

Tales of the New Slayers

Aftershocks

By Jill Irving

With Hector Diaz, Bradley Lord, and Michael Robinson

Raine MacEnroe was running late. She'd slept poorly, much of the night spent reliving the evening's events. As she entered the dojo, she immediately noticed that Delia was not there, as was her wont. A moment later, she realized that the door to Delia's stall was wide open, and the stall appeared to have been emptied of all her belongings.

Only the morning before the stall had contained a huge portion of Delia's life, the part she needed to keep away from her mother. Now, everything had changed. The night before had been a series of revelations: Delia's Grandmother had cast a spell that made Raine and Wylie demon-magnets in order to protect Delia, Delia had been revealed to have demon-blood, Delia had cast spells, and Delia's grandmother had died in the battle to stop a big, bad demon from taking Raine, Wylie, Delia, and her mother as her minions. Raine wasn't sure where things stood now or if it was really any of her business. It wasn't surprising that Delia might not feel like working out this morning; but the stall standing empty was a bit disturbing.

Delia Hunter slept in, though calling it sleep might have been an exaggeration. By the time she finally dragged herself out of bed, the sun was high in the sky. She dressed for running and headed straight out the door. At the corner she contemplated her normal path, realized that she didn't want to run into anyone, and veered off away from her beaten path.

Her thoughts churned as she ran long and hard, beating her body into submission. When she returned to her home well over an hour later, her mother was standing in the entryway staring into space.

"Mom?"

"Oh, there you are. Maryann just called. She will be coming over to help make arrangements. I don't really know what I'm supposed to do."

Delia nodded unsurprised. "I'm going to shower; I will be down in a few minutes to help." She ran up the stairs without waiting for comment.

Amelia turned to watch after her daughter. "I'm sorry" she whispered.

Trim arrived at the Hunter household with his grandmother. He was anxious to see Delia after the events of the night past. Entering the house there seemed to be an invisible pall cast over everything. Amelia Hunter stood in the entryway helplessly wringing her hands.

"Delia should be right down. Oh...please come in." She stepped aside to allow them entrance.

As they walked in, Delia dashed down the stairs. Trim greeted her immediately. "Deal, are you okay?"

"I'm alive." She responded flippantly and headed into the library. "Thanks for your offer of assistance. Come on in here."

As the other's followed her into the room, Delia walked directly to the desk. She crouched down and lifted a throw rug. Underneath a small safe was revealed. She quickly dialed the code and opened it. When she pulled out a packet of documents, she looked up to find everyone staring at her.

"Grams told me about this shortly after we got here. She wanted to let me know that everything was all set." She separated a large envelope. "This is her Will. The house and all her assets, not that there are a lot, were left to mom. There's a life insurance policy, she made me the beneficiary, with Mom as the executor until I'm of age."

"I didn't realize" Amelia mused as she took the envelope from her daughter.

Delia pulled out a folded set of papers. "She made her final arrangements too." Unfolding them, she handed a couple handwritten pages to Maryann. "This is the ceremony she wanted."

Maryann scanned the writing. "It is not so a different from the ways of the Strega, I can do this."

"Thank you! We would appreciate your assistance." Delia offered. She pulled out another sheet of paper. "She wants to be cremated. She made all the arrangements with the undertaker here in town, looks like it is even paid for." She continued as she looked over the papers. "I guess I should call them...The officer I spoke to last night said the body should be released this afternoon."

"What else do we need to do?" Amelia asked looking around.

"Chairs, food and drink for after the ceremony?" Trim suggested.

Maryann responded, "I will bring meatballs. I make the bread."

"We're not expecting many people, though I suppose we need to put an obituary in the paper. I'll take care of that." Delia wrote down some notes for herself. "We shouldn't need too many chairs. I think we should be able to take out the folding chairs. I'll pick up some cookies and drinks. We can make up coffee."

"Anything else?" Amelia asked her daughter.

“I think that should be everything. I have a few errands to run, Mom. I’ll take care of everything.”

“Is this what you did...before...?” Amelia asked in a small voice.

Delia looked hard at her mother’s expression. “Some of it. Max handled most of it.” She looked away from her mother’s pain. Delia grabbed her car keys off the desk.

“Maryann, Trim, thanks for everything.” She rushed toward the door.

“Deal!” Trim called after her, but she did not stop.

A grease-covered hand picked up an old grimy phone on the third ring. “MacEnroe Motors.” A male voice announced.

“Um...can you please give Raine a message?” Delia asked.

“I think she’s around here...Raine?” She could hear the name yelled away from the receiver, “...I’m sure...”

“Can you just give her the message?”

“Yeah. I guess so.”

“Tell her that Delia won’t be around for practice...for awhile. Thanks.” <click>

Raine slid out from under a car just as Bobby stared at the phone in his hand. “Is that for me?”

