



Tales of the  
New  
Slayers

So this is what love feels like.

“Full grain leather custom Vendramini motorcycle boots imported from the United Kingdom.” Raine took another breath and looked closer at the display in the window of Farmingham’s downtown Shoe Mart. It was as if the owners knew that somewhere in the town, the perfect customer would show up for the \$225.00 pair of boots. “Those are meant for me.”

Delia was getting antsy. She missed her workout this morning so that she can go window shopping with Raine and Wiley. A girly affair she would have gladly ducked out of except that lately she was worried about Raine, and like grenades, having friends sometimes takes some special attention. “Standard issue boots work for me.”

Raine looked down at Delia’s feet. The combat boots that adorned them surely made an impact but Raine wasn’t interested in practicality. “Right. If your feet are shaped like bricks.”

“My feet are not shaped like bricks.”

Wiley was less than enthused with the whole Shoe Mart experience; she had hoped Raine would show an interest in more . . . feminine wear. Wiley’s feet were usually adorned in something with straps that gave her a bit more height and emphasized her figure. Unless they were stylish, boots did nothing for her. “C’mon, boots are boots. Whether or not your feet are brick shaped.”

“My feet are not shaped like bricks. Can we stop with the brick thing!”

Raine raises a threatening finger to Wiley. “No, no, no . . . With these babies I can look good, ride my bike, and kick vamp rumps with style. I want them. All the best dressed superheroes have them.”

“You’re way too much into this slayer thing. It’s getting scary.” Wiley says while turning her attention away from the window and toward the Double R Diner across the street. “At least they have a nice heel.”

Wiley see’s her current beau, Brandon across the street speaking with another boy who Wiley did not recognize. She walks over to them. “Excuse me y’all . . .”

Delia watched Wiley saunter across the street. “What’s with her? I swear that her brain shuts down at the sign of any boy.” She stands looking across the street as Wiley fawns over the handsome Brandon. “I know she’s better than that . . . Raine? . . . Raine?”

Raine is still facing the store window. “Two hundred bucks! Where do I get two hundred bucks. That’s a lot of oil changes. - Shoot! “

Delia hoped the infatuation was over. “Sometimes you can’t have your way, Raine. Happens to everyone. Welcome to the world.”

Raine pulls away from the window. “No, I forgot . . . I have a brake job this morning! Bobby has a family thing and Josiah a church thing. I gotta get back to . . .” Raine looks around. “Where’s Wiley?”

Delia points across the street. “Flirting.”

Across the street, Raine sees Wiley putting her arm around Brandon and flashing a toothy smile at the other boy. Raine grimaces slightly. “Oh.”

“You okay?” Delia asks.

“Yeah, it’s just . . . I . . . I hate it when she does that. It’s beneath her. “

“Don’t take it personal, Raine . . . but her crowd over there thinks it’s demeaning when she hangs out with us. Why do we bother, she’s more interested in guys than vamps. She’s never going to be one of us, and I ain’t about to start painting my nails. Wiley hanging with us is a conflict of interest.”

Raine raises the back of her hand toward Delia. Her nails were painted in a subtle shade of lavender. Delia blushed. “Not you too. This is like the body snatchers! You’re wearing make up too aren’t you? I thought something looked different.”

“It’s just a light foundation. No biggy.”

“Make up is a biggy. For you it’s a major biggy! What’s next? A skirt? Cucumbers on your eyes? . . .”

“A double date!”

Raine and Delia turn to Wiley who had walked back up to them while they were distracted. “What?”

Wiley gave them her huge southern bred smile . . . “Raine and I have a double date with Brandon and Gary!”

Raine closed her eyes hoping this was actually a bad dream. Delia gave Wiley the sternest look she could muster. . . . “You have got to be kidding.”

# tales of the New Slayers

## As I Am

By  
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“**Y**ou’re not going through with this right?” Delia felt she was losing control of everything she had come to consider normal. Raine on a double date with three of the cool kids in the school was not normal.

In the shop sink Raine aggressively washes the oil off her hands. “It’s a hike. I like hikes. Besides, Mercy will be home for the weekend, and the garage is closed on Sunday. I can get away.”

“What about patrols. What do you think Jacqueline is going to do when she finds out that her two slayers have taken off? She hates it when I go alone.”

