

A Question of Faith: Responsibility, Murder and Redemption in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

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***Buffy the Vampire Slayer* — An Introduction**

Buffy the Vampire Slayer was originally a movie, penned by young screenwriter Joss Whedon, about a bubbly blond high school student given the powers to fight the forces of darkness. The movie was mediocre in pretty much every way, getting unspectacular reviews and faring only adequately at the box office. It was released and quickly forgotten in 1992. But Whedon always felt that the story had been butchered by the Hollywood system, and longed for another chance to tell the story he had originally wanted to tell. That chance came along in 1997, when he was approached by the fledgling WB network to do a mid-season replacement show. Whedon jumped at the chance to adapt *Buffy* to the television format. He put together twelve original episodes, the show attracted a sizable audience, and it was renewed. *Buffy* soon took off, attracting critical praise and a rabid fan base. The show would continue for six more full seasons, producing 144 total episodes. A top Hollywood screenwriter and former sitcom writer, Whedon put the show's emphasis on writing. *Buffy* quickly gained a reputation as being one of the best written on television, and the show began to develop its trademark witty back-and-forth, pop-culture reference laced banter between the characters. *Buffy* also was a novelty in that it intentionally flaunted categorization — it was a mish-mash of horror, teen melodrama, comedy, fantasy, romance, action and soap opera. The show was also one of the first to utilize the Internet as a way for fans to communicate with each other, and became famous for “posting parties” — as soon as a new episode was over, fans would

Chrestomathy: Annual Review of Undergraduate Research at the College of Charleston

Volume 3, 2004: pp. 205-228

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get on bulletin boards and post thoughts, comments, and criticisms to each other, and would often discuss and dissect that night's show for hours. According to Whedon, the way the fans embraced the show was no accident:

I designed the show to create that strong reaction. I designed *Buffy* to be an icon, to be an emotional experience, to be loved in a way that other shows can't be loved. Because it's about adolescence, which is the most important thing people go through in their development, becoming an adult. And it mythologizes it in such a way, such a romantic way — it basically says, 'Everybody who made it through adolescence is a hero.' And I think that's very personal, that people get something from that that's very real. I wanted people to embrace it in a way that exists beyond, 'Oh, that was a wonderful show about lawyers, let's have dinner.' (Whedon, 2001)

The show, in its original conception, was to be an allegory for the high school experience. Buffy Summers appears to be a normal teenager, but is in fact the Slayer, the chosen one of her generation given superhuman powers in order to fight the forces of evil, especially vampires. When she arrives in idyllic Sunnydale at the beginning of her sophomore year, she is anxious to move away from her Slayer identity and live the normal life of a teenager. However, trouble soon arrives in the form of vampires and her new Watcher, Giles (Watchers train and direct Slayers). Buffy soon befriends some other students, Willow, Xander and Cordelia, and the group begins working together. As it turns out, Sunnydale lies squarely on top of the Hellmouth—a “center of mystical convergence” that attracts all types of demons and fiends. This plot device provides the show with seven seasons worth of evil for Buffy to fight. The basic premise was to use Buffy's extraordinary circumstances to parallel the ordinary torment of adolescence. No one's high school is literally on top of the mouth of Hell, but tellingly, it does not require a tremendous stretch of the imagination to imagine it is. Likewise, the jocks and bullies in one's high school were not actually vampires and demons, but one can posit

that they would not have acted much differently if they had been. Examples like this go on and on, but the basic gist of the show, at least in the high school years (the first three seasons), was that of the hellish adolescent experience made literal. It seems to be for this reason that the show had such extreme emotional resonance among adolescents, although it was relatable for anyone who managed to survive high school.

The show was also groundbreaking stylistically. The episode “Hush” (1999) was, except for a few minutes at the beginning and the end, completely devoid of dialogue. “Restless” (2000) took place entirely in the characters’ dreams. “The Body” (2001), dealing with the death of Buffy’s mother, featured several scenes where the camera would run for minutes on end, with no cuts and no edits. “Once More, With Feeling” (2001) was an entire episode in which the story was told in a series of Broadway-style musical numbers. The show also dealt with subjects like teen sex, lesbianism and death with a brutal honesty rarely seen in television. The show garnered numerous Emmy nominations and critical praise for breaking new ground. The show also inspired a spin-off show, *Angel*, which ran for five seasons and garnered much critical praise as well.

The show’s fan support is perhaps rivaled only by *Star Trek* in terms of devotion. *Buffy* fans regularly hold conventions around the world to listen to and meet the cast and crew of the show. When *Buffy* was released on DVD, the show outsold many shows that garnered much higher ratings. The show has also appealed to the intellectual crowd. There have been several Buffy conferences held in the United Kingdom, and the first American conference was held in May 2004 at Middle Tennessee State University. There is an online journal, *Slayage*, devoted to academic articles related to the show, and there have been numerous books of essays and academic articles concerning the show. Some observers have dubbed it the heir apparent to *Star Trek* (Lichtenberg, 2003, 122), predicting that its fan devotion will last through the decades and be picked up by fans of the next generation.

