

Buffering the Vampire Slayer
Episode 5.16: The Body

Laura: Hey, you beautiful Scoobs. This is Laura Zak from Angel on Top.

Brittany: And I'm Brittany Ashley, also from Angel on Top.

Laura: For the last year or so, it has been our great honor to host a sister podcast to Buffering the Vampire Slayer in which we rewatch every episode of the Buffy spin-off, Angel, in tandem with the equivalent Buffy episodes.

Brittany: If you've not yet taken the journey from Sunnydale to Los Angeles to brood with us, and even if you've never watched an episode of Angel in your life, we're here to tell you that Season 2 is a magnificent time to join our family.

Laura: The second season of Angel is jam-packed with objectively good television. And you can expect more of your favorites, like Cordelia coming into her own powers, Wesley battling inner and outer demons, Angel walking his cluttered path to redemption, cameos from Buffy regulars like Faith, Spike and Willow, and—

Brittany: More Darla, Darla, Darla! Plus you'll get to know new characters who are some of the best in the entire Whedonverse, like Charles Gunn, defender of downtown LA's most vulnerable, and Lorne, the emotionally intelligent demon who runs a karaoke bar.

Laura: Our Angel on Top community is growing every day and we'd love for you to join us for queer feminist analysis, new jingles and every episode, a new poem from Angel's point of view.

Brittany: You can find Angel on Top on iTunes, Spotify and Google Play.

Laura: Until then, see ya at the next crossover.

Brittany: Ooh!

Brittany: Hey Laura Zak, quick question for you.

Laura: What's that, Brittany Ashley?

Brittany: Do you remember Buffy's ex?

Laura: Who, Faith?

Brittany: No, the other one, that soft-spoken broody guy with the dark past?

Laura: Oh, you mean *Angel*, the ensouled vampire with a heart of gold on a quest to atone for past sins?

Brittany: Yeah, that's the one. We should do a rewatch podcast about his aptly-titled spin-off, *Angel*.

Laura: Brittany, we already have one. We're in Season 2.

Brittany: Oh right, hi, we're the hosts of *Angel on Top*.

Laura: An *Angel* rewatch podcast that releases episodes every other Wednesday in tandem with *Buffering the Vampire Slayer*.

Brittany: Wait, do you remember the episode in Season 1 where Faith shows up and there's *so much* sexual tension between the three of them?

[CHIME]

Jenny: Content note, gentle Scoobies. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* contains heavy themes and this episode deals with loss and grief.

Kristin: Hey there. So today we are journeying into one of the most impactful episodes of television ever made, Season 5, Episode 16 of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The Body*. We've worked really hard to honor this episode with our discussion and with the incredible contributions of many others. In today's episode, you will hear a small segment of our conversation with Jen Malkowski, who's a professor of film and media studies at Smith College, with a specialization in death and dying in media. We were so moved by our conversation with Jen that we released the full interview in our main feed today, alongside this episode.

Jenny: You'll also be hearing four poems read by our friend, author, poet and professor at Regis University, Alyse Knorr. All of the information on Jen and Alyse's work can be found in today's show notes. We are so honored and thankful that they spent this time with us.

Kristin: Next week, we're gonna have a special episode including a conversation with *Angel on Top*'s Brittany Ashley, and previously unreleased interview footage from our interview with Kristine Sutherland herself. So, so excited to share this with you all as well. The following week, May 13th, we'll move into our conversation on Season 5, Episode 17, *Forever*.

Jenny: Speaking of moving into things, hey! [Kristin laughs] It's time... heh-HA!

Kristin: [laughs] Never know—I never know where you're gonna go and it's always a delight.

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: Mmhmm.

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: [laughing] Mmhmm.

Jenny: Yes, it's time to, um... gently caress you with the results of—

Kristin: Wow.

Jenny: The Sexual Tension Awards from I Was Made to Love You, the previous episode. Are you ready? [both laugh]

Kristin: That's pretty good, right?

Jenny: These results! [clears throat] Okay. This is truly incredible, what a day. With 1% of the vote, in fourth place, we have Xander and Robot April.

Kristin: Love to know who that 1% is.

Jenny: Yeah, yeah.

Kristin: Love to know who you are out there. It's very nice.

Jenny: Uh, with 21% of the vote, a huge leap from fourth to third, we have Willow and April. The robot.

Kristin: Mmhmm.

Jenny: 21%, third place. O—kay. In second place, disappointing Kristin—

Kristin: Mmhmm. Deeply.

Jenny: And metaphysical throuples everywhere. [Kristin laughs] Buffy and the shared entity of Ben and Glory in a semi-throuple? 29%.

Kristin: Are you saying that there's some kind of connection?

Jenny: Second place?

Kristin: Between Ben and Glory?

Jenny: I can't—I just get this feeling that they have something to do with each other. Are they... friends?

[BEN IS GLORY jingle plays]
Ben is Glory! Glory is Ben!
Ben is Glory! Glory is Ben!
In case you forget, I'll say it again
Ben is Glory and Glory is Ben!

Jenny: Okay, and then... [sighs] perhaps in the—one of the most glorious moments of penetration on the entire show. [both laugh]

Kristin: [laughing] Oh my god, Jenny.

Jenny: Sorry, should I not say that?

Kristin: [laughing] No, please!

Jenny: With 49% of the vote, first place, it's Buffy and throwing Spike through a window. Nice.

Kristin: Woo! Congratulations. You are all still listeners to Buffering the Vampire Slayer. [laughs]

Jenny: Sorry!

Kristin: Um, we are going to have more news updates, including Spooky News and upcoming online events inside of our full episode with Jen Malkowski, also released today. So for now, let's journey together into today's conversation. Listen. We're always so in awe of the power of Buffy and how it brings us together in difficult times and around complicated issues. So we couldn't be more thankful to have you all here together with us as we honor this brilliant and powerful episode of television.

Jenny: Hell. Yes.

[A slower, sadder version of the Buffering theme plays]

[CHIME]

Jenny: [dejectedly] Hello. [Kristin laughs] And welcome. [builds back up to excitement] To Buffering the Vampire Slayer, a podcast [Kristin laughs] where we're watching and discussing every episode of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, one at a time, spoiler-free and keeping our chins up while we do it. I'm Jenny Owen Youngs.

Kristin: And I'm Kristin Russo. I'm sorry that I'm, like, lightly laughing over your somberness, Jenny.

Jenny: Mmm.

Kristin: It is somber. It's somber and we are going to be somber. We all know it, we've all been bracing for it for a long time. But apparently, I'm one of those people who laughs in the face of grief, so. [laughs]

Jenny: I see.

Kristin: I am Kristin Russo and this week we are talking about Season 5, Episode 16, The Body. Probably one of the most notable episodes of television ever created, and certainly one of if not the best of the series. We'll talk about all of that. You should stay tuned at the end of this podcast every other week, but especially this week, for an original song. This week, not only written by you, Jenny—do you wanna talk—why don't we just, like, break our format already, right at the top.

Jenny: Sure.

Kristin: And you can talk a little bit about the song that is gonna happen at the end. But also, we just came out of a theme that is different, that we've had in our... what do you call it? Little... suitcase—

Jenny: Pocket. Glove box.

Kristin: Pocket—yep. [laughs]

Jenny: Hope chest.

Kristin: Security deposit box—

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: For a long time. So yeah, let's talk about music for a moment.

Jenny: Yes, okay. So when we were first starting to think about making the podcast, there were several versions of the theme music that we tried. And this, I think, was the first one. And we just deemed it way too sad for the regular theme. But we were like, there is a very sad episode eventually. We could just use it for that.

Kristin: Yeah.

Jenny: As like, a special thing. So, yeah.

Kristin: So this was—that was—what you just heard was almost the original theme song for the podcast, before it got ramped up. Um... but yeah, fitting—I think a fitting tone setter for the episode. And also I feel, you know, I guess to jump for a moment back into the intro of this is the one where we lose Joyce. I mean, technically it is not the one where we lose Joyce. We lost Joyce at the end of the last episode, but this is the one where we move through the initial shock of losing Joyce.

Jenny: Mmm.

Kristin: And I think that there's something obviously in the theme being different this week that is somber to match the tone of the episode. But I also think that it—there's something about honoring Joyce, honoring Kristine Sutherland and her work, and also honoring this episode of television. Something to set it apart from the rest, because as we will talk about at length, this episode is far set apart from the rest.

Jenny: Yes.

Kristin: And Jenny, tell us about who you worked with on the song for this week.

Jenny: So for this week's song, I collaborated with friend of ours, friend of the pod, Saul Simon MacWilliams. I've known Saul for a long time, we went to college together, met at music school. And um, we've collaborated here and there over the years. And he's just like, really wonderful. He works a lot in film scoring now, that's his primary focus, and that's kind of why I thought of him when we were starting to talk about this song. He's worked on *Beasts of No Nation*, *Digging for Fire*, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, *Far Cry 5* the video game, *Chasing Coral*, and the television series, *The Good Doctor*. Among many other things, he's Emmy-nominated, he's a total babe. And it was my divine pleasure to work with him on coming up with something that could hope to do this episode justice.

Kristin: Yeah. Yeah—

Jenny: Saul has never watched an episode of Buffy the Vampire Slayer except this one.

Kristin: Ugh!

Jenny: So, sorry, Saul.

Kristin: Could you imagine? Dear god. Like, what does he think the rest of the series is like? [both laugh] But yeah, Saul is—Saul is very special. And also, when we—when Jenny and I were talking about this song, and Jenny, you brought up Saul, I was immediately like, fuck yes. Because I've heard things that you and Saul have worked on together before and I know that, um, you know—people who make music as individuals and do it well, that's something. But when you find people who collaborate well together, it is just a joy to witness. And I have always felt that way about things that you've worked on with him.

So we are a bit of a ways from you hearing that song, but wanted to mention it up at the top. And Jenny, I've said which one this is, but we have not yet talked about who wrote and directed this episode. Though I'm sure... all of you know that already.

Jenny: Well, The Body was written and directed by... Joss... Jose? Joss? Am I saying this right?

Kristin: I'm not sure.

Jenny: We-DAWN?

Kristin: I think it's we-DAWN, yeah.

Jenny: Joss Whedon! [Kristin laughs] And it originally aired on February 27th, 2001.

Kristin: Yes. And I mentioned this to you, Jenny. But I learned, during my deep research on this episode—probably more research than I've done on any episode in our history—that you all, watching this in real time, saw The Body in February. And I believe it was something like six weeks before you got the next episode, Forever. And I—I am so sorry. My deepest condolences to all of you for having to end on this episode and then not come back. We are not gonna do that to you here. We will be talking about Forever in two weeks. [laughs] So don't worry, don't worry. We will not keep you hanging at the end of this.

So this episode, like all episodes, is broken into four acts. But I think, and I know you agree with me, Jenny, these acts are very, very specifically touching on different parts of this initial shock of loss. And on the—there's a Buffy wiki and I'm sure many of you are familiar with it. And on the Buffy wiki, they titled the acts. And I—this might be the actual titles, I couldn't find confirmation. But I loved the titles so much that I just want to share them here. Act 1 is referred to as The Daughter. Act 2 is referred to as The Sisters. Act 3 is referred to as The Family. And Act 4 is referred to as The Body.

So Jenny and I are going to be more demarcated than usual and we're gonna tackle each one of these acts. And Jenny, I'm sure that you're aware of this and most of you probably are too, but each of these acts begins—I mean, the title of this episode is The Body. But each of these acts begins with a shot of the body. And we can talk about that as we go, but I think it's very powerful, the use of sound and music—lack of music is so powerful—there's just so much. There's so much to talk about. And I think we can do that within the context of the acts themselves.

Jenny: Mm.

Kristin: Before we head into Act 1, I wanna tell you that as we transition into each of the four acts of this episode, you will be hearing our good friend, professor, author, poet, Alyse Knorr, reading the work of four different poets. Each poem was selected by the three of us to usher us into that chapter of conversation. So let us get into Act 1.

[Alyse Knorr reading "Without Music" by Marie Howe]

Only the car radio
driving from the drugstore to the restaurant to his apartment:

rock and roll, oldies but goodies,
and sometimes, softly, piano music

rising from the piano teacher's apartment on the first floor.

Most of it happened without music,
the clink of a spoon from the kitchen,

someone talking. Silence.

Somebody sleeping. Someone watching somebody sleep.

Jenny: Okay, so the cold open of this episode may be familiar to you because it's the end of the previous episode.

Kristin: Mm, only time that that has ever been done in the series. And actually, Jenny, the only time that there was no Previously On in the live—like, you know, watching it in real time. There was—

Jenny: Oh, wow.

Kristin: Yeah, the only time that there was no Previously On. We just went right back into it.

Jenny: And when we come back from the credits, we have a flashback. It's Christmas. Everyone is—like, all the Scoobies are at the Summers house. Eatin', jokin', laughin', havin' better times—[laughs sadly]

Kristin: Yeah.

Jenny: Than this episode is having. There's some great vomit misunderstandings. [Kristin laughs] Um... there's a whole thing with Tara and Willow and tummy rubbing, which personally, I could have done without.

Kristin: Mm, glad we got you to say "tummy rubbing," though.

Jenny: Yeah...

