

“The Wall”

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Disclaimer: Joss owns all.

Rating: PG-13. A couple of swear words.

Pairing: B/F

Notes: Might contain plenty of mistakes, both linguistic and plot-wise. Might be also OOC. But I don't really care :) Takes place somewhere after “The Zeppo”

Feedback: Sure.

Summary: Green slimy demons, mind games and consequences.

Faith was sitting on the table, mindlessly tossing something small and round into the air over and over again. She'd been unusually quiet and detached from everything and everyone the whole day.

Giles kept talking, dwelling on something about green-skinned slimy demons, which had been recently seen in the nearby park. His discourse was nothing but some vague droning to Buffy. What was the point of listening anyway? Green slimy demons, big deal! She'll go there and kick the crap out of them. Correction: they'll go there, as in her and Faith.

Buffy shifted on her chair, her legs dangling around, and observed the younger girl.

Faith's make-up was slightly darker than usual, her skin paler. The tough façade, everyone was so used to, seemed to be there, but... Something was different. Buffy got an impression, as if the bricks in the wall had given a crack. She wasn't sure if she liked it or not.

- ...And then you cut off their heads, and they disappear... Buffy, are you listening to me?

It took some effort to tear her eyes away from the automatic movement of Faith's hands. The sight was somehow mesmerizing.

- What?

Giles sighed.

- I really hope you had been listening. It is very important to follow the rules in this particular case, Buffy, unless you want to put yourself into ultimate danger. And Faith as well.

He glanced at the brunette, who was still wandering in some another reality.

- You cannot fall for their mind games. And build up that wall I told you about. It's the only way to beat them.

Mind games? What mind games? Did he say something about building walls?

Buffy shook her head and turned around on hearing footsteps behind her back. Xander entered the library looking like an old man after a long working day. He dropped his duffel bag on the floor and grumbled something resembling “Hey, everyone”.

- Hey yourself. What's with the dullness?

- Nothing in particular, - he said sternly not even looking at Buffy. Instead, he shot a strange glance at Faith, lowering himself on the chair, and kept on staring at the flying thing in her hands.

- What's that? – he asked finally. On getting no response, he stood up and approached the table. – Faith! What is that?

Faith gave a start, and the small thing she had been playing with fell on the floor. It bounced a few times and disappeared behind the bookcase.

- Huh?

Faith looked around as if she'd just been woken up.

- Xander! – Buffy quickly rose to her feet and picked up the fallen object, which appeared to be a ball. A cute rubber thingy, a cat or a dog would play with. Buffy raised her eyebrows and looked questioningly at Faith who suddenly seemed to be perfectly aware of her surroundings. Moreover, she seemed to be seriously pissed off.

- What do you want, loser boy? – Faith asked tensely.

- Just wanted to know what was the crap you were throwing around. Things like that get on my nerves.

The glimpse of surprise in the brunette's eyes vanished almost instantly and turned into sarcasm.

- Really? Oh right. Forgot that you're the sensitive type. So, my bad.

- What WAS it? –Xander uttered through clenched teeth.

- What's your problem, Xan? It's just a toy. – Buffy twirled the ball between her fingers.

- Is it, Faith? Big Bad Slayer playing toys? Oh right. I forgot. – he mimicked her earlier intonation. – You DO play toys. Living toys!

For some reason he sounded really hurt. Buffy looked at him, then at Faith. Some understanding flickered in the brunette's eyes, but right away changed into pity and contempt.

- Jeez, you're so pathetic!

She climbed down from the table and headed for the door, snatching the ball from Buffy's hands on her way out.

- Faith!

The younger girl turned around unwillingly.

- Giles? – she said, boredom very clear in the voice. *Talking about building walls.* thought Buffy.

Giles coughed and took off his glasses.

- I have no idea what's going on here between all of you. But notwithstanding this... predicament, I need you girls to go to the park immediately.

- There isn't any predicament, Giles. – Buffy said hurriedly. – We're going, right Faith?

The brunette shrugged and nodded wordlessly making her way out. Buffy glanced at Giles apologetically and followed her sister slayer.

- What was that all about, Faith? – Buffy asked catching up with the brunette.

