Pairing: Spike/Xander
Rating: R
Warnings: a little language, a little angst, a little m/m, a little violence
Notes: For spring_with_xan. I'll be posting the chapters all day. Lovely banner by zoesmith
Summary: Based on this prompt from reremouse: Post-Chosen Xander needs a place to live. It's Spike's turn to take Xander in. Why is he homeless? What happened? And why did he have to turn to Spike?
(Extra challenge: The reason is something other than torture, captivity, slavery, abuse, or a falling out with the scoobies)

Good Mojo

by

Whichclothes

1 Welcome to Zagreb

He adjusted his eyepatch, tightened his grip on the suitcase handle, and squared his shoulders. He could do this.

He knocked on the door.

He heard the clomp of heavy boots approaching and the clank of a bolt unlocking. The door swung open.

“I’m not buying any, so—“

The look of absolute shock on the vampire’s face
was priceless. Xander wished he had a camera to record it. He was pretty sure a digital camera would work.

“Harris?!” came the tiny whisper.

“One and the same.”

“What—what in the bloody hell....” Spike sputtered helplessly.

“Can I come inside, Spike?”

“You—you’re a vamp now too?”


Spike blinked at him for a moment, then looked up and down the hallway, as if he expected more surprises to come popping out of the woodwork. There was nobody else there, though. Just grimy, scuffed greenish walls. Spike stepped aside and motioned Xander in, then shut the door behind
The apartment wasn’t what Xander had expected. A thick blanket was tacked over the single window, but the place was neat and clean. There was a futon flanked by a couple of end tables, an entertainment stand with a good-sized tv, and a small dresser. All the furniture looked like it came from Ikea. A Persian carpet in reds and golds covered a good part of the wood floor and the white walls were bare. There was a small kitchen area. No table, but then Spike probably didn’t do a whole lot of sit-down dining. There were two more doors. One of them was open and Xander could catch just a glimpse of a bathroom. The other was closed. Closet, probably.

“You came to inspect my flat, Harris?”

Spike had recovered enough to be sarcastic. Good.

“No. Although I could. Inspect, that is. Could fix that broken cabinet, too.” Xander pointed at the kitchen, where one cabinet door hung askew.

Spike stared at him silently for a moment and then stalked into the kitchenette. Xander let his suitcase drop to the floor. It was strange how very un-Spikish this place was.

Spike came back with two tumblers pretty full of amber liquid. He handed one to Xander, who took a big, grateful gulp. The burn in his throat was delicious.

“Mind if I sit?”

Spike raised an eyebrow, but gestured at the futon. Xander limped over and collapsed heavily onto it, nearly sloshing some of his drink.

Spike crossed his arms and stared. “So? Getting a
mite impatient for an explanation here.”

“You? Impatient? No!”

Spike scowled, and Xander grinned apologetically. It probably wasn’t a great idea to piss Spike off right now.

“Just give me a minute, okay? I’ve been traveling forever, I feel like shit, and I’d like to get several more ounces of this stuff in me before I begin.”

Spike glared, but then he stomped into the kitchen and came back with the bottle in his hand. He poured some more in Xander’s glass, drained his own glass, and then refilled it. Still holding the bottle, he sank onto the other end of the futon.

Xander drank several more swallows, imagining that the pain faded a little more with each one. It didn’t. It never did. But he could pretend.

Wordlessly, Spike reached over and gave him another refill. Xander sipped and let his head fall
back against the cushion, allowed his eye to fall closed for just one moment. Then he sighed for the third time and looked at Spike. “Thanks,” he said.

“What are you doing here, Harris?”

“Looking for you.”

“Why?”

Xander grinned a little. “I need you to bite me.”

“What?!”

“Bite me, Spike.” Xander chuckled. “Really.”

Spike shook his head. “No. Look, I can tell you’re ill, but getting yourself turned isn’t the answer. You’d still look and talk like you, but it wouldn’t be you anymore.”

“Duh. Haven’t I been around vamps for a decade? I know how it works. I don’t want you to kill me, just feed from me. Just...a few swallows, I guess. I mean,
if I wanted to get vamped, I wouldn’t have had to drag myself all the fucking way to—where the hell are we?”

“Zagreb,” Spike muttered.

“Zagreb. Not exactly in the neighborhood. And do I look like I’m in any shape for sightseeing?”

He looked like shit, actually, and he knew it. Pale. Much too thin. Kinda shaky. Ten years older than his true age. And that wasn’t even counting the missing eye.

Spike frowned at him.

Outside, a siren rang out, police or an ambulance, one of those weird, foreign-sounding ones that reminded you you weren’t in the USA any longer. Xander glanced at his watch, but he had no idea whether it was set for the right time zone. He might have changed it during his layover in Paris, or maybe not. Christ, he was so tired. But he supposed Spike was reasonable enough in expecting an
“Harris? What the hell are you looking for?”

“Salvation, I guess.”

Now Spike cocked his eyebrow again. “You’ve come to me for salvation? Bit of the wrong direction, innit?"

“You’re the only direction. Here’s the thing.” He drained his glass at once and set it on the little table beside him. “I was in England. Fighting the apocalypse du jour, right? Same old, same old. Only it turns out it’s a lot harder to fight without depth perception, so I ended up stuck on book duty. Which isn’t exactly my thing, you know?”

Xander wondered how much of his depression and self-loathing were coming across. He’d been miserable. There were his friends, powerful and brave as usual, off fighting the good fight, while he was hanging around Giles’s place with his nose between dusty pages. He knew he was useless, that
they were only giving him things to keep him busy and make him feel like he was contributing.

Spike didn’t comment, though. He just waited, oddly serenely.

“I was struggling with this book. Big old thing. Creepy cover. No Cliff’s Notes or Classic Comics edition. There was this spell in it. For happiness, I thought. I figured, hey, I could use a little of that. And Xander Harris knows what he’s doing, he doesn’t need to wait for help from his incredibly powerful wiccan best friend. So I recited it. Only…my Etruscan is a little, um, rusty.”

Spike reached over to the table next to him and picked up a pack of cigarettes. He shook one out and lit it with a silver lighter, exhaling a long cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. “What happened?”

“Instead of happiness, I got a curse. *Nex tarda.*”

“Slow death,” Spike said softly.
“Yeah. Always with the Latin, right? Can’t have me a
good old English curse, uh-uhn.”

“How long?”

“This was six months ago. Giles figures I’ve got
another six months or so to go, only I’m gonna
spend four or five of those in a bed. Slowly wasting
away and becoming paralyzed, I understand.”

Spike took another puff. “Not a pretty way to go.
But where do I come in?”

“Giles and Willow did some research. Real research,
not my pathetic version. The only cure for *nex tarda*
is *morsus necis.*”

“The bite of death.”

“Yep. Which apparently means vamps.”

“I can see that. But again, why me?”

“Because it’s not just one morsus necis. It has to be
repeated once a month for twelve months, by the same teeth. And, well, most vamps, the bite is kind of a one-time shot, right? I’m not gonna be cured of anything if my throat’s ripped out.”

Spike let out another toxic cloud and then stubbed out the cigarette in a small glass ashtray. “So you reckoned you needed a demon you could trust not to kill you.”

“Giles said we could catch one and keep it locked up for a year, let it snack on me every thirty days. But...eww. The whole vampire prisoner thing sounded like trouble city. Especially with slayers on the premises.”

“Not generally a good combination.”

“Not generally, no. So, much as it pained me—and believe me, I know pain—I went off to LA, to talk to Deadboy.”

“Oh.”
“Oh is right. Seems that certain people don’t feel the need to share tiny little tidbits of information, like that Deadboy isn’t so Deadboy anymore.”

Spike made a pained face and looked away. “No,” he nearly whispered. “The pouf’s a real boy now, isn’t he? Still prancing around, though.”

“Yeah, well, he wasn’t doing any prancing when I saw him. He had a busted leg. I guess mortality’s almost as bad as Cyclops-vision when it comes to battling monsters.” Still, though, Angel had seemed oddly content to be human again. Maybe because he didn’t have to worry about the whole losing the soul thing anymore, and that meant he’d been getting very happy lately with some blonde babe.

Xander looked at his empty glass and considered whether he should drink some more. Probably not a good idea. If he mixed much more alcohol with the pain pills he was taking, finding a cure was going to be a moot point.

“So anyway, the brooding guy formerly known as
Deadboy let me in on another piece of news, which is that the rumors of your death were greatly exaggerated, too.”

“I did die. Burned up. Just...got resurrected.”

“So Angel said. Death really doesn’t stick with you people, does it?”

Spike shrugged.

“Angel told me you were alive. Alive-ish, anyhow. And he gave me your address. He didn’t really tell me what the hell you were doing here, though.”

Spike rubbed his face. He looked tired, too, Xander realized. Older, somehow, even though that was stupid. “What I’m mostly doing is staying far away from that wanker. As if he wasn’t bad enough before, he gets himself a pulse and suddenly he’s too good to be seen with the likes of me.”

Wow. Spike was bitter.
“But what are you doing here, Spike?”

Spike laughed harshly. “I have a job. A job! I’m a bouncer, see, for this bloke who doesn’t mind employing a demon or two in his bar. I keep the peace and he keeps me in rent and fags and liquor.”

“How are you eating?”

“Vinko has some connections, so he keeps me in blood, too. Cow and pig, mostly, but sometimes human. Hospital cast-offs, that sort of thing.”

“And you’re okay with this?”

Another shrug. “Sometimes I get in a bit of a brawl, pick up a bird now and then.”

They were both silent a while. Then Spike said, quietly, “Does Buffy know you’re here?”

“Yeah.”

“So she knows I’m....”
“Not ashes? Uh-huh.”

“Oh.”

Xander was going to say more, to try and describe the whole complicated mess that was him and Buffy, but suddenly he was so overcome with exhaustion he could barely keep his eye open. Either Spike was going to go along with the plan, or…or Xander might as well finish that bottle of booze.

“Spike. Will you do it? Will you help me?”

“’M not going back to the States. Or Old Blighty.”

“I’ll stay here. You can go on with your life. Unlife. Whatever. Just have a little nibble of me once a month.”

Spike narrowed his eyes at him. “Got a place to stay?”
Xander shook his head. “I figure you owe me. I put you up twice, didn’t I?”

Spike snorted. “Bloody tied me to your chair.”

“You can tie me up, too, if that’s what floats your boat. But the big advantage to me as a roomie is that I’m much less likely to drain you in your sleep.”

Spike stood, and for several minutes he paced silently back and forth. Xander fought not to succumb to exhaustion. Finally, Spike paused and pointed at the futon.

“Only have the one bed,” he announced.

“I can sleep while you’re at work. And if this works, and I get stronger, while you’re sleeping I can make myself scarce. There must be places I could hang out in this town.”

“And how are you going to eat? My dinner won’t set well with you.”
“I’ve got a little money.” It was very little, actually, squirreled away from the carpentry jobs he’d had in Cleveland. He didn’t have the right papers to work in England. If he scrimped, it would probably last him most of a year. Giles had offered to give him more, but he’d refused. He was twenty-five years old and got himself in this mess and he needed to stop relying on his friends for everything.

Spike thought a while longer, then pursed his lips and nodded. “All right. I’ll give it a go.”

Xander heaved an enormous sigh of relief. Deep in his heart, he’d doubted whether Spike would be willing to do this. He’s not sure he would have made a sacrifice like that for Spike, had their roles been reversed.

“Thanks,” he said.

“You look knackered.”

“Yeah. I’m.... Is it okay if I sleep, just for a while?”
“Okay. Have to leave for work soon anyway.”

Xander nodded his thanks. He kicked off his shoes and squirmed around until he was lying on his side. Almost immediately, he fell asleep.

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There’s always that moment of confusion when you wake up in a new place. Xander actually panicked a little, feeling trapped, but then he realized he wasn’t confined, he was just wrapped in a soft blanket. Spike had tucked him in.

Xander lurched off the futon and into the bathroom, which was as neat and unadorned as the rest of the place. He pulled his pills out of his pocket and swallowed a few with a couple handfuls of water. Then he stumbled back into the main room. The apartment was empty. Spike must still be at work, or wherever else the vampire went.
Xander wearily crawled back under the blanket and let the blackness descend again.

~*~*~*~*~

“Oi! Up with you!”

