

So. Hmmm, uh...this story, wherein we cut right to the chase and use every cliché in the book and leave all questions unanswered and force the characters to serve our whims and kinks. What can I say. It's fluff.

Anyway. "These characters are not mine," blah a thousand years of blah and yadda, amen, and all hail Joss Whedon and Mutant Enemy, who cause me to leave bitemarks in my hand on Tuesdays.

Oh, and "throwing shapes" is slang for showing off, but also for striking a pose, voguing, stylin', etc. It's also said of guitar players, from what I can gather, when they strut and fret onstage. It's kind of a self-referential writerly title for what I was doing here, which is to say, just playing and fucking around. More to the point, it's the title of a song by Dirty Vegas, whose self-titled CD you should go buy right now, because it rocks. You can consider it the theme music for this piece. Except for the guitar music in the car scene. That was Stevie Ray Vaughn's "Testify."

14,094 words

Throwing Shapes

by
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Part One

"I think we lost them," he said, and that was the first thing he remembered saying. He was remembering things even as they happened--entering the alley, lacing his fingers into the mesh fence, listening to the distant shouts fade and a siren rise. He became aware that he was chilled, and that it was night. Maybe he wasn't remembering at all, but waking up. Yeah, that was it. He felt like he was coming to. Surfacing from...something else. He shook his head, trying to clear it. Magic 8-Ball says reply hazy, try again.

"Lost what?" said the man next to him. "What the bloody hell were those things?"

"Maybe it's Halloween." His own voice sounded low and thick and breathless. Frost puffed from his mouth. That is the sound of my voice, he thought. That is my breath.

"Yeahhhh," the man drawled dubiously. "Listen...er, what's your name again, mate?"

He opened his mouth, tongue and throat working automatically as if to form some word in reply, but nothing came out. It was his brain that had frozen, though, lost. "I don't know. I don't know my own name. Why don't I know my name?" Panicky, he turned and focused on the other man, who seemed to have found the one square foot of alley that received any of the faint light shining from above. His white hair and a slice of cheek glowed. One eyebrow, so dark it might have been drawn on with a pencil, raised.

"Dunno. Maybe you've got that whattayoucallit."

"What?"

"That thing where you forget things."

"Amnesia?"

"Yeah, that's it."

He stared, slightly gape-mouthed. "Are you fucking with me?"

The man frowned. Or at least, the half of his face that was visible did. The other half was still in shadow. It was probably frowning too. "Why would I do that?"

"I don't know. Wait, I do." He assessed the strange impressions that were crashing in on him from all sides and singled one out. "You have this tone of voice that says 'I will fuck with you.'"

"Do I?"

"Yeah, that one." He raised a hand to his head, thrust fingers through his hair. They came away covered in something he couldn't quite make out. Something glittery

and dry with a smell of--he sniffed his fingers hesitantly--smoke and roses. Okay then. Magic 8-Ball says, cannot predict now. "What's *your* name?" he asked, reaching for some small lifeline.

"Name's--" The other man paused, head cocked. "Oh, sod it."

"Ha. Funny name."

The man glared accusingly, snapped, "I've got amnesia!"

"Well, don't blame me! It's not contagious."

"Yeah, well--" The man cast about as if for something to hit, then his gaze slanted down to one side and he noticed he was holding something. He raised his hand, in which he grasped a black bag. "Something here," he said, surprised, and moved fully into the light as he unzipped the bag.

The man with no name stepped closer to take a look, and then caught his breath. Inside the bag was money, money, and more money. Big wads of filthy lucre, some loose, some neatly bound. Large denominations, too. "Holy Lords of the ATM," he said. And then blinked and snapped his head up: "Did you steal that?"

"What?!" The man looked astonished and affronted. "Why d'you assume that?" Then he seemed to take in the situation. "Oh. Guess it doesn't look so good." He rallied. "Course, I don't know for sure, do I? Maybe we stole it together." He jerked his chin once, pointedly. "You're the one with the gun."

"Excuse me?" But that's when he lifted his own hand and realized damn it, he was packing heat. "Gah!" Alarmed, he threw the weapon away (the other man exclaiming at the act), but in doing so, his wrist caught the light and he saw something more interesting, but no less worrisome. It was a hospital ID bracelet with a name neatly typed on it. Beautiful. "Hey, I'm Harris," he said, with a surge of relief. "Harris Xander." Wait, that didn't sound right. "Oh, surname comma first. Make that Xander Harris."

"Lovely bit of convenience for you," the other man scoffed. He looked at his wrists and seemed put out that he didn't have his own band. "Maybe I've got a wallet," he grouched half to himself. Setting the bag of money between his feet, he felt around in his coat pockets, drawing out items one by one and setting them on a dumpster lid:

crumpled pack of cigarettes, lighter, switchblade, candle stub, pocket watch, small rock, tin of Altoids, hip flask, three racing stubs, and a baggie with a mysterious substance that looked not unlike pot. Exasperated, the man growled at his coat and shook it. "Walking junk drawer!" Finally, he came up with a laminated ID card that he squinted at closely. "Spike," he read. "Spike Vicious."

"Okay, *you* win for the most disturbing name," Xander said in a heartfelt manner. "You think your parents had some issues?"

"Suspect I named myself," Spike said, repocketing the card and his other worldly goods. He shrugged. "Must be in a band."

"Like Sid Vicious...hey! I remembered something." Xander felt proud. He searched his memory for more. "Pamela Anderson. Star Wars. Snickers bars."

"At least you haven't forgotten the important things," Spike snarked, rolling his eyes.

It occurred to Xander to pat himself down, but his own pockets were empty. "I'm missing a wallet too. Maybe we were mugged."

"Right." Spike took his cigarettes back out, studied the pack curiously, then tapped one into his mouth like a pro. "Took our vid club memberships but left the amazing bag of cash. Too heavy for them to carry, I imagine." He lit up, inhaled, and looked satisfied with his experimental vice.

Xander wondered if this mingled feeling of annoyance and insult was a familiar one. "You're a very sarcastic man," he mentioned. "And British--did you know that?"

"I say! Blimey, cor! Hadn't penetrated the old melon, chap! Ta ever so!"

"Bet you didn't know you're wearing eyeliner," Xander rejoined.

Spike's eyes widened in outrage. "Am not."

"Are too."

They both paused simultaneously, eyeing each other. "I have a feeling we know each other pretty well," Xander hazarded. Spike nodded in agreement, expression

undecided between relief and dismay at this deduction. "And apparently we rob banks together."

"Yeah," Spike said. "Must be--"

"There they are!" someone yelled at the mouth of the alley.

Xander jumped, his heartbeat skittering out from under him, and his whole body immediately shifted into running gear. He grabbed Spike's arm to pull him away, but it was like pulling on a tree. He staggered and rebounded back against Spike, who'd leaned down to snatch the money bag and didn't even oof on impact. "Come on!" Xander said, tugging again. Spike moved with him this time, then paused to grab the gun. Letting go of him, Xander legged it, but had to come to a sudden, heel-grinding halt when the other end of the alley filled with a wall of hulking, shadowed flesh straight out of a comic book. Spike slammed into him from behind, and Xander yelped.

"Wall! Wall of man-thing!" he yelled, pointing at the towering, alley-wide creature with blinding red eyes that Xander hoped amnesia would steal the memory of very soon, because otherwise he would have nightmares for years.

Spike sucked in a breath and yanked him to the side, shouldering his way through a door that splintered as if it were made of matchsticks. "This way," he said.

They stumbled into a room that stank of bodily fluids deposited with bad aim by men who had eaten too much asparagus. Xander shuddered and flinched as something unseen brushed his face. Laundry, maybe. Or else skin. Human skin, on a hanger! He flailed, panic rising, and banged into a piece of furniture. Pain! Pain now! Ow! He'd lost Spike, and he was trapped in a room of asparagus and skin and sentient, biting furniture, and the man-thing would be right behind him at any moment, which was a reasonable explanation for why he gave a girly-scream when a hand grabbed his shoulder.

"Keep up!" Spike growled.

"Sir, yes, sir," Xander breathed as he was swept along through the darkness in an urgency of leather. He wondered if this facetiousness was characteristic of him, and the fear--that worried him. Was it possible he was a wuss? Damn. He hoped not. Because that'd be--

Between one thought and the next, the floor went out from under him.

"Stairs here," Spike said curtly.

Xander, tumbling after him at a ninety-degree angle, couldn't draw quite enough breath to curse. He let his feet carry him after Spike, who apparently needed no breath whatsoever, damn him, besides being able to see in the dark. The boards beneath their feet creaked dangerously and felt soft, even rotten. Xander kept a handful of Spike's leather coat to guide him, and trusted that guidance as best he could. The other man was zig-zagging through a maze of what seemed to be boxes, based on the occasional shin impact. After a minute he stopped, paused, turned, and moved with more care. Eyes finally adjusting, it was just possible to pick out shapes in a dim grey light.

