

Ned Balbo

ANYANKA'S WISH

Anyanka, a "vengeance demon" in Joss Whedon's Buffyverse, grants wishes to women scorned, usually with a terrifying twist.

Avenging women wronged requires commitment—
you've got to have the stomach for revenge.
Imagination, too—what good is rage
without poetic justice? Faithful wives
or bar-scene regulars, daughters in love
the first time or the last, two-timed once more—
they all deserve the aid of someone stronger
who'll defend them to the bitter end.
But some resist. It's disappointing when
I send some Don Juan on his one-way trip
into the hell dimension where he'll burn
eternally down there (all over, too)
only to find his jilted sweetheart sorry
she declared, "I wish he'd disappear
and burn in hell for all he's put me through!"
Surely she knows: some words you can't take back?
And yet, she tries, cries out, "I didn't mean it!"
(she really means, *I'm sorry that I did*)
till I step out of reach and flash from sight.
Make up your mind! it makes me want to scream.

A thousand years ago, when I was human,
Aud of Sjornjost, steeped in my grimoire,
I, too, was lied to, spurned, but used my talents
to avenge the wrong—so well, in fact,
the Lower Powers noticed, sought me out,
and offered me a job. And so, promoted
to a Vengeance Demon, here I am
today, still wreaking havoc. In that time,
I've learned some things: Love hurts and doesn't last;
pain hurts and does, with just a little help;
and people never change: the same old stories
keep unfolding with a different cast.
It's funny: when I think about those girls
who weakened and forgave—who got their wish



but failed to see how fortunate they were—
I hear their voices whimper, *Justice, vengeance,*
and revenge...Any, they're not the same.
I beg to differ, girls. Revenge is sweet,
and punishing wrongdoers *should* feel great—
that's justice at its best. Let's not split hairs
when those who hurt us get what they deserve.
Millennia may pass, but men are men,
and hanging there, for all to see, is proof
of who's to blame, their weapon evident!
Flattered, misled in love, or ruled by force,
we're just as badly used as Eve or Lilith
who refused, rightly, to lie beneath
the first man, Adam, to whom she was equal,
formed of the earth with magic in her blood.
I'm magic, too, and listening all the time
to voices: soft seductions, pleasure's moans,
brief joys, and weeping—always so much weeping . . .
I hear the words of sisters brutalized
and give them, finally, what they really want.

. . . In fact, I hear someone in California
right now, poised and pretty, cheated on,
so angry that her voice cuts through dimensions
if you care to listen and know how.
It doesn't matter that she's still in high school,
steeped in feuds and petty jealousies,
shocked that her boyfriend strayed like all the rest;
I know her rage, my amulet's aglow,
and what she's feeling every woman knows
or will, in time.

And what she most desires
—a new twist on a theme that's long familiar,
feared yet longed-for, loathed yet strangely sweet—
the gentlest nudge will bring out in the open
when we meet if I, too, get my wish.

