

*Pairing: Spike/Xander*

*Rating: NC-17*

*Disclaimer: I'm not Joss*

*Warnings: a little non-con and torture and general darkness, especially at the beginning*

*Summary: For [👤dragonyphoenix](#), who wanted some Wishverse Spander. Just before the Master's machine is complete, and after Willow and Xander have become vampires, Spike shows up in Sunnydale.*

*Notes: Incorporates the [👤50kinkyways](#) prompt "biting." Many thanks to [👤silk labyrinth](#) for beta-ing!*

## Alliances

by

[Whichclothes](#)

Part One

Willow was playing with the puppy again.

Sometimes she wanted Xander to play too, but today when he'd tried she snarled at him, so he retreated to the wobbly wooden chair just outside the cell. He sat there, watching silently, stroking himself through the denim of his jeans.

Angel was splayed on his back, his arms and legs stretched wide and chained to the floor. Willow had torn his ragged, filthy clothing to shreds so that now he was completely naked, the ribs and hipbones prominent on his underfed body.

The corpse of a pretty girl had been discarded in the corner of the cell, not much visible of her aside from her drab-green clothing. Willow had dragged the sobbing girl into the cell and held her in place while the girl had sucked on Angel's cock. Willow had fondled the girl as she choked and cried and, when Angel was fully hard despite himself, Willow had gleefully torn into the girl's neck. She'd sprinkled a few drops of blood onto

Angel's mouth too, and although he clearly hated himself for it he'd licked the scarlet droplets from his lips, groaning at the taste.

Then Willow had moved quickly, tying a leather cord around the base of Angel's cock and balls so that his erection remained, angry and painful-looking. He'd screamed when she shoved a huge plug into his ass. And then she'd shoved one end of a dildo into his mouth and strapped it in place with a leather harness that wrapped around his head. She'd settled down onto the toy, riding it, so that Angel's head was obscured entirely beneath her skirts.

Angel could only buck and writhe a little underneath her—Xander figured he probably couldn't breathe at all—and as Willow rocked on his face she tossed lit matches onto his belly. One of the matches bounced against the purple head of Angel's cock and even buried as he was, Angel managed to cry out.

The entire scene was diverting, something to do

while the fucking sun shone. Xander remembered two or three years earlier, back when he had been one of the weaklings scurrying around in fear, the big vampire had appeared, promising redemption at the hands of someone named Buffy. But this Buffy never arrived and the halls at Sunnydale High grew gradually emptier. And then one morning Willow didn't show up at school. Xander knew what had happened to her and he'd grieved. But when she'd appeared outside his house three nights later, calling for him, she'd still looked so much like his best friend, like the girl who'd shared her PB&J with him back in first grade, that he'd left the relative safety of his crappy home.

Willow herself had helped capture Angel not long after, luring him into a trap by wearing something pink and fuzzy and looking helpless. The Master had been very pleased, so that now Willow was his favorite and Xander enjoyed favored status by extension.

So all was good. Xander ate well. His parents had been one of his first meals and *that* had been

fucking satisfying. Xander had died a virgin but now he got plenty of sex, sometimes with Willow, occasionally with one of the other vampires, and now and then when the mood hit him, with his prey. He didn't have to worry about flunking algebra anymore, and he was no longer the uncool dork in the cheap clothes, snubbed by the other kids. Hell, he'd eaten some of those snubbers himself.

He should be happy, he thought, as he watched Willow lean down to rake sharp fingernails across Angel's chest. She left five deep furrows in the flesh, each of them bleeding sluggishly, as if Angel's body begrudged the loss of any blood at all. Xander licked his lips and rubbed a little harder on the bulge at his crotch. He was a little hungry. Maybe he'd head upstairs in a few to have a snack. The Master kept several people caged in case someone got the munchies during daylight. But for now Xander still watched Willow play, and he sulked a little. Because he wasn't happy. Yeah, now he and Willow screwed, but they were missing that connection they'd had when they

were human, that bond of love and friendship. Probably Xander shouldn't care about that shit anymore now that he was a demon, but he did.

A couple years ago, not long before Xander died, a pair of vampires had arrived in Sunnydale. Nothing unusual about that—the Hellmouth drew vamps like a lamp drew moths. But this pair was different. Instead of gleefully massacring the locals, the male, a cocky guy with day-glo hair, had spent most of his time looking for Angel. This vampire had even captured Xander once and demanded to know where Angel was—apparently he thought Angel could somehow help his girlfriend, who looked like an extra from the *Addams Family*. Surprisingly, when Xander told him he had no idea where Angel was, the vampire had just let him go, wandering off muttering something to himself about peaches and poufs.

But what stuck in Xander's head about that odd pair of vamps was how dedicated the male was to the female. He loved her, *adored* her freaky self. Until then, Xander hadn't realized demons were

capable of emotions like that. Maybe most of them weren't. But now, as he watched the puppy thrash helplessly and Willow wriggle and laugh, Xander wished he had his own someone special.

Christ. Even as a vampire he was a dork.

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The Master was giving a speech. Again. He was about as interesting as Mrs. Davis had been when she droned away in geography class. Xander was a vampire now—he shouldn't have to listen to boring lectures anymore.

But Xander was listening—or at least pretending to—as he stood next to the Master on the stage and looked suitably right-hand-mannish. As opposed to miniony, because Xander was *not* a fucking minion. Willow was on the stage too, holding the Master's hand and gazing adoringly at him. The two of them looked like a girl and her doting grandfather. Well, except Willow had a little blood smudged on her chin and the Master

was fucking hideous.

“For too long our kind has crawled around in the Dark Ages,” the Master was saying. “Running after our prey, no better than beasts. But this is the age of technology! We are superior beings—why do we let the lowly humans be the only ones to use machines, to increase productivity, to be efficient?”

The assembled masses mumbled something vaguely approving. Xander figured that most of them didn't give a crap about the Master's great plan, but they knew better than to be anything but supportive. You'd think an ancient monster would have outgrown the need for yesvamps, but apparently not.

The Master smiled, revealing yellowed fangs, and continued. “In less than two weeks' time the machine will be complete, and then we can begin our collections. What used to take all night will now take only minutes, leaving us free to spend our nights however we wish. Perusing great

literature, perhaps. Finding ways to improve our unives—perhaps one of you will invent a sunblock effective enough to allow us to go out in broad daylight. Or maybe you'll discover a way to overcome that ancient nuisance, the need to be invited into homes. Maybe you'll even create a mirror that reflects our faces!”

Xander had to turn his face away and bite at his lip. He was pretty sure that the Master was a whole lot better off not seeing his own face. Xander wished he didn't have to see it either.

The Master drew Willow closer to him, settling his arm over her shoulders. “With this machine, we will truly rule the world! We will be twenty-first century demons!”

The crowd obediently clapped and cheered.

“Bollocks.”

The cheering stopped abruptly and everyone turned to the back of the room to see who had

spoken. Xander tried to peer through the crowd; the Master and Willow were doing the same.

And then the audience parted and a figure made its way to the middle of the room. The vampires left a wide circle around him as if they wanted to make sure nobody accused them of being with the guy.

Xander recognized him.

He was dressed pretty much like Xander remembered—black leather duster over a red shirt and black tee and tight black jeans. Almost-white hair slicked back. Lit cigarette stuck between two fingers that sported chipped black nail polish.

“William!” the Master exclaimed in surprise; Xander couldn’t tell if it was a happy sort of surprise or not.

“Spike, mate. Has been since 1880. Or perhaps senility’s crept up on you? That would explain this

daft scheme of yours.”

“It’s a brilliant plan!”

Spike snorted, took a puff of his cigarette, and flicked it negligently to the side. Some of the vampires ducked out of its way. “Bollocks,” he said again. “What sort of demon needs a bloody machine?”

The entire audience gasped at his audacity, but Spike didn’t seem to care. He hooked his thumbs in his belt loops as if he thought he could take on the whole roomful.

“Maybe you didn’t *understand* that part,” the Master sneered. “With the machine, we’ll be free to spend our time in other pursuits.”

“Other pursuits? We’re demons! We’re not meant to sit about contemplating philosophy. We do three things: we fight, we feed, we fuck. You haven’t done that last one in centuries, I’d reckon, and you have your sodding minions to fight for

you. That leaves feeding, and what fun is that without the hunt? We're predators, mate, not soccer moms at a drive-thru."

The circle around Spike widened, as if he might explode or something. But that didn't put him off any, nor did the Master's growl. Spike cocked an eyebrow. "Besides, genius, if you're so bloody *efficient*, eventually you'll run out of humans. The pickings are looking slim in Sunnydale already. Then what?"

"We'll breed more," the Master said through gritted fangs.

Spike made a dismissive *pfft* sound. "Breed? Loads more trouble than it's worth. Takes ages before they're big enough to make a decent meal, and in the meantime you have to remember to feed 'em and keep 'em clean. I know—sometimes Dru fancied keeping one of them as a pet, but she'd always forget to care for it properly. And in any case, I'm a hunter, not a bloody farmer."

Privately, Xander agreed. Honestly, he'd been hoping the Master grew tired of his stupid plan. And if the Master didn't, Xander had been hoping that once the machine was functioning he could persuade Willow to leave with him, to head somewhere more interesting. He didn't want to spend eternity in fucking Sunnydale, that's for sure.

"It's too much for a simple demon like you to understand," the Master said. All the minions in the room were following the conversation nervously, heads swiveling back and forth to watch. The Master continued, "But even if you don't understand, I'll allow you to join us, William. You can help us round up humans to be processed."

"Told you, it's Spike. And I came to Sunnyhell 'cause I was looking for a bit of fun. I didn't mean to become a factory worker. So bugger off, batface."

The crowd gasped again, louder this time, and

backed a few feet farther away. Without any blood circulation the Master's face couldn't exactly turn livid, but Xander could almost swear he saw little puffs of steam coming out of his pointy ears. "Get him!" he roared.

At first, nobody moved. Spike waited as if he actually wanted to be attacked.

The Master stomped his foot. "Now, idiots!"

The minions glanced at each other. They looked at Spike and then at the Master and then at least a few of them apparently decided that the Master was scarier—he sure looked scarier—and they hurled themselves at Spike. They were sort of half-hearted hurls, though. Xander snorted with amusement at his own thoughts and watched the fun.

Spike waited until the minions were pretty much on top of him before he moved. When he did move, though, it was lightning fast, his feet kicking out even swifter than Xander's demon-enhanced

eyes could track, and when an attacking vampire or three stumbled backwards, Spike laughed gleefully and grabbed a chubby guy by the head, twisting it all the way around like that girl in *The Exorcist*.

