

Feel Again

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Feel Again

by [kally77](#)

Summary

Spike comes out of the amulet not as a ghost but as a burned, bloody mess. Angel tries very hard not to care, but it doesn't work so well.

Feel Again

Seconds passed, seemingly interminable, before anyone moved, and when they did it seemed to be all at once.

Fred covered her mouth with her hand as she turned away from the body on the floor, and found a safe place in Lorne's arms, who looked nauseous himself. Wes dropped down to one knee, his forearm in front of his mouth and nose, his free hand hovering above the burnt mass as if he wanted to touch, help, but wasn't too sure how, or whether touching would bring pain. Gunn didn't seem to have as many scruples as he bent down and pressed two fingers where – presumably, but it was hard to tell – the carotid was.

"No pulse," he said grimly after a few instants. "Whoever it was, it's too late..."

"He hasn't had a pulse in a century," Angel interrupted him, his voice stripped of any emotion as he stared, unblinking, at the badly burnt body slumped on the floor of his office. The stench was atrocious, but behind it, there was no doubt whose scent this was, even if the damage was too great to identify him by sight.

"Vampire?" Wes asked perfunctorily as he glanced up.

"Spike."

The ex-Watcher's eyes widened very slightly before returning to the unmoving body.

"Spike?" Gunn repeated, startled. "*The* Spike?"

Fred dared to turn back toward them, although, Angel noticed, her gaze did not stray toward the floor. "Who is Spike?"

"William the Bloody," Wes whispered as he stood again. "One of the worst recorded vampires. Second only to..."

A fugitive glance in Angel's direction, and he didn't finish that statement. Angel did it for him.

"Me. But he's dead. He died in Sunnydale."

That earned him another glance from Wes, sharper, this one, but Wes didn't comment. Instead, he went to the phone and requested medical assistance.

"We're trying to heal him?" Gunn questioned when Wes was done. "Wouldn't a well placed stake be more appropriate?"

Wes had a small shake of head as he came to stand between Gunn and Angel, his eyes back on the body in front of them. "He was an ally of the Slayer. Or so Angel told me."

A pointed look said without words that it was *all* Angel had told him.

“Are we to assume he died – or was presumed dead – fighting by Buffy’s side when she closed the Hellmouth?”

Angel mumbled something that might have been affirmative.

“Anything else we might need to know about...”

A medical team rushing in prevented Angel from having to answer. Under Wesley’s directions, they lifted Spike onto a stretcher with the utmost care, but even then ashes and bits of clothing – only clothing, Angel tried to convince himself, nothing else – fell off to the floor. Wesley requested Fred’s help, as he followed the stretcher out. Lorne left too, muttering something about a drink, and after a quiet “You’d better get this cleaned ASAP” Gunn slipped out of the room.

For a moment longer, Angel’s eyes remained on the blackened carpet, and he could still see in his mind his estranged grandchild, scorched beyond recognition, all his hair burnt off his head, what remained of his clothes stuck in a bloody, sooty mess to his body. Vampires just were not meant to survive that kind of burns; Gunn had been right, a stake would have been far more appropriate – and much kinder, too.

Finally tearing his gaze off that spot on the floor, he noticed the amulet that had dropped from the envelope he had torn open earlier – the amulet from which Spike had painfully materialized, and that, Angel supposed, he had been wearing upon closing the Hellmouth. Helping to close it. Buffy had done the work, Angel was sure of it, however much she had tried to give credit to Spike.

Clutching the bauble in his hand, he sat down at his desk, managed to operate the phone to request a custodian’s immediate help, and then tried to focus on the mail waiting for him. Instead, his eyes were drawn back to the carpet.

It could have been him, lying in Spike’s place, if only a certain Slayer had wished it so.

He wasn’t sure whether to envy or pity him.

The custodian had come and gone and Angel had worked his way through half his inbox when Wesley returned, bringing back with him the sickening scent of burnt flesh that Angel tried to ignore the best he could. Sometimes, not needing to breathe was a blessing.

“Is there anything you may tell me about Spike’s recent activities that would explain what’s going on?” he asked without preamble. “Burnt to that degree, he should be dust by now.”

Angel shrugged and picked up the amulet on his desk, holding it tight enough that one of the edges cut into his palm.

“I told you, he was helping Buffy, and she said he died when she closed the Hellmouth.”

Wesley seemed distracted, looking on the floor as if searching for something as he insisted: “Did she say anything more than that? Did he disappear in flames, maybe? And where is that

thing that...”

“Wes?” Angel sighed tiredly, holding his open hand out toward the other man. “Is that what you’re looking for?”

With a pleased nod, the Watcher took hold of the amulet and examined it, turning it between his fingers, cleaning off the speck of blood left from Angel’s palm.

“Spike came out of this, didn’t he? That’s what it seemed to me.”

Angel merely grunted, and tried to return to what he had been doing. He didn’t see the words on the letter in his hand, however, but the incredible spectacle of Spike appearing right out of the amulet – only to collapse in an unconscious mess. After a few seconds, Wesley’s impatient tone brought him back to the present.

“So? What is it? What do you know? Come on, Angel, what are you not telling me?”

So many things, Angel thought to himself, *that I wouldn’t even know where to start if I had to say it all.*

“Wolfram & Hart gave me the amulet. I gave it to Buffy. She gave it to Spike. As far as I know, he died wearing it.”