Violence in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

As its title suggests, there is a lot of violence on the show. After all, the show’s titular character is a girl whose gift and duty is to kill

evil creatures. Therefore, *Buffy* has featured hundreds of monsters being killed. The show does something unique to clearly differentiate between a “good” death (killing a vampire) and the tragic death of a human. Whenever a vampire is killed, he or she simply turns to dust, effectively vanishing. This is a useful plot device, as otherwise Buffy and friends would have to spend a large portion of their time in gravedigging and body disposal. But it is even more important thematically. Having vampires basically just disappear after they’re killed makes the killing clean and uncomplicated, essentially consequence-free in a way that having to look at and deal with the body would not. Whedon has acknowledged this, saying, “It shows that they’re monsters; I didn’t really want to have a high school girl killing *people* every week” (Whedon quoted in Wilcox, 2002, 12). Thus, the viewer never feels a great deal of gravity about the slaying of a vampire. They are evil beings, they are killed, they turn to dust, and the show moves on to the next scene.

But the show has dealt with violent death on a more human level. Perhaps the show’s best and most thorough exploration into the causes and consequences of a violent killing is the story arc of Faith, the rogue Slayer who accidentally killed a man and turned bad. The story of Faith’s descent and redemption is worth exploring, particularly for what it has to say about the concept of murder. As legal scholar William MacNeil has noted, *Buffy* is not a legal show in any conventional sense. The characters are not in any legal professions or avocations, and the law is seldom involved with the show, and even then only marginally. But MacNeil argues that *Buffy* is worth an exploration by legal scholars on some issues, because despite its non-legal nature, he points out that the show is “intensively legalist in its issues” (MacNeil, 2003, 2422). *Buffy* addresses moral and ethical questions that are directly relevant to the law on many issues. Nowhere is this more evident than in the character of Faith. The writers used this character and this story to delve into very serious questions involving responsibility, power, accountability, and redemption. Faith’s story tells a great deal about what can lead a person to take a life, what can happen to a person afterwards, and what can bring a person back to humanity.

Faith: Recipe for Disaster

First of all, it needs to be briefly explained as to how there could be two slayers. There is only one Slayer alive at a time, and a new Slayer is called only when the previous one dies. Buffy was drowned by a vampire in the first season finale. She was quickly revived by Xander, but she had been clinically dead for several seconds. Thus, in the second season, another slayer, Kendra, showed up. Kendra was a foil to Buffy in that she was completely devoted to her duty as Slayer and did not believe in having any sort of life apart from being the Slayer. Kendra was killed at the end of the second season, and Faith was called to take her place.

The viewer never finds out much about Faith's background. She is from a tough neighborhood in Boston, was raised by an alcoholic single mother, and dropped out of high school. Her Watcher was killed by the vampire Kaquistos, whom she fled — bringing her to Sunnydale. The viewer first sees Faith dancing seductively at a club with a vampire before taking him out back to stake him (“Faith, Hope, and Trick,” 1998). This is to become a dangerous pattern — Faith sees being a slayer not as a duty, but as a pleasure. In Faith's first episode, Buffy warns her, “Maybe you enjoy it a little too much. The job is to slay vampires” (“Faith, Hope, and Trick,” 1998). Buffy and Faith meet, and while there is some tension, each is intrigued by the prospect of working with another slayer. Giles is appointed as Faith's interim Watcher, and Faith stays in Sunnydale and begins to work with the group. However, since she doesn't attend high school with the others, she has a tough time fitting in to the group. She also lives in a seedy hotel on the bad side of town, physically isolating her from the rest of the group's upper-middle class digs. Buffy becomes worried that Faith is becoming too isolated, and tries to spend more time with Faith. But Faith remains largely isolated, and her personality is unchanged. She still slays not to fulfill her duty or to protect lives, but because she has fun doing it. Faith also does not attempt to pursue any meaningful relationships with anyone, especially men, preferring a series of casual physical relationships.

In the middle of the third season, most of these issues come to a breaking point. Buffy begins to bristle under their new Watcher Wesley's strict orders. Buffy begins to question his commands, and

Faith tries to goad Buffy into her way of thinking:

Faith: You're actually going to take orders from him?

Buffy: That's the job. What else can we do?

Faith: Whatever we want. We're Slayers, girlfriend. The Chosen Two. Why should we let him take all the fun out of it?

Buffy: That would be tragic. Taking the fun out of slaying, stabbing, beheading...

Faith: Oh yeah, like you don't dig it.

Buffy: I don't.

Faith: You're a liar. I've seen you. Tell me staking a vamp doesn't get you little bit juiced. Come on, say it. (Silence.)

