

Disclaimer: It all belongs to Joss and Mutant Enemy, not me. \*big sigh\*

### Letter to Me

Curled up in the corner of the sofa, Buffy pressed a button on the remote control, and the television screen went black.

For a long while, she didn't move, sitting in the darkened room, just staring at nothing until her eyes burned. She snuggled the blanket a little tighter around her shoulders, trying to warm away the chill that seemed to have permanently settled inside her.

It didn't work.

It had been the voices that had caught her attention, and had drawn her almost against her will to the door of the television room. They weren't the same, not by a long way, but they were enough to stir up memories. *Not that it takes much*, she acknowledged wryly.

But to let those memories play in company felt like it would have cheapened them somehow, because they were all she had. So she had thrown the others out, then closed her eyes and just *listened*.

As soon as the show was over, she opened her eyes and turned the TV off; there was no sense trying to pretend anymore, not when the voices weren't there to make it that much easier.

Just then, the idea that had been lurking at the edge of her mind, and had been since she realized just what she was watching, gave itself up, so stark and beautiful in its simplicity that she just had to smile. It would *work*.

*Now I just have to convince the others...* That was enough to chase away the smile. They would not be easy to sway, that was for sure. Buffy stood, leaving the blanket in a huddle on the sofa.

Before she could reach to open the door, it opened of itself, and a tousled blond head poked in. "Uh, Buffy?" Andrew's voice was hesitant. "Is it all right if we come back in now? I... um, I mean, *we*... we just want to finish watching this episode..."

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Willow stared at her, eyes wide. "Buffy... what are you *thinking*?"

She huffed and crossed her arms, sitting back in her chair with a frown. "Will..."

"Do you know what this could do?" Willow leaned forward, as if to lend more impact to her words. "This is really dangerous stuff! I mean, we can't be playing..."

“So not playing, here, Will,” she replied, refusing to give an inch. “I am totally-serious Buffy.”

“I know, and that’s what’s worrying me,” Willow muttered. “Buffy…”

“Tell me you wouldn’t,” Buffy challenged, before her friend could complete her thought. “Tell me that if you knew of a way to do this without destroying *everything*, you wouldn’t want to.”

Pain filled Willow’s features, mixed heavily with longing and shame. “I can’t say that,” she whispered, “and you know it. But…”

“You know what?” she interrupted, trying to keep her tone even. “I’m going to start again. *Hey, Will,*” she said, forcing herself to smile brightly. “*Remember after Sunnydale, when you said you’d do a spell for me?*”

With a resigned sigh, Willow replied, “*Sure, Buffy. Have you decided what you want?*” Her voice was sadly lacking in enthusiasm.

Nodding, Buffy pointed to the envelope that still lay halfway across the table between them. “*I’d like you to help me send this letter...*”

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Buffy let herself in through the front door. There were homey sounds from the kitchen, and something that smelled very much like her mother’s chicken parmesan wafted into the foyer. She sniffed appreciatively and followed her nose.

Her mother was just closing the oven door. “Hi, honey,” she said with a warm smile. “Dinner will be ready in just a few minutes.”

“Smells yummy,” Buffy replied, sliding onto one of the stools at the island. “Are we expecting company?” Then a terrible thought suddenly struck her. “You don’t have a *date*, do you?” she asked, her tone filled with mock horror that wasn’t really so mock.

Joyce laughed. “No, not tonight, but maybe soon,” she teased. “I just thought we’d have a nice dinner to celebrate the end of your first school year here in Sunnydale.”

For a second, she couldn’t say anything, her mind whirling around the fact that just a few days ago, she had died. *Okay*, she thought, watching as her mother retrieved some lettuce and other salad fixings from the refrigerator, *that feels weird, like we’re actually celebrating my death. Well, I guess a resurrection is something to celebrate. Three cheers for Xander and CPR.* “Thanks, Mom,” she managed at last.

“And I thought we could discuss your father’s invitation.” Joyce glanced up at her, eyes soft, then returned her attention to the carrots.

“Okay,” Buffy replied, forcing a smile. *Not sure I really want to go*, she thought, staring down at her fingers, tracing circles on the island counter. *I mean, not after the Buffy Summers, This Is Your Worst Nightmare show a few weeks back. But it might be nice to get out of Sunnydale, avoid the next apocalypse for as long as I can...*

“Oh, Buffy,” her mother said, and it brought her out of her thoughts with a start. “This came for you today.” She handed Buffy an envelope, addressed to her in her own handwriting, but at their old address in Los Angeles.

Confused, she studied it carefully, then turned puzzled eyes to her mother. “What’s this?”

“A time capsule, apparently.”

“How do you know?”