“Um...well...she wanted me to give you a message.” Bobby explained.

“I didn’t take that long...”

“She seemed impatient.”

“Who was it?” Raine asked.

“Delia I think, she said she wouldn’t be around for practice awhile.”

“Oh...guess Delia didn’t want to talk to me.” Raine surmised wiping her hands on a rag.

As Trim entered Jacqueline’s house, the rest of the Scoobies sans Delia were gathered in the living room. Raine was leaning in the entranceway. Jacqueline perched on the edge of her desk chair. Kate paced back and forth in front of the coffee table. Wylie and Zoe were sprawled on the couch.

Zoe was speaking, “...never really thought anyone would die.”

“What’s goin’ on?” Trim demanded as he walked in.

Jacqueline responded, “We were discussing what happened last night. What Delia’s grandmother did was very irresponsible. She could have done a lot more than just get Raine or Wylie hurt.”

“Not to mention the fact that Delia is a demon.” Zoe added.

“She’s not really a demon...” Trim protested.

“Well, perhaps not. We don’t know all the details. Delia hasn’t really been very forthcoming with them.” Jacqueline continued.

“Delia’s had a lot of stuff going on lately. We don’t even know how much she knew.” Kate offered.

“Guys, I know you are all kinda upset with Delia's Grandmom, ‘specially Raine and Wylie, but we've got to remember that Deal isn't to blame for that. She needs us to stand by her. I know she is more torn up inside than she's letting on. Her Grandmom's service will be at 4 O'clock this Sunday, at Deal's house. Be there or you'll be toads.”

“That’s enough, Trim. Each of us may do as our conscience suggests, but I’m sure we all will be in attendance.”

“But Delia has some explaining to do.” Wylie affirmed.

Kate stated firmly, “I’ll be there. I learned a lot about her when we went to Maryland. This is hard for her; she’s going to need help.”

“I’ll do everything I can to help.” Zoe agreed.

Raine nodded her head, but remained silent.

Delia stood in her bedroom contemplating her appearance in the mirror. She wore dark slacks and a jacket with a regimental flare. On someone else, the cap she was wearing might look jaunty, on her it added to the uniform-flavor. Her eyes were dry, as they had been for two days, but her skin had a pasty caste to it.

When the knock at her door sounded, she blew out two green tapers which had been burning on her bureau and stepped out the door.

“You ready?” Amelia asked. Her eyes were red but dry as well.

“As much as anyone could expect, I guess.” Delia responded slipping into step with her mother and leading her down the stairs. “You?”

Amelia seemed to think about it for a few minutes. “It’s not as hard this time, not for me.”

Delia watched her mother’s face. “Why’s that?”

“I spent so much of my life wanting to get away from her and from this life. I don’t know. Maybe somehow it was all dead to me already.” She ducked her head. “My fault. This was probably all my fault.”

Delia squeezed her closer. “No. I don’t think so. You didn’t make the pact. We were both, no, we were all pawns.” She stopped for a moment at the foot of the stairs.

“Maybe if Grams had said something sooner...”

The doorbell rang as they stood wrapped in their own thoughts.

“It might not have mattered. It could have precipitated things instead of helping...” Delia shook her head and stepped over to the front door. “Ifs never solve anything anyway.” She opened the door.

Maryann and Trim were waiting outside. As soon as the door was ajar, Maryann was in motion. She walked straight through the house, her arms laden with fresh-smelling plants.

“First we a cleanse the air.” She announced pulling out fresh rosemary and sweeping it around through the rooms. “Trim, you a go outside and set a up the altar. You a listen. We perform the ritual out-a-side with the clean a air all around. You hear?”

“Yes, Grans.” Trim took some bags of plants with him outside into the yard. Delia followed to help him with setting up an altar. Folding chairs were already set in a sheltered location in the yard. It looked remarkably like a Druid’s Grove.

Maryann sent a penetrating look Amelia’s way after the teens had left the house. “The girl, she must a be trained. Too much power to no be controlled! You no like a the magick, I a know. For you, I will bind a your powers again. But for the girl, she must a learn a control.”

Amelia looked out towards the yard. “I know. I was hoping she’d never...I know it’s too late now.”

“Much a too late!” Maryann finished pulling out some more herbs to perform her spell.

The Scoobies gathered outside of Delia’s house. Wylie and Raine stood off to one side, uncomfortable in their black clothes of mourning.

“I feel like a fake.” Wylie complained. “I don’t feel like mourning the woman...”

Kate responded vehemently, “It’s like Trim said, we’re here for Delia. No matter what we feel about her grams, you know she’s got to be hurting.”

“Maybe we should take turns scheduling stuff with her so she won’t be alone afterwards.” Zoe suggested quietly.

