

Standard Disclaimers Apply

Warnings : implied and requested

threesomes/moresomes

History of a Future With a Different Past um Sorta

by

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1 Exactly like Nimrod!

-The Xanders-

"So, lemme get this straight. We combine you, Tara and Giles' mojo might, Anya's remaining link to the reality altering powers of vengeance demons and the dimension weakening powers of Dawn's Key-ness and then throw in a desire for something that can protect Dawn from Glory and see what we get?" Xander paced the Magic Box looking for support in the face of insanity.

Willow blushed. "The goal of the spell isn't just 'thrown in', this is a very old spell from a respectable source, the openness of the desired results allows the ritual to use our resources in the most powerful way possible, even if we wouldn't have known the outcome was an option before we started. It should bring us the best hope for Dawn."

"And I'm all in favor of protecting Dawn, we all know that. It's just an open ended desire for *something* that will solve our current problem... you do realize this is *exactly* how the X-Men ended up fighting Nimrod!" He coughed and blushed as the various blank looks informed him that no, no one else realized this nor had the slightest idea what a relevant point he had just made. "Anya! Lovely, formerly wish twisting girlfriend of mine, surely you can see the ways in which trawling the cosmos for something that can defeat a hellgod could go bad?"

The former demon nodded in a businesslike fashion. "Certainly unexpected side effects are a possibility when you make generalized wishes. While I would generally use a broad interpretation to make results as gruesome as possible, even I

didn't expect the repercussions of Cordelia's wish when I granted it." She carefully restacked her money before turning to the credit card machine. "In this case the controlling force isn't malevolent, but it is highly chaotic, and we should probably expect some additional results besides what we want out of it."

"See? Open ended requests and chaos. Dangerous combo."

"As opposed to that safe and fluffy combination that is an insane and evil goddess?" Xander had almost forgotten Buffy, she had been so still, but now she was clearly ready to talk. "Look, I know you're trying to be voice of reason guy, and maybe this will leave us with some cleanup when the dust settles, but we are desperate! Too many people know about Dawn! You saw what Spike looked like when Glory was through with him, what if she had grabbed someone else?"

Giles looked as deeply offended as his British reserve would allow. "Are you implying that Spike is more dedicated to Dawn than the rest of us?"

"Of course she's not, G-Man!" Amazing Donut-Boy powers of smoothing things over, activate! "But dedication is only one factor in resistance to interrogation, and well, not that I like to think about it, but between a fledgehood under Angelus, PT-ing himself back from a shattered spine and dealing with the chip for over a year, the Bleached Un-Menace pretty much has his Post-Doc in surviving torture. And while one of us might have held out, can you honestly say you would have had the physical reserves to get as far in escaping as he did?" He hated to see the defeat in the older man's eyes, but Xander had accepted his relative strength within the group long ago and others could too.

"No, I suppose you're right, though the first part of that sounded suspiciously like something you picked up one Halloween..."

"Heh, it's gotten so mixed in with war films and Tom Clancy books I'm never quite sure what's residual and what's Hollywood anymore." But the tense moment had passed, and he figured he might as well complete the round of concessions. "Okay, Buffy, you're right. Glory is the biggest danger we've

ever seen, and that's saying something, so whatever horrible unexpected consequence comes out of this, we'll just defeat it eventually too. I'll put in my final vote for more focus even at the cost of power and consider myself overruled."

Buffy smiled her thanks and went to corner Willow on how exactly her sister's 'Key-ness' would be harnessed while Dawn slid up beside Xander. "So, speaking of Spike, how is he doing? Buffy won't let me visit him yet, and I don't know if it's squick from the 'bot or if she doesn't want me scared by how badly he was hurt."

With a brief thought to how much better the him-crush had been, he gave the teen a hug. "He's improving fast, I dropped by with some blood before I came here and he's already on his feet. If we didn't need you to be part of the ritual, Buffy would probably have you staying with him during it."

"So you think she still trusts him?"

"Dawn, you can always trust Spike to be Spike. And while that includes a truly impressive level of self

centeredness and a frighteningly low level of impulse control, there's also the crazy loyalty part of the package that a select few get to benefit from. And you won the vampire guard dog lottery."

She shook her head firmly. "Buffy won it, I just get it by association. And I guess mom did too."

Xander matched her firm head shake and raised her a wagging finger. "No, Spike had that weird 'will you be my quarter my age mommy' thing going on even when he was full out evil and wanted to kill Buffy. It was actually pretty confusing. I think having a complete lunatic for a sire affected his brain." He saw Willow walking over to them and grasped the teen's arm. "Look, Dawnie, I'm hoping this spell will give us a mystical sword or a magic ring or a first edition copy of Defeating Hellgods For Dummies, but if it brings us someone or something alive instead, I want you to hightail it to Spike's crypt and stay with him until we figure out what we're dealing with, okay?"

She nodded and stepped over to the circle that the other participants were forming. Buffy paced and

looked like she was ready to slay and Xander backed into a corner in the hopes of avoiding any magical backlash. He was supposed to be concentrating on the goal of the spell, but he found his mind replaying the conversation with Dawn, and forced it back on track as Willow and Tara completed their chant and all five in the circle spoke the not-calling-it-a-wish they had hammered out earlier.

"See our plight, the Hellgod Glory, her harm to innocents, her threat to Dawn, her danger to the world. Seek the solution in all that is, in all that could be, in all that was or will be. Bring the solution to us, bring it now!" A mote of light in the center of the group grew into a whirling ball and then suddenly expanded to six feet across, knocking the participants backwards. Xander ran to Dawn, helping her to her feet just as the light stilled, seemed to almost solidify and then blinked out, leaving two figures standing in the middle of the Magic Box.

"Dawn, go, just like I told you." Xander was amazed his voice worked.

"But that, that *is*-"

"Just go," he pushed her to the door and out into the sunlight. "I'll be there soon." The whole time he couldn't take his eyes off the newcomers. It *was* Spike, a Spike with black hair instead of blond and a different long black coat over a tight body suit that looked like a cross between a wetsuit and a superhero costume. But that barely registered beside the other figure, a man dressed similarly though with a brown motorcycle jacket and knee high swashbuckler style boots that enhanced the superhero look. A man with long brown hair, brown eyes and a paler, slightly younger looking version of the face that Xander saw every morning in the mirror.

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"Bloody hell, Red sent us back too far!"

Xander was looking around the odd room at the collection of people and at first agreeing, but then, "I don't think so, Spike."

He got the ire of his sire aimed at him instead of the absent Willow for his troubles. "What else is there to think, Harris? That's your old slayer pal not to mention you and Red with heartbeats, I call that too far back!"

Oooh, 'Harris'. Spike was in a mood, and not the fun 'I have to act mad and punish you for being reckless, but we both know I had a great time' mood he normally got into. Damage control, stat! "Yeah, but me with a heartbeat is older, we're not at the library and I don't recognize either of those girls." He waved in the direction of the two strange blonds as he peeked behind a counter looking for a calendar. "Ah, see!" He triumphantly waved a handful of receipts. "May of 2001! We're right when we're supposed to be!" His triumph eased. "Which actually makes the 'me and Wills alive' thing even weirder, doesn't it?"