Wesley’s puzzled frown was predictable, and Angel braced himself for the last tidbit of information he had to share.

“He has a soul, too.”

In other circumstances, the Watcher’s slow blink and bewildered look might have been comical. Right then however, Angel couldn’t have found humor in anything. He hadn’t found humor in anything in a long time, it seemed.

“I beg your pardon?”

Foreseeing what question would come next, Angel justified himself without waiting.

“He died hours after I heard about it, so it’s not like it mattered anymore.”

“Except that we now have two souled vampires where the prophecy...”

Standing brusquely, Angel stopped the tirade with a shake of his head.

“I don’t want to hear it, Wes. I don’t have time to hear it. As a matter of fact, I don’t want to hear a word about Spike.”

He strode toward the door, certain that someone, somewhere in the building would give him the opportunity to kill something without remorse, and was stopped by three simple words.

“What about Buffy?”

He turned back to Wesley, and received a look as blank as the one he was giving him.

“Shall we warn her? She’d probably want to know...”

“How is Spike?”

Wes seemed thrown off by the change of topic; after all, Angel had said seconds earlier that he didn’t want to hear about Spike. And to tell the truth, he had a pretty good idea of how badly Spike fared. He simply wanted Wesley to hear himself say it.

“Rather bad, I’m afraid,” he conceded. “The medical team is baffled, Fred is running some tests and I’m going to check a couple of spells. We’re not sure why he isn’t dust yet.”

“So you’re not sure he won’t be dust soon,” Angel finished for him. “She thinks he’s dead. No reason to make her believe otherwise if you can’t promise he’ll get any better.”

The tone of his voice made the decision final, and Wesley acknowledged that with a slight nod. Putting his grandchild firmly out of his mind, Angel strode away. He had a law firm to run and odds to beat. He couldn’t afford to give Wolfram & Hart a loophole to play with by not doing his job. Connor’s continued happiness depended on it.

For the past week, the reports about Spike’s condition had accumulated on Angel’s desk. Apparently, Wesley had taken the ‘I don’t want to hear about it’ literally, and was communicating in writing. One or two pages every day, always precisely on the center of his desk when he came in each morning, and that Angel pushed into a corner without reading more than the subject line.

He didn’t want to know. He didn’t need to know. He didn’t need to, because he already knew. Spike wasn’t any better. If he had been, he would have found a way to aggravate Angel already. So he wasn’t, and Angel didn’t want to hear it confirmed. Didn’t want to hear how bad it was. At least, as long as there were reports every morning, it meant that Spike wasn’t dust – and why that was a relief, Angel couldn’t have said.

Which was why when, on the ninth day after Spike’s appearance, Angel found his desk empty of the familiar report, he froze and unwittingly took a deep breath. Was Spike dust? Wouldn’t he have felt it, known it, if he was?

With some difficulty, he moved and took a seat at his desk. He was about to call Wesley to have confirmation of Spike’s fate when the Englishman entered the room unannounced and came to stand by his desk.

“Angel,” he greeted the vampire with an inclination of the head. “Have you made a decision?”

Mentally reviewing his last discussions with Wesley and any open case that might have needed his attention, Angel couldn’t figure out what Wesley was talking about.

“A decision? About what?”

“Spike, of course,” the human said with an exasperated sigh. “If you don’t want to, just say so and I’ll just find another solution. Unless you want him dead, in which case it would certainly be faster and less painful to simply stake him.”

Angel shook his head, still not understanding what Wesley expected from him. But before he could ask for precisions, Wesley nodded, his gaze hardening.

“I see. Well, at least I have an answer now.”

And with that, Wes left, head high, obviously angry, although for what reason Angel still didn’t know. It reminded him of this same man, a few months back, when the scar across his throat was still fresh, and the flame of betrayal was still vivid in his eyes. Angel had forgiven Wesley for stealing his son, he really had; he understood, even, why he had done it. But reminders like this of everything that had happened were like shards of glass reopening barely healed wounds.

Tiredly, Angel reached for the pile of reports about Spike and read them all, one after the other, from the most recent to the oldest, understanding as he did Wesley’s question and anger as well as a few other random comments from Wes, Fred, and even Gunn. They had assumed he knew what was going on in the hospital ward, tried to get him to react, help, without being too obvious, and he hadn’t understood. Had let words pass without asking what they meant. When had he stopped caring about what his friends were trying to tell him? Since they had come to W&H? Before that?

The room was dark, only lit by the sinuous lines on the screen of a machine pushed in a corner. Angel’s eyes rested on the green waves for an instant as he wondered what the machine could be registering. Spike was dead, after all, no vital signs to be taken anywhere on him. He would ask someone, later, maybe.

Realizing that he was only delaying, he finally walked inside the room, feeling magic crackle around him. It had to be powerful spells, if he could feel them so clearly when they were not even directed toward him. And again, he was trying to delay.

Finally forcing his attention to the bed, he couldn’t stifle a gasp. It was as the reports had described, and even grimmer. The simple sight of Spike was painful, almost worse, it seemed, than on that first day, because the cover of clothing was gone. Angel had been right when thinking that a stake would have been more merciful than this.

