Recognition

by purplefeen

character: Spike
genre: character study
rating: T
time frame: summer after s5

He noticed the marks on the whelp first while on patrol. Rows and rows of black lines across his shoulder blade, exposed when a vamp tried to get his claws on the boy. Not wanting to know what sex games Anya had him at now, he didn't ask about them.

Two days later, as he was making Dawn go to bed, he noticed a dozen or so of the marks on her as well. Figuring out that they hadn't been a sign of Anya's possessive demon personality, he demanded from Dawn to know just what they were. Her one word answer?

"Tara."

Glinda the good witch had stuttered and stumbled and when Spike finally growled in frustration and ripped at her sleeve to find almost as many of the black tattoo-like marks as Xander had, Tara finally sent him on to Willow.

Willow, with much less stammering and only slightly fewer marks, sent him to Giles for his answers.

Giles was glad to see him, told him, in fact, that he'd been wondering when he would finally arrive to ask about the spikes.

"Spikes?" Spike asked in deep confusion.

Giles poured them both a glass of his best bourbon, a gesture not overlooked by Spike, who now wondered what in the bloody hell was going on. Was he dying? Vampires don't die. At least, not with advance knowledge. Unless of course, the vamp in question was chained in place and waiting for the sunrise. Were they going to murder him? He'd been helping the little bastards all summer. Bollocks, even before that, when the slayer had been alive.

Spike wouldn't take the drink. "Rupert," Spike threatened with a glare like frozen steel in his eyes, "You'd better tell me what the bloody buggerin' hell is goin' on here before I decide to ignore the headache and rip your soddin' head off." His voice had been steady and even, but there was no mistaking that a master vampire was in residence and ready to do just as he'd promised.

"We-" Giles cleared his dry throat and started again. "We, that is, Anya - and I approved of course - but Anya thought it would be helpful – for you – to see just how much you really do care. I mean, that is, how much you contribute. To the cause, as it were. And so I asked Willow and Tara to concoct a spell. Not harmful, just a small glamour, that would make a mark like a small railroad spike appear whenever you saved one of the children's lives. Or mine, for that matter. I have nine of the marks on my shoulder," he told Spike with some smug satisfaction.

Spike looked at him like he was insane. "I've saved your life nine times? Why didn't you stop me for hell's sake?"

Giles just smiled at Spike's discomfiture. "Three appeared as soon as the spell was cast."

Spike stood and stalked out, not wanting to hear any more. A thought occurred to him. He'd saved the donut boy's life… oh holy fuck!

He went to spill himself some ex-demon blood.

"No, Spike! Let me down!" Anya held onto Spike with both hands so that the hold he had around her neck - and two feet off the floor - wouldn't harm her too fragile human body.

"It wasn't for you, Spike! It was for *them*!"

Spike dropped her. "You have one minute." He looked at his watch. "Go."

"We demons have to stick together, Spike."

"Fifty seconds."

"They take advantage of you, or are you too dead to see that? And they treat you like offal covered in dung beetles. And yet you go on every night, fighting the ’good fight‘," she held her hands up and make the quotation mark gesture. "I know you don't care if you save them, well, except for Dawn, because of that promise to Buffy. But they *should*. And they don't. Or rather, they *didn't*. But they do now." Her smile beamed.

Spike recalled suddenly how research hadn't been so bleedin' horrid lately. Giles bringing him blood. Tara fussing over his having a comfortable chair. Willow sharing what she found on the internet and asking his opinion. Xander - well, Xander had pretty much just left him alone. Which was more than he would ever have hoped for.

And patrols - well, patrols had been - almost like the good old days. Everyone looking to him for guidance. Taking command and everyone doing as they're told. Willow *asking* him things in his head instead of psychically barking orders at him.

He looked at Anya and, well, he didn't smile exactly. But he stopped scowling. Instead, he tilted his head and looked at her as if seeing her for the first time. The he nodded his head once. He started to leave, then turned back toward her and gave her a quick and unsure kiss on the cheek.

Running one finger down the soft human skin of her cheek, he whispered, "You ever wise up and dump the dough boy, you call me first." With a sly grin and a wink, he was gone.

The End