Spike & Buffy Meta

by womanaction

Summary

Compilation of meta posts originally posted to Tumblr 2013-2015 on the subject of Spike & Buffy.
OOC In Something Blue

I always thought this was so odd and out of place in 4x9 “Something Blue”:

SPIKE: They’re strong, and I can’t fight. If they get in, I don’t know if I can protect you.
BUFFY: You think you have to protect me?
SPIKE: Oh, not with the Girl-Power bit!

While it’s not OOC for Spike to say some nasty and misogynistic things, he has never before (and never since iirc) expressed a belief that Buffy needs protecting. That was Riley’s, and, to a lesser extent, Angel’s, wheelhouse. (I think Angel had gotten over this by 7x21 “End of Days” - he shows confidence in Buffy’s abilities in the fight with Caleb and simply enjoys watching her fight).

I assumed that this, like the equally out of place “mother” scene (hello, we’ve already seen Spike’s fondness for Joyce quite clearly), was meant to be a sort of nod to fighting “typical” sitcom couples, but it just never seemed right. Buffy immediately reprimands Spike for his remark, and yet this is a pivotal episode for Buffy/Riley. While Riley’s misplaced beliefs about Buffy needing to be protected do interfere with their connection, she rarely (at the beginning of the relationship) corrects him or obviously resists his desire to protect her. In fact, she continues to coddle Riley and act like he can overpower her (as in their sparring scene). What gives?

I almost wonder if some of this is due to Willow’s spell in a less obvious way. While some parts of the engagement correspond to real personality traits of Spike and Buffy (Spike’s overt physicality, their constant bickering, Buffy’s repressed romantic side and desire for her friends to accept her choices, the conflict between their essential vampire/Slayer natures), others seem like direct stereotypes that barely echo the characters we know. Doylian explanation - the writers thought it was funny. Watsonian theory - perhaps Willow infused some of her own conceptions about marriage into the spell. As we’ve seen before in the Buffyverse, spells and curses often end when the source is destroyed (e.g. destroying Anyanka’s source of power in 3x9 “The Wish”). This implies a constant flow of energy is required to keep a spell going. The curse, therefore, would be linked to Willow’s energies, and her subconscious prompting could have created the “sitcom” side to the enchanted!B/S interactions.
I used to think I gave up on Buffy and Spike having a healthy relationship in S6 after “Wrecked”. “Smashed” was, in a way, everything I thought the consummation of their relationship should be - violent, but beautifully so, with all of their vulnerabilities out on display. I loved how they couldn’t hide anything from each other, how they played so well in an antagonist relationship because they always knew just what to say to hurt the other. When Buffy was emotionally sore after Parker breaking her heart, Spike used every verbal weapon in his arsenal to rip her to shreds, and when he essentially lost his identity of 100 years when he was “defanged” she took every opportunity to belittle him for it. So while “Smashed” was not gentle, or tender, or any of those things I often hope for in a scene between one of my OTPs, I think it was the right place for their characters.

But “Wrecked”, while still true to the characters, showed them at their worst. It was the worst possible morning-after, because while their vulnerabilities remained clear, they tried to hide them and hurt each other. Buffy tried to deny Spike’s personhood, while he claimed that he had regained his power. Their relationship continues to go downhill through “Dead Things”, a low from which I often feel on rewatches it’s impossible to recover from. “Dead Things” showcases their essential differences, the jaded disdain Spike has acquired through his soullessness and a century of practice going up against Buffy’s idealism and black-and-white morality. He tries to convince her that the death of a human can be simply erased, that by covering the evidence he can diminish the impact. Then, unable to deal with the darkness inside her, she takes it out on him in a scene reminiscent of the one between Faith and Buffy in Season 4’s “Who Are You”. And this is all after scenes of sordid sexuality expressing the darkest and most twisted aspects of their relationship. Rather than Buffy leading Spike to the light, as in much of Season 5, he is now dragging her down with him. She is unable to resist him because of the shock of returning to hellish Earth, and he is unable to find something better when his moral compass depends solely on her.

