

Title: In Spite of Everything

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Pairing, Characters: Spike/Xander

Rating: NC-17

Summary: Prequel to *Love Is More Thicker Than Regret*. In spite of everything, Spike and Xander wound up as friends. Then fate stepped in and gave them love.

Disclaimer: Joss said I could, so I am.

A/N: Title is from an E. E. Cummings' poem of the same name.

The first time they met since Sunnydale imploded was at Buffy's funeral. Giles was tight-lipped at Spike's presence, but too British to open his mouth. Dawn was too grief-stricken to even notice his being there; Willow the same.

Which left Xander.

Xander who huddled into his parka and yanked the hood down over his face to keep the rain from seeping under his eye patch before starting towards the lone figure doing his best to lurk behind a decent-sized tombstone marker and remain unobtrusive.

And he would have too, but then, Xander had heard it slip from Andrew that Spike was alive. Something about a brouhaha in Los Angeles between Angel and some Senior Partners of Evil, Inc., and that he, Spike, and the rest of Angel's gang were in the fight of their lives and were needing Giles' help. Giles had sent a few slayers, the day had been saved, and life – or in Spike's case, unlife – had gone on.

So, Spike being alive meant him being at Buffy's funeral. He wouldn't *not* come, no matter that he and Buffy hadn't spoken since Sunnydale. It was a matter of respect. Of love, even.

"You don't have to stand over here all by yourself," Xander said once he'd reached Spike, raising his voice to be heard over the downpour.

Spike didn't say anything, of course, or maybe not of course. Xander wasn't quite sure why Spike was suddenly making with the non-verbal. Which Xander felt the need to compensate for. Damn him and his babble.

"And we're not going to bring her back. You know... just in case you were wondering," he added.

"Wasn't."

"Wasn't what?"

“Wondering.”

“Oh.”

“Tweren’t like last time didn’t go pear-shaped, yeah? Figured Red probably learned her lesson.”

“Consequences,” Xander murmured, remembering Spike’s oddly prophetic words.

“Got it in one.”

Xander glanced over his shoulder to see the priest move off and Giles and the others gather closer to the coffin. Huddling together as they sobbed their final goodbyes.

He’d already said his. A long and heartfelt one as he’d lovingly carved his friend’s final resting place. The tears he’d shed forever entombed in the wood with a final coat of varnish.

“Buy you a drink?”

The invitation came out of the blue, but Xander wasn’t about to take it back.

Spike didn’t say anything, but he did nod.

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They slid into opposite sides of the booth tucked away in a darkened corner of the pub, a bottle of Glenfiddich and two glasses between them. Spike did the honors, pouring each of them a glass, then raising his in the air.

“To the Slayer.”

“To Buffy.” Xander briefly touched his glass to a surprised Spike’s and downed his shot. The whisky burned his throat and made his eye water. At least, that’s what he blamed his tears on.

It must have bothered Spike too, because he seemed to be having the same problem.

Surprisingly, he and Spike exchanged barely a handful of words after their initial toast, but the silence wasn’t awkward or uncomfortable. In truth, it was actually kinda welcome, Xander couldn’t help but think. Somehow the bottle wound up empty and

the hours flew by. And somewhere in that time, whatever lingering resentment he'd felt for Spike just withered and died.

When Xander happened to glance at his watch, he was shocked to see that it was close to six. The funeral had been at two. Four hours of companionable... whatever it had been. Commiserating, maybe?

He stood, held onto the table for a minute to make sure that his legs would support him. It was a wonder he could even remember his name, let alone where he was at, given the amount of alcohol he'd consumed.

"Should probably be going," he said, grabbing his parka off the hook.

"Yeah."

Spike stood as well and shrugged into his duster.

"You got a place to stay?"

Spike nodded.

"Right... well... I'll be seeing you."

Xander lifted his hand in farewell and headed towards the exit. At the last moment, he turned, walked back to the booth. He fumbled in his pocket and pulled out a piece of paper and pen. Scribbled his cell phone number and email address on it and handed it to Spike.

"Don't be a stranger."

Xander smiled. Spike smiled back.

This time when he walked away, he didn't feel like he'd never hear from Spike again.

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The first email Xander got, he was in Cozumel. It was a month to the day of Buffy's funeral. The message was short and sweet - well, if you could call anything written by Spike "sweet". It mentioned the latest assignment Angel had him working on. At the bottom was a telephone number.

