

And the World Spins Madly On

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And the World Spins Madly On

by [enigmaticblue](#)

Summary

Sometimes, after you've lost everything, the only thing to do is start again.

Notes

Written for the trope_bingo prompt “trust and vows” and the hc_bingo prompt “grief”. This is...not really a happy fic, guys. Sorry.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

“Woke up and wished that I was dead/With an aching in my head/I lay motionless in bed/I thought of you and where you’d gone/and let the world spin madly on./Everything that I said I’d do/Like make the world brand new/And take the time for you/just got lost and slept right through the dawn/And the world spins madly on...I watch the stars from my window sill./The whole world is moving and I’m standing still.” ~The Weepies, “World Spins Madly On”

Dawn holds her breath as she hears movement above her, and then she hears a soft, reassuring whistle, so she stays where she is. No whistle, and she heads deeper into the tunnels, to a dark alcove with a dark blanket pulled over her as camouflage.

Spike jumps down through the trapdoor and drops a bundle, then heads up the ladder to pull the trapdoor closed. Only then does Dawn turn on the flashlight. “I hope you got extra batteries. I think these are about dead.”

“No batteries, but I did get candles,” Spike replies. “And food.”

Dawn is *starving*, but she’s not about to admit to that. Spike has been working overtime to keep her safe and make sure she has what she needs. “Thanks.”

“Sorry it’s not more,” Spike apologizes as he dumps out what he’s found on the ground—mostly bags of chips, and Slim Jims, and a couple of energy bars. There’s one lone banana that’s half-black with age, and that’s about it.

Dawn grabs a bag of chips and rips it open. “How is it out there?”

Spike crouches down next to her. “They haven’t lost steam yet, and we can’t stay here much longer. It’s not safe.”

Dawn swallows hard past the lump in her throat and fishes out another chip. “I know. What about the others?”

Spike shakes his head. “No sign of them.”

She closes her eyes briefly. “Don’t lie to me, Spike. I can’t bear it if you’re hiding something from me.”

Spike heaves a deep sigh. “I found remains near your sister’s grave. There wasn’t much left, but it was a man and a woman. The Magic Box was burned to the ground, and I haven’t seen any sign of them. They might just be hiding really well, but—they’d be looking for you, Nibblet, and they know where I live.”

“What about my house?” Dawn asks.

“Trashed,” Spike says briefly. “But not completely. We could still salvage a few things.”

Dawn perks up at that. “You have a plan.”

“We can’t stay here,” Spike repeats. “And even if we could call the Watcher, there’s not much he could do, not without—”

“Not without my sister,” Dawn finishes softly.

Giles had made Dawn promise to call him if she needed anything, but she has no idea where the phone number is. Giles had given it to Willow, probably thinking that it would be safer, but with the Magic Box burned down, there’s really no way to contact him. It’s not as though they can dial 411 for the Watcher’s Council.

“We leave during the daylight,” Spike says. “They’re quieter then, and I’ve still got the Desoto. The windows are blacked out, so it won’t be a problem. We’ll go by your house first so you can grab what you need, and then we’ll get out of town.”

“Where are we going?” Dawn asks.

Spike shrugs. "Figure that's up to you."

Dawn has one thought. "Wesley. He'll help."

Spike grimaces. "And we'll have to deal with Angel if we go there."

"He's not back yet," Dawn replies. "At least he wasn't the last time I talked to Wes, and we can call before we show up at the hotel. He might know how to get in touch with Giles, too."

Spike nods. "I guess it's worth a shot."

Dawn hesitates, and then says, "Maybe we shouldn't call Giles."

"Why?"

"Because he's not going to let me stay with you," Dawn replies. "And I probably won't be able to stay with him, either, and it's going to suck."

Spike frowns. "No one's taking you away from me, Bit. I promised your sister that I'd look after you, and I can't do that if I'm not with you."

"You might not be able to stop it," Dawn replies. "No one is going to back you up, Spike. No one is going to argue that you should be a part of my life, other than me, and I'm not losing you, too."

"What do you want me to do?" Spike snaps. "I can't protect you here!"

Dawn gives him a level look. “I want you to promise me that if it looks like Giles is going to put me in foster care, or take me away from you, that you’ll spring me.” She manages a smile. “I asked Wes once if he ever thought about just leaving, taking off and traveling the country. We could do that.”

“Think your sister might be a little unhappy if you’re not in school,” Spike counters.

“My sister is dead,” Dawn says bitterly. “They’re all dead, other than you. Why should I care about school?”

She can tell that Spike is trying to find a reason that will satisfy her, and maybe one of the Scoobies would have been able to manage it, or Giles, but Spike’s not human, and he doesn’t place a high value on the same things that humans do. Even if he did, Dawn’s pretty sure his arguments still wouldn’t sway her.

A life on the road with Spike would be better than going to live with strangers, no question.

“I swore I’d take care of you, and that means making sure you finish high school at least,” Spike says sternly. “But where you go to school—I imagine that doesn’t matter as much as you finishing.”

Dawn feels a sense of relief. “Then you promise?”

“Yeah, and if the littlest Watcher wants to tag along, we’ll take him, too,” Spike replies. “I’m not leaving you, Dawn. Not ever.”

Dawn knows that Spike will keep his promise, and that’s the main thing. “Okay. Then we go to Los Angeles, and we contact Giles, and we leave if things aren’t going our way.”

Spike smiles. “I always thought you could be a criminal mastermind given the right opportunities.”

“Nothing holding me back now,” Dawn replies. “But we can go back to the house first, right? There are pictures and...” She trails off. “There are things I’d hate to leave behind.”

“We’ll take the tunnels, and we’ll go during the day, early morning,” Spike says. “Most of them are asleep then. We’ll only take what we can carry, and then we leave town. We drive straight to LA. Do you know where Wesley is?”

Dawn shakes his head. “We can call him when we get into town. I know his number.”

“It’s a plan,” Spike says. “It might even be a good plan.”

Dawn knows what that means—it means they’re probably screwed. “Yeah, well, that doesn’t bode well at all.”

They spend the night underneath the crypt, and in spite of Dawn’s protests, Spike insists on keeping watch. He’s done a lot of that—making sure she sleeps and eats on a semi-regular schedule while he does without.

Dawn isn’t sure if he’s been able to buy blood, especially with the demon biker gang out and about. She knows he’s been trying to ration what’s in his fridge, but there isn’t much left.

That might be another reason for them to leave town, sooner rather than later, because Spike has to eat, and humans are still off the menu.

Dawn follows Spike through the tunnels to the manhole closest to her house. “I’ll go first,” Spike says quietly, “and I’ll make sure the coast is clear. If it is, I’ll give the signal.”

“Be careful,” Dawn says. She’s well aware that Spike is about the only thing standing between her and death. She doesn’t have a prayer of getting out of Sunnydale without him.

“Always,” Spike replies with a crooked grin, and then he jumps straight up, through the manhole, and Dawn starts up the ladder.

She pokes her head up cautiously, just to make sure that Spike has made it to the front porch. Dawn ducks back down immediately, not wanting Spike to yell at her for being reckless again.

When she hears the low whistle that’s become their signal, Dawn boosts herself out of the manhole and sprints the distance to the house, ducking inside. The door is half off its hinges, and the interior has been completely trashed, but Dawn wills herself not to react.

The house is but a fraction of what she’s lost, and Dawn has no time for tears.

“Grab what you need,” Spike says quietly. “I’m going to pick up supplies from the kitchen and weapons, just in case.”

Dawn hasn’t had a shower in over a week, but she knows better than to try to grab one now. They can’t stay in the house for long, and so she takes just enough time to change into clean clothes, which makes her feel marginally better, and then she starts shoving clothing in a bag. Dawn grabs a couple of books—*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the last book her mother had ever bought for her, and a copy of *Little Women* that had belonged to her mom.

There are others she wants to take with her, but they’re traveling light, and Dawn knows better. Books, no matter what their sentimental value, can be replaced, and she’ll always have the memories of her book club with her mom.

Dawn is more interested in the pictures—the framed photo of her mom, Buffy, and Dawn that was sitting on the bedside table. The glass is broken, and Dawn pulls out the photo and sticks it inside *Harry Potter* to keep it safe.

She goes through her mom’s old room, the one that Willow and Tara had been sharing, and grabs a few mementos—a necklace that Tara had worn frequently, one of Willow’s bracelets, and a couple of pictures. She tucks those inside a book, too.

In her sister's room, she grabs pictures and a few other things, irreplaceable things, and tucks them into the empty corners of her pack. She feels a little like she's stealing—and it wouldn't be the first time—but the alternative is to leave what little remains for the demon horde.

Dawn grabs one of Buffy's leather jackets from the closet and hugs it close, tucking it through one of the straps of her backpack, and then starts to head downstairs.

Spike gives a high, sharp whistle, and Dawn freezes, hearing the sound of splintering wood in the next moment. She knows what Spike had told her, but she doesn't want to leave him alone.

And yet, he'd made her promise, and Dawn remembers what he'd said, that he could fight better if he knows she's safe.

Dawn creeps back up the stairs as quietly as possible and then goes to Buffy's old room, since it has the best options for getting off the roof. She slides open the window and gently sets her pack down on the roof before slipping through as quietly as possible.

She puts on Buffy's coat, and then shrugs her pack into place. Carefully, but quickly, she climbs onto the tree branch that hangs near the roof. Dawn would drop down from a lower point on the limb, but it's not safe, so she creeps along the limb to the trunk of the tree, and then shimmies down so that the wide trunk hides her from view.

From there, she runs to the manhole and drops down, although she stays there instead of following the tunnels back to Spike's crypt.

This is the part that Dawn doesn't have any instructions for. Spike had said not to brave the tunnels alone, but not what she should do if she ends up in the tunnels alone on his orders. Unless Spike waits until after dark, though, he'll have to come to this manhole and travel by the tunnels.