Spike was about to answer when Older, Tired Looking Buffy apparently decided she'd had enough of being ignored. "Look, I don't know or care where you're from," she said pulling a stake out of her belt and advancing towards Spike, "but you're supposed

to be able to help, so unless you want to get up close and personal with Mr PointEEE!"

Her threat delivery was thrown off a bit when Spike simply grabbed her wrist, twisted it until she dropped the stake with a scream and kept twisting her around until she was neatly pinned against a shelf with her arm behind her back at nearly the breaking point. "Need a judge's ruling, Xanpet..." Yeah, not Harris anymore! "If I go back in time and kill a Slayer I already killed once, do I get to add her to my tally or not?"

Xander gave the matter some thought before responding. "I'm going to say no to 'number of Slayers killed' but yes to the secondary 'number of times you defeated a Slayer' count. Though this looks more like a suicide by vamp, if you ask me, was she even trying?" He was distracted by his own voice babbling a little hysterically.

"No chip! You got us a chipless Spike! How the hell is a chipless Spike and vamped me supposed to help us defeat Glory?"

"Oh, good, so Glory is around?" He walked up to his human self, figuring they should get some intel before this got any wackier. "You guys brought us here to fight Glory? Sounds fun, but we actually just need to steal something of hers."

"Well, not you specifically," human Willow was glancing rapidly between him and Spike, who had grabbed Buffy's other arm and immobilized her.

"We were, um doing a ritual to draw on our powers and bring us someone or something that could help in the fight."

"Seriously?" Xander shook his head. "You were all 'here's our power, please get us anything that will solve the immediate problem'? I mean, this is *exactly* how the X-Men ended up dealing with Nimrod!"

2 Future History

-Black Haired Spike-

Spike rolled his eyes. "*You're* a nimrod, pet. Do something useful and see if the connection with Red works." He turned his attention away from his childe and spoke quietly to the Slayer in front of him. "Now, as fond memories as this brings back, the girls did recommend not killing anyone while we were here if we could avoid it, so, how about we step back and talk a piece, yeah?"

"N-not killing sounds g-good." One of the mystery blonds spoke up. "Maybe we can, um, sit down and discuss what each of us was looking for and maybe we can help each other?"

The Slayer nodded shortly. "Fine, talking it is." He snickered slightly, she had a pair on her this one, acting like she was doing him a big favor by not being killed. But then, from what he remembered, she had always thought she was something more than another disposable girl in the line.

"Brilliant." Spike let go and stepped back with a slight bow towards the table covered with old books and notes. "So Xanpet, anything from Red?"

He looked at the living witch and amended with a smirk, "Our Red, that is."

Xander was staring with some irritation at his palm display. "I dunno, I've got a signal but it's too weak to actually talk. I'm trying to send a plain text and it's taking forever..."

The living Xander moved nervously close enough to look over his vampire counterpart's shoulder and gaped. "You've got a holographic PDA cell phone? That connects across alternate universes? I would so not be complaining about signal strength!" Xanpet gave him a 'oh really?' look which caused a small, only slightly hysterical, giggle. "Well, okay, obviously I would, because you're me, or at least a demonic future version of me and you are, though the me me doesn't even have a cell phone so to some extent the point still stands."

If there was any justice in the world, Xanpet would have given his bumbling human counterpart an aloof sneer, demonstrating the inherent superiority of demons. Instead he giggled back. "Yeah but you said 'I would' which means what you would do in

my situation, and in my situation you would have a palm display that you were totally used to and that Wills swore up down and sideways would work to keep us connected in the past and how do you figure alternate universes?"

"Well it must be, right?" The human Red said excitedly. "Like you said earlier, you're younger, well physically younger at least than our Xander, so you must have been turned earlier, but Xander isn't turned, which I'm really happy about, no offense to you because I'm sure your me likes you better as a soulless demon since from what you said she is one herself..."

"But you aren't, so breathe, Wills!" Human Xander put in. Spike lowered his head into his hand for a moment and thanked all the gods that might listen that their Red had stayed in the present to maintain the spell. If there were four of them...

"Yes well," an older human who had been quietly recovering from a head injury stepped in, "Clearly the ritual pulled these two from an alternate reality, most likely, considering Anya's participation from

the, er, Wishverse where the Master took over Sunnydale."

Spike snorted loudly. "Don't think so, mate, Old Batface was dusted by Slutty the Vampire Layer here before I met any of this lot. Speaking of meeting, why don't we back up to the introduction stage, shall we? Obviously you all recognize me and my Childe, and I know who Red, Xan and Slutty are... you look familiar too."

"This is Giles, Spike!" The younger vampire grinned and clapped the Englishman on the back. "He was the Buffinator's watcher, remember? I wanted Dru to turn him as a research vamp but you said you couldn't deal with another childe with us still so young..."

"Oh right!" Spike nodded sharply, recognizing him now. "I had to tell you the whole story of me mum to stop you from trying to turn him yourself." They had been vaguely planning on coming back for the man, he recalled, but then they got caught up in their African adventure and the Watcher had died before they finished.

"I don't know those two, or the girl who ran out when we got here, though. Hi girls, I'm Xander! Um, but you knew that." Spike tried to resist banging his head on a handy shelf. His childe was never, in a dozen centuries, going to be suave.

One of the women stepped forward, and Spike got a feeling that even though she smelled fully human, there was something hidden inside her. "I'm Anya. This reality's Xander and I are dating. This is my second opportunity to see two Xanders at once and last time we didn't have time to all have sex. I'd be very interested in seeing how vampire stamina would effect his already impressive ability to give orgasms."

The human Xander pulled her out of the way before Spike could do more than growl and talked to her quietly about appropriate suggestions while gesturing to Xanpet in a way that was apparently meant to convey how very much this was never ever going to happen and that everyone should pretend they hadn't heard the suggestions. From the others' reactions, he figured this was a standard plan.

"I'm T-tara... I'm, that is Willow and I are, um..."

"She's my girlfriend, and a very powerful witch."

Red put her arm around the shy blond's shoulders, and Spike couldn't help but smile a little. Xanpet responded more openly, giving a double thumbs up and a big grin.

"Way to go, Wills! Making with the witchy smoochies!" Then he turned and pointed at his sire. "And in your *face*, fang man!" What the hell? Spike glared, waiting for either an apology or an explanation. "You always said that if we hadn't been turned, me and Wills would have stayed repressed and straight forever, and I said 'no, Wills would have come out in college and I would have eventually had to work as a rent boy to survive' and here she is with a hot college girlfriend!"

"And here is me, very straight and not at all repressed!" Spike smirked at the human Xander's reaction, looked like he was right on one out of two at least. "And I have a good job in construction, I'll have you know! I'm an assistant foreman! No renting! Er, boying. Rent boying."

"Hey, really? That's great, man! Way better than prison guard, am I right?"

"Oh yeah, that's what they said at that stupid career day and wait, when were you turned?"

