

*Buffy*  
THE  
VAMPIRE  
SLAYER

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COYOTE MOON

JOHN VORNHOLT

NIGHT OF THE LIVING RERUN

ARTHUR BYRON COVER

PORTAL THROUGH TIME

ALICE HENDERSON

Based on the hit TV series created by Joss Whedon

SIMON PULSE

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**B**orn into a legendary role, Buffy the Vampire Slayer carries the burden of humanity on her shoulders. Her true identity is known only to her watcher, Giles, her best friends Willow, Xander, and Cordelia, and the mysteriously good-hearted vampire Angel. Living in Sunnydale, California, above the Hellmouth, she is a high school student by day and a demon's worst adversary by night. These are her stories.



# COYOTE MOON

## CHAPTER ONE

The night wind brought a howl that was sharp and high-pitched, like a baby crying. Only it wasn't a human baby. Buffy Summers paused to listen as she stepped out of the Bronze, Sunnydale's coolest club. Of course, it was Sunnydale's *only* club, and they let everybody in—but it was still cool, somehow.

The door opened again, and Xander, her friend, stepped into the dark alley, bumping into her with his gangly body. “Hey, Buffy, this is a doorway, not a parking lot.”

“Sorry,” she said. “Do you hear that?”

Xander frowned as he listened to the rock music thumping through the walls. “Do you think the band finally hit the right chord?”

“No way,” Buffy answered. “It was something else, like a howl.”

The door opened again, and Willow stepped out and bumped into them. “Are we pretending to be the Three Stooges?” she asked.

“No,” Xander answered. “That’s when we all try to go through the door at the same time. This is where we stand in the alley and listen to . . . What are we listening to?”

Buffy shook her mane of honey-blond hair. “I don’t know, just some weird sound—like a howl.”

“Are you sure it wasn’t the lead singer?” Willow asked.

Buffy sighed. “Okay, so tonight wasn’t Lollapalooza at the Bronze. Have you got a better idea where to go?”

“We could go home and sleep?” Willow said hopefully.

“There’s plenty of time to sleep once school starts again,” Xander scoffed. “Biology, English literature, study hall in the library—what could be more restful? But for right now, we’ve got to *party!*”

“He’s right,” Buffy insisted. “The break’s almost over, and it’s our duty as teenagers to have as much fun as possible before school starts.”

Willow looked wistful. “I think school’s more fun than vacation.”

“That’s why we hang with you,” Xander said. “You’re really bizarre.”

Buffy started walking down the service road that cut between the warehouses around the Bronze. “During those

desperate times when there's no party anywhere else, I know two guys who never let you down—Ben and Jerry! My mom just put in a supply of cookie dough ice cream.”

“My favorite!” Xander exclaimed.

With Buffy the Vampire Slayer leading the way, the three friends wandered from the bad part of town, across the tracks, onto a well-lit suburban street. Buffy had to admit that things had been a bit boring lately—what with no school plus no vampires to slay—but she wasn't going to complain. Vampire vacation was even better than school vacation.

“Listen,” Willow said excitedly. “I just heard there's a carnival opening this weekend in the vacant lot on Main Street, where the drive-in movie used to be!”

“What kind of carnival?” Xander asked.

“You know,” Willow said, “a cheap, tawdry affair with creaky rides and hokey fun houses.”

“Cool!” Xander exclaimed. “Just the thing we need to end the break.”

“And blow all the money we made from babysitting,” Buffy added.

Enthused about the coming weekend, the three teenagers walked more quickly past the grassy lawns and sedate houses. Except for the way it looked, there was nothing sedate about the town of Sunnydale. It was perched on the Hellmouth, a very special place where the forces of darkness converged and attracted monsters from all over the world. *Real* monsters.



As they walked under a streetlamp, Buffy turned and saw a smudge under Xander's lip. She licked her finger and started to wipe it off. "Hold still, Xander, there's chocolate milk shake on your lip."

He smiled sheepishly and pushed her hand away. "Uh, that's my new mustache and goatee. I've got that whole Johnny Depp thing going."

Willow grinned but quickly covered her mouth. "Oh, it's very dashing."

Xander beamed proudly. "Do you think so?"

"If you want a mustache," Buffy said, "I think you'd better grow the hair in your nose longer."

"That stinks," Xander complained, slouching ahead of the girls. "I'll probably shave it off, but you could let me enjoy it until school starts, okay?"

"Okay," Buffy said with amusement. "Don't wig out."

Willow frowned puzzledly at her. "Why do men want to grow hair on their faces?"

"They're primitive," Buffy said with a shrug. "Deep down, under all that deodorant and aftershave, most of them would like to sleep in a cave and pick bugs out of their hairy hides."