“So do I. Don’t worry, she’ll deal. “

“I’m trying to get you to turn away from the dark side here! You keep this up and you’ll end up a mindless fashion zombie running here and there cause it’s the cool thing to do and ending up a divorced bitter soccer mom with two kids, a mortgage and the best years of your life comfortably bound between the covers of a high school yearbook. I’ve seen that life, Raine, you’ll hate it.”

Raine dries her hands and walks over to the front counter of MacEnroe Motors. She sits down and starts writing up a work order for the job she just finished. “Are you through prophesizing my doom, D? It’s a day hike. You and I both know that Gary is going to get nowhere with me. I’m there to keep Wiley out of trouble. She needs out-of-trouble-keeping.”

Delia suspected that Raine had more than a sisterly interest in keeping Wiley out of trouble, but she didn’t want to go there. “Right. I ask you to work out with me and

you give me excuses, Wiley asks you to go to the Double R for a Milk Shake and suddenly you've got all the time in the world."

"D. I work out at four in the morning. You're always welcome to join me, and Wiley has never invited me for a Milk Shake."

"Good, cause Milk Shakes can confuse things. You get all foamy in the mouth if you don't handle them right and if you drink them too fast then afterwards you might not feel so well. Then there's the ice headache thing that . . ."

"Delia. We're not talking about Milk Shakes."

Delia sits down on a nearby chair and shrugs her shoulders. "Forget the Milk Shake. Raine, you like Wiley . . ."

Raine doesn't look up from her paperwork. She gives a non-committal "Uh-huh"

"Thing is Raine . . . Wiley . . . likes . . . boys." There, she said it.

"So?"

"So I don't want you to get hurt. You can be a real pain in the ass when you are upset and she's not gonna change her religion."

Raine puts the paperwork away in a folder, grabs her keys and starts for the front door of the garage. "I have to close up. Listen Delia, I'm cool with the concern, but I can take care of myself. What do *you* have planned this weekend?"

"Trim and I are going through a military workout program."

Raine laughs. "Trim? And you're talking tome about changing religions?"

Delia beams deviously. "Trim's coming over to my house for dinner . . . my other guest is TJ, an old friend of mine who is in on my plans for Trim."

"You're evil. If I survive this date, I may have to kill you."

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**D**elia gets into her car and drives away. Raine appreciated her concern. However, Raine's main interest in Wiley was based on the fact that Wiley was a slayer and Raine liked the idea of having a friend who might be going through the same changes as she was. Wiley's smile, perfect skin and bright enticing eyes were icing on the cake. A cake that Raine knew she would never taste. It was no different than Trim looking at any cheerleader and hoping that somehow cupid

would be drunk that day and willing to spend his arrows on anyone. Like the motorcycle boots, sometimes you can look but you can't touch.

At the top of the stairs Raine walks into the kitchen to the sound of the teapot whistling. She turns it off and prepares a cup of tea for Mercy.

Mercy is in the living room walking around with a fly swatter. Raine walks over to the desk where sits a walking cane that appeared in the house a few nights before after Raine had a vivid dream about her mother. She picks it up. "Garage is locked up. I made your tea." Mercy slaps the fly swatter down with a flick of her wrist. "Gotcha!"

"We have flies?"

"I killed five of them so far, three male and two female."

Raine puts the tea on the desk and sits down across from her. She inspects the cane. "Find anything special about this? When can I have it?"

"Thanks for the tea, hon." Mercy picks the cup up and takes a sip. Then she backs away from the desk and sits on the love seat with Raine. "It's authentic. It even flips open with the combination she developed. The cane was designed and built by Rafael Antonio. One of the best gadget men in the espionage industry. His initials are inside the scabbard section. It's your mother's weapon. "

"Any idea how it got here?"

"None. I do know that George would've wanted you to have it. But I'm not prepared to give it to you. Lot's of wee beasties know that cane. You'd be inviting trouble. "

They sit silently sipping their tea. Raine struggles for conversation. "How can you tell the female from the male flies?"

"The male flies were on a beer can and the female ones were on the phone."

Raine thinks about Mercy's reply for a moment before realizing that she was set up for a joke. She brings the cane up threateningly "Ohh you!"

They laugh.

"Can I go on a double date with Wiley. It's an overnight hike."

