

Title: Route 666

Author: bewildered

Era/season/setting: Post-series (immediately post-NFA)

Rating: R for language, sexual situations

Summary: Lorne needs to get out of LA. Spike has a car and no reason to stay. Can this Odd Couple survive the road trip from hell? And will Buffy ever catch up?

Takes place after Not Fade Away, comics do not exist. Rated R for foul language and sexual situations.

Seasonal Spuffy note take 2: Yeah, so I wanted to have this chapter DONE for today, and instead it is only partially done. Spike and Lorne decided a throwaway scene needed to be something more, and so I am nowhere near the chapter end. And there has been very little betaing, though Sigyn was kind enough to read what I have so far. BUT I will share it here anyhow! Because Spike and Lorne! Keep an eye out for future updates on my EF and AO3 (where I am posting Chapter 1 today.) Much love to you all and thanks to the SS organizers and moderators for another fantastic round! See you next season!

Chapter 3: Needles PARTIAL ROUGH DRAFT

Spike didn't seem to be in the mood for conversation, or for much of anything at all, and Lorne didn't see any need to draw him out (because he didn't care, he really didn't); he watched the dim hills go past in silence, tuning out the noise as best he could and trying not to think too hard about anything at all. Counting the bushes helped; there were lots of bushes, and numbers were soothingly non-judgmental.

Lorne had counted six hundred and twenty-seven when he began to grow alarmed.

"Not to be a backseat driver," he said, shifting awkwardly. "Especially since I'm in the front seat. But there seems to be a road hazard coming up."

Spike's eyes flickered over and back, dismissively. "How so?"

"I mean, it's not a road hazard for me," Lorne went on, feeling his voice accelerate. "But last I checked you were still a vampire."

"That I am."

"And the windshield of this car is made of glass."

"That it is," Spike grinned, easing the car into a wide curve.

"And the sun is coming up!" Lorne clutched at the dash, watching as the road curved around into a patch of sunlight.

"Oh, come on," Spike laughed madly, accelerating into the light. "Live dangerously for once." And his face was bathed in the glow of the morning sun.

Lorne lunged out to grab the steering wheel, hoping against hope he could reach it before Spike's hands crumbled to dust, but weirdly, Spike's hands didn't show any signs of crumbling, just kept on gripping the steering wheel. The sunlight made the bruises and abrasions look even worse.

After a few seconds of hands-not-crumbling, Spike started to laugh again; Lorne awkwardly released the wheel, sinking back into his seat.

“Sorry, mate,” Spike said, not sounding especially sorry at all. “Thought you knew this was a company vehicle. Glass is all necro-tempered. Safe as houses for a vamp.” He lifted one hand, gazing at the light playing over it.

“Wait, this car belongs to Wolfram and Hart?” The velour upholstery under his keister suddenly made Lorne’s skin crawl.

“Mine now,” Spike shrugged.

“Doesn’t it have, I don’t know, LoJack or something?” Lorne craned his neck to look back down the road. “Not too keen on a high speed pursuit.”

“Fair certain Wolfram and Hart’s got more on their mind right now than tracking down the black sheep of their executive fleet,” Spike breezed, tossing an arm over the back of the seat. “Doubt they’ll even miss it for weeks. Expect by then I’ll be able to work something out, or have it at a chop shop.”

“You hope.” Lorne glanced behind them again. The road was still empty, half of it still in the shadows of the hills.

“Hope’s not a thing I’m known for,” Spike said blandly.

“No, I suppose not.” Lorne mostly knew him for being a pain in Angel’s ass, though occasionally in recent months he’d glimpsed glimmers of more. Confusing glimmers, because they didn’t always mesh with what Angel had shared about his vampiric descendant. What had Angel said? He’d said something about-

Oh, no. No no no. Just stop that train of thought right there, Lorniecakes. Angel is not a part of your world any more, he doesn’t deserve any real estate in your brain. Wash that vamp right out of your hair and think about something, anything, that isn’t Angel. In fact, don’t even think his name any more. Forget Voldemort, there’s a new He Who Shall Not Be Named in town.

No more thinking the A-word.

“Angel, he had hope,” Spike said, having apparently not gotten the memo from Lorne’s brain yet. “Look where it got him!”

Lorne turned pointedly away and stared out the window. There were still an awful lot of bushes to count, and that was way more important than thinking about the unthinkable.

Six hundred twenty-eight....

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Spike was smart enough by now to know when he was being given the brush-off — he’d learned a bit since his mawkish, blind adoration for Cecily — and it sort of pissed him off, that even the Angelette who’d had too much of Angel (if he’d read that last huddle correctly) still couldn’t be arsed to give him the time of day, but at the same time, he was feeling weirdly free. The kind of free that came with total loss, of course, but he’d take the miniscule upside to the black hole gaping in his heart now.