“We’re here; let’s not push it.” Raine stated firmly. “Let’s go in, get it over with.”

Delia stood stoically beside her friend T.J., her mother was sitting to her left. A notice had been placed in the paper, but they weren’t expecting the turnout they’d gotten. Her grandmother had known many, but few actually called her friend. Only a few members of her quilting circle came. Delia suspected that they shared a bit more than patterns and recipes, but little was said of such things.

Maryann officiated the ritual. If anyone thought it odd, nothing was said. The air was redolent with the scents of spring, the scent of life. The aroma of the herbs that Maryann burned on the altar seemed to blend into the earthy fragrance in the air.

“From a the earth a we come and to a the earth we a go back.” Maryann recited. “All is a part of the grand a design. Such isa the cycle of a life.”

She spread fresh sage over the quilt on the altar. “Thisa woman, thisa white witch, she a was brave and a bold. She gave a herself over to the powers. She gave of herself completely as we a all must. She made a mistakes. As we all do. She learned, she a changed, and she made herself a better.”

She looked up and smiled at Delia then. “She taught others what she a learned. She a passed on the knowledge that a the earth gives us. Now she is in the a bosom of the earth.” She paused looking around the congregation. “We must a all learn from her a example. We must a learn to look past the mistakes of a the past. We must a learn to respect others. We must a give back to the earth. And it a harm none.”

Delia’s shoulders had pushed back to an almost painful erectness during the speech. Kate stepped up and took her left hand. Delia looked down at her friend for a moment, but made no comment and did not pull away. Kate cleared her throat and began to recite*:

“Have you ever seen a bluebird fall?
Whispered leaves
On trembled morn
Followed through in warbled tones
A brush to death
Among reborn
Have you ever seen a bluebird fall?
Fragile wings
Flight unlearned
Tumble down amongst the boughs
Endless plunge
Without return
Have you ever seen a bluebird fall?
Future beauty
At once disposed
Splintered against the ancient's skin
Eyes too new
Forever closed
Have you ever seen a bluebird fall?
.....I have.”

Maryann allowed silence to reign for a few moments when Kate had finished. “Bella” she said to the young woman. “Come a child. You must a speak now.” Maryann signaled for Amelia to come forth.

Amelia’s hands were clenched together in front of her. She was pale and shaky, but she stood and walked to the altar. She stood looking around seeing very few faces she knew well. Her own support system was nearly eradicated with both her husband and mother gone. She looked at Delia as she croaked out, “I don’t know what to say. I spent my whole life fighting all this” she waved her hands indicating the Wiccan ceremony, “Disbelieving in everything that my mother believed, even keeping my daughter away from these things. Yet somehow, now, in the end, they give me comfort. My mother was a strong, willful woman, a witch. I hope she finds peace in knowing that she saved us, her daughter and granddaughter. In the end, she won.”

Amelia sank down into the nearest available chair, as if her legs would no longer support her. Maryann motioned to Delia. “Come, now a you must speak.”

Delia disengaged her hand from Kate’s and marched forward; she slid her now empty hand into her jacket’s pocket and took firm hold of the token within. She cleared her throat and spoke in an emotion-laden voice. “Nine months ago, when I buried my father, my world ended. Much through the efforts of my grandmother, I had started to piece back a life; to find something new in myself. Now she is gone...” She stopped for a long

time, her jaw tight with the struggle to contain her thoughts. Finally, she spoke softly, “I wish her comfort and peace in that which is beyond. She has earned at least that.” With her last words, she simply walked away from the gathering; she stopped at the urn containing her grandmother’s ashes and touched it briefly. Then she was gone, enclosed in her house; retreated to the depths of her grandmother’s library.

“As the a child has said. ‘May Dolores Withers find a peace in the afterlife with her ancestors!’” She picked up the urn and handed it to Amelia. “Come a now. We must let her a go.” As Amelia opened the urn, Maryann gathered up the quilt she had covered in herbs. As the contents of both spilled, Amelia whispered “Vento” and a breeze swept up the ashes and herbs and took them off to the four corners. “So mote it be!” Maryann announced when the last had flown off.

The service broke up slowly. The Scoobies gathered together trying to decide whether to bother Delia or not. Amelia rushed in to the house to lay out food for the reception. A plethora of dishes had arrived from Dolores’s quilting group and Maryann arrived bearing much of her own cooking. As Amelia spread the dishes across the huge farmhouse table, guests started to troop in.

T.J. looked around the room and asked immediately, “Where is she?”

Amelia looked up at the strong young woman who seemed to make such an impression on her daughter. She could see a lot of Jack in her...in both of them. “Probably in the library...I didn’t want to disturb her.”

“Leave that to me.” T.J. strode into the hall towards the library.

“I’m not sure that’s a good idea.” Kate said as she watched the other girl exit the room.