Slaying is what we're built for. If you're not enjoying it, you're doing something wrong. ("Bad Girls," 1999)

Later on, Faith opens a school window and convinces Buffy to skip out in the middle of a chemistry test, then talks Buffy into attacking a nest of sleeping vampires, and they rush headlong into a dangerous battle. They survive, and go out dancing and partying, which is very out of the ordinary for Buffy. When they find out that the demon Balthazar is in Sunnydale, they know they must fight him. Buffy wants to go back to Giles, Wesley, and the rest of the group, do research on Balthazar's weaknesses, and come up with a plan. But Faith convinces her that they should directly attack Balthazar immediately. They have no weapons, but Faith convinces Buffy to break into a local sporting goods store and steal some knives and bows. Buffy, of course, is hesitant about this, but Faith tries to convince her that, "The life of a Slayer is very simple: Want. Take. Have" ("Bad Girls," 1999). But Buffy's flirtation with this philosophy comes to an abrupt halt when the police arrive. Buffy immediately surrenders to them and Faith reluctantly does the same. While being taken to the station Faith convinces Buffy to help her kick the cruiser's cage forward onto the policemen so they can escape. After they escape, Buffy runs home, while Faith, unbeknownst to Buffy, goes back to the sporting goods store to grab the weapons. They reunite the following evening to attack Balthazar, and tragedy is on the horizon.

While *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has garnered a reputation for being a

hip and youth-oriented show, much of the show's underlying morality could have been lifted directly from Max Weber's *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. The show canonizes Buffy in no small part because of her responsibility, sense of duty and willingness to sacrifice herself, physically, intellectually and emotionally, for the benefit of others. One observer has gone so far as to call *Buffy* a "prime time passion play" (McDonald, 2000, 63). The other "good" characters on the show exhibit similar characteristics: Xander, Giles and Willow all devote their lives, foregoing personal opportunities, to helping Buffy in her fight against evil. While the show is often very, very funny, there is no mistaking that whatever dilemma the group is currently dealing with is not to be taken lightly. The show is also unique in the way evil is fought. Despite her superpowers, Buffy does not respond immediately to the bad guys. When Sunnydale is threatened, the group gathers in the school library or the magic shop and does research. As the Watcher, Giles has hundreds of volumes dealing with the occult, and the group uses the books and oftentimes the Internet to find weaknesses and formulate a plan. In the world of *Buffy*, fighting evil is not as simple as using super powers, but is rather a process of dedication and very hard, time-consuming effort. Elbow grease is every bit as valuable a weapon as superhuman strength. The show also often glorifies delayed gratification. Without fail, whenever a character does something rash or selfish to benefit themselves, something bad is going to happen to that character. The most egregious example of this is that Buffy and Angel's relationship is ready to go to the next level, although Buffy is hesitant about sleeping with him. When she finally gives in to desire, and Angel experiences a "moment of true happiness," a gypsy curse kicks in, taking his soul and turning him once again into an evil monster ("Surprise," 1998). He ends up killing many people, and Buffy is left to blame herself for giving in to lust. Given that Faith represents the opposite of all of these traits — she wants instant gratification, she does not sacrifice for others, she does not believe in hard work, and slays for fun, not out of duty — it should come as no surprise that her character would soon take a turn for the worse.

It is because of their very different natures, philosophies and values that Faith and Buffy's paths would diverge. As co-producer and series

writer Marti Noxon says, “The goal of that show was to delineate the philosophical differences between these two characters (Noxon, 2003, “Season 3 Overview”). One way of thinking about the three slayers (Kendra as well) is that each of the three is a close parallel to Freud’s three parts of the mind. Wild, irrational, impulsive Faith would of course be the id. Dutiful, by the book Kendra would represent the superego. Which would leave rational Buffy as the ego. The show portrays the other two slayers as fundamentally flawed and incapable of being effective slayers over any long amount of time, with only Buffy striking the perfect balance needed to do the job correctly. Story editor and series writer Doug Petrie seems to second this when he says of Faith, “She’s in many ways Buffy’s evil twin. She gets to do all the things Buffy wants to but can’t” (Petrie, 2003, “Series 3 Overview”).

With Faith, Buffy flaunted the rules of authority, something the viewer had not really seen her do before. *Buffy*, as a show about adolescence, typically expresses skepticism towards authority (Wall and Zyrd, 2002, 56). The Principal and the Watchers’ Council both only get in Buffy’s way, and Sunnydale’s mayor and a secret government organization both turn out to be major villains. But this had never before crossed the line to the outright flaunting of social norms and rules. Buffy’s actions are very out of the ordinary for the normally responsible Slayer. To quickly recap: she disobeys her Watcher, skips out in the middle of a test, attacks vampires without consulting anyone, breaks into a store and attempts to steal things, and then causes the police to crash their cruiser so that she can escape. This is, in essence, a question of power and authority. These two girls are superheroes, given special powers which they use to defend society. Are they still accountable to society’s rules, or should they be held to a different standard? Whedon has stated explicitly that this was a goal of the story arc, saying it was “our attempt to explore being a Slayer in terms of the power of it...We wanted to show that the power that the Slayer has, while it is supposed to be used for good, is still power and can corrupt” (Whedon, 2003, “Season 3 Overview”). Petrie notes that is significant that Buffy went along with Faith in running afoul of social rules, saying, “Buffy thinks that Faith is right in this episode. She starts to flirt with the idea, for the first time, that she doesn’t have to

obey rules, and that she is above society. She follows Faith, and she sees the consequences of it” (Petrie, 2003, “Season 3 Overview”).