"Yes, that might be more helpful information," the Watcher said stuffily - but then how else could he be expected to say it? "It would be best to know where our two realities diverged if not with Buffy's arrival in Sunnydale, how far in the future these vampires are from, and what their purpose in coming here was."

"Right then, shorter than my boy here is likely to give it to you, I brought Xanpet and Red to Dru as presents after she broke up with me over that entire Acatlha fiasco and fighting Angelus. She turned them both and we all lived happily ever after for the last, I dunno how long..."

"Seventy four years, Spike! You do know because our 75th anniversary of being a family is coming up and Wills and I both want to do something special and you keep pretending to not even know how long it's been!" And now his childe was pouting at

him, and worse, it looked like a pout of actual hurt, as opposed to a pout of wanting to get shagged through the nearest surface. Not that the two always required different responses.

Knowing he looked like a complete ponce but figuring he could kill any of the humans who pointed it out, he slipped his arm around Xanpet's shoulders and stroked his hair. "Come now, luv, don't be like that... You know I love you, can't imagine a world without you and Red too. Just never been one for remembering anniversaries and round numbers of years gone by." The boy was relaxing a little and Spike kissed the turning mark Dru had left on his neck, remembering the times he had drank from it and fed Xander his own blood, acting as a second sire to both former white hats, just as Angelus had for him. "Besides, like to think we do something special just about every time the four of us are together..."

"Wills and I weren't planning an orgy." The grumpy tone was lost in an unnecessary but complimentary gasp as Spike started nibbling on his childe's ear and stroking his chest. He wasn't doing things *exactly*

like Angelus, after all - neither Xander nor Red had reason to resent him. "Well, okay, we weren't *only* planning an orgy..."

"You know, Xander, it really isn't safe to leave our Spike in that crypt all the time and we have plenty of room..."

"I love you Anya, but I am not having a threesome with Spike either!"

Xanpet pulled away with a breathy laugh and aimed a smirk at his human counterpart. "Hey man, don't knock it till you've tried it. I mean, a couple of centuries of experience and not needing to breathe? Plus, when you get turned, even your tongue gets vampire strength." Spike preened happily as the boy turned a wide variety of interesting colors.

"Ahem!" Oops, got the Watcher hot and bothered too, and now he has to stop the fun before anyone notices he's something other than annoyed. "I believe we were waiting to find out exactly why the two of you were trying to travel into the past when our ritual somehow pulled you into our reality."

"Oh well, short version, because I kinda zoned out every time Wills explained the long version..." His child managed to dodge the slap aimed at his head without losing his place, "was that we were aiming for the point at the very end of Glory's incarceration on Earth when she was known to be in Sunnydale and we were supposed to be in Africa and wouldn't run into ourselves. So we need to find her energy key thing and mystically chop it in half so that we can both use it."

Several things happened very quickly at that point, and Spike saw the Slayer lunging for his child with a stake as he heard the twang of a crossbow from where the watcher had positioned himself behind a counter. Both of the unprovoked attacks missed the heart, but he'd had enough and lunged for the blond annoyance ready and willing to break her neck. He caught sight of the human Xander out of the corner of his eye grabbing an ax, but he was too far away to be a serious worry.

Well, that's what he thought before the young man sliced through the top of the heavy curtain over the

shop's large picture window, flooding the room with sunlight.

3 Rules Clarification

-The Willows-

Willow thumped her computer. It had been decades since she had a computer with any internal connections that would react to being thumped - hell, Spike and Xan could play vamp strength hacky sack with the thing and it wouldn't notice - but the instinct was still there. Sometimes technology needed to be hit.

"This should be working!"

"I'm sure it will, Little Tree. William and the kitten went farther than we planned, but they are in the right place and can help themselves to the Key." She looked at her Sire, trying to translate Dru-speak into something that made sense. For all their bond in blood and mutual magic use, she had to admit she was the worst of their family at understanding the mad vampire.

"You think we sent them back too far?"

"No no, back just enough but off to the side, I felt you pull them windershins of us."

Willow put it aside for later consideration and tried to figure out why she didn't have a signal to Xander. She was certain that the cyber magic linking his palm display to her computer should have followed the tether that the time travel spell kept between them. She had specifically coded this magic to keep an active connection, even to the point of maintaining a common timeframe between the two groups.

Spike had argued that factor, saying that the whole advantage of time travel should be taking however long it took in the past without running down the clock in the present, but she and Xander had argued the advantages of consultation and research if they ran into problems and Dru had semi-coherently supported them. But what was the point of running down the clock if she couldn't get a decent signal to- *PING!*

A plain text? She opened it quickly. "Wills - weirdness. Right time but you and me are still alive

and here. They were doing mojo here and think we're their answer. Can't raise you, boost the signal, huh?"

"Pulled to the side, was it? Farther but the right amount back?" She spared her sire a small scowl as she sent out an all-call to the online coven for support and pricked her finger on the ritual spire beside the keyboard. "Someday I'll understand what you're saying before it's redundant."

Drusilla laughed happily and leaned down to kiss her. "Your mind runs straight along, Little Tree, stops at the red lamps and signals for the track change. You cannot see how to dance in the square and still make tea time with the Bishop."

With a sad smile, Willow kissed her back. She had been disappointed when Spike pointed out that she wasn't advancing in magic learning it in the instinctive, symbolic way that Dru used and should perhaps pursue a more modern method that would match her organized mind. But her sire had never resented losing her as a student and collaborating on large magics was always a wild ride.

Seeing three coven members had spired on, she routed their support into the tether and tried to raise Xander again. This time she was relieved to see a familiar smiling face. "Wills! Perfect! Can you tell Spike that we agreed decades ago that a sunlight kill counts and we're out?"

Willow resisted an urge to bang her head on the desk. "Seriously? You're playing Slayer Hunt at a time like this?"

"Well, technically, they started it, but I think we should still abide by the rules. Spike wants to kill them all because they tried to stake me, and he says we shouldn't give credit for a sneak attack, but-

"Okay, okay, I get the picture." She reached for her visor. "Put me on a table or something, okay? Now sunlight kills do count, as long as the area of sunlight is either too large to get out of quickly enough, or if doing so would have put you at a serious disadvantage for continuing the fight. If you have a reasonable escape route, it's a draw."

"See!" The visor had kicked in and Willow took in the little shop, Xan and Spike and... Wow, her and Xander. "I told you it counted. Human me for the win!"

"Yeah, wow, human you grew up even yummiier. And I got some dress sense!"

Xander's face fell. "It's only been a couple of years too! I told Dru she should wait to turn me because I didn't want to be carded for all eternity, but nooooo..."

"This is fascinating and all," and oh wow again, it was Buffy! "But do you think maybe we could move on to something more relevant?"

"Oh, of course!" She turned back to Xander. "So human you gets kill credit and you can't slaughter them, but Spike's been holding out for a 'they hurt my Xan!' corollary to all the rules so he's allowed to come back later even though wins usually give them lifetime immunity."

"This is more relevant?"

"Well, *yeah!*" Xander said cheerfully. "It means you guys win and we play the whole Glory thing your way. Though I still don't know why you went all stake-y to begin with..."