Xander blinked blearily at the vampire standing impatiently over him. He had no idea when it was. With the blanket over the window, he didn’t even know whether it was day or night. He sat up and rubbed his eye. The empty socket felt dry and itchy, and the skin around it was irritated from the patch.

“Hi, Spike.”

“I want my bed.”

“Oh. Sorry.” Xander stood and stretched.

Spike smelled like cigarettes and beer. He had a big red mug in his left hand and a pillow in his right.
Xander started toward the bathroom, but his legs gave out and he nearly stumbled. He managed to catch himself on the edge of the futon and pull himself upright. Fuck. That was happening more and more often lately.

“Spike, when can we—“

“Yeah, all right.” Spike actually looked concerned. He tossed the pillow onto the mattress and placed the mug on an end table. “Let’s do this.”

Xander slumped slightly with relief and hoped Spike hadn’t noticed. “I’d think you’d be happier about this. I mean, when’s the last time you got to sink your fangs into someone?”

Spike frowned. “Last time I remember was right before those wankers shoved that chip in my brain. But I guess I ate some people later, too, didn’t I?”

“Oh, yeah. The First. But even that’s been a few years. So now here’s your chance.”
“Harris, have you ever been bitten?”

“Ummm....” Xander fidgeted with the mattress seam.

Spike raised an eyebrow. “Harris?”

Lying was probably not a good idea right now. “Dracula,” he mumbled.

“What?” said Spike, even though he must have heard perfectly well.

But Xander repeated it, more loudly. “Dracula, okay? I...spent some time with him after Sunnydale imploded.”

“You and...and him?”

Xander was blushing, damnit. He found a fascinating spot on the carpet to look at.

He would have liked to blame the thing with Drac on the thrall, like the bug-eating. But the truth was,
Dracula wasn’t the first male he’d been attracted to. It’s just that he liked girls, too, and that had seemed so much simpler. Even if most of the girls he ended up with were at least a tiny bit demonic. But then Drac had kidnapped him, and well, yeah. There had been a little biting. And it turned out that if you were going to have gay sex for the first time, you could do worse than a partner with seven hundred years of experience.

Spike stomped around angrily for a few minutes, muttering to himself.

Xander couldn’t help teasing a little. “You’re not jealous are you?”

Spike shot him a look that probably would have scared him, if he weren’t already dying anyway, and if he wasn’t actually keen for Spike to chomp on him. “Not bloody jealous! Only disgusted that I’m getting that pillock’s used goods.”

Xander was too tired and in pain to be offended. “Yeah, whatever. He was actually nice to me, you
know?” He was. Nicer than any of Xander’s other partners except Anya. It wasn’t some deep relationship or anything, but they’d had fun together for a while.

Spike rolled his eyes. But then he clumped over to the futon and threw himself down on it. “C’mon then.”

Xander sat next to him, and his legs thanked him. Xander tilted his head. Spike licked his lips, leaned toward him, and then suddenly moved away. “Give me your wrist,” he demanded.

“Not my neck?”

“You really trust me to do this and not drain you?”

“I don’t have a whole lot of choice, do I? Anyway, that’s a better way to die than what’s in store for me right now.”

“I…I haven’t done this in a while, yeah? Not sure I’d stop in time with a big vein.”
“Oh. Then here you go.” Xander held his arm toward Spike. Spike stared at it for a minute, kind of the same way Xander looked at his plate when Giles put some weird new food on it, something with a vaguely obscene name like bangers or spotted dick, and Xander wasn’t sure whether he was going to like it.

Almost delicately, Spike took hold of his forearm. He shuddered slightly and then vamped out.

Xander hadn’t been close to a vampire in gameface for a while. He certainly hadn’t sat complacently next to one on an Ikea couch. But he’d become used to a lot of strange things over the years, so he didn’t move at all as Spike bent his head over Xander’s wrist and then carefully penetrated the thin skin with his incisors.

Razor-sharp teeth cutting through delicate flesh always hurt, no matter how gentle the owner of those teeth tried to be. But as soon as the vampire began to draw on the wound, sucking the blood...
with soft lips, the pain would be joined with a pleasure better than any of the drugs Giles had given him, a deep, languid thrill that ran from his head down his spine and straight to his groin. It was like mixing heroin with Viagra.

He hadn’t been sure what his reaction would be to Spike’s bite. Not that Spike wasn’t hot—Xander had admitted to himself some time ago that the cocky little vampire was pretty much sex on two legs. But Little Xander had mostly given up soon after the curse. Xander hadn’t even had a hard-on for months.

But when Spike moaned quietly over his meal, and his eyelids fluttered a little, Xander felt his cock give an interested twitch and begin to slowly fill. Spike moaned again and then suddenly withdrew his fangs, pushing Xander’s arm roughly away. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. “Enough,” he growled.

It probably was. Xander felt a little light-headed. “Thanks,” he said.
“My pleasure,” Spike replied, and adjusted himself slightly.

Xander stood, slightly wobbly. “Um, you probably want to get to sleep. I’m gonna take a shower. And is there some place I can put my stuff?” He gestured at his suitcase, which was still exactly where he’d dropped it when he first came in.

“That’s all you have? For twelve months?”

“That’s everything I own. I lost all my stuff when Sunnydale was destroyed.” He shrugged. “Haven’t really accumulated that much since.”

“I’ll clear out a drawer for you later.”

“Thanks.”

Xander walked to his luggage and unzipped it. He pulled out a red t-shirt, a pair of boxers, and some jeans. He also pulled out his small gray toiletry bag. He carried them into the bathroom. Now that he
was a little more wide awake, he saw that the room contained a toilet, a pedestal sink, a small mirror—not that Spike needed that--, one of those mysterious-looking washer-dryer machines, and a shower stall with a rounded glass door. There were two wood shelves on the wall, one with a brush and scissors and hair gel, and one was empty. Xander put his toiletry bag on the empty one. There was a small white rug on the blue tile floor. In the corner was a little wooden cabinet with towels in it.

Xander stripped, remembering to remove the medicine bottle from his pocket. He downed a couple of the pills and placed the bottle on the shelf. With a small sigh of relief, he pulled the patch over his head and placed it next to the bottle. He used the toilet and then turned on the shower tap as hot as it would go.

The water felt good. The curse made his wasted muscles constantly feel like he’d been running a marathon, and the needle-like spray helped loosen them up. He lathered up with Spike’s soap, which was unscented, and then used the vampire’s
shampoo. At least he hoped it was shampoo—the label was in Croatian.

By the time he’d dried off and brushed his teeth and hair and pulled on his too-loose clothes and his eyepatch, he felt slightly human again. He hung up the towel and left his dirty clothes in a small heap in the corner. He’d discuss laundry arrangements with Spike later.

When he came out of the bathroom, Spike had unfolded the futon frame so it was flat like a bed. He was sitting on it cross-legged and barefooted, watching tv. He glanced at Xander. “I expect you’re hungry now.”

He was, and that was kind of surprising, because his appetite had pretty much disappeared lately. “Yeah. Is there a grocery store nearby?”

“About a block away. But I picked up a few things on my way home.” Spike waved toward the kitchen. Xander saw that there were some apples on the counter, and some cans of what looked like soup,
and a loaf of brown bread. He opened the fridge and found a carton of milk and a couple of fruit juices, plus some cheese and sliced meat.

“Wow. You didn’t have to—“

“Didn’t want you fainting away after I fed, did I?” Spike’s eyes were on the tv screen. The program was in German, though, and Xander didn’t understand it. It might have been a game show.

Xander munched on an apple, then made himself a sandwich, which he ate leaning against the counter and then washed down with some blackcurrant juice. It had been months since food had had any appeal for him, but this tasted good. When he was finished, he cleaned his dishes and looked at Spike, who seemed to be absorbed in a telenovela.

“I guess I’ll go take a walk for a while. What time do you leave for work?” He wanted to make sure and return before Spike left, since he didn’t have a key.

“You look like you’ll make about two blocks before
you collapse, and I can’t come rushing out to save you now.”

Honestly, Xander wasn’t sure how far he’d make it himself, but what else could he do? “I’ll find a café or a park bench or something.”

Spike rolled his eyes. “Stop being thick. You can stay here.”

“But you need to sleep.”

“Just keep it quiet, and I will.”

“Okay. Thanks.”

Spike turned back to the tv, and Xander looked around the small apartment. There was no place to sit except—

“Oh, for Christ’s sake! You can sit here.” Spike patted the mattress next to him. “I won’t bloody bite.”
Xander snorted out a laugh, and even Spike smiled wryly. Then Xander walked over and lowered himself onto the futon. There was a second pillow there now, and he propped it behind his head so he could see the tv. On the screen, a woman with a fancy hairdo was crying into a hanky while an older man with a moustache scowled at her.

“You always wear that thing?”

Xander turned his head to find Spike staring closely at him. Specifically, at his face. “When I’m not at home. It looks pretty gross.”

“Could get a glass one.”

“I tried. It was uncomfortable, and I thought it was kind of creepy. People would stare at it.”

“Won’t bother me if you want to take it off. I’ve seen worse, I’m sure.”

Xander said nothing for a moment, then reached up and pulled the thing off. He tossed it to the floor
next to him and rubbed at the mark from the elastic band. Spike looked at him curiously, but without any trace of disgust.

“Yeah,” the vampire said. “Seen a lot worse.”

“If it wasn’t for you, I wouldn’t be seeing anything. Thanks.” He never had thanked Spike for saving his vision—and, most likely, his life—that day.

Spike looked slightly surprised, then shrugged. “Never would have heard the end of it from the Slayer if I’d let that bastard blind you.” He reached over and turned off the lamp at his side, so that the only light in the room came from the tv. He tossed the remote into Xander’s lap and pulled off his black t-shirt, which he dropped on the floor. Then he lay down on his side, facing away from Xander, and, presumably, went to sleep.

Xander watched the flickering screen for a time, but he probably couldn’t have followed the story even if it had been in English. The pain and exhaustion were gnawing at him again, reminding him that he
may have managed one bite, but there were many more still to go. Reminding him what a useless idiot he was.

His gaze wandered, and soon he was staring instead at Spike’s pale back, which was almost bluish in the light from the tv. Spike was lying slightly curved into himself and his vertebrae stood out sharply. His shoulders were broad and sinewy and his waist was narrow. If he was breathing, it was so lightly that he wasn’t moving at all. Dracula never breathed in his sleep, except when he was dreaming. But Spike was a much younger vampire and somehow more human. Even before the soul. Right now, his lips were slightly parted and his face looked innocent and serene.

2 Who Needs Petar

The next day when Spike came home from work, he tossed a key onto Xander’s blanket-covered chest. Xander yawned and picked up the piece of metal, squinting at it sleepily. “What’s this?”
“Key, berk.”

“To what?”

“The flat. So I don’t have to play gatekeeper for you.”

Xander sat up and ran a hand through his hair. “Thanks,” he said. He’d been saying a lot of that word to Spike lately. He set the key on the table and swung his feet around to the floor. Meanwhile, Spike headed for the fridge, where he stowed several packets of red fluid.

Xander stood and padded into the bathroom. He shucked his boxers and swallowed some pills and used the toilet, then had another long, hot shower.

When he came out, Spike was just moving some books out of the top drawer of his dresser. Xander smiled at him and emptied his suitcase into the drawer. Not much there. Just socks, underwear, a few t-shirts and a couple pairs of jeans. He’d need
to buy a coat when it got cold; his last one got shredded by an orange demon shortly before Xander was cursed. At least it wasn’t him who was shredded. He stuck a small black photo album in with his clothes. He’d had it in his pocket when they went to the high school to fight that final battle. It contained pictures of Jesse and Anya, and of Willow and Buffy and Dawn and even Giles. It was his only treasured possession, and his only tangible memory of his lost friend and lost lover.

As Xander heated himself some soup, Spike stripped and collapsed onto the bed. Xander tried not to ogle the beautiful naked flesh, but Spike caught him looking and smirked. He pulled the blanket over himself and flipped on the tv. It wasn’t the first time Xander had seen the vampire in his birthday suit. They’d briefly lived together twice before, after all, and Spike wasn’t all that conscientious about keeping himself clothed. Back when Xander had been in denial about his bisexuality, it had bothered him. Which was probably at least partly why Spike did it. Now, though, well, he could just enjoy the view.
After he ate, Xander sat next to Spike and watched tv for a while. At least it was in English this time. The BBC, in fact, talking about the war in Iraq. “I used to fancy wars,” Spike said thoughtfully. “Loads of opportunities for a vampire, yeah?”