Kristin: A phrase—a word combo probably most didn't expect to hear in this episode of our podcast. [both laugh]

Jenny: Um. Then, my favorite—mm, there's actually—this is like, jam—they get all of the fun of this episode jammed into this one scene, basically. We get—

Kristin: Yeah. Well, and do you know—do you know why, Jenny, this scene was put here?

Jenny: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Kristin: Tell us.

Jenny: Yeah, I wanna—well, it's two things, right. It has like, the impact of like, hey, remember—

Kristin: Mmhmm.

Jenny: Remember when things were good?

Kristin: Right.

Jenny: But it's also, you know, Joss talks in the commentary about how he knew he was going to have to have, like, the you know, "execute producer," like, all of the credits that have to roll at the beginning. Like, in the lower, you know, quarter of your screen, at the top of an episode. He knew all those were gonna be coming up and he was like, I can't have this happening over Sarah's long shot.

Kristin: Right.

Jenny: So I think the reason that this scene was deemed necessary, that there be a scene before Sarah's long shot, was that. To keep the credits over something else and then, because of that, you know, in looking around for like, what can we do, what can we put together for the credits to roll over? Uh, they ended up finding, you know, this scene. Which is like, so beautiful and reminds us, basically, of what we've just lost. Right?

Kristin: Right, yeah. It's a beautiful—and there's so many moments, smaller moments like this. But it's a beautiful way to give us this sharp contrast, just this very, very stark difference between what was—what once was and what now is, in the present moment. And I think—I mentioned that there's no music in this episode. There is—this scene has, I believe, the only music in the episode, and it's very faint. I think it's The First Noel? It's like a Christmas hymn—

Jenny: Right.

Kristin: Sort of just playing very, very lightly, underneath.

Jenny: Very lightly and it also sounds like it's, like, behind two closed doors.

Kristin: Yeah.

Jenny: It sounds like it's two rooms over.

Kristin: Yeah, totally. Were you gonna say something funny, Jenny? Because we could use it. [laughs]

Jenny: I was gonna say that I love this bit about Dawn not believing in Santa. [Kristin laughs] And Anya saying, "oh, it's a myth." And everyone's like, yeah, we—Santa's not—and she's like, no, no, no. It's a myth *that*—

Kristin: That it's a myth. [laughs]

Jenny: It's a myth. Unfortunately, uh, the real Santa does a lot of disemboweling of children. [both laugh]

Kristin: Right.

Jenny: But hey, it's good to know that he's out there, doing whatever. And that he has an amazing, uh, PR person.

Kristin: You know, it's interesting, Jenny, too. Like, so much of this—and I even had a note up—in the cold open about this. Like, Buffy—we hear her say these lines that just slay, no pun intended, us all, where she says, "Mom. Mom." And then she says, "Mommy." And then we go to the credits. And, you know, there's something in those lines where she reverts to, like, this childhood version of herself. And I think that loss, grief, death, trauma, shock, these things really make us go back to those, like, instinctual childlike places.

And so I'm just now pulling that into this Christmas scene that you're talking about. And, you know, the myth of Santa, the idea of Santa. Like, we see—Buffy is growing up in this episode in a way that she has not yet before. Dawn is growing up in a way that she has not yet before. We're seeing, like, the loss of... this childhood. These childhood notions. And I think that that—I didn't even think about it before you said this about Santa. But I think that, like, a small little line as this is—like, everything in this episode is there for a reason. And the idea of Santa as this childhood myth, and now it's like, well, it wasn't a myth, right? It wasn't—but the actual reality is, when you really think about it, like, it's a joke, it's funny here. But it's like this gruesome, gruesome thing.

Jenny: Mmm.

Kristin: And so I think that there's something there, too. There's something everywhere in this episode. I'm sure that many of you would agree that we could probably talk about this episode, you know, five times, once a year. We won't do that to ourselves, or you. But—[laughs]

Jenny: Jesus, no.

Kristin: And find—but we would find something more in each viewing. So anyway. We go to the kitchen. Another light moment, in the kitchen. Which, really fun—a fun throwback to Band Candy. Simpler, simpler times, when the biggest problem was eating chocolate that turned everybody into teenagers. And—

Jenny: Ugh! Were we ever so young?

Kristin: I know. And Joyce has burned the pie. Another moment, right? Like, this is another moment of like, something that's supposed to be beautiful and it, like, kind of changes very quickly. And she's like, sad that she burnt the pie. And then she drops it. Or somebody drops it. Buffy drops it? I don't know who drops the pie.

Jenny: Buffy's trying to cut it—

Kristin: Mmhmm.

Jenny: And accidentally flips it off of the counter.

Kristin: Right. And that brings us into this incredible shot, which is, um, as any of you who have watched the director's commentary know, this entire shot is done handheld. Which like, oh my god, standing ovation for the gentleman behind this camera. Because he was not using like a—what do you call it? A dolly? A rig? A thing? He wasn't—the camera was not on wheels. It was on his freaking shoulder. So he's like, kneeling down at points and standing back up at points. And also, you know, I know we're gonna talk about Sarah Michelle Gellar at length. But she—this is unreal, her performance in this scene. And she did this, like Joss says in the commentary, she did this like, seven fucking times.

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: So... to take us to the start. The pie falls and it shatters. And when it shatters, the noise just is sucked right out of your television screen and you go to this closeup on Joyce again. And that moment of dissonance, we'll see it again and again and again and again, in this episode. And I think it is so poignant. And any—I think, you know, all of us have experienced loss of some kind. And I just—if it's alright with you, Jenny, would love to talk about an experience that I had with, um, with my mom.

Jenny: Mm.

Kristin: Over ten years ago. Because it—you know, a lot of it comes up for me in watching this episode. When I was 21, my mom went into just to have her gallbladder removed. It was a very simple procedure, it's a very standard procedure. But something happened in the surgery that went wrong, and without going into, like, all of the nitty gritty, she wound up going back into emergency surgery about two days later. And the surgery was, like, seven hours long. It was very, very traumatic. And when she came out, she was—it didn't look like she was

going to pull through. She was in intensive care for six weeks. She was on a respirator. And we—it got to the point where we all were told to say our goodbyes, and we did.

And you know, there are so many memories that I have of that experience. And mine ended in this—this way, it's funny, like, right? We see in this episode these moments where Buffy sees these flashes, these fantasies, of like, it going a different way. And sometimes when I think about what happened with my mom, it almost feels like that. Like, I'm living this alternate reality, because it wasn't supposed to be this way. She wasn't supposed to be alive, according to everyone.

Jenny: Mmm.

Kristin: But suddenly, she like, turned the corner. And you know, her respirator, which was at, like, 80 or 90% oxygen, was able to start coming down and down and down and down. And then they were able to like, you know, take her out of like, the coma—medically-induced coma that she was in and we were able to talk to her. And so, you know, there's gonna be a few moments in our discussion of this episode where I reference this.

And the first one is this dissonance of seeing something, like, you know, this memory of Christmas. And then opening your eyes and seeing what's actually in front of you. And not being able to reconcile those things. They don't make sense together, none of it makes sense. None of it ever makes sense. And that's, like, one of the underlying themes of the whole episode. And for me, and this is something that, like, I, you know, have talked about before, maybe even on this podcast. But one of the things that I remember the most about the experience of near-to-losing my own mom was that she—before she went in for this surgery, the first surgery, she had been in like, Myrtle—my sister used to go to Myrtle Beach every year. As like, a middle schooler. And my sister had gone to Myrtle Beach with my parents and my mom had, like, this wonderful pedicure.

And so I just—like, I couldn't get over and I've never, ever lost the image of her perfectly pedicured toes in this room that was full of, like, you know, just horror, for all of us. That like, amidst it all, these perfectly painted toes were just, like, there in the bed. And you know, I think any of you who have experienced any kind of loss or experienced anything like this, probably have moments like this. Where it's just like, you cannot make sense of it. Because it doesn't make sense.

Jenny: Mmm. Yeah, I mean, that's kind of like, this whole episode. Right?

Kristin: Yeah. You wanna just stop there? Call it? [laughs]

Jenny: Yeah. Well, thanks for listening.

Kristin: Thank you, and that is our episode on The Body. [laughs] Thank you for listening to my story about my mom's toes. Another thing you probably did not think that we would be talking about in this episode, but here we are.

Jenny: Oh, any distracting port in a storm. [Kristin laughs] So... we've got, you know, mom, mom-mom-mom-mom-mom, maybe if I scream, my mom will wake up. And Buffy walks to the kitchen and gets the phone. Right? To call 911.

Kristin: Yes.

Jenny: The operator instructs her to try CPR, which she knows. And we get this, like, very disturbing moment while she's compressing Joyce's chest—

Kristin: Ugh.

Jenny: Where maybe like a rib cracks or something.

Kristin: Yeah, yeah.

Jenny: Loudly.

Kristin: Definitely. And, you know, we'll talk about the—there's a lot of moments that were intentionally put in this episode to underline the, like, upsetting physicality of death?

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: Right? I mean, the whole freaking thing is called The Body. And there are things that Joss talks about having specifically put in, this being one of them, to underline that. That like, there—this is so, like, um... I'll use the word grotesquely, though I'm not sure it's the right one. But so grotesquely physical. And this is one. And Jenny, I wrote down this note in this moment where the rib cracked as well. Because I also think that it's... maybe anyone doing this would crack a rib. I mean, the 911 operator doesn't seem, you know, surprised by it at all.

Jenny: Yeah, yeah.

Kristin: But I also think that, um... you know. The fact that Buffy has this strength is usually her asset. And I just thought, like, there might be something here too about the fact that this—this episode is so different than any other episode. Because it is so outside of the realm of the supernatural, that you don't even know

where you are anymore. You don't—you know. And I think that for Buffy, literally, all these powers she has—she's one girl in all the world. And it doesn't fucking matter. And in this moment, it's even possibly hindering her. Her strength is not only not helping her, but it's just like, possibly hurt her mom even more than she was already—again. She's not alive, but again, potentially hurt.

Jenny: Right.

Kristin: So, yeah.

Jenny: Yeah, and I mean, I think like—something else that I think is interesting that kind of relates to what you just said is—well, it's like a branch on the tree of what you just said—is that, like, this episode reduces Buffy. Like A, those powers don't matter. You know, her strength doesn't matter or is possibly a hindrance. But like, this is the most human—

Kristin: Mmhmm.

Jenny: Buffy ever gets. And this is the... unbeatable foe, right? Like...

Kristin: [laughs] Yeah.

Jenny: There is no winning against death.

Kristin: Mmhmm.

Jenny: It's not something she can fight or deal with. But it's also interesting that like, she can't combat this, but the Scoobies still rally around her. Like, they kind of like, have the same structural... purpose.

Kristin: Mm. I think they—I think they find that. Right? Like, it's like—[laughs] they're like, lost at the start. But I think yeah, they are—

Jenny: Sure.

Kristin: Right, they can still—and that's, like, you know—and we'll talk about it more. But that's like, kind of where Xander gets, right? "That's what we do. We help Buffy."

Jenny: Right. Right, right.

Kristin: So yeah, you're right. It's—they can find their purpose, but I guess, yeah, she can't. Because what is her purpose? And also, you know, when you think about

Buffy and the creation of Buffy, like, literally. Her mom is such a part of her, and such a part of what has made her her.

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: That she's losing her, but she's also losing this, like, huge part of herself, of what has given her herself. There's all the mystical, there's all the magical. Did that come from Joyce? No. Well, who knows. [laughs] But probably not.

Jenny: Yeah, I was just thinking... now that we are forced to think about losing Joyce. It's like, making me kind of reflect on her in ways that I haven't before. And I wonder if—okay, so. I wonder if Joyce ever had an experience where she wondered if Buffy being the Slayer had anything to do with her.

Kristin: Right.

Jenny: You know?

Kristin: Right.

Jenny: Any kind of hereditary nature or even nurture, like.

Kristin: Mmhmm.

Jenny: Something that never gets explored, but is kind of interesting to me.

Kristin: Yeah, yeah. And right, that's why I kind of, like, hesitated for a second when I said, well, she doesn't have anything to do with the magical or mystical. It's like, well, *does* she, though?

Jenny: Mmm.

Kristin: You know, she is, one would imagine, 50% of the DNA in the body of Buffy Summers.

Jenny: Right.

Kristin: So what is it about a Slayer that makes a Slayer chosen, and does it have anything to do with their, like, ancestry? You know, or their—

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: Their DNA, their genetics. Anyhow. Buffy's still on this call, and um, we get the line from the 911 dispatcher. You know, Buffy says, "she's cold." And the dispatcher says, "the body is cold?" And Buffy says, "no, my mom." And this, I think, is really important and powerful. Because we're seeing—I mean, from Moment One, to the end of this episode, we are seeing our titular character in shock. There is not a moment of this episode where Buffy is not in shock. You know, sometimes I think I've used the word, like, grief and loss. But we don't see grief here. Unless you wanna count that initial shock as part of the grieving process. But she is not present in any kind of way where she's having, like, emotional responses that someone outside of shock would have.

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: And right now, she is aware, on one hand, that her mom is not there and completely unaware that her mom is not there. And she gets off the phone and she calls Giles.

Jenny: [exhales] And this... phone shot.

Kristin: Mmm.

Jenny: This phone shot, this like—it starts as a very closeup of the phone keypad. And kids. [Kristin laughs] This is what we used to communicate with each other before we had iPhones.

