

Domestic Piranha 04.5: Not For Public Consumption

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/67075) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/67075>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Buffy the Vampire Slayer , Angel: the Series
Relationships:	Angel/Charles Gunn/Wesley Wyndam-Pryce , Spike/Xander Harris
Characters:	Angel , Charles Gunn , Wesley Wyndam-Pryce , Spike , Xander Harris
Additional Tags:	Co-Written
Language:	English
Series:	Part 8 of Domestic Piranha
Collections:	WesleyFanfiction.Net
Stats:	Published: 2010-03-03 Words: 8,528 Chapters: 1/1

Domestic Piranha 04.5: Not For Public Consumption

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Summary

Wesley, Angel, and Gunn play in the pool. Morons happen.

"How long has it been since anyone used this?" Wesley managed to sound fastidiously squicked, and eager all at the same time.

"For its intended purpose? Probably a couple of decades. It's just been sort of lying here... fallow. Useless. It had a reason for being, once." Angel intoned it as if giving a funeral oration.

Wesley gave him a flat look, then turned a brighter, more cheery one on Gunn. "Do you think it has a reason for being, now, Charles? Or shall we leave it... 'fallow'?"

"I think if somebody doesn't get his undead ass outta my way, I'm gonna pick him up and use him as an air mattress. Watcha think-- do vampires float?"

"No. They don't." Angel spoke quickly, backing up a step as Wesley and Gunn gave him considering looks. Luckily, by backing up, he moved out of Gunn's way.

As he stepped into the room, Wesley looked him over. "You were right. Green is a much better color for you."

"Yeah, brings out my inner leprechaun," Gunn answered with a straight face. Angel gave him an 'Excuse me?' look. "What, haven't you ever heard of the black Irish?"

Angel just opened his mouth -- but said nothing. Ahead of them, Wesley turned and continued towards the pool. A company had been in earlier in the week, repairing everything and getting it usable again. Gunn and Angel stood there and watched him.

"You're right," Angel said casually. "The stripes add an...effect."

"Kind of givin' me vertigo, though. I mean, if you follow one all the way around..." Gunn's eyes sort of spun in circles, and he swayed a little in place as he watched Wesley walk over to the diving board.

"Perhaps you shouldn't be staring," Wesley said sternly.

"Isn't that what they're *for*?" Gunn folded his arms. "I mean, please, like that whole ensemble doesn't just scream 'look at me, look at me now' " He blinked, then buried his face in his hands. "Oh, god, help me, man. I'm channeling Cordelia."

Angel reached over and patted his arm. "It's all right. It is, though. Why else would anyone put a stripe...there?" Wesley was still glaring at them, though now his hands were on his hips -- meaning he'd dropped his towel and was facing them, square-on. In nothing but a Speedo.

"As though either of you were wearing *more*," Wesley began.

"Yes, but unlike us, you picked out your *own* swimwear," Angel pointed out.

They watched in fascination as Wesley slowly blushed. Both their jaws dropped as Wesley said, "Actually, I didn't...."

Angel looked at Gunn. "Did you?"

Gunn shook his head, with a suspicious glance at Wesley. "Not unless I've been sleep-shopping. Who's been measurin' you for Speedos, Wes?"

Wesley just wandered back towards the diving board. "Did they say the board was safe to use?"

Gunn stalked forward and grabbed him by the most grabbable spot available-- the back of those Speedos. "You got yourself a personal shopper, Wesley?"

"Do you **mind**?" Wesley protested, as though baring his bum at Gunn and Angel wasn't a regular activity. He pulled himself free of Gunn's grasp and managed to look offended.

"I don't mind," Angel replied, changing the meaning of the phrase with his tone. "Do you mind?" he asked Gunn.

"Only when my mom slapped me upside the head," Gunn answered sincerely. "Seems like I remember somebody saying he **didn't** want to be thrown in the pool, for instance, but, y'know, I don't really mind, do I?"

Wesley backed up a step. "And I **meant** it."

Angel held up a hand as Gunn advanced on him. "Glasses."

After a final panicked plea for mercy met with none, Wesley shrugged and tossed his glasses to Angel. Felt himself lifted in strong arms, which was nice, but only for about two or three seconds, before he was suddenly splashing into over-chlorinated water that was **far** too cold. Wesley shrieked, then was completely immersed in the water. He sank to the bottom...where he waited.

Angel and Gunn looked at each other with amused glances. Then 'ha-ha, isn't Wesley funny' glances. Then 'um, he **is** trying to be funny, right?' glances. And then about three **more** seconds passed, and there were two much bigger splashes.

They got down to the bottom of the pool and found Wesley lying there, motionless. They each grabbed an arm and hauled him upwards. Reaching the surface, they pulled him out onto the slick tile floor with a mighty effort, and Gunn started CPR. Well, he put his lips over Wesley's and blew into his mouth, anyway, which made it awfully hard for Wesley to continue pretending not to breathe. Especially when he sort of accidentally stuck his tongue into Gunn's mouth.

Gunn jerked back, staring wildly at Wesley. "What? What's--" Angel demanded, then stopped and glared as Wesley grinned.

"My heroes," he simpered, and batted his eyelashes.

"That wasn't very fucking funny!" Gunn yelled.

Wesley stared at them without blinking. "Neither was throwing me into the water in the first place."

Angel looked at Gunn. "I thought it was funny. What about you?"

Gunn was still glaring, still pissed off. "Yeah, I thought that part was funny. Throwing a guy in the pool ranks right up there with 'let's make them think I'm dead!'"

Wesley sat up calmly. "As if I would go anywhere near a pool with you two, without an underwater breathing spell." He tugged on the red braided cord around his neck. And pointed...pointedly...towards the one around Gunn's.