Mercy sat back and sipped her tea. "Isn't Wiley that pretty girl from the party . . . Chloe's big fan, I recall. You like her, right?"

“Did I miss a memo? She’s a friend, I’d like to have a friend who can kick butt and who I don’t have to worry about getting dead.”

“Easy there hon. You can go. The other couple, are they girls?”

“They are guys. It’s a double date . . . with guys.”

“Sweetness, you do understand the whole gay thing right. You don’t want to send out the wrong signals. Think of this tea . . . if I was a coffee drinker, the tea wouldn’t taste as good, I actually might grow to really dislike tea if it was served to me instead of coffee. It has nothing to do with the tea, but it’s about expectations . . .”

Raine gets up and puts the cane down next to Mercy. “ They’ll be over soon to pick me up. I’m going to pack up.”

Mercy takes another sip of her tea. “Remember the tea, honey. Coffee drinkers can be ornery”

As Raine climbs the ladder up to her room in the attic she exclaims. “I wish people would stop comparing my life to beverages!”

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Jacqueline loomed over Zoe’s shoulder as Zoe worked the keyboard. Screens upon screens flashed on the monitor as Zoe’s seemingly infinite patience was coming to an end. “There are ghosts, there are false leads . . .all kinds of evidence that they are out there somewhere.”

“So they are not as foolproof as one might be lead to believe.”

Zoe tries something else on the keyboard, as the computer responds she takes a break and looks up at Jacqueline . . .”Um... I hate to tell you, but all those ghosts and loose threads were all intentional. This group you are looking for didn’t leave a single clue to their existence that wasn’t exactly what they wanted you to see. “

“But they exist. That much we know.”

“Can I . . .uh . . .can I ask why? I mean, why do we need to know about them. Are they involved in anything we’re investigating? Do they work for EverAfter?”

“No. Nothing like that. There is a legend among the watchers of a group who has taken it upon themselves to spy on all the activities of the council and every watcher. No more than myth really, developed by some overly creative and paranoid watchers in the nineties. I was curious as to whether there was any truth to it.”

A knock on the door brings an end to their conversation. Jacqueline opens the door and Delia walks in. She looked a little frustrated.

“Delia. Is everything okay?”

“Raine and Wiley went off on a date to the mountains.”

Jacqueline had become quite adept at translating the often insensible connections between the words that teenagers lumped together to call English, but sometimes the meanings of their grammatical conflagrations escaped her. “But . . . what if there is a need? Vampires . . . mummies . . . the holy ghost? Where are they . . . wait one moment.”

Zoe and Delia stand quietly looking at Jacqueline as her brain fired up and made the connections. “Raine and Wiley . . . on a date?”

“It’s not that way. They are on a date with boys.” Delia corrected.

Jacqueline felt a huge relief sweep over her shoulders and psyche. “Ah, well, good. There’s no telling what manner of complications would come about if . . . wait one moment . . .”

Zoe and Delia wait again.

“. . . With boys?”

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Raine hated having to sit in the backseat of the jeep. She would have preferred shotgun, or better yet, following the group on her bike. Unfortunately, Brandon was driving and Wiley just had to be sitting up front with him to discuss the latest gossip going on in the school placing far too much importance on teen angst than someone who was aware of bigger issues (re; Vampire) going on in the world should. Gary sat on his side of the backseat trying to join in on the gossip and periodically throwing Raine a bone to try to get her in the conversation. Her backpack was firmly placed between them.

“So you like hikes.” Gary asks trying to look over Raine’s backpack.

“Yeah. You?”

“Not particularly, but I couldn’t pass up a chance to go out with a couple of girls like you and Wiley!” Gary had a huge grin on his face as if he just said something witty and charming. Brandon seemed to think so because he raised a hand up to get a “high five” from Gary. “Oh yeah!”

Gary slapped Brandon’s outstretched hand appropriately. “yeah! Wooooo!”



Raine slunk into her seat. Wiley turned to look at her, her face in a frozen smile. “This is going to be awesome! “

“I’m in awe already.” Raine replied, wondering how the two lunk heads in charge of this trip could drive and talk at the same time. Having known Wiley for just a short time, Raine wondered how anyone can go through their life surrounded by and even welcoming jerks like these two. She could see in Wiley’s eyes a hint of sadness and hesitation. Being popular was a tough job. Outside, the countryside had turned to hills and rocks as the jeep ascended a mountain road. Raine saw a sign announcing Mt. Alejandro in thirty miles. Their torturous car ride was almost at an end.

