

Pairings: Primarily Spike/Xander, secondarily Angel/Xander, some Xander/Cordelia and Spike/Dru

Setting: Season 2, few days after "School Hard"

Rating: Mostly R, but gets to NC-17 for sex and violence at places

Feedback: Please, please, please

Disclaimer: Nothing belongs to me; all belongs to Joss and Mutant Enemy and anybody else who actually makes money off this stuff - certainly not me.

Warnings: m/m sex, het sex, character death, sexual violence, rape

Summary: Spike has a plan, sort of; Xander is just a meal, at first; Angel plays superhero, and fails; can the three of them live in this world and not kill each other?

Reviews:

In Backfire, daedream_fanbot takes one of the sacred clichés of BTVS fandom; namely Spike coming after Xander post School Hard and turns it into something shiny, original and wonderfully new. Watching evil, predatory Spike ensnare first Xander and then Angel in his little twisted games is a thrill to follow, and Spike becoming trapped by his own Machiavellian schemes is a thing of beauty to behold. Excellent writing, terrific characterization, spot on pacing and a kick-ass plot all add up to making Backfire one of the top fics of this or any other year.

Rarely does a story explode onto the scene with such an assured voice and a deft hand at twists and turns of a deeply involving plot as Spike claims Xander and then shares him with Angel, forcing Xander to become the lover of both vampires. This fic is dark, dangerous and completely hot!

Author's Note: I know this first chapter is going to sound familiar to some readers. Keep reading, though. I believe I've added enough twists to make it unique.

68,818 words



Backfire

by
Daedreams

1 Plan A

As plans go, it was, admittedly, pretty weak. He was going to follow the boy home, catch him, scare him, and kill him. Alright, so that doesn't technically constitute a plan. That's what he did every night. Only this time it was a specific boy. And he had a specific reason to kill this specific boy. Well...it was as good a reason as any, really. This boy knew the Slayer. What a fitting message to send to the little bint. A little something that said, "You think you can stop me by having your mum crack my skull with an axe?" *No, sir, a little skull cracking doesn't slow me down one little bit.* Plus this tasty morsel he was following was offered to him by Angelus himself. Spike was simply accepting the invitation.

The boy was being cautious. Carrying a small stake discreetly by his side, he was walking quickly and inspecting the shadows as he passed. Even so, Spike had been able to follow him all the way from the school without any trouble. It's not like this child had any heightened senses or acute awareness skills. He was just one of the few that knew what went bump in the night. And Spike could work around that.

It really didn't take a lot of stealth or cleverness. Spike simply followed him up his sidewalk, onto the front porch and stepped up behind him as he was unlocking the front door. Everybody always made this mistake. They somehow figured that once they were on their own property or on their own front porch that they were safe. They let their guard down. Started concentrating on finding the right key on the key ring. This boy was no different.

He slid his key into the lock. Spike tapped him on the shoulder. The boy turned

around. And Spike punched him in the jaw, causing his head to slam back and hit the door. He collapsed in a semi-unconscious state.

The vampire took the stake out of his hand and threw it into the bushes. He grabbed the boy by the wrist and dragged him off the front porch to the side of the house. In this low rent neighborhood, the space between the houses was narrow, dirty and dark.

He held the boy against his own house by the upper arms. The boy's head was rolling back and forth on his shoulders, his brain still trying to process what had happened in the past twenty seconds.

Spike did his best to be patient. Shortly, the boy's eyes began to focus, and his muscles tensed slightly before going into a complete spasm when the gravity of the situation finally became clear.

"Holy fuck," was about all the boy could muster when he saw Spike's face just inches away from his own.

"Interesting choice of words," the vampire smirked back at him.

The boy's eyes got wide and he opened his mouth to scream, "Buf-!" But the air suddenly left his lungs when Spike slammed him hard against the brick wall.

When he had caught his breath again, Spike made sure he was looking into his eyes when he said, "Your little Buffy is no where near here. You shout like that again and I'll snap the neck of the first person who peaks their head around this corner. Are we clear?" The boy blinked. Spike slammed his back against the house again. He gasped. Spike asked again, "We clear?"

The boy nodded frantically. His breathing was fast and heavy and his eyes started darting around, no doubt looking for something heavy or a sharp pointy weapon of some kind. He began to squirm against the wall. He brought his hands up and grasped Spike at the elbows and tried to push.

Spike started to get curious. The boy obviously knew he was going to die. It was more than most of his victims knew. Most would just smell of fear and uncertainty.

But this boy knew. Knew what vampires were. Knew that Spike was a vampire. And knew that Spike meant death. And yet, he was still trying to find something that would save his own life. It made him grin. Spike decided to play.

He let go of him quickly and took a step back. It took a moment for the boy to realize what had just happened. Then he turned and ran. The vampire was sure that he was running as fast as his little legs could carry him, but it only took Spike less than a moment to get in front of him. The boy slammed into him as Spike reached out and clasped cool fingers around his neck. He pulled the boy further into him and whispered, “Going somewhere?” before tossing the child backwards several feet into the side yard.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

It was like Xander’s brain was on a ten-second time-delay. Instinct was telling him he was in trouble, but he couldn’t get his mind and body to cooperate. The wind was knocked out of him again when he landed on his back in a clump of dirt. *Ow*, was about all his brain could come up with before Spike was on top him, grabbing his upper arms, lifting him and slamming him against the house again. Then his brain told his legs to run. *Stupid brain.*

Okay, Xan, he thought, here you are again. Did he just give me a chance to get away? Now, why would he do that? Oh, because you can’t get away. Evil vampire is having a little fun, isn’t he? Xander stopped struggling. He caught his frantic breath. He looked squarely into the vampire’s eyes and thought for the second time in as many minutes, I’m gonna die.

I’m gonna die right here next to my own house. It seems a bit anti-climatic. Spike was leaning forward and pressing his chest against Xander’s. The vampire dipped his head under Xander’s chin and he felt a cold nose rub lightly along his neck. He shivered.

Spike lifted his head and looked into his eyes again. Xander couldn’t blink. The blue eyes staring back into his were mesmerizing. They twinkled with a smile behind them and Xander felt nothing but anger toward this creature in front of him. Then the fear was back as those blue eyes were morphed into a gold that held

nothing behind them but pain and death. Xander glanced down to the vampire's mouth which hung open slightly to reveal the teeth that he had prayed nightly he would never ever see this close.

"Please....," he found himself whimpering. "...don't."

Spike cocked his head and pressed his entire body against Xander's. Every muscle in his body tensed and he could feel his pulse raging. Finally his brain caught up and it was pissed off again. Xander had a flash of his mother's mood swings and his ridiculous brain decided to think, *I'm too young for menopause*, before it fired back to anger. His tense muscles twitched and that raging pulse burned hot. Spike suddenly pulled away from him slightly and the demon's eyes narrowed.

"You gonna kill me, vampire?" Xander surprised himself by saying. "Then just do it. What are you waiting for? You can play around all you want, but this is going to end the same way. Me, dead. You, sated and blood-happy. So what are you waiting for? An engraved invitation? Tell you what, let me go find a pen and paper and I'll write something up real quick-like. How about: 'Xander Harris cordially invites one William the Bloody, Spike to his friends, to get on with it all ready and sink his ridiculously sharp and pointy teeth into his neck and drink him til he collapses dead on the ground just a few feet from the comfort of his own bed.'"

Spiked blinked. It actually looked kinda funny over gold eyes.

"Whatsa matter? Not fancy enough? Well, I could use calligraphy, but you'll have to let me go for a few weeks or months so I can learn it. Then, of course, it will be another six to eight weeks for the actual engraving. I'd have to send out for that. Tell you what, why don't we meet up here again in, say, six months? The invitation should be ready by then, and maybe even include some pretty embossed flowers or some gold foil-"

Xander was cut off when Spike lunged forward and two fangs pierced his neck. He felt himself go cold and white with panic. But only for a moment, then his blood was pumping again too fast. Finally his brain and body started working together, and he tried everything in his power to get this beast off of him.

But Spike was pressed up against him too hard. And his cold hands had moved

down his arms and were gripping his wrists. Xander could feel the vampire's hard tight muscles push into every part of his own hard tight muscles. He could feel his own rapid pulse beat against the dead body in front of him. He could feel Spike swallow as the short vampire's neck was resting against his upper chest. The vampire's cold neck was getting warmer as more of Xander's blood was gulped down it.

Xander felt a tear fall down his face, and in his head he said goodbye to Willow. And Buffy. And his mother, and Giles and even Jesse, who he realized he never had a chance to say goodbye to and isn't that a shame and that's really been weighing on him for quite some time hasn't it and he thought about saying goodbye to his father then thought better of it and discovered he didn't really care all that much that he was never going to see his father again and isn't this an odd time for self-discovery and hey...*why aren't I dead yet?*

Spike's pull on his blood had slowed down. Now the entire body pushed against him was warm. But Xander could still feel his pulse beating. And upon further reflection, he noticed that the blood in his body seemed to be pumping in two different directions. Up through his neck and into this demon's increasingly hot body and also down to his groin and filling the very last muscle that he should be thinking about right now.

But there it was. All hot and perky. And even more disturbing was the feel of something similar pushing into his hip from the vampire in front of him.

Oh, God help me, am I getting turned on by this? Is he turned on by this? This can't be right. Then Spike shifted and their cocks were lined up together and the vampire started rubbing and grinding and Xander's brain decided to stop working entirely.

Xander thrust forward involuntarily and a moan escaped from his throat at the same time that the same noise escaped from Spike's. The pulling at his neck became even slower and the heat from both their bodies was scorching. Xander was burning on the inside and out. Spike's grip on Xander's wrists loosened for just a moment then he squeezed tight and made some sort of weird guttural noise and pushed his teeth into Xander even further and harder and Xander came and screamed.

Neither moved. Something fired in Xander's brain and he twitched. The vampire

twitched back and pulled his fangs out of Xander's neck. Spike was suddenly two steps away from him and Xander slid down the wall and brought his hand up to his neck. He looked up at Spike and saw two sparkling blue eyes piercing down at him. Somehow he found himself still angry.

"You done?" He asked. Spiked nodded. "You aren't gonna kill me?"

"Not tonight."

"Why?"

Spike just grinned. "See you again soon, yeah?"

"Oh, you bet. Anxiously awaiting *that* encounter." Xander snarked back.

Then Spike was gone and Xander was left sitting in his side yard with blood dripping from his neck through his fingers. He was pissed off, and tired, and weak, and hot, and confused, and...oddly satisfied. Then he panicked.

2

Panic

Angel was sitting entirely too close to Xander. Granted, he was about three feet away, but it felt way too close. They were both reclining on the middle step of the stairs in the library, the set closest to Giles' office. Xander couldn't remember who had sat down first, but now he couldn't concentrate on what Giles was talking about because Angel was sitting way too damn close. *Okay, so the concept of concentration has flown out the window this last couple of days, but I'm trying, I really am.* Plus, the dead guy kept looking over at him. He could practically feel the cold eyes burrowing into his head. But whenever he would turn to glare back at him, Angel would quickly look back out at the other people in the room.

And...okay, wait, is he even closer to me now? Angel's shoulder wasn't touching the railing anymore. He was sitting more in the center of the stairs. Xander had had about enough of this.

He deliberately turned toward Angel and was about to open his mouth to say something when the vampire closed the distance between them and was sitting mere inches away.

"I have to ask you something," Angel whispered without actually looking at Xander.

On the other side of the rectangular table in the center of the room, Giles had his easel out with some sort of demonic family tree displayed on it and was trying to explain something about something and it was all just so fascinating. Xander could tell by the backs of everyone's heads that they were just as riveted as he was.

Xander leaned away from Angel as much as he could, "Personal space, Deadboy. Did they not have this concept two hundred years ago? Not looking to make-out with you."

"This may sound a little strange but..." The vampire trailed off, seemingly searching for words.

Xander was just pissed off and impatient now. He had been twitchy all day, and Angel pulling this weird secretive too-close crap was just making him twitchier. "What?" He hissed out, still trying to stay quiet so no one would turn around and see them sitting this close together.

"When Spike bit you-" *Xander went cold* "-how much blood did he take?"

``*`*`*`*`*`*`*`*

Xander had stayed in panic mode for quite a while after Spike had disappeared. He had pulled himself up out of the dirt and ran to his door, feeling his pockets frantically before discovering his key was still in the lock, exactly where he had put it just a few minutes *How long? Five minutes? Ten? An hour?* ago.

He scampered inside as quickly as he could, cursing himself for not doing that when he had first put his key in the lock. *How, exactly, did I end up by the side of the house, anyway? How did he grab me? How could I be such a moron? Did I let this happen?*

He locked himself in the bathroom, turned on the bright overhead light, took his shirt off and inspected the bite mark in the mirror. He saw two distinctive holes in the space where his neck met his right shoulder. They were dark and there was a slight discoloration of his skin around them. *That's going to be a nasty bruise.* There was also some blood, but not as much as he expected to see.

Then he noticed the bruising starting to take shape on his upper arms, then on his wrists (it was going to be really bad on his wrists). Dark color was also spreading on his shoulders. He used a small hand mirror to look at his back. He couldn't see anything different yet, but knew the evidence would show up soon since he could now suddenly start to feel it all over his body. The pain was really starting to come into focus now. He hurt all over. He felt like someone had...well, he felt like a vampire and tossed him around then took a bite out of his neck.

Then he looked himself in the eyes. And he got really scared. All he saw staring back at him was a frightened little boy. He was just a small town comic book geek who had somehow gotten himself mixed up with a super-hero chick and spent his days adding demonology to his school curriculum and nights trying to help battle said demons and most of the time not being very successful. *And, ladies and gentlemen, let's use tonight's little suck-fest as a slap-in-the-face demonstration of why I...suck.*

Xander reached over and hit the light switch, engulfing the room in darkness. He sat down on the toilet seat and stared into the nothing. *Perhaps it's just best if I don't think about this anymore tonight.* But the way his body felt was not going to let him just stop thinking.

He bowed his head and looked at his hands. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he was able to see that they were covered in dirt and grime. Then he felt that dirt and grime creep over his whole body and into his skin, and he never felt so filthy in his entire life.

Without switching on the light, Xander pulled the rest of his clothes off quickly, trying to ignore the drying spunk on the inside of his jeans, and jumped into the shower, turning the tap to as hot as he could stand. With a funky old washcloth and a tiny sliver of soap, he scrubbed every inch of his body hard, including the bruised areas and the bite mark (even though that hurt like hell).

Xander didn't know how long he stayed in the shower. It only occurred to him to get out when the water started getting cold. He made quick work of drying off, then gathered his clothing, crossed the hall to his bedroom, dumped his clothes in a pile at the end of the bed, and buried himself beneath his covers. He prayed that sleep would overtake him, and before he could say amen, he was asleep.

He slept for two seconds. Or at least it felt like two seconds. When he awoke, it was quarter past eight. He had forgotten to set his alarm and was now late for school.

And the memories of the night before...well, they took less than two seconds to come flooding to the front of his brain. He sat up and his body screamed at him. He had never been this sore.

For several more minutes, Xander sat on his bed. He took slow deep breaths and lightly rubbed the muscles that hurt the most. His bruises were turning pretty *disturbing* colors and his wrists looked like he had smeared them with black paint. He reached into his nightstand, got out the bottle of Advil he kept there, and dry swallowed four pills.

Okay, here goes. He swung his legs over the side of his bed, stood up slowly and planned his strategy for telling the others what had happened as he got ready for his day, choosing a collared shirt with long sleeves as his *hide-all-the-evidence-of-the-real-world-from-the-world-in-denial* costume.

Perhaps "strategy" wasn't really the right word. He would just tell them what happened. Spike got him. Slapped him around a bit. Bit him. And let him go. That was really all that happened. Right? Xander didn't know why Spike had let him go, but that was for Giles to figure out. And the rest of it...no. There was no rest of it. Spike bit him. A long...slow...bite. A long slow bite that curled Xander's toes. A long slow bite that made his blood surge to very wrong places of his body. A long

slow bite that made him...no. The rest of it didn't really happen. Not really. And the crumpled sticky pair of jeans on the floor at the end of his bed was certainly no evidence to the contrary. Nope.

Xander arrived at school just when the bell dismissed second period. He quickly got lost in the crowd and then managed to keep his brain text-book oriented for the next two classes before meeting the gang in the library at lunch.

By the time he had finished the telling of his dramatic little vampire encounter, and everyone was done with their "Oh, dear Lord" and "Oh, Xander!" and "I'm gonna kill that son-of-a-bitch just a little more than usual," he finally felt that he could put it behind him. Giles was going to ask Angel if he knew of any reason that Spike wouldn't have killed him, and Buffy said she would target her patrol to flush out Spike. Willow cried a little, and Xander had to reassure her that he would be extra-specially careful. He promised not to go anywhere at night alone until William the Bloody was dust under the carpet.

All in all, he felt better. He had taken two more Advil just before lunch, and he had the support and protection of his very best friends, so everything was going to be just fine.

It wasn't until his last class of the day (the stupid science test that he forgot to study for) that he noticed that maybe everything wasn't fine. He couldn't get his mind to focus. He could barely finish reading one question on the test before his mind wandered. And he wasn't thinking about Buffy in that short little skirt she liked to patrol in. And he wasn't thinking about the supple curves covered by that tight cream-colored sweater that Cordelia was wearing. And, no, he wasn't even thinking about the Babylon 5 mini-marathon on the Sci-Fi Channel this Friday.

He was thinking about the bite. That bite. He was replaying it over and over again. Remembering things that he couldn't have noticed at the time. Like how cool Spike's breath had been when his mouth opened. And the sharp pain as his fangs had glided into Xander's skin. It had been so easy, so smooth. Like a warm knife through butter, although that sounded cliché. He remembered how, as his body went white, the world had gone red, just for a moment, and how he had felt a kind of strange peace come over him. The moan that had escaped Spike's throat that matched the moan that had escaped his own. Spike's body pressed against

Xander's. *And, oh god, I can still feel it. Spike's cool body against mine. His skin getting warmer, hotter, or is that my skin?*

*And I came. Fuck, that really happened didn't it? And, oh God, so did he. Didn't he? I think he did. I know I did. I'm so screwed up. There is something seriously wrong with me. Oh, great, and now I'm hard again. Right here in the middle of science class. Perfect. Why is this happening to me? I can still feel him. Why can I feel him? His mouth and his body and his teeth and his... **snap***

Xander looked down at his hand and saw he had snapped his pencil in half. Then the bell rang. He looked down at his blank test paper and cursed.

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Now Angel was sitting inches away from him and asking him a really stupid question. How much blood had Spike taken? What did that matter? Xander pushed Angel away from him.