"Is that what that is?" Angel asked, sounding only a little befuddled.

Gunn looked embarrassed. "Forgot about that." Then his expression changed. "Hey, when you gave me this, you said...."

Wesley grinned. "Like this pool, it does have...certain uses other than its original intent. Why should Angel get to have all the fun?"

"I've been having fun?" Angel asked, sounding a little more befuddled. "As soon as we get you into the pool, yes, I believe you shall be," Wesley explained patiently.

"Oh." Angel said it with almost no inflection, but his eyes told another story. The story began with 'throw me in the pool'. It really was too good an offer to refuse, so they did. Well, they tried, but a dead man built like a linebacker isn't exactly easy to throw.

They settled for the swami trick: Wesley made vague mystical motions in front of his eyes until they were pointing in opposite directions, and then Gunn simply pushed him backwards into the water with one finger. Wesley suspected Angel had been faking, but as it got him in the water, who cared? He dove in after him, and Gunn made a huge splash as well. A moment later, all three were trying to entangle themselves.

Angel was doing his best to follow one of those stripes all the way around Wesley's Speedos, but he'd apparently gone blind, because he was doing it in Braille. Gunn, meanwhile, was testing out the benefits of that little red cord around his neck. Wesley had his fingers twined in Angel's hair, and was doing terrible things to his now-soaked spikes. Surprisingly, Angel wasn't complaining.

Someone, as well, had his hand on Wesley's back. He couldn't tell who, and frankly, didn't care as long as the hand continued rubbing like that. He would have moaned, had his mouth been free. And why was it, his brain asked himself, they had waited so long to get the hotel pool repaired?

"GERONIMO!!!!"

"GENERAL CUSTER!!!"

SPLASH

SPLASH

A veritable tsunami made its way towards the three of them, and Wesley was quite glad for the red cord around his own neck as the shock-wave broke him away from his lovers. After a moment, two soon-to-be removed heads broke the surface-- one dark, one light.

"Who-hoo! Water's a bit cold, but other than that, I give the pool a 'nine'." Xander hit the water with the side of his hand, sending a spray of water across Spike's face.

Wesley tightened his hand on Angel's arm, to prevent him from killing the two. "Not in the pool," he said calmly. "We don't want to be cleaning it all over again."

"I'm thinking it might be worth it." Gunn started a purposeful Australian crawl in their direction. Spike stuck out his tongue, gave a little wave, and sank quickly to the floor of the pool.

Xander smiled nervously. "Um... itwashisidea...." Then he started backstroking for all he was worth. Which was terribly unfair, Wesley thought, since **his** backstroking had been so rudely interrupted.

"You always say that," Angel said, matter-of-factly, before starting out after Xander. With Gunn submerging to follow Spike -- and wasn't the vampire in for a surprise, there -- Wesley decided to stay where he was, and watch. Xander sped up his strokes for the edge of the pool, and Wesley saw a pale white blur speeding away from a dark one.

In a few seconds, Spike's head bobbed up. "Alright, who turned this one and why didn't you warn me? No bloody fai... blub blub blub..." as Gunn dragged him back down under the surface.

Xander had reached the ladder at the far end of the pool and was rapidly scrambling out. At Spike's words, he turned around and looked accusingly at Angel. "You turned Gunn? Oh, that is **so** not fair! Spike won't turn me until I look old enough to buy booze, which I'm thinking... what, thirty-five? And you're just suckin' em down right and left?"

Angel just sort of floated. Mouth open. Which probably had more to do with Xander's swimsuit than his babbling. Xander looked at Angel, then grinned evilly. Backed up the ladder one more rung, and twisted his hips back and forth.

"Careful, someone might not appreciate your point of view," he taunted. Before Angel could snap out of it, Xander turned and scrambled the rest of the way out of the pool. Wesley tried to decide if he wanted to say something about Angel's staring at the naked young man -- or if he just wanted those two out of the way, so he could get back to his own almost-naked pool games.

Spike saved him the trouble by popping up again, a somewhat mollified Gunn right behind him. Somewhat mollified because Spike was wearing a major pout (but nothing else) and holding the back of his head as if it had just been whapped. Underwater. "S'not fair. Only Xander's allowed to do that!"

Xander came skidding around to the near edge of the pool, glaring at Gunn. "You hit Spike?" His hands were slightly raised, balled into fists.

Gunn just returned the glare. "And the only reason you didn't get whapped is because pretty-boy over there got distracted by your little wrinkled things."

"Oi!" Spike splashed around to face him. "Those're **my** little wrinkled things, mate!" Now Xander was glaring at Spike. "I mean... big wrinkled things...?"

"The water's cold," Xander said.

Gunn smirked. "It's not **that** cold." With a yell that sounded something like 'cowabunga', Xander leapt towards Gunn. Spike started laughing, then as Xander landed on Gunn and knocked him underwater, leapt upon them, as well.

Angel started swimming towards them, looking put-upon. He shot Wesley a look. "And you wondered why I didn't get the pool fixed before now?"

"I'm wondering why you didn't get Spike fixed a hundred odd years ago. You have to admit, it would have solved a great many of our problems."

"I didn't have a soul back then. I was insane. I thought he was cute."

"You weren't insane, you were a sadistic sociopath, and you let him live because you somehow knew he'd be around to torture us now."

Angel shrugged, pointlessly shook water out of his hair, and then dived into the melee. Wesley sighed, climbed out of the pool, and shook his head. He was tempted to put a freezing spell on the lot of them, and extracted Spike and Xander, himself. Or extract Angel and Gunn, and float them upstairs where they could try again for some privacy.