Kristin: Yeah. It sounded like [makes beeping noises].

Jenny: Yeah. [both laugh] Exactly. Uh... I love how this looks and feels like you're in her body when—

Kristin: Yes.

Jenny: You see this shot. And it's like a slow, kind of scary zoom.

Kristin: Yeah!

Jenny: Like, really slow, the phone just like, slightly getting closer and closer.

Kristin: Yeah. Joss says in the commentary, to me—to him, that's the moment that Buffy realizes her mom is dead. Like, looking at the phone.

Jenny: Mmm.

Kristin: Just like, in that moment. Which is probably sort of—and it's also, that phone, the button shot, is the first cut from that really long camera shot. So up until that moment, we've been in one long shot with Buffy.

Jenny: Oof.

Kristin: Yeah. Incredible. Really incredible.

Jenny: Brutal.

Kristin: And Jenny, you mentioned feeling like you're inside of—like, you feel like you are Buffy.

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: And what's really interesting is, her looking at those phone buttons is really the only time we get, like, a POV shot from her in this entire first act. We see her looking a lot, right. She's like looking out the window, she's looking out the back door.

Jenny: Right.

Kristin: But we don't see from her—and I think so much—I thought a lot about House of Leaves, watching this episode.

Jenny: Mmm.

Kristin: And I think a lot of you are familiar with the book. Jenny, I know you are, because you're the reason I read it. [laughs] But House of Leaves is a book—the only book I've ever read like this, where you're—you know, it's about a haunted house, to really oversimplify it. But essentially, the book is written so that as the house is becoming more and more of a presence in these people's lives, you are having to flip the book upside down to read these crazy footnotes. Or twist it around in a circle to read the words that are written in a circle. And the—what happens is as the reader, you are experiencing some of the frustration and horror of the characters, literally, because you're doing these things as you read. And you know, obviously this is television, it's a different format. But I do feel like so much of what happens in this episode is put to us to make us face our shit about death. Because—the removal of music is one huge place where that's done, right?

Jenny: Oh, yeah.

Kristin: They are not giving us the ability to lean on some strings or some piano and be like, oh, this is what we're supposed to feel. They are leaving us with this silence. And we fill that in, as humans, that's just what humans do.

Jenny: Yeah. Ooh, yeah.

Kristin: Yeah. So anyhow.

Jenny: So she figures out the phone. And we hear Giles answer. And she just says, "Giles, you have to come, she's at the house." And hangs up.

Kristin: Yes. And of course—

Jenny: Whew!

Kristin: Of course Giles—

Jenny: The call you never wanna get from—

Kristin: Right. But Giles has no—I mean, Giles thinks... Giles thinks we're in just another episode of Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Like we all did, you know?

Jenny: He doesn't know anything.

Kristin: He has no idea. And—and then we get this moment with Joyce's skirt. Which is another one of these, like... dissonant moments of, the things we think about.

Jenny: Mm.

Kristin: And also, I think, like, a physicality moment. Another like, my mom's underwear might be showing, and that can't be, when the paramedics get here. It's like, if you wrote that down on paper, that does—none of it makes any sense. But in the moment, you're like, still trying to hold onto what's logical and what you would normally prioritize. But the world has flipped upside down, so how does any of it mean anything?

Jenny: Mmhmm, mmhmm.

Kristin: [clears throat] So, yeah. The paramedics arrive. And they're even—I know that, like, whatever. This episode is not about the paramedics. But they are so—even their responses are so drastically different, as they're talking or not talking to Buffy. You know, like, one of them is so much more compassionate and

gentle with her. And the other one is just so removed and medical and mathematical about it.

Jenny: Mm. Do you think that, um, that's due to what's actually going on, in the reality of the scene. Or do you feel like that's, like...

Kristin: Mmm.

Jenny: Partially Buffy's interpretation?

Kristin: Mm, because like, the one is talking to her and the other one isn't, that like, we're getting a bit of, um, her experience? I mean, we are, right? Like, the camera—the way that the camera shots are chosen in this scene are so much so to show us what Buffy is experiencing. So I think that that's a good hunch, in terms of like, what we're seeing from them. Because we don't even see—the paramedic that talks to her and tells her about her mom, we only see his mouth for the most part. We see his face for a brief second, but mostly, he's—you know, he's out of focus. They're out of focus, because—

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: That's what she's experiencing.

Jenny: Right, right, right.

Kristin: The sound design is brilliant in this whole episode, and this is like, one of those moments where we're hearing things we would not normally hear in an episode of television. [laughs] It's like, you know, we're hearing like, the bag be set down on the floor and the tube be pulled out and the clinking and the clanking. And all of that just puts us there. It really is so environmental.

Jenny: Yeah. Yeah, and um, we get this sort of panic by proxy. Like, this moment where one of the paramedics says, "I'm bagging her"—

Kristin: Mmm.

Jenny: And Buffy's like, what? And we're all like, what?

Kristin: Mmhmm.

Jenny: Those of us who aren't paramedics, of course. If you're a paramedic and you're listening, stop writing your email. We get it.

Kristin: Um, I have a slight anecdote to take us to a fun place for a moment that has to do with this that you just reminded me of, Jenny. Um, which is when I was four, I think, I got my ears pierced. My mom took me to the counter and the man behind the counter said he just had to get the gun. [laughs] And I—

Jenny: Hmm!

Kristin: [laughs] Was like, literally—

Jenny: You disappeared and a cloud of dust was left in your place.

Kristin: [laughing] Yes. I was like, stricken. I was like, "the gun?! I didn't know that's how you got your ears pierced!" [both laugh] Anyhow. That was your moment of levity. Back to death! Okay, so. The paramedics are working on Joyce and we get the first of two of these, like, fantasy moments, right? Where Buffy is imagining what it could have been, if—and she really is holding onto—and we'll see how this impacts her as the, you know, series continues. But in this episode, there's a massive theme of her feeling like, if she had just gotten there sooner. Like—

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: Right? She wasn't there. And if you think back to the last four and a half seasons of this show... I mean, I just had this memory of like, Faith in Joyce's room being like, your fucking daughter is not gonna help you, and Buffy busting through.

Jenny: Right.

Kristin: Like, that is her role. She's always there in time. That's what this show has taught us again and again and again.

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: And if you put yourself, like, inside the universe of the show, Buffy—it feels like that to her too, I'm sure. That like, she always makes sure that she's there. Even when you think it's not gonna work, it works. She figures it out. And so she is just underneath the fact that she was not there and that she could not help and that she did not help—

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: And what if she had gotten there sooner?

Jenny: Yeah. I love, too, this—just before this fantasy sequence, when the paramedics are asking her various questions. And Buffy is like, fast-talking and explaining and like, just trying to, like—she's obviously, of course, in shock. But also it feels like—you know, she thinks like, if I can just answer their questions right—

Kristin: Yeah...

Jenny: And, like, explain to them that she's been fine, you know?

Kristin: Yes.

Jenny: That she should be fine, that then she'll be fine.

Kristin: Right. Right. Oof.

Jenny: You know?

Kristin: That one gave the chills. Thank you, Jenny.

Jenny: Here to help. [Kristin laughs] And these—these, like—man, these shots!

Kristin: Ugh, beautiful.

Jenny: These close, close shots of the machine on the ground and the different sections of the paramedics' bodies. And when it finally... comes time for them to call it and one of the paramedics approaches her and tells her that Joyce is gone. This framing, where they've chosen to, like, crop out his eyes.

Kristin: Mmhmm.

Jenny: On—when the cam—you know, they do this—I think it's called a two-shot. Where they do, like, you know, over one shoulder—

Kristin: And over the other, yeah.

Jenny: And then over the other person's shoulder. And then they cut it together to make a conversation. When we get Buffy looking at him, in the two-shot, he's cropped out and it's like, you know, obviously she's just like, kind of like, staring into the middle distance that happens to be around his, like, chest.

Kristin: Mmhmm.

Jenny: You know? And then when we get the other perspective, he's—his shoulder is just—like, his out-of-focus shoulder is just like, taking up most of the screen. And Buffy is just, like, crammed in on the side.

Kristin: Yeah.

Jenny: You know?

Kristin: Yeah. And Joss talks about that in the commentary too, right? That like, he sort of was seeing the shot as it was happening and was like, ooh, let's push this as far as we can push it. Because there is something so visually fucked up about, like, how little space she has in there. So—I mean, this episode—you know, you mentioned that Saul, who worked on the song with you, is an Emmy-nominated musician. Which made me realize that we should point out that this was not—this did not win an Emmy. This is—I mean, this is... my experience of this episode, Jenny, when you showed it to me for the first time many years ago. I was like—I have not ever seen an episode of television this powerful. Ever. Not Buffy, of TV ever. And I'm definitely not alone in that opinion. Critics, you know, the world round have discussed the power of this episode. The fact that it didn't get its, you know, award nods is, I think, rooted in the place of like, genre shows often getting overlooked in things like that.

Jenny: Mmhmm, mmhmm, mmhmm.

Kristin: But hot damn, did this episode—this episode deserves a truck full of awards. For everything, from the cinematography to the writing to the acting—I mean, just every facet of it is remarkable.

Jenny: Yeah. Yeah, it really is.

Kristin: So as the paramedics leave, Buffy—in another moment of dissonance—says "good luck" to them out the window as, like—you know, out the door. She's just like, good luck on your next journey. Like, she doesn't know what she's saying.

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: And I can relate to this so deeply, right? This, like—when you're just in shock and you do not know what words make sense.

Jenny: Mmhmm. The paramedic also tells her while she waits for the coroner's office to show up and collect Joyce, try not to disturb the body.

Kristin: Yes.

Jenny: Okay, A, try not to disturb the body. B, when someone dies in their home and the paramedics come and can't revive them, they just... chill there until the coroner can come pick them up. That is... brutal!

Kristin: Yeah. Yeah. And it's like—and that's the thing, right? And I know that we're in the first act still, but a lot of I think the bigger things are gonna come out in the beginning. It's like, that is kind of what the purpose of this episode was intended for, was to like, force the audience to sit with the reality of death, instead of what we usually get in television, which is the fantasy of death. And—right. It's like, what—

Jenny: Yeah. There's a lesson.

Kristin: [laughing] Yeah, well. Yeah, I don't know that—right, Joss didn't really wanna teach us a lesson necessarily. But I do think that—

Jenny: No, I'm saying, the fantasy of death is that there's a lesson.

Kristin: Oh, yes. Exactly. Exactly. And then the reality is, you know, we get—later, we get paperwork.

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: And like, you know, having experienced loss myself and also being close to people who have experienced loss. Like, there's this whole side of shock and grief. But then there's this entirely other side of like, equal measure, of logistics and of reality and of like, life keeps going on and what the fuck? Like, it really is just mindnumbingly overwhelming. And I think most of you probably know this, but you know, Joss lost his mom in a car crash at a young age.

Jenny: Mmm.

Kristin: And so had, you know, his own experiences of sudden loss and having to suddenly come to terms with the—um, I think he refers to it as like, boring? Right, like, the almost boring first few hours of post-death.

Jenny: We get... Buffy, still waiting for Giles to show up, walking through the house in kind of a daze. And then almost, like, absentmindedly, throwing up.

Kristin: Mmhmm.

Jenny: On a carpet in a room we've never seen before.

Kristin: Yeah. And the room is like, this—again, contrast of like, she has just thrown up on the floor. But—and that's happening in like the bottom quadrant of the screen. But then, like, the top quadrant of the screen, we have like, sunlight pouring through the windows. Wind blowing through, chimes we hear outside, children we hear outside. And it's like, again, this like—

Jenny: The sounds of life going on, outside.

Kristin: Right. Right. And like—and that's just the fact of it, right? Inexplicably, life continues. Inexplicably, no matter what the horror is that you're experiencing in your own life, outside of your home, outside of your—you know, metaphorically or literally. It just keeps going. It just keeps going.

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: And also, I think that it's—what's really powerful about this episode is most of it is done in real time. You know, like, there is a special care taken to the way that this is shot where we are following her every move.

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: And... yeah. She walks outside. Her face is sort of, like, clammy is the word that comes to my mind when I think about it. And walks back in—

Jenny: Very sweaty.

Kristin: Yeah. She walks back inside, she gets paper towels absentmindedly. She's cleaning up the throw-up that has just happened in this other room, when Giles gets there.

Jenny: Even the way that this paper towel absorbing moisture is shot is like, whoa.

Kristin: Right?

Jenny: Yeah. And then the deliberate choice to keep Giles so far down the hall from Buffy?

Kristin: Mmhmm. Mmhmm.

Jenny: You know? He thinks it's Glory, of course, right away. But then he sees Joyce on the floor in the living room and runs by her. And Buffy's like, w-wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, we're not supposed to move the body! And then she...

Kristin: Ugh.

Jenny: She claps her hand over her mouth, trying to, I think, push...

Kristin: Put it back in.

Jenny: Those words back in, yeah.

Kristin: Yeah.

Jenny: Whew!

Kristin: And like, you know, I know obviously I am not the person who created this episode. And the person who did create this episode said that, like, his view of it is that the moment that she realizes her mom is dead is when she is looking at that phone.

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: I would counter that I think it could also be considered this moment. Because it is a moment when her brain is five paces past her experience, and so her brain has referred to her mom as "the body." And that horror of, um, realization, I think also is like, she's realizing the loss. And she's with—

Jenny: Mmm.

