Well, we don't have to guess."

"Huh?" Dylan pulled back. "Whaddya talking about?"

"Look..." Rhea's head nodded towards the kitchen. Sitting in the window facing the backyard was the clock, the large face easily read from where they were standing. "Seems Jacey thought of everything."

Dylan narrowed her eyes to get the clock in focus. "Well, time's a wastin'." She grabbed the bottle of champagne and popped the cork, not even bothering to watch it fly away. It was dark. What was the point? Hastily she poured two glasses, handing one to her partner as she sipped her own.

"Hey!"

"Sorry, just makin' sure it hadn't gone off."

"Yeah, yeah." Rhea didn't believe one word. "Happy anniversary, Lani."

"It's not **the** anniversary, Rhee."

"I know that, but it's **our** anniversary. All of us. One year ago since we were invaded by two of the loveliest people in the world."

"That's a bit strong, don't you think? I mean Jacey's okay but Convent..." The death stare convinced her to drop it. "Okay, okay. To the two loveliest people in the world..." She just couldn't say the word, content to mumble over it in the toast. "...but, more importantly, to us. To tonight. To life."

"That's worth celebrating, isn't it?"

"Sure is. Especially as the night will not be over for another..." she squinted again, "...hour and a bit."

"How many times have I told you to wear your glasses?"

"Glasses? We're dead! What do I need glasses for?"

"Well, right now to read the clock!"

"In an hour and a bit I won't need them, will I!" Dylan was getting defensive. It was all so stupid, wasting time on an argument that would be useless in an hour. Just as her mouth closed a strawberry was shoved inside. She bit down, savoring the sweetness of the fruit. She could eat... with her own mouth. Dylan stopped to enjoy the moment.

"Yeah, that's what I felt." Rhea watched the myriad of emotions crossing her lover's face. Why were they arguing? There was too much to enjoy in such a short time. She plucked out another strawberry, this time putting it in her own mouth. Before she could take a bite, lips swept down from above and a tongue plundered her mouth. So wrapped up in the sensation she didn't notice that the fruit was missing. "Hey!" Her eyes finally opened and glared at Dylan.

"Just reminding you about my glib tongue," Dylan replied arrogantly as she made a show of eating the strawberry that she had skillfully slipped from Rhea's mouth. She was so damned smug about it that Rhea wanted to slap that look off her face.

"Well, if I recall, I said I was too tired." Rhea returned the arrogant smile with one of her own, pleased to see the grin drop from the brunette's face. Her finger poked her lover in the chest. "Don't get so cocky, my friend." She lifted her glass. "Now... happy anniversary, Lani." Rhea clinked her glass against Dylan's, tasting the bubbly experimentally. It had been way too long since she had drunk anything. The bubbles sat on her tongue and tickled, drawing a giggle from her. "Tickles."

Dylan didn't bother with a sip, instead opting for a full mouthful of the liquid. "Yeah." She didn't give the champagne time to dance on her tongue as it slid swiftly down her throat to her stomach. "Do ghosts get drunk?"

"In this form, I suppose we can." The bottle was already hovering over Dylan's empty glass. "But I'm not making love to a drunk."

Dylan's eyes shot up. "Love? Did you say... I... I...love?" The bottle hit the tray with a thud, closely followed by the glass. Nervously, Dylan rubbed her palms on her pants. "When?" She wanted her Halloween candy... now.

"What's your hurry?"

"Don't do this to me, Rhee." The clock was ticking and they both knew it.

"Just one more strawberry." Before she had finished the last word the fruit was being shoved at her face. "In a hurry?"

Dylan's eyes flitted to the clock, which blurrily said eleven o'clock. "You could say that."

"Well...," Rhea surveyed the backyard and the neighboring houses. "There." She pointed to a spot under the large elm tree sitting near the back fence. "That should be out of sight of anyone."

"Hell, I don't care if everyone can see..." *as long as I get some...*, her mind completed. The look on Rhea's face made her wonder if she had said that last part aloud. *Too late now.* "...but for you, we can hide away." Despite hanging around with gangsters in her past life, Dylan knew Rhea was an innocent in some matters. But that was part of her charm in the brunette's eyes.

She grabbed the blanket and pillow, extending her vacant hand behind her to accept Rhea's fingers. Just as Xena had earlier in the evening, Dylan had no doubt that lover would be there for her, and she was not disappointed. The warmth found her an instant before skin touched skin. It was more than a physical connection that bound them together. Their spirits were intertwined for eternity.

