

The More Things Change

An ANGEL fan fiction by Jason Vey

Rated TV-14 for mature themes and suggested sex

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters. Joss/Mutant Enemy does. This is an exploration for amusement and because of my love for the characters and world Joss has created. And yes, this particular one may be a bit unorthodox. It may even tick some people off, but hey, this is my playground for a few pages and dammit, I wanted to play! Please don't sue.

So I lay here in bed, gazing up at the ceiling and thinking about nothing, and I have an epiphany. Strange how they come to you when you're really not thinking or pondering any of the great mysteries of life.

She lays next to me, breathing deeply, content. I roll over on my side to watch her sleep for awhile. Reach out, touch her smooth back. No scars; Slayers never get scars. I stroke her soft, brunette hair and she sighs, content. I marvel at those strange quirks fate likes to throw in our path. How many times have we saved one another, but remained distant, somehow, until there was no longer anything in our way, no one left to disapprove—well, no one who matters, anyway.

The pendant around her neck, the Gem of Dolunay in a sterling silver setting, keeps her from aging, but also imparts her with the same allergy to sunlight that I possess. A small sacrifice, she said, for the chance to be together forever. I went through Hell—quite literally—to get that bauble for her, but damn it all, I deserved it for once. I've sacrificed and fought and rarely asked for anything in return. Thank goodness the Powers seemed to look at it the same way.

I stroke her back, lean over, and kiss her gently on the neck. She smiles in her sleep. Her warmth infuses my own cold being; it's been awhile since I've fed. I get up from bed and pad across the floor of my reclaimed room. Strange that it's been so many years since I reclaimed the Hyperion, so many years since the fall of the Los Angeles branch of Wolfram and Hart, and yet it still feels like yesterday.

I remember holding Gunn's hand after that final, apocalyptic battle. I remember watching the life fade from him on the floor of the Hyperion. I remember how important it was that he called me "friend" in those final minutes. And I remember the palpable aura of sorrow and rage coming from Illyria as she stood sentinel over us.

Illyria. She's still around, a surprisingly staunch ally in the continuing fight. She's probably downstairs, sitting in the garden, staring up at the moon. I sometimes wonder why Illyria bothered to stay. Perhaps it's Fred's memories and emotions, which it took years but she's finally integrated into her own person. She looks like Fred, now, and I don't mind so much. It's a reminder of who I fight for and why I continue to fight. And still...she is Illyria, not Fred. She still has those idiosyncratic ways that are a constant reminder of her alien origins. The way she cocks her head, the way she studies everything intently. Her cold, analytical gaze and mode of speech.

At least she's not blue anymore.

I reach the fridge and pull out an old wine bottle, which of course isn't full of wine. I pour a mug of thick, viscous liquid and put it in the microwave for a minute. When I go back to bed I want to be warm for the one I never thought I'd see this way.

I sit at the table and think about the past fifteen years, about everything that's happened since we brought down Wolfram and Hart. The costs were high, the sacrifices great, but the rewards were arguably greater. Spike, for example, got his Shanshu. Last I heard he was touring the country for his recent book of poetry and doing fairly well. He has a band as well, and they're not bad if you're into that hard rock/power punk stuff that the kids listen to these days. Every so often he'll take out a vampire or two for old time's sake, but he knows he doesn't have the strength he used to. Knows he doesn't heal as fast or completely. Overall he's out there enjoying all that life has to offer, with my blessing. Last time I saw him was three years ago. We talked about Buffy a little, I made a joke that I noticed a few gray hairs, and he smiled at me. I think he's still uncomfortable with the idea that he got the reward and I didn't. I never told him that I signed it away. Never told him that I got my own reward out of the deal, though I'm fairly certain he knows. At very least, he knows that she and I are together, and he doesn't seem overly concerned about it.

I finish my blood and make my way back to bed. She's still asleep. That's good. I like to watch her sleep. I like the slow, rhythmic rise of her breasts as she breathes. I vaguely remember what breathing felt like, from that one day over twenty years ago with Buffy...that day nobody but me remembers. Still, she doesn't mind that I don't breathe. Doesn't mind that my heart doesn't beat or quicken at her touch. Once upon a time, I minded...but no more. I look on her and I'm content. And I'm happy.

Perfectly happy.

The Powers have what you could call a very quirky sense of humor. I look at her and am just wrapped in joy, and I understand the epiphany. I understand my own reward out of this whole thing. Because I was willing to sacrifice my shot at humanity, because I was willing to forego a reward and fight for the sake of the fight, that's when I really gained redemption. The Powers have allowed me to be happy. The soul remains, but the curse is gone. I wonder what the Kalderash Roma would think of that.

Why you? I think. *Why this, why now?* I never, ever thought that it would be her. I always thought that Buffy would be the one in the end. The one I was destined to be with. Once, I thought I could maybe find happiness with Cordy, but she's moved on. And Buffy is dead.

* * *

It was, ironically, at Buffy's funeral five years ago that it all fell into place. I was at the casket, weeping like a child, and I could feel her eyes on me. She was concerned, but didn't know how to approach me, didn't know how to offer solace or take it. She always was like that, a mask of tough over a sea of emotion inside. Finally I left the place after shaking Giles' hand one last time, and giving him a long embrace, the two men who loved her most, the father and the beloved. Xander and Willow stood together across the room and gave a nod; they were glad I came, despite any past grievances between us.