The library door opened after a brisk knock

“I didn’t invite you to enter” Delia complained from the depths of the room. She sat at the desk with her journal before her, a pen in her hand.

“You would have.” T.J. assumed.

Delia closed her journal and shoved it into a drawer in the desk. She stopped to lock the drawer before she got up. “No, I don’t think I would have.”

“When have you ever denied me anything?” T.J. asked reasonably, sitting herself in a cozy chair.

Delia glared at her for a moment. “Don’t start with me.”

T.J. leaned back in the chair. “You can’t hide in here forever. You need to go out there and talk to these people. They are here for you!”

“I can’t!”

“You have to.”

“You don’t get it. You, they, came here today to comfort me. There’s not a bloody thing any of you can do to comfort me. Your sympathies just make me hurt more. All these people around me, friends, people who say they want to help me. But I feel more alone than ever.”

T.J. sighed loudly. “Deal, no one expects this to be easy for you. You don’t have to be Ms. Sunshine and Politeness. Hell, no one would believe that of you, let alone expect it. But they are here for you. They won’t leave until they feel like they’ve done something.” She stood up and walked to her friend. “So you need to go out there and let them do what they have to. Then you can sulk when they are gone.”

“Sulk?! Is that what you call it?!” Delia turned enraged. “In nine months I lost my father and my grandmother. I’m left with a woman who barely knows me and will never understand me. I’m sulking?! I’m pissed! My whole freaking world just fell apart again and no one out there can fix it, assuming they even want to.” She turned back to the mantel and slammed her fists on top of it. “I can’t even let them try. I let them help me and they’ll die too.”

“Oh man!” T.J. whispered, sliding her hands on Delia’s shoulders. Delia shook her off and moved across the room. “I so didn’t see that coming.” She crossed to the door. “You should still come out.”

“In a bit...maybe.” Delia suggested as she picked up a photo of her father.

“I’m out” T.J. announced walking up to Delia’s gathered friends.
“What does that mean precisely?” Jacqueline asked.

T.J. grinned for a second. “It could mean a lot of things, but in this case I just don’t know what else to do to help our girl. She’s about as tough as they come and this just made it worse.”

“Really? Hadn’t noticed!” Raine muttered.

“Is she gonna come out, or are we gonna hafta drag her out of there?” Trim asked.

“Don’t know. Maybe. She’s...there’s not much any of you can say that will help her right now.” T.J. offered. “Perhaps if you give her some time...”

Trim got in her face. “You don’t know everything that happened. We gotta talk to her soon.”

“Right now?” T.J. argued. “Right now, you’ve got to give her some room.”

A male voice accompanied a gentle knock on the door. “Delia? Can I come in for a second?” Darius McAllister asked.

A long pause ensued before a reluctant, “yea, I guess” came forth.

Darius glanced around the room, somehow it seemed to fit and contrast with the girl before him at the same time. “I just wanted to tell you how sorry I am.” The tall, confident girl who always looked like she could take on a dragon and win was gone. In her place, was a worn, bewildered little girl who’d just taken one blow more than she could handle. Letting his insight guide him, he started walking towards her. When he reached her side, he took her hand gently between both of his. “I know you don’t want to talk about it and all these words probably sound really hollow right now.” He stroked his hand across her palm. “But you can’t give up on caring, Delia. Right now, you want to shut down. That’s normal. It might even be healthy. But you can’t give up all together.”

Delia looked up at him, her face expressing her stunned confusion.

Dare gazed into her eyes, stroking his hand over her palm again. “Everyone doesn’t leave. Everyone doesn’t die! It just seems that way at this moment. It will get better. It has to, doesn’t it?”

Delia’s eyes started to water, but she held his gaze in silence.

“When you are ready, there are a lot of others who care. They’ll help you rebuild.” He lifted his hand and stroked it down her cheek wiping away a single tear that had slipped out unbidden. “People who will fight with you, who will fight for you, they’ll help you build a new life too.”

“Dare...” she whispered.

“Shh. You don’t have to say anything.” He kissed her gently on the forehead. “My life fell apart once too. My dad helped me rebuild. I know that if he were gone...I would be inconsolable...for awhile.”

“Why?” Delia rasped hardly understanding her own question.

“You pull at me. I don’t know why or how. But you tug at me whether you want to or not.” He patted her hand. “I’ve got to go home, my brother is alone and it will be dark soon. If you need to talk...”

“Thank you.” She spoke to his receding back.

As she heard the front door close, she squared her shoulders and marched into the living room where the Scoobies were hanging out. Trim balanced a loaded plate in one hand and a cup in the other. Jacqueline had taken a seat in the wing chair at the head of the coffee table. Wylie and Raine had made themselves comfortable on the couch.

