Tonight

by purplefeen

Angel/Willow
genre: romance
rating: Teens
written for Gabrielle
disclaimer: songs are owned by Jim Steinman and Dan Hartman
time frame: during s3's Graduation Day
summary: The senior class has one last night to live their lives

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Her cousin Cynthia sent her the song through email and she didn't know why. Cynthia had strange tastes in… everything. She was sort of like Cordelia, if Cordy liked jazz and punk. At first, she wasn't really listening to the words; it was in her thoughts along the lines of *'It's got a good beat and you can dance to it.'*

But as Windows Media Player automatically repeated the only song on its playlist, the words started penetrating.

I've got a dream 'bout an angel on the beachAnd the perfect waves are starting to comeHis hair is flying out in ribbons of goldAnd his touch has got the power to stun

She thought about Angel, and how he had once been Angelus. Not the sick megalomaniac Angelus that he had become last year, but the Angelus of the Watcher's Diaries. Cunning, powerful, unstoppable. He would have been scarier than the scariest thing they had ever faced.

But fascinating as well.

I've got a dream 'bout an angel in the forestEnchanted by the edge of a lakeHis body's flowing in the jewels aliveAnd the earth below is starting to shake

She got another vision, this one of what it must have been like to be sent to Hell. To have endured centuries there and how that would change you; it would have to change you.

It probably would have destroyed all traces of the megalomaniac. She wished her ensouling spell could have worked so it hadn't had to come to that. But since he had gone to Hell, she was glad he didn't have the soul there. A human soul wouldn't be able to survive through that. At least, not without… she didn't want to think about it.

But somehow, by some miracle, when he came out of Hell, his soul was restored. Maybe it had been there waiting for him all along. Maybe when he dropped onto that same spot where Buffy had stabbed him and sent him to Hell, maybe the soul was waiting there, at the exact place of his death. Waiting for him to return, thanks to her spell.

But I don't see any angels in the cityI don't hear any holy choirs singAnd if I can't get an angelI can still get a boyAnd a boy'd be the next best thingThe next best thing to an angelA boy'd be the next best thing

Maybe Angel, after living through Hell, wouldn't be able to be as much of a demon as he had before. Maybe with the demon weakened after being in Hell, the soul would be more in control. Without having to fight the demon - if the demon was even able to manifest itself again. But being just a boy wouldn't be so bad, would it? A boy with superhuman strength and two and a half centuries of wisdom. Would that be so bad?

I've got a dream 'bout a boy in a castleAnd he's dancing like a cat on the stairsHe's got the fire of a prince in his eyesAnd the thunder of a drum in his earsI've got a dream 'bout a boy on a starLooking down upon the realm of the worldHe's there all alone and dreaming of someone like meI'm not an angel but at least I'm a girl

Maybe he can be happy now. Maybe this is the chance he needed. A fresh, shiny, clean soul to help him learn how to live again. Maybe Buffy can't be with him, but that shouldn't stop him from finding some kind of happiness with somebody. Because he should be happy - or, reasonably happy. Content, at least. At peace. And with a subdued demon and a pure soul, nothing is going to stop him, I'll make sure of it.

She slipped the bangle bracelet she'd been toying with on her wrist and looked at the clock. Almost eight, it was time to get going. But first…

She slipped a Cd-R into the disk drive of her computer. If there was ever a night for this song, tonight was it.

Their last night on Earth unless they defeated the Mayor. And the Bronze was open to all seniors of Sunnydale High. Anything they wanted, including beer. And condoms, in case they did live through it. Tamara's uncle owned the club and she had told him what was happening. He was closing the Bronze and throwing an all out bash for the kids willing to risk their lives for their town.

She grabbed the disk, slipped it into a jewel case and set out.

He held Giles back.

"Giles, they may all be dead tomorrow. Some of them will be. They're just kids, Rupert, let them live, if only for tonight."

Giles huffed, but inwardly admitted that Angel had a point. But still, they should be training, preparing…

He looked over to see Willow dancing with that short lad who once came into the library to borrow a book. Buffy was laughing and dancing with the tall chap that Xander was always so uncomfortable around. And Xander, well, Xander was holding Cordelia very close and slow dancing to a song with an up tempo beat.

Maybe they all did deserve this. They'd averted apocalypses before, but that was no guarantee they'd live through this one. He turned and left without another word.

Angel stood where he was, in the shadows, watching these brave children celebrate their last night as children. Tomorrow, they would all grow up, too quickly. Another song started and his eye was caught by Willow jumping up and down and clapping.

She must like this song.

He listened. It had something to do with an angel.

The song picked up tempo and most of the kids stood and moved and started to sing.