Joyce looked up from tossing the salad. “It was inside another envelope, addressed to me. There was a note from one of your old teachers, about a time capsule that you’d done at the beginning of seventh grade.” She frowned slightly. “Or, well, I think that’s what it said. For a teacher, her writing wasn’t very readable...”

“Thanks, Mom,” Buffy replied, distracted by her mail. *I don’t remember any time capsules or anything from seventh grade*, she thought, wandering up the stairs to her room. *Of course, that doesn’t really mean that much... Seventh grade was entirely forgettable.*

“On the other hand,” she continued aloud, sitting down on her bed, “this could be something from someone on the not-so-daylight-friendly side of my life, and is more than likely to blow up in my face.” She examined the envelope closely, pressing it, crushing it, trying to do anything she could think of to make it do whatever evil thing it was supposed to do.

When nothing happened, eventually she was forced to consider that it might actually *be* what the note had told her mother it was – a time capsule. If it was, it was *much* less interesting than dinner. She shrugged and set it aside.

Later that evening, she picked up the letter once again and decided to read it before going out on patrol. She opened the crumpled envelope to pull out the equally wrinkled pages, then settled on her bed, wondering what her seventh-grade self had to say.

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*Dear Buffy,*

I know a lot of people would probably start something like this with "Dear Me," instead, but that just seems weird, you know? When I look at where I am and where you are, it really seems like we're two different people, so it's just easier to think about it that way. Sorry, but by the time I'm done, you'll understand. I hope.

If we've timed this right, you should be getting this the summer before you start your junior year of high school. I really hope we do get the timing right; there are so many ways this could just blow up in our faces. I think I'm just going to go on the assumption that it works out, because the other options? Not so much with the nice.

So, how are things there in 1997? I mean, aside from the obvious and usual weirdness, and the gi-normous chip you've got on your shoulder because the Master killed you...

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Buffy sat bolt upright. "Oh, my God," she whispered, staring at the words. "How could you *possibly* have known that?" The paper rustled as her fingers tightened, and she started reading faster, wanting to get to the bottom of whatever this was.

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And, oh, yeah, this isn't from the seventh grade, like it said in Mom's note. I'm writing this to you from about 10 years in the future. Had to get your attention somehow, and prove that what I'm going to say is true and that I'm you, or you're me, or you will become me... Damn, writing to your past self from the future is hard!

You might as well get started on freaking out – that way at least it'll all be out of your system.

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"Freaking out?" Buffy demanded of the page. "Are you *kidding*? Do you really expect me..." Realizing she was practically yelling at a piece of paper, she flushed, but lowered

her voice and went on. “To believe that you’re from the future? Okay, I think someone’s playing a very bad joke on me.”

She couldn’t quite put aside the letter, though. That *was* her handwriting; the *Buffy* was exactly the same way she signed her name, and she always looped her Ts that way, and... *And I can’t stop now. This future-me – if it really is! – must have written for a reason. Maybe she’ll tell me some good stuff about school...*

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*So... if I was 16 year old me, and some future-me sent a letter back in time, what would I want to know about?*

*Huh – you know, I was kind of joking when I said that it felt like we were two different people, but now, thinking about it, it really does feel that way. I’m sure there were lots of things that I’d want to know about from a future-me, but I can’t think of a single one... Except for knowing how long I lived, maybe? So hey! You live at least another 10 years from where you are.*

*Kind of.*

*Maybe I should have asked Dawn... her memories seem to be clearer than mine sometimes. Oh, well.*

*If you want to know what will happen to you... I don’t know. I mean, really. You getting this when I don’t remember getting any letter... it’s going to change things. Knowing what I’m going to tell you might change the way you react to certain situations... and I’m not stupid enough to think that everything that happened to me will happen to you without question, not after this.*

*So really, it’d be a lot of information that might turn out to be completely useless, and haven’t we already wasted enough brain cells on useless information? Take, for example, Algebra?*

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Buffy found herself smiling, in spite of being irritated that this future-Buffy was going to be all tight-fisted with what she knew. *See*, she thought, with just a hint of triumph, *I told Willow that Algebra is a subject a Slayer will never have a use for...*

*So maybe Mom won't be too upset that I didn't exactly get an A... Then she sighed. Like she's going to believe in something some incarnation of me says in a letter that's supposed to be from the future. I'm not sure I believe it.*

Which, the more she read, was really a blatant lie.

