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<th>Teen And Up Audiences</th>
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<td>Character:</td>
<td>Xander Harris, Richard Castle, The Scoobies - Character, Cast of Castle</td>
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<td>Post-Chosen, Ignores Comic Book Canon</td>
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<td>Part 4 of Buffy The Vampire Slayer</td>
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**By Rook or By Crook**

by [managerie](http://archiveofourown.org/users/managerie)

**Summary**

Rick Castle just wanted to meet the guy

**Notes**

See the end of the work for [notes](http://archiveofourown.org/works/4549698/notes)
Chapter 1

Rick Castle doesn’t need to be introduced to other authors by his publisher. He is famous enough in his own right. He does not require an ice breaker or a mutual friend to meet his fellow writers.

Especially when that mutual friend/publisher is his ex-wife. “Gina, no more.”

Castle sighs as he pulls his hand out of Gina Cowell’s grasp. "I’ve been introduced to nearly every writer you have ever represented. Four of them are my own friends. Can I please be allowed to mingle at this meet & greet without the compulsory introductions? My book signing doesn’t even start for another 2 hours."

Gina huffs, "Fine. You can wander off on your own if..."

She grabs Rick’s arm as he turns away about to bolt like a ten year old given a dollar and told to choose whatever he likes. "If you meet with one last writer."

Pulling Castle over to a man in his 50’s that could charitably be called skeletal, Gina makes with the usual round of names, “John Herding I want you to meet Rick Castle.”

"Castle? Rick Castle? You wrote those Storm mysteries, correct?” The skull faced man asks. "You killed him off didn't you? That was a colossally stupid move. Leaves no room for sequels without having to backtrack or succumb to the Reichenbach Falls."

Irritated that he has to defend his decision, again, Rick counters, "Well, maybe. But there really wasn’t anything else I could do with Storm. He played himself out. I had nowhere to go."

Herding grunts, “Hmm. A good writer never runs out of ideas.”

Gina has made her escape across the room already, so Rick has to take a deep breath and grate out, “My ideas are still coming I assure you. Right now I’m working with the NYPD for my new book. It has a female detective, Nikki Heat. I’m researching her by working with Detective Kate Beckett and helping the police.”

"A woman police officer you say? So, Derrick Storm in a dress I see. Well, if you ever want a good read try my latest.” He reaches for a copy of the book on his table and hands it to Castle. "Here, for your daughter, Alexandra isn’t it?"

Castle takes the novel in both hands, “Alexis. Um, thanks. She’ll love a signed first edition of Death’s Erotic Accomplishments.”

Herding waves vaguely and turns toward the next customer, already signing another book.

Castle looks at the novel in his hand as he joins his friend Varner Wilson at the table. As Varner signs his last book and closes his table down, Rick exclaims in horror, “My god, he writes in the point of view of deranged serial arsonist. He thinks this is appropriate reading material for a 15 year old girl?”

Varner grabs the book and starts leafing through it; probably looking for the naughty bits. Castle looks around at the gathering, a mixture of eager fans and jaded writers. Rick notices a table with more than its share of teenage girls and young women. The females seem to have formed a line near a table that closed an hour ago. The only man around that section has dark curly hair and is
wearing a plaid long sleeved shirt with faded blue jeans. Castle is immediately on alert. Is this some perverted pedophile or concerned father?

The tall, medium built man in his late 20’s seems to be studying the girls as he talks to them. Studying, not in a calculating way, but more like trying to determine their mood. Rick doesn’t get a predator vibe off the guy. The man looks at his watch then finally turns his head towards Castle. When Rick sees the whole face not just his left ear, he feels stupid. It’s the author. He’s waiting to escape his fans and observing his audience: nothing creepy there. Castle bumps Varner’s arm to get his attention.

Pointing subtly across the room, Rick asks, “Do you know who that is?”

Lifting his head in annoyance, Varner looks out over the room, “No. but I'd like to.”

“Come on. This is a gathering of the finest writers in North America. Well, a gathering of those who were willing to attend. We aren't here to pick up a new conquest.”

In one of the worst impressions of Mae West, Varner drawls, “Speak for yourself, Honey. That guy is a hunk of man meat. And if he can string words together, all the better. You think he writes fitness manuals? Oh!”

Castle rolls his eyes, “No! Philistine! Don't you ever look at the author's picture? That's A.L. Harris.”