“How the hell should I know,” he answered as quietly as his angry voice would let him. “I haven't really been thinking about it, you know.” Then he realized that was an odd thing to say. Why would Angel assume Xander had been thinking about it. *Careful. I doth protest too much*, Xander thought, channeling an inner Shakespeare he did know existed.

Angel turned his head and looked Xander square in the eye. The look was piercing and scrutinizing in that undead evil way, and it made Xander's guts betray his no-doubt cool unyielding exterior by cowering into a little ball. Angel stared and Xander began to shake just a little. He hoped it wasn't noticeable, but quickly realized it was.

“Now we both know that's not true.” Angel's voice was even lower and quieter than it had been before. Suddenly Xander was scared. This stupid dead thing knew. He knew what had happened, and how Xander had been feeling the last couple of days, and now he could feel the tears start to fall down his face, and he was embarrassed and ashamed and mad at Angel for seeing him and knowing him.

Angel reached out and touched the brilliantly purple bruise on Xander's right wrist. The vampire then grasped him lightly by the elbow and guided him off the stairs and into Giles' office. He set him down in the chair, handed him a box of tissue from the desk, then walked back out into the library, closing the door behind him.

Xander sat for a few moments before taking a tissue from the box and wiping his face. He threw the crumpled tissue at the trash can, missed, and then popped two more Advil from the bottle he carried with him at all times.

He sat there for what seemed like a very long time. He heard mumbled voices on the other side of the closed door, then he heard people leaving the library. Finally, Angel came back into the office with Giles immediately at his heels. Giles closed the door behind them. Xander looked back and forth from the vampire to the Watcher. He wasn't really sure what was happening. He wasn't sure how this next part was supposed to go. What was supposed to be said. Angel broke the silence.

"Xander, I have to ask you some more questions, and I need you to answer me honestly. I know it may be hard, but this is very important. I don't want you to be embarrassed or ashamed. It's just us men here. Okay?"

Xander was panicked. "Please don't ask me, Angel. Please?"

Angel squatted down next to the chair. "It's okay. You didn't do anything wrong."

Xander started crying again and did his best to hide his face from Giles who was cleaning his glasses and looking quite confused and concerned.

"Angel, if the boy doesn't want to talk about it--"

"He has to," Angel snapped back at Giles. "If what I think happened really happened then..." The vampire seemed to be searching for the next words. He shook his head slowly and turned back to Xander. "How much blood did he take?"

Xander wiped his eyes with another tissue and shook his head. "I don't know." Angel's eyes narrowed. "Well, it's not like I had a measuring cup! How am I supposed to know a thing like that?!"

“Just-” Angel started.

“I’m not dead, am I? That’s how much he took. He bit, he drank, he left. End of story.”

“How long did he drink?”

“Again, sorry I wasn’t forthcoming with the units of measurement. I didn’t clock him. He drank, okay? A lot. For...a while. For a long time.” Xander closed his eyes. He felt the teeth in his neck. He felt the pull of his blood as it left his body. He felt the hands on his wrists, and Spike’s body against his and the hardness pressed into his own, and now the desire began to build up in him. Again.

This desire, this heat, that had been engulfing him since science class the day before. It had been all he thought about. All he felt. He had masturbated six times in the last twenty-four hours and he still felt...unsatisfied. Restless. Twitchy. Empty.

He opened his eyes and looked at Angel. He hated this soulful vampire more now than ever before. He hated him because Angel knew what was happening. And why. He hated him because Xander Harris was about to ask Angel the vampire the very last thing he ever wanted to ask.

Xander took Angel’s wrist and growled out in anger, sorrow and desperation, “Will you help me?”

3 The Reason

It didn’t help. The explanation. It didn’t help at *all*. It made it worse. He wanted to go back to not knowing. Xander hated Angel. He hated Spike, too. In fact, he hated vampires in general. All of them. Stupid evil blood-sucking bastards.

Later that night, Xander sat in his dark bedroom staring out the window, trying to

figure out how this new information was going to effect his future. Or perhaps, just the next few minutes.

Fortunately, Xander didn't have to go into too much detail about what had really happened with Spike, and the subsequent days. Angel pretty much figured the rest of it out on his own and filled Giles in on the situation. All Xander had to do was agree that yes, he had an orgasm when Spike bit him. And yes, he had been in a constant state of arousal for a little more than a day now. Yes, he was thinking about Spike. And yes, his skin twitched with a bizarre desire that he couldn't quite figure out or quell.

It had been a particularly humiliating conversation. Angel explained to Xander that Giles had to be in on it because he was going to need the Watcher's help in researching how to reverse it.

"Reverse what, exactly?" Xander questioned.

"Okay, let me tell you what I know. I just want to preface this by saying that what I'm about to tell you, you won't find in any Watcher's diaries or any written document that I know of. I know it because I've experienced it. Been involved." Angel took a deep breath and hung his head down.

"Enough with the dramatic pauses! Tell me what's going on!" Xander was getting a little tired of Angel's whole tortured-soul thing.

"Right. You see, you should be dead. Spike took a lot of blood. Only reason you're not dead has to do with not only how *much* he took, but *how* he took it."

Xander looked over at Giles as the older man reached for a notepad and pen. "Hey, Giles, this is not a teaching case." Giles looked at Xander confused. "I don't need to be a chapter in your diary, thank you very much. You want to write about me? Do it after I'm dead and can't know about it."

Giles blinked at Xander. The Watcher looked to be figuring something out in his head. He slowly set down the pad and pen, then nodded toward Angel to continue.

"When Spike started drinking slower, that's when things started...heating up,

right?”

Xander nodded. He was getting very nervous. “It’s a connection, right? We’ve got some sort of bond thing going on now? That’s why we...you know...um...”

Xander made a subtle pumping motion with his fist. Giles removed his glasses quickly and started cleaning them.

“Not exactly. Not a bond. And the fact that you both...climaxed, well, that’s not really all that unusual. Any kill that’s not just a quick meal is quite a...sexual experience for a vampire. And usually about half the time, a victim will get there, too. Well, they would get there if they weren’t, you know, dead.”

“I get it. Still waiting for the punch-line, though, dude.”

“It’s all about you not being dead. And because he didn’t kill you, that works in connection with the sex part. It’s because Spike slowed down. He slowed way down. Drank enough to kill you, but your body was...I don’t know the right word...distracted? And now, you’re having a physical reaction. You have a need for completion.”

“Completion? You mean that my body is telling me that it wants to die?” *Okay, panic-mode, again.*

“It doesn’t *want* to die. It *needs* to.”

“Oh, thanks! Much better! You’re telling me, what, I’m in limbo? Just waiting here for Spike to finish me off? No thank you! I might not be a genius, but I’m smarter than that. I don’t want to die!”

“You’re right, you are smarter than that. That’s why this physical need you have to die is manifesting itself as sexual. *That* your body, and mind, can deal with.”

“Oh, yeah. My mind’s been coping with jerking off to thoughts of Spike real well. No problem, here. Excuse me while I just go play with my dad’s loaded gun.”

“Xander, really, no need to get drastic.” Giles added.

Angel let out a big sigh. “Now, the bad news.”

“*Now*, the bad news? Was there good news?” turning to Giles, “Did I miss the good news?”

“Poor choice of words. Sorry.” Angel paced back and forth a couple times, then came to a stop against the opposite wall of the office. It did not escape Xander’s attention that the vampire was now standing as far away from him as possible.

“Um, you see, you will continue to feel this way. You’ll feel pulled toward Spike. You’ll crave his bite. Not to bring death, your brain won’t let that happen. But to bring...release. Completion.”

“Okay. I’ll crave Spike to bite me again.” He looked from Angel to Giles and back. “Fix it, please.”

Angel shrugged. “Don’t know how.”

“Um...not good enough.” He turned toward Giles, again. “Fix it, please.”

“Oh, yes, well, I’ll have to research...”

“Angel said that there is nothing written about this.”

“That I know of, I said. I haven’t ever wanted to reverse it, so I never really looked.”

“You did this to someone?” Xander asked, not really surprised.

“Well, yeah. It was a very long time ago.”

“How did it end before?”

“Oh, she just...died. Or, you know, I killed her.” Angel fidgeted and managed to look even more uncomfortable in his own skin. “We don’t have to talk about this right now, do we?”

Xander set the box of tissues back on the desk and stood up on shaky legs. “Okay, let me get his whole thing straight. When Spike bit me, I should have died. But because of the way he bit me, combined with the most disturbing orgasm that I’ve ever had in my life, I didn’t die. Now I have this creepy desire to have Spike bite me again which is manifesting itself as sexual desire. And it won’t end until I die. Do have I that right?”

Angel crossed his arms over his chest. “That about summed it up.”

“Right then, raise your hand for killing Spike really really dead!” Xander suggested as he shot his hand in the air. Giles sheepishly raised his hand to shoulder height. Angel kept his arms crossed. “Hey, Deadboy, little support here.”

“Can’t kill Spike.” Angel looked distraught.

“Sure we can. Little beheading, little stake through the heart. No more Spike. No more creepy vampire sexual needs for me. Win-win.”

Angel shook his head. “Can’t kill Spike. Killing Spike won’t stop it. Won’t make it better. In fact, it would get worse.”

“Oh, please explain to me how this can get worse.” Xander slowly sat back down in the chair. “No, never mind. Please don’t explain.”

“Listen, without Spike as an outlet, you’ll have nowhere to direct these urges.”

“I have nowhere to direct them NOW!”

“Yeah, but you have the potential. With Spike still alive-”

“Okay, I get it,” Xander interrupted, having no interest in hearing Angel speak anymore. He turned to Giles. “Fix it, please.”

“It will be my highest priority.” Giles stepped over to Xander and rested a hand on his shoulder. He smiled. “We’ll fix it.”

``*`*`*`*`*`*`*`*`

Angel had walked him home. They didn't say much during the short journey. Angel said he would find Buffy and explain why she couldn't kill Spike right away, without going into the really embarrassing details. Xander had thanked the vampire with a simple nod when they reached his front porch.

He had stripped down to his boxers when he got to his room, jacked off for the...what? fourth time that day, then just sat there on the bed. Thinking about...well, honestly, thinking about Spike. What if Angel was right? What if Giles could never fix it? What if he felt this way forever? *What does this really mean for me?*

And that's how Xander found himself sitting on the edge of his bed and staring out the window at 2 am. Trying to digest his future as a Spike-nympho. And, more to the point, trying to bury this unbelievable urge to walk outside and bare his neck to the vampire that was now standing in his back yard smoking a cigarette. Leaning against a tree. Just staring into Xander's dark room, and right into his eyes. Calling to him without saying a word.

God, Xander hated vampires.

4

The Pull

About a day after he had bitten the Xander kid, Spike started to feel it. The pull. It was about what he thought it would be. A desire to finish the job.

He knew it would happen. He had done everything right. He just hadn't expected it to be this...strong. By the time another day had passed, Spike couldn't get the boy out of his head. He thought about him while shagging Drusilla. He pictured the kid while draining his latest meal. And when he wasn't shagging or eating, he just sat in his room, stroking himself, and trying to figure out the best time to go see this Xander kid and bite him, kill him, and, most likely, fuck him. Not necessarily in that order.

That's how Dru found him early that evening. Sitting propped up on their four poster bed, shirtless, jeans unzipped and pushed down to just below his hips, and pulling on himself in long slow strokes. His eyes opened as he heard her come down the stairs to their candle-lit basement bedroom and watched as she glided over to the side of the bed. Gliding seemed to be the perfect word for Drusilla. She never seemed to actually walk. The floor length skirts she always wore covered her legs completely, and her steps were so light and small that she just skated across the floor.

Dru eyed Spike's body with that enticing expression of curiosity and lust. It was the same look she had the first time she saw him naked, and every time there after. It never ceased to amaze him that she was never able to shake the innocent look of a blushing bride on her wedding night.

Without a word, Dru slowly hitched up her skirt, crawled onto the bed, and straddled Spike's hips. She removed his hand from his cock, placed it on her breast, then guided him into her. She placed two hands on his chest and began moving on top of him with such skill and talent that the "blushing bride" analogy went completely out the window.

He let her pump herself on him while his thoughts drifted back toward Xander. He vamped out and ran his tongue across his fangs, cutting himself and sucking on the small amount of blood that flowed. He imagined himself attached to Xander's neck, licking the scar he had made. He could almost feel his teeth sinking into that beautiful soft warm skin.

As he lost himself in the fantasy, he involuntarily took control back from Dru. He moved his hands to grip her hips and thrust up into her, smooth and steady. She was cool and wet and as tight as the very first time. He was always afraid that he was going to break her. Especially recently, in her weakened state.

Now though, she was making grunting and cooing noises that Spike barely heard since, in his mind, it wasn't the vampiress he was inside.

When he came, he pulled Drusilla down on top of him and tore into her neck, drinking her cold dead blood and finding himself comparing it Xander's hot pulsating blood that had tingled on his tongue and made his toes curl just a little bit.

Dru climbed off of him, curled her legs underneath herself, and settled next to Spike on the bed. She reached over to him and petted the ridges on his face. He adored when she did that. Like she was appreciating every part of him.

“My poor Spike,” she cooed. “Little shepherd has lost his flock.”

Spike tried to focus his thoughts back to the real world so he could work out what the crazy vampire was trying to say.

“So so lost. Looking in all the wrong places.”

“What are you on about, luv?”

Dru stretched out next to him and leaned in close to his ear. “Sheep is searching for his shepherd. Needs to be herded. Needs a home.”

He wasn't sure he knew what was going on in that rattled brain of hers, but he knew he had to finish up his little project with the boy. He knew that for sure. Spike morphed back into his human features, took Dru's hand and kissed it. “I'm going to be gone for a little while,” he told her.

She grinned at him, then the world disappeared from her eyes as she said, “Yes...a little while.”

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Spike crept around the house, peering in windows until he found Xander's bedroom. Mini-blinds partially shielded the view, but they weren't closed all the way, and the vampire could see most of what was going on inside the room.

Xander was propped up on his bed in the exact position that Spike had been earlier that night. And in the exact same state of dress. Doing the exact same thing. Spike grinned. He knew what the boy was thinking, too.

He watched as the boy's strokes became more fevered and his eyes rolled back. He

watched as Xander came, then sunk down into his pillows and slowly caught his breath. He watched as Xander composed himself, took a couple tissues from his night stand and cleaned up.

Spike looked around the back yard, walked over to a tree just few feet away, settled himself against it and lit a cigarette. He could see Xander move to the edge of his bed and sit with his head in his hands. He saw the boy lift his head slowly and look at the window. He watched as Xander's eyes adjusted to the darkness outside. He knew the precise moment that Xander saw the glow of Spike's cigarette, then the outline of Spike himself.

They stared at each other like that for quite some time. Both wanting the same thing. Spike knowing it was Xander's move, since he couldn't enter the house.

Spike finished his cigarette, flicked it away, then pulled another one and his lighter out of his duster pocket. He broke eye contact with the boy as he glanced down to light it. When he looked up again, Xander was gone.

``*`*`*`*`*`*`*`*`

Xander was cussing himself out. His body was making him do things that his mind was screaming at him not to do. It was like the two didn't exist in the same person anymore. He had certainly lost control of his dick before. He was, after all, a seventeen year old boy. That particular muscle had had it's own brain for several years now. But this was different. This wasn't just an unruly penis he was dealing with, but the complete betrayal of his entire body.

From the moment he saw the cigarette glow out the window, his legs had itched to stand up and walk out the door. His dick had stood up at attention again, and his blood began to pump hot and fast through his veins.

No, no, no, he kept trying to tell his body. Don't go out there. Evil vampire out there. Evil vampire who wants to kill you. You don't have a death wish. You have a long humiliating life ahead of you and you want to experience every embarrassing moment of it. Don't go out there. He's going to kill you. If you go out there, you will die. Don't go out there.

By the time he had thought *Don't go out there* for the seventh time, he was standing at the back door, clad in just his boxers, with his hand on the door knob.

Fuck me, he cursed himself again.

Xander was terrified as he opened the door. He shook fiercely as he walked over to Spike, whose position hadn't changed. He stood in front of the vampire and coughed as cancer-causing smoke was blown in his face.

"Christ, Spike, you trying to kill me?" Okay, *that* was out of his mouth before he could brain-check it.

Spike laughed and flicked the cigarette away. "Well, that's the question now, isn't it?"

Without the cancer-stick between himself and the vampire, Xander took one more step closer to Spike. "I really don't want to die."

"Then what are you doing out here?" Spike took hold of Xander's arms.

"I think you know the answer to that, you evil prick," Xander responded, an unwelcome tear rolling down his cheek. He watched Spike's eyes as they changed from sparkling blue to glowing gold. He thought about Willow. He loved Willow. He tilted his head to left, exposing the scar that was just barely starting to heal. He thought about Buffy. He loved Buffy.

Spike leaned forward and Xander felt a cold tongue wet the mark on his neck. His knees went weak. Spike squeezed harder on his upper arms and Xander found himself leaning further into the vampire. Then he thought about Angel. He hated Angel. If it wasn't for Angel, Spike would have had no idea who Xander was. It was Angel who took Xander into the school on Parent-Teacher Night and offered to share him with Spike.

"Fuck you, Angel." The words escaped his lips before he could brain-check them, again.

Spike stopped licking him suddenly and pushed Xander away slightly. "Name's not Angel, whelp."

Xander was so tired. He was frustrated, and horny, and either wanted to go back inside or die. He didn't really know which. The entire situation was making him more angry.

"Wasn't talking to you," he told Spike.

The vampire glanced around the yard. "Just you and me here."

"Listen, you gonna bite me or not? 'Cause I'm standing right here." Spike cocked an eyebrow at Xander. "And, believe me, I don't want to be standing here. But here I am. Just waiting for you to bite me. Or possibly kill me. Or, if not either of those, or maybe in addition to both of those, I'm waiting for you to fuck me." *Brain-check, brain-check, brain-check!* "Well, alright, not that last thing. Forget I said that last thing." Xander was shaking even harder now. "I just need something. Something to make this go away. 'Cause I can't live like this. And I don't want to die like this. I need it to stop. Please, make it stop."

The words coming from Xander felt like they should have been a sad desperate cry for help, but he was just spitting mad. Spike brought a hand up to Xander's face and wiped off the hot tears that had been streaming down his face. "What are you so upset about, kid?"

"What? What am I upset about? This isn't upset. This is pissed off! And it's a stupid question, anyway. I'm pissed at you, Spike! For making me feel this way. I'm pissed because you made me want you in all sorts of disturbing ways. And I'm pissed because I know that now. And I'm pissed at Angel because he knows it and he told me and doesn't know how to fix it. And now I have to crave you. You! A short evil vampire with stupid hair. And I don't really know what I crave. I just know that I need you inside me. And I don't know if I mean your teeth in my neck or...something else. All I really know for sure is that a few minutes ago I was going crazy sitting in my bedroom, ready to claw my skin off because I needed something so bad. And now that you're standing here and touching me, I feel good and whole and I want more of you."

