

Rating: Adult

Written for: [Schmangst-a-thon](#) for Ladycat who wanted S/X with either emotional or physical hurt and SMUT. She didn't want serious levels of angst; I hope I avoided that.

I also hope this is schmangst.

Thanks to: Adis723 for the beta and Uberaeryn and Stoney321 for accepting freak-out phone calls.

Notes: Takes place in Africa immediately post AtS Season-5 "Damage."

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Choices

by

[Crazydiamondsue](#)

"Of all the cyber cafés in all the third-world towns in all the distant continents, he walks into mine."

Spike turned around to see a grimly smiling Xander behind him. He watched as Xander pulled the chair opposite him back and sat, waving at the now smiling girl

behind the counter.

“So that’s how you greet the returning dead?” Spike asked, frowning.

“Hey, I offered Buffy pizza,” Xander said with a shrug. “I guess I could have gone with ‘This looks the beginning of a beautiful friendship’, but that’s wrong for so many reasons, and how often do I get to use my Bogey voice?”

“Right,” Spike said, lifting his cup of Assam tea and staring down into it. “Kind of forgotten how shock kicks in your babbling reflex. Comforting, that.”

Xander grinned lazily. “Nah, I’ve just discovered that the babble thing works really well here – gives them more of a chance of picking out words they know. And I kinda hate to tell you that your, “Ta-da! Undead!” news was preempted by a lengthy, gaspy – yeah he actually typed *gasp* a couple of times – email from Andrew.” Spike started and Xander rolled his eyes. “Don’t worry, the last sentence was, ‘Oh, yeah, don’t tell Buffy.’” He frowned. “He misspelled ‘Balrog,’ though.”

The smiling girl behind the counter was now a smiling girl at their side, setting a tall glass of a dark brew on the

table and stepping back. “*Moni*, Szander,” she said with a smile and then looked at Spike, glared, and went back behind her counter.

Spike stared after her and then looked at Xander.

“Slayer? ‘Cause I’ve been gettin’ the silent but deadly treatment since I walked in here.”

Xander smiled, lifting his glass. “*Siyani*,” he said, pointing toward the girl, “came to tell me that an Englishman was at the café asking for me. I was sorta ticked off about that, because my report’s not due for another week. Then she added in a way too casual way, and trust me – I’ve been here way too long when I’m gettin’ ‘casual’ out of broken English – ‘And he’s vampire.’”

Xander looked at Spike for a long moment, and when the vampire expressed no surprise, he shrugged. “Since I carve the stakes she keeps under the counter, I had to explain that you were kind of a friend. Add that to the fact she has sort of a,” Xander coughed, “crush on me, and ‘kind of a friend’ translates loosely in Chichewa to a,” Xander made air quotes, “*special friend*, she’s kind of pissed. And homosexuality is illegal in Malawi, so let’s save the ‘Spike! You’re alive!’ hug until later, okay?”

“Yeah, I’ll hold myself back,” Spike muttered. He reached for Xander’s glass, sniffing it. “She must hate me, all right, ‘cause I said, ‘Bring us something strong, love,’ and she dumped this cup of monkey piss in front of me and gave you the good stuff.”

Xander took the glass back from Spike and took a long drink. “Imported liquor’s too expensive for these little places to stock. They serve a home brew to the locals, though. They call it ‘Number One,’ which is funny to me for reasons you’d never apprec...”

“*Star Trek*,” Spike interrupted absently.

“Yeah,” Xander said with a flash of confusion, and then shook it off. “Anyway, it’s not bad once you get used to it. Only need one glass to get smashed at first, and it gets the tartar off your teeth.” He slid his tongue slowly around his mouth. “I’m thinkin’ maybe the enamel, too.”

They sat there silently for a moment, Spike ignoring his tea as he watched Xander drain his own glass in a few measured swallows. Xander thumped the empty glass to the table and pushed his chair back.

“So, okay, it’s been, uh, interesting, to see you alive and

kicking again,” Xander said as he stood, “and I’m touched, really, in a weird sort of way, that you came all this way to give me the news, but you can tell Angel that if Andrew couldn’t talk Giles into helping you out, I don’t have much of a shot...”

“Angel didn’t send me,” Spike said quietly. He lifted a hand, rubbing it absently against the band of white on his arm. “We ran into a bit of a...situation,” he said, his fingers tightening unconsciously against the bandage. “And I took off. He doesn’t even know I’m here.”