“I suppose so.”

Spike sighed, and Xander didn’t know if it was wistfulness or regret.

“I expect you feel like a veteran sometimes.”

Xander thought about this for a moment. “Maybe. I mean, I’ve seen plenty of combat, I guess.”

“Lost comrades in arms.”

“Yeah.”

“Nobody gave you any medals, though.”

“No.”
“And you saved the world. More than once.”

Xander glanced over at Spike, whose eyes were glued carefully on the screen. “You lose an eye, and it fucks up your whole life,” Xander said. “Or you lose the girl you almost married. Or you burn up.” Spike’s head swung around to face him. “And nobody even says thank you, and the next day you’re on to the next apocalypse.”

“And somebody else gets to be the Chosen One, with the super powers.”

“Or the champion, with the brand new heartbeat.”

They just looked at each other, sharing a moment of complete understanding. Then Spike snorted softly and Xander smiled and stood. “I think I’ll go out for a little while,” he said.

“Not going to collapse in a heap somewhere?”

Xander shook his head. He was feeling a little
stronger, actually, and he couldn’t stay inside forever. “I’ll take it easy. Need anything while I’m out?”

Spike blinked at him for a minute, then nodded. “Yeah. There’s a bookstore on Ban Jelacic Square. Algoritam. They carry books in English. Will you pick me up a few? This time of year they’re only open during daylight hours.”

Xander had never given much thought to the inconvenience aspect of not being able to go out in daylight. It’d get damn annoying after a few decades. No matter vamps were so cranky. “Sure. Anything in particular?”

Spike got up and stepped into the kitchen, still nude. Still pretty. He opened a drawer and pulled out a pad of paper and a pen. He scribbled for a minute and then tore off the top sheet of paper. He padded over and handed it to Xander. “Here. Any of these, if they have them.”

Xander tucked the paper in his pocket without
reading it. “Okay.”

“Need kuna?”

“No. I changed some pounds at the airport. You can pay me back later. Or...I owe you for the groceries, don’t I?”

Spike shrugged. “That’s fine.”

Xander happily watched Spike walk back to the futon. This time, when Spike turned and caught him looking, it was Xander who smirked.

It was still early morning, and people were bustling down the sidewalk on their way to work. Xander consulted the map he’d printed out back in London and headed in the general direction of the square. He passed a McDonalds along the way and considered going in. What did Mickey D’s taste like in Croatia? But he continued on his way, and soon he came to a large, paved area. Trams and bicyclists
zoomed through, and pedestrians scurried to stay out of their way. There was a big white tent set up in the middle, and a stage next to it, and a statue of a guy on horseback wielding a pointy sword.

There were several cafés, too, and Xander picked one at random. He sat beneath a red umbrella, and when the waiter came to him, he said “Espresso, molim.” He’d printed out some phrases in Croatian too, back in England, and studied them during the flight over. Please. Thank you. Where is the closest hospital? Can I borrow some sharpened wood or some holy water? The basics.

He sipped his caffeine and watched the people go by. A few gave him a startled glance. The patch was a bit, well, eye-catching. He’d grown used to the stares. Most people ignored him, though.

A couple hours and two espressos later, Xander paid. He’d traveled around Europe a little with Buffy after they left Cleveland, and he loved how most places didn’t seem to care if you sat there all day, nursing a drink or two. But even just sitting here
had tired him out, and he still had an errand to run and several blocks to walk back.

The bookstore was a big one. Xander headed downstairs, where the English-language books apparently lived, and pulled the paper out of his pocket. Spike’s handwriting was precise and ornate. Victorian-looking. Xander had a sudden mental image of a small boy leaning over some paper and carefully copying words with a fountain pen. The boy had sharp blue eyes.

Xander shook his head and actually read the list:

*Alfred Lord Tennyson*

*Dickens (but not Oliver Twist)*

*Edgar Allan Poe*

*Christopher Moore*

*Neil Gaiman*
Okay. Xander had no idea about any of them except Poe—they’d watched *The Pit and the Pendulum* with Vincent Price in sophomore English class. He must have looked pretty clueless, stranded in the middle of the store with his scrap of paper, because a pretty brunette salesclerk approached and said something to him in what he assumed was Croatian.

“Um...do you speak English?” he asked.

“Sure! How can I help you?”

“Do you have any of these?” He handed her the paper.

He followed her around the store, and soon he had a stack of half a dozen books in his hand. Spike probably didn’t expect him to get *everything* on the list, but Spike had been pretty gracious, considering. Before he paid, Xander passed a display of books on music, and spied a biography of the Sex Pistols. He grinned and snagged that, too.

Xander barely made it up the stairs to Spike’s
apartment. He opened the door as quietly as possible. Spike blinked sleepily at him and Xander tried not to smile at his wildly mussed hair. Spike’s eyes fell shut again and Xander left the book bag on the kitchen counter. He toed off his shoes and slipped off his jeans and then, with a weary sigh, slipped into bed beside the sleeping vampire.

~*~*~*~*~

Spike had a Playstation.

Xander woke up most mornings to discover Spike propped up next to him, his nose in one of his books. Xander would get up and shower and pop some pills and eat. Then he’d head outside. He’d stop at one of the many cafés and have some coffee, then wander the city until he got tired. He’d buy some groceries at the little store down the street. The clerk there, an older lady with a blonde ponytail, got to know him. He’d say, “Hvala!” and she’d answer “Thank you!”
When he returned to the apartment, while Spike slept, Xander stole cars and killed aliens with the sound turned way down. Eventually Spike would wake up—vampires only needed a few hours of sleep—and join Xander in a few games. Then he’d have a few mugs of blood while Xander had some dinner, and they’d watch tv. Xander was trying, fairly unsuccessfully, to learn some Italian. It always sounded so sexy to him. Finally, Spike would shower and leave for work, and then Xander would turn in.

Sometimes Spike had a day off. Then they’d mostly sit silently in front of a movie or CSI episodes dubbed into Croatian, drinking beer or whiskey.

Xander had assumed they’d get sick of each other pretty soon, but instead he found himself actually enjoying Spike’s company. He didn’t know whether Spike enjoyed his as well, but the vampire seemed companionable enough, and didn’t complain.

Xander figured out how to work the washer/dryer.

Once a week his phone would ring and it would be
Willow, checking to see how he was. She was busy with the coven and her new girlfriend, a slightly scary witch named Frankie. Buffy was fine, Willow said. Fighting evil as always. Giles was fine, too. Dawn was busy with school. How was he doing? she’d ask. Good, he’d say. The truth was, he wasn’t much better. But he wasn’t any worse, either, and that was something.

He ran out of pills. Spike said he was moaning in his sleep and asked him why. Xander explained, and the next morning Spike came home with a bag full of the stuff, enough to last Xander several months. Xander didn’t ask him where he got it.

Thirty days after the first bite, Xander told Spike it was time for the second. They were standing in the kitchen at the time; Xander was washing dishes as Spike sipped from a cup.

“Think it’s helping?” Spike asked.

“I dunno. I’m not dead yet.”
“It doesn’t bother you? Being a demon snack?”

“I’ve been one before, remember? For fun, not a cure.”

“Why didn’t you go to Dracula?”

Xander had thought of it, of course. But he wasn’t sure he trusted the old guy not to just go ahead and turn him. Besides, they’d had a good time together and all, but Xander had the feeling they’d end up at each others’ throats after a couple months. Literally. But that was all too complicated to explain, so he only said, “It didn’t work out between us.”

“Do you wish Captain Forehead could have helped?”

“No. No way. I can’t imagine having to stay with him for a year, either.”

Spike leaned back against the counter. “And it’s all right that it’s me? A bloke who tried to kill you?”
“That was kinda mutual for a while. And I figure the thing with Caleb kind of makes up for that. Anyway, I never hated you for it.”

“But you did hate me.”

“Yeah. But not for that.”

“Then?”

“You tried to rape Buffy.”

Spike set his jaw and looked away.

It was funny, but Buffy forgave Spike a long time before Xander did. When he got a soul, that seemed to make everything okay with her. Not with Xander, though. Even when Spike wore the amulet and burned up those ubervamps, that hadn’t been enough.

And then Xander had got himself cursed and gone to LA, and found Angel sitting in the sun in the
courtyard of some old hotel, his bare chest deeply tanned and his leg propped up in a cast. When Xander had recovered from that little shock, Angel told him that Spike had reappeared and fought at his side, and after they’d had some enormous battle and Angel had been turned human, Spike had taken off for Europe. Still stayed in touch now and then, Angel said, passing on rumors he heard about malevolence on the continent. Now and then killing a nasty demon or two.

“Why didn’t anybody tell us Spike was alive? Why didn’t he get hold of Buffy?”

“He didn’t want her to know,” Angel replied.

“Why not? He said he loved her.”

“He did,” Angel said softly. “He wanted her to remember him as a hero.”

“Yeah, but couldn’t he be all Mr. Hero Guy and be with Buffy?” Xander hadn’t been sure why he was even asking, except he was confused.
“He was a hero, but he’s still Spike. He knew he’d hurt her, eventually. So he stayed away.”

That’s when Xander forgave Spike.

He didn’t say any of this now, as Spike stared fiercely at the wooden floor. Instead, he put away the last dish and shut the cupboard. “Let’s go have a bite,” he said.

Spike looked over at him with glittering eyes and nodded.

Spike fed from his wrist again, and this time Xander’s cock became fully hard and he actually resisted a little when Spike pushed his arm away. Spike looked at him with his feral yellow eyes and the vampire was panting heavily. Xander swallowed and stood and headed for the bathroom.

~*~*~*~*~
After the second bite, he really did feel better. Stronger. More energetic. But that meant he grew restless, too. There was a funicular, a ridiculously short ride that he might just as easily have avoided by climbing some stairs. But he liked the eccentric thing and rode it often. He wandered farther during the day, exploring the old, winding streets of the Kaptol district, and then stopping on his way back at Dolac, the farmers’ market, for fresh fruit. But it wasn’t enough. He needed something to do.

He fixed the broken cabinet. He got rid of the squeak in the bathroom door. He scrounged some wood and a few tools and built some shutters for the window, and then he hung them inside so they could open the glass for some fresh air as soon as the sun went down. When Spike was home at night, he liked to lean against the window frame with a cigarette in his hand, blowing puffs of smoke out over the street.

He built Spike a small bookshelf, and saw the vampire try to hide a pleased smile when he came
home to discover his little library all lined up neatly.

He learned some Croatian.

He picked up a dilapidated table and a couple of chairs and repaired them, then sanded the wood and stained it. Now they could sit and eat, or sometimes Xander would play solitaire, or Spike would jot away in a little book he kept hidden away somewhere most of the time.

But Xander still felt...twitchy.

Maybe Spike noticed. He was a pretty perceptive guy, actually. Because one evening as he was getting ready to go to work, he asked, “Want to come with?”

The bar was only a few blocks away. Xander had passed it plenty of times without knowing that was where Spike worked. He wasn’t sure what he’d been picturing, but it wasn’t a bad place. Nicer than Willy’s, anyway, and the crowd looked mostly human.
As soon as they walked in, a man approached. He was a little chubby, and he had one of those hairstyles where he was completely bald on top, with his graying hair long on the sides. He had a small scar across one cheek, and he was wearing a pair of jeans and a Mickey Mouse t-shirt. He smiled broadly at them.

“Vinko, this is my mate, Xander. Xander, meet my boss.”

They shook hands. “Nice to meet you!” Vinko said. “You’re British also?”

“No, American.”

“Ah! Wonderful. What sort of demon are you?”

Spike snorted.

“I’m just human,” Xander replied, and Vinko grinned and patted his shoulder.
“Well, welcome! Please, come have drink. On me.”

“Thanks.”

Vinko led them to a booth and waved Xander to a seat. Spike stood next to him, looking carefully over the crowd, and then Vinko returned a moment later with a tall glass of beer. He handed it to Xander and smiled widely when Xander said, “Hvala.”

“See? Already your friend learns our language. Wonderful!” After another round of hand-shaking he wandered off.

A girl came over, tall and thin and blonde and stunning. She slipped her arm around Spike’s waist and whispered something in his ear. Spike grinned and said something back in Croatian, then gestured at Xander. “Emilija, meet Xander. Xander, Emilija.”