Dawn's patience is rewarded eventually. It feels as though hours have passed, but she suspects it's closer to thirty minutes—she's never been good about wearing a watch, and that hasn't changed—when Spike drops through the manhole, falling to his knees.

For a second, Dawn thinks that everything might be okay, but Spike doesn't get up, and so it's not just a bad fall.

“Spike?”

“We need to get out of town,” Spike replies wearily. “They have my scent now, and they might try to track me.”

Dawn settles her pack a little more securely and then reaches down for the bag of weapons that Spike had collected. “You'd better lean on me.”

“Leave the weapons,” Spike says. “You can't carry all of that and take my weight, too.”

“Watch me,” Dawn replies grimly. “You've been carrying me for the last week and more. We'll take it slow, and if we have to drop the weapons along the way, we will.”

She helps Spike up with her free hand, and he leans against her heavily for a moment before straightening. “All right, let's go.”

They have to move slowly, because Spike is badly injured, and Dawn is hampered by the weapons, her backpack, and Spike.

Another day, Spike would probably have been able to shake it off, but after over a week of short rations and very little sleep, his resources are low.

“Are we still leaving today?” she asks.

“Yeah, but you might have to drive part of the way,” Spike replies.

Dawn feels alarm. “I don’t know how to drive!”

“No time like the present to learn,” Spike replies with a hint of his old wryness. “And it’s an automatic, so it’s a piece of cake.”

“You say that, but there are classes you take for driver’s education,” Dawn protests. “That last for *weeks*.”

Spike gives her a long, steady look. “You can do this, Nibblet.”

What he means is that Dawn *has* to do it, just like she’s had to do a lot of things recently. “Can’t” isn’t a word that she’s allowed to keep in her vocabulary.

Dawn takes a deep breath and nods. “Okay.”

Buffy would climb behind the wheel, license or no license, and Dawn can do no less.

They don’t stay long in Spike’s crypt. He directs her to throw a few more things in the bag with the weapons—a few more t-shirts, a few other articles of clothing, and CDs that Spike insists he can’t replace and can’t live without.

In the meantime, he drinks what little blood is left in his fridge and uses a couple of old t-shirts to bind up his wounds. Dawn tries not to look, because it’s pretty awful. There is at least one deep slice to his side, and another to his left arm that has rendered it almost useless. The wounds won’t prevent him from driving, but if he passes out at any point, they’re going to be in trouble.

Spike's Desoto is parked inside Restfield at least, and Spike drapes an old woolen blanket over his head as he says, "I'm going to have to make a run for it. Can you carry the bags?"

Dawn nods.

She follows in his wake, letting Spike set the pace, hoping that they don't run into more trouble. She's not going to be of much help if they do.

Spike dives into the car, and Dawn throws their bags into the backseat and slips into the front passenger seat.

"Okay, pay attention," Spike warns her. "If I have to pull over, you're going to have to take us the rest of the way there."

Dawn watches as he turns the key in the ignition and puts the car into drive. The windows are still mostly blacked out, and she hopes that doesn't get them pulled over. "Accelerator on the right, brake on the left," Spike says. "Keep it under the speed limit and stay between the lines, and we'll be fine."

She really hopes that's true. Surely, their luck has to change some time.

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Wesley startles when the phone in the office rings. He'd been deep into a book, working on a translation, and he isn't expecting a call. Cordelia has already been by once that day, and his relationship with Gunn is still tense, especially since Charles had heard from Cordelia about Wesley's near miss with the vampire, and he'd been upset and angry.

It's probably a good thing that neither Gunn nor Cordelia have any idea that Wesley had taken out *four* vampires, even if he'd nearly been killed in the process. If they'd had more than a faint suspicion that he was going out hunting by himself, they probably would have kept watch on the hotel to try and catch him in the act.

But they don't know, because they haven't been around much this summer. And, as Wesley keeps reminding everyone, he's an adult, even if he doesn't look like one, and he gets to make his own decisions, even if that puts him in danger.

He nearly knocks over his mug of lukewarm tea when he reaches for the phone, but he rights it and grabs the receiver on the fourth ring. "Angel Investigations," he says, although they're not doing much investigating these days.

"Wes?"

He recognizes Dawn's voice immediately, and she sounds tearful and slightly panicked. It's been more than a week since he'd heard from her, but he'd assumed she was busy with school and didn't have time for him.

Wesley had tried to be grateful that she was making friends and doing well, but now he's thinking he should have been worried.

"Dawn? What's wrong?" Wesley asks.

Dawn takes in an audible, shuddering breath. "We're in Los Angeles. Spike passed out, and I don't know how to get to the hotel. I'm not even sure where we are."

"Take a deep breath," Wesley advises. When she sobs in his ear, he repeats, "Dawn, take a deep breath with me now. In—out." He makes sure she can hear him breathe, and when she calms a bit, he says, "I need you to look around. Can you see a street sign or an address on a building?"

"I'm at a payphone," Dawn says, "but, um, we were on I-5, and we got off on San Fernando Road. That's when Spike passed out."

“Okay, this is easy,” Wesley replies. “I’d come to you, but I don’t have transportation. You’re going to have to do this. Stay where you are for now, wait until the sun goes down and traffic starts to clear up, okay? Then you’re going to take I-5 to the US-101 exit towards Vine Street, and then turn right on Vine, and left on Wilshire. You can’t miss the hotel.”

Dawn takes a deep breath. “Repeat that again.”

Wesley does, slowly and with emphasis on the streets and directions. “You can do this,” he repeats. “Don’t go over the posted speed limit and stop for yellow lights. Don’t give the police any reason to pull you over. If you are stopped, tell them that you had to drive your brother to the hospital. That will buy you some time.”

“Then they’ll check for a pulse and find out that he’s dead!” Dawn protests, an edge of hysteria in her voice.

“And you’ll appear very shocked, and you’ll cry, and they will assume you were rushing him to the hospital and didn’t realize he’d already passed,” Wesley explains patiently. “They won’t ask any questions, because they’ll assume you’re in shock, and when they transport you to the hospital or wherever, you’ll ask to call your aunt, and I will make sure that Cordelia comes with me to pick you up.”

“You’ve thought about this a lot,” Dawn says.

Wesley snorts. “I’ve known for months that someone might pick me up. I’ve come up with contingency plans for *everything*.”

“Okay, fair,” Dawn replies. “Wes, Spike is going to need blood.”

“I’ll work on that,” Wesley promises, “and I’ll be here when you arrive.”

He briefly debates whether to call someone after Dawn hangs up, but immediately nixes the idea. Cordelia isn’t Spike’s biggest fan, and would probably advocate for leaving him out for

the sun, and Wesley has no idea what she might do with Dawn. Gunn is out of the question for the same reason, as is Gunn's crew. Fred still hasn't emerged from her room, and Wesley is beginning to think she never will.

The Hyperion is large enough that Wesley can hide Spike *and* Dawn here if he has to, and no one will ever know of their presence. He's not sure whether Angel will be able to sense their presence if they're far enough away inside the hotel, but Wesley is willing to take the chance. Since Fred refuses to come out, he doesn't have to worry about her either.

Wesley bikes to the nearest location where he knows he can get blood, a butcher's shop that Angel had frequented on occasion. "I need blood," Wesley says. "It's for a friend."

Maybe the butcher remembers Angel making the same request, because he fills a couple of large tubs with blood and takes Wesley's proffered cash.

Wesley is running low on funds, but he has enough for food for Spike, Dawn and himself for at least a week. If he doesn't get a new source of income soon, though, he's going to be in trouble.

Not for the first time, Wesley considers turning to a life of crime, and silently acknowledges that it might just come to that.

For now, though, he buys blood and then calls for pizza. If Spike is hungry, Dawn is likely to be, too.

Besides, Wesley is going to need to eat soon.

He keeps an eye on the clock and is unsurprised when the pizza arrives before Dawn does. Wesley just hopes that her tardiness doesn't mean something has gone horribly wrong.

Around ten, he hears the rumble of a car engine, and he quickly exits the hotel, seeing an old, black car with windows that have been painted over. Wesley can't make anyone out, but he

waves the car around the back of the hotel to the alley where deliveries used to be taken.

If Dawn and Spike stay more than a few days, they'll have to hide the car somewhere else, but that's a problem for the future.

Dawn climbs out from behind the wheel, and Wesley can see how shaky she looks, her face pale against the dirt and blood smudged along one cheek.

"Dawn, are you okay?" he asks quickly.

She nods, swallowing audibly. "It's just..." Her voice is thick and choked with tears, and Wesley knows she's going to have a breakdown, and they need to get Spike inside.

"I'll help you with Spike," Wesley says briskly. "And then we can get the rest of your things out of the car. I called for pizza, although you'll want to heat it up in the microwave."

Dawn manages to get ahold of herself. "I don't care if it's cold, Wes. I'm so hungry I could eat anything."

"All right, then let's get Spike settled."

The vampire is unconscious and won't rouse when Wesley tries to shake him, so he and Dawn each take an arm and they drag him inside.

"Where?" Dawn asks, her voice strained.

"Office," Wesley says briefly. "Couch."



They're both panting when they finally deposit Spike on the couch. "How long has he been unconscious?"

"Since I called you," she says, her breath hitching. "I couldn't get him to wake up."

Wesley frowns. "Help me get his coat off. I need to see the damage. Are you okay to patch him up while I heat up some blood?"

Dawn nods. "I can get started."

Once they've pulled off Spike's coat and his shirts, Wesley begins to understand why Spike is out. There's a deep slice crossing his chest diagonally from his left collarbone to his right hip, and a deep slash in his left arm, as well as other cuts and bruises in various stages of healing. And while Spike was lean the last time Wesley saw him, he looks almost gaunt now.

