Xander has forty acres, and no mule. Spike can't resist pointing this out. Xander doesn't even bother with the by now ritual response of "Shut up, Spike."

He patrols the fence line at night, planting or replacing the bone, gut and wood fetishes he uses to ward the property. Spike is usually visible as a pale blur out of the corner of Xander's eye, the glowing tip of a cigarette. Xander wonders sometimes, when he lets himself wonder anything, where Spike might have gotten them.
A smoking Spike is a quiet Spike though, so Xander doesn't ask.

Usually, Spike never stops talking. As if he has to fill in for Xander, who's been alone for so long that the babble stream has gone mostly subterranean.

"You were never one with the mojo, Harris, where'd you learn to make 'em?" Spike's asked this before, and the question has two answers, both true, for different values of "truth."

The first and usual answer is "here and there," which is true because he's combined techniques for making the things from several cultures, and added a few elements of his own. Spike can usually lure a few more details out of him, before Xander decides discretion is the better part of valor. The other answer is "from a dream," and that's also true, even if he'd been wide awake at the time. A dark woman with dreadlocks, wearing some kind of war-paint crouching on the other side of his campfire, handing him the first fetish, a smooth, yard long stick with carved plaques of bone that rattled when he took it from her. The only time he'd seen her before, had been a dream. He doesn't give any details about that.

In the end, they work, (or seem to) and that's all that really matters.
Xander has forty acres and no mule, but what he does have is a house that's as stocked and fortified as he can make it, a wood shop, chickens, ducks, guard geese, a clan of possibly demonic cats led by a Siamese looking queen that had to be about the size of a bob cat, a pond, a well, and a garden. Spike made unkind comparisons to movies starring Charleton Heston, and books by Richard Matheson.

"Got to admit there's a I Am Legend feeling to all this, Harris," Spike says with a smirk while Xander finishes off the latest batch of fetishes.

"I don't see vampires lining up outside the property line yelling for my blood, Spike."

"Be big fat targets that way, wouldn't they?"

"Shut up Spike," Xander said.

"Maybe they're just waiting for you to stick your nose out of your cozy little farmstead here." Spike says after a rare moment of silence. About fifteen minutes. "You never even bother to change your route when you need to do a little looting. Anything out there probably knows your routine like the back of their claws."

"Shut up Spike."
"Though if this were *I Am Legend* I'd be some sad little bint trying to seduce the hero in order to find out what his weakness was, or whatever the hell she was trying to do."

"Shut up Spike."

"And there'd be a lot more garlic all about the place."

"Shut up Spike."

"And you'd be going out in the day time to kill the poor comatose vamps."

"Shut up Spike."

"And you'd be a real nutter after a while--well, more of a nutter."

"Shut up Spike."

There's an ancient Ford truck that's seen better days that Xander drives when he needs to go on "shopping trips" that sometimes take days. The truck is on it's last legs, and Xander has vague plans of catching a horse or two (he's seen a few feral bands grazing in the distance on his shopping trips) and putting together some kind of wagon, when he can't find gas, or tires or when the engine finally gives up the ghost. He has a couple books
about carts and carriages, and a few on horses that he's found in various places, and he has an idea already for the kind of rig he wants.

When Xander mentions his plans, Spike generally points out that if he'd wanted horses he'd missed his chance when he'd been turning them loose where ever he'd found them starving and still penned up when he'd still been wandering around. He also points that one of the many, many reasons Xander hadn't kept a horse or two was because Xander's only real experience with horses were those little pony-go-rounds at the State Fair when he was six.

Xander doesn't like the "shopping trips." The quiet, the sense of being watched by ghosts crawls along his nerves, makes him hyper alert, hyper aware of his surroundings to an almost painful extent. He loads up on fetishes before he goes, and plants them at campsites, in the empty towns, along highways.

It can take days finding stores and houses that haven't been completely looted, clothes that are his size. He doesn't go looking for trouble, though there are times when trouble has found him. One time, it was a pack of feral dogs that had him pinned Cujo-style on top of a jungle gym--not the world's finest moment for the Xan-
man--and another time it was some kind of demon, another looter who'd tried to steal his supplies.

There are surprisingly few vampires. Spike waxes nostalgic about the Flu Pandemic of 1918 that had apparently resulted in a vampire baby boom that had lasted into the twenties. Xander's only been attacked a few times on these trips, and usually not by more than one or two at a time. If there's any vampires intent on creating a new society (and executing him as a serial killer) he hasn't run into them yet.

He finds vitamins, cold medicine and aspirin. Bandages, mason jars, nails, clothes, and a few other things people generally don't think to take when they're in a hurry with the looting. (There's no electricity, why in the hell would you steal a tv, unless you had your own generator?) A real find is some canned food: Dinty Moore Beef Stew, and Chef Boyardee Ravioli, at least twenty cans, all together. He fills up on gas, siphoning from old cars, and then heads back home. The entire trip takes about a week, and this time, there's no attacks. No other looters, demon or human, and absolutely no vampires.

That just makes him more jumpy.

"Bring me any pressies?" Spike says so suddenly that Xander nearly drops his case of mason jars.
"Yeah, you get to watch me die of a heart attack," Xander says when his heart stops trying to jump out of his throat.

"Bad day at the office, dear?" Spike asks with a smirk.

"Shut up Spike," Xander said, and started to carry the jars toward the house. "I got you some whiskey."

"The good stuff, right?" Spike says, following him inside.

"Just what I was able to find." It was Jim Beam, which he knew wasn't Spike's favorite brand, but Spike would survive the experience, he was sure.

Xander carts the rest of the supplies from his "shopping trip" into the house. He doesn't try to get Spike to help, and Spike doesn't offer--and Xander doesn't expect him to. Xander is pretty sure the likelihood of Spike offering to help is about even with that of a snowball fight in Hell. He ignores an entirely mental version of Spike's voice prissily telling him that in Dante's Inferno, the lowest level of hell is cold.

He listens with half an ear to Spike's fountain of words, not really paying attention as he puts things away, and then starts on his chores. There's animals to feed, a garden to water and weed. Outdoors, the silence is broken occasionally by some argument among the geese,
or Shithead the Rooster Cocka-doodling his head off. (Roosters, Xander had discovered, don't just crow in the morning. They also crow in the afternoon, in the evening, and occasionally in the middle of the night when you're trying to sleep, and they don't--shut--up.)

Xander can almost feel Spike watching him from the deeply shadowed porch while he works. Quiet, familiar, and uncomfortable. It leaves an itch between his shoulder blades, knowing Spike's watching. Sometimes he wonders what Spike sees.

Sometimes he wonders why Spike stays.

He's never asked Spike why.

For a while he was afraid he was going crazy. Spike showing up--and Xander doesn't know when he had--wasn't something he'd ever imagined happening. Oh, he'd known that somehow, Spike had come back to life, or had been re-animated or whatever. He also knew that Spike had probably died when Los Angeles had blown right open, and the U.S, thinking that it was the start of World War Three, shot it's entire wad at the world.

One day Spike was just there like a cat, looking around the house and taking up residence in the basement and bitching about the plumbing. There's something
comforting about the complaints, and it's one of the things that kept Xander from being afraid that Spike was actually the First Evil in his more suspicious (paranoid) moments.

Somehow it doesn't seem likely that the First Evil would follow him around making sarcastic comments and bitching about the lack of electricity, and television. In his paranoid moments, he shouts accusations and threats that Spike usually ignores, though a time or two, they've actually fought--not physically, just shouting, and getting into each other's faces, that was the limit, by some silent, mutual agreement.

The End