In the meantime, driving in the sun was fascinating.

He'd seen photographs, of course — even experienced more of the sun than was strictly healthy for a vampire — but there was a big difference between shuttered glimpses and coffee table books and the reality of a sun-drenched world filling his entire vision. He'd not taken time to enjoy it during his brief ownership of the Gem of Amara, in his rush to find the slayer.

He supposed the vista of mediocre hills dotted with scrubby bushes wasn't particularly exciting to the more jaded sun-dwellers, but after more than a century in the dark, just the way the morning sun sent long fingers of shadows tracing the contours of the ground was novel and intriguing, the colors of the world like an alien landscape, rushing past at speeds undreamed of in his human days. This was the unlife, out on the open road, footloose and fancy free, nothing holding him back from going wherever the whim took him.

Needles was a whim, possibly a laughable one, but it was something his brain had latched on to when he'd stopped for petrol, studying the faded map posted outside the gas station.

"Why the bloody hell not?" he'd muttered, jotted down the route, and been off.

He hadn't expected to find another tattered remnant of Angel's bloody mission along the way, but he supposed it made a twisted sense. Sod's Law had kept sucking him back into Angel's world, and apparently Sod's Law wasn't letting go of him so easily, like dog shit on the sole of a boot. But he could find a place to scrape the Host off his Doc Martens — someplace safe, of course, the fellow had always been reasonably cordial to him — and then he'd be alone, the way he was always meant to be, a lone wolf traveling each and every highway.

It was going to be fucking brilliant.

He kept repeating that in his head.

Fucking. Brilliant.

And if the company was less-than-convivial, the ride was smooth as Bu- butter, and sweet as Bu-sweet as- god, he needed to stop trying to think of similes, his brain was stuck on past sweetness and he was driving forward into the future, the free future, leaving his baggage behind, and all he really wanted to think about was how bloody fantastic the hum of the motor felt. The dash of the '61 was a good deal posher than his own Fireflite had been, tricked out with gleaming textured chrome and cunning details, the speedometer wide and prominent right under the windshield, all of it polished as if it were new, and the car responded to his slightest touch like- like-

All right, he told himself. You may as well just accept it. This bloody car is as close to Buffy as you're ever likely to get again, and you might as well enjoy it. DeSoto in the hand, et cetera, et cetera. No need to stay all obsessed with someone who likely never shed a tear when you were gone.

A tiny, tentative voice at the back of his head piped up. She was crying when you last saw her. She cried and she said-

Shut it! he snapped at his stupider inner self. She was bleeding and burning and her eyes were probably all full of smoke from the vamp barbecue. She wasn't crying for you.

He'd wager she'd weep when she heard about-

Open road. Open road, lone wolf, no strings. Just the way he liked it.

He popped the Circle Jerks cassette out of the player — he was already bored of that ironic choice anyhow — and replaced it with The Great Rock 'N Roll Swindle.

Lorne signed audibly as the orchestra started playing God Save the Queen, though he started to shift uncomfortably when the spoken word part started up. For a singer, he was woefully uneducated on the classics, Spike sniffed to himself, but that wasn't the song he even wanted to hear; he waited for the last notes of the orchestra to fade away, and punched "reverse" on the player. (Bloody brilliant work, they way they'd made the tape deck blend in with the vintage dashboard; even the buttons looked like 1961.)

Sid Vicious's voice rolled out of the speakers in less-than-subtle mockery of Frank Sinatra's vibrato.

"And now, the end is near..."

Spike could practically hear Lorne's wince across the bench seat of the car.

Sid had it bloody right, he thought darkly, foot heavy on the accelerator. From now on, I'll do it my way.

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Great purple spotted Dalmations, Spike was trying to kill him.

He didn't know which was worse, the part where the atrocious singer was pretending to be Sinatra, or the part where the atrocious singer dropped the parody and just started screaming, but in the end all of it just gave him a blinding headache, exacerbated by the waves of despair and grief and rage practically rolling off his vamp chauffeur. It was a good thing Spike wasn't singing, or Lorne would likely be forced to leap from the vehicle, all action-movie style, except he had no idea how to tuck and roll or whatever the stunt guys did and would just end up as a smear of pesto on the asphalt.

He didn't even have the luxury of counting bushes any more; they'd emerged from the hills and out onto a straight stretch of highway, a frontage road on either side of that, and the scenery had given way to desert, flat as a pancake. Flatter. Flat as a pancake that had been run over by a semi truck.

"Gods, I need a latte," he muttered when the hellacious screaming finally ended. The tape whirred and clicked and then the symphony started up again.