Most of the remaining crowd scurried farther away. *Chickenshits*, Xander thought. What was the point of being a monster if you couldn't even fight right? He'd have joined in himself—it looked like fun—but it was also pretty fun to watch. Besides, Willow had crept over to his side and draped herself against him, and was now happily caressing his ass. Violence always turned her on.

No matter how good a brawler he was, Spike's situation should have been hopeless due to the sheer number of opponents. But most of the minions pressed to the edges of the room, gawping nervously. The few that had the balls to actually attack acted like the idiot bad guys in every stupid movie Xander had ever seen, going at him one at a time. He picked them off neatly, breaking their necks, poking out their eyes, or

busting their knees so they couldn't stand up any more. Soon the floor was littered with moaning, incapacitated demons and drifting clouds of dust.

But Spike was also gradually falling back towards the exit, Xander noticed. Probably wise, because Spike was beginning to slow down a little. Even vampire endurance had its limits. When he made it to the door, Spike managed to wrest one unfortunate guy's head clean off. Then, with a swirl of his duster, Spike was gone.

The Master was not pleased. He stomped his foot and growled and thrust a broken chair leg through the chest of the nearest demon. Then he turned to face Willow and Xander.

Willow was unfazed. She'd worked her hand beneath Xander's waistband and her cold palm was cupping his left cheek, her long nails digging in just a little. Xander, however, had to resist the urge to take a few steps back because the Master looked seriously pissed. And he might give boring lectures about dumb evil schemes, and he might

have his minions do most of his dirty work, but he was still seven hundred years older than Xander and a pretty powerful demon.

“Stupid little upstart,” the Master said. It took Xander a moment to realize that the Master meant Spike and not him. “He’s been nothing but trouble from the night he was turned. I should have had my Darla punish Angelus for allowing his making.”

Xander nodded. No point in arguing with the Master when he was in a mood like this. Then Willow pressed her finger between his cheeks, which made him jump a little. If the Master noticed, he didn’t seem to care. “William should leave town now,” the Master said. “But he’s probably too stubborn and too foolish to do so.” He pointed a skinny, taloned finger at Xander. “I want *you* to take care of him.”

“Um, run him out of town?”

“No! Dust him, of course!”

Willow had turned her body so that his right leg was trapped between both of hers and she was kind of humping up against his hip. It was pretty distracting, and even more so when her roving finger touched his sphincter and then, ever so slightly, inside. “Okay,” Xander said to the Master. “No problem.”

The Master nodded as if that satisfied him. “I think I’ll go work on my machine,” he muttered.

Xander managed not to snicker at the double-entendre, but only because Willow had worked her finger in as far as the first knuckle.

“Come on, Xanny,” she purred. She bit at his ear, not especially gently either. “I have some new toys we can play with.”

He nuzzled into her hair. The evening had gone so much better than the tedious lecture had promised.

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Xander was walking a little unsteadily by the time he left the Bronze. Willow's new toys were...impressive. He wouldn't have minded spending a little more time with them, actually, but she'd grown bored and wandered off to find some girls, she said. She seemed to prefer them to boys, actually. Xander, on the other hand, felt pretty much in the middle on this issue. Girls were nice but so were boys, in an entirely different sort of way. Being forced to pick just one would be like having to choose between Ho-Hos and Twinkies. Each was equally delicious in its own cream-filled way.

He wasn't sure anymore if he'd felt like this when he was human. Back then he'd been mostly fixated on females, but maybe that was because it was expected of him. Maybe it just hadn't occurred to him that he was missing out on half the world, like walking around with one eye closed. Or maybe he figured being straight was

easier than being bi. It was hard now for him to remember what had motivated his human self and honestly, it was pretty uncomfortable if he did try to remember.

Anyway, it didn't matter. He'd gotten laid and he'd had a little meal from one of the caged humans—so convenient, like snack-sized cans of Pringles—and it was another fine Sunnydale night. He didn't really have any particular destination in mind as he sauntered out into the darkness.

Maybe he'd head over to the highway and see if he could flag down a clueless motorist. He wasn't really hungry, but he wouldn't mind another bite or two. Or maybe he'd head over to Sam's Comix. Xander was always careful not to eat the comic shop guy—if he did, there would be no new shipments of *Astonishing X-Men* or *Wolverine*—but he certainly wasn't averse to a little larceny. He chuckled to himself. It was good to be evil.

It was a quiet night. The human residents of Sunnydale knew better than to venture outside their homes after sunset, and the Master had put

most of the minions to work on machine-building duty. He'd turned a few people with manufacturing know-how specifically so they could work on his project, but tonight all the vamps were chipping in as penance for their embarrassing failure to stop Spike. All except Willow, of course, who was off playing, and Xander, who was supposed to be hunting Spike but who didn't feel any particular obligation to hurry.

Something skittered along the buildings on one side of Main Street, hugging the shadowy spots where the streetlight couldn't reach. Xander inhaled. Renghui demon. Not especially evil, so not an ally, but not edible either, and they didn't put up a fight worth the effort. Xander let it go. An entire community of demons like that had set up shop in town, barely tolerated by either humans or vampires. They were sort of Sunnydale's equivalent of the DMZ, and they often provided services that vampires couldn't easily do for themselves or didn't want to, and that humans were too scared to do, like running the two all-

night gas stations.

A few years ago it was Xander who crept anxiously around the city at night. Willow had recruited him to join this group of losers—led by the school librarian, of all people—who actually thought they stood a chance against the Master and his followers. They'd driven around with stakes and crossbows and holy water, and when they were really lucky they'd even managed to dust an especially stupid vampire or two. But mostly they were unlucky, and their ranks had already been pretty severely depleted by the time the bad guys caught Willow and then she sank her teeth into Xander.

Xander turned left from Main onto Fourth. Maybe he'd check out UC Sunnydale. Sometimes students were too stupid or too drunk to stay inside at night like the university told them to, and they'd hang around campus somewhere, partying.

But Xander had only gone about a half block down Fourth when something came flying out of the

alley, knocking him to the sidewalk with a painful thud.

Xander had learned long ago that when he was attacked, his best response was to appear weaker than he was. It hadn't been the demons who'd taught him that, but his own bastard father. It was a lesson that had come in handy more than once when he was a white hat, stumbling around town with a neon "BITE ME" sign just about stuck into his skull, trying not to piss his pants with fear every time something moved. Monsters had struck and he'd flopped to the ground. They'd eased up, maybe taking the time to gloat over easy prey, and then he'd killed them, or his friends had.

He wasn't that weak boy anymore. But still he took the blow and just lay there, absorbing a punch or two until he could roll over and see what was after him this time.

And to his delight, the what turned out to be a certain blond vampire.

Xander grinned, sprouted fangs, and punched Spike solidly in the balls.

Spike howled. To his credit, though, he didn't fall away, but instead hit back, breaking Xander's nose and sending blood spurting everywhere. Xander laughed and bucked up so that Spike went flying off him. Spike's skull hit the pavement with a loud crack and when he got to his feet he shook his head as if to clear it. Meanwhile, Xander had scrambled upright too, and he wiped the back of his hand across his upper lip.

"I remember you," Spike said. "Scared little whelp, hanging about with bloody Angel. Still keeping bad company, I see." He gestured in the general direction of the Bronze.

Xander shrugged. "For now, maybe. And I'm not scared anymore. Or a whelp."

"Reckon you're the big bad now, do you?" Spike said with a sneer.

“Bad enough.”

“Too stupid to be frightened any longer?”

“Oh, I still get scared enough. When there’s something to be scared of, that is. But I don’t see anything, do you?”

Spike shook his head slowly and made as if he were going to simply walk past. Xander might or might not have fallen for it, once upon a time. But tonight he only smiled and waited for Spike to spin and launch himself at Xander again. As soon as Spike got close, Xander kicked outward, planting one boot very firmly in Spike’s midsection. Sadly, he missed Spike’s already-abused balls, and even worse, Spike grabbed his foot and twisted. It was a move that might have badly broken Xander’s ankle, but Xander turned with it, using his free leg to sweep Spike to the ground.

They rolled around for a while after that, each of

them getting in a hit or a kick or knee whenever they could. Xander fought dirty, aiming for Spike's crotch whenever he could, and Spike took a painful bite or two out of Xander's shoulder, not quite managing to latch onto his neck.

They were a pretty even match, really. Spike was older and more experienced at fighting, but he was also probably somewhat battered from his earlier brawl. Xander was bigger and heavier and he'd been feeding well. Probably better than Spike, who was a little on the thin side. They could have fought all night.

Except at some point in the proceedings Xander got a taste of Spike's blood, and of course Spike had a good mouthful of Xander. The fresh blood—even vamp juice was delicious—and the close body contact and the general thrill of a good scuffle had a predictable effect on the pair of vampires.

Xander and Spike stopped trying to dust each other and instead concentrated on getting as free

of obstructing clothing as possible. Xander had thought that Willow had worn him out, but a demon constitution was a wonderful thing, and Spike's cold skin and hard angles against him were fucking wonderful.

And fucking—that was a really good idea.

More wrestling followed, complete with snarling and growling interspersed with moans and groans, as each jockeyed to top. Xander won, partly on account of his greater bulk and partly, he suspected, because Spike wasn't trying as hard as he pretended to. When Xander jammed his thumb into Spike's hole, Spike stopped struggling altogether.

“More, you bloody pillock. Or is your thumb bigger than your dick?”

Xander flipped Spike over without removing the digit in question. He took only a moment to admire the pale ass that glowed softly in the lamplight like the moon itself, and then he pulled

his thumb out and replaced it with his cock. “Does that feel like a thumb?” he demanded, hammering mercilessly into the clutching tightness with only blood to serve as a lubricant.

“Fucking brilliant, mate. Like that. Harder!” Spike pushed up on his knees, rocking his hips back into Xander’s thrusts. He wrapped a hand around his own cock and stripped it almost viciously, keeping to the rhythm that Xander set.

They rutted like a pair of animals, swearing and howling, until Xander felt himself nearing the edge of the cliff. Then he bent down so that he was blanketing Spike’s back, and he sank his fangs into the meat below Spike’s right shoulder blade.

Spike screamed. Xander came hard. Almost simultaneously, so did Spike, his inner muscles spasming and milking the last of Xander’s climax from him.

They pulled apart with a wet sucking sound and collapsed onto their backs, side by side on the

pavement in front of the Espresso Pump. "I'm supposed to kill you," Xander said when he could talk again.

"You're over a century too late for that, mate."

"Hah."

"Nearly shagged me to death, if that helps."

"Probably not what the Master was going for."

Spike propped himself up on one elbow so he could look at Xander. "Are you really on with that scheme of his?"

"Not really. I think it's pretty lame."

Spike reached over, scraped a little gummy blood from Xander's cheek, and stuck his finger into his mouth. He sucked it clean. "Then why stick with the wanker?"

"Dunno. He's the only game in town, pretty much."

