

Out For a Walk

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/14000970) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/14000970>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	F/M
Fandom:	Buffy the Vampire Slayer
Relationships:	Spike/Buffy Summers , Angel (BtVS)/Cordelia Chase
Language:	English
Series:	Part 18 of Far to Go
Stats:	Published: 2018-03-17 Words: 2,750 Chapters: 1/1

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Summary

While in Sunnydale to pick up Faith, Angel finds himself drawn to Buffy's house, unable to stay away. Takes place between chapter sixteen of Lost Child and the Epilogue.

1630 Revello Drive. Angel stared at the house, studying it like it was an enemy he had to defeat. Or a monster just waiting to devour him. He shouldn't be here. He knew that. Faith would still be at the Magic Box, since it had been the agreed upon neutral zone while the lawyers of the Watchers' Council hashed things out with Wolfram & Hart.

Apparently, they'd worked out that all slayers counted as sisters, thus making Faith part of Buffy's family. Which meant she was part of the original agreement keeping Wolfram & Hart from going after her or her family. There had also been some patent issues thrown in, since the Watchers' Council had legally claimed slaypipes and the method of producing them using the So'voriku ritual.

Angel had to admit it had been a pretty brilliant plan. Not as satisfying as directly fighting the evil law firm, but definitely brilliant. Just standing around thinking about things wasn't going to accomplish anything, though.

It's not too late. Just turn around and go to the Magic Box. Get Faith and go. Instead, his feet started moving, taking him closer to Buffy's house. He needed to see her at least once, now that he had a pain chip that would keep him from being perfectly happy. It had been a few months now, and he hadn't contacted her in any way in all that time. And she hadn't bothered to contact him. He should just leave it that way. He had Cordelia and Connor to focus on. He should....

He reached the front door and lifted his hand to knock. Too late, now. He'd announced his presence. Besides, wasn't it better this way? She'd been so upset about the time a couple years ago when he'd come to protect her around Thanksgiving and had kept it a secret. She'd want to know he was here. He tried not to think of the last time, when she'd chased him out of the house with a broom.

The door swung open, and Angel prepared himself for talking to either Buffy or Joyce. Instead, it was Dawn, glaring at him like he was something disgusting she'd found on the bottom of her shoe. At least some things were still the same.

"Um... hi. I'm here to see Buffy. Can I come in?"

"No." Then she slammed the door.

He stared blankly at it for a moment, tempted to just force it open and go inside. That hadn't turned out too well for him last time, leading to the broom incident. He knocked again. This time, when Dawn flung the door open, Spike was standing behind her. Angel knew better, he really did, but his mind flashed back to the other time he'd come to this house only to find the younger vampire standing behind a Summers. He lunged forward only to find himself bouncing off of an invisible barrier and landing on his ass.

"I told you you couldn't come in," Dawn said with a disturbingly familiar smirk. "Buffy asked Tara to do a disinvite a few months ago. Why are you even here, anyway?"

She'd disinvented him. He felt.... He wasn't really sure how he felt. It hurt, but at the same time.... *It's good she did this. It'll keep her safe from me.* He was safer now, but he still had terrible hungers and urges. He was, after, still a vampire. Just like Spike was, soul or not.

"I could ask the same about him," Angel said, glaring at Spike as he slowly got back up to his feet.

Spike just raised a brow at that, shifting to lean casually against the door frame with his arms crossed over his chest "Live here, don't I?"

Of course he did. It had been a stupid a question. He was wearing the same style of baggy sweater and black utility kilt as last year, during the broom incident, and for the same reason. Of course Buffy would want him nearby when he was carrying her child.

"Look, I'm just in town to pick up Faith and wanted to check in with Buffy." It rankled, having to explain himself to Spike of all people, but it was his only hope of seeing Buffy.

Spike and Dawn exchanged an odd look before the girl rolled her eyes. "Jeez, dude, do you ever check your phone?" she asked. Then she turned around and started walking away. "I have homework to do."

Did he ever check his phone? Why would she be asking that? He fished it out of his pocket and flipped it open. Still the voicemail from earlier that he hadn't had time to ask Cordelia to access for him. It wouldn't be from Buffy. Had something happened with Faith? Cold fear settled in his gut. He'd sent her to Sunnydale thinking that Buffy would be mature enough to handle it. His conversation with Giles had seemed to confirm that thought, but what if he'd been wrong?

"Where's Faith?" he demanded. "And Buffy? I need to talk to Buffy."

