

## What I Did On My Summer Vacation

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# What I Did On My Summer Vacation

by [enigmaticblue](#)

## Summary

Almost in spite of himself, Wesley finds himself corresponding with Dawn over that long, barren summer.

## Notes

Written for the trope\_bingo prompt “unexpected friendship” and the WILD CARD hc\_bingo prompt “abandonment issues.”

Wesley sits on the couch in the lobby of the hotel, the silence echoing around him. Angel had basically left as soon as he'd dropped Wesley off, and he's been gone for more than a week now. Cordelia stops by every day, to make sure Wesley is okay, and to check on Fred, but Gunn has been spending a lot of time with his old gang.

It makes sense, really. If Cordelia has a vision, she calls Gunn, and they take care of the problem. If they need extra muscle, they rely on Gunn's friends, with Angel gone and Wesley all but out of commission.

There's a part of Wesley that wishes he could go out with Rondell again, because Rondell would let him get in on the action. The one time he'd brought it up with Gunn, Charles had said, "Someone has to stick around the hotel and make sure Fred's okay."

Since Wesley has yet to see Fred, he's not really sure why his presence is needed. The reality is that he's bored, and he feels even more useless now than he had in Sunnydale. Angel had promised to stick with him; he'd promised that he would look after Wesley, and now Wesley is alone.

He feels abandoned, and even knowing *why* no one is around doesn't help him accept the fact that he's no more than an afterthought, suited only to ensure that Fred doesn't self-destruct somehow.

Almost in spite of himself, he dials Buffy's home number, wanting desperately to talk to *someone*.

Dawn picks up. "Summers' residence."

"It's me, Wesley," he says. "I—" He realizes that he doesn't really have any reason to call, other than sheer loneliness. "I just wanted to see how you were."

"Crappy," Dawn says immediately, "but no worse than I was doing when you left. What about you?"

“Basically, no one is here,” Wesley admits. “Angel took off, and no one else seems to want to stick around the hotel. Well, other than Fred, but I haven’t seen her yet.”

There’s a pause, and Wesley wonders if he’s said the wrong thing, or maybe he shouldn’t have called at all. “Hang on, I’m taking the phone into the other room.” Another pause. “Okay, tell me about this Fred person and why you haven’t seen her.”

Wesley has only received bits and pieces of the story himself. Cordelia had apparently been rather busy being a princess, and Gunn had been fighting with the human rebels while Angel was lost to his demon. Angel knows the most about Fred, and why she refuses to come out of her room, but he hadn’t stuck around long enough to fill Wesley in on the details.

Still, he tells Dawn what he knows, and finds a certain measure of relief in being able to talk to *someone*.

“Alternate dimensions sound like a pain in the ass,” is Dawn’s considered opinion when he’s done.

“It seems that way,” Wesley agrees, remembering that Glory had wanted to use Dawn’s blood to pull the walls between the worlds down. “What have you been doing?”

“Nothing, really,” Dawn admits. “I mean, Xander and Anya have to work, so they’re not around. Willow is taking summer courses, and Tara is working, too. Spike comes around sometimes, but only at night.”

Wesley thinks that he can hear the same aching loneliness in her voice that he feels. He feels strange talking to a teenage girl—they have very little in common, and whatever Wesley’s physical appearance, he’s a man in his thirties. A friendship with Dawn is, on some level, wildly inappropriate.

On the other hand, he’s a de-aged ex-Watcher, and she’s an ancient ball of energy in the form of a teenage girl. So, maybe it makes sense after all.

Not that it really gives them anything to talk about, which is painfully obvious over the phone. Wesley's life is incredibly dull these days. "Well, then, I should let you get back to it."

Dawn huffs. "Did you ever get a chance to finish watching *The Princess Bride*?"

"No," Wesley admits. "I haven't been able to get my hands on a copy."

"Do that, and then call me back, and we can watch it together," Dawn orders. "I think you're the only person I know who hasn't seen it, and it's a critical part of pop culture. Also, I make everyone I know watch it." She pauses. "At least, those are the memories that the monks gave me."

Wesley feels a spike of pity. His body might not be his own, and he might have lost his independence, but at least his memories—good, bad, and completely fucking awful—are his alone.

"I'll do that," he promises. "The day after tomorrow? I should be able to get my hands on a copy."