And besides, Willow's all rah-rah with the old guy, and I hang with her."

"Willow? The ginger bint?"

"Um, yeah." Xander sat up and looked around for his jeans.

"You and she were mates back when you were human, yeah?"

Xander sighed. "Yeah. She turned me, actually."

"So you've a tie to your sire. I understand that."

They both got to their feet, shifted to their human faces, and started slowly pulling on their clothing. Xander's was somewhat the worse for wear, but it was easy enough to steal new. No more Wal-Mart clearance bin for him. He snuck a glance at Spike, who looked suddenly tired and worn, and a realization struck him. "That girl you were with last time...um...."

“Drusilla,” Spike said quietly.

“Drusilla. Right. Is she your sire?”

“Sire and the fucking light of my unlife for over a century.”

Xander looked around the deserted street. “So where is she?”

Spike snarled half-heartedly. “No idea. Barmy bird left me for a Chaos demon.”

“Oh. Sorry.”

Spike nodded and shrugged into his duster. They stood there on the sidewalk, not quite looking at each other, and the moment felt a whole lot more morning-aftery than any of Xander’s previous quick fucks.

“So,” Xander said after an awkward pause. “You still planning on heading out of town?”

Spike gave him a sharp look. “If I stay here you’ll have to try and dust me. And then I’ll dust you and—”

“Don’t be so sure about that, Bleachie. I’ll kick your undead ass.”

“Nah. Besides, ’t’s not nearly as much fun as fucking my arse, is it?”

“Nope.”

Spike stared at a spot somewhere several feet to Xander’s right. “Could come with me. Fledge like you needs to see the world, yeah?”

Xander’s unbeating heart twinged. “I—I can’t. Willow—”

“Right.”

And then Xander had another insight. Two in one evening—he was on a roll. “You didn’t just come to Sunnydale for kicks and giggles, did you? You

were looking for something. Someone.”

Spike was silent so long that Xander was sure he wouldn't answer. But finally he nodded once. “My sire's sire.”

“Who's your grandpa?”

Spike sighed loudly. For a creature who didn't need to breathe he was really good at it. “Gelus. Reckoned maybe I could find some way to shake that sodding soul from him and....” His voice trailed off.

“*Angel?* Angel is dear old granddad?”

“Yeah. 'S why I came last time—his blood mended Dru. But now.... He's a great sodding pillock but he's family.” Spike shrugged. “Can't find him anyway. I expect you lot ran his wide do-gooding arse out of town, or finally dusted the git.”

Xander thought quickly. If he said yes, Spike would probably take off and then Xander could tell the

Master he'd taken care of Spike and it wouldn't quite be a lie. The Master would never know the difference. Yep, that was the wisest course of action.

But Spike was standing there, somehow managing to look hopeful, dejected, and slightly menacing all at once; and he had the sweetest ass Xander had ever met; and he'd talked to Xander, really talked to him. Didn't just order him around or use him as a sex toy or cower like the extra in a bad horror movie.

With a pretty melodramatic sigh of his own, Xander shook his head. "He's still around."

Spike's head had been bowed, but now it shot up. "Yeah? Where? Can't find his scent anywhere." After a brief pause he added, "Last time you said you didn't know where he was."

"I know. Except I did know then—not as much of a scaredy cat as you thought, even when I was human—and I know where he is now, too."

Spike chewed on his upper lip for a second. “I haven’t any dosh if you’re looking for payment, mate. Maybe you reckon another shag’s your price.”

“Honestly? I’m shagged out for tonight. No, no price. Angel’s being held prisoner by the Master.”

Spike blinked at him. “Why?”

“To torture him, mostly. The Master was pissed that Angel was trying to help humans—not that he did a lot of good at it, but still—and so he keeps him chained up. He lets Willow play with him. He wants Angel to have to watch when the machine starts production.”

Spike shook his head. “Don’t understand what the poof was about, anyway. I know he has the bloody soul, can’t eat humans like a proper vampire, yadda yadda. But he spent a century skulking about with horrible hair and noshing on vermin. Why the sudden urge to become a savior? ’T’s not

natural, not even for him.”

Xander rubbed his face. Daylight was hours away but he was suddenly very tired. “I don’t know, Spike. Maybe he was trying to start a club. But he accomplished pretty much jack shit and now he’s locked in a cage in the Bronze and he is not a happy camper.”

Spike took a few steps away and turned to gaze up at a street light. A pair of bats were wheeling around up there, gobbling up mouthfuls of nummy bugs. With his back still to Xander, Spike said, “Free him.”

“Can’t. The Master keeps the key. He lets Willow have it sometimes, but I doubt he’d give it to me. And even if he did, I’d have to get Angel past a building full of vampires. They’d notice, Spike.”

“Then tell me exactly where he is. I’ll fetch him myself.”

“Yeah, and end up dusted. If you’re lucky. You’re

pretty high up on the Master's shit list right now. He's likely to throw you in a cage too, and believe me, you wouldn't like it."

Spike whirled around to glare at him. "I'll off the old bastard. Maybe become master myself."

"You won't get anywhere near him, Spike. Yeah, I know today's performance was pathetic, but the minions won't let you attack the Master. They're petrified of him. And for good reason. He doesn't fight often, but when he does he's fucking fierce."

Spike bared his human teeth. "I won't just bloody walk away!"

Xander found himself admiring the guy. Spike was loyal—sticking with his crazy sire all those years and now trying to rescue Angel. Sure, he had his own self-interests at heart, too—obviously, he didn't want to be alone—but still. Willow would never risk her own neck for Xander, and nobody else would probably give a shit what happened to him. True loyalty was rare enough in humans, and

even more so in demons. But how far would it go?

“I have an idea,” Xander said.

## **Part Two**

They ended up at Xander’s parents’ house. It had stood abandoned since he killed them and he’d never bothered to poke around. There was nothing there that he wanted. But he and Spike needed a private place to chat, preferably a private place with booze. Willy’s had plenty of booze but also lots of prying ears with supernatural hearing. Since Xander had killed Tony and Jessica early on a Friday night—when they’d probably stocked up already for the weekend but not yet imbibed their way too deeply into the hooch—he figured there was probably something at the old homestead with which to wet his whistle.

The house hadn’t looked all that great when the Harrises were alive. Home improvement wasn’t his family’s forte. But after a couple of years of

complete neglect it looked truly awful. The yard was nothing but parched weeds and bits of trash that had been deposited by the breeze. The paint was cracked and peeling, two of the windows were broken, and the oak tree in the front yard had died and toppled over, collapsing part of the roof. The inside wasn't much better: dead flies and old bloodstains and a thick layer of dust over everything. Furniture was still overturned from the struggles the last time Xander had been there.

“Lovely place you have here,” Spike commented as they entered the kitchen.

Xander ignored him. He went straight for the cupboard next to the microwave—the one with the metal handle obviously worn from years of use—and yanked open the door. “Paydirt,” he chortled. He made a face at the Southern Comfort and instead pulled out a pair of other bottles. “You want the Gordon’s or the Wild Turkey?” he asked Spike.

Spike made a face of his own.

“Yeah, pops was a real connoisseur of fine liquor. If it was cheap and it got you wasted he’d give it a big thumbs up,” Xander said. Spike took the whiskey and unscrewed the top. “Guess it’s vodka for me,” Xander said, opening his own bottle.

For a moment, Xander considered leading Spike into his old bedroom. But then he decided that he didn’t want to face the ghosts of his human past, so he turned and took them into the living room instead. It was a little eerie, too. Xander had seen a documentary on TV once about these ruins that had been found somewhere—Utah or Arizona or somewhere like that, maybe, he couldn’t remember. Several hundred years ago some group of people had built adobe houses in cliffs and they’d lived there for a couple centuries before abruptly vanishing. Their belongings were still there—weapons and pots and clothing, even dolls and other toys—all set out as if their owners had only gone out for a little stroll. Nobody knew what had happened to those people. The living room was like that, with the remote control still

perched atop a *TV Guide* next to Tony's armchair, and two plates with the dried remains of some kind of food sitting on the coffee table. There was an open can of beer and a lipstick-stained glass that still smelled faintly of alcohol.

Tony and Jessica had been sitting and eating their dinners in front of the TV when Xander had arrived. He'd entered through the back door, delighted that he didn't need an invitation, maybe because his stuff was still there. He'd called to them and they'd rushed into the kitchen, their faces white with shock. Oh, that had been *fun!*

Now, Spike collapsed onto the couch, sending up a big cloud of dust that would have made them choke if they'd been breathing. He rested his booted feet on the coffee table—Jessica would have had a fit over that—and took a hefty swig from his bottle. Xander uncapped his vodka and sat down next to him.

“So what's the grand scheme, mate? Getting me pissed and taking advantage of me?”

“Didn’t need to get you drunk to do that.”

Spike snorted and took another long drink.

Xander had never liked vodka when he was alive, and its taste hadn’t improved now that he was dead. But the burn as it slipped down his gullet was nice, almost like being warm-blooded again, at least for a moment. “I don’t give a rat’s ass what happens to Angel,” he said. “But obviously you do. I *do* care about Willow, though. And I’m not real keen on the whole machine idea, and neither are you.”

“So?”

“So we cooperate. We work together and find a way to take down the Master. Then you can have Angel and we can smash the fucking machine into a zillion tiny bits.”

Spike lifted a scarred eyebrow. “Us against the world?”

“Nope, just against the Master. And if you want to take over when he’s gone, be my guest. I have no desire to babysit a pack of minions. I wanna do like you said before—see the world.”

“With your precious Willow at your side.”

Xander downed another mouthful. He wasn’t at all certain that Willow would follow him even if the plan worked. “I don’t want to be alone,” he said softly.

Spike didn’t make fun of him. Vampires in glass houses and all that.

They’d each made their way silently through half the contents of their bottle before Spike spoke again. “Two against the world is a lovely idea, but it’ll get us both dusted. I don’t mind meeting my end like that—always pictured myself going out in a blaze of glory, I have—but I’d rather survive.”

“Well, I don’t wanna dust either. I’m only

eighteen, Spike, and that's counting all the human years. What kind of immortality is that? But none of the other vampires are gonna help us, and I'm not so sure they'd be all that useful even if they were willing."

"We need allies who have a grudge against the Master, perhaps. Zealots of some kind. People with a reason to fight."

Xander thought about the school librarian and his followers. They were foolhardy and outmatched, but they were willing to go to battle. "The white hats, maybe. I think there's a few of them left. The Master's kind of saving them for the end so they can see his triumph, or some kind of stupid crap like that."

"You expect we could persuade them? They're not likely to be our biggest fans, you know."

"I know. But yeah, maybe. It's worth a shot, anyway." And then a brilliant idea struck him as he remembered the Renghui demon from earlier that

night. “You know who else might help? All the DMZ demons.”