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*Anyway, the point of this wasn't to let you know about all the things – some good, some bad – that happen (or may not happen now, being all realistic and stuff) to you between when you are and when I am. This is to let you know about something that you will regret if you don't do it right. I didn't get it all wrong, but I got it wrong in enough ways that I might as well have. I'm going to trust you to get it right.*

*Okay, scratch that – I should be honest. I pretty much blew the whole thing. Faith would have had a better shot at getting it right than I did at that point, and yeah, you don't know her, but that's really saying something.*

*Of course, it all has to do with a guy.*

*I am telling you right now – this guy will love you. He will love you so much that... you know what? Words can't even describe it.*

*And if you let yourself, you will love him the same way. But you have to let yourself. That's going to be the hard part. If everything that happened to me still happens to you, too... I don't know. A lot of bad things happened, and they all left a mark, and I couldn't let myself love because of them. Not just him, but anyone.*

*Let me tell you – not being able to love? Being too scared to let yourself love? That is a very sad state.*

*Okay, that makes a whole lot of the sense that's not, doesn't it? It's not going to get much better. Sorry.*

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*For a second, Buffy stared at the words. “Not able to love? What does that mean?” she asked softly. “Not even this guy that... It sounds so lonely. What happened to you?” Then, considering the warnings her future self had already given, she shook her head. “Maybe you're right. I don't want to know.”*

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*Now for the difficult-truth part of this letter. This guy? He's a vampire. And – let me just stress this – it's not Angel.*

*I know Angel's got this whole darkly brooding mysterious tortured martyr thing going on, which from experience I can say is very attractive. He's also definitely easy on the eyes. But here's the thing – Angel said he loved me, and maybe he did, but that's not what came through in his actions. He's rarely come out and helped, has he? Just makes with the cryptic warnings and disappears again.*

*That never changes much. After a while, yes, he would help, but then he left. Instead of staying and trying to find a way to make things work between us, he left. Is that the mark of someone who loves you? That when things get difficult, they leave?*

*What do you think?*

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*Angel... leaves? Buffy read the words three times before they finally registered. I just barely decided that I like him – like, like like him – and now Back-to-the-Future me is already giving me the warning that he's going to ditch me?*

*But then she found herself agreeing with this crazy future self. She's... I'm right. That isn't what someone who loves you would do. Not if they really love you...*

Knowing there wasn't going to be any future – heh – in what she had started to feel for Angel hurt, but probably not as much as Angel's leaving had done to time-travel Buffy, and she started to get an inkling of what might have made her be afraid to love.

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Anyway, enough about Angel. I'm sure you're asking what's the point of risking the whole space-time continuum with this letter (and if you're not, maybe you should be – Will says this is a very dangerous proposition) if I'm not going to say what I should be saying.

All right, what I should be saying is this: Giles and the Council don't know everything about vampires. And even if they're right most of the time, there's always, always going to be a vampire that proves them wrong.

Giles says that vampires are just animals, that all they think about is blood and death and killing and they're just evil. And yes, that really does describe nearly every vamp you take out on patrol. But it doesn't describe him.

What I'm going to tell you is important, and I want you to remember it. What a person was like before he was turned informs the vampire he becomes. Underneath everything, that person is still there, just with all his inhibitions removed. If he was a selfish, lying womanizer before he was turned, he'll still be a selfish lying womanizer, only now he'll be extra evil and have the strength of a demon to back it up.

If he was warm and caring and loving... you see where I'm going? That is all still there. That love and caring is buried beneath the vampire, but it manages to sneak out in some ways. He was with her for more than 100 years. He didn't leave her even when she was weak and sick after what happened in Prague. He loved her.



And I couldn't let myself see what was right in front of me. Whenever he told me that he loved me, I threw it back in his face that he was a vampire, that he was soulless, that he couldn't love because of that. Angel and Giles taught me that prejudice, and I couldn't let it go.

I don't think I have to say this, but I'm going to anyway – I hope you can.

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She frowned, and glanced back at the previous pages of the letter, all crumpled from her earlier treatment. *Bad things? Bad things that involve Angel... and possibly Giles? What is she talking about? Teaching prejudice?*

Then she shivered. *If the thing with Angel is what made her treat this guy who loved her like that...*

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Maybe it sounds easy, maybe it doesn't, but this is going to make it a whole lot harder – when he first gets to town, he's not going to love you. Okay, that's not entirely true. He'll love you to be dead. It takes time and exposure and some really painful things to happen before he'll fall in love with you, but once he does, he's yours, body, heart and soulless being. And see, that means you can be his, too.

Giving your heart away is a scary thing. (Unless it's just incredibly icky, you know, in the non-metaphorical way...) Accepting someone else's in return and knowing that now you have the responsibility of keeping it safe... that you could hurt them so badly even when you don't want to... That's just about the scariest thing ever. Even more than an apocalypse, believe it or not. Especially when... okay, not getting into that now. Hopefully you'll never know.