"Sure, and see if you can coax Fred out of her room," Dawn suggests. "Maybe a movie would be low key enough that she'd let you."

Wesley grimaces. "I guess."

"Have you even tried?" Dawn asks.

He sighs. "Not really." To be honest, Wesley has been wallowing more than a little bit, and maybe it's time that he at least attempt something constructive. "I'll do what I can."

“It’s just—sometimes I feel a little crazy myself,” Dawn admits softly. “If the others weren’t around... I have to look normal for them, you know? Otherwise, the social workers are going to wonder.”

Wesley doesn’t know what to say to that other than, “Sometimes I feel like I might be going crazy, too. Like I’ll lose what makes me who I am as time goes on.”

“Maybe you’ll become someone different,” Dawn suggests. “That doesn’t have to be a bad thing.”

“Maybe,” Wesley allows. “I should go try and talk to Fred.”

“Day after tomorrow,” Dawn insists.

He smiles, realizing that he actually has something to look forward to now. “I promise.”

Wesley trudges up the stairs to the room Fred has been staying in. It’s possible that she’s emerged at some point, and he just hasn’t seen her. The Hyperion is a big place, and Fred could be wandering around after Wesley had gone to bed.

He knocks on her door. “Fred? It’s Wesley. Are you alright?” There’s a sound on the other side of the door, but no other response. “Well, if you need anything you could, um, come find me.”

He winces. That’s probably not at all reassuring. “I promise I’m not a threat or anything. I, um, I’m really just a kid.”

It’s the first time he’s thought looking like a kid might actually help him.

The door actually opens a crack, just wide enough for Wesley to see a thin face dominated by huge brown eyes. “Hi.”

“Hi,” Wesley replies. “I’m, I’m Wesley. I don’t know if anybody told you about me.”

“Cordy said you were staying here,” Fred says with a thick Texan drawl. “That you don’t have any parents.”

Wesley hesitates. “No, not really. It’s complicated.”

“I’m fine,” Fred says firmly. “I’m just not ready to come out yet.”

“That’s fine,” Wesley says quickly. “I just—wanted you to know I’m here, and um, I’m going to be watching *The Princess Bride* the day after tomorrow. I didn’t know if you liked movies.”

Fred blinks. “Movies? Oh, I guess I used to. I don’t know. It’s been a long time.”

“Well, feel free to join me if you want,” Wesley says. “You don’t have to. I’m going to be calling a friend so we can kind of watch it together, but I can put her on speaker. It’s just, you know, if you want.”

“Thanks,” Fred says. “Maybe I will.” And then she closes the door.

At least Wesley has tried. He should probably keep trying, now that they’ve been properly introduced. It’s not like he has much better to do.

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Wesley realizes that he needs transportation. His motorcycle is in storage, and he has a bus pass, but he needs to be more mobile and less reliant on a fixed schedule, and given his apparent age, he doesn’t have a lot of options.

In short, he needs a bicycle, because he's not ready to take up skateboarding.

Angel had left some cash for Wesley, partly for food and other necessities, and Wesley can withdraw money from his own account via the ATM, and he doesn't need *that* much money for the bike.

The next day, he takes the bus to the nearest bike shop and brings cash, knowing from experience that he's going to look like a kid who has saved up his allowance for the bike of his dreams, or at least the bike he could afford.

"Saved up your allowance, huh?" the salesman asks knowingly. His nametag reads "Brad."

Wesley shrugs. "Allowance, birthday money, Christmas money, you know."

"You sure you don't want your folks here?" Brad asks.

Wesley gives him the most unimpressed look he can manage. "My dad's on a business trip, and my mom works two jobs and doesn't have the time. So, it's pretty much just me."

"Fair enough, kid. Do you want to take anything for a test drive?" he asks

Wesley had done a bit of research, so he knows enough to pick out the three models he thinks might work the best. He takes a turn around the block on all three and settles on a mountain bike with 21 gears, mostly because he thinks he might have need of them.

It's nothing fancy, but he bikes back to the Hyperion, and while he's soaked with sweat and his legs are burning by the time he arrives, it's a good kind of exertion. He'd managed to acquire a copy of the movie, too, so his phone date with Dawn is on.



And “date” is definitely the wrong word in that context, but Wesley isn’t sure that there’s another word that fits.