“The what?” Spike looked mystified.

“The...the skittering in the corners types. There’s lots of ’em around, not threatening enough for the Master or the white hats to be gunning for them. But I don’t think they’re especially happy around here, either. The minions go after them sometimes, just for sport. I bet that if we promised to let them live their lives in peace, and if the humans promised the same thing, they’d join us.”

Spike looked impressed. “You’re not half as stupid as you look.”

Xander grinned at him.

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The next evening Xander snuck out of the Bronze an hour or so after sunset. He hoped he wasn’t

looking too sneaky about his sneaking, but in any case, probably nobody even noticed. Willow was off torturing a pair of pretty blondes that a minion had brought her, the way a human admirer might bring a girl chocolates or a bouquet of flowers. The Master was overseeing the final stages of construction and probably gloating beyond all endurance. Nobody else gave a damn about Xander. Well, one of the listless humans in the cages saw him leave, but that poor son of a bitch was probably just happy to have one fewer vamp on the premises—not that it would help him any.

The night was a bit livelier outside. A few of the minions had caught some kind of demon—something skinny with reddish fur and big, manga eyes—and they were toying with it. It already looked weakened and it probably wouldn't last much longer. Xander didn't spare any of them more than a contemptuous glance as he walked by. Picking on things that couldn't even put up a decent fight was stupid and betrayed the bullies' own weakness.

The white hats spent their evenings in the high school library. That was stupid too—any old vamp who wanted could break in, and the only reason they hadn't was the Master's orders to leave them alone for a while. If the librarian and his pals had half a brain they would use someone's house as HQ. Safer that way. But their idiocy made Xander's job a whole lot easier.

He whistled to himself as he walked. He hoped that Spike was doing as he promised, which was looking for the DMZ demons and sweet-talking them a little. Spike could have just run off, of course. It would have made sense. But Xander didn't think he'd back down from a brawl like that. Besides, last night's fuck had been wonderful and more of that would be of the good.

Xander broke a useless lock on one of the school doors. He was down at the end of the north wing, where he'd once suffered through biology with Mrs. Hammett, a strange old biddy who kept half-glasses perched on her thin nose and cackled with laughter at science jokes none of the students

understood. He wandered slowly down the hall, inhaling the familiar scent of floor cleaners and sweat and chalk, but the odor had richer tones now that he was a demon. He could smell hormones—yum—and all the things that went with them: fear and lust and shame and anger.

When he found himself in front of his old locker, he yanked it open. It belonged to a girl now, and inside the locker door were pictures of movie stars and musicians he didn't recognize. She had a little flower-shaped mirror—which of course didn't reflect him—and some scribbled-on notebooks and a few bulky texts. An olive green hoody hung on the hook and there were a pair of gray Nikes at the bottom of the locker. He wondered if she knew what had become of the boy who'd had that locker a few years earlier. Probably not.

He left the locker door open as he continued down the hall.

As he approached the library doors he could hear voices inside. Three of them, all male. They were

low but urgent, as if the three of them were arguing over something important. Xander sidled closer and peeked in through the little window.

The librarian was there—Giles, Xander remembered—still sporting tweed. His face was worn and beard-stubbed and his hair messy and he had dark circles under his eyes. Xander remembered the other two also. The short one was Oz, who was a year ahead of them and who Willow had a mad crush on shortly before she died. And the other one, the biggest of the group, was Larry. Larry had made Xander's life miserable from fourth grade on, but had been pretty decent to him at the end, when Xander had served his brief time with the good guys.

Xander watched through the window as the three of them spoke, and he felt a strange pang, remembering when he was one of them too. Yeah, he'd been bored silly by the research parts and scared shitless by the rest, but he'd been part of the gang, at least. Accepted. Not the geeky freak with the bad clothes and drunk parents.

The white hats were so deeply into their conversation that none of them noticed when Xander crept silently into the room. He kept to the deep shadows around the edges as he moved closer. Then Larry began to pace in an agitated sort of way. When he came within a few feet of Xander, Xander sprang forward and grabbed him, wrapping his arm around the big guy's neck.

Larry bellowed in fear.

To their credit, Giles and Oz didn't just sit there. They each dove for weapons: Oz snagged a crossbow and Giles an oversized ornate cross. But Oz couldn't shoot him without the arrow hitting Larry, and a cross wasn't much good from halfway across the room.

"Hi, guys," Xander said.

"Xander!" exclaimed Giles.

"Hey. You remember me. Cool. But wow, your

ranks are seriously depleted. Weren't there, like, a dozen of us when your us was my us?" He couldn't quite keep the glee out of his voice. Evil, right?

"Hey, dude," Larry said in a choked and terrified voice. "Remember that time when we were fighting those ugly green demons? The ones with the poison horns? One of 'em almost got you, right, but I stepped in and—"

"Save it," Xander interrupted. "A walk down memory lane isn't gonna make me kiss and make up, and besides, I might start to remember that time in eighth grade when you hid all my clothes while I was in the shower after gym. And Oz, you can forget the sidling because I see you and old Larry's looking extra tasty tonight."

Oz froze, then shrugged and walked back to Giles' side. "What is it you want?" Giles asked wearily, probably cluing in that if Xander had just wanted fast food, Larry would be dead meat already.

Xander smiled. He was wearing his human face— Look ma, no fangs!—but from the way Giles went a shade whiter, he had the feeling his grin still wasn't very reassuring. He couldn't help it. He'd never been all that great with diplomacy even when he had a soul. "I came to make you an offer you can't refuse," he said.

"We are not interested in your offer," Giles replied.

"Right. You don't negotiate with terrorists, huh? But right now your choices are listen to me or watch Larry die. I'd go for curtain number one, G-Man."

Giles and Oz exchanged a look, and then Giles' shoulders sagged a little. "Very well. What is it you want?"

"A big bowl of M&M's with all the brown ones removed. No, wait. That's Van Halen."

"Xander!" Giles sounded an awful lot like a

librarian reprimanding a smart-ass teenager, which made Xander's grin widen. Larry wiggled a little so Xander tightened his chokehold until his captive was still.

"Okay. Here's the deal. You guys don't like the Master. Don't blame you. He's a homicidal megalomaniac and boring to boot. And he's got this big old doomsday plan and you guys are pretty much screwed. But the thing is, he's not my favorite guy either. I'd rather be rid of him if I could."

Giles' eyes narrowed. "What are you saying?"

"I'm saying, how 'bout we work together, kumbaya style? We help each other out with our mutual problem. And once the Master's gone I'm out of here and I don't care what happens to you. You can put the sunny back in Sunnydale."

"You wish to...cooperate with us?"

"Yep."

“Willow, too?” Oz asked.

“No. She’s solidly on the Master’s team. But once this is over, I want to take her away with me. And I do have at least one other co-conspirator. Maybe lots more, depending on how his night’s going.”

“Who?” Giles asked.

“Spike.”

Giles gawped for a moment. “William the Bloody??”

“The same. He’s not a Master fan either, plus he wants to rescue Angel ’cause they’re family.”

More gawping. “Angel’s still alive?”

“No, but he’s not any deader than he used to be. He’s not in the best of health, though. So we team up and get rid of the Master. Spike springs Angel; I drag Willow away by her hair, caveman style, and

you stop getting eaten. Happy ending. Roll credits.”

Giles shook his head slightly. “Why should we trust you?”

“Why not? I don’t have any reason to make this shit up—if I wanted you dead that badly I could’ve picked you off already. Besides, what choice do you have? You don’t do this and the three of you—well, two after I munch on old Lare here—won’t last another two weeks. The boss’s plan is almost ready and once that starts, well...goodbye cruel world.”

Giles and Oz stared at each other, both of them attempting an entire conversation with their eyes. Larry made an unintelligible meeping sound. And then Oz shrugged. “He’s right, man.” Giles sighed.

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Spike caught up with Xander on Olive Street, just in front of Pete’s Shoe Repair. Xander heard him

coming, but still allowed himself to be slammed hard against the rough brick of the building. Spike pinned Xander against the wall, planting his legs around one of Xander's, pressing his crotch hard against Xander's hip. "And how was your day at work, pet?" he purred into Xander's ear.

Xander was instantly, achingly hard. He worked his hand under Spike's duster to squeeze his ass. "Dandy. The librarian and his merry men are on board. There's only three of them left, but they have a pretty good arsenal and I think they're up for a suicide mission. How about your guys?"

"Some of them were too scared. But others were agreeable enough. Signed up loads of Jehengoi."

"Aren't those the ones that look like three-foot-tall chickens?"

"Yeah."

"Not really very ferocious, are they? I mean, what can they do? Peck?"

Spike's sharp teeth nipped hard enough at Xander's earlobe to draw blood. "There are several hundred of the buggers. That's enough to slow the minions down, in any case. And there are other species as well. Not a brilliant army, not even combined with your poncy humans, but bloody well better than nothing." He licked the droplets of blood from Xander's ear and then dragged his tongue slowly down Xander's neck.

Xander shivered. "Okay. So...I guess our business is concluded for tonight."

"Hmmm," Spike hummed against Xander's skin.

Xander took a quick look up and down the street. Nobody was visible, but he didn't want anyone seeing them and reporting back to the Master that Xander wasn't exactly following orders to the letter. Xander moved his hands away from Spike's ass—reluctantly—and grabbed his collar instead, then pushed him away. "Race you to my parents' place," he said, beginning to run before the

sentence was even complete.

Running was fun when you were a vampire. Not like when you were human and were either forced to plod endlessly around the school track or else flee in terror from the monster du jour. Now Xander could run faster than any Olympic sprinter and keep it up for hours. His muscles would tire eventually—even vampires had their limits—but not for miles and miles.

So when they arrived at the house, both of them had plenty of energy to tear off one another's clothing, leaving it scattered all over the dusty living room. A brief bout of naked wrestling followed, ending with Xander on his back on the grungy old carpet, with Spike straddling his hips. Christ, Spike was gorgeous. Xander had been too terrified to notice that when he was human, but now he could fully appreciate Spike's tight muscles and sculpted face, the brightness of his eyes and the fullness of his lips. He wondered how Spike managed to pull off being pretty without for a moment being unmasculine. Well, that hard

cock helped, with its rosy head emerged from the foreskin and glistening slightly in the moonlight that snuck in through the living room blinds.

“Like what you see, love?” Spike smirked.

“Not bad.”

Spike ran a hand across Xander’s right bicep. “You’ve still a bit of a tan. Pity it’ll soon fade entirely.”

“True. But I’m never gonna grow love-handles or go bald. I figure that’s a fair trade.”

Spike tweaked one of Xander’s nipples and then the other, making them form stiff little peaks. Then a single finger traced a path down the center of Xander’s chest and abdomen, dipping briefly into his navel before tickling at the trail of dark hair that led to his groin. “Should’ve had you when you were alive,” Spike said wistfully.