What had once been pale, flawless skin and faint blue lines that begged to be followed by eyes, fingers or tongue in their intricate roads, was now a crackled, charcoal mess. It seemed as though Spike would crumble to ashes at the barest touch. And so, Angel had to try. Stepping closer, he reached out to Spike’s hand resting at his side on the bed. A single finger touching as lightly as he knew how. There was no crumbling to ashes, but a moan escaped Spike’s throat, startling Angel enough that he took a step back.

Eyelids fluttered open; they seemed oddly naked with their not yet fully regrown eyelashes. The blue of Spike’s eyes, though, despite the shadows, was still as vibrant as ever.

“Angelus...”

The word was hoarse. Dry lips, dry throat. It didn't sound like Spike, and it wasn't Spike, not really, not with all the drugs the reports said were in his system. And yet Angel responded to a name that wasn't his.

“I'm here. Stay calm.”

Spike hadn't moved save for opening his eyes, but that felt like something important to say. Better if he remained immobile, certainly.

“Dru warned me about touching the stars, but I never thought...”

He let out something that was half a chuckle, half a moan, and Angel cringed at the painful sound.

“She's been out long. Do you think she'll be back soon?”

“Who?”

“Don't like her going out without me. I should...”

Blackened fingers curled up on the sheet as Spike tried to sit up. Angel was about to push him down, but hesitated, unwilling to touch him – and hurt him. The movement stopped however, and Spike's body lay still again, his eyes shut tight. Angel thought he had fallen asleep again, but a whisper proved him wrong.

“Please... Angelus, please... It hurts so much... Make it stop...”

Angel had learned, long before that day, just how much pain – or how much pleasure – it took to make Spike beg. He had no doubt that this particular threshold had been crossed long ago, and it made a slow anger rise in him to think that it had lasted so long already. It was his fault, in part, for not reading Wesley's reports and his almost week-old suggestion that Angel's blood might help. Wes had meant to use it in a spell, but Angel could spare a little before that. It couldn't hurt Spike, and maybe, just maybe, it would help.

Coming closer to the head of the bed, he briefly pondered his options. He didn't want to move Spike and hurt him even more in the process. Wrist, then. A flash of his fangs, and already blood was welling up in the two neat punctures. Carefully, he approached his wrist to Spike's mouth, and a drop of blood fell and tinted it red. Damaged nostrils flared, the tip of a tongue came to investigate, and Angel lowered his wrist until it barely touched Spike's lips. They parted against the wounds, and again that clever tongue was there, coaxing more blood out, caressing as Spike suckled like a newborn.

The experience was somehow familiar, and for an instant Angel closed his eyes, trying to see not the damaged shell of his grandchild, but rather the arrogant prick that would sulk like a child when Angelus refused to call him Spike, yet moan in delight if, at the right time, with the right touch, he called him Will. The image was there, as clear as it had been a century before, and, surprisingly enough, as arousing. Angel opened his eyes again, and forced

himself to focus on the vampire in front of him. That was when he noticed it, that soft, so faint rumbling.

Spike was purring.

How could he purr when he was in so much pain?

And yet... he was, no doubt about it.

For a few more instants, the suckling continued, and then, slowly, as Spike fell asleep, stopped.

Angel took a step back, his gaze still on Spike, and told himself that he was imagining things. No, Spike didn't look any better. Not yet. But he would, eventually, Angel silently promised the unsuspecting vampire.

Finally starting to leave, he thought he heard something and looked back at Spike again. But no, he was asleep, Angel was just hallucinating again. No way had he called Angel 'Sire'.

"I'll do it."

If Wesley was surprised by the interruption, he didn't show it. Instead, looked up from the pages he had been absorbed in and gave Angel a small nod. Then he calmly walked to his desk, put down the book he had been perusing and picked up another one.

"What made you change your mind?" he asked, his tone as light as if he had been inquiring about the weather.

Angel shrugged and buried his hands in his pockets. He was aware, acutely so, of the closed wounds on the inside of his wrist.

"I just... I went to see him. If you think it'll help..."

"I wouldn't have asked if I didn't think it would," Wesley gently chided as he gathered a few ingredients and a large recipient. He looked around the room before realizing that the only available surface was the floor. Unfazed, he knelt down and organized everything around him, the book on one side, the ingredients on the other and the bowl in front of him.

"I'll start this," he announced distractedly. "Why don't you go to Fred and ask her to take some of your blood and..."

"No need for syringes," Angel cut in as he sat down across from Wes. "Just tell me when you need it."

Wesley's eyes flickered from Angel's face to the letter opener he had picked up on the desk and to his slightly bloodstained wrist before returning to what he was doing.

"Did he feed from you?" he asked after a few instants.

“A little,” Angel confirmed, uneasy.

“That’s good. We’ve had problems making him feed. Did he bite you? We haven’t seen him change to his demon mask since...”

“He didn’t.”

It was weird, Angel pondered as Wesley glanced up at him again and then focused on mixing smelly herbs and things. Weird that Wes would care so much about helping a vampire he didn’t even know when it had taken so long to Angel to even go see Spike.

“Why do you do all this?” he asked, observing Wesley’s precise movements and obvious concentration.

“All this?” Wesley repeated absently.

“All this for Spike. Why does it matter to you that he lives or not?”

A flicker of surprise, and Wesley was motioning to the letter opener.

“Now. Just place your wrist above the bowl and I’ll tell you when to stop. Be quiet until we’re done.”