"Where are we?" Xander asked.

"Basement. Stairs to the street over there. C'mon."

They crept up again until reached a locked door set with a carelessly painted window that was letting through swabs of dirty light around the edges. Spike tried the handle, then reared back and kicked it open with one boot. Xander tried not to be impressed.

"I'm clearly the brains of the outfit," he reassured himself in a mutter as Spike bounded up the exterior stairs.

Outside, they found themselves in another nondescript alley, but at least not the same one as before. Xander peered around nervously, expecting comic book monsters at every turn. "Which way?"

"Er, this way." Spike strode off decisively, then stopped and turned on a dime. "This way," he said hurriedly. "Fast!"

Xander ran after him, feet pounding on cobblestones, kicking aside scattered newspapers and stray cans. They turned one corner, ran down a street lined with warehouses, turned another corner at what appeared to be random. Another street, another corner, and then they paused. Now what? he wondered. "Any of this look familiar to you?"

"No," Spike said. "You?"

"Nope."

"We can hide in here," Spike decided, looking up and down the grimy front of a brick building. A wide set of doors were peeling paint like bark, and a small red light glowed above them. He lifted a leg to kick at the handles.

"Wait," Xander said. He pulled at one of the doors, which opened easily. "Me brains. You boots," he said, the mocking earning him a charming scowl. He bowed and ushered Spike through, then strolled in on his heels and bumped almost at once into his back. "We're going to have to learn to coordinate," he began, "if we're going to--" And then he couldn't help but notice the array of colorful, inhuman faces looking back at them with interest, a raucous debate interrupted by their arrival.

One of their number, a small man wearing a red suit, feathered hat and quilted cape, stepped forward slowly and pushed his sunglasses down his nose. "Well, this certainly makes the search easier. On the other hand, not much sport to it." He smiled too brightly. "I guess we'll have to invent some new fun."

Part Two

"Do you know these people?" Xander whispered to Spike.

"I don't know anyone, you great marvelous git, including you."

Spike hadn't bothered to whisper, and now the man in the red suit chuckled and approached. He walked softly in exaggerated piratical boots, and carried a big stick with brilliant feathers on its knob. "Someone rain a little magic on your heads, boys? Might want to think about carrying an umbrella." There was something sly and knowing behind the nonsensical words, but Xander couldn't figure out what.

"What the hell are you on about?" Spike asked bluntly.

"Yeah, and who the hell are you?" Xander added, buoyed by Spike's aggressive stance--though keeping slightly behind him, just to be prudent.

"Me? Oh, no one important." Despite his claim, the man's voice oozed menace. "A small fry among fishes, a jack among kings, a jester of wishes, a beater of wings. But you can call me...Ray." It was strangely anticlimactic. Plus,

"Okay, what's up with the rhyming?"

Ray laughed and produced a rubber ball from thin air. He tossed and caught it a few times, half hypnotizing Xander before his fingers flashed, making the ball vanish, then reappear. "Here, boy. Catch!"

Xander instinctively threw up his hands as the ball arced his way, but right before it reached him it exploded into a bird, which hovered momentarily in the air, wings beating madly, spraying him and Spike with shiny rainbow confetti that smelled of chocolate and bananas. "What the--?" He interrupted himself to cough, waving his hand in front of his face. Spike jerked back with a look at his confetti-covered coat and dusted off the arms.

"Mind the leather!"

"Give that some time to sink in, kids," Ray said, "and then tell me what you think."

This Ray guy was a magician, Xander decided. That explained a lot, including the freakish looking line of creatures arrayed behind him. They must work for a circus. He was about to vocalize this for Spike's benefit, but the other man spoke first.

"I can tell you what I think right now, mate." Spike rolled his words into a pause and smiled. Then with utter suddenness he barked "Run!" at Xander and hot-footed it back toward the door they'd come through. Taken by surprise, Xander hesitated only a second before scrambling after him. As they raced away, he imagined a herd of buffalo thundering on their trail, but it might just have been his heart attack. He felt like he was dying--wait, hadn't he just gotten out of the hospital? Maybe he *was* dying. It felt like cancer of the feet, which were possibly going to turn black and fall off any moment now.

"How can you run like that?" he gasped to Spike, who was bounding ahead of him like a punk gazelle, twisting gracefully around trashcans and protruding dumpsters, and quite close to leaving him behind entirely by the looks of it. Except that as Xander rounded a corner, he ran bang into Spike, who was coming back around it. Xander hastily tried to switch gears, but didn't have to, because he was being

yanked forward again in an inhumanly tight grip. It took him a moment to realize that Spike hadn't been changing direction--he'd deliberately fallen back to collect him. A moment later and the man was tossing him up a fence as if he weighed nothing. By some weird instinct that went perfectly with his whole amnesiac misadventure, Xander clawed for purchase in the mesh and managed to hang on and swing himself across. He fell on his ass on the ground, and was pulling himself together when a bag of money landed on his head.

"Thanks a--"

Spike flowed over the fence and dropped next to him, cat-footed.

"--lot. Man, how do you *do* that? Oh, wait! I'm getting it--you're in the circus with those guys. We probably both are." That was food for thought, and a terrible piece of food struck him. "You don't think I'm a clown, do you?"

"Wasn't going to mention it," Spike said, pulling him to his feet. "Keep moving."

"I hate clowns," Xander huffed, breaking by sheer force of will into a fresh sprint. "I bet they kidnapped me at birth--raised me into their evil trade--I decided to escape--you're a trapeze--contortionist--I paid you--stole money from the ringmaster--to help--"

"Here," Spike said, stopping short. "We'll drop down this manhole. They'll never think to look for us there."

"We go down there," Xander said between breaths, "and I want my money back."

"*Your* money?" Spike laughed shortly and yanked the manhole cover off. "Here then. Hold the bag and oopsy-daisy, down you go."

It was a long drop and a wet splash, and as Xander turned his ankle he decided that when he got the chance he'd punch this Spike guy, even if he was kind of a hottie.

Part Three

"See, it's not so bad," Spike said, as Xander limped around the parking lot in a small circle, testing his weight. He looked up at Spike, whose head was tilted in close observation of his progress. With the sodium light behind him, his face was shadow, his hair a pale gleam. "You'll be prancing around again in no time."

"My ankle is an eggplant and I smell of sewage."

Hard to tell, but Spike seemed to be smiling a crooked smile. "And you don't even know if this is a novelty."

"Shut up." But Xander smiled back. And then grinned, and finally began to laugh, whooping into the silence of the parking lot's empty, stretching lanes, bending over to keep from falling. It was a minute before he caught his breath again. "Oh man, oh man...what in the seven monkey hells are we doing? Who *are* we?"

"Dunno. My ID card has an address, though."

Xander straightened up at this casually imparted information. "Yeah?"

Five minutes later they were on an empty downtown street trying to hail a taxi where there were none. "This town looks big enough for a taxi," Xander grumbled. "Wherever it is."

"Sunnydale, California," Spike said matter of factly, though it clearly meant nothing to either of them. He looked up a taxi service and dialed their number as Xander paced the sidewalk and craned his neck, expecting to see a taxi any moment, despite the empty promise of the street. "Lo. Need a taxi. Yeah. Uh, First Street, near the cemet--hello? Hello?" Spike glared at the phone in bafflement. "Bloke hung up on me."

He dialed another and another, growing increasingly enraged. "Think that's funny, you cretinous git?" Spike shouted at one point into the phone. "Why don't you get off your great grinning fanny then and wheel one of your junkheaps down here so I can--oh, *bloody* bugging hell!" He flung the phone at its cradle then abruptly ripped it out by the cord and beat the case until coins poured out like a slot-machine jackpot. When he stopped he seemed as surprised as Xander at the broken phone in

his hand, and the results of his attack. "Don't know my own strength," he muttered, dropping the now useless equipment.

"Well, at least you got us some change. We can use it for vending machines. Easier than breaking a hundred." Xander swept it into their money bag.

"Can't be far, anyway. Address says Tenth Street."

Nine blocks later they stood in front of a vacant lot, staring at a cat who blinked twice at them then loped off in search of more interesting company.

"Nice place," Xander said. "What it lacks in ambiance it makes up for in garbage. Of course, what it lacks in *roof* it makes up for in *nothing*." He turned in resigned irritation to Spike. "So you've got a phony ID. Why am I not surprised?"

"Says the man with none at all."

"At least I have a comfy bed waiting for me at the hospital," Xander retorted, then broke off to meet Spike's widening eyes with his own.