Xander had worked himself out of Spike's grip and was now clutching the vampire's shoulders. He wasn't at all sure what made him do it, but he suddenly leaned down and started sucking on Spike's neck. The skin was cold and felt dead. There was no pulse. He sucked hard and felt the area that his mouth was touching grow slightly warmer and he realized that he was trying to pull Spike's blood toward him.

However, this really didn't seem to be fulfilling any specific current need he was having except for making him even harder. He pulled away from Spike and watched the small red mark he had made on the vampire's neck fade away quickly.

Xander looked into the vampire's gold eyes and tried not to sound too desperate when he said, "Fix it."

Spike leaned down and sucked on his neck, mimicking Xander's move from a moment ago. Xander made a low growling noise that he had never made before and thrust his hips up against the vampire.

Keeping his mouth secure on his neck, Spike grabbed his arms again and spun them around so that now Xander's back was against the tree. The vampire then ran his hand slowly down Xander's bare chest, slipped it into the waistband of his boxers and *dear God, no other person has ever touched my dick before. Christ, his hand is cold.*

Spike ran his thumb over the tip of Xander's cock and caught the pre-come that had already started leaking, then he was stoking and Xander stopped thinking. He began pumping himself into the vampire's fist, and moved a hand to rest on the back of Spike's head, trying to pull him closer.

Spike was holding onto Xander's left hip and somehow controlling the thrusts. The vampire was moving his hand entirely too slow, and would occasionally slide his fingers down and roll Xander's balls with his fingers before continuing the smooth and steady ministrations of his cock.

Xander's breathing was getting more desperate even though Spike wasn't moving his hand any faster. In fact, the whole time he was being jerked off so *fucking* slow that he thought there was no way he was going to come. His entire body screamed

for completion.

“Inside me,” he choked out into Spike’s ear, and he finally felt fangs slide into his neck. The orgasm was so sudden that it took a moment for him to realize it was happening. “Oh, God. Fuck,” and other incoherent words came out of his mouth as the vampire drank from him.

And Xander felt perfect. He felt complete. He was ready to die.

Then the fangs were gone and Xander collapsed to the ground. He fell forward and wrapped his arms around Spike’s legs, resting his cheek against the vampire’s thighs.

Xander sat there like that for several minutes. He let his breath slow down and mind catch up. Finally he let go of Spike’s legs and leaned back on his heels. He raised his head slowly, eyes halting for just a moment on the vampire’s crotch as he noticed a darker spot on the front of the black jeans.

By the time his gaze reached Spike’s face, he was looking again at sparkling blue eyes. The vampire had a stupid grin on his face and seemed to have more color in his cheeks. *This is disturbing on so many levels*, Xander thought, and struggled to stand up.

When his legs decided to work, he straightened up and leaned back against the tree. He shivered when Spike put his slightly warm hands on either side of Xander’s chest and leaned forward.

“I didn’t think keeping you alive like this would be so much fun,” Spike said with that same damn grin.

“So glad I could amuse. You gonna kill me or not?”

“Not tonight. See you again soon, though, yeah?”

“Oh, sure thing, Dread Pirate Roberts. ‘Good night, sleep tight. I’ll most likely kill you in the morning.’ I’ve seen that movie, you know. And I’m not one to just wait around to die. If you’re going to kill me, than fucking kill me!”

“And I’m not one to be taking orders from spotty-faced little boys.”

Xander’s fist struck Spike’s jaw before either one really knew what was happening. Spike, who had been propelled back about a foot, shook his head a couple times (more out of shock than pain, Xander figured), then let out a little laugh. The vampire took one step forward, latched dull teeth onto his bite mark, and sucked hard.

Xander threw his head back against the tree and semi-screamed, “Fuck!” through gritted teeth. Spike stopped as quickly as he started and moved to look Xander in the eyes.

“You know what’s going on, right?” Spike asked.

“Angel explained it to me.”

Spike seemed amused. “Oh, Angel did, did he? Suppose he would know. He’s the one who taught it to me. Never had any use for it until now.”

“God, I fucking hate Angel.”

A snicker from Spike. “Yeah. Me, too.” The vampire took a step back. “I’m not going to kill you right away. I’ll kill you, yes. If I don’t, then I’ll go around feeling like this forever. Can’t have that. But it is kind of amusing for now.”

“What do you mean *you’ll* go around feeling like this?”

“What? Angel didn’t explain that part? Typical.” Spike sighed. “You crave me. I crave you. That’s just the way it works. It will continue that way until you die. Then I’m free of it.”

“But it doesn’t work the other way around, right? I mean, when I die, then you’re free, but when you die…” Xander slid down the tree again. Angel had explained this part, sure, but it had taken a really long time to process the information completely. “If you die, then this craving, this need, it won’t go away, will it? I’m going to be pulled toward you, but there won’t be a you to go to. What will happen

to me?”

Spike squatted down in front of Xander with that same fucking look of amusement on his face and in his eyes. “Well, I heard about this bird this one time whose vampire got dusted before she died, and they found her in her house two weeks later and she had clawed every inch of her skin off. When they found her, she was just a pile of blood and muscle.” Spike raised an eyebrow at Xander’s shocked expression. “Yummy.”

“Please, go away now,” Xander whispered.

“Sure thing, little sheep.” With that, Spike patted Xander on the head and walked out of the back yard.

Xander stayed sitting against the tree for another hour. He finally got up and slowly walked back into his house, stripped off his sticky boxer shorts, and climbed under his covers.

He laid awake the rest of the night, got up around seven, took a shower and went to school. He figured that this was what the rest of his life was going to be like. Disturbing sex and blood acts in his back yard every night until Spike was tired of him. He tried to wrap his brain around it and make it okay in his mind.

What he didn’t know was that it was about to get so much worse.

5

So Much Worse

God, Xander hated Angel.

“I know you think you can handle this, but you’re not safe around him!” Angel was screaming.

“Of course, I’m not safe. But I’ll figure something out on my own! I don’t need you!”

Xander and Angel were having this very loud and heated argument while standing in the library surrounded by Buffy and Willow and Giles. Giles was standing near the men, trying to mediate this unmediatable fight.

“Boys, boys, calm down please,” Giles tried to interject.

Angel ignored him, “I’m the only qualified person in this bunch who’s available. Buffy has got her sacred duty keeping her busy. She can’t be at your house every night.”

“I don’t want *you* at my house every night! Spike said he wasn’t going to kill me right away. Can’t we just let it go for now?”

“No!” was the collective cry from the other four people in the room. Xander looked over at Willow and was saddened by the look of fear on her face. He walked over to her and squatted down in front of the chair she was seated in. He took her hand.

“Wills, I know you’re scared. And I am, too. But until we figure out how to fix it, then this is the way it is. I’ll cope. I’ll deal. And I’ll not die. Not, yet.”

“Not *ever*, Xander,” Willow cried. He sighed heavily and stood up to face the group again.

“I know I’m not safe. I know I’m walking a fine line by...well, just existing right now. But there are some things that I will not do, and one of those things is have this dead guy,” Xander pointed at Angel, “as my *fucking bodyguard!*”

“Xander!” Buffy and Willow gasped.

“Listen, you stupid punk,” Angel hissed out, “you’re really going to risk your own life just because you hate me? The only thing standing between life and death for you right now is pride!” Angel stepped up to Xander, put his face in his, and continued with pure disdain, “You’re going to die bleeding and alone.”

Xander took a step back and punched Angel in the jaw. The vampire staggered back a few steps then charged forward again with a fist up, ready to strike.

“Enough!” The deep voice echoed through the library so suddenly and forcefully that everyone froze. Angel in mid-swing, Xander’s arm up to block the expected blow, Buffy halfway out of her chair, and Willow with her head in her hands. Then everyone turned to look at Giles.

The librarian tore his glasses off his face and started cleaning them vigorously. There was an audible crack as one of the lenses broke between Giles’ fingers. He looked down at the glass in his handkerchief and stuffed both it and the ruined spectacles in his shirt pocket.

Xander and Angel backed away from each other. Buffy slowly lowered herself back in her chair. Willow started chewing on a fingernail.

“Now,” Giles took a deep breath, composed himself, and turned to Angel, “This is what is going to happen. Angel, you will watch out for Xander. You will allow Xander and Spike to get whatever fix they need to get and you will make sure that Spike doesn’t kill him. You will continue to do this until we find a...cure.”

Xander opened his mouth to say something but was cut off when Giles whipped his head toward him and glared the coldest stare he had ever seen on anybody. He had never seen the Watcher so angry.

“Not a word, Xander. To coin your own phrase, ‘This is the way it is.’” Giles walked over to Xander and placed a hand on his arm, his face softening. “There are people here who care about you, Xander. People who love you. We will not let you die. We’ll fix it. And in the meantime, we *will* protect you.” Xander relented with a nod.

Giles walked toward his office. When he reached the door, he turned around and faced the group again. “Buffy, go patrol. Angel, walk Willow and Xander home. Stay with Xander.” With that, he went into his office and shut the door.

The room stayed quiet for several moments. Then Buffy got up, gathered her stake

and axe and left the library, but not before giving both Xander's and Angel's hand a quick squeeze as she passed them.

Willow stuffed her books into her backpack, and the three walked out into the evening.

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As soon as they got outside, and all the other distractions disappeared, Xander felt the stirring in his blood and his pants. He had managed to find the time to jerk off just once that day, in a dark janitor's closet, with his other hand on the lockless door knob so no one walked in on him.

His thoughts never really strayed far from Spike that whole day. Mostly he would picture the vampire's face, ridges on his nose and forehead, evil gold eyes, sharp greedy teeth. He would feel Spike's hands on his arms and chest. And his cold fingers wrapped around his cock.

During his janitor's-closet-jerk-off session, Xander felt Spike stroking him and drove himself a little crazy by mimicking the move with his own hand. In his head, he was telling Spike to move faster, but he couldn't make his own hand do anything different than the long slow pulls he felt the night before. He finally let go of the door knob and reached up to touch the mark on the right side of his neck. The moment he did, he bit his lip to muffle the moan as he came. He pressed his back against the door and cleaned himself up with toilet paper that he found on the shelf next to him.

Now his mind wandered as the trio walked toward Willow's house. This time, though, Xander started conjuring new images in his head. Picturing Spike in ways that he had not seen before. Like shirtless. And like having cold vampire fingers clutch his own bare ass. This was quite disturbing.

He snuck a look at Angel, who was walking between himself and Willow. Angel kept giving Xander creepy side-glances, and Xander had a sudden fear that the vampire could possibly smell something that was giving away his current arousal. Plus, it was getting a little difficult to walk comfortably.

When Spike appeared in front of them, Xander's body reacted before his mind did. This was getting to be the norm. Angel and Willow stopped immediately, but Xander took a couple quick steps toward Spike before Angel grabbed his arm and pulled him back. Xander glared at the vampire clutching his arm, then at the vampire standing several feet in front of him.

"Hey, Spike," Xander called out as he tried to twist his arm out of Angel's grasp. "You gonna kill me tonight?"

Spike tilted his head to the side slightly. "Wasn't planning on it."

Angel tightened his grip. "We need to get Willow home."

"Go ahead," Xander answered.

"I'm not leaving you. We've already established this."

"Get Willow home, Angel." Xander growled at him.

"Uh, boys," Spike smirked, "I believe this point is moot."

Xander and Angel looked at Willow. She was now a couple yards behind them in the arms of a tall dirty vampire that had come out of nowhere. He was crushing her back against his chest, hand over her mouth. Her eyes were frantic. Two more vampires came out of the shadows and flanked Willow and her captor, all in game face.

Angel made a move toward Willow, and Xander was suddenly torn out of Angel's grip and into Spike's. Angel stopped. He was in fighting stance, looking back and forth between Willow and Xander.

"I didn't come here for a fight, Angelus," Spike explained calmly.

"You're not leaving here with him." Angel growled back.

"Wasn't planning on it."

Xander found himself leaning into Spike who wasn't really holding his arm, more like stroking it. Xander's breathing started to quicken. He reached up and grabbed Spike's duster. He was unable to tear his stare away from the vampire's blue eyes. He wanted so much for this to stop.

"No, I've got something else in mind," Spike continued. He beckoned to Angel with his finger, "Come here."

"What are you up to, Spike?" Angel narrowed his eyes.

"I said, come here."

"I don't take orders from you. Never have. Never will."

Spike gave a small nod to the vampire holding Willow. That vamp moved Willow's head to the side and slowly scraped his fangs across her neck. She squeezed her eyes tight and whimpered.

"You son-of-a-bitch!" Angel vamped out and shouted at Spike, "Not Willow!"

"Then come here," Spike said with a smug smile.

Angel took a few steps toward Spike and Xander who were not too subtly starting to grope at each other. Suddenly Xander felt himself being thrust forward. Spike has holding him by the arms, pushing him face first at Angel.

"What the hell are you doing?" Xander called out over his shoulder at Spike.

"Take his arms, Angelus." Spike ignored Xander and was staring intently at Angel. He shook Xander lightly and said again, "Take him!"

Angel glanced back at Willow. Her eyes were wide open again, tears running down her face, and two dark red lines were trickling blood from her neck. Angel turned back around and grabbed Xander's arms, just above where Spike was holding him.

Spike stepped up closer behind Xander. He could feel the vampire's erection

pressing into his ass. His blood was pumping harder, and he had a flash image of Spike inside him, and this time it wasn't his teeth.

“Now,” Spike was still speaking to Angel, “bite him.”

“What!?” Xander and Angel shouted.

Spike let go of Xander's left arm, put his hand on his head and tilted it to the left. The vampire ran his tongue slowly and smoothly across the raw and bruised scar. Xander shivered.

Then Spike took hold of Xander's left arm again, let go of his right arm and violently forced his head to tilt in the other direction, exposing the unscarred left side of his neck. “Bite him.”

“Are you out of your mind?” Angel asked, which was exactly what Xander was thinking and would of asked himself if he had been able to formulate words. His body was doing a flip-flop between anger and desire that was pretty much turning his mind to mush.

“Come on, Angelus. I'm just doing what you taught me.” Spike walked Xander forward one more step until he was pretty well crushed between the two vampires. “Sharing.”

Angel's gold eyes looked panicked. His eyes were flicking back and forth from Spike to Xander's neck.

“How long has it been, Angel?” Spike asked, lowering his voice to a husky whisper that blew cool breath across Xander's hot skin. “Human blood. How long has it been since you sunk those long teeth into virgin flesh? Since you felt blood pump into your mouth? Filling you. Warm. Sticky. How long, Angel?”

The three of them were panting. Xander's skin was crawling with need. “Please,” was the only word he could get his brain to say.

“You know what I'm telling you to do, right Angel?” Spike had removed his hands from Xander completely and was now holding onto Angel's arms, keeping the older

vampire pressed against Xander. Now Xander felt Angel's erection against his own. His disgust reached a level he didn't know existed.

"Never, Spike. I won't," Angel croaked out while still staring at Xander's neck.

"Right, then." Spike looked up at Willow's captor. "Do it."

Angel looked back and saw the vampire sink his teeth into Willow. She screamed beneath the hand covering her mouth.

"No!" Angel and Xander both shouted.

"Stop," Spike said casually. The gulping stopped, but the vampire kept his teeth buried in Willow's neck. She had a look of utter terror in her eyes.

Angel turned his glare back to Spike. "How could you do this?" he asked, sounding more desperate than angry.

"Vampire. Remember? It has been a while for you, hasn't it? You don't want the little redhead to die? Bite him." Spike pressed Xander harder into Angel.

Angel looked back at Willow, then at Xander, then at Xander's neck, then back at Willow, and finally at Spike. "I can't," he whimpered.

"You will," Spike countered.

Angel morphed back into his human guise and started to cry. It was absolutely the most disturbing thing that Xander had ever seen. And this is what got Xander scared. Not getting turned on by Spike. Not needing Spike to bite him and *yes, damnit* fuck him. Not the possibility that Spike was trying to force Angel to kill him. But Angel crying. Angel was crying because he knew that he was going to do this bad thing that Spike was asking of him. And when Angel got scared...it was very very bad.

And Angel was looking directly at Xander with absolute sorrow in those tear filled eyes. Angel swallowed hard. "I'm sorry," he whispered and stole a glance back at Willow who was still impaled on the vampire's teeth.

Angel turned slowly back to Xander in full vamp face. "I'm so sorry," he said one more time before sinking his fangs into Xander's neck.

Xander screamed. It felt like he was being stabbed with a steak knife. He heard Spike laugh. Then he heard the vampire behind say in a very soft low voice, "Don't kill him, Angelus."

He felt Angel drinking. Felt the blood pump from his body and Angel's mouth grow warmer.

And then two more fangs pierced the other side of his neck.

Xander's legs completely stopped working. The two bodies crushing him and the two sets of teeth in his neck were the only things holding him up. He was gasping. His blood was screaming. He heard Angel start to moan. The two arms from behind him snaked between himself and Angel. He felt a palm cup his pulsating cock through his jeans and the back of the other hand as it gripped Angel's.

Then all cylinders fired in his brain, and he figured out what was happening. Angel and Spike were drinking slow. Really slow. Xander reached back and took hold of Spike's hips. "Please," he said again and tried to make more words come out like *don't* or *stop* or *no*, but he just stopped at "Please."

This time he barely noticed when he came. The world was going tilty and gray. Then all the pressure disappeared, and he crumpled to the ground. He was sprawled on his back in the grass gasping for breath. He looked to his right and focused on Angel. Angel was staring back at him, big brown eyes filled with terror. Xander turned to his left and looked at Spike. Spike was staring at Angel with blue-eyed smugness and that blood-soaked grin that Xander was ready to rip off his face.

Everyone turned to look at Willow as she gasped and fell forward when the vampire minion took his fangs out and pushed her away.

The last thing Xander saw before he passed out was Angel punching Spike. Now, *that* was satisfying.

Tilt-a-Whirl

Xander's head spun. He flashed on a memory of when he was thirteen, and he and Jesse thought it would be fun to sneak into his father's liquor cabinet. They had taken many sips of the most foul tasting clear liquid, then the next morning had woken up feeling exactly like this. Achy and spinny and dry-mouthed. He turned his head to the right and opened his eyes, expecting to see Jesse laying there, looking like Xander felt.

Instead, he was looking at a wall. But it wasn't his wall. His wall was covered in posters and stickers and random paraphernalia that reflected his interest in music and comic books and sports and Amy Yip.