Varner perks up and takes a better look at the man in plaid, “Wait. That guy writes The Sunnydale Chronicles?”

Castle nods, "Yup."

“Wow. No one really looks at the author's pic anyway. I can see now that was a mistake. He's dreamy and steamy.” Varner says as he fans himself dramatically.

“Hey, I agonize over my picture. You saying you don't?” Castle asks.

Varner reverts back to the Mae West butchering, “Honey, no one's cared about this ugly mug since my second book got to number 3 on the New York Times Best Sellers. All they care about is whether I'll buy the next round.”

Rick grimaces, “Charming. Alexis and I have read every book in the series.”

Castle gestures with his arms as if explaining the mechanics of fairy dust to little children. “We avidly follow all the exploits of Buffy Winters the Vampire Slayer in pre-crater Sunnydale, California.”

He leans closer to Varner as if sharing a secret, “Alexis really identifies with Sunshine Goldberg, the ginger headed Witch who helps Buffy fight the forces of Evil.”

Rick straightens and brushes imaginary lint casually off his coat, “Personally, I see myself as Liam, the strong, brooding and mysterious vampire with a soul.”

Varner snorts, “You are so deluding yourself. If any character screams you and your naughty, eager puppy persona, it’s Lexie Jones, the Zeppo.”

Castle narrows his eyes at Varner, “I resent that remark. Anyway, it’s not just an autograph I’m after. Harris is renowned for his pitch perfect depictions of strong, aggressive female characters
that are multidimensional yet still smolderingly feminine. He walks a fine line. A line I too would like to stroll. Seriously, I need someone to help with Nikki Heat. I've written Derrick Storm for so long, trying to write a female protagonist at this juncture could be a disaster. I might miss the mark by miles. What if she's too girly? What if she's too butch? I want a real testament to working female detectives, not Sam Spade in drag. Or worse, a cross between Nancy Drew and Martina. Maybe he'll give it a read through. Do a forward.”

Castle starts to walk over and waves at Varner. “Wish me luck.”

Varner cups his hand on the side of his mouth like a bull horn, “Luck hell. Get me a phone number!”
Detective Kate Beckett makes her way swiftly off the elevator at police headquarters. Jaw clinched, Kate notices Rick Castle sitting beside her chair holding an ice pack to his own jaw. Beckett frowns when she reaches her desk. She leans towards Castle, getting right in his personal space as she inspects the bruise. "What the hell happened?"

With pitiful eyes Castle starts, “I...”

Kate stands up straight and demands, “What did you do to this guy?”

Indignant, Castle removes the ice pack. "Hey, I did nothing. I just wanted to talk to him. You know? Author to author. He took one look at me and threw me on the ground face first.”

“A reasonable reaction.” Detective Kevin Ryan observes with a smirk as he leaves the break room with a file and a coffee to join them at Kate’s station.

Beckett returns her attention to Castle, “And you've never seen this guy before?”

Feeling interrogated and put upon, Rick answers, “We’ve never met. He writes The Sunnydale Chronicles.”

“Buffy the Vampire Slayer?” exclaims Ryan’s partner, Det. Javier Esposito, as he comes up the hall to gather around Castle.

Ryan looks at Esposito, then back at Castle, “This guy is The A.L. Harris? You got attacked by A.L. Harris?”

Not happy that his injuries are taking a backseat, Castle declares, “Yes, and how do you know?

Pretending he is stretching his neck, Ryan admits, “I might have read like every single book. Twice.”


Castle quirks his eyebrows and raises his hands, palms out, “Oh ho. So, a little fantasy escapism when you're taking that bubble bath?”

Ryan bobs his head towards Castle, “What's your excuse for knowing him?”

Injuries forgotten now that the chance to show off has arrived, Castle perks up, “Besides being a fellow writer, same publishing house and one of Alexis' favorite series? He writes the best female characterizations in the western world. I wanted some insight into the species. Nikki Heat might need a little feminizing, especially since I'm basing her on Beckett.”

Esposito grimaces and turns to Beckett, “Anyway. No damage to property. Castle wasn't seriously hurt, more’s the pity, and Harris has no priors.”

Smirking again, Ryan adds, “Actually, he has no real record at all.”

Beckett makes a grab for Ryan’s file. “Let me see that. Nothing before 2003?”

Esposito points at the bottom of the page, “Take a look at the notation.” Then shares a look with
Ryan.