Part Four

"Hi, I'm Xander Harris and I'm looking for my bed." Xander smiled winningly at the suspicious nurse behind the counter. "And maybe my wallet."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I think I checked out of here in a hurry." Xander held up his wrist to display his ID cuff. "I don't actually remember. Could be those drugs you were pumping into me," he speculated with broad good cheer. The nurse stared, then dragged herself to her feet and grabbed his wrist to read the cuff. After a few seconds her expression changed and she let go his wrist. Eyeballing him warily, she made a point of crossing the station to use a wall phone instead of the one on her desk, and began muttering into it.

"Looks like you didn't pay your bill, mate," Spike said cynically.

Xander tried to quash his uneasiness. "Guess I can now."

"Are you mad? Toss our hard-earned money away on hospital bills? I *don't* think so."

From ninety-nine out of a hundred people this would have been a joke. Xander felt sure of this, even though he couldn't name a hundred people he knew. He could in fact name only one, who happened to be Spike, a strange man who was quite obviously appalled at the thought of giving perfectly good cash away to undeserving medical professionals. In the harsh fluorescent lights of the hospital, Xander noticed for the first time how unusual looking Spike was, with his pale skin and penciled-on eyebrows. The blond-white shock of his hair might have branded him a Billy Idol wannabe, but who wanted to look like Billy Idol these days? Which assumed Xander knew when these days were, and he didn't really, but they *felt* post-Billy Idol. It was the kind of thing you just knew in your gut. Anyway, Spike didn't need to try and look like anyone else. He carried an exaggerated, cinematic air about him, like a movie bad-ass who'd taken a wrong turn and wound up in this very mundane hallway, and it was an air that had nothing to do with the expense of his clothes but everything to do with drama. The battered leather coat, scuffed ass-kicker boots, and threadbare jeans were a second skin, and the snaky line of his hips said he'd shed them in an instant and do nasty things to you, maybe with a knife, maybe just with his body.

"Yeah," Xander said in a slow voice, as the light in the hallway pulsed and sharpened, "we wouldn't want to do that." Spike's blue eyes held his with intensity and then he tilted his head. Xander saw glitter on his jawline, matching the glitter on his coat he hadn't been able to brush off entirely. They seemed of one mind, and when Spike flicked his tongue across his lower lip, Xander lost breath and motor function in one big whoosh of awe.

"Plenty of beds in a hospital," Spike murmured. "Even if we can't find yours."

"Uh huh," Xander croaked, spellbound by his mouth, which had just said something interesting as it moved in undreamed of ways. He blinked and caught up. "Bed?"

"Mmm."

"I don't suppose there's any chance we're related," Xander said breathlessly while Spike eased closer. "Distant cousins..."

"Don't think I care."

Oh brother, Xander thought, and then Spike sniffed his neck and all thoughts shorted out as a scalding wave of lust rolled down through his body. "Holy homosexuals," he said in a prayerful manner. "I think we're gay."

"Er, yeah," Spike said distractedly, drawing back and staring over his shoulder. "Say, it might be a good time to leave."

And who was arguing? "Great! Fantastic! Let's go! Hotel, I'm thinking--"

"All right, Mister Harris. You came home on your own. Good boy. Why don't we just take a walk--"

Xander turned at the voice behind him and looked up into the face of a very big man wearing orderly whites, with a matching pal looming next to him. "Um, hey, yeah--actually, it turns out I don't need a bed after all. Well, I do need a bed. But uh--you know, I'll just be going. Sorry to bother you--hey!" The orderlies had taken his arms and were walking him away from Spike at a brisk pace. "Help! What are you doing?"

"Just taking you back to the ward, son, where you can rejoin the other crazies. They've missed you, you know. Hasn't been the same since you left."

"There's cake tonight," said the other orderly. "Isn't there, Phil?"

"That's right," said Phil. "Chocolate."

"Cake? Oh, well..." Faking interest, Xander jerked abruptly, trying to free himself from their grips, but merely ended up swinging with his feet off the ground like a kid on a jungle gym. "Let me go! Spike!"

"Oof," said Phil, suddenly tumbling to the ground and nearly yanking Xander's left arm out of its socket as he did. One moment riding his back like a pouncing tiger, Spike yelled with wrath and rolled off, clutching his head. "Son of a bitch!" he howled, and hit Phil with the bag of money, clearly blaming him for whatever pain he'd suffered. As the bag impacted, he shouted again with baffled outrage, his face a

mask of agony. A few bills fluttered loose and drifted to the tiles. As the other orderly let go of Xander's arm and lunged for Spike, Xander tripped him, sending him sprawling across Phil's prone form.

"Come on," he said to Spike, pulling the other man to his feet. Spike groaned and let himself be guided down the hall toward the exit at a lurching run.

It seemed only sensible to take the car that was idling outside the emergency doors, especially since the anxious parents-to-be probably wouldn't be back to park it anytime soon. Driving off, Xander promised himself he'd leave it somewhere with keys intact and a thank-you note. If they were criminals, they could at least be responsible ones. Of course, now it appeared he might be something more than a criminal.

"I'm an escaped mental patient," he realized aloud.

Spike, slumped in the passenger seat, eyed him blearily. "There's a shocker."

"Hey, I haven't done anything crazy!" Xander protested, before pausing a judicious moment. "Yet." He paused again. "That I know of."

"You'd better live up to your paperwork, then." Spike, recovering quickly from his attack, slid across the seat and licked Xander's ear. The wheel creaked in Xander's tightening hands and the car began to veer drunkenly toward the lane divider. He only realized his eyes had closed when he heard a flurry of car horns protest. His eyes flew open again and he wrenched the car out of oncoming traffic. Spike, indifferent to the danger, chewed Xander's shoulder and slid a hand between his legs.

"Whoa!" Xander flailed at him, trying to dislodge hand or mouth, whatever he could reach. "Seat belt! Seat! This isn't a good idea!" Spike laughed and worked his hand across the fly of Xander's jeans. "Okay, no," Xander said weakly. "Cut it out. Oh. Oh. Oh crap--the cops!"

He yanked on the wheel and Spike tumbled away against the dash, swearing in violent surprise, but whatever he said Xander couldn't hear under the sudden wail of guitar music from the car's CD player. His eyes zipped back and forth between the whirl of blue lights nearing in the rear-view mirror and the road ahead. Sirens added to the cacophony in his head, and he yelled for Spike to turn off the music as he

sped the car through a red light and around a corner. When it kept playing, he spared an irritated glance sideways. A bar of light slid through the darkness of the car to momentarily illuminate Spike's face, wild-eyed and grinning like a madman at the cops behind him. And oh fuck, of course they were both crazy, they'd probably met in an institution somewhere and made a career of springing each other out, and now fate was catching up with them and they were going to die, die, die.

It took most of his broken concentration to keep the car ahead of the cops and on the road, but the next time he looked over Spike was hanging half out of the window, one hand wrapped in his seat belt as he anchored himself and braced his body into the whipping wind. "What the hell are you doing?" Xander shouted in wide-eyed disbelief, then heard the first gunshot. Shocked, he threw himself back into driving. A hazy intuition of chase scenes told him he needed to keep the car a moving target, so he aimed it into the oncoming lane and back again, thankful that the road remained empty and terrified that it wouldn't remain that way.

Spike kept his hold even as the car zig-zagged from lane to lane, emptying his gun at the cops. "Whooo!" he cried, and finally slithered back in through the window. "I got a tire," he crowed, checking the chamber of the gun to confirm it was empty.

"Mazal tov." Xander watched the police car spin to a halt in the middle of the road and begin to dwindle with distance. It was then he realized his dick was hard and he was breathing like a boxer mid-match, and he needed--oh, fuck. With unerring timing, Spike tossed the gun aside and crawled across the seat, head disappearing below Xander's field of vision. He bit his lip and clenched his hands on the wheel, gaze wildly panning to figure out where he could safely park. With pangs of relief and horror he felt his zipper slide open to release him. A wet, cool mouth engulfed him and he arched into the seat, digging his heels in for purchase as he shoved deeper, incidentally accelerating the car toward a street light. He gasped and somehow managed during moments of cross-eyed ecstasy to pry his foot from the pedal and bump the car off the road, over the curb, and into a heap of shrubbery that fully engulfed the vehicle and hid it from view.

After braking and shifting into park, he threw his head back and panted for oxygen, the stuff of dear life. The CD ended, leaving them in silence. His hands dropped to Spike's hair and clung in its tendrils and discovered the nape of his neck, so cool to the touch, like Japanese ice cream in a skin of mochi, and how he knew that he

didn't know, just like two hours ago he hadn't known he'd like this, but he did. Maybe they could have ice cream afterwards.

As if finally sensing the car was no longer in motion, Spike popped up from his lap. Xander groaned piteously at the loss, Spike growled and shifted across him, there was a jiggling and then a crack, and the seat fell back with both of them in it, Spike landing across Xander in a heap of buttery leather and muscle. Oh, much better. And the fun just got funner when Spike straddled him and yanked his own jeans open, bumping his head against the roof in the process. Xander giggled. Spike snarled and dropped on him like a big cat, pissed off and horny. The heavy drape of his body took Xander's breath away.