"Seems to me that the Key is still a person in this timeline," Spike put in casually. "A person they like, and they figured the mystical splitting would kill 'em."

A variety of surprised and shifty expressions swept the small group, but the human Xander was the first to speak. "What do you mean 'still' a person?"

"Well from the research we did, and by 'we' obviously I mean 'me' because Spike and Xan were too busy killing demons..." Willow quailed only slightly under her sire's glare and reminded herself that he was in the past of another timestream and probably wouldn't be mad at her by the time he got back... or two minutes from now, for that matter. "It seems that the guardian monk guys first tried to hide the Key by making it into a living person, but the knights found and killed him, returning it to its

energy form. Not too bright, since that just made it easier for Glory to find and use."

"Huh." Her Xander gave this some thought. "So... *will* the energy extractor splitter saver thingie kill a human form key? Because it looks like that's not an option."

Willow popped a screen over her visor view and started searching. "I'll have to look into what we know about the ritual and how the key power was actually matrixed. I might be able to examine it remotely as well once you find whoever it is."

Another round of shifty looks didn't surprise her. "Looks like we've got a line on that, Red," Spike said as he settled back against the counter and pulled Xander into his arms. "But if we're playing by the sodding rules and working with this lot, you'll need to come up with a plan that won't hurt whoever it is before they'll trust us."

The younger vampire snuggled back and Willow spared a moment of annoyance at them for taunting her with cuddles when she could look but not touch. "Well, since we don't need to leave

enough Key-ness for Glory to work with, that should be easier, right? And while Wills and Dru work on that, we can go kick some ass! Do you think we should take out the knight dudes first or the Hell Bitch?"

The human Xander, who she noted with some amusement was trying very hard not to watch himself get comfortable with another man, spoke up. "So, you mean you really will help take out Glory? The spell worked at least that much? Did you bring any mystical doodads that could make that a viable plan? Because we've already seen hellgod versus vamp and it wasn't pretty for the vamp."

At the mention of mystical doodads, Willow's own human counterpart gasped and spoke for the first time since she'd seen her.

"The gem of Amara!"

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Willow blushed as everyone, including a

holographic version of her younger self who was sitting on the table, stared.

"Um, I don't think that will help with Glory," Xander said in confusion.

"No, I mean vamp you and Spike, with the standing in sunlight and making rules about what happens when people get technical kills!" She tried to look at the pair's hands, but one of Spike's was stuffed under the younger vampire's jacket, and both of Xander's seemed to be looking in Spike's back pockets for something. Except she didn't think those body suits had pockets... "Buffy didn't get the gem away from Spike in that reality! Except, I thought there was only one?"

"There can b-EEP!" Vampire geekiness was cut off by a sire's tongue in the ear. "Jeee! Ah! Okay, sorry, no Highlander!"

"Get it away from me?" Spike looked away from the ear to consider her. "How'd she do that then, the Watcher figure where it was first?"

"Um, no, you were fighting her in the daytime and she kinda yanked it off your finger so you had to scramble for shade before you combusted." Both vampires looked flabbergasted at the story.

"So I was, what, wearing it right there on my hand like some ponce, waving it around in case she didn't get the 'This is the only thing protecting me, cut my hand off' billboard on her own?" He nuzzled vamp Xander and shook his head sadly. "See, luv, this is why we couldn't wait to get a couple of more years on you before turning. Clearly I would have been a bloody useless moron without you and Red around as me minders."

"Well, you were going through a bad time," Anya put in sympathetically. "Dru had just dumped you again, and you were making bad choices. I mean, you were dating Harmony."

Xander leapt from Spike's arms, ending up beside his human self and gaping, betrayed, at his sire.

"Harmony *Kendall*! The Cordette who Cordy called shallow? And when you say dating, clearly you mean... Ew! Ew, ew, ick, bleh! You and Harmony?"

Human Xander took a shot at reassuring himself.

"Well, not really *him* and Harmony, it was the Spike who didn't take you and Wills back as a courting gift for Dru. And, well, not exactly Harmony either, she was vamped during Graduation. And like Ahn said, it was a really bad time for him... I'm pretty sure he never actually *liked* her."

"Well..."

"Can we move on here?" Buffy seemed really stressed. Willow figured she and Xander had more cause, they were the ones dealing with evil twins... Though weirdly, not so much. The holographic Willow on the table was nothing like the psycho dominatrix who had flirted with her and tried to make the Bronze into a playground. "Like to the part where you guys have something to offer in defeating Glory?"

"Sure, Buffster, we're on the case." Vamp Xander was apparently just as good at soothing things over as the real one. "I guess the main question is if we want to try to take the human guy out first or just go straight to a throw down with the goddess?"

"There is a human involved with Glory?" Willow saw her shock echoed on the other Scoobies' faces.

"Wouldn't she just suck his brain?"

"Ben Wilkinson." Spike explained. "And not so much involved..."

"Ben?" Buffy looked confused. "He's an intern at the hospital, he was helping treat my mom. What does he have to do with Glory?"

Vampire Xander looked sad as he tried to break the news. "Well, what Spike's telling you is this Ben guy... Glory..."

"So, they have some sort of connection?" Her Xander seemed to be trying to follow the conversation but having no more luck than she was.

"Do you lot all have plugs in your bleeding ears? Ben! Glory!"

"But what about them?" Willow was concerned at the vampire's anger but didn't know what to do about it.

"Sire!" The holographic her broke in before Spike could start yelling nonsense again. "We're looking at a very powerful obfuscating spell, you aren't going to get through with repetition or volume."

Vamp Xander nodded. "Okay, so are we immune because we're undead or because we don't belong in this timestream?"

"Could be either, you'd have to tell another vamp and see if it remembers."

He nodded then grinned and turned to Anya. "Hey, orgasm chick! Didn't you say something earlier about there being a Spike around here too that you're on some kind of terms with?"

"Oh yes!" Anya ignored Xander's rather obvious 'no' gestures. "He has a crypt over in Restfield. He's been very helpful during this entire Glory ordeal."

"Right then! Let's go, sire. If this Spike is immune to the spell he can help us with Ben and if he isn't, we can make fun of him for not turning Wills and me when he had a chance." The pair of vampires

headed out into the street, leaving behind a confused group of Scoobies.

Two minutes later, Xander darted back into the door and grabbed his palm display which was currently projecting a cranky, foot tapping vampire Willow and left again with an embarrassed laugh.

4 Liking the World

-Blond Spike-

Spike leaned casually against the wall listening to his Nibblet worry. He would have much rather been lying down, but the girl was already upset by the marks on his face; no way he was going to let on that the remaining wounds weren't just cosmetic. He spared a brief grateful thought for Harris' blood delivery that morning, too little, too old and too cold but he wouldn't be faking it this well without it.

A less bitter gratitude had gone out to the whelp's orders to Dawn. They might not like each other, but neither denied the other's loyalty to the girl.

"Do you think they're going to be okay? I mean, what if the you they got doesn't like us? Or doesn't have the chip? And Xander was there but he was younger and pale, so he was probably vamped too, and Anya once told me that vamp!Xander was pretty evil..."