Kate reacts then reads the notation aloud. "All records lost in the collapse of hometown. No way."

Ryan smiles and throws a hand full of peanuts in his mouth, “Check place of birth.”


Incredulous, Castle asks, “Really? I thought that was just a plot devise.”

Esposito sits on the corner of his own desk, “Must have sucked having all your worldly possessions swallowed by the earth, could make a guy a little edgy.”

Beckett pulls at her lip, “Castle can be annoying but I can't see someone wanting to hit him before speaking to him.”

Ryan sits at his desk and leans back, “I think I might have a reason for his overreaction. At booking they have to ask if you have any medical issues.”

Beckett nods, “Right.”

Ryan leans forward and continues, “Castle approached Harris on his left side.”

“Right” Castle shakes his head, “I mean correct.”

Ryan picks up a booking form, “According to this, Harris has an artificial left eye. He wouldn't have seen Castle until after Castle grabbed his arm.”

Rick slaps his own face then flinches, remembering his jaw, "Oh god. So, stupid. Never grab somebody in New York unless they see you coming.”

Ryan replaces the booking form into the file, “Right.”

Beckett narrows her eyes and walks towards Ryan & Esposito’s desks, “So, Sunnydale survivor with a glass eye gets tapped on the arm by Castle on his blind side. I see him freaking a little. He's startled but going full commando and body slamming him to the floor? That's still an overreaction.”

Castle valiantly defends his manhood, “He took me by surprise. No way he gets the drop on me otherwise. Maybe it’s PTSD? It can't have been pleasant losing your home & your eye. When did he lose it?”

Esposito answers, “Right before the collapse according to his medical records, which survived only because they consulted a Doctor in L.A.”

Castle raises his eyebrows and observes to Kate, “That's having a bad year.”

Ryan reads from his notes.”Witnesses at the writers' shindig say that it didn't look like Harris was trying to get away from Castle.”

Esposito adds,”Nor was he trying to hurt Castle. Most say Harris subdued Castle, making sure he couldn't get away. Then tried to get everyone out of the area and asked them to call the police.”

Incredulous herself now, Kate leans on Ryan’s desk, “He asked to have the police called?”

Completely amused, Ryan answers,”Yup. Weird huh?”
Beckett walks back over to her desk. Arms crossed and almost to herself Kate observes, "This doesn't make sense. Famous authors don't just attack their colleagues for no reason."

Down the hall a uniformed officer approaches Beckett, “Detective Beckett, the family is here. Figured you'd want to talk to them first.”

“Thanks Rodrigo.” Kate gathers the files and prepares to meet the family of Alexander Harris.
“Put your hands in the air and step away from Castle!” Bellows an angry Detective Kate Beckett as she points her gun at the small blonde woman.

The older man with glasses gets in front of the girl. “Really, Detective, she was just startled. There is no need for weaponry. We promise it won’t happen again.”

The blonde looks at the Englishman then at Castle, “Oops?”

All eyes turn to the figure on the floor. Rick Castle cradles his arm and winces as he tries to recover from the second, and most violent, body slam of the day. “That's ok.” He gasps, “Just stay over there please.”

The red headed woman with the group looks pale and contrite. She slowly makes her way over to Castle as Beckett, Esposito, and Ryan holster their weapons then explain everything to the uniforms. The redhead kneels down next to Castle. “Sorry. Sorry. Um, I'm good at first aid. Let me see your face and arm Mr. Castle.”

Having reassured the uniforms, Beckett approaches what is left of the group. The blonde woman still looks like she could barely swat a fly, but Kate saw her flip Castle in air. That tweed guy was faster than Beckett would have assumed. Kate still can’t figure out what that blue light coming off the redhead might have been. Only the mousy brown haired girl stayed back. Seems the others are protective of her. Probably because she’s the youngest.

“Ok. Can you explain why you all keep going after Castle like he blew up your school?”

The older man stammers, “Yes. We do apologize. You see, Mr. Castle bears a striking resemblance to someone in our past.” The older man pauses and looks over at Castle as the redhead massages Rick’s head. “A satanic preacher named Caleb terrorized the town of Sunnydale the months preceding its collapse. Caleb tortured, murdered, and mutilated several people.”

Mousy girls speaks up, “He nearly killed us all. Xander pulled a girl to safety but then...”