"I've got a dream when the darkness is overWe'll be lying in the rays of the sunBut it's only a dream and tonight is for realYou'll never know what it meansBut you'll know how it feelsIt's gonna be over (over)Before you know it's begun(Before you know it's begun)It's all we really got tonightStop your crying hold on (tonight)Before you know it it's gone (tonight)Tonight is what it means to be youngTonight is what it means to be young"

Angel looked around at the kids. Warriors. All living, growing, surviving on the Hellmouth - their whole lives. *And tomorrow?*

"Let the revels beginLet the fire be startedWe're dancing for the restless and the broken-heartedLet the revels beginLet the fire be startedWe're dancing for the desperate and the broken-heartedLet the revels begin...(Tonight is what it means to be young...)Let the fire be started...(Before you know it it's gone...)We're dancing for the restless and the broken-heartedLet the revels beginLet the fire be startedWe're dancing for the desperate and the broken-hearted"

Willow turned and saw him, even in his cloak of shadows. She jumped up and down, apparently happy to see him, and headed toward him.

The kids were still singing, the chorus of this song went on seemingly forever.

"Say a prayer in the darkness for the magick to comeNo matter what it seemsTonight is what it means to be youngBefore you know it it's goneTonight is what it means to be youngBefore you know it it's gone"

"Hi, Angel."

"Hi, Willow."

"Do you want to come… come dance with us? You have as much right to be here as any of us."

Angel took a step back, one that took his face - and his eyes - out of the shadows.

"No, Willow, I don't-" but Willow cut him off with her gasp. He thought she'd been hurt and took hold of her arm, wanting to pull her away from whatever the danger was.

Instead of showing him where the pain was, with wide, surprised eyes, she said to him, "You went to Hell."

He blinked and pulled forward into the shadows again.

"Yeah, um, didn't - didn't Buffy already tell you that?"

"No, YOU went to Hell. Angel, not Angelus. Your soul. You had your soul when you went to Hell. It's - in your eyes." She hadn't been this close to him before, never really looked -

"Yeah," he said, not really understanding what she was saying. Hadn't Buffy been through this with them?

"I'm - I'm so sorry, Angel. I didn't mean to."

She was crying now, fat tears that made her look so vulnerable. And young.

"Didn't Buffy tell you?"

Willow gasped again. "Buffy knew?"

"Well, yeah," Angel said, feeling uncomfortable about explaining something he thought would have been explained a year ago. "You gave me my soul back right before Buffy stabbed me through the heart and sent me to Hell."

Willow sobbed heavily and, shocked as he was that she was doing it, she threw her arms around his neck and kept apologizing to him. She explained that she'd meant to give him his soul before he opened Acathla. Buffy had never told her the spell had worked, so when he came back from Hell and had a soul, she thought it was something he got when he left Hell. Or something that had been waiting for him, waiting for his return.

She didn't know how he could have survived Hell. He shouldn't have been able to. It was all her fault and now he'd have a tortured soul forever, all because of her.

He held onto her and let her cry, whispering a soothing, shushing sound into her ear. One hand rubbed her back while the other smoothed down her hair.

"Does it hurt?" she asked him finally. Quietly.

This was his savior, he couldn't lie to her.

"Yes, sometimes it does."

"Can - can I - do anything? Any magic or - I just want to make it better, Angel."

She was serious. So very serious. When tonight was a night for celebrating. For celebrating life. For celebrating survival. For celebrating being young and alive.

"Dance with me?"

Without leading her to the dance floor, he took her in his arms and started swaying slowly, not in time to the music, in time to this thing that was magically forming between them.

Willow, a small human girl, friend of the girl he had loved until a few months ago, had reached out and offered comfort and apologies to a demon. With no self-motivation. Just because she was who she was.

He knew there had to be some prophesy that covered this because all of the sudden, the burdens that had been tormenting his soul since his return from Hell were lessened somewhat.

She looked up at him and smiled and he did an unthinkable thing. He leaned down and kissed her. Just a touch, really. Just a brush of his lips across hers. But there was power in it. Magick, chemistry, whatever you wanted to call it; it felt right.

Willow's hand moved up to touch the warmth she felt in her lips, but Angel wouldn't allow it. Before her hand reached its destination, he was there. Taking the kiss a little further, a little deeper.

He pulled back and remembered the dancing, singing, swirling teenagers around them. And their purpose here tonight.

He might not be here tomorrow night. And he didn't want to start something that would break her heart if he didn't make it through. Or break his.

As much as he would have loved to spend his last night on Earth with Willow in his bed, he couldn't do that to her. He didn't think she'd be willing anyway. But just in case she would be, he wouldn't ask.

"For now, dance with me," he said instead; this time leading her out onto the dance floor. He wasn't ashamed of her and knowing her as he did, he didn't think she'd be ashamed of him either. And if she was his, was going to be his, he wanted everyone to know it. Even Buffy. She knew he didn't love her anymore and he was almost certain she felt the same way. But he wasn't going to hide.

They danced for hours, never leaving each other's embrace. Buffy never confronted them, neither did Xander. He didn't know what had happened to earn them the reprieve. He didn't ask.

Until that song started to play again and, as before, the brave warriors of Sunnydale High School sang out their battle cry.

"It's all we really got tonightStop your cryin' hold on (tonight)Before you know it it's gone (tonight)Tonight is what it means to be youngTonight is what it means to be young...The things they sayAnd then the things they doNothin's gonna stop us if our dream is true..."