- Nothing. – Faith kept striding forward, clutching the ball in her fist. – Just the loser boy on his hype.

- What is *that* supposed to mean? You looked like you knew what was going on.

- So?

They passed the entrance, the door banging behind them and proceeded into the shadows of the nighttime Sunnydale streets.

- What do you mean "so"? I wanna know what's going on with you.

Faith stopped in her tracks and turned her angry gaze to Buffy.

- Since when, B? Why the hell do you suddenly care?

- What? – Buffy frowned. – Of course, I care! You're my friend.

Faith snorted.

- Your friend. Are you crazy? I've never been your friend and never will be. Me? Part of your little private club? Fat chance, baby. I'll never fit in. – she punctuated her words as if talking to a child.

Buffy stood silent for a moment. A strangely inappropriate thought crossed her mind. "She's so pretty when she's broken." She shook her head. "Where did that come from?"

- You are my friend, Faith. Whether you want it or not. – she said slowly, tasting the words on her tongue, not really knowing what to say next, but deciding to follow her gut feeling. – As for your not fitting in, that's bullshit. If you stop pitying yourself and get your head from your ass, you'll fit in perfectly.

Faith blinked in surprise at the older girl's choice of words.

- So. Welcome to my loser club, if you want to. – Buffy said after a few seconds. – And if you really want to talk, and I mean REALLY, I'll be there.

Faith stood dumbfounded for a minute. Again, it seemed to Buffy as if the hard brick wall was shaking, about to smash into a thousand pieces. She almost heard a soft grumbling of stone.

But then Faith flashed her teeth in a cheerful smile.

- Anyone ever tell you that you're wicked hot when you're angry?

Buffy closed her eyes for a second and sighed. Angry? She wasn't angry any more. All she felt was sadness and irritation.

- Whatever. Just keep in mind what I told you.

She turned around and walked in the direction of the park.

- Can you see them?

- Yes. Keep quiet. – Buffy hissed and peered through the bushes trying to discern the bulky figures hidden behind the leaves. The creatures were moving on the spot silently, as if performing some kind of ritual.

- What are they doing? – Buffy whispered.

- Who cares? I'm going. – Faith said impatiently and took out her knife.

- Fai... - Buffy's fingers slipped along the sleeve of the brunette's jacket in their vain attempt to stop her. Faith jerked her arm away and rushed through the branches.

- But Giles said something... Damn it!

Buffy took after her, trying to extend her night vision and not to get her eyes punctured by the spiky twigs. She saw Faith attack one of the three creatures and vaguely thought that this kind of things has been always happening since Faith appeared. No thinking, no nothing, right into the battle. And Buffy always followed, having no choice in the matter.

The fight wasn't as hard as Buffy had expected. The demons seemed huge, but for some reason they did not try to defend themselves much. When she sliced their throats they fell on the ground like logs and immediately started to melt into some insipid mucus. She killed the second one and wiped her fingers against her pants, making a disgusted face. She turned around to see how Faith was doing.

The lithe movements and reckless manner of the other girl's fighting have always impressed Buffy and made her feel a little bit uneasy. It was like watching a thunderstorm, the power of nature that can only be observed but never controlled or overridden. There was also this peculiar yearning in the blonde's chest, some secret wish to be part of it.

Buffy stood there transfixed, silently watching as the dark slim figure beat her much larger opponent, and suddenly realized something was definitely wrong with the whole picture. She noticed before that the creatures were not trying to defend themselves. But now she clearly saw that the remaining one was welcoming its death. As if that was his utmost purpose of being here.

- Faith! – Buffy approached the fighting duo worriedly, not sure if she should interfere. Faith kept on punching the ugly thing, which now was lying quietly on the ground. It was when Buffy almost lost her patience, that Faith finally plunged her knife into the demons neck.

- You beat like my dead...

But before she could finish, the creature turned into green goo absorbing her hands and clothes. Faith rolled over onto her back panting heavily.

- Faith? – Buffy quickly fell down on her knees beside the girl. The feeling of wrongness was growing stronger and stronger verging on panic. – Faith, you alright?

The brunette did not answer and kept her eyes shut. The only sound Buffy could hear was heavy breathing and rapid heart beating. Whether it was hers or Faith's she couldn't tell.