"Wouldn't fret so, if I were you. Was probably wisest that you not be there while they worked things out, but the spell was supposed to bring help, yeah? And even before the chip, I wasn't so chuffed on hell dimension opening. Told your sis once, I like the world, and whatever version of me this is likely feels the same way."

She nodded, paced a little, then came and leaned beside him. "I guess so. Just hope there's something they can do to help."

He could only agree. Well, agree and try to distract her with tales of Rio for a while until a strange feeling crept up on him.

"Nibblet, p'haps you'd best get below for now." He guided her quickly over to the hatch to the lower crypt.

"Is it Glory?"

He cursed himself for frightening her. "No, luv, not sure what, not even sure it's bad, truthfully." It actually felt like it was calling to him, like when Drusilla had been away chasing her mad ideas a while then came back to him, but not quite, and in spite of the indirect light that told him the sun was still high in the sky a part of him wanted to run from the crypt and reunite with... whatever it was drawing near.

Instead he took a firm grip on his instincts and arranged himself casually in his armchair, close enough to defend the lower level if need be, but not so obviously blocking as to draw attention to it. He tried to force down the pain and prepared himself to fight if he had to. The pulling sensation only grew stronger until he could hear running footsteps just before his door burst open and the most important person in his life ran to him.

Or maybe it was just Harris.

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Spike sat in shock for a moment as he tried to reconcile the feelings of *love/want/protect* with the face and voice it was aimed at. Eventually he started listening to the words.

"...whoever did this! Seriously, they'll be so dead there won't be enough left to go to Hell. But we have to get you better first. Please, drink Sire." And the words confirmed what the feelings and lack of body heat had been trying to tell him, that this was his beautiful Childe and he was offering him strength, so there was really nothing for it but to vamp out and bite.

It wasn't Sire's blood, but it wasn't the odd, tainted taste of unrelated vampires, either. It was rich and heady and felt a little like he had stored some of his own strength away to be returned to him in his hour of need. It was love and comfort and submission and...

And being ripped away and thrown across the crypt into a hard wall. Leaping to his feet, he looked over to see his Childe being menaced by... himself?

"What the Hell, Childe! How dare you let someone else feed from you? Some fucking past life loser? Just because he looks like I used to, you want to-"

"Leave him alone, you wanker!" He was shouting at himself and preparing to enter a fight he knew for a fact he would lose to defend a Childe he had just met a minute ago. Sure this was the Hellmouth, but seriously? "I can feel the bond with him and I don't even bleed like my Harris! The pup was running on pure demon instinct."

His doppelganger shifted out of gameface and looked down at the whimpering vampire in his hands and Spike saw the moment when the rage shifted to confusion and concern at vampire-Xander's broken explanations.

"You were hurting, Sire, hurting so bad! I could feel the pain and danger and hunger, so hungry, Sire shouldn't *be* that hungry and hurt and I had to help, had to fix you, and..."

"Shhh, shush Xanpet, it's okay, I'm not angry anymore, I didn't know you felt the bond with him... Bloody strange, all of this if you ask me."

"Right there with you, mate." Spike settled back into his chair and enjoyed the feeling of his body starting to knit together in a way it hadn't been able to on the short rations he'd had access to. Not that it would help if he had to fight this version of himself. He could feel the age and strength of the demon before him and was belatedly catching up to the fact that both vampires had entered from the still sunny outdoors. "Guess you held onto your ring then, huh? But how is it working for both of you?"

His older self accepted the tacit offer of a truce and settled down on the nearby tomb, still gently petting his distressed Childe. "Got my Xanpet here to thank for that, on both counts really. When we first found the Gem, he commented on how a hand wasn't the most defensible place to wear it - something about a bloody goblin maybe biting my finger off before falling into a volcano..."

"Gollum." Spike and Xander corrected at the same time, and the younger vampire stared at him for a moment before pointing accusingly at his true Sire. "You tried to make like you'd never read Lord of the Rings! If he knows it, you really must have too!"

"Not the point," the other Spike said smoothly, but spared a glare for his double before continuing. "So I wore it on a chain under my shirt for a while - long as the gem was touching me it still worked - and when we each had one we actually put them in our bodies so no one would be removing them without a really lucky shot or an extended vivisection."

Wow, he was an idiot. "Damn, why didn't I think of that?"

"What can I say, he drives me crazy, but Xan thinks around corners." Spike took a moment to appreciate how effective his 'calm appraising' gaze was before he got annoyed at having it turned on himself. "So, two questions. Who's the human bint in the basement here and what the bloody bugging hell happened to you?"

Easy one first. "My sire left me, I got experimented on by soldier boys and then I starved for a year and a half before a hell god decided to play Twenty Questions. I've been recovering on sodding pig's blood, how do you think you would look, mate?" But even as he said it, he knew this version of himself would never be stuck in such a situation. He had a family, he would have had backup, and probably not been a little drunk and a lot reckless with anger at losing the gem to begin with.

"Glory did this to you?" Spike liked this protective, vampiric version of Harris. "That's it, I'm gonna kill that bitch even deader than we planned. Nobody messes with the Fang-tastic Four, even in another timeline!"

The other Spike froze for a long second, until Spike gave in and mouthed 'Fang-tastic Four?' then dropped his head hard onto the stone lid. "I told you never to call us that around... well, sentient beings, didn't I pet?"

It was a near thing, but vampires still couldn't blush. "...yes Sire."

"Remember next time, yeah? So, soldier boys, eh? You were the one they nabbed in this version?"

"That's right, they chipped someone else in yours?"

A tight, angry nod. "Dru. She wandered off to play while we were here looking for the gem - we'd already done the Slayer at that point so we didn't worry much, but she managed to get into Red's dreams and we figured out where she was. Hired some muscle with the rest of the swag from that tomb and wiped out the whole sodding lot of them."

"Wills figured out how to get the chip out, but it was horrible the few times we saw it go off." Xander looked haunted still and from the smell of them they had to be decades in the future. "Hey! I should ring her up again, maybe she can do something about yours!"

All three vampires turned towards the hatch as a loud "Eep!" came from the lower level.

"Right, about the human downstairs...?"

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Spiked cursed to himself, his brief moment of joy at the thought that the chip might be removed crushed by the reminder of what its loss would do to his relationship with the Bit - to say nothing of Buffy.

Actually, better to say nothing of Buffy right now, anyway. Just that brief moment of holding his Childe, even one he hadn't truly made or raised, had him rethinking what he and a human could offer each other. What he felt for her was real, but that didn't mean it had any hope of a future.

But on to the immediate problem. "She's under my protection, and I think that's all you need to know for now." He said it like a threat, because that's how master vampires said that sort of thing but they all knew it was half bluff and half request. Still, with the bond he had to this different Xander, he figured he'd get away with it.

The other Spike had apparently made the same assessment and just smirked. "Taking in strays, mate? That's fine, but is she decent for company or she going to hide downstairs and eavesdrop all day?"

