

ETERNAL DANCE

A Buffy Fanfiction by AmandaK

Angel pulled up in front of the old wooden house on Revello Drive and killed the engine. He sat for a moment, studying the building. It could do with a paintjob; the white paint was cracking and flaking, giving the house a forlorn look. Sunlight filtered through the foliage of the trees in the yard and reflected from the windows. Heavy curtains kept the glare from entering the rooms. Nowadays, with the ozone layer all but disappeared, sunlight was almost as lethal to humans as it was to vampires.

Angel reached for the blanket on the backseat before he climbed from the car. A few moments later he knocked on the door and frowned at the small tendrils of smoke, which began to drift up from his hands. He pounded again.

"Hold your 'orses," growled a familiar voice from inside, a voice Angel had known for nearly two hundred years. The door swung open to reveal Spike, who took great care to remain in the shadows. He looked exactly as he had done for decades. Perhaps his hair was a little longer, and not as bleached, to fit in better with the fashion of the time. The leather coat had long since gone to dust, unlike its owner, but Spike still dressed in black jeans, black tee and boots.

"Hello, Spike," Angel said. "I came as soon as I heard." Suddenly worried, he frowned. "Am I still in time?"

Spike nodded and stepped away to allow Angel entry. "Yeah. Just. She's been asking for you."

"Where is she?" Angel asked.

"Upstairs, 'er old bedroom," Spike pointed. Angel thanked him with a nod and began to climb the stairs. No more words were needed between them.

Angel hesitated in front of the door to the bedroom. He was suddenly afraid of what he would find. It had been many years since he had last seen Buffy. And now, with the illness eating away at her -- would he even recognize her?

"Well, go on then, what you waiting for?" Spike asked as he came up behind Angel. "She won't stake you." He reached past Angel and pushed against the bedroom door. "Pet, look who's here to see you?"

Involuntarily, Angel drew in a sharp breath when he caught his first glimpse of Buffy. She looked so frail, so vulnerable. Her hair, once shiny and blonde, was now a dull sandy color streaked with gray, and it hung in untidy strands about her face. Her cheeks were sunken, smoothing the wrinkles that time had carved in her skin. Her eyes were closed, and the scent of death was heavy in the air. Angel cast a sideways glance at Spike. "Is she--"

Before he could finish, Buffy opened her eyes. A tiny sparkle appeared in their green depths when she recognized her visitor. "Angel!" Her voice was as frail as her appearance. She lifted a tired hand and patted the bed beside her, inviting him to sit down.

He hesitated another moment. She seemed so fragile. Then he sat down and took her thin hand in his. Blue veins showed through the pale skin.

"You came," she whispered, a small smile curling her lips. "I'm glad you did."

Angel wasn't sure what to say. "Of course I did," he said hoarsely, his voice filled with emotions. Behind him, the door closed with a muted click as Spike exited the room to give them some privacy. "How could I not? You're my friend. And friends--" He found he could not continue.

She finished for him. "Say goodbye. I'm dying, Angel. It's okay to say it. I have lived a long and mostly happy life. I'm at peace with my death, this time. I'm glad I got the chance to say goodbye to everyone: Willow, Anya, Cordy. And you."

Angel didn't know how to respond, so he settled for holding her hand, so warm, between his two cool ones. They chatted for a few minutes, reminiscing about days gone by and people passed away, the way old friends do.

Buffy soon tired, and her voice grew even weaker. Her eyes drifted shut and Angel noticed she forced herself to keep them open.

"I should go," he said softly.

Buffy nodded, too worn out to speak.

Angel blinked to drive back the tears that threatened to fall. He didn't want her to see how much this was hurting him. He wished it didn't have to end like this, that he could chase off the sickness that was eating her from the inside out. Actually, there was a way but he knew she would refuse if he offered. There wasn't a doubt in his mind that Spike already exhausted every argument possible, and impossible, to convince her to let him

turn her. Buffy wasn't the kind of girl to go for it. Never had been. And now, she never would be.

Angel swallowed the lump from his throat and leaned down to place a gentle kiss on her forehead. "Goodbye, my love."

A small twitch of her lips was his answer and her eyes opened again for a brief moment. "Bye Angel," she mouthed without sound as her eyes fell shut once more.

Her chest still rose and fell, though; it wasn't over yet. Angel got up from the bed, cast a last, longing glance at his former lover, then squared his shoulders and quietly walked from the room.

Downstairs, Spike looked up from a magazine he was reading -- or not reading, Angel noted. Staring at, was more likely; Spike held the magazine upside down in his hands without noticing.

"She's asleep."

Spike put the magazine away. "It won't be much longer," he said, and Angel saw deep pain hidden in the vampire's blue eyes. It was a reflection of his own. Despite their differences, the two vamps had one thing in common: their love for the slayer who lay dying in her bed upstairs.

"Is she in any pain?" Angel asked, concerned.

Spike shook his head. "No. Doc says she's comfortable. The morphine sees to that."