She smiled briefly at him and then turned her attention back to Spike, sliding her hand a little farther down, onto his ass. He turned his head and gave her a quick kiss on the cheek. “Milija, love, I’m
working. We’ll talk later, yeah?”

She gave him a little pout, slapped his ass lightly, and then stalked off without another look at Xander.

“One of your admirers?”

Spike smirked. “Can’t help being dead gorgeous, can I?”

“Emphasis on the dead.”

Spike gave him two fingers and Xander laughed. It felt good.

Over the course of the next couple hours, Xander had two more beers. Spike circulated in the crowd, keeping an eye on everything, sometimes stopping back at Xander’s table for a few minutes. A constant parade of girls attached themselves to him, but Xander noticed that he didn’t let any of them stay there for long.
Vinko sat down with Xander for a while and they chatted a little. Vinko had been to the U.S. a couple years earlier, to visit a cousin in Chicago. He liked the people and the music and the food.

Vinko was just getting up when an argument broke out between two men in a corner of the room. Almost instantly, Spike was there, calming them down. A big guy in a bad suit escorted one of them to the door, and Xander realized that the big guy must work there, too.

Although Xander was enjoying himself, he grew tired. He caught Spike’s eye and Spike sauntered over. “I’m gonna call it a night.”

“You all right to get home?”

“I think I can manage. Thanks. And...thanks for inviting me. It was nice.”

Spike smiled at him, a pleasant smile. Sweet, even. And if he knew Xander was thinking that he’d probably deck him. As yet another girl brushed
Spike’s arm in passing, a thought struck Xander.

“Um...I’m not cramping your style, am I?”

“What do you mean?”

Xander gestured at the girl’s shapely retreating backside. “You seem to be pretty popular. But it’s kinda hard for you to bring anybody home, with me hanging around.”

Spike shrugged. “Never brought any of them home before. That’s...my own space. Private. I can always go someplace else to get my leg over. Hell, there’s an empty room in the back and Vinko’s willing to look the other way.”

Xander’s stomach clenched and he swallowed. “I hadn’t thought...look, I’ll find another place to stay, okay? Borrow some money from Giles or something. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to intrude on your privacy.”

Spike tilted his head and looked at him through
narrowed yes. “You’re not intruding,” he said softly. “Stay.”

Relief washed through Xander but now there was a funny little flutter in his chest. Maybe it was the pills.

Spike turned and walked away to deal with a loud drunk across the room.

After that, Xander walked to work with Spike most evenings, and had a drink or two before heading back home to sleep. Vinko seemed to like him a lot, especially when he discovered that Xander liked science fiction. He’d happily chat about which Star Trek movies were good and which sucked, and how much he missed Babylon 5, and whether Kirk or Picard was better. He told Xander there was a sci-fi convention in Zagreb every April. He gave him free beer and snacks.

When he wasn’t talking with Vinko, Xander watched
Spike. He saw how the vampire kept on the move, always chatting with people in a friendly manner, but never sticking with them for long. He’d flirt a little with the girls, but never get beyond a peck on the cheek or a quick grope to the butt. He constantly scanned the bar for trouble. And when something did happen, he was there in a flash, usually defusing the situation long before anything nasty happened. The big guy, Petar, was there to back him up, but Spike seemed to be doing most of the diplomacy.

Whatever he was doing, Spike checked on Xander often, sometimes pausing at his table for a moment, sometimes just flashing him a smile from across the room. Xander admitted to himself that he was beginning to treasure those speedy interactions. It felt a lot like it had in high school, when popular, beautiful Cordelia Chase, who was way out of his league, had spoken to him, had actually dated him.

Back at the apartment, Spike and Xander didn’t talk all that much. But they shared the space and the
Playstation and sometimes the bed. They never touched one another. Xander brought Spike books and magazines—he’d become a regular at Algoritam and all the clerks knew him by now—and, even though Xander was perfectly capable now of doing his own food shopping, Spike brought him snacks. One day he produced an entire box of Twinkies and smilingly refused to divulge his source. Xander dove into the spongecakey goodness just to stop himself from kissing Spike in delight.

When it was time for the third bite Xander became erect before Spike even touched him. Spike’s bulge, too, was clearly visible through his tight jeans. Spike left for work right afterward, and this time Xander didn’t go with him. Instead, he stayed in and jerked off, picturing Spike the whole time.

This was bad.

~*~*~*~*~

A week or so after the third bite, and Xander was
feeling pretty good. He’d put some weight back on, he had some color in his cheeks, and the shadows beneath his eyes—well, eye and eye socket--had faded. He might even have been able to manage without the pills, but the thought of not taking them filled him with mild panic, and he realized he’d managed to get himself a big hairy monkey on his back. Great. Exactly what he needed. Now if he managed to successfully de-curse, he was also going to need to detox. He should have known. Harrises and addictive substances didn’t mix well.

Okay. Something else to put on his neverending list of Things to Worry About. Somewhere after the death curse and the developing unrequited crush on his vampire roommate, and right before lack of binocular vision and being generally useless.

He came out of the bathroom and Spike sighed melodramatically. “Ready yet, Princess?”

“You’re just jealous because I have a reflection.”

“Wouldn’t want one if I looked like you, twat.”
Xander knew it was meant as a meaningless jibe, and he tried to ignore the small stab of hurt. Spike was right. He was a twat.

They walked in silence to the bar. Just before they went in, though, Spike turned and stroked Xander’s cheek with his thumb. “Ponce,” he mumbled, and stomped inside. Xander was left outside the door, his mouth hanging in shock.

Xander stayed late that night. He was playing with his phone, considering adding a new ring tone, when Spike plopped down in the chair opposite him. He had a glass of beer and he took a long draw from it. Business was slow that evening, so he could sit for a while, glancing frequently at the few remaining customers.

“Don’t get many calls on that thing, do you?”

Xander’s jaw tightened and he looked away. “No.”

“Why not? Did you have some kind of falling out
with the other Scoobies?” Spike sounded genuinely concerned, as if he really wanted to know the answer.

“No. It’s just…they’re outgrowing me.”

Spike tilted his head. “What do you mean?”

“You know…Willow’s got a steady girlfriend and the coven and she’s finishing her Masters degree. Dawn’s in college. Even Giles has a girlfriend, and he’s doing all this Watcher stuff. And Buffy... she’s got this boyfriend she’s all serious about.” He paused and looked at Spike. “Sorry.”

But Spike smiled and waved his hand. “I got over her some time ago.”

Oh. “She’s sort of a general, training this army of Slayers. They listen to her, too. She’s all... all grown up.”

“And you’re not?”
Xander sank his head in one hand. “I’m still doing the same shit as when I was fifteen, only with one eye. Looking stuff up in books. Making stupid, dangerous mistakes.”

“You could go to university.”

“I never was any good at school. Too stupid.”

“You’re a good hand at building things.”

Xander hid a tiny shiver at the praise. “Yeah. But nobody wants to hire a one-eyed carpenter. And it’s hard to explain why I don’t really have a resume. ‘Yeah, well, my last real employer got blown up in a hellmouth and since then I’ve been semi-employed as a demon hunter.’ That’s gonna open a lot of doors.”

“Well, they’re bloody stupid if they don’t see what a good catch you’d be.”

Another little shiver at that and he smiled wryly.
“What about a girl? Or a boy? Or...sodding Dracula?”

“Told you. Drac and me...it was just a thing, you know? Nothing serious. And about the only girls I see are slayers, and they scare me.”

Spike laughed and took a swig of his beer. “With you there, pet.”

“And boys, um, haven’t really tried that. Just Drac, and he’s not really a boy anyway, is he?”

Spike finished his beer and stood. He looked Xander in the eye. “Some day you’ll find someone who recognizes your worth. And perhaps then you’ll recognize it, too.”

And for the second time that night he walked away, leaving Xander gaping.

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Two evenings later, Vinko looked unhappy when they arrived at the bar.

“What’s the problem, mate?” Spike asked, lighting a cigarette.

“Ah, it’s Petar. He say he get better job at Stretan Put.”

“That dive?”

“Da.”

“Tosser. They’ll eat him alive over there.” Spike turned to Xander. “He’s a big enough bloke but can’t fight worth a damn. I saved his sodding hide more than once.”

“Da, so this is true. But now I am missing one man, yes?”

“You didn’t need him, Vinko. I can manage fine on my own.”
Vinko patted Spike on the shoulder. “Yes, I know you are very good. But two is better. Looks more scary. Is better...deter, yes?”

Suddenly, the man pointed at Xander. “You!”

Xander raised his eyebrows.

“You need job, maybe?”

Xander laughed. “You want to hire me as a bouncer?”

“Yes! Is good idea. You are big enough.”

“But I can’t fight worth shit.” He pointed at the patch. “Anybody comes at me from my left and I can’t see them until they’re on top of me. And I’m...sick.”

Vinko waved his hand dismissively. “Not important. Is only important you look like good fighter. And your eye, that make you look...dangerous, yes? Like
man not to be given shit.”

Spike exhaled a cloud of smoke. “He’s right, Xan. The patch makes you look like the Big Bad.”

Xander stared at Spike, expecting to see a teasing smirk, but Spike’s face appeared completely serious. Spike thought he looked...bad. And he’d called him Xan. Not Harris or whelp or even Xander. Xan.

That little flutter returned to his chest.

But Spike was still looking closely at him. “You’re looking loads healthier, too. We put you in the right clothes—a bit of leather, perhaps—and you’ll do nicely.”

“But...I don’t have papers to work here.”

Vinko laughed and Spike cocked an eyebrow at him. “And you think I do, love? I don’t even officially exist.”
Vinko grasped Xander’s arm. “I pay you under table. Like Spike. It will be good. You stay here, you make angry face when customers don’t behave. Spike calms them down. You have some money and my bar is happy place.”

The two of them looked at Xander while he pondered the offer. The money would be nice. He was here practically every night anyway. He certainly didn’t have anything better to do.

“All right,” he said. “You got yourself a one-eyed bouncer.”

3 Beware of the Hotel California

There was an unintended consequence to the new job.

Oh, the benefits were plenty. The paycheck, for one. Not a huge amount, but enough that he didn’t have to worry anymore about whether he’d be able to feed himself off his dwindling savings. Spike
wouldn’t let him chip in on the rent, so he bought the vampire more books and some new games for the Playstation. Every time he brought home a new gift, Spike gave him an odd, searching look, but Xander ignored it. He knew the stuff made Spike happy.

He thought about suggesting they rent a bigger apartment, but that seemed to imply a permanency to their situation that just didn’t exist. After all, Xander would be getting out of Spike’s hair as soon as the cure was complete. And Xander’s salary wasn’t really enough for him to afford his own place.

He did have enough money to add to his wardrobe. Spike threw out his old stuff—a little too gleefully, Xander thought—and gave him very specific instructions about what to buy instead. Xander could tell that Spike would have loved to come shopping with him, probably so he could make snarky comments and ensure Xander didn’t purchase anything with actual colors in it. But again, the sun interfered. Xander did fine on his own,
though, returning home with tight jeans and tight white t-shirts and a couple black denim shirts and a really boss motorcycle jacket that he should be able to wear in a few weeks, when the weather cooled a little. And boots. Black shitkickers not so different from Spike’s Docs.

He liked the work, too. It was fun being menacing. His persona was Silent but Dangerous, Potentially Mentally Unstable American. The customers bought it. When Spike went to smooth out a problem, they’d look back and forth between the confident Englishman and his glowering, maimed co-worker, and they’d visibly get a hold on themselves. Xander had never thought of himself as being frightening before, and it was kind of good for his ego. Even if he knew it was all a front.

He also liked working with Spike, and talking with Vinko, and even getting handled a little by the girls who’d taken a sudden interest in him. His Croatian was improving. And despite what Spike had told him, he noticed that the vampire never did disappear into a back room with any girls. In fact,
his interactions with everyone other than Vinko and Xander and Emerik the bartender never went beyond professional sociability. And that made Xander completely, irrationally, pleased.

But working with Spike meant keeping more or less the same hours as Spike. And that wasn’t a problem in and of itself, but it meant that the system they had for taking turns in bed didn’t work anymore. Oh, the futon was big enough for two. But every day that passed, Xander became more and more aware of the beautiful, naked creature inches away from him. And although Spike didn’t say anything, surely he was aware of how Xander was aware, and that was a problem. Spike didn’t seem to mind a certain amount of being lusted after, but sooner or later he was going to get tired of being the object of Xander’s desire. Not to mention which Xander was beginning to feel a whole lot of built-up sexual frustration, and he had no time alone to do anything about it. He tried the shower a couple of times, but he knew Spike was right on the other side of the wall, and between vamp hearing and vamp smelling, he could tell exactly what Xander
was up to.

