Pairing: Spike/Xander
Rating: NC-17
Disclaimer: I'm not Joss
Warnings: angst and slash
Summary: A decade post-series (and ignoring the comics), Xander is leading a normal life. Then he discovers Spike in an alley, amnesiac and human.
Author's Note: This fic is complete and I'll post a chapter a day. The title is stolen from a poem by Jeff Clark, which can be read here.
http://www.bostonreview.net/BR21.6/sampler2.html

And should be read, because it's oddly appropriate, although I discovered it after the fic was written.

The Ghost Has No Home

by

Whichclothes

Part One

Xander Harris didn’t rescue anyone anymore. He’d done his time, he figured. Helped save the world enough times. Lost enough—his innocence, his friends, his eye. He’d more than earned an early retirement, with a normal life and normal job. He certainly didn’t go rushing in dangerous situations anymore, like confronting the three young thugs who were beating the homeless guy in the alley.
But, okay, even retired, he could still pull out his cell phone and call 911. No risk to himself, nothing remotely heroic about that.

Except his goddamn battery was dead.

He stuffed the phone back in his pocket and walked away. Surely someone else would come along soon, someone who could remember to plug their phone into the recharger now and then. Xander had a house to get to, and a shower to take, and at seven he was going to pick up Nicole and they were going to see some movie with George Clooney in it and afterwards she might even decide to invite him into her place.

At the end of the block, the signal said “Don’t Walk.” Xander waited for the signal to change, and when it did, he promptly turned around and jogged back to the alley. He swore at himself the whole way.

When he got there, the kids were kicking at the
bum, who was huddled in such a tight ball he appeared to be only a dirty pile of clothing. Xander wasn’t a complete fool, and three against one weren’t odds he favored. He pulled his phone back out and flipped it open. “Hey!” he yelled at the attackers. “Cops are on their way. I’d scram if I were you.”

Three heads snapped up, and the kids looked at him in a way that reminded him uncomfortably of hyenas. They stopped kicking the guy and they stalked toward Xander instead. Xander gave them his most threatening look, the one that said he’d killed before and wasn’t afraid to do it again. The eye patch helped, he thought. It was easy to look bad-ass with a patch on your eye.

Apparently, the youths thought so, too, because they snarled and sneered at him, but then they went right on past. Xander watched them for a moment as they tried to hightail it away without losing their cool. Then, with an overly dramatic sigh, he went to check on their victim.
The man was still curled up so tightly it was hard to get a good look at him. He wasn’t a very big person. His hair was kind of long and curly, but Xander couldn’t tell its actual color because it was matted with blood. Not surprisingly, he reeked of alcohol.

Xander knelt beside him and softly set one hand on his shoulder. “Hey, they’re gone,” he said quietly. “Can I give you a ride to the hospital?”

The man unfolded himself just a little and turned his head to look at Xander. His face was swelling already and covered in blood and grime. But still, his identity was unmistakable. After all, Xander had seen him this badly beaten before, and that scar on one eyebrow was pretty distinctive.

“Spike!”

Spike could barely walk and Xander practically had to carry him to his Honda, which was a block away. When they got there and Xander unlocked the door, Spike collapsed heavily into the passenger seat. Xander helped tuck Spike’s appendages inside and
shut the door, then went around and got in on his side.

Then he sat there for a moment, trying to figure out what to do. He couldn’t exactly take a vampire to the ER, now, could he? But he couldn’t just leave him here either. Spike wasn’t looking at him; instead, he slumped against the window with his eyes closed, moaning slightly and bleeding onto the upholstery.

And then Xander’s brain, which had occasionally been accused of being a little slow on the uptake, finally noticed something. It was about 5:15pm. While there were a few clouds in the sky, they certainly didn’t offer enough protection from the sun for a vampire. And Spike, for whom three unarmed teenagers should have been no match at all, was bruised and sort of mangled, but he was definitely not in flames.

“Spike? What the hell’s going on?”

Spike opened his lids and frowned at Xander in
confusion. “Why d’you keep callin’ me tha’?” he slurred. He was having difficulty speaking with his lip split and his mouth all puffy.

Xander blinked at him. “Calling you what?”

“Spi’.”

“What? You want me to call you William instead? You used to hate that.”

Spike’s eyes grew very round and, with a groan, he sat up straight. His breaths came harsh and rapid. “Do you know me?”

Xander was smart enough to realize that there was a story to be told, and that his car was probably not the best place to tell it. “Let’s...let’s get home, okay?”

But Spike put out a hand toward him. It was really dirty and shaking wildly, and Xander had to resist the impulse to bat it away. Spike’s fingers tugged weakly at Xander’s shirtsleeve.
“Please,” Spike rasped. “Please. Do you know who I am?”

“Yeah. I do.”

He might have said more, but Spike let his arm fall, and then he covered his face with his hands and sobbed like a baby.

~*~*~*~*~

Xander really did have to carry Spike into the house. The burst of tears seemed to have drained away the last of his energy and his head lolled against Xander’s shoulder, his eyes fluttering half-shut. He weighed surprisingly little.

Xander took him into the guest room and set him down on the bed. Inside, under the bright overhead light, he looked awful. Worse than Xander had ever seen him, actually, and Xander had seen him pretty beat up before. Spike flopped bonelessly as Xander
pulled off his clothing. He set the filthy tatters in the corner of the room, deciding to deal with them later. Burning was too good for them.

Xander had seen Spike naked before, back when Spike had crashed in his basement and, later, in his apartment. Even half-crazy with the new soul and the First Evil, he’d been beautiful. Now he was skeletal, and new bruises bloomed over old. His limbs and torso were dotted with scrapes and scars, and his skin was clammy and yellowish where it wasn’t just gray with dirt. He reeked of stale urine, and the red, rashy area around his groin suggested to Xander that he’d pissed himself more than once.

Leaving Spike where he was, Xander walked into the guest bath and filled the tub. He had no idea how badly injured Spike was, and there was no way he was going to be able to tell until he got some of the layers of dirt off of him. He turned off the tap and went back to Spike, who remained on the bed, unmoving.

“I’m gonna carry you into the bath now, okay?”
When Spike didn’t respond, Xander scooped him up. He could feel Spike’s heart beating, too fast, he thought. It reminded him of a bluejay that had flown against his window once when he was eight or nine. It had lain on the ground, stunned, until Xander picked it up in his hands. He’d carried it into his room and set it gingerly inside an empty shoebox. He’d gone to get a saucer of water for it but when he came back its heart was silent, its eyes open and empty. He’d cried over it and then buried it in the back yard.

Spike opened his eyes a little when he was mostly submerged. “Wha’?” he said.

“Just cleaning you up a little, that’s all.”

Spike blinked a few times, as if he was trying to make sense of the words, and his chin dropped down to his chest. Xander took advantage of the opportunity to dab at the back of Spike’s head with a washcloth. He’d seen a lot of head injuries before and he was pretty sure this was just a nasty scalp
laceration. He didn’t think it was enough to cause amnesia, but then Xander was no doctor.

By the time Spike was reasonably scrubbed the water was dark gray and nearly cool, and Spike began to shake. Swearing softly under his breath, Xander pulled him out of the tub and sort of draped him over Xander’s body long enough pat him dry with a towel. Spike swayed and moaned. Xander lifted him into his arms again. He meant to put him back in the bed, but a glimpse at the blanket changed his mind. It was badly soiled just from its brief contact with Spike and his clothing. So instead Xander carried Spike into his own room, and set him on his own clean bedding. Then he ran and fetched his first aid kit, and used up all his bandages and Neosporin on Spike’s various injuries, none of which looked life-threatening, at least to him. When he was finished he tucked Spike in between the sheets, and pulled the blankets up over him.

Spike looked up at him blearily. “Who are you?”

“Xander. Xander Harris.” He didn’t see any spark of
recognition in those blue eyes. “Um...and what do you want me to call you?”

After a pause, Spike said, “Go by John, but ’s not my name. Tha’ name you called me....”

“Spike?”

“Yeah. Tha’s me?”

“Yeah.”

Spike swallowed loudly and shut his eyes for a moment. “Call me tha’.”

“Okay. Um, Spike? Can I get you something to eat? Or, uh, drink?” He suspected O Pos was no longer on the menu, but didn’t want to presume.

“Whiskey.”

“Sorry. Fresh out.” Actually, it had been years since he’d had any alcohol in the house at all. “How about...some soup, maybe?”
Spike nodded slightly. “Yeah. ‘Kay.”

Xander left him there and went into the kitchen. He was just getting the can opener when the phone rang. “Oh, fuck!” he exclaimed, suddenly remembering where he was supposed to be right now.

He picked up the receiver and, without even a hello, said, “I’m sorry! God, I’m really sorry, Nicole.”

“Did you change your mind or something?”

“No! Of course not! It’s just...I kinda ran into, um, an old friend. Unexpectedly. He’s in really bad shape and I was patching him up, and—“

“Okay, fine, whatever. I don’t need to hear the lame excuse, Xander.”

“But it’s not! I mean, I really did—“

“Whatever. Look. I’ll see you Monday.” Her voice
was cold and detached.

“Nicole, I’ll make it up to you, I promise.”

“Goodbye, Xander.”

Fuck. Well, she was already pissed. He could deal with it later, when she’d cooled off a little.

It didn’t take him long to nuke a can of chicken noodle, which he carried back into his bedroom along with a bottle of water. He had to help prop Spike up with pillows and, when Spike’s hand shook alarmingly, ended up spooning the soup into Spike’s mouth himself. Spike’s pupils were dilated, pools of deep black edged by blue ice, and his face was pale and sweaty. He’d had only half the bowl and a few sips of water when he turned his head away. “Can’t,” he rasped.

Xander scowled grimly and fetched a plastic wastebasket and a towel. He set the trash can on the floor beside Spike and put the towel on his nightstand. “Look, if you’re gonna puke, try to get it
in here, okay?”

Spike nodded wanly.

Xander stood there for a few minutes, just watching him. Spike’s eyes were closed but his entire body shook with tremors.

“Spike? How long have you been drinking?”

Spike didn’t bother to open his eyes. “Dunno. Six, seven years.”

Shit. “And how long has it been since your last drink?”

Spike tried, with limited success, to shrug. “Day or two.”

Shit shit. “Look, we need to get you to the hospital. Pretty soon you’re gonna—“

“No!” Spike sat upright, the blankets falling away from him, and struggled to get out of bed. He took a
single step and the collapsed, falling heavily onto the floor. He screamed when he hit the ground, and Xander darted forward to pick him up.

“Spike! You’re gonna—“

“Please!” Spike’s face was bathed in terror. “Please, no hospital. They’ll lock me up again and I....” To Xander’s horror, he started crying again, and his body was shaking so badly it seemed like it would just fly apart.

Xander sighed deeply. “Okay, okay. No hospital.” It appeared to him that Spike relaxed a little at that, and then Spike allowed Xander to lift him back into the bed and tuck him in. “You’re going to be really sick, you know that?”

Spike just shook his head and stared pleadingly at him. “Please,” he croaked.

“Fine. Against my better judgment, but fine. I have to make a couple calls, okay? You try to get some rest.”
He started to walk away, but stopped when Spike whispered, “Alex?”