“Hey! I’m perfectly fine now. More than fine.”

“But cold, love. And...if I’d looked at you then...really *seen* you...if I hadn’t been preoccupied with Dru....” He sighed. “I’d have turned you myself. Then *I’d* be your sire.”

A soulless creature shouldn’t feel regrets, should he? But when Spike said those words, Xander’s heart twisted a little. What if Spike had been the one to kill him? Xander hadn’t lived long after Spike last left town; those few remaining months hadn’t even been memorable or worthwhile. He’d spent most of them afraid anyway. If Spike had turned him they’d have left this miserable little town long ago, and Xander wouldn’t have had this stupid, useless longing for a sire who would never love him back.

Xander smiled weakly. “Adopt me?”

Spike didn’t scoff. Instead, he went very still, his fingers freezing in place on Xander’s belly. Xander heard him swallow. In a quiet, hoarse voice he said, “If I had sired you, would you have stayed

with me? Or shagged a few times and moved on to greener pastures.”

No way should a terrifying, bloodthirsty demon look so...vulnerable, Xander thought. Xander reached up to stroke Spike’s thigh. “I’ve never...never had someone who cared about me. Except for Willow, and that’s.... Anyway. I don’t know what I’d have done, but I don’t think I’m a greener pastures kind of vamp.”

Spike nodded solemnly. “Nor am I.”

“Yeah. Kinda got that.”

“So?” Spike asked and he vamped out. He waited expectantly.

Xander looked up at him, puzzled. “Already dead, Spike.”

Spike shrugged. “Like you said. Adopt.”

For a moment, Xander was absolutely

speechless—a condition that had rarely afflicted him in either human or vampire form. He'd been flippant when he suggested adoption, his usual reaction to emotional turmoil. But now Spike looked dead serious. Not to mention nervous.

“Daddy,” Xander said, grinning. And then, without a smile and with a little hitch in his voice, “Sire.”

Spike's pupils blew wide open in his amber irises and his entire body shuddered almost violently. Then, lightning fast, he bent down and bit Xander's neck exactly where Willow once had. It was not a dainty little nibble—he sank his fangs in almost viciously. It hurt. But oh god, it hurt so *good!* Xander tilted his neck to the side, giving Spike better access, and his hands clutched convulsively at Spike's flexing ass. He felt the pull as Spike drank from him, the friction of their cocks and balls trapped together between their bodies, the rough fibers of the carpet underneath him. He wasn't a man anymore, didn't even feel like a demon—more like some non-sentient creature at the bottom of the sea floor, something that was

all nerve endings and writhing movements, something that was engulfed and wanted nothing but more.

Spike pulled away from his neck with a sudden, tearing jerk. He sat astride Xander looking feral and triumphant, his eyes sparking, his mouth and chin smeared crimson, his cock dripping streamlets of pearly fluid. He held his wrist to Xander's mouth, and Xander, who hadn't even realized he'd vamped out, latched on to it. Spike tasted good—rich and complex and a little spicy, like Xander understood fine wine was supposed to taste, with layers of flavor that contrasted without competing. Xander could imagine feeding on nothing but that particular blood for eternity and never growing tired of it.

After Xander swallowed several mouthfuls, Spike stroked his hair tenderly, like a lover, and gently pulled his arm away. For a long minute they stared at each other. Xander felt content for the first time in as long as he could remember.

Content but incredibly horny.

“Fuck me, Sire,” he ordered, and shifted Spike back a little so Xander could wrap his legs around him.

“Slick?” Spike asked, surprising Xander.

“No. Not this time.” They could go for gentle cuddles another time, maybe—even demons liked to snuggle now and then. Now he wanted rough. He wanted the pain of being taken and he wanted blood.

Spike was happy to oblige.

He reached over first, though, and grabbed a tasseled pillow from the couch. Xander lifted his hips so Spike could jam it under his ass. And then, with no preparation or ceremony, Spike thrust his cock into Xander.

Xander screamed in pain and ecstasy. The corded muscles in Spike's arms were in sharp relief as he

propped himself up, hips pumping. He bent his head again, biting Xander over the left nipple just enough to draw blood, and then over the right, then along Xander's clavicles and down his sternum, across his ribs, down the length of both arms, until Xander's upper body was dotted so liberally with tiny pinpricks that he could no longer distinguish which part of him Spike was damaging next.

Just about when Xander felt he couldn't stand it any longer, Spike threw his head back and howled. Xander could feel him climax, could feel Spike's cock pulse inside him, and then Xander was coming too, his voice adding to Spike's din.

As they caught their breaths—habit—they held each other, slowly tracing fingertips along sensitized skin, memorizing every nook and cranny, curve and protrusion. "Sire," Xander said happily into the crook of Spike's neck.

Spike hummed his approval.

A minute or two later, Xander said, “Doesn’t mean you can order me around, you know. I am *not* your minion.”

Spike slapped Xander’s ass lightly. “What’s the point of siring someone if you can’t order him about?” he mock-pouted.

“I’ll tell you what. You can boss me around on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and I get to be in charge Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays.”

“What about Sundays?”

“On Sundays we rest.”

“Git.”

“Yeah, but now I’m *your* git.”

### **Part Three**

The two floors above the Bronze had once been apartments. Really cheap apartments, because

who wants to live directly over a club? When the Master had taken over the Bronze he'd commandeered the apartments too, mostly through the expedient method of eating their occupants. Now the windows had been covered with plywood and the minions slept in the rooms. The Master himself had sleeping quarters near his precious machine. Willow had her own place on the third floor, two rooms with the walls spray-painted in strange designs and a big bed with always-rumpled sheets. Xander had been in there only a few times—she didn't often want him intruding in her space. Xander's apartment was on the second floor. It was just a simple studio and he hadn't bothered to decorate it at all. But he had a comfy chair and a decent bed, and a TV he liked to watch during daylight. He had a bathroom with decent water pressure in the mildewy shower, too.

Xander went straight to his room when he returned from his parents' house. He would have preferred to spend the day with Spike—his sire!—but someone might notice him missing and now

wasn't the time to raise suspicions. As soon as he entered his room but before he could close the door behind him, Willow appeared in the hallway.

She leaned against the doorframe and pouted. "I was looking for you," she said.

"Sorry. I was out looking for Spike. Master's orders, right?"

"I was bored."

"Sorry," he repeated.

She entered his apartment and walked toward him, a predatory smile on her lips. Shit. If she got too close she would discover the evidence of his encounter with Spike: the smell of the other vampire, the not-quite-healed bite marks all over Xander's body.

Xander danced nimbly away from her and to the other side of his bed. "So, it's late. Or, um, early. I'm beat. Gonna hit the hay."

She made a face and poked at his pillow. “I’ve hardly seen you at all, Xanny.”

She knew he hated to be called that. And why she had a sudden interest in him now of all times was a mystery. More Harris bad luck, he guessed.

“We can hang tomorrow, Will. I promise. But I really need some shut-eye.”

“Bored.”

“Why don’t you go play with the puppy? That always cheers you up.”

“I don’t wanna play by myself.”

Even when she had been alive, when Willow got into a mood like this she was pretty intractable. The girl had a stubborn streak that resembled the Grand Canyon, and it hadn’t become any shallower or narrower now that she was a demon.

“What do you want?” he asked wearily.

“Come with.” She held out her hand towards him.

He had no good way to refuse. With a resigned sigh and a fervent hope that she wasn't in a very observant frame of mind, he nodded. Then he followed her out of the apartment and down the hallway, where one of the minions had left a drained corpse. Again. Minions made shitty neighbors.

Xander's and Willow's boots clomped loudly on the stained concrete stairs as they made their way down to the basement. Willow must have already begged the key from the Master, because when they arrived outside Angel's cell she pulled the key out from the front of her blouse, an action he might have found fascinating at one time.

Angel was in terrible shape. It had obviously been a long time since he'd fed—his torn and bruised skin was very dry, and it was stretched tightly over his bones. He was already lying on his side when they arrived, but when he heard them he tried to

curl into a tighter ball. Something big was jammed in his ass—Xander couldn't make out what—and his arms were behind his back, the elbows bent and the forearms lashed tightly together. His back was so tattered that Xander could see glimpses of white bone.

Willow stomped over to Angel and kicked him onto his back. His chest was tilted upwards because his arms were trapped beneath him, and he whimpered when Willow planted a heel on his balls. "Poor puppy," she said. "So sad. Maybe we should neuter him, huh Xan? 'Cause that's what you do to puppies."

Angel made a strangled sound but couldn't move away.

Willow laughed merrily and pressed down a little harder with her foot.

"Willow?" Xander said. "You know, the Master's going to be angry if Angel dusts too soon."

“Then we’ll have to play nice,” she said sadly. She looked up at Xander with sparkling eyes. “I wanna watch you this time.”

“Watch me what?”

She tapped a finger against her chin thoughtfully, then smiled. “He’s going to suck you, baby.”

Xander wasn’t too fond of that idea—a mouthful of fangs that belonged to a guy with a grudge wasn’t exactly what he wanted to stick his dick into. But Willow had the stubborn look on her face again, and she was already hauling Angel to his knees by his hair. Once in position, Angel stared down at the floor, swaying slightly.

Xander had never been so not in the mood in his life. He’d never given a shit before what happened to Angel, but Spike cared about Angel, and now Xander cared about Spike. Plus, wasn’t Angel sort of his great-grandpa now? But Willow was leaning up against the far wall, her leather pants already undone, her hand shoved down the front of them.

She lifted her eyebrows expectantly.

Xander stepped closer to Angel and stilled him with a hand on Angel's shoulder. "If I even think I feel a fang, I'm gonna castrate you myself. Slowly. With my fingernails. And then I'll choke you with your own dick. Got it?"

Angel didn't look up—he only nodded twice.

Angel didn't smell good. He was filthy and he had Christ knew what kinds of fluids dried on his body and matting his hair. So not with the sexy. So Xander planted a clear image of Spike in his head—Spike as Xander had seen him only a few hours earlier, perched victoriously between Xander's legs, his mouth bright with Xander's blood. That did it. Xander began to grow hard. He hastily unbuttoned his jeans, gave himself a few strokes, and then held his cock to Angel's slack lips.

Angel didn't put up any resistance as the cock was pushed into his mouth. But as soon as the crown

touched Angel's tongue, his head snapped up, his dull eyes grown suddenly very sharp. He started to say something, and Xander hit him hard to shut him up. Angel toppled over. Xander dragged Angel back to his knees.

“Not a fucking word,” Xander hissed, hoping like hell that Angel could tell from the look on his face that silence would be in both their best interests. To emphasize his point, Xander cut his eyes toward Willow, who was watching avidly, her hand moving up and down at her crotch.