"I wasn't eavesdropping!" The Bit popped her head up and pouted. "You guys talk loud, it's not like I had a glass to the ceiling - Spike doesn't even have glasses!" She came all the way out and stared openly at the two new vampires. Xander stared right back, confusion written all over his face.

"Um, Sire?"

"Yes?" Spike was glad that vampires didn't blush as he answered at the same time as his doppelganger.

"I'm kinda remembering this girl and kinda not and it's giving me a wiggins."

"How so, luv?"

Dawn moved not so subtly over and sat on the arm of Spike's chair away from the other vampires.

"Well, I know her name is Dawn, and I'm pretty sure that she's Buffy's sister... But I don't remember Buffy *having* a sister. Except that I know she *does* in a really general way, I just can't dredge up any specific memories with her in them... Serious wiggins."

The other Spike nodded, but stayed relaxed.

"Sounds like we found our key. Contrary to Red's opinion, I do pay some attention to research. When the key was made flesh in our reality, it was a massive spell; made a place for the new human in the world and in the minds of everyone who 'should' have known him. Same thing happened here, but we weren't around for the transforming spell, so you're just getting some residual effect, weak enough to see the holes."

Dawn was trembling slightly, but Spike's relaxation was becoming more real. Even several decades out of date, he knew himself well enough to be sure he wasn't bluffing, and the other Spike was regarding the Nibblet without any sort of malice. "So what exactly are you needing the Key *for*?"

Xander grinned. "Believe it or not, we need it to save the world."

5 And All the People In It

-Dawn-

She stared. Then she gaped. She thought about switching it up with some goggling, but decided to babble instead.

"You want to save the world? But you're vampires, and not even 'chipped and forced to get along with humans' vampires like Spike, or souled vampires like Angel! Well, unless you do have souls, is there a lot of soul having in the future?"

The dark haired Spike gave a slight sneer of disgust, while Xander responded more overtly. "Souls? Ew! Yuck, we leave that to Grandpa Brood Boy, thank you very much! It's just, you know, the world." He squared his shoulders dramatically and did a not horrible impression of The Tick. "That's where I keep all my STUFF!"

Dawn giggled, but then was filled with confusion. "I remember getting you that box set for **your birthday** one year, but obviously I didn't... but you still had it and my Xander still has it..." The intellectual knowledge that she wasn't real had been hard but somehow **meeting people** who weren't part of the spell was worse. She was surprised when a familiar, if less well muscled, arm went around her shoulder.

"Hey, Dawn-a-matrix, don't sweat it. I mean, memory and reality are pretty weird anyway - like the Matrix has come out already, hasn't it? Living in a world that wasn't real, but it was, in that everyone was still experiencing it... I didn't get that set for my birthday, so I bought it for myself with Christmas money... but your Xander has months of extra memories of watching it, and the memory of someone paying enough attention to what he wanted to get it. Ya know?"

She smiled. Older and younger at the same time, soulless and demonically possessed, her Xander was still awesome. "Yeah, I get it."

She glanced over at the two Spikes to find them deep in a whispered conversation. Or possibly argument, it was hard to say. Finally her Spike nodded sharply and turned to her. "Alright, Nibblet, obviously it's safe for you back at the Magic Box, so Xan here is gonna walk you back over while me and... er, me, go take care of our little Hellgod problem."

Before she could express her disbelief that Glory had gone from beating him practically to dust to becoming something two of him could 'take care of' Xander had launched his own objections.

"Whoa, without me? No way! If there's gonna be a god-kill, I want in on it! And she messed with my sire... I mean you... who isn't really my sire but still feels like it, and I have a really strong desire to pulp that bitch's face..."

The other Spike sighed and beckoned him over.

"Xan-pet, that's why you can't come. Blondie here knows where we can find the other bloke, and if we play it smooth this can be a quick job, but it has to be clean and cold. You're too upset, and I

understand why, but it has to be this way." The younger vampire gave a truly adorable pout and got a cuff to the head for his troubles. "Besides, don't forget we're on the clock here for our world too. We deal with Glory while you get Red and her human version figuring out [how to](#) bring Key energy back with us without hurting the snack pack."

"Can you really..." Dawn was embarrassed by the childlike sound of her own voice, but she had been scared for so long. "You'll be able to get rid of her?"

The blond Spike smiled at her - not a smirk or a sneer but a reassuring smile. "Seems the 'Fang-tastic Four' had some intel in the future that even the Wanker's Council isn't privy to. Glory has a... we'll call it a resting state that she's vulnerable in. There's a spell that prevents humans from learning about it or remembering it if they do, but conveniently enough, we aren't human so we can use the info."

"You'll be careful, still?"

"Always, pet, always."

The two Spikes headed down to the crypt's sewer access and Xander grinned and offered his arm.

"Come on, Dawn, on the way back to the shop you can tell me all about the mess Spike and Dru would have made of their unlives without me and Wills around to keep an eye on them."

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"Really? Captain Hairgel smashed the thing? What a loser!"

"Well, I dunno," Dawn licked her ice cream cone and considered. "I think sending it to him in the first place was kinda dumb. I mean, what if walking in the sun made him perfectly happy and then we've got Invulnerable Angelus on our hands."

Seeing a vampire shudder in horror was almost as odd as seeing a vampire walking in the sun eating ice cream. "Okay, point there. Very good point. Spike swears that before the curse he was, you know, a bastard but not a lunatic. It took us a few decades, but we even got Dru convinced that

'Daddy' wasn't ever coming back the way she remembered him and we were better off with Broody Smurf."

She was still giggling at that image when they walked into the Magic Box, to find the rest of the Scoobies in full research mode.

"...where they're wearing them, but is there some kind of spell that will just pull all gems to you?"

"Oooh, that's a good one!" Xander left her side to hop up on the counter beside Buffy's book and look at it. "The evil lawyer guys tried something similar to that once, only it was basically a nudity spell." He grinned at the Slayer's discomfort and Dawn couldn't help but giggle. "I so wanted Wills to learn it, but Spike and Deadboy were all 'rush rush, find the conduit, stop the apocalypse' and we didn't have time to keep some of them alive to ask about it."

"Whoa, time out!" The human Xander looked at his double with great suspicion. "Why would you guys be working with Captain Forehead and stopping the end of the world?"

"Wait, I know this one..." Buffy glared at the vampire beside her and not so subtly moved between him and her sister, causing rolled eyes from the latter. "*You* like dog racing and Manchester United too?"

"They actually outlawed dog racing a few decades back, and I'm more of a Lakers fan, but yeah, what can I say?" He grinned and began to sing happily, "*We love the whole world, and all the people in it, boom de yada, boom de...* and that commercial hasn't come out yet, has it?" At the various confused head shakes he flopped backwards onto the counter. "Man, I'm so used to my references being too old, and I go back in time to find they're too new."

Dawn patted his shoulder sympathetically, causing Buffy to physically move her back away from the vamp. "Little late for worrying, I just walked across town with the guy... Anyway, he and the other Spike need some of my Key power to save the world in their time, and you're supposed to help figure out how."