“Hey Brandon, you see the Pats game yesterday!?” . . . another round of woos and hand slapping followed. Raine wondered why guys spent so much time and energy watching other guys rolling around in dirt wearing tight uniforms. It seemed rather gay to her, but what did she know.

Ten minutes of jock-speak later, Raine notices another sign outside, “Mt. Alejandro, Thirty Miles”.

“Odd” she murmurs to herself.

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The car ride ended with a disrespectful off road trek that seemed to excite Brandon and Gary. Mud, dirt, tree limbs and destruction of mother nature seemed to give them the giggles. Raine held on through the jittery ride content in the knowledge that Brandon was going to have some serious repairs to make on his Jeep after all this was said and done.

Trees and hills surrounded the small clearing with a cabin and three lean tos. Raine pulled her pack out of the jeep and swung it on her back. “Let’s set up, then I want to hike up a ways. “

“Hike? Hell no girl!” Brandon says with the wisdom and authority of an ashtray. “We’re gonna hang and have some fun!” He slips an arm around Wiley’s waist and draws her toward him. “Right Wiley!?”

Raine is disappointed to see Wiley smile and play along. “Yeah Raine, just relax for once, huh!”

“Fine. But I gotta stretch my legs a bit.” Raine pulls out her compass and gets her bearings before walking toward what appeared to be a minor trail through the trees. “I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

As she walks away Gary looks on. "I have some ideas on how I'd like those legs to stretch."

Brandon slaps him playfully on the head. "Yeah, I hear she kicks high too. She's a freak though. If it wasn't for Wiley she'd be totally blacklisted."

Wiley pulls away from Brandon and goes to the Jeep to get her pack. "What do you know? Everyone has issues."

Gary's face lit up with a mischievous smile. "Yeah, I heard from Jan that she was some sort of lesbo . . ."

"Shut up!" Wiley helped Brandon pull a heavy cooler from the back of the jeep. "What is this?"

Brandon and Gary open the container with a flair and give each other a high five. "Beer!!"

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The path was longer than Raine had anticipated. It twisted and turned as she ascended and while her sense of direction always seemed to be spot on, she came upon the same patch of trees that she had noted and passed twice before.

"Oh, now I see."

Looking around to make sure there are no witnesses, Raine jumps up a tree lithely and quietly. From her view above, she looks at the mountainside. The path she had taken was clear, but much shorter than it felt. She had been going around in circles. She tugs at a branch and snaps off a limb she can use as a walking stick then jumps back down to the ground.

With the limb, she taps on the ground in front of her and leaves a mark before heading up the trail again.

As Raine continues into the distance, the land, trees and air shimmer behind her and are replaced with a different set of trees and plant life.

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Raine had been gone for about an hour and Wiley was starting to worry. Brandon and Gary had managed to make quite a dent in the beer inventory, constantly offering up the brew to her. She turned it down politely, but she was starting to get thirsty and funny enough, water was not on the menu.

Brandon places a beer in Wiley's hand. "C'mon Wiley, drink up! This is a party. Don't let Raine get you down. After today, she might even be one of us and she'll dump that stable of losers she hangs with. I mean really . . . Trim? Deadly Delia? That geek girl, Zoe? Man, I woulda started drinking months ago."

Wiley spots Raine coming back to the camp with her pack and a walking stick. She walks over and meets her at the edge of the camp. "What happened?"

Raine was a bit irritated. "I got lost. I figured it out though; Is that a beer?"

Wiley looks at the container in her hand. "It's what Brandon and Gary brought for us to drink. Want some?"

"No thanks, I brought water."

"Listen Raine, How about opening up some to Gary? He really likes you. He specifically wanted you on this trip. He's on the football team, and a bit of a hunk."

"A hunk of what? "

Wiley puts on a pleading voice. "Please, please, please. You might have fun, and you're too pretty to not like boys. Jesus! I can't imagine! Eww. How can you look at another girl and . . .and . . .ugh. "

"What I think when I look at you is way different and far less creepy than what most guys would be thinking. You don't think those idiots won't hesitate to call you a bitch or a slut behind your back? With them it's about control."

