

~ How I Spent My Tartarus Vacation ~

by Ambrosia

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Subtext: There is a smidgen of it in here, but not much at all. Actually it's sort of invisible.

The next thing Gabrielle knew was that she was lying on the ground. She arose from the ground and looked upwards, but could not see hole from which she had jumped from with Hope in her arms. Speaking of Hope where was she?

Gabrielle scanned around the dark place she was in, but could find no sign of her daughter. She shrugged her shoulders and proceeded to walk around to investigate her surroundings when she heard someone call her name from behind. She swiftly turned around to come face to face with Hades himself.

"Am I dead?" she asked him.

"No."

"No? But I jumped into that pit with Hope. Where is she anyway?"

"Lets not talk about Hope right now. Instead let's focus on you. No, you are definitely not dead Gabrielle. You are...oh how should I say this...in limbo. Consider this a waiting period."

"Where am I?" Gabrielle asked, getting excited at the idea of getting to return to Xena.

"In Tartarus," Hades replied.

"I don't get it. How can I be in Tartarus if I'm not dead?"

"Well...you're not really *in* Tartarus. More on the outskirts of it. You will return to Earth soon enough. When you do you will find that you are in a hospice, but don't worry because you're not hurt that much."

"Will I see Xena?"

"I don't know. Will you?" With that he disappeared.

This is so confusing, Gabrielle thought as she searched the Tartarus outskirts again. It was then that she located a café that had the name "Hot Stuff".

"Oh that is just plain sick," Gabrielle muttered as she headed towards the place. *No where else to go, so might as well check it out.*

As Angel got off the ground he wondered at what had just happened. Buffy had killed him, without so much as an explanation. As Angel searched around him he was suddenly overtaken with a vast headache. With this headache came memories roaring through his mind of the events of the last few months. *Oh no. The curse.* Angel was seeing everything that he had done after his one night with Buffy. He had become that monster he had been so long ago.

"That's why she did it," he said aloud to no one in particular.

As Angel walked around he suddenly located what appeared to be a coffee shop. *What is a coffee shop doing down here?* Angel shrugged and began to head in the direction of the establishment.

Gabrielle sat at a table in the crowded café sipping a cup of hot lemon tea, contemplating the current events. Thank the gods she would be able to go back home. *I cannot wait to see Xena. To hug her and maybe even...* "Excuse me?" said a male voice.

Gabrielle jumped at the surprise of having someone sneak up on her, when she had been lost in her thoughts.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to frighten you." The man turned to walk away.

Gabrielle caught him by the sleeve of his shirt, "No don't go. I was just daydreaming. What can I do for you?"

"I was wondering if I could sit here with you. All the other tables seem to be taken."

"Sure. Have a seat."

"Thanks." The man smiled warmly over at Gabrielle, as he took his seat on the opposite booth.

"So, what's your poison?" he asked.

"Hey! I had a good reason for killing my daughter!" Gabrielle shouted defensively, which was quickly followed by a blush of embarrassment. *Relax Gabrielle. This man knows nothing about you.*

The man wore an expression of shock, but did not comment. *I have no right to judge, but I don't even think I could stoop that low.* "I meant what are you drinking?" the man asked.

"Oh. Tea." Gabrielle was still red in the face.

"I believe I'll have coffee." The man called a waitress over and ordered a cup of black coffee. As he ordered Gabrielle noted that he had a kind face. Warm dark brown eyes...

"Do you want a refill?" he asked her.

"No thanks."

"Then that will be all miss. Thank you," he said to the waitress as she left.

"Uh oh."

"What's the matter?" Gabrielle asked.

"I just remembered I don't have any money with me."

Gabrielle replied, "Why do you think they don't have any prices on the food? When I asked them they said you'll be paying soon enough."

The man then looked grim and said, "For a moment there I managed to forget where I was."

"I'm sorry. Then you're staying?" Gabrielle inquired gently.

"Yes. You're not?"

Gabrielle shook her head.

"Well that's good to hear." He then smiled again, but there was sadness in his eyes.

"Here we are talking, and I don't even know your name. I'm Gabrielle," she said extending her palm towards him.

"I'm Angel," Angel replied taking the offered hand in his.

"Nice to meet you Angel."

"Same here Gabrielle," he smiled again, shaking his head in wonder, "You know Gabrielle there is something about you that makes me think that everything is going to be okay. Something that gives me hope."

Gabrielle spit out the swallow of tea she had just taken. She sprayed the table, "I'm sorry," she said using the napkins to wipe up the liquid.

"That's okay," Angel said good-naturedly helping her.

When they were done Angel examined Gabrielle noting that she now again looked the way she had when he had first come over. He took one of her hands in his own. "Did I say something wrong Red?" he teased trying to get Gabrielle out of her depressed state. *And I'm the one who is staying.*

Gabrielle giggled some at the nickname, "It's just that my daughters' name was Hope."

Angel thought for a moment, "Is she the one that you poisoned?" he asked as gently as he could.

Gabrielle nodded taking another sip of her now lukewarm tea.