"You taste like a banana split," he said after they'd kissed for a minute.

"Thought that was you," Spike murmured, thrusting his hips.

"Oh," Xander commented intelligently, as their dicks slid back and forth together. "God, your--that's--" He had a lot of compliments on the tip of his tongue, but Spike's tongue was there too and he couldn't quite bring the words out. It felt like Spike was trying to eat his face, his teeth sharp and bitey and his lips hungry, and when he moved to gnaw neckward, Xander began to bang his head against the car seat, it was so good. Spike tore his shirt open, wrestled his own coat off, and a frantic kindling built around their hips as they struggled. Xander's hands grabbed blindly and latched onto a wooden pole, and then a weird pulpy plastic, which he clawed for purchase. A moment later his hand was full of...dirt? He turned his head and saw a tumble of garden equipment and bagged mulch in the back seat.

"Fuck," Spike said, his cheek skidding across Xander's, voice cracking in his ear. A flame lit under Xander's skin and rippled down his body, and all distractions were instantly forgotten as he writhed desperately upward.

"Right there!" he said fiercely, when Spike's cock rolled gloriously across his, balls dragging up his shaft. "God, right there!" He clutched Spike's hips and nearly sobbed as Spike repeated the motion. The other man's face was like a sharp moon above him, one crescent cheekbone white and the other in shadow, his eyes inky and wide, lips parted as he gasped. Xander tried to force his legs wider and began to kick one foot against the car's dashboard. The CD player leapt into song again, guitar licks filling the car as he approached the shiny light at the end of the tunnel that was the biggest orgasm he'd ever had--the first, from a certain point of view,

which was his, his, his--and he was just feeling an immense joy and gratitude, and feeling every cell in his body split apart with nuclear fission, when he kicked the gear shift and sent the car back into drive.

"Oh god, *yeah*," Spike gritted out, his face so shocked and strained he looked as if he were dying, and Xander felt the spattering of his come. His own rising panic as the car bumped and thrashed forward through the foliage was suddenly vented into the perfect erotic pitch, and he cried out as he climaxed. Shudders of bliss went through him and nearly peaked again as they smacked hard into something and tried to climb over it, engine churning.

"Car," he croaked. "Turn off the engine."

Spike, melting across him, ignored the command. Xander tried to wriggle out from underneath and right himself, but it was hopeless and he flopped back a few moments later, his body feeling like a large, soft glazed doughnut, a condition he identified as perfect contentment.

Except for the car, which was a nagging worry, as they might be about to drive back into traffic.

"Get up," he said, not moving, eyes shut. "Get up and turn off the car."

"Yeah."

Part Five

After they'd risen from their shared stupor and shut off the car, and climbed out (fumbling with their clothes and half-falling to the ground like a pair of stoners), they discovered they were in a graveyard. The car had driven itself half onto a sloped headstone and hung from it, one wheel in the air, the other mired in sod. Xander wasn't able to find anything on which to write a thank-you note, but he insisted on leaving some money in the trunk. Spike grumbled but let it pass.

"It's getting light," Xander said as they trudged out the cemetery gates. The sky was grey, just beginning to pink at the edges. "You hungry?"

"Bloody starving." Spike's face was a tense frown, as if troublesome thoughts were massing, but all guys had their moods, and Xander didn't pay much attention.

"There's a coffee shop."

Spike seemed unenthused, but didn't protest as Xander led them inside and took a booth. He scanned his menu with restless eyes and kept staring out the window, where the lightening sky was bringing cars and shopfronts into distinct view. Xander ordered eggs, bacon, pancakes and coffee. Spike shrugged at the waitress's inquiring look and said, "Whatever."

"He'll have the same," Xander said. After she left, he kicked Spike under the table. He'd meant it to be kind of companionable, but Spike glared at him morosely. "What's up?"

"Dunno. I feel..." He searched for words, brows knifing together like fierce black wings. "Wired up, like. I'm all on edge."

"Smoke another cigarette," Xander suggested dryly.

Spike's absent expression didn't change. "Yeah. Might help." He pulled out his smokes, lit one, and dragged the ashtray toward himself.

Feeling a bit scattered, Xander began bouncing his fork up and down by the prongs. "After breakfast we should get a room. Set up a base for our investigations."

"Investigations?"

"Someone in this town has to know who we are." His voice lowered. "Someone besides the authorities and those wacky cats in the warehouse."

"So far the odds of running up against someone friendly aren't exactly falling in our favor," Spike said skeptically.

"Well, yeah, Mister Shoots-at-Cops." Xander heard a small note of stridency in his voice and glanced around to make sure no one had heard his remark.

"Oh, and you were gonna outrun them?" Derision laced Spike's voice.

"I...could've."

Their food came and Xander tucked in eagerly. Only after he'd gotten down a few mouthfuls did he notice Spike picking at his food. "Now what?" he asked around a mouthful of toast. "If you wanted fried, you should've said something."

Spike lifted a pancake dubiously then let it fall. Xander watched, fork poised halfway to his mouth, as the other man poked the eggs, shoved some toast around idly, then picked up a slice of bacon and sniffed finickily. With a look of boredom he dropped it and pushed his plate away. Sighing, he picked up his cigarette again and took a long-suffering drag.

"You know, it's really not that bad," Xander said, and then a thought occurred to him. "Hey--maybe you're a vegetarian."

With a head cock, Spike gave this consideration. "Don't think so. Bacon looks the tastiest." He ostentatiously geared himself up to give the bacon another try. He bit a piece in half, swallowed, shrugged, and finished it.

Xander shook his head and worked on his own meal while Spike drank coffee and brooded. They paid and left as the cafe began to get busy. No one seemed inclined to identify them as wanted criminals. Things were looking up.

"Okay, where to?" Xander asked as they walked outside. "Are we the bed-and-breakfast type, or Motel 6 guys?"

"With the money in that bag, we can stay at the Hilton." Despite the warm air, Spike hunched himself deeper into his coat as he strode alongside Xander.

"Yeah, but--" Xander glanced at him, paused. "Um, don't freak out, but I think you're on fire somewhere."

Spike glanced down at himself, wisps of smoke curling off his body. Xander couldn't tell where it was coming from, and could only guess that Spike had absent-mindedly put a cigarette out in his pocket, but as Spike began patting himself down in confusion, the tips of his hair went up in tiny flames. Shocked, Xander began beating at him. Spike yelped and dragged his coat over his head, and that seemed to help things up top, but his hands were smoking now, and Xander was horrified to see patches of red spreading across his skin. Some connection he didn't even know he was making clicked and he hustled Spike under an awning.

"What the *hell*?" Spike let his coat drop back down to his shoulders and felt gingerly at his hair, which had escaped mostly unscathed, except for a little crisping at the ends.

"Well, either you're wearing *incredibly* flammable hair spray, which you managed to get all over your hands--or you've got a bizarre medical condition that makes you allergic to sunlight." As Xander spoke, his words slowed and petered into nothing, his brain trying to make sense of what his eyes were telling him. The plate-glass window of the store they stood in front of was a perfect reflective surface, and he could see himself in it just fine. But not Spike.

"You're a vampire!" he said accusingly, the pieces falling into place.

Spike stared at him in amazed disgust. "Don't be daft. There's no such thing."

"Oh yeah? Explain how you're all flamey in the sun then, and you have no reflection--and you didn't want to eat!--not *food* anyway. Because you're a bloodsucking fiend. I bet you don't even have a pulse!"

"Course I do." Spike sighed and made a show of checking his pulse, his expression gradually changing from irritation to alarm, his hands jerking as he tried both wrists, then his neck.

"See?!" Xander backed a few steps away, making the sign of the cross, the money bag bumping awkwardly on his arm. "Stay back!"

"Oh, please. If I was gonna bite you'd I'd have done it by now, wouldn't I?"

"You *did* bite me!" And it had been damn good, Xander was forced to remember, a sudden full-body blush soothing away the edge of his fear. He cleared his throat.

"Okay, nibbled."

"Mmm." Spike smiled in a sultry, gleaming-eyed way that Xander couldn't help but associate now with *vampire*.

A woman walked by, giving them an odd look, and Xander gathered his addled wits and made a decision. He took a deep breath. "I guess we should find someplace out of the sun."

Part Six

The hotel wasn't much to look at, but it was the closest, and given Spike's tendency to combust that was the important thing. Its exterior was peeling paint, the lobby plants were dusty plastic, and the number on their room door hung upside down. Once inside, Spike turned on the TV set and sat on the end of the bed to watch, as immediately absorbed as a ten-year old by the pretty colors.