However, after a recent rewatch, I’ve changed my tune. I think “Older and Far Away”, the episode immediately following “Dead Things”, would represent my sort of last-ditch hope for a healthy (pre-breakup) Spike/Buffy relationship in Season 6’s bleak landscape. In this episode, despite the obvious tension left from the events of “Dead Things”, the audience begins to see more of the easy camaraderie that characterized Spike and Buffy’s interactions earlier in the season. They play cards together and flirt and make fun of each other. When he acts seductively toward her, it seems more playful and flirtatious than demonic, and she reciprocates lightly. Buffy tells Tara she isn’t ready to “come out” about Spike, through which she implies that she is coming to terms with their relationship. Rather than a dark secret she plans to hide forever, they now seem to be a relationship-in-progress. It’s not clear what’s happened between the last interaction we saw between them in “Dead Things” (her leaving him bloodied in an alley) and this acknowledgment of some kind of relationship to Tara in “OaFA”, but the knowledge that Buffy did not come back wrong has obviously shaped their relationship. She also refuses his advances while her friends are around (as opposed to the rather disturbing balcony sex scene in “Dead Things”), although she does converse and even flirt with him in their presence. Between their scenes in this episode and the almost romantic kiss at the beginning of “As You Were”, things seemed to be looking up for Buffy and Spike.

Whether they could truly have a healthy, romantic/sexual relationship while he is soulless (and, especially, while she is also depressed) has been debated by the fandom, and my feelings on the issue are complicated, considering the complications that arise later in the season. Still, I think it’s worth considering that their relationship, while often damaging to both parties, was able to repair itself somewhat after the events of “Dead Things”. It’s possible that if the whole eggs debacle had been
avoided, things between them could have been at least a little less destructive.
A Monster or A Man

I had an abrupt revelation when rewatching Spike’s famous speech in “The Gift”. Sure, I’ve seen it or heard it dozens, maybe hundreds of times. It’s somewhere in my top 10 favorite Spike/Buffy moments for sure. Everyone knows it. But this time, I heard something different in his words.

That moment is not universally loved. I’ve heard fans complain that the writers were being lazy, giving Spike & Buffy a meaningful moment based on nothing so they could speed up their development artificially. Others have faulted Spike himself for crediting Buffy with something she never did.

The contention is never with “I know you’ll never love me” - Spike, at least, believes this at this moment in time, and it’s echoed two season later when Buffy confesses her love and he doesn’t believe her. Nor is it with his acknowledgement, “I know that I’m a monster.” Spike has always been portrayed as a fairly self-aware vamp - he knows what he’s doing is wrong, he just doesn’t care. He’s having fun. No, those who find a problem in the scene point out, “But you treat me like a man. And that’s…” as flawed.

Does Buffy treat him like a man? We’re not considering season 6, here, but simply seasons 2-5. She distrusts him. She insults him. She laughs off his declaration of love. She attacks him even when he can’t hurt her back. This is not a discussion of whether such actions are warranted, simply whether they match up with this merciful picture Spike seems to painting of her.

We could brush it off, attribute it to rose-colored glasses. But Spike hated her before he loved her (even if he was attracted to her from the start), so that doesn’t seem right. He, more than anybody, knows her flaws. No, I think something deeper is going on here.

Buffy treats him like a man precisely because she expects more of him. In “Lovers Walk” (3x8), she is angry with him for breaking his word that he would not return. His word? Buffy, since when do you trust the word of a non-Angel vampire? She treats him like a man because she does not coddle or pity him after the chip. Instead of ending their enmity because of his inability to fight back, she mostly transfers the physical aggression to verbal.

She treats him like a man by expecting him to share his information about Slayers in 5x7 “Fool For Love”. Sure, she goes straight for the attack, but then she wines and dines him. She knows she needs him, needs the information that he has, and she respects that. And in battle, she may not trust him as much as he’d like, but she doesn’t try to protect him despite his value. She believes he can take care of that on his own.

She’s shocked when he confesses his love (the first time) in 5x14 “Crush”. Later, she seems to expect him to know it’s wrong, and he admits that he does. She finally uninvites him from her house - which she didn’t do even after he made himself welcome back in S3 - and she seems to be shocked that he would do that.