“Caleb poked Xander's eye out with his bare hands before we could pull him off.” Announces the blonde in a detached voice and haunted face.

Esposito and Ryan exhale as one, “Jesus.”

Beckett returns her attention to the man, “And Castle looks like him?”

This is answered by the anxious redhead, “He looks just like Caleb would 5 years later. It’s really creepy and makes me want to go hug Xander.”

The youngest girl starts pulling at the man’s arm, “Yeah. Can we Giles? If Xander thought- Oh god. If he..he thought Caleb… He must be seriously wigged. Please? We really need to be there for him this time.”

Beckett goes over to her desk and starts taking notes, “Just a moment, I need to get all this straight. That preacher could be Rick Castle's twin?”

The Brit nods, “Yes, but presumably he is dead now. As I said the resemblance startled us. Xander especially, I wager.”
“He wasn't trying to exact revenge. He just wanted everyone to be safe from- well me.” Castle looks at Beckett then the redhead and smiles.”Wow. You are a grade ‘A’ Florence Nightingale. I can't even feel the bump from earlier. Thanks.”

“Um, my pleasure. We're really sorry we thought you were a sadistic mass murderer.” She says with eyes wide open and beguiling.

Castle starts to get off the floor,”Hey, greatest compliment I've had all year. Most people think I'm annoying but harmless.”

The blonde moves towards Giles suddenly and Castle flinches, much to the amusement of Ryan & Esposito. Oblivious, the blonde addresses the Englishman, “Giles, I really am feeling antsy about Xander. Can we please go see him? Who knows what he's going through in that cell? If I need to be stripped search I will. He needs us.”

It’s an example of how out of sorts Castle is that he doesn’t even try to add a suggestive comment.

“Detective?” The man they are calling ‘Giles’ asks Beckett.

Kate grabs a sheet of paper, “Just let me get ID's and your relation to Mr. Harris.”

“Rupert Giles. Next of Kin.”

“Willow Rosenberg, best friend since infancy.”

“Buffy Summers, runner up best friend. This is my sister Dawn Summers. She's practically Xander's little sister.”

“Xander is short for Alexander. Cute.” Acknowledges Ryan as he takes over the note taking from Beckett.

Willow starts to bounce in place, “We used to be inseparable then we lost our best friend Jesse. Then we got Buffy as our new best friend and I got a new girl friend. Not girlfriend girlfriend but friend who was also a girl. Buffy and I have never had sex.”

“Willow!” Dawn and Buffy exclaim at the same time.

Nodding his head slowly, Castle says, “I get it now.”

“Get what?” Asks Beckett.

“Sunshine Goldberg.” He says pointing at Willow. “She babbles just like Sunshine in the books”

Ryan chimes in, “Rupert Giles could be Robert Davis the British Watcher guy.”

Esposito nods, “Right.” He points at Dawn, “Aurora Winters equals Dawn Summers.”

Beckett picks up the theme and gesture towards the blonde, “Buffy Summers... wait. Why didn't he change your first name as well?”

Willow snorts, “Are you kidding? What could be better than 'Buffy: The Vampire Slayer'. He said there wasn't a more incongruous title out there.”

Giles smiles slyly as he cleans his glasses, “He couldn't have planned it better if he tried.”

Dawn bounces, relishing making fun of her big Sis, “How ridiculous is it to have a kick ass
defender against Vampires and Demons with a name like Buffy?”

Rick looks at everyone and remarks, “He’s right. It sets the tone for the whole series. Quirky, yet deadly.”

Buffy shrugs at Castle, “We try.”

Beckett starts to hand out the paper work,”Alright, if you'll check these out for accuracy, we can start to get you in to see him. Mr. Giles you can go first as his next of kin.”

Replacing his glasses, Giles ventures, “If it’s alright with you detective, I think Willow should go first. She has known Xander the longest and could testify to his well being. Also, he will be more honest with her. He tends to shield Dawn from any unpleasantness and underplays his injuries to Buffy.”

Beckett shrugs, “Fine by me, just follow the officer ‘Sunshine’.”

”K. Thanks.” Willow bounces up, then skips over to the officer, smiles at him, then bounces down the hall.

Turning back towards Kate, Rupert inquires, “What final charges will be brought towards Xander?”

“Actually…” Esposito looks towards Kate. He and Ryan go for the puppy dog eyes.