He blinked. This wasn't his wall. This wall was blank and boring. And these sure as hell weren't his sheets. These sheets weren't the thread-bare blue stripes he'd had for entirely too many years. These sheets were red and, my god...silk.

He turned his head to the left and the first thing he saw was Angel. Sitting on the floor against the far wall. The vampire's knees were drawn up to his chest. His palms were resting on the floor. He was staring at Xander.

He glanced around the room, pulling the situation in focus. This was Angel's basement flat. He had been here once before. It was a large room with this bed tucked into an alcove that offered a kind of privacy from the living area, kitchen, and front door. He looked back at Angel. "How long?"

"Two days."

Xander nodded. "Sunday," he said to himself to clarify and get his bearings. *Damn. Missed the Babylon 5 marathon.* "Just you here?"

“Buffy and Giles just left to patrol.”

Xander sat up quickly, terrified. “Willow?!”

“She’s fine. Vamp took a good size bite out of her, but she didn’t lose a lot of blood. She’s been by a lot.”

He relaxed and looked down, discovering he was wearing only a pair of sweat pants that weren’t his own. “Um, what the hell?” he asked pointing to his legs.

“They’re Giles’,” Angel answered, like that explained everything.

“Okay, Deadboy, I’m gonna need a little more exposition.”

Angel looked tired. Really tired. He was keeping his head cast down, glancing up at Xander through hooded eyes. The details came quickly. Aside from Willow’s house, Angel’s abode was the closest, so he had brought Xander here. Couldn’t do hospital because couldn’t think of a reason why there was so much blood loss yet so little death. Because of the how the blood was lost, Xander really just needed a place to sleep it off. The clothes? Well, they all just figured that Xander wouldn’t be comfortable in Angel’s.

“Good call,” Xander mumbled at that revelation, and decided not to ask who had changed his clothes. “Where do my parents think I am?”

“Willow’s.”

“It’s Sunday now, though. They’ll be expecting me home.”

“Yeah. You should probably get going.”

“Um, yeah. You forgetting something?” Angel’s blank expression didn’t change. “Vampire bodyguard. Remember? Not that you did me a lot of good last time, but my friends will kill me if I get killed.”

Angel’s body twitched and Xander heard a rattle of metal. “You were right. Spike’s not going to kill you for a while.”

“I love being right. Hey, here’s a funny sidebar…why are you chained to the wall?” It was odd that he hadn’t noticed it before, but now Xander saw the chain running down the wall, one end attached to a heavy-duty eye hook, the other disappearing next to Angel’s hand.

Angel lifted his arm, exposing the three-inch manacle latched around his wrist. “To keep you safe.”

“From you?”

“Yes.”

Xander’s stomach twisted into a sudden knot, then unclenched immediately as he felt the blood inside him split and flow in two different directions. He thought instantly of the first bite from Spike. Then the second. Then the third. Then Angel. He reached up and touched the new mark on the left side of his neck. His pulse was strong there. His neck was hot. The loose fitting sweats betrayed his arousal.

But Angel wasn’t looking at Xander. The vampire’s head was bent over so far that Xander could only see the top of his head, his arms wrapped tightly around his knees. Angel was breathing heavily, in hard gasps. Xander knew what that heavy breathing meant. Had heard it, felt it, from a vampire before.

Oh, crap.

Xander stood up and scanned the room for his clothes, finding them folded neatly on the bedside cabinet. The new sound that escaped from Angel was what gave him pause as he held his t-shirt in his hand.

Angel hadn’t moved from his position on the floor, except for the gentle rocking, forward and back. Xander had just heard a low groan. It had sounded sad and desperate and like it existed so deep in Angel that it hurt to get it out.

Sitting back down on the bed, Xander started to fret. It was a new emotion for him, fretting. Seemed like something that old British folk like Giles would do. But here he found himself, fretting none the less.

Spike sure had known what he was doing, didn't he? He could have killed Xander that first night, causing the Slayer great heartache. But then she would have just enacted her revenge and there would have been an apocalyptic battle and blood would have been spilled on both sides. But this. Sucking one of the Slayer's best friends into a mental frenzy of blood-lust and sexual desire. Devising it so killing Spike would result in said friend's increased inner torture and possible suicide. Brilliant safe-guard, really.

And now this. Take one acid-laced psycho vampire, add a dash of hormonal highly-susceptible teenager, and shake liberally with unstable, ensouled, repressed, reformed second vampire, and you get a cocktail of the most bitter tasting threesome ever concocted.

Giles, Xander prayed in his head, please find a way to fix this. Please. Make it all go away.

Xander's entire body was burning now. His breathing was beginning to match Angel's. Over this past week Xander had felt scared, concerned, uncomfortable, creepy, crabby, disgusted, agitated, occasionally satisfied, and all around angry and horny. This was his life. A Tasmanian Devil of twisting emotion that had the potential to suck in the entire rest of his existence. He was going to go mad with the constant internal conflict. It was going to rip him to shreds. It was time to pick an emotion.

If his brain had been working properly at that moment, he would have picked 'angry.' Instead, he chose 'satisfied.' Which meant he had to get the one and only thing that could satisfy him. Angel.

``*`*`*`*`*`*`*`*

Angel was turning Friday night's events over and over in his head. Was there any way he could have gotten out of this? Should he have taken the chance and lunged at the vampire holding Willow? There were many ways that vamp could have ended the girl. Would Angel have made it in time before Willow's throat was ripped out. Or neck was broken? If he had actually managed to wrench Willow away, would

Spike had reneged and kidnapped or killed Xander? If Angel had simply attacked Spike, then Willow would surely have been dead.

How the hell did Spike get the upper hand? Spike! When Angel had left the vampire a hundred years ago, he was still a spoiled fledgling who tore through towns and countries with no regard for strategy and repercussions. Even when they had run into each other in the 1940's, the younger vampire had been as immature and as hapless as ever. Now Spike was running his own household. And his plot devices, while probably not too carefully thought out, were beginning to match Angelus' notorious nefarious schemes.

The groan that found its way out of the inner depths of Angel's soul brought him back to the present like someone had torn a blindfold off his eyes. Even with his head down and eyes still clenched tight, he could sense Xander's presence. He couldn't figure out why the boy hadn't left yet. Didn't Xander get what was going on?

Then it occurred to Angel that, yes, Xander knew exactly what was going on.

"You really are a fool, aren't you?" Xander's voice had a smoothness to it that almost frightened Angel. "Chaining yourself to a wall. Ha. *You're* the one that explained this to *me*."

There was shuffling in front of him and Angel could feel the heat coming off of Xander.

"Did you think that I could go home and resume my life? I couldn't when it was just Spike inside me. Now it's you, too."

Xander had apparently knelt down in front of him and his hands were gripping Angel's forearms, pulling them away from his knees. Angel raised his head to look into Xander's eyes. Eyes that were supposed to be brown, but lust was turning them black.

"If you really wanted to stay away from me, you could have taken me to Giles' or Willow's at any time. There would have been no way that they would have invited you or Spike in. If this was really all about you vampires, then I would have found a

way to be safe. But this thing that you're feeling..." Xander leaned in too close to Angel's ear, "...all the things you want to do to me right now. I'm feeling it, too."

Angel allowed himself to be pulled up to a standing position, back shoved against the wall. Part of his brain was telling him to push this warm-blooded human away, break the chain and run away as quickly as possible. At the same time, his demon-infused mind was firing precise instructions on how to subdue this idiot-child, fuck him into the wall, and suck every last ounce of blood out of a gaping hole in his neck.

Xander's hands were gripping Angel's shoulders, pressing him hard into the wall. Those hands slipped slowly down his arms and rested firmly on Angel's wrists. *I know that move*, Angel thought, trying to concentrate on the smaller details, rather than the situation itself. But Xander was still talking.

"It doesn't matter if you want it or not. *I don't want it. Doesn't matter. This is going to happen. What's your body telling you to do, Angel?*" Xander closed the gap between their bodies.

Angel was trying not to let his demon take over. His inner vampire could take control of this situation, but if it did, Xander would end up dead. There were some things that the soul couldn't stop. Angelus would step out, satisfy this urge, and then skip away and leave Angel with the guilt and the clean up.

Xander was right. This was going to happen. But he couldn't let Angelus out. So it was Angel that was going to have to do it.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Xander didn't know that he could feel this much revulsion and this much desire at the same time. He wanted it quick. He wanted it over. And he needed it now.

He forced himself to look into Angel's eyes. Xander had to let Angel know that whatever happened next was supposed to. It wasn't Xander's fault. It wasn't Angel's fault. It was just what was supposed to happen. The way it was. The way it is.

Xander saw his own fear and anger mirrored back at him in Angel's face. Then a mask was slipped over the vampire's eyes and Xander saw nothing. No fear, no anger, no emotion. Suddenly, brown eyes shifted to gold, and Angel was biting. Xander didn't see him move. Just felt the fangs in his neck.

For a moment he was thankful. This was what he wanted, wasn't it? Wasn't it? The bite. His body was waiting for the end. The punch line. But wait. That's what his body wanted. To die. He didn't want to die. This wasn't right at all. Need the bite so much, but can't die.

"Stop, Angel," Xander tried to make the words sound harsh. "Stop, now."

Angel pulled out of Xander's throat, brown/black and gold eyes meeting again. They were both hyperventilating. Xander pressed his impossibly hard cock into Angel, meeting the same hardness on the other side of Angel's jeans.

"Not yet. I need more. You need more." Xander let go of Angel's wrists and moved his upper body away to take in all of Angel's vampire features. "Make me not die."

Angel brought his hands up, rattling the chain connected to the wall, and gripped Xander's shoulders. Xander closed his eyes and whispered, "Make it happen."

Then Xander was facing the wall. Bare chest pressed into the chain that ran diagonally across his body, still connected to Angel's right wrist. He didn't feel the sweat pants come down, but they were around his knees now. He felt rough jeans rub against his ass, and hard lips suck on the fresh wound on the left side his neck.

His blood was screaming. "Angel," he heard himself say. He pounded a palm against the wall in front of him. "Fuck."

The jeans and lips were suddenly pulled away. Xander heard the click of a belt buckle. He turned his head to the left slightly and the corner of his eye caught Angel shoving his jeans to just below his hips.

His brain then captured the next few things, but refused to process them, like zoning out during a filmstrip in school. He felt a hand put a bruise hold on his hip. He saw

Angel put two fingers into his own mouth, then pull them out covered in spit. Then one of those fingers was inside of him. He didn't remember feeling it go in. It was just there.

And then that was the only thing he could feel. Something in him. Someone. Angel twisted his finger and oh god. *Oh god, please don't let my brain start working right now.*

The finger was gone, Xander gasped, then there were two. Xander turned his head back to face forward and smacked his forehead and both palms against the wall several times. "God, fuck," he sobbed out.

Angel was moving his fingers. Twisting and scissoring. *No, no, no, no*, Xander's mind was trying to function. Trying to tell him make this all stop. But he felt pre-come start to leak out of his own cock and was never more angry with his own body for betraying him like this.

The fingers were gone. *Oh god no. "Yes." fuck no.* Two separate parts of him. Two parts that would never meet, never agree. *Spike.* "Spike," Xander's mind and voice whispered in anger and gratitude.

Xander heard Angel spit, and he knew right then that it wasn't going to be enough. He felt something large and too foreign touch the entrance to his hole and his body shut down. He clenched every muscle, his body making a final stand.

Then there was a hand on his cock. It wasn't his own hand. And it wasn't the long slender fingers he remembered from several nights ago. The large rough fingers captured what he had been leaking and then he was being stroked hard.

Angel's lips were on Xander's neck again, sucking and licking. Xander let one rasping groan escape and thrust forward into Angel's fist. When he pushed backwards again, Xander felt Angel's cock break his threshold and *holy mother of god!* Then he screamed.

It hurt. *It fucking hurts. Oh god stop it hurts!*

And Angel didn't give him time, he didn't give him time. He was just thrusting. It

was fast and hard and punishing and over very very quickly.

The sucking on Xander's neck became fangs and he was penetrated again. He came screaming onto the wall and over Angel's hand. He felt a cold rush burst inside of him, then he was warm again like fire, like ash.

When Angel pulled away, the chain that had made an impression in Xander's chest was pulled with him, causing them both to stumble and fall, palms on the floor, gasping for breath.

Fluid was gushing out of Xander. He was bleeding. And not just his neck. He turned toward Angel, but Angel wasn't looking at him. He had already pulled his jeans back up around his hips and was whimpering like a little girl, rolled up in a ball.

That was when he heard the clapping. "Bloody priceless," and Spike stepped out of the shadows.

7

Touching

"That looked like fun," Spike said as his applause died out.

"Fuck you," was Xander's witty retort.

"All in good time, little one." Spike stepped over to Xander. The vampire leaned down and Xander felt himself being lifted up. He was too tired to protest. Spike's touch wasn't rough. It wasn't cruel. It was swift and deliberate. Xander was carried quickly to the bed and laid down on his stomach. The sweat pants were removed entirely.

Xander buried his face in Angel's pillow, then hated himself even more for knowing the smell. He knew Angel's smell, now. Was it even possible to hate himself more? Was this really his life now? He just got fucked by Angel. Buffy's boyfriend. A vampire. A vampire with a soul. Maybe the soul was gone. Maybe this was the Angelus that they wrote about in the Watchers' diaries. That thought might actually be a bit comforting. To know that it was really a soulless thing that he had just had sex with, and not the guy that Buffy was falling in love with. But Xander

felt pretty sure that it was Angel. Angelus wouldn't have been cowering in the corner. He could still hear Angel crying.

Then there were cool hands on the back of his legs. They were stoking him slowly yet firmly. The hands moved up his legs, ghosted over his ass, then began massaging the muscles of his lower back.

Xander's stomach unclenched, and he relaxed into the mattress. No one had ever touched him like this before. He managed to stop his brain from picturing Spike, and just concentrate on the hands. The fingers were so smooth. So different than the fingers that had been gripping his hip and cock just a few minutes before. Those were big and rough. Callused. These were thin and long like a woman's. Or how Xander had imagined a woman's would be. He had kissed a few girls in the last couple of years, but it had never gone beyond lips. He hadn't known how good hands could be.

And now he was getting hard again. His turn-around time had gotten ridiculously short this past week. But it wasn't just hardness. That same damn burning sensation was filling him. Xander could feel his blood pounding just under his skin. He had to be touched. Needed hands and teeth. The week old scar on his neck was throbbing. Spike's touch was the only thing that was going to make this itching go away. Xander didn't know if his body could take more abuse.

But the hands pressed slightly harder into his back and pushed up his skin to his shoulders, one hand slipping further up and brushing the scar on the right side of his neck just as it was starting to pulsate and burn even more. Xander groaned into the pillow.

The hands left him suddenly and were gone long enough for Xander to wonder if the hands' owner had left. Then they were back, this time on the inside of his thighs, pushing them apart. Xander felt warm and cool fluid leak out of his body, and he wanted to cry again, but instead just told himself to shut up and deal with it later. He was going to have a lot to deal with later.

Then there was a new sensation on his ass cheek, and it was soft and cool and wet, and his brain said, *Spike!*, and that was okay, because it felt good. The hands, the fingers, the tongue. All Spike, all good.

Spike's tongue lapped slowly on his hot skin. Xander felt a little like a kitten being cleaned by his mother. Almost felt like purring, if his body knew how. Then the tongue moved to his crack and slid down, touching his entrance. And when did he start thinking of that place as an entrance instead of an exit?

But it has good because it was soft. And when there was a little more pressure as Spike pushed in a little bit more, Xander managed to gasp and groan at the same time. He heard a matching groan come from Spike.

Then he was empty again and Spike was talking. "Now, there's a combination of flavors I haven't tasted in over a century." Xander turned his head to the right just in time to see Angel lift his head and look at them both as Spike said, "Right, Angelus?"

Angel growled and Spike laughed. Xander didn't care about that now, though, because Spike had put his tongue back where it was supposed to be. Xander lifted his hips up off the bed and Spike was able to push that silk tongue in even more. Xander didn't know how he had managed to live his whole life without ever feeling this before. Why hadn't anyone told him? He felt perfectly okay with dying right now. With Spike's tongue in his ass. That's not wrong, is it? Can't be. Feels too good.

Then it was wrong. Very wrong. Because those weren't dull teeth that he felt on that very tender spot on his ass surrounding the hole. Those were fangs. Sharp, potentially intrusive fangs.

"Gah!" Xander screamed, and flipped over quickly, throwing Spike to the other side of the bed, against the wall. "No, no, no! You will not bite me! Not there!"

Xander saw a look of shock flash over Spike's vampire face, before it was quickly replaced with dull amusement. "Wasn't gonna bite you, you git."

Xander pointed at him. "Then what's with the grr-face and the fangs on me?"

Spike chuckled *yeah, chuckled*. "I was just tasting. Vampires taste better, taste more, in their true face. Didn't you know that?"

“Okay, first, ew. And second, why would I know that?”

“You’ve got a lot to learn about vampires, mate.”

“I think I know as much as I want to about vampires, thank you very much.” It was at that point that Xander let his eyes drop to the rest of Spike and register that the vampire, sitting casually now in the middle of the bed, back pressed against the wall, was completely naked. That must have been what he was doing when his hands had left Xander. “Spike, you’re naked.” Oh, that was a clever thing to say.

“Yeah, pet,” Spike confirmed, poking Xander’s hip with his toe, “So are you.”

Xander glanced down at himself, although, yes, he did know that. The room stayed quiet for a while after that. Xander continued to keep his eyes trained on himself, although he knew that Spike was looking at him, too. He had no idea what Angel was doing, and he didn’t care.

``*`*`*`*`*`*`*`*`

Spike let the stillness continue. He craved to reach over and touch the boy again, but he was curious to see how this next part was going to play out. To see what Xander would do next.

It took a long time. Or perhaps what just felt like a long time.

Xander’s deep breathing started to become more labored. He still wouldn’t look up at Spike or anything else. The boy’s heart was pumping faster, but he just wouldn’t move.

The one beating heart in the room was all Spike could hear. It was comforting. The one point of frantic surrounded by the utter calm of the rest of the room. But Spike suddenly shattered that image by losing control of his own breath. He found himself gasping with desire as he watched his boy struggle with some internal conflict that they both knew he was going to lose.

Spike had time to ponder the situation. Run through his options. The first and most obvious being to just end this foolishness, drain the boy while Angel was chained to the wall, and go back to his Dru. He hadn't been back in the last few days. After that night in the boy's backyard, he had gathered a few mindless minions and planned his little encounter with Angelus. Bloody ponce. His ol' Sire was going around calling himself Angel. Spike had known something was different about him when they had run into each other on that U-boat during the war. Angelus was still behind Angel's soul somewhere. He just needed a little reminding on how to be a vampire, that's all.

