



# Exercises in Friendship

## Part Two: Significant Weapons

By Jill Irving and Brad Lord

Friday, the week was finally over! As much as I like school, sometimes I just couldn't wait for the weekend.

"Delia! Hey D!" a voice called out.

"Déjà vu anyone?" I looked around the crowded hall to see Kate coming toward me.

"Hey D, has Jacqueline talked to you yet today?"

"No, I wasn't in language class today. Why? What's up?"

"I'm not sure, but we're all supposed to meet at her house in an hour, my guess is she's got some info for us."

"OK, I'll be there."

"You got any idea where Trim is? I don't think he knows either."

"I haven't seen him all day...all week for that matter. I'm not sure, but I think he's been avoiding me."

"Why? What did you do to him?" she asked in a quiet voice...

"Nothing really. I just tried to get him into a little exercise routine so..."

"Exercise! Trim? You've got to be kidding! The two go together like oil and water. Remember he puked at the gym after only five sit-ups?"

"Yeah, well, I just thought that with our extra curricular activities, it would be good for him to be able to handle himself better."

"I agree with you there, but, well...you know...he's Trim, he's got his own talents, like eating."

"That's how it started. I invited him to dinner with my family and T.J."

"T.J.? Who's he?"

"*She* is a good friend of mine from boot camp."

“Dinner huh? Food would be the perfect lure for Trim.”

“After dinner T.J. and I started him on some easy Tai Chi moves and he was doing pretty well, then T.J. kissed me...”

“Kissed you? Deal! I didn’t think you flipped that way.”

“I don’t! I mean that’s not...it’s alright for others...I just don’t like...Grrrrr Arrrgggh.”

“I think you’d better quit while you’re ahead D.”

“I prefer to call it a strategic retreat.”

“So, let me get this straight; You asked Trim over, fed him some great food, forced him to be very close to two good looking, sweaty girls through the devious excuse of exercise and then kissed someone else at the end of the night. No wonder he’s avoiding you D.”

“Oh crap.” I sighed. “He did seem to think it was some kind of date.”

“D, the male mind isn’t a complex thing to understand. Maybe you’d better go have a talk with him.”

“Couldn’t I just pummel him until he forgets?”

“Perhaps, but I think talking would be better, and less bloody.”

“You’re right, I suppose. Well there’s no time like the present. He usually watches the cheerleaders practice on the football field after school; I’ll look for him there and tell him about the meeting. We’ll talk, I’ll fix things, and we can get back to non-avoidance mode.”

“Alright, see you later.”

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I got out to the field a few minutes later to find Trim talking to some of the football players. Well, they *were* talking until one of the jocks shoved Trim up against the fence. By the time I reached them, two other players were holding Trim to either side. The first one, I could now see was the JV Team Captain, was hauling back to punch Trim in the face.

I called out “You’re a real hero when it’s three to one, Jimmy.”

As fast as I could, I stepped up to his left. I grabbed his arm, using the punch’s momentum to spin him around and pull his arm up behind him.

“That’s enough!” I yelled. “Leave him alone!”

“Hey! Who’s that?” the jock squealed in pain.

“Christ! It’s Deadly Delia!” one of the others answered.

The Neanderthal broke free and swung a roundhouse punch at me, so I ducked under it and slammed him in the stomach. He fell back on his butt clutching his belly. I hadn’t meant to hit him so hard; I really wanted to avoid fighting.

“Dude, you just got beat up by a girl!” Nate Gonwit said laughing at him.

The rest of the jocks started laughing as well. Jimmy didn’t take it very well.

“Arrrgggh...I’m gonna beat you to a pulp!” he raged.

It was easy for me to side step his attack and stretch out my leg to trip him up. He went flying headlong into the bleachers. That's when the Coach showed up.

"Wha's goin' on here?" He yelled. "Fallucci! I know you've got somthin' to do with this!"

Good god, this school has a moron for a coach! I thought.

"They started it all" Trim replied.

"Riiiiight... you're innocent and I've got a bridge to sell."

"It's true Coach, they..." I tried to explain.

"Who are *you* little girl?"

