Buffy dealt with her grief and anxiety the best way she could right now, by hitting something. The Slayer’s blows descended upon a tree’s trunk repeatedly, breaking the bark in a shower of splinters, each punch carrying enough force to make the entire thing shake down to its foundations.

Buffy’s hair whipped rapidly as her body twisted and shook from the motions of her rapid strikes, grunts of pure frustration and anger escaping as gaps from her lips. A sense of overwhelming indignation and desperation flooded every part of her being. All she could do was lash out against the unfairness of the universe by taking out her volatile anger into the nearest thing she could find, which was this tree.

Given the number of fallen trees around them, and how bruised her knuckles were at this point, it hadn’t been the first.

This was her reward. After so much hardship and loss, sacrificing so much to protect people, killed so many vampires and demons as a Slayer, all she had to show for it was to be stranded on a time far from her own, unable to ever reconnect with her family and friends ever again.

God, Willow and Xander wouldn’t even be born for *decades*. Her *mother* was still six years away from being born! How messed up was that…

She was stuck. There was nothing she could do about it, Buffy Summers would spend the rest of her life away from the people she loved, grow old and gray until finally the same would happen to the Buffy of the future, only for her to end up in the past again.

Buffy shouted, and with one final punch she brought down the tree.

The trunk fell with a deafening crash, echoing through the forest until it finally settled. Then the only sound were Buffy’s pants, followed by her sobbing. She fell to the ground and hugged her legs, burying her face on her knees as her body lightly shook with her cries. The Slayer felt more vulnerable and weaker than ever before, it was like she was a child again, lost and alone.

What was she supposed to *do?* Go back to the US and just… live there again? Just count the years until everyone she knew and loved was born again, pretend she wasn’t Buffy, and keep herself at a distance for the rest of her life?

That was no way to live…

The sound of heavy footsteps reached her ears, crunching over fallen twigs and leaves. She looked up with tear-stricken eyes at Luisa, the large woman looking down at her with sympathy and heartache.

“…Broke a few trees, eh?” She tried to ease the tension with an easy-going joke. “I’m partial to throwing boulders myself”

Buffy just stared at her.

Luisa winced, “Right, not the best thing to say right now.” She sighed, sitting down in front of the blonde. “I… can’t even begin to image what you’re going through, having everything you love be so far away from you” Her voice came soft and gentle, “I don’t know what I’d do if couldn’t see my family again”

Buffy sniffed, rubbing one eye against her arm to dry the tears.

“I’m not good at this Buffy,” The powerhouse of the Madrigal family said. “All I know is how to lift and hit things really hard. If I could punch what’s hurting you, believe me, I would”

That got a soft snort from the Slayer.

“But… if you don’t know where to go from here,” She offered her a smile and a hand. “You can always stay here, until you find your footing, and find what you want”

Buffy looked at that giant gentle woman for a moment, touched to know there was still someone in the world who would offer her kindness in her time of need and care for her enough to do anything to stem the tide of tears and offer her a home.

Unlucky as she was, Buffy was capable of finding miracles from time to time.

She reached out, and the larger hand wrapped around her smaller one with tender care. Buffy sniffed once more, pawning at her eyes, the redness of her crying remained, and the stains of her tears in her cheeks were noticeable with the dirt from the trees. “I don’t… I don’t want to force you to care for me”

“Buffy, I don’t think you could force anyone to do that,” Luisa said. “My family *likes* you, we like having you around. You’re not a burden to us in any way, not now, not ever”

That was… good to know, honestly. Her sense of self-worth was below the ground at this point, and with her lift bereft of direction right now, she needed the strongest support she could cling to lest she lost herself completely. Buffy knew she had to remain strong or else she’d fall down the pit and never climb back again.

So here was Luisa, with the strength of a demigod and all the bravery of a lioness, offering her a place to stay, to find herself. Buffy counted herself blessed for having met her, and the wonderful people that were the Madrigal family in this quaint little town in the middle of the Colombian mountains.

“Thank you…” Buffy muttered, “I’m sorry you have to see me like this,”

Luisa chuckled, “You should have seen us a year ago. We learned we all have our burdens Buffy, and it’s not wrong to let them out. Nobody can blame you for feeling like this, not after what you went through”

Buffy pursed her lips and looked down, still holding Luisa’s hand.