“Xander.”

“Xander. Were we mates?”


He sat down on his couch and gazed at the blank television screen for a moment before picking up his phone. It had been a long time since he’d dialed this number, but it was still there in his contacts, and the voice that answered was still familiar.

“Xander! Good Lord, what’s happened? Have you had a relapse?”

A little flower of bitterness bloomed in Xander’s belly. “No,” he answered shortly. “Not a drop for over five years. Not since we spoke last.”
There was a long pause on the other end. “If it’s money you’re after, I can only—”

“I don’t need your money! I’m doing pretty well, actually, thank you very much. I have a good job, and a house, and…and that’s not why I called.”

“Then what is it?”

The flower grew thorns and Xander struggled to keep his voice even. “It’s Spike, Giles.”

“SPIKE?” Giles asked incredulously. “The vampire?”

“Yeah. Only...not so much anymore, I don’t think.”

“Spike’s dead,” Giles said flatly.

“Yeah, I was there, remember? Ubervamps, ugly jewelry, collapsing high school, enormous crater.”

“That, erm, wasn’t what I meant, actually.”

Even after all these years, across these many miles,
Xander could tell when Giles was being evasive. “Oh?” Xander said, pushing as much scorn into the syllable as he could.

“Aafter...after Sunnydale, he was resurrected in Los Angeles. He spent some time with Angel and his colleagues before—”

“Wait! Resurrected. You mean, he was alive again?”

“Undead. He was a ghost of sorts, and then once again a vampire.”

Xander shook his head in a vain attempt to clear his confusion. “But you said he was dead.”

“I meant final death, Xander. A year or so after Spike was...brought back...Angel led them into some sort of battle. They were all destroyed.”

“How do you know this?”

“Various Watcher contacts. We were keeping an eye on Angel, you see. His intentions at the time were
Several thoughts occurred to Xander at once. If Spike was dead—again—then what was he doing in Xander’s bed right now? And Angel finally dust—that was a concept Xander was going to have to mull over later. And, “You knew Spike was alive and you didn’t tell Buffy!”

“I thought…I thought it was best if she didn’t have the distraction.”

For a moment, Xander was so angry he could barely speak. “The...the distraction! You son of a bitch! What makes you think you have the right—She died, and she never knew.”

Quietly, Giles replied, “I thought it was for the best.”

Xander wanted to hang up and erase the phone number from his contacts and never hear that voice again. But he didn’t, because right now he needed some help, and he had nowhere else to turn. He
swore and then growled, “Spike’s here, Giles. Alive. I mean, really alive, pulse and all. I found him in an alley today, and he’s all fucked up. He’s been beaten, and he doesn’t remember anything, and he’s about to go through a pretty nasty case of withdrawal.”

“Spike’s…Spike’s THERE? How?”

“I don’t know.”

“Xander, I—”

“Here’s what I need. I need you to get all your little Watcher buddies together and see if you can figure out what’s going on. And I also need you to get me a nice big bunch of Valium, because he’s gonna need it.”

“All right,” Giles said resignedly. “I’ll see what we can learn. The address for the medicine?”

Xander gave it to him and then hung up without saying goodbye. If he’d had time, he would have
Part Two

Over the next few days, Spike threw up a lot. Fortunately, most of the time he managed to get it into the trash can, but still, Xander spent a lot of time laundering towels and sheets and wiping various body fluids off of Spike, and trying to get some liquids to stay in the former vampire’s stomach. The Valium arrived and undoubtedly helped, but still Spike trembled and sweated, and his heart skipped and stuttered. He alternately whimpered at the agonizing pain in his head or begged pathetically for a drink, just one little drink.

Xander placed cool cloths on his brow and cleaned up his messes and helped him onto the toilet when
Spike had to take a leak, but he did not give into the pleading, nor did he bat an eye at the threats. It wasn’t if if he’d never heard them before. A quick glance in the mirror told him he was looking almost as bad as Spike. His hair stuck up all over and his eye was sunken, the skin underneath so dark it looked like someone had given him a shiner. He’d called in for pizza and Chinese, but he wasn’t eating it much, and he certainly wasn’t getting to the gym, or even, for that matter, to his own shower.

He wasn’t sleeping in his own bed, of course, and the guest room seemed too far away if Spike needed him. So he inflated the air mattress he’d acquired for an abortive attempt at camping, and set it up on his bedroom floor. It was not particularly comfortable.

On Monday morning he had to call into work. He told his boss he had the flu, and Jim was understanding. “Take your time,” he said. “I don’t want you spreading those germs here anyway.” Luckily, Xander had accumulated several weeks of sick leave in the four years he’d worked for the
court, so that was one less worry, at least.

He tried calling Nicole a couple of times, but she wouldn’t speak to him, and finally he gave it up. He told himself that if the woman was going to be this judgmental, maybe he was better off without her anyway.

Xander and Spike didn’t speak at all, at least not beyond a word here and there about soup or piss or vomit. Most of the time Spike wasn’t up to it anyway, although at least Xander was relieved when Spike didn’t sink into hallucinations and DTs.

On Friday afternoon, Spike actually managed to keep down two bowls of soup—with noodles—a glass of Gatorade, and a couple of crackers. He still looked like death warmed over, but the tremor was gone and his eyes seemed clearer, more focused. Xander helped him move to the air mattress for a few minutes so Xander could once again put fresh sheets on his bed, and, for the first time since he’d stripped off Spike’s filthy rags, put some clothes on him. They were Xander’s clothes, a t-shirt and a pair
of sweats, and they were too big for Spike, but Spike’s own clothing had been hauled away by the garbage men already. At least these were clean, and soft and comfortable.

When Spike was again ensconced in Xander’s bed, his hair freshly combed with Xander’s brush—and Xander still wasn’t used to seeing him with his hair unbleached—Xander sat on the bed next to him. “How you feeling?”

Spike nodded. “Almost human,” he said, and Xander had to stifle a snort.

“Good. If you’re feeling up to it, maybe tomorrow you can make it all the way to the living room. I’m guessing you’re feeling well enough to start being bored.”

Spike nodded again. “Ta.” He licked his lips. “You...you seem to know how to do this.” He waved his hand vaguely at himself. “Are you a nurse?”

Xander barked out a laugh. “No. I’m an assistant
jury commissioner. But I’ve had some experience dealing with detox.”

“You?”

“Once upon a time. Well, a few times upon a time. But not for a while.”

“’S that how you know me? We drank together?”

“No. I hadn’t even started yet when I knew you.”

“Then how? Please?” Spike was holding his breath, as if he wasn’t sure Xander would answer his plea, or maybe wasn’t sure he’d like what Xander had to tell him.

This conversation was inevitable and Xander had been thinking about it all week. Wondering how to approach it, what exactly to tell Spike. So he was ready now. “Why don’t you tell me what you do know, and I’ll fill you in on the rest.”

Spike looked disappointed, but he said, “All right. I
woke up in an alley ten years ago. No clothes. No ID, of course. Didn’t remember anything at all about myself, had no idea where I was or how I’d got there. I began to wander, I expect. Don’t recall that time very well. It was...fuzzy.” The anguish painted clearly across his features told Xander it had been much worse than that.

Xander tried to imagine for a moment what it would be like to lose yourself so completely and he shuddered. “What happened?” he asked softly.

“Police found me. Took me to hospital, but the doctors couldn’t find anything wrong with me. No head injury. I wasn’t drinking then,” he added hastily. “Least, doctors saw no sign of it.

“They searched missing persons reports and police records. Took my fingerprints and DNA. Nothing. Everyone reckoned perhaps my people were in the UK, but nobody could find them. Nobody knew how I’d come to LA or what I was doing there, either.” He bit at his lip and his eyes started to tear up. He wiped impatiently at them with his forearm.
“They locked me up. Put me in the loony bin. I’m not barmy, though. I just can’t bloody remember! And then, after ages, I, erm, got out.”

Xander lifted his eyebrows. “You escaped, didn’t you?”

Spike didn’t answer, but just glared at him defiantly and worked his jaw.

“Hey, don’t worry about it. I’m not gonna turn you in or anything, okay?”

Spike relaxed a little. “I had nothing. Just a name some nurse bint made up. John Smith. Not very creative, was she? I had no papers, no job skills that I knew of. I seem to know quite a bit about the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Was I an historian?”

Xander shook his head.

“Well, not many jobs there, even if I was,” Spike
said.

“How have you managed to live?”

“However I could. Odd jobs here and there, when I can find them. When I can’t....” He scowled so fiercely then, almost daring Xander to judge him, that Xander had a sudden insight into exactly how Spike had kept himself in food and drink over the years.

*Christ!* Xander wanted to say, as the image came to him unbidden of Spike kneeling in an alley, an anonymous man’s dick stuffed between those full lips. But Xander managed to keep his face neutral. “Sometimes we gotta do...stuff...to survive. I’ve done things I wish I could forget.”

“Yeah, well, careful what you wish for. Forgetting’s not all it’s cracked up to be.” But Spike looked relieved that Xander hadn’t rejected him outright over his veiled admission. “’t’s funny, you know. The drinking and all—it makes the lack of memories less painful. If I have enough, I can almost forget
what I’ve forgotten.” His laugh held very little humor.

“I looked really hard for answers at the bottom of a bottle. Didn’t find them,” Xander said.

“So you found them somewhere else?”

“No. I just started asking different questions.” Xander grinned a little, mocking his own hard-won wisdom.

Neither said anything for several minutes. But then Spike shifted slightly on the pillows and cleared his throat. “Will you tell me now?”

“Okay.” Xander took a deep breath. “You came to town when I was still in high school. Sunnydale. That’s where I lived.”

“Isn’t that the town that sank into a hole?”

“The very same. This was a few years before that. You came with your girlfriend, Drusilla—“
“I had a bird?”

“Yeah. You’d been together a long time. But she was sick, and you thought somebody there could cure her. Which he did, in a manner of speaking. Anyway, that’s when we first met. You sort of...got into a fight with some of my friends.”

Spike furrowed his brows. “I was…. I don’t recall, but there’s this feeling in my gut...I wasn’t a very nice person, was I?”

“Um, no.” Understatement of the century, maybe. “You were actually kind of evil.” When Spike shrank in on himself, Xander quickly added, “But you did really care about Drusilla, I’ll give you that. You were hurt really badly and it took you a while to recover.”

“Hurt?”

“Back injury. You were in a wheelchair and everything. Drusilla took care of you. When you got
better, you did something, well, sort of good. You helped stop someone even worse than you. And then you left. I didn’t see you again for a couple years.” Xander had decided already to skip over Spike’s appearance during senior year, and to condense the rest a little. “When you came back, Drusilla had left you. You were...man, this is hard to explain...you were caught by these government guys who didn’t like the bad things you’d done. They sort of...controlled your behavior.”

“Parole?”

“No, you weren’t in prison.”

Spike looked puzzled. “Behavior modification?”

“Yeah, basically. Punishment for doing bad stuff.”

“But the police couldn’t find any records of me....”

“It was top secret stuff, I think. I don’t think they would have made their records very accessible.”
Spike nodded as if this made sense. “So then I reformed?”