"Excuse me?" I turned to him, one brow raised. "I'm Delia Hunter and..."

"Well missy, are my boys here botherin' *you*?"

"No, I..."

"Then lets just let things come to an end here and now. OK?" The Coach turned to Trim, "Fallucci! What's wit' you? Now yer letting girls' fight for you? You ever gonna grow a pair?"

I could tell Trim was holding back a rage that was close to boiling over. He was probably having thoughts of casting some sort of spell on the Coach that would give him puss-filled lesions.

"Yeah Coach, that's it. I'm gonna put together a gang of female bodyguards, called the Slayers and take over the whole town!" There was a definite snarl to Trim's voice.

"You do that Fallucci!"

"Hey, you see how easy it was for one girl to take down your prized pet over there? Just think what a whole buncha girls like little ol' D here could do!"

"TRIM!" I yelled at him.

Jimmy jumped in at this point. "You little nerd! Go hang out with your freaky friends, you're not wanted here!" he yelled as he flew at Trim. I stepped up, ready for action, but the Coach grabbed his "prized pet" and hauled him back. The rest of the team seemed on the verge of attacking as well. The testosterone level was thick as a London fog.

"Can it boys! This ends here and now!" The Coach announced.

"But Coach! He deserves to be pounded!"

The rest of the team chimed in with a healthy "YEAH!"

"I said *can* it! Everyone hit the showers! NOW!"

The team started to walk back to the locker room. I could hear the Coach yelling at Captain Football "What's the matter wit' you? Fightin' a girl fer Christ sake!"

"But Coach..." he whined back.

I turned to Trim but he wasn't there. I looked around and found him almost across the field already. He could certainly move when he wanted to. Catching up to him I asked, "You alright? Did you get hurt?"

“WHY’D YOU HAFTA DO THAT?” he yelled at me. Was he crying?

“I was just trying to help a...” I could see his eye was swelling up, I stepped in front of him, “Here, let me take a look at your eye, which one did this to you?”

“Stop it! I don’t need your help and I already have a mother!”

He turned and started to walk away from me. I could see a stain of blood coming through the back of his shirt, more must have happened than I originally thought. “Trim! You’re bleeding!”

“Go away!” he yelled picking up the pace to get away from me. Like Trim could ever move that fast!

I grabbed his arm effectively stopping his forward momentum. “What is your damage?” I questioned, “I just saved your butt!”

“Did I ask you too?” He sneered trying to shake off my hold.

“No, friends help friends.” I reminded him tightening my grip on his arm.

He pointed his thumb back to the scene of the confrontation. “You think that was helping? How am I ever gonna live that down?”

“You’d prefer to be pummeled I suppose?” I suggested. When he didn’t answer immediately, I closely observed his sullen expression. “Was I supposed to watch them beat you up and do nothing?” He tried yanking his arm away again, but I held on. “Dammit Trim, you’re bleeding! Would you stop being Joe Attitude for a minute and let me make sure you’re not going to drop dead? Dead bad, remember? Raine would kick my ass something fierce if I stood here and let you bite it.”

“I think I fell on a nail in the bleachers.” He finally responded. “It’s just a flesh wound.”

“When did you become the Black Knight? Let me see.” I turned him and yanked his shirt up to expose the wound.

“Stop it!” he whined attempting to shrug his shirt back down and walk away.

I grabbed him and held him immobile while examining the injury.

“I’m fine. Leave me alone.”

“No one ever believes me when I say that and I’m a hell of a lot tougher than you.”

“I can take my knocks from the jocks....I do it all the time.”

I laughed; I couldn’t help it. It was like the flip side of an argument with Raine. “It doesn’t look too deep. Some antiseptic and a large band aid should take care of this okay; I’ve got that stuff in my pack.”

“Good, I don’t want to have to go for a ride in the Deliamobile.”

“The what?” I exclaimed.

“The ambulance” he looked like that should have been incredibly obvious.

“Who coined that phrase?” my voice held a note of warning.

“I don’t know it’s just something I heard around school...”

“Names, I need names!”