Kristin: You know, and she's with her other parental figure. You know, these—there are four acts in this episode. And the one with the Scoobies, the one with the family, that is not the one where we see the most of Giles. The one where we see the most of Giles is actually this first act and then the final act. And I think that it's really notable that Giles is included in this act where the only other people, apart from the paramedics, are Buffy and Joyce. Because Giles is... I mean, you know, Giles is her dad.

[Alyse Knorr reading "Memorial" by Audre Lorde]

If you come as softly
As the wind within the trees
You may hear what I hear

See what sorrow sees.

If you come as lightly
As threading dew
I will take you gladly
Nor ask more of you.

You may sit beside me
Silent as a breath
Only those who stay dead
Shall remember death.

And if you come I will be silent
Nor speak harsh words to you.
I will not ask you why now.
Or how, or what you do.

We shall sit here, softly
Beneath two different years
And the rich between us
Shall drink our tears.

Jenny: Okay. Coming into the second act...

Kristin: Yes. And notably we see, right, Joyce again.

Jenny: Joyce being zipped into a body bag.

Kristin: They say this on the commentary. I thought this was, like, just a fun technical thing. But, you know, poor Kristine Sutherland. [laughs]

Jenny: Lying around for eight days, holding very still.

Kristin: Yes and what's, like, really cool technologically speaking, but also really fucking creepy, is that this scene where she's being zipped into the bag was the only time when she blinked, I guess. [both laugh a little nervously] And so they digitally took it out. They—like, they basically put her eyes over the blink so that we don't see her blink. Which is like, really cool, but also—[makes the sound affect noise from the shower scene in Psycho].

Jenny: Yeah, very—very Twilight Zone.

Kristin: Yeah. Right. And so—and this act, as I talked about at the top, this is called The Sisters because this is where the primary focus is Dawn and Buffy telling Dawn. [Jenny audibly shudders] I had, you know... Buffy and I are basically the same age, as are you, Jenny. And I have a little sister. And my—Buffy is, what, 20, 21 in this season?

Jenny: Mmhmm, mmhmm, mmhmm.

Kristin: Which was my age when I, you know, said goodbye to my mom. And my sister was Dawn's age—the same. We were the same exact places except for my sister was not a mystical Key. To my knowledge. Honest to god, she fucking could be. If we really think about it. [laughs]

Jenny: [makes high-pitched thinking noise] Definitely mystical.

Kristin: [laughs] But, um... my sister was kept in the dark, with a lot of my experience. And I very much took on the role of parent, instantly. Instantly.

Jenny: Mmm.

Kristin: And we don't see that, like, a ton. But I think that like, Buffy... Buffy is in shock and yet she has still gotten herself to the school. She has walked into the classroom and she is tasked with telling Dawn this information. And obviously, we'll backtrack because that's not how this scene begins. But just, like, a note that I personally related to this so much so too. Because I had to call my sister's school and be like, hi. And you know, you think you're so old when you're 20, 21, like a—and I guess you are, when you're losing a parent. But like, you know, I was just like, hey, my sister's in school. And like, I just want you to know that we're, like, losing my mom, she's in intensive care. And like, if my sister's not doing so well, like, that's why. So blah blah blah.

Jenny: Jesus.

Kristin: Just doing these like logistical fucking things, you know? But anyway, that's not how this begins. It begins in a lovely bathroom scene. Reminds me of My So-Called Life, all their bathroom scenes. [laughs]

Jenny: Mmm. Mmhmm.

Kristin: So much happens in middle school and high school bathrooms on television. And I have to tell you that, like, nothing happened in bathrooms for me when I was in high school and middle school. [laughs]

Jenny: Yeah, nothing for me either. Veronica Mars does a lot of her business in what we dubbed the toilet office on VMI.

Kristin: Yeah.

Jenny: She's always taking cases in there. Okay. So this intro to Dawn, really designed to be like, a tidy little fake-out. Joyce being zipped into the bag, cut to Dawn crying in the bathroom. Her friend saying, "it's not that bad" and Dawn saying, "how can you say that?"

Kristin: [laughing a little] Right.

Jenny: Of course, she's talking about how some boy named Kevin called her "freaky." Um...

Kristin: [laughs] Which I agree with her friend here. You know, freaky doesn't have to mean bad. And we learn that Kevin actually thinks she's pretty fucking cool.

Jenny: Yeah, we do. We get there eventually, but first, we have to kind of get through this like, little chat with her friend Lisa. And they get through this whole conversation and deem themselves ready to leave the bathroom. Dawn's been crying but she kind of splashes some water on her face. They have to walk past this—what's this girl's name? [laughs]

Kristin: Uh, her name is Kirstie and she is, like, the new Cordelia/Harmony ringleader of her own Cordettes at this middle school. [both laugh]

Jenny: Right, so they've gotta walk past Kirstie, the new Cordelia. [both laugh] And then they—

Kristin: I mean, she—Kirstie could only hope to be the new Cordelia, but we'll see. [both laugh]

Jenny: And then they head into art class, and it's figure drawing. They're drawing—are you ready?—the negative space.

Kristin: Mmm.

Jenny: Around a woman's body. Mmm.

Kristin: Yeah, so um, we have—we're putting up two episodes. Because we had this incredible, incredible opportunity to speak with Jen Malkowski. Jen reached out to us a couple of months ago. And we're putting up the whole conversation because

it's just—I was able to speak with Jen and it was such a moving conversation that I want you to all be able to listen to it, like, right on the heels of this, if you want to. But we're gonna put a little bit of the conversation here, and this is a segment about this negative space conversation.

Jen is, just so you have a little bit of reference, a professor of film and media studies at Smith College with a specialization in death and dying in media. They published a book about the digital age expansion of documentary recordings of death, and regularly teach a seminar at Smith College about death and violence in film and TV. On top of that all, Jen is queer, nonbinary, and a lifelong Buffy fan. So as you can tell, possibly the perfect person to speak to about this episode. And so let's go over to my conversation with Jen that this piece focuses on, this negative space.

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: This drawing of negative space around a body.

[CHIME]

Jen: Nothing in a Joss Whedon episode is there by accident. So even in the kind of, what seems like a very throwaway plot about Dawn being at school and having her crush and she's in an art class. But, you know, listen to what the lecture is—it's not a lecture exactly. But the—what the teacher is saying. She's talking about, we're gonna draw this statue of a woman's body. No coincidence there. And we're looking at the negative space around the object, right? Not the object itself, but the space around it.

And I think that's really the mission statement for this episode, right? To kind of look at, process, as that body materializes what's happening around it, what's happening to, you know, this initial emotional journey of several characters that we've come to know so well over the years. That kind of negative space around the body. You know, what an individual death means, really, in the context of a show that's given us hundreds and hundreds of deaths, most of which mean nothing at all.

Kristin: I wonder, sort of on behalf of the people listening and myself, what you think this episode can give to us, right? That, like, it's hard to watch. But how can we use it to, um... reflect positively on this experience that we do all wrestle with, that we do all face? And maybe that's putting too much on you, I don't mean to. [laughs]

Jen: No! No, actually, I have two answers to that. One of them ties back to that scene I was talking about with Dawn. And it always struck me when I watched this episode, right from the beginning. We don't actually fully see the moment that Buffy tells Dawn this news, right? Which I was dread—I mean, you kind of dread that.

But also, that's—that's the real, like, emotional heart of, you know, films and TV about death. Right, this kind of, like, oh, that moment you get this horrible news, the kind of distraught, awful emotion around it. And it's surprising, I think, that we watch that exchange, muffled. We don't hear the sound, really. We're inside the art class with these other students and teachers we've never seen before and I think never see again? Maybe some of them we see again. [both laugh]

Kristin: Yeah, I think you're right.

Jen: But no one we care about, right? We're put back with these nobodies who are just watching this happen to Dawn and can't even really hear it. And it's this, um, strange moment stylistically. But I think that move that the show makes at that moment highlights our role as voyeurs, really, in the pain of others. It asks us to think about, why are we drawn to stories about death and grief? Like, what role do these stories serve in our lives and why does it make it so uncomfortable for us when we see those things represented a little more realistically, like they are in this episode, than the way we usually see death in film and media.

Um, you know, but as I said, I think they do serve a role. Film and TV shows, for most of us, are rehearsals for our own losses, right? When they're about death. The experiences we're gonna go through, losing people we care about, and eventually for our own deaths. I mean, if we—where do we learn how to die? I mean, physically, it's easy. You don't have any control over it.

Kristin: [laughing] Right.

Jen: But I think, you know, emotionally and interpersonally, where do we learn those skills? Because the deaths of people around us are often really far removed, at this point in our history. It used to be really different. In the 19th century, people would go to the death beds of their neighbors, right?

Kristin: Wow.

Jen: They would like, go next door to the farmhouse and actually visit with their dying neighbor. Can you imagine doing that today? It's such a strange idea, because we've really pushed the process of dying out of view, for the most part. So, you know—but we have to get these lessons somewhere. And I think an episode

like this has the potential to help a lot of us in that sense. But my second answer to this—I revisited Joss Whedon's commentary track—it's transcribed online for anybody who wants to see it, about this episode. I was curious what he had said about it. And he says something really devastating here, and it's kind of a longer quotation, but I'll just read it out. He says:

"My experience of death is that, apart from a lot of hugging at funerals, it seldom brings people together. It actually tears them apart. And I had always learned from TV that a death made everybody stronger and better and learn about themselves. And my experience was that an important piece had been taken out of the puzzle, amongst my family or friends or whomever it was, and that that piece would never be replaced, and people would never be the same. And that there is no glorious pay-off. There are sometimes revelations, and lessons that are useful. You have to take something out of it, because it's inevitable."

Kristin: Oof.

Jen: But, you know, from him—[laughs] uh, you know—

Kristin: Yeah.

Jen: One of the—one of the makers behind this episode. It's a pretty dark message. Right? So... I'm not, you know—

Kristin: Yeah. I really set you up for that, didn't I? I was like— [both laugh] "Oh, what can you get from it, Kristin? Well, let me tell you."

Jen: "Nothing!" [both laugh] You know, I'm not personally in the camp of—I'm all about the death of the author. Media isn't—you know, just because Joss Whedon says "don't take anything from this, [both laugh] death is terrible, there's no upside." Uh, you know, we have our own interpretations and that's how—that's how meaning is created.

Kristin: Yeah.

Jen: It's the interaction between maker and audience. And all kinds of other voices, like yours and Jenny's, and how we interpret what we see. But I thought I would share that particularly grim statement from the person who wrote and directed this episode. [both laugh]

Kristin: Well, you know, what's interesting and maybe, you know—I mean, I am notoriously sort of—no matter how old I get, I just can't seem to fully take off my rose-colored glasses. [both laugh] But I do think that, like, there is a bit of a

parallel between those two things, between what you're saying and what he's saying. And I think that for me, the thing that really jumped out and the moment that I got chills when you were talking was when you said, like, we sort of like, need to practice.

Jen: Yeah!

Kristin: We need rehearsal. We need—we need some way to do this. And I think that, you know, I can't put meaning on what Joss was saying in the commentary here. But I think that that's sort of also the point, that like, there isn't a larger meaning. There isn't a big thing, there isn't—you're not gonna become, like, a better person or unlock the mysteries or what have you.

Jen: Mmhmm.

Kristin: That maybe, at the end of the day, we just need to be able to sit with this. We need to be able to look at it, we need to be able to look at what it really is and what it really feels like when we do lose people. And when we face death ourselves.

Jen: And I think when the people we care about lose people.

Kristin: Yes.

Jen: I mean, because ultimately, learning about death, thinking about death, sitting with your own mortality and the mortality of everyone around you. It's also about taking care of the people you love. Because you're gonna wanna be there for folks who are going through this. And if you have so much discomfort and so little experience thinking about these issues, you're not gonna be able to show up for those folks in the way that you would want to.

Kristin: Yeah. I just was recently having a conversation with somebody about this—not even related to death, but just loss in general—

Jen: Mmhmm.

Kristin: The losses that we walk through in our lives. And the conversation I was having was with somebody else who had gone through a divorce, which is its own loss.

Jen: Yeah.

Kristin: And she came to me in the wake of my divorce, because she had just started going through her own divorce.

Jen: Mmhmm.

Kristin: And she said, you know, the way that you were able to connect with me was so powerful. And I said, well, yeah, because I was able to look at you and say, this is awful! [both laugh] I wasn't trying—right? Like, I wasn't trying to make it—I wasn't trying to tell you you were gonna get something out of it or that it was gonna be okay or that, like, whatever. Because—and I think that—you know, and the reason I bring it up is because I think that that's also when we say practice and rehearse and familiarize. It's like, the ability to look at somebody who has suffered a loss, and in our context, we're talking about death. And to really say, like, you know what, no, it's not okay. Like, it's not.

Jen: Yeah.

Kristin: And there might not be a big lesson. It might just hurt. But I know some of that hurt and I can, like, share some of that with you. I can let you know that I see you. I think that's a powerful thing that we can take from—you know, obviously our own losses. But also from this episode of television.

