Persuasion

by Sadhyl

Summary

Buffy is introduced to the pleasures of literature

Notes


There are a lot of inspirations for this, but two big ones: The works of Miss Austen, and the soundgasm. I was too impatient to wait for my beta on this, so I can’t thank mydeira (but I do anyway), but mouseincanada pinch hit and told me to publish it. NOW. I also especially want to thank the lovely women over at Austen.com for making their great resource available, and for hosting a wonderful community of wonderful people. I’ve devolved to lurker mode there, but still couldn’t be as happy without them in the world.

Spike hid in the corner by the fridge, mug in hand, when Xander toed the back door open, letting himself and all the late morning sunlight into the kitchen. He staggered in and dropped the four bags of groceries he carried onto the island and turned to scowl at Spike. “You think you could be a little less help?”

“Hello, daylight. So unless you want your Twinkies and ho-hos to go up in vampire dust, I think I’m off pack mule duty.” He nodded briefly as Buffy came in, adding two more bags to the pile.

Xander scowled. “I don’t know why she didn’t put a stake in you ages ago.”
“Xander,” she warned, beginning to put away the groceries.

Spike shrugged. “Guess she found other uses for me.” He lifted the mug to his mouth.

Xander stepped towards him. “I should do it right now.”

He looked at the brunette appraisingly. His tongue flicked out, and very slowly he licked the remnants of blood from his lips. He smacked them together with a light pop and cocked his eyebrows once. “Maybe you’ve got better uses for me, too.”

A direct hit on Xander’s “run away” button.

He spluttered and stepped back, putting a hand between himself and the vampire. In a panic, he looked to Buffy, who just shrugged, then back to Spike, who raised his eyebrows again, leering. He blushed deep scarlet and, with a growl of surrender, disappeared back out the door.

Spike set his mug down. “Well, he’s no fun. He left just when it was getting interesting.” He began helping her put the groceries away.

“You two are like a couple of little kids,” she groused good naturedly, opening the fridge. “Why do you pick on him so much?”

“Because he told me it would rain when I wished it fair,” Spike sniped back.

She looked at him like he had grown a second head.

“What? Don’t tell me you don’t know the reference?” When she continued staring at him blankly, he threw up his hands. “Bloody American education system! Don’t even read the classics!” He glared at her. “Tell me, do you read anything that isn’t on Oprah’s bloody bookshelf?”

“Shows what you know. I don’t even have time to read those.”

The vinegar seems to go out of him. “It’s a quote from Jane Austen. Sense and Sensibility.”

“You’ve read Jane Austen?”

He shrugged. “When I was alive, yeah. She was all the rage. And a good read, too!”

Buffy continued loading produce into the fridge.

“I could read it to you, if you’d like,” he suggested hesitantly.

She was shocked and more than a little touched at the suggestion. “You’d do that?”

“What? It’s a shame for you not to get to know good stories cuz you’re too busy saving the world. Ought to be reminded what you’re saving it for. Feel less like a chore if someone else is doing the reading. You can close your eyes and enjoy.”

“I think I might like that.”

“Oh.” He looked up at her, and she saw the brief flicker of pleasure in his eyes. “Alright then.”

That night on patrol they stopped off at the Paper Trail and picked up a copy of Persuasion. She wasn’t familiar at all with Austen’s works, so she let Spike choose. He selected a hardcover version,
small but nicely bound.

When they got home, she curled up on the couch and he sat in the armchair and began reading. “Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch-hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage; there he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one. . . “

The second night she fell asleep in the middle of the reading. He didn’t wake her.

The next day she picked up her own copy, a paperback to keep in her purse. During her lunch break and lulls between students, she reread the chapter from the night before. He was pleasantly surprised when she told him to start with Chapter 3 instead of re-reading the last.

At Chapter 5, Dawn started joining them.

After that every night there were a few more girls. Andrew also started sitting in early on. As new girls joined the household, they were brought up to speed on the tale of Anne Elliot so they too could join in the circle. Various copies of the book floated around the house for those who joined later to catch up. No one ever read ahead. And no one touched Spike’s copy on the mantle.

But when he read, it was only for Buffy. He paid no attention to the crowd that gathered every night after patrol. Buffy would settle on the couch, and he would take up the little volume and sit in the chair and begin reading as though they were the only two people in the world. His voice lost the harsh accent of his regular speech as he read, drifting into the tonier speech of his educated youth. He would pitch his voice higher for the women, slightly lower for the men, never putting on voices, just regulating his words to indicate changes in character. His voice remained soft but clear until she almost forgot that he was actually reading to her and that the words weren’t just appearing in her head on their own. He never missed a night, no matter how intense the day had been, and she found that even though she wasn’t sleeping much anymore, this quiet hour helped her gather her energies.

The night Giles and Robin tried to kill him, he brought the book to her door.

She let him in, and he sat in her rocker, gently stroking the volume between his hands. She didn’t know what he wanted, what to do, so she sat on the edge of the bed and waited.

“I used to read these to my mother,” he finally said.

She didn’t know what to say.

“She had read them when she was a girl, and loved them,” he continued. “When she started getting sick, she was so weak she couldn’t hold the books for herself, so I read them to her. I had forgotten until tonight.”

“She always liked Pride and Prejudice best. She loved how Darcy and Elizabeth fought and hated each other until they loved each other, but then had to struggle to get together. But I liked Persuasion best. To see such a frail, timid creature made strong by the power of love appealed to me then . . .”

“Spike,” she said softly.

He looked up at her. “Yeah, pet?”

“Will you read to me?”
“Of course.” He started to open the book.

“Come lay down with me?”