**I Can Dream About You**

He rolled the window down and felt the cool spring breeze on his face. LA beckoned. A big, teeming city full of people; the perfect place to loose yourself.

Maybe find yourself.

He didn't know what was going to happen now, but hopefully, it would all somehow work out. Right now, he had no idea how that was going to be possible…

*Three hours earlier…*

He stood in the shadows, where he always was, and he saw the firetrucks and the police cars pull up. He saw the rescue workers running to save the students who had stayed and fought, some making the ultimate sacrifice. That guy Buffy had been dancing with last night had been eaten by the mayor. Or - the demon the mayor had become. But still, the demon seemed an awful lot like the human it had once been.

Just like vampires.

He saw it all and yet he didn't. Now that it was over, all he really saw was *her*. And it wasn't fair. What he wanted to do wasn't fair to her. He was a vampire, he lived in the dark. He spent his life - unlife - fighting things that weren't even as evil as he had once been. But evil and dangerous none the less.

He couldn't ask her to accept that. A lifetime of that. She was so young, so smart, so deserving of a life out of the shadows.

Maybe he should just go with his original plan. When it was obvious he and Buffy not only didn't love each other any more, but couldn't live in the same town, he'd decided to leave. All Buffy saw when she looked at him now was a vampire.

But Willow… Willow had looked at him last night, really looked at him and seen him, seen Liam. Seen his soul.

He'd held her so long last night. Comforted her when she felt to blame for his soul having suffered in Hell. Held her as they danced under the stairs, unsure of these new feelings that were erupting so fast inside of him that he almost ran away in fear. Took her to the dance floor and held her as they danced in front of everyone, just knowing in his gut - in his soul - that it was meant to be this way. That she was meant to be there - in his arms. Held her when everyone had gone home, settled now on one of the plush couches at the Bronze, holding her and watching her sleep. Held her when she awoke and kissed her tears away.

Kissed away her fear that they might lose, even though they had to win. Kissed away her sorrow at the possible loss of her friends, even though they had yet to know who would live and who would die. Kissed away her unspoken fear at losing him. But Willow was so easy to read, she never held her emotions back. Something that felt wondrous and new compared to Buffy's careful mask that was always in place. He kissed her until all her fears and uncertainties were gone.

And then he'd just kissed her. Kissed her because he wanted to; kissed her because he needed to. Held on to something he never dreamt he'd be able to have.

*Hope.*

And they'd done it; they'd won. And now that hope was gone. Watching her now, he saw her, saw what she really was. Just a child. Just a little girl who had this special gift to make all the evil disappear. All of the evil within him, anyway. And the pain. The centuries of pain. Gone, with just a touch from her fingers.

But in the end, he was an evil vampire with a damaged soul.

And she was a beautiful girl who deserved so much better than that.

He stood and watched her, determined to memorise every detail before he left her for good.

I can dream about youIf I can't hold you tonightI can dream about youYou know how to hold me just rightI can dream about youIf I can't hold you tonightI can dream about youYou know how to hold me just right

He pictured Los Angeles, cold and unfamiliar, but a good place to get lost in. And so many lost people needing help as well.

Moving sidewalks, I don't see under my feetClimbing up from down here belowWhere the streets see me lonely for you.

He didn't deserve her. Not his demon and not his soul. If he ever needed a reason to work for redemption, a bright, glittering reason was just over there, laughing with her human friends. Being happy. Being human. Being innocent. Being Willow.

I can dream about youIf I can't hold you tonightI can dream about youYou know how to hold me just right

He got lost in his inner visions of long days in a lonely bed and long nights wishing he'd been a little more selfish and had been able to just take what he wanted and not look back.

So lost that he actually jumped when he felt the touch on his arm. He looked up to see her smiling at him, smile bright as a diamond and eyes shining like emeralds. She took his hand and asked, "You okay?"

Looking at her, holding her hand, he wondered how he ever thought he could leave her. It was selfish - yes, but it was also the only thing he could do.

He pulled her to him, her back to his front and held her close as they watched the devastation around them returning to normal. Normal for Sunnydale.

As the last firetruck pulled away, Buffy stepped away from Giles and looked their way. She didn't say anything, didn't look any particular way. Just a blank expression before she turned and walked over to Xander and Cordy.

"Wanna go over there?" Angel asked.

Willow smiled at the group, then shook her head. "Nah, I think it's time I graduated."

He looked over to where she slept, an innocent spirit willing to leave everything she knew and go with him to make a new life in a new town.

A new world.

He turned on the radio and smiled as the song came on.

Maybe Fate was on their side. Because he wouldn't have to just dream.

I can dream about youI'm gonna press my lips against you and hold you tight to meI can dream about youYou know you got me spellbound what else can it beMoving sidewalks, I don't see under my feetClimbing up from the pain in my heart 'cause it's you that I need.I don't understand itI can't keep my mind off loving you (Not even for a minute)Ooo, now baby, I'm caught up in the magic I see in youThere's one thing to doI can dream about youIf I can't hold you tonightI can dream about youYou know how to hold me just rightI can dream about youIf I can't hold you tonightI can dream about youYou know how to hold me just right

The End