- Faith, are you hurt?

Buffy hurriedly checked the younger girl for any kind of visual damage but thankfully found none. Just a huge amount of semi-transparent mud covering half of the lying body.

- Faith! Answer me! – Buffy could hardly recognize her own voice. Was she scared? No way, she was terrified. Especially when she saw the telltale glisten on Faith's cheeks. Faith does not cry.

- What's wrong?!

To her partial relief the brown eyes opened. Faith slowly sat up and looked around. On noticing the demon's remains she winced and finally felt the wetness on her face. She wiped it with her sleeve and coughed.

- FAITH!

- Yeah B, I hear you. – came the muffled reply. – Don't shout, 'Kay?

She rose to her feet swaying slightly glancing at the dead creature again.

- I could really use a smoke right now, - she said out of the blue. Buffy blinked and stood up. She felt exhausted. Faith searched her pockets, but finding nothing she sighed and ran her hand through her hair.

- Let's get outta here. – She turned and staggered away. Buffy followed her, unsure of how to react. Everything in her head was so mixed-up. She didn't want to think anymore. She felt drunk. The trees, wet grass, black-out houses seemed nothing but a blur. Some thoughts of danger and wrongness crossed her mind but immediately were dissolved into the fog that was the only constant thing she could conceive. She didn't even notice it when they reached Faith's motel. The reality rushed into her as somebody touched her hand. She looked up only to see the brunette's profile lit by the pale moon light somewhat surreal and so very distant.

Why was she still holding her wrist?

- You wanna come in?

Buffy blinked on hearing the unexpected question. Her perception must have been playing tricks on her. It wasn't possible that she heard right, was it?

Suddenly Faith looked her in the eye.

- I'm not repeating myself, B. Just tell me yes or no. And that's it.

The dust was slowly falling into the grass. The bricks in the wall cracked and groaned and were saturated with unnatural light. It felt like the end of the days. Both comforting and terrifying.

Buffy closed her eyes for a moment and nodded.

- Yes.

- Good.

Faith opened the door and led them inside. They stood there a couple of minutes looking around, as if neither of them had seen this place for years. Even without the light the room was a mess.

Faith turned on the switch, but the power was off. She didn't seem surprised though.

- Forgot to pay the bill. And I don't have any candles.

- It's alright. – Buffy stepped closer to the bed and sat down carefully not taking her eyes off the younger girl. Faith took a pack of cigarettes from the table, and lit up. She approached the window and climbed onto the sill propping herself against the wall. She sighed, letting out a puff of smoke and turned to Buffy.

- Okay, I'm ready. Shoot.

- What? – Buffy frowned. She still wasn't sure what was going on. The fog in her head was making things slow and incomprehensible. Where was that wall she had been seeing? Was it still breaking apart?

- The questions. – Faith said trying to sound distinctly. – I'm sure you have plenty. – She shook off the ash on the floor and ran her hand through her hair. – And I'm ready to answer. Right now. You said you'd be there if I wanted to really talk. I want to. – She smiled crookedly. – But we'll do it my way. You ask, I answer. That's the only way. Like that game. Truth or dare. But without the dare part.

- O-okay. – Buffy shook her head in attempt to regain some clear thinking, desperately trying to find a question that wouldn't sound as stupid as she felt.

- I didn't know you smoked. – She blurted out. – How long have you been... you know?

- Nice start B. – Faith chuckled and glanced out of the window. – OK then. Three years. Next one?

- Um... It's just that... I didn't know.

Faith laughed sincerely.

- You don't know a thing about me B. So, next question?

Buffy clutched her hands together. It definitely was not going the way she expected.

- Don't you wanna clean up first? I mean, take a shower or something, the demon goo and all that. We could talk in a more comfortable...

- It's not about comfortable B. – Faith snapped. – It's about fast and satisfying. It ain't gonna be hug and cry and share and kiss. You want information, I give you the information. Nothing else.

Buffy looked up, feeling unexpected anger curling her fingers into fists. The heavy veil lifted up and she saw the wall again, blank and solid as ever.