Standing by the door, Xander stared at him with equal fascination until Spike finally noticed and looked over. "What?"

"So...are you, uh, craving blood?"

"I suppose so. Wouldn't say no to a cuppa something hot."

"Eww." The stitch of nausea in Xander's belly wasn't feigned.

"You asked."

"Forgive me if I don't open a vein, pal. And by the way, you seem to be dealing a bit too well with this--this--" He waved a hand. "Vampy lifestyle thing."

"S what I am, innit?" Spike, attention dragged away from Regis, was looking irritable again. "What do you want me to do, rend my clothes and weep 'O woe is me'?"

"A little remorse for your unholy state wouldn't hurt, I'm thinking."

"I'll angst later. After my nap." He scooted back across the bed and piled a couple of pillows behind him. Getting as comfortable as you please, thought Xander. "There won't be any rending of clothes, though," he added in afterthought. "I've only got what I'm wearing."

It seemed pointless to argue. On the other hand, Xander kind of suspected they argued a lot. Whatever relationship existed between them--and dear lord, let's pause a moment to savor the insanity of *that*--seemed to have a life of its own, a bipolar current that clearly didn't need memory to keep it running.

How the hell had he gotten hooked up with a vampire, he wondered as he sat on his own bed. This said disturbing things about him, he was sure. Unhappy home life, bad upbringing. He had probably been a juvenile delinquent, spent some time behind bars, kicked in and out of foster care. Oh yeah. He could feel the certainty growing as he soaked in his surroundings--the musty bedspreads, scratched table, and shabby carpets all felt strangely like home to him. He was a troublemaker from the wrong side of the tracks, Spike his vampire biker boyfriend, and one day he'd acted out too far and the pigs had picked him up, sent him to crazy-town. Spike, not the sort to let his fella get locked up without a fight, busted him loose, and they'd robbed a bank (or something--this part was vague in his imagination), and then they'd...they'd what? They'd both gotten knocked on the head?

Xander decided a nap was a good idea.

Part Seven

When Xander woke up, the room's shadows were deeper and Spike's mouth was on the back of his neck. He would have been more nervous about this if Spike hadn't been licking hot sweet paths into his hairline, if his hand hadn't been wrapped around Xander's dick, if he hadn't been making British-y little purring sounds.

"You awake yet, pet?"

"Parts of me are."

They did some more of the sex thing which Xander was beginning to decide he liked. After all, who didn't like sex? Even sex with vampires. Or, especially sex with vampires. Still not sure of that one yet. Entirely naked sex was a new twist,

and so was sex in bed. All good. And when it turned out Spike had the oral talents of a thousand-dollar whore, Xander discovered that grown men could weep. A happy, happy discovery.

A few hours later, body sore in a number of interesting places, Xander woke up again to find Spike draped over his chest. His head was round and heavy and fuzzy like a curled-up cat, and the back of his neck and muscular shoulders flickered with light from the TV. Xander watched the news in silence over the grassy knoll of his hair. After a minute or ten, someone's stomach growled--he couldn't tell whose--and Spike shifted, yawned, and propped himself up to study Xander.

"We're going to have to figure out the blood thing really soon," Xander said. "Because that look on your face right now is wiggling me the fuck out."

Spike almost managed to look contrite. "Sorry, love. Feeling peckish." He shoved upright and ran his hands through his hair, then pulled on his jeans.

"Where do you get blood, I wonder?" Xander got dressed as well, thinking aloud. "Maybe a butcher shop?"

"Right," Spike snarked in a not-unfriendly way. "And there's sure to be an all-night butcher's right around the corner."

Funnily enough, there was. More funnily, they didn't seem at all surprised when Spike asked to buy a few pints of pig's blood. In fact, they had plastic containers of it handy in the fridge, and the man in the stained apron bagged four of them, along with a stack of napkins.

"Okay, *that* was...odd," Xander said as they walked away, the implications of their shopping trip taking unpleasant shape in his mind.

Ignoring him, Spike drew out a container of blood and peeled back the lid. He raised it like a ballpark beer cup.

"Whoa!" Xander stopped in his tracks, freaking out. "What are you doing? You can't just drink that on the street!"

Spike lowered the container. "Why not?" he asked in a too reasonable voice.

"I don't know, maybe because it's *blood*? Besides, don't you want some time to get used to the idea?"

For the first time since Xander had met him, Spike's expression lost some of its gloss and turned honest, even rueful. He took a breath, exhaled hard. "If I think about it, I'm liable to lose my nerve." He held the container in front of him, gazing a moment into its depths, then drank.

Sickened but unable to tear his eyes away, Xander watched as he swallowed with increasing greed. When he lowered the container, there was a smeared trace of red at the corner of his mouth. Spike licked it clean and grimaced pensively.

"How was it?" Xander asked, feeling his stomach turn over.

"Terrible." He paused. "Hits the spot, though." The contradiction seemed to piss him off, and Xander couldn't blame him. Having to drink blood to keep your grave-cold body animated struck him as a grossly unnatural fate--worse than death in the most literal sense. Except that here was Spike, walking and talking and smoking cigarettes, having sex and bacon and really not all the worse for wear.

"Do you suppose we went out before?" Xander wondered aloud.

Spike looked up from his dinner. "Say again?"

"Before you died--do you suppose we were, you know, dating?"

"What does it matter?"

"I don't know." They resumed walking to the hotel, and Xander's thoughts meandered on their own track. "It's more romantic, isn't it? I mean, if you died and came back from the grave, and I was all torn up because I realized I still loved you, even though you were the living dead--or is that zombies?"

"You love me?" Spike's head tilted as he looked sidelong with interest.

"I'm just saying." Xander shook the question off. "How likely are we to have met *after*?"

"You've got a point."

"Don't look now," Xander said, ducking his head away from the street. "Cops." The patrol car passed them on the other side of the road at normal speed, and he tried to act like any ordinary person would who wasn't wanted by the law, but couldn't resist a glance over his shoulder. Were they slowing down? He squinted. "Crap. Brake lights."

They ducked out of sight into an alley and came up around the back of the hotel. With a flurry of haste they grabbed the money and gun and retreated down the stairs again as the squad car was pulling into the lot below.

Xander kept looking behind them for blocks. "I don't think they saw us."

"Probably getting a sniff of the bedsheets right about now."

"So this is life on the lam. *Not* really growing on me, to be honest."

"You're doing all right." Spike slung a companionable arm around his shoulder. "Good eyes, quick reflexes." As if to test his praise, he abruptly swung Xander around, crushing him close. Xander gasped into the kiss and then let himself go, eyes closed, tongue slippery with traces of blood. Not so bad. He could get used to it.

Or then again, he already had.

Part Eight

"L.A.?" Xander repeated over the babble of the sports bar. Someone's arm jostled his, almost spilling his beer. "Why do you want to go there?"

"Because it's not here." Spike licked salt from his hand, slammed back a shot of tequila, and bit his lime in quick, graceful motions that Xander followed with his eyes like a dog watching tennis. Vampire or not, his boyfriend was cool. "Sunnydale's obviously trouble for us," he continued. "L.A.'s not more than a two-

hour drive." He tapped one finger on the map for emphasis, then headed off to a table with his beer. Xander followed.

"We don't have a car," he pointed out.

"We're *car* thieves," Spike shot back, articulating the words as if Xander were slightly thick. "And we have great wads of cash." With oblivious satisfaction he patted the gym bag that sat plunked in the middle of the table.

A few heads at nearby tables turned, eyes drawn by unerring instinct to a source of ill-gotten gains. Xander smiled nervously at them. "Ha ha," he said loudly. "What, my old boxing gloves? Money?" Hunching his shoulders, he whispered across the table: "Are you *trying* to get us mugged?"

"Relax," Spike commanded in a sure drawl, gazing around the bar the way a king might survey his domain. He did look dangerously in his element here, surrounded by dart boards and pool tables and spilled whiskey, even though the bar patrons were beefy, bearded types who didn't look inclined to rub shoulders with faggots, which they unquestionably were, especially here, where a high-school degree would probably brand you an intellectual and hair dye was the kiss of death. Xander tried not to notice the glances aimed their way.

"Relax, right. Hey, I've got an idea. Let's relax somewhere other than here. We could take in a movie." He stood up and jiggled his foot impatiently, but Spike remained seated, and eventually Xander retook his own chair.

"Think I might have a game of billiards," Spike said musingly. "See if we can't earn some interest on our funds."

"No, no, and emphatically no!" Xander shook his finger at the vampire.

Part Nine

And of course that really worked.

Xander kept one hand splayed over his face and peered out through his fingers as Spike spun the cue ball lazily across the table to land another shot in the corner

pocket. "I say," he piped in a fruity voice pitched an octave higher than his natural one, "that was a bit of luck, what?"