“More or less. It kind of took you a while to really...get into the spirit of it. But you did, and for a while you helped me and my friends fight bad guys, actually.”

“You were police?”

“No. More like...um...specialized bounty hunters. Kind of.”

“Oh. You said we weren’t mates.”

“We weren’t. But we did fight together. For a while you dated one of my best friends. Buffy.”

Spike perked up considerably at that. “Buffy? Can I speak with her?”

“She’s dead,” Xander said flatly. “Eight—no, almost nine years ago.”
Spike’s shoulders slumped. “Do you know how I got to LA? What happened to me?”

“No. We had a big fight in Sunnydale and…and you were a real hero.”

Spike looked up sharply. “A hero? Me?”

“Yeah. You saved a lot of people. But then the city collapsed and we thought you were dead.”

“Perhaps I was injured and that’s how I lost my memories. But…when was that?”

“2003.”

“I woke up in that alley in May 2004. What happened in between?”

“I dunno, man.” Xander had decided not to talk about the thing with Angel, either. He didn’t really know what had happened that year anyway, and he couldn’t think of how to explain the little he was aware of.
Spike rubbed his face. “What else do you know about me? My name? My family?”

“You name is William Pratt, I think. But you went by Spike. And you’re from London, but your family, um, they’ve all been dead for a long time.”

Spike shut his eyes and turned away. “So I have nobody, then,” he whispered.

Xander had never imagined a scenario when his heart would ache for Spike, but now it did. He patted Spike’s knee. “You have me, okay?”

“We weren’t mates,” Spike said bitterly.

“No, we weren’t. But I was a lot younger then, more narrow-minded, I guess. There’s no reason we can’t be friends now.”

“Don’t want your pity!” Spike spat, and tried to jerk away from Xander’s hand.
“It’s not pity, Spike. It’s...karmic payback, maybe. Because once I was in just about as bad a shape as you—no amnesia, but minus one eye, and that counts, right?—and somebody who didn’t especially want to helped me get on my feet. Helped a couple of times.” Is still helping, he could have added, and didn’t, but with his free hand he squeezed the bottle of Valium he carried in his pocket.

Now Spike was staring at the ceiling. “I used to think...for ages, I thought my memories would come back. I even went to LA, poked around near that alley, hoping something would shake loose.” He shook his head. “I’ll never get them back.”

“So stay with me, Spike. Maybe you can’t get your past back, but that doesn’t mean you can’t have a future. Stay.” And he patted Spike’s knee, which felt bony even through the blanket.

After a long pause, Spike snuffled. “All right,” he said.
Spike grew gradually stronger over the following days. At first, Xander had to almost carry him into the living room, and then had to tote him periodically to the bathroom. But soon Spike could install himself on the couch, and then he even managed to make a sandwich or run a bath without help. When Xander felt confident that Spike would be all right alone, Xander went back to work, and he knew Spike spent most of the day dozing in front of the television. After work Xander hit the gym, and then he’d come home and join Spike on the couch, pushing food into their mouths, watching whatever crap was on.

Spike didn’t leave the house at all, but Xander brought him some clothes, just a couple of t-shirts and pairs of jeans, all in black, and a pair of black boots. Spike eyed the small pile. “Afraid of color?” The irony was enough to send Xander into a fit of giggles that had Spike staring at him quizzically.
One night, almost three weeks after he’d first appeared, Spike looked at Xander with his head cocked, his blue eyes piercing. “Don’t have much of a life, do you?”

“What do you mean?” Xander looked around the living room. It was nice. Not huge, but comfortable and attractive. And it was his. Well, mostly the bank’s, but still, it wasn’t some crappy apartment, and it sure as hell wasn’t his parents’ old basement.

“Friends? Family? Hobbies?”

“My Mom died a couple years ago. Dad and I aren’t really in touch. Hell, maybe he’s dead by now, too. I learned about alcohol withdrawal from him. My old friends from when I was a kid, Buffy and the rest, they’re dead too. Or…estranged, I guess. I’ve got some friends at work, but we don’t really hang out much. Sometimes we go to lunch together or something. And as for hobbies, there’s the gym, and I like to hammer a nail here and there, but it’s been raining all week so I’d rather stay inside.”
Spike was still giving him that look. “What about a bird? Handsome bloke like you, I’d think the bints would be all over you.”

Xander was taken by surprise at Spike calling him handsome, and it took him a moment to reply. “Yeah, well, I was almost married once, a long time ago. I dumped her at the altar. She died later.” He judiciously edited out the part where Spike had sex with her on camera. “After that, I don’t know. I’ve got a lot of baggage. Most girls don’t want that, or if they do, it’s only so they can fix me. I don’t need fixing.”

“Blokes, then.”

“I’m not gay, Spike.”

Spike shrugged. “How about me? You said I shagged girls, yeah?”

“Yes.”
“Boys, too?”

“Um, none that I knew of.”

“When I woke up in that alley, I didn’t know what I was.”

“So?”

“So I fancy both, I reckon.”

“Well, bully for you. I don’t.”

“Have you ever tried?”

Xander was getting uncomfortable with this discussion, especially with Spike sitting only inches away from him on the couch. “No, I’ve never tried guys. I don’t want to try guys, Spike. I’m not attracted to them.”

Spike leered slightly. “Never know until you give it a go, do you?”
Xander shifted slightly farther away. “I don’t want any going, thanks.”

Spike inched closer. “You certain?”

“I’m—“ Xander swallowed. “Spike, are you making a pass at me?” His voice may have been a little shriller than he’d intended.

Spike smirked. “D’you want me to?”

“No!” Xander squawked. “What’s the deal? Are you feeling that hard up? ‘Cause you’re looking a lot better, and I’m sure I could fix you up with someone. There’s this guy at work, Rudy, and—“

“Don’t want Rudy. I only thought I could show you some gratitude for all you’ve done for me.”

Xander lurched to his feet. “Gratitude! Look, you don’t need to, to whore yourself out to me!”

Spike’s grin turned into a sneer. “Think you’re too good for a bloody rentboy, do you? I’ve bent over
for all sorts of blokes—old, ugly, drugged—I’m not too sodding proud to bend over for a treat like you.”

He looked so furious all of a sudden, so heated and desperate and vulnerable, that Xander’s own shock and anger evaporated. Ten years. A decade with nothing, not even the memory of someone caring about him, not even a real fucking name. Xander let all of the air escape his lungs in a loud whoosh, and then he collapsed back on the couch, back beside Spike who glared murderously at the coffee table. “I’m sorry, Spike. I don’t think I’m too good for you. I’m not. I’m just…. You don’t owe me anything, okay? You might not remember, but I do. I told you, you’re a hero. I owe you. More than just free room and board. You know, you saved my other goddamn eye.”

Spike snapped his head around to look at him. “How?”

“This guy—he was bad, really, really bad—we were fighting him and his...helpers. He took out my eye
with his fucking thumb, just like that, and he was gonna do the other. You stopped him.”

“I did that?”

“Yeah, you did. And more, a lot more.”

Spike lifted his chin a little and the lines of tension around his eyes and mouth eased. Then he nodded, just once.

~*~*~*~*~

Xander was back in his own bed, Spike having moved himself into the guest room several nights earlier. All that lay between them now was a wall, one thin little wall.

Xander tossed and turned for a long time and when he finally fell asleep, he dreamed of Spike tied in a chair in his parents’ basement, and Spike nude and half-nuts, parading through his apartment in Sunnydale. He dreamed of Caleb, too, popping his
eye like a grape, but in this version, when Spike saved him, Xander gave Spike a kiss, deep and greedy.

Xander woke up then. His empty socket itched and his cock was throbbing between his legs. He cursed Spike under his breath and then jerked off silently, thinking only of women. Women with lush, curvy bodies and long, thick hair. Most definitely not male former vampires with British accents and cheekbones to die for.

~*~*~*~*~

“Is he still there?”

Xander peered around the corner and into the living room, where Spike was shouting at a soccer match on tv. “Yeah.”

“And his... health?”

“All dried out. Sober as a judge. Bruises all healed.”
“Has he recalled anything?”

“Nothing. Did you find anything out?”

“What have you told him?”

“A semi-accurate version of the truth, minus demons and the undead. Giles, have you found anything out?” He whispered the question again fiercely.

“Perhaps. There was a prophecy, it seems, the Shanshu Prophecy.”

“Shampoo?”

Giles sighed. “Shanshu, Xander. It says an ensouled vampire will become a champion and will afterward be rewarded with humanity.”

Xander thought about how Spike had spent the last bunch of years. “Some reward,” he said.
“Apparently, Angel had hoped it was meant for him. But perhaps it was Spike instead.”

“Yeah, well, does this Shih-Tzu thing say anything about amnesia?”

“No, I don’t think so. But it’s rather hard to translate. Perhaps it’s simply impossible for a human to exist with a vampire’s memories.”

“Can you find a way to bring them back?”

“Xander, Spike’s fully human now. Do you really think it’s wise to help him recollect all that he’s done? What might the knowledge of all those murders do to a man?”

“I don’t know. But he’s got nothing, Giles. Just me. He deserves to have himself.”

After a long minute, Giles said, “I’ll see what I can do.”

Xander wasn’t sure he trusted the man. There was
no love lost between Giles and Spike, and Xander knew that Giles had helped set Spike up, that time with Principal Wood, even though the vampire had a soul by then. And then he hadn’t even mentioned Spike’s resurrection to Buffy, hell, to any of them. If Spike had joined them in Cleveland he could have been a real asset. He might even have been enough to save Buffy’s life, and Willow’s, and Dawn’s. Xander gritted his teeth. He had no other choice but to trust Giles now, did he?

“He’s been through a lot,” he finally said. “He’s earned a couple of breaks. Help him out, Giles.”

Giles mumbled something that might have been grudging agreement, and then hung up.

When Xander went back into the living room and sat down on the couch, Spike passed him the bowl of popcorn. “One of the people from the court?” he asked.

“No. Actually, that was Rupert Giles. An old friend from Sunnydale.”
Spike tore his eyes away from the tv screen to look at Xander. “The estranged one?”

“The very same.”

“You two nattered a long time for two blokes who aren’t speaking to one another.”

“Yeah. He’s kind of doing me a favor, actually.”

“Why?”

“Before Buffy died, she made him swear he’d look out for me. I think...I think she kinda knew her days were numbered. She had a dangerous job.”

“What happened between you and this Giles fellow?”

“He...made some decisions I didn’t like. Pushed Buffy and my best friend, Willow, in a direction he shouldn’t have. Didn’t listen to me when I said it was a bad idea.” He sighed. “None of them listened
to me. Giles is a really smart guy, a lot smarter than me, and I guess they figured he always knew better. Anyway, it got them all killed. Buffy, Willow, Dawn, even Faith, the first girl I ever had sex with. Everyone but Giles and me. It wasn’t entirely his fault, not really, but I couldn’t help but blame him.”

“Is that when you began to drink?”

Xander rubbed at his face. “Yeah. I knew better. My parents were both drunks, my aunts and uncles…. But at the time, it seemed like the thing to do. Giles kept picking me up, getting me clean, but I was so angry at him, and I could tell he was really disappointed in me. He thought I should keep on fighting the good fight, I guess.”