The Act

The last part of the episode follows the Slayers as they try to attack Balthazar’s lair. As they approach, they are attacked by a group of vampires. They slay them, and continue on towards the lair. At this point, Deputy Mayor Alan Finch, who apparently was coming to them with information about the mayor’s nefarious plans, steps out of the shadows and touches Faith on the arm. Faith, in the heat of battle, wheels around on him, throws him up against a nearby dumpster, and pulls out a stake, ready to strike. At the last second, Buffy realizes that this is a human, and shouts, “Faith, no!” (“Bad Girls,” 1999) But it is too late, and Faith drives the wooden stake into the Finch’s heart. Buffy immediately goes to try to help him. Buffy tries to help him, but he quickly dies. Faith drags Buffy away from the body, and the two flee the scene.

A fundamental question that must be asked is: was this murder? Did Faith murder Alan Finch? It boils down to exactly how you define murder. A general definition of murder is to willingly take the life of another human being. Petrie, the episode’s writer, says, “There’s so much killing on the show, but it’s always supernatural, and here we killed a real, live, non-supernatural person. This is murder. Faith murdered this guy. It was an accident, but it’s still murder” (Petrie, 2003, “Bad Girls” (Writer Commentary)). The idea of accidental murder is an oxymoron: under almost any traditional definition of murder, the intent of causing the person’s death must be present. While Buffy did recognize Alan Finch as a human, it seems very clear that Faith did not mean to kill a human being when she staked Alan Finch. The two commonly recognized components of murder are the act that brings about the end of a person’s life, and the intent to end said life. The first component is clearly present here, as Faith drove a wooden stake through his heart. But what about intent? In one sense, Faith intends to kill him, as she attacked him with the stake. However, Faith does not intend to attack a human being, but attacks him because she reasonably believes him to be a vampire. In his book *Bad Acts and Guilty Minds: Conundrums of the Criminal Law*, theorist Leo Katz

discusses analogous cases in Africa where people have killed other people believing them to be ghosts. Is this murder? Katz finds the general consensus is that this is not murder, because these people reasonably believed that the person was a ghost, and there's nothing illegal about killing a ghost (Katz, 1987, 165-169). Faith could also probably stake (pun intended) a legitimate claim to being not guilty by reason of self-defense. Given the circumstances, it was perfectly reasonable for her to believe that Alan Finch was yet another vampire out to kill her, and that she was therefore justified in using deadly force. All things considered, Faith did not murder Alan Finch. If she acted wrongly in the situation, it was in being reckless or careless, which typically fall under manslaughter or wrongful death statutes, not those against murder. Even so, Faith has taken a human life, and things can never be the same. As Petrie says, "This is where Faith takes a major turn. Faith stakes a human being. Here's where the season changes, here's where the characters change, and here's where we've gone where we've never gone before" (Petrie, 2003, "Bad Girls" (Writer Commentary)).

The Aftermath

Later that night, Buffy goes to Faith's hotel room, and finds Faith scrubbing the blood out of her clothes in the bathroom sink:

Buffy: Faith, we need to talk about what we're going to do.

Faith: There's nothing to talk about. I was doing my job.

Buffy: Being a slayer is not the same as being a killer. (Silence.)

Faith, please don't shut me out here. Look, sooner or later we're both going to have to deal.

Faith: Wrong.

Buffy: We can help each other.

Faith: I don't need it.

Buffy: Yeah, who's wrong now? Faith, you can shut off all the emotions that you want, but eventually they're going to find a body.

Faith: Okay, this is the last time we're going to have this conversation, and we're not even having it now, do you understand me? There is no body. I took it, weighted it, and

dumped it. The body doesn't exist.

Buffy: Getting rid of the evidence doesn't make the problem go away.

Faith: It does for me.

Buffy: Faith, you don't get it. You killed a man.

Faith: No, you don't get it. I don't care. ("Bad Girls," 1999)

This is the last scene of "Bad Girls." The storyline continues in the next episode, "Consequences" (1999). The episode opens with a dream sequence. Buffy is underwater, trying to swim to the surface, but she can't because Alan Finch is grabbing her shoe and trying to pull her down to the depths. Buffy finally kicks free, swims to the surface, and gasps for breath. But Faith is waiting for her at the surface, and immediately pushes her head back under water ("Consequences," 1999). On this note, Buffy wakes up. She hears the television softly playing in the living room, and gets up to find her mother watching a news report announcing that the body of Alan Finch was found. When she goes to school the next day, Wesley tells the Slayers to investigate the murder. Buffy is rattled and suggests that it is the police's responsibility. Faith calmly accepts the assignment. As they leave, Buffy pulls Faith into a classroom and tells her that she does not feel comfortable keeping what happened a secret, saying they need to tell people. Faith resists, saying she does not want to go to jail and that Buffy was as much to blame as she was ("Consequences," 1999). The police are investigating, and when they discover the murder weapon was a wooden stake, the mayor wants them to go after the Slayers and get them out of his way. Buffy and Faith investigate Alan Finch and discover that all of his documents have suspiciously disappeared. They realize that he must have had information that the mayor did not want anyone to see. Buffy expresses surprise that the mayor is involved in sinister doings:

Faith: When are you going to learn, B? It doesn't matter what kind of vibe you get off a person, 'cause nine times out of ten the face they're showing you is not the real one.