"He didn't tell me," Dawn murmurs. "I knew it was bad, but—"

"He probably didn't want to worry you," Wesley replies absently. "I think we have enough gauze." The wounds are still bleeding sluggishly at the deepest locations, so gauze is a necessity. "Stay here while I round up supplies."

He brings the box of first aid supplies and the pizza first, and then goes to heat up blood for Spike, rummaging through drawers and cupboards for a straw. He's hoping that the smell of the blood will rouse Spike enough to let him drink.

With blood and a little time, Spike will heal. Given Dawn's condition, he's not sure the same can be said for her.

Dawn is still taping the gauze in place when Wesley returns. "There's a bathroom just down the hall there if you want to clean up," he says. "I'll finish this and try to get Spike to drink something."

She nods wearily and follows Wesley's directions.

Wesley has patched up a fair number of wounds at this point, both his own and others', and so his movements are quick and practiced. Once the worst of it has been taken care of, he holds the mug under Spike's nose.

"Come on," he coaxes. "I know you must be hungry."

Spike's face shifts and he groans. Wesley pushes the straw against Spike's lips, and after a moment, he starts to suck steadily.

When he starts to slurp, Wesley grimaces and pulls the straw away. Spike tries to follow it, and then his eyes blink open and he stares at Wesley blearily. "Wes?"

"Yeah, it's me," Wesley replies. "I have more blood if you want it."

Spike tries to sit up. "Dawn—"

Wesley puts a hand on his shoulder to keep him in place. "She's in the bathroom right now. She's safe. Do you want more?"

"Dawn needs to eat," Spike mutters. "I have to—"

"Rest," Wesley says, finishing his sentence. "I'll check on Dawn and get you more blood. There's pizza on the desk for her for whenever she emerges from the bathroom."

Spike seems to relax slightly at that. "Where's Angel?"

Wesley shrugs. “No idea. He hasn’t kept in touch.” He knows that he sounds short, but he can’t help it.

Spike’s gaze sharpens slightly. “You’ve done some growing this summer.”

“Maybe so,” Wesley says. “I’ll be right back.”

He checks on Dawn first, knocking softly on the bathroom door, and calling, “Spike is awake. I’m going to get more blood for him.”

“I’ll be out in a minute,” she replies, her voice shaky, and Wesley knows she’s been crying.

He’ll never admit it, but he’s retreated into the bathroom to get himself under control more than once. “Take your time,” he replies.

Dawn is eating a slice of pizza in the office when Wesley returns with more blood. She’s washed her face, but he can still see the clear signs of tears in her red and puffy eyes.

“I could reheat that for you,” Wesley offers, passing the mug to Spike, who’s sitting up and looking far more aware.

Dawn shakes her head. “No need. This is fine.”

Silence falls over the office, and Wesley perches on the edge of the desk. It’s not entirely comfortable, but Wesley has been alone a lot this summer, and he suspects that he’s just not used to having anyone around.

Dawn eats two more slices of pizza, and Wesley grabs another mug of blood for Spike, and then Dawn cautiously asks, “Do you know how to get in touch with Giles?”

Wesley swallows hard, his dinner turning into a cold lump in his stomach. "If you mean, do I have his direct number, no. He didn't give it to me."

Spike raises his eyebrows. "But you could get in touch with him?"

"My father knows him," Wesley says, trying to keep his voice even, but it cracks on "father," and he winces.

Dawn's expression is sympathetic. Wesley has dropped a few hints about his family situation, and so she has some idea of why Wesley would be reluctant. "Giles made me promise to call him if anything happened, but I don't know that he'll let me stay with Spike."

Wesley hesitates. "You could send a letter. That would take time to reach him, but if you sent it to Council headquarters, it *would* reach him eventually."

"He'll probably find out that something has gone wrong prior to that," Spike points out quietly. "If he hasn't tried to call the Magic Box already, he will."

"I could give you the number to call," Wesley offers. "The number to Council headquarters, anyway. They might listen to you."

"Or they might think I'm insane," Dawn replies.

Wesley hesitates, thinking through the possibilities. "If you told them that Sunnydale had been overrun, they would probably at least send a team."

Spike gives him a sharp look. "You don't like that idea."

"You kept the knowledge of Buffy's death from the Council at large, didn't you?" Wesley asks.

Dawn nods. "We had the Buffy-bot, and we didn't want the demons and vampires to know that, um, that..." She trails off, unable to finish the sentence.

Wesley sighs. "As I understand it, the Slayer line split when the Master nearly killed your sister a few years ago. That's why Faith is the Slayer, but the line runs through her now, and she's in prison."

Dawn frowns, clearly not understanding the point that Wesley is driving at. "So?"

"So, as long as your sis was on the Hellmouth, the Council wankers could afford to leave Faith where she was," Spike says. "But if they need a new Slayer, they'll either break Faith out of prison, or they'll have her killed."

Dawn looks alarmed. "They wouldn't do that, would they?"

Wesley runs a hand through his hair. "Unfortunately, I think killing her is the most likely scenario. They haven't been able to control her before, and she's caused too much trouble for them to risk releasing her, even if she has been reformed."

"Has she?" Dawn asks dubiously. "I mean, she beat up my mom, and locked me in a closet, and slept with Buffy's boyfriend."

"And she tortured me," Wesley replies. "I'm not her biggest fan, although I do think she deserves a chance to turn her life around. As it stands now, though, I'm not sure she'll get the opportunity."

Dawn frowns. "But Giles wouldn't do it."

"Sure he would," Spike says with a snort. "The Watcher isn't exactly lily white."

Wesley nods, concurring with Spike, although he knows very little of Giles' past. "Watchers are trained to see all of the options, even the distasteful ones. And we are trained to make those decisions, even at great personal cost."

"So, even if we just told Giles, he might kill Faith so they could get a new Slayer, one who's not in prison?" Dawn demands.

"That's about the sum of it." Wesley shrugs. "Or he might try to get her out, or perhaps the Council will send a group to take care of the Hellmouth. There's no telling which potential Slayer would get Chosen next, and she might be needed elsewhere."

Dawn turns to Spike. "I don't know what to do."

Neither does Wesley, if he's honest. From what Dawn had told him, the Buffy-bot and Spike had mostly been keeping a lid on things, along with Giles and the rest of Buffy's friends. Now, the game has changed.

"I wish I knew, Bit," Spike says. "Told you I wouldn't let anything happen to you, and I don't much care about some Slayer I've never met, but the Council is never anything but trouble."

Dawn looks at Wesley. "What do you think?"

Wesley wishes a lot of things in that moment. He wishes he looked as old as he feels, because he might have been able to do some good. He wishes he knew the right thing to do.

He wishes he were stronger.

Whatever he might have said in response is cut off by the sound of someone entering the lobby. Cordelia calls his name. "Wesley! I had a vision!"

Wesley knows that he should hide both Dawn and Spike, but there's no time, because Cordelia is entering the office. She'd probably seen the light on, and Wesley spends most of his time in the office these days, because it's at least familiar.

Wesley intercepts her at the door. "I can explain."

"Explain what?" Cordelia asks, and then pushes past Wesley to get a good look at Spike—who at least looks relatively harmless with his chest and arm bandaged—and Dawn. "What the hell is going on here?"

Wesley gets between Cordelia and the others again. "I told you that Dawn and I had been talking this summer. When she needed help, I told her she could come here."

Cordelia is clearly looking around for a weapon, but there are none within reach, and since Spike isn't moving, she seems to be relaxing slightly. "Dawn, yes, but Spike?"

"He's with me," Dawn says boldly, her chin tilted defiantly. "He saved my life."

"He has a chip in his head, and he can't harm humans," Wesley reminds her. "You know that."

Cordy frowns. "That doesn't mean you invite him to stay!"

"Sunnydale has been overrun by a demon gang who realized that the Slayer is dead," Wesley says bluntly. "Right now, our choices are either to deal with the menace ourselves or call the Council. And frankly, Cordy, we could use the extra muscle right now."

She grimaces. "Fair point. Angel's not going to be happy about it, though."

"Angel doesn't have to know," Wesley replies grimly. "Besides, he left the hotel in my care, and I get to say who stays here, at least in the short term. I can offer shelter to my friends if I

like.”

He probably sounds like a petulant child, but he doesn’t care. Angel had left him high and dry for the summer, and so Wesley can’t really be arsed to care what he would or wouldn’t like.

Cordy sighs. “You’re responsible for them, Wes.”

“I never expected anything else,” Wesley replies.

“And Fred is still hiding?” Cordelia asks.

Wesley shrugs. “I don’t think she’ll come out until Angel returns.”

“Well, he’d better get here soon, because I think that demon gang in Sunnydale is heading to Los Angeles next.”

Spike’s head comes up. “Bloody hell.”

Wesley knows what that means. “Angel? He’s here?”

“I *did* get a vision,” Cordelia points out. “It makes sense if Angel is returning, since I’m his contact with the Powers That Be.”

“Stall him,” Wesley orders, bundling up the first aid kit and the remaining first aid supplies, trying to collect anything with blood on it. “I’ll get Spike and Dawn under cover.”

“He’s going to know they’re here,” Cordelia protests.



Wesley smirks. “No, he won’t. This is a big place, and this is Angel. He had no idea Darla was really back for how long? If he doesn’t suspect anything, he won’t *know* anything, unless someone spills the beans. Spike, can you walk?”

“What about me?” Dawn protests.

Wesley smiles. “I know you can walk. Cordelia, we’re going to the far west side of the hotel. That should do it. For right now, Angel can stay in the dark.”

“On your head be it,” Cordy replies. “You’d better move fast.”

“Dawn, grab Spike’s things,” Wesley orders, as Cordelia heads out to run interference. Whatever her misgivings, she’s backing Wesley up, and he loves her for that. “Spike, lean on me.”