I went to the Hollywood sign and sat there, staring out at the lights of Los Angeles, and a hand fell on my shoulder. It was her.

"Hey, Angel," she said.

"Hi."

"You holding up okay?"

“I don’t know. I always knew this day would come, but somehow, down inside, I guess I hoped it’d be me who went first.”

“I can see that. Tough when the love of your life dies, I guess. I wouldn’t know. Never let anyone in enough because I didn’t want to be where you are now.”

“What about Robin?”

“Robin? That lasted about six months. The whole Watcher-Slayer relationship isn’t conducive to romance. Then he went down in battle. Died good; I’ve gotta give him props for that.”

There was a beat before she continued. “Funny. I didn’t think it’d hit me so hard, her dying. She and I were never the best of friends. She couldn’t ever really trust me. Don’t blame her for that. But still...it hurts.”

We sat in silence for a good half hour after that. Sometime during that period I came to realize she was holding my hand. Finally I looked up at her and managed to whisper, “What’s happening here?”

Then we were kissing. It was like some strange, surreal dream where nothing was the way it was supposed to be, and yet everything was right. I pulled away, confused, and just looked at her. I’d never noticed before just how beautiful she was.

“Buffy,” I managed to choke out.

“Shh,” she said. “Angel...I think that Buffy wouldn’t want you to keep mourning her. I think she’d want you to move on. I think, if you ever become human again, that she’d want you to be happy.”

“I can’t become human. I gave it up to take down Wolfram and Hart.”

“You gave it up?”

“Signed it away. In blood.”

“Hell of a sacrifice.”

“I did what needed to be done. I always do what needs to be done.”

“Then maybe it’s time, just for a little while, for you to take some solace for yourself.”

“What are you saying?”

“I’m saying I want you to take me home. I’m saying you’re not the only one who needs this. Who needs to feel something...anything.”

Dazed, wondering if this was the right thing to do or something horribly wrong and disrespectful...I took her home and for one night we allowed ourselves to forget about everything, to lose ourselves in one another, and I’ll never forget what she said to me just before she fell asleep.

“You’ve made a career out of saving me. Maybe it’s time I save you for a change.”

* * *

And so it is. After five years she’s still here, and my home has become our home. Giles was outraged over the whole thing; she was fired from the council and came to work with me. She gives me a reason to keep fighting, and I give her the same.

I start when a hand falls on my shoulder. Quickly reach for a blanket to cover my nakedness and spin.

I’m speechless for a moment. There in front of me, glowing with an inner light and peace unlike anything I’ve ever seen, is the last person I ever expected to see again.

“Buffy?”

She smiles and reaches out to touch my cheek. I start to cry, then realize who it is that’s sharing my bed, and try to stammer a half-assed explanation.

“It’s okay,” she says, amusement brightening her eyes. “You can be happy now. It’s allowed. And I want you to be.”

“I feel like I’ve betrayed us, somehow.”

“No. You and she are meant for one another. Probably why I was always so jealous of her in the past. I could never give you what you deserved, Angel. Our love was passion. It was the stuff of great poetry, like Spike used to say. It was a flame that burned hot and bright and eventually would’ve consumed both of us. Move on, Angel. Be happy, and live a life of joy and peace. It’s what I want for you.”

“You’re sure?”

“Positive.”

Then she’s gone. A dream? An hallucination? Or a real apparition? Maybe for my own piece of mind I’ll have someone check for spiritual residue tomorrow, but in the end it doesn’t really matter. She’s right. When you’re immortal, the people you love grow old and die, or die young fighting alongside you. You have to go on and live, and find someone new.

Except I don’t. Not anymore. So long as she wears that gem, she’ll always be by my side. And somehow I know that when we’ve been here ten thousand years, I’ll still love her with a quiet, content, real love that’s there even when the fires of passion die down into smoldering embers.

She stirs, rolls over. Her eyes flutter once, twice, then open up. She smiles up at me and takes my hand. I lean down and kiss her softly.

“Mmm,” she says. “What time is it?”

“Late. I couldn’t sleep.”

“You just fed. I can taste it on you.”

“Just heated some from the fridge. I wanted to be warm for a little while.”

“Then come back under the covers and warm me up. No sense in wasting it.”

I crawl back under the covers and wrap my arms around her. She looks at me, really looks into me with those deep brown eyes, and I see fear and joy and excitement all wrapped up together. And she says the words I’ve been waiting five years (and probably longer) to hear.

“I love you, Angel.”

In those words I find what I’ve been struggling for all these years. Happiness. Pure, simple, perfect happiness. It’s about damned time. Only one thing left to say.

“I love you too, Faith.”

—FINIS—

LYRICS:

My lyrics were “Amazing Grace.” Alas, I lost the e-mail with the assignments and so I can’t remember who sent them. Who’er it was, thanks! The line I used was “When we’ve been here ten thousand years.”

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.

’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
’Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,
His Word my hope secures;
He will my Shield and Portion be,
As long as life endures.

Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun forbear to shine;
But God, Who called me here below,
Shall be forever mine.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we'd first begun.