Wincing slightly at the sharp pain, Angel held his dripping wrist as Wesley had indicated and tried to pay attention to the words recited to activate the spell. Why did all magic need such pompous formulas rather than simple ones? Whatever the reason for its complexity, the spell seemed to work as the content of the bowl glowed for a second before returning to its dark red, almost black color.

“It’s done,” Wesley announced and Angel removed his arm, pressing on the wound to stop the bleeding. “And to answer your question...”

He rose lithely, holding the bowl in his two hands, and waited for Angel to stand before he continued.

“I suppose it matters so much because he’s a souled vampire. I’m helping him for the same reasons I joined your fight in the beginning. Because it’s a fight worth fighting.”

He paused, his eyes seemingly seeing right through Angel, and then added, very quietly:

“Isn’t it?”

Angel could do nothing but nod.

Telling himself that he didn’t have anything better to do despite the pile of papers on his desk waiting for his signature, Angel accompanied Wesley to the hospital floor, curious as to how exactly the end of the spell would go – and whether it would work. He started being worried when Wesley requested the help of three male nurses, and watched, sickened, as they held

down a struggling and screaming Spike while Wesley applied the bowl's contents to the burnt skin as quickly as he could.

"Enough!" Angel heard himself growl, loud enough that all four humans, startled, looked at him, and Spike whimpered.

"I know it looks cruel," Wesley admitted, apologetic, "but I can't drug him any more without risking it affecting the spell, and then it would all have been for nothing."

Fighting down the cold anger that was threatening to seize him, Angel ordered the nurses out of the room; they didn't hesitate a second before obeying, merely glancing at Wesley as they went.

"I'll hold him still," he informed the Watcher before he could protest, and approached the bed. Spike's eyes were golden but his face was still human, and for an instant Angel wondered whether he wasn't shifting because the change was painful.

"Spike, I know it hurts but you have to be still. This will help. You understand?"

A blink, a look at Wes, and then Spike nodded, barely.

Moving behind the head of the bed, Angel motioned stiffly for Wesley to continue. As soon as the human's fingers touched darkened skin, Spike moaned and his body trembled. It was clear that he was doing his best to remain still, as Angel had told him to, but it was also clear that the pain was immense. When the shaking became too much, Angel dared to press both his hands to Spike's shoulders. His hold was slippery as Wesley had already applied the blood mixture there, but the contact seemed to help as Spike froze and looked up, straight into Angel's eyes.

"Hurts. Make it stop, Angelus."

Startled by the hoarse whisper, Wesley stopped working for an instant and looked at Angel. The pause didn't last however, and he was soon working again, clearly as quickly as he could.

"I know it does, Will. But it'll be over soon. And then you'll be better. I promise."

Spike moaned and closed his eyes, but his movements remained at a minimum. After a few more minutes, Wesley was done, and Angel was relieved to see him put the bowl down. But then, he explained that he had to do Spike's back, too, even if the burns weren't as severe, and Angel froze as he realized that they were only half way through the ordeal.

Wesley had left a while before, grim and nervously exhausted after the task that had been his, thanking Angel for his help in keeping Spike as still as possible. Angel stayed, found a chair, and sat down, even though all he wanted was to be away from the smell of blood, ashes and magic, away from the muffled whimpers that still shook Spike's body every so often.

Elbows on his knees, chin in his hands, Angel kept an eye on Spike. On his darkened skin, the spell mixture had almost seemed black at first, but gradually, with each passing moment, the burns and blood seemed to melt and fade, as if absorbed by Spike's slowly healing flesh. It would take a while, Wesley had said, maybe up to two days, maybe a second treatment would be necessary, but to see the spell beginning to work was surprisingly heartwarming.

Surprisingly, because Angel shouldn't have cared, one way or the other. Spike had ceased being his responsibility long before to become a pain, and Angel couldn't think of any reason why he should want the other vampire to get better. Hot poker, Buffy, his soul, the amulet, all were reasons to want him dusted for good. So why had something broken in Angel when the boy called him Angelus? He should have been upset at that, he wasn't Angelus, wouldn't be ever again if he could help it, and yet, hearing the name had only surprised him. And he'd been as surprised as the first time Connor had called him Dad.

Sitting straight, Angel frowned at the turn his thoughts had taken. Why would his mind associate Connor and Spike? Nothing in common, between the two of them, nothing but this frightening, overwhelming anger toward Angel.

Nothing but blood.

With a shake of his head, Angel stood, ready to leave. He pointedly avoided looking at Spike as he did. He had done his part, like with Connor. He had nothing more to do or say.

Like with Connor.

Three days had passed since the spell. Three days during which the reports had again appeared on Angel's desk, and he had returned to his habit of setting them aside unread. Three days of staying away from the medical level. Three days that had passed with a few meetings with clients Angel had tried not to kill, fights against demons who weren't clients anymore, and an infuriating and pointless discussion with Eve that had left Angel ready for more violence.

A soft knock on the office door was followed by the entrance of Fred, a rare enough occurrence that Angel stopped what he was doing to smile at her. They were all busy in their new jobs, and despite their promises to remain close, the group was slowly drifting apart.

"Nice to see you, Fred. What's going on?"

"I wanted to talk to you about Spike."