“Please tell me that I still get the chance to shower,” Dawn says, grabbing the mug of blood and the nearly-empty pizza box.

Wesley smiles. “Promise.”

He’s explored the hotel from top to bottom, every room and every wing, and he knows just how far Spike and Dawn have to be for the marble floors and carpets and the plastered walls will hide their presence. It’s not ideal, but it should suffice for the moment.

And while Angel might sense *something*, he’ll probably write it off. There’s absolutely no reason for him to suspect that Spike and Dawn are here.

“These rooms adjoin each other,” Wesley explains, leading them to the rooms he thinks will be safest. “You can leave the connecting door closed or not, whatever you’d like. There’s hot water, too. Dawn and I will need to move the car and grab the bags, though.”

Dawn dangles the keys. "Got it."

Spike frowns, but doesn't protest. "Be careful, half pint. You don't need Angel's wrath."

"I can handle it," Wesley says with a grimace. "And if he thinks I'm going to welcome him back with open arms, he's going to have another thing coming."

Something about this situation has made Wesley bold. When push comes to shove, he'll defend Dawn to the death, and since Spike seems necessary to Dawn's well being, Wesley will defend him, too.

Cordelia is doing a fairly decent job of distracting Angel, apparently, because Wesley doesn't see him anywhere. Wesley leads Dawn out through the service entrance, where the Desoto is still sitting.

"Where does Angel park?" Dawn whispers.

"Underground," Wesley explains. "I would have sent you there, but no one else really parks there. Gunn usually takes the alley, and it wouldn't do for him to see Spike's car."

Dawn climbs behind the wheel again, her knuckles turning white. "What do I do?"

"Back straight out slowly," Wesley advises. "I don't think Angel will be able to see us from where he is."

Dawn inches along through the alley, and they park around the block in a lot, one of the cheaper ones in the area, thankfully.

"You aren't going to get into trouble, are you?" Dawn asks as they haul her and Spike's bags out of the backseat.

Wesley shrugs. "I think the better question is whether I care. Worst case, we all hit the road together, right?"

Dawn manages a smile. "Thanks."

Wesley shrugs. "You kept me sane this summer. This is the very least I can do."

He doesn't add that he actually feels competent, a bit like his old self, when he's with Dawn and Spike. He misses that person he'd fought so hard to become, and it's nice to feel a bit like that man again—or that he could *be* that man again.

"I'll come check on you guys in a bit," Wesley promises when he delivers Dawn and their baggage back to their rooms.

Wesley stops by his room briefly for a change of clothes and a brief, thorough, wash, wanting to reduce the risk that Angel will smell Spike or Dawn on him, which is really the biggest danger. Still, it's a risk he has to take.

"Wes!" Angel calls with a broad smile, as though no time has gone by. "Where were you?"

"Just doing my rounds," Wesley replies, forcing a smile. "How was your retreat?"

Angel shrugs. "Murderous monks, you know. It wasn't as restful as I'd hoped."

"It's good to have you back," Wesley replies with a smile that he hopes doesn't look fake. He's sweating a bit, waiting for Angel to ask who his visitors have been.

"Cordy had a vision about Sunnydale," Angel says, sounding distracted. "Have you been in contact with anybody there?"

“Just Dawn,” Wesley replies, and realizes that Angel is too focused on the job at hand to think about who else might be in the hotel. “But it’s been a while since she’s called or emailed.”

It’s technically the truth, and Wesley doesn’t mind lying by omission in this instance while they figure things out. Eventually, Angel have to be told the truth, or will discover it for himself, but right now, Wesley needs to protect Dawn—and therefore, by extension, Spike.

“Cordy said that Giles went back to England,” Angel says. “Do you know how we might reach him?”

Wesley hesitates. If Angel calls the Council headquarters, he may or may not get anywhere, but the decision will be out of Wesley’s hands. “You could call Council headquarters directly,” Wesley replies.

Angel frowns. “And if they ask why you’re not the one calling?”

“Tell them I died,” Wesley says bluntly. “Or that I’ve gone missing and you haven’t found my body. They probably won’t care, but it will stop them from looking for me.”

“I didn’t think you’d want to go that far,” Angel objects.

Wesley shrugs. “We know this isn’t going to wear off, and I don’t want my father to know. If you call and tell them I’m either dead or missing, they won’t question why you’re the one calling looking for Giles.”

Angel looks conflicted. “The Council isn’t my biggest fan.”

“You’re calling for information, which they need,” Wesley points out. “And you may want to consider breaking Faith out of jail before they try to kill her.”

“Would they do that?” Angel asks.

Wesley just raises his eyebrows.

Angel sighs. “You’re right, of course. I’ll consider it.”

“Do more than that, Angel,” Wesley advises, feeling as though he’s on solid ground for the first time in a while. “If you care for Faith at all, you’ll make sure she’s out of harm’s way before the Council finds out that Buffy is dead.”

Angel gives him a sharp look. “I thought you said you didn’t want to be in charge anymore.”

“I said I probably shouldn’t be in charge,” Wesley corrects him. “But since you essentially did just that over this summer, it seems that I still retain control of the agency, such as it is. I’d also suggest going up to see Fred. She’ll talk to me through the door, and I think Cordelia has spoken with her, but it’s you she keeps asking about.”

“Then I guess I’ll go check on Fred, call the Council and tell them you’re missing, and then rescue Faith and clear out a demon horde,” Angel says.

Wesley smiles. “Just another day, right? Aren’t you glad you came back?”

Angel gives him a sharp look. “Are *you* okay?”

“Me?” Wesley asks dismissively. “I’m fine.”

Angel frowns. “I’m sorry I left you in the lurch.”

“In spite of appearances, I *am* a grown man,” Wesley replies. “No apologies are necessary.”

“Still,” Angel says, faltering a bit. “I’m glad you’re okay. Cordy said you bought a bike.”

“I needed to get around,” Wesley replies. “But we’re running low on funds, and I’m obviously not in the best position to bring in new clients. If you don’t want the firm to dissolve, I’d recommend getting on that. Perhaps you can get some money out of the Council if you promise to clean up Sunnydale.”

Angel still looks puzzled. “That’s—incredibly mercenary of you.”

“I had been considering turning to a life of crime until I reached the age of majority in order to meet my basic needs,” Wesley replies. “I’m rather hoping to avoid that.”

“Duly noted,” Angel says. “Do you have the number of the Council?”

“Of course,” Wesley replies, and writes it down, handing it to Angel with a flourish that he hopes is pure distraction. So far, Angel hasn’t sensed anything amiss other than Wesley’s chilly attitude, and he’d like it to stay that way. “Let me know how it goes.”

He leaves, mostly because he doesn’t want to give Angel a chance to peer below the surface to see what Wesley is keeping from him. The longer Wesley is in Angel’s presence, the better the chance that Angel will see—or smell, or hear—something Wesley doesn’t want him to.

Then again, Wesley is good at hiding the emotions he doesn’t want others to see. He’s had considerable practice at this point. Angel will expect that Wesley to hide his anger, and maybe to avoid Angel, which will give him the freedom to see to Dawn and Spike.

Wesley smiles grimly. It looks like he’s going to be playing the avoidance game. The best part is that while he has a very real, non-childish reason for doing so, the effect will be the same: with any luck, Angel will start bending over backwards to make him happy.

And that might mean that Angel will have to let Dawn and Spike stay.

Instead of going back to his room, Wesley sneaks over to the west wing of the hotel to give Dawn the good news. He pauses outside her door, though, because he can hear her sobbing, and he doesn't know if he should interrupt.

They haven't touched on their sorrows really. Dawn would mention missing her sister, or being worried about the Scoobies' secretiveness, but not her grief. Wesley suspects that her grief was, and is, too large to put into words.

After a moment, Wesley tries the doorknob and it turns easily under his hand, and he slips inside. Dawn is alone, and there's no way that Spike hasn't heard her, but maybe this is a private bargain they've struck.

Wesley has made no such deal, and he sits on the edge of the bed next to Dawn, so that she has her back to him, curled up in a ball and crying as though she will never stop.

He rests a hand on her shoulder. "I think Angel will take care of all the dirty work—he'll call the Council and rescue Faith, and probably clear the demons out of Sunnydale."

Dawn's breath hitches. "I don't care."

Wesley hesitates, and then he stretches out next to her, tugging at her shoulder until she rolls over with her face buried in his stomach. "It's really hitting home now, huh?" he asks sympathetically.

"They're all dead," Dawn says, her words indistinct as she begins to cry again. "All of them! I don't have anybody."

"You have Spike," Wesley feels compelled to point out. "And me, for whatever that's worth."

Her sobs become even more forceful, and Wesley realizes that there is no cheering her up; there is nothing he can say to lessen her grief or her pain. So, instead of saying anything, Wesley strokes her hair, moving it out of her face and scratching her scalp, gently untangling hair still damp from the shower.

He does that over and over until her sobs taper off. His shirt is damp from her tears, but he doesn't move.

Dawn eventually curls her fingers into his t-shirt, as though to keep him in place. "Sorry."

"Don't be sorry," Wesley replies, continuing to run his fingers through her hair. "Where's Spike?"

"Smoking, I think," Dawn says. "He said he needed to get away from the Angel-stench."

Wesley chuckles. "Good luck to him, I guess."

"Did you tell Angel we were here?"

"No, I let him believe that I hadn't heard from you since your last email," Wesley replies. "And he probably thinks I'm angry with him for abandoning me over the summer."

Dawn makes a sound that might almost be a laugh. "Aren't you angry?"

"Yes, which is why it's the perfect excuse," Wesley says. "And knowing Angel, he'll either avoid me until I get over it—which won't be for a very long time—or he'll try to buy my affection the way he did Cordelia."

"What did he do for her?" Dawn asks.