And it was so bleedin' easy, too. Just threaten the cute little red-headed white-hat. If Angel wasn't so hard-up for the Slayer, which was so obvious, by the way, then Spike was sure Angel would be going after Red. Who wouldn't? In fact, Spike was a little disappointed that he hadn't gotten a hold of Red instead of the boy last week.

But on the other hand, this boy was something interesting. Something different. Something... special. So pure and innocent, like the red-head, but also something more. The boy had a bit of an anger streak in him. That anger and determination was what caused Spike to keep the boy around on the night that he should have killed him.

During the two days that Spike had spent underground, waiting for Xander to wake up, he had thought about the boy's anger. And when Spike had finally entered Angel's apartment and watched Xander seduce the vampire chained to wall...well, that was just...perfection.

The boy was still so scared and had a lot to learn, never knowing which emotion to feel or how to really react to this new development in his life. But if Spike pushed hard enough...well, then he may have just enough reason to keep little Xander around for a long time. A very long time.

Finally Xander's hand twitched. Paused. Twitched again. Then it was grasping Spike's ankle. Just holding on like Xander was afraid he was going to fall off the bed or something. Still he wasn't looking up.

Then the boy's thumb started moving. Was stroking. Xander loosened his grip just a little, but pressed his thumb more firmly into Spike's ankle and just stroked.

Slowly.

Spike was finished with patience and lunged forward, landing on top of Xander, spreading across him until Spike's full body was pressed into the boy's. Their eyes met, brown and blue, both darkened with black lust.

"You want?" Spike managed to gasp out between pointless sharp breaths.

"I need," Xander stated simply, his breath seemingly more controlled than Spike's.

Spike let a small smile cross his face. "I'll give you what you need. You tell me when you're ready for what you want."

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Xander knew that he should have paid more attention to what Spike said, but he just nodded. "I need you to touch me."

Spike's hand slid slowly down Xander's left arm until their fingers were clasped together. The vampire lifted himself slightly off of Xander and brought their joined hands down between them.

The hand gripping Xander's fingers let go and the cool palm was now pressed against the back of his hand. He was being guided down, and when Spike's hand forced Xander's to close, his fingers were being wrapped around both of their erections. Xander was familiar with the way his hand felt around his own dick, but now he was also clasping another man's that was pressed up against his own.

Why had the world kept such secrets from him? *Why didn't anyone tell me that I could feel this way?* Was it just this vampire thing? Or was it Spike? He certainly had no interest in touching Angel like this. In fact, the thought grossed him out so much, that he pushed it out of his head completely.

Xander was still able to see blue at the edges of Spike's large black pupils. He couldn't read much in those eyes, and decided that he really didn't want to try.

Spike's hand was moving and Xander let his own hand be guided. The paler hand was forcing his own to touch every part of the two hard cocks. Getting familiar. Getting to know the differences. Spike's was longer and thinner than Xander's. But there was also foreskin, which was a fascinating discovery.

The room was so quiet, except for their breathing. Xander was slightly curious if Angel was watching them, but didn't care quite enough to break contact with Spike's eyes. The only thing that existed was Spike's eyes, and Spike's hand, and Spike's cock.

Those blue eyes flashed gold for just a moment when their fingers pushed the foreskin down and rubbed the very sensitive head underneath. Then they captured the leaking fluid from both of them, providing just the right amount of slick for the continued stroking. Slow stroking.

Xander made a move to thrust his hips up into their fists, but Spike brought his hand down onto Xander's right hip and pushed him back into the mattress. And then that was how Spike continued to hold himself up. Cool palm pressed into Xander's hipbone, causing a bruise that was going to be as black as the ones on his wrists just a week ago. Xander's unoccupied hand wrapped around the one on his hip.

"Need to move," Xander finally gasped out. "Let me move." Spike ignored him. The vampire brought his head down and pressed their foreheads together. The world was filled with Spike's eyes. It was too much. Too much sensation. Spike's scar on Xander's neck was on fire. Xander closed his eyes.

"Open your eyes," the voice was so soft, but it wasn't a request. Even so, Xander didn't feel compelled to comply.

Then the smooth forehead that was resting against his own changed. It became sharp and bumpy and oddly warmer. Xander's eyes shot open and were greeted by gold.

And the stroking remained slow. And good. And Xander needed to move. Wanted the hand covering his own to go faster. Wanted so bad to take back control, but the gold that was his world was telling him not to.

“What do you need, Xander?” He felt the cool breath against his lips, and he quivered despite the heat in the rest of his body.

“Need to move.”

“No. What else do you need?”

Xander licked his lips. Feeling the presence of the other set of lips so near his, but not actually touching. And the stroking remained slow. And good.

"Touch me. Faster. More." But Spike's hand wouldn't move any faster. Xander tried to rack his brain to figure out what he needed. What did Spike want to hear? On the tip of his tongue was, *fuck me fuck me fuck me hard now hard fast fuck*, but what came out was,

“Bite me.” And the world came flooding back into view when the gold eyes were gone and the fangs pierced his neck. Xander’s blood was pulled from his body in several sharp gulps before they both came - Xander screaming and Spike moaning.

They stayed that way. Completely still. Hands still clasped around each other, and teeth buried in Xander’s neck. Finally Xander’s head fell further to the left and his eyes focused on Angel.

The other vampire was just as still. Watching them. And the look wasn’t anger or fear or disgust or contempt. It was a new emotion that Xander hadn’t seen before. Concern.

Xander’s eyes started to roll up, but stopped when he saw the glint of silver on the nightstand. A key. He slowly let go of their softening penises and Spike let him. The teeth came out of Xander’s neck, but the mouth stayed where it was, lapping at the closing wound.

Xander reached up and took the key in his hand. He tossed it with the best aim he could muster and heard it skid along the floor, stopping hopefully close to Angel. Then, despite the 48 hours of unconsciousness that he had just awoke from an hour before, he fell asleep.

Domestic Bliss

Xander awoke just after dawn the next morning. He was alone in the bed. Angel's bed. No, he didn't have to think hard to recall the previous night's events. He had been fully aware what was happening as it was happening. Felt every touch and every sensation. It was a part of him.

He had always thought that he had a full life. Avoiding his family was a full-time job in itself. He may not have been the most popular guy in school, but he had great friends. And when Buffy moved to town, and he had lost Jesse and the veil had been lifted to reveal the evil of Sunnydale...when that happened, his life had direction. He had a purpose. He had a new friend and he had helped save the world that one time.

All in all, his life had been good. Terrifying at times, sure, but still good. So Xander didn't know how he could possibly find room in his head for Spike. And Angel. But there they were - invading his cluttered mind anyway. Stupid-fucking-evil vampires.

Glancing around the room, he found them both still there. Spike was chained to the wall. He had a fresh bruise on his eye and a rapidly healing cut on his cheek. He was also unconscious on the floor. Or possibly asleep. It was hard to tell.

As Xander padded toward the bathroom, clothes in hand, he passed Angel asleep on the couch. The older vampire didn't have a scratch on him. Xander tried to envision how that fight had gone, and how he had managed to sleep through it, but was tired of thinking of vampires, so he let it go.

He had expected pain when he was using the toilet, and was surprised when there wasn't any. It occurred to him that the tongue that had violated him last night *and had felt oh so good, damnit* had actually healed the damage that Angel had done.

Wasn't that odd? And convenient. And ew.

The shower was quick and focused, as Xander didn't want to spend too much more time naked in Angel's apartment. He dried off absently and left the wet towel on the floor.

Dressed in Giles' sweatpants and his own t-shirt, Xander walked home in the glow of the welcoming Sunnydale sunrise. No one was awake when he got to his house, and he wondered if they had noticed that he hadn't come home. It was just more repression material, so he focused on his day ahead instead.

Arriving at school half an hour early, he found Giles already in the library office, head buried in a book. Giles didn't notice Xander's presence until he dropped the sweatpants down on the desk.

"Xander!" Giles stood up.

"Thanks for those." Xander leaned against the wall next to the door.

"Are you alright? How are you feeling? Where is Angel? Would you like to sit down?"

Xander smiled. "Yes. As good as to be expected. At his apartment. That's okay, I'll stand."

Giles looked confused for a moment, then the tension left his shoulders and he chuckled a little. "Yes, well..." He sat back down, placed a marker in his book, and closed it, setting it on the desk. "I didn't expect to see you here today."

"Not an invalid Giles. Just needed a little rest." He pointed at the book Giles had just closed. "That for me?"

"Y-yes, it is." He picked the book up again. "It's a diary from a watcher based in Peru in the 1920's. I know Angel said that no one had written about it, but I have to check for myself."

"Yeah, sure. That makes sense."

“Xander, are you alright? Really.”

Xander didn't answer for a moment. “What do Buffy and Willow know?”

Giles removed his glasses and cleaned them absently. “They know of the pull that you feel toward Spike. And now Angel. And how the vampires feel pulled back toward you.”

“But do they know-”

“No. They only know about the biting. Nothing else.”

Xander crossed his arms over his chest and did his best to look Giles in the eye, but failed miserably. The floor was much easier to look at. Oh, look - fascinating checkerboard pattern. “It's bad, Giles,” he shivered and the librarian was immediately by his side. Not touching, but there.

“They can't just bite. If they just bite, then my body wants to give in. Give over control and just die. I don't even think that they would need to take that much blood in order for it to happen, either. I think my body will just except it and stop working.”

Giles reached out and touched his arm, causing Xander to flinch.

“I have to...” Xander's voice got very soft. He didn't really know if Giles could hear him, but he kept talking anyway, “I have to be coming...climaxing...when they do it. I have to be touched. By them.”

“Xander,” was the reply, just as soft, letting him know that Giles had heard. “I'm trying. I vow to you - I will not stop until I find a cure. I will not stop.”

Xander nodded and the room was still. Why did everything always have to be so still? So fucking still. All it did was give him time to think and thinking only led to Spike. And that only led to Angel. And that was badness. Very very badness.

“Grahhhhhh!” Xander exploded and pushed Giles away from him hard. He spun

and slammed his fist into the wall. Brought it back and did it again. Brought it back and - was grabbed from behind and shoved into a chair.

He struggled violently as Giles tried to hold him there. "Please, Xander, stop. Please don't hurt yourself."

Xander managed to push Giles away again and ran out of the office, running smack into Buffy as she entered the library. The Slayer staggered back a couple of steps. Xander was sprawled on the ground.

"Oh! Xander!" Buffy panicked and was helping him up immediately. "I'm so sorry. Are you okay? Why are you here? I didn't expect you today."

The anger inside of Xander was about to throw up all over Buffy. Then he saw Willow step up behind Buffy, and he instantly became Suppression-Boy. It was an art.

"Hey, Buff, hey Wills! What do you mean? Of course I'm here. What? Are you talking about that little bout of unconsciousness this weekend?" He waved the experience away. "Oh, that was just a nap. You know me! I'm all about nap-time. Hey, wouldn't it be great if we still had nap-time at school? Catch a little shut-eye in the middle of math class. Well, I suppose I do that anyway, but you know, if we all did it at the same time..."

He put his arms around Buffy and Willow and continued the babble-speak as he led them out of the library just as the first warning bell rang.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

When Spike opened his eyes, he was looking directly at Angel. "Bloody hell. That's a face I was happy not to wake up to for a hundred years."

Angel was crouched down in front of him as Spike maneuvered himself to a more comfortable sitting position against the wall. "Afternoon, Spike. We have to talk."

Spike automatically reached for the cigarettes in his coat pocket, before discovering

that the duster was crumpled in a ball on the floor on the other side of the room. He rolled his eyes. “Oh, goody. You know how I’ve always relished our little chats.” Spike shook his right arm and rattled the chain keeping him secured in the Angel-house-of-fun.

Angel scooted back until he was sitting with his back against the bed. “I won’t ask you why. No point in that. Why you picked now to finally start sharing, I’ll never know. You always were a twisted sick fuck.”

Spike laughed. “Excuse me? *I* was a twisted fuck? You were twisted long before me, mate. I learned at your knee. Or did you forget that, too?”

Angel ignored him. “This is the way it’s going to be. You’re going to stay here. You give Xander what he needs, when he needs it, and you won’t kill him.” Spike huffed. ”You will not leave here, which means that you won’t kill anyone anymore. When this is over, when Giles finds a cure, I’ll let Xander stake you.”

Spike’s smile beamed over the entire room. “And what makes you think Xander-boy is going to want to stake me?”

“You’re not as cute as you think you are.”

“Course I am.”

Angel got up and crossed the large room to the refrigerator, taking out two packets of blood. He tossed one back at Spike, landing it directly in front of him.

“No thanks,” Spike pushed the packet away with the tip of his shoe. “Had my fill of sweet blood last night.”

“That’s pig’s blood, Spike. I’m weaning you off human.”

“Fuck that! You honestly think that you’re going to keep me here? That I’m just going to sit back and let anyone stake me? You always were a pompous primadona, Angelus. This is not your show.”

“Oh, yeah? Who’s the one chained to the wall?” Angel walked into the bathroom

and slammed the door. In a moment, he heard the shower come on.

Spike stood up with the bag of blood and hurled it with all his strength at the bathroom. It hit with a splat, painting the door red.

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After school, Xander stopped at home briefly, just to see if his mother would ask him about the previous night. She didn't. She asked him about school, and told him that he really should come to bible study this Wednesday, because Reverend Malcolm had been asking about him. But she didn't ask him how his weekend with Willow had been. And didn't ask him where he had been the night before. Or about the bruises on his neck, or the fading ones on his wrists.

So he packed a bag of two pairs of jeans, four t-shirts, and two collared button-downs, along with the essential toiletries and comic books, then stole forty bucks from her purse, and slipped out of the house, shouting over his shoulder that he would be back later, and not caring that she wouldn't notice. Nope, not caring at all. Nope.

With a quick stop at the drugstore, Xander arrived back at Angel's a little after four. He was surprised to see both vampires awake. Angel was 409ing the bathroom door, which looked pink, while scowling at Spike, still chained to the wall, who looked smug.

"Well isn't this the picture of domestic bliss." Xander threw his duffle bag on the couch. "Honey, I'm home!"

Angel and Spike's eyes followed him around the small space as Xander began unpacking his bag. He cleared out one drawer of the dresser for his meager set of clothes, quickly stashed the recently purchased tube of lubricant in the nightstand, then settled on the couch and started reading one of his comic books.

Finding the vamps still staring at him, Xander spoke to Angel. "Got any real food in this joint? I don't have the same taste for blood as you two, cause ew."

Angel blinked. “Uh, no. Sorry.”

Xander pointed at the bathroom door. “Better finish that up, Deadboy. It’s gonna congeal or something.” Angel coated the door with other spray of the cleaner. Xander reached over to the phone on the side table. “I’m gonna order a pizza. Sausage and pineapple. Don’t like it? Tough. Angel, you’re paying.”

Angel turned back to him quickly, but Xander just glared. Angel nodded and finished cleaning the door.

Neither saw the satisfied smirk from Spike in the corner.

9

Routine

Routine. It was like prison in that way. Or maybe those special prisons that they lock away the psychos. The murderers that claimed that they did it because of the voices in their heads, or to serve God, or to impress Scott Bakula or something. Or hell. Hell consisted of routine, right? Hell was the routine of being a normal teenage boy.

A normal boy who was split into tiny little pieces. Each piece living its own separate life from the other. Like in *Army of Darkness* when Ash smashed the mirror and a dozen little mini-Ashes came out of the reflected images and started wreaking havoc. Except mini-Xanders weren’t evil. Well...maybe a couple of them.

Mini-Xander #1 - The Teenager. A typical high school boy, one assumes. Goofy Xander, shunned by the ladies and can’t figure out geometry for the life of him. Best friend Willow, the brain, and such the cutie-patootie when she pouts. Best friend. Weren’t you supposed to tell your best friend everything? Wills knew a few of the mini-Xans, but certainly not all. So Mini-#1 was mask #1. A full-service, head to toe ghost costume. Just floating along.

Mini-Xander #2 - The Slayerette. Well, he did help save the world that one time. He wasn't really in the big Hellmouth-beast battle, but he brought the Slayer back to life and that was something, wasn't it? He helped out. He read the demony-type books. Sometimes. And he cheered the one-and-only Buffster when she beat the bad guys. Go, Buffy! So, yeah. Slayerette. *God, we need a better name.*

Mini-Xander #3 - The Dutiful Son. Well, Son, anyway. Maybe not so much with the 'dutiful.' He showed back up at his parents' house two or three times a week when he knew they would home. Ate the obligatory leftover Chinese and got his permission slip signed for the museum field trip. He never stayed the night, and he really wasn't sure if they noticed or not. He was the son they always wanted, really. They couldn't ask for anything more. And they didn't.

Mini-Xander #4 - The Bitten. A source of blood for two ancient vampires. Both evil. Well, Buffy would claim that only one was evil, but she didn't know. Not really. Not when she would look at Angel with those big round saucer-eyes, you could actually see her knees wiggle with the weakness and the swooning. Insert sick-vomity noises here. Buffy and Willow knew about Mini-#4. Knew that Xander itched to be bitten. Knew that the dead guys had to bite. Knew that he stayed at Angel's and that was the safest place, since they could keep Spike chained up there. Yeah, they thought they knew everything.

Mini-Xander #5 - The Slut. Okay, slut might not be the right word. Whore was probably more like it. It's not like he fucked anything that moved. But he was taking it up the ass by the Slayer's boyfriend. And he did get off by the touch of an evil bloodsucker who would probably rather be tearing out the hearts of innocent little girls all over the Hellmouth. So, slut, whore...whatever.

Mini-Xander #6 - ... No name. Can't come up with a thing. This Mini was under so many layers of ghost costume that it barely existed. This was the ghost. The real ghost. Hidden. Cold. Not quite dead, but trying to be. This was the anger. The sorrow. The shame. The weeping little boy in Giles' arms. The one that broke the lamps and teapots in the librarian's office. And who one time fell into a hole of himself for almost a full day at the Watcher's apartment. Who collapsed in agony because a 7th Mini showed up and started enjoying what the 5th Mini was up to. #6 managed to beat the hell out of #7 during that day at Giles', but #'s 4 and 5 had to

go do their duty again, so now #7 perks up now and again and kicks #6 in the head.

This is me. A puzzle. Missing a few pieces. It doesn't all quite fit. The image is blurry and unfocusy. I'm parts that don't equal a whole (ooh, philosophical math). Swiss cheese (uuhh, food). Okay, now I'm hungry and my brain hurts. Crap, did someone just ask me something?

Xander looked up from the ancient text he wasn't reading. "What?"

"I said," Buffy rolled her eyes, "what are you going to dress up as for Halloween?"