Buffy gets mad about the bot. Notice everyone else’s reactions - Willow seems fascinated, Giles a little disgusted, Dawn amused, and Xander even pities Spike. But Buffy seems shocked and outraged, and surprised that no one else feels that way. They take it for granted that he would be capable of that - she doesn’t. She holds him personally accountable for it in a concentrated rage that we don’t see attributed to other vampire’s wrongs (except, of course, Angel’s). And although she didn’t think him capable of withstanding Glory’s torture, when he does he gets another little step up
on his pedestal. Suddenly, he’s in her inner circle - she trusts him to get a vehicle, to lead them, to take care of Dawn more and more. Perhaps most tellingly, she takes him at his word when he says he would die for her (in 5x19 “Tough Love” and again in 5x22 “The Gift”).

Nobody has ever expected much from William/Spike. His mother loved him, but seemed to accept him and not push him to be more ambitious. Drusilla made him mostly as a plaything. Angelus saw little merit in him at first, and although he eventually exploited Spike’s potential, he also demeaned him and insulted him at every turn. Darla seemed to have little use for him at all. Harmony just wanted a cuddle buddy. But here is Buffy (and Dawn, and Joyce, because they all fill this role in Spike’s life), and she is disappointed in him when he fails or betrays them. She expects more of him, which in turn leads him to strive to be better. She treats him like a man.
It just hit me why Buffy acts so unimpressed when Spike offers to stake Dru for her. It’s not that she doesn’t realize how important his sire is to him.

Angel staked Darla for her, and he still left. At that time, it was a sign that she could trust him, but that was all the way back in the first season, before Angelus surfaced. Therefore, why would Spike staking Dru prove that he really loves her? He is unconsciously following in Angel’s footsteps, and this makes Buffy even more uncomfortable with the situation.

Even if she could accept Spike’s feelings, even if she could believe that Spike had changed, it wouldn’t matter. He could still, like Angel, change again. Staking his sire, working with her, hanging out with her friends - those are the exact things that Angel did. And he still turned into a vengeful, sadistic murderer.

I’ve never really seen that sire parallel touched on in “Crush” readings, and I didn’t consider the aspect until now.

Huh.

(Also, I would really enjoy doing a whole Freudian reading of this idea of staking the “mother/lover” sire in favor of the new lover.)

EDIT 7.25: This post is making the rounds again so I thought I should clarify. I am not remarking on why Buffy didn’t fall into Spike’s arms - there are obviously plenty of sound reasons for that. However, I had always thought it was odd that she was completely unsurprised by Spike’s threat to stake Dru (she wasn’t suspicious or shocked). I think Angel/Spike parallels reveal reasons for Buffy’s unwillingness to trust Spike even when they are confidants or lovers.
They Just Fit

I didn’t write them to come together, they just fit. - Joss Whedon, on Buffy and Spike’s songs in “Once More With Feeling” (OMWF Commentary, BtVS Season 6 DVD set)

This moment on the commentary struck me especially strongly because it describes not only the relationship between Buffy and Spike in “OMWF”, but also their relationship in the entire show (taken from a meta-analysis standpoint). Some TV couples are made for each other, planned from the start. Destined. Whatever. Buffy and Spike most certainly were not; they found each other on their own.

Heck, Spike wasn’t even written to stay on the show. According to multiple sources (including the Season 2 DVD special features), Spike was supposed to have been killed off after a few episodes to make way for the threat of Angelus. Five seasons later, he finally kicks the bucket, only to reappear on the next season of Angel. That’s a little off-topic, though - my point is merely that Buffy and Spike weren’t “meant to be” by any stretch of the phrase.

The only thing Buffy and Spike were destined to be was enemies. Buffy, as the Slayer, had a sacred duty to dust him, and Spike, as the slayer of Slayers, had a sacrilegious duty to drain her dry. Their first shaky, reluctant alliances in seasons 2 and 4 seem to be mostly based on the idea that one of them should kill the other. After the finales of season 5 and 7, respectively, this is a darkly ironic concept, since they both go out in heroic sacrifices (…and come back).

Buffy and Spike weren’t supposed to have a grand, sweeping orchestral scores romance. That was reserved for Buffy and Angel. Even Spike and Drusilla, twisted as their romance was, had more rights to a happy ending than Buffy and Spike. When Giles is forced to witness their spell-induced smooching in 4x9 “Something Blue”, he only copes with reality by assuring himself that there is more scotch. Buffy and Spike are an impossibility.