His opponent glowered like an ill-tempered buffalo. "Yeah. Damn lucky." The man caught his friend's eye, and a long, meaningful look was exchanged. "Funny how much *luckier* you keep getting the longer we play."

"Well, I'm learning the game, aren't I?" Spike asked earnestly, eyes wide. Xander swallowed a groan and half hid behind his fingers again. "It's only natural I'd get better. I must say, it's far less difficult than I expected. Easy-peasey, once you get the hang of it." Jauntily, he chalked his cue. "Do I get another shot now?"

"Yes," his opponent--Biff, Jeff, Tuff?--growled.

"Oh, marvelous."

The dread of knowing exactly what was coming was eased only slightly by Xander's hope that his amnesia might be progressive and he would someday forget it all. He watched Spike lose the game with a few artfully mis-shot balls and hand over a stack of bills to Tuff, who, suspicions deflected, took them with renewed commitment to the game, aided by an 'accidental' glimpse of the gym bag's contents. The stakes for their rematch rose precariously, and Spike bent to take his opening shot, paused, and smiled winsomely at Xander, who smiled weakly back.

The balls broke and scattered with a resounding smack, three of them ricocheting to drop with graceful aplomb into waiting pockets. Tuff and his pal Little Tuff watched with tightening jaws as Spike sunk shot after shot, swaggering around the pool table with increasingly less effort to hide his smirk or his skills. He handily won. They'd never had a chance, and the curdling rage of their faces as the realization struck was not a pretty sight.

"Lovely game, lads." Spike picked up his money and pocketed it. The side of his coat bulged. "Hope we'll have a chance to play again when I'm in town."

Xander tightened his grip on the bag he'd been given to hold and slid off his stool, brazening a polite smile at the crowd closing in. "Nice to meet ya," he murmured, easing to Spike's side.

A meaty hand fell on his arm. "Don't run off so fast, kid." Little Tuff filled Xander's field of view, mouth flattening. He really wasn't all that little. "We need to talk to your *friend* here." He put an unpleasant emphasis on his words. A period of obligatory verbal sparring followed, leaving Xander with only a hazy impression of Tuff's fury and Spike's enjoyment, and then punches flew and suddenly the world snapped into sharp focus and real-time, full of sounds and smells and sensation, bellows and beer and sweat and pain. Xander held onto the gym bag with utter force of will and lashed out at their attackers, but a solid blow dropped him quickly to the floor, from which vantage he watched Spike ward off blows like a windmill, laughing. It was only when his frustrated opponents paused briefly to regroup that he finally bothered to strike back, but when he did, one punch laid the nearest man out flat. The only trouble was, it felled Spike too, sending him howling to the floor next to Xander, hands clutched to his temples.

That was *not* in the script, and the cold wash of fear that swept over Xander lent him an unexpected determination. He jerked the gun from Spike's pocket and stood, brandishing it at the crowd, who fell back with alarm. Flicking the safety off, he cocked the trigger and aimed at the nearest heavy's head. The man blanched and raised his hands. His beer bottle dropped to the floor with a hollow sound, punctuating the silence that followed.

"We'll be leaving now," Xander told him, rolling the words carefully off his tongue. "And it would help a lot if you'd clear a path to the door."

"Yeah, sure, friend." With obliging haste, the man used his massively tattooed arms to shove the others aside. No one resisted.

"Thanks." Xander glanced around, then nudged gently Spike with his shoe. "C'mon. Up we go." He helped Spike stagger to his feet and led him out the now pin-drop quiet bar, giving him an extra shove as they neared the door and then backing out after him, gun trained on the crowd, who with the inevitability of their genre were sure to regain courage and flood out after them as soon as it was safe. This in mind, he paused at the exit. "First man who comes out after us, I shoot," he said in clear, cold voice. He crooked up one side of his mouth. "Nothing personal."

Outside, the night was dark and cool on his hot skin. Spike leaned against a car, looking as if he might be sick, but pushed himself off and staggered gamely into a run alongside Xander as they put distance between them and the Rusty Rake.

"Time to get more bullets for that gun," Spike said as they were loping down what Xander counted to be their five hundred and fifteenth alley in two days.

"No, it's time to get *rid* of the gun before we shoot someone with it." Stopping under a security light, he wiped the weapon clean of fingerprints and threw it in a trash can. When he turned to leave, Spike barred his way, shoulders set. He might have looked dangerous to anyone who hadn't seen him try to fight, but when he spoke his voice was calm.

"It's always useful to have a weapon."

"Tough. I've decided we're honest, non-violent criminals."

The other man looked disappointed, then annoyed. "Who died and made you boss?"

"Apparently you did, vamp-boy. Especially since you drop like a Raggedy Ann doll every time you hit someone."

His shoulders slumped a little. "Noticed that, did you." He sounded embarrassed.

"Kinda hard to miss." Xander felt a moment's honest pity for him, the kind you'd feel for any guy who hit the mats that hard in a fight. "What happened to you back there?"

"Hurts." Spike touched the side of his head. "Like lightning going all through me." He winced at the memory, or at the remnants of pain. Xander reached out and replaced Spike's fingers with his own, stroking the skin of his temple. The pity he'd felt was replaced by something else too, a mushy goodness, and he knew that if he'd had his memory, there'd have been other associations for this feeling--other people he'd woken up next to, different eyes looking at him, living eyes maybe. But he didn't feel as if he was missing anything or anyone, and he had to trust that. He had to trust something.

With an intense, seeking gaze Spike held his. "You were quite a picture, though." His voice was a low husk. "Gun in hand. All rough and tough and," his eyes flicked down, "hard."

Xander's lips parted as if to reply and Spike walked into him and they kissed hungrily, and their chests and hips and knees kissed through the friction of clothing, and Xander moaned breathily into Spike's mouth. The money bag dropped, and

welded together they lurched toward the wall and crashed into it. Spike's shoulders flexed on the bricks like wings as Xander shoved forward, laddering his body against all that hard muscle, trying to climb a little closer to home. He didn't know who the hell he was, or who Spike was, but god this felt right. Xander wrenched both their zippers down and Spike gasped and lifted his chin and twisted his entire body like a snake as their cocks rubbed together, wet and messy at the heads. Spike's hands clung to Xander's ass and drew him close with hard, strong thrusts that sent shockwaves into his balls. He buried his face in Spike's neck and bit hard and felt the vampire's throat arch, his body seize as he cried out in guttural passion. Xander felt something shift strangely against his cheek, and raising his head saw a yellow-eyed demon straight out of hell, lips drawn back to reveal sharp fangs, brows ridged in a frieze of perplexity or rage or ecstasy. He gasped once and then danced in an arc, toes barely brushing the ground as Spike whirled him against the wall and held him pinned there with inhuman power. He was going to die, that was certain.

But possibly not for years and years.

Spike, groaning, shifted his hips and resumed a frantic rhythm. Xander sucked in ragged breaths and tried to make his toes reach the ground and failing that felt himself begin to escalate toward a climax so intense he thought he might black out. He gripped Spike's shoulders and kissed him roughly, cutting his tongue on the other man's fangs. A shudder worked through Spike's body and was answered in his. It felt like they were dancing, but their mouths were filling with blood and it was something different, even wilder, and as Xander spun out into orbit, his come striping Spike's belly, he knew that he'd never be able to remember anything as amazing as this.

Part Ten

"So this is L.A."

Xander leaned his head out the window of their non-violently stolen and hotwired car and let the diesel fumes and residual smog bathe his face. Ahead of them, a web of lights was shaping up into the outline of a city far bigger than the one they'd left behind.

Dawn was already approaching again though as they entered the city proper, and the sight of it unnerved Xander. He kept looking over at Spike, expecting to see him burst into flames. They made it to a hotel with minutes to spare. Their lodgings were a step up this time. Several steps, and they led to a marbled foyer with a fountain splashing in the middle and giant potted palms circling the edges. Spike sauntered to the check-in counter and tossed down some bills, which fanned themselves out like a winning hand of cards. "Give us the honeymoon suite," he said with a cocky smile.

The desk clerk, unmistakably gay and clearly used to celebrity eccentricities, began typing into his computer. "Very good, sir," he said smoothly. "How many nights?"

"No nights," said Spike. "Days. Start with a week's worth, then we'll see." He turned and lounged against the counter, eyeing Xander like a particularly favorable piece of luggage. Xander grinned.

Ten minutes later their grungy clothes were on the way to the laundry, carried off by a friendly Mexican maid (who, given a bill of large denomination, pretended not to notice the spunk stains on their jeans) and the two of them were soaking in a jacuzzi with an open bottle of Stoli on the tiles. "Good service," Xander said, resting his head on the tub's rim.