Wiley gave Raine an evil eye. "You really have to lighten up. I know about control, Raine. My father called me all those things and more. I'll never let anyone control me. Period."

Raine was a little surprised to hear Wiley even mention her father. She never knew. "Oops, stepped on a landmine. Pardon me. "

"It's not like it comes up in conversation much. Especially with you. You're so busy being loner-girl, you forget you have friends. I like friends."

"Fine. You be popular girl, I'm loner girl. At the end of the day I don't have to deal with these losers. What they think of you begins and ends at their hips. Not everyone with a smile and nice ass is a friend. At least my thoughts begin with friendship then go from there." Raine hated herself for saying what she just said.

Wiley stops walking. She sees Brandon starting a fire in the middle of the camp and makes sure that her voice is low enough so he can't hear. "You mean . . . you think of me , um in that way?"

Raine despised where this conversation was heading. If she could drive a stake through its heart and dust it she would've done it twice. "No, At least not in *their* way. It's not like I have a whole lot of experience here, I even get a bit freaked when Mercy and . . .uh . . . her *girlfriend* get together. Can we stop talking about this?"

"So what is it about me?"

"Fine. You want to know?"

"Not really."

"Fine."

"Tell me."

"Wiley!" If at all possible, Raine was getting more frustrated.

"No, we're here now. Tell me."

Raine drops her back pack and pulls out a water bottle. She hands it to Wiley. "I don't really know, Wiley. I like you, and I want us to be good friends. We have to work together and I really need someone who I can relate to."

"Is that it? I want us to be friends too. I like how you just don't give in to anybody."

"Ha! You really have to get to know Mercy better, and my mom wasn't a push over either."

"So you really don't like me in that way?" Wiley almost seemed disappointed. Despite the uneasiness, she still wanted to be liked and found attractive.

"I don't know. Maybe."

"Back to eww." Wiley's impressions of homosexuals were based on ignorance and the idea that it was evil. Having some direct experience now she knew that wasn't the case. But she was still human.

"Wiley, after we spend time together I wonder a lot about what I might have said that made you smile, or what I did to make you laugh. Just so that next time we get together I might be able to do it again. I know you're not gay, but I am. Take me as I am and as a friend, that's all I want."

Wiley drinks from the water bottle and hands it back to Raine. "That's all?"

“I lie. I’m a damned liar. You’re irresistible.”

“Thought so.” Wiley gave Raine a genuine smile. She puts an arm around Raine’s waist and leads her to the campfire. “C’mon, Loner-girl. Let me introduce you to my world.”

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The radio blared with rich hip hop posers being angry for absolutely nothing. In support of that theory, Raine noted how much it seemed to speak to the drunk white suburban homeboys she had the pain of having as company. She sat nursing the last of her water as Wiley danced with a barely standing Brandon. Gary danced a few feet from them to the beat of an entirely different drummer . . . different song . . . different sense of rhythm . . . just different. It would be funny if it wasn’t so painful. Raine noted not to cringe the next time Mercy played her blues cds.

Wiley had given in to beer. With her every sip, Raine felt more distanced and alone. Finally came the inevitable moment Raine feared. Brandon and Wiley made their excuses to call it a night and go to the cabin, leaving Raine with Gary the wonder dog.

Raine looked toward the edge of the camp where she saw that the trees had shifted. After her longer than expected walk through the woods she paid more attention to the scenery. The point east of her between the cabin and the first lean-to had four trees prominently in the forefront. Now there was only one large tree. Gary stumbled to the ground next to her and clumsily made it look as if he had done it on purpose. “Hey Raine, what kind of music you like.”

“Oh the usual, the kind with beats, melodies, rhythms . . . nothing like this stuff.”

“Cool. I can accept that. What you looking at?”

“The trees. They’re changing.”

“Riiiiiggghhhht” Gary places his arm around Raine’s shoulders. She gives him a sharp look that he doesn’t notice. “I heard you were kinda strange. I like that.”

Raine takes his hand and pulls it away from her. “Thanks. I think.”

He then places his hand on her knee. “Funny, I also heard you were . . . not interested in guys. - I didn’t believe it for a moment mind you.”