Angel's smile slowly disappeared as she excitedly told him about Spike's condition improving drastically, and when she explained that he was well enough to receive visitors, he simply stared at her, wondering whether she was suggesting that he go see him. But he soon realized that wasn't what she meant, as she said that she had offered to Spike to call Buffy for him and that he had refused. Angel's staring seemed to upset Fred and she finished talking in a rush, wringing her hands on her lap.

“Why are you telling me this?” he finally asked. “You made an offer, he declined it, end of the story.”

She tried to plead a little more, but Angel blocked her out. He wasn't so much upset about the idea of Buffy visiting Spike, he realized, but rather he was upset about not being upset. Surely, a month back, he wouldn't have wanted to host a reunion for the Slayer and Spike. Now however, he couldn't have cared less. She had refused his help, sent him away, left the country. He had finally taken the hint.

Fred eventually left, and Angel felt a pang of guilt at the way he had received her. She only had Spike's best interest at heart, he told himself. And maybe she was right. Maybe Spike did need visits. He had to be bored out of his mind, confined in a bed as he was, and a bored Spike could turn dangerously destructive.

The door was open and Angel walked in without knocking. Spike was half sitting, half reclining on his bed, the sheet drawn up to his waist, his hands resting on either side of him. His eyes were open and staring ahead. His regular blinking was the only movement he made.

“Spike,” Angel said quietly after a few seconds, announcing his presence. The other vampire didn't seem surprised in the slightest to hear him. Of course not.

“Angel,” he replied blankly, never turning his eyes toward him.

Long seconds disappeared into silence.

“Glad to see you're feeling better.”

Spike snorted and finally moved, just enough to look at Angel.

“Feeling better?” he snapped. “Better than what? I can't feel a thing. I'm trapped in a bloody box made out of cotton, how is that any better?”

Angel felt his throat tighten. When Fred had told him Spike was better, he hadn't thought of asking her for more details, and now he wished he had.

“It won't last,” he said, trying for cheerfulness and failing miserably. “It'll pass and...”

“You don't know that. Your Watcher and the bird don't know that, so how could you? Just saying that won't make the world any more real.”

The bitterness in Spike's voice was scorching. Wanting nothing more than to flee, Angel forced himself to get closer to the bed. Once upon a time, it had been his favorite game to break through Spike's defenses, to literally break him. Now, he couldn't stand to see him like this, and wanted to shake him until he started fighting again.

“The world *is* real,” he said coldly. “And maybe right now you're lucky. Better not to feel anything than to get hurt, over and over again.”

Spike's eyes widened, and Angel had the sudden impression that he was about to yell at him. And then... he laughed, a deep, bitter laugh, which ended on a broken sob that tore down Angel inside. The clear blue eyes closed, and after a few minutes Angel was certain that Spike was asleep. Still, he remained there, standing, immobile, watching the repaired but still marred skin of his grandchilde, the short hair covering his head, already a light honey brown. After an eternity, he stepped closer, close enough to touch, and did just that, running the back of his fingers along Spike's jaw, down his shoulder and arm all the way to his hand. Spike didn't react in any way at the touch, and Angel sighed softly. Turning to leave, he was stopped by a hand grabbing his wrist. He glanced back at Spike; his eyes were still closed, but a wet trace gleamed on the edge of his eyelids.

"Thanks," he murmured, and let go of Angel.

Three more days passed, and when Angel entered his office that morning his desk was exactly as he had left it the night before. No new memo about Spike's condition.

He sat down and opened his mail, going through the motion of reading two letters before giving up and reaching for the memo from the previous day. Spike was well enough to be released from the hospital that same evening, it said. Still little to no feeling on his skin, but there was nothing Wes or Fred could do about that, not with Spike flat down refusing more tests or magic to be performed on him.

Gathering the pile of reports, Angel shoved them into a folder that quickly disappeared to the very bottom of his desk drawer. He ought to have been happy, he told himself, that his grandchilde was well – or as close to well someone who had been seconds from being ashes could be after so little time. Happy that Spike had left without making a fuss, as would have been the norm for him. So why did he feel so...

Why did he feel nothing?

When, late that night, Angel entered his apartment and discovered a dark silhouette in front of the windows, he wasn't as annoyed as he should have been. He should have expected it, of course. Spike wasn't going to leave so easily.

"What do you want?" he called out toward the other vampire, keeping an eye on him even as he went to the open kitchen and its supply of blood.

"You have a nice view from here. Beautiful sunset. Almost worth losing your soul for it, isn't it?"

Angel half choked on his dinner. He was about to deny what Spike was not so subtly hinting at, and teach him a lesson while he was at it, but he didn't need to, as Spike shook his head.

"Yeah, I know, you didn't. Still, you must have paid a pretty price for this. What was it?"

Blood. A son. Friends. Dreams. Hopes.

Nothing Angel could admit to.

He was quiet as he returned to the living room, took his jacket off, and undid the cuffs of his shirt. Quiet long enough that Spike should have turned, looked at him, talked, done something, anything to break the silence. Spike had never been that patient, never liked the silence. And yet, he remained quiet and still.

“Why are you here, Spike?”

A shrug. “Don’t know. What’s a bloke supposed to do after dying to save the world?”

Angel’s hands curled into tight fists before opening again. How was he supposed to know? He wasn’t that kind of hero.

“You didn’t die.”