Angel held out his hand. Spike regarded it, uncertain. "Thank you," Angel said, and Spike accepted the proffered hand. "Thank you for taking care of her, for loving her." For doing what I couldn't do, he didn't add.

Suddenly uncomfortable, Spike looked away and raised a shoulder in an 'aw-shucks' gesture. "'s nothin'," he mumbled.

After he let Angel out and watched his grandsire drive away, Spike trudged up the stairs. His gait was slow and reluctant. He knew that tonight would be the night; the night that Buffy would die. The night that he would lose his love, his soulmate. Soul or no soul.

Buffy was asleep when he entered the room, and he took a seat in the wicker chair next to the bed. He had lost count of the many hours he spent at her bedside to watch her wither away. So many years of technological advancement, of new medical developments and fresh cures. And still nobody could save his Buffy.

He sniffled, suppressing the sobs that threatened to wrench from his throat, and watched her sleep. To Spike, Buffy looked as beautiful as she had done the very first time he laid eyes on her, more than fifty years ago. Time had not been unkind to her, but the years left their mark on her visage. Spike's thoughts drifted back over their time together. They had fought, hated, loved, slayed, and fought some more. Theirs was an eternal dance. A dance that was coming to an end tonight.

It had grown dark outside when Buffy stirred. Spike lit a shaded lamp in the corner -- not because he needed the light but because he didn't want Buffy to wake up to darkness.

"Spike?" If not for his vampiric hearing, he might have missed her soft question.

"Right here, luv," he replied and moved over to the bed. "How are you feeling? Can I get you anything? Some soup, maybe?"

Buffy gave a slight shake of her head. "No, thank you. I'm not hungry. You know that--"

"Yes, I bloody well know," he interrupted her, harsher than he intended. He quirked an eyebrow. "You know, Slayer, you're a bit of an aberration."

A tiny spark of the old fire returned to her eyes. "Oh?"

"You're the first slayer in history to die of old age, in her own bed."

Buffy's mouth curled and her gaze softened. "Thanks to you."

Spike shook his head. "No. You were simply too good a fighter. Although," he winked, "I do remember saving your pretty butt a time or two. There was the Mokra demon. And the three Davriks. Oh, and let's not forget the bloody Thesulac demons."

Buffy chuckled and the chuckles changed into a coughing spasm. Spike helped her sit up, supporting her body against his chest. "Easy, Pet," he said. "Here." He reached for the glass of water on the bedside table and helped her take a sip.

"That's not what I was talking about," Buffy said once she caught her breath. "You gave me a reason to live. You told me once that every slayer has a death wish. I lost mine a

long time ago."

Touched to tears and unable to speak, Spike merely gaped at her. She met his gaze, and volumes were spoken in the silence until she sank deeper into the pillows and closed her eyes, taking a shaky breath.

"Spike?"

"Yes, luv?"

"I'm cold. Please hold me?"

She didn't have to ask him twice. He climbed up on the bed beside her and made himself comfortable before pulling her into his arms. She nestled against his chest, a few strands of hair tickling his nose, and he wrapped his arms around her. Again, he was surprised and shocked at how skinny her frame had become, and how fragile. Her slayer strength left her a long time ago, and now her human strength was wilting quickly also. What was left was a thin, frail body that Spike feared he would break if he squeezed too hard.

"Buffy, it's not too late, Pet," he whispered against the top of her head. He brushed a strand of hair from her cheek. "I can still--"

"No, Spike," she cut in. "We've been over this. I don't want to. It's not so bad, dying. I've done it before. Giles will be there. And my Mom and Dawn. And Xander." She smiled weakly in memory of those that died before her.

He swallowed. He recalled how devastated he had been when she died that first time, half a century ago. It had been hell on earth, and Spike didn't think he could do it again.

"Spike. I love you," Buffy murmured before she drifted off into unconsciousness.

"I love you too, Slayer" he whispered into her hair. He knew she wouldn't wake up.

An hour later, her breathing stopped and Spike realized it was over. Buffy was gone. Finally, he allowed himself to cry, and cold, salty tears dripped down his cheeks and fell onto her hair. How was he supposed to live his eternal unlife without her by his side? He couldn't. And Spike had decided a long time ago that he wouldn't.

When Buffy first got sick, he had been tempted to ask her to end his existence before she died. A quick stake through the heart was all it would take. But he'd been loath to ask it of her, to ask her to murder the man she loved. Just as he couldn't bring himself to turn her against her will.

He shifted, and gently rested her body against the pillows before he rolled off the bed. He walked over to the window and pulled the heavy drapes aside. The room faced east; the stars shone in a clear sky, and there wasn't a cloud in sight. Spike nodded with satisfaction. In a few hours, the sun would come up, and it would all be over.

With a final glance at the dark Sunnydale street, he returned to the bed and once more pulled Buffy's body in his embrace, his arms encircling her. He rested his cheek against her hair. "It was a beautiful dance, Buffy," he muttered and closed his eyes.

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