Jen: Definitely. And if you think about it, I mean, there are so few universals in human life. Really. I mean, there's all kinds of things we are told are universal, and many of us know they're really not. But this is one of them. We're all gonna die and we're all gonna experience loss. This is something that really brings us together, you know, as a people. But it's rare that we actually feel that way about it, that we feel connected and together in these experiences. And I think the best thing, you know, an episode of TV like this can do, that's really not there to entertain us? [laughs] In the way that Buffy is usually there to entertain us—is to help us get better at connecting through loss and at reckoning with, you know, this thing that we all share.

[CHIME]

Kristin: Thank you, Jen, so much. I cannot, cannot encourage you enough to listen to the full conversation that we had, because—I've listened to it, like, three times at this point. And every time, I'm just like, oh my god! Like, Jen, do you wanna make a podcast? Because you fucking rule. [Jenny laughs] I would listen to you talk all day long, every day.

Okay. So... so yeah. There's a lot happening, in every aspect of this. And I think that, you know, uh... part of what we come to as Buffy arrives is this, like, oh! This awful moment, you know, when you like, know something is horribly wrong, but you don't know what it is yet. Is there anything worse?

Jenny: Right.

Kristin: 'Cause there isn't, right?

Jenny: It's pretty bad. But before we get there, I think that it's considerate and also cruel of the show to give us some more levity. To give us a window into like—

Kristin: Yeah.

Jenny: Ah, yes, business as usual. Teen drama.

Kristin: Yeah. Mmhmm.

Jenny: Dawn is, like, worried about what this cute boy thinks of her. And then she, like, you know, is at an easel next to him. And they're like, having a conversation that kind of reveals that, you know, he... might be—uh, you know, fond of her. That like, they're relating. It's like, nice. And then you see Lisa, holding up in the background—[both laugh] she's written "he wants you!" huge on her sketchpad.

Kristin: Too—way too big. This is way too risky.

Jenny: Way, way, way, way, way—danger, Will Robinson.

Kristin: [laughs] Yeah.

Jenny: Um. And then, then it really starts to take off when Kevin reveals that he thinks Kirstie sucks. [both laugh] And Dawn starts telling the story about how they were reading a tome called the Annals of History— [Kristin laughs] and Kirstie didn't know how to pronounce "annals" so she said—and then there's Buffy.

Kristin: Yeah, we don't get the—we don't even get the anal joke. Goddamn it.

Jenny: No, no, that's the kind of joke where you don't need to get to the punchline. [both laugh] It kinda... announces itself.

Kristin: Right. Yeah and you know, I just—I have, like, just a little piece of commentary about—I kind of have commentary about the commentary. Ha-ha-ha.

Jenny: Mmm. Interesting.

Kristin: But like—because Joss, and also I think—you know, so many people talk about this as this, you know, the problems you think you have before you're

experiencing death like this, right? Like—and that is a true experience. Like, I remember experiencing that with my mom. It was like, one moment I was like, waiting tables, about to watch the series—or season finale of the first season of *Survivor*. Like, so fucking stoked. And then the next minute, I was like, literally, why did I care about anything? I don't care about school, I don't care about my job, I don't care about television. I need to get home *now*. Nothing else matters.

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: So there is full truth in the difference of, like, your priorities in these moments. But... when we see Dawn talking to Kevin, right. He brings up the fact—I don't know what kind of conversations Dawn has had about cutting and self-harm or like, how this has become knowledge past, you know, her own knowledge. But she's talking to him about how things have gotten really intense for her. And Kevin is, like, really, really picking up what she's putting down. And so I hesitate to just say, like, she was just lost in the trivial things of being a kid, because she really—the things that she's talking about are anything but trivial. Dawn has learned, just a couple of episodes ago, that she's a mystical fucking Key. She doesn't know her origin story, she's trying to connect with somebody. So I know that there is that, oh, what you thought were problems and that's why that's there. But I just wanna say that I think that there is a bit of depth to what Dawn is working through with Kevin here, even though it is not the same as what happens when Buffy walks in the door. [laughs]

Jenny: I think it's also interesting that they—I mean, it makes a lot of sense, I guess, in the sort of like... scheme of what's going on in this episode and what goes on in high school.

Kristin: Mmhmm.

Jenny: That they would, like, return to mentioning this. Because this is the only other time this comes up, right?

Kristin: Yes. Yes, it is.

Jenny: That they would A, choose to touch on it in this episode and B, that they would choose to touch on it again and then never again—it's just like—

Kristin: Right.

Jenny: Interesting.

Kristin: I mean, I—I just think that—and I'm—you know, as always, email us, bufferingthevampireslayer@gmail.com with your thoughts. But I just am, um... I struggle with why they didn't choose to actually make this more, you know, simple. Like, why wasn't it just that Kevin had called her freaky and like, you know, that he had a crush on her. Like, there was a choice to make this about her life becoming really intense. So it seems like there's something there that I've not heard discussion on, but is pinging around inside of my brain.

Jenny: Mmm.

Kristin: So anyway. Then—right, this moment of Buffy saying Dawn's name. And everyone in the classroom, even—the teacher, most notably, perhaps—but really recognizing that something horrible has—your older sister does not walk into a classroom and call your name in the middle of you drawing a fucking figure, unless something absolutely horrible has happened.

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: And this scene—you know, and this is part of the commentary, too. But like, this scene was filmed every which way, of Dawn and Buffy having the conversation where Buffy is telling her this. And ultimately, what was used is what we see here, where we hear almost nothing. We are, like, back—as Jenny was even saying. Like, we are back with the people watching this.

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: And it's devas—it's devastating. And Michelle Trachtenberg—you know, like, obviously we've talked about Sarah Michelle Gellar and—I mean, so many people in this fucking ep—we're about to turn the corner to, like, Willow and Anya. Don't even get me fucking started. But like, the acting from Michelle Trachtenberg is unbelievable.

Jenny: Yeah, she... collapses. And she tells us everything we need to know from behind, you know, sound muffling glass and from twenty paces.

Kristin: Right. Well, and this is like—'cause this is—um, again, I hesitate with the grief, but this is a shock, this is a moment, this is a trauma that is big enough to be communicated through glass.

Jenny: Mmm.

Kristin: Right, you don't need—you don't need the words to see. And that's, like—it kind of connects to the notion that there are things that humans can experience

together without needing words. Without needing language. You know, if I speak this language and you speak another language and we can't understand each other, there are still certain things that we can communicate very clearly. And this kind of loss, this kind of trauma, is one of those things. You know what is happening. I don't need to tell you, you can see it, because you are also human and these are universal experiences. They are—as Tara will point out, like, everyone experiences them differently. But we all are alive and we all will die—

Jenny: Mmm.

Kristin: And we all experience loss and that is universal. And that is powerful, and that's why this fucking episode is so powerful, because it actually harnesses that. Jesus Christ. [laughs]

Jenny: Yeah. [exhales] Just really heavy breathing through this whole episode, you know what I mean?

Kristin: [laughs] Okay, so. Coming out of the second act, we end on another body. This is the body that Dawn has drawn. And that is the last shot of Act 2, as we leave to head into Act 3.

[Alyse Knorr reading "Making a Fist" by Naomi Shihab Nye]

We forget that we are all dead men conversing with dead men.
—Jorge Luis Borges

For the first time, on the road north of Tampico,
I felt the life sliding out of me,
a drum in the desert, harder and harder to hear.
I was seven, I lay in the car
watching palm trees swirl a sickening pattern past the glass.
My stomach was a melon split wide inside my skin.

"How do you know if you are going to die?"
I begged my mother.
We had been traveling for days.
With strange confidence she answered,
"When you can no longer make a fist."

Years later I smile to think of that journey,
the borders we must cross separately,
stamped with our unanswerable woes.
I who did not die, who am still living,

still lying in the backseat behind all my questions,
clenching and opening one small hand.

Jenny: Woof!

Kristin: "Woof" is right. Act 3 begins again, as each act does, on Joyce. I find this scene to be, um, powerful in connection with the scene in Act 1 where Buffy has pulled down Joyce's skirt to kind of cover her body? Because this scene begins with Joyce and she's now at the morgue in the hospital, pre-autopsy. And they are cutting off the slip that she's wearing. And there's just something, like, so... woof, to use your words, Jenny—

Jenny: Mmhmm, mmhmm.

Kristin: About how quickly the passage of time—I mean, the pass—the amount of time that has happened from when we were in Buffy's house and she was pulling down her skirt, to the moment that she's on this table. And then they are taking clothes off because clothes don't matter.

Jenny: Mmm.

Kristin: Another important theme in this act. Clothes don't matter when you are a body that—and so that's where we are.

Jenny: Ugh.

Kristin: Ugh! Get me out of here! [laughs]

Jenny: Yeah, I—[laughs] just remembered I have to go.

Kristin: [laughs] Somebody—I need one of those hooks to pull me off stage right now. [Jenny laughs] What do you call it, the shepherd's cook?

Jenny: A shepherd's crook.

Kristin: Crook.

Jenny: [singsong] Hell yeah.

Kristin: [sighs] Okay, so. Beautiful silence, beginning this act as well. Yeah, these first two shots, right? Of Xander and Anya in the car and Tara and Willow in their room. Nothing, you hear nothing. You hear, like, maybe like a whoosh of the car and that's it.

Jenny: Mmm.

Kristin: And it's just, like—makes you take a breath. Fun fact from the commentary. This shot that is really beaut—

Jenny: [laughs] Is it a *fun* fact? Just kidding.

Kristin: No, I think it is, 'cause it's—well, so Tara—this shot that lands on Tara comes, like, from the road, through the window and up into Tara.

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: And they shot that on the roof of the building, so they like faked the window and they faked the bookcase, right, and um—to get that shot. And that shot's important because they—you know, they're trying to convey to us, obviously, that everything's happening simultaneously. But I just thought it was fun—

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: That it was on the roof and then of course, we go into the room.

Jenny: Oh, man.

Kristin: Ohh. As goes Willow, so goes our... nation. What's the quote? [laughs]

Jenny: Uh, basically that, I think.

Kristin: [laughs] I mean. We have talked, how many years now, about Willow and what she does to us. Even fucking Joss on the goddamn commentary is like, yeah, this is pretty much when nobody could fucking keep it together. [laughs] So.

Jenny: Mmhmm!

Kristin: This is the place where we all lost our collective shit. Willow having, I don't know, for me perhaps the most relatable experience right here, where she's like, black is too somber, yellow is too cheery. Joyce like my blue sweater, but I can't find my blue sweater. And this is *undoing* her. I mean, obviously, we all know that it is not the lack of the blue sweater that is undoing her, but it is her vehicle. We all have our vehicles with loss and with sadness—

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: And this is Willow's. And hoo! Alyson Hannigan. I can't—like, I'm not—she's not even in front of me right now. And I can see her face so vividly crumpled and it murders me.

[Clip from episode plays]

Willow: [crying] I have to be supportive. Buffy needs me to be supportive. [sobbing] God, why do all of my shirts have to have stupid things on them? Why can't I just dress like a grown-up? Can I be a grown-up?

Tara: Shhh.

Willow: Tara...

Tara: Shh, darling.

Willow: I can't do this.

[kissing noises]

Tara: We can do this.

Kristin: Oh my gosh! A lesbian kiss on screen?

Jenny: Uh... yep.

Kristin: First time, Jenny!

Jenny: Guess so.

Kristin: [singing] Feels like the first time!

Jenny: Really interesting choice, uh, of course, to save this first time for an instance where it's not about... it. At all.

Kristin: Yes. If it's okay with you, Jenny, I'm—I would like to take us down a little bit of a history tunnel when it comes to—

Jenny: Yes please!

Kristin: Yes! This is a phenomenon referred to as the lesbian kiss episode. Which, this is bucking—

Jenny: The hell?

Kristin: This is bucking the lesbian episode episode. It is saying "fuck you" to the lesbian kiss episode. So let me tell you. This is—2005 actually, the New York Times wrote an article about this lesbian kiss episode phenomenon. The article concluded that women kissing woman is often used as a gimmick during sweeps periods. So like, you know, when Nielsen ratings are used to determine advertising rates. So the thing that makes something a lesbian kiss episode is "eminently visual, cheap, controversial, and elegantly reversible." So what that means is that sweeps lesbians typically vanish or go straight when the week is over. Like, these are like, disappearing—it's like, we get the kiss and then that's it. It was just about the kiss, it was about the tantalizing nature of this thing.

Jenny: Mmm.

Kristin: Kisses between women are perfect sweeps stunts. They offer something, quote, "for everyone. From advocacy groups looking for role models to indignation-seeking conservatives, from goggle-eyed male viewers to progressive female viewers, from tyrants who demand psychological complexity to plot buffs." So this is this ridiculous, like... idea. And it—but it's not ridiculous. It's ridiculous 'cause we're mad about it, and I didn't even think we were gonna get a Patriarchy jingle in this episode. But it turns out, look at us, we did.

[THE PATRIARCHY jingle plays]
The patriarchy! [thunder clap, evil laughter]

Jenny: Life finds a way.

Kristin: [laughing] Life always does find a way, doesn't it? But—so it's this idea that seeing two women kiss is fun. But as our hero Marti Noxon said in an interview once, "You can show two girls kissing once but you can't show them kissing twice. Because the second time it means that they liked it."

Jenny: Ha!