"Five star," Spike murmured, burying himself in bubbles, first up to his sloping shoulders, then to his chin, before he finally vanished under the water's surface, leaving only a lilypad of stiff white curls behind. The lilypad floated toward Xander, who watched it with slitted eyes. Hands, their temperature raised by water to a living heat, slid up his legs, and then the lilypad sank.

"Oh god," Xander said, eyes falling shut, his body sliding further into the tub. "Oh my god."

So vampires didn't need to breathe, it turned out, and this was a fine thing.

Part Eleven

Day was for sleeping and fucking and eating and Lifetime television, and then it was night again, the city laid out below them like a web of diamonds. A breeze imported from somewhere far north of southern California was coming through the open balcony doors, lifting the drapes and ruffling Xander's hair, sending a few stray Benjamin Franklins fluttering across the bedspread. The drapes and carpet were dark, the walls paneled in glossy wood, the lights indirect. It was a men's club passing as a hotel, its interior fitted out as neatly as a ship's cabin, lit here and there with low, indirect lights installed by designers with great sympathy for the tastes of the wealthy, of which class Xander was now a member.

"...one hundred and fifty, two hundred and fifty, three hundred and fifty." He placed the last bill down on its pile, feeling slightly dazed. "Two hundred and twelve thousand, three hundred and fifty dollars."

Spike turned his head, the movement crinkling the messier, previously counted bills that Xander had heaped on him like dry autumn leaves. "That ought to keep us in blood and skittles for a bit."

Xander lay down next to Spike, pressing a bill under his nose and inhaling. "We could live for years on this."

"You're thinking too small, love. We could live for *weeks* on this."

"Wee--okay, I hope you're joking. There's no way we could spend it that quickly. Not unless we lit our fat Cuban cigars with it." Spike contrived to look mysterious, and Xander poked him. "You *are* joking, right?"

"Nah. I could spend this in a few hours and not even strain myself."

"I can tell that I'm going to be sensible planning-for-the-future guy here. Damn." Xander threw a hand above his head and sighed. "I wanted to be wild-and-crazy, live-for-the-moment guy. But with you for competition, I've got the short straw."

Spike propped himself up on one elbow, gazed down fondly at him. "Now why can't you live for the moment with me? Plenty of straws to go round."

"Buddy logic," Xander said succinctly, meeting Spike's blue eyes. "You want your eternal truths, go to the movies. Every partnership is a wacky mismatch of opposites. Criminal and cop. Brains and brawny muscle. Mister Sensible-Shoes and Mister Footloose."

"And I take it you're the shoe-wearing egghead of this duo." Spike's brows knitted as if he found Xander infinitely curious.

"Bingo."

"So that stunt with the gun last night was just what...a fluke?"

"Just call me fluke-man," Xander gasped rather inanely, as Spike's hand drifted south in a rustle of money and did naughty things to him.

A smile curved up one side of Spike's lips. "Here's to flukes, then." And he toasted Xander with his mouth.

"Mmm," Xander said. The sensible part of him, a birthright he couldn't deny no matter how scrambled his brains were, was thinking worriedly about the large pile of money they were lying in, and whether it was fully sanitary, and where they'd stash it when they left the hotel, and if the car they'd valet-parked in the garage had been spotted as stolen, and the odds that cops were coming up in the elevator right now on the way to their room, and--

--and the rest of him toasted Spike back and said to hell with all of it.

Part Twelve

These were the things Xander had noticed about Spike and liked:

His fingertips were like butter from the fridge. All of Spike's skin was butter, white and smooth. But Xander was the one who melted.

His hair stuck up all over in tufts because he'd gelled it some time before losing his memory and hadn't yet washed it. It smelled vaguely fruity, which was the gel, and of the pillows they'd slept on, but it didn't have the usual grittiness of unwashed hair, a smell Xander knew he would have recognized.

He had a scar on one eyebrow, sharp deep slices.

He had scars everywhere on his body, light as cobwebs.

His tongue tasted like whatever he'd tasted last. Vodka had no taste, though, so when he drank he tasted of nothing. Or sometimes Xander.

He was wearing three rings: a knobby silver skull, a snake, and a hawk holding a banner that said 'Freedom'. They were the ugliest things Xander had ever seen.

The hair on his legs was sparse and light brown.

Muscles.

His fingernails were painted black and the polish had chipped. He had clever fingers that looked like they belonged on a guitar but played Xander instead.

He liked to have his neck bitten. And the rest of him.

His fangs lengthened from the original teeth; his eyes could turn yellow. His face stretched as the demon rose, and felt bumpy and swollen as if it should be painful, as if something were wedged underneath the skin, but he liked to be touched there. It felt as if something lived under the skin, and Xander sometimes expected the ridges to move when he stroked them. They hadn't yet. It was just the ripple of skin under his hand.

His dick got hard again and again.

He was uncut, and the skin rippled there too when Xander moved it.

He didn't know his own strength, but he was rough in all the right ways.

No stubble on his jaw.

Licking his ass was like licking salt before the shot and the lime.

He sometimes breathed.

Part Thirteen

The streets of L.A. were best seen through the windows of a limo, Xander thought. You didn't need evidence for comparison to know that. Along the boulevards strolled people who only came out at night. Not vampires, but hookers and dealers and coke-eyed yuppies who'd spent their days locked up in cubicles. Street people camped on the sidewalks in groups, chatting to each other and calling out remarks to passers-by as they passed brown bags back and forth.

Down from Xander on the ridiculously wide leather seat, Spike lounged in black silk, drinking from a bottle of whisky and making prank calls. "Hello, Sabrina, love? What--it's not? Who's this then? Trish? What've you done with Sabrina--put her on, will you, I can't hold forever, Jen and Brad are already at the table. ...No, it's the right number, pet, it's on my speed dial." Spike stretched out his legs and rested his feet on Xander's thigh. He was barefoot. "God!" he swore, uttering the word with a bottomless disgust that could almost be mistaken for sincere. "That's just like her--takin' off without a word after all the trouble I've gone to! It took me forever to get these bloody reservations. Look, what are you doing tonight, love? Can you be at Spago in fifteen minutes--I mean, half hour tops, otherwise I'll look like a right git who can't get a date, you know what I'm saying?"

Xander stroked the soles of Spike's feet and inspected his unnaturally neat toenails, then gave his entire body a yank, drawing him slitheringly across the seat. Spike let himself fall back and be dragged, the bottle and phone coming along with him, action-figure accessories attached as if by glue to his hands. "Oh, just throw on any old thing--" he was saying with faux impatience as Xander took the phone from his hand, shut it off, and tossed it on the floor. "Hey! I had her on the hook! I could *feel* it!"

"I pity the many women you've undoubtedly toyed with and destroyed." Feet propped against the window now, Spike did silent, smirky things with his lips and held the whisky bottle out to Xander. "Nooo, thanks," he said, taking the bottle (which Spike was swinging like a bell) and slipping it into the bar caddy. "I've spent the last forty-eight hours more drunk than sober."

"Ditto. I feel brilliant." Spike curled upright as effortlessly as a caterpillar and draped himself over Xander's side. He smelled of cigarettes and expensive booze, a heady mixture that Xander was coming to find addictive in a second-hand kind of way.

"I think this club is in a bad part of town," Xander observed, looking back out the window.

"All the good ones are."

When Xander turned his head, Spike was right *there*, close as life or its simulation, his face a glittering diamond of pale cheekbones and jaw planes, his sharply etched hair shading off from the sides. Elegant neck encircled by a thin choker. Silk to the waist, leather below, his clothes as black as his wide-blown pupils. All of him black and white. He was mesmerizing, and Xander couldn't fathom what had made Spike choose him. Couldn't remember. He could only imagine that Spike, unable to see himself in a mirror, had no idea how stunning he was. At least not since he'd died. Maybe death gave you an inferiority complex, made you hanker after solid homespun guys, reassuring goofballs who didn't mind a lack of circulation or reflection.

Of course, Xander wouldn't consider himself *bad* looking. He just had that raw, gawky look that said adolescence wasn't that far behind him. Plus, after prolonged personal examination in hotel bathrooms, he'd decided that his ears stuck out, a defect that could be compensated for by floppy hair, sure, but then there was the hair itself. Basically, next to Spike, he looked as if he'd just wrestled a few small dogs and lost. Whereas Spike made GQ models look shabby.

But he felt pretty good tonight, dressed to the nines or even the tens in a green silk shirt and a pair of pre-aged blue jeans, with his own choker and a new earring and a trendy black rubber bracelet and a new tattoo chafing lightly against his sleeve. He was feeling almost hot, and when Spike slid his hand down his inseam and adjusted him familiarly, he upgraded that feeling to most.

"Mmm," Xander said. "Don't." He reluctantly made himself nudge Spike's hand away. "I want to hold the buzz for the dance floor. Otherwise, I'll just flail around and feel lame."