Or there was the 'turn them into bugs' spell which he kept asking Angel why he couldn't use on those two. Angel hadn't actually ever given him a reason, other than asking "Do you really wanna lose track of them?" Gunn had offered a solution to that one. Wesley had to admit, he liked the idea of a bug-circus. Xander and Spike could do little tricks and wear stupid hats. Unlike now, he realized, when they were trying to get themselves drowned.

Figuratively, at least, in Spike's case. "Angel, you might want to be careful--"

Angel must have caught on at the same time, because Xander came shooting to the surface, inhaling great gasps of air. "That's it, he's evil again, he's trying to drown me!"

"He can't be evil again," Wesley explained patiently, for about the millionth time. "We fixed that little problem years ago." And if they'd only known that all it took was a certain rare talisman, the burning of 'stinky herbs', painting yourself blue, sitting naked in the middle of Rodeo Drive, and chanting the theme to Lamb-Chop's Play-Along, they would have made Angel do it much earlier. All right, technically only the talisman and the stinky herbs were necessary, but what Angel didn't know wouldn't hurt them.

"So why's he trying to drown me?" Xander sputtered in between being casually dunked again by said not-evil vampire.

Wesley rolled his eyes. "I can't imagine."

Spike finally wrestled himself somewhat free of Gunn, who was doing a good job of dunking, himself. He started to go after Xander, when he stopped and looked at Wesley. With a grin, he nudged Xander. "Oi! Look, he's wearing them." Wesley felt himself blushing, as all four turned to look where Spike was pointing.

Xander blinked, then said seriously, "He'd have to be. They're attached. Well, at least mine are."

"Not for long," Gunn muttered.

Spike splashed water in Xander's face. "The briefs, dimwit." And he pointed again. Xander followed his finger. And then he followed one of the white stripes. And then his eyes crossed.

"Hey!" Angel growled. He advanced on Xander. "Keep your--" Then he stopped, as if realizing what a stupid thing he was about to say.

Xander just stuck his tongue out. "Why'd you let Spike buy them, then, if you were gonna get defensive about it?" Gunn's and Angel's eyes swung around like the turret on a Sherman tank, and aimed directly at Spike. Wesley, meanwhile, began searching his memory for a personal body-shield spell.

Spike smirked silently, and the turret began to swing in Wesley's direction.

"You let **Spike** buy this for you?" Angel said in a soft, gentle, utterly terrifying tone, and Wesley wondered briefly if Xander wasn't right about him being evil again, after all.

"You're going to deny that you appreciate its effect?" He gave Angel a flat, stern look. As if Angel's eyes weren't even now straying down, and around, and crossing slightly before being yanked back up to glare at Wes' face again.

Truth was, he couldn't explain exactly how he'd come to let Spike buy them for him. Or how he'd actually got around to mentioning it, in the younger vampire's presence. He spared a glare for said vampire, and his cohort, who were taking the opportunity to sneak out of range. Giggling. At least now he knew why Spike had been willing to buy them at all.

"I appreciate the effect," Gunn said slowly. "It's the cause that I've got a problem with. How come you're letting the bleached weenie fit you for swimsuits?"

"Hey!" Xander said from the edge of the pool, where he was sitting, kicking his feet, and watching in amusement. "He's not... wait, what am I saying. Please continue."

Spike, who'd been bobbing in the water near him, pulled Xander in by one foot, and wrestled him into the corner of the pool. "I am **not** a weenie. Say it." Xander crossed his arms and shook his head. "Say it or I'll tickle...."

"You're a weenie!" Xander yelled, and made a leap out of the pool -- getting only a few inches before Spike grabbed him and pulled him in. From the shrieks and threats that followed, Wesley deduced Spike was giving good on his threat. Wesley, however, was more concerned with his own well-being than making sure they didn't injure themselves.

Angel and Gunn were climbing out of the pool, and still advancing on him. He tried to make a stand, but he felt somewhat ridiculous doing so in only a pair of tiny swim briefs.

"I didn't do any such thing as let him *fit* me for them," he said with as much dignity as he could muster. "I merely let him *pay* for them. Because *someone* borrowed my credit card to take to the edged-weapons show, and never returned it." He raised an eyebrow at Gunn.

Wesley's lovers decided to divide their attentions, which was exactly what Wesley had been afraid of. Angel spun around and dove back into the water, cutting across toward Spike like a rather large, brown-haired shark. Gunn continued to glare at Wesley. "Oh, and you couldn't call *someone* and ask him to meet you there and pay for it?"

"That would have rather ruined the surprise, wouldn't it have?" Wesley demanded. Backed up another step, and began rehearsing, mentally, the 'deflect all blows' shield spell he'd remembered.

They heard a high-pitched yelp, and a splash, then a loud, low growl. That was followed by a "What the bloody *hell* is your problem? It wasn't even my cash. When's the last time I had any of my own money?"

Which made Gunn stop. Wesley could see him thinking things through. "*Harris* paid for those?"

"Well, technically Spike did, with Xander's--" He stopped as he realized he wasn't helping himself.

"You let Spike buy you *those* briefs with *that* money?"

"Yelp! Hey, I bought your --eep!-- Christmas presents with *that* money..." Xander shouted between tickles. "And what's so wrong with---giggle-- my job?"

"Yeah!" Spike didn't stop tickling while he defended his lover. "What's more upright and morally unblemished than providin' reasonably-priced pics of naked demons to those desperate folks out there who don't 'ave a cuddly one of their very own?"

