

Written for 🍷[spring_with_xan](#), at the last possible moment because I'm like that (and even more so than usual these days.) As a result, sadly, these 2400 words are unbeta'd - please do let me know if you spot any mistakes. Feedback and concrit always welcomed. Fulfils the prompt "We're pretending, right?" on my 🍷[10_cliche_fics table](#). Characters not mine; full disclaimer [here](#)

By Any Other Name

by
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“Oh dear,” said Giles.

Buffy and Xander, who hadn't actually been reading anyway, promptly looked up. Dawn shoved away her math book, sensing a break from homework. Willow stopped reorganizing the shelves and came over, looking worried.

Giles pushed a folded piece of paper across the table.
“Look at that.”

Under tea [rings](#) and the odd smear of jam, the advertisement offered 'a unique opportunity to purchase one of the few remaining original statues of Lat,' and requested 'discerning buyers' to inquire 'in complete confidence.'

Buffy looked blank. "What's a statue of Lat?"

"Ah," Giles said. "The texts are not entirely clear on this point –"

"Are they ever?" muttered Dawn.

"– but it appears that the item in question may be used to prevent milk from souring –"

"Now *that* would be handy for the fridge at work," Xander said.

"– or to summon Kalashnikov the Devourer."

"I'm guessing most discerning buyers aren't dairy freaks," Buffy said.

"Indeed," Giles said.

“Kalashnikov?” said Xander.

“Yes,” said Giles. “His cult own the company.”

Dawn snorted.

Willow began unfolding the paper. “Where’d you get this?”

“It’s a local newsletter I get for the store,” Giles said. “Mostly it has wildly inaccurate articles on the occult, and people offering crystal healing. A few suppliers advertise in, it, though. Sometimes they have good bulk deals on things. Herbs, entrails, what have you.” He blinked against Willow’s glare. “Not that I buy the entrails.”

“Does it say who’s selling it?” Buffy reached out for the paper. “Cause I don’t want any summoning or devouring going on this week. Or, you know, ever.”

“A member of the cult, maybe?” said Xander.

“No, they wouldn’t sell it,” said Willow. “Probably more like a demonic weapons dealer. They don’t want to use it, but they don’t care if someone else does as long as

they get the money.”

Buffy pushed the paper back to Giles. “Call them. Offer to buy it.”

“The price is likely to be, well, astronomical,” Giles said.

“Yeah, but we’re not really going to *buy* it,” Buffy said.

“Just get an ID on these slimeballs, and I can get a little quality slaying done.”

“Do you think they’re like, literal slimeballs?” Dawn said.

“Cause if so, you should definitely change before you go. I like that shirt.”

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Giles had to hold the receiver a good six inches from his ear. The Pavak on the other end either wanted to intimidate him, or didn’t understand the concept of ‘telephone.’

It also wasn’t interested in answering Giles’ questions.

“We meet. Eight o’clock tomorrow night. Back room at

Fellini's. Only one of your people. We talk." There was a horrible sound that might have been a laugh. "If we like you, maybe we sell. If not, maybe we kill."

Click.

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The bell over the door rang.

"What's up, Watcher?" Spike paused and held up one finger. "No, wait. First, tell me what it's worth to me. Then you can tell me what's so important that you lowered yourself to call me."

Giles gestured towards the table where he'd set out the bottle and glasses. Spike arched an eyebrow, but sat down and listened and drank while Giles outlined the problem.

"... and they want a meeting, over dinner, to discuss terms. Buffy can't go, as they're certain to recognize her as the Slayer. She could probably cope with them – they can't plan to send *that* many goons to the restaurant – but I doubt they'll bring the statue to the preliminary

meeting. We don't want to fight them, we want to find out where they're based." Giles threw back his own drink. "I highly doubt this is the first or only destructive artifact they're selling."

"You really thought you could phone up and they'd tell you where their headquarters were?" Spike looked pityingly at Giles. "'Why yes, just drop by our secret lair, I'll fax over directions right away.' Don't think so, mate."

"They were quite clear that they only want one person to go," Giles said. "I also get the impression they're a bit selective about their customers. Our best chance probably lies in sending someone strong. Someone they respect. I thought of sending Willow, but she's determined to keep away from magic for now. I don't want to place her in a situation where she might be forced to use it."