“If you wanna punch a few more trees we can go at it” Luisa offered with half a smile, “Or we can find you a big nasty beast to beat up”

Buffy looked at her, and managed to smile. “Nah, I’m good,” She said, still squeezing the muscular woman’s hand. “This is nice.”

X~X~X~X~X

Life went on. As they say. Days became weeks, weeks became months.

It was harsh at first, for not a day went by she wasn’t reminded of her family. Spending time with the Madrigals was as soothing as it was aching for Buffy. Yet she still found solace in the kindness of these wonderful and strange people. While she liked to spend time with all of them, Buffy found herself closest to Luisa’s nearest relatives.

Mirabel was a joy to be around. Always so curious and upbeat about everything Buffy talked about, asking her endless questions about the future and how things would change. Her experience with the hidden mystical side of the world (though she refrained from going over the gorier aspects), helping her speculate on the nature of the Miracle and the birth of Casita and her family’s powers.

Buffy suspected it might be the action of a local spirit or mountain god. Which seemed to really excite Mirabel at the prospect. Just in case she half-jokingly told her not to bring that up near the church. Buffy liked to believe Mirabel’s lack of powers didn’t mean she lacked a blessing, as proved by their grandmother, Mirabel had the ability to be whatever her family needed. She was their ‘heart’.

Isobel was such a lively free spirit, it honestly reminded her of some of her best friends growing up in Sunnydale. Hints of a ‘prom queen’ could be seen in her, which seemed to be remnants of her old attitude where she tried to be the ‘perfect daughter’ of the Madrigal family. Always prim and proper, doing whatever she had to preserve that image, even almost marrying a man she did not love because it was a ‘good match’. Said man was to marry their cousin Dolores instead, which… weird but she wasn’t going to judge.

Isobel liked to experiment so freely with her plants, creating the largest, weirdest, and most spectacular things she could think of with utter joy. Honestly, she reminded her of Willow whenever she got like that, marveling at the wonders her magic was capable of.

Their parents Agustín and Julieta were some of the kindest people around. Buffy had lost count of the times she had seen the accident-prone man injure himself while doing various tasks around town, and how many times she kept him from hurting himself even worse. Yet he never lost his spirit, she found that attitude endearing in him, and always returned to have his wounds healed by his wife’s magical cooking. Magic or not, Julieta’s cooking was to die for, and Buffy had to keep herself from breaking down into tears when she offered her a batch of baked goods and a sweet smile that reminded her too much of her mother. Helping Julieta cook quickly became one of her favorite things.

The rest of the family was a joy. From Bruno’s skittish and humorous nature. Felíx’s and Pepa’s welcoming nature. Dolores’ ability to always ‘lend an ear’. Camilo’s capacity to make people laugh. Antonio’s adorable kindness. Alma’s wisdom and compassion.

And of course, there was Luisa, who had easily become her closest friend. Her capacity to help her was matched by her superhuman strength, lifting boulders as easily as she could lift her spirits. With a smile or a quip, Luisa never failed to bring a smile out of Buffy.

She was just… nice. Very nice. The Slayer felt at ease when she was with Luisa. Her troubles vanished under the relief Luisa’s laughs brought her. Feeling safe and comforted by her immense strength in a way, the sight of those muscles made her feel very… at ease…

Okay, perhaps she felt a touch *too* comfortable around Luisa. Buffy wasn’t so oblivious as to the fact she *liked* Luisa in that sense. There was attraction, yes. She liked spending time with her, of course. And sometimes she imagined what it’d feel like to… touch those muscles more intimately.

But dare she? She was just starting to get her life back together. Could she really risk it with Luisa after all the kindness she’d given her? Wouldn’t it be like, taking advantage of the hospitality the family had provided?

Her previous love life left… a lot to be desired (And she tried *very* hard not to think about the fact that Angel and Spike were still alive somewhere). So she found herself rather lost as to what she should do about these feelings she’s been having.

…But at the same time, what had she to lose? Why live in fear now after everything that happened to her? Why not just come out and say it?

Okay, she couldn’t just approach Luisa and say ‘Hey, I like you!’, that wouldn’t be smooth at all…

No, perhaps she could play up the charm first…

She just needed to get Luisa somewhere private.