But before all that happens, before he even thinks about you in the don't-want-your-blood way, you'll have to fight him. A lot. And he'll say hurtful things, and he'll still be in love with her for a long time. There's always the possibility that by sending this, I'll alter my – your – our? – actions enough to change

everything, and maybe she won't leave him. As much as it hurts to admit it, that's all right, too. He was happy with her for a long time.

And while I so wish he would be with me, I just want him to be happy. He deserves that.

(Okay, happy with me, first. If not with me, then just happy. I'm only human after all.)

It'll be hard – believe me, I know it will be hard – but don't hate him. Don't do what I did and mock him and belittle him and use him.

If you think I regret everything I did... you don't know how right you are.

But whatever you do, remember what I said – underneath the attitude and bravado and all the vampire evil, there is a man, who loves and feels everything deeply and passionately. He can be hurt more easily by your words than he can by your fists and that's really saying something.

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The letter rattled in her hand, and Buffy realized she was gripping it so tightly that it was starting to tear. Slowly, she relaxed, laying it on the bed in front of her. “God,” she whispered, staring at the words, dark and accusing on the paper. “What kind of a bitch am I going to turn into?”

Carefully, she touched the letter once more, her finger lightly underlining the words. “This guy,” she said, “this vampire... he loved that other chick, that *vampire* chick for a century, and he loves you, all without a soul? How amazing is that?”

The way future-Buffy was painting this vamp... it made her wonder how anyone would want to hurt him.

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Because this is what happened. I used him, used his love – the love I said over and over that I didn't think he was capable of! – to make me feel better and I gave

him nothing. And when I was finally ready to admit that I loved him, that I'd fallen in love with him somewhere along the way, he didn't believe me. Then he died. He died saving the world.

I wasn't ready for that. I never thought he wouldn't make it. I always believed he'd be right there... and then he wasn't anymore. It was hard. It's still hard, even all this time later. I miss him so much...

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"He *died*?" she gasped, covering her mouth with one hand. "You told him... and he didn't... Oh, God, what did you *do* to him?"

Then she remembered just who this letter was from, and why it was written, and despite the capacity for denial she *knew* she had, her conscience forced her to be honest. "What did *I* do to him?"

Sniffing a little, worried about what the future might bring in a way she'd never thought about before, she said, "No wonder you sent this."

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And yeah, I really do think risking the entire space-time continuum for him is worth it. Because... because if I – you – we tell him and he believes this time? He might live this time. And that... that is totally worth it. He's not perfect, and even if he loves you, he'll still screw up, sometimes really big. But I'm – you're – we're not perfect either. He knows that, and he still loves me. You.

Even if you do all the things I've asked you not to, and everything still plays out the way I remember it... I'm begging you to remember this. If you go to a pyramid to find out something about a mystical and mysterious weapon, and there's a funky old lady telling you about it and she gets killed by an evil preacher, and Angel shows up, please, don't kiss Angel. Even though you don't know it, he is there watching your back. I've stayed up a lot of nights thinking about it, and I really believe that was it, the last thing on a whole train of things that kept him from believing me. If I hadn't... Well, I guess you know. And if you don't, you really haven't been paying attention.

*Now, look how long this is. I really hope you stuck with me this far. And even if this doesn't change anything, and you don't get to have a future with him... at least I tried.*

*Love,  
Buffy*

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An instant earlier, Buffy had dropped the letter she'd written into the vortex of Willow's spell. She watched as it twirled down, kind of like water getting sucked down a drain. There was a wind tossing her hair as the spell swirled around them.

As soon as the paper had passed through, a wave of time, invisible, untouchable, swept over them both, and the vortex blinked out of existence.

The ends of Buffy's hair fluttered in the dying breeze as she looked up at Willow, questions in her eyes that she was almost afraid to ask. She saw the same questions reflected in Willow's pinched face.

Buffy forced her throat to work, and swallowed the huge lump caught there. "Did... did it work?" she finally managed, her voice a hoarse whisper.

Willow shook her head. "I don't know," she replied, and slumped a little in her weariness, staring down into the empty earthenware bowl that had been the focus of the spell.

Buffy sighed heavily, her shoulders sagging, and a sadness settled over her. It was familiar, years old, but at the same time, it still felt so deep and painful that she had to blink away tears. "Thanks, Will," she choked out, grasping at a tiny thread of gratitude. "Thanks for trying." Then her knees stopped holding her upright, and she sank to the floor, her vision blurred by tears beyond her control.

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Buffy stared at the pages of her own script spread out over her bed, and felt the heartbreak her older self had more than hinted at. "I want that," she murmured, touching the tip of one finger to an obvious tearstain on the last page. "I want..."

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April 29, 2009