All conversation ceased when she walked into the room. Many mouths opened as if to say something, but Delia held up her hand.

“Can we just take this one at a time and see how much I can stand?” She asked looking around the room. “First, I guess I owe you all an apology. Well, my Grams does, but she’s not able to give it.” She turned toward Raine and Wylie. “I know you two are probably both pissed, you deserve to be. Honestly, so am I. Since I found out about...her...she’s always been a power for good. I can only think she was desperate. It’s no excuse but maybe an explanation. I need you to understand that I had no idea, not what she was doing or why, not that this whole thing was going to go down...if I had...” She shrugged her shoulders. “Ifs don’t matter anyway. For what it’s worth, I’m sorry!”

“I’m sure you are sorry and didn’t mean for this to happen, but that doesn’t solve everything. There are things that must be discussed.” Jacqueline responded.

Delia pinned her with a look, “You think I don’t get that? Everything is different now. It can’t help but be.” She ran her fingers through her hair.

“Maybe we all need some time to adjust.” Kate suggested glancing at the tense faces of all of her friends.

Everyone remained still, looking at each other for a few moments before Delia turned back towards the exit.

“**B**efore a I go, young lady!” Maryann announced from the doorway. “You a come over here. You a listen! You a listen good.”

Delia crossed respectfully to Trim’s tiny grandmother. “Yes, ma’am”

“Your grandmother, her a spirit is at peace. Her a soul is released. You are a released too. All is good a now. But you must learn control. You must a continue the training. You must a come to my house twice a week a now. I will teach a you. I will teach a you and you will a learn!” She nodded her head as if all would naturally agree with her.

“You will come Tuesday with Trim and we will a see what you know.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Delia answered.

“You a sleep. You will a be easy. All will be good, you a see. I a tell you. You a see!”

“Thank you!” Delia responded, her shock in her tone and demeanor.

Dolores’s desk floated several feet above the floor of the library as Delia’s eyes opened wide. She stared at her grandmother.

“How could you have done this?” Delia asked the woman slouched over the desk. Her grandmother looked up from the books open across the desk. Several of the tomes looked familiar to Delia.

“You always said ‘do no harm’?” Delia continued though there was no apparent reaction from the woman at the desk.

Dolores flipped the page of the tome in front of her. The scene of the library behind her melted, suddenly it was huge, parchment pages in written in Latin. As the pages of that book changed, Delia thought she recognized something about the Slayer of Vampyres. The page behind her shifted again as Dolores turned to another book on the desk; the writing became English, the name ‘Solindra Withers’ appeared briefly.

Delia tried to move closer to her grandmother’s desk, but her steps made her no closer to the floating desk.

“Must protect them...two Slayers...” Dolores muttered, changing the pages again.

The book behind Dolores dissolved into mist, behind the mist she could see young Dolores arguing with a young Maryann. The words were silenced, but the anger and the set of their shoulders was very familiar.

“Grams, please...” Delia tried speaking again.

Dolores finally looked up. She smiled as she reached out a hand to her granddaughter. Delia finally noticed the nearly invisible line of energy extending from her grandmother to herself.

With one last glance at Dolores, she reached down into her boot and pulled out her K-Bar. With a slash of arm, the line of energy was broken and the whole room floated upwards into a brilliant white light.

Delia woke to an empty room, her face wet with her tears, but her heart a little lighter.

Delia knocked on the door of the Delvecchio's duplex the next day. When Martha answered, Delia got in her face very quickly.

"You have my stuff. I want it back." Her attitude said she wasn't taking no for an answer.

"Your mother..."

"...Has had a change of heart." Delia finished her sentence. "She told me you have it and I'm here to get it back."

"I'll have to talk to your mother."

"You can go ahead and call her while I'm getting my stuff." She pushed her way into the house. "Where is it...?"

"You can't just barge in here. I'm going to..."

"What? Call the police? Excellent! Be sure to tell them how you stole my stuff out the MacEnroe's barn in the first place."

When Delia finished finding a home for all her stuff, she pulled out a duffel bag. In the bag, she packed two of her father's swords, several sharpened stakes, holy water and a large cross. In the pockets of the combat fatigues she wore, she put in two small aerosol canisters of hairspray, a lighter, and yet another vial of holy water. She tucked her K-Bar down inside one boot and a stake in the other. Around her neck she wore a cross given to her for her thirteenth birthday.

Grabbing her pack she headed out into the early evening. The sun was just starting its descent as she entered the Farmingham Memorial cemetery.

Dare pulled his motorcycle over in front of the cemetery when he saw Delia. He pulled off his helmet and yelled out to her. "Delia!"

She stiffened slightly, but continued to travel into the depths of the cemetery. Dare started to dismount, but stopped midway as he glanced at the reddening caste of the sun. Checking his watch, he muttered "Damn" as he threw his helmet back on and rode away.