"That's right. Keep your edge." Spike's hand crept back a moment to emphasize just where that edge was. Xander batted it away again.

Inside the club, electronic music bounced off the walls, anchored by a thumping base line. The walls were high slabs of grey concrete, resembling the inside of a missile silo, and the floor was crowded with bodies both human and demon, writhing side by side in casual disregard of each other under the play of strobe lights.

"How'd you find out about this place?" Xander asked, raising his voice to be heard.

"Last night--that tat artist."

"Frank?"

"No, the other one." Spike took their drinks from the bartender and handed one to Xander. "He was a demon. Gave me the book on places around town that cater to our sort."

Xander tried to recall what the other tattoo artist had looked like, but he hadn't been paying that much attention. He'd seemed perfectly ordinary.

Downing half his drink and abandoning the rest, he let Spike draw him out to the dance floor, and let the wordless music take him. It shivered under his skin and through his bones, dissolving all his self-consciousness, making him Spike's mirror. Spike dancing was just like Spike fucking, unhurried on the surface, urgency bleeding out from within. Serious and ironic and graceful. And the strobing lights were like blades slicing across him, sharp lines of light across his hair, cutting his shirt to ribbons; or maybe the buttons had slid undone themselves to leave his chest bare as he swayed, one hand on Xander's hip, his leg between Xander's legs, his body one long rolling thrust, rising and falling no more than a few inches at a time, like the subtle surface of the ocean.

He was surface all over and it gleamed brightly.

Part Fourteen

They'd been dancing for a few hours with occasional breaks for crowd-watching, drinking, and up-against-the-wall macking, when the big guy appeared. It was impossible to say how long he stood there. Xander didn't notice him at first, awareness sharpening only gradually in the corner of his eye, finally cohering as he tossed his hair back, dislodging a few sweaty strands. When he focused briefly there was this guy, standing there dumbstruck ("Gobsmacked," Spike said later) in the middle of the dance floor, staring at Xander as if he had three heads. He was dressed in drably expensive Hollywood black, but his half-dropped jaw and weed-whacked hair cut didn't bring out the best in him, and for some reason Xander took an instant dislike, despite the very strong possibility he was being cruised.

Shaking his head, he easily blew off the man, despite that he was as immobile as a statue, an immovable object surrounded by a frenzy of dancing bodies that never quite collided with him; easily because Spike was grinding against Xander, naked from the waist up, shirt hanging flayed from his leather pants, every sculpted perfect line in his body tensed and pulsing with energy. His eyes were half-closed, his jaw like the line of a boomerang, his shoulders sloping back as he held onto Xander with one arm. Every base thump pounded them closer together at the hips. Xander's own shirt was hanging open, brushing against his sweaty and electrified skin and he was plugged in, couldn't get enough, and Spike was pouring like liquid against him, but more solid than anything else in the universe.

And then the big goon appeared out of nowhere and whirled Spike out of Xander's arms and punched him. Spike flew back several feet in the air and landed on the floor between a pair of dancers, who jumped aside in shock.

Hey, am I the kind of man other men start bar fights over? Xander asked himself momentarily, struck to surprise in the flare of music and violence and confusion. But since the answer to that was a big fat *no*, anger swept over him a second later, and he leapt for the goon, pulling at his arm to prevent pursuit. The guy shrugged

him off and then impatiently turned and shoved at his chest, sending Xander staggering off-balance. Strangers' hands caught and steadied him before nudging him helpfully away again with what might have been voyeuristic encouragement to fight. Xander was more than willing, but Spike--

"No!" he shouted when Spike flipped himself to his feet and snarled, fists raised against the guy. Any attempt by Spike to fight would end in pain and disaster, but he had killer instincts. Xander couldn't imagine how he'd honed them, given what inevitably occurred. Anticipation was like a blow to his own gut, and he tried to reach the big well-dressed jerk who was looming over his boyfriend, when Spike hauled back and landed a punch.

There was a split-second when Spike's face was stripped open to Xander's view, raw with an expectant wince of pain and humiliation, but as the moment passed and the base thumped, it lit up with amazement...and then he tipped his head, expression altering in quick succession to a savage delight and then rage. And Xander discovered two things: that Spike could kick ass, and that he was fighting someone exactly as strong as he was.

"Oh shit," he said. "Vampire."

They flung each other around the dance floor with abandon, punching and kicking as dancers scattered to the edges, far enough away to avoid becoming collateral damage but close enough to keep watching the show. Xander, out of his element, watched along with them. They'd both vamped out, and over the near deafening music he could hear the stranger shouting at Spike. He could only make out scraps of words--what sounded like his name, and threats. Spike looked absolutely indifferent to whatever was being said, if he could even hear it. The opportunity to brawl without consequences had fired his fuse and he was whaling on his foe every chance he got, whirling and kicking like a wind-up ninja with moves Xander had seen on cable television the night before, but never in real life.

Not in his four days of living memory, at least.

Anxiety was rising in his gut, though, because the guy was strong and no less determined to win. His moves were just as fast and powerful if less graceful, and he had about thirty pounds over Spike, which was beginning to count. When a forceful toss from the strange vamp landed Spike sprawling at Xander's feet, he helped Spike up and held on. Spike's face was covered in blood and he wore a gleeful

smile; it took him a moment to focus his dancing, golden eyes on Xander. "You all right, love?" He licked his lips, still grinning widely, and bounced in place from foot to foot.

"Yes--no! Let's get out of here. This guy's nuts."

The stranger was waiting several paces away with arms at his sides, watching them. Spike's lips curled back further. "Gotta agree. I think he's asking for a bit more punishment, too."

"Spike!" Xander dragged at his shoulders, compelled the other man to turn his head. "Let it go. Okay? Because I don't want to let you. Go." Xander could sense how unpersuasive this was in the face of vampire--or maybe just masculine--pride. "And I'm turned on," he added. "And I want you to come with me. Come. With me." He held Spike's eyes, got his attention.

"Yeah? Oh. Yeah." Spike grabbed the back of his neck suddenly and kissed him, smearing his face with blood and sending a rush of it down through his electrified veins to throb in his cock. He broke the kiss, leaving Xander breathless, and turned to the guy with a shrug. "Sorry, mate. Just got busy. Take a rain check, 'ey?"

As they began to walk away, the stranger started towards them. Spike stiffened, arm around Xander's shoulders. "Xander," the guy said, looking directly into his eyes in an almost pleading way, his human face back in place. Shocked at hearing his own name, Xander stared at him. "Xander, you don't have to go with him. Whatever hold he has on you, it's meaningless." The guy held out his hand, palm open. "No one will blame you--Buffy, Giles--they'll understand. Whatever's happened, it's not too late. Trust me. I know."

He sounded earnest and scarily intense, standing there with his hand outstretched like a born-again Christian whose muscular zeal had just gotten the better of him, and Xander instinctively recoiled. "Look, if I dated you, I'm sorry, okay, man? But I'm really *not* interested in getting back together. So move on, buddy. It's for the best."

The vampire frowned and blinked in confusion, mouth opening then closing. "Uh..."

Shaking his head, Xander fell into step with Spike. "I take everything back. If that guy was my type, I *really* don't want to know about my past life."

Part Fifteen

Later, though, he brooded. Spike, gluttoned on sex and blood (he'd found a service that would deliver it to their hotel room along with Chinese food for Xander), lay sleeping on his stomach next to him.

The strange vampire in the club had been the first person they'd met apart from hospital staff who'd said Xander's name, who'd known him. The guy they'd met in the warehouse, Ray, didn't really count. But the vamp had called him 'Xander', had spoken of other people they apparently both knew--Buffy, Giles. Names he couldn't put to faces, but which represented some life he'd had. Friends? Siblings? No connection fired. Was he from L.A. or from Sunnydale? If they stayed here, would he run into others who claimed to know him?

It felt okay not having a past, and he began to wonder why that was. Had his life been so awful that escape was a relief? His life. It wasn't his. *His* life had started four days ago, and it was a roller coaster of sex and money and snuggly vampire. Even disconnected from knowledge and memories, he knew this was crazy--it should feel unreal, all of it. You don't just wake up into a life story where you were rich and lucky and screwing yourself senseless with a hot monster. It was the kind of unreality that meant you might be lying in a hospital bed somewhere, tied down and doped up, your mind spinning fantasies as the doctors clucked their tongues and stroked their beards.

But it felt unquestionably, solidly, utterly real. Right now, his tattoo was tingling and his balls were spent, and the bed smelled of Chinese food and sex, and Spike's sleeping profile, mashed into the pillow, was like a flipped coin balanced on its edge in defiance of all odds. Lucky. That was how Xander felt. Crazy lucky, and good.

And if there was anything lurking below the surface of his mind, any memory of a life less happy, he didn't want to know about it.

He was going to spend himself until luck ran out. And then...he'd flip a new coin.

The End