Wesley, very wisely, didn't reply. Whenever Rupert called down to inquire how 'his boy' was doing, Wesley stammered something vague and hoped to god the other man didn't know that Xander's one week stint as a copy-boy had turned into something more. Granted, it had been two years, now, but since Rupert never referred to the magazine, Wesley wasn't *about* to be the one to bring it up. In conversation. The topic, that was.

Wesley realized Gunn had gained another foot on his advance. He crossed his arms and frowned, slightly. "If you object to my attempting to acquire a set of swim shorts on my own,

to surprise you both, then I do apologize." He sniffed, just a little, and turned his back. Allowing Gunn to be transfixed by the white stripe that ran around the *back*, of course.

"Ummm...." Gunn replied intelligently.

Angel reached Spike, and ducked him neatly, dragging Xander, still giggling, with him. A few seconds later, a sputtering human and two growling vampires resurfaced. Angel turned to stare at Wesley. "Surprise?" He sounded a little guilty. "You.. wanted to surprise us? Oh."

"Yes," Wesley admitted, sounding a touch hurt. A touch dejected. "I didn't think you'd mind who *paid* for the stupid thing." He took a step away from them all, as if heading for the changing rooms. He knew that if anyone were *not* staring at that white stripe, they would be seeing the very picture of masked-wounded pride and rejection.

He didn't hear anyone coming after him, so he continued on to the far door. Maybe they'd catch him while he was naked.... Then his foot was flying out from under him, and he felt a sharp crack in his elbow, then on the back of his head.

Lying flat on the tile gave him an excellent view of the fresco on the ceiling at least. It really had turned out rather well-- the three of them against the splendor of Mount Olympus, Angel feeding him grapes while he reclined on a chaise, Gunn pouring him a cup of nectar, strategically-placed fig leaves for all concerned. Which were, of course, removable via a dial on the far wall. The final stroke of genius had been the addition of a tiny Xandercupid at one end of the scene, and a Spikecupid at the other, each aiming an arrow in the direction of the central trio. But why did the Spikecupid's wings appear to be fluttering?

"Wes? Wes, are you okay?" Angel sounded far too concerned about something, Wesley realized. Perhaps he knew about the fluttering wings in the mural. Then he realized his eyes weren't *open*. So he opened them. Four heads were gathered in the air, above him. Spike was the only one who didn't look worried.

Spike looked bored. And hungry. "Is he dead? Can I eat him?"

Xander whapped him hard on the arm, not at all playfully. "No, he isn't, and no, you may not. You don't eat family, even after they're dead. Which he's not." Wide brown eyes looked back to Wesley. "You're not, are you?"

"No," he said slowly. He could see Angel and Gunn looking reassured. At least, he thought that was how they looked. "Why are there two of everybody?"

"Man," Gunn swore. "Cordelia is *never* going to leave us home without a babysitter *ever* again. First time all week she leaves us alone and we break Wesley."

"He's not broken," Angel snapped, and he moved forward to feel Wes' head.

"OW!"

Angel stopped. "OK, so he's broken...."

"I am not broken," Wesley answered with great dignity. Something about that didn't sound right, so he decided to try it again. "I am **not** broken."

"Just a little bent," Spike sniggered.

"Oh, like you can talk," Angel muttered, and touched Wesley's head again, more gently. "Wes, can you remember that anti-concussion spell you said you looked up for Spike?"

Xander gave his lover an incredulous stare. "You think you need an anti-concussion spell? There's nothing in there to concuss!"

Spike was about to answer, and Angel put a hand over his mouth. "Wes? Can you remember it?"

Wes opened his mouth to say that yes, he did recall looking it up. Then he stopped and asked, instead, "Mind if I throw up, first?"

Afterwards, spell applied and taken upstairs to bed, Wesley found himself being waited on by two very large, adorable, and contrite lovers. They'd managed to leave Spike and Xander down below, though Wes could still hear Spike yelling about someone's very rude behavior. Truthfully, Wes thought Gunn was the one who'd leaned Wes sideways enough to aim for Spike.

And it wasn't as though the vampire hadn't leapt into the pool to clean off, thereby requiring a call to the pool company before anyone could use it again. Right now, all Wesley cared about was the two men before him, who were taking turns reading to him from out of one of his favorite books.

"Mr. and Mrs. Brown first met Paddington on a railway platform. In fact, that was how he came to have such an unusual name for a bear, for Paddington was the name of the station." Angel read aloud with a pained expression. "Wes, are you sure you don't want to hear something out of *_Leatherlust 3_*?" he asked.

"No. Now tell about the sign that says 'Please look after this bear.' Wesley stuck out his chin determinedly. He'd spent a most entertaining hour taking lessons from Spike on how to do this, and he had to admit it worked like a charm.

"Okay, okay... um, that's not on this page. Do you want me to skip to where it is?" Wesley just trembled his lower lip a bit, and Angel quickly turned the pages. "Mrs. Brown caught a glimpse of the writing on the label. It said, simply, Please Look After This Bear. Thank You."

Wesley sniffed for the poor abandoned bear, causing Angel and Gunn to look over at him, alarmed. "Poor Paddington," Wesley said. "All alone in a strange country. How terribly frightened he must have been." He caught the concerned, confused look Gunn and Angel exchanged. Obviously wondering if the anti-concussion spell had worked completely.

"Maybe you should read for a bit," Angel said to Gunn, handing the book over.

"Nah, man, he doesn't wanna hear me read. You read." Gunn pushed the book back.

Angel shook his head. "No, it's your turn. I read *all* of _The Velveteen Rabbit_, *and* _The Pokey Little Puppy_."

"Yeah, but those were short. This one's a novel. Besides, I can't do the accents."

"Trust me, Angel can't either." Wesley gave them both a glare. "And if one of you doesn't start reading soon, I'm going to throw a tantrum." Which foretold many dangers, chief among them being the danger of getting hit in the head by levitating throw-pillows, and the danger of no sex.