“Yeah, I noticed the armband look you’re working. Kinda hoped at first you were easing your way out of the 70s retro and into more of an 80s groove. I mean, none of us wanted to say anything, Spike, but the Billy Idol thing was starting to look a little dated,” Xander said. “Hey, I bet I’ve got a sweatshirt somewhere in my stuff. We could cut the sleeves off...”

Spike turned his hands over, staring down at the bandages that covered his forearms as if he were actually considering Xander’s suggestion. He snorted and looked up, noticing that Xander’s teasing had stopped and a distant, but curious, look had replaced it.

“Slayer,” Spike said simply, lifting his hands.

“Huh,” Xander answered, cocking his head. “Thought you’d already made quota. She get the best of you this time, or this one of those, ‘you should see the other guy’ deals?”

“That’s the thing,” Spike said, looking up, his eyes earnest and meeting Xander’s, seeing the eye patch take on a dull gleam in the low light of the overhead lamps. “This Slayer...she thought I’d done things to her, and even when she knew it wasn’t me, she still knew other things I’d done. Other Slayers. And what she did...can’t say I didn’t deserve it. So I got to thinking, knew you were in Africa, knew you were rounding up Slayers. Thought maybe I could help with that.” He swallowed, eyes still on Xander, “Kind of reverse the, what’s-it, karma, somehow. Take it back.”

“Uh-huh,” Xander said slowly, spinning his chair, straddling it, and leaning in toward Spike. “Now how ‘bout you tell me the real reason you’re here?”

Spike glanced over at the counter where the girl, Siyani, had stopped wiping glasses and was now polishing a stake meaningfully, her eyes firmly on him. “How about

we take this somewhere else?”

Xander groaned. “I *knew* it! This is going to involve hugging, isn’t it? I’m not kidding, Spike, they take those anti-sodomy laws seriously here...”

“Harris,” Spike said, his voice low and tight, “please.”

Xander stared at him silently for a moment, and then shook his head. “Years of past history and months of carefully honed instinct are telling me that we’re even, and you should just...but,” he sighed, “the Number One I chugged is saying, ‘what the hell?’, so come on,” he said, standing.

Xander waved Spike ahead of him as they headed out into the night.

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Spike rolled his eyes at Xander’s, “What, you waiting for an invitation?” and stepped into a standard hotel room with a double bed, desk and chair and even a view overlooking a swimming pool. The only indications that Harris wasn’t a typical college student on a holiday safari

were the files scattered over the desk and the photographs, all of girls, pinned to the wall.

“Kind of pictured something more...” he muttered, looking around.

“Tribal?” Xander laughed, closing the door. “Giles picked Malawi as the base because of its tourist friendly vibe. I wouldn’t stand out, other than the obvious,” he said, waving at the patch. “But don’t worry, this is just that – base. I get around to places that make the Hellmouth look like a rest stop with really bad plumbing.”

Spike shrugged. “Just that my trek to the dark continent was a bit more Discovery Channel, is all,” he said, looking around.

“Yeah, well, you know all the cool demons; I just know a bunch of English guys with a charge account,” Xander said, reaching into a crate and tossing Spike a Coca-Cola bottle filled with a warm, dangerously dark liquid.

“Make it so, Number One,” Xander said, popping the top off of his own and taking a deep swallow.

“The gods must be crazy,” Spike said in return, tipping

the bottle.

Xander leaned back against the desk, watching Spike pace around the room. “So Angel didn’t send you,” he said, considering. “Okay, I buy that, ‘cause I’m the last person at Slayer-central Angel would reach out to. Willow always had a soft spot for him, anyway. But, c’mon, Spike, *reversing the Slayer slaying karma?*” He shook his head. “You were a lot more convincing when you were evil...er.”

Spike didn’t answer, busying himself with picking up the hand carved idols that Siyani insisted on filling Xander’s room with, despite the fact that her family had been Catholic for generations, and turning them to face the wall.

Xander stared at him, struck by a sudden sense of déjà vu. “So I get why you’re here, or why you’re back, sort of; Andrew’s email was heavy on the squeals and light on the details, but why are you *here?* In Africa? How’d you know where to find me? Everyone else give you the brush off? How far was I down the list?”