Wesley figures it's as much a distraction as anything else. "He bought her a bunch of designer clothes. I think he got Gunn something, too."

"And he didn't get anything for you?" Dawn asks, sounding outraged.

"I think he believed I was a sure thing, and then...this happened, and I was dependent upon him, and he ran off, so..." Wesley considers it for a moment. "He'll probably attempt to buy me books I can't get anywhere else."

"So, what are you going to do?" Dawn asks.

Wesley smiles. "I'm going to bargain for safe harbor for you and Spike."

"Bold move," Dawn comments. "You think it will work?"

"If it doesn't, then we'll figure something else out," Wesley replies. "Or I'll leave with you. I told Angel to tell the Council that I'm either dead or missing."

"I didn't think you'd ever just leave," Dawn admits.

Wesley leans his head back against the headboard and closes his eyes. "Neither did I."

But he's suddenly giving the idea serious consideration.

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Dawn wakes before the sun comes up, but Wesley is still asleep. She knows that it's probably not a good idea for him to stay here, so she nudges him awake. "Hey, it's close to morning."

Wesley groans but rolls off the bed without further prodding. "I'll bring breakfast as soon as I can for you *and* Spike."

"Thanks," Dawn replies. She's not happy about the idea of hiding out, but she is less thrilled by the idea of running into Angel.

Even if Angel doesn't flip his lid at Spike's presence, there's every possibility that he'll insist she go into foster care, or find her aunt—who hasn't kept in touch since her mom's death—or some other far-flung relative. And that will leave Dawn adrift, without the one person she trusts.

Well, two people, if she counts Wesley, which she does. And she doesn't want to lose contact with Wesley either, although Wesley is technically easier to explain than Spike.

She takes another shower, just because she can, and she's not going to take showers for granted again any time soon. She pulls on clean clothes and checks her reflection in the mirror, grateful to see that there's no trace of her tears this morning.

She had tried not to cry in front of Spike, not wanting to put more of a burden on him, but Wesley is different. He's her age, but he's not. He's been through the ringer, just like she has, but in a different way. He's good in a crisis, and good with weapons.

Wesley feels like an equal in a way, and she doesn't feel like she has to hide her feelings from him.

Plus, he'd been pretty great about comforting her the previous night.

For lack of anything better to do, she pulls out her mom's copy of *Little Women* and starts reading it for the third—or maybe fourth—time.

She's not really in the mood for it, but reading it is a little like slipping on her favorite pair of shoes. Maybe she'd rather be wearing slippers, but her shoes are still comfortable.

And maybe that metaphor had gotten away from her.

There's a quiet knock on the door when she's about a hundred pages in, and Wesley slips inside the room.

"Sorry it took me so long. I had to be sure that Angel wouldn't realize that I was heating blood up. And Cordy brought donuts." He hands over a donut wrapped up in a napkin, a large mug in the other hand. "Is Spike awake?"

"I'm sure he will be for you," Dawn replies, and knocks on the connecting door. "He's been eating pretty lightly this last week."

Spike opens the connecting door a moment later. "What?" he snarls.

"Blood," Wesley says briefly. "Here."

Spike grabs the mug and drinks deeply, his face changing as he does.

"I think that's the equivalent of a thank you," Dawn says, amused.

Wesley shrugs. "Not necessary. Angel is going to call the Council today, and he's planning on breaking Faith out of jail soon, hopefully before the Council can make a plan to kill her."

"And how do you feel about that?" Dawn asks.

“Like I don’t really want Faith to see me like this, but we don’t always get what we want,” Wesley replies peevishly.

Spike licks his lips. “How long can we feasibly stay here?”

“The west wing has its own entrance and exit, and no one ever comes over here,” Wesley says reasonably. “If Faith senses a vampire, she’ll probably assume that it’s Angel, unless he’s not here. Angel doesn’t expect you to be here, and he tends to be oblivious, especially when there’s a problem needing his attention. And, I expect that they’ll probably head to Sunnydale as soon as possible, probably right after breaking Faith out.”

“That’s good, right?” Dawn asks.

Wesley shrugs. “Maybe. When Angel doesn’t find your body, he’s going to start asking questions, though.”

“So, we could have come here in between times,” Dawn suggests.

“As I see it, we have two options,” Wesley says. “Either we tell Angel that you’re staying here for the time being, and say nothing about Spike, or we wait until he gets back from Sunnydale, tell Angel that Spike saved your life, and I tell him that we’re a package deal, and if he wants me to stay, you and Spike get to stay, too.”

“Will that work?” Spike asks.

Wesley shrugs. “The real question is whether I care either way, and I don’t.”

Dawn thinks that those are brave words, and Wesley probably doesn’t mean them, not entirely. He won’t want to lose his friends, not when push comes to shove.

Than again, Wesley looks defenseless, and it's possible that Angel will put up with a lot to avoid losing him.

"What do you think?" Dawn asks.

"I already told Angel to tell the Council that I'm dead," Wesley replies. "I say we go with option B, and we split if Angel decides not to play ball."

Spike gives him a sharp look. "What happened to you, half-pint?"

"Angel made me a promise," Wesley says baldly. "He said he would be there, and he wasn't. I can't trust that he'll be there in the future, so maybe it's time I make my own plans—and my own friends."

Dawn hears a deep pain in his words, maybe the kind of abandonment issues that she has, too. If everybody in Wesley's life has disappointed him, maybe it makes sense that Wesley would want friends of his own, that he could rely upon.

"What makes you think I'd keep a promise?" Spike challenged, his eyes hard.

Wesley smirks, suddenly looking far older. "Because Dawn is alive, and not in Sunnydale. You could have run. You could have left her behind, and you didn't. You brought her here, even though you might have to deal with Angel."

Spike's expression softens. "Then I'll make you a promise. You want to get out of here, I'm your ride. You might actually be useful."

"More use than I am here," Wesley says sourly.

Dawn feels the need to change the subject. "What about Fred?"

“She talked to Angel, and even came out of her room for a bit,” Wesley replies. “Which is more than I accomplished all summer.”

Dawn winces. “That’s not your fault, Wes. She wouldn’t come out for Cordelia or Gunn either, and they were in whatever hell dimension she was in, too.”

“Pylea,” Wesley corrects absently. “And I do realize that but... Never mind. Look, if you need cash for supplies or whatever, I can probably manage it, or I can go shopping for whatever you need.” He flushes. “If you’re comfortable with that.”

Dawn almost laughs, because it’s clear that Wesley is referring to what the sign in the aisles of the grocery store call “feminine hygiene,” but it’s also sweet.

“I think I’m good,” Dawn replies, grateful that she’d grabbed a box of tampons from her house just in case. “At least for right now.”

“Spike?”

Spike appears curiously hesitant. “Sure you won’t get into trouble with Peaches for bringing me blood? He’ll notice it’s missing.”

“Not if I keep everything stocked at the right levels, which reminds me,” Wesley replies, and ducks out into the hallway, hauling a cooler into the room. “It should stay good for about 24 hours in that. It’s easier to refill ice than blood, and this way Angel won’t know.”

“You’re going to an awful lot of trouble,” Spike replies, but he sounds almost fond, and Dawn knows that tone of voice.

The thing is, Spike responds to trust, and kindness, and Wesley is sticking his neck out for them in a way that not many have before. Wesley might technically be older than her, but she

still feels a certain responsibility for him, especially when he brushes dark blond hair out of his eyes, looking all of twelve.

“Better than going hunting by myself, or hunting with the others only to be told that I’m taking too many risks,” Wesley says. “It’s fine.”

“Be careful,” Dawn says impulsively. “I don’t want you to get into trouble.”

Wesley smiles, but the expression doesn’t put her fears to rest—he looks reckless and wild, like he’s ready to take on impossible odds and doesn’t care what the results might be. “I’ll be fine,” he says, and Dawn wishes she believed him. “If you want to get out of the hotel, we could,” he offers in the next breath. “I mean, I just have the one bike, but we could walk or take the bus somewhere.”

Not for the first time, Dawn wonders how excruciatingly lonely Wesley’s summer must have been that he’d remain in near-constant contact with her, or that he’d be willing to spend the day with her in Los Angeles. She thinks it must have been pretty bad.

She glances at Spike, who shrugs. “Long as it’s daylight, and you’re with the Watcher here, I think you’ll be fine if you want to go.”

Dawn *does* with a sudden, sharp longing that can only be explained by the number of hours she’d spent cooped up this week, with no human contact other than Spike.

She wants to see the sun. She wants to see a movie. She wants to remember that there’s a world outside of Sunnydale and demon hunting and terror.

“Yes,” she says. “Can we—” She has no idea what she wants to do first.

“We could take the bus,” Wesley suggests. “Go to the beach. See what we want to do from there.”

Dawn looks at Spike, who's smiling a little wistfully. "You two go, have a good time. Think I'll just sleep a while longer."

"Spike—" Dawn begins.

"No," he says, interrupting her. "This is good, Bit. No sense you staying cooped up in here all day."

She wants to reassure him, but has no idea what to say, and so she turns to Wesley. "How are we going to get out of here without Angel knowing?"

Wesley smiles. "Leave that to me."

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Wesley knows that he'll eventually need to come clean, and when that happens, he might have to cut his ties and run.

Even though he had never believed that he would leave Angel, the fact is that Angel had left him first. Maybe if he could still be a private investigator, it wouldn't have mattered so much, but Wesley can't keep up with the business. If this curse doesn't suddenly wear off, if he doesn't wake up as a grown man again, he has *years* of waiting in limbo.

The truth, if he's being honest with himself, is that he'd never completely forgiven Angel for firing all of them. Angel's constancy after the curse had banked the fires of his anger, so much so that he'd told himself he was over it.

But a summer alone had taught him differently, and Wesley isn't sure there's anything Angel could do now to make up for those long, barren months.