He topped up Spike's glass. "You're the obvious choice. I expect they'd be happier dealing with a vampire than a human."

"Doesn't hurt that I'm the most expendable member of the team, either," Spike said, with a shrewd look. Giles had the decency to blush.

“Your reputation is quite well known. They may be more forthcoming with a fellow evil doer.”

Spike smirked.

“Just try not to get into a fight.” Giles sighed. “And see what you can pick up.”

“It’d be easier if I had someone to distract them,” Spike said. “Might get a chance to poke around.”

“Were you listening?” Giles said with irritation. “They said one. I don’t want to upset them and lose the chance to gather information.”

“Could probably take a consort with me,” Spike said. “That’d be accepted in most demon circles.”

Giles blinked. “True. I suppose that could work. Except for the minor matter that you don’t *have* a consort.”

Spike shrugged. “They don’t know that.”

“Also true.”

They both thought about the possibilities.

Giles tapped his glasses on the open book. "It's no good. Willow's innate magics will be instantly detectable; they'd realize you aren't bonded to her, or you'd radiate similar magic. Buffy can't go, and Dawn is simply out of the question. I'm afraid you'll have to go alone."

Spike sighed. "Do you always overlook the obvious?"

Giles looked at him blankly.

"I'll take carpenter boy."

Giles opened his mouth. Shut it. Nodded speculatively.

"Settled, then?" Spike rose. "If we're agreed – got things to do. Tell him to pick me up at seven. And make sure he wears something decent. My consort's got to have style."

"He's not going to like this," Giles muttered.

Spike raised the eyebrow again. "Doesn't have to." The door slammed behind him.

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Xander didn't like it. And that was the understatement of the year. Other reactions were mixed.

"Aww! You'll be such a cute couple!"

"Dawn! Are you out of your *mind*? I am not going to be... to act like... I am not going on a *date* with *Spike*!"

"Giles, what on earth were you thinking? I'm not letting Xander go into some den of iniquity by himself. Demonic iniquity!" Buffy waved her arms. "The worst kind!"

"There'll be iniquity?" Willow wrinkled her forehead.

"He won't be alone," Dawn pointed out, a dreamy look gracing her face. "He'll be with Spike."

"Nor is it a den of, er, iniquity," Giles said. "It's a very fine and," he grimaced, "expensive restaurant. The Pavaks have chosen it as neutral ground."

"You make it sound like a Bond movie or something," Buffy said. "Could we get back to the bit where it's a good idea to send Xander to meet with demons?"

“What, you don’t think he’s up to it?” Dawn challenged.

“Hey, I’m up for it,” Xander objected. “I’m just not up for Spike.”

There was a brief pause.

“Well, he *is* compact and well-muscled...” Buffy teased.

“I just mean – I don’t – oh geez, Dawn, stop snickering, are you *twelve*? Bring on the demons, fine, but I don’t see why I have to pretend to be Spike’s love-monkey!”

Giles sighed. “Xander, I understand your objections, but the Pavaks were quite clear they will only meet with one of us. Spike was an obvious choice, to help maintain the appearance of, ah, evil – ”

“And because he’ll rip them to shreds if they try anything,” Dawn said.

“ – and it gives us an advantage, because demon protocol allows for the presence of a consort.”

“How come?”

Giles coughed. "Some demons have a, er, physical or mystical link to, er, a mate or slave."

"Sometimes a symbiote, or a parasite," Willow put in. "And they can't be separated. Vampires can separate from theirs, of course, but the rules are standard."

"So if one side gets to bring *their* parasites, the other does too," said Xander. "Very comforting."

"It won't be so bad," Dawn said consolingly. "All you have to do is go have a great meal, and keep quiet. Janice's dad took her to Fellini's once for her birthday and she said it was amazing. I wish I could go."

"You'd never manage the keeping quiet," said Buffy. "Giles, are you sure there's no other way?"

"There's always another way," said Willow. "But I think Giles is right, this is the best option. Spike can go sweet-talk them; Xander keeps an eye on Spike. We gain their trust, find out where they live, and *then* you get to do the hacking and slashing."

"Willow has hit on the salient point," Giles said. "While I think Spike is highly suited to this expedition, I would

prefer that we not send him to meet with the demon Mafia all by himself, if possible. He is prone to temptation and, ah, flights of idiocy.”

Buffy threw up her hands. “Okay. Fine. Xander can go.” She looked at Dawn and grinned. “But only if we get to dress him.”