Angel gave Wesley a frantic -- for Angel -- look, threw the book at Gunn and dove for the mattress beside Wesley. He ignored both of their surprised looks, though Wes' turned into a triumphant grin when Angel wriggled under the duvet and snuggled him. "I'll cuddle. You read."

"How come you get all the good jobs?" Gunn demanded.

"Because I thought of it first," Angel replied easily. Wesley just settled himself into Angel's arms, and waited. And waited.

At a mild throat clearing from Wesley, Gunn jumped. "I uh... lost the page."

"Page ten," Wesley prompted him patiently.

"Oh." More silence, because Gunn was obviously already *on* page ten. The illustration on page eleven was plainly visible even from the bed. "She... ah... she turned appealingly to her husband. 'Oh, Henry, what *shall* we do? We can't just leave him here...' " Gunn shook his head and closed the book, holding his place with his finger. "Yes, they can! I mean, who goes around pickin' up strange bears in subway stations? It's a damn good way to get chomped on."

Wesley frowned. "You're worse at this than Angel. I realize that you think if you bollocks up doing it, I'll let you stop. And you're correct--"

He was interrupted by Gunn yelling "yes!" and tossing the book down. Gunn froze when he saw Wesley frowning slightly at him.

"*However*," Wesley continued. "I shall be read to, and if I have to ask Spike to do so -- again -- I shall. He does a very good job of it, does all the different voices, and Xander knows how to stay quiet and be an appreciative audience." Which meant bang went any chance at sex, and from the looks on their faces, Angel and Gunn realized this at the same time, because they both dove for the book.

"Be careful, you two-- that's a first edition!"

Gunn managed to get his hands on it first, and quickly located the correct page. "We can't just leave him here. There's no knowing what will happen to him..." He glanced up at Wesley.

"Um, can I read and cuddle at the same time?"

Wesley considered. "Possibly. As long as you can still do the different voices." From the look on Gunn's face, he was clearly debating the choice. He looked from Wesley, to the book, and back. Wesley wriggled a bit, enticingly, and Gunn finally scooted over.

It took a moment to get everyone situated so everyone could snuggle, and Gunn could still hold the book. Wesley waited until Gunn was half a sentence into the next paragraph before asking, "Could you let me up? I have to use the loo."

Gunn and Angel looked across Wesley at each other. "Really?" Angel asked. "Or are we still being punished?"

Wesley made a quick mental note-- when taking headgame lessons from Spike, keep in mind that Angel has known him for over a hundred years. "Really. Unless you'd like a waterbed in addition to an indoor pool." His lovers reluctantly untangled their arms from around him and let him rise.

He did so, gracefully, and headed to the bathroom. He made use of the facilities, then noticed something. He wandered back out to the bedroom and stood there. Angel and Gunn looked up at him, confused expressions on their faces appearing when they saw the one on his.

"Where are my swim briefs?" Wesley asked.

Angel and Gunn gave each other surprised, confused looks. "Did you see his briefs?" Angel asked.

"Nah, man. I thought you had 'em."

"I don't have them," Angel replied with a slow shake of his head.

"Hope we didn't *lose* them," Gunn muttered, and made a show of looking around.

Wesley's eyes narrowed. "I think you lot made off with them, just because I let someone whose name will not be mentioned pay for them." They both looked innocently at him, and he shook his head sternly. "I suppose you'll just have to buy me a new pair, then, won't you."

"I kinda like the pair you have now," Gunn said with a sly smile.

Wesley crossed his arms in front of his chest and returned the smile with a scolding frown. Not that he minded being leered at while naked, but the briefs had cost a bit of money which he'd had to pay *back*. For a few square inches of cloth, they'd been rather expensive. Then he smiled, slowly. "Then you don't mind if I use the pool in this outfit?"

"Uh-" Gunn stopped, and turned to Angel. "Is this a trick question?"

Angel sighed. "I don't know. He's worse than a girlfriend sometimes."

"I shall mention that to your last one, the next time I speak with her," Wesley promised, adding the evil quirk of his eyebrow that someone whose name would not be mentioned had assured him would knock his lovers senseless.

"Ubbadubba..." Angel replied with great coherence.

"*I* don't mind if you use the pool in that outfit, as long as the poster boys for drowning-at-birth ain't in it," Gunn finally ventured.

"Good one," Angel told him.

"Thanks."

"So if I suggested I might be in the pool tomorrow afternoon, wearing this outfit, that would be all right with you?" Wesley asked.

Angel furrowed his brow. "This all seems too easy, somehow."

Gunn picked up the book from his lap. Studied it meticulously, as if it might offer him the correct answer. And it might, if he knew how to read it-- Paddington was very wise, for a marmalade-eating bear from darkest Peru. At last he raised his head. "Are they gonna be cleaning the pool tomorrow afternoon?"

Angel shook his head. "No, it should be clean before brunch."

"Brunch?" Gunn gave him a questioning look, and Angel shrugged.

"If Cordelia says thou shalt eat brunch, then thou shalt eat brunch."

"Why does Cordelia want us to eat brunch tomorrow?"

Wesley rolled his eyes. He didn't understand why it was so difficult for anyone to remember such simple details. He was, on the other hand, beginning to understand why every female on the planet thought men were dolts. They *were*.

Angel and Gunn were looking at him, now, obviously hoping for a clue. He cleared his throat. "Brunch. A late, large, catered breakfast. Serving twelve."

Angel started to count on his fingers. "Me, Gunn, Wesley, Cordy, my idiot child, my idiot child's boyfriend..." He looked up. "That's six..."