Spike shrugged. “Knew you were here ‘cause of Andrew. He couldn’t stop blathering on about the sodding fish you

sent him. Had a friend do a search on mbuna fish, cross-referenced that with the bloody Council, and there it was...Malawi.” He gestured to the tourism poster on the wall and its cheery slogan, looking at Xander. “*The warm heart of Africa.*”

“Yeah, I figured that one out, too,” Xander mumbled, taking another drink.

“You *were* the list, Harris,” Spike said, moving away from the window and toward Xander. “Needed you to do something for me.”

“I figured,” Xander sighed, setting his bottle down. “Like I said, Spike – we’re even. I got the whole thing with you and Anya...eventually, and I went along with Buffy’s ‘he’s our champion’ speech because of that. So it cancelled out – clean slate. I don’t owe you anything.”

“And there it is – champion,” Spike said, staring past him. He laughed suddenly. “And you know the funny thing? Angel hates it, too. ‘Champion.’ You thought we believed it, didn’t you, Harris? The whole ‘they’ve got *souls* now.’ Every time Buffy said it, every time she tried to make all of you, even herself, believe it. I saw the look in your eyes, in Rupert’s, when you looked at me. It didn’t cancel

out anything. It still doesn't," he said, arms crossing and his fingers rubbing the bands on his arms.

Xander closed his eye, rubbing a hand tiredly against his forehead. "Spike, it's late, I've had way more Number One than is medically necessary, and I'm remembering why all of our conversations usually ended in one of us throwing a punch. Yeah, okay, you and Angel are souled – you're *champions*. Champions, who, according to Buffy-mail are running an evil law firm, but what's a little more "evil now" back and forth..."

"Couldn't go to Buffy," Spike said quietly, cutting Xander off. "Even with what she thinks she knows about Wolfram & Hart, she'd still believe in me. Or try to, because she has to. Couldn't go to Rupert or Red, either, they'd just try to 'fix' me, if only to stop the spread of evil," he said, chuckling. "Had to be you."

"Er, yay?" Xander said, frowning. "Spike, you realize I haven't understood a thing you've said since 'the gods must be crazy', right? 'Cause, Coca-Cola," he said, lifting the bottle, "heh. Good one. But now all I'm hearing is crazy, and, much like the Billy Idol thing, gettin' kind of old."

“Buffy put that medallion in my hand and called me a champion. And I took it, because I would have done anything to keep the look in her eyes I’d seen there one night, one terrifying, amazing night. So I put it on because I wanted that from her, and I wanted that *for* me. Champion.” He looked at Xander for a moment and then continued. “And when the fire burned through me, I let myself believe it. And when I came back, I realized the fire had cleansed the slate clean, but it had burned away everything else, too. Everything there was between us...just wiped away. Because it had to be, for her.” His voice lowered and he stared down at his hands again. “And then there was Angel.”

Xander’s brows lifted and his mouth quirked but Spike was waving that away, continuing. “I won’t bore you with the details, mate, but for a bit there I was...tied to Angel.” Xander’s brows lifted higher but Spike carried on, oblivious. “And then when I *could* leave, I didn’t want to. First off because there was something Angel had that could have been mine, too, and God, how he hated that. So I wanted it then,” Spike said, looking up with a dark grin.

“Spike,” Xander said carefully, “I don’t know how current your information is, but I’m pretty sure Angel hasn’t had

Buffy in a long..."

"Not Buffy," Spike said, shaking his head. "Bigger than Buffy, though I'll deny that if you repeat it," he added, with a jab of his finger. "I don't think you can get this, Harris, but Angelus...he was like, like the Slayer is to you. Followed him, tried to earn the right, bloody *take* the right, to run with him, and then he was gone."

Spike looked up at Xander, saw a glimmer of understanding there and shook his head. "I waited a century for him to come back. And when he did, he ripped into me in all the ways I'd forgotten. So the second, the *second*, he was Angel the pure again, and I had my chance, I ripped right back."

Spike dropped down on the edge of the bed and drained the bottle in his hands. "You think you know, Harris, the way it was between me and Buffy. All the wrong and none of the right. But the minute this soul slammed back into me, I knew I could never make it right. But she didn't. To her, the soul meant everything, the how and the why, and she forgave me. Whatever you think you know, *she* forgave me. But the things I've done to Angel, what I am to Angel, he'll never forgive. So I could stay there, fight it out for my own reasons, because he'd

never care. And then this,” Spike said, looking down at his hands, as if they belonged to someone else, “and he looked at me like I was something other than the monster he’d made. He looked at me with *hope*,” Spike spat, startling Xander.