"Was she bad?"

Gabrielle laughed without humor, "That's an understatement."

They were silent for a few moments lost in their own thoughts. Finally Angel spoke up, "Is that why you are here?"

Gabrielle shook her head, "No. I'm here because I sacrificed myself."

Angel was taken aback. "Why did you do that?"

"Because if I hadn't sacrificed myself, then my best friend would be dead. It was either she or I, and I was not about to let her die. I love her too much," she finished silently.

"Must be some friend you have there."

"She is," Gabrielle replied simply.

After a minute Angel asked, "Why did one of you have to die if you don't mind my asking?"

"I don't, it's just a very complicated story."

Angel laughed, "Can't be any more complicated than my own."

"Okay then. You see my daughter Hope came back from the dead. You with me so far?"

Angel nodded, not appearing surprised.

"She had to be killed again because she was evil itself, and I found out that if my friend Xena were to kill her, then her lifeline would be cut. I could not allow that to happen, so I grabbed my daughter and jumped into a pit with her, and here I am now."

Angel nodded again, "And now you get to go back?"

"Yes. Somehow miraculously I lived."

Once again there was silence until Gabrielle broke it by asking, "How did you get here?"

"My ex-girlfriend killed me," he stated, appearing as though he was not about to divulge any more information.

I'm not about to let that happen. I told my story, now he tells his. "And?" Gabrielle prodded gently.

"And that's it."

"No it's not."

Angel looked as if he was growing impatient, but Gabrielle being Gabrielle was not about to back down. He looked over at her and then threw up his hands, "Fine. Here it is in a nutshell. I met her, I was good, I turned bad, did bad stuff including attempting to send the world to Hell, and she killed me so that wouldn't happen. I guess in a way you could call me a sacrifice too, because I had to die so others wouldn't."

Unlike Angel had been with her story, Gabrielle was shocked speechless for a moment. "Um...why did you turn bad?"

"I'm a vampire and my soul was taken away." Angel took a sip of his coffee. It seemed to get bitterer with every swallow.

Gabrielle wore an expression of confusion, "What is a vampire?"

"You don't know what a vampire is?"

It was now time for Gabrielle to turn impatient, "If I did do you think I'd be asking?"

Angel seemed to ignore that statement, "A vampire is a creature of the undead that has fangs, can't come out in the daytime because the sun can kill it, and it needs blood in order to be strong and live."

"Oh you mean a Bacchae. I was one of those once, but just for a little while."

Angel looked confused but did not comment. "Anyway that's why I'm here."

"Well you seem like you have a soul."

"That's because at the last minute somehow I got it back, but by then it was too late. Buffy had to kill me to shut the gateway to Hell. I don't blame her, but it still hurts that she did it. She kissed me, hugged me, told me not to look back and then stabbed me with a sword." Angel started to cry.

Gabrielle reached over and pulled a napkin out of its dispenser and handed it to him. He thanked her and dabbed at his eyes trying to compose himself.

"I'm sorry Red," he said.

"No need to apologize Angel." Gabrielle smiled and squeezed his hand. "If you don't mind my asking what is this Hell you speak of?"

Angel then stared at her as if she had lost her mind, "That's where we are now Gabrielle." He spoke to her as if she were a confused child.

"No Angel. This is Tartarus."

Fine. I'm not going to argue with you. Angel smiled and said, "Your absolutely right."

Gabrielle smiled proud that he had seen things her way. "So Angel, what bad stuff did you do to deserve to be down here?"

"I told you I tried to send the world to He- I mean Tartarus."

"Why did you try to do that?"

"I have no idea." Angel shrugged.

"So you wouldn't have come down here if it weren't for that incident?"

Angel shook his head, "I wouldn't say that."

"Well how did you turn bad? I mean how did you lose your soul?"

Angel winced at the memory, "On my ex-girlfriends seventeenth birthday I gave her a present that cost me my soul." Again he looked as if he wasn't about to explain.

Gabrielle sighed. *I cannot believe I'm saying this, but it's easier to get Xena to talk about her past than it is this guy.* "Must you be so cryptic?"

"I slept with her."

"What's wrong with that?" *At least one of us is getting some action.*

"A curse was put on me that if I were to experience true happiness then I would lose my soul. That night I did."

Gabrielle was silent for a moment, "That's romantic but sad."

"Yes. I suppose it is Red." He smiled sadly.

"So she was forced to kill you," Gabrielle said more to herself than him.

"Yes. It was her job. She's the slayer."

"What is a slayer?"

"Are you a reporter or something?"

"Huh?"

"Nevermind. A slayer is a person who slays."

"Oh." *I'm not any closer to finding out what he means, but I give up.*

"So let's talk about you Red. Why was your daughter evil?"

"She was the daughter of Dahok."

