

POINTING THE WAY

A Buffy Fanfiction by AmandaK

Covered beneath the charred blanket, Spike walked out of the magic shop. He left a wave of hurt in his wake that mingled with the hatred oozing off of the people in the shop until Tara thought she could taste the foulness. A small furrow appeared between her brows while she studied the others. Giles was rubbing his glasses furiously, as if he were trying to wear a hole in them. Xander glared at the closed door. Willow's face was full of determination. And Dawn... Dawn's eyes were downcast, and she wore a sad expression that had no business on such a youthful face. Tara's frown deepened.

Were they right? Was Spike truly still the vicious beast they made him out to be? Were his feelings for Buffy as vile as they had concluded? Did any of them even have a right to judge the vampire? Xander was in love with an ex-demon, and a lot of people would consider her relationship with Willow just as loathsome.

The other night, when Willow asked her to do the spell banishing Spike from the Summers' house, Tara had been glad to help out. After Buffy returned and told her story, she had been filled with righteous anger. And when Dawn, just now, told the vampire to stay away from her, the witch had jumped to the girl's aid, protecting her from the horror that was Spike.

But his pain was honest, sincere, real. She would have had to be carved out of wood not to notice it. How was that even possible? He was a vampire, a soulless killer; only a tiny bit of government hardware in his brain kept him from further bloodshed. Yet, curiously, beneath the bluster, there had been true pain at their rejection.

Who could she talk to about this? Not to any of the gang, that much was certain, Tara decided while once again looking at their hardened features. Not to Buffy either; abhorrence at the mere thought of Spike loving her was all that occupied her thoughts. Who?

Spike.

Spike was the only person she could discuss this new insight with.

Not sure what talking to the vampire would achieve, Tara nevertheless made a mental note to visit him in his crypt at the first chance she got.

The following morning the sun was high in a clear blue sky when, a little hesitant, Tara knocked on the door to Spike's crypt. She received no reply. Surmising that the vampire wasn't courting spontaneous combustion, she pushed the door open and entered. The heavy door squeaked on its hinges and Tara winced involuntarily.

"Spike?"

Again, no answer. Tara descended the steps and looked uncertainly around the empty crypt.

"Spike?"

"What do you want?"

She jumped at the sudden voice behind her and whirled around to see the blond vampire step out from the shadows. He was dressed in his trademark black shirt and jeans, lacking the duster, and he held a lowered crossbow in his hands.

"Shut the bloody door," he barked with a sharp nod at the bright ray of sunlight, which streamed in through the crack.

"S-sorry," Tara mumbled. She hurried over to do as she was told.

"Now, then," Spike continued when the door was secured. His tone was as cold as his eyes. "To what do I owe this honor, Witch?"

"I-I-I came to t-talk," Tara said. It was a long time since she had stuttered so badly and she bit her lower lip before she continued. "I... need to know... if it's true."

Spike put the crossbow on top of the sarcophagus before he cocked his head to study her, his chiseled features unreadable. Tara reminded herself that he was chipped; he couldn't hurt her. That knowledge was all that kept her from doing an about-face and running back out into the safety of the sunlight.

"Do you really l-love Buffy?" She peeked at him from beneath the bangs that fell across her eyes.

Something softened in his features when she mentioned the slayer's name. Yet his voice was harsh when he answered her.

"So that's how you lezzers get your kicks? Yes, I do, I hate to say. Happy now? Then

there's the exit." Spike pointed at the door and wheeled around to stride back into the shadows.

Tara ignored the insult. "Wait," she called. "I believe you." Somehow, everything made sense to her now.

Spike froze mid-stride and slowly turned once more to find her eyes. She could feel the mixture of disbelief, hope and anxiety come off of him in waves. He studied her again for long minutes. Tara held her breath, unsure what to say next. Then the glimmer of hope in his eyes faded and they returned to a dull blue.

"Doesn't matter," he said, quietly. "You heard Rupert. There is no way to Buffy."

"Maybe there is," Tara whispered.

Spike threw up his hands. "Bloody hell, woman! Are you slow-witted or what? The watcher is right. You, her friends, you hate me. Buffy hates me. She told me that the only bleedin' chance I'd ever had was when she was unconscious. And she's bloody right; she made that pretty clear when she shut me out."

Tara shook her head. "She doesn't hate you. She hates what you are."

Spike roared and vamped out. Despite her confidence in the chip, Tara took a weary step back. However, she stood her ground when he marched up to her and flashed his fangs in her face.

"This, you mean?" he snarled. He shook his head; the ridges faded and Spike returned to his human visage. "I'm a vampire. An evil, undead bloodsucker. I can't bleedin' change what I am!"

"True," Tara admitted, meeting his eyes. "But you can change how you treat her."

Spike cocked his head again, his blue eyes suddenly thoughtful. "What do you mean?" he asked slowly.

"You approach her like a v-vampire would," Tara explained. She was ad-libbing, and her voice became stronger as her understanding grew. "You s-sneak into her house, steal her things. You always lie to her, to Dawn, to us. You chained her up and threatened her! That's not the way to a girl's heart, you know."

"It always worked with Dru," Spike protested.

"Drusilla is a vampire," Tara reminded him gently, as if that explained it all.

It did.

"So," Spike continued after a lengthy silence, "you're saying I should -- what? Bring her flowers? Get her presents? Sing serenades beneath her bedroom window?"

Tara giggled at the mental picture. "Perhaps not that." Her expression turned serious again. "You were a m-man once. You'll remember what to do."

"Soddin' lot of good that did me," Spike grunted, and Tara smiled. She had heard the tale.

"It wouldn't hurt to try," she said softly, reaching out to touch his cheek. "After all, what have you got to lose?"

With those words, Tara left the vampire to his thoughts. She exited the crypt, careful to close the door properly behind her. A shy smile played around her lips while she walked through the sunlit cemetery. Perhaps she had pointed him the way.

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