Libido problems aside, things were good. And of course Xander was damn lucky to even have a sex drive at all, and wouldn’t if it weren’t for Spike. In fact, if it weren’t for Spike he’d be in bed somewhere, motionless, still dying by inches. In comparison, this little issue was a walk in the park.

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The fourth bite came on one of their days off. The futon was folded into a couch and they’d been watching Clint Eastwood flicks on Spike’s DVD player. Xander was in a t-shirt and boxers, Spike was wearing a pair of jeans with the top button undone.

Clint was in the middle of a shootout when Spike suddenly turned to Xander. “Hasn’t it been thirty days?”

“Shit. What’s today?” Xander had lost track.
“Twelve September.”

“Yeah. Thirty days.”

“So, then?”

Christ. Conditioned response—Xander was getting hard. He held out his hand, palm up. Spike looked at it. “Xan?”

“Yeah?”

“Maybe we could do your neck this time?”

Wow. Little Xander liked that idea just fine. “Um, okay. Sure.”

“I won’t drain you.”

Xander looked at Spike. Really looked, straight into those clear blue eyes. “I trust you,” he said.

Spike’s eyes grew wide and Xander heard him swallow.
Spike scooted a little closer and leaned into him. Xander tilted his head, his body thrumming in expectation. He wanted to reach out and clutch the vampire closer to him, to run his palms over that smooth, bare skin, but he forced his hands to remain limp at his side. Spike’s cool breath puffed against him, and Xander closed his eyes and fought for control.

Nothing happened.

Xander opened his eyes again, and now Spike’s were amber and hooded by heavy brows. His long, sharp teeth were glistening, so close to Xander’s undefended throat. But Spike was hesitating, a look of uncertainty on his demonic face.

“Spike?”

“This is all right with you?” Spike whispered.

“Yeah. Please.”
Spike shivered and then struck, his fangs sinking deeply into Xander’s carotid.

The pain came first. It always did. But he’d learned to ride it out, because it was soon joined by a trickle, then a wave of pure bliss, hot prickling goodness soaking through every fiber of his body, still wrapped with the ache. But he didn’t mind some pain with his pleasure, did he? Preferred it, even, maybe. Look at his bed partners—demonic types every one of them. He could blame Faith if he tried—mixing sex with near-death in a way guaranteed to warp his impressionable teenaged brain. Or he could blame his parents, who’d taught him that a beating meant somebody cared enough to notice you. Or maybe the Hellmouth itself was to blame, damaging him in his mother’s womb. In the end, though, it didn’t matter where the fault lay. He was being bitten, and it was all good.

And now, Spike’s hair tickling under his jawline, his hard body pressed against Xander’s shoulder and arm and thigh, the coppery-sweet smell of him filling Xander’s nose...that was all good, too.
With a sound between a gasp and a moan, Spike tore himself away. He remained very close, though, his breathing harsh, his lips painted red with Xander’s blood. He looked down at Xander’s lap, and Xander realized that his cock was jutting through his boxer fly, red and glistening and hard enough to cut diamonds. Spike let his face shift back to human and then, without a word, he sank to his knees between Xander’s legs and took Xander’s cock in his mouth.

Xander was so shocked that for a moment his lungs stopped working, and then he had to pull in a huge, whooping breath of oxygen.

Spike’s cool mouth, the same mouth that was just biting and feeding from him, now surrounded his rigid shaft, creating wet suction while Spike’s right hand worked the base of him, adding a little rough friction.

Xander was still frozen in astonishment, but then he looked down, and the blond head was bobbing at
his crotch, and Spike’s left hand was fumbling urgently with the remaining buttons on his jeans, and then Spike was fisting himself in sync with Xander.

Xander groaned. Of their own accord, because he clearly wasn’t in control of anything at the moment, his hands raised off the couch and alit on Spike’s bare shoulders, where they clutched for all they were worth. Xander’s hips thrust upwards, into that heavenly demonic mouth. Spike moved his right hand through Xander’s fly, cradling his balls, and swallowed his cock to the root.

Xander made a strangled noise. “Spike! Fuck! I’m gonna—“

And then he lost the power of speech as Spike hummed.

Explosively, Xander came. He shoved himself deep into that throat, emptying himself into it for what seemed like an eternity, and Spike only swallowed and then convulsed slightly as his own orgasm
came, splashing himself and Xander with his semen.

With a slurp, Spike released Xander from his mouth. He withdrew his hand from Xander’s boxers and patted Xander’s thigh. He stood then, his long, wet cock still sticking out of his jeans. He smiled wickedly at Xander with his tongue curled around his teeth.

“Gonna go shower,” he said. Xander watched as he walked away. Spike’s jeans had settled halfway down his ass, and Xander concluded it must be some kind of special vampire magic that kept them from falling off altogether.

~*~*~*~*~

They didn’t talk about the blowjob.

Although Xander had been taken by surprise at the time—to say the least—he understood Spike’s motives. Even though Spike hadn’t complained about it, his presence had put a serious cramp in
Spike’s sex life. If Spike was getting any at all he was being pretty fast and secretive about it, because the only time the two of them were apart was when Xander wandered the city by day, and Spike was stuck in the apartment. Besides, Xander knew quite well from his time with Dracula that for vampires, blood and sex were pretty inextricably linked. And, well, vamps liked putting things in their mouths. Spike didn’t smoke cigarettes because of the nicotine.

So Spike was horny and had just had a few swallows of demon aphrodisiac. And Little Xander had been standing up and begging for attention, hadn’t it? Under those circumstances, that nice little bout of fellatio was logical. It didn’t mean anything. Certainly didn’t mean Spike really wanted him, Xander Harris, doughnut boy and one-eyed cursed wonder.

That knowledge didn’t bother Xander. Not really. He was used to being...well, unwanted wasn’t the right word. Buffy and Willow and Giles and Dawn—even his parents—didn’t actually not want him. None of
them would dance with glee if the curse worked. It’s just that none of them had any use for him in particular. They were fine with him being around, but they didn’t need him.

What did bother him, though, was that, far from reducing his sexual tension, his little episode with Spike had ramped it up about five notches. Now he could barely even look at those soft, full lips without remembering how they’d felt on him, around him. His fingers practically itched for another feel of the vampire’s cool, soft skin. In bed, Xander had to remain resolutely turned away from Spike, his hands tucked firmly under his own armpits, his body practically teetering on his edge of the bed.

So it was a little awkward between them, and Xander found himself putting as much distance between himself and Spike as was possible when they shared a small apartment and a futon and a job. For his part, Spike didn’t say anything, but sometimes Xander caught him frowning unhappily. A few times Spike actually opened his mouth and looked like he was about to make a comment, but
then he shut it again. Xander was glad. He didn’t really need to hear any rejection right now. Or, well, ever.

But Xander did miss the easy camaraderie they’d been building. Sexiness aside, he’d actually been enjoying Spike’s company. He was smart and funny, and he could quote Shakespeare one minute and then laugh at South Park the next. He’d been tutoring Xander on punk music from the 70’s and, much to Xander’s surprise, he’d found himself a budding fan of the Buzzcocks and Stiff Little Fingers. Spike had watched a lot of tv over the years, too—another byproduct of the sunlight aversion—and was a veritable fount of pop culture knowledge.

Fuck.

Xander was falling for him. He needed to be done with the *morsus necis* thing and get himself far, far away.

~~*~*~*~*~
Vinko’s place had a few demon customers. Not many, and they tended to be types that blended in pretty well with humans. Peaceful demons who just wanted a couple drinks and maybe a little dancing on weekends, when there was live music. They never caused any trouble. While they may not have been fooled by Xander’s attempts to look intimidating, they certainly recognized Spike for what he was, and went out of their way not to piss off the vampire.

It was unusual, then, when a quartet of Fyarls showed up one Friday. Xander kept a close eye on them. He noticed that Spike did, too. But the demons didn’t do anything but order some beer and tap their fingers to the music, which was currently a Croatian-accented cover of “Hotel California.” After an hour or so they left.

As Spike and Xander walked home late that night, Xander asked, “What do you think was up with those demons?”
“Dunno. Don’t get their type often around here.” Spike puffed on his cigarette. “It’s fine, as long as they keep their mucous to themselves, you know?”

“Ugh. Mucous.” He’d forgotten about that part.

“Yeah. And they’re bloody hard to kill, too. Has to be with silver.”

“Like a werewolf.”

“Nah. There are lots of ways to off a pup. You can drain them, or break their necks. Done it myself, a few times. Only the bullet has to be silver.”

Xander suddenly thought about Oz and wondered what had become of him. But Spike was still expounding on Fyarls.

“But with these buggers, you can stab ‘em, bash ‘em, set ‘em on fire if you like, but it won’t do the trick. Have to stick ‘em with silver.”

“Hopefully, these guys will behave themselves and
there will be no sticking.”

Spike took a last draw and then crushed the butt under his boot. “Remember when that tosser turned the Watcher into a Fyarl? That was a good time.”

“A good time? Buffy almost killed him!”

Spike waved his hand. “Yeah, yeah. But he survived. It was funny.”

“Funny!”

“Yeah. I’d just been chipped, you know. Wasn’t having a lot of laughs right then. But then those soldier fucks were chasing us in the Watcher’s poncy little car, and he was getting all growly, and...it was funny.”

They were silent a moment.

“Spike?”
“Yeah?”

“I’m sorry.”

“What for, love?”

Xander tried to ignore the endearment, which he knew meant nothing. “I treated you like shit. I mean... after the chip and all, and that must have been really hard on you, and nobody should have people shoving things in their brains, and....” He trailed off, unable to express himself clearly.

Spike had stopped walking and was looking at him in puzzlement. “I’m a vampire, remember? No soul then. Evil. Tried to kill you more than once.”

Xander stopped, too. “Yeah. So fine, vampire tries to kill me, I try to stake him. Fair enough. But I didn’t have to be mean to you, when you were...I don’t know. Vulnerable.”

Spike blinked at him. “Huh. I can’t recall anybody apologizing to me before. Ever.”
“Well, you were evil. But still. Angel never did? For what he did when he was Angelus?”

Spike snorted. “Angel apologize to me? When Acathla flies.”

“Well, he should.”

Spike stared at him for a moment. Xander couldn’t read his expression. Then he shrugged and continued walking.

“I had him tortured with hot pokers, you know.”

Xander followed him. “Yeah. I heard. Would have done it myself, sometimes.”

“Don’t much care for Peaches, do you?”

“Nope.”

“Why? He’s the big bloody hero, isn’t he?”
“Well, there was the part where he tortured Giles and killed Ms. Calendar and tried to end the world.”

“Right. But that was when he didn’t have his soul.”

“Sure. But when you didn’t have a soul you helped Buffy save the world. And later, you didn’t blab when Glory got you, and you took care of Dawn. And you went and got your soul on purpose. Fought for it.”

Spike was looking at him that way again, and Xander realized he’d said too much. Damnit, when was he going to learn to keep his stupid mouth shut?

By now they were home, and they trudged up the stairs in silence. Inside the apartment, Xander headed for the bathroom to piss and brush his teeth and strip off his clothes. When he came out, Spike was already lying down, the blanket pulled up to his chest. Xander crawled in beside him, and Spike reached over to flip off the light.
He was almost asleep when a cool hand fell lightly on his shoulder.

“Xander?”

He rolled over, and he could just barely make out Spike’s eyes glistening in the bit of light that snuck in under the door.

“What you said just then...did you mean it?”

Xander took a deep breath. Fuck. “Yeah. I did.”

Spike moved his head closer and kissed him softly, almost chastely, on the lips. Then he pulled away. “Thank you,” he whispered. And he turned around and went to sleep.

~*~*~*~*~

The Fyarls were back the next night.

Once again, they sat in the corner, drinking and
growling quietly at each other in their own language. Xander leaned against the bar, watching them, while Spike circulated among the crowd as usual. Vinko came up behind Xander.

“I don’t like these demons. I think they cause trouble.”

“Do you want us to make them leave?” The “us” being pretty much a fiction, of course, and really meaning “Spike, with Xander hovering uselessly nearby.”