- You want it this way, huh? – She rose to her feet and came closer to the figure perched on the sill. She could hardly make out the brunette's features in the darkness, but she clearly sensed fear and uncertainty radiating from the girl in front of her. Such a discrepancy in what she saw and what she perceived. – Okay then. What's your deal with Xander?

Faith hesitated for a second throwing the butt out of the window and made a grimace.

- I fucked him. Threw him out. The boy got upset cuz of the lack of attention. Nothing special.

Buffy inhaled deeply and muttered “Jesus” under her breath.

- What was that B? – Faith lit another cigarette and casually smiled tilting her head to the side.

- Nothing. – Buffy bit her lip. *Take a grip. I'm OK. I can play by her rules.* - What's that? – She pointed to the rubber ball still clutched in Faith's hand.

For a split second the brunette seemed to be caught off guard. She looked at the toy as if she saw it for the first time. Then she threw it off into the darkness of the room and turned away as it leaped around and disappeared somewhere under the bed.

- It's a ball, as you might have noticed. – She took a long drag and smirked. – I used to have a dog when I was little. Just for a day. I got him this toy. But then he had to move out. Mom said we had nothing to do with curs. – She turned away still having this sinister smile on her face. – Yeah, that's what she said... Next question?

Buffy was slightly shaking. She had no obvious reason whatsoever for feeling that disturbed. She was just talking to Faith, for god's sake. That was unusual per se, as Giles would put it, but why did she have the certainty it was mere the tip of the iceberg? She braced all the courage she had and asked the next question.

- What happened back there, with the demon?... Why were you crying?

Faith froze. She glanced at the blonde, put the cigarette back into her mouth and inhaled quickly as if trying to find the answer in the inanimate nicotine stick.

- The guy owed me some. – she finally said.

- What?

- Met him the other day. – Faith uttered through clenched teeth and looked at her arm. – Just a scratch though.

- What?! – Buffy came closer and reached out to touch the girl's shoulder. – Let me see.

- No!

- Faith, don't be stupid, let me see!

Faith rolled her eyes and pulled up her sleeve. Just above her elbow there was a deep half-healed cut. Buffy gingerly ran her finger near the wound.

- That's gruesome!

- It's nothing B. – Faith adjusted her shirt hurriedly.

- We gotta show that to Giles.

- No fucking way B! It'll be fine tomorrow, you know that!

- I know, but... Giles said something about mind games... Weren't you listening?

- Strangely enough, I was B. – Faith said calmly. – At least I heard what I needed to. You were not hurt, so it doesn't concern you.

- What do you mean I wasn't...? I felt the numbness and... the fog... - Buffy's legs suddenly refused to support her. She sat down on the nearby chair feeling the blood rushing to her face. Now she understood. At least for the extent that was enough.

- You were hurt. And they got to you, didn't they? That's why you... What did they do to you? – She whispered, praying she wasn't right in her assumption.

Faith threw her second butt outside and climbed out of the sill. She went to the bed and sat down.

- Nothing much B. – she said quietly. – I just saw things. – she shook her head sadly. – I can't believe I'm doing this... But the game's a game, right? I laid down the rules, I'm gonna follow them... So, go ahead and ask your question.

Where's the damn wall? Those shaking bricks... Why does it keep disappearing? Was it just my imagination? Buffy shivered and asked.

- What did they make you see?

Faith sighed and looked at her.

- I'll tell you. But if I talk, that's between the two of us. Or I kill you.

The last part was uttered in such a light yet sure and steel way that Buffy wondered unwillingly what might happen if they ever become enemies.

She nodded.

- OK. Here it goes. Nothing tragic though. Things like that happen all the time.

Faith turned her gaze to the window, drawing the moon reflection into her eyes, making them silver. She continued talking in an even, emotionless voice.

- No big deal. It's just that... the fucker made me re-live it all over again... I was ten. My Mom came back home late. She was wasted. Said she was gonna take a bath. She did. When she didn't

come out in three hours I got worried. I knocked at the door. When she didn't answer I broke the lock. My hands were bruised the next day. There was dried blood on them, but I couldn't remember why. I came inside. She was in the bathtub and she was just floating there. I watched her for a couple of minutes I think. And I realized she wasn't breathing. I touched her forehead. She didn't wake up.

- Faith... - Buffy whispered.