Willow promptly launched into some wicca-babble and was soon joined by a holographic techno-wicca counterpoint. Giles merely looked suspiciously at the vampire. "I see. And as for Glory and the threat to *our world now?*"

"Ben's Glory!" Everyone turned to the human Xander with varying expressions of confusion and dawning understanding. "Ben is Glory and Glory is Ben. That's what vamp me and his Creepy Wrong Touch Sire were trying to tell us!"

Dawn missed the ensuing discussion, only catching, "It's totally a right touch!" as the memory of talking to Ben in the hospital then being threatened by Glory suddenly clicked together. He'd seemed so nice and he had been Glory's secret identity all along?

And now, it seemed, he was dead, and Glory with him. Should she celebrate or mourn? She felt Tara's arm slip around her shoulders and let the gentle witch support her as she broke down in tears of combined relief, sorrow and anger.

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It was two more hours before the future Spike sauntered back into the Magic Box looking insufferably smug. Two hours of esoteric magic talk and the vampy Willow replacing her hologram with a 3-D chart of some kind that Willow, Tara and Giles poked at and discussed while vampy Xander looked bored, Buffy paced and human Xander tried to keep Anya from suggesting sex things.

At one point she had lost track of 'Xanpet' only to have him return from the back room of the shop and skirt the bright patch from the windows to stand beside her. "Listen, I, um, I need you to do me a favor," he'd said quietly, and pressed a small object into her hand. It was one of the jewelry type boxes Giles kept for customers who were buying gifts, and had what might have been links from the punching bag chain twisted tightly around it to prevent any casual snooping - not that Dawn was a snoop!

"Once me and Spike are gone, could you give this to, well, your Spike? It's... I just want him to have it. To, you know, remember me by."

"You really love your Spike, don't you?" She tucked it in her pocket after a quick look around to make sure Buffy wasn't observing them.

A familiar grin, with only a hint of evil. "My Spike, your Spike... I think if I went back in time far enough to meet William before he was turned I would love him too. He's just all, you know, loveable."

Dawn laughed, and would have agreed, but Buffy had finally noticed them and come over to protect her virtue or whatever.

Now she looked up at the dramatic entrance.

"Where's Spike? Um, I mean our Spike." The sun was low enough that he could have made it in under the shadows of surrounding buildings. Glory hadn't hurt him again, had she?

"He's fine, Snackpack, that sodding chip gave him a good hit when he went for the human version of the bint, so we looked around the storage rooms for

something to help him feel better and he went home to sleep it off."

Buffy got her typical superior disgusted look. "Were you stealing blood, drugs or both?"

"Right, guess we should have gone around to Emergency for a transfusion and a script instead, except that, oh no, we've got no heartbeats, to say nothing of insurance." Overtly turning his back on her, he embraced his Xander and allowed a thorough injury check. "Went like clockwork, luv, the chip blast was the most either of us got hurt." Sniffing the air, he gave an indulgent smile. "Can tell me what you've been up to and take your punishment when we get home, yeah?"

Snuggling under the duster, which should have been impossible at their relative sizes, the other vamp snickered. "What, that ice cream place I remember from High School is still around, like I could have resisted!"

Buffy stalked up behind them, holding Mr Pointy in an ironically pointless way. "You shouldn't turn your back on me, fangface."

Xanpet looked up long enough to roll his eyes.

"Why, is it dangerous?"

"No," his human counterpart responded in his best Giles imitation, "It's just tacky! ...um, right, time stream split before that bit. There was a six inch tall fear demon, it was a thing."

While the Xanders grinned at each other, Buffy all but stomped her foot. "It *is* tacky! I've come close to dusting you and you were never able to kill me, so just because I can't hurt you *now* is no reason to disrespect me!"

Dawn drew a breath but her Xander cut her off.

"Let's just put that in the 'too easy to be worth it' category, Dawnster, and see if we're ready to send our room temperature pals home, okay?"

Willow and, surprisingly, the other Willow were quick to jump on the suggestion, and in no time to speak of she was pressing a bandage to the small cut where a specially rigged 'life matrix crystal' (whatever that was) had been pushed into her flesh to draw some of her blood. Apparently, it was always the blood.

"Okay, you two kids drive safe and don't ever come back, huh?" Xander held her back from the edge of the circle where the two vampires had originally appeared and now waited to return. Vamp Xander was grinning and bouncing.

"Bye Buffster, G-man, it was great to see you again! Bye me and Wills, hope that humanity thing keeps working out for you! Thanks for the memories, Dawn-a-matrix! Bye Tara, be good to Wills! Have fun Orgasm Chick, talk Xan into that threesome - it will loosen him up! Bye-"

Spike clamped a hand firmly over his childe's mouth and nodded to the room. "Right then, thanks for the crystal, hope to never do it again. Oh and Slutty?" He grinned wolfishly as light began to swirl around them. "I *could* kill you as it turns out, before the Gem. Without Red and my boy, you were just another piece of Council cannon fodder. Think about it."

Xander left her side to put an arm around the Slayer. "*Don't* think about it, Buff. The council pretty much works for you now, and you'll never be what

the other slayers were to them." Willow nodded her agreement as she joined them.

Dawn was still a little cranky about the chaperone act but gave a quick hug of her own before she walked over to Anya and let the core Scoobies do their post-apocalypse-prevention bonding. "You know, those versions of Xander and Spike were really cute together."

"Don't you think? I wish Xander would listen to my ideas about... well, I'm not supposed to about this with you, am I?"

Dawn grinned evilly. "Maybe not the specifics, but I actually had a plan to get him listening if you were interested?"

The ex-demoness' smile turned calculating. "Are you going to want pictures?"

"Only of the PG stuff."

"Oh, Giles! Why don't you go with the others back to Buffy's house and Dawn will help me lock up..."

If you don't recognize the song Vamp!Xander breaks into, google or youtube "Boom de yada Discovery Channel". I'm 95% sure on it making you smile.

A/N2 : The Hubby has a friend named Dawn who uses Dawnamatrix as a screen name and I stole it as a Xanderish pet name with a naughtier than usual twist.

6 A Crypt Convo

A knock on the crypt door as it was opened quickly for a Scooby to slip through wasn't exactly the courtesy they'd give a human, but Spike would take it over a kicked in door. He looked up from the scratchy image of Timmy on the TV screen when he heard the fast pounding heartbeat. "Problem with the Bit?"

Xander shifted awkwardly. "What, there has to be trouble for me to... oh forget it, I can't even

pretend. Dawnie's fine, but I wanna know what's going on with you."

"What about me, Xa- er, Whelp?"

Ah nothing like a good opening. "That, for starters. You keep trying to call me Xan, or pet, I think I even caught you saying 'luv' when we were all arguing about whether to try talking to the crazy knight guys Friday."

"I, well I got mixed up with talking to you, Buffy and the Nibblet so close together."

"Yeah, so mixed up you were backing me up against the Buffster..."

Calling himself five kinds of poof in his head, Spike made a last ditch effort at Big Bad-ness. "Wasn't backing *you* up, was just supporting the good idea that somehow wandered into your empty head." Xander just stared for a few seconds. "Fine, it's not like I actually like you or anything, just that... both of our little visitors from the future shared blood with me, trying to bring me up to strength for fighting Glory if it came to that."