The thing is, though, Wesley *likes* the bike. He likes the sense of freedom it gives him. He’s no longer stuck at the hotel until Cordelia or Gunn show up to possibly give him a ride to wherever he wants to go. In fact, that night, he bikes out and finds a food truck that sells tacos, because he remembers Cordelia saying something about Fred liking them. He knocks briefly, tells her what he’s leaving outside her door, and then waits just down the hall until she opens it wide enough to pull in the plastic bag.

Wesley smiles and goes back downstairs, devouring his beef and bean and shredded pork tacos until he’s full, and the juices cover his hands.

He just wishes he had someone to share the experience with, but the hotel is as empty tonight as it was that morning, save for the bike sitting in the corner of the lobby.

That night, he dreams about riding all the way to Sunnydale, and he’s disappointed the next morning to wake up in Los Angeles.

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It takes Cordelia a few days to even notice the bike. “When did you get that?” she asks.

Wesley shrugs. “Earlier this week. I got tired of waiting around for rides.”

She frowns. “You’re being careful, aren’t you?”

“Of course,” Wesley replies. He hates it when the others ask questions that they wouldn’t have months ago, before the curse. “I may look like a child, but I’m not one.”

She gives him an apologetic look. “I’m sorry. I just worry about you. I know we haven’t been around as much lately, and that’s not really fair to you.”

“You have to pay the bills somehow,” Wesley says philosophically. “And we haven’t had a lot of cases lately.”

Cordelia drums her fingers against the front desk. “I’ve had a few visions, but it’s almost like the Powers That Be know Angel isn’t around.”

Wesley grimaces. “Maybe they do.”

“But really, Wes, are you okay?” Cordelia asks. “This is a big place to be alone in. *I* don’t even like to be here when I’m by myself.”

Wesley considers telling her the truth—that he’s horribly lonely, that he feels as though Angel has abandoned him, that he’s afraid the others will leave him behind completely, that he will never be anything other than a burden.

What he actually says is, “I’m trying to stay busy.”

“Any luck coaxing Fred out of her room?” Cordelia asks.

He shakes his head. “I brought her tacos the other day, though.”

“That was nice of you,” Cordelia replies. She checks her watch. “Okay, I hate to run, but I’ve got a temp gig to get to if I want to keep paying rent and eating.”

She’d brought by some groceries, and Wesley grabs a budget frozen dinner to eat, and then loads his backpack with a crossbow and extra bolts. He’s well aware that he’s taking his life in his hands, and that this is probably a really stupid thing to do without backup.

On the other hand, Wesley isn't about to lose his hard-won skills just because the others have either abandoned him or are treating him like a child.

He bikes a few miles to an area he knows to be a frequent vampire hangout, and then hides the bike behind a dumpster. In this case, his size is actually an advantage, because it's easier for him to get in and out of buildings through windows or gaps in fences.

Wesley moves as stealthily as possible, and systematically searches the warehouse, finding nothing more than a few rats. The next warehouse yields no better results, and since it's getting dark, he decides to call it quits and head back to the Hyperion.

He tells himself that it doesn't matter that he hadn't found anything, that the exercise is the important thing. He's honing his hunting skills.

When he gets back, Wesley goes down to the basement and practices target shooting with the crossbow. They don't have any recurve or compound bows, which is unfortunate, since the crossbow doesn't quite have the range that he'd prefer.

Only when he's tired enough that he thinks he'll be able to sleep does he head upstairs, stripping off his grubby clothing and dropping it in a corner. He'll have to do laundry soon, but he thinks he can put it off for a while.

Once again the hotel is too quiet for him to drop off easily, so he turns on the television, letting the voices of the late-night talk show host wash over him. If he turns the volume down low enough, he can pretend his friends are next door talking.

Maybe that makes him pathetic, but at least it helps him sleep.

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“Do you have an email address?” Dawn asks a couple of weeks later.

Wesley has been calling a couple of times every week. Sometimes they only talk for a few minutes, and other times they’re on the phone for hours. Dawn keeps asking if he’s seen this movie, or read that book, or watched that TV show, and then Wesley will read it or watch it, sometimes while Dawn is on speaker phone.

“Why on earth should I read *Harry Potter*?” Wesley had asked after the third such request.