They stared at each other across the expanse of the room, silent but for the rattle of the air conditioner, and then Spike said tiredly, “Buffy looked at me like that because the man she...” Spike broke off, “the man she cared for had to be worth believing in. Angel looked at me like that because it has to be true – why we fight.” Spike scoffed, “And since I’m not angling to get into Angel’s knickers, I’m not seeing it work out quite so well.” He met Xander’s gaze. “So I came to you.”

Xander cleared his throat. “Are my knickers figuring in this scenario? ‘Cause if that’s what you were needing from me...”

“Damn it, Harris,” Spike snarled, lunging to his feet.

“Hey,” Xander said calmly, “my room, my beer...my quips.”

Spike stopped, chuckling darkly. “Right. Kind of makes it

easier, that. 'S why I'm here, innit? You were always so good at seeing the monster, so remind me...Xander, tell me just how wrong and evil I am."

Xander turned away from Spike, walking over to the window and looking out into the darkness. "You know, Spike," he began, his tone light, conversational. "I don't think you ever realized how young we all were. And I get that a couple of centuries would make your perspective slightly...off. I'm the oldest, did you ever know that?"

Xander looked back at Spike who was staring at him in silent confusion. "Couple of months older than Buffy, and a few more than Willow." Xander turned back to the night sky, considering. "I had a friend once, a long time ago. He got vamped before I understood what that really meant, and he told me I was just a shadow to him. And that's all we were to you, wasn't it? Me, Willow, Giles. Just shadows around Buffy, getting in your way. You didn't know us at all."

Spike stared hard at Xander's back. "Knew enough to know what buttons to push," he said.

Xander looked back at him, laughing. "Yeah, you knew that. But you never got it, any of it. You thought we did

it, all that we did, for her, for Buffy.” Xander shrugged. “And you’re not wrong. But that wasn’t all of it. Goin’ out in a blaze of glory, you missed those last moments on the Hellmouth. You got the chance to burn it all away, but we got the chance to make a choice.”

Xander walked back over to the desk, pulling the chair out and dropping down on to it. “Evil wasn’t in our backyard, anymore. We’d earned the right to step back, let someone else take our place, fight the good fight.” Xander smiled slightly. “But somehow we ended up on a plane to England, and then in a room in London, none of us admitting that yeah, we had another choice. We stood together and watched Giles and Andrew spin a globe, letting it scatter us around the world. And I still had choices. I could have gone with Buffy to Rome, or stayed there in England with Giles. But I chose this, because it meant facing something I didn’t want to face. Doing it alone, and dealing with that if I fucked it up.”

Xander stood up, shoving the chair aside and walking over to Spike. “Look at me, Spike,” he commanded quietly.

Spike looked up, his eyes narrowed and dark with confusion. Recognizing the sound of Xander’s voice, but

lost by its tone, the sureness in his voice, the measured certainty of his words.

“Look at me,” Xander said again, moving closer.

Spike looked up at him, seeing Harris, but *not* Harris, somehow. Same dark hair, but shorter now, close-cropped and almost brutal in the way it framed his face, highlighting the eye patch. The remaining eye losing some of its darkness against the dark tan of his skin. Shoulders squared and filling out a dark grey t-shirt, hard flat stomach tapering down to dusty jeans that were battered and stained, but actually fit. And the way his body moved...purposeful, every action contained.

“You came here wanting a ‘fuck off, Fangless,’ didn’t you? Vampires are monsters...they make monster movies about them. But I’ve seen all kinds of monsters, Spike. I’ve seen them in the people I love, in myself. I’ve spent months in a world that’s daily life isn’t any better than some of our more hum-drum apocalypses. I’ve seen Slayers who shrug off their destinies, because what do they care about a faceless evil on the other side of the world, when they see death every day that doesn’t come with fangs? And they’re supposed to fight, Spike, because prophecy said they have to and a spell,

something *we* did, made it inevitable. So a vampire that doesn't want to fight because he doesn't feel he deserves to?" Xander shrugged. "I've heard worse."

"*You* don't get it, Harris," Spike sighed. "So you've grown up. Bully for you. But I always knew what you were, fighting at the Slayer's side," Spike snorted, "needing to be her hero, being everything I wasn't..."