It’s Castle who breaks the stare, “I don't plan to press charges on either of you. It was a case of mistaken identity. Harris was making a citizen's arrest. In his mind he was protecting people. If he can live with being nearly blinded, I can nurse a few bruises.”

Dawn squeals and jumps over to Castle to give him a hug. "Oh, thank you.”

“You're welcome. I'm just sorry I upset him. He really is a fabulous writer.”

Smiling, Kate starts to lead the group down the hall, “We’ll have Mr. Harris moved to a conference room. We'll return his property and you can see him there. He'll have some paper work to sign. It shouldn't even show up on his record. We didn't officially arrest him. Just a person of interest.”

Giles follows Beckett, “I’m sure Xander will be a mixture of gratitude and disappointment.”

Puzzled, Castle asks, “Why disappointed?” He looks at Buffy.

Buffy blinks at Giles then looks at Castle, “No mug shot.”

Laughing, Ryan & Esposito lead the group to Conference room 2. Kate & Rick stay behind.

Clapping her hands in an effort not to rub them together in glee, Kate inquires, “So, change careers about 5 years ago did ya?”

Castle chuckles, “No. They say we looked enough alike that we could be brothers.” He eyes Beckett meaningfully.

Kate nods her head, “You think maybe your mystery father started another family when he got back home? Think you have a half brother with a habit of mutilation?”

“Could be. Did you put them in interrogation 2?” Ricks asks.
“Yup. Want to do a little spying on one of the greatest selling authors for young adults in the last 10 years?”

Leading Kate further down the hall, Castle takes her arm, “I thought you'd never ask.”
Chapter 4

Kate joins her fellow detectives in the observation room. She sees that Giles has made himself comfortable standing in the corner furthest from the door. Buffy and Dawn stand near the table. The door opens and a tall, handsome, dark haired, laughing man walks into the room arms linked with Willow. Kate assumes this is Xander Harris. It’s the best, most infectious smile Becket has ever seen. Dawn rushes across the room and hugs/slams into Harris.

“Oh Xander! We were so worried and then we got here and Mr. Castle looked sooo much like Caleb and..”

“Dawnie, Dawnie. Hush. It’s OK, I’m OK. You’re OK. Everything is OK.” He squeezes her tight then lets her go. One arm around Willow and the other around Dawn, Harris walks over to Buffy. Buffy immediately grabs Xander around the neck, forcing him to bend down.

“Don’t ever do that again. If you thought Caleb was back you should have called me. If it had been Caleb and you went after him alone, I,I.”

Buffy starts to falter and Xander lets go of Willow and Dawn to completely encircle Buffy in his arms. “Hey, hey. You told me you got rid of Caleb. I knew on some level that it couldn’t be him. I just reacted instinctively. You know me, Mr. Useless normal guy. I would never plan a siege without my girls.”

Xander looks over in the corner at Giles. The Englishman taps his nose and tips his head towards the mirror. Xander nods then goes back to nuzzling Buffy. She pulls away from him and wipes at her eyes. “It’s just that, I know how you are. You would try and save everyone else before even thinking about yourself. That’s got to stop young man.” She playfully swats him on the arm.

Xander lowers his head like a chastened school boy and murmurs, “Yes, ma’am”

Giles claps his hands together loudly, “Alright children. Now that we are all assembled shall we go to supper? I think our reservations are still good.”

Xander looks at the mirror than back at the girls who have surrounded him with bouncy enthusiasm. "Hey, guys. Can I meet you there? I want to apologize to Mr. Castle.”

Willow stops bouncing long enough to say, “Oh, Xander we already did that. Especially after Buffy went commando on him”

Xander tilts his head to the side like an inquisitive dog, “Buffy’s going commando and Willow of all people noticed before me?”

All three girls swat Xander simultaneously. In the observation room Castle snickers causing Kate to swat him.

Grinning broadly Xander continues, “No seriously guys. I need to talk to Castle. Get over this reaction. I can’t body slam everyone who resembles Caleb. If for no other reason than it hurts even when you land on your opponent.”

All three girls look towards Giles pleadingly. The Englishman clears his throat and starts to remove his glasses then stops. He looks up at Xander and their eyes meet. Satisfied with whatever he sees in Xander’s face, Giles replaces his handkerchief and spreads his arms out. "Ladies, if Xander feels he needs this closure than who are we to second guess the man?”
Before the pouts become profound Xander starts to usher the girls out into the hallway. "I’ll just get over this, then meet you at the place. Where is it again?"