The night air was crisp and clear, the moon casting an eerie glow on the backyard. Dylan wished for more light but her life was never perfect. Sometimes close, like tonight, but never absolutely perfect. She threw out the blanket on the ground near the tree, checking the line of sight of neighbors and deciding it was safe enough. Again she nervously rubbed her palms down her trousers. "So..."

Why did this feel like their first time, one anxiously waiting on the other to make the first move? "So..."

"C'mere..." Dylan murmured, throwing her fedora off absently, not even noticing where it went. Next the coat and tie lay abandoned on the ground. Rhea watched like a voyeur as each piece of clothing disappeared. The braces noisily snapped back into shape as the tension was released.

"Is this a one woman show or are you joining me?" Her lover stood there like a statue. What was going through her head? Enjoyment? Lust? Fear?

"Oh, yeah." Rhea reached for the buckle on her belt, slipping the metal tongue through the hole. She knelt down and unbuckled her shoes, slipping them off clumsily. "Been way too long..."

"I know what you mean." Seventy years was an eternity. "But it's like riding a bike I suppose."

"Huh?"

"You never forget."

"No...", Rhea whispered, "...you never forget." How could she forget what had survived two lifetimes between them? It kept them bound to this house. It kept them together. It kept them sane.

Finally free of apparel they reached for each other. A shudder ran through the smaller woman. "What's wrong?" Had Dylan done something wrong already?

"Just cold."

"Heh... I've forgotten what that feels like."

Rhea grabbed the large hand and placed over her goosebumps. "That's what it feels like." The heat between them sprang into life emboldening Rhea. "Got a solution?"

"Solution?"

The blonde inwardly sighed. "You gonna do something about it?"

"Ooohhh.... sure." Dylan rakishly smiled, wondering if Rhea could see it in the semi-darkness. "Any requests?"

"If I've got to tell you..."

"I know what goes where, darlin'." The brunette's voice dripped with desire.

"Good, because show and tell will not work here, Lani." Rhea's hand wound around the tall woman's neck pulling her head down for a kiss. "That's better..." The kiss quickly escalated with an urgency both could feel.

Dylan's hands began to roam, sliding with a long-distant familiarity that had her aching for more. A gentle moan escaped her lips as her memory burst into life, filling her mind with images and sounds that had stirred her blood in another life. The moon touched the young woman's skin, painting her in a yellow glow.

She lay Rhea down on the blanket, standing back for a moment to gaze at the moon-kissed body. The blonde moved seductively, casting hills and valleys into deep shadow and hiding secrets that

had been forbidden for so long. "You coming or not?"

"I will be, darlin'" Dylan lowered herself over her lover. "Believe me, I will be..."

* * *

It was a frantic hour as both women tried to make as many memories as they could to last them for the years to come. It was not time for tenderness or whispered declarations, but for sweet desperation and fevered completion. Every second counted as the time slipped through grasping fingers. Exhaustion called to them but they refused to succumb to it as they made fresh memories to replace fading ones. They both explored skin, muscle and tissue, remembering every perfection, dip, scar and smell. It was a clamoring for as much knowledge as could be accumulated in the precious minutes left. But it was all slipping away. Midnight tolled like a death knell. No sound could be heard but their hearts pounded with each stroke of the silent call.

"Crap...." Dylan could only manage the expletive before her spirit moved. She looked back to see her body slowly fade away, returning to where it had been called up from. The dream had died.

* * *

The room was in near darkness, only illuminated by the waning moon through the far window. A solitary figure stood there, the wispy curtain pulled aside to allow the moonlight in. Brooding eyes roamed over the now deserted street, remnants of Halloween scattered all over the ground.

Sorry?

Dylan glanced over her shoulder at her lover seated in front of her never ending soaps.

Why? What did you do?

No. Are you sorry about tonight?

I'm sorry about it ending. That it ever happened? No, of course not. Why?

Because you haven't said a word since we returned.

Just thinking.

Rhea bit her tongue. The comment was so begging for a smart ass remark but it was not the time.

About what?

About tonight. About us... about you.

Sorry.

For what? They were good thoughts. I now have some new memories I thought I'd never have.

Oh. Rhea had worried that Dylan would curse the night ever happening and the gift so generously given being cruelly snatched away. But... but, it was foolish to seethe over what was taken.

They would be forever in little Xena's debt for giving them one last chance to live, to experience love... again.

THE END.

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