Xander snickered, looking every bit as young as he should be and nothing like the man who had faced Spike down moments before. Then he looked back at Spike, nodding, and that certainty was back. "Yeah, that's what you'd think. Boy, you missed out on the bad old Angel days when Buffy would actually try to use me to make someone jealous." He shrugged lightly. "I fought at first because I'd lost a friend, then because of Buffy. And then because I had to, because I wasn't innocent anymore. You think you lost that innocence the day you became a vampire. You didn't. You lost choice. You lost the innocence the day the soul came back and you knew what was out there, what you had done, and what it meant."

Spike shook his head. "No. You're wrong. Buffy told me once that I couldn't be a human, couldn't be a vampire.

But the soul..." he groaned, looking away. "Doesn't make a man, won't let me be a monster."

"Having a soul never did much in making me a man," Xander said. "Kinda had to figure that out on my own, with a little help. So I guess we're done here, Spike. Not gonna tell you that you're a monster just because of the fangy thing. But I will tell you this. Knowing what's out there and having the strength to fight and someone believing you can do it, and still walking away? *That* makes you a monster."

Xander stopped, weighing that, and then shrugged, leaving the rest up to Spike. Spike said nothing, his fingers tracing circles against the bandages again, circling tighter and tighter until threads of red streaked the white.

"You should change those," Xander said abruptly, turning away and opening a drawer in the desk and rummaging around.

"Doesn't matter," Spike said, standing. "No pain, and not like I can get an infection, right?"

Xander walked over to the bed, carrying a First Aid kit.

“Sit,” he commanded, grinning slightly as Spike automatically obeyed. “Hands.”

Xander knelt and took Spike’s hands in his. He turned them over, noting how the bandages were wrapped and sealed in a very sterile, obviously medical way and that their present griminess meant Spike hadn’t touched them since. Except to worry at them, fingerprints and nail marks scoring the cloth.

Xander slowly unwrapped the first one and then lifted Spike’s forearm, looking at the thin red line that braceleted it, blood seeping slowly from around a few pulled sutures. “Wow. The whole thing, huh?” He watched as Spike curled his fingers, making a loose fist. “Can’t believe they managed to make them work again. But you’re a vampire, right?” he said shrugging, “you could just grow a new pair.”

Spike snorted, his eyes following the slow work of Xander’s hands as they cleaned and bandaged, gentle against his skin. “M needing to grow a pair, isn’t that what you said?”

Xander looked up, smiling and then reached for the other hand.

Spike shrugged. "Angel's got good docs, evil or no. Can fix most anything broken." He looked down at Xander's face, at the one eye narrowed in concentration. "Could fix you, too, you know," he said, tapping below his own eye.

Xander shook his head, his eyes still on Spike's hand. "No, thanks. The things I lost? That isn't what I'd want back." His mouth tightened briefly, and then he was back to work, his attention solely on Spike as he re-bandaged.

"Christ, you're so fucking noble," Spike said, jerking his hand out of Xander's and pushing away, walking across the room. "You can't even hate me. *You*, Harris, can't hate me." He threw his head back, vamping and turning back to Xander with a snarl. "Need me to remind you, that it? Evil, undead taking and touching everything you thought was yours?"

Xander slammed the lid closed on the First Aid kit, getting to his feet. "Damn it, Spike!" he yelled, his fists clenching. And then he stopped, backing down and shaking his head. "You know, when Siyani told me you were waiting for me down at the café, I almost didn't go. And I acted like I didn't care when I did, because no

matter what reason you came here for, I *knew* this is how we'd end up, and I didn't want it to be this way. But I had to see you, even if it went this way, because...but you know what? It doesn't matter, because this," he said, waving a hand between them, "this is all you wanted, and all you'll ever want. But I'm not going to give you what you want, Spike. Because the boy you came here looking for – he's the shadow. And unless you're ready to see the man," Xander shrugged, "we're finished."

Spike's face shifted back, and he stared at Xander, eyes wary and body rigid.

Xander walked over to him, jaw lifting as Spike stood his ground. "You came here because you thought I'd be the only one who'd still see the monster. What if we were both wrong?"

They stood facing each other, and then Xander said quietly, "You were right. I did hate you. I hated the vampire without even trying to, and I hated Buffy pushing Willow and me away and then turning to you because you could help in ways we couldn't. And then, after the soul...I really hated you. Why I couldn't believe in the whole, 'he has a soul' mantra – because it put you in reach."