Gunn took over. "Um.. Detective Kate? She likes you this week, right?"

Angel nodded. "I bought six tickets to the Policeman's Ball from her, and that put her ahead in the office contest, apparently." He glanced sheepishly at his lovers. "By the way, we're going to the Policeman's Ball next Saturday..." Wesley ahem'd. Angel went back to his finger-counting.

"Okay, Kate, that's seven... Oh, God, Spike's not bringing the kids down again, is he? The last time he brought the piranhas to the table, he ended up feeding them all the cinnamon rolls."

Wesley ahem'ed again. When Angel and Gunn were facing him, quietly, he said, "Try 'idiot child's boyfriend's best friend since pre-school.' Work your way from there, if you like."

"Willow?" Angel asked. "Why-- brunch. Tomorrow." He scurried out of bed as quickly as he could. "We're buying you a new suit."

Gunn looked from Angel to Wesley. "Would someone like to tell me what I'm missing? How do you get from Willow, to brunch, to...oh shit. That's tomorrow?" He followed Angel out of the bed and dug around for his clothes, as Angel was doing. "I *knew* it was a trick question. Hey!" He stopped as he found his jeans. "Why are we buying him a new pair? We've got the other pair stashed--"

Angel looked at him. "Do you want everyone looking at his stripes?"

Gunn took a quick glance at where the stripes used to be, and shook his head, with an accompanying gulp. "No. Uh-uh. G-Man would probably cross his eyes and fall over dead of a heart attack, anyway."

"He'll turn you into a newt again if he hears you calling him that," Wesley pointed out.

Gunn shrugged. "Wasn't that bad. I got better."

Angel paused, one leg in his trousers, one leg out. An interesting picture, and thank God they'd managed to convince him that leather wasn't just for evil vampires anymore. "Where are we gonna find him a new suit at this time of night?"

"Why don't we just cut off a pair of cargo pants. At the knee. You can swim in that, right, Wes?" Gunn suggested.

Wesley looked at his two mind-boggling lovers. "Right, then." He crossed over to the bed, grabbed his book, and headed for the door.

"Where are you going?" Angel asked.

"To find someone to finish reading to me." Cut-off cargo pants. Really. How was he supposed to show off his arse in cargo pants?

"Yo, you're still naked," Gunn pointed out.

He shrugged one shoulder. "I don't suppose Spike and Xander will mind, given their own swimming attire."

Angel pulled his leg back *out* of his leather trousers, and was across the room before Wesley had even thought about taking another step towards the door. Gunn wasn't far behind him. "We'll buy you a new suit in the morning," Angel promised. "Well, Gunn'll buy you a new suit in the morning. I'll just stay here and not turn to dust."

"Yeah, whatever kind you want. Micro-mini-whatever. Long as it covers the important parts."

Wesley folded his arms, tucking the book between them. "I thought you loved me for my mind?"

"What mind?" Gunn said, then when he realized what he'd just said, stammered, "What if I stop at that funky bookstore on my way, and get you..uh...something?"

"Randal's Manifesto on Komodo Demons," Angel suggested. "He's been after that one for weeks."

Gunn nodded quickly. "I can do that."

Wesley was trying very hard not to smile. It was flattering to see how quickly he'd managed to get these two so completely well-trained. To control his smile, he asked, "If you're going to be at the book seller's, can you stop in next door and get me some more tea?"

Gunn started to nod. Then his eyes narrowed. "Do I look like your personal errand boy?"

If Gunn thought Wesley was going to fold, he would be sorely disappointed. This just called for a slight change in tactics. "If you want to see me try to survive on Cordelia's coffee, it is, of course, up to you. But I tend to get very weak, and rather grumpy..."

"I think I'm being manipulated, here..." Gunn frowned.

Really? What clued him in, exactly--the fact that the naked man with the children's book in his arms was directing the progress of his every step? Wesley rolled his eyes. "I think I'm going to go find someone to read to me," he said simply, and took another step toward the door. He found himself being lifted up and carried back to the bed. As he landed on the bed with a gentle bounce, he looked up at Angel. "Was there something you wanted?"

Angel glowered at him. "You are staying there. Tomorrow morning, Gunn will go get you a new pair of briefs. Tomorrow night, all three of us will go get you your book and tea -- Giles will want to go to the book shop, so we can take them along. Sometime after everyone from Sunnydale goes *back* to Sunnydale, the three of us are locking the doors and windows and sewer escapes to the hotel and enjoying the pool in privacy."

Angel leaned over and plucked the book from Wes' arms. "And right now, you are going to listen to *us* read to you." He glared at Gunn, as if daring him to object.

"I ain't reading that stupid book," Gunn said.

"Excuse me," Angel said to Wesley, and hauled Gunn out the door and into the hallway, by his ear.

"What?" Gunn asked grumpily when the door had shut behind them and they were standing in the carpeted hall.

"You are *going* to read that stupid book, and you're going to *sound* like you like it, and you're going to shut up about it," Angel said, growling softly.

"Why the hell should I? It's a kid's book, and he's just doing it to prove we'll do anything for him."

Angel nodded. "Yeah. Think about it. If you were a guy as smart as Wesley, would you be asking your lovers to read you kid's books, unless you *needed* to know they'd do anything for you?"

Gunn opened his mouth to retort, then he paused. "You don't think he's just seeing how far he can push us?"

Angel nodded. "I think that's exactly what he's doing. See how far we'll go for him. He knows what we'd do in life and death situations. But this stuff? Embarrass ourselves? Gunn -- Spike and Xander had to talk him *into* this thing in the first place, remember?"