It had come close, really close, but he was here, now, wasn’t he? As obnoxious and annoying as ever. Or almost.

“Sure feels like I did,” he muttered, almost low enough that Angel didn’t catch it.

Three steps, and Angel was picking up his phone. Two calls, a few barked orders, and Spike was on payroll with a suite to his name two levels under Angel’s apartment. He didn’t move, as Angel did all this, merely kept staring through the window at the city below them. But when Angel told him he would show him to his new place, he finally moved, turned to Angel, and nodded as if none of this mattered but he would humor Angel anyway.

A couple of hours later, light steps woke Angel. He blinked a few times until he could discern the intruder.

Spike, who else?

Angel was about to let him know exactly what he thought of being awoken hours before morning – a speech he had once given to the same person about being awoken hours before sunset; things changed – when Spike, who had paused by the door, moved again. In seconds, he was naked, and before Angel could react he pulled the covers back and slipped into the bed. Still trying to figure out what the hell was going on, Angel allowed his hand to be taken, his arm pulled gently until he was on his side, spooned against Spike’s back, his arm over the slender waist.

It was a good thing that he was wearing sweatpants, especially as his body insisted on recognizing the pattern. More than a few times, they had gone to sleep in this very same position. With the only difference that it used to be after a round or three of fucking.

Spike didn’t comment on the hardening length pressing against his backside. He didn’t say a word, didn’t move. And as Angel wondered what his grandchild expected, Spike simply fell

asleep. Lulled by the regular breathing that decades earlier, he remembered, had meant William felt safe, Angel drifted back to sleep.

When he awoke in the morning, he was alone.

Days passed, and a routine was soon established. By day, Spike was part of Angel's troops, fighting where he was directed but questioning everything more often than not, back to his old sarcastic self and catching up on lost time. He seemed to have grown fond of Fred, and she was the only one who escaped his scathing remarks. He pleaded and argued until Angel gave him an office, as far away from his own as he could, and Angel rolled his eyes but signed the order form for a big screen television and a game system.

Nights, however, were something else. Sometimes they worked together late into the night, sometimes he knew Spike went out for a drink or a fight, but it always ended the same way. Never a word as, each night, Spike came into Angel's bed and silently requested to be held. Never a goodbye or thank you when he left before morning.

Never a word from Angel either.

Angel still wasn't sure why Spike was acting like this, what he wanted from him. But he was reluctant to broach the subject, afraid that, if he mentioned it in the bright light of day, Spike would stop coming to him. Somehow, he didn't want that. He had slept alone for far too long, and having someone in bed with him – having this someone – felt better than he would have expected. Even if they did nothing more than sleep.

The status quo, of course, could not last long.

It happened on one of these nights when Spike had gone out at sunset with that look that promised pain to the LA demon population. When he finally slipped into bed, Angel was startled by the strong smell of blood coming from his grandchild. It had happened before, small nicks and light wounds, but Spike had never been hurt enough to smell so strongly of blood.

For the first time disrupting their nightly ritual, Angel turned on the bedside light and pulled Spike flat on his back, earning a hard glare for his trouble. A deep slash ran diagonally across Spike's chest, from over his heart to his ribs, with two shallow cuts running parallel on each side. It looked as if Spike had tried to clean it, but it was still bleeding.

"Will be healed by morning," Spike said as Angel stood and went to the bathroom to retrieve his first aid kit. "You know that."

Ignoring him, Angel sat on the bed and proceeded to bandage the cut, allowing himself for the first time to notice how well Spike's skin had healed. It was perfect marble again, where it wasn't cut to ribbons. Angel's hands might have lingered a little longer than necessary. Or he might have only wished it.

“I don’t want you bleeding all over my sheets,” was all he gave as an explanation for what he did.

When he came back from the bathroom, Spike was on his side, eyes closed, but Angel could have sworn he was only pretending to be asleep. His body was too tense for sleep, and he seemed ready to bolt out of bed. Angel didn’t touch him as he lay down, unwilling to press on the wound. But as he did every night, Spike pulled Angel’s arm around him, and pressed it tight against his chest. It had to hurt – Spike’s sharp intake of breath was proof of that – but when Angel tried to remove his arm, Spike held it in place. For a few more seconds, Angel struggled to free himself, but when he couldn’t make Spike let go of him without hurting him, he gave up.

He didn’t sleep, that night, and as far as he could tell neither did Spike.

At first, it only happened once every two or three weeks. Spike would come to bed with freshly bandaged wounds and act as if nothing was wrong, while Angel was able to tell that he was in pain.

Then, it started to happen more often. Once a week. Then twice.

The night it happened for the third time in four days, Angel gave up on pretending nothing was going on. He stood and left the room. When he came back, he turned the lights on and stood by the foot of the bed. Spike glared at him for a second before noticing what he held in his right hand. His eyes widened, then, and the tip of a tongue came out to moisten his lips.

“Tell me one thing,” Angel asked, his voice crackling with ice. “Do you actually go out and fight badly on purpose or do you just stay home and do it to yourself?”

Spike’s blank look was answer enough, and Angel’s fingers tightened on the knife’s handle.

“If it’s pain you were after,” he growled, “you just needed to ask.”

Spike didn’t flinch as Angel had expected him to. His eyes simply shifted from Angel to the knife, and if anything his look turned hungry.