Xander stored it in his phone's address book and made a mental note to call Spike tomorrow. He was asleep on his feet right now, and had only opened his laptop to make sure nothing dire had happened at HQ before showering and falling into bed.

Tracking down slayers was exhausting work.

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"What?"

Xander flinched at the yelled greeting, and double-checked the numbers on the screen to make sure he'd dialed correctly. Not that he had anything to compare it to as he'd deleted Spike's email – it was a reflex action. Crazy person answering equals staring at the phone as if it had suddenly sprouted a head, or maybe wings. Oh, look, a flying cell phone.

Then he heard a "bloody hell" in a very distinctive voice and what sounded like fighting coming through the line. A second later, the connection was lost.

He was in the middle of redialing when his phone rang.

"Hello! Spike? Are you alright?"

"Harris?"

"Yeah. It's me. I heard fighting."

"Sorry 'bout that. Was having a conversation with a Plixlin who didn't take too kindly to the interruption. Had to set it straight. No worries."

"Oh."

Silence crackled over the line until they both spoke at once.

"What are – ?"

"Where are – ?"

A chuckle by Spike. Outright laughter from Xander, and damn, it felt so *good* to laugh again.

Spike turned out to be in New Orleans, something about a demon overlord trying to invoke some ritual, yada yada. Spike had swooped in and saved the day and was

currently taking a few days R & R for a job well done before returning to Los Angeles and Angel's next assignment.

"And R & R means getting into fights?" Xander wanted to know.

"The Plixlin started it." There was a distinctive pout in Spike's voice.

"Ahhh..."

"So, what adventure does the watcher have you on?"

"I'm in Cozumel, actually. Just finished up here and was heading back to London later tonight."

"Could swing through New Orleans. See the sights."

And Xander thought - *what the heck?*

A quick call to United and he'd cancelled his flight to London and booked one to New Orleans, first class, and thank you Mr. Harris for being a 1K Mileage Plus member.

Spike met him at the airport and when Xander asked where he was staying, Spike just shrugged. While Spike drove, Xander booked them into the two-bedroom Victorian Suite at Le Pavillon Hotel, because nothing said expense account like a five star hotel. Plus, he took perverse pleasure in seeing Spike scrunch up his nose in distaste when the door was opened and he got a good look at the décor.

In retaliation, Spike got him liquored up, dragged him all over the French Quarter pointing out the sites like he was a native, then made him play kitten poker with demons until the wee hours of the morning, barely getting them back to their suite before the sun came up.

Drunk and tired made Xander all thumbs, but Spike managed to get him stripped down to his boxers and into bed. He was asleep before his head hit the pillow and never heard Spike stumble off to his own bedroom.

It was the most fun he'd had in like... ever.

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The next time the two caught up was in Seattle the last week of December, though they'd talked a few times over the phone and exchanged a few emails back and forth. Xander was wrapping up Council business and would have returned to London for his

next assignment, but his connecting flight out of New York had been cancelled due to a snow storm, so it was either be stuck in Seattle in a nice suite, or stuck in New York at the airport.

The suite won, hands down.

So, on the spur of the moment, he called Spike.

Spike was surprised to hear that Xander was so close and hopped the next flight out of LAX.

New Year's was rung in spectacularly.

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It was late October before Xander saw Spike again, Halloween specifically. He was in Spain; Spike was in Italy. Spike flew over, but rather than go out, they hung out in Xander's hotel room, drinking beer and watching bad television.

The night was oddly reminiscent.

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Christmas came and went. So, too, did New Years. They were at opposite ends of the globe at the time, so they couldn't meet up, but they chatted for an hour or so both days.

Then Xander got busy, Giles handing him one assignment after the other, until the days blended together and the beginning of February turned into the end of February and he was once more back in Mexico, just a different city. Puerto Vallarta this time.

The mission wasn't slayer related, but some ancient artifact Giles wanted found, because if it ended up in the wrong hands, there was no telling what might happen.

So there he was, breaking into the Chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe at all hours of the night, determined to find this *thing* - and Giles had been rather vague as to the exact nature of the artifact - and get it back to London and under lock and key. Xander followed the directions given him, the scrying stone held out at arm's length in every which way until it started to glow brightly. The light pinpointed a spot on the pillar, at a piece of stone a slightly different shade of white than the rest.