"So if we do stupid shit like read him Paddington Bear, he'll know what? That we like him?"

Angel shook his head. "That's not what he needs to know." He paused, tapping on the wall. "Gunn, that guy in there has saved our asses more times than I can count, and he's fucked over his damn English pride any time we needed him to. If he needs us to do the same thing, to read him Paddington Bear or The Little Engine That Could, or Politically Incorrect Bedtime Stories, in order to know that we love him, I don't think it's too much to ask."

"I kinda like The Little Engine That Could," Gunn said. "Yeah, I hear ya. Can't we just say 'hey, we love you, let's get sweaty'?"

Angel shrugged. "Maybe after we finish reading to him."

They stood there silently, while Gunn thought it over. Finally he sighed. "Hell, it's a short book."

"Don't try skipping pages or anything," Angel warned. "He's got it memorized."

Gunn snorted. "Couldn't he have read anything *normal* when he was a kid? Y'know, like The Urban Survival Manual, or How To Kill A Vampire With Things You Find In Your Own Kitchen."

"You frighten me sometimes." Angel took the book from him. "Actually, I think Cordelia may have read that last one." Angel opened the door slowly, half afraid that Wesley had escaped out the window to go buy his own swimsuit at Wal-Mart while they were arguing.

Instead they saw him, lying on his side with the blankets pulled up to his shoulder. Sound asleep.

"Think he's faking?" Gunn whispered.

Angel shook his head. "His heart's beating too slow for him to be awake." Gunn blinked at that, but looked back at Wesley.

His head was sunk slightly into the middle pillow, still-wet hair fanned out across it, and a tiny frown twisted his otherwise expressionless face. He was still wearing his glasses.

"Damn," Gunn whispered. "Shoulda just read--" He cut himself off, and went over to the bed. Easing himself onto the bed, slowly and carefully enough that Wesley wouldn't wake, Gunn

scooted closer -- close enough to touch, though he didn't. "How can he not know?" he whispered, knowing Angel could hear, whether or not the vampire had followed him to the bedside.

"Just stupid?" Angel whispered back. "I mean, he **is** with **us**."

Angel managed to cross the space between the door and the bed in the time it took Gunn to realize he was trying to make a joke. "Angel, nobody who can come up with a way to give blowjobs in a swimming pool without having to breathe could be too stupid to realize we love him."

"I think that was more a matter of motivation," Angel said as he climbed into the bed on the other side of Wesley. Then his face grew serious, as he looked down at Wes' face. "He just doesn't expect it."

Gunn didn't say anything in response. He looked from Angel back to Wesley, and thought things over. Finally he came to a decision. He reached up, carefully removed Wesley's glasses, and snuggled in closer to hold the sleeping man. "Angel?"

"Yeah?"

"One of these days...."

"He's going to take it for granted?"

"If I have to read him everything up to _Paddington Goes To College_."

"_Paddington Gets Married_."

"Paddington buys a house and has two point five fuzzy damn bear kids who grow up to raise piranhas."

Angel chuckled. He bit his lip, trying not to make any noise, but when Gunn looked up at him, he laughed again.

Gunn smiled, and shook his head. "Yeah. Well, what can I say. The **weirdest** ass people in your family."

Angel gave him a look. "That would include you, too, you know."

Gunn nodded. "Yeah. I know." He reached across Wesley with one arm, and put his hand on Angel's shoulder. They lay like that for a minute, just listening to Wes breathe. Then Gunn added, "But do I have to admit to being related to Spike? Couldn't we just say you found him under a stinkweed bush or something?"

Angel shook his head. "If we don't claim him, he'll pout." When Gunn just gave him a 'yeah, so?' look, Angel added, "Have you noticed the way Wes has been pouting, recently?"

"Yeah. He's getting damn good at it."

"Spike gave him some pointers."

Gunn just gaped at him. He turned his gaze back to Wesley, and stopped whatever he'd been about to say when he saw the grin the not-so-asleep Wesley was trying to hide. Tapping Angel on the shoulder, Gunn shifted his eyes just a bit, and hid his own grin. "We can't let those two play together anymore, man. Spike's a bad influence."

Angel didn't have to hide his smile, with Wesley's back turned to him. "I think you're right. We'll have to lock Wes up in here and keep him to ourselves."

"Whoever thought those two would hang together, anyway?" Gunn asked in honest bewilderment. "Unless Wesley's just observing be-kind-to-morons year."

"He's the only one who can carry on a decent conversation about politics, football, and Fyarl economics." Wesley didn't open his eyes, though his voice showed no signs of his having been asleep.

"Spike? Decent conversation?" Gunn looked at Angel. "Is he delirious, man?"

"Concussion, remember?"

"Are you questioning my mystical skills?" Wesley asked, assuming a tone of patently false petulance.

"No, just your taste in drinking buddies. And beer." Gunn nestled his chin against Wesley's forehead, so he couldn't see the mortally-offended frown he knew was appearing on Wesley's face.

"You, who drink *American* beer, cast aspersion on what I drink?" Wesley shifted a little, cuddling himself in more tightly. Angel shifted as well, moving forward into the inch of space Wes' motion left between them.

"That stuff you drink would kill a horse."

"Or someone weaned on grain-flavored water," Wesley countered.

"Hey, *I* was weaned on Irish whiskey," Angel pointed out. "And even I think the stuff you drink could kill a horse and the sumo wrestler who rode in on it."

Wesley started to protest, and Gunn lowered his face to cut him off with a kiss. After a second: "Shut up, Wes. We're saying you drink manly beer. Go with it."

He sighed. "It's only four point three percent alcohol, you know."