Xander slammed the book shut and got a small glare from Giles. "Oh, no. That's a secret. Don't worry, I'll be at your house at four, then you'll see. We'll go get the kiddies for a little treat-o-rama then it'll be time for real Halloweeny goodness at The Bronze." He pointed at Willow. "Get those dancing' shoes on, little missy!"

Willow held a red sneakered foot up high over the table. "I'm shoed-up and ready to go!"

"Well, the red works, but I was thinking something more along the lines of stiletto-sluttiness. Three inches of strappy heaven."

"Xander!" "Xander!"

"What?"

The girls sighed and went back to whispering about something boy-related. Xander opened the book again. Thank you, Mini-#1.

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The vampires' sleeping schedule altered slightly after a short time. They would wake up around three in the afternoon, shortly before Xander got home from school. Bedtime came at around two or three in the morning, long after Xander had gone to sleep. They would both fall into the bed, exhausted from the nightly fight (sometimes just words and sometimes with fists) about Angel not letting Spike out

to feed.

Spike had been chained up in the Angel-house-of-fun-and-terror (and, yes, Spike and Xander had agreed on that name) for two months now. A chained up Spike is not a happy Spike. The chain was longer, though. At least Angel did that for the fussy little vampire. Spike could get around the entire apartment, now. The hook on the wall had been moved to next to the bed and was reinforced with some serious-looking iron plating after Spike had broken free a couple of times. He never got far. But Xander had a sneaking suspicion that the younger vamp didn't try very hard. Angel always caught up to him pretty quick.

Angel was determined that Spike not kill. It really wasn't a very pleasant scene to be in the middle of when they fought. But Xander learned to block it out, and he usually slept through most of it. Unless the fights got very physical and Spike's chain would smack his sleeping body with the violent movements. At that point, Xander would scream for the children to shut the fuck up and go to bed like good little vampires or they wouldn't get their Xander-fix the next day. It was an idle threat and they all knew it, but it quieted the children enough for Xander to get some rest.

The only thing that kept Spike calm was touching Xander. When Spike would get pacey in the early evenings, or get really rambly about missing Drusilla, all Xander had to do was touch Spike's hip and the vampire's cool mouth would close over Xander's Spike-scar and suck. At that point his Spike-scar would start to burn with need and Xander wasn't quite sure if it had started to burn before or after they had touched. And when they were in that position, the world would still. Xander's little swiss-cheese brain would close up and all he needed was to feel Spike's bare skin against his own and sharp pointy teeth in his neck.

When it was just the two of them alone, they would get lost in the sensations and it took forever to come. They knew every part of each other. Had licked, sucked, and touched every piece of hot and cool skin. Almost every part. They had managed to not kiss in all that time. But Xander didn't mind at all. Kissing just seemed...not right. Kissing was something you did with a girlfriend. Spike wasn't a girlfriend. Plus, Xander was a little put off by the whole kissing thing right now. Since the last girl he kissed turned out to be a mummy who was attempting to suck the life out of him. So, he was perfectly happy putting off lip-on-lip action with Spike for...well,

ever.

Sex with Spike was all about the touching. And aside from the tongue and the occasional single finger, the only part of Spike that had ever been inside Xander was the fangs. It wasn't a conscious decision that they made, it was just the way they did things. That final act of penetration wasn't what Xander needed. Neither did Spike, apparently. It rarely occurred to Xander that they could be doing more. And when he did think of it, Spike's tongue would suddenly find a new happy spot on Xander's body and all thoughts would go bye-bye. *Spike. Touch. Good.*

Of course, no one knew about those alone times with Spike (hello, Mini-Xander #7). Spike wasn't trusted alone with Xander. Death was still a possibility. But this was the combo that was Mini-#6 and Mini-#7. #6 wanted an ending and #7 just wanted. So when he was pulled toward Spike when he wasn't at home, #7 would play the Slayer-gang off of each other, creating alibis and more secrets, and Xander would sneak back home without Angel and wrap himself up in a bleached-blond-evil-vampire package for a few hours.

And Spike hadn't tried to kill him. Yet. Sometimes the vampire would drink for what seemed like too long, and Xander would just whisper, "Spike," and he would pull the fangs out and keep his bumpy forehead resting on Xander's shoulder for a while.

This one time, Spike slid his fangs into Xander's neck, closed his mouth around the seeping wounds and didn't suck. He just stayed like that for half an hour and Xander came twice and they weren't even touching each other any place else.

Spike was elegance, and Spike was grace. Spike was cool slow strokes and heavy breathing. Spike was the cause of it all. Spike was the reason to die. And the reason to live. And to feel.

And when Spike would roll off the bed and clean himself off and get dressed, then he was just Spike. Evil vampire. Bitchy, violent, threatening, and the most annoying creature that ever walked the face of the earth. He hogged the remote. He ripped up valuable comics. Spike was always shirtless. The manacle around his wrist made the obligatory black tee disappear for good. He spilled pig's blood over everything. He would "accidentally" whack his chain against Xander's or Angel's head while

he crossed the room. It was like living with a two year old.

And Angel loved to exude his Sire-authority over Spike, although it was clear that Spike didn't give a flying-fuck. The little vampire never did anything he was told and would sometimes just punch Angel in the back for simply walking across the living room. The two of them were constantly black and blue. The moment one wound would heal, they would give each other another. It was like living with a two year old and his four year old older brother. Yep, Xander was an official babysitter. And he didn't even get paid for it.

Angel didn't touch Xander. Except for one hand on his hip, one hand on his cock, his dick in his ass, and his fangs that ripped through the Angel-scar. One or two times a day, they would both just start to feel it at the same time and go to the bed, Xander on his hands and knees with Angel behind him.

Xander would take off his shirt to expose the Angel-scar, and would lower his jeans just enough for comfortable access. Angel would simply lower his trousers to just below his hips. It was quick and dirty and very slimy because Angel would use a lot of lube. A lot. He would prepare Xander with no more than two scissoring fingers. When his cock went in, cold fingers would wrap around Xander's dick and the stoking met with the thrusts. The bite and orgasm would come quickly after, and Xander would go to the bathroom to clean up leaving Angel to do so on the bed. They had a heavy investment in sheets that were replaced at least twice a day. The washing machine was always running.

And it was pleasurable sometimes. Angel never aimed for it, but he would occasionally hit Xander's prostate (a part of his body that Spike was kind enough to show Xander with a probing finger one day). But mostly it was routine and necessary. He felt like they were an old married couple just going through the motions.

A minor-apocalypse kept them apart for two days once, and they didn't even make it to the bed. Or the apartment. Angel had taken him over a park bench using such an over abundant amount of spit, that Xander could have sworn he felt more spit rather than come run down his legs on the way home. It was gross.

Sometimes both Xander's scars would burn at the same time. It didn't happen often,

but when it did the vampires shared their time with Xander, making him the center of a slick vampire sandwich - Spike face up on the bed, Xander looking down on him, and Angel behind Xander. Only during these events would Angel move differently. He would go slower. Almost, but not quite matching the strokes of Spike's hand on Xander's cock. When they were like that, Xander's hand on Spike would match Angel's movements, leaving Spike out of pace, but still causing them all to come at the same time when the vampires would sink their teeth in simultaneously. It was a beautiful moment. For cheap demon porn.

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Xander continued to show up on Giles' doorstep from time to time because of the screaming and hitting and crying and blaming the Watcher for not making it stop. Yep, Mini-#6 was a splotchy mess. And Giles was very very patient and calm and that almost pissed Xander off more, but not quite. When he would leave Giles', Xander would feel more like a stone than ever before. Not having accomplished a thing to merge all the Minis, but able to cope with it better, somehow.

And Xander never stopped trying to be Mini-#1, and even got over the whole kissing thing when he found himself sucking-face with Cordelia after a particularly traumatic event involving being trapped in a cave with several scaly demonic dogs scratching to get past the rock barricade they made. That little incident led to several unexpected make-out sessions in a janitor's closet which in turn created a whole new Mini-Xander #...what number are we on? This one was Secret-Boyfriend-Guy because Cordy refused to tell her friends what they were doing, and Xander was afraid to tell Willow because there were feelings there, and he didn't want his best friend to be hurt.

Then it all changed when Buffy killed Drusilla.

“Spike...”

“Master Spike, please wake up.”

“Master Spike.”

Xander felt himself waking from a surprising dreamless sleep. Wasn't quite time to get up, though. It felt entirely too early. A hand flew across him and grabbed onto something that he couldn't see, since his eyes were still all closed and everything.

Angel's voice. “Who the fuck are you, and what are doing in my house?” There was a dull slap and the arm was back at Angel's side, behind Xander.

Then Spike's voice. “Relax, Peaches, it's just Dalton. What do you want? And this had better be good, or you'll be sucked up in the poof's fancy new vacuum.”

Time to get a fuller picture of the situation. Xander opened his eyes and first saw Spike's back, since that was what his forehead had been pressed against for the past several hours. He pulled his head back and lifted up. Angel was already sitting up with his back to the wall behind Xander. (The older vampire had given up the couch after two weeks of a sore back. He really was spoiled to the creature comforts. Wimp-ass vampire.) Spike was still lying on his side with just his head raised a little. Spike's position on the outside of the bed was determined because it was closest to where the chain was secured to the wall. That way it was less likely that the other two would get hit with it when Spike thrashed in his sleep, which he did do occasionally. Plus, it was funny when Spike rolled off the bed.

“Master Spike, I'm sorry. I know you said that you shouldn't be disturbed, and she even told me not to get you, but I know that you would want to know. Or help if you can.” Dalton eyed the chain that ran from the manacle on Spike's right wrist to the wall.

Spike sat up quickly. He grabbed Dalton's arm and there was fear in the fledgling's eyes. “What happened?” Spike growled out. Xander could tell Spike was in game face, even from behind, just from the sound of his voice.

“Sh-sh-she wanted to go out. We'd been bringing home food, just like you said.

Fresh food. Virgins, babies, everything she likes. B-but she wanted to go out and we just couldn't stop her. Everyone went with her, Spike, everyone. But the Slayer...she was crazy tonight. Still is. Killed two of us before we even saw her, then five more were gone within moments. I knew that I had to come get you when there were only six left. I don't think they can protect her. And she refused to leave. Said she wanted to meet the girl who was going to change it all."

Through this entire exposition, Angel had climbed over Xander and Spike and gotten dressed. Within another moment, Spike had his jeans and boots on and was tugging furiously at the chain on the wall. Xander had never seen Spike in such a rage. Actually it was more of a panic. William the Bloody was panicking. Then there was screaming.

"Let me out of here! Let me out! You bloody mother-fucker! Let me out!"

"You're not going anywhere, Spike," Angel said calmly while lacing up his shoes. "I'm going out because Buffy needs my help. Nobody needs you."

"Arrrgghhhhhh! You can't! You can't! Make her stop, Angelus! You can't let her! My Dru's weak, you KNOW that, she can't fight! It's not fair. It's not fair." This last sentence came out as more of a sob and Spike collapsed on the floor by the bed.

Angel came over to Dalton and lifted him up by the collar so they were eye to eye. "Where is she?"

Dalton gulped and looked down at Spike who was holding his head in his hands. Angel shook the fledge violently. He looked back up quickly and sputtered out, "P-pleasant Fields. The center near the m-mausoleum."

"Thank you." Dalton disintegrated from a stake that Xander didn't see Angel holding. He pointed at Spike and spoke to Xander. "Don't let him hurt himself." Then he was gone in an overly dramatic flourish.

Xander heard himself hyperventilating in the quiet of the room. The adrenaline of three vampires could still be felt pulsating in the small space, having no place to go but to Xander's blood.

Spike got up suddenly, walked across the apartment, and stood facing the farthest wall, near the kitchenette. It was as far as he could go, with the chain pulled taut.

Xander watched as the muscles in Spike's back began clenching tighter and tighter, his shoulders hitching up and down with hard deep breaths. Then Spike drew his right arm back, hand clenched in a tight fist. The arm shot forward, looking to collide with the cement wall.

"No!" Xander flew out of the bed and ran toward Spike. The chain wasn't long enough. With the force that Spike put into that punch, the chain was going pull the manacle back and peel the skin off Spike's arm right up to the elbow. Xander had a vivid image in his mind of it happening. He almost vomited.

Then there was a snap, and a thunk, and a whip when the chain flew back and hit Xander in the chin cutting a gouge there that had Xander's head spinning and thinking, *That's gonna leave a mark*. The chain settled on the floor like a dead snake, black and withered from the sun.

In the flash it took for Spike to grab his duster off the hook near the door and exit the basement, Xander managed to see the manacle still wrapped around Spike's wrist, a single mangled link hanging from the secure clasp.

Xander cared that he was bleeding profusely from the chin, but only for a moment. He was dressed and out the door seconds later.

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He wished he could have of seen the fight. And Drusilla. Spike had spoken of her often, and Xander wanted to meet the vampire who had raptured the Big Bad. But by the time he got to the mausoleum, only Buffy, Angel, and Spike remained. There were little piles of dust spread about the headstones.

Buffy was just catching her breath but was still in fighting stance, stake in hand. She was glaring at Spike who was struggling in Angel's arms. The older vampire was doing his best to hold the younger back from lunging at the Slayer. Spike was, of course, screaming.

“You little bitch! Couldn’t you see she wasn’t fighting you back? She didn’t have the strength! You just dusted her. Didn’t even give her a bleedin’ chance. If she was back to herself she could have killed you with a fingernail! Don’t know anything about a fair fight, you fucking slut!”

At that, Angel shifted his grip on Spike to one arm tight around his neck and used the other arm to punch Spike in the back.

“Angel, let him go.” This, surprisingly, came from Buffy. Angel, Xander, and even Spike looked at her in shock. “He’s right. I didn’t give her a chance to fight. If he wants to fight for her now, he can. It’s not like it’ll bring her back.” Buffy kicked absently at a small pile of dust at her feet. Spike roared and slid into game face.

“Buffy, you can’t kill him,” Angel explained still holding fast to Spike.

Buffy rolled her eyes. “I know that.”

“He’s out for blood. I can’t make him promise not to kill you.”

“He won’t kill me.”

“How do you know?”

Buffy looked at Angel like he was an idiot. It was gratifying. “Because I won’t let him. Give me a little credit, would ya. Slayer, here.” Buffy threw the stake away and tightened her stance. “Let him go.”

Angel held on. “I’m stepping in if it gets too bad.” Buffy shrugged. Angel let go of Spike and stepped back.

The vampire flew at Buffy. She jumped out of the way at the very last moment, and Spike’s skull cracked a headstone. He took a couple seconds to clear his head then turned toward her again. This time when he came at her, he was much more focused.

Xander walked up to Angel. The two just stood and watched the fight. It was truly

spectacular.

Almost every single punch and kick landed on its mark. They were each good at blocking punches, Buffy a little better than Spike, but the movements were so swift and constant that it was almost hard to see all that was happening. It was an incredibly even match. Neither let the other take the advantage for too long. When one would get knocked to the ground, he or she would be up again in an instant, or leg-sweeping the other to the ground. They used every fighting technique that Xander had ever seen in both the graveyards and the movies.

About an hour later, Xander was starting to feel a little sick. The punches that were connecting sounded wet and thuddy. They were both covered in blood. Angel had tried to stop it a couple of times, but the fighters told him to back off. It was slowing down. They were clearly exhausted, but neither relented. It was all getting pretty pointless.

After another ten minutes, Angel tried again. “We have to go, Spike! It’s almost sunrise.” Sure enough, the sky was turning a soft blue and an orange glow could be seen on the horizon. Xander was worried that they had waited just a little too long.

“Do you even have time to get back?” he asked Angel, who was really looking worried by now.

“Not sure. We have to get them to stop. I never should have let them do this.”

“Oh, get a grip, Deadboy. When has anyone ever been able to get Buffy or Spike to do or not do anything?”

“Good point.” Angel looked at the sky. “But we have to stop this. Now.”

“Okay...thoughts? Suggestions?”

After two minutes of pleading and reasoning, and getting absolutely no response from the two focused and increasingly groggy fighters, the sky started turning a bright orangey-pink. They had run out of time. Angel found a semi-shaded spot under a tree.

Xander ran to the mausoleum and found it securely locked. Frantically searching for another option, he saw a smaller crypt nearby with the door slightly ajar. He sprinted to it and pushed the door open all the way. It was about fifteen by fifteen feet inside. Dry, with two sarcophaguses on the walls to the right and left. There was one window, above the stone coffin on the left, but it was high and narrow. It would have to do.

Buffy and Spike were still fighting. It was getting a bit sloppy. Xander searched the ground and found a large tree branch. He picked it up, walked up behind Spike and slammed it over his head. The sudden hit from behind caused the vampire to fall to his knees.

Buffy glared. "Xander! What are doing?"

"Sunrise, Buffy," Xander pointed to the sky. She and Spike looked up.

"Oh. Why didn't anybody say anything?" Xander rolled his eyes. "Angel!" Buffy finally saw her vampire huddled under a tree looking nervous, and she hobbled to him.

Xander slid his hands under Spike's arms and helped him stand. "Over here!" he yelled at the two by the tree as he pulled the weakened bloody vampire with him toward the crypt.

The four of them stumbled in at about the same time. Angel and Buffy staggering to the far corner to the right, while Xander pulled Spike with him to the closest corner on the left. Just then, sunlight hit the window and split the crypt in two. The beam of light was about three feet wide, but it was bright and it warmed the small space considerably.

Buffy and Spike collapsed. Angel and Xander knelt down next to their respective charges and started inspecting the wounds.

A few minutes later, Angel helped Buffy stand. They had quietly agreed that she needed a first aid kit and should go home. After a bit of smooching, Buffy crossed the light, which was already threatening to get wider throughout the day, and stood in front of Xander.

“Come on, Xander,” she coaxed, hand held tight to her side which possibly contained bruised or broken ribs.

Xander looked at her a bit shocked. It hadn't occurred to him to go with Buffy. “Do you need help?”

Buffy blinked, considering. “Um, no. I'll be alright. But it's time to go.”

“I think I'll stay here.”

She glanced over at Angel who looked confused. Turning back she asked, “Why?”

Xander took a moment to re-inspect the wounds on Spike's face and hands. It was probably nothing that wouldn't heal in a few days; kinda hard to tell under all the blood. But when Xander saw the look in Spike's eyes, he knew that he couldn't leave.

He stood up and took Buffy's arm, walking her over to the entrance of the crypt. He spoke softly, knowing the vampires could hear him anyway. “Look at him, Buffy. He needs help.”

She peeked past him at the creature slumped on the ground. Shrugging, she said, “He's no worse off than me.”

Xander tried to be patient. “Physically, yes. He'll heal, just like you. But, Buff...you didn't just lose the love of your life. He did.”

Buffy looked confused. “Angel can take care of him.”