Dawn was quiet for a long moment before she said, “Mom and I used to have a book club, just for the two of us. I thought it might be fun.”

Wesley hadn’t the heart to refuse any of her requests after that.

“I do have an email address,” Wesley admits.

“Maybe we should start emailing sometimes,” Dawn suggests. “All the long distance phone calls are adding up. We could instant message.”

“I’ve never done that,” Wesley admits.

Dawn laughs. “Better get with the time period, Wes. You’re not an old man anymore.”

“I feel like an old man most of the time,” Wesley says. “Other than the lack of creaky bones.”

“You weren’t that old,” Dawn protests.

“Old enough,” Wesley replies. “How is Spike?”

Dawn makes a sound that's the equivalent of a verbal shrug. "He still comes around. I mean, he patrols with the others, but they've been getting him to watch me sometimes, too."

"What are the others doing?"

"Scooby gang stuff, I guess," Dawn replies. "Nothing they need me for, that's for sure. It's probably a good thing that I have Spike around, because otherwise I'd be even more bored."

Wesley makes a sound of agreement. "I know what you mean."

"Still no luck with Fred?" Dawn asks.

"No, although I've brought her tacos a couple of times, and she seems to appreciate it," Wesley says.

Dawn sighs gustily. "Have you ever thought about running away? Just—taking off and starting over?"

"I used to think about that a lot," Wesley replies. "Not so much in the last couple of years, though." Then, in a spirit of honesty, he adds, "A lot more lately. There doesn't seem to be as much holding me here as there used to be."

"Any time you want a running buddy, let me know," Dawn says, and Wesley can't quite read her tone. She's at least halfway serious. "Although we might have to take Spike with us."

For a moment, Wesley allows himself to think about the possibility. Spike had treated Wesley like an equal, like an adult, and so had Dawn. "That's more tempting than I'd like to admit."

"Maybe when we get a little older," Dawn says wistfully.

“Maybe so,” Wesley replies. “So, walk me through this instant messaging thing.”

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“Hey, Wes,” Gunn says, entering the lobby while Wesley is messaging back and forth with Dawn. In the last weeks, Willow and the others had become even more secretive, and Dawn is worried.

“Hi,” Wesley says, distracted by his conversation with Dawn. “What’s up?”

“Rondell invited you on a hunt with us tonight if you’re up for it,” Gunn says. “Thought you might want to get out of the hotel for a bit.”

Wesley doesn’t tell him that he’s been out of the hotel plenty, extending his bike rides farther and farther afield, hunting vampires when he can, but mostly just exploring.

He’s up to six vampires, which isn’t bad, considering his limitations.

“Um, sure, just let me finish this up,” Wesley replies, quickly typing out a message to Dawn telling that he’s going on a hunt.

*Lucky* is her response. *TTYL*.

“Who are you talking to?” Gunn asks, sounding a little surprised.

Wesley glances up, feeling a little guilty, although he’s not sure why. “Dawn, Buffy’s younger sister.”

Gunn frowns. "So, you've made friends with a teenage girl."

"She's having a rough summer," Wesley replies, and resolutely does *not* add "as am I." "We connected when I was in Sunnydale the last time."

"I guess that makes sense," Gunn says.

Wesley doesn't try to explain the situation any further with Gunn, mostly because he knows it's going to be pointless. What he and Dawn have in common is what sets them apart from everyone else. "So, a hunt. When do we need to leave?"

"Now, if you're ready," Gunn says.

Wesley grabs a couple of stakes and his crossbow, and he's ready to go. There are a few new faces in Rondell's crew, and others who are missing, but Rondell greets Wesley warmly.

"Where you been holed up?" Rondell asks. "I told G he should bring you around more often."

Wesley slaps his hand. "I've been staying busy. What about you? Any success lately?"

"Some," Rondell replies. "You up for this?"

"More than," Wesley says.

He gets paired off with one of the younger members of the crew again, riding in the back of the truck with a boy who looks about fourteen and called himself Mouse.

“What do they call you?” Mouse asks as they hang onto the sides of the truck, bouncing along darkened streets on their way to the vampire nest.

Wesley hesitates. “Wesley, but sometimes they call me English.”

Mouse laughs, his hazel eyes a striking contrast to his dark skin. “Yeah, that you are, dude. Rondell seems to think you’re some kind of prodigy.”