“Then I’m asking,” he said calmly, coolly, and Angel’s plan backfired. He had wanted to kick some sense back into his grandchild, and had definitely not imagined he would be the one shaken to his bones.

The image of a Victorian bed floated in his mind over that of his simpler bed, William bound to it by thick scarves, bloody from the tip of a dagger that had drawn scrolls and Celtic knots over his body. He had begged, then, although for Angelus to stop or continue, Angel wasn’t certain anymore. He only knew that he wasn’t going down that road ever again.

The knife slipped from his fingers, clattering to the floor, and Spike looked distinctly disappointed as he leaned back and covered his face with his arm.

“Why?” Angel asked, and repeated himself when Spike didn’t answer.

“Because,” he finally replied, his voice no louder than a murmur, “I’d rather feel pain than nothing at all.”

Lines blurred in Angel’s mind. Pain, pleasure, he had once wielded both without a second thought, but had he felt either one at all since signing his name on a W & H contract? Bland days, quiet nights, nothing to look forward to, nothing to lose as he had already lost everything that had mattered. Everything but this one remnant of his past.

His hand fisted on the sheet and pulled at it, slowly uncovering Spike until his whole body was revealed. He didn’t move at all, making Angel wonder how much feeling had returned to his skin, but when Angel reached out to touch his calf, a shiver ran through the naked body.

Angel knelt on the bed and cautious hands glided over skin, soon followed by lips, tongue and teeth. Spike’s arm was still hiding his face, but there were clues – shudders, strangled gasps, involuntary breaths – to guide Angel. Slowly, he moved upward, touching, stroking, biting every inch of skin he could reach save for the twitching cock that he studiously avoided. By the time he reached Spike’s chest, Spike was shaking under him.

Carefully, Angel pulled off the latest bandage, revealing a series of parallel cuts along Spike’s torso. The tip of his tongue following one cut and lapping at dried blood had Spike writhing, his hands coming to Angel’s shoulders, to hold closer or push back, Angel didn’t know and didn’t care. He captured each wrist, pinned them down on the sides, and returned to his task. One after the other, he cleaned each wound, feeling Spike grow harder and more desperate under him, and his own body humming at the sensations.

When he knew – how could he not know – that Spike was a second, a touch, a bite away from coming, Angel raised himself up to look at his face. Pale blue eyes, so clear and wide, begged for release.

“Still would rather feel pain?” Angel asked, his voice surprisingly hoarse.

The hint of a pout stretched Spike’s lips. “Vampire. Not exactly adverse to pain.”

Growling, Angel shifted to his demon visage. If it was pain his silly grandchilde wanted...

Without warning, he bent down and tore into Spike’s neck, intending to make the bite as painful as he could, but ultimately unable to. Spike howled and bucked under him, his hips rising to search for – and find – needed friction and release. The scent of his come in the air, the flavor of his blood on Angel’s tongue and the feel of his body pulsing against Angel combined to cause Angel’s inexorable downfall.

“Pleasure’s nice, too,” Spike panted after a few seconds, and Angel could do nothing but laugh.

A trickle of blood was seeping from the corner of Spike’s smirking lips, and Angel wasn’t sure whether he wanted to lick the blood off or slap the smirk away. Both, probably. The idiot was just infuriating. Why had he goaded that demon into a fight? The dealings had been

going fine, they could have been done with this client and back to the office already if not for Spike's compulsion to play.

Still, Angel could not complain too much. He hadn't been so happy with the terms of the contract himself, and blaming the failure of the negotiations on Spike was perfectly fine with him. There was no reason to complain either as Spike did not intentionally put himself into harm's way, and instead fought to the best of his abilities. Big progress there, and definitely something to celebrate once they got home. Angel doubted they would reach the bed before clothes would be ripped off and a rock hard cock would thrust into a willing body. It didn't matter who gave and who received, only the contact was important, hands, mouths, fangs, dicks, and eventually shared blood and pleasure. And the thought was not exactly helping Angel concentrate.

He tried to return his attention to what was going on in front of him, but it was difficult to remain focused when so much had changed in a few weeks. He caught Spike's eyes and held back a grin at the fire they contained. Angel wasn't the only one thinking naughty thoughts. And Spike wasn't the only one either who had rediscovered how to feel.

Next Time

Angel stepped out of the elevator and into the penthouse. He listened closely as he hung his jacket in the entry closet, but he couldn't hear a thing, and wasn't all that surprised, when he went into the bedroom, to find that the bed was empty. It was only a couple of hours past midnight, and sunrise was still far away. Spike had to have gone out, maybe for a drink, maybe for a fight.

Hopefully not for anything more than that.

Coming closer to the bed and its rumpled sheets, Angel sniffed lightly. Spike's scent was there, and his own, already fading after a five-days absence. He could also smell blood, and the scent twisted his guts. If he had known he would be gone for so long, he would have made Spike come with him. God only knew what kind of trouble Spike had gotten himself into. Next time, Angel would drag him along, Spike's grumbling notwithstanding.

Then again, Angel thought as he shifted his sore shoulders and groaned, he could have used more fighting power on his trip.

Next time, definitely.

Still stretching muscles that shouldn't have hurt that much — he still trained and fought regularly, after all; he wasn't getting soft the way some idiotic Childe of his claimed at least once a week — Angel trudged over to the en suite bathroom and ran a bath in the chest deep, cast iron monstrosity of a tub while he undressed, groans accompanying his every movements. He was almost glad that the mirror didn't cast his reflection; he was pretty sure that his back had to be black and blue, and had no desire to see it.