"But Xander is more refined," Willow said with a hopeful lilt to her voice. "He wouldn't really grow a bunch of facial hair, would he? I'm scared of things that are *too* hairy."

Buffy twitched as the fine hairs on the back of her neck stood on end—they must not have liked Willow's remark. She also felt a slight cramp, reminding her of the next full moon.

But she couldn't think about that now, because the hairs on her neck continued their edgy dance.

She knew they were in grave danger. *But from where? From what?* Instinctively she slowed her pace and went into a crouch.

Suddenly a pack of wild animals burst from one of the side yards and loped to a stop in front of Xander. With a startled howl, the mustachioed hero sprang backward and scurried toward Buffy. While her friends fell in line behind the Slayer, the pack completed a lazy circle around them. Their actions reminded Buffy of a pack of hyenas she had once encountered at the zoo, but they looked more like dogs.

Then the Slayer realized what the predators were—*coyotes*.

She had seen coyotes often in the hills around Los Angeles, where she used to live, while horseback riding in Griffith Park or walking near Dodger Stadium. But that was always from a distance—she had never seen a pack of coyotes at close quarters, and it was a startling experience.

Numbering about fifteen, they were a scrawny, scruffy bunch, with mangy coats and darting eyes. Their tongues hung languidly over long jaws and jagged teeth, and they panted as if they had run a long distance. In their wary eyes, Buffy saw mischief and intelligence. She knew she should stay on her guard, but it was hard to be afraid of them when they looked so much like dogs. *Well, maybe dogs that need a bath and a trim. And a decent mud pack*, she thought.

None of them would meet her gaze except for one—an old

gray coyote with rheumy yellow eyes. It stopped and stared at her with a wisdom that seemed to be ancient.

To cover his initial fright, Xander swaggered toward the scrawny predators. “Hey, man, it’s just coyotes. Shoo! Go away!”

Some of the scruffy beasts did back away a few steps, but others bared their long canine teeth.

“Xander, leave them alone,” Buffy ordered, still in her fighting stance. “Don’t start any trouble.”

“Oh, come on, they’re just coyotes. You’re new here, but we see them all the time.”

“Duh,” Buffy said testily. “I saw coyotes in Los Angeles all the time too. This bunch *looks* normal, but there’s something wiggins about them.”

Even Willow scoffed at her fear. “He’s right, Buffy. It’s unusual to see them this close, but coyotes come down from the hills this time of year, looking for water.”

As if on some silent command, the pack of coyotes whirled gracefully on their haunches and loped away. Their joyous, high-pitched yips sounded like a bunch of marauding bandits in an old John Wayne movie. Within seconds, most of them had disappeared around a corner.

“See, they’re chicken!” Xander claimed, proudly puffing out his chest. He shouted after the coyotes, “Yeah, go on! Get out of here!”

The old coyote with the weird eyes stopped at the corner to look back at Buffy, and she felt the cramps, the chills, the

heaves, and just about every other warning sign her body was capable of producing. The animal didn't look annoyed—just curious. Finally it dashed off after its buds, and their eerie yipping continued to pierce the night for many minutes.

“They're on the hunt,” Willow said cheerfully. “I did a report on coyotes in zoology, so I know about their habits.”

“Don't you think there's something way bizarre about them?” Buffy asked. “Apart from the fact that coyotes are bizarre anyway.”

“No,” Willow answered thoughtfully. “But coyotes *are* strange. Did you know, you can train bears, tigers, elephants, and just about every other creature on earth—but not coyotes. In the wild or in captivity, coyotes do their own thing. Native Americans have all kinds of tales about them.”

“They're just dumb dogs,” Xander said, grinning at Buffy. He put his arm protectively around her shoulders. “Don't worry, Buff. If you're scared of those big bow-wows, I'll protect you.”

She shook off his gangly arm. “That's real Hercules of you, but as long as they stay away from us, we'll have no problem.”

“Xander is right,” Willow said reassuringly. “We see them around here a lot. Even though coyotes live all over the West, often near urban areas, it's very rare for them to attack humans.”

“I'll remember that.” Buffy gave her wispy friend a smile. She didn't want to get mad at Xander and Willow; after all,

it wasn't often they got to act more macho than the Slayer. Maybe it was just a pack of especially bold coyotes, new in town, razzing the locals. Still, she couldn't get the aged eyes of that grizzled coyote out of her mind.

With her heightened senses, Buffy could still hear the coyotes as they continued their romp through Sunnydale's quiet streets. Their depraved yowls sounded like a combination of tomcats, wolves, and two-year-old toddlers. Buffy was glad when the awful yelps faded into the starlit distance.

"The children of the night," Xander said in his best Bela Lugosi imitation. "What beautiful music they make."