“Why’d you give up the bottle, then?”

“I dunno. I had an epiphany. I was wasted and I rolled my car. Thank the gods, I didn’t hit anyone else. But I was trapped inside for a long time, all banged up, waiting for someone to find me. I was there long enough to get sober, and even though
my leg was busted and all of me felt I’d been through a meat grinder, what I really wanted most was a drink. I started laughing at myself like a lunatic, Spike. I mean, after all I’d been through, all I’d faced, and it was booze that was gonna kill me. I let Giles check me into rehab after that, and I haven’t had a drop to drink since.”

Spike swallowed a mouthful of popcorn, then used his tongue to dig around in his teeth for a minute. “And now life’s a bowl of cherries, innit? Even without your friends?”

Xander shrugged. “It’s good enough. After I dried out I worked construction for a while, took some night classes at the community college. I never liked school much before, but these classes were kind of fun. One of my instructors was Jim Ishimura, the jury commissioner. He offered me a job, and I was tired of freezing or sweating while I built houses, so I took it.”

“ Took a liking to you, did he?”
Xander rolled his eyes. “It’s not like that. He liked my work, that’s all. Still does. I’ve been promoted twice.” He couldn’t help the little note of pride that crept into his voice. It was nice to be acknowledged like that for once.

Spike grabbed another handful of popcorn from the bowl in Xander’s lap. “Sounds just peachy,” he said with his mouth full, and Xander might have been angry at the sarcasm if he didn’t see the echoes of sorrow that shadowed Spike’s face, the small sparks of envy. Xander stuffed his own mouth with buttery, salty goodness.

When a Coors commercial came on, Spike turned and looked at Xander again. “How old am I?” he demanded. “A bit older than you, yeah?”

“Um, a bit, yeah,” Xander said without choking. “Several years, anyway. But I don’t know when your birthday is.” And that was the truth.

“’M a bit advanced in years for new beginnings.”
Xander gnawed at his lip for a moment. “Look, Spike. One thing I can say about you, even when you were evil, you always rolled with the punches. I mean...you had a lot of shit happen to you but you didn’t give up. You kind of reinvented yourself to go with the times, you know?”

Spike just looked at him.

Xander smiled. “I’m pretty sure if you set your mind on a goal, you’re gonna reach it, Spike.”

Slowly, Spike smiled back.

**Part Three**

The Santa Fe tracks ran about three-quarters of a mile away from Xander’s house. He liked to lay in bed late at night with his window open and listen to the train’s whistle blow. It made him think about journeys, and the people who might be on board, and he wondered if they looked out at the cozy little houses they passed and wished that they were home.
Tonight he was huddled under his blankets because it was cold out, but he still kept the window open. The train didn’t soothe him tonight. Instead, he found himself waiting for another noise, the sound of the front door opening and shutting.

It was his own damn fault. Two months ago, he’d persuaded Spike to sign up for some classes at the community college. After some arguing and blustering, Spike had, and now he was taking a computer course that he really liked, and a history course that had him muttering over the inaccuracies of textbooks and his pillock of a professor, at the same time wondering aloud why he was so certain about the way things really had been in pre-War Berlin.

Spike still didn’t have a car of his own, but two days a week Xander dropped him off at the college on his way to work, and, when he wasn’t in class, Spike spent the day in the library or computer labs. Xander swung by to pick him up on the way home, and they’d usually stop somewhere for a hamburger or something, with Spike talking
animatedly all through dinner about his day. It was
nice to see him like that, Xander thought, with his
hands waving around so much that he tended to
knock over their Pepsis, and his eyes sparkling, and
he looked so goddamn alive.

Spike thought most of his fellow students were
children and he called them a lot of names that
probably meant “idiot” in British. But he did get to
know a few of them, mostly older students like
himself—well, not quite so very old, probably—and
they’d get together to study or for lunch or coffee.
That was good, too. Xander knew Spike hadn’t
exactly been overburdened by friends in his
existence but now he seemed happy with his small
circle of pals and they, in turn, seemed satisfied by
whatever he’d told them about his misty past.

And then one of them asked Spike out. Xander had
seen the guy a couple times when Xander picked
Spike up. His name was Brett and he’d been a cop,
of all things, until a motorcycle injury inspired a
change of career. Now he wanted to be a lawyer.
He was in his mid-thirties, tall and muscular, with
dark hair he kept cut very short. He was good-looking, too, with startling green eyes. Spike had mentioned a few days earlier that Brett had invited him to go see a movie, some documentary thing that was playing at the art theater and that a professor had recommended. Afterward, Spike said, they’d probably head to Java Java, where another classmate of theirs had a gig with his band.

Of course, Xander had grinned and congratulated Spike on the date, and he knew he should be pleased for his roommate, for the progress that this signified. But something uncomfortable uncurled in Xander’s belly at the news. Xander told himself very firmly that he was just concerned for Spike, worried that he and Brett might decide to have a few drinks, or maybe worried that Brett would end up treating Spike badly somehow, that Spike would be disappointed or hurt in his foray into this fledgling relationship. He was concerned about his friend, that’s all. Perfectly understandable. He absolutely was not jealous.

So he kept the blankets pulled up to his chin as he
shifted and squirmed in his bed, and he listened to the trains call out, and when the front door opened and closed he breathed a long, noisy sigh. A moment later, there was a rap at his door. “Xan? You awake?”

“Sure. C’mon in.”

Spike brought the pleasant scents of popcorn and coffee into the room with him. No alcohol, though, and his eyes were clear and sharp. “Like what you’ve done with the place,” he grinned, gesturing at the heap of clothing in one corner. Xander had tried to distract himself earlier in the evening by going through his closet and dresser, weeding out clothes he no longer wanted.

“Me and Martha Stewart are like this,” Xander replied, hooking his index fingers together.

Spike crossed the room and plopped down on the bed, but then he didn’t say anything.

“Didja have a nice time?” Xander asked.
“The film was good. The band was horrible. What sort of music did I listen to, before?”


“I can remember some of the lyrics. Don’t know when I heard them, though,” Spike said, a little wistfully.

“So, this Brett guy...how did that go?”

Xander had tried to sound breezy and light, but Spike cocked an eyebrow at him. “He’s a nice enough bloke. Jealous, are you, pet?”

“No!” Xander sputtered indignantly. “I am not jealous. I was just being nice.”

Spike didn’t look convinced. “I didn’t pitch a fit when you went out with that bint last week—what
was her name? Whingey?"

“Wendy.” Although she’d spent the whole evening bitching about everything in the world until Xander was pretty much counting the minutes until he could gracefully rid himself of her. “Her name was Wendy, and why should there be any fit pitching? You and I are not dating, Spike.”

“Right. Because you’re not gay,” said Spike, and stood. Xander watched him walk back out the door, his compact silhouette framed in the light from the hallway. He didn’t slam the door shut, just closed it firmly.

~*~*~*~*~

Spike was out again with Brett, studying, he said, when Xander’s phone rang. He looked at the screen and felt his stomach tighten.

“Hi, Giles,” he said.
“Xander.”

“What’s up?”

“Is Spike still there?”

“Yeah.”

“And what have you told him about his history?”

Xander sighed. “Not much. He has no clue about the whole vampire business. I mean, it’s kind of a hard thing to bring up in conversation. ‘Hey, did I ever tell you you used to be a one hundred and fifty year old blood-sucking demon?’ I figured if he’s not gonna remember anyway, why stick him with that?”

There was a long pause, of the type Xander had heard referred to as pregnant. Finally, Giles said, “I believe we’ve discovered a method to restore his memories.”

Xander sat down on the nearest chair. “Would he still...still be human?”
“It won’t change what he is. If he’s human then he’ll remain that way. But I can’t foresee what this knowledge might do to him emotionally, psychologically.”

“I don’t…. Jesus, Giles, he’s starting to have a life. To be happy. I don’t want to ruin that.”

“Then don’t.”

“But I don’t know if that’s fair. I mean, good or bad or whatever, they’re his memories! What gives me the right to make that kind of a choice for someone else?”

“Sometimes, circumstances force us to make decisions for others. Sometimes we might choose wrongly. We can only do what we think is best, Xander.”

There was a plea there, unspoken but present. Xander felt tears threatening to escape his closed eyelid. “It’s a hard position to be in, G-Man.” It was
the first time he’d used the nickname in a decade. It was neither an apology nor an absolution, but it was...something.

“It is,” Giles agreed softly.

Xander opened his eye and tipped his head up to stare at the ceiling. “Why don’t...why don’t you tell me about this method you’ve discovered?”

~*~*~*~*~

Xander had found himself in some very strange situations over the years. Zombies, witches, werewolves, demons, Indian curses, hyenas, evil goddesses...yeah, the Hellmouth had given him a very wide variety of experiences. He wasn’t sure of any of them had been as weird as this one.

The four of them sat around a square table, reading menus. Directly across from Xander was Spike in a blue silky tee that matched his eyes. To Xander’s right sat Brett, whose gaze kept wandering from his
menu to Spike. He had a tattoo encircling his left wrist, Xander saw. It looked like a bracelet made of skulls. Wendy was on Xander’s left. She was really pretty, with curly auburn hair and pixieish features. She was complaining about the lack of vegetarian options.

The double date had not been Xander’s idea. It had begun when Wendy called, wondering whether Xander was busy on Saturday and if not, whether he wanted to try that new place on 9th Street. Xander hadn’t been able to find a polite way to refuse. After he’d hung up the phone he’d bounced his head against the wall a few times, and Spike had turned his head away from the television and smirked at him. “Not looking forward to another evening with Windy, pet?”

“No,” Xander moaned. He’d endured man-eating bug demons and life-sucking mummies and rogue slayers, he reminded himself. He could get through one meal with a court reporter.

“How about if Brett and I join you, then? Might give
you a bit of a break from her.”

“Really?”

“Sure. Long as you pay,” Spike grinned. He still had no money of his own, though he kept promising he’d pay Xander back someday. Xander kept telling him it was no big deal, and it wasn’t. He could afford Spike’s small expenses, and it made him happy to know he was helping the guy. Besides, Xander had had Giles and Jim to help him get on his own feet, and it felt good to know that now he was in the position to do the same for somebody else.

So here they were at Bailiwick, and when the waitress came by, Xander ordered the biggest steak on the menu, just to annoy his date. Wendy made a sour face at him and chose a salad with the dressing on the side and absolutely no tomatoes. Brett wanted some sort of chicken and bacon thing that had actually sounded pretty good to Xander, too, but had slightly less potential to irritate Wendy. And Spike ordered a steak as well—“So rare I can hear it moo, love”—with onions on it.
“Somebody doesn’t want to get kissed tonight,” Brett teased.

“I’ll have a packet of mints after,” replied Spike, and, Xander was pretty sure, squeezed Brett’s knee under the table.

Wendy had a glass of wine, but the men just had water. Xander wondered if Spike had told Brett about his past at all. What little he knew of it, anyway.

Brett smiled at Xander politely. “You from around here originally?” he asked.

“No, I grew up down south. Then I kind of moved around a lot. I’ve been here almost six years. You?”

“I’m a local, born and raised.”