Coming up from behind, Giles says, “You remember, behind the garden?”

Nodding Xander says, "Oh, yeah.” He then knocks on the door to the observation room while waving at the girls. Giles quickly hustles them out of the building before they get their footing back and object.

The observation room door slowly opens to reveal a slightly embarrassed Becket. “We just wanted to make sure they really were your family. While in our custody we have to do everything we can to ensure your safety and..”

“Kate, he caught us. Just take your lumps.” Castle interrupts her as he shuffles pass into the hall. "You wanted to talk to me Mr. Harris.”

“IT’s Xander and yes. Can we go to a room without the fancy mirrors?”

“Certainly, Xander. Interrogation room 5 has camera but no mirrors. The cameras would be turned off. It’s as private as a government building gets. Follow me please and do call me Rick.”

With that, Castle starts for the mentioned room. Leaving a perplexed Kate and two disappointed male detectives. Xander quickly says his goodbyes and follows Castle.

Xander enters the room and closes the door. Castle has seated himself as far away from the entrance as possible. It seems Rick doesn’t want to make Xander uncomfortable. Which only makes Xander feel more like a heel.”I just wanted to apologize and say thanks for taking all this so well.”

For a moment Xander doesn’t think Castle is going to speak. Then Rick takes a deep breath and looks directly into Xander’s eye. When he speaks, it’s with a gravity that few who know Castle would recognize, “When they told me what happened to you.” Castle pauses to swallow and licks his lips, “It would take a much crueler man than me to hold a grudge like that. Especially against one of the greatest fantasy writers of the last 10 years.”

Blushing furiously, Xander sits across from Rick and stammers out, “I just write what I saw growing up and added vampires. Not really much to it. Doesn't take talent to copy down what happens around you.”

Castle leans forward to rebut, “Not true. I’m sure your history books wrote down what happened accurately. Yet I don't see people running out to get the autograph of the California Bureau of Education. How you say it is as important as what you say. And what you have said in your books is that girls can be just as kick ass as men. Which is why I wanted to talk to you.”

Shrugging Xander says, “It’s not that different from writing guys. She kicks ass, that's hot. She figures out how to save the day, that's cool. What makes her sexy and attractive isn't some contrived set up. I mean when guys try to make a girl sexy you get cheesy porn.”

Castle giggles, ”True. What I mean is, I wrote Derrick Storm for years. I knew how his mind worked. I could easily imagine how people would see him and react to him. He basically was what every boy pretends on the playground. Super secret agent with all the right moves and the best gadgets. James Bond: American Style. But now I want to write a female lead. She’s a detective in New York: smart, capable, aggressive, and sexy. Most of all I need her to stay feminine. I would hate to have gone through all this torture defending my decision to kill off Storm, just to have his
twin sister show up as Nikki Heat.”

Xander snorts and relaxes even more. “I had a similar problem when I had Davis’ girlfriend, the science teacher Miss Month, killed off. Major backlash. But it had to happen. Something was needed to push Buffy to a decision to face Liam. What you need to showcase Nikki Heat is an admirer. Nothing portrays a character better than a mirror for the audience. She needs a partner. Someone who is right beside her in the thick of things and thinks she's all that and a bag of chips.”

Rubbing his chin Castle nods, “Nikki Heat needs a rookie female cop who hero worships her.”

Considering this, Xander says, “You could make it another chick. What you have to work around is that most readers even woman readers can’t really imagine a girl saving the world by herself. I call it the Joan of Arc syndrome.”

Castle laughs, “That’s great and true. You’ve managed it. Buffy’s saved the world over and over again. Your books fly off the shelves. How can your readers believe a sixteen year old cheerleader can save the world?”

“Buffy doesn’t do it alone. It’s what makes her so successful. She’s alive because she’s willing to work with others. Any other girl in her position, fighting evil with nothing but a stake, a watcher, and a cloud of secrecy…” Xander trails off. Almost as if he can see a succession of young girls fighting alone and dying alone. A life snuffed out far too soon. He shakes his head and focuses on Castle once more, “Buffy has Sunshine, whose a computer Wiz, Davis who knows the history of the occult, Liam who is a vampire but willing to fight on her side. And then there is the person that the audience identifies with. They see Buffy through his eyes and that’s what keeps her sexy, girly and believable.”