"You know, he always gave me the creeps," Buffy said, "because I don't think he knew what he was saying. He, like, learned it phonetically. And why did he walk around with his cape in front of his mouth? Did he have bad breath? All the vampires I know like to have their fangs hanging out, primed and ready."

"I'm going to pass on ice cream," Willow said with a yawn. "It's time to go home—to dream of returning to school and ending this pointless existence."

"It's called *va-ca-tion*," Xander insisted. "The absence of work, the natural state of being, the purpose of life."

"It's boring," Willow said. "But maybe it will pick up this weekend."

"Maybe it will," Buffy agreed, taking a last look around the quiet suburban neighborhood.

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Buffy never slept well or deeply anymore, and it didn't take much to jolt her out of bed like a rocket. Still dressed in a clinging sleeveless shirt, she rolled out of bed onto her bare feet and listened to the disturbing sounds coming through her bedroom window. The warm night air brought demented yapping that was unmistakable—the coyotes were on the hunt! They were nearby, coming closer.

She knew instinctively that it was the same pack of coyotes they had met earlier that night. Although it was now close to four o'clock in the morning, they weren't done terrorizing the neighborhood yet. Truthfully, Buffy relished an opportunity to observe the pack without those skeptics, Xander and Willow, slowing her down. She had never seen coyotes that bold, and she wanted to keep an eye on them.

Rising like a wave, the eerie yapping passed over her house like an aural ghost. Buffy pulled on a pair of jeans and her tennis shoes, crawled out the window, and scurried down the roof. By the time she jumped to the ground, all she got was a glimpse of the pack as they charged brazenly down the middle of the street. In the lead was a swift blond canine, clutching something white in its mouth.

In a frenzy of demented yapping, the others chased it down an alley and were gone a second later. Although she doubted whether she could catch them, Buffy was about to try when she heard a frenzied shout. She turned to see a middle-aged woman in a nightgown bearing down on her.

“Stop them! Stop them!” the woman screamed. “My baby!”

“Your baby!” Buffy said with a gasp. Had they really snatched a baby?

Panting for breath, the distraught woman rushed up to Buffy and grabbed her arm. “They took my Tiger!”

The teenager blinked at her. “Okay, did they take a baby or a tiger? Or was it a baby tiger?”

“Oh, no, my precious *Tiger!*” the woman shrieked. “He’s a little pug-nosed chow.”

“Oh, a dog,” Buffy said, trying not to look relieved. It was terrible that the coyotes had snatched the woman’s dog, but that was better than a baby. She remembered similar tragedies in Los Angeles; that’s what happened when coyotes went hunting in the suburbs.

“They took him right out of my backyard!” the woman said in a quavering voice. “He was old and infirm, and he couldn’t fight back. We have to *save* him!”

Buffy held her hands and tried to be comforting. “I’m sorry, but I don’t see how we’re going to save Tiger. He was probably dead within seconds of them grabbing him. Besides, there’s no way we could catch them.”

The distraught woman buried her face in her hands and began to weep, and Buffy glanced around, amazed that nobody else had come out to witness this dramatic scene. Even now, the yelps of the coyotes sounded distant, as if they had only been a passing nightmare.

There wasn’t much for Buffy to do but walk her home. “Where do you live?” she asked.

“Can’t we do *anything*?” her neighbor blubbered.

“Well, sure, we’ll report them to Animal Control, or the dog catcher, or whoever handles stuff like this.” Buffy mustered a hopeful smile.

“They won’t do anything,” the woman grumbled. “Tiger is gone, all thanks to those damn coyotes! It must be Coyote Moon that brought them here. Curse them!”

“Coyote Moon?” Buffy asked warily.

The woman stared grimly down the deserted street, which looked so peaceful that it was hard to imagine it had just been the scene of a grisly hunt and kill. “Coyote Moon comes in August,” she intoned, “when it gets hot. It rises red, and it brings the coyotes. That’s what my grandmother always said.”

“Grandmothers are usually right about that stuff,” Buffy remarked lamely, thinking of Grandma Summers playing bridge in Clearwater, Florida.

The woman began to weep uncontrollably, and the Slayer guided her to the sidewalk. “Just point the way home.”

She only lived half a block away, yet it took about ten minutes to walk her home. Buffy listened sympathetically to lighthearted tales about Tiger’s exploits. He was a much-beloved little dog, and he had lived a full, spoiled life. Talking seemed to make the woman feel better, and she thanked Buffy profusely.

The teen made sure that her neighbor was safely entrenched behind locked doors before she left her. Although the woman



was safe, Tiger was still gone, and nothing would erase the savagery of that attack.

As Buffy walked home, the warm wind again brought the eerie sound of coyotes yipping and yowling. She hoped the pack would move on to some other town or go back to the wilderness, but she wasn't counting on it. Unfortunately, when nasty critters got a taste of Sunnydale, they usually made themselves right at home.