Buffy: I guess you know a lot about that.

Faith: What is that supposed to mean?

Buffy: It's just, look at you, Faith. Less than 24 hours ago you killed a man. And now it's all zip-a-dee-do-da? That's not your real face and I know it. I know what you're feeling because I'm feeling it, too.

Faith: Do you? Fill me in, because I'd like to hear this.

Buffy: Dirty. Like something sick crept inside you and you can't get it out. And you keep hoping it was just some nightmare, but it wasn't! And we're going to have to figure out...

Faith: Is there going to be an intermission in this?

Buffy: Just let me talk to Giles, okay? I SWEAR...

Faith: NO. We're not bringing anybody else into this. You gotta keep your head, B. This is all going to blow over in a couple of days.

Buffy: And if it doesn't?

Faith: If it doesn't? They got a freighter leaving the docks at least twice a day. It ain't fancy, but it gets you gone.

Buffy: And that's it? You just live with it? You see the dead guy in your head every day for the rest of your life?

Faith: Buffy, I'm not going to see anything. I missed the mark last night, and I'm sorry about the guy. I really am. But it happens. Anyways, how many people do you think we've saved by now? Thousands? And didn't you stop the world from ending? Because in my book, that puts you and me in the plus column.

Buffy: We help people. It doesn't mean we can do whatever we want.

Faith: Why not? The guy I offed was no Gandhi. I mean, we just saw it, he was mixed up in dirty dealings.

Buffy: Maybe. But what if he was coming to us for help?

Faith: What if he was? You're still not seeing the big picture, B. Something made us different. We're warriors. We're built to kill.

Buffy: To kill demons! But it does not mean that we get to pass judgment on people like we're better than everyone else!

Faith: We are better. (Stunned silence from Buffy.) That's right, better. People need us to survive. In the balance,

nobody's going to cry over some random bystander who's caught in the crossfire.

Buffy: (quietly) I am.

Faith: (shakes head) That's your loss (walks away)
("Consequences," 1999).

Later, the police question both Slayers, and it becomes quickly clear that their stories do not add up. Buffy decides to go to Giles, but when she arrives, Faith has already told him that Buffy killed Finch. When Buffy and Giles get in private, however, Giles tells Buffy that he knows Faith is lying and that Buffy did not kill Finch. Angel, who has done his fair share of killing, attempts to talk to Faith, telling her, "To kill without remorse is to feel like a God. But you're not a God. You're not much more than a child. Going down this path will ruin you. You can't imagine the price for true evil. If you can trust us, Faith, this can all change" ("Consequences," 1999). But she is unresponsive. Later in the episode, Faith tries to leave town by hopping on a ship at the docks. Buffy goes down to stop her, they begin to argue, and are ambushed by a gang of vampires sent by the mayor. Faith is about to get hit by falling crate, and Buffy pushes her out of the way and is hit herself. The two fight the vampires together. Buffy is in danger of being killed by the mayor's close assistant, the vampire Trick, when Faith rushes over and stakes him, saving Buffy's life. The viewer feels that this is a good sign until the end of the episode, when Faith approaches the mayor about his "job opening," and the viewer realizes that Faith staked Trick not to save Buffy, but so she could ally with the mayor and do Buffy in herself ("Consequences," 1999).

The aftermath and consequences of the death of Alan Finch play a very important role in terms of the show's exploring the seductive, corrupting nature power often has on people. As Whedon has said, one of the primary reasons Faith was brought onto the show was, "because we didn't want to send Buffy into too dark a place where we didn't like her anymore. We used Faith's character as the person who might do something, who might take it too far" (Whedon, 2003, "Season 3 Overview"). These two young girls are given both the power and the responsibility to literally save the world, and react to it in two distinctly different ways. As Petrie says, "Faith enjoys her job too

much, and she doesn't see herself as responsible" (Petrie, 2003, "Season 3 Overview). These episodes illuminate the fact that the two Slayers take very different approaches to the impact their supernatural powers have on their susceptibility to the rules and norms of society. Faith believes that the two of them are better than everyone else, and therefore they should not have to play by society's rules. As long as they do their job and stay "in the plus column," society should be grateful and has no right to try to punish them. She believes that her special strength exempts her from social rules, in this case the criminal justice system. Buffy, on the other hand, looks at it the other way. Because they are given such a spectacular responsibility, they are charged with saving and protecting people. Given this, they are doubly culpable in a situation where they directly kill someone, and therefore very much subject to society's rules.

But this conclusion about Buffy's attitude of responsibility based solely on the killing of Alan Finch is problematic. Buffy did not actually kill Alan Finch or really have anything to do with it other than being present. Despite Faith's claim that the two Slayers were in this together, had the matter been brought before a criminal trial, Buffy would not have been charged with the killing of Alan Finch. If the situation had been reversed, and it had been Buffy who had staked him through the heart, would her attitude have been the same? Well, as it turns out, something remarkably similar to this happened in the second season.