He looked surprised, but came over to the bed next to her. She lay down, and he spooned up behind her, putting an arm around her to hold the book in front of them, resting his head on his elbow to be able to see over her shoulder.

She closed her eyes, letting his words invade her gently. Anne was at the inn her sister’s family was staying at, and Wentworth was visiting. Buffy could feel the intensity of Anne’s feelings, the pain of her loss as she spoke to Benwick about the faithlessness of men. And then they were gone. Buffy’s heart raced as Wentworth returned. Would he say something? Would Anne? But no, he was gone again, with a meaningful look and a gesture toward the desk.

Spike’s voice changed as he began reading the letter Wentworth had left for Anne. Buffy heard layers of meaning in the words, heard his own pain and hope put forth in another’s words.

I can listen no longer in silence. I must speak to you by such means as are within my reach. You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope. Tell me not that I am too late, that such precious feelings are gone for ever. I offer myself to you again with a heart even more your own, than when you almost broke it eight years and a half ago. Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman, that his love has an earlier death. I have loved none but you. Unjust I may have been, weak and resentful I have been, but never inconstant. You alone have brought me to Bath. For you alone I think and plan.--Have you not seen this? Can you fail to have understood my wishes?--I had not waited even these ten days, could I have read your feelings, as I think you must have penetrated mine. I can hardly write. I am every instant hearing something which overpowers me. You sink your voice, but I can distinguish the tones of that voice, when they would be lost on others.--Too good, too excellent creature! You do us justice, indeed. You do believe that there is true attachment and constancy among men. Believe it to be most fervent, most undeviating, in

F. W.

I must go, uncertain of my fate; but I shall return hither, or follow your party, as soon as possible. A word, a look, will be enough to decide whether I enter your father’s house this evening, or never.

His mouth so close to her ear, she couldn’t help but hear his voice tremble at the intensity of the plea. Buffy’s breathing became quicker as Anne raced to catch him, to share her own feelings. She almost cried as the two finally opened their hearts to each other.

And then the chapter was over.

He started to close the book. “Spike? Will you keep reading? I need a happy ending.”

He eased back down, opening the pages again. “Be glad to. Could use a happy ending myself.”

Giles was relieved that the training session was almost over.

Looking out across the five rows of young women arrayed across the Hyperion ballroom, he was doubly relieved that he didn’t have to actually spar with any of them. He could still remember all the bruises and aches he’d gotten training Buffy, and he wasn’t as young as he had been then. As it was,
he was exhausted just from instructing them all.

He clapped his hands to get their attention. “Alright, ladies, I believe we’re done for now.” The organized lines broke before he finished speaking. “Go get cleaned up before dinner,” he shouted over the sudden girlish chatter.

He sank into a nearby chair, taking off his glasses to rub his eyes tiredly. When he looked up, he was surprised to see Vi and several of the other girls standing hesitantly in front of him. Vi held a paperback in her hands, well read and heavily dog eared. He looked up into their earnest faces. “Can I help you ladies?”

The looked at each other a bit nervously. Finally Vi, apparently the spokesperson of the group, addressed him. “Mr. Giles, we were wondering if . . .” She turned back, drawing support from her comrades. “Back in Sunnydale, Spike was reading to us.” She handed him the volume in her hand. He was surprised to see the heavily worn book was an Austen classic. “He stopped after the night . . .” she dropped her eyes, censoring herself, “after he was deprogrammed. And now that he’s gone . . . well, it just wouldn’t be the same if one of us read it, you know? So we wondered if you would finish it for us?”

He was thoughtful, thumbing through the bent pages. Only the last twenty or so remained pristine. The chapters remaining to be read.

He smiled slightly. He’d never imagined being a substitute for Spike. But then, he also never would have imagined Spike reading classics of British literature to a ragtag group of teenage girls. He knew why they were asking him. It wasn’t out of respect or anything so deep. It was because he and Spike shared an accent, at least to their unsophisticated ear. They were used to hearing the words of the story spoken in the dialect they came from. It somehow made the archaic phrasing easier to understand. He had seen it before.

But there was a deeper meaning for him, a sense of obligation he wasn’t really ready to acknowledge. But here was a way to ameliorate some small part of that obligation.

“Of course, I would be glad to. Why don’t we gather in the lounge after dinner?”

The girls broke into a wreath of smiles and scampered away, Vi pausing momentarily to mouth a quick “Thank you, Mr. Giles.”

He opened the book and began reading from beginning.

Buffy couldn’t find anyone. She knew Angel and his team were out on a case, but the hotel should still have been teeming with slayers and Scoobies. But there was not a soul to be found.

She started to pass by the lounge when she heard Giles’ measured tones through the slightly open door. She paused and peered in.

Everyone was there, gathered around the wing chair Giles was sitting in. She recognized the words he spoke as he read aloud to the group collected there. Spike’s copy had disappeared with the rest of Sunnydale, still sitting on the mantle in her mother’s house. But the story remained. It moved her that the girls had wanted to hear the rest of it after all that had happened to them.

“Who can be in doubt of what followed?” Giles’ even baritone rang softly in the quiet room. “When any two young people take it into their heads to marry, they are pretty sure by perseverance to carry their point, be they ever so poor, or ever so imprudent, or ever so little likely to be necessary to each
other's ultimate comfort. This may be bad morality to conclude with, but I believe it to be truth; and if such parties succeed, how should a Captain Wentworth and an Anne Elliot, with the advantage of maturity of mind, consciousness of right, and one independent fortune between them, fail of bearing down every opposition?"

She touched the new paperback resting in her own jacket pocket. A copy of *Pride and Prejudice*, the first few chapters slightly bent from reading.

It had been his mother’s favorite.

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