Angel's departure had scattered the team, and Wesley doesn't know that they'll ever get that closeness back, and he's not sure he can forgive Angel for that either, even if it isn't entirely his fault.

Right now, though, it makes sense to hide Dawn and Spike's presence and let Angel deal with the situation with the Council, and down in Sunnydale. Wesley can spring Spike and Dawn on Angel later.

Or possibly never, he allows himself to think for the first time.

He leads Dawn out of the west wing of the building. The door is in shadow, but it's still early in the day, and usually too early for Angel to be up and about. Angel usually parks in the basement lot, so the sun isn't a concern.

"So, what are we going to do?" Dawn asks.

"You said you wanted to go to the beach," Wesley replies. "I've got enough money for a day out."

"I have some cash, too," Dawn replies. "Not a ton, but enough to pay my own way, at least."

Wesley shrugs. "Don't worry about it. I figure if we pool our resources, we should have enough for food for you and blood for Spike for a few weeks anyway."

"And after that?"

"I guess we'll see." Wesley offers a crooked smile. "I've been taking things one day at a time, you know?"

Wesley hasn't been to the beach all summer, and he doesn't have swimming trunks, although he's wearing shorts and a t-shirt, and Dawn is wearing shorts that display most of her legs

and a tank top. In that, she fits right in with all the other girls her age, and since today is Saturday, there are a rather large number of teenagers on the bus.

After all, not every kid in Los Angeles has a parent who's willing to drive, or another way to get a ride, but the bus is always available.

The bus deposits them on the Santa Monica pier, and they start walking. Dawn has flip flops, but Wesley takes off his shoes and socks, tucking the socks inside his shoes, and tying the laces together so he can hang them over his shoulder.

"It's weird, right?" Dawn asks, looking around as Wesley knots the laces of his trainers.

"What's weird?" he asks, standing.

"Everybody is wandering around, like nothing is wrong, like the world hasn't changed, and it has," Dawn replies. "Sometimes I'm surprised because the sun comes up, and my sister isn't in the world, and that just feels wrong."

Wesley can't disagree with her, and he'd had that thought more than once over the summer as he hunted vampires on his own, and frequented taco trucks and convenience stores. He'd been waiting for someone to notice that he was always alone, even though he'd taken pains to fly under the radar.

Nonetheless, he'd kept thinking that *someone* should notice him, should see his situation, and no one had. It had given him new insight into all of the newspaper articles about children who fall through the cracks.

"That's kind of the point, though, isn't it?" Wesley finally asks. "We might resent them not noticing, but it's better if they don't. We take care of those threats so they don't have to know about what goes bump in the night."

"Doesn't it get old?" Dawn asks plaintively.

Wesley thinks about that for a moment, and then says honestly, “Not as much as the idea that something terrible could be going on right under their noses and they *choose* not to see it.”

He’s taken to giving spare change to the homeless he runs across, because he’s realized that to be a child—particularly a white, relatively well-dressed and well-nourished child—renders a kind of invisibility. It’s both a blessing and a curse.

Dawn kicks at the sand. “Spike wants me to go back to school.”

“You could go to school here,” Wesley points out. “Or we could try harder to get in touch with Giles or your relatives.”

“Why?” Dawn demands. “Spike says I should go to school because that’s what Buffy would want, but it won’t do me any good, not when I plan on hunting demons full-time.”

Wesley isn’t surprised by her statement, and he thinks about his response, not wanting to give her a stock answer. He tries to put himself in Dawn’s shoes, and thinks about how she’d suggested that he go back to school, and his gut-level response.

Wesley will never be anything other than a demon hunter, and so he doesn’t need additional education. He can understand why Dawn would feel the same way.

“You should at least get your GED,” Wesley replies, “although a high school diploma tends to look better when you’re applying for jobs, so there is that.”

Dawn snorts. “Who would hire me?”

“I don’t know,” Wesley says simply. “But slaying demons generally doesn’t pay the bills. Angel Investigations was often in the red, and now it’s basically defunct without me or Angel

as the driving force. While Angel might not need money, I do, and I have no way of earning it right now.”

There *are* things that Wesley could do under the table, like run drugs, but he has to draw the line somewhere, and he knows that he’s unlikely to find someone who trusts him.

He is, in a word, fucked.

“So, what are *you* going to do?” Dawn challenges. “You say you don’t need to go to school, but the same idea applies to you. You’ll need your diploma or GED for most jobs when you do look like you might be close enough to 18 to pass, and if Angel tells the Council you’re dead, you’ll need new documents.”

Wesley grimaces. He hadn’t quite thought that part through, although Dawn is right. He *will* need new papers, and that opens up a possibility he hasn’t considered.

“I might be able to contact my aunt,” he says. “She might help. She never did like my dad much.”

Dawn frowns. “I thought all of your relatives were in England.”

Wesley doesn’t think about his family much, other than his father, who had loomed so large for most of his life. His mother had been kind, but unable to stand up to his father, a stranger in a strange land who had never quite adapted.

Wesley had met his aunt, his mother’s sister, only once, when she’d come to England. He remembers her as being completely no-nonsense, direct and forceful in a way his mother never had been. She had been brusque with his father, impatient with his mother, and she’d brought Wesley a t-shirt that said, “I <3 New York,” which is where she’d been living at the time.

He hadn’t been allowed to wear the t-shirt, but he had appreciated the thought at the time.

“My mother was American,” Wesley replies. “And I think her sister still lives here in the States. I could find her, although I’d have to explain things, and that might take some doing.”

Dawn blinks. “I thought you were uber-British.”

“My father wishes I were,” Wesley says quietly. “He always said I was too much like my mum, weak like her.”

Dawn snorts. “Weak? Has he met you?”

Wesley smiles. “Let’s just say that I wasn’t his definition of strong.”

“So, your aunt,” Dawn says. “Where is she now?”

“No idea,” Wesley admits. “But she was getting a doctorate in something, maybe English or folk lore, something. I’m a private detective. I should be able to find her.”

“Would she help you?”

Wesley remembers snatches of conversation he’d overheard between his aunt and parents, and he thinks she would. “Probably, but convincing her I’m her nephew is something else altogether.”

“You could tell her that your Wesley’s kid, or if she saw you when you were about this age, she might recognize you,” Dawn says. “We could go with you, and if she didn’t believe you right off, Spike could change, and then she’d have to believe there was something weird, right?”

“I guess,” Wesley says. “I’d never really thought about that possibility.”

He hadn't gone to her when he'd been kicked out of the Watchers Council, or in any of the years since then, mostly because he hadn't thought about it. His dad had been very clear that the American side of his family was worthless.

Then again, his dad never had much use for women, unless they were Slayers, and even then, they were only of use if they served the Council.

There are so many things that Wesley is still unearthing from his psyche, so much baggage he has yet to unpack.

"But you've met her," Dawn says.

"Once," Wesley agrees. "When I was about this age. I guess the only concern I'd have is that she might have a heart attack."

Dawn rolls her eyes. "She's not *that* old, right? She'll be fine, and maybe she'd like to hear from you."

"I guess it wouldn't hurt to look," Wesley admits. "The worst thing that could happen is she slams the door in my face, right? I doubt she'd go to my parents."

"If she does, we hit the road," Dawn says. "Spike already said he'd take us both."

Wesley shakes his head. "Can we, I don't know, talk about something else? I just want to *not* think about the future."

"Yeah, same here," Dawn replies. "Although I have to say that it's easier to focus on your problems rather than mine."

Wesley snorts. “Right. So, what do you want to do?”

“Let’s just enjoy the sun,” Dawn says.

The day turns out to be the best of all possible worlds. They don’t talk about friends they’ve lost, or the lives they’ve left behind. They walk the beach and splash in the surf, and they buy tacos from a food truck and ice cream from a miniscule shop with no tables inside but plenty outside. When they’re tired, they go to the theater and wind up seeing *Jurassic Park III*, which isn’t great, but is the only thing they can agree on, and is relatively entertaining, if a little stupid.

They stop to get dinner at a different food truck, and it appears that Dawn is entranced by the possibilities of what she can put on her loaded fries. “How many food trucks are there in Los Angeles?” she asks.

Wesley shrugs. “I don’t know. Hundreds, probably.”

“We should try all of them,” Dawn says grandly.

Wesley gives her a look. “That would take years.”

“So what?” Dawn asks. “It’s something to look forward to, right?”

Wesley immediately understands what she means; food is a reliable source of pleasure, something to look forward to two or three times per day when everything else has gone to shit.

“Movies, too,” Wesley says. “And books. There are always books.”

“TV shows,” Dawn replies.

He's getting into the spirit of things now, understanding what Dawn is doing. "Ice cream."

"There are always new flavors," Dawn replies. Her expression grows serious. "Buffy made me promise to live. It's just a matter of finding something to live for."

Wesley bumps her shoulder companionably with his own. "There's me."

"And there's Spike," she agrees. "He told Buffy that he wouldn't let anything happen to me. If I did anything, he'd probably find a way to resurrect me and kick my ass."

"He'd be right," Wesley replies. "I'd help him."

Dawn smiles. "Thanks."

"I don't have so many friends that I'm willing to lose one," Wesley replies.

The bus ride back to the Hyperion is uneventful, which is the best thing that can be said about a bus ride. "I'll go in the service entrance," Dawn says when the bus drops them off one block over. "You should probably keep your cover."

"Thanks," Wesley says. "I'll come by tonight."

"Be careful," Dawn advises. "Angel is sneaky."

Wesley isn't too worried. Angel might be sneaky, but in this case, he doesn't know what to be on the lookout for, not unless Cordy has spilled the beans. Wesley doesn't think she will, though. She already feels guilty enough for leaving him alone for most of the summer.