Trim must have recognized my I-am-so-annoyed-with-you look. “Did I ever tell you that my Grans knows David Copperfield, the magician?” He asked.

“You’ve mentioned it once or twice.”

“Talking about my Grans...she doesn’t want me to hang around with you or go over to your house any more.” He looked down at his shoes.

“Why?”

“I’m not sure, but I think it has something to do with why you’re in this hundred year old picture.” He said pulling an old photograph from his backpack.

I snatched the picture from him to take a closer look. “That’s not me. I mean, it looks like me, but it’s not.”

Trim came around and looked on with me. Pointing at one couple, he said, “This is my Papa and Grans.”

I considered for a moment. “Well, I know that our grandmothers were contemporaries.”

“Contemporaries? What do you mean?”

“Part of the same generation; they knew each other. I’d have to guess that this is Grams.” I handed him back the picture.

“Wow! Your Grams was hot!”

“She looks a lot like me.” I shook my head at the absurdity of his statement.

“Urr...yeah.” He responded chuckling, seemingly as perplexed as I was. There was an awkward silence as I finished cleaning his ‘flesh wound’ and we started walking to Jacqueline’s. “Anyway, now I don’t know what to do. What are my grandparents and your grandparents doing in the same picture, and why do they hate each other so much?”

“Farmingham is a small town. Obviously, they would have known each other. My Grams indicated they had a ‘falling out’; she wouldn’t go into any details.”

“My Grans makes it out to be a lot worse. What am I supposed to do? I usually do what she says, but we’re...good friends and we’ve got all the slayage to handle. Where would the rest of the Scooby gang be without us?”

“Scooby gang? You’d best not be comparing me to ‘Danger Prone Daphne’!”

“Oh nooooo...I think of you more like Fred.”

“Good!”

“That makes me Shaggy, Zoe is Velma, *Wylie* would be Daphne, Raine is Scrappy...”

“PUPPYYYYY POWWERRRR!” We yelled together.

We laughed uproariously for a while. When we could breathe again, I continued seriously, “I don’t know, I won’t let anyone make such decisions for me...but we’re two different people Trim.”

“Grans is training me, I’m like her Padawan.”

“Maybe we should just limit our exposure to each other’s families? Grams really wanted me to stay clear of your grandmother too.”

“Dammit, I want to know why! It’s gotta have something to do with this picture. Maybe I can work some mojo to find out.”

“Trim, I don’t think you should be messing around with magicks you don’t understand.”

“I understand it all right.” Trim bragged.

“This doesn’t sound like something your grandmother taught you. It sounds awfully advanced.”

“How would you know? You don’t have any magic in your blood. Magick is one of my talents…”

“...like eating?” I asked.

“Grans has got tons of spells in her Book of Shadows.”

“Maybe, it just doesn’t sound like something that even Jacqueline would do and she’s got a lot more experience than you.”

“But dammit, I want to know!” He sounded almost angry.

“How’s it feel to want?” I remarked with typical sarcasm.

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**W**e arrived at Jacqueline’s a few minutes later. Trim was still pouting, but seemed to have accepted that we could hang together away from home. It was an uneasy truce and we still had a lot of talking to do.

The gang was already gathered. Several of them exclaimed, “What happened?” as they got a look at Trim’s face.

Kate yelled, “Delia, you weren’t supposed to…” she stopped mid-sentence as I glared at her.

I looked over to where Jacqueline and Raine sat with a large tome spread in front of them. “Perhaps you can help me with the jock-punching-bag over there. Maybe knock some sense into him; convince him that having me help him is preferable to having his brain pureed. It’s not as if he has a lot to spare; wouldn’t want him to end up riding the little bus to school. I tried to find out which one of the JV Neanderthals did this. But apparently Trim thinks those wannabe heroes have the right to pummel him at will.”

“Gee, D, tell us how you really feel.” Raine cracked.

“I can make him tell us.” Kate spoke with an evil grin.

“Kate!” I exclaimed, “You can do that? I mean...No that’s not right.”

Trim’s eyes grew large at that thought. “Hey...!”