Kristin: And yeah, pretty nice from Marti. So I just wanted to tell you some of the television shows who have had an episode like this, a lesbian kiss episode. 1991, the first one that is on record that I found was an episode of LA Law. And these are all episodes where there is, quote-unquote "lesbian kiss" where the character either goes back to being straight or just disappears and was, like, a one—it was a one-episode character.

Jenny: Hmm.

Kristin: 1993, Picket Fences. 1994, Roseanne. 1995, Deep Space Nine. 1998, Sex and the City. 1999, Party of Five. 2001, the year we're in with this episode, Friends. And there—the list is very long. This is just a small selection, but these are all episodes of television that sort of used women kissing women as a way to make their ratings go up, and where the kiss was overtly sexual in nature, right? And what is so incredible about the fact that this is the first time that we see Willow and Tara kiss is it is, like you said, Jenny, it is not about the kiss at all. It is about the fact that they are a couple, that they love each other, that they're moving through sadness and loss and trauma together.

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: And they are supporting each other. And that's what the kiss is about. Ugh! I have the chills. Ba-ba-ba-ba.

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: You know, I know that we all have different feelings on Joss Whedon for different reasons. But I will say that, according to all the things I read, this was the one time in the history of the show that Joss threatened to quit the show if the network wouldn't air it. Because the network was basically, like, we already have too many gay characters, like, why do you need to put this kiss in this episode? And he was like, I will literally pack up my fucking shit and leave if you don't let it air.

Jenny: Hoo-hoo-hoo!

Kristin: Yeah! So like... you know, when you think about The Body—I think for most of us, when we think about The Body, we're not thinking about this piece of it. But this is a really big deal, it's such a big deal. And I'm just, like, delighted by it. I'm so—I'm so proud to get to witness it. I'm so proud that this show that we are talking about did something like this. I think that it is so impactful. Fuck yeah!

Jenny: Yep. It's really serious. It's really serious!

Kristin: Right?

Jenny: Um, yeah.

Kristin: Speaking of serious. [laughs]

Jenny: Anya and Xander have arrived. And we get a little bit more of seeing that Xander expresses upsetness by getting testy.

Kristin: Yeah.

Jenny: You know, and he double parks—

Kristin: That's so interesting, Jenny. You just made me remember that scene where he's in the waiting room with Willow, remember?

Jenny: Mmhmm, mmhmm.

Kristin: He's so angry. Yeah.

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: Sorry, you were probably referencing that, but—

Jenny: Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

Kristin: I like to spell it out for myself, so. Continue. [laughs]

Jenny: No, that's good. So Xander and Anya pull up and there's no parking. They double park and he says, are you coming up? And Anya's like, you're double parked. And he says, basically, fuck it. You know, let 'em give me a ticket.

Kristin: Which—they do. [laughs]

Jenny: And... and they head upstairs. Ugh, this scene, right? Like, everyone's so... uncomfortable. And none of them knows what to do with themselves. And Anya, classic Anya, is the only one who is willing to voice these questions and this uncertainty. And it's like, met with such a strong... negative reaction.

Kristin: Mmhmm.

Jenny: Like, nobody can believe that she, like, has the audacity to say these things. But I also feel like they're all wondering these things, you know?

Kristin: Right. Well, you know what's interesting is like, hearing you say that, Jenny. My, I guess, interpretation is not even that they know that they have those questions and they are deliberately suppressing them. But that for us—for most people, death is something that is, like, taboo to talk about.

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: Like, there are ways in which we are supposed to behave—so I don't even think that these questions necessarily occur to them in a conscious manner. Which is why I think Willow is as angry as she is at Anya for asking them.

Jenny: Right.

Kristin: Because it is just wrenching her out of what she has been taught for all these years.

Jenny: Right. Right. And it's interesting too to see Xander gets snippy with Tara. When he says, yeah, like, we know where the morgue is. We do morgue time in the Scooby gang.

Kristin: Yeah! Ouch. Yeah.

Jenny: Like, dude! Yikes. And then Willow is snippy with Anya. They're, like, each snippy with each other's cross partner and then... the only way that Xander can get diffused is by Willow kind of coming back to her essential self and like...

Kristin: Mmhmm. Putting her—

Jenny: Being adorable and kind of like, snapping him out of it.

Kristin: Putting her little fists up! Ugh.

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: It's like, Willow—you know, if you had to ask me for, like, a scene to encapsulate the love that Willow and Xander have for each other, it would prob—might be this moment where Willow puts her little fists up and is like, come on. I'll help ya, we'll go. And then Xander being like, "I couldn't take ya," and kissing her on the forehead and just holding her.

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: It is just—you know, you're seeing—when you have, like, a childhood friend and they lose a parent, that is a very specific experience. Because you—they aren't your parent, but in a lot of ways, they are.

Jenny: Right.

Kristin: You have memories that date back for a long time. And you know, Willow and Xander share memories of each other's families from when they were

little-little. But I do think that Joyce has become a mom figure for all of them. And they're experiencing that loss, both through their love for Buffy and also their love for Joyce, and the fact that Joyce is no more. And it's just—it's beautifully captured with Willow and Xander because I think of how their friendship goes back.

Jenny: Yeah. Anya's asking questions, you know, like, what's gonna happen, are we gonna see the body, are they gonna cut the body open?

Kristin: Mmhmm.

Jenny: And this—there's this, like, mounting tension as everyone is just, like, eee, what are you saying? Right?

Kristin: Right, right.

Jenny: And it's interesting, because Anya spent a thousand years killing so many people and we assume being around so many dead bodies. [laughs]

Kristin: Yeah but she didn't stick around.

Jenny: Well, she didn't stick around and she also didn't care.

Kristin: Yeah. Yeah, I think that's the—that's it, right there. Both—those two things in combination is what sets it apart from this experience. 'Cause, you know, I think that she—what she doesn't understand is the mourning rituals of humans, the grieving rituals of humans. And also, she doesn't understand what she's feeling because she has never felt it before.

Jenny: Mmhmm, mmhmm.

Kristin: And there's this really incredible exchange right before we get Anya's speech, which, you know, head's up, we're gonna play it. So if you need to skip forward a little bit, you can. [laughs] But um, Anya asks these questions that you already talked about, Jenny. And Willow says, "It's not okay for you to be asking these questions." And I speak a little bit about this with Jen in the interview that also went up today. But this is sort of like—Anya is the most childlike of the bunch. And often, you know, these are questions that will come from children.

And the idea that there are questions that are inappropriate to ask is really troubling, because—you know, these are really important questions. And for Anya, these are really, really important questions because she is just—and they refer to it in the commentary as a plot twist for Anya, which I find interesting. But that we don't expect Anya to be sensitive, which in fact is where this is all coming from.

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: So let's go—let's play this, I think, perhaps one of the most memorable moments in the episode and comes up for, I think, so many of us when we think about this episode. Let's hear the magnificent Emma Caulfield as Anya, talking about why she's asking these questions.

[Clip from episode plays]

Anya: [crying] But I don't understand! I don't understand how this all happens, how we go through this. I mean, I knew her, and then she's—there's just a body! And I don't understand why she just can't get back in it and not be *dead* anymore! It's stupid. It's mortal and stupid! And—and Xander's crying and not talking. And—and I was having fruit punch, and I thought, well, Joyce will never have any more fruit punch, ever. And she'll never have eggs, or yawn, or brush her hair, not ever, and no one will explain to me *why*.

Kristin: Oof! Um, first of all. But Jenny, I... I don't know. You know, it's hard to know when you watch a series and then you watch it again—and perhaps, in your case, in many of your cases, again and again and again and again—what you understand about the character these second, third, fourth, fifth times through the viewing that is informing your watch.

But to me, I like, didn't experience this as a plot twist with Anya. It did not feel surprising to me, because I feel like from near to the beginning, I've been reading Anya's experience of the world as, you know, a demon who is now human, experiencing things for the first time and genuinely trying to understand. So to me, it doesn't seem like a departure of any kind. It seems like an underlying of what was there in a, you know, much more grave situation.

Jenny: Yeah, I agree. Like, Anya—similar to Spike, you know, has this kind of emotional intelligence or emotional question—she's aspiring towards emotional intelligence. She's like a blank slate, you know?

Kristin: Yeah. Yeah.

Jenny: Just trying to get a handle on things. And I think, like, it is a little surprising to see her questioning so tenderly—

Kristin: Mmhmm.

Jenny: About Joyce. Because I feel like we've seen her be very tender about Xander. But we haven't seen her relating to other people or, like, seeming protective or loving towards other people besides Xander.

Kristin: Yeah. That's true.

Jenny: Until now, I think.

Kristin: That's true. That's very true. You mentioned Spike, Jenny, and so I just do wanna put a note in here that this episode, we see everyone and we do not see Spike. And this is the first time, I believe, in—since Spike became, like, part of the Scooby gang in Season 4, that he's been absent from an episode.

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: We've seen him in every episode since then. So that's notable and interesting. And you know, we'll talk about it as we move forward. But just to put—put a pin in it. No Spike.

Jenny: Yes.

Kristin: Xander, punching right through the wall. Uh...

Jenny: [laughing] I love that—[both laugh] Anya says, "Xander decides he blames the wall."

Kristin: [laughs] Ohh. It's great. This is great. It's a great encapsulation of the many ways in which we process things. And Xander's is really—you know, I said I identify with Willow here. But I—I think I identify with all of them in different aspects. And Xander really—you know, he says something like, I felt relief for a second. And Willow's like, oh, a whole second. [both laugh] But he sort of—you know, so much of this is like, not being able to accept the reality. And not feeling like you're grounded, not feeling like you have two feet on the floor, not feeling like the walls are real. Not feeling like you are real, everything feels so fucked up. And there is something about punching a wall—I don't think Xander intended to punch right through it. But there's something about punching a wall that is a physical reminder of your own existence.

Jenny: Yep.

Kristin: And the existence of the space around you being real. And so, I get it.

Jenny: Yeah, and—[laughs] Anya very practically points that he could have punched an electrical... thing.

Kristin: [laughs] Yeah.

Jenny: Which, true, dude! Be careful.

Kristin: Yeah.

Jenny: And then I love this little reality moment of, uh... Xander like criticizing how poorly the drywall has been—

Kristin: Yeah!

Jenny: Installed. And he's like, ugh, who did the drywall in this place? And Willow's like, "I always forget to ask." [both laugh]

Kristin: Yeah.

Jenny: It's great. Great, great, great.

Kristin: And then, you know, we get this moment from Tara. And Tara, we all know 'cause we've seen the episode. We will get the reveal in the next act of the fact that Tara has experienced loss like this directly. And so Tara, you know, for this whole scene is really—and cheer for Amber Benson—because she's really giving us these eyes of understanding throughout this entire act, of—

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: Looking at each person, her beloved Willow. And then Xander *and* Anya. Like, she even looks at Willow when Willow's getting testy with Anya, like, ooh man, give her her space. Give her space, because Tara's *really*... empathizing, I guess, with each response to this.

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: And she just looks at Xander and she says, it hurts. You know?

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: And that "it hurts" is felt on every level. It physically hurt you and that is because you emotionally are hurting.

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: And then we talked about this moment already, Jenny, but we get to this moment with Xander where he sort of—you know, him punching the wall also gives them all something to do. And they need to get Xander's fucking hand out of the wall. There's nothing more—and I know that any of you can attest to this. When you are in a moment of trauma, there's nothing more wonderful than a simple fucking task that you need to complete.

Jenny: Uh-huh!

Kristin: And so they're all just so excited, like, oh god, thank god you put your fucking hand in this wall, man! [laughing] 'Cause now we have—we just need to get it out. And, um—and Xander has found his resolve to say, "we will help. That's what we do. We help Buffy."

Jenny: Yeah. Yeah, and then they round up to head out. And we get two great beats. One of Willow dashing back in after everyone has left to grab one more outfit change. And then over out the window, Xander's getting a ticket—

Kristin: Yes.

Jenny: Just as—just minutes before he'll be getting back to his car.

Kristin: Yes.

Jenny: Isn't that just the way?

Kristin: Isn't it just? Murphy's Law, right?

Jenny: We—um... that's everything that can go wrong, will go wrong.

Kristin: Will go wrong. Yeah.

Jenny: So I guess it does apply.

Kristin: Um, I have—

Jenny: The one thing I think that we missed is that when—

Kristin: Yes.

Jenny: Anya sits down in that papasan chair...

Kristin: Hell yeah! I'm so glad that the word "papasan chair" also made it into this episode. [both laugh]

Jenny: She, you know, she's like, oh, I'm sitting down and there's something... like, bumpy underneath me or something. And she pulls out the blue sweater that Willow is so obviously looking for.

Kristin: Yep.

Jenny: And tucks it into a drawer and continues to—

Kristin: And—yeah, and that Willow comes around to this place of like, I don't care—like, once she gets the next foothold which is, okay, we need to leave, we need to go help Buffy. Like, she's gotten past that initial "I don't know what to wear." And she's, like, oh yeah, the sweater doesn't matter. It's fine.

Jenny: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Kristin: The last thing that I wanna say before we move into the final act here is just a really fun—and again, you know, for those of you who've watched the director's commentary, some of this will be familiar to you. But for those of you who haven't, I don't wanna rob you of some of these amazing little facts. During the filming of this scene, Alyson Hannigan had an allergic reaction to what they think is the plaster from the wall that Xander had punched through, [laughing] that she had to go to the fucking ER and get, like, a steroid shot. [both laugh] Because her entire face blew up.