When Wesley enters the lobby, he sees Angel standing at the front desk with Gunn, Cordy, and—amazingly enough—Fred.

He feels a little hurt by that, since he'd been trying to get Fred to emerge from her room for months, and the most he's seen of her is about half of her face through the crack in the door.

"Where have you been?" Angel asks as soon as he catches sight of Wesley.

Wesley shrugs. "Out."

"With a girl?" he questions.

Wesley glares at him. "I thought we agreed that you wouldn't do that sniffing thing."

"I can't help it," Angel protests. "It's right there."

"She's a friend," Wesley replies. "I was alone most of the summer, and I got bored here, so I went out." That has the benefit of being true, so that Angel won't have any idea that he's lying. Wesley *had* gone out, and he'd made a friend. Angel doesn't have to know that he'd mostly contacted Dawn via phone or email.

Angel frowns, and Wesley wonders if he can tell that it's Dawn's scent, because that would be bad—or at least very difficult to explain. He hopes that Angel doesn't get it into his head to look around the Hyperion for signs of life. "Just a friend?"

"Anything else would be wildly inappropriate for a variety of reasons," Wesley replies repressively.

Angel looks abashed, and Wesley knows he won't look any closer. "Right. Sorry."

“Forget it,” Wesley says. “Did you call the Council?”

“I called, but no one wanted to talk to me,” Angel replies. “I left a message to get in touch with Giles, though, and I imagine he’ll return my call eventually. We’re planning on breaking Faith out of prison tomorrow, and we’ll head down to Sunnydale immediately after that. Gunn’s crew is providing additional support.”

Wesley nods, and says, “Good luck,” as neutrally as he can.

Angel’s eyes narrow, and Wesley can feel Cordy and Gunn watching him. “You’re not going to try to argue that you should go with us?”

Wesley raises his eyebrows and crosses his arms in front of his chest. “Would you let me come?”

“Why should that matter?” Angel asks.

“Because I’m not going to waste my time arguing when I’m not going to get anywhere,” Wesley replies sharply. “I’ve tried arguing with you before, and to no effect. You wouldn’t let me go with you to Pylea, and I came very close to dying in Sunnydale. You left me here so you could go off and grieve for Buffy, and nothing I said would stop you, not even the promise you made me.”

He doesn’t yell, even though he’d like to, and he keeps his voice even, as though discussing the weather. Wesley is angry, but he knows showing it won’t help. It will just make everybody who looks at him see only a child throwing a temper tantrum.

Angel looks stricken. “Wes, you know—”

“I *don’t* know,” Wesley says forcefully, interrupting whatever explanation Angel had been about to offer. “What I *know* is that you’re going to Sunnydale without me, and that it will be years before I’m of any use to you. This summer taught me that.”

Angel is starting to get angry now. “What do you want me to do, Wes?”

“Nothing,” Wesley says wearily. “That’s just it. You can’t do anything. Good luck in Sunnydale.”

He heads for the stairs, hearing Cordy say, “Let him go, Angel. It’s been a rough summer for all of us.”

Wesley locks the door of his room, knowing that it won’t stop anybody from entering if they really want to get inside, but he figures it sends a clear signal.

The truth is that he’s *tired*. He’s tired of feeling useless, of being looked at as though he has something wrong with him. It had been bad enough before Sunnydale, but now the change is even more marked.

Dawn had come to *Wesley* for help, not Angel. She had trusted him to take care of her and Spike, and Wesley had. He’s not useless, even if his friends persist in thinking that he is.

And if he can’t be happy here, if he can’t stay here, maybe it’s time to find somewhere else to be.

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Wesley comes by late the night they’d gone to the beach, looking about done in. “I have to get back,” he whispers quickly, slipping inside her open door. “But I wanted to tell you that Angel and the others leave tomorrow afternoon. They’re going to break Faith out of prison and head directly to Sunnydale from there.”

“What are you going to do?” Dawn asks.

Wesley's smile is fleeting, the circles under his eyes dark. "I'm going to lie low, and try to act normally so he doesn't suspect you're here. If you leave through the service entrance, I don't think anyone will see you, and Cordy said she'd bring breakfast for you tomorrow."

Something has happened, she can tell from his demeanor, but Dawn can see he's in a hurry. "Let me know if you need anything," she says.

Some unnamed emotion passes over his face, and he says, "Thank you. I'll see you tomorrow sometime, after they all leave."

Cordelia does come by in the morning with a breakfast burrito, although she doesn't stay to talk long. "It's better for everybody if Angel doesn't know you're here," she says, sounding grim, and Dawn wonders again what had happened. "We're leaving around four today, by the way."

"You think we should be gone before you guys get back," Dawn says.

Cordelia's expression softens slightly. "I think you'd be welcome to stay, and we would figure things out, but—I don't see how Angel would ever accept Spike being around, and if Wesley lays down an ultimatum..."

"I thought Angel was supposed to look after him!" Dawn protests. Whatever her issues with the Scoobies might have been, however angry she is that they're dead—irrational or no—she'd known they would look after her. Them, and Spike.

Right now, she has Spike, and no one else. She doesn't care for Angel all that much after what he'd done to Buffy and their family, she doesn't know how to feel about Cordelia, and she doesn't know Gunn at all.

Staying here, without Spike, would probably be better than foster care, but not by much.

"Angel thinks that Wesley will choose him," Cordelia replies.

Dawn has gotten to know Wesley fairly well over the last few months, and she says, “He probably would have if Angel hadn’t broken his promise.”

“We’ve all done things we regret,” Cordelia says softly. “Look, I’m not saying that you have to leave, or even that you should. We could probably convince Angel to lay off until we get in touch with Giles anyway. I’m just saying—I wouldn’t be surprised if Spike met a dusty end before anyone could stop Angel.”

Dawn thinks that Spike is probably better at taking care of himself than Cordelia’s giving him credit for, but then again, he’s hurt, and still recovering, and Angel is at full strength.

Although, given what Dawn had seen of the demons in Sunnydale, he might be hurting a little by the time he gets back.

“Be careful,” Dawn advises finally, not responding to Cordelia’s warning. “It’s pretty bad down there.”

Cordelia blinks rapidly, and Dawn realizes that she’s lost friends in this, too, even if they hadn’t been close. “I didn’t get a chance to say this the other night, and I know it sounds stupid, but I’m really sorry.”

Dawn blinks back tears of her own. “Yeah. Thanks.”

Cordelia gives her a brief, hard hug, and then leaves abruptly, and Dawn retreats inside her room and shuts the door.

Spike is sitting in a shadowed corner of the room, a lit cigarette dangling from his mouth. “What are you thinking, Bit?”

“I think she might be right,” Dawn admits. “I don’t want to get Wes into trouble, and I don’t want to make him leave if he doesn’t want to. I don’t want to make him choose us over them.”

She’s lost her home and her friends, and most of her family. She won’t deprive Wesley of the same things.

“You’re a good friend, Bit,” Spike says quietly. “You’re a good person.”

Dawn swallows. “It doesn’t seem that way sometimes.”

“There are a lot of things that seem one way and are another,” Spike replies.

She sighs. “I don’t know what to do, Spike.”

“You live,” he says simply. “As best as you can for as long as you can, and I’ll keep you safe. We’ll muddle through together somehow.”

She wants to hug him. She wants the reassurance of his touch, the way Wesley had reassured her the other night when she’d been overcome by grief. And yet, she knows those things make him uncomfortable, and he doesn’t know how to initiate, or even to respond.

Instead, Dawn says, “I’m glad I have you.”

Spike’s expression softens, and he stands up in one fluid motion, following the shadows in the room to where Dawn is standing. For a moment, Dawn thinks he’ll just stand there, not saying anything, or doing anything, and then he runs a hand down her hair, cupping her shoulder briefly. “Always,” he says, and then ducks his head, as though embarrassed, and retreats into his own room.

Dawn spends the rest of the day reading, and sometimes napping. She's bored, but it's a lazy sort of feeling, without the tension of the last weeks. She's safe here, even if it's merely a brief stop along the way.

Dawn hears the quiet knock in the late afternoon, and she calls out, "Yeah, come in."

Spike is back in her room, sprawled in the chair next to an open window, smoking a cigarette, as Wesley slips inside. "What's up, short stuff?" Spike drawls.

"Angel and the others just left," Wesley says. "I don't know how long they'll be gone. It could be days, or hours, or—"

"Slow down," Dawn says. "Cordelia told me when she stopped by this morning. We have some time."

Wesley nods, and looks at Spike. "You should be completely healed by the time Angel returns."

"That your way of kicking us out?" Spike asks.

Wesley looks distracted and out of sorts, and he runs a hand through his shaggy hair. "No, of course not. It's—I don't know."

"What happened with Angel?" Dawn asks, knowing that *something* had happened, given Wesley's demeanor last night and Cordelia's words of warning this morning.

"I told him off," Wesley replies. "I just—I don't think I can stay here either. Not really."

Dawn can sense a freak out coming. "Sit down, Wes, preferably before you hyperventilate."

Wesley sits down on the edge of the bed near Dawn. “This is stupid. I’m sorry. I should just ___”

“Sit,” Spike says quietly. “Peaches would make anybody crazy.”

So often over the last few months, Dawn has felt adrift in a sea of grief, like everyone had been looking after her, or hiding things from her, and she’d had to figure things out as best she could.

But Wesley is different. He’s both younger and older than she is, strong and vulnerable, smart and kind and fragile. He had held her and stroked her hair, and now Dawn wraps an arm around his shoulders and says, “You don’t have to stay here if you don’t want to.”

Wesley closes his eyes. “I can’t *do* anything here.”

Dawn can sympathize with that statement. “Okay. So, what would you want to do if you could?”

“I’ll be older in a few years,” Wesley says, sounding a little desperate. “They’ll have to take me seriously then, right?”