"And who is he?" *Let's see how she deals with all these questions.*

"He is an evil demon. I went to this temple where these people worshipped this one god, and I thought the god was supposed to be a good god but it turned out to be Dahok. He decided to choose me to carry his child, because he couldn't come to the earth himself. While I was there I killed for the first time and lost my blood innocence. I still have nightmares about it. The horrible thing about was that I meant to kill her. She wasn't a good person, but I had no right to take her life. Anyway after all this happened, my friend Xena came in to save me, but Dahok elevated me on top of fire and impregnated me. I didn't have a normal pregnancy; therefore Hope was born not long after all that took place. I called her Hope, hoping that she wouldn't turn evil like what was intended to happen. Obviously it didn't work. I tried to kill her before, by poisoning her but she came back. I don't even know if she is dead now. If I survived then she probably did too." A tear fell down her smooth cheek, and Angel wiped it away with the padded part of his thumb. She smiled at him and then looked down at the table as if all the sudden it intrigued her.

Angel lifted her chin up until Gabrielle was looking into his dark eyes with her sparkling green ones, "I'm sure that when all that took place it was a reflex when you killed her. I've done much worse if it makes you feel any better."

"Try me."

"I have taken hundreds of lives. I even tried to kill Buffy a few times. I killed her watchers girlfriend Jenny, who was also her teacher."

Gabrielle's eyes grew wide with shock, "That was because of the curse right?"

"Yes, but I chose to do it. I chose to become a vampire."

"Well I could sort of compare you to my friend Xena."

"Your friend is a killer? That doesn't seem like your type Red?"

"She used to be a killer. Now she only kills as a last resort, and only those who are bad. Maybe this will make you feel better. When she killed she wasn't under the influence of anything. She did it just because she could." Gabrielle stabbed the table for emphasis when she said the last statement.

"How did she change?"

"She had some help from Hercules."

"Ah." *Don't ask Angel. These names have got to go.*

"And at least you had a reason to kill Angel. Xena killed because she wanted to rob them. Ransack their villages. She was known as the Destroyer of Nations."

"What do you mean I had a reason? I did it because it was fun," he said in disgust with himself.

"Yes, but didn't you drink their blood so you could live?"

"Well yes but-

"Then there is your reason. You needed to survive. When Xena did it she didn't need to."

"I appreciate what you are trying to do Red, but I could have just went to a blood bank, or got blood from a butcher shop or something. I had options and I chose to kill humans so that I could live."

"Well Xena practically did it, so she wouldn't be bored."

"Enough talk of Xena. Let's get back to you."

"Okay."

"So what will you do when you get back Red?"

"Locate Xena."

Angel laughed. "This Xena is someone special to you isn't she?"

"She is my other half Angel," Gabrielle said smiling dreamily.

Before Angel could comment a man came up to their table. He turned his attention to Angel. "Are you Angel?" he asked.

"Yes I am," Angel replied, the fear obvious in his eyes. *Must be time for me to go.*

Angel's fear wasn't lost on Gabrielle. She stood up and faced the man. "You can't take him Hades."

"Mind your own business Gabrielle."

"Don't tell me what to do. This man is sorry for what he did. I know he has done a lot of things, but can't you see the self-repulsion, the guilt in his eyes. Yes he tried to send the world to Tartarus, but he wasn't all there. Now if you decide to keep this honorable and kind man down here, and let him suffer forever, then you can just keep me too. I refuse to leave without him. By the gods give him another chance. You're giving me one." She tried to give him her best impression of the Xena "look".

While Angel sat there in surprise Hades said, "Are you done Gabrielle?"

She thought for a minute, "I guess I am."

"Then both of you will be happy to know that Angel too is going back."

Gabrielle smiled widely as Angel replied, "He is? I mean I am?" He shot up from the booth.

"Yes you are. You see Angel there was slight technicality. It seems that you were supposed to go to Hell, but you instead were sent here to Tartarus. Therefore you get to return to earth."

"Told you there was a Hell Red."

Gabrielle's smile vanished, "Wait a minute. You mean that that is the only reason he is being sent back?"

"Gabrielle that's okay. I'm just happy to be going back." His eyes pleaded with her not to say anything more. She silently obeyed his wish.

"I'm happy you are going back Angel," she said, her smile in place again.

"So am I Red. So am I."

"So if you two would come with me, I'll get you back to where you belong."

Angel and Gabrielle followed Hades outside. "Gabrielle you see that blue light over there?"

Gabrielle nodded.

"Go in there and you will wake up to find that you are in a hospice. Angel do you see that yellow light over there." Hades pointed in the opposite direction that he had with Gabrielle.

"Yes I do."

"You go there. You will end up in the place that you died. Now you two go and I'll see you later." He then disappeared.

"That was not funny at all," Gabrielle stated, as Angel agreed.

Angel turned to Gabrielle and touched her cheek with one of his hands, "Well have a great life Red."

"You too Angel. I don't think I understand all this, but something tells me chances are we will never meet again." She had tears in her eyes. She was going to miss this man, whom she had only known for a short time.

Angel surprisingly had tears in his eyes too, "Something tells me the same exact thing Red." He then bent down and kissed her lightly on her lips. "You and Xena take care of each other."

"You and Buffy do the same."

Angel smiled sadly, "Might be too late for us."

"Might not. You've gotta have hope."