“Don’t worry Trim, I didn’t mean it.” Kate laughed. “Sometimes you’re an easy mark.”

“Trim, who was it that hurt you this way?” Jacqueline asked inspecting the damage.

“Did this happen on school grounds? I can take care of it...”

“STOP! Leave me alone!” Trim yelled. “You wanted to see us, we’re here. What’s this all about?”

“Fine, we shall begin. Certain information has come to light that suggests that our enemies, Ever After Marketing, may be collecting a powerful weapon against the Slayers. We need to ascertain the veracity of this intelligence.”

“What’d she just say?” Trim asked.

“She said that we need to find out if it’s true and presumably stop it from getting to them.” Kate interpreted.

“I don’t understand why people can’t just say what they mean in terms normal folk can understand.” Trim complained.

I inquired, “So what’s the intel?”

“I’ve made some inquiries among the newly re-formed watcher organization. They believe that several couriers may be en route to Farmingham carrying pieces of this ‘weapon’.”

“Any details as to what this weapon is?” Kate asked.

“No, but Jacqueline has been showing me a couple nasty items in her books that might arrive ‘some assembly required’.” Raine explained pointing at the book in her lap.

“My sources suggest that at least one, possibly two, of them were already destroyed by the Sunnydale Slayer. But there are several others that could still do a lot of damage.”

“Basically we don’t know what it is, if it’s really coming here, or how it will be arriving. Wylie summarized. “I should have gone shoe shopping.” She continued with a sigh.

“That is why you are here, to do research.” Jacqueline clarified.

“Well I doubt anything is coming in via UPS or Fedex, so we’re not going to find much online.” Zoe offered. “Perhaps if I could get into Ever After Marketing’s network...but that would probably require bouncing my signal across the world, access through their firewall may require me to redirect protocols across different ports, plus I’ll need to write a program for cracking their admin account password. That could take me a little while.”

“Yes...well...that sounds like a good start.” Jacqueline commented her eyes looking a bit glazed from the techno-babble.

“You know, Matt sometimes has a little more info on the demons and such in town. He might know about, I don’t know, a demonic-messenger service that might be used or any newbies in town. It couldn’t hurt to check with him.” Trim suggested.

“And of course, Matt is currently working at the Double-R where you could also get a bite to eat.” I finished.

“Well...if I’m there anyway...”

“It’s not a bad idea, though. There might be something online about such services too. Might not be able to do a standard Google to find it...but I bet Zoe could find it.” I added with a wink in her direction.

“In the meantime, Wylie and I should probably do some extra patrolling. Maybe we’ll be able to catch one or more of them on the way into town.” Raine recommended.

“Yes, that is a good idea as well. I want to know where you are at all times though. No heroics.” Jacqueline ordered. “Kate, I’ll need you to assist me with researching these weapons. We need to know what we’re dealing with and how to destroy it.”

“What about Trim and Delia?” Kate inquired.

“I think we’re Double-R bound. If Matt has any useful information, we’ll call.”

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**M**att had heard of a courier service that operated out of Boston. He also said he knew someone who knew more about them. It took about twenty minutes to drag the information from his rattled brain. That was long enough for Trim to inhale a disgusting amount of greasy diner food. My arteries were hardening from thinking about it; I didn’t want to contemplate watching it.

I called information and got a number for the service. Then phoning Jacqueline, I gave her the number. I suggested that someone call and pretend to be Andrea’s secretary, from Ever After, trying to confirm arrival dates and times. She said she’d get it done. Meanwhile, Trim and I were going to see Matt’s acquaintance.

Sam Towle, Matt told us, was apparently human and had been a driver for a short time with Deacon’s Courier Service. He used to do a regular run from Boston to Manchester, but business had slowed and they’d laid him off. Sam was living in a shack at the edge of town, redneck territory.

We approached the house carefully. The only sound came from the TV inside which was blaring an episode of COPS. I had Trim stay a few steps behind me, just in case, while I knocked on the door. No one answered.

“Sam” I yelled out trying to get his attention, while pounding the door harder.

“Doesn’t seem to be here” Trim observed.