Angel opened his mouth again, but as Xander prepared to give him another hard punch, he closed it. His gaze was troubled and confused, but maybe not completely hopeless anymore. He blinked a few times and then dropped his jaw silently.

With a sigh of relief that Xander hoped Willow mistook for lust, he shoved his dick back into Angel's mouth. Angel swallowed without gagging, and when Xander clutched his dirty hair with both

hands, Angel allowed his head to be moved up and down.

No matter whether Xander really wanted to do this or not, it still felt pretty good. He thrust deeply, smoothly. When he looked down at Angel's face, tears were coursing down Angel's gaunt cheeks. From shame? Or maybe because he was getting the first taste of Spike he'd had in a long time—even if it was secondhand off Xander's dick.

Whatever the cause, the tears weren't a turn-off for Willow, who was making soft moaning noises. And, truthfully, Xander didn't mind them either. He moved faster, alternately shoving in so deep that Angel's nose smooshed up against Xander's pubis, then pulling nearly all the way out. Angel was actively participating—maybe to hurry things along—bobbing his head and sucking deeply. Despite the night's earlier workout with Spike, it didn't take long before Xander groaned and shot his load down Angel's throat.

Xander pulled out of Angel with a slurping sound. Angel didn't move. His lips were smeared with come and saliva. But he gave Xander another questioning look and Xander did his best to silently warn the other vampire to keep his trap shut. Xander tucked himself back into his jeans and buttoned up.

“I hope you're not bored anymore, Will, but I am really going to turn in now.”

Her hand was still working swiftly and she was staring hungrily at Angel. She nodded absently, not turning to watch as Xander left.

He made it up to the main floor before he heard Angel begin screaming.

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Xander didn't escape as early the following evening as he'd hoped. The Master was speechifying again. One of the minions actually nodded off in the middle of it and the Master

twisted her head off, which woke the rest up pretty nicely.

Willow seemed to be in a good mood, smiling a cat-ate-the-cream smile as she sat on the edge of the stage and swung her legs. Even from several feet away Xander could smell Angel's blood on her, as well as a few splatters from whomever she'd had for dinner.

That made Xander's stomach rumble, so as soon as the Master dismissed them, Xander took off towards the high school. Sure enough, he found a half dozen kids clustered near one end of the place, passing a joint around. He didn't know if they were chronically stupid or just really stoned, but none of them had any idea he was there until he'd actually grabbed one of them, a chubby boy with a pimply face. The others screeched and ran away; Xander tore carelessly into the boy's neck, drinking greedily until the boy's heart stopped. Then Xander dropped the body onto the ground. He considered hiding it somewhere—his uneasy truce with the white hats might be threatened if

they realized he'd been snacking right outside their door—but then decided that they'd have no way to know he was the culprit.

Just as Xander neared the entrance closest to the gym, he saw Spike sauntering over, his shoulders swinging confidently. Xander liked the way Spike moved, prowling like a true predator, as if he owned the world. He made himself seem much bigger.

When Spike was within touching distance, he grabbed Xander and licked at the corner of his mouth. “Eaten without me, I see,” Spike said.

“Yeah. Sorry. I had the munchies. You wanna catch a bite before we go in?”

“Nah. Later. Let's get this over with.”

They entered the school side by side, footsteps echoing in the empty hallway, then burst dramatically into the gym. They were fashionably late, which meant three human faces and about a

hundred or so demon faces swiveled their way. There were a dozen varieties of demons in various sizes and shapes, and they had been milling around the floor while Giles and his little gang clustered uneasily in front of the stage, like chaperones at the world's weirdest prom.

"You're here," Giles said, pretty unnecessarily in Xander's view.

Spike rolled his eyes and, with Xander remaining next to him, strode to the center of the room. "Right then," he said, looking around. "This is a motley crew, but it'll have to do. If you're going to be a coward and slink off halfway through, might as well speak up now. My boy and I will eat you now and save time later."

The audience shifted uncomfortably. Xander wasn't too sure about his sire's motivational skills, but in a show of solidarity he kept his mouth shut and glared menacingly.

"We're not going to back out," Giles said. "But

why should we trust *you*?”

Spike narrowed his eyes and stalked closer to Giles, who looked scared but held his ground. Spike looked him up and down, then tilted his head. “You’re one of those Watcher pillocks, aren’t you?”

“How did you—” Giles squared his shoulders. “Yes. I am.”

“Where's your Slayer then?”

Now Giles’ shoulders slumped. “Cleveland,” he mumbled.

“Pity. It’s been ages since I tasted Slayer. You know what their blood does to a vampire?”

Xander had no idea what a Slayer was, but by the way Spike turned his head to leer at him, Xander had the idea that eating Slayers was a good thing. Maybe he’d get to try one if they survived this.

“You’re hardly inspiring confidence,” Giles said.

With another roll of his eyes, Spike said, “I expect you’ve studied the Diaries like a good little Watcher.”

“Of course.”

“And you’ve read of the Aurelius clan?”

“Yes.”

“Then you know that if it comes to me or the Master, he’s a much bigger threat to peace, justice, and the American way. I never could be arsed with grand schemes—a bit of a brawl, a nice nosh, and a shag and I’m content. And you’ll also know that I’m not a fan of great-great-grandpa. Two of us never have got on.”

Giles seemed to consider this a moment. “Yes, all right. But why would you go to all this trouble to fight him?”

“Because I fancy the world like it is. Demons hunting humans, the way nature intended. None of this bloody *machine* shite. Because I’m tired of wankers like the Master with their delusions of being the vampire love child of Genghis Khan and Adolf Hitler, always ordering blokes about. Because I want to take my boy and my sire and get the bloody hell away from this shithole.”

Now Giles turned a little to frown at Xander. “I don’t understand. Didn’t Willow turn you? Spike wasn’t even in town when you died, was he?”

Xander walked over and slung his arm around Spike’s waist. As Spike smiled smugly, Xander nuzzled at his sire’s neck. “Technicality. Spike’s my sire now.”

“Why?”

Xander answered honestly. “He wants me. Really wants me.”

“Damned right,” Spike said, squeezing him back,

while Giles nodded slightly.

“I see,” Giles said. Quite a few of the watching demons made approving noises—they understood. Most demons were pretty clannish.

Then Oz came forward. “Look,” he said. “I don’t really care who’s biting who, as long as they’re already dead. What I want to know is how you plan to win this thing.” It was the longest speech Xander had ever heard from him.

As over a hundred pairs of eyes looked at them expectantly, Xander and Spike exchanged a quick glance. The thing was, they didn’t really have much of a plan. Xander never had been any good at strategy—Willow used to kick his ass at Risk every time—and Spike wasn’t exactly Mr. Be Prepared either. Willow would have been really helpful right about now, Xander thought, if she wasn’t playing for the other team.

Xander took a deep breath. “Just before sunset tomorrow, I’m going to get the key to the cell

where they're keeping Angel. I'll have to talk Willow into it—the Master's not real big about sharing with anyone else. When we get into the cell I'm gonna wait until she's, um, distracted, then I'm gonna knock her out. I'll free Angel. Hopefully he'll be in good enough shape to get out of there on his own steam and I can carry Will."

"But what about the Master?" Larry asked.

"I was getting to that. While I'm down in the basement, you guys," he waved at the demony assemblage, "are going to create a distraction. You're gonna stage a sort of riot outside the Bronze. The Master'll send most of the minions out after you, but that time of the evening everyone's kinda slow and groggy, and not their strongest because they haven't fed yet."

The demons looked a little uneasy and the Jehengoi clucked at each other, but nobody exactly objected. Xander knew the demons were going to get slaughtered, but the carnage would keep the minions occupied, at least.

“And the Master?” Giles asked.

“That’s where we come in,” Spike replied. “While that lot’s out in the street and Xan’s in the basement, we find the Master. He’ll most likely be near his precious machine. We dust him.”

Larry didn’t look happy. “That’s it?”

“You got a better idea?” Xander demanded.

Larry shook his head doubtfully, but Giles said, “Sometimes simple is best. But what happens if we succeed?”

“Truce between us holds long enough for me and Xan and Angel to skip town.”

“And Willow,” Xander added, knowing he was being overly optimistic.

“Sure, pet,” Spike said a little condescendingly. Then he turned back to Giles. “You’ll not see us

again. What you do in Sunnydale after we've gone is your own affair."

"But you'll still be murdering people!" said Larry.

"Vampires. Not as if we can survive on hamburgers, is it? But it won't be *your* people we're eating at least."

Giles didn't look happy. "And if we should encounter one another in the future...."

"Truce is off," interrupted Spike. "But it's a big world, innit? I reckon we can stay out of each other's way easily enough."

Giles didn't look happy—none of them did. Maybe they were just too goddamn goody-two-shoes to make a deal with the devil, even if the devil was the better choice at the moment.

"You know," Xander said, "you lied to me once, Giles."

Giles frowned at him. “I haven’t any idea what you mean.”

“Back when Willow first recruited me to join you guys, and I went out patrolling with you the first time. You remember that? We ran into this fledge and I didn’t want to stake him ‘cause I *knew* him. Jonathan Levinson. We weren’t really friends, but back in seventh grade we were always the last two guys picked for teams in PE. And sometimes during dodgeball we’d hide in the back and talk about Star Trek.”

“I remember. He nearly killed you and you just stood there with the stake in your hand. Willow dusted him, as I recall.”

“Yeah. And I was kinda torn up about it, but you told me it wasn’t really Jonathan. You said it was just a demon who’d stolen his body, hijacked some of his memories. And I believed you. So a couple days later when my pal Jesse showed up with shiny new teeth, I rammed that hunk of wood home right away. My first kill, actually.”

Giles nodded.

“But you were lying,” Xander said. “Now I know firsthand. Yeah, I’m undead now and not a human anymore, but I’m still Xander Harris. I like my meat a little rarer. But I’m still *me*. I still like to watch sci fi and I still fantasize about Angelina Jolie—sorry, Spike—and I still suck at spelling.”

“You no longer have a soul,” Giles said coldly.

“Yeah, I guess that makes all the difference to you, huh? Ted Bundy, Josef Mengele, guys like them—they’re a-okay because they have a soul attached. But poor old Jonathan who was just fucking hungry—he’s a monster.”

Giles flinched a little but stood his ground. “You *are* a monster, Xander.”

“Yeah. But I’m an honest one. You wanna know what Tony Harris did behind closed doors?”  
Xander squeezed Spike tightly. “I’ll take an honest

monster over one who pretends to be good any day.”

Spike turned his head to grin at Xander. “Brilliant, love.”

Nobody had ever called Xander brilliant before.

By the dubious look on his face, Giles wasn't entirely convinced of Xander's genius. But Oz nodded and moved closer to Giles. “It's cool. We have to do this, man.”