It was no surprise to anyone that Delia wasn't at school the next couple days. More surprising was that when she returned on Wednesday, she was sporting a variety of fresh wounds and bruises. She arrived promptly in homeroom and did little more than nod her head in Trim's direction.

During lunch, instead of joining the Scoobies in the cafeteria, she changed into her gym clothes and ran. Dare noticed her heading out and grabbed his gym gear. He waited until she finished her current lap before striding out to join her.

"Delia, how are you doing?"

"How do you suppose?" She asked continuing to run past him without slowing down.

He put on some speed to keep up with her. "Hey, I'm not as good at this as you."

"So don't try to keep up." Delia suggested speeding up more.

“I thought you don’t mind company running.”

Delia looked over her shoulder. “Today I do. I want to be alone.”

“Haven’t you had enough of that in the last few days?” Dare asked.

Delia stopped cold and swung around. “You think you know how I feel? You think you can decide what’s appropriate for me?” She spat out.

Dare stopped in front of her and faced her down. “I’m not trying to tell you how you should feel...it’s just this wasn’t where you were when I left on Sunday.” His brows rose in genuine perplexity.

“Golly gee. I guess you were wrong. That mustn’t happen often.” She blasted sarcastically. “Sorry I don’t have enough time for another therapy session. I need to get in my run before class. We’ll have to reschedule. How ‘bout never?”

Dare stood staring at her in shock as she twisted back and sprinted off again at an even faster pace. “What happened?” He whispered as he watched. Turning on his heel, he headed back into the building to find one of her friends.

“What do you want, Dare?” Wylie asked in a surprisingly surly voice.

Dare’s eyebrow rose. “I was curious about what was up with Deadly Delia.”

“How should I know?”

“I thought she was one of your friends.”

Wylie glanced around the hall where they were standing. “Look, stuff happened...stuff I can’t explain...because of Delia. We all just need some time to figure it all out.”

“Because of Delia? That doesn’t sound right...” Dare considered, “she’s one of the most straight-forward, good people I’ve ever met.”

“You don’t know everything.”

“So tell me!”

Wylie slammed past him, hip-checking him as she went. “It’s not my story to tell. Stay out of it Dare. Things will work out in time.”

Dare reached out and grabbed her arm. She glanced down at his hand and raised her brow as if to say ‘are you stupid?’ “Before Delia gets herself killed?”

Wylie shook off the hand that had not released her, “What are you talking about?”

“I saw her last night.”

“So?”

Dare leaned forward, lowering his voice. “I saw her near the cemetery; she had her pack and was bristling with weapons. Today she’s bruised and battered. What does that tell you?”

Wylie stared at him a moment while her mind worked it out. “She’s hunting” she whispered.

“She’s good, but she’s only human. How long can she survive against the things that go bump in the night alone?” Dare strode away without waiting for her answer.

Wylie caught Kate after school. “We need to have a long chat with Delia.”
“You’re over your anger issues?” Kate asked packing her books into a backpack.

Wylie looked at her for a moment. “I don’t know how I feel about everything that happened, but I know we have to stop Delia.”

“Stop Delia from what?” Kate asked.

“From getting herself killed...or worse, turned.”

Kate stopped in her tracks and gaped at Wylie. “What the heck are you talking about?”

Wylie huffed out a breath; then dragged Kate out of eavesdropping range. “Dare saw Delia alone in the cemetery last night with weapons. She was hunting.”

“I don’t get it. Why would she be hunting?” Kate asked disbelievingly.

“We’re looking for her so we can find out and stop her.”

“Wylie, I’m sure she’s in a lot of pain right now...”

Wylie grabbed Kate’s wrist and responded convincingly. “People in pain can do a lot of strange things.”

Kate nodded her head. She pulled out her phone and hit the speed dial. She was not surprised that she got no answer. “Let’s find her.”

Raine was on patrol alone. Wylie had bailed because 'she had something to take care of'. So much for protecting the world from evil! The cemetery had been quiet this evening, as it had been the night before. Raine decided to ride over to the tracks to see if anything was doing there. She left her bike near the road and headed towards the old train cars.

In the distance she could hear the sounds of battle. She sprang up onto the nearest car and peered out over the grounds. Far to her left she could see someone in dark clothes fighting against two vampires. From the distance, Raine would swear it was Delia held immobile by one vampire while another approached. She leapt off the car and raced towards the melee.

As she ran, praying she'd make it in time, she saw Delia throw her captor over her head and follow through with a stake to the heart. As Raine started to launch herself into the fight, Delia rolled and threw flames at the remaining vamp. It yelled out in anguish and poofed, landing Raine in its floating dust particles. Raine turned to Delia.