And yet, they happen. Over and over again, they are drawn to each other, and even before Spike falls in love with Buffy they both exhibit a strange unwillingness to let the other one die. Even in 3x8 “Lovers Walk”, after their truce has clearly expired, Buffy lets Spike go without a second thought. We do not see this kind of behavior even with her human enemies - Buffy follows Faith all the way to LA in AtS 1x18 “Five By Five”, and Faith is only a deranged Slayer, not a vampire who has spent over a century murdering the innocent. Why? This is never adequately explained. After Spike is chipped in 4x7 “The Initiative”, Buffy’s mercy makes sense, but unrestrained, Spike supposedly was one of the most notorious vampires ever.

They weren’t made to be together. They were, in fact, made to be complete opposites - but they fit. We see this as early as 2x11 “What’s My Line? Part 2”.

SPIKE: I’d rather be fighting you [instead of Kendra], anyway.

BUFFY: Mutual.

Similarly, when they first work together, they become dependent on each other very quickly. In 2x22 “Becoming Part 2”, Buffy assures Xander that she won’t be going in alone. Despite her initial misgivings, Spike convinces her very quickly that he is serious about their alliance.

Even after Spike returns and attempts to kill Buffy in 4x3 “The Harsh Light of Day”, they fall back
almost immediately into a sort of camaraderie. In 4x8 “Pangs”, he goes to the Scoobies when he has nowhere else to turn, and, while she hardly accepts him with open arms, her gentle smack on the top of his head seems more playful than belligerent. Buffy expresses disgust at the thought of her magically-induced love for Spike in 4x9 “Something Blue”, but she is still prepared to protect him from the Initiative until the halfway point of the season.

BUFFY: Why are you always around when I’m miserable?
SPIKE: Cause that’s when you’re alone, I reckon. I’m not much for crowds myself these days.
BUFFY: Me neither.
SPIKE: That works out nicely then.

(6x4, “Flooded”)

They fit. Somehow, some way, these character find their way to each other and make something happen. Whether it is teamwork, romance, hatred, playful banter, or raw sexuality, Buffy and Spike are always drawn to each other - not by any superficial devices of the writers, but seemingly of their own accord.

For the record, I think that’s kind of beautiful.
Buffy Loved Spike

“Buffy was in love with Spike the moment their hands clasped.” - Joss Whedon

One thing that I confront fairly frequently in my exploration of everything Spuffy on the Internet is the idea that Spike was right when he told Buffy she didn’t love him (“Chosen”). At first glance, this makes sense. Spike has always been able to see through what Buffy says to what she really means. Remember “Lovers Walk”? “I can’t fool myself - or Spike, for some reason”. This is one reason he becomes her confidant in early Season 6 - he understands her without explanation.

I see a problem with this frame of logic, however. Why would Buffy tell him she loved him if she really didn’t? The obvious explanation would be to ease his suffering, to give him the “crumb” he was looking for all the way back in “Crush”. That would also explain why she would only tell him at the last minute, when things were dire. Still, in my eyes, I cannot reconcile this with Buffy’s character.

Why? Because she never told Riley she loved him.

If she was capable of telling Spike she loved him even if she didn’t, why not Riley? Was she really willing to sacrifice more to ease the momentary pain of a vampire who tried to kill her on multiple occasions and attempted to rape her only the year before than to keep her relationship with a “good guy” who admitted he cheated on her because he didn’t believe she loved him?

Over and over again, Buffy is careful not to use the word “love” about Riley. He tells Xander in “The Replacement” that he believes Buffy doesn’t love him, and even when he leaves in “Into the Woods” she never says it, even to herself. The generally accepted explanation for this is that she could never love anyone the way she loved Angel, and, of course, she has seen the kind of damage love can do.

In Season 7, she behaves much in the same way toward Spike. When questioned about her feelings, she tells Dawn that she “feels for Spike” (“Him”), and admits to Angel that Spike is “in [her] heart” (“Chosen”). Yet in “First Date”, she asks, “Why does everyone in this house think I’m still in love with Spike?” (emphasis added). Whoa. So she is willing to admit a past-tense love of Spike, just not present.