Spike shifted again, stance going from casual to territorial. "Faith bugged off to Cleveland this morning now that she's free and clear. She left you a voicemail about it. As for what you 'need,' that don't carry much weight here these days. Buffy is running errands while some of the others handle tonight's patrol. You want to talk to her, learn to use the bloody phone. Could have saved yourself the trip."

Angel didn't really know how to respond to that. It was the same advice Buffy herself had given him more than once. Don't come to Sunnydale, just call. Someday, he'd maybe even take it. For now, though, he was stuck staring awkwardly at Spike, unable to force his way inside and not really willing to slink off like a stray dog.

Finally, the other vampire sighed and muttered, "Might as well make some use of you then, yeah? Back in half a tick."

The door was shut in Angel's face for the second time that night, but he was still able to hear the argument that started up between Spike and Dawn.

"Need you to watch Thursday for a bit. Heading out for a walk."

“You’re *supposed* to be resting.”

“I’ve been on bed rest for an entire sodding *week*. Going to go completely sack of hammers if I don’t get out for a bit. Besides, Ben said it’s safe enough now for a spot of exercise.”

“What if something attacks you? You should wait for Buffy to get home.”

A low growl of frustration that had Angel tensing. If Spike got too annoyed, there was no way for him to get in there and rescue Dawn. *And probably not really any need*, he reluctantly admitted to himself. Spike had a soul now. One he’d fought for, instead of having it cursed on him. Angel tried to convince himself that somehow made the younger vampire’s soul lesser. He’d won it from a demon, right? That had to make it tainted in some way. He tried not to think about the fact there were neutral and even good demons in the world.

“I’m just going ‘round the sodding block, Nibblet, and I’m taking Angel. I’ll ring Buffy up along the way.”

Then the door opened, revealing Spike again, this time with his coat and boots on. He closed the door behind him as he brushed past Angel and headed towards the road. For a moment, Angel just stood there, bristling at the idea that he was expected to follow after. He thought of Buffy and her behavior when Spike and Thursday had been taken by Wolfram & Hart. If something happened to him while he was carrying her other child, she’d go completely crazy.

For Buffy. He’d do this for Buffy, not out of any kind of twisted desire to spend time in Spike’s company. Though he had to grudgingly admit it felt oddly... right as he swung into step beside the blond. They walked in silence for a moment, Angel keeping to a slow, easy pace to match Spike’s plodding amble. It was different from the usual swaggering strut or seductive panther glide he was used to. And all because of...

Angel glanced at Spike out of the corner of his eyes, gaze traveling down towards his middle. With the baggy sweater – and even more the fact that Spike was male – pregnancy wasn’t the first thing that would come to mind looking at him. He just looked like one of those guys who was chubby in the middle while being thin everywhere else. For someone who knew, though, it was obvious, and Angel found himself wondering what it was like. Another being inside of you, flooding your body with strange hormones and even changing your shape as it grew. Moving around and kicking to remind you that it was a separate entity sharing space inside of your body.

He wanted to think it sounded beautiful and that he’d have been willing to go through it for Connor if things had been flipped somehow, leaving him pregnant instead of Darla. Really, though, it sounded horrifying, something both the demon and soul in him agreed on. They had to share space with each other, after all, and it wasn’t exactly pleasant. The soul was disgusted by the desires of the demon, and the demon.... The demon despised the soul and would do anything to get rid of it.

How the *hell* had Spike been able to fight for his soul? His thoughts flickered uncomfortably to back when he’d been soulless after his night with Buffy. The Judge had found no humanity in him at all, but had said that both Spike and Dru were full of it. Maybe that was the reason. He’d always thought of Spike as lesser than him. Weaker. What if...?

His thoughts were interrupted by Spike pulling a cell phone out of his pocket and flipping it open before dialing a number.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” The voice on the other end was muffled, but still clear to Angel’s vampire hearing. Buffy. And she didn’t sound happy.

Spike didn’t seem too disturbed by it, though. He just chuckled, a fond little smile on his face. “Little bit tattled then, did she? No need to worry, love, safe as houses and you know I need the exercise. We’re just going ‘round the block, and I doubt good old gramps is going to stake me or anything.” He raised a brow and glanced over at Angel. “Right, mate?”

“Let me talk to him,” Buffy demanded.

Spike handed the phone over without any hesitation as far as Angel could tell, something he wouldn’t have been able to do if their positions had been reversed. Which could mean that he wasn’t really as attached to Buffy, and this was all a ruse to get back at him for “stealing” Dru... *Or their relationship is just that trusting and comfortable.*

He didn’t like that thought but had to admit it made a lot more sense than some Byzantium revenge plot that included getting pregnant twice and fighting for his soul. Spike could do convoluted with the best of them when he wanted, but on the whole, he tended to be pretty straightforward. A revenge plot would have been working to get Buffy’s trust, getting the chip removed, then waiting long enough to flaunt it all in Angel’s face before killing her.