“I hate this town,” Wendy interjected. “It’s so boring. You have to drive to the Bay Area to find anything interesting to do.”
“Oh, I don’t know,” Brett said amiably. “I’ve found some pretty interesting things right here.” He raised his eyebrows at Spike, who grinned.

“I’ll bet England is way more fascinating,” Wendy said.

“Wouldn’t know. Haven’t been there in years,” Spike responded, and sipped at his water.

A whole lot of years, Xander thought, but didn’t say anything.

Wendy said, “Well, I’d like to visit. But it’s such a pain in the neck to get a passport and everything, and then there’s that long flight, crammed into the plane like cattle and exposed to every germ in the world. Ugh. I hate flying.”

“Could go by ship instead.”

“But that’s so slow! And we get hardly any vacation time—right Xander?—so by the time I got there, I’d
pretty much just have to turn around and come back. Plus, I heard that those cruises are total rip-offs. They quote you a reasonable price and then nickel and dime you to death with extras. And mandatory tips!”

Spike caught Xander’s eye and smirked before looking back at Wendy. “I expect you’ll just have to confine your travels to this continent, then, love.”

She sighed theatrically. “You mean, like, by car? Man, the traffic is so bad everywhere, and have you seen the price of gas lately? My car’s a real piece of shit, too, and I think my mechanic is cheating me.”

“Train?” Spike’s eyes were sparkling.

“Always late! I took Amtrak from Seattle to Portland a few years ago, and it’s supposed to be really pretty, right? But it was raining the whole time and I could hardly see anything, and the lady behind me was yakking on her cell phone practically the whole time, and the bathrooms reeked.”
Spike looked like he was going to say something more to her, so Xander quickly interrupted. “So, Brett, Spike tells me you want to go to law school.”

“Well, I have a few years to go before I get there, but yeah.”

“What kind of law do you think you’ll practice?”

Brett spoke for a while about his plans, and then the waitress arrived with their food. Brett dug right into his, while Wendy poked skeptically at her salad and called the waitress back to get more caramelized walnuts and a different kind of dressing because her raspberry balsamic tasted off, she said. Xander’s steak was actually really good, but he found himself mesmerized by the sight of bloody little chunks of meat being slipped into Spike’s mouth, and Spike’s tongue poking out slightly to lick off a drip of juices, and then Spike’s long, delicate neck working as he swallowed. Spike caught Xander looking, raised his scarred eyebrow, and then asked Brett something about Excel spreadsheets.
Wendy didn’t like any of the dessert choices, but then she ate three quarters of Xander’s chocolate mousse cake anyway. Brett had a double espresso and a berry cobbler. Spike drank some tea, Earl Grey. “Do you enjoy working for the court?” Spike asked Wendy, a look of complete innocence pasted on his face. Xander would have kicked him if he could have.

She scowled. “Ugh. The pay really sucks, you know? And now we have these furloughs, so I’m making five percent less and once a month I’m having to squish five days worth of work into four. They’re making us take furloughs on Wednesday, too, which is really stupid. I mean, they could at least give us a long weekend, right?”

Spike nodded. “Well, perhaps the blokes in Sacramento will sort the economy soon, and then—“

“Those morons? Yeah, right! I don’t even bother to vote, they’re all such a bunch of idiots.”
A little desperately, Xander made the universal “Bring me the check” signal to the waitress, who was several tables away.

When the bill came, Brett made as if to take it, but Xander snatched it away. “Oh, this one’s on me,” he said, pulling out his MasterCard.

“Okay, but next time’s my treat,” Brett replied.

It was windy outside, and they all hunched awkwardly just outside the entrance. “We could head over to Java Java,” Wendy said. “They’re way overpriced, but—“

“Um, great idea, but I’m gonna have to pass. I have a big project to get done tomorrow. The gutters on the south side of the house are about to fall down any second.”

Spike kept a straight face. “Yeah, the gutters. It’d be a shame if they caused any damage.”

Xander put his arm around Wendy’s shoulders. “Let
me walk you to your car, though, okay? Where are you parked?”

“Oh, about a million miles away,” she said, pointing down the street. “I circled the block a bunch of times but there was nothing closer, and I wasn’t about to pay a fortune to park in the garage.”

“Don’t worry about getting Spike home,” Brett said, catching at Spike’s hand. “I’ll give him a ride.”

“That’s nice of you,” Xander said quickly through gritted teeth, before Spike could add anything about the giving a ride part.

“Don’t wait up, Xan. Wendy, it’s been lovely.” Spike and Brett walked in one direction while Wendy led Xander in the other. He gave her a kiss when they got to her car, really not much more than a peck on the cheek, and was relieved when she didn’t complain about that, too. He was very, very happy to watch her drive off.
Xander didn’t wait up. He stripped out of his clothes and climbed into bed, determined to fall asleep right away. But he couldn’t, and instead he helplessly watched the red digits on his alarm clock change until it was well past midnight. Then he stared up at the ceiling and fumed. He wasn’t even sure who he was angry at. Spike? Himself? Brett? The gods? Maybe all of the above.

He had almost decided to get out of bed when he heard Spike come home. The front door slammed shut and the lock rattled closed, then booted footsteps walked past Xander’s room and to the bedroom next door. He heard those boots thud against the floor as Spike removed them and then, a few moments later, the toilet in the hall bathroom flushed and the water in the sink ran. After that was silence, and still Xander couldn’t sleep.

So he was wide awake when his own bedroom door
flew open and Spike came marching in. He was naked and heart-wrenchingly beautiful, and Xander admitted to himself that maybe he *was* a little bit gay. Without a word, Spike flung himself on top of Xander and crushed their mouths together in a hot, greedy kiss.

It was unlike any kiss Xander had experienced before. He could feel the slight bristles of Spike’s cheeks against his own, and Spike’s tongue was demanding, aggressive almost. The feel of him on top of Xander’s body was more substantial than any of the women he’d been with, taller, tighter, all hard angles instead of soft curves. Except Xander’s hands seemed to have found their way to Spike’s ass, and that was curvy and soft enough, the skin silky over bunched muscles.

When Spike finally relented and broke his mouth away, they were both breathless. Spike looked down at him and then dipped his head again so he could whisper in Xander’s ear. He somehow managed to make his voice rough and purring at the same time. “So, pet. Still straight as an arrow?” And
to emphasize the question he thrust his hips against Xander’s, only the layers of the quilt and sheet between them.

Xander groaned. “Maybe...just a little bit bent,” he rasped.

What followed next was a revelation. If Xander had allowed himself to imagine this scenario at all, he would have assumed it would have been awkward. After all, the mechanics of it were new to him, the topology entirely different from what he was used to. And this wasn’t just some random man he was with, but Spike, William the Bloody, formerly a vampire who’d filled Xander’s heart with terror. And they weren’t exactly well prepared—Spike muttered darkly about the shortcomings of hand lotion when used as lube.

But the truth was, it just about blew Xander’s mind. Spike was so hot around his cock; and his face so gorgeous as Xander pounded into him, his eyelids fluttering with every thrust, his kiss-swollen mouth hanging open; and he made these sounds, these
little growly sort of moans, that were easily the sexiest thing Xander had ever heard. Xander loved the way Spike’s long, hard cock dug into Xander’s belly, smearing dampness into the hairs there, and the way Spike’s pink nipples hardened as Xander played with them. He loved the feel of Spike’s hands—long, masculine fingers—digging into his own ass, urging him deeper inside that tight channel. But when he collapsed onto Spike’s heaving chest, and Spike bit his shoulder and howled into Xander’s skin, and warm fluid spatred and stuck between them, that sent Xander over the edge, and he came harder than he ever had before. So hard that he was a little surprised a few minutes later when his senses returned and his head was still attached to his body.

He was still inside Spike. Spike was licking gently at the little indentations his teeth had made and rubbing at Xander’s calves with his toes. Xander looked down at him and smiled. “I am so gay,” he announced.
Spike moved back into Xander’s bed, even brought the small collection of clothes he’d accumulated and shoved them into Xander’s closet and dresser. He dumped Brett, who took it reasonably well, he said.

Xander spent a week or so feeling so giddy he almost could have thought himself drunk again. But there was no crash, no hangover, no self-hatred and acid self-recrimination. Just Spike, waiting for him with open arms and eager lips. Spike snuggling with him on the couch, each of them running fingers over the other as if they’d been deprived of touch for years, and had to make up for it now. Spike laughing across the table while they ate dinner, his eyes twinkling as the waiter blushed a little at their tightly entwined hands.

The strangest part of it was how comfortable this all felt. Physically comfortable—Spike fit in Xander’s
arms exactly right. And, as spectacular as it felt when Xander sheathed himself inside Spike, it turned out that it felt equally wonderful when Spike sank his own length into Xander. But it was also emotionally comfortable, as if they’d been lovers for years.

Spike seemed genuinely happy, too, more like the Spike of Sunnydale but relaxed and without the menace. He was hardly the same person Xander had found in that alley not long ago, skinny and beaten and full of despair. Xander remembered how hard Spike had taken it when Drusilla left him, and now Xander was the focus of that intense devotion. Xander was the center of someone else’s world.

No wonder he felt giddy.
Part Four

“Hey, Xander,” Jim said, and plopped an envelope down on his desk. “You going to join us this year?”

Xander looked up from his spreadsheet and smiled. “You kidding? I’d never miss the social event of the season.”

“Good. Candace was just mentioning the other day that she hasn’t seen you since forever.”

“Um, is it okay if I bring a date?”

“Sure! Who’s the lucky girl?”

“Uh…guy, actually.”

Jim’s eyebrows flew up. “Really?”

“Really.”

“Well, I gotta tell you...I’m really relieved it’s not Wendy.” Jim grinned.
“A world of no. Not Wendy. It’s Spike, actually.”

“Your roommate? I hadn’t realized, uh....”

“We weren’t. We were strictly roomies until recently.”

Jim patted his shoulder. “Well, by all means, bring him with. I’m anxious to meet the man that can put up with you.”

Xander remembered the invitation later that night, as he lay spooned up against Spike’s smooth back. “How do you feel about going somewhere for Thanksgiving?” he asked, tickling his fingertips through the damp, wiry hair around Spike’s flaccid cock.

He could feel Spike’s shrug. “Never really thought of it as my holiday. Don’t recall ever celebrating it before, other than with a better meal than usual at a soup kitchen.”
Xander remembered something. “We spent it together once. At Giles’s house. Buffy did the cooking, and Willow was there, and Anya.”

“And me? Why was I invited?”

“You weren’t.” Xander kissed Spike’s shoulder as a sort of apology. “You showed up needing help. It was just after you’d escaped from those government bastards.” Xander thought about how shitty Spike had looked that day—even before the Indian spirits shot their arrows through him—and how desperate he must have been to come crawling to the Scoobies for assistance. He kissed Spike again.

“And you helped me?”

“Eventually. We didn’t exactly trust you then.” Or, well, ever, Xander thought. “But we worked out sort of a deal.”

“And I ate Thanksgiving dinner with you.”
“Yeah.” Slight stretch of the truth there.

“I don’t remember,” Spike said sadly.

Xande caressed Spike’s hard belly. “I doubt it’d be one of your happier memories anyway.”