Jenny: Oh, buddy.

Kristin: So that's a nice moment of levity for all of us, journeying through this episode.

Jenny: Delightful.

Kristin: Delightful. So that is the third act.

[Alyse Knorr reading "21" by Sally Keith]

Poem I wrote for my mother to say to me:

Sweet child I made of fire, sweet child, little fire
Bedeck the world with angels and ladders

Little mirror, I give you my last ounce of breath
I give you my breath to be emptied of life

Here, little fire, here, here
Little fire, lift my hand to feel a body emptied of life
Lift my hand, little mirror

Little fire, sweet child,
Put flowers on top of the table
Little fire, light candles in churches and cathedrals

Fire catches, sweet child
Bedeck the world with angels and ladders
Climb, little fire, climb higher and higher

I made you like this, little mirror, listen
As the wind shifts, listen to the smallest drops of water

Kristin: Here we are at the start of the fourth act. The fourth and final act of the episode that we have been thinking about for years. [laughs] Since we began this podcast, so. [Jenny laughs] I am feeling anticipatory relief that we're three-quarters of the way through—

Jenny: It's almost over!

Kristin: We almost did it! This is the act referred to in that wiki article as The Body. And it starts, again, on Joyce in the hospital. Dr. Krinks is here in the morgue. This is now, we are to believe, post-autopsy because he's about to come out into the waiting room and tell Buffy et al. that this was a result of a brain aneurysm and it was—

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: Connected to the surgery and the tumor and all of that stuff. So.

Jenny: We get this *wonderful*, beautiful, dim long shot—

Kristin: Mmm.

Jenny: Of Dr. Krinks wrapping up in the autopsy zone and, you know, walking through the sort of like, labyrinthine hospital corridors.

Kristin: It made me think that perhaps when Faith was in the coma, they had put her in the morgue, looked very similar to me. [both laugh]

Jenny: Joss mentions in the commentary that he was watching Magnolia, the Paul Thomas Anderson film, over and over and over again, right around when they made this episode. And I think that shows, like, these long shots, it's very PTA.

Kristin: Mmhmm, mmhmm.

Jenny: If you've ever seen Magnolia or Boogie Nights or any of his many other wonderful films.

Kristin: Yeah. Did you just refer to him as PTA?

Jenny: That's right.

Kristin: Wow. Just didn't know you were on an initial-only basis. [laughs]

Jenny: Yeah, well. Me and PTA, you know how it is.

Kristin: Um, so we go into—speaking of lighting. The lighting really, I mean... it's incredible in the whole episode. We haven't really talked about it and I think it reaches its fucking crescendo in this last act. Because we have this, like, you know, lighting you were talking about in the morgue and in the hallway. And then we have this really stark lighting, you know, just—every waiting room across fucking America and maybe the world is lit with this, like, just—if you weren't upset enough, like, now you have to like see your own skin yellowed under the light of this bullshit lighting. [both laugh] So that's done really well in the waiting room. And the lighting continues in this entire act, to just be unreal.

We get—the only time, I think—I don't know. Maybe it's the only, like, really obvious time we get it. But these crossfades of the passage of time as they all hug each other. We see a moment between Willow and Buffy, which I think is really powerful. We see Tara and Dawn have a moment, which is really incredible. And then we get a brief chuckle. Thank you so much, Anya, when Anya sort of like, bear-hugs Giles. Which is really fun and sweet.

Jenny: [laughs] Yeah, it is very sweet.

Kristin: Yeah.

Jenny: All the Scoobies, together. Fucking... assembling to do what they do.

Kristin: To do what they do. And you know, there's a lot of things that happen in this last quarter of the episode. But I think one is underlined right in this first moment where Dr. Krinks comes out and says what has happened. And Dawn immediately says, "can we see her?" And Buffy says—

Jenny: It's not real for Dawn yet!

Kristin: Exactly. And that—that totally is not on Buffy's radar. And I'm not saying it should be. I mean, you know, Jesus. But like, Buffy has had this experience of seeing Joyce, of seeing the body, of having moved through all of this. Dawn has had *none* of that. Dawn just got told in school, she hasn't seen anything, it does not seem real at all to her.

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: I learned—I'm with my parents. I'm staying with my parents, I've been here for about five weeks. And my dad lost his mom at the same, actually, as Buffy. He was 21 when his mom passed away. And we were having a conversation about, I don't know, probably just like, masculinity. Listen, I am who I am, okay? And I learned that when my grandmother passed away—I never met her. I was far from being born. And I learned that when my grandmother passed away, my grandfather—so, you know, Italian. My dad's 100% Italian. My grandfather is first generation. My grandmother came over from Italy. They had very strong opinions about who should and should not experience the reality of death.

And so I learned this past week, that when my grandmother passed away, my grandfather allowed my dad to be in the room. But my aunt—my dad is one of two—was not allowed to be in the room. She was not allowed to be with my grandmother, her mother, as she died. Which was, like, staggering to me. I had never heard of this. I am near to 40 years old, this story was never told to me before. And I just could not—I still cannot get over it. And I guess I'm reminded of it in this moment because, you know, the difference in being able to understand loss—you know, Buffy having seen it, my dad having seen it. And Dawn and my aunt, not having been able to get that, is measurable. So there's a little bit of gender for you in an episode about death. You're welcome.

Jenny: Yeah, what a strange choice.

Kristin: By my grandfather?

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: Well, but it isn't strange. It's like, he—I mean, it is. But it—it's not for him, it wasn't for him, because it was like, a man—this is a man's job is to carry the burden of something as gruesome as the body, right?

Jenny: Mmm.

Kristin: But like—and so that—it was like—it was almost like they were doing her a favor, is how I think that that my grandfather probably viewed it.

Jenny: Right.

Kristin: But you know, in a larger understanding of gender and how fucked up it all is, like, it's so—it's like, really, really robbing my aunt of an experience that likely could have helped her grieve her mother.

Jenny: Right.

Kristin: But it just was not how the understanding was at that time for my grandfather, having to do entirely with gender.

Jenny: Yeah. [groans]

Kristin: Yeah. I know, right?

Jenny: It's a thing. [Kristin laughs] It's really a thing. Uh. Okay, so. One thing here worth mentioning in the delivery of information and news to Buffy is that Dr. Krinks is saying, like, you know, it happened really fast.

Kristin: Yeah.

Jenny: She, you know, probably didn't feel any pain. And Buffy's like, are you sure? And he's like, absolutely. And then the doctor's mouth keeps moving, as I'm sure he's saying something, like, nice. But what Buffy hears is, "I have to lie to make you feel better."

Kristin: Right. Yeah, and it's on the heels of another one of these quick fantasy montages of like, her having gotten there soon enough. Them all being happy in the hospital room 'cause Joyce is fine and thank god.

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: And it's just—yeah, she's wrestling with guilt, big time. Speaking of wrestling, she's gonna be wrestling with a vampire soon. But we'll get there. [laughs]

Jenny: There's also—I noticed some in-frame filming equipment—

Kristin: Did you?

Jenny: In this waiting room scene.

Kristin: Oh.

Jenny: It's on the left of the screen. It's just the symptom of, you know, aspect ratio changing when the show got reframed for Hulu and whatnot.

Kristin: Mmm.

Jenny: It's—there's definitely something poking into the frame there. [both laugh]

Kristin: Yeah, and—so Giles is doing dad's work here.

Jenny: Ugh! Giles.

Kristin: Right? This is really—yeegh, ugh. Giles is saying, you know, I'm gonna—I'll fill out—I'll take care of the forms. You know, I'll do this for her and, you know, Dr. Krinks is like, well, we will need her to sign some stuff. And he's like, very firm and gentle at the same time, like, I will find what you need to do and only show you what you need to see and only ask that of you. And it's just... like, again, hearkening back to the emotional side of grief, but then this practical side. And what's so powerful, I think, about Giles' presence is that he, in this episode, shows up in an emotional capacity, and he also shows up in a practical capacity. He's really there to help Buffy with all of this.

Jenny: Good dad.

Kristin: Yeah.

Jenny: Good dad. Dawn's hatching a plan!

Kristin: [laughs] I thought you were gonna say, Dawn—

Jenny: Fucking Harriet the Spy over here has to, and I air-quote, pee. [Kristin laughs] Um, she's on a one-teen mission—

Kristin: Yeah.

Jenny: To find the morgue. Which happens to be—[laughs] right across from the bathroom. It's like, one door is like, women. And the other door is like... [Kristin laughs] "authorized personnel only. Definitely no dead bodies this way, turn back, all ye who wish to enter here."

Kristin: It's like... it's like—there's like a sign on the women's bathroom with like, a skirt stick figure. And then there's a sign on the morgue door that's just a little face with two cross-eyes.

Jenny: Like a little coffin. [both laugh] Oh yeah, yeah. [both laugh] Um, okay.

Kristin: Can you hear—this is the obvious laughter of people who are desperate to find a laugh. Like, we're like, [loudly] ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!

Jenny: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So— [laughs] so Dawn heads out on this mission. Anya, Xander and Willow decide that they're gonna go get snacks. Leaving Buffy alone with Tara.

Kristin: I mean, Xander has spent his entire paycheck on the vending machine. [laughs]

Jenny: It's—it's true. Has Buffy ever been alone with Tara before that we have seen?

Kristin: No. No, I really don't think so. I... I think—nope. When she was alone with—the only time I remember her being alone with Tara is when she was actually Faith. [laughs]

Jenny: Oh—nice. Tight! [Kristin laughs] Uh, you know what's so interesting is that, as soon as everyone is gone and it's just Buffy and Tara, and we have this very beautiful straight-on shot of them side by side, talking but not looking at each other. And Buffy says, "I'm sorry you have to go through all this."

Kristin: Ugh, yeah.

Jenny: So interesting.

Kristin: But it makes sense, it's another one of those—like, it's almost the same moment as her wishing the paramedics—

Jenny: Saying "good luck," right.

Kristin: Yes. 'Cause you're just, like—you're like, I guess I'm—like, I'm—my default is to be polite. You know, like, these polite things that we do in our everyday life. And then when they're like put in the context of this, you realize kind of how ridiculous they are? [laughs]

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: But yeah. And she says to Tara, "I don't even know if I'm here." Which is such like a beautifully resonant sentence, illustrating this out of body shock experience. And she says, "I've never done this," and then is sort of like, that's—it's so stupid. Like, obviously I've never done this. But she opens up this door for Tara, essentially. Which is good 'cause Tara's horrible at opening doors, as we've learned in many episodes past. [both laugh]

Jenny: Wow.

Kristin: Tara—I'm sorry. I'm sorry!

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: Now that we're allowed to laugh, man, I'm going for it.

Jenny: No, no, it's—I think you gotta get it where you can.

Kristin: [laughs] But Tara says, "I have." And this is a reveal, you know—

Jenny: Right.

Kristin: Of the fact that Tara has experienced loss. And is it the same as Buffy's lost? Of course not. But is it loss? Indeed it is. And it gives her this connection to Buffy that is—

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: Probably one of the more important lifelines that Buffy gets in the episode.

Jenny: Yeah. Yeah, Tara's mom died when she was 17. And one of my favorite—like, one of the things that I think of when I think of this episode is this exchange when Buffy says, "Was it sudden?" and Tara says, "No. And yes."

Kristin: Mmhmm.

Jenny: Because how could it not be—like, no matter how much you see it coming—

Kristin: Yeah.

Jenny: How could this incredibly important figure in your life, ceasing to exist, not feel sudden in some way?

Kristin: Totally. Totally. And... you know, I've been—obviously we're taping this episode at a really overwhelming time. Because we are going through, like, this global experience of loss and panic and, you know, complete life shifting experiences. And one of the—it's been so treacherous to walk towards it. Because—I mean, this is so absolutely morbid, but also so completely accurate. Jenny and I both were in positions where we were like, are we gonna lose people before we tape this episode? Like, where will we be and like, where will our listeners be? Like, where will we all be and how do we do this?

And, you know, one of the things that I—the reason that I'm bringing this up and that it brought up in my mind, Jenny, when you said what you said was because my grandmother is sick. And today, as of this taping, she's having a really good day, but she's had some really bad days—

Jenny: Aw, yeah!

Kristin: Yeah, she's had a really good day today, but she's had some really, really bad days over the past week. And you know, really ironically, as I've been—[laughs] as I've been exploring this episode which is about the body, I have also been navigating my mom being afraid of losing her mom and not being able to be physically with her. Right, this like, distance and that lack and what have you. And my mom has said, you know, in a few of our conversations, like, that she feels in ways that she's already mourning her, already mourning her loss.

Jenny: Ugh!

Kristin: Even though there's—you know, we don't know that we're going to lose my grandmother, but she is 94 years old. And I haven't really even had this exchange with my mom directly, but like, I'm—it's just—there's something so staggering about me listening to my mom talk about how she's attempting to mourn and grieve now. Because that's your body sort of trying to prepare itself. And me knowing that I had mourned her, my own mother.

Jenny: Mmm.

Kristin: But I know, on the other side of that, that I didn't lose her and that there is something—this is a very long winded way of saying—that there is something different between when you think you are preparing and when it actually is real. That is a distinct divide. And that is, you know, tying back to Tara saying, was it sudden? No, but is it always sudden? Yes. Can you ever be prepared for the reality that is a death, that is loss like that? No. You can't.