In the second season's eleventh episode, "Ted" (1997), guest star John Ritter plays the title character, Buffy's mother's new boyfriend. Buffy feels threatened by this new presence in her life, especially since he gets along so well with all of her friends. But Ted begins acting strangely and threatening Buffy. One night, Buffy comes home to find Ted in her room, having read her diary, and threatening to put her in a mental hospital for her delusions about being a "vampire Slayer." He becomes physically confrontational, they get into a fight, Buffy punches him and kicks him several times, and he stumbles backwards and falls down the stairs, landing dead at the bottom ("Ted," 1997).

Did Buffy murder Ted? She certainly knocked him down the stairs. And while she may not have meant to kill him in that fashion, she was certainly trying to hurt him. And self-defense is definitely not a valid defense for Buffy's actions, since Ted was unarmed and not a deadly

threat to her. While it was not premeditated, she did punch and kick Ted (although he hit her first) very hard. Although Buffy severely disliked Ted, it did not appear as if she had any intention of actually taking his life. So Buffy is not a murderer, but is at least culpable in some way. Of course, later in the episode we find out that Ted is in fact an evil robot, and comes back to try take Buffy's mom away and kill her, only to have Buffy stop him. So Buffy stops an evil robot, so it was just another episode. But it is morally problematic, because Buffy believed Ted to be human when she killed him. So in a sense, Buffy was more of a murderer than Faith was. Faith killed a human, but she thought she was just killing another vampire. Buffy, on the other hand, stopped an evil robot, but as far as she knew, she was killing a human being.

But how did Buffy react to this? Did she take responsibility for her actions? The police come to the scene to take away the body and investigate, and the police begin talking to Buffy's mom. She tries to cover for Buffy by telling them that he fell down the stairs, but Buffy interrupts the conversation and tells the police that she hit him ("Ted," 1997). Buffy then goes to the police station and tells the police exactly what happened. The next day in school, she has to talk to her friends about it ("Ted," 1997):

Buffy: We had a fight, and I lost my temper. I really let him have it.

Willow: The paper said he fell.

Buffy: He fell...hard.

Xander: What was he?

Buffy: What?

Xander: What was he? A demon, a giant bug, some kind of dark God with the secrets of nouveau cuisine? I mean, we are talking creature feature here, right?

Buffy: (dramatic silence).

Xander: Oh, man.

Willow: But I'm sure it wasn't your fault. He started it.

Buffy: Yeah. That defense only works in six year old court, Will.

Xander: Court? Are they charging you with something?

Buffy: I don't know. Not yet (pause). He was a person. And I killed him.

Willow: Don't say that.

Buffy: Why not? Everyone else is, and it's the truth.

Xander: It was an accident.

Buffy: I'm the slayer. I had no right to hit him like that. ("Ted," 1997)

Later on, the group is gathered in the library doing research into Ted's background, trying to help Buffy, when Cordelia brings up an important question:

Cordelia: I don't get it. Buffy's the Slayer. Shouldn't she have...

Xander: What? A license to kill?

Cordelia: Well, not for fun. But she's like the superman. Shouldn't she have different rules?

Willow: Sure, in a fascist society.

Cordelia: Right! Why can't we have one of those? ("Ted," 1997)

Buffy realizes that she has crossed the line and is fully prepared to pay the consequences for her action. Note that in the dialogues with Faith concerning the killing of Alan Finch, Faith constantly creates excuses to avoid taking responsibility for her own actions (it was an accident, he was involved in dirty dealings, what's one death compared to the lives we've saved, etc.). Other people, most notably Buffy, try to convince her that these are not valid. Now contrast that with Buffy's response upon "killing" Ted. In Buffy's case, everyone else tries to make up excuses for her, but she refuses to accept them. Her mom tries to tell the police Buffy had nothing to do with it, Willow tells her that Ted started it, Xander tells her it was an accident. If she wants to, she can accept any of these as a way out of accepting the consequences of her action. But she steadfastly accepts the full blame for what she has done, and is fully willing to cooperate with the police and accept her punishment. It is also worth contrasting the way in which Faith and Buffy bring their Slayer status into the conversations

concerning their respective killings. Faith brings it up to note that she is very powerful and has done good things for people, and therefore should not be held accountable — another excuse. Buffy, on the other hand, only brings it up to further emphasize the wrongness of what she has done to Ted, to say that she of all people should have known better than to do something like that. So, to answer Cordelia's question — should Superman have different rules? The only logical answer is no. Great power and great responsibility go hand in hand, and in the case of the Slayers, they are responsible for helping and saving people. It is of course impossible to save everyone, but when a life is taken through their own recklessness or carelessness, such as the killing of Alan Finch, they must be held accountable. To do otherwise would be allowing the Slayers to effectively play God, kill some and save others, choose who lives and who dies, and that is and should be beyond the power of the Slayers.