“Who? Not the werewolf guy, Cato?”

Xander shakes his head and smiles, “Lexie Jones. He loves Buffy. Right now it’s a huge crush that isn’t returned. Later it will turn into deep affection. Like a big brother towards his little Sis. No matter where Lexie's libido is, he will always see Buffy as his hero. Always. She isn’t perfect and when she goes wrong, Lexie will be the first to confront her. It’s not a blind worship. But make no mistake. He would go and has gone into to Hell for her. Even knowing he's going to lose everything by following her, he doesn’t hesitate. It’s a partnership that seems uneven. Lexie has no special super powers. He isn’t strong or quick. Most of the time he stumbles into trouble. But out of everyone, he’s Buffy’s partner. Davis is an adviser/father figure, Sunshine is the best friend, and Liam is the tragic and hopeless love interest that will always be just out of reach. Lexie gives Buffy the one thing the others never can; Normal, Real. How to live in the world and not let your ego isolate you. Buffy could have so easily become absorbed in world saving, leaving no room for being a girl. That’s where Lexie comes in. He loves her, not because she is the Slayer. He loves her because she’s Buffy.”

Castle smiles at Xander. Seeing a kindred spirit. Someone for whom the characters they write are as real as a neighbor or friend. “You’re right. Lexie keeps her grounded. He follows her everywhere. Goes through everything with her. Yet, never forgets he’s human. He doesn’t let that stop him from saving the day though.”

Xander blushes unexpectantly and lowers his head bashfully, “No, he doesn’t.”

Xander clears his throat and looks up, ”Look at all the great partnerships in literature and entertainment: Holmes & Watson, Jeeves & Wooster, Batman & Robin, Kirk & Spock, Solo & Kuryakin, Starsky & Hutch, Crocket & Tubbs, Scully & Mulder, and Denny & Allen. What do they have in common?”
Castle mutely shakes his head.

Xander continues, “Each couple fit together well. They play off each other’s strength and weaknesses. They get along well but aren’t simple carbon copies. It was a very domestic partnership. They could conceivably have been married off screen. Not saying they were having sex. Well, maybe Starsky & Hutch. No, I’m talking about that intense partnership that goes beyond work, or friendship or even family. I’m talking life partners. How many times have you read or seen the girlfriend of the week leave or die? The core partnership is always going to be the strongest relationship of either partner’s life. You might not ever be able to imagine them having sex, but you do acknowledge that no one will ever get between them. You might even believe that one of them loves the other in an unrequited fashion.

Castle eagerly joins in, “Liam couldn’t drive Buffy away from Lexie. Ophelia couldn’t stop Lexie from following Buffy no matter how hard she tried. Lovers come and go but the partnership remains. Yeah, I see that now. Thank you. I think I know how to get my audience to see Nikki as I see her.”

“You're welcome. Sorry again for going all Banzai on you. We'll be in New York for another week. We head home to England after that. Here's my number. And please do not give that number to our publisher.” Xander hands Castle a card with a hand written number penciled in.

Castle quirks an eyebrow and smirks, “Trying to avoid Big Brother?”

Xander laughs, “We’re having a difference of opinion right now. They want Lexie to get with Buffy after Grad. They feel that Lexie’s break up with Ophelia and Liam’s departure to L.A. opens up the possibility for them. I’m fighting them on it. They want Buffy to mature and draw in older readers. I’m not sure I’d be comfortable writing a love scene. I figure if I just go ahead and write the freshman year of college and they see where this is going, they’ll agree with me that Lexie getting the girl would ruin the dynamic of the group.”

Castle rises and starts to lead Xander out into the hall. “You really think this Unresolved Sexual Tension thing is the key to a partnership that lasts? You don’t think your couple should at least try to get together?”

Nearing the elevators, Xander shakes his head, “The banter is always better without the sex thing getting in the way. Look at Moonlighting, Cheers and that show; the one with the skinny sister of that girl from Tin Man?“ Xander looks imploringly at Castle

Rick blinks, then gets it. “Bones? You’ve never seen Bones?”

“God, no. I can't stand the actor who plays the FBI man. Don't know why, but he gives me the extreme heebies something fierce.”

With that, A.L. Harris stepped into the elevator and was gone.

End Notes

No Beta Reader.
Originally posted on liveJournal 22nd-Apr-2010
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