“His TV is on...” I responded, “He’s probably around here somewhere.”

“Well, then let’s look around.” Trim walked past me into the house.

I turned off the set as soon as we walked in. In the ensuing silence, I could hear nothing but the cracking of the floorboards and the settling of the house.

As we wandered around, Trim enthused, “This place would make a great haunted house come Halloween.”

“Who can think of such things? After all the stuff we’ve seen, the last thing I want to do is set myself up to be scared by ghosts and ghouls.”

“But think of all the candy!” Trim advocated.

I just shook my head as I walked through to the kitchen. “Well, I don’t see him anywhere. There doesn’t appear to be much room for hiding here.”

“Should we wait...?”

“Shhh!” I whispered when my ears picked up slight noise.

“What...” Trim stopped at my furious wave.



<Click> The small noise reverberated through the room moments before we hurtled down through a trap in the floor.

“Arrrgggh!” Trim yelled as he fell.

I landed on Trim. Good for me, his padding to broke my fall. Not so good for him, my hard muscle and bone smashed him into the floor. I got up quickly as I could, checking for damage as I moved. We seemed to be in an 8-foot square room with no exits.

I examined the trapdoor as well as I could from fifteen feet below. Floorboards were squeaking above. Both Trim and I were silent waiting to see who was up there.

“Well, this is fun!” Trim announced trying to sit up.

“Are you hurt badly?” I asked him.

“I think I’m okay.” He took the hand I offered him and we got him to his feet.

“Looky, looky what we got.” A dark figure appeared above. “It’s a couple of meddling kids” his laugh was all cartoony. He turned to someone behind him “tell the boss we’ve intercepted the package and will deliver as planned.” He peered back down at us. “Don’t get too comfy down there...you won’t be around long.” The trap door then reset with a resounding thump.

I pulled out my cell phone to call for the rescue. “Damn, no signal...what good are these things?” I complained as I tried moving it around attempting to get a signal. “Keep trying for a signal, I’m going to check out these walls.”

“Who do you think you are, Spiderman?”

“No, just someone who has experience climbing” I told him as I started sliding my hands against the wall. The structure was wooden, and like the rest of the building, had seen better days. At one point there must have been a ladder against the wall, I could feel grooves where it had been yanked out. With a little work, I noted, those grooves could make hand or foot holds. I reached into my boot for my trusty K-Bar, using the tip to dig out the groove.

After a few minutes, I called Trim over “here, see if you can fit your foot in here.”

“It’s a bit of a squeeze, but it just might work.”

I got closer to Trim and whispered the plan. “I’m going dig out a ladder of sorts all the way to the top. When I’m done, I need you to open that door. I don’t think it can be done from up there...it would knock me over if I could even manage to open it in the first place.” I started to dig out another handhold. “Maybe you should make some noise...complain or something...loudly.”

“No problem” and Trim proceeded to complain about his aching body, how hungry he was, the dark, school, and everything else.

When I had dug out enough handholds, I climbed back down to him. “Okay Trim,” as I whispered to him, I took his hand, “This is the big one, it needs to work. Use your power to open that door.”

“Hold on, what’s the plan after it’s open?” He questioned.

“I climb up first, you cover me with mojo. When I’m at the top, I’ll engage anyone up there and you get your ass up that ladder.”

“That’s a great plan...and if the thing that is up there pounds you into the floor before I’m one step up the ladder? I’ll go first.”

I patted his hand. “Trim, it’s sweet of you to offer, but foolish too. What am I going to do while you are climbing up first? The best I can do is climb right after you, then they push you down at the top and we both go splat again. Mojo has reach. I’ll have one chance at a throw of my knife and the angle will be nearly impossible.”

“But you...”

“If you were to get to the top first, something could grab and stop you from getting a chance to use your mojo. If I’m there first, you can help me with the juice when you get to the top. It just makes more sense.”

“But D, I don’t want you hurt.”

I squeezed his hand tightly, “I’ll be careful Trim.”

In a feat of concentration previously unheard of from Trim, he managed to slam open the door. It was noisy, but that was secondary.