After a very long pause, Giles nodded too. “Very well.”

It wasn't exactly the friendliest of alliances, Xander thought, but it would have to do.

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The night, as they say, was young.

After the party in the gym broke up and

everyone—human and otherwise—went their separate ways, Xander followed Spike out into the night, away from the center of town.

“Where to, fearless leader?” Xander asked.

“Now that the entertainment portion of the evening is over, I expect it’s time for a snack.”

“Ah. Gotcha.”

Xander himself wasn’t hungry—the pimply boy had been pretty filling—but he walked happily alongside Spike, peppering him with questions about his adventures out in the world. Spike seemed to enjoy telling about his exploits, and even if Xander wasn’t a hundred percent sure everything Spike said was strictly true, it was certainly fun to hear.

“—just left Milan and Dru wanted to go to San Francisco to meet Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti—she thought Beat poetry actually involved beating people, the daft old bird—and I was tired of the

continent myself, so—”

“Spike.” Xander stopped in his tracks and when he spoke, Spike did too.

“Yeah?”

“Do you think Giles was right? Am I a monster?”

Spike frowned. “You are a vampire, love.”

“Yeah, I know. And I’m all up with the bloodsucking and all, but...I’m not a very good vampire, am I?”

“I think you’re lovely.”

“Thanks. But I mean, the regular vamp stuff, all the menacing and torturing and things, I’m not really into it. I’d rather have a nice quick meal and, well, hang out with someone. Hang out with you.”

“But you fancy fighting too, yeah?”

Xander shrugged. "Sure. It's fun and I'm pretty good at it. But I'm not really into it like some of the guys."

"Look. When I was human, there were those who said...well, they didn't like the way I chose to spend my days."

"Yeah? What did you do? Were you a robber or...oh! Jack the Ripper! That was about your time, right? Was that you?"

Spike shifted his eyes oddly. He mumbled something that sounded like, "Wrote poems."

"Huh?"

Xander could have sworn Spike tried to blush. "I wrote sodding poetry, all right? Bloody awful poetry, in fact, and everyone knew it, but I was sincere. Those were my real feelings I was tormenting all over the page."

"Oh." Maybe Xander should have been surprised,

except sometimes when he looked at Spike he saw a certain...well, softness wasn't the right word. Sensitivity? Vulnerability? Spike might try to hide it, but Xander could tell he felt emotions deeply. With a sudden mental image of Spike bent over a desk, scribbling madly away, Xander had to hide a grin. "Okay."

"My point, pet, is that you shouldn't let anyone tell you what kind of man to be, nor what kind of demon. And one of the joys of being a vamp is you don't have to care a whit what anyone else thinks of you. Anyone except your sire, that is, and I think you're a right treat."

"Be true to myself, huh?"

"Right. Now enough with the philosophy. Let's find someone to eat."

## **Part Four**

Xander woke up in the early afternoon. He'd left Spike at his parents' place shortly before dawn,

both of them sated with sex and blood. Usually, after a big meal and a lot of fucking, Xander would have slept in. But he'd been having horrible nightmares, a lot of them about what it had been like to wake up in his own coffin and have to dig his way out, and finally he gave up on sleep.

The Bronze was a quiet place this time of day, with most of the vampires tucked away in their beds. A couple of them had partied a little hearty and passed out in the hallway—they'd better hope they woke up before the sun crept in around the edges of the boarded-up [windows](#).

Drained corpses littered what used to be the dance [floor](#). The Master would make the minions dump the bodies after sunset—nobody wanted a lot of rotting cadavers lying around. In the hanging cages, a few humans still stirred feebly. Xander stopped to stare at one of them, a pretty girl who looked vaguely familiar. Maybe they went to school together. If so, he was sure she never spared him a glance back then. He looked at her pleading eyes and remembered that at one time

he would have been shocked to see her like this, with pinprick wounds marring the paper-white skin of her neck, and her dress torn down the front. He would have been horrified, even, and he would have pitied her. Now he felt...nothing. He wasn't happy to see her like this, but he wasn't sad either. It was like going [grocery](#) shopping when you weren't hungry—you didn't waste time feeling sorry for the plastic-wrapped ground beef.

Xander wandered away from the cage, ignoring the way the girl moaned in defeat. He sat on the edge of the stage, swinging his feet, thinking. He felt nothing about that girl in the cage, or any of the other people in the room, or any of the hundred or so people he'd killed in the last couple years. Or, for that matter, about any of the couple dozen demons he'd help kill before that. But that didn't mean he didn't *feel*.

If Spike were in a cage like that, hurt or even just captured, Xander would be enraged. He'd tear apart the world to save him. He'd do the same for Willow, even though he knew she didn't feel that

way about him.

So he wasn't callous or hard-hearted. He was only selective about who he cared about. That was fair enough, right? The world had certainly been selective in caring about him.

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He went up to Willow's room around the time she usually woke up. He was bringing a gift.

He knocked on her door and heard her sleepy  
"Come in."

She was alone, which was a little surprising. Her hair was spread out across her pillow and she had the blankets pulled up to her chin, and when she smiled at him she reminded him suddenly of the time they were eight and she was recovering from the chicken pox. Her mother had decided Willow was finally on the mend enough for visitors, so Xander had come over with coloring books and candy bars, and she'd smiled at him just like that

when he walked into her bedroom.

“You’re up and about early,” she said.

“Early vamp catches the worm.”

She wrinkled her nose. “Worms. Ew.” And then she noticed the large plastic bag in his hand.

“What’s that?”

“A surprise.”

She sat up and clapped her hands happily. But the blanket fell to her waist, revealing her small, perky tits, and that kind of shattered the illusion of young, human Willow. Just a few days earlier, Xander would have stripped off his own clothing and leapt onto the bed too. Now he just waved the bag a little. “You gotta get up if you want the presents, Will.”

“Are they worth getting up for?”

“Oh, I think so.” He grinned. “I took a little drive

last night—went to Goleta.” That was true. Spike had stolen a Mustang and they’d zoomed around for a while.

“What’s in Goleta?”

He turned the bag around so she could see the printing on it. “Sexiverse.”

Her eyes sparkled. “Ooh! But then why do I have to get out of bed?”

“Because this particular present is for use on someone else.” He reached into the bag and pulled out the monstrosity he’d found: a black dildo almost as big as his forearm.

“Pretty!” she said.

“Yep. And I have some really wicked nipple clamps in here too, and this really nifty little gadget that delivers electrical shocks, and a leather hood.”

He’d sort of gone on a little spree while Spike ate the clerk. He’d picked up a few things for him and

Spike, too, but Spike was keeping those items for now.

Willow climbed out of bed catlike and stretched—which was still pretty damned distracting—and reached for the bag. “Gimme.”

“Do you have any ideas for using them?”

“The puppy, of course!”

He nodded as if that plan had never occurred to him. “Okay. Maybe you want to eat first or something. But I found this butt plug that looks like a little tail—”

She clapped her hands again and bounced on her feet before grabbing a silky black blouse off a nearby chair. The blouse went on over her head and then she jammed herself into a pair of really tight leather pants. Some black boots with tall stiletto heels and she was ready. “Let’s go play!” she said, and dragged him out the door by the hand.

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For once, Angel didn't already have something shoved up his ass. Must have been a relief to him, Xander thought. The big vampire was in relatively good shape, too—still skeletal, but all his wounds looked a couple of days old. Willow must have found another way to entertain herself the previous night. Angel's neck was encircled by a heavy collar that was attached to the wall by a thick chain, but he was otherwise unfettered. When they arrived, he moaned and curled himself into a tight fetal ball.

“Aw,” Willow said as she unlocked the door. “He doesn't look very happy to see us. Maybe the presents will cheer him up.”

Angel shuddered.

Xander glanced nervously around. He'd never been much for wearing watches when he was alive, and hadn't picked up the habit now that he

was undead. It wasn't as if he had important appointments to get to. The only time concern for a vampire, usually, was getting to shelter before the sun rose, and they had an instinct for when that was going to happen—sort of an itchy feeling under the skin. And all of that was well and good, but tonight Xander needed to get the timing just right. Too soon and he'd blow the surprise for the Master, too late and Willow would hear the ruckus outside.

Willow took the bag from Xander's hand and stalked slowly over to Angel. She touched the point of one heel against his neck. "Roll over, puppy. On your back."

Angel made a hopeless sort of whimpering sound and complied. His eyes were closed, like a very young child hiding from the monster under his bed. He grunted when Willow upended the bag, allowing the contents to tumble to his belly and bounce onto the floor.

"Toys!" Willow said. "Which one should we try out

first?”

Angel squeezed his eyelids even more tightly shut.

Willow sighed melodramatically and knelt beside him. She touched her fingertip playfully to his nose, then traced it down the center of his emaciated body, all the way to the tip of his soft cock. She pawed through the little collection on the floor for a moment, then picked up one of the nipple clamps. It was a little metal spring device with the jaws coated in black rubber. A large o-ring hung from the end of it. She pinched the clamp a few times, opening and closing it, before attaching it firmly to Angel’s left tit. Once it was on, she tightened it and gave the ring a quick tug. Angel hissed a little and tried to lift his chest up, but she pushed him back down again. Then she attached the other clamp to his right nipple.

Xander’s sharp ears caught a hint of noise from outside, maybe a single shout. Willow heard it too—her eyebrows drew together and she cocked her head upwards a little.

“So! Will! The clamps are good, but don’t you like the other toys?”

He heaved a silent sigh of relief as Willow looked back down at the things on the floor in front of her. She lifted the dildo and turned it over in her hands. Angel must have opened his eyes a crack because his muscles went very tense and he pressed his legs tightly together.

“Hmm,” Willow said thoughtfully. “Maybe in a little bit.” She set the phallus down and instead picked up a small plastic case. She clicked the hinges open and made a very pleased sound when she looked inside, absurdly like a girl getting a pretty piece of jewelry as a gift. “Does it need a plug-in?” she asked, looking around for an outlet.

“Nope. Batteries included.”

She set the case down and almost reverently pulled out a slender metal wand attached by a cord to a black plastic battery case. She turned the

case over until she found the switch; when she turned it on, Xander heard a faint humming sound. Along with some muted yelling from outside.

“So,” Xander said loudly. “I think you’re not supposed to use those things, like, above the waist or something. But I guess cardiac arrest’s not an issue with the undead, right?”

She waved the wand around, smiling, as if she were a magician. And then she touched the tip of it to Angel’s balls and pressed the trigger.

Angel bellowed much louder than Xander would have thought was possible in his weakened condition, and his entire body jerked and spasmed. As casually as possible, Xander stepped behind Willow.

“This is fun,” she said after a moment. Angel had stilled by then and just lay there, panting shallowly. “I bet I could stick it up his butt, right?”