Spike shrugged. "Can stop somewhere. Not like we're in a hurry."

Lorne glanced out the window as an exit rolled past. Ranchero Road. He shuddered. Hadn't taken them long to get out to the boonies, far from the neon-lit civilization he'd found so comfortingly unlike home. He doubted they'd be able to find- "Oh! There's a Starbucks!"

Spike glanced over. "Already past that exit, mate. But I'll pull over next one, see what we can find."

Lorne suppressed a sigh as Spike abruptly dove across three lanes of traffic to get to the right-hand lane. It wasn't like Starbucks was good coffee, he comforted himself. Just that the slightly-burned java flavor would be something familiar in this desert wasteland. Maybe this next exit would have something better. He couldn't hope for the level of G&B or M Street Café, or even his own barista at Caritas, but he could live without the artisanal almond extract and the deft foam art if he just had something drinkable.

Unfortunately, when Spike zoomed off onto the exit for 395, it just looked like more wasteland.

"Are you sure this is a good move? Looking for a latte, not a landfill."

"There's a place up ahead. Can see the sign."

"Starbucks?"

"Pilot."

"Pilot? Never heard of that café."

"Not a café," Spike said jovially. "But they have coffee."

Lorne watched aghast as they pulled into a huge parking lot that was literally filled with huge semi trucks. It was like a gas station, except a gas station on steroids, everything taller and wider and vaguely intimidating, like it was there for the service of giants, not the merely six-foot-two like Lorne himself.

"What is that?" he squeaked.

"That," Spike grinned, "is what we call a truck stop."

"A truck stop," Lorne repeated nervously. "For trucks?"

"They allow civilians in on occasion. If we look mean enough." But Spike swerved off to the right instead of closer to the refueling behemoth, screeching into a parking space on the shaded west side of a smaller building. A red sign on the side of the building proclaimed OUTPOST CAFE in the kind of letters that belonged on a Wanted! sign in a bad Western. "See?" he said smugly. "Found you a cafe."

"I don't know," Lorne said dubiously, feeling vaguely unnerved by the rustic beams and stonework. They had to be an architectural fashion statement, not a necessity, which boded poorly for the coffee served within. "Why is there a bench made out of logs?"

"Ambiance," Spike said sagely.

"They forgot the accent mark over the e," Lorne grumbled.

"There's two kinds of cafés," Spike breezed, running a hand over his tousled hair. "The kind that put accent marks over their e's, and the kind that don't. 'Fraid to tell you, the first kind ain't likely to serve folks looking like us, not outside of the big city."

"Oh, come on, you're a perfectly handsome..." Spike turned so Lorne could see how his black eye had bloomed just in their short drive. "Right. Suppose you do look rather like you got run over by a truck. Hence the truck stop."

"Yeah. And I got news for you, they're likely not used to the green, either."

Lorne sighed. "Has it been said that it's not easy being green?"

"Might have been, once or twice before." Spike slapped Lorne on the shoulder, bracingly. "Don't worry, once you have some caffeine in your system, perhaps some huevos rancheros, you'll be... Well, you'll still be green, but perhaps a little brighter." Spike tilted his head, considering. "Maybe closer to emerald than sage." He glanced outside at the shaded lot. "In the meantime, I estimate just about an hour and a half before the path to our parking space becomes just a tad bit too sunny for

yours truly. Shall we?"

Lorne secretly doubted that anything other than a 3-day spa treatment complete with acupuncture and a three-hour mud bath could improve his color, but caffeine would definitely be a good start. "I suppose."

The interior was clean and worn, done up almost entirely in shades of brown, except for red checked curtains and a massive red bandanna that festooned the neck of a deer head mounted prominently on the wall. Lorne shuddered at the sight, looking quickly away from the glass marble eyes, instead scanning the array of faded black and white photographs that densely covered the wood paneling, a motley assortment of vintage cowboys, signed photos of country music stars and rodeo queens, and a few movie stills from *The Wizard of Oz* - the brown parts, of course, not the loving Technicolor. Still, Judy Garland. That was one thing he had in common with the place.

That and the brown.

Lorne sighed. Might as well embrace my inner bleah, he thought, and followed Spike past the sign that encouraged them to "Seat yourself, pardner!" to a booth in the corner, thankfully far from the taxidermy.

As Lorne awkwardly slid into the booth, Spike tugged a couple of plastic-coated menus from behind the napkin holder, sliding one across the table. "Order what you want, mate. My treat."

Lorne cocked an eyebrow at that. "You have money?"

"Corporate credit card."

"Well in that case you're not technically treating. I could use my own- wait. When did they issue you a corporate credit card? You never signed a contract with Wolfram and Hart."