He palmed his pocket knife and dug around the edges until the piece, roughly four inches by six inches, came free. Inside was a burlap sack, as near as Xander could figure. He reached for it, and nearly had a heart attack when Spike called his name.

"Xander, wait!"

Xander whirled around, hand to his chest as if that would calm his racing heart.

"Dammit, Spike! Gimme a heart attack, why don't you?" he hissed, his voice easily carrying across the deserted church.

"Sorry." He sounded anything but. In fact, there was distinctive smirk on his face as he walked towards Xander.

"What are you doing here anyway?"

"Same reason as you, I suspect. Ancient relic of questionable power. In the wrong hands —"

"Can bring about another apocalypse," Xander finished, laughing. "I see we got the same memo."

"Yeah." Spike reached into his pocket, pulled out cigarettes and lighter, and would have lit up, but for the frown on Xander's face.

"For crying out loud, Spike. We're in a *church*."

Spike snorted. "And that wasn't you, swearing up a storm just a minute ago?"

Xander actually looked sheepish.

"Should probably snatch that thing and get out of here before someone catches us. I could..." Spike gestured towards the hole.

"Be my guest," Xander replied.

Spike retrieving the artifact from its hiding spot was anti-climactic. There were no Indiana Jones-like booby traps. No bells and whistles that went off. No rush of *la policia* or priests crying foul. Spike turned and opened the sack, revealing their prize.

"It doesn't seem all that powerful," Xander commented as he ran his hand over the top of the sphere-like golden object. His eyes glowed an unholy shade of red, as did Spike's since he was holding the artifact at the time.

Neither noticed.

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"I think you should move in with me," Spike announced as they were walking back to Xander's hotel room. "You love me; I love you. You could still work for Giles. You wouldn't have to work for Angel. Unless you wanted to, of course."

"Really? Move in together?" *Yes, yes, yes!* He didn't say that out loud so as not to appear too eager, and he kept his face averted for the same reason. The thought of living with Spike just made him all kinds of happy. "But," he added, and somehow managed to keep the excitement out of his voice, "Aren't you living at some hotel with Angel?"

"Just gives me an excuse to leave. Rather doubt the pouf'll want to listen to us shaggin' all the time." Spike wiggled his eyebrows suggestively and Xander had an evil thought.

"I don't know. Maybe he could stand to listen to us 'shag' a few times first."

"Right. So we stay at Angel's for a bit. I give him a week before he throws us out. How do you feel about living in a basement?"

"How big will the bed be? And will it have cable?"

"Big as they come... and, goes without saying, luv."

"Then no, I won't mind living in a basement." *And I don't mind the "luvs" either.*

Xander got a kiss on the cheek, which turned into a kiss on the lips, which turned into Xander being dragged into an alley and pressed up against the wall with Spike leaning heavily against him. Rubbing and rubbing until Xander was in danger of coming in his pants if Spike didn't stop.

"Spike," he panted out around kisses. "Hotel... bed..."

Another toe-curling kiss and Spike reluctantly pulled away, adjusted himself in his jeans. Would have helped Xander out with his own "problem" but knew that if he touched him again, there'd be a lot more naughty touching taking place.

"Come on, Xan," he finally said. "Hotel's just a few blocks away."

Xander nodded as if mentally fortifying himself and pushed away from the wall. "Right. Hotel."

They went to Spike's hotel, not Xander's, but that was alright because there was a bubble bath, and a back massage, courtesy of Spike, and a king-sized bed with 400-thread count sheets.

And when Spike finally took him with cock and yes, with fangs – because... vampire, and he got that now – Xander was right where he wanted to be. At least until they switched positions and he felt Spike slide down on his cock and ride him into oblivion.

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Los Angeles was wild and different the second time around. But then, the first time, he'd just been grateful to be alive after the Sunnydale fallout. Besides, they'd not stayed longer than the night before heading off to Cleveland, then on to London.

Now, seeing everything through Spike's eyes, with his enthusiasm, not even Angel's perpetual brood was enough to dampen his excitement.

And as the days slipped by and Angel's looks grew more and more calculating, it was Spike's love that kept him going, made him see the good in everyone. Even a jealous vampire.

He should have known better.