“You hold the top bit to your ear and the bottom near your mouth,” Spike chimed in helpfully, scattering Angel’s cluttered thoughts.

“Yeah, I do actually understand that part of how a phone works,” he shot back.

“Never can be too sure, what with the whole voicemail issue.” A shrug and an infuriating smirk that made Angel want to smack him.... Or possibly kiss him. “I’ve heard tell you’ve problems with texts as well.”

Angel ignored the comment and brought the phone up to his ear. “Buffy,” he said quietly. He waited for the longing to overwhelm him, the need to be near her, to hold him in his arms. It was there, but... strangely muted. Instead of remembering the time they’d spent together, images of Cordelia and Connor washed through his mind.

“Hi, Angel,” Buffy chirped with false cheer. “Do you remember that time when Acatla swallowed you? You know, me running you through with a big pointy sword and the whole one-hundred years being tortured in a hell dimension?”

“Yes,” he answered, voice tight. Not exactly one of his fonder memories, and he knew it wasn’t one of hers, either. Why was she bringing it up? To rub his nose in how evil he’d been? To remind him of how much he’d deserved that torture?

The cheerful tone was suddenly replaced with something harsher. “That’s going to seem like the Teddy Bears’ Picnic compared to what I’ll do to you if Spike gets hurt or stressed enough for it to endanger the baby. Most of the bumpies that go ugly in the night know better than to

hang around my block, but keep an eye out. Once around the block, then get out of my town.”

“Buffy....”

“Put Spike back on.”

Spike plucked the phone out of his hand before he could protest or say anything else. “Me again.”

“You stay safe and take it easy, or I swear it’s going to be –”

“Bubble wrap, packing peanuts, bathtub?” Spike interrupted. “You keep promising that, but never following through. I’ve got to say, you’re coming off as a bit of a tease, Slayer.”

“A tease, huh? You keep doing things like this, and there’s going to be some follow through.... Or maybe not. Maybe only good little vampires get the bubble wrap.”

That got a low, seductive laugh that sent uncomfortable feelings shivering through Angel’s body. “Oh, I can be very, *very* good,” Spike purred, a glance towards him catching it as he curled his tongue behind his teeth.

“I know you can.” Buffy’s voice was soft, full of a tenderness that Angel hadn’t heard in a long time. “Go on and finish your walk. I’ll be home soon. We’ll put on Princess Bride, and I’ll rub your feet.”

“Mmm. That sounds bloody fantastic. I’ll be waiting.”

“You better be, or else.”

Spike smiled, as soft and tender as Buffy’s voice had been. “Love you, too.”

He hung up, and the two of them walked together in silence for a few moments while Angel thought about everything he’d just heard. Even after everything that had happened in the fall – with Darla’s pregnancy and the mess with Wolfram & Hart – he’d still had the same image of Buffy in his mind. A destiny-bound holy warrior. A fighter, but also innocent and virtuous. An icon and prize rather than a real person. The woman he’d heard on the phone was just that. A woman, not the girl wearing a cheerleader outfit with a lollipop in her mouth. She’d changed. She’d become....

“I don’t want to know about the bubble wrap and packing peanuts, do I?” he asked abruptly. It sounded kinky, and not like the kind of thing *his* Buffy would have been into.

Spike gave him a look. It wasn’t contempt or annoyance or anything like that. It was pity. “You really don’t,” he said, voice oddly gentle. “Because even if it was as dirty as what you’re no doubt thinkin’, it would still be something beautiful.”

Beautiful.... To Angel, beautiful had become days spent out of the sun with Cordelia, taking care of Connor together. It should have been Buffy. His vision of beauty. But it had changed. *He’d* changed, and it hurt. It felt like something was dying inside of him.

They finished the walk in a strangely companionable silence, Angel staying at the end of the driveway while Spike went on to the front of the door. He looked over his shoulder at Angel, too much knowledge in his eyes. "Go home, Angel, and don't come back. There's nothing for you here in Sunnydale anymore."

Then he went inside, leaving Angel out in the metaphorical cold. Spike was right. There was nothing here for him anymore. And maybe... maybe that was how it was supposed to be. Maybe Buffy had never been his destiny, but part of the path to finding it. Angel turned away and walked to where he'd left his car, ready to return to L.A. Where his future waited.

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