“No. Just watch them close, okay?”

“Done.”

Vinko patted his shoulder. “You have much experience with demons, yes?”

Xander smothered a snicker. “Um, yeah. We had a lot of them where I grew up.”

“This is where you meet Spike?”
“Yeah. I met him when I was a kid.”

“He was not good vampire then, right?”

“No, not really.”

“But now you good friends.”

Xander supposed they were. In fact, Spike was practically his closest friend at the moment, and as far as he could tell, he was pretty much Spike’s only friend. He nodded at Vinko.

“This is good. He is more happy since you come here.”

Vinko patted him again and then moved away to serve some drinks. Xander stayed where he was, mulling over what the man had said. Remembering that small, sweet kiss the night before, which had somehow been more intimate than when Spike had sucked on his cock.
A small fuss at one end of the room woke him from his reverie. A girl in a yellow dress was crying, and two men at her table were arguing loudly. Spike was already there, and Xander marched over, looking as frightening as he could.

He hadn’t picked up enough Croatian yet to follow what was going on, but Spike was rubbing the girl’s shoulder and speaking rapidly but calmly to the men. Xander scowled at them, and both men relaxed a little, clearly wishing to avoid a confrontation with him.

Spike turned and looked at him. “It’s all right. These blokes are her brothers and they’re having a bit of a family disagreement about the man she’s been dating. But they’re over it now, right?” He said something in Croatian, and the men nodded nervously. The girl had stopped crying and was sniffling into a tissue, and one of the men said “Oprostite,” to her. She smiled at him and then the siblings had a group hug. Spike touched her shoulder once more and then walked toward Xander. They went to the other end of the room,
and saw that the Fyarls’ table was empty.

“Nice job intimidating, Xan,” Spike said, smiling at him. “You settled those blokes right down.”

“Where did you learn to be so good at defusing situations, Spike?”

Spike laughed. “You spend a hundred years or so with Dru, you better be a good hand at talking nicely to someone who’s irrational. Not to mention a couple decades with Peaches and Darla.”

“So you were the diplomat of the Scourge of Europe?”

“When I had to be, pet.”

The rest of the evening was pretty quiet. One guy had too much to drink and got extra loud and obnoxious, and wasn’t happy when Vinko cut him off. But Xander just had to lift his eyebrows at him and he shut right up. Another guy was bugging a girl, not leaving her alone when she told him to.
Spike and Xander escorted him to the door.

They stuck around to help clean up a little, and then headed home. It was chilly, and Xander was glad for his new jacket. Spike was wearing his duster. The streets were nearly deserted and their footsteps echoed between the buildings.

They were almost home when a car came screeching around the corner. This wasn’t unusual. Drivers in Zagreb tended to be pretty leadfooted, and Xander had long since learned how to leap nimbly out of the way at intersections. But then this car came to a shuddering stop right next to them and before Xander and Spike had a chance to do anything, they were surrounded by Fyarls.

Spike puffed coolly on his cigarette. “Can I help you fellows?”

One of the demons snarled something at him. Spike vamped out and snarled right back. Every muscle in Xander’s body was tense.
There was another short interchange of barking and growling, and the demons stepped closer.

“Xan, these buggers seem to have a bone to pick with me. But it’s nothing to do with you, so go. I think they’ll leave you be.” Spike’s voice was low and urgent.

“I’m not gonna just leave you here, Spike!”

“Xander! You can’t beat them. Please. Go.” Shit. Now he sounded desperate. He’d dropped the cigarette and his hands were balled at his sides.

One of the demons must have understood, because it said something to Xander and gestured at him to move away.

“Guys! Can’t we talk about this somewhere?” Xander asked.

As an answer, the demon shoved him hard.

Spike reached into his jacket and pulled out a knife,
and Xander had a pretty good suspicion that it was silver.

“Xander! Get the fuck out of here!” Spike screamed, just as two of the beasts rushed him. Xander lunged towards them, but then suddenly something came at him from his blind side, hitting him hard in the head, and everything went black.

4 Good as Silver

He couldn’t have been unconscious for long. When he came to he was lying on the sidewalk. A few feet away was a Fyarl demon, unmoving. Xander moaned and crawled over for a closer look. The demon had a big gash in its chest and it was good and dead.

There was no sign of Spike or the other demons.

Xander had been clocked on the skull before. Many times. He was sort of a connoisseur of head injuries. This was a Category Three: enough to knock him out.
for a few minutes and give him a nasty headache, not enough to require an ER visit or to endanger his already less-than-stellar mental faculties. Great. Where the fuck was Spike?

He shouted Spike’s name. His voice bounced off the buildings and resonated down the empty street. There was no answer.

He was pretty certain Spike wouldn’t just mosey on home and leave him passed out on the sidewalk, but their place was less than a block away, so he decided to try there first. Staggering slightly, he made his way down the street and up the stairs to their apartment. Not surprisingly, it was empty.

Xander scribbled a quick note to Spike, on the off-chance that he showed up later:

*Gone looking for you. Please call me ASAP if you get this.*

He added his phone number and fervently wished Spike had a cell phone of his own. He’d asked Spike
about it once, and the vampire had shrugged. “Who’s going to be ringing me anyway?” Which was a pretty good point, actually, but right now a phone would be handy. Xander was sure that if Spike did come home, he’d find some way to borrow someone else’s phone.

Xander peeked in the bathroom to make sure he didn’t look too frightening to be seen in public, but the only sign of his injury was a bruise near his left temple. He swallowed a couple extra pills and then left.

Back outside, the sky was just beginning to lighten. If Spike was still out here somewhere, he’d better get indoors quick. A police car was pulled alongside the demon’s corpse, and two officers were standing over it, staring, as if they had no idea what to do about it. Xander walked by as casually as possible, but the police barely glanced his way.

He went back to the bar, but the door was locked and there was no sign of Spike or Vinko or anybody else. So he leaned against the wall and wondered
what the hell he was supposed to do.

Right. No other choice, was there?

He pulled out his phone and punched a few buttons. There were a few rings and then a message: “Hi. This is Willow. I may not be in this astral plane right now, so leave me a message and I’ll get back to you.”

He disconnected and realized how early the hour was. Most people not keeping vampire time were still asleep, and it was an hour earlier in England than here. Who might he be able to get hold of?

Ah.

Again he punched buttons, and this time a sleepy, irritated voice answered.

“Yes?”

“Hi, Giles.”
“Xander! Do you have any idea what time—you’re not ill, are you?”

“No. I’m fine. It’s Spike.”

“Spike?”

Xander gave Giles a brief rundown on what had happened. “Can you help me find him?”

“He’s a vampire, Xander, and rather resourceful. I’m sure he’ll be fine. Perhaps he ran off to avoid these demons.”

“He wouldn’t have just left me there on the sidewalk. Something’s wrong.”

“He can hold his own in a fight.”

“But these were Fyarls! Three of them. You remember—“

“Yes. Quite.” Giles didn’t like to talk about that episode. “But I don’t understand why you’re so
concerned—Oh. Dear lord. The curse. How many bites have you left?”

Xander hadn’t even thought about that.

“There’s a bunch left, Giles, but that’s not the point. Just...please? Can you help?” He knew he sounded desperate, but then he was desperate. Where else could he turn? He couldn’t very well call the police and file a missing vampire report, could he?

Giles promised to do what he could. He said he’d call back soon, and hung up. Xander was left alone in the dawn.

~*~*~*~*~

Xander spent the day pacing restlessly around the city, searching hopelessly for anything, any clue of Spike’s whereabouts. He scanned every car that went by, every one parked on the street, looking for the green Opel the demons had driven. Of course, there was no sign of it. He went by the apartment
several times, finding it empty, the note still there in the middle of the futon where he’d left it. He spoke with Giles several times, but Giles had nothing helpful to tell him, just that he was working on the problem.

Then Xander had another idea.

This time he had to dig around a little before finding the number he was looking for. He finally found it, though, scrawled on a scrap of paper that was stuck in his wallet. He tried for a moment to figure the time difference and then shrugged. He was going to call now anyway.

A woman with a sort of breathy voice answered. “Yes?”

“I need to speak to Angel, please.”

“Just a sec.”

There was a rustling noise, and then a male voice, “What?”
“This is Xander. Uh, Xander Harris.”

A slight pause. “What’s he done now?”

“What?”

“Is he refusing to bite you? Or asking for payment or something? Let me talk to him.”

Jesus. He always did assume the worst of Spike, didn’t he? Even now.

“His biting me is so not the problem.” And then he told the former vampire about Spike’s disappearance.

When he finished, there was a long silence.

“Angel? Are you still there?”

Angel sighed loudly. “About six months ago, I heard there were some Sacati in Ljubljana. I asked Spike to deal with them. You know Sacati?”
“No.”

“Nasty little shits. Always scheming, you know? This group was trying to set up a slaving ring in central Europe. They’re not too dangerous themselves, but they tend to have the money for hired guns. Spike went in there and sent them all running. I’m thinking they may have hired those Fyarls to get some payback. That’s the kind of thing they’d do.”

Xander felt shaky. “So you think...they came to kill him?”

“If they wanted to just kill him they would’ve just staked him where they found him.”

There hadn’t been any Spikish piles of dust when Xander regained consciousness. Xander felt a little of the fear dissipate. But then Angel went on. “Sacati’d probably want him roughed up pretty good before they dusted him. Like I said, nasty little shits.” And there came the fear back in full force.
“Do you know where they’ve taken him?”

“Xander, you’re not thinking of trying to rescue him? These are Fyarls. They’ve got this mucous—“

“I know. But I can’t just do fucking nothing.”

Angel was silent again. Finally, he said, “Okay. Let me make some calls.”

So there was Xander, waiting again.

It occurred to him that if he ever did find these monsters, he was going to need some weapons. So he went back to the apartment and pulled his entire stash of kuna out of his dresser drawer. He hoped it was enough.

He walked a few blocks to Nama, the big department store. He headed straight for the kitchenware department, pulled out his Croatian-English dictionary, and said to the frowning salesclerk, “Nož srebro, molim.”
He followed her to a display, and she waved at several knives. He picked one up and squinted at the imprint. Good. Sterling silver.

“Koliko je ovo?”

She named a price, but he wasn’t good with numbers yet. So when he told her he didn’t understand, she pulled out a scrap of paper and wrote a figure on it. Okay. He could afford several.

“Šest, molim,” he said. She grabbed half a dozen and rang them up for him.

He jogged home and stuffed them in his inside jacket pocket.

It was nearly 3pm, and he’d been up for twenty-four hours straight. He wasn’t at full strength still and he was exhausted. So he slumped on the futon, his phone next to him so he’d wake if it rang. He fell into a deep sleep almost immediately.
He dreamt of a demon band playing screeching versions of Eagles songs. It was terrible. And then he realized that there really was music, but it was the Hawaii Five-O theme, and it was his phone. He reached for the phone knocked it onto the floor, and then managed to pick it up and get it to his ear.

“Spike?” he asked, not really expecting to get a yes.

“I was right. The Fyarls are working for those Sacati.”

Xander sat up and rubbed the heel of his free hand against his eye.

“Shit,” he said.

“They’re supposed to dust him. But they’re gonna want to play with him first.”
“Fuck. Where are they, Angel?”

“I don’t know.”

Xander groaned.

“Look, if you need to find a vampire to bite you, I can find you one and you can start over, and—”

“It’s not about that!” Xander struggled to remain calm. “Nobody else is going to come to his rescue, Angel.”

“So? Why do you care?”

“I’m so not going to have this conversation right now.” He glanced at his watch. Fuck. It was nearly eight o’clock. “I’m gonna go look for him.”

“Christ, Xander. Okay. Fyarls like water. Running water. There’s a river in Zagreb, isn’t there?”

“The Sava.”
“They’ll be somewhere near it.”

That didn’t narrow it down much, but it was something. “If you find out more—“

“I’ll call. Xander?”

“Yeah?”

“Could you get Buffy to come help?”

Xander gritted his teeth. “No. She wouldn’t—There isn’t enough time.”

“Be careful.”


~*~*~*~*~

It was Sunday and the bar was closed. Xander swore
softly to himself. He had no way to get hold of Vinko, who could have been a help. Xander didn’t have a car. Didn’t even have a valid driver’s license. He hadn’t needed to drive since he left Cleveland.