It was with a sigh of sheer pleasure that he climbed into the hot water and laid down. He turned off the tap with his foot and closed his eyes, allowing the tiredness of the past few days to dissolve in the water. The first two days had been filled with intense negotiations. The next three, with duels in which he, somehow, had always ended up being challenged. So much for being in charge. The whole thing had culminated with signatures on a document that would save a lot of human lives, or at least that was what he hoped, so it had been worth it. Still, it would have been nice if that Graim'leen demon had conceded defeat *before* stomping all over Angel's back with its four legs.

After the shouts and arguments from the negotiations, the silence of the empty apartment was blissful. There would be more of the former when Spike returned from wherever he had gone to find blood and pain, but for now, Angel closed his eyes and cleared his mind. He never realized he was slowly drifting into much needed sleep, not until the clanking sound of metal hitting the porcelain jerked him awake.

He sat up in the now tepid water and blinked toward the door. Spike was standing there, as though frozen mid-step, surprise and the smallest hint of fear flickering through his features. The end of his belt was still in his hand; it was the buckle that had awakened Angel when falling to the floor.

Angel's hands tightened into fists in the water as he took stock of the damage. Spike's right eye was practically swelled shut. Dried blood was flaking under his nose; the reason, maybe, why he hadn't noticed Angel's smell. There was more blood at the corner of his mouth and on the knuckles of both his hands. His t-shirt looked damp in a couple of spots, and Angel had no doubt that the dark fabric hid even more blood.

Angel didn't even know where to start. Reproaches had never worked so well with Spike, and he'd always seemed to see them as fuel to keep doing whatever it was that infuriated Angel rather than incentive to stop. Questions about where Spike had gone and what he had done to end up in such a state wouldn't help anything. Angel knew the 'why'; the 'how' was irrelevant. Reminders about their unspoken agreement, maybe? But Angel had broken that first by leaving for so long, however unintentionally.

In the end, Angel only said one word. It snapped like a whip between them.

“Strip.”

Certain that Spike would obey, Angel resolutely turned his gaze away. Pulling the plug from tub, he stepped out of it and walked over to the shower stall. The tiles were cold beneath his feet, and so was the water in the shower when he first turned it on. In seconds, it was almost hot enough to burn. He had drawn the shower door half closed to stop the water from spraying out, but he could still see Spike approaching, could see a snapshot of his bruised body, and the tilt of his head, chin up, all traces of apology now hidden behind bravado.

“Get in.”

A muscle was twitching in Spike's discolored cheek when he drew the glass door open and stepped in. Angel moved to the back of the stall to get a good look at him. Most of the bruises were fresh, but a few seemed at least a couple of days old.

“Anything broken?” he asked, more coldly than he meant to.

Spike shivered when the hot water first hit him. “Don't think so,” he muttered, then turned a raised eyebrow at Angel. “You don't look all that good yourself.”

Angel's hand clenched at the back of Spike's head and squeezed tight. “The difference, boy, is that I didn't *try* to get hurt.”

Gold flakes glimmered in Spike's good eye, darkened to midnight blue by the equally dark tiles in the room. Any second, now, he would say that it wasn't any of Angel's business, that Angel had showed he didn't care by going away for so long, that he had no right to say a word about any of it.

Or maybe it was only Angel's guilty conscience talking, because Spike didn't say a word, and after a few more seconds he lowered his eyes, staring at a spot on Angel's chest.

Angel sighed. He pulled at Spike's neck until their foreheads touched and murmured, “Silly boy.”

Spike's eyes flickered back up, almost hopeful now. His hand, slowly rising to trail against Angel's thigh, was equally hopeful when it took hold of Angel's slowly filling cock.

"It's not as bad as it looks," Spike said quietly. "The blood isn't even all mine."

And indeed, the water flowing over Spike was cleaning off blood, revealing unbroken skin in some places.

Angel flexed his fingers over Spike's neck. He wanted to ask how badly the need to feel had shaken Spike; how long he had resisted before giving in. He could see it, though, written all over Spike's skin in blue, purple, and sickly yellow. His hand drifted along Spike's shoulder, stopping over a large bruise that extended three inches toward Spike's collarbone. He rubbed his thumb against it, then pressed hard, watching not what he was doing but the rising of Spike's cock between them, water and precome dripping from the tip.

A simple change in his touch caused Spike to turn around after a last, almost regretful squeeze to Angel's cock. Spike's hands came up to rest on the tile in front of him. His knuckles were clean, now, but they looked raw, the skin torn and cut. Angel bit back a growl and pushed two fingers inside Spike, slick from water only. More pain, but the moan that rose from Spike's lips, prayer and praise both, was pure pleasure.

Two steps backward on that long journey, Angel thought, gritting his teeth and twisting his fingers viciously. But they'd get there, eventually. They had all the time in the world.

"Next time," he said very low as he pulled his fingers free and lined up his cock to Spike's entrance, "you're coming with me."

A slam of his hips drew groans from them both. Spike pushed back against him, then dropped a hand to grip Angel's hand where it had found its way to Spike's cock.

"Next time," Spike repeated, and it was as good as a promise.

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