“Don’t I get a vote?” Xander asked indignantly.

“No,” said three female voices in chorus.

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Xander leaned against the elevator wall, head spinning. The evening had contained a startling quantity of extremely good wine – at least, by Xander’s standards. Thank God the elevator was moving at its usual snail-like pace.

Although, he’d felt off-balance since the moment Spike showed up at his door, looking and behaving like a blond James Bond. Since when did Spike own a suit like that? He looked – he was – well, Xander hadn’t looked that good even on his wedding day. Stupid vampire coolness.

It wasn't fair.

For such an upscale restaurant, Fellini's was pretty relaxed about the appearance of their clientele – at least, those in the private rooms. Or rather, the physical features of their clientele; everyone had been snappily dressed, no matter how many arms they had. He'd have to let Giles know it was hardly 'neutral ground.' The Pavaks probably ran it, part of the whole demon Mafia thing. Still, the food had been amazing.

Almost as amazing as the way in which Spike had negotiated the menu, traded witticisms with the maitre d', and snarked at the waiter in just the right way to amuse the Pavaks, who at first hadn't seemed real big on the concept of amusement. The Spike he'd seen tonight was someone he'd never seen before. Someone... relaxed, enjoying himself, despite their mission.

He sneaked a glimpse at Spike lounging against the other wall. Spike, who'd said they'd better get in the elevator together, in case they'd been followed. Keep the show going.

He hadn't been so thrilled by the way Spike had thrown an arm around him, ruffled his hair, and occasionally

kicked him under the table. But after the first couple of glasses of wine, things had gotten a little fuzzy around the edges, and he found himself laughing at Spike's jokes and kicking him back.

He hadn't even batted an eye when Spike leaned over and extravagantly kissed the top of his head.

Of course, that might have been because Spike had then quietly hissed, "Give us away, and I'll lick up the puddles of blood the Pavaks leave behind."

Still. Xander had had a surprisingly good time. He wasn't used to enjoying his evenings out.

All his recent attempts at dating had failed miserably. If his latest date wasn't trying to eat him, sacrifice him, or lay eggs in him, then she was morally opposed to science fiction, or wanted at least ten children. Other times he ran out of gas, got mugged on his way to her place, or the cinema burned down. One memorable time, he developed stomach flu in the middle of the evening. He'd seriously begun to think Anya had cursed him after all.

Tonight, he'd been surrounded by demons eating calf brains, while pretending Spike was his boyfriend, and it

had *still* been the best evening out he'd had in months.

Xander bit his lip. It had been a good evening all on its own. Even without comparing it to his usual dates. Not that this had been a date. In no way was this a date. It had been... fun. But it wasn't a date.

"This wasn't a date," he blurted.

Spike stared at him. "I know that."

"Well, uh. Good."

"If it was a date, I'd be naked in your bed already."

Spike's look was lewd, sultry, so obviously a joke – and then suddenly, so very obviously, not.

Xander's breath came faster.

Spike moved closer to him. Xander pressed his back against the wall.

Spike leaned up against him, taking his time, plastering himself against Xander inch by inch.

Then he kissed him.

It was a revelation.

Xander's hands came up to clutch at Spike, his hair, his ass, anything he could reach. Spike was grinding against him, hips moving in sinuous rhythm with his tongue, sweet pressure in all the right spots. His hands started working their way under Xander's shirt, as he moved his mouth to Xander's neck.

Xander couldn't get enough air. He was suddenly hot and prickling with sweat, as if he'd run all the way up the stairs instead of taking the elevator to the eleventh floor – where the door was opening.

“Door!” he exclaimed, pushing feebly at Spike.

Spike peeled himself off Xander just as slowly, stepped back into the doorway and held out his hand.

Xander moved towards him, walking awkwardly, and gestured down the hall to his apartment.

“Want me to get the keys?” Spike said huskily as they reached the door.

Xander fumbled in his pocket, mouth dry, and dropped the keys. Spike bent to get them, and brushed his cheek against Xander's ridiculously eager erection as he rose. Xander groaned.

Spike unlocked the door, gestured Xander in, and stood there expectantly.

Xander stumbled in and turned.

If it wasn't a date, there shouldn't have been a good-night kiss.

Too late, he thought, and said, "Come in, Spike."

The End