So. Anyhow. I—I think that... this—you know, it's like the same—the monologue from Anya, the scene we get here between Tara and Buffy. The—there's just so many touchstones in this episode, which is why it's as stunning as it is. It's not about, like, well, this is a really good episode and boy, what about that one scene? You know, it's like, every fucking moment of this is packed with emotion. And also, to call back to Act 3, like, packed with the space for us to also fill in our own experiences. So like, thank you, and also fuck you! You know? [laughs]

Jenny: Ha! Uh, I do know. [Kristin laughs] I really do. Man oh man oh man. You know that thing where you're just a teen, and... your mom has just died, where you haven't seen her?

Kristin: Yeah, you're like, [singing] I'm just a little Key, trying to—[crosstalk]

Jenny: You're like, prove it!

Kristin: [still singing the tune, then stops] Yeah.

Jenny: Um, what? [laughs]

Kristin: I'm sorry, I was just singing Avril Lavigne's Sk8er Boi, but trying to fill it in with words about—

Jenny: Wow! Okay. [laughs] Okay.

Kristin: Listen. You know what? It's been a long ride, okay?

Jenny: So—no, I know. I know, I know.

Kristin: So yes, I do. You just want to go into the morgue because you just want to understand the reality. And that—

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: We've said that, right? Or maybe—I don't know. But I think we've at least made mention of it, that like, the difference between these two, Dawn and Buffy, is that one—for one, it is all too real, and for the other, it is not real at all.

Jenny: Yeah, and she finds her way to a Joyce-shaped covering.

Kristin: Yeah.

Jenny: And is standing there, thinking about pulling the sheet down or whatever. But oh no, in the background, it's a morgue-pire! [Kristin laughs] Ready to attack—I just hate when I'm trying to prove that one of my loved ones has just died. And then I get interrupted by the unholy undead. And you know what's really something about—this scene, like so much of this episode, is so quiet. And kind of all we hear is just like, footstep. Footstep. And this body—the body of this vampire has been made up to, like, really... look like it's, you know—

Kristin: It's pretty dead.

Jenny: Been dead, you know?

Kristin: [laughing] It's pretty fucking dead, yeah.

Jenny: And naked, of course, because morgue. And so... this vampire attacks Dawn. And we hate it.

Kristin: Ugh!

Jenny: Right?

Kristin: It's really rough. But I also—like, I personally love it? Like, I love the fact that we—I don't remember if this is from the commentary or from an article I read or whatever. But essentially, the idea that like, life continues to go on. And in the first act, the way that that appears to us is like, sunlight and noises and wind chimes. But like, also life going on for this group of people means vampires. Like, we're still on the fucking Hellmouth and it doesn't matter that your own mother has just died of natural causes. Because you're still—hey, you're still here, still fucking vampires. And I just think that's really powerful. And I think that it's nice to also feel like we are in an episode—like, I think it's a relief to feel like we're in an episode of Buffy the Vampire Slayer—

Jenny: A little bit of normalcy.

Kristin: Yeah, like—

Jenny: Well, it's also nice to see—you know, we get this reminder that Buffy fights death, in a way, every single day of her life.

Kristin: Yeah.

Jenny: And even though there is absolutely nothing that she can do to win the fight against death where her mother is concerned, she can still do her work—

Kristin: Mmhmm.

Jenny: And protect people and kill vampires.

Kristin: Yeah, and—

Jenny: Thwart death, in her way.

Kristin: You know, I think too that there's something about the fact that this is a show and if it wasn't in the clip that we put in the episode with Jen, you will hear Jen and I talk about this a little bit more in the larger interview. But that we've seen so many deaths in this show, in five seasons. But most of them do not matter, I believe, is what Jen says.

Jenny: Right.

Kristin: And there's something about the way that this vampire is being fought. And also, the fucking way he's killed! That is so different than the way that we usually see vamps dusted. And also, that like, you can see—well, I can see, as the viewer interpreting, Buffy's eyes after she kills the vampire. Sort of like, registering like, this is what I do. But also, this is different. You know, like, this vampire is just like every other vampire I've ever killed. And yet now I'm, like, recognizing the difference in these deaths, in contrast with this death, my mother.

Jenny: Mmm.

Kristin: Could definitely do without the, like, surgical saw beheading. But I understand why it's there. [laughs]

Jenny: Brutal!

Kristin: Whew! Rough. Real rough.

Jenny: Disgusting!

Kristin: Thank god dust is what happens after a vampire is beheaded. Because I was ready to—

Jenny: Uh, yeah.

Kristin: Not think about that. Anymore. But unfortunately, after the floor is covered in morgue-pire dust, there is—[Jenny laughs] this ending moment. And a stunning shot. Like, fucking breathtaking shot, of Buffy in the background. Dawn in sort of the middle—actually, first she's in the foreground, then she becomes in the middle ground, as we go to the other side of the table where Joyce is, or I should say, the body is. And we see the three of them, in one shot. It is, like—even describing it makes me have the chills in a bad way.

Jenny: Yeah. They have this exchange, right? Where Dawn says, "is she cold?" And Buffy says, "it's not her. She's gone." And Dawn says, "where'd she go?" And then Dawn's reaching and reaching. And almost... touches Joyce, but does not.

Kristin: Right. And this is an—even Jen in our interview talks about this. But it's sort of like a common conversation that, at the time of viewing this, a lot of people who had watched it thought that the ending was intended to be a signal. Because, you know, don't forget, Dawn is the Key. She is mystical, she is magical. And a lot of people apparently thought, like, oh, this ending is to signal to us that Dawn's gonna bring Joyce back.

Jenny: Right.

Kristin: Which makes sense. Like, that interpretation totally makes sense. Because it is hard to be yanked out of the universe that you're normally in. All of our minds wanna just be like, okay, so that was—woof! But we're going back to, like, it's okay, right? And you know, the real reason for this, as, you know, Joss says, is that he wanted to underline the fact that there is nothing there. That like, we want to be able to touch this, we want to be able to understand it, we want to be able to make something of it. But the fact of the matter is that it is what it is. And that person is not there anymore. As much as, you know, the sort of focus of this episode was not to—and Joss talks about this, right? Like, this was not—I didn't make this episode to give catharsis. Like, I made the episode to, like, show that there isn't anything and blah blah blah blah. It's like—

Jenny: Right.

Kristin: I was thinking so much about that, because the truth of the matter is that yes, if you were Buffy or Dawn or one of the Scoobies or what have you, in this

episode, you might have gone from the beginning of this episode to the end of this episode and not taken anything from it, right? I do believe that is possible and common to experience this without you being able to find any deeper meaning. But the truth of it is that we are not actually in the episode. We are watching the episode, which means that catharsis is implied. Because you're—if something is powerfully illustrating experiences that you either have had or that you know you will have, you are finding company.

And so even though, like, I understand that the intentionality of this episode was not to, like, you know, give us something. Screw you, Joss. [laughs] We got some—I still think we get something. Because—[sighs] what do we have as humans, except for the ability to share experiences? Like, that is it and that is—when things are at their darkest, you know, the best thing that you can have is Tara, is somebody who says, like, I know. You can't have somebody who's saying it's gonna be okay. You can't have somebody who's saying, like, this or that or the other thing. You need to have a witness, a mirror, whatever you wanna call it. You need to have the understanding that you aren't alone in your experience. And so that is why I find this episode so powerful.

And why, you know, Jenny and I have had—if you follow us on social media, you may know—ongoing conversations about this episode, especially in the climate that we're in. How do we do this, will we be able to help people? Will we hurting people [sic]? What's gonna happen? And I think that, like, you know, where we landed was in this place of—we have gone through so much. We started this podcast at the end of 2015. You know, Jenny and I have gone through so much personally. We have collectively gone through so much politically.

Jenny: Mmhmm.

Kristin: And this show has always, always acted as a vehicle to come together. And so I—

Jenny: Mmhmm!

Kristin: You know, I think that this episode is there for us to be able to see that our experiences are not singular. And I hope that this podcast is here for us to connect to each other, to remind each other that what we're experiencing right now is not singular. Uh... end monologue. [laughs] [Jenny sighs and Kristin laughs harder] Jenny...

Jenny: I'm... so—and now it's time for the Sexual Tension Awards!

Kristin: Yeah. Uh, if it wasn't already clear to you, some of you have asked us about the Sexual Tension Awards. And some of you have written in very sarcastically laughing at us that we would have to do Sexual Tension Awards in this episode. But you perhaps forgot that we are all powerful—

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: And long ago decided, yeah right! [laughs]

Jenny: Absolutely not.

Kristin: No thank you! This episode is *not* getting the Sexual Tension Awards, because we are not fucking monsters.

Jenny: Yeah.

Kristin: But.

Jenny: Although I don't know, I saw a lot of chemistry between that vomit and that very absorbent paper towel!

Kristin: [laughs] Why don't we just give—we'll hand it out to Kevin and Dawn. [laughs]

Jenny: Oh, yeah.

Kristin: They can—

Jenny: They had some—

Kristin: We'll take—they'll take it. We'll give it to them, by power of... attorney. What do you—I don't know how the law works. Okay. [laughs]

Jenny: I think it's podcast of attorney.

Kristin: Okay. This is—you know, last week, we did a mailbag. And I'm sure a lot of you will have a lot of thoughts about this. I do wanna say, too, so many of you have written us emails about this episode for years, talking about how powerful it is to you, how much you connect it to your own experiences, your own losses. Our hope is that you find each other, you know, to talk about those things now and connect with each other. And you know, find each other on social media or what have you, to have conversations if you need to. Jenny?

Jenny: Yes?

Kristin: Do you think it's time for us to tell them who we are, and then howl out, and then play a song that will probably—

Jenny: Yes.

Kristin: Make them feel more feelings? Do you think that's—

Jenny: [singsong] Yes!

Kristin: Where we are? Great.

Jenny: Well hey, I'm Jenny Owen Youngs. And when I'm not being devastated by Buffy the Vampire Slayer, [Kristin laughs] I am often found writing and recording hot, hot jams! You can learn more about me and hear some of those songs over at jennyowenyoungs.com. You can give me a shout on Twitter @JennyOwenYoungs. I have a new EP that came out in November that I love so much, that you can give a listen to on all the digital platforms you're familiar with. You can also hear me talk at length about another petite blond protagonist over on Veronica Mars Investigations, the podcast!

Kristin: [laughs] I am Kristin Russo. And when I am not being dragged through my own emotional minefield of experience by this television show, I can be found, you know, helping queer communities. And also, doing a fun new Patreon-only podcast with Joanna Robinson where I am watching films for the first time. Tonight, actually, right after talking about The Body, I'm watching Prometheus tonight. So, you know, I don't know if anyone ever has watched The Body twice and then Prometheus in one day. But that's what I'm—[laughs]

Jenny: Eee, oh god, Prometheus? Do you have to?

Kristin: I have to. It's Joanna's pick.

Jenny: Hmm.

Kristin: Not for quality, but for me seeing where the universe went. So—

Jenny: Okay, alright, I guess.

Kristin: Yeah. So anyhow—

Jenny: Blegh.

Kristin: You can find more about me on my website, kristinnoeline.com. That's k-r-i-s-t-i-n-o-e-l-i-n-e. And that is also the spelling of my Twitter and Instagram handle where you can learn about my adventures living with my parents in upstate New York with my two cats. [both laugh] During this pandemic. You can learn more about the podcast on our Patreon. Jenny, where do they find—

Jenny: What the hell?

Kristin: Where do they find us?

Jenny: [laughs] Buffering the Vampire Slayer, as I *always* say, at this juncture in the outro [Kristin laughs], is on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, @BufferingCast. You can email us at bufferingthevampireslayer@gmail.com or leave us a voicemail at 216-30-BUFFY.

Kristin: Hell yes. And, um—sorry, Jenny. It's just like, you know, they changed the format of the episode, so I didn't know how deep we were changing ours—

Jenny: Sure, sure, sure.

Kristin: If you wanna support us and the work we do, we would love that! You can, in fact. You can go to our website, bufferingthevampireslayer.com. You can join our Patreon, which is found on that website. You can go to our store, we have a United States-based store and we also have a UK/EU store that ships overseas for lower rates. You can find all of that, bufferingthevampireslayer.com. Also, you know. We were just featured in this wonderful article in The Guardian—

Jenny: Ahh!

Kristin: Along with Joanna Robinson and Joanna Robinson's work because there's a new podcast about The Sopranos. And we were talking about some of the stuff over there. So that's fun, we'll put that up on social media. And thank you to The Guardian for including us.

Jenny: Hell yeah.

Kristin: And I think, Jenny... let us howl out. I am—I have never been more excited to howl out, because I'm so proud of us.

Jenny: [laughs] And never look back!

Kristin: I'm so proud of us. I promise you, I will never watch The Body ever again.

Jenny: Ha!

Kristin: [laughing] I've watched it 57 fucking times in the last few months.

Jenny: Oh my god.

Kristin: That's a lie, I probably will watch it again. But. [clears throat]

Jenny: Well. Till... next time...

Both: Awwwwoooooooooooooooooooo!

[Jenny performing "The Body" off the album Songs from Season 5 by
Buffering the Vampire Slayer]