To the Edge and Back

To return to the story of Faith: after she begins working for the mayor, she initially maintains contact with Buffy and group, essentially working as a double agent. But Buffy and Angel soon set a trap for her in which she is forced to reveal her true allegiances. For the rest of the third season she is an open adversary of Buffy. She also grows very close to the character of the mayor, who becomes a father figure to her. As the season progresses, Faith kills two men at the mayor's request, both times because they had something the mayor wanted. Both times Faith does so efficiently and without remorse. If she was not a cold-blooded murderer by killing Alan Finch, she certainly becomes one by killing these two. Faith also becomes more openly jealous and contemptuous of Buffy, and sets out to destroy her. She shoots Angel with a poison arrow, but the catch is that the only antidote to the poison is to drink the blood of a slayer. Faith knows that this will force Buffy to come after her, and Buffy prepares to do exactly that. Buffy's friends get a little bit worried, though:

Xander: Are you sure you're ready for this? I don't want to lose you.

Buffy: Don't worry, I won't get hurt.

Xander: That's not what I meant. ("Graduation Day, Part I," 1999)

What Xander means, of course, is that he does not want to see Buffy go through the same transformation he witnessed Faith go through when she took a human life.

Buffy goes after Faith, there is an action-packed, climactic battle scene, and Buffy finally manages to stab Faith in the stomach, but Faith jumps off the building into the bed of a moving truck to prevent Buffy from feeding her to Angel. Buffy is later forced to cure Angel by letting him drink her own blood, nearly dying in the process. The fall does not kill Faith, but it inflicts severe head trauma and puts her into a coma. Buffy and the gang go on to defeat the mayor, stop the Ascension, and graduate from high school. The next season, Season 4, sees Buffy and friends in their first year out of high school. Midway through the season ("This Year's Girl," 2000), Faith wakes up from her coma. She discovers that the mayor has left her a gift, some sort of weapon. Faith goes after Buffy, fights her, and then uses the weapon to switch bodies with her. In the next episode, "Who Are You?" (2000), the two Slayers experience what it is like to live as the other one.

Buffy (in Faith's body) is soon taken into custody for the killing of Alan Finch. Faith (in Buffy's body) spends time looking at herself in the mirror, mockingly wagging her finger and saying, "Because it's wrong" ("Who Are You?," 2000). While hanging out with Buffy's friends, a vampire is spotted, and Faith feels compelled to go kill it and save the potential victim because that is what Buffy would do. She does so, and the would-be victim thanks her profusely and sincerely, which rattles Faith a little. From there, she goes to see Riley, Buffy's boyfriend. Here, for the first time in her life, Faith experiences sex as an expression of love, not just a casual physical act. It is above and beyond Faith's previous sexual experiences. Faith decides that she needs to get away from her past, and heads to the airport to leave the country. But she sees a news report about a group of vampires taking over a church full of people, and she realizes that people rely on Buffy to stop these things, and so she must go and try to stop it, saying to herself, "I'm Buffy — I have to do this ("Who Are You?," 2000)." Meanwhile, Buffy has escaped from custody, convinced Giles and her

friends of what has happened, and gotten a device that can switch their bodies back. Faith arrives at the church and tells the vampires that they cannot kill these people “because it’s wrong.” She then proceeds to fight and defeat the vampires. Immediately afterwards, Buffy shows up and the two fight once again. After a while, Faith pins Buffy to the ground:

Buffy (in Faith’s body): You can’t win this.
 Faith (in Buffy’s body): Shut up! Do you think I’m afraid of you? (At this point Faith begins to viciously pummel her own body.) You’re nothing! Disgusting, murderous bitch! You’re nothing! You’re disgusting! (“Who Are You?,” 2000)

At this point Buffy uses the device to switch their bodies back and Faith jumps up and runs away.

These two episodes are extremely important to the development of Faith’s character. When she awakes from the coma, Faith is completely amoral and is only out for revenge for what Buffy did to her. She thinks the best way to do this is to simply switch their identities. But she learns what Buffy and Buffy’s life is really like, and this shakes her because she begins to see the error of her ways. When she mockingly chides “because it’s wrong” into the mirror at the beginning of the episode, she is laughing at Buffy’s entire way of life. But by the end of the episode, when she tells the vampire he cannot kill the people “because it’s wrong,” Faith is very serious about it, and she now understands why Buffy does the things she does. She has experienced firsthand the love and respect given to Buffy by others, and Faith feels a sense of accomplishment when she fulfills her duty in saving people. At the end of the episode when Faith is punching Buffy and calling her “nothing,” “murderous bitch” and “disgusting,” it is very clear to the viewer that Faith is saying these things not to Buffy, but rather to her own face. Faith has slowly realized that Buffy’s way of life is better in every way than the life she has chosen to leave, and she hates herself for making the wrong choices.

As scholar Greg Forster has pointed out, this whole episode borrows heavily from Plato’s *Republic* (Forster 2003, 7-19). Plato asks the question of who is happier: the just man or the unjust man? Plato

answers that the just man is happier because all parts of his consciousness are in harmony with one another, while the unjust man lacks self-restraint and is a slave to his never-ending desires. To illustrate this, Plato proposes the following scenario: there is a just man who everyone believes to be unjust, and there is an unjust man who everyone believes to be just. Effectively, the good person will be treated as a villain, and the villain will be treated like a great man, enjoying all of life's privileges. But Plato maintains that the just man is still better off, because true happiness is not the function of one's external treatment, but rather the consequence of one's internal harmony. In "Who Are You?" Faith learns this first-hand, as living in Buffy's body does not bring her the expected happiness, but guilt and remorse for her unjust actions.