“My family has been hunting vampires for generations,” Wesley says, giving as much of the truth as he can. “You could say I’ve had special training from birth.”

“Where’s your family now?” Mouse asks.

Wesley makes himself shrug nonchalantly. “We didn’t see eye to eye on some things, so I struck out on my own.”

Mouse might look impressed. “Yeah, I hear you on that.”

Gunn has his own role to play, so Wesley doesn’t spend much time with him. The older kids herd the vampires towards the trucks where Wesley and the younger kids pick them off with crossbows, and the rotating stake-thrower that reminds Wesley of a Gatling gun.

The nest is a big one, and at least two kids get bitten, although they aren’t drained. When Wesley runs out of crossbow bolts, he vaults out of the back of the truck and starts to use his stakes.

He’s been working on increasing his upper body strength, and he doesn’t have any trouble driving the stake home.

A vampire makes a grab for him, and Wesley twists away, ducking under his outstretched arms to drive a stake through the vampire’s heart.



“Wesley!” Gunn shouts.

Wesley looks around for the threat, but the few vampires remaining are being taken down by Rondell’s crew. “What?”

“I thought you were staying in the back of the truck!” Gunn says, coming over to grab Wesley’s arm.

Wesley pulls free. “I’m fine. I had it.”

“It’s too dangerous.”

The rest of the crew is starting to stare at them, and Wesley flushes. “Gunn, please don’t embarrass me in front of our friends.”

Gunn actually stops at that, and gives Wesley a tight nod. “We’ll talk back at the hotel.”

“I can’t wait,” Wesley says tightly, stalking off to climb into Gunn’s truck.

“What was that?” Gunn demands a few minutes later once he’d said his goodbyes to Rondell and the others.

“*That* was me doing my job,” Wesley snaps. “I know what I look like, Charles, but I’m no child.”

Gunn blows out a breath. “No, you’re my friend, and if something were to happen to you—”

“Then it would be my own choices that put me in danger,” Wesley snaps. “As an adult, I have the right to make those decisions.”

Gunn shakes his head, but he doesn’t disagree. “You have the right, but it would suck to lose you, man.”

“Thank you, but I’m not going to hide in the hotel until I’m fully grown again,” Wesley replies.

Gunn doesn’t say anything in response, but Wesley suspects that he won’t be going on any additional hunts with Gunn.

*Fine, Wesley thinks. I’ll just keep hunting on my own.*

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*You are so lucky, Dawn messages him the following day. No one will let me hunt vampires.*

*Get Spike to train you, Wesley replies. They might not let you go out, but you should know how to use a stake. Tell him that it’s dangerous if you don’t know how to defend yourself.*

*J that might work. What are you going to do?*

*Keep going out by myself, Wesley types, then hesitates before he hits send. He doesn’t think that Dawn should go out by herself, and if she knows that’s what he’s doing, she might be more tempted. He hits send anyway.*

*Dangerous, Dawn comments. Be careful. I’d hate to lose someone else.*

Wesley drums his fingers on the desk. *I have to do it, but I'll be careful.*

*U mad at Gunn?*

*A little, Wesley admits. I'm not a child.*

*Still sucks.*

*You said it.*

There's a long pause, and then Dawn sends, *Gotta go. Dinner.*

Cordelia had a shift at work and then an audition, so she's not even going to be coming by the Hyperion, not unless she has a vision that requires Wesley's skills at research. He hasn't seen Gunn since the night before, and there had been a distance between them that Wesley wished to bridge and couldn't.

He's pretty sure that only a promise to be more careful in the future, and promising that he wouldn't put himself in danger would have smoothed things over. Wesley's not going to make a promise that he has no intention of keeping.

Wesley goes back out to hunt that night, although in a slightly different area of town. He follows the same pattern as the last few weeks, going to a warehouse and sneaking inside after hiding his bike.

By going out before the sun sets, Wesley hopes to catch any vampires napping, or at least not alert.

He freezes inside the first warehouse when he hears voices, and then begins to creep forward slowly.

In one corner of the warehouse, there are four vampires lounging on filthy mattresses. Wesley knows that four is too many for him to take on alone. Even when he'd been fully grown, he still probably would have waited for backup.

Wesley takes a step back, deciding that he would sneak back out the way he came in. He might be able to come back the next day with a couple of Molotov cocktails to even up the odds.