“Sure, Will. Sounds like a blast.”

She giggled and pulled at one of Angel’s legs. He tried to resist, but even he had to know he didn’t have a fucking chance.

Outside there were a series of thuds and crashes.

Willow looked up again.

Xander knelt behind her and set a hand on her shoulder. “Want me to give you a hand with that?” he asked. He brushed a hand down her bare arm and leaned forward against her.

She rested back against him. “I wanna keep him on his back, baby. Wanna see his face. Will you bend his legs up for me?”

“Sure thing,” he said and hit her with all his strength in the side of the head.

Unfortunately, she had moved a little and the blow didn’t hit her as straight on as he’d intended.

Instead of conking out, she fell over and immediately sprang to her feet, vamped out and snarling at him.

“What?” she demanded.

He scrambled up, too. “Sorry. It’s nothing personal, I promise.”

She wasn’t at all mollified. “I brought you into this world, Alexander Lavelle Harris, and I’ll take you out of it.”

They were circling around slowly, Xander trying not to trip over Angel. “Yeah, about that,” he said. “I don’t think you’re all that fit for demon parenthood. I’ve been neglected.”

She sprang at him and he ducked just in time. The noises outside had grown louder, more frenzied, but she was too focused on him to notice.

“Baby’s got a brand new Sire,” he said. “One who wants me. But I’m not forgetting you, Will. I still

love you, I do. Come with us.”

Her only answer was an enraged sort of shriek and another pounce in his direction. She was going for his throat and felt assured of success—she was really fast and possibly stronger than him, and she knew that Xander didn’t really want to dust her. But the heel of one of her boots caught on the huge dildo and she went crashing to the ground. Angel moved, pinning her to the ground by her shoulders, and Xander socked her right under the chin.

She went limp.

Xander moved quickly. “We gotta book.” He ran outside the cell and grabbed the pair of vamp-proof handcuffs that were hanging there. He rolled Willow onto her side and locked her wrists behind her. Then he slipped the hood over her head and buckled it tight. It had no eye holes or mouth opening, which he hoped would help slow her down a little if she regained consciousness at an inconvenient time.

“What’s going on?” Angel asked. He was up on his knees again but swaying a little.

“No time for explanations, big guy.” Xander found the key to the cell—Willow had dropped it near the door—and made a quick, silent prayer that it would fit Angel’s collar too. He didn’t know who’d listen to a vampire’s prayer, but the key fit and the lock clicked open. Xander took Angel’s hand and hauled him upright, then bent and picked up Willow, heaving her over his shoulder. “Let’s go,” he said.

Angel didn’t argue. Still wearing nothing but the nipple clamps, he was the first out of the cell. He had to brace himself on the walls now and then as they went, and Xander was a little worried about the stairs. There was no way he could carry Willow *and* Angel.

But more urgent noises echoed down into the basement and the sound of them seemed to give Angel incentive to move. They plodded up the

stairs side by side.

At the top of the stairs was a short hallway leading to the main room, where chaos reigned. The battle between the vampires and the DMZ demons was apparently in full swing, and some of it had spilled back into the Bronze. Feathers and blood and dust flew everywhere.

“Xander, what—?” Angel began.

“Follow me and try not to get dusted.”

It wasn't easy winding his way through the melee while hauling Willow and leading a bewildered, naked vampire, but Xander gave it his best shot. Spike was here somewhere and might be in trouble.

The Master had been building the machine in the big back room that had once been used as storage and for the bands waiting to go on stage. When Xander burst into the room, the first thing he saw was Larry's corpse crumpled in front of him, the

neck bent at an impossible angle. Giles was on the floor, too, his head bloody but his chest still moving up and down. He seemed to be out for the count. Oz was running around with a stake in his hand, but he couldn't get a clear shot at the Master, who was dancing around with Spike.

Oh, Spike.

He was wounded. His nuclear hair was matted with dark blood and more was dripping down his face, partially obscuring his vision. He kept shaking his head, trying to fling the blood away. His left arm was hanging oddly, the shoulder probably dislocated, his clothing was shredded, the parts of his face that weren't bloody were puffy and bruising, and he was moving awkwardly. It looked like his left leg was going to give out anytime.

The Master was toying with him, oblivious to the rest of the room as he pummeled Spike, sometimes saying something to him in a language that sounded similar to German.

“William!” Angel shouted.

Spike turned his head, which allowed the Master to get in a blow that knocked him to the ground.

“Goddamn it,” Xander said. He let Willow fall to floor with a thump.

Spike struggled to regain his footing and Angel made his stumbling way towards the combatants.

Xander pushed Angel out of the way—the idiot was only going to get himself dusted—and leaped on the Master’s back.

“Traitors!” the Master screamed. He reached behind himself, trying to knock Xander free, but Xander held on tightly. He hoped Oz didn’t decide to kill two vamps with one stake and ram the wood home through both their backs. The Master’s claws dug deeply into Xander’s flesh, but Xander didn’t let go. The two of them staggered drunkenly together as Xander put his hands on either side of the Master’s bald, sort of scaly head

and tried to twist the fucking thing off.

He was doing pretty well, he thought. He was only two years old in demon years and the Master had been around when quill pens were the latest and greatest invention. He wondered whether Spike was proud of him.

And then the Master reached up and pressed his wickedly sharp claws right into Xander's eyes.

Xander screamed.

He couldn't see anything but pain, vivid lightning bolts of pain, but he held on, and he heard Spike roar with rage, and he very clearly felt the Master crumble away beneath him.

After that, things got pretty confusing.

There was a lot of shouting. Somebody was holding his head still, trying to examine his injuries maybe. Somebody was holding a bloody wrist to his mouth—gods, that was Spike, and he tasted

wonderful—but before Xander had drunk nearly enough the wrist was taken away and Xander was being lifted and carried like a baby amidst jostling and yelling. He felt suddenly as weak as a baby and he let his head loll against tobacco-scented leather. He wondered vaguely how Spike was managing to carry him with that bad arm.

He lost track of things altogether after that. Maybe passed out.

When Xander became fully aware again, his head was cradled on something soft. Something that shifted a little and smelled like—oh. Spike. His head was on Spike's lap.

“We're not dust?” Xander asked. It came out in a sort of creak.

Spike pushed a lock of hair out of his face. “Not quite, love.”

“The Master?”

“Enjoying scenic hell right about now.”

Xander let out a long sigh. But then he asked, “Willow?”

“Full of questions, aren’t you? She’s in the boot and not too happy about it either. Dunno how you mean to keep her from trying to kill us all.”

Xander wasn’t sure about that either, but that was a problem for another day. “Angel?” he asked.

Spike’s body moved when he snorted. “Poof’s unhappy about the clothing I gave him. Should have left him in just those clamps; he looked brilliant like that. But he’s fine. Asleep now, I expect. When he wakes up he’s going to have a sodding crisis of conscience over how to fill his belly and whether he ought to be dusting us bad, evil demons. We’ll sort that later as well.”

“Where are we?” Xander liked the feel of Spike’s hand against his brow, cool and soothing.

“An old barn about two hours north of Sunnydale. The sun’ll be up shortly but we should be safe enough here for the time being.”

Now that Spike had said where they were, Xander inhaled and recognized the smells of hay and old metal and oil, dry wood and the ghost of horse shit. “Everything’s okay?” he asked.

“More or less. Two of your humans survived the fight. When I left they and the demons were dismantling the machine.”

“Good.”

Spike bent down to press soft lips to Xander’s forehead. “Open your eyes, pet.”

“No.”

“Why not?”

*Because as long as my lids are closed, I'm not really blind.* He wondered how hard it would be to

learn Braille, and whether there were demonic seeing eye dogs. Would Spike still want him when he was so badly damaged? He wouldn't be able to hunt like this, would he?

Spike's thumb traced along Xander's eyebrow. "Come on now. Give us a look."

Xander shook his head stubbornly.

"Open up, Xan. I just want a quick peek and then I'll let you have another few swallows of your old sire."

But that reminded Xander. "You were hurt!" he said, trying to sit up.

Spike held him down firmly but gently. "I'll mend. Always do. Now, don't make me punish you, whelp."

Punishment sounded...kind of fun, actually. Which meant maybe Xander wasn't as badly hurt as he'd feared. Very cautiously, he opened his eyelids,

first just a crack and then more.

He could see! Well, sort of. His vision was hazy, blurry, and when he experimented a little he realized he wasn't seeing anything at all out of his left eye, which still felt as if someone had ground glass into it. But he could make out the vague outlines of Spike's face hovering over his, peering intently at him.

"Well?" Xander asked. "What's the verdict, doc?"

"The right one's all scratched up. But we'll get a good bellyful of blood into you tonight and that eye will be right as rain."

"Oh," Xander said, considerably relieved. "And the left?"

He saw Spike shake his head. "It's gone. Nothing left to mend. Bastard yanked it right out, I'll wager."

Xander felt sick. Could vampires puke? "That's an

appetizing picture.”

Spike clucked at him. “Does it hurt much?”

“Nah,” Xander lied. “Just a tickle. But, um, does it bother you that I’m...disfigured?”

“Bother me? Don’t be daft! I’m bloody proud of it. ’T’s something to show the whole bleeding world: look what my boy did for *me*. Nobody’s ever had my back like that, Xan. Nobody’s ever risked himself for me.” Spike's voice cracked a little with emotion and Xander turned his head to nuzzle in against his sire’s stomach. Spike was proud of him. Proud of Xander Harris.

“You’re one hell of a vampire,” Spike said, again smoothing at Xander’s hair. “’M bloody lucky to have found you.”

“Ditto,” Xander sighed happily. After a brief pause, he added, “So, what’s the plan now?”

“When the sun sets we find someone to eat. Or,

more likely, some cows if we don't want the poof pitching a fit. And we finish mending. And then...dunno. We tame your girl and sort Angel. There's this chaos mage I met once in England. Not exactly evil, but he fancies a bit of trouble now and then. Perhaps he knows how to get rid of a pesky soul."

"So we go to England?"

"We go wherever we want, pet. I promised you I'd show you the world and I will."

"I'll only see it with one eye."

Spike kissed him again. "Then I'll have to show you twice as much, won't I?"

"I was thinking, maybe we should look up this Slayer person. Sounds like she'd be interesting to...get to know."

Spike laughed. "Took me twenty years to bag my first Slayer, whelp. You think you can beat that?"

“I can try.”

Spike chuckled. “That’s my boy.” Then he held his wrist against Xander’s mouth and Xander dropped his fangs. He drew gently, taking tiny sips of his sire’s blood, allowing himself to savor the taste. He fell asleep with his lips still pressed to Spike’s skin. And his dreams were sweet, filled with love and mayhem.



**The End**