The Faith story arc is continued in the first season of Buffy's spin-off show, *Angel*. After leaving Sunnydale, Faith goes to Los Angeles, where she is soon recruited by enemies of Angel's to kill him. She takes Wesley, who had crossed over from *Buffy*, hostage and forces Angel into a physical confrontation. The two fight a vicious battle, with the fight eventually spilling onto the street. It soon becomes apparent that what Faith really wants is for Angel to kill her, eventually screaming at him, "I'm evil! I'm bad!...Do you hear me?...Angel, please, just do it. Just do it. Just kill me" ("Sanctuary," 2000). Faith has clearly realized how wrong she has been in everything, and feels that it would be easier to be killed in battle than have to try to make things right again. But Angel refuses to kill her, instead holding her and promising that he will help her. Angel lets Faith stay with him, and he tries to advise her on how he lives with the things he's done and how he tries to redeem himself by doing good in the world. Faith listens, but expresses doubt as to whether or not she can do it. Buffy, afraid that Angel's in danger, shows up to help him, only to find Angel and Faith peacefully talking. Faith tries to apologize to Buffy for everything she did, but acknowledges that there is nothing she can ever do to make it right. Buffy is unmoved by Faith's sentiments, and wants her handed over to the authorities, but Angel refuses. It is at this point that the Watchers' Council sends its extraction team in to get Faith, and a battle ensues. Angel, Wesley and Buffy defeat the team from the Council, but now Faith is nowhere to be found. She

has run away once again. The police, aware that Faith was hiding at Angel's, show up and arrest Angel when he fails to give her over. Angel is brought to police headquarters, but when he arrives he is stunned to see Faith already there, giving a confession to an officer. Angel is released and Faith goes quietly into a jail cell. Elyse Rae Helford describes Faith at this point in the story arc as "quiet, penitent, desexualized, solemn" (Helford, 2002, 33) — in short, emotionally unrecognizable as the formerly loud, carefree, seductive and brash Faith viewers had come to know. Angel closes the Faith storyline by saying that Faith may finally have a chance to find peace ("Sanctuary," 2000).

As an epilogue, Faith returns to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in the seventh and final season, having served her time for the death of Alan Finch. While she is still somewhat impulsive, she appears to be rehabilitated, and she joins Buffy and the group as they fight the fight of their lives in the series finale ("Chosen," 2003). So how is Faith rehabilitated? The first step is acknowledging the inherent wrongness of the things she has done. Faith finally sees the true nature of what she has done and wants to make it up to the people around her she has hurt, but it is by and large too late. As Laura Resnick says, "Faith's longing to belong is most moving after she's ensured that she can never belong again. Her desire to be a true Slayer only becomes truly apparent in season four, after she has betrayed and abandoned all that being a Slayer means. Prior to her downfall, Faith disregarded the moral principles of Slaying and enjoyed the violence and power. Only much later, as she struggles alone in a mentally unstable state...does Faith start grappling with what it means to be a Slayer, to protect the innocent, to commit murder, to atone for evil (Resnick, 2003, 59)." Switching bodies with Buffy gives Faith this moral clarity that she has completely lacked up until that time. The next step was taking responsibility for what she has done. She accomplishes this when she voluntarily goes to the police station, admits her crimes, and accepts the legal punishment. But the third and most important step in Faith's rehabilitation is her decision to seek redemption. While she initially feels that it is impossible, Angel talks to her about his own path to redemption — living his life to serve others and saving as many lives as he can. It is unclear whether or not Faith fully accepts this at the

time of their conversation, but when she is released and rejoins Buffy and the group it quickly becomes apparent that this is the case.

The story of Faith is an interesting one in that it encompasses the entire gamut of murder. The episodes dealing with Faith examine what made her a killer, how she reacted to the killing, her refusal to take responsibility, her desire for revenge, her realization of the wrong she has done, her acceptance of criminal punishment, and her desire to make amends for her actions. Upon her return, Faith has come full circle. When the viewer initially comes upon Faith, she is a little impulsive, but is still actively doing good. But she soon grows too enamored of the lifestyle of the Slayer, and becomes callous and reckless, leading to the accidental killing of Alan Finch. Instead of taking responsibility for her actions, Faith instead makes excuses and denies any wrongdoing, feeling she should be exempt from society's rules because of her special status. This denial sends her spiraling downward into darkness, and she soon becomes allies with the evil mayor and becomes an enemy of her former friends. When she returns to Sunnydale, she has only vengeance on her mind, but her body switching plan backfires in that instead of making her happy, it makes her realize all of the bad choices she has made, and she feels angry and remorseful. When she goes to Los Angeles, she initially wants to die, but is later convinced by Angel that redemption is a possibility, and that she is strong enough to do it. She turns herself into the police, serves her time, and years later emerges once again dedicated to saving people and using her power for good.

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