She removes his hand from her knee. “No please, mind me.” In all her slayer training, Jacqueline failed to teach Raine anything about handling creeps that she might have to face day to day in normal circumstances. It wouldn’t take much for Gary to end up with several broken bones, but Raine couldn’t go there. He embarrassingly qualified as human.

Gary maneuvers himself in front of her and grabs Raine by the shoulders, she is more shocked than intimidated. "C'mon Raine. After tonight you'll hang with the rest of us. Dump your fat and psycho friends."

He pushes her down, she ends up on her back. Using the momentum, Raine uses her legs to toss him over and several feet beyond her. She hoped she hadn't hurt him. "I said no."

Gary got up on his feet and faced her. He didn't seem drunk anymore. To not encourage him to any further violence, Raine stayed on the ground hoping he'd settle. It didn't look like he was about to.

"No to what? From what I hear it's not like you know what you're missing."

Despite the knowledge that she could knock Gary into the next generation of assholes, Raine still felt scared, scared of what she thought Gary was going to try and do, and scared of the intense anger welling up inside of her, the like of which she had never felt before. Scared of what she might do if she lost control.

Scared. Not of Gary, but of consequences.

There was something else to it. A different feeling making its way through the fear. Raine looked quickly in all directions. She was detecting vampires. Her senses were reaching overload when five pairs of arms rose out of the ground around her. Raine suddenly found the tables turned as her legs and arms were held firm. She struggled but her supernatural captors held tight. She tried to bite the hands that circled her face to keep her from screaming. Gary suddenly was more of a threat than Raine thought.

"My friends thought you might need some encouragement."

Behind him, three more boys showed up. Raine pegged them all for vampires. She recognized one of them as Sean Myers, a jock she put into his place a few weeks before. He had tried to win her over with his inexplicable locker room charm and when she did not respond to his liking he turned to verbal abuse. In the end, she really didn't want to hit him with the locker as hard as she did. It looked like he was still missing some teeth. "Good work Gary. Ass jew can zee, our frenz will make sssure you have your fun. Then cheese oars."

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If Wiley had to say no one more time she swore she would slap Brandon so hard he would need a skin graft. Making out was nice, Brandon was handsome enough and Wiley was willing, but she wasn't prepared to go any further than that. It annoyed her how guys tended to succumb to the lowest common denominator. "Brandon, stop it. If you want to get anywhere with me, you'll stop now."

He pulled away. She still had it, she still could control these mindless apes with just a twist of innuendo. "That's a good boy. You think Raine is having a good time? I mean, Gary isn't really her type y'know." Since she found out Raine's secret, Wiley had wondered about who was her own "type". Most guys were no more than accessories to her, she tended to keep them emotionally at an arms distance. She knew there were good guys out there . . . just not in her experience.

Brandon drew her closer to him and started nibbling on her neck. His clumsy effort caused her to giggle. "It's just one night, she'll live."

Wiley pulls Brandon up toward her and starts kissing him. Her effort was less the result of passion as one to keep him and his hands busy doing what she wanted him to do. She allowed herself to enjoy the moment. They kissed deeply. The only light in the cabin came from the window above their bunk. Wiley hated the dark, she actually preferred to have a nightlight on when she slept . . . not something she'd share with the other "slayers". Her mind had drifted from nightlights back to Brandon when she heard a muffled scream outside of the cabin. She pushes Brandon away. "What was that?"

"Jason and Freddy out for a walk. Maybe they'll meet Frankenstein and have a good time. C'mon Wiley, I'm starting to think this is a waste of time."

Wiley listened intently and heard more scuffling outside. "Something's going on out there."

Brandon grabbed her arm and forcibly tried to bring her down to him. "Forget it Wiley, Raine and Gary are probably hitting it off."

Wiley pushes him away unsuccessfully, his arms now wrapped around her waist. How pathetic. She looked out the window and saw Raine on the ground struggling while Gary (surprisingly) sat on top of her. This wasn't good. "Brandon! I think Gary is attacking Raine!"

Brandon pulled down on Wiley. "I said, she'll live. Now come here you!" He made a good effort to force Wiley down. Without thinking she brought her legs up and used them to push Brandon away from her. "Let go of me!"

Brandon hit a beam hard enough that by the time his body hit the ground, he was unconscious. "Oh shoot! Brandon?!"