Dawn feels for him. “Not necessarily. No one took me seriously in Sunnydale, or let me do anything.”

“What are you thinking, Watcher?” Spike asks, and Dawn wonders if it’s Spike’s agelessness that allows him to look past the surface, or if it had been Wesley’s actions in Sunnydale.

Then again, Spike had just expected her to figure out how to drive after watching him for a while, and she’d done it, so maybe Spike just doesn’t believe in not being able to do something that needs doing.

“I have an aunt,” Wesley says quietly. “I think I’d like to see her if I can find her. She might not—she might not understand, but I think she knew about some of it. Maybe—maybe she could help.”

Dawn glances at Spike. “I’m not leaving you,” she says. “And you know there aren’t a lot of options, not once Giles knows.”

There’s no way that Giles will allow Dawn to remain in Spike’s care, the way he’d allowed her to stay with the Scoobies, who are all dead, as far as Dawn knows. Dawn hasn’t been able to reach her aunt or her father, and she has no living grandparents. She doesn’t think it likely that Giles would take over her care, which means the foster system, and Spike is definitely better than that.

“Wes’ aunt might take exception to me,” Spike points out.

“We wouldn’t have to stay with her, just nearby,” Dawn argues. “We could find a place. You could tell everyone you’re my brother. I’ll finish high school.”

It’s kind of a bribe, because Dawn is still not sure why school is all that important given everything she’s seen and experienced. What good is math or science when her career goal is fighting demons?

“That’s assuming my aunt is even around, or that she believes me, or anything,” Wesley replies plaintively. “I didn’t want to leave.”

And Dawn *gets* that; she *gets* Wesley’s almost-tangible despair. She hadn’t wanted to leave Sunnydale either, or her house, or her friends. She hadn’t wanted to lose everyone she loved, other than Spike.

But the fact remains that they *had* lost nearly everything, and they’re rebuilding slowly.

“We should stick together,” Dawn says quietly. “Whatever happens, even if you decide to stay here, we should stick together.”

Wesley sags against her. “I agree.”

“You should both sleep,” Spike declares, stubbing out his cigarette on the windowsill and flicking the butt outside. “You need it. What’s your aunt’s name, Wes?”

Wesley blinks at him owlishly. “Huh?”

“Angel’s gone, so the computer downstairs is free,” Spike points out with exaggerated patience. “I’ll see if I can track her down.”

“You know how to use a computer?” Wesley asks, and Dawn knows how tired he must be to ask such a dumb question, but given the dark circles under his eyes, he hasn’t slept much.

Spike rolls his eyes. “I’ve learned.”

“Abigail Disick,” Wesley replies. “I think she got her Ph.D. from Columbia if that helps.”

“I thought she’d be a Wyndam or a Pryce,” Dawn objects.

Wesley manages a faint smile. “No, that was all my father. The Wyndams and Pryces joined lineages about three generations back, and hyphenated.”

“Poor sod,” Spike mutters. “That’s quite the mouthful to get saddled with.”

Wesley shrugs. “Could be worse, I suppose.”

“I’ll go see what I can dig up,” Spike says. “You two get some sleep,” and he turns off the lights as he leaves the room.

“Come on,” Dawn says, stretching out on the bed. Wesley is wearing a pair of shorts and a t-shirt, and he lies down next to her. “This isn’t weird, right?”

“We’re friends,” Wesley says firmly, although the statement is punctuated by a yawn. “It’s not weird.”

And it isn’t, really, Dawn thinks. She has zero attraction to him, not even the faintest hint of a crush, but she trusts him. Wesley is basically the strangest combination of younger and older brother *ever*, but she doesn’t mind.

She trusts Spike implicitly, and she plans on sticking with him for pretty much ever, but Wesley is human, and relates to her on a human level.

“Even if you leave, you can come back,” Dawn says quietly. “You know that, right?”

“I know,” Wesley says. “I just feel as though, if I leave, I won’t return.”

Dawn understands that feeling. “I don’t think I’ll ever go back to Sunnydale, even if I could. It would be too hard.”

“It’s not your fault,” Wesley says quietly. “I mean, I don’t know if you—never mind.”

Since Dawn has been feeling as though it was all her fault—because Buffy wouldn’t have had to sacrifice herself if it weren’t for her very existence, and if Buffy weren’t dead, the demons wouldn’t have taken over Sunnydale—she appreciates the thought.

“It is, though,” Dawn says. “Spike told me that I wasn’t evil, but bad things follow me, Wes. Maybe you shouldn’t hang out with us, because it’s probably a bad idea.”

Wesley is quiet for a long few minutes. “My father used to lock me in a closet when he was displeased,” he says. “And I would wonder what I’d done to deserve it, because it had to be something, right? I had to be bad, or not good enough, or *something* to deserve it.”

“You weren’t!” Dawn protests instinctively before she realizes where Wesley is going with his story. “You aren’t.”

“Neither are you,” he replies. “You are a girl, who has been dealt an extraordinarily bad hand, and you are making the best of it. I’m sorry to have burdened you more.”

Dawn sighs. “You haven’t. It’s nice to be the strong one. I never got the chance before.” Wesley is silent, and she says, “This completely sucks, and I wish we were still emailing back and forth, but you’re a good guy, Wes. I’m glad I could count on you.”

“Always,” Wesley replies, his voice hoarse. “I will always have your back.”

And that’s two people that Dawn can count on, she thinks, and maybe that’s pretty damn good, all things considered.

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As tired as he is, Wesley doesn’t sleep much that night, turning the various possibilities over in his head as he lies next to Dawn. Up until this point, he’d stayed at the Hyperion for lack of a better option. Because Angel had made a promise, and Wesley had believed him—until he hadn’t.

He’s not sure going to his aunt will be much better. She will very likely treat him like a child, and it will be difficult to explain why he isn’t. So far, Angel and the others can still be reminded that Wesley isn’t what he appears to be.

But he's not happy, and that's what keeps him awake. If Wesley stays here, he will continue to be unhappy; if he leaves, he might find a situation that suits him better.

Wesley hadn't planned on striking out on his own, but with others? It might be worth it. He's angry enough to leave now, but is that the right decision? Should he try to stick it out?

And yet his instinct tells him that if he is going to leave, he must go while Angel and the others are in Sunnydale, and leave no trace behind, other than a note saying he's left of his own volition, and not to worry, with maybe a phone number in case of emergencies, one that can't be traced.

They'll still worry, but it's not as though they *need* Wesley, not anymore. Not like Dawn needs him. And if Faith stays, Wesley is very sure he doesn't want to be here, not while he's vulnerable like this.

That decides the matter, at least for Wesley, and he goes to sleep easily after that.

He and Dawn wake up late the following morning, next to each other but not touching, which he's grateful for, since anything else would have been awkward. When Wesley crawls out of bed, Dawn stirs. "Wes?"

"Do you want breakfast?" Wesley asks.

"Is there breakfast?"

"If there isn't, I can make some, or find some," Wesley offers. "I should probably get more blood for Spike anyway. We'll have to take some with us."

"Us?" Dawn asks.

Wesley meets her eyes. "I told you that I would always have your back, and I can't very well do that from here if you leave, can I?"

A smile breaks out over Dawn's face. "We're going to find your aunt?"

Wesley nods. "We're going to find my aunt. After that, I don't know what will happen, but I figure we can make things up as we go along."

"You've got stones, Watcher," Spike says, startling Wesley. He turns to see Spike standing in the doorway, an unlit cigarette dangling from his mouth. "Turns out that there are a couple of Abigail Disicks in the country, but only one who went to Columbia to get her degree in folklore. She teaches at a school in Seattle, Washington."

Wesley blinks, surprised. "You found her?"

"Wasn't that hard," Spike replies. "Like I said, I've learned a few things over the years, and I hear it's overcast in Seattle a lot."

Wesley feels a glimmer of hope. "Then you wouldn't mind leaving soon?"

"You're in an awful hurry," Spike observes, heading over to the still-open window.

Wesley doesn't know how to put how he's feeling into words. "The others assume that I'll stay because I have nowhere else to go, and I'm dependent upon them. I don't know how to show them I'm not, other than to leave." He pauses and adds, "And if I try to explain it to them face to face, they might convince me to stay."

"That, and if Peaches caught wind of your plan, he might stake me and ask questions later," Spike observes.

Wesley shrugs. "You said it, I didn't."

He doesn't want to believe that of Angel, but he still remembers Angel shutting Darla and Drusilla in a room with a bunch of lawyers, of Angel coming by their offices and taking a book, resulting in Wesley tearing his stitches.

He remembers Angel leaving, even after he'd promised to stay.

Spike has only promised Wesley a ride, but he's taken care of Dawn, and that's good enough. Oddly enough, Wesley trusts that Spike will make no promises he's won't carry out, and that's something.

"We'll get you sorted, short stuff," Spike says. "Even if that just means hitting the road again."

Wesley remembers Dawn's question from what seems like a lifetime ago, asking him if he'd ever think about ditching L.A. and hitting the road. At the time, he hadn't even considered the possibility, and now that's exactly what he plans to do.

"Okay," Wesley agrees. "Dawn?"

"It's better than the alternatives," she says, trying for a smile and not quite managing it. "We'll be like the three Musketeers, right?"

And Wesley smiles. "All for one?"

"And one for all," Spike and Dawn finish in unison.

He thinks that maybe in this crazy, fucked up world he lives in, that's more than he had reason to hope for.

## End Notes

I have been wanting to write this story for a long time, where Spike and Dawn take off after the events of early S6, when everyone is dead, and wind up in L.A. As this series progressed, I realized it was the perfect opportunity to write that fic, completely with its original title, although it turned out far differently than I'd expected, and yes, there will definitely be more.

And before anybody asks, no, there will be no miraculous resurrections in this story. Sorry. Again.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!