“Wow, did you feel that juice?” He asked, shocked by his own power.

“My hand tingled...” I pulled my hand away and shook it. “See you at the top,” I announced quickly climbing my pseudo ladder. Someone appeared at the rim before I was at the top.

“Dissolvo” Trim slammed his spell into the figure and he fell away. I leaped up, grabbing the rim, and pulled myself up.

The creature before me had grayish skin, wicked teeth, and was about 5’6”. It did an instant stand and came after me, I sidestepped and he crashed into the wall. I could hear other footsteps approaching and Trim’s huffing and puffing up the ‘ladder’. I held my position in front of the trap until he was climbing out. By then, a human who had to be Matt’s ‘friend’ Sam was in the room. As he came at me, I slipped under his guard and knocked him out with a one-two combination to the jaw and sternum.

I could hear chortling behind me from the gray-guy. Trim was actually standing in the Tai Chi position I’d taught him, holding a ready position. I dove past him into a flip-flop, smashing my feet into the Gray’s face as I started the landing. I was off-balance so I rolled forward to the edge of the pit, but was able to steady myself as I stood.

It was dark now. Even if I hadn’t noticed it through the windows, I would have figured it out from the wrinkle-face that stepped into the room then.

“You meddling kids think you can defeat *us*? Only a true Slayer can...”

While he was prattling about our uselessness, I reached into my pocket and found my handy travel hairspray and lighter. Trim started muttering a spell, I think, it didn’t sound familiar, but it caught the vamp’s attention.

Simultaneously, the vampire sprang at Trim, Trim stepped aside, and I fired the aerosol spray through the lighted flame. We had instant vamp flambé hurtling down into the

trap. Trim laughed as he kicked the mechanism that slammed the door closed again. The vamp was still screaming from the flames.

“Nice job!” I told him.

“You too!” He looked around. “Where do you suppose that package is?”

“Right here.”

He looked more closely. “I don’t see...”

“Don’t you see? It’s us. The ‘weapon’ to use against the Slayers was their friends and helpers. If they caught us, they thought they could keep Raine and Wylie at bay.”

“Would that have worked?” He asked.

“I’m not sure. Raine’s been through a lot recently, I don’t think she’ll like others getting hurt on her account. Whether she’d think one or two of us would be acceptable losses weighed against winning the fight against the big bad, I couldn’t tell you. I’d just as soon not put her in that situation.”

“So they kept calling us ‘meddling kids’. That makes it official; we’re a part of the Scooby-Doo gang. If so, who’s our Scooby-Doo? Where’s our Mystery Machine? And our Scooby snacks?”

“After this, I’ll buy you a whole bag of Scooby Snacks...actually would you settle for some of Grams’ cookies? I’m kind of broke.”

Trim shrugged his shoulders, “I hate to turn down free food, but outside of the...Scooby business...we really can’t hang out.”

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Wrap-up was interesting. It seemed I had been right, Caitlin and/or Andrea thought to use us against the Slayers. Wylie said Trim and I had just been lucky, we could’ve been killed, and next time they’d send more muscle. Jacqueline thought it possible they’d think twice before trying it again; we ‘Scoobies’ might be a little tougher to deal with than they expected. Raine didn’t say much, but she clearly wasn’t happy with the situation. I’ve got a bad feeling that another weight was just put on her shoulders. Good thing she is strong.

My thoughts continued to churn around all of the ramifications that could have come from our capture as I ran the next morning. One thing that surprised me was how well Trim and I worked together. When push came to shove, Trim was one hundred percent there in the moment. I hadn’t given him that sort of credit; he was definitely making me reevaluate my estimation of him. Of course, as fate would have it, now that I’d like to spend a bit more time getting to know him, we’re not allowed to hang together...at least not openly.

Just after I passed by Trim’s house on my morning run, I heard the sound of someone huffing and puffing behind me. I turned to see Trim already sweating bullets with the activity. Surprised, I smiled my greeting and slowed down to his pace.

“Hey...D...Is a side-stitch an incredibly sharp pain running up and down one side of your body? Grrrrr...Arrrgggh”