With no other options, he jogged down to the river and stood near the banks, looking up and down. It was a long river. Spike could be anywhere. Assuming the Fyarls hadn’t taken him out of the area altogether.

For lack of anything better to do, Xander started to the left, keeping his eye open for any sign of vampire or Fyarl or even the green Opel. He’d gone nearly a mile when his phone rang. He glanced at the number before answering.

“Will! Please tell me you have good news!”

“Giles told me what happened. No sign of him yet?”

“Angel says they’re going to kill him. Jesus, Will, help me!”
“Are you all right, Xander? ‘Cause you sound—“

“Willow! Please!” If he could have reached through the phone lines and strangled her, he probably would have.

“Okay. There’s a spell. It’ll find all the demons within about a one mile radius.”

“What if he’s more than a mile away?”

“You have to keep moving. It’ll last a couple hours.”

“Fine. Say it now, please.”

“No, Xander. Then it’d just find all the demons within a mile of me, and I don’t really think there are any, ‘cause we’re kinda out in the woods, and anyway, Spike’s certainly not here, and—“

“I get it. I have to say it.”

“Uh-huh.”
Shit. And he had such a great track record with magic. There was the time with Sweet. And then the curse. What would he manage to fuck up this time?

“Xan?”

“Okay. Lay it on me.”

“It’s pretty simple.”

He snorted. Simple for her, maybe. The girl who nearly destroyed the world with her magic. He took a deep breath.

“Nartneucne es sionomed...”

He repeated, after her, trying desperately to twist his tongue around the syllables properly.

“Sol ednod duditla...”

“Erbos noc ojoim etnemaregil...”
“Ereui rartsom oleic…”

“Ledy arreit al.”

He took a deep breath. Good. No cataclysm yet.

“You have to say it twice more, Xan.”

So twice more he repeated, and then he felt the hair on the back of his neck lift as if he were standing in a strong electrical field. He looked around and...there. On the opposite bank of the river, several hundred yards farther along in the direction he’d been travelling, an odd greenish light hovered over the ground.

“Xan?”

“I see something. I’ll call you back later. Thanks, Will.”

“Be careful!”

Jesus. Everybody was telling him that.
He shoved the phone in his pocket and ran back to the nearest bridge. The clock was ticking. That could be another demon he’d spied. Spike could already be dust. He might not be able to save him if he wasn’t. He ran faster.

The light was thirty feet in the air, directly over an abandoned-looking building. It looked like it might have been a small factory of some kind at one point. Now it looked like the type of place demons liked to hang. The front doors were iron and padlocked tightly. He went around the side, and—

Green Opel.

There was a smaller door here, and it was propped open slightly with a chunk of cement. Xander pulled one of the knives out of his jacket and crept closer. He was almost to the door when he heared noises. Growling and grunting. Fyarls speaking.

He paused, thought about waiting until help could arrive. But Vinko wouldn’t be around until Tuesday
evening. He didn’t know whether Angel or Buffy or Willow would be willing to come, and even if they were, none of them would be able to get here until tomorrow afternoon at the soonest. That might be far too late for Spike.

He was going to screw this up. He was going to get himself killed, too.

He closed his eye briefly, muttered a prayer to whatever gods would listen, and slipped through the door.

It wasn’t much brighter inside than out. The large room was mostly empty. Three Fyarls were sitting around a rickety table, playing cards. In the center of the room was—fuck. Fuck. He needed to concentrate on the Fyarls right now. One of them had its back to him and the others were looking at the cards in their hands.

As hard as he could, hoping that his poor depth perception didn’t screw things up, Xander threw the knife. It landed square in the middle of the closest
demon’s back. It howled and leaped to its feet, knocking its chair over. It made horrible noises as it tried vainly to pull the blade out.

But he had no time to celebrate his victory, because the other two were roaring and heading straight at him. He grabbed a second knife and threw, but it clattered uselessly to the side. The third, though, hit one of the demons in the upper arm. It screamed and yanked it out, but Xander already had another knife in his hand, and this one went true, imbedding itself in the Fyarl’s chest. The demon bellowed and fell backward.

And Xander reached for the fifth knife, but already the last demon was there, and it snorted at him. He jerked to the side, and the wad of slime hit the left side of his neck and slid under his jacket, down his shoulder. Almost immediately, it hardened, and suddenly his left arm was useless.

The demon was nearly on top of him, its claws extended, and it took a wild swipe, gashing shallowly across his chest. That was gonna hurt
later, if he survived. It lunged again.

But Xander had the knife in hand, and, as the demon descended on him, he plunged the blade deeply into its throat. It made a horrible gargling sound, clutching at its neck. Then it fell to the ground with a crash.

Xander looked around. Three motionless demons littered the floor.

Make that four. Because that was Spike over there, or what was left of him anyway.

5 If I Had a Kuna for Every Demon

He was huddled on his side. He was hogtied, with chains binding his hands and ankles behind his back. He was naked. His pale, pale body was covered in scratches and gouges and bruises and small, circular burns. Both of his eyes were so puffy it was unlikely he could open them, his nose was broken, and the whole side of his head was matted with dried blood.
His genitals were badly swollen, and a long piece of metal pipe was sticking out of his rectum.

Xander knelt and laid a hand on Spike’s shoulder. “Spike?” he whispered. There was no response.

Xander looked around the room. For all he knew, there were more demons lurking someplace. He needed to get Spike out of here.

Okay. Chains first.

With a grimace on his face, Xander walked back to where the Fyarls were. He went through the pockets of the first and found nothing but some rumpled kuna. With the second demon, though, he found paydirt: a ring of keys. He took it over to Spike and was very relieved to find that one of the keys fit the locks that bound the vampire. Awkwardly, due to the useless arm, Xander unchained him. Then he carefully drew out the pipe, fighting nausea as a gush of blood escaped from Spike’s torn body.

Spike wasn’t a very big guy, but there was no way
Xander was going to be able to carry him with one arm. He shrugged out of his jacket and, as gingerly as he could, rolled Spike onto it. Then he laboriously dragged it—and Spike—across the floor and to the door.

Another of the keys was for the Opel. Xander ran outside and unlocked the back, then, after some fumbling, managed to fold the seat down. He pulled Spike across the crumbling asphalt until he was flush against the car. Then, swearing loudly, and probably banging Spike up even worse in the process, he tugged and lifted and juggled Spike into the hatch. He covered him with his jacket.

In the driver’s seat, Xander was faced with another problem. The car had a manual transmission. He had to take his good hand off the steering wheel to shift, and he was thankful that there was very little traffic this time of night. He kept the car in second gear, coasting whenever possible and trying to avoid stopping altogether, and drove across the bridge and back to their building.
He parked haphazardly as close to the door as possible and considered how the hell he was going to get Spike up the stairs. And he’d better decide quickly, because eventually Zagreb’s finest were bound to come along, and he really didn’t want to explain why he had what appeared to be a brutalized corpse in the back of his car.

He got out, walked to the back, and opened the hatch. Spike still appeared to be unconscious. He wasn’t even breathing. Okay. He was just going to have to manage, that’s all. Tonight he'd killed three Fyarls; he ought to be able to handle one smallish vampire.

Xander slipped his jacket back on himself. He maneuvered Spike around and into his arm, wincing as the inert body bounced and flopped against the inside of the car. He took a deep breath and managed to heave Spike over his left shoulder, using his right arm to keep him in place. It was really unwieldy, but he just might make it upstairs.

And he did, barely. He knelt in front of the
apartment door, cringing again as Spike rolled to the floor. He unlocked the door, tugged and rolled Spike inside, and then locked the door behind them.

And then he collapsed on his back on the floor, panting, not quite believing that they’d actually made it home.

Home, where he had a damaged vampire and a paralyzed arm.

~*~*~*~*~

“Yes?”

“Do you know if there’s any cure for Fyarl mucous?”

“Xan—Xander?”

“Yeah.”

“Jesus! What—“
“I’m tired, Angel. My arm won’t work. I’ve got claw marks across my chest.” As soon as he said that, they started to hurt. “And Spike—he’s a goddamn mess. I don’t want to talk about it right now. Just tell me. Do you know what to do about demon snot?”

“Where are you, Xander?”

“Home.”

“And Spike?”

“Passed out next to me.”

Angel swore under his breath. “All right. If you soak the mucous it’ll come off, and the effect will wear off pretty quickly.”

“Great. Any tips for doctoring vamps, other than lots of blood?”

“No. That’s it. Human’s best.”
“’Kay. Thanks. Gotta go.”

“Xander? Are you going to be all right?”

“Eventually.”

“And Spike?”

“I dunno.”

“I’ll call you later.”

Xander pushed the disconnect button and let his arm fall to his side. He rolled his head and looked at Spike, who was still in a small, bloody heap. He needed to get his act together.

He had just managed to wrestle Spike onto the futon when his phone rang again.

“Xander! What happened? Were there demons and was Spike there and are you okay?”

“Yes and yes and more or less.”
“Is Spike—“

“He’s here, Will. We’re home. And please, please let me call you tomorrow, okay? I’m wiped.”

She was quiet for a moment. “Okay. But don’t forget to call, Mister.”

“Kay.”

Once again he hung up and this time he turned the phone off. He didn’t have the energy to talk to anyone else right now. He really just wanted to sleep, actually. But he had to try to get some blood in Spike, and get rid of the crap on his arm, and do something about those wounds on his chest, and get Spike cleaned up. Shit.

Getting blood into an unconscious vampire was a problem. He tried pouring some in to Spike’s gaping mouth, but it just poured right out again, trickling down the white neck and onto the pillowcase. He dripped just a few drops in and massaged Spike’s
throat, but at that rate it’d be the next century before enough got in there.

Xander sighed and fetched the last remaining silver knife. He couldn’t move his left arm yet, but he could cut it, and he did, slicing shallowly into the wrist. Then he pressed the wrist against those soft, slack lips. At first nothing happened. But then he felt a little more pressure against his skin, and a slight suction, and he heard the tiny sound of Spike swallowing. He held his arm still, watching carefully, finding the sight of Spike feeding from him erotic even under these circumstances.

Spike moaned quietly. Xander whispered his name, and he thought maybe Spike’s eyelashes fluttered a little, but it was hard to tell.

Xander was wondering how much blood Spike could safely take from him when the vampire moaned again and moved his head slightly, detaching his mouth from Xander. Without really thinking about what he was doing, Xander reached out and smoothed the hair on the undamaged side of
Spike’s head, but Spike didn’t respond.

Xander dragged himself into the bathroom and painstakingly stripped off his clothes. Getting the pill bottle open one-handed was a pain in the ass, but he managed. He turned the shower on. The water stung when it hit his chest, but he stood there for a long time, feeling the dried mucous slowly loosen and wash away. It took forever to get it all off, and by the time it was gone, he was leaning wearily against the shower wall.

Finally he dried off. He stopped at the dresser to pull on some briefs, and then crawled into bed beside Spike. Everything else could wait until he got a few hours of sleep.

~*~*~*~*~

It was Spike shifting slightly beside him that woke him up. He looked groggily at the vampire, and was pleased to see that he looked better already. There were still quite a few nasty-looking wounds, but his
eyes and nose had healed considerably.

Spike groaned and moved again. He was shivering. Automatically, Xander drew the battered body close to himself, wrapping Spike in an arm that was, blessedly, once again working. Spike didn’t open his eyes, but he sighed and nestled closer against him.

And then Xander froze, because Spike slowly nuzzled at his chest, and then he started licking at Xander’s claw marks, his pink tongue lapping against Xander’s skin like a cat’s. So Xander wasn’t completely surprised when he felt sharp teeth sinking into the flesh just over his left nipple. Now it was Xander’s turn to moan, because Jesus Christ.

Spike wiggled slightly against him, nursing from him slowly.

Xander had no idea how much blood he was taking. He didn’t really care. He could be perfectly happy dying like this.

Then Spike moved again and withdrew his fangs,
but pressed himself against Xander even more. That was okay, too. Xander liked the cool hardness of Spike’s body, and apparently even unconscious, Spike enjoyed his body heat.

Xander fell back asleep.

~*~*~*~*~

“Xander? Oh, god, Xander. What did I do?”

Xander awoke to a pair of anguished-looking blue eyes, only inches from his brown one.

“Spike! You’re awake.” Well, that was brilliant.

“I bit you!” Spike was tracing his fingers lightly over the tiny puncture marks on Xander’s chest.

“Not the first time.”