"Yeah, and you think it's safe because of that, until you wake up the next morning after five mugs and find your battle-axe stuck in the dart board and your underwear hangin' from the moose head," Gunn complained. "No more of that stuff for me."

"That was Angel's underwear, you know," Wesley said mildly. He ignored Angel's surprised "It was what?" and continued, "Just because one mug is the fluid ounce equivalent of a can

and a half of American beer--"

"And I don't recall anyone *saying* that when I ordered my second one," Gunn countered.

"Well, I thought you knew how much alcohol you could tolerate. No one forced you to drink it. Unless you considered Spike's taunts a form of irresistible motivation."

"No whiny little punk-ass vampire is gonna tell me I can't hold my liquor, even if he *is* family."

Wesley leaned his head back against Angel's chest. "Spike's not so bad, really. We've got a lot in common, when you come down to it. We're both English. Both not really wanted by our own families..." At Angel's indrawn breath-just-for-speaking-purposes, Wesley shook his head. "Our original families. And we've both been adopted into a better one."

"Man, you can't--" Gunn started to object, then he stopped, no doubt realizing that Wesley wasn't saying anything even remotely untrue. "You picked a lot better boyfriend, though."

Angel and Gunn found that they were both now holding Wesley tighter, so tightly there was barely any room at all, between them.

"Wes," Angel began, but he faltered when Wesley and Gunn looked at him.

"It's all right," Wesley said, a moment later. But Angel shook his head.

"No, it's not."

"No, I suppose it isn't. Just sometimes. It's not that I miss home, because this *is* home. Just... sometimes..." Just sometimes he missed what home might've been. And that was why there were cases of Batham's Bitter and a dart board in which to get one's helm-axe stuck.

"Yeah, we know. Sometimes you just gotta drink imported beer and watch _Red Dwarf_ 'til two-thirty in the morning. But maybe we could get the G-Man to move down here, so you have a better class of pansy-ass British guys to chill with?"

Wesley poked Gunn in the ribs, right in the one ticklish spot they'd ever found. As Gunn yelped, Wesley said, "You cannot drag Rupert down here just to keep me company. He has a life, and work, in Sunnydale. Besides which, he's entirely the wrong class. His family is low upper class. Mine is upper middle class. We would never get along for more than an hour."

"Um..." Gunn sounded as though he was doing some figuring, in his head.

Meanwhile, Angel said, "We could invite him down sometime. I mean, more often. I know Xander wants to see him again -- we don't have to tell him we just want him here for his accent."

"Hang on," Gunn interrupted. "What's the difference between upper lower and middle whatever?"

"Five pounds more in income per year and a stripe on your old school tie that's about a millimeter wider," Wesley answered seriously. Semi-seriously.

"About that stripe..." Angel began, but Gunn cut him off.

"If we can't get G-m... I mean, Rupert, to move down here... does this mean I have to be nice to Spike?"

"If you are nice to Spike, it will only make him wonder what you're up to." Wesley paused, then added with a faint smile, "If you were nice to him for a few days, it would drive him absolutely mad with paranoia."

"Oh, yeah?" Gunn raised an eyebrow. Then he slowly smiled. "Sounds like fun. When can I start? Can I go be nice to him right now?"

Wesley shook his head and pressed himself closer to Gunn, if that was possible. Angel obligingly filled in the sesquicentillimeter of space that was left between them. "No. You have to stay here and be nice to me."

"Should I get up and get Paddington?"

Wesley shook his head again. "No. I think not. I think you should be nice to me in a manner that doesn't involve bears. Even ones from darkest Peru."

"About that stripe," Angel said again.

"Yes?"

"Which one is wider?"

Wesley kept his face straight as he looked over his shoulder. "If you can't tell by looking, you obviously weren't properly educated."

"Oh." Angel nodded, then leaned down and placed his teeth carefully around Wesley's shoulder.

"Um, I'm thinking you'd better not tease him, or the fangs come out," Gunn explained.

"I'm quaking in terror," Wesley said, wriggling in something other than terror. Angel pressed down with his teeth, just a little. "I...ah...mine."

"Your what?" (Or actually, "Youh wha?")

"My stripe."

"Yeah, and about *that* stripe..." Gunn looked him in the eye.

"Hmmm?"

"We love you, Wes." Angel bit down a little harder, and Wesley was torn between looking back at Gunn and allowing his eyeballs to roll up in his head. "But you are **never** seein' those briefs again."

Wesley blinked at him, astonished at the sincerity of the growl. Gunn had sounded positively vampiric. "I don't understand. I thought you rather liked them."

"I do. But they're getting burned."

"Burned?" Wesley had tried to keep the tone of hurt out of his voice, but from his lovers' reactions, he knew he hadn't been entirely successful. Not that he minded, given where their hands were.

"Yeah. In a ritual sacrifice in the middle of Rodeo Drive. While Angel sings 'This is the song that doesn't end...' They just cause too much trouble, Wes."

Angel took his teeth off Wesley's shoulder, to the tune of a disappointed moan. "I'm not singing that again."

Both of his lovers looked back at him. "You're not **singing** again. We promised the Powers That Be."

"Perhaps I could...just wear it for you?" Wesley suggested.

Gunn considered it. He looked over at Angel, and they held a silent conference. Wesley wriggled a bit, trying to encourage Angel to return his mouth to its former residence. "Maybe," Gunn finally allowed.

"Only in this room," Angel added.

"Or in the pool **if** the terrible twins, Cordelia, and everyone else including David and the Sunnydale crew are at least two hundred miles away and guaranteed not to return until the weekend."

Wesley pouted a bit. "Are you sure that will be safe enough?" He felt a hand suddenly tracing the path where the stripe would have been.

"No. Three hundred miles."

the end

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