There were rips in her clothes and her eye was starting to blossom into a lovely shiner. As Delia gathered her bag and belongings, she was nearly limping and clearly in some pain.

"Patrolling on your own now?" Raine said.

Delia glared at her for a moment before throwing her bag over her uninjured shoulder and starting to shuffle away.

"DELIA!" Raine moved to get in her face. "You're going to get yourself killed if you keep this up." In the last few weeks Raine had gone from concern, to exasperation, and was rapidly reaching indifference with Delia's antics. Like Kiera told her, the best thing to give a hero with a death wish, is what they want.

Delia shifted to go around the Slayer. "Yeah, well it looks like I'm going to take a few of my kind with me when I go." She left her sometime friend staring after her as she staggered away.

Wylie grabbed Delia in the hallway at lunch time the next day. Delia tried to slip away, but Wylie had her arms held firmly behind her. A little bit of maneuvering had them heading into Jacqueline's classroom. Zoe stood at the door and closed it behind them.

"What the hell is this?" Delia demanded of the gathered Scoobies sitting in the room.

"This is an intervention." Kate stated standing to look her friend in the eyes. "We heard what you are doing."

Delia glared at Raine who was leaning on a counter near the window. "It's my life."

"It'll be your death." Zoe said softly from behind her.

Delia finally shook off Wylie, who stepped back placing herself in front of the door. Delia was breathing heavily from the effort. Her hands were gripped tightly together in fists.

"You shouldn't be out there alone. We're supposed to be a team." Trim filled the silence.

Delia shook her head once. "You all fight demons. Don't you get it? I am one."

Jacqueline was the first to recover. "I was not there, so perhaps I missed something. You don't appear to be a demon."

"It's in my blood. They all saw it. I had horns and everything." Delia yelled in frustration.

"Perhaps you should tell us what you know about the pact your grandmother made." Jacqueline tried to keep everyone calm.

"It wasn't my grandmother. It was the progenitor of my line. I don't even know her name. I only heard about it once and not in much detail. Her family was in danger, she made a pact with 'one of those who walked the earth before us' in order to have the power to save her family. Through her all the females of the line, an unbroken line of females, have had the ability to call the power. There was to be a price at some point. It would come many years after her, and I guess she wasn't worried about it." Delia's attention had drifted from the group to her hands during the course of the explanation.

"How long have you known?" Wylie asked.

“I heard a little while after we moved here, before I met all of you.” Delia looked up at Kate.

“Why didn’t you tell us you could cast cool spells like that?” Trim asked.

Delia looked over to him. “I didn’t believe in magic before I got here. Grams had just started to teach me. It was a slow process because it had to be kept hidden from Mom. Grams wanted to make sure I had control of my power before I started using it.”

“So you hid it from us.” Raine stated flatly.

Delia glanced up at her, she was motionless and in complete control of whatever emotions she had, very un-Raine-like. “It’s like anything new you learn. You practice it until it’s secure and you can safely use it, unless your life depends on it.”

“So you are a witch!” Zoe exclaimed from near the door.

“I thought so. Turns out I’m a demon.” Delia shook her head. “I didn’t realize the source of the power until Trim read about the demon in that book at Grams, until Mom and I were turned into card-carrying demons.”

“Ignorance is bliss.” Kate volunteered.

“I’ve not read this passage, but as far as I can tell you may have a little demon blood, but it wouldn’t be very strong after so many generations. I suspect you were changed by a spell cast by the Demoness or her henchman.” Jacqueline suggested. “I would be interested in reading up on her more. Perhaps you will loan me the tome?”

“Delia, even if you do have some demon blood, we know you are not evil.” Kate stepped up to her friend and placed her hands on her shoulders.

“Either way, hunting for vampires is certainly going to get you killed, because it appears that whatever this demon blood gives you, it doesn’t help your ability to heal.” Wylie tried to turn the topic back to original intent.

“I thought the blood made me evil. I wanted to prove I wasn’t.”

“That wasn’t it, was it?” Kate asked her eyes penetrating into Delia’s. “You told Raine that you would take some of your kind out with you. You wanted to destroy yourself because you were evil.”

Delia closed her eyes. “I didn’t want to kill myself. That’s quitting! But I didn’t want to hurt any of you...you are all good. I just...” she shook her head “guess I wasn’t really thinking straight. So much happened all at once and my emotions were so messed up...”

“We get that!” Kate took her friend’s hand. “But you can’t keep this up. We need you. You’re part of the team. An important part!”

Raine finally spoke up “Team? This is a team? The Yankees are a team, the Justice League is a team. We’re just trying to get through a high school that is literally hell. We’re also your friends and watching your back is becoming dangerous.”

Delia’s temper flared. “Okay. ENOUGH! You’ve been accusing me of this for a long time. Excluding my hunting for the last few nights, which put no one but me in danger, I am innocent of your accusations.”