Xander pulled her outside the crypt where perhaps they couldn't be heard. “He can, but he won't. Listen...,” he tried to gather his thoughts, “I don't fully understand the relationship between Angel and Spike. But in the almost three months since I've been living with them, they have never uttered a kind word to each other. Not once. Spike might be an evil soulless creep of a vampire, but he loved that Drusilla. And anyone going through that kind of pain doesn't deserve to be alone. And even with Angel in there, he's alone.”

“I don’t get you. All this about losing the ‘love of his life.’ Vampires can’t love.”

“Excuse me? Aren’t you dating one?”

“Angel’s different. He’s got a soul.”

“Ah, yes. Sweet, sweet Angel with his good and pure soul.”

“Xander, don’t-”

“Listen, you believe whatever you want about Angel, okay. I don’t care. I’m not talking about him. And, yeah, maybe love isn’t the right word for what Spike felt for Drusilla. But...you’ve never heard him talk about her. If it’s not love, than it’s obsession. And you don’t get over that with just one fight with you.”

“Xander, do you care about Spike? After everything he’s done to you? He’ll kill you the moment he gets you alone. You know that, right?”

The first question threw him. Did he care about Spike? The possibility of death had been hanging over his head for months now. And Spike had had the opportunity to kill him many times over and didn’t. Not that Buffy knew that. He decided that he didn’t want to create another Mini at that moment to deal with it and shoved the issue through a hole in his brain.

“That’s beside the point, Buff. Go home and get patched up. I’ll stay here today. I’d have to come back at some point, anyway.” He pulled the collar of his shirt back to reveal the Angel-scar. “Bite, remember?”

Buffy grimaced. “Yeah, okay. Be careful.” She gave him a bloody peck on the cheek and turned toward home, limping slightly and shuffling through the piles of dust, which kicked up and spun around her before resettling pointlessly on the ground.

Xander absently palmed the blood off his cheek and re-entered the crypt. Neither vampire had moved. He glared at Angel for a moment, then sat down next to Spike. The injured one just sat, staring at the far wall. He looked hollow and destroyed.

Xander slid the duster, which somehow managed to stay on him during the entire bout, off Spike's shoulders and inspected the bruises on his arms. There wasn't a lot he could do about most of the injuries. He suspected broken ribs and perhaps some ruptured internal organs, but vamps healed fast enough, so he wasn't worried about it.

Instead, he removed his own t-shirt, spit on it, and proceeded to clean the blood covering Spike's face. Eventually, he was able to see the damage done there. Lip split in two different places, two black eyes, one completely swollen shut and the other streaked with red veins where a blood vessel had burst. A cheekbone was clearly broken and the nose was lying at an odd angle.

He had no idea why Buffy hadn't looked this bad. "Geez, Spike. You don't take a punch very well," he commented casually, which was rewarded by a shrug - Spike's first movement since they entered the crypt. It was promising. Xander decided to see what else he could get out of the vampire.

"I mean, I hope you heal up quick, cause what would all the ladies say when they see this lopsided nose and flawed line in your cheekbone. Gotta tell ya, not pretty, man."

No reaction. Okay, different tactic.

"Buffy really wailed on you. You know, if she didn't have strict instructions not to kill you, then you would be a pile of dust mixed in with your girlfriend." That did it.

A hand came up and closed around Xander's throat.

"Spike!" Angel cried from the other side of the crypt.

The grasp was high on his neck, just under his chin. The fingers were far from the scars that rested closer to Xander's shoulders, near the collarbones. Spike wasn't squeezing. Despite the speed in which the hand had come up, there was oddly no malice or threat in gesture.

Xander turned his head slightly toward Angel. "S'okay. Not hurting me." Angel's

eyebrows scrunched and Xander turned back away from the annoying yet familiar expression.

Now Spike was looking at Xander, head tilted slightly. A look had glazed over the one open eye. Xander stared, trying to place the expression. He hadn't seen it before, but thought perhaps there was a touch of desperation.

“Oh, God. Spike. You were trying to let her win, weren't you?” The expression didn't change, but Spike started moving his thumb back and forth along Xander's chin. “If you wanted to die, you could have just stayed out in the sunlight.” The thumb-stroking stopped. Xander got it. “But that would have been insulting to Drusilla.” Thumb moving again. “You had to go down fighting. For her.”

Spike's fingers slid up Xander's throat to grasp just his chin. Then he was being pulled forward slowly and closer to Spike. The vampire closed the distance between them and Xander felt Spike's lips on his own for the first time. It was faint and soft, and not even a kiss. They just touched for a few moments, then Spike pulled away, let go of Xander and rested his head back against the wall.

A part of Xander died a little bit right then. He thought perhaps he could feel a hole in his swiss cheese brain close up. He leaned back and fell against the sarcophagus behind him, closing his eyes. All cylinders in his brain fired and he searched his fractured mind to figure out who was missing. Mini-Xander roll-call. Is everyone present and accounted for? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven...wait. Six? Hello? Where are you guilt? Where are you anger? Where are you shame?

Oh, crap.

The day passed slowly. The patch of sunlight grew to a max width of about ten feet before it started shrinking again. Angel and Spike slept, and Xander spent his time watching Spike's face heal.

Xander's butt was getting sore from the hard concrete floor. He knew his body should be telling him to go to the bathroom or to be hungry, but it wasn't. Instead, he stayed planted next to Spike and he couldn't figure out why. Sometime in the early afternoon, Xander didn't know exactly when since he wasn't wearing his watch, Spike opened his eyes. The left one was still very swollen, but it wasn't sealed shut anymore. The redness in the right had cleared up. The vampire kept his head against the wall, but turned it to look at Xander. Xander smiled. Spike didn't.

"How ya feeling?"

Spike blinked, clearly processing the question. "Bones shifting. Organs mending. Heart still not beating. Fit as a fiddle, luv. You?"

"My butt hurts."

Spike nodded and closed his eyes again. Xander reached out and put his hand on Spike's arm. The vampire didn't move.

"Spike," Xander said softly.

"Mm."

"Tell me about her."

Spike opened his eyes which still held very little expression. "Why?"

Xander started stroking his thumb across Spike's forearm. "Because my grandmother died when I was eight. I loved her very much. And after the funeral, my parents stopped talking about her. And after a couple of years, all the pictures of her that had been around the house were completely replaced with new pictures. My family lost the memory of her, and now I don't miss her because I don't remember her."

“I’ll never forget my Dru.”

“I know that. But if you tell me about her, and if you keep talking to me about her, then I’ll remember her, too. And you won’t be the only one who has to carry her memories.”

Spike finally smiled. “You are a strange boy.”

“Yeah, but don’t tell anyone. It would destroy the reputation I have going as an upright solid citizen and then I’d never get to be President.” Xander slid his hand down Spike’s arm and pressed his warm palm into the cold one. Their fingers closed around each other.

“I met Dru in 1880. She found me in an alley and whispered to me the most beautiful words that a woman could ever say...”

``*`*`*`*`*`*`*`*`

Spike stopped talking. It had only been perhaps an hour. Spike had told Xander about several of the ultra-creepy stunts that Drusilla had pulled, and Xander wondered if many of them were because she was crazy or because she was a vampire. Spike had joined her in most of her escapades, but Xander had a sneaking suspicion that it was mainly just out of loyalty. At least that was what he was going to tell himself for now.

He also learned that it wasn't Angel who sired Spike, it was Drusilla. Spike didn't explain why he always called Angel his sire, but Xander figured that was a story for a later time.

Spike wasn't talking anymore because Xander had just asked, "How did she get so crazy?"

The vampire looked sad for just a moment and his voiced softened, "She was mad since the day I met her. But she wasn't always like that. Right, Angelus?" Spike didn't look across the crypt, but Xander did.

He didn't know how long Angel had been awake, but the older vampire was crouched down in the darkest spot of his shadowed corner, watching them, his face hidden behind his brood-mask.

"You wanna tell that story, dear Angel?" Spike offered. When Angel didn't answer, Xander asked another question to draw the focus away from the broody one. He didn't care all that much what Angel had to say, anyway.

"So, what's the longest you and she ever spent apart?"

Spike thought on that for a little while. "We were separated for almost a year once. It was Chicago, the 1930's. I was in prison for tax evasion, and there is no way that you are ever going to hear the rest of that story, so don't even ask." Xander grinned at that, trying to envision how such a scenario could possibly have transpired, and just came to the conclusion that Spike was lying.

"And these past few months, with us...well, it's weird, isn't it?" Xander's brain started firing and small events started to piece together in his mind. "You've been chained to a wall for three months. You've been forced to put up with me and him. You've been yelling and screaming about not being able to hunt and kill and smoke. You've been saying how much you missed her." He took hold of the manacle on Spike's right wrist. "And you could have left at any time."

Xander got up quickly and crossed the crypt to stand in the middle of the beam of light. "And you really could have killed me at any time, too. All those times when it was just the two of us alone," he vaguely heard Angel stand up behind him, "you could have killed me, broken the chain, gone back to your precious Drusilla and left town before Angel was even home." The panic was just about full-blown now. "Am I right?"

Fucking evil vampire just grinned.

Xander started pacing back and forth in the light, talking almost to himself. "I think that I convinced myself that you wouldn't kill me when we were alone because it just wouldn't do to have Angel come home to find my dead cold body on the bed and you still chained to the wall. He would dust you in an instant. It never occurred to me that you could get away." Then that brief interlude of panic-mode vanished.

Just vanished. Xander was suddenly very calm and now more curious than anything else.

He cocked his head toward Spike, whose expression he couldn't read. "You didn't kill me. All this time. Why? You could have ended this whole thing with a simple twist of my neck or just drained me completely. Could have gone back to the crazy vampire and been done with it all. Why, Spike?"

Spike still sat on the ground. Legs bent up and outstretched arms resting lightly on his knees, looking the very definition of casual. His fingers were twitching, like they did just before he got into a fight with Angel. Xander had always thought that the twitching was anticipation, his hands getting ready to tighten into fists. But he realized at that moment that it was just the first and second fingers on the right hand that were moving. Spike wanted *needed?* a cigarette. The vampire was trying to calm his nerves. He was actually trying not to fight.

Xander had never felt nervous around Spike. Except those first two times. The vampire had said several times that he wasn't going to kill Xander...yet. And finally the "yet" sunk in.

"How long were you going to wait? To kill me?" The self-preservation that had shown itself a few minutes before suddenly left the building, and Xander stalked back out of the light to stand in front of Spike. For just a moment, their positions allowed Xander a modicum of authority. An ounce of...control that he didn't remember having before. Of course, that was just for moment. Then Spike stood up.

Now, Xander may have an inch or so on the vampire, but Spike always seemed to loom over the human. It wasn't the height that made Xander feel so diminutive, it was the confidence, the cockiness, the coolness, the control that the vampire always seemed to have.

"Startin' to feel nervous, little boy?" Xander hadn't seen that smug look directed at him for several months and it made him...nervous. Damn. "Are ya feeling the borrowed time you've been livin' on?"

Both men quickly reached out to grab each other's arms. Xander wanted to see if he could get back some of that control he had just a second ago. But Spike was faster,

so Xander felt those long slender fingers close around his biceps. Which meant that the only part of Spike that Xander managed to get hold of were his elbows. That seemed silly so he dropped his hands.

While pulling Xander closer to him, Spike also pushed the human down just a little so that now Xander really was shorter than the vampire. It was a submissive position that Spike hadn't put him in for quite some time.

"You know, this wasn't my original plan. I was simply going to kill you three months ago. But you intrigued me, so I thought I'd try this new thing. Thought I'd see how you'd turn out. What you would do with it. And bringing Angel into the fun and games was sure genius on my part, don't you think? God knows he could use a little excitement in his life. Worked, too. Worked, didn't it?"

The vampire leaned forward slightly and continued his little speech as a whisper in Xander's ear.

"And just between you and me...didn't really mind the chaining up. True, I was forced to eat that bloody awful pig's blood, but do you realize that I had my dear ol' sire waiting on me hand and foot?" Xander couldn't help but grin along with Spike at that. "Plus...had *you* around, didn't I?" He placed a kiss gently on Xander's cheek, right next to his ear. "Wasn't always so bad, was it?"

Spike ran his tongue around Xander's ear, then nibbled just a touch on the lobe. Oh, yeah. He knew Xander loved that. Suddenly, Xander's stomach clenched and unclenched like it did when he was pulled toward Angel. Angel, damnit! He did not fucking want Angel, right now.

Wait...he didn't want Spike either, did he? Didn't *want*. That was the whole point of this, wasn't it? The need, the physical manifestation of death. This had nothing to do with the want behind the desire.

But Spike still had his mouth on him, on the other ear now. And all that blood that was rushing to Xander's cock right now, that was for Angel, right? Not at all for Spike. Certainly not because of what Spike was doing with his tongue on his neck, right near the jaw line and no where near his Spike-scar.

'Cause that can't feel good just because it feels good, right? All those times when Xander went back to the apartment without Angel to be alone with Spike was because he was pulled back. Not because he just wanted Spike to do that thing with his tongue and fingers. Not just that one thing, but all those things. Spike touching him, feeling him, prolonging his orgasm so that he screamed when he finally released.

It was the pull that made him do all that, need all that. Yes. The pull. *Which is why I'm going to get away from Spike right now and go over there to Angel to get this thing taken care of. Then I'm going to leave this crypt, like I should have done with Buffy this morning, and let Angel deal with however he's going to deal with Spike now that he's not chained up. That's a good plan. And I'm going to execute it any minute now. Real soon. Just after Spike is done with the fingers on my nipples and the unzipping of my jeans and oh, Jesus, God, touch me there, right there yes please please like that, "Ugghhhh."*

Okay, brain, focus. This is not about Spike. Xander could feel his Angel-scar burning and the itch was starting to spread throughout his body. It was so confusing. He had felt the itch/burn in both scars at the same time before, but right now his Spike-scar wasn't warm, or itchy, or pulsating or anything. But Spike was still touching him, making him want things, things that Angel never did. Things Xander didn't want Angel to do. He wanted Spike to do them. To do exactly what he was doing now. But he needed Angel. It should be Angel touching him right now.

Xander managed to twist his head around to steal a glance toward the other corner of the crypt. Angel was standing there, one hand gripping the top of the sarcophagus, panting like a dog and looking frantically between Xander and the light that still shone on the floor. The beam of sunshine was thinner now and not quite as bright. Xander figured that if Angel did it quickly enough, he could cross it without getting singed too badly. But perhaps Angel wasn't willing to take that risk, because he didn't seem to be making any attempt to come toward them. Meant that Xander was going to have to go over there.

Sure. No problem. Just got to break away from Spike. That's easily done. Uh, huh. Right. Xander brought his hands up to twist his fingers in Spike's hair as the vampire was nibbling just the right way on one of his nipples. *Okay, I can do*

this... "Angel," he choked out.

Then those wonderful teeth weren't dull any more and Xander felt a sharp fang pierce his skin exactly where he did not want a piercing. "Gah!"

Spike stopped everything he was doing and held on to Xander's upper arms again, pushed him away slightly, and glared at the human in angry game face.

"Told you once before, whelp, I'm not Angel and don't appreciate being called that."

Xander shook his head. "No. Wasn't calling you Angel. I-I..." He knew that this next thing was going to sound kind of rude, but it had to be said. "I need Angel right now, Spike. I'm sorry."

The expressions on Spike's face shifted from anger to hurt to confusion, then landed on clarity and smugness. *Oh, isn't that a pretty combination*, Xander's brain snarked at him.

"I see." Spike ran that beautiful tongue along his teeth, scraping gently on the pointy ones, which caused Xander's achingly hard cock to twitch. *Damnit. What the fuck does that mean?*

"Need Angel, do you?" Spike continued. "Well, what if I don't want to give you up? Then what, huh?"

"You think I want this, Spike? You think I'm happy about being pulled across this crypt right now? About stopping you? Think I want that thing over there to touch me? It's all your fault, remember? You did this. All of it."

Xander leaned forward into Spike and brought his mouth close to the vampire's ear to continue in quieter tones. "Could have been just you and me, Spike. Any time we wanted. But, no. You had to go and prove something to your sire. You had to share. That meant giving up a little bit of the power, didn't it? Giving up some of the control." Xander started to piece together what he could about the relationship between the two vampires. "Just like you used to."

Spike pushed Xander back and lunged at his throat. It seemed sudden, but it took

Xander just a moment to realize that Spike was being very careful. The vampire's teeth were dull. Xander hadn't noticed Spike's face change back to human-mode. Also he was pressing those teeth into the Angel-scar, not his own.

The teeth went away and then there was just lips and tongue, sucking Spike's sire's scar. The heat and desire that ran through Xander's body were conflicting with the emotion that was pouring out of his brain. He was trying to accept the fact that he wanted Spike. Really wanted him. And he didn't feel the anger or revulsion or disgust that should have gone along with that. But his body needed Angel, and Spike was manipulating the two into a new and squishy-itchy desire that left him completely unable to move or make any decisions at the moment other than, *okay that feels good, I'll just stay here and let him do that.*

Xander whimpered when Spike pulled away to look him in the eyes. *Ooh, pretty blue eyes.*

"You still don't get it do you? After all this time. I thought you were smarter than that." Spike let go of Xander and stepped back to lean against the wall. His hands made a move to reach into his coat pocket for a smoke, then he quickly crossed his arms over his chest when it clearly dawned on him that the duster was on the ground, and there were no cigarettes in it anyway. Xander recognized this entire move as one that signified Spike was about to go into speechifying-mode.

"You are close, though. On the right track, but you've got the details wrong. Let me spell it out for you, kid, since you insist on being so daft. It's not about me giving the control over to Angel. It's not about sex. It's not about death. It has never been about death. Vampires don't need to kill to feed. We drink blood to feed. The killing? That's about something else entirely. It's about power.

"So this thing," he continued, gesturing to the three of them, "is related to that power, that control. These past few months you've been a good little victim. Following the herd like the sheep that you are. That I'm guessing you've always been. You just gave up. Gave it up. The control. Well, I've got some surprising news for you, whelp. I didn't do this so I could have you around to fuck. Although I'm certainly not complaining about that part. And that's not why I brought Angel into it, either. Now, I'll give you a chance here, boy. Have you figured it out, yet?"

This rapid fire information was hurting Xander's brain. Was he supposed to be figuring out some sort of puzzle? Spike was just standing there staring at him, patiently, fingers twitching slightly. Were these past three months supposed to be some kind of lesson? Is this the test? Should he have been taking notes? Fuck!

Okay, let's go back to the beginning. I'm walking home, tra-la-la. At my door, key in lock then get head smashed and dragged to the side yard of my house. Once there, I get smacked around, toyed with, then there are fangs in my neck and I'm dying. But wait...no. I'm not dying. I thought I was dying, but Spike wasn't killing me at the time. He said that he planned on it, but didn't. So what changed his mind? It's about power. At that moment in the side yard, Spike had the power. But he didn't use it. He didn't take it. He...gave it to me. He shared it. With me.