And then his sneaker scuffs the floor, and one of the vampires raises his head. "Did you hear that?"

Wesley holds his breath.

"Probably a squatter," another vampire says. "How nice of breakfast to deliver itself."

Wesley doesn't hesitate. He fires off a crossbow bolt, dusting one vampire, and then he runs.

There's the sound of general confusion behind him, and one of the vampires yells, "Hunters!"

Wesley runs through his options. He could try playing cat and mouse with the others, and hopefully pick off the remaining three, or he could make a run for it and hope like hell he got away.

"I see him! It's a kid!"

Wesley makes a dive for a pile of debris. Cat and mouse it is, then. He tells himself that this is just like his final for the Watcher's Academy. He squeezes through the small space left between some pallets and the wall they're leaning up against.

He hurriedly reloads his crossbow and crouches in the darkness, straining his ears for any sounds from the vampires.

There's a crack of wood to his left, and he whirls, firing on the figure silhouetted in the fading light from the setting sun. Wesley's practice pays off, because he manages to dust that vampire, too.

He reloads again and feels someone grab the back of his shirt, and Wesley twists desperately, hearing the fabric rip. He fires on the vampire point blank and dusts that one before he feels the sharp pain of teeth in his neck.

Wesley knows that he can't afford to stop moving and he throws himself forward, scrabbling for the stake tucked in the waistband of his jeans. He can feel the skin tear, and blood start to run down his neck and chest, and he lands hard on his shoulder, turning at the last moment so he can quickly roll onto his back.

When the last vampire throws himself on top of Wesley, he basically dusts himself, and Wesley coughs as some of the dust enters his gaping mouth.

He lies there for a few moments, and then manages to collect himself and scramble to his feet. He's bleeding, and he can't afford to stick around here. He has to get back to the hotel before it gets too late, or he'll have every vampires in a five block radius attracted by the scent of his blood.

Wesley gets out of the warehouse the same way he came in, and he shoves his crossbow into his pack, and then yanks off his t-shirt, pressing it against the wound in his neck, hissing at the pain.

He's tired and hurting, and he wants nothing more than to be back in his own room so he can lick his wounds and recover.

He has to ride back to the hotel one-handed, and he's forced to go slow and make stops every few blocks to rest.

When he finally gets back to the hotel, he's relieved that no one is around—not that he expects anybody to be there. He lets out a sigh of relief that borders on a sob, and trudges up the stairs, shutting and locking his door behind him.

Wesley pulls the shirt away from his neck to check the damage. Thankfully, the vampire had terrible aim, because he was nowhere near a vein or artery. There's no way the wound could be mistaken for anything other than what it is, which is not good. It means he's going to have to find a way to hide it until it heals.

That would probably be harder if the others were actually around more often.

Wesley showers, washing the wound thoroughly and grunting at the pain. The wound is bleeding sluggishly again, and he finds his gauze and medical tape and covers the wound.

There's a part of him that's appalled at the chance he'd taken, but he's also relieved and filled with pride.

Wesley had taken on four vampires alone and lived to tell the tale. It's just too bad that he can't tell anybody.

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Actually, Wesley does end up telling Dawn. He calls her, and while he downplays the danger a bit, he's otherwise honest.

“You could have been killed!” Dawn exclaims. “That was really dumb.”

“I'm aware,” he admits. “I just needed to prove myself.”

She sighs. “I get it, but it’s stupid to go out by yourself unless you’re the Slayer.”

“Really, it’s stupid to go alone even if you are the Slayer,” Wesley points out. “The problem is that there’s no one here that will go out with me.”

“I think you should stop,” Dawn says. “The risk isn’t worth it.”

“I feel like I’m going stir crazy,” Wesley protests. “If I felt useless before, it’s nothing to how I feel now, and I’ve proven I can take care of myself.”

Dawn is quiet for a moment. “I know. It really sucks.”

“I won’t go out again for a while,” he promises. “A few weeks anyway. I’m going to have a hard enough time covering up this injury. I don’t need to worry about another.”

“How are you going to manage that?” Dawn asks.

“Well, considering how little the others are around here, it shouldn’t be too hard, and I have a few collared shirts. As long as no one looks too closely, I’ll be fine.”