When Spike confesses his feelings to her in “Touched”, she does not reciprocate the “I love you”. She does not use the phrase “I love you” in a romantic sense from the time Angel leaves until “Chosen”. Why would she use it only then, if she didn’t earnestly feel love toward Spike, at least in that moment? Buffy’s mental block about those three little words were a major catalyst for the disintegration of the Buffy/Riley relationship, so it seems unlikely that she would suddenly become cavalier about them now. She would only use those words if she genuinely meant them, and she does not take her feelings lightly. She meant it: she loved Spike.
How You Try: Spike, Buffy, and Persistence

“...I love what you are, what you do, how you try...”

- Spike, "Touched" (7x20)

I like to joke that Spike has a lot of moments deserving of the “you tried” star. You can tell when such a moment occurs, because I tend to say “oh, honey” just as he does the stupid thing. And then, because I’m a tremendous dork, I’ll write the star in the air.

It’s no secret that I love Spike’s speech to Buffy in “Touched”. Most people seem to, including those who don’t ship Spuffy or even watch the show (a gender-neutral version credited to “Joss Whedon” floated by my dash the other day and I squealed a bit). I have always thought that the way he tells her he loves her because of how she tries is beautiful, because at a time when everybody else in her life is expecting perfection, he thinks her efforts are worth loving.

But, all jokes and Comic Sans aside, Spike has always tried very obviously. From his first introduction, he’s been trying (and, for the most part, failing). He tried to kill Buffy for years; he tried to remove the chip; he tried to be good without a soul.

SPIKE: I love you.

BUFFY: No, you don’t.

SPIKE: You think I haven’t tried not to?

BUFFY: Try harder.
Try as he might, however, some obstacles are too great even for Spike to surpass. He has the tendency to set his jaw and try the same strategy again - but bigger, and better! - instead of changing tactics. Instead of seriously plotting against Buffy in early season 2, he takes advantage of the plots of others in order to physically confront her (as in “Halloween”, 2x6), although he never wins. Spike’s in it for the thrill as much as for the kill, and it’s not much fun if it doesn’t end in a huge fight to the death.

His response to failure is always: try harder! And plans? Well, he’s a bit too impatient for that. This is the vampire who couldn’t wait until Saturday to fight Buffy in his very first appearance (“School Hard”, 2x3).

SPIKE: I had a plan.

ANGEL: You, a plan?

SPIKE: A good plan, smart plan, carefully laid out. But I got bored. All that watching, waiting. My legs started to cramp.

(AtS “In the Dark”, 1x3)

When he falls for Buffy, his response is much the same. Be good! Be as much good, as often as possible. Kill demons, preferably when Buffy is watching. Help Buffy out, take care of her family, smile, flirt, piss off Riley as much as possible. Of course, in “Crush” (5x14) he does kidnap her, but I suspect that’s only due to Drusilla’s interference.

RILEY: Do you actually think you’ve got a shot with her?

SPIKE: No, I don’t. Fellow’s got to do what he can, though. Got to try.

(“Into the Woods”, 5x10)

Spike never really explains why he fell for Buffy in the first place; truth be told, I doubt he really knows. His attraction to her was evident from the start, and as he grew to know her further that attraction developed into more. But I think that this “trying” nature is part of what drew him to her from the start.

Buffy is stubborn. She does what has to be done, and if she doesn’t succeed, she sharpens her stake and heads back into the fray. She refuses to compromise, as when Giles suggests the awful possibility of killing Dawn.

GILES: If the ritual starts, then every living creature in this and every other dimension imaginable will suffer unbearable torment and death…including Dawn.
BUFFY: Then the last thing she’ll see is me protecting her.
GILES: You’ll fail. You’ll die. We all will.
BUFFY: I’m sorry.

(“The Gift”, 5x22)

When Buffy commits, she commits. This is especially evident when it comes to her romantic relationships. She doesn’t want it to just fall apart - and she is always the one to be left.
BUFFY: Don’t what? Don’t love you? I’m sorry. You know what? I didn’t know that I got a choice in that. I’m never gonna change. I can’t change. I want my life to be with you.

(“The Prom”, 3x20)

What else do you want from me, Riley? I’ve given you everything that I have, I’ve given you my heart, my body and soul!
- Buffy (“Into The Woods”, 5x10)

Again and again, even when things look impossible, Buffy tries. And I think that Spike recognized that kindred effort in her. While it’s certainly not his only reason to love her, I believe that it did inspire him to “become a better man”, as Buffy says in “Never Leave Me” (7x9). Because, in the end, she also loves how he tries.

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