Wiley didn't wait for an answer, he was still breathing. She ran out of the cabin. The air was now cold and it served to take any drowsiness she might have entertained away. "Raine!?"

Raine was strong enough to pull away from one set of arms, but there were too many, the vamps caught her in a bad position and now with Gary practically sitting on

her chest she was having problems. Without resorting to their game faces, Sean and the other vampires helped Gary to keep her down. She kept trying to shift, turn and move out of the situation, but Gary seemed to enjoy it as if she was some sort of amusement ride. He fought against her, managing to undo her jacket and was now pulling at the simple t-shirt she had worn in the hopes that it was not too appealing. Apparently, it didn't matter.

The Vamps started pulling out of the ground, increasing their grip on her. Their nails had already drawn blood and Raine could sense that they were starting to get blood crazed. Gary laughed.

“These guys promised to see to it that you and I had a good time. Afterwards I get to hang with them forever! Super strength, immortality, eternal coolness . . . I'm there baby!”

Raine is startled at the sound of her shirt ripping.

Then, Gary suddenly rises several feet in the air above her. Raine wonders how he was managing to fly when she realized it wasn't of his own doing. At her feet she saw Wiley. The southern bombshell had thrown Gary several yards into the woods, and with Raine's makeshift walking stick dusted the two vampires at Raine's feet.

Raine took full advantage of her newfound freedom to slide free of her captors while Wiley wailed on them with the four foot long stake. Raine pulled herself away from the fight and focused on covering herself. Wiley seemed to have things well in hand. Too well.

She wasn't dusting the remaining vampires, she was beating them, hurting them, crippling them, and pounding them, but despite several opportunities she wasn't staking them. “W..Wiley . . . get it over with already!”

Wiley's head was spinning with the mix of beer and emotions. The walking stick slammed repeatedly into Gary's face, and in her beer blurred vision, into the face of every guy who ever tried to get into her pants or hurt her and her friends . . . arrogant . . . stupid . . . Wiley had seen fear in Raine's eyes, a girl who could take down monsters, caught in the lies and mind games of this contemptible breed , protected by laws, cliques, fathers, and the idea that boys will be boys . . .

...and she felt responsible.

Raine saw Brandon come out of the cabin, he wasn't doing too good on his feet. Gary ran up to him. “C'mon! They've gone nuts! Let's get out of here . . .”

Gary leads Brandon away toward the back of the camp where Brandon's jeep was parked. Raine watches as the vehicle makes it's way out of the camp down the road they came on. Then the night shifts and the road and scenery changes as the jeep disappears into the distance. “Brandon! No!”



It's too late. The Jeep is gone, swallowed into the night. Raine turns back toward Wiley. She was standing in a cloud of dust shimmering in the moonlight. She looked angry, tired and disheveled. "Wiley?"

She dropped the walking stick and fell to her knees. "Raine... you okay? God, I'm sorry!"

Raine comes over to Wiley and puts an arm around her. "So is this what happens when popular girls get too much to drink? You need Dr. Laura, girl."

Despite reassurances, Wiley could feel that Raine was shaking. Being a slayer didn't necessarily prepare you for what just happened. All powers aside, Raine was still just a teenager, who spent her life with a loving family and only the problems she brought upon herself . . .not like Wiley. "This was my idea. I thought you were just confused y'know. Thought maybe I could help you sort things out . . . God, I'm sorry. I had no idea!"

Wiley puts her arms around Raine, hoping to help her. "Wiley, I can deal . . . really. . . it's not your fault."

Wiley rips a piece of her blouse and uses the fabric to wipe some of the dirt and blood off Raine's face and shoulders. "Here, let me . . .I hate them, I really do. They get drunk and stupid, and because they're rich or connected they think they can get away with this crap." Wiley was becoming obsessive with getting the dirt off of Raine, as if it represented the bile and repugnance of what just happened.

"Hey, hey, when you reach bone it's time to stop."

Wiley giggles. Raine smiles. "You better now?"

Wiley grabs Raine and brings her lips to hers. Raine is shocked. Wiley's lips slide pass Raine's as she changes her concentration onto Raine's neck. "Oh, he ripped your shirt."

"Oh boy."