Xander stepped closer, staring into Spike's eyes. "I listened to your sad tale, so now you do me the favor of hearing mine. You know, I didn't even see it back then, but hey, there were a lot of distractions. Willow knew, though. Did you know it's not normal for a guy to hate one guy and then make jokes about how hot the other guy is?" Xander snorted. "As much TV as I've watched, you'd think I would have figured that one out. And then you died," Xander said quietly, "but so did she, so there was a lot pain, and it all kind of mixed up together. But *you* came back, and that might have involved a couple of crates of Number One and a late night phone call to Willow which included a lack of shock on her part and a great deal of horror on mine. So I can't give you what you're looking for Spike," Xander said softly. "I've already met the monster. I'm still waiting to meet the man."

Spike looked back at him, so close that he could see the shadow of lashes against one cheek and count the seams in the eye patch on the other. He took a deep breath and let it out, so close that he felt it breeze against Xander's lips and flutter back against his own. "Why are you telling me this, Harris?"

"Because I know it won't matter," Xander answered, his

gaze firm, honest. “This isn’t what you came here looking for, and I knew that when I walked into the café. But I still had to try, because even though both of us know we’re not going to get what we want from each other, neither one of us has walked out of this room.”

“You’re not the one I want,” Spike said flatly.

“I’m the one that’s here,” Xander said, lowering his head and brushing his lips against Spike’s. Just the barest feeling of flesh against flesh, Xander’s lips dry, rough and nervous and Spike’s tight and sealed, but then lifting and softening slightly. Xander raised his head, looking down into Spike’s half-lidded gaze. He swallowed hard. “I’ll take that as a yes?”

Spike’s arms shot up and around Xander’s neck, lips crushing together, hips slamming as Xander fell back against the darkened window, the glass shuddering beneath them. Spike’s mouth ground down on his, open and eager, teeth scraping and tongue darting until Xander had to grab onto him and just breathe.

Spike lifted his head and Xander opened his eye with a quiet groan. “Make that a ‘hell, yeah’,” he said weakly.

Spike's lips twitched and he pressed closer, tracing the hard lines and planes of Xander's back, and then he pulled away suddenly, jerking his hands back.

Xander frowned. "Or maybe you were just proving a point."

Spike lifted a brow. "See? Part of you still thinks I'm evil. No," he said, sobering and raising his hands palm-out to Xander. "Can't feel them," he said quietly, "can't feel...anything."

"Really?" Xander asked, pushing away from the window and taking Spike's hands in his. He rubbed his thumbs lightly against the inside of Spike's wrists and then jerked straight up, pulling Spike's arms above his head and slamming their bodies together, feeling his erection grind against Spike's as they met. "*Anything?*"

Spike gasped. "Maybe a twinge."

"A twinge, huh?" Xander grinned. "Wanna try for a 'tingle'?" Xander dropped Spike's hands and placed a palm flat against Spike's chest, pushing him back. He followed Spike down onto the bed, kicking off his boots as he went. Then his hands were lost in cool cotton,

rough and needy as they sought flesh beneath it. He buried his mouth in the curve of Spike's neck, the strokes of his tongue cool before his breath bathed hot behind it.

Spike was all coiled tension and subtle violence beneath him, touches harsh and beyond control under Xander's shirt, scraping further and tearing open jeans, the denim and cotton rending in his hands. His fingers stilled as they slid against bare skin, letting the brush of Xander's hands against him become the feeling in his own.

Xander sat back, pulling Spike against him, hands trailing down Spike's arms, smoothing against Spike's sides and then twisting together in the back of his shirt. Xander gathered the material in his fist, tighter and tighter, until he could sweep it over Spike's head, letting the shirt rub cool and soft against Spike's back as he pulled him in for a kiss.

Xander's cock was a heavy, warm weight against Spike's stomach, brushing in a teasing pattern as their bodies met and parted in the heat of the kiss. Xander tossed the t-shirt away and let his hands glide from ribs to hipbones as he lowered Spike down onto the bed.

Spike fell back into the tangled sheets, watching as

Xander's fingers traced over his chest, brushing nipples lightly. And then Xander's hands were lifting away, one sliding up the hem of his own shirt as the other dropped to the cock that jutted toward Spike, easing down its length. Spike stared as Xander eased up on his knees, one hand pumping himself, fingers fast and wrist flicking, as the other dragged his t-shirt up to bare a hard, tan stomach, but not high enough to reveal the fingers circling his own nipple.