- Shut up B or I never talk to you again. – She looked at the older girl and added a little bit softer. – I'm almost finished, don't worry.

Buffy nodded as she got down from her chair and sat on the floor near the bed.

- I thought then she would be too heavy. I wouldn't be able to get her out of the bath... - Faith paused and frowned. – And then... I... actually I don't remember what happened then... B you gonna break my hand.

- Sorry. - Buffy hurriedly let go of Faith's fingers, which she clutched in her palm not even realizing she did so. – Sorry, I didn't mean to... - Buffy hugged herself still sitting on the floor and asked quietly. – You feeling any better?

Faith stood up and approached the window again.

- Dunno... No, I don't. I mean, about what happened. – she quickly added glancing back at Buffy who lowered her eyes. – I don't feel different about... what I told you... But I feel better about other things.

Buffy looked up. Maybe it was because of tears that welled into her eyes as she had been listening, or the aftershocks of the story, but instead of the motel room window she saw the brick wall with a huge uneven opening in the middle. Faith was standing beside it with her back turned to the streaming silvery light, her face hidden by the darkness.

- What things? – Buffy whispered, afraid to blink and destroy the illusion.

- You.

Faith slowly came closer and sat on the floor in front of Buffy.

- You see, the thing with the bathtub... is not that important.

Her voice was so quiet that Buffy wasn't sure if the girl was talking at all. Was she reading her thoughts?

- But what I saw today... I think it kinda changed everything.

- What did you see?

Faith sighed and clasped her hands together.

- I'm not gonna tell you everything the bastard showed me. You don't need to know that. It's just that... at the end you had a knife in my guts. Right up to the handle.

Buffy stiffened and stared at the brunette, unable to produce any reaction.

- Just thought you might need to know that B. And if you'd said no tonight at the door... I'd be on my way outta here right now.

Faith stood up abruptly and turned away.

- I think the heart-to-heart is over B. You should go.

Buffy rose to her feet and shook her head, finally gaining her ability to speak.

- No, it's not over Faith.

She came up to the other girl, feeling the desperate need to see her face. She walked around the motionless figure and found herself looking straight into the glistening brown eyes.

- What he showed you is total bullshit, Faith. He just wanted you out of the picture. – she said firmly. – Cause I would never... ever do this to you, you hear me?

Faith gave a soft chuckle and lifted her eyes to the ceiling. Whether to show her distrust or simply to fight back tears, Buffy couldn't tell. *Oh, what the hell.* Throwing away every single reason why she shouldn't be doing that, she grabbed the other girl in a bone-crashing hug.

- Ooh, - Faith staggered but remained standing. After a few seconds she returned the hug, placing her hands carefully around Buffy's back.

- I should have taken that shower. After all, it did turn into hug and cry and share and kiss. Although without the kiss. – Faith mumbled backing away slightly.

- That can be improved. – Buffy gave her a quick peck on the lips and hurriedly stepped away before she did anything even more stupid. Was it stupid? Did she cross the line? What the hell was going on anyway?

Faith stood there with her eyes closed, the reddish tinge on her cheeks making her less of a ghost in the moon light.

- Faith? Buffy asked weakly, the feeling that she had ruined everything growing with every second.

The brunette slowly opened her eyes. The smile that appeared on her lips made Buffy sigh with a huge relief and shyly smile back.

- Wow. Was it some kinda acceptance kiss you do with all the Scoobs? – Faith blurted out, flushing even more.

- Um... not really. – Buffy lowered her eyes and quickly added. - But you're accepted anyway. If you want to... I mean.

- I guess. Heck, if I chose to be such a sap this evening, I might as well be the best one.

Buffy giggled and looked warmly at Faith. She felt that the burden of the past several days she hadn't even realized she'd been carrying was finally taken off from her shoulders. It was a nice feeling of closure.

- Well... I suppose, NOW the conversation is over.

- Yeah... - Faith shifted from one foot to the other and looked out of the window.

Buffy went to the door and took the handle. But before letting herself out, she turned around and caught a glimpse of the brick wall again.

- By the way, Faith. Nice wall. But I hope that opening will remain there. At least for me.

Faith looked at her thoughtfully, not a bit of surprise on her face.

- I hope that too B.

THE END