"Nicked the boss's a week or so back. Wanker never even noticed."

Lorne could think of a dozen snappy comebacks to that, but they all required him to speak about, refer to, or think about He Who Shall Not Be Named, and so he just flipped through the menu, searching for the coffee selection. Maybe it wasn't a latte he needed, lattes were light and frothy and full of good cheer. He needed something sharper, something more bitter to match his mood. Maybe a double espresso, or ooh! He could go for a Turkish coffee, all spiced and so thick you had to chew it....

He stared uncomprehendingly at the "Wet Yer Whistle" section of the menu. "It just says Hot Coffee," he muttered. "Do they have a separate coffee menu, or something?" He hopefully riffled through the remaining menus.

"Most likely not. Expect they just have plain old coffee."

"I don't think I've ever had that." Off Spike's sardonic look, he shrugged defensively. "From another dimension, sweetcakes. And I popped right into downtown LA, with a café to make you weep for joy on every corner. Why would I ever look for something ordinary?"

Spike glanced past Lorne then, teeth bared in a grin, and Lorne tensed, imagining a team of assassins come to track them down, but it was just the waitress, dolled up in cowboy boots, a long denim skirt, and a plaid button-down that managed to be just the wrong shade of red to go with the curtains. She was the kind of middle-aged pretty that had likely looked middle-aged when she was

twenty, and would likely still look pretty when she was seventy. She smiled brightly enough, but Lorne noticed she stood a few feet back from the table. Her name tag read "Lynett" in cursive that Lorne realized was rendered like a rope, the L topped with a lasso loop.

"What can I get you cowboys to drink?"

"Oh, I'm not a cowb- I mean, yeah, the brown leather is kind of on-theme, but then there's the paisley, and the boots are all wrong, and...." He trailed off at her wry look. "And you just call everyone 'cowboy,' don't you? I'm sorry, it's been a long night. A long year." He sighed. "I'll, um, have coffee."

"You sure?" she asked, lifting her eyebrows. "You're looking a little green to me."

"Yeah, uh, costume party."

She shrugged, apparently unconcerned, and turned to Spike.

"Hot chocolate," he said with a smile that tried very hard to be winning but the bruises turned ghastly. "Mini marshmallows if you have them. Tell me, pet. Can a fellow get something off the dinner menu this time of morning?"

"Might take a bit longer, but yeppers."

"Brilliant," he sighed. "I'll have an order of Buffalo wings to start, then. Extra spicy."

Lorne turned back to the beginning of the menu while Lynett sauntered off in her boots. "Please tell me they have something that isn't heartburn-on-a-platter here."

"Unlikely. Food's likely good, though. You don't last decades feeding truck drivers if the food's not good."

Lorne skimmed over the menu, eyes catching on a few more frightening items - Divorced Eggs? Road Kill Omelette? Really? The "Build Yer' Own Omelette" had promise, but Lorne wasn't sure he could in good conscience order an item with "Yer'" in the name. On the next page, though, he found Big Mike's Eggs Benedict, which was still likely to give him heartburn but he'd take Hollandaise heartburn over deep-fried-meat heartburn any day. He just hoped Big Mike knew how to poach an egg.

He was going to read further, just to see what else he could find, but was distracted by a numbered list just under the eggs.

"Cowperson's Creed?" he read with a short laugh. "Man, good thing they don't know what cows were where I come from."

"What were they?" Spike asked vaguely, still perusing the menu.

"Humans."

"That would definitely give this establishment a different theme."

"Item one. Dare to be a cowperson." Lorne closed the menu. "Please tell me they mean that ironically."

"Hardly," Spike snorted. "Here, let me read you the legend of the Outpost Cafe."

“There’s a legend?”

“Right here.” Flipping over the menu, Spike began to read off the back in a low voice, putting on possibly the worst fake accent Lorne had ever heard — which was saying something after his months in the Entertainment Division. “Long ago in a far away desert, a vast land, there wandered a man, a missionary soul among the native people of the Mojave. A man of great faith, Father Guido Junipero and his burro Pancho traveled for days living on fresh game, snakes, and roadrunner stew. This poor father suffered from indigestion while his burro suffered under him. One evening around a campfire, after a particular fine meal of jack rabbit stew, Father Guido passed gas and—”

“I think I’ve heard enough,” Lorne interrupted.

MORE TO COME! HOW WILL LORNE LIKE HIS COFFEE? WILL SPIKE EVER GET CLEANED UP? WHAT ARE THE REMAINING LINE ITEMS OF THE COWPERSON’S CREED? SOME OF THESE QUESTIONS WILL BE ANSWERED WHEN I COMPLETE THIS CHAPTER!

Thank you for reading!

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