Xander's eye slid closed and his mouth parted; breaths becoming faster, harsher, drowning out the slick sounds of skin against skin. Spike's eyes followed every stroke of Xander's hand, every slight thrust of his hips. He reached down to cup himself, pressing hard and feeling his cock throb against the scratch of the denim and the scrape of the zipper. He tightened his grip, and grimaced as his hand fumbled, numb and clumsy.

Lifting his hands to his stomach, Spike laced his fingers together and let his thumbs make slow circles around his navel, able to feel the friction against his fingers. Xander opened his eyes, his hands slowing, and drew a deep, shuddering breath as he watched Spike slide his hands down his stomach, his thumbs rimming the edge of his navel and fingers disappearing beneath the waist of his

jeans.

Xander pulled his shirt over his head roughly, dropping, naked, down onto Spike and ducking his head. He pressed his lips against the bandages covering Spike's arms, kissing lightly. Spike's hands stilled and he tried to pull them away, but they lay motionless, pinned between the fabric of his jeans and the press of Xander's mouth.

Xander's lips dipped lower, tracing the silent veins, the rough knuckles, and then the curves of Spike's trembling fingers. When he reached the fly of Spike's jeans, he lifted his head. Spike arched against him, his stomach tightening as he moved to pull his fingers free.

"Stop," Xander commanded without bothering to look up. Propping himself up with one arm, he reached out and glided the backs of his fingers against Spike's thigh, twisting and turning until they brushed over the hard swell of Spike's cock. He traced down the length, and then let his fingers slide back up it until they reached Spike's waist again. Slipping his hands beneath to rub against Spike's, Xander slowly popped the fly open, licking his lips and breathing a reverent, "Oh, God," as Spike's cock, framed by dark curls and the splay of his fingers, was revealed.

Spike moaned roughly and then bit his lips together, cursing himself.

“What?” Xander asked, looking up at him, confusion and lust, combined with the eye patch, making him look like a drunken pirate.

Spike laughed shortly. “Nothing. Just been a while since anyone’s looked at me like that.”

“Really?” Xander said, grinning. “‘Cause I’m having to open my eye really wide to take it all in.”

Spike snorted, and then Xander’s hair was brushing against his stomach, mouth fluttering warm against his cock as Xander muttered, “*Really wide,*” and then lips were opening around him, and the entire world was suddenly warm and wet and turning only on the stroke of Xander’s tongue.

Xander guided Spike’s hands around his neck, anchoring them there, and then slid his own around Spike’s hips, lifting and levering until Spike’s feet were braced apart, thighs straining as he pumped himself in and out of Xander’s mouth.

Spike watched as Xander's lips closed around him, dark red and bruised by the steady thrust of his cock. But when he looked up and met Xander's gaze, the unwavering sureness he saw there caused him to fall back, pulling away and shaking his head.

"Yes," Xander said fiercely, falling on Spike and pinning his hands up and over his head, covering Spike's body until their lips were brushing close and their gazes met again.

"No," Spike growled, thrusting up against Xander and then falling back with a gasp. "That's not what I want."

Xander's chin scraped harsh against Spike's cheek as he lowered his lips closer. "What *do* you want, Spike?" he breathed.

"For you to finish what you started," Spike said roughly, yanking his hands free of Xander's and flipping over onto his stomach, pressing back into Xander's body and bracing himself up on his elbows.

Xander trailed a hand thoughtfully down Spike's back and cocked his head. Letting his hand press against Spike,

palm flat and warm against cool, smooth skin, he reached beneath the pillow and drew out a bottle of lotion.

Spike snickered.

Xander popped the lid, rolling his eyes. “I live alone in a country where most of the women I meet are off limits due to protocol and sodomy’s illegal, remember? Stop giggling. What’s under *your* pillow?”

Spike turned his head, glaring. “First – wasn’t giggling, very manly chuckling, maybe. Second – none of your sodding business.” He gasped as Xander’s fingers teased into him, slick and warm, and then exhaled as they eased out. “Forgot about that illegal rot...” he gave another manly snicker, “sure we should be doing this, Xander?”

Xander slid a lotion wet hand up his cock and then leaned forward, pressing into Spike. “You’re a rebel – so rebel.”

Xander eased into Spike carefully, his thumbs digging into Spike’s hips to still their impatient movements and letting himself savor every inch of the slow, slow glide. Feeling their hips settle together, he arched back,

pumping roughly and then stopping as he looked down at Spike's bowed back, his head lowered in submission.