From what Dawn had said it was a bit more than that from the vamp-him at least, but no need to nitpick when he was getting somewhere. "What does that have to do with how you've been acting towards me?"

"A master vampire's blood is powerful stuff, pet. It's what we use to pass on our demon to a new vamp, after all. When it's freely given to a member of the same family, it ties you closer together, shares feelings, sometimes even memories. From an older version of myself, it was almost like being him for a moment."

"Okay, that makes a weird, Hellmouthy sort of sense." Xander firmly told himself that he was relieved rather than disappointed. "So the other you's feelings about his me are getting confused with this me so you temporarily forget that you hate me?"

Spike was going to run out of words for 'poncy bugger' if he kept this up. "Could be that 'hate' is a little strong. You aren't a completely insufferable prick when you forget that you hate me... All the

'pet' and 'luv' stuff, though, yeah it just slips out, especially if I've had one of his dreams that day. Getting better though, and I still love the Slayer." He did, damn it. His other self's memories of drinking her down had confused that for a while, but he hadn't let it draw him off course.

"Yeah, well, good luck with that one pal, you're gonna need it." He wondered if he had grown a second head the way the vamp stared at him for a moment there.

"Huh, usually that's when you lot tell me that soulless things can't love." And Harris was usually the quickest on the draw with the line too.

Xander blushed. A second head would have been less embarrassing. "Yeah, well... That vampire was... a lot like me. I felt more like he was me than my two halves felt about each other during the Toth thing, ya know? Makes it harder to swallow the old party line on 'nothing of the human remains' when you can see yourself so clearly still in there." He fingered the ball in his pocket that he'd been planning on tossing a lot sooner in this conversation. "And

anyway, I figure something is keeping you around here helping, and you don't seem like the type for a long buildup to betrayal."

Spike's confusion was only partially faked, but still just seemed to annoy the Scooby and he sighed before throwing something across the crypt.

"Catch." Reaching out instinctively, he grabbed the small ball, and was preparing a sarcastic question of whether this was impromptu male bonding when he glanced down and choked on his own words. The ball lying in his hand had small silver crosses glued all over its surface.

"Er... Ow?"

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Xander hadn't expected that having his suspicions confirmed would make him laugh, but Spike's totally straightfaced and wooden delivery of pretending to drop the ball in pain was beautifully understated. No wonder British TV was so funny.

"So the other Spike came back to the shop after

dusk, and some stuff he said got me thinking that maybe he'd either fixed the chip, given you his Gem or both."

Spike held back a relieved sigh that the Nibblet hadn't blabbed about his Childe's going away pressie. She'd obviously had her suspicions but had only told him that she trusted him and hoped he would be sticking around before she left him to open it alone. His Xanpet... er Harris, that is, seemed fairly relaxed for being in a crypt with a vamp he apparently suspected of being able to hurt him again. "This where you tell me about the letters you gave to all the other Scoobies to open if you didn't come back from this visit?"

"Hey, that would have been a really smart... I mean 'Yes. Yes, I definitely did that.'" He knew his 'bad liar' delivery wasn't as good as the vampire's, but it got a smile anyway. "There hasn't been any increase in barbeque fork accidents, and Buffy's still alive after Dawn reissued your invitation, so I'm back to the 'starting to believe you mean it with the Slayer luvn' bit."

"I've not been killing." He knew it was as good as saying he could again, but even if his doppelganger hadn't had Red deal with the chip, he suspected that the Gem would blunt the damage enough to allow him to feed and Xan obviously was thinking it as well. "I've gone out of town a few times to feed, but I left 'em breathing and they were all 'volunteers' anyway."

"Volunteers like Riley was doing or Tennessee State fans?" Ha, score one for the Xan Man, Spike actually snorted at that one.

"Neither luv, it was a game Dru and I used to play a lot - cut nervously through a few dark alleys on the wrong side of town and see if we could get our meal to pick itself."

"Ah, the old 'mugging the monster' scenario. I'm gonna be big with the non-judging on that one, especially if they're living through it. But what's your game plan here? Buffster or G-man will find out eventually, you know." And Xander wasn't a little worried about Spike being driven out of Sunnydale when they did. It would be a relief,

especially with Anya's continuing 'hints'. Really. A relief.

"Figured those Renaissance Faire blokes would be attacking eventually, and I won't be endangering the Bit by holding back... So they'll know then if it doesn't come out sooner. Just hoping Buffy will see that I've been controlling myself even without the chip and let me stay. If not, well, my new bit of bling should protect me enough that I won't have to hurt her defending myself, and I'll decide what to do with my unlife from there." And surely she would see it if Xander could. Even if Buffy didn't come to love him he would regret leaving Sunnydale and Xanpe- that is, the Little Bit. Wouldn't regret never seeing Harris again, that was just the memories of his other self.

"As long as it doesn't involve trying to win Dru back with Scooby Snacks like the other you did, hopefully you'll have a good unlife either way." Did he really just hope for Spike's happiness? And bring up the him and Wills turning thing?

He was aiming for a smirk but suspected it came out as more of a sad smile. "Pretty sure I missed my window on that one... Dru won't even be thinking of taking me back for a couple of decades after threatening to stake her for the Slayer, no matter what pressies I come up with." He tossed the ball from hand to hand, marveling at the cool feel of the crosses. "Missed the window on turning you two at all, really. Red's gotten too powerful and would end up doing something dangerous in the rush of losing her inhibitions, and you've lost that undercurrent of despair that would have let some part of you welcome a new take on life."

"The implication that you've thought this through is a little frightening..." He had to return the grin though. "But I've gotta say I like my life a lot better than I did in High School. Um, sorta speaking in the direction of which, would you mind coming over to the apartment this weekend to provide brute strength for a project. Anya wants a pot rack over the kitchen island and having someone able to just hold it in place would be nice. She says she'll pay you in beer."

He didn't mention his suspicions that Anya was plotting something of an inappropriate nature - he didn't know for sure, and Spike could always say no, and it might be nice to do a project then drink some beer.

"Could do. Have to be after sunset unless you'll be telling Anyanka about the Gem anyway." He didn't mention his suspicions from all the 'hints' that Nibblet had been dropping lately and the significant glances she and Demongirl had been exchanging when they thought neither he nor Xanpet were looking. This might be unrelated, and Harris could always say no, and it might be nice to lend a hand and have a beer, maybe watch some telly with decent reception.

"I probably should, if you're going to have an invite to our place she should know all the facts." Hopefully it wouldn't scare her off the whole 'them and Spike' idea. Wait, no, hopefully it *would*! Right.

"Let me know if she changes her mind at the next meeting then. And if not, stock some decent beer!" Maybe knowing would delay whatever naughty

plans she was hatching until he'd given this thing with the Slayer a good try. Er, or got rid of the idea entirely, of course. That would be even better. Yeah.

"I'll see ya then, Fangl- er, Blood Breath."

"See ya then, whelp."

The End