“So what did you have in mind this time, pet?”

“Jim’s invited us to his house. He has sort of a big thing every year, rounds up all the strays with no family near. It’s nice, actually. His wife, Candace, makes this killer stuffing with cranberries in it, and then she always does apple pie, too. I love apple pie.”

“Invited us, Xan?”

“Well, me. But I asked if I could bring you and he said yes.”

“Said you wanted to drag along your poor, deprived housemate?”
“No. I said I wanted to bring a date.”

Spike stopped breathing for a moment and became very still. Then he squirmed around until he was facing Xander, looking seriously into his eye. “You’re willing to tell the people at work about us?” he asked.

“Of course! Why wouldn’t I?”

Spike swallowed. “Thought you might be...ashamed.”

“To come out of the closet? Spike, I didn’t even know I was in the closet until recently, but I sure as hell don’t intend to hide there. If other people can’t handle it, that’s their problem.”

“No, I mean...it’s just me, innit? The freak you rescued from an alley.”

Xander clutched Spike’s shoulder. “Jesus, Spike! You think I could ever be ashamed of you? You’re fucking gorgeous—way out of my league, really—
and you’re no more of a freak than I am.” He laughed. “At least you still have all your parts. Spike, I told you before, and I’ll tell anyone else who’ll listen. You’re a hero.”

Spike cocked his head a little. “That’s really how you see me?”

“Yeah.” Xander moved his hand to Spike’s back and stroked the skin between his shoulders. “Maybe someday you’ll see yourself like that, too.”

~*~*~*~*~

Candace cooed over Spike and Jim shook his hand and welcomed him warmly. Rudy from accounting was there, and his jaw dropped as he looked back and forth between Xander and Spike.

Jim brought them glasses full of apple cider—not the hard stuff, but freshly pressed and good—and they munched on raw vegetables and inhaled the mouthwatering scent of roasting turkey. Xander and
Spike stood with their arms draped around each other, chatting easily with people from the court, and some folks Xander had met during previous Thanksgivings at the Ishimuras’ house. Spike had been a little tense at first, but then he loosened up and even seemed to be enjoying himself.

When the meal was ready, they sat beside each other, and they held hands while Jim gave a brief, non-denominational speech of gratitude for friends and family and good health. As was the tradition, everyone else around the table took a turn, stating something they were thankful for. When it came to Xander’s turn he smiled at Spike and raised their clasped hands so he could kiss Spike’s. “I’m thankful for lucky discoveries,” he said.

Spike blinked at him and looked down at his own lap. “’M thankful for caring hearts,” he said, his voice quiet and rough.

It was a good dinner. Rudy was sitting across from Spike, frankly staring. Then he leaned forward and almost-whispered, “What was the thing with
Wendy, then, Xander? Beard?"

Spike snorted. “Xan could find a better beard than that cow.”

“She wasn’t, Rudy. I really do like women. It’s just, well, I like Spike better.”

Spike smiled sunnily at that.

Rudy swallowed a mouthful of yams. “How’d you two meet?”

Spike and Xander exchanged a look. They really hadn’t discussed how to deal with questions like that. With an expression of trust that broke Xander’s heart, Spike said, “Xan can tell you all about it.”

Xander swallowed. “Um...we knew each other a long time ago, back when I was a kid.”

“And you were lovers then?”
Xander chuckled. “Not hardly. But we ran into each other unexpectedly several months ago, and Spike was looking for a place to stay.”

“Xander took me in like a stray dog,” Spike added.

“Yeah, except I fed you better. Anyway, Spike moved in and we...I don’t know. We hit it off, I guess.”

Rudy sighed. “It must have been fate. You were meant to be together.”

“I don’t know....” Xander said, and noticed that Spike looked uncomfortable, too. “Destiny, all that stuff, it always seems to lead somewhere unpleasant.”

Spike shivered. “Don’t much fancy mojo myself.”

“Well, whatever. You two seem really happy, anyway. That’s nice.”

“It is nice,” Xander agreed. “I’m really fortunate.”
Spike leaned over and gave him a peck on the cheek.

Later, after both pumpkin and apple pies, Xander felt as stuffed as a turkey himself, and he and Spike were leaning slightly against each other on a couch in a tryptophan-induced haze. There was a football game on the tv, and a lot of people were gathered around the screen, cheering for one team or another, but Xander was more comfortable cuddled up against a warm and pliant Spike. On a chair across from them, Jim’s mother beamed at them.

“It’s nice to see two young men so content,” she said. “I think you’ll have a long time together.”

“Thanks, Mrs. Ishimura. I hope so.”

“Mr. Ishimura and I have been married for 51 years, you know.” She gestured toward her husband, who was in the kitchen, pouring some wine for himself and a grandson.
“Wow, that’s incredible.”

“It’s not always easy, being with someone you love. Sometimes you make mistakes. We’ve both made a lot over the years.” She smiled, showing deep dimples. “But we’ve always been honest with each other. That’s the secret, I think.”

“Hmm,” said Xander, shifting a little uncomfortably in his seat. Just then the grandson came over and smilingly helped her to her feet before leading her outside. Apparently he’d been installing some sort of water feature in his parents’ garden and he wanted her to see it.

Spike mumbled sleepily, “Think you can drive us home, pet? I’m knackered.”

“Sure. Me too, actually.”

They said their thanks and goodbyes, and then drove home through the dark. Spike didn’t say anything, and Xander thought he might actually have fallen asleep. Xander turned on the radio. He
didn’t want to hear his own thoughts, which were echoing Mrs. Ishimura’s words.

It was over a week later when Spike tugged Xander’s car keys out of his fingers and shoved them into his own front pocket.

“Spike! I want to go to the gym. You can come with if you want.” Spike didn’t like the gym much, although he’d lately taken to joining Xander for an evening run.

“Not getting these back until you tell me what’s wrong.”

Xander grabbed the belt loop at Spike’s waist and yanked him close before trying to get his hand into Spike’s pants. “Sounds like a challenge,” he mock-growled.

But Spike pushed him away and crossed his arms. “Something’s been bothering you for a while, Xan.
You’re not going anywhere until you tell me what. Not getting any of this, either,” he added, waving his hands down the front of his own body.

“Yeah, as if you could hold out very long.”

Spike stuck out his chin. “Can. I still remember how to wank, you know.”

“What do you want from me, Spike?”

“Tell me what’s eating you.”

Xande puffed out a breath of resignation. “It’s…it’s something Mrs. Ishimura said.”

Spike’s eyebrows flew up. “That old bird? How did she manage to set you off?”

“She said the secret to a relationship is honesty.”

“And?”

“And…I’ve never lied to you, Spike, not once.
But...but there are some things I’ve sort of...omitted.”

“Important things, pet?” Spike’s voice was even.

Xander collapsed onto a kitchen chair. “I guess so. Yeah, important things.”

“And why haven’t you told them?”

“Because...they’re about you, about your past. And I thought they’d be pretty hard to hear.”

Spike had gone pale. “You’ve already said I was bad, yeah? And we didn’t get on. Is it worse than that?”

Xander couldn’t look at him. He stared at the wall instead, at framed picture he’d hung there of a leafless tree in a misty, empty field, with a low fence running in front. “Yeah,” he whispered.

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They sat across from each other in the living room, stiff and formal, with Spike on the couch and Xander in a chair he’d pulled over. Spike was wound so tightly he looked ready to explode at the tiniest touch.

“Gods, I need a drink,” Xander groaned. Spike just glared. Xander took a deep breath. “Okay. What I’m about to tell you…it’s gonna sound really nuts, okay? I promise you, though, it’s true. Every word.”

Spike nodded once.

“Fuck. Okay. So there are things in this world that...that most people think don’t exist. Mostly it’s because they never see them, but even when they do, they convince themselves it’s not so.”

“What sorts of things?”

“Monsters. Demons, and werewolves, and prophecies, and hells, and magic. Real magic, not the pulling rabbits out of a hat kind. More like the
skinning someone alive with a single word kind.”

“And you know this because...?”

“I’ve seen it. Sunnydale, where I grew up, it was on a Hellmouth. It was like demon central. Buffy, my friend, your girlfriend for a while, she was a vampire Slayer.”

“Vampire,” whispered Spike thoughtfully.

“Yeah. And Giles was her Watcher, and Willow was a witch. Anya? Former vengeance demon. Dawn was a mystical key thing.”

“And you, Xander?”

Xander laughed without humor. “Plain old, boring old human.” He paused for a minute. “You’re not telling me I’m crazy yet. How come?”

“When I lived on the streets, I saw things. Sometimes it was just the drink, I expect, but sometimes...I think it was real. Things that went
bump in the night, yeah?”

“Pretty much. There’s more of them in some places than others—not too many here, it’s one of the reasons I came here—and once you know what you’re looking at they’re easier to spot.”

Spike nodded again. “So, this is to do with how I lost my memories, then?”

“Yeah. And what happened before.”

“So?”

Xander stood suddenly, and spent several minutes pacing before turning to look at Spike. “Are you sure you want to know? It’s not—it’s bad. And you’re happy now, aren’t you? We’re.... I’m fucking in love with you! I’ve never been in love before and now I am, and can’t we just leave things as they are?”

Spike looked completely thunderstruck. “You love me?” he choked.
“Yes. I love you, Spike.” They seemed so simple, those little words.

“You know these things about me, these bad things, and you love me anyhow.”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Because...because I know the good things, too. And recently, I’ve got to know you much better than I ever did before. You’re...amazingly loveable, actually.” He tried a small grin and was surprised when he succeeded.

Spike looked up at him. “I love you too, you know. Have for ages.” Xander’s heart wrenched with some unnamable combination of joy and sadness. “But I have to know. What if this isn’t the real me?”

Xander walked over and sat next to him on the couch, and caught Spike’s hands in his own. “Giles
told me a way...he found a sort of spell. I can do it and you’ll remember everything.”

“Please, Xan.” Spike’s face was flushed now, his breathing rapid.

Xander sighed. “Okay. Okay. But make sure you remember this, too: whatever you’ve been, even when you were at your worst, there was always something about you.... And you are a hero. A Champion. You’ve saved the world, Spike.”

Spike looked startled. “Saved the world?”

“Yeah. I mean, maybe that’s not such a big deal, even I did it once. But you did more than once, even when it meant your own destruction.”

“But I’m not destroyed.”

“Not now. But you were.” Spike shook his head in confusion, and Xander sighed again. “Don’t worry, it’ll all be clear soon enough.”
“What do we have to do? This spell?”

“You want to do it now?”

“Yeah. Not getting any younger, am I?”


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It was funny how ridiculously easy it ended up being.

There were no magic crystals or herbs or talismans or glass globes. Nothing at all, actually, but a half dozen words in a language that didn’t sound remotely familiar to Xander. And he didn’t even have to say them; he only had to write them carefully on a scrap of paper, exactly as Giles had told him, and then give the paper to Spike. Spike looked at the tiny scribbles, shrugged, and then shoved the paper in his mouth. With a small look of
disgust, he chewed and then swallowed.

Giles hadn’t told Xander what would happen next, and for long minutes, nothing did. Spike and Xander just sat there, holding hands, listening to one another breathe. “Maybe it won’t work,” Spike said with mixed disappointment and relief.