Xander slid his hands up to Spike's shoulders, leaning in and keeping his lower body still as he pressed his lips against Spike's neck and said harshly, "Stop trying to make me your punisher. I told you I wouldn't do that for you, and I'm not going to let you make me." Xander swallowed, his throat working against Spike's back. "No matter how hot it looks."

Xander arched back, wrapping his arms around Spike and pulling him up until they were pressed together front to back and grinding deeper and faster than the new position allowed.

"God, yes," Spike gasped, letting Xander knot their hands together around his middle and pressing back into every slamming thrust.

Xander buried his face into the curve of Spike's neck, his lips rough and frantic on the skin there as he gritted out, "Don't want you to be my bitch, Spike, I told you – I want to meet the *man*."

Spike's eyes closed and his jaw tightened as he let his

head fall back against Xander's shoulder. "Don't know who he is, anymore," he said roughly.

"I do," Xander said, gripping tight and guiding their fingers down to clasp around Spike's cock and stroke together. "He's a man who wants to feel. Whether it's this," Xander said, twisting his hips and pulling out slightly and then twisting them back as he thrust in again. "Or this," he said quietly, brushing his lips lightly down Spike's cheek and then ducking his head to cover Spike's mouth with his own and kissing him with slow, deep glides of his tongue.

Xander lifted his head and looked down at their joined hands, his fingers laced with Spike's and giving the strokes strength and sureness. "But I don't want you to just feel it, Spike," Xander panted, "I want you to feel it from me."

Spike's body grew taut and rigid and he gasped, jerking back against Xander with a cry.

"I...oh, God," Xander groaned, his grip tightening around Spike as his body shook, thrusting hard and reckless as he came, his hand moving faster on Spike's until he felt an answering shudder as Spike's release coated their hands.

Xander pulled back slightly, looking down at Spike's hand, still wrapped loosely in his. "Sorry," he muttered, pulling away.

"Sorry?" Spike said, looking back with a wary frown. "For what?"

"For, um, blasting off like that," Xander said, shrugging and ducking his head. "I was doing pretty well with the first time jitters, counting to a hundred in Chichewa backwards, but when you tightened up around me and made that noise and..." Xander broke off, turning away.

"First time?" Spike scoffed. "What happened to the man who was yanking me back against him and telling me - *me* - not to act like a little bitch?"

"Okay, I *never* said little," Xander said, his head jerking as he looked back. "And yeah, first time. Well, doing *that*."

"Huh," Spike said, turning slowly until he and Xander were face to face. "Never would have guessed."

Xander smiled slightly. "That was a variation on fantasy number 5. Most of them involve you seducing me." He

frowned, “And take place in my parents’ old basement, oddly.”

Spike smirked and then reached out a cautious hand, gliding it down Xander’s chest, both of them watching its path. He let his hand settle above Xander’s heart. “Wish I could feel that,” he said softly.

Xander reached for Spike’s hand, pressing his lips again to the bandage. “You’ll heal.”

Spike tugged Xander to him and Xander held his breath as Spike leaned in slowly and kissed him lightly on the lips. He drew back, his head tilting as he looked at Xander, and then he licked his lips, frowning. “Xander, what you said, I...” he shook his head. “This would never work, you know. I mean, you and me? It’s bloody stupid.”

Xander fell back into the sheets, grinning up at Spike. “But that’s what makes it so cool if it does.”

Spike stared down at him and then ducked his head, hiding a smile.

Xander watched the smile spread and grinned harder. “So I’m gonna go kill monsters, real ones, tomorrow.”

What're you gonna do?"

Spike shrugged. "Corrupt the natives, drink all your home brew and maybe see a man about a blow job." Spike grinned as Xander snickered and then looked down at his hands, flexing the fingers. "Then I figure I'll head back to L.A. and annoy the hell out of Angel until he stops looking at me like I'm some kind of shiny new weapon to point at the bad men."

"Shouldn't take too long," Xander said, nodding.

"Not any longer than it takes for him to get the credit card bill," Spike agreed. He looked down at Xander, seeing the happiness on his face and swallowing. "But more than that...I don't know. You and I may be even, but there are things I owe Angel and things he owes me," Spike said, his voice lowering. "So this may be all there is, and this may be all that I am. You good with that?"

Xander took Spike's hand in his again, feeling how the fingers pressed strongly this time. "I made my choice when I went down to that café," he said, drawing Spike down to him, "I just needed to let you know that you had one, too, if you ever wanted to take it."

The End