

The Girlfriend Job

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The Girlfriend Job

by [pprfaith](#)

Summary

“Eliot,” Parker barks as she slams into the chair and snarls at the nearest waitress until she passes over a bowl of pretzels, “has a girlfriend.”

(Childhood friends, misunderstandings and a helping of fluff.)

Notes

For peaceful_fury, who asked for Leverage/BtVS, with Buffy having spent her summers on her grandma's farm and being childhood friends with Eliot.

I had fun. I hope you do, too.

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“Eliot,” Parker barks as she slams into the chair and snarls at the nearest waitress until she passes over a bowl of pretzels, “has a *girlfriend*.”

“A friend who is a girl or a girlfriend?” Alec asks before he looks up, takes one look at her wrathful face and regrets the question.

“A friend. Who is a girl. A girlfriend!” Parker repeats before shoving a fistful of pretzels into her mouth and if you think chewing vengefully is not a thing, you haven’t met Parker.

“And how do you know that?”

“I saw them outside! They were hugging!”

“No kissing?”

“Ewww, gross!” Parker complains on reflex, then pauses, thoughtful expression on her face. She’s probably imagining Eliot kisses. Alec knows he is.

With a sigh, he closes his laptop and shuffles his chair closer to hers. “Look, Parker. It’s probably just some random girl. You know Eliot has those all the time.”

“But-“

“And even if it’s not, he’s a grown-ass man. He can have a girlfriend if he wants to.”

She pouts, snuggling her face into his shoulder. Parker loses the ability to hold up her head when she’s sad. He pats her hair gently but doesn’t try to hug her. There’s always a fifty percent chance that hugs not initiated by Parker make her feel caged and freak and run away and not come back until she’s stolen at least three world-famous artifacts, which can take anywhere between forty-eight hours and three weeks and Alec doesn’t like it when Parker freaks and runs, so hugging is a no-no when she’s like this.

It’s in the handbook.

The one he’s writing. On how not to make Parker feel Bad Things.

“But we have a Plan,” she complains in a small voice and great, now Alec’s sad, too.

“But Eliot doesn’t know about the Plan, so you can’t fault him for not sticking to it. If that girl’s really his girlfriend, we need to back off and be his friends.”

Because their clever eight step plan to Seduce Eliot into Happy Threesomeness 5eva is based on a) Eliot’s availability and b) his enthusiastic consent to either/and/all of the three possible relationship options they’d like to have with him (platonic romance / casual dating / all the freaking romance – There might or might not be a color-coded 3D model of the plan and all

its options and derivations somewhere on his favorite laptop.). They agreed on that long before the Plan was even the Plan with a capital P.

Parker's head grows heavier. From across the Brewpub, Amy sends them a worried look. Alec waves her off. "But she's probably not his girlfriend, okay?"

She hums in quiet agreement and starts munching her pretzels again, this time one by one. And slightly less vengeful.

Of course, that's when the doors swing open to allow a draft of November air and the man himself, a cute little blonde (not as cute as Parker) tucked under his left arm and the soft smile on his face. The one he only gets around the team and small children. And once a Chihuahua, but he was very drugged up on painkillers and he gets snarly when they mention it.

Parker's head practically lolls on Alec's arm. Eliot, of course, notices immediately and teleports himself and his girlfriend across the room in a split second. "Why is Parker sad? Hardison, what did you do?!"

Before Alec can answer, Parker shoots their hitter her best glare and snaps, "You have a girlfriend!"

Said girlfriend takes a beat, then gets a horrified look on her face, then snorts a laugh and then says, "Ewww, gross!"

She uses the exact same tone of voice Parker did two minutes ago. But unlike his awesome thief of a girlfriend, she doesn't reconsider. Instead she punches Eliot in the arm and repeats, "Gross!"

Eliot turns his offended, scowly face on her. "Hey! I'm hot!"

She wrinkles her nose. "I know what you looked like with pimples and coke bottle glasses."

He scowls harder, then apparently decides to volley back with, "I've seen you naked."

Which, what? Parker makes a sound like she's dying under the weight of her crushed hopes. The girl shoots her a questioning look. Eliot ignores her with long practice. Parker makes that noise a lot, admittedly. Especially when they're out of whatever food she craves at that moment.

"There was a two inch claw imbedded in my thigh and I was in serious danger of bleeding out. It doesn't count."

"1999," Eliot parries.

"We were skinny dipping in old Canton's duck pond. And also drunk. No dice, El. And why are we even talking about this?" She shakes her head and turns back to Alec and Parker, waving. "Hi, I'm Buffy. I grew up with Eliot. You're Hardison and Parker, right? He won't shut up about you two."