“Maybe not.”

“If it doesn’t, you’ll still tell me everything?”

“Yes. I didn’t mean...I never meant to be dishonest, Spike. I only thought—“

“I know.” Spike squeezed his hand hard. “You’re a good man, Xander Harris. A hero, too, I expect, in your own quiet way.”

Xander swallowed past the lump in his throat.
“Thanks.”

“I wonder whether—“ Xander was never to know what Spike was wondering, because Spike suddenly
froze, and his entire body went rigid before his eyes rolled back in his head and he keeled over. He collapsed to the floor.

Panicked, Xander checked his breathing and heartbeat, but they seemed normal. So he gently lifted Spike back onto the couch. At first he arranged Spike’s arms across his chest, but that made him look too disturbingly like a corpse, so instead Xander placed them at his side.

Spike breathed, in and out, his face completely blank.

Xander waited.

Almost an hour later, Xander was still watching carefully when those eyes blinked open again then slowly focused on him. For a moment nothing else happened. Then Spike shot up to his feet and a horrible, animal shriek escaped his lungs. It sounded like rage and terror and despair all wrapped in one ugly package.
Xander had jumped up, too, and he stumbled backwards a little. When the shriek subsided to an awful keening sound, he took a half step forward. “Spike?” he whispered.

“No!” Spike screamed. And then he ran. Across the room to the front door, which he flung open savagely, and then into the cold night.

Xander did the only thing he could—he chased him.

Xander had been jogging and working out nearly every day for years. He was in really good shape, and he was also several years younger than Spike’s apparent physical age. When he and Spike ran together, Xander had to slow a bit to keep them in pace, especially toward the end of the run, when Spike would be huffing and puffing like a locomotive.

Tonight, though, the one time when it really mattered, Xander couldn’t catch him.

He ran as fast as he could, and for a while Spike was
tantalizingly ahead of him, but the distance between them grew greater and greater, and soon Spike was swallowed up by the blackness.

Gone.

Xander trudged back home, aching and feeling like he might vomit. He crumpled onto the couch and stared blankly at the front door. It was December, and probably in the mid-40s out. Spike had run away wearing nothing but jeans and a t-shirt and a pair of Docs. His phone was still on the dining room table; Xander could see it from where he sat. If he had his wallet on him, it contained nothing more than a student ID card and maybe twenty bucks.

Xander waited.

**Part Five**

Xander hated Christmas. He always had. He hated it when he was a kid and his parents would get him some cheap, crappy thing they’d picked up at the drugstore, and, if he was really lucky, underwear or socks. And he’d had to go outside to escape the
yelling and the punching and the throwing, and he’d huddled there in his tent, wishing they’d at least give him a frigging pair of warm pajamas. He’d hated it when he got older, and Christmas just meant more dreams unfulfilled, another year full of death and destruction just over the horizon. He’d hated it later, when he spent the holiday alone, not even a Charlie Brown Christmas tree in whatever miserable place he was living, silently downing endless bottles of booze. And even lately he’d hated it, because he was still alone except for a few friends, and they were all false cheer and fake good wishes, and he’d had to dodge the innocently offered wine and spiked nog and hot buttered rum.

He honestly hadn’t given much thought to this year’s Christmas. He’d still been a little lightheaded about the whole concept of Spike, and shagging, and shagging Spike.

Now that was gone.

Because of Christmas and New Year, Xander had most of two weeks off, and while that might have
been fun if Spike was still around—hell, they could have gone on vacation, maybe taken a cheap cruise to Mexico or rented a place up in the mountains—now it meant no work to distract him.

Xander sat home, staring blankly at the television, pretending he wasn’t dying for just. One. Little. Drink.

He didn’t startle when his phone rang on Christmas day. Instead, he shuffled numbly into the kitchen and found the phone where he’d left it on the counter and slid it open. “Yeah?” he said without inflection.

“Xander? Is that you?”

“Oh. Hi, Giles.”

“Xander? Whatever is the matter?”

“I’m not drinking, if that’s what you mean. Not a fucking drop.”
“I didn’t mean—Xander, what’s happened?”

A long, shuddering sigh escaped Xander’s lungs. “He remembered.”

“You used the incantation.”

“Yes.”

“And?”

“And he remembered.”

“Yes, Xander, I understood that bit. What happened next?”

“He left. He screamed and he ran, and I chased him but I fucking lost him, and I’ve looked everywhere but I can’t find him ‘cause he’s gone, he’s just fucking gone!” His voice had risen to a shout and he was panting, his throat sore and tight from it.

“You’ve...you’ve grown to care for him a great deal, haven’t you?”
For an answer, Xander could only sob, so that’s what he did, until he was sitting on the floor slumped against a wall, and his nose was all snotty and his eye all bleary and his chest ached, too, and Giles had probably spent a fortune on the international call. “Sorry, G-Man,” he managed.

“It’s all right. He’d become a close friend.”

“Lover. We were lovers, Giles.”

“Oh. I see.” Xander wondered if Giles was cleaning his glasses now, and it almost made him smile to think of it. “Can I help with anything, Xander?”

“No.” He cleared his throat. “There’s nothing to be done. I’ll be okay. I’m kinda falling apart but I’ll put myself together and I’ll be okay. But...thanks.”

“If you think of anything....”

“Thanks. I mean, not just for this. Thank you, Giles.”
“Merry Christmas, Xander.”

“You, too, G-Man. Merry Christmas.”

The day after Christmas, a package arrived. The return address was his parents’ old address in Sunnydale, and the postmark was too smeared to read properly, but he thought it was from somewhere in Illinois. It was a box, wrapped in brown paper, about ten by twelve by three inches. His name and address were printed in large block letters in black Sharpie, and the only other marking was a priority mail sticker in red, white, and blue.

He set the box down on his kitchen table and stared at it for a long time. It didn’t do anything. Just sat there, like a box ought to do.

Eventually he grabbed a box cutter and used it to cut the tape, and he slipped the brown paper away. Inside was an unmarked box, and inside that was a small envelope marked with a big, black “X”, and a
package covered in bubble wrap and wrapped in red wrapping paper with little silvery snowflakes all over it.

He opened the envelope first. There was a plain sheet of paper inside, but the handwriting was elaborate and precise. Old-fashioned.

X,

Didn’t mean to be a bloody coward. I’m trying to remember what you said, trying to see myself as you do. It’s really sodding hard. Thank you for taking me in despite everything and treating me like a man. Thank you for caring.

Found this when I poked about the pouf’s old hotel in LA. Thought you might like to
have it.
The dosh was his, as well. He had loads.

There was a cashier’s check in the envelope, made out to Xander Harris. The amount took Xander’s breath away: $100,000.

Xander set envelope and letter and check down on the table. They looked like nothing important like that, just innocuous little pieces of paper. He unwound the bubble wrap and set that aside, too, before carefully using his thumbnail to slit the tape that held the wrapping paper on. He smiled a little to himself, picturing Spike shopping for Christmas paper.

Inside was a wooden picture frame. It was a little more ornate than anything he would have chosen, and he ran a fingertip over the gilded scrolls and
curlicues. It looked like something that might hang in a Victorian parlor, he thought. The glass was covered by a thick piece of cardboard, which he pried away.

It was a penciled sketch, a pretty good one. It showed three people sitting around a table, in a setting that Xander immediately recognized as the Bronze. On the left was Buffy, a glass in her hand and her head thrown back in laughter. Willow was in the center, looking toward Buffy, grinning with delight and maybe just a little mischief. Next to her was Xander, young, with two good eyes and an arm flung casually around the back of Willow’s chair. His clothes were baggy and his hair was flopping in his face, and he was smiling, too. All three of them looked comfortable, easy. Happy.

Xander didn’t cry over the drawing, not one little drop. Not even though he owned no photos of his lost friends, and this was the first time in almost a decade he’d seen their faces. No, he definitely didn’t cry. Instead, he fetched a hammer and a nail and he hung the frame directly over the fireplace in
the living room. It was a spot that was easily visible from every place in the room, and even from the hall beyond. The frame didn’t match his décor at all, and the picture looked just perfect there.

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A new year meant resolutions, and Xander was full of them.

He stopped hiding out at home, alone, and made a real effort to join his co-workers for lunch or dinner or evenings out. His good humor may have felt a little forced at first, but soon it got easier, and he was confident that someday he’d be nearly as carefree as he acted. He didn’t actually date anyone, male or female—he wasn’t ready for that yet. But he had friends, and that was a good start.

He registered at the university. He’d earned an associates degree from the community college a few years back, but now he decided it was finally time to get his BA. He agonized a little over
choosing a major, before finally turning to Jim for advice. “It doesn’t really matter, Xander,” Jim said. “My degree’s in Anthropology. Choose something you’re interested in, maybe even something you’re passionate about. That’s the most important thing.”

So Xander thought about it for a while and then, with a small smile, checked the box for History. If he ever saw Spike again, maybe he could impress him with a newfound knowledge of the late nineteenth century.

He picked up his phone one afternoon and dialed that number that was still in his address book. When Giles answered, he seemed genuinely happy to speak with Xander, and the two of them had a long talk, catching up and making amends. Xander even promised a visit to London—he could certainly afford one now—maybe in August, when he had some vacation time coming. After they hung up, Xander felt warm inside, as if there had been a block of ice in his heart he hadn’t known about, and it had finally melted.
He hired a private detective and tracked down Tony Harris who, it turned out, had died several years earlier and had been buried in a pauper’s grave in Phoenix. Xander wasn’t really sad over it—his father had been dead to him for a very long time—but he paid to have Tony disinterred and buried alongside Jessica near Denver. He bought them a headstone, too, very simple. Just their names and dates of birth and death. But it was something, some sign that once, someone had cared about them.

And finally, Xander wrote a letter.

Dear Spike,

I don’t know if you’ll ever get this, but I had to give it a try. Thank you for the drawing. All my photos of the girls were destroyed in Sunnydale. I can’t tell you how much it means to me. And the money—you didn’t have to do that, but I guess you know that. So, thank you. I’m putting it to good use.
I treated you like a man because you are one. You were one even before you were human again. You deserve to be treated like one.

If I can be brave enough to admit I love you, you can be brave enough to face me. Don’t be a wuss. Yell at me if you want. That’s okay. Just, if you still love me, come home, Spike. Please come home.

X

With no other address available to him, he got the Hyperion’s address from Giles, and sent the letter there. Spike had been there once, maybe he’d go there again.

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It was really frigging hot out.

People around here were used to the heat, didn’t bat an eye when the mercury topped 100. But that was because most of them could blithely go from
air conditioned houses to air conditioned cars to air conditioned offices, where, even if the temp hit three digits outside, it was always so chilly that some of the women in accounting wore sweaters.

Usually Xander was firmly among the ranks of those who were happily unconcerned about the weather. He’d do his running before dawn, when the delta breezes were still cool, or, failing that, just use the treadmill at the gym. Today, though, his air conditioner had rattled and clunked to a halt right after he got home from work, when, according to the thermometer on his front porch, it was 107 degrees. He’d called the repair guys, who’d cheerily informed him that they could probably fit in a visit by next Tuesday. So now Xander was in back of the house, feeling his skin sizzle like a vampire’s while he attacked the air conditioner with a wrench and a screwdriver and a dangerously small amount of knowledge about the wretched beasts. When the heat got to be so much that his lungs felt like they were baking in his chest, he’d turn on the sprinkler and stand under the blessedly cold water for a few minutes, swallowing what he could like a dog and
letting the rest soak him thoroughly.