Dawn huffs a laugh. “Good luck with that. It’s my experience that people start paying attention at pretty much the exact time you wish they wouldn’t.”

Wesley knows that’s probably true, but he’s still hoping that the others’ apparent distraction will work in his favor.

It turns out that Dawn is right, though, because Cordelia spots the Band-Aids on his neck the following day when she stops by with groceries while Wesley is working on a translation.

“What the hell happened?” she demands, pulling the collar of Wesley’s shirt aside to get a better look.

Wesley isn’t about to tell her the whole truth, so he says, “I got caught riding my bike after dark. I dusted the vampire, though, so all’s well that ends well.”

“Why didn’t you call me?” Cordelia demands. “You didn’t have to deal with this by yourself!”

Wesley stares at her. “What, like I haven’t been dealing with everything else by myself this summer? Angel fucks off for parts unknown when he promised that he wouldn’t, and I get stuck here.”

Cordelia’s expression softens. “I’m sorry, Wes. I know—”

“It’s not your fault,” Wesley says. “Someone should be here in case Fred decides to emerge from her room, and you and Gunn have to take care of the visions and pay the bills. It’s just—it’s like last year all over again, only...”

“Only worse?” Cordelia suggests gently. “Because at least then you still had the work.”

Wesley refuses to meet her eyes. “I understand grieving, Cordy, I do, but Buffy’s dead. She doesn’t need Angel anymore, and I do.”

Cordelia sighs. “We all do. Come on, let’s get out of here for a while. We can go see a movie or something.”

Wesley still feels strange going out, because it invariably appears as though Cordy is humoring a younger relation. Still, he’s missed the closeness that had formed when it had just been him and Cordelia and Gunn running the agency.



Angel had regained Wesley's trust over the last months while Wesley had been small, but as the long, hot weeks of summer passed with no sign of him, Wesley felt that trust eroding.

He wants Angel to come back, of course, but he's no longer looking forward to it as a chance to have his friend back. Angel's return will simply make Wesley's life easier, but he doesn't think he'll be able to trust Angel not to leave again.

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"When do you start school?" Wesley asks a couple of weeks later. Dawn had called him this time, wanting to complain about how secretive Buffy's friends were being, and how they barely had time for her, and how Giles had left.

Wesley can sympathize, and she knows that, which is why Wesley is the one she calls.

"Two weeks," Dawn says. "I'm almost looking forward to it. I mean, I'm still the freaky girl with the freaky sister whose mom died, but at least it will be something to do."

Wesley makes a noise of agreement. "I wouldn't mind going back to school just for something to do," he admits.

"Why don't you?" Dawn asks. "I doubt you learned the same things at Watcher school as you would in public school."

"Maybe if I could pass as a high school student," Wesley says wistfully. "But all Watchers got the basic public school education through fourth form."

"I have no idea what that means," Dawn admits.

"It means that we essentially got through the equivalent of junior high before we started specialized studies, although I started language studies early on top of my regular

coursework,” Wesley replies.

Dawn is quiet for a moment. “You know, you could teach yourself some stuff that could come in handy, like more magic, or even computer stuff.”

“That’s not a bad idea,” Wesley replies. “How is Spike?”

“He’s here actually. Do you want to say hello?”

“No, just tell him hi for me. You’re lucky he stuck around, you know,” Wesley says a little enviously.

“I know,” Dawn agrees readily. “Are you going to be okay? We might not be able to talk as much once I start school.”

Wesley feels the sharp pang of disappointment, but he says lightly, “I’ll survive. Maybe I’ll take the bus to Sunnydale again and visit over Labor Day.”

There’s a pause, and Dawn says, “Spike says he’d come and pick you up the next time he has business in L.A.”

Even though the last time he’d gone to Sunnydale he’d wound up with a concussion, the idea has a certain appeal. “I’d like that.”

“I should probably go,” Dawn says.

“Hang in there, Dawn,” Wesley replies. “And if you need me to come to Sunnydale, I will.”

“You too,” Dawn says.

Wesley hangs up and looks around the office. The hotel is empty again, other than Fred, who still won't open the door more than a crack.

He's alone, and likely to stay that way until Angel finally returns, but Wesley knows that if this summer has taught him anything, it's that he's capable of standing on his own two feet with minimal assistance, even now.

Maybe it's time that he stops relying on others, at least as much as possible.

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