Raine stood up. “You get in over your head more and more.”

"No, I don't! I've actually been getting hurt less and less. As for rushing in, I've never really done that...let's look at specifics." Delia moved over to the desk and leaned against it. "Let's see, there was Earphone incident when I ended up in the hospital. Let's see how'd that go? Trim found the poison, I ran out of the chess club room and radioed you for backup, said I'd meet you at the A/V room door. I didn't get there, because this crazy phantasm of my father beat the hell out of me before I ever got a swing in." She ticked off one finger. "I didn't endanger you and I didn't rush into battle. Guess that wasn't the time you were talking about.

"You did end up in the hospital." Raine crossed her arms and just cold-eyed stared at Delia.

"Not for the first time, probably not for the last. Let's see, then there was the hulk incidents. When it was Christian Oullete's dad, I saw you two getting knocked down and decided to go for the drapes to try to wrap him up. With Duncan's and Zoe's dads I grabbed the net from above and dropped it. No, no rushing in then."

"If it had not worked out, any single blow from them could have killed you."

"Maybe, maybe not! You don't really know what I can take because you treat me as you would a child. Where was I? While Matt was living at my place, I got slammed into the wall of my house, but I didn't rush in to fight it; I turned a corner trying to figure out what I saw. Later when you and I ran into big blue-eyes again, it was you who rushed in and got sucker-punched. I seem to recall knocking him down so you could get to your feet. So what are we talking about?" She finished challenging Raine with her look.

"What about the guys outside the Vault? Did you forget that?"

"No. I admit to having misjudged that. But it wasn't a lack of thought; it was a misunderstanding of the situation. When I went in, it was verbal only and only the leader was involved. It just shifted gears too fast. Normally I could handle a few guys like that; one of them got lucky and put me in a sleeper hold. End of story!"

Raine raised her hands in frustration. "The end of story is going to be when the one that gets lucky isn't some parking lot bully. Personally, I don't want to see you become a martyr, I don't want to see Trim dead by daddy, Kate crushed by something she can't repel, or Zoe becoming collateral damage ."

Wylie gave Raine's outburst some thought. "Hey, what about me?"

"I don't want that either. But I'd rather be doing something about all the bad that is going on around here than stick my head in the sand and pretend that it isn't happening. I'd rather try to stop it from getting worse than die an ignominious death when some ancient demon walks into my house and says 'oh look, a tasty treat'. We all chose to take risks now rather than be caught off-guard later. As for your famous regenerative powers, they won't stop you or Wylie from dying the same as us. Dead is dead. You can't regenerate dead."

"You know what? . . . I'm pretty pissed off that my dad got turned into a vegetable and there's nothing I do can change it. You go ahead and be all you can be. I'll be home taking care of Dad with my ignominious head in the sand."

Wylie had gotten a little perturbed. "What. about. me?!"

"You're cute, but you're a slayer." Raine took her cellphone out of her pocket and threw it against the wall, shattering as if it were made of a thin ceramic. She turned on her heel and heads to the door. "Jaqueline's going to need one."

Delia decided not to let it go. She bellowed after Raine. "I'm pretty pissed about my DEAD father and my DEAD grandmother. I can't go home and TAKE CARE of them. Trust me, you think your life sucks, maybe you are right, but try mine for a while. No one handed me Slayer powers to deal with the Evils in this world, all I've got is the skills I've been learning my whole life. All I can do is the best I can do with the sucky hand I got dealt." Her voice softened as she continued. "You want to quit, you can try, but honestly I don't think it works that way. I really don't think you work that way either."

Raine let the door slam on her way out. Silence reigned for several moments as everyone looked around hopelessly.

"What do we do now?" Wylie asked.

"We do what needs to be done. And we wait for her to come around. Delia is correct; she won't be able to stay out of it for very long. For one thing, they know who she is and will eventually come for her." Jacqueline stated still watching after the door.

Kate turned to Delia, "What about you?"

"I don't know. I didn't mean to make her leave. She's worth more to the group than me." Delia admitted.

Jacqueline intercepted her on the way to the door. "This is not the time to be breaking up the group. Our enemies know too much about us. They will see this as a sign of weakness and they will strike."

"Losing a Slayer will hurt more than losing a Demon." Delia noted heading towards the door.

"You just don't get it, we've gotta have our Fred." Trim argued.

"Are you going to continue this insanity?" Wylie asked her mind still reeling.

"Whatever Raine decides, you can't be slaying alone...you won't survive."

"If you guys still want me on the team, I won't hunt alone." She looked around at all the faces of the group, seeing some doubt, she continued out the door. "Let me know your decision. I'll be around."

*** Original Poem "Bluebird" by Michael Robinson**

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