Parker, missing the obvious point, looks between them. “But you’re younger than Eliot. He’s *old*.”

She says it half because it always get her hilarious Eliot-faces and half because Parker honestly believes that anyone over thirty-five is ancient.

Buffy shrugs and sits herself down uninvited. She tugs Eliot down after her, though, so she’s forgiven. Sort of. Provisionary forgiveness. She might still turn out to be sleeping with their hitter. “Well, I say ‘grew up with’, but it’s really more of a ‘his dad worked for my nanna on her ranch and when my parents dumped me there during the summer, Eliot was the lucky guy who got to trail my kiddie-self and make sure I didn’t drown in that duck pond I mentioned’.”

“Or get caught on the electric fence,” Eliot adds. “Or try to jump out of the hay loft. Or wander off and get lost. Or try to ride the most manic horse in the stable. Or-“

“We get it! You were a poor, beleaguered thirteen-year-old. Jesus, El!” Buffy laughs and Alec squeezes Parker’s knee under the table because this? This is little sister territory and not lost love territory and that means the Plan is back on.

Parker suddenly regains her ability to hold her head upright and beams. “Do you like horses? I once watched a horse kill a clown! It was horrible!” She sounds way too happy about that.

Buffy, to her credit, only blinks twice, then shrugs. “I grew up around nanna’s horses, so yeah, I guess. Bubblegum once tried to eat my hair, though.”

Alec can’t help it. “Bubblegum?”

Eliot groans. “Prince Bubblegum the Fruity,” he says, like every single syllable is causing him actual, physical pain. Once he’s done, he closes his eyes, lips pressed tight.

His friend unceremoniously punches him in the arm. “I was six.”

“Prince Bubblegum the Fruity,” Alec repeats before Eliot can. He doesn’t even try to keep the glee out of his voice. “Prince – oh god, please tell me Eliot rode him. Tell me Eliot rode a horse named Prince Bubblegum the Fruity. Please, I beg you!”

Buffy laughs, nods and leans in to quietly confess, “At a tournament, even. The girl he had a crush on was there and she was completely convinced he was gay afterwards.”

That woman is a gold mine. A gold mine of Embarrassing Eliot Spencer Childhood Stories. Which is pretty cool considering Parker still argues that Eliot was probably made in a pod somewhere, not born. “A growly pod,” she insists.

Alec chin-hands. Hard. “Tell me more,” he demands in a breathy voice.

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“I like them,” Buffy concludes hours later, well fed and pleasantly tired, as she slumps into the couch at Eliot’s apartment. Apart from a humongous entertainment set-up, it’s pretty much the only furniture in the room.

Eliot's never been much of a packrat, but this is ridiculous. He doesn't even really live here, Buffy's sure. Especially after what she saw today.

The man in question grunts something vague and grabs two beers out of the fridge. One he passes to her, the other he keeps as he drops down next to her, slinging an arm around her shoulders immediately. They've always been touchy, the two of them, since a ten-year-old Eliot told a four-year-old Buffy that he didn't have a mom and she concluded that meant he had a hug deficit to be made up for.

They didn't, for a while in the middle, when Eliot jumped at loud noises and broke the hands of anyone trying to touch him without explicit consent. When Buffy stared into the dark of her bedroom for nights on end and waited for her body to finally give up and die, please, just die again.

They didn't touch, there, in the middle.

They've both come a long way since then.

And Buffy has a sneaking suspicion that, more than the hug-dispensation she started back up a few years ago, it's been the two people she just met who made it that way.

She closes her eyes, snuggles into her oldest friend's side and inhales the scent of him, beer and good food and sweat and the metal of his hidden blades. When she was four and his father made him look after her while he did his work on her nanna's ranch, he seemed a giant to her.

He was so much older, so much bigger, but not aloof at all. He growled and grumbled, but he played all her games with her, and when she demanded help sneaking into the stables to pet the horseys, he came with her and made sure no-one bit off her hand.

And he came back the next day and the next and the next and for a girl growing up under the tender ministrations of one Au Pair after another, that was magical.

Hell, that was two thirds of the reason she kept going back to nanna's summer after summer until – well. Until.

Funny story, Eliot joining the army and Buffy going to war happened at almost the same time.

They talked less, wrote more, put lie after lie to paper. *I'm fine, be home soon, nothing interesting happened this week, I wish you were here.*

Between fifteen and twenty she saw him only once, when he dropped by unexpectedly, hair shorn, fatigues dirty, and hell in his eyes. He slept in her guest room for two days straight and all her friends gave her wide eyes and probing questions and Buffy ignored them because Eliot.