And he swore a lot, which didn’t cool him down at all, but did make him feel a little better.

“That’s quite a mouth you’ve got on you.”

Xander jumped and bashed his head and swore again, all the while spinning awkwardly around.

It was a hallucination. He had heatstroke and now he was seeing things, and, apparently, hearing them, too.

“Myself, I find a nice afternoon in the sun refreshing. Might even work up a tan.” The mirage smiled and waved its arms around a little. It was wearing snug, faded blue jeans and a plain white t-shirt and black boots. Its hair was honey-colored, cut quite short and slicked back a little to tame the curls. It had a black duffle bag slung over one shoulder.

Sweat was trickling down from Xander’s scalp,
stinging his eye and tickling the skin under the patch. He stood up straight and pulled the patch off, then shoved it in his pocket. He wiped his arm across his forehead and rubbed a little at the line the patch’s elastic cord had indented. He was still clutching the wrench like a weapon. He let it drop onto the grass. “You,” he said. His mouth was as dry as the Mojave.

“Me,” said the mirage, and then it bit its lip. Could delusions get nervous? “How about...how about we go someplace and have a chat over a cold drink?”

“I...I have to shower first.” It was the only response that came to mind at the moment, at least the only one that made sense, and it was true. Even he could tell that he reeked, and his hair was sweat-plastered to his skull.

“I can wait.”

They walked into the house, and Xander led them into the living room. Spike let the bag slide off his shoulder and onto the floor with a quiet whomp. He
sauntered over to the fireplace then and stood gazing at the picture that hung over it. “Looks nice there,” he commented, his back still turned to Xander.

“I thought so.” He stared at the broad shoulders. They were tense. “I’m gonna hop in the shower.”

“Hurry. It’s like a bloody oven in here.”

Xander carefully banished all thoughts from his head, all hopes and fears, everything but the basics of pulling off his sticky clothing and turning on the tap, then soaping and shampooing and rinsing and drying, and putting on a clean pair of cargo shorts and a dark green tee. He ran a comb through his hair, not bothering to dry it, and shoved his feet into a pair of flip-flops. Then he retrieved the eye patch from the pocket of his dirty jeans, slipped it over his head, and walked back out into the living room.

Spike was standing exactly where he’d left him, awkwardly, as if he was hesitant to sit down
without an invitation. “Ready, then?” he asked.

“Yep.”

Xander grabbed his wallet off the kitchen counter and they walked back outside, Xander locking the door behind them. There was an unfamiliar car parked out front, a shiny black BMW. “We can take mine, if you like,” Spike said, and Xander followed him and then climbed into the plush passenger seat, feeling detached and floating, like he was in a dream.

“Java Java?” Spike asked, and Xander nodded. It was only a couple miles away.

Most of the other customers in the coffee house were high school kids, chattering like a troop of monkeys, and they glanced at Xander’s patch, raised an eyebrow or two, and then ignored them. Xander ordered the biggest iced tea the pierced guy behind the counter could get him, while Spike had an Italian soda, raspberry. They found a tiny table in a relatively quiet corner and sat at it for a while, just
looking at one another.

It was Spike who spoke first. “Got your letter.”

“Yeah?”

“’M not a wuss.”

Xander felt the corner of his mouth twitch, just a little. “Good. So you can go ahead and yell at me now. I deserve it.”

“Why didn’t you tell me what I was?” His voice was calm, not raised at all.

“Because I figured you had enough to deal with already, without the whole vampire thing. Because I thought it’d be easier for you to go on with your life without that. Because I thought you’d be hurt by knowing.”

“You reckoned you should decide what was best for me.”
“Yes.”

Spike shook his head. “Don’t. You’ve no right to keep anyone’s past from him. If it had been you, would you want to know about the Scoobies, all the rest, even the painful bits?”

“Yeah. Yeah, I would.”

“So,” Spike said, and took a long gulp of his drink.

“I’m sorry,” Xander said, knowing it was lame.

“You did it for me, though? Not because you were ashamed of what I’ve been?”

“Jesus, Spike, I’m not ashamed of anything about you. Tell everyone I’ve ever met that you used to be William the Bloody and I’ll just nod and back you up until they come and drag us both to the loony bin. Some of what you did—well, it’s pretty horrifying—but not for a demon. I wasn’t ashamed of Anya and she did some really nasty stuff, too. Hell, I’ve managed to do some pretty awful things myself,
and hey, fully human here. I’m not ashamed.”

Spike nodded at his little speech. “All right, then.”

They were silent for several moments. Then Xander asked, “That’s it? No voice raising or dish throwing?”

Spike cocked an eyebrow. “Could manage a spanking later, if you like.”

Xander’s dick twitched. He silently ordered it to go back to sleep. “So you didn’t remember that you were straight?”

Spike shook his head and did that thing with his tongue. “Never was, pet.”

“Really?”

“Me and ‘Gelus, back when, and—”

“I don’t really need to hear the rundown of one hundred and fifty years of your love life, Spike.”
Especially if it involves Angel.”

Spike smirked at him.

Xander reached over and grabbed Spike’s free hand with both of his. “How are you doing, Spike? I mean, it must have been so much, all at once....”

Spike brought their hands up and kissed Xander’s scraped knuckles, before letting their palms rest on the table top again. “I never wanted the bloody prophecy for myself, not really. Fought for it once, but that was only because it was Angel, you know? He’s the one who was so desperate to become a real boy.” He sighed and looked down. “And all he is, is dust in a dirty old alley.”

“He wanted redemption, didn’t he? Maybe he found it. You never know what you might find in an alley.” Xander squeezed Spike’s hand and smiled at him.

“Remember when the Slayer died?”
“Which time?”

“When your witch brought her back.”

“Yeah. Kind of hard to forget, really.”

“She said she’d been in heaven, or something like it. She’s there now, isn’t she? And Red, Nibblet, the others...even Peaches, I expect.”

“I’d like to think so.”

Spike nodded thoughtfully.

Xander slurped at his tea until the glass was empty of anything but ice. He released Spike’s hand and Spike waved at him a little, so Xander went and fetched refills for them both. “Gonna rot your teeth with all that sugar,” he said, plonking Spike’s soda in front of him.

“I saw a dentist recently. Horrible! Worse than Angelus.”
“Well, your smile is all sparkly.”

“I don’t sparkle,” Spike said, slightly sourly. “I miss my fangs, sometimes. Miss some of the rest as well. My hair’s turning gray.” He patted at it.

“So bleach it again and nobody will know.”

“’M going to get wrinkles. And my joints will get stiff and someday I’ll likely need sodding Viagra!” He’d raised his voice a little, and the nearest teenagers snickered.

“Welcome to humanity, Spike. But you know, you’ve probably got a year or two left in you before they cart you away.”

“Will you want me when I’m old, Xander?”

“Of course. I’ll be old, too, you know. We’ll be decrepit together. We can share a room at the rest home. We can…shake our canes together at all the young whippersnappers.”
“Shake our canes?”

“Okay. I didn’t mean that as a euphemism, actually.”

“Euphemism. Fancy word.”

Xander grinned. “You’re talking to a college man. I signed up at the university. Got straight A’s this spring, too.”

“Good for you, pet,” Spike said, and looked like he meant it.

“It is. Although right now I’m kind of wishing I took air conditioner repair instead of macroeconomics.”

“I’m rich, you know. Cheap old sod was bloody loaded. I can put you up at the Doubletree until your AC’s mended. Hell, I can buy you a whole new house, if you like.”

“I don’t want you to buy me anything, Spike.”
Spike’s face fell and his shoulders sagged. “Oh,” he said.

“I like my house. It’s mine, and I want to keep it. But…I’d like it even better if it was ours.”

Hope sparked in those blue eyes. “Yeah?”

“Stay with me, Spike. Please.”

Xander watched a slow smile stretch the corners of Spike’s mouth. “I’d like that.”

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Xander yelped. “That’s cold!”

“Can sort that, pet,” Spike chuckled and licked the melted remains of the ice cube out of the cleft of Xander’s ass. His tongue was chilled, too, but still felt really, really good, and the next sound Xander made was much more in the neighborhood of a moan. He was just beginning to wiggle a little in
hopes that that tongue would make its way a bit farther down when he heard the clink of ice in a metal bowl, and another cube landed right between his shoulder blades.

Then Spike was straddling him, lapping delicately at the water on Xander’s back like a cat, making Xander shiver. Spike’s cock nestled against Xander’s butt and his balls brushed against sensitive skin. Xander wiggled again and Spike laughed, low and dirty, sounding as evil as he ever was. Xander groaned in response.

Xander hadn’t had any action other than his own right hand since Spike left him, almost eight months ago. He pretty much felt like he was going to burst. And he knew Spike hadn’t slept with anyone else either, but Spike didn’t seem to be in any hurry, slowly trailing his tongue and fingers across Xander’s skin until his lips latched onto Xander’s neck and his blunt teeth nibbled gently over Xander’s carotid.

“Returning to your roots?” Xander managed to ask.
Spike detached himself and whispered into Xander’s ear. “The demon’s still here, you know. All wrapped up in a nice living package, is all. Lucky for you, too, or you’d only have William Pratt, and he wouldn’t know how to do this.” He thrust his hips against Xander then, and his cock skidded nicely on sweat and icewater and spit and lube.

Xander laughed into his pillow. “I don’t know what I’d do without a little demon in my bed.”

“Not so little, pet,” Spike growled, and thrust again.

After that, neither of them was capable of coherent speech for some time.

They lay tangled together, sticky and floppy all over, like things that had melted in the sun. “You know, the back yard’s plenty big enough. We could put in a pool,” Xander mused.

“Skinny dipping?” Spike said hopefully.
“Um, I think we might have to plant some bigger trees between us and the neighbors first.”

“Hmm,” Spike said, and tweaked Xander’s left nipple.

“Hey, Spike? How would you like to give me a tour of London?”

“I expect it’s changed a bit since I was there last, love.”

“But would you go?”

“With you? Anywhere.”

“Good. ‘Cause Giles has invited me to visit.”

“Made up with the Watcher, then?”

“Yeah.” Xander thought for a minute. “Are you okay with that? I mean, there was that thing with Principal Wood, and—“
“’T’s fine. I only want you happy, pet.” He lifted his head up a little to look at Xander’s face. “Are you? Happy?”

Xander scooped Spike into his arms, until the former vampire was settled on top of him. “Never been happier.”

“Glad you poked your nose into that alley, then?”

Xander squeezed Spike’s completely squeezable ass. “Best decision I ever made.”

Outside, a train whistle blew, two longs, a short, another long. Xander wouldn’t have heard it if the AC had been on. Funny how things worked out sometimes, not the way you expected, maybe, but sometimes better.

He squeezed again, and gasped as Spike sucked on his nipple.

Sometimes much, much better.
Fin