“But you’re hurt, and...how did we get here? Those demons—“
“Those demons are dead, and everything’s going to be fine. Do you want me to get you some blood?”

“I fed from you when you were hurt!”

Spike was still nestled against him, and Xander could feel how tense his body was. But god, that body felt good against his.

“It’s no big deal. You were banged up a whole lot worse than me, and I wanted you to. It’s okay.”

Spike looked around the room in confusion. “How did I get here?”

“In the back of a car, and then over my shoulder.”

“You—you rescued me?”

Xander tried not to be hurt by Spike’s incredulous tone. Of course the vampire was surprised. Who expected the Zeppo to pull something like this off all by himself? “Yeah,” he said tightly.
“Bloody hell,” Spike whispered.

Abruptly, Xander pulled himself away from Spike and stood. He padded to the fridge and poured some blood into Spike’s favorite mug, then nuked it in the microwave and carried it over. Spike’s hands were slightly shaky, but he was able to hold the cup himself. Xander said nothing as Spike gulped and swallowed, quickly draining the container. Xander took it from him and brought him a refill, then another, and then one more. Finally, Spike said it was enough for now.

He still looked like shit. Bruised and bloody and weak. His head fell back against the stained pillow, and his eyes closed. “Let me rest a bit, yeah?”

“Sure.”

Xander realized he had no idea when he last ate, and he was ravenous. He headed into the kitchen and drank most of a carton of juice, and then ate pretty much everything he could find.
When his stomach was pleasantly full, he checked on Spike, who was sleeping soundly. Then he picked up his phone and turned it on. He had seventeen messages. He checked the numbers. A bunch from Willow. A couple each from Giles and Angel. And even one from Buffy. Xander sighed and took the phone into the bathroom, shutting the door so he wouldn’t wake Spike.

He called each of them back, assuring them that he was fine and everything was okay. Only Angel asked how Spike was doing. None of them seemed quite willing to believe he’d successfully fought three Fyarls single-handed.

He had, though, hadn’t he? He’d done the spell correctly, he’d found the missing vampire, he’d offed the bad guys, and he’d gotten Spike home and on the mend. Huh.

When he came back out, Spike was propped up in bed, blinking sleepily at him.
“Want some blood, Spike?”

“Yeah. Please.”

Xander was still wearing only his briefs, and Spike stared at him as he padded into the kitchen and warmed up a mug. He carried it over.

“How are you feeling, Spike?”

“I’m fine. Mmm—maybe some disinfectant might be of the good. Are Fyarls germy?”

“First aid kit on the shelf in the closet.”

Xander doctored himself while Spike drank.

“How are you feeling, Spike?”

The vampire looked down at himself. “I’ve been better. Would have been a lot worse if it weren’t for you. But that was a really stupid thing to do, Xander.”
“What?” Xander growled. “I was just supposed to let them tear you apart?”

“They could have bloody well torn you apart, too. Nearly did.”

Xander shrugged. “Yeah, well, if I had a kuna for every demon that almost killed me….”

Spike shook his head. “You could have found another vampire, pet. Your friends could have helped you...control it.”

Suddenly, Xander was furious. “You think I saved your ass just so you could bite me? You think that’s all....” He couldn’t say any more. Snarling wordlessly, he stomped over to the dresser and started to throw on a pair of jeans.

“Xander, what—“

“Shut up! Just shut the fuck up!” He didn’t look at Spike as he pulled on a shirt and his filthy jacket, and slipped his feet into a pair of Reeboks. Then he
left, slamming the door behind him.

It was late afternoon. He tramped aimlessly around, not even realizing until he was far from home that he wasn’t wearing the patch. Home. That was a joke. He had places he could stay—Spike’s apartment, Giles’ place, Buffy’s Slayer Headquarters near Bath, probably even Willow’s coven in a pinch. But he didn’t really have a home, did he? A quarter century of life, and all he had to show for it was some clothing, a small photo album, and some interesting scars.

Last night, he’d finally done something really right. He’d saved someone he—oh fuck. Someone he loved.

He sank to the curb, burying his face in his hands.

He’d fallen in love with Spike. And he had no idea what he was going to do about it.

6 Spooning Mush
It was dark when Xander got back to the apartment. He trudged up the stairs as if he were going to his own execution. He felt shakier than when he’d faced those demons.

But when he got inside, all thoughts of impending doom flew away. Spike was heaped in the middle of the floor, naked and shivering miserably. Xander flew to his side.

“Spike! What happened?”

Spike looked up at him. “Y-y-you were g-g-gone,” he said accusingly.

“And?”

“A-a-and I w-w-was....” Spike snarled in frustration at his inability to speak clearly through chattering teeth.

Xander scooped the vampire into his arms and carried him the few steps to the bed. He pulled the covers over him, but he continued shaking. So
Xander kicked off his shoes and pulled off his jacket and shirt and jeans, and slipped under the blankets as well. He lay down and pulled Spike against himself. Spike made a tiny whimpering noise and plastered his body against Xander’s. “W-w-w-warm,” he mumbled.

It took a long time for Spike’s trembling to stop. Xander treasured every moment, knowing that once he had his say, he’d never be able to hold Spike like this again.

Eventually, though, Spike pulled away slightly, looking at Xander with eyes of blue ice.

“Wanna tell me what happened, Spike?”

“You left.”

“Yeah. We covered that.”

“I was... was afraid you wouldn’t come back. Wanted to catch you. But my sodding legs gave way and then I couldn’t go anywhere and I thought...
thought you were gone for good.” His voice sounded anguished.

“I wouldn’t leave you alone when you’re hurt.”

Spike gazed at him. “No. I expect you wouldn’t. But why did you go?”

“I was angry.”

“Why?”

“You think—everybody thinks—I just saved you because I need you to bite me. Because I need to use you.”

“But you do. You have eight more bites until you’re sorted, yeah?”

“That’s not the point!”

Spike frowned at him. “Then what, pet?”

Xander couldn’t do this with Spike still wrapped in
his arms. But he did have to do this. He detached himself and sat at the edge of the bed, his back to Spike. He took several deep breaths.

“I saved you because I care about you,” he said quietly. But Spike would hear. He had vampire hearing. “Because I love you.”

There was almost complete silence in the room. The only sound was his own slightly ragged breathing. Then he heard the rustling of fabric, and a cool hand landed softly on his back. He hunched away from it.

“Pet?” Spike said softly.

“Don’t. You don’t have to be nice to me. I understand. Really. I just needed to tell you.”

“Understand what, love?”

“You...we used to hate each other, or maybe you were kinda indifferent to me, I don’t know. And then we kind of...lately...I’ve felt like we were...friends, you know? And you’ve been really
nice to me, and you’re saving my life, so this was the least I could do, and I’ll find another place to live, and....” To his complete mortification, he broke down in tears. The horrible, noisy kind where the wails come rushing out of your lungs and tears make your eyes—eye—all puffy and your face turns red and snot runs out of your nose and your whole body shakes and he couldn’t stop, couldn’t fucking stop.

Spike gathered him in his arms. Unmindful of the wounds they were both still sporting, he held him tight, rubbing his back, crooning in his ear.

Eventually, Xander got himself under control. He reached down and used his t-shirt to wipe his face. He was still sniffling a little. Spike had one arm flung over his shoulders.

“Xan? Want to tell me what all that was about?”

Xander sighed. He felt worn out. It had been an exhausting couple of days. “I’m tired. I just want...just wish...just wish you needed me.” That
sounded small and childlike, but his tears had apparently washed away his ability to self-censor.

Spike reached over and cupped Xander’s chin with his hand, and applied a tiny bit of pressure so Xander was looking at him.

“Do need you, pet,” he said.

“No. I mean not just to get you patched up. I mean—“

“I know what you mean. You want me to love you. You. Xander Harris.”

Xander closed his eye. He couldn’t face that intense gaze. “Yeah,” he whispered.

“But I do. I love you.”

Xander’s eye snapped open again in shock. He saw no sign of pity or untruth in Spike. Just affection and…and sorrow.
“I love you, Xander. Have for some time, I expect. Knew for certain the other night, when you apologized to me. When you said those things about me.”

“How could you love me, Spike? I’m a fuck-up, I’m—“

“Better than all of them, love. You have no special powers. No slayer strength or strong magics. You’re not a Watcher or the Key. And yet you’ve kept in there, haven’t you? For ten years. When you’ve lost those you love and everything you own and your own bleeding eye, you’ve kept fighting the good fight. You saved the day more than once. Saved me. Risked your hide against three fucking monsters and beat them and rescued me. You’re better than them all. How could I not love you?”

Xander’s breath was stuck in his throat.

“But we can’t do this.” Spike released his chin and dropped his arm, turned away from him on the futon. “I can’t have you.”
“Why?” Christ, he was not going to bawl again.

“I’m still a demon. I’ll hurt you. I will.”

Xander thought about this, then nodded. “Yeah. You probably will. But Spike, I’m human, and I hurt Anya when I left her at the altar. My parents are human and they hurt me…well, a lot. Willow hurt me when she nearly destroyed the world. People hurt each other. It’s so fucking easy to do! But we get over it, you know?”

Spike turned and looked at him. His eyes were glittering with tears.

“We forgive each other, and we move on, and next time we try a little harder. I’m willing to do that for you, Spike. Because you know what? Nothing you can do to me will hurt as much as living without you.”

At first Spike just stared. Then he smiled a little. “That’s quite a lot of wisdom from someone over a
“I’ve seen a lot for a guy my age.”

“That you have. That you have.” He frowned. “Pet, when I love...I don’t do things halfway, yeah? I throw myself into it. It’s my nature. I was with Dru over a hundred years, and she was as barmy as they come.”

Xander blinked at him.

“If we...do this, pet, it means you’re stuck with me forever. Long past when you’re sorted. I’ve been left enough.”

Xander reached over and grabbed Spike’s hand. “If we do this, you’re stuck with me, too. What about when I get old?”

“I’ll spoon mush into your toothless gob and change your nappies.”

“So I’ll be this decrepit, dirty old man with the hot,
young lover?”

Spike smiled and scooted until he was pressing closely against Xander’s side. “You will be. It’ll be a scandal. People will see us together and think I’m your boy toy.”

They leaned their heads together and that was very nice.

“Love? Will your friends be all right with this?”

Xander laughed. “I really don’t care. They’ll have to deal. Besides, Buffy’s not really in any position to criticize me for sleeping with you, is she?”

“No. I expect not.” Spike rested his hand on Xander’s thigh.

“Angel will probably pitch a fit.”

Now it was Spike’s turn to laugh. “Well, there’s a bloody good reason to do it right there.”
“He helped me find you, you know.”

Xander turned his head, and he and Spike kissed slowly, deeply, passionately. But when Xander put his hand up to Spike’s head, he felt dried blood and was suddenly reminded that Spike had recently been injured. He pulled his lips away.

“Spike? Want me to get you cleaned up?”

Spike’s smile was warm and sweet and heart-achingly beautiful. “That’d be lovely.”

So he settled back down on the mattress, and Xander fed him more microwaved blood, then brought in some towels and a bowl of warm water, and wiped away the blood and grime from Spike’s torso and limbs. His wounds were better already, and he lay languidly on the futon, clearly enjoying being cared for. His head was a little more problematic, but the vampire didn’t have the strength yet to stand in the shower. But with lots more water and towels and a comb and patience, Xander was finally able to get his hair clean. He
towed it dry, not wanting Spike to get a chill, and suppressed a smile at the wild mop of curls that resulted.

The sheets, of course, were dirty as well. Xander tugged Spike this way and that as he pulled the bedding off, and then covered the futon in a clean blanket. Satisfied that he had done enough, he crawled next to Spike and they wrapped their arms around one another.

He would really have liked to make love to Spike. To bury himself deeply inside the vampire, or feel the vampire bury himself deeply in him. Didn’t matter. It was all good. But Spike needed to finish healing, and they both still needed some rest, and for now, this was perfect.

And then he started chuckling.

“Pet? Care to share?”

“I was just thinking about that spell.”
“The one with the *nex tarda* curse?”

“Yeah. Maybe I didn’t screw it up after all.”

“Oh?”

“If it weren’t for the curse, I wouldn’t have come here. But I did, and now I’m happy. Just like the spell promised.”

Spike snuggled even closer against him, his skin cool and smooth against Xander’s. “Bloody good mojo, love,” he murmured.


*The End*