On the third day he came out of his room in time to catch her trying to tape up broken ribs by herself after another fruitless encounter with Glory, and the hell in his eyes got red-hot and

liquid and he *made her* tell him.

He stayed for eight days, considered going AWOL so he wouldn't have to leave again and made her promise not to die.

She broke that promise. Took her less than two months.

There were more visits, afterwards. The middle. No touching. No looking each other in the eye because what they saw there looked too similar to what they dreamed about in the dark.

Damien Moreau.

Buffy didn't hug Eliot once while he was with Moreau. She didn't call and she didn't visit and she didn't write him.

He'd only just gotten away from Moreau when he picked up with his new team and she hadn't gotten around to getting Eliot used to positive human contact again. But now he is and she knows why. Hardison and Parker.

They touched him all afternoon, shoulders bumping, hands grazing, a kick under the table, a slap on the arm. Easy. Familiar. And he didn't flinch, or twitch, or go for a knife even once, went soft and goop-y around the edges instead, the way she thought he'd unlearned long ago.

Buffy likes them for that alone.

"They're okay," Eliot allows, belatedly.

She rolls her eyes, elbows him, careful to keep her beer level as she does. "Bullshit. They love you and you love them."

There is a very long, very deliberate silence. Buffy knows that kind of silence. Of her three serious relationships, two ended in bloodshed and one in blatant abandonment. After crap like that, love is *hard*, okay? It is.

But Eliot isn't the strongest guy she knows for nothing, because he works through it. Says, "They're my team."

Team, Buffy thinks, means *Scoobies*, in this case. Only she never wanted to bone Wills and Xander.

"Okay," she announces, swinging herself up and around until she's straddling his lap. She wedges her beer between the cushions and uses her freed hands to squish his face between them. "Listen to me. Are you listening to me?"

Actually, he looks like he's plotting which window to throw her out of, but, whatever. His attention is on her. It counts.

"Remember when I was twelve and had the worst crush on you and asked to kiss you and you said it'd be terrible and awkward and I did it anyway and it was? I asked you how you knew

and you were nice enough not to say ‘because you’re twelve, you brat’. Instead you went all mysterious and told me that sometimes, you just know.”

He’s staring at her like the window is still an option, but he’s not going to kill her right now. She grins. “So, believe me when I tell you that you love those two and they love you back. I know, because sometimes, you just know, and also, because it’s as obvious as me being twelve and a brat. Parker let you have her pretzels. She slapped Hardison hard enough that his fingers turned white for a full minute when he tried to grab some. Also, the look on her face when she thought I was your girlfriend could have killed puppies and Hardison wasn’t much better. Capiche?”

She uses her hold on him to nod his head. Just to help him along. And doesn’t tell him that she also heard them talk about the Plan with her super slayer hearing before they ever got to the table, because he kind of needs to do this on his own. The days when Eliot was the more emotionally mature of them are over.

He scowls and finally jerks free, elbowing her off his lap and leaping up.

“It’s not that simple!”

She recovers her beer, sips it, and checks her phone. Dawn hasn’t texted back yet on the demon thing that brought Buffy to Portland in the first place, so it’s cool. She watches Eliot pace for a minute before asking, “Why not?”

He opens his mouth. He stops. He snarls. He deflates, rubbing a hand through his hair toward his neck, where his thumb rubs reflexively. There’s an old scar there, beneath his hair, from when his dad flung an empty beer bottle too hard and hit bullseye and Buffy is the only person left alive who remembers that.

And that’s a shame because Eliot is amazing. He’s brilliant and kind and gentle and skilled and dangerous and he was all of those things long before he was a weapon and Buffy is usually selfish with her friends, but she wants other people to know these things. She wants them to know Eliot for who he is because he’s her oldest friend and he deserves it.

“Fantastic,” she chirps after a long pause, during which Eliot doesn’t say a word, just stews, getting up and dumping her empty in the sink. “I’m crashing here tonight. Find somewhere else to sleep, freezer-feet.”

She saunters into his basically empty bedroom and slams the door shut. A few minutes later, through his quiet cursing, she hears the front door and then nothing. She has a pretty good idea of where he’s sleeping tonight.

Fifteen minutes later, he sends her a text. It’s a snapshot of the Brewpub’s outside, as close to a concession as she’s likely to ever get. It’s followed directly by, *I’m telling your sister who ruined her Belle costume when she was eight.*

Buffy laughs and texts back from the comfort of Eliot’s expensive, under-used bed. *Tell me about the sex in the morning.*

She takes his lack of an answer as agreement.

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