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Jacqueline was relieved to see Raine walk into her classroom. She had thought to admonish both her slayers for abandoning their duties for the weekend, but decided against it. Wiley was still too new, and Jacqueline didn't want to do anything that might push Raine away from her. Raine's present situation at home made dealing with her a more sensitive matter. Raine looked worse for wear and unusually distant even for her. She sat at one of the desks.

“Morning Raine . . . is everything okay?”

“Jacqueline. You know that book on Japanese ghosts and demon variations you made me study last month?”

“Yes, after I met your Japanese friend. I thought the connection might actually get you to focus on some of your studies.”

“It worked. There is a nurikabe on the Alejandro mountain.”

Jacqueline was impressed with Raine. The nurikabe is a little known type of ghost that originated in the orient. The ghost often appeared as a wall or mirage. Its sole intent was to confuse travelers and cause them to get lost. “Are you sure, or did you and your friends just get lost?”

“Oh I’m sure. Once I figured it out, I grabbed a tree branch and the ghost kept its distance. A couple of our supposed friends might still be out there.”

Jacqueline was getting excited. “Very resourceful Raine. I had no idea you paid so much attention.” The common method to send a nurikabe on its way was to tap a branch or twig at its base. This is the reason why travelers took to carrying walking staffs on long journeys, to protect themselves from getting lost due to the efforts of the mischievous ghosts. “Should we do something about your friends . . . the lost ones?”

Raine didn’t reply immediately.

“Raine?”

“No. I don’t think so.” Raine gets up and starts to walk out of the room just as Wiley walks in, dressed to kill and holding a large package. Jacqueline sensed they had some matter to discuss and quickly found something for herself to do beyond hearing distance. “Morning Wiley, good to see you back.”

Wiley hands Raine the package. “This is for you.” Raine takes the package and places it on a desk and immediately starts to open it. “What is it? Gary’s head?”

Wiley smiles. “Better.”

Raine’s eyes opened wide as she pulled out a pair of full grain leather custom Vendramini motorcycle boots imported from the United Kingdom. “Whoa, no Wiley . . . this is too much.”

Wiley sat down on the desk. “Paid in plastic. It’s the least I can do. I’m really sorry for what happened. I don’t deal well with beer. Just so you know . . . I’m not sorry about everything, but it doesn’t mean that I’m . . . that you and I . . . it’d not that I . . . Hell, I shouldn’t touch beer. Beer is like all of mankind’s stupidity in one addictive

fattening drink. It makes everyone look the same, makes idiots look like geniuses and geniuses idiots. It's like a sign you wear saying that you are giving up. Most of all, it makes you do things you regret later. Not that I regret, but it . . . it's not me."

Raine raises a hand to stop her. "Hey, I know. Just between us, it's okay. Just between friends."

Wiley leans in and whispers. "It was kinda like kissing myself . . ."

"Based on my point of view, then it was a good thing right? So how was I?"

"You want to know?"

"Not really."

"Fine."

"Tell me."

"Raine!" Wiley looked around nervously.

Raine imitated Wiley's southern drawl . . . "No, we're he'ah now. Tell me."

"You keep this up loner-girl and the boots go back."

Raine grabs both boots and holds them to her chest. "Don't be evil, you know what I do to evil. - I was kidding you, pop-girl. Our secret is safe."

"It better be. We'd have to neuter Trim if he ever found out."

Wiley gets up and leaves the classroom in her usual bubbly self. In a louder voice she says "See you later Jacqueline! Brandon and I are done! I have some serious flirting to do."

Jacqueline joins Raine. "That girl's hormones are going to be problematic. Imagine, arranging for the two of you to go on a date, and with boys! Doesn't she know?"

Raine looks out the door as Wiley merges into the crowd of students in the hallway. "How many different drinks do you think there are in the world?"

"Innumerable I would imagine."

"I like water. Water is water. I suppose if you're not sure about what you like to drink you'd have to try several before you can make up your mind. You might even consider trying a drink a few times before deciding. . . and if you don't like the drink, it

doesn't make that drink bad does it? I mean there are people in the world who actually like Moxie, Right?"

Jacqueline was definitely confused. She found that in situations like this it was often best to be short and direct until you can figure out what the actual conversation was about.

"I like tea."

The End

*Thanks to Chris Dellario the seed that grew this tale.*