Holy fuck. All this time, I've felt so helpless, so out of control. Of course! So had Spike. And Angel. Spike didn't give me to Angel. He gave Angel to me! I've been giving up all this control to these two vampires. Just been handing it over like some fool. A sheep. All this fucking time...I could have been sharing it. And even taken it back entirely if I wanted.

Spike must have seen the realization dawn on Xander's face, because the vampire was smiling. "Get it?"

Xander nodded slowly, a smile spreading across his face to match Spike's. He got it. The pull was still there, sure, but he didn't have to play the victim anymore. He could make it about what he wanted. He could take back everything that he had given.

"What do you want, Xander?"

Xander's eyes narrowed. The smile was still there, but he was suddenly feeling very sinister. *Take it back.* He turned his back on Spike. Toward Angel. *Take it back.*

He stalked across the fading light. Angel was still panting. Without hesitation, Xander stepped up to the vampire and punched him. The unexpected blow caused Angel to stagger back and hit the wall. Xander used his own forward momentum to allow himself to fall into Angel.

With his hands pressed into Angel's shoulders, he latched onto the vampire's neck and sucked, pulling the cold blood up to his warm mouth. He ran his dull teeth over the red mark he had made, pushing in slightly, but not breaking the skin. Angel gasped.

"Let's play our game a little different, today." Xander started slowly unbuttoning Angel's shirt. "We're gonna take our time, Deadboy." He looked up into the vampire's eyes. Angel was giving Xander his patented distressed expression. It was way past tiresome.

"We can't stop what's happening," Xander continued. "But it doesn't have to be the tedious task that you've made it. I've learned a few things in these past few months. Things about touching..." the shirt slid off Angel's shoulders, "and feeling. And making it good." His mouth clamped down on an exposed nipple and sucked until the nub was hard under his tongue.

Angel made an attempt to push him away, but Xander grabbed his wrists and pressed them against the wall by his shoulders. He knew Angel could break away without much effort, but he also knew how guilty the vampire had been feeling about these events. It's easy to manipulate a person who's feeling guilty. Xander had first hand experience with that particular trick.

Now, manipulation is a tricky thing. The trick being that one should not manipulate someone into doing something that person doesn't want. When it comes to sex, that would be called rape. And Xander wanted no part of that. But one should instead manipulate said person into figuring out what they do want. This is one of the things he learned from Spike. Because no matter how shamed and guilty he had been feeling, he had also liked what Spike was doing. How it made him feel.

And now that Mini-#6 seemed to have crumpled into nothingness, Xander was really ok with the feeling good about it all. So, if only he could get Angel on board, then this whole experience could turn out to be more positive than negative. Well, as long as he didn't think too far into the future.

By this time, Xander's hands had moved down to Angel's jeans, had them unzipped and were working them slowly off the vampire's hips. Angel had a look of astonishment in his eyes that was met by Xander's determination.

Angel wasn't moving; perhaps still trying to figure out exactly what was happening. He finally broke out of his stupor when Xander pushed down Angel's plain black boxer briefs and wrapped his warm fingers around the already hard cock he found there.

The vampire put his hands on Xander's shoulders and made another minor attempt to push him away. "Wait, no. This isn't supposed to happen like this."

Xander shrugged the hands off. "Remember that first time, when I told you to give in to what your body wanted?"

Angel nodded hesitantly.

"Well, this time I'm telling you to just let it happen. Do what feels good, not just what is necessary."

"But...Buffy-"

"This isn't about her. This is about us making the best of a fucked-up situation." Xander leaned in and ran his tongue along Angel's ear, while at the same time running his thumb under the foreskin of his dick, caressing the sensitive skin underneath. "Feels good, right?"

"This is not smart, Xander," Angel whispered while finally wrapping his arms around Xander's waist and pulling him in closer.

"Mm-hm. Nobody ever accused me of being smart. Let's prove them right." Xander moved one of Angel's hands between them and pushed it down into his own boxers, the jeans still unzipped and open thanks to Spike a few minutes ago, and closed the fingers around his cock. "Just touch me and stop thinking. You think too much, anyway."

For a few minutes, the two simply stood there and stroked each other. Xander took the time to get to know what Angel liked by trying different movements and touches. He also did his best to concentrate on Angel's hand on him. The previous times were so quick and rough he never had the time to just feel it.

He was discovering that he liked the different feel of Angel's hand. It was bigger than Spike's and the movement was still faster and rougher, but the new kind of friction was a welcome change now that he was paying attention to it.

Very soon, though, Xander needed more. He wished that he understood why he needed the actual act of penetration from Angel and not from Spike, but now wasn't the time to stop and reflect. He had suppressed that particular question for months now, so one more day wouldn't hurt anyone.

Angel felt it at the same time, of course, and made a move to bend Xander over onto the sarcophagus. Instead of willingly being maneuvered, however, Xander extracted himself from Angel's hands and climbed on top of the concrete tomb, removing the rest of his clothing as he did so. The vampire looked confused.

"Strip," Xander demanded, pointing at the jeans and underwear that were resting around the vampire's hips.

Angel stilled for just a moment. His eyes scanning Xander's naked body. Since Angel was watching, Xander took his own cock in his hand and began pulling roughly, mimicking Angel's standard moves.

"Want this? Want me?" Xander taunted. "Strip. Get up here. And take me."

The next move was so quick, Xander really didn't see it. Suddenly he was aware of his legs on Angel's shoulders and a cool gooey finger being pressed into his ass. Xander knew the gooeyness was a result of the lube that Angel carried in his pants pocket all the time. Ever since the incident over the park bench, Angel made sure he was never caught unprepared again. Like a good little vampire Boy Scout.

Angel prepared Xander with the two scissoring fingers as always, but this time he took a moment to find the prostate and send Xander's brain into little sparkles of heaven. Soon Angel removed his fingers, and Xander let go of himself so he could pull Angel down to his chest as the vampire entered him.

Xander could tell that Angel was making a point of controlling the inward thrust. It was slow, but not achingly so. When he was completely sheathed inside him,

Xander pressed his cheek into Angel's and whispered.

"Don't move for a second. Feel it. Feel how warm I am. Feel how my muscles can contract around you...like that." Angel made a grunting noise as Xander squeezed him. "Feel how you fit into me and how my body molds to you. Like it? Like it, Angel?"

"Yes," Angel whispered back immediately. "But gotta move, now. Can I move now, please?"

Xander smiled against Angel's ear. "Well, since you asked so politely. Move."

Angel didn't need to be told twice. His thrusts were wicked fast, like before, but seemed to be less frantic this time. He made a point of brushing Xander's fun-spot with every push in, sending Xander to happy-land and keeping him there for an indeterminate amount of time.

Xander had no clue how long they lasted. It seemed forever, and he was enjoying every minute of it. He liked the coolness of Angel and how he could feel the vampire's skin warming up with the friction. At one point, Xander wrapped his fingers in Angel's hair and forced the vampire to look him in the face.

And at that moment, he finally saw something other than deadness in Angel's eyes. It wasn't life, but it was perhaps the promise of life. Not quite happiness, but something less than anger. Contentment was the word he would use, if someone had pressed him to describe it.

They were still looking at each other when they felt their climaxes coming. Xander watched as Angel's features shifted to vampire and was fascinated that he could still see the contentment in the gold eyes that he had seen in the brown.

Angel moved his head to rest his mouth near Xander's left collarbone, over the Angel-scar. It was the first time the vampire had touched him from this angle since the mark was first made. He sucked slightly, then scraped fangs over the mark. He quickened the movement of his hips and the thrusting became pounding.

Xander heard his own mouth start babbling; something he had never done with

Angel before. "Oh, fuck, yeah. Oh god, so good, fuck me, yeah Angel more hard harder fuck me fuck bite me..."

The teeth sunk in and Xander's world went white while he came. He felt every ounce of warmth being sucked from his body while at the same time he could feel every drop of cold semen being pumped into him. His brain stopped functioning entirely, for a lot longer than it usually did when an orgasm overtook him.

He was warm and sticky and happy and when neurons started firing in his brain again, he felt something that he never had after sex with Angel. He felt that he was still completely in control.

Of course, that feeling only lasted for a second. Until he heard Spike say, from his forgotten position on the other side of the crypt, "Hello, Slayer."

12

Something New

If this were the movies, there would have probably been a moment here where the world stopped, and everyone had a minute to absorb the situation and decide what they were going to do and say. But this wasn't the movies. Everything happened immediately and all at once.

Spike started laughing. Angel and Xander scrambled off the sarcophagus and struggled into their clothes.

Angel was saying things like "Wait, wait, I can explain, it's not what you think," while Buffy was screaming, "What-what are you doing? Angel? Xander? What the hell? What...?" She was holding up her stake, like thrusting a sharp pointy object into the air was going to kill the visual of what she just saw and heard. How much did she see? How much did she hear?

Xander found absolutely no words. Could he explain? Was it not what she thought it was? The reasons behind it all weren't what she thought, surely. But what did she think?

He couldn't even begin to comprehend what might be going through her mind. She just saw one of her best friends and her boyfriend having sex. There was so much badness here. Maybe they should have told her from the beginning what was happening. But that was a conversation that he couldn't conceive of having. Now he was going to be forced to have it.

Or Angel was going to be forced to have it. Considering that while Xander was still struggling to lace up his shoes, both Buffy and Angel had disappeared outside. When had the sun set?

Sure enough, it was dark out. The sky was still a pinkish color, but the sun was definitely down. For a moment, Xander considered running after them. He had to tell Buffy his side of the story. Then two things occurred to him. One, should this be a private time between Buffy and her boyfriend? It couldn't be a good thing to have both of them attacking her with explanations.

And two, what about Spike? The vampire was currently getting his laughter under control and brushing the dust of the crypt off his leather coat.

"How do you get yourself into these things, Xander?" he mused while putting on his duster and looking not at all like last night he had gotten into an hour long fight with the Slayer who just murdered his girlfriend. How does he do that? Even still covered in bruises and cuts, he can look like he lives in his own little bubble and nothing in the world can touch him.

"You know what, Spike?" Xander pushed the Buffy-thing away from his brain and grimaced as he used his Spike-blood stained shirt to clean his own spunk off his stomach, then put on said t-shirt. "I've never been one to multi-task effectively. I can really only deal with one badness at a time. So I'm just going to put aside the fact that Buffy just walked in on Angel fucking me. I'll let the boyfriend deal with that for now. I've got another concern that is demanding my attention."

"Oh, yeah? What's that, then?"

"You."

"Aahhh. I'm touched. Concerned about little ol' me, are ya? Let me ease some of that burden. I'm fine. Now, if you'll excuse me, I've got a bit of catching up to do." Spike gently shoved Xander away from the door. Xander let him, knowing that fighting it would do no good.

Even though Xander left the crypt just moments after Spike, the vampire was already almost out of sight. Xander took off at a sprint, doing his best to keep up as Spike made his way through the recently dark streets. At one point, Xander lost him all together. However, when he rounded a blind corner, coming out of an alleyway, he was stopped abruptly by the leather brick wall that is Spike.

The vampire was standing in the parking lot of a brightly lit convenience store. Xander regained his composure quickly and stepped up next to Spike, mimicking the vampire's stance of ramrod straight back and thumbs hooked in belt loops. In the harsh light of the overhead street lamps, and despite the bruise-blotched face and shirtlessness under the leather coat, Spike looked extremely menacing. And not the least bit sexy. Nope.

"Uh, Spike...what are we doing here?"

"Have no bloody idea what you're doin' here, mate. I'm here to satisfy a craving that's been burning for, oh, about three months now."

Xander observed the hustle and bustle of the busy store. Four cars in the parking lot. Almost a dozen people in and around the store itself, including one behind the counter and a couple kids loitering around the outdoor phone booth. "Um...what exactly is the plan here, Spike?"

"Plan?"

"I mean, this isn't really your scene, is it? Unless you plan to, hee-hee, kill *all* these people. Oh, god! You're not planning on killing *everyone*, are you? 'Cause, I gotta say, that would be very very bad. And I'd have to, you know...stop you." Xander's voice wavered a little on that last part. So far, stopping Spike had not been his

strong point.

Spike chuckled and turned toward Xander. With a smirk on his face, he patted the human on the shoulder. "Let's see how that works out for you." He then sauntered slowly toward the front door.

Xander held back a moment, running through his options in his head. *Go get Buffy? Bad idea. She's dealing with the thing that I'm not dealing with right now. Option 2...fuck, I don't have time for this.*

"Strange things are afoot at the Circle-K," Xander mumbled under his breath before following Spike toward the store.

He stepped up next to the vampire again, just inside the door. Spike was looking around, eyeing everyone. His gaze finally settled on the young man behind the counter. The clerk was ringing up the purchases of a woman in her late twenties. A four year old girl was attached to her leg, staring up at Spike. The vampire's head slowly lowered 'til he was looking at the girl.

Xander reached up and wrapped his fingers around Spike's upper arm. He held on as tight as he could and whispered softly, knowing the vampire could hear, "Please, Spike. Not the little girl."

Spike's head whipped around to face Xander. His eyes were gold, the other features were still in human-mode, but the sneer was pure vampire. "Remind me to tell you a sweet little story about a girl in a coal bin, someday."

The vampire twisted out of Xander's ineffectual grip and launched himself from the door to over the counter in less than a moment.

"Hey!" the clerk shouted as he was shoved to the floor. Without slipping into game face, Spike let out a loud growl at the boy, then directed it toward the woman and several other people standing around the front of the store. Then he turned to Xander, morphed his gold eyes back to blue, let his sneer turn into a smirk, and winked.

But it wasn't until Spike reached up to the shelf above the cashier's counter that

Xander figured out what was going on. Stuffing two packets of cigarettes into his duster pocket, Spike turned around and grabbed a small bottle of JD. He twisted the cap off and took two deep swallows before pocketing that as well. He then jumped back over the counter and out the door again, leaving Xander looking and feeling befuddled.

After a moment, the clerk ungracefully got to his feet and pointed at Xander, “You!”

“Me?”

“Yeah. Either you pay for what your friend took, or I’m calling the police.”

The woman had quickly gathered up her child and was already getting into her car. Everyone else was staring at him. There were three young kids hanging around the beer cooler pocketing cans of Pabst Blue Ribbon while the clerk’s attention was focused elsewhere.

“Oh, he’s not my friend.” *Yeah, that’s the part to focus on right now, genius.*

“Bullshit.” The clerk picked up the phone.

“Okay, geez, here.” Xander withdrew his last twenty from his wallet, placed it on the counter and picked up two Snickers candy bars from a nearby display case. He walked out, ignoring the clerk’s screams of “hey, this isn’t enough” and stood in the middle of the parking lot, looking for Spike.

He managed to scarf down the first candy bar in moments, his stomach reminding him that he hadn’t eaten in almost twenty-four hours. While working on the second one, Xander saw a whisp of smoke coming from the alleyway they had emerged from a few minutes before.

The second Snickery-goodness resting comfortably in his tummy, Xander sauntered into the alley and found Spike leaning against a wall, taking a final deep drag on a cigarette. His eyes were rolled up in his head and he looked in absolute heaven. Was it possible for a vampire to look like he was in heaven? That didn’t seem right.

Spike flicked the butt away and after a moment his eyes focused on Xander.

“Thanks for not killing anyone back there.”

“Hmff.” He pushed himself off the wall and dug another cigarette out of his pocket, lighting it with the silver Zippo that Angel had let him keep.

Xander trotted after him. “You owe me twenty bucks.”

“Yeah, I’ll get right on that, mate.”

The two walked through several alleys. Spike strolled at a pace that let Xander stay with him, but they walked in silence.

Finally, ten minutes, several cigarettes, and many swigs of whiskey later, Xander asked, “Are we going somewhere specific? Or this just some random scenic tour of the most Hellmouthy parts of the Hellmouth?”

“Just looking for something.”

“And that would be what?”

Spike came to an abrupt stop as they rounded a corner into yet another non-descript alley. “That.”

A man and woman. Alone. In an alley on the Hellmouth. God, people were stupid.

Xander turned toward Spike. “Don’t suppose there’s any way I can talk you out of this?” Spike didn’t respond. He looked hungry and a little bit feral. The last time Xander saw that look on the vampire’s face was when Xander himself was almost his midnight snack.

He looked back at the couple macking in the alley. Then he looked closer. This wasn’t a young couple of kids just looking for some place private to get their groove on. There was something wrong. The noises coming from the girl were muffled. The guy had a hand over her mouth and she was struggling. Suddenly she was on the ground and he was on top of her. Long red hair, wet with alley-grime,

was tangled around her face. Her blouse was ripped and her skirt was shoved up around her waist. Her hands were pinned over her head, which then turned. And her panicked eyes locked onto Xander.

Xander's brain went into overload. Without taking his eyes off the girl, he spoke to Spike. "You gonna kill them both? You don't have to kill. Told me so yourself."

"Never left a witness before. Not planning on breaking from tradition now."

"But you don't need them both, do you? I mean, you can get a full meal from just one, right?"

"Hardly the point." Spike stepped forward and Xander grabbed his arm. Spike's head whipped back in full game face and he growled. "You can't save them, boy. Don't even try."

"I'm just trying to be rational about this. Listen to me for just a second. Please." He stole a glance back at the girl and saw her stop moving, saw something scary in her eyes. Spike wasn't saying anything, but he also wasn't making a move toward the couple anymore, either, so Xander kept talking.

"Okay. It's been a while since you've done this. Probably since me, right? You don't want a quick kill. I know you. You want to have fun. That girl there. She's not going to put up any kind of a fight. Look at her, she's stopped struggling against that guy. Her fight's gone. Concentrate on him. That guy will fight back. Give you a chance to play with your food first. I know how much you like to play with your food."

Spike looked back at the two. The girl's eyes were completely glazed over, seeing nothing. The guy was moving on top of her, making grunting noises. Xander's stomach turned, the candy bars threatening to come up.

Spike turned back and twisted his arm out of Xander's grip. "I'm not a moron, boy. I know what you're trying to do."

"I'm right, though, aren't I?"

The vampire grinned and tilted his head a little. He let his evil face fall away. “Girl’s too skinny, anyway.”

Then in an instant, Spike was across the alley and was ripping the rapist off the girl. Xander ran up to her. She still wasn’t moving. Her lip was cut and her left eye and cheekbone were red and swollen. She was conscious, though, and Xander shook her lightly to get her to focus.

“Hey. Hey, you’re gonna be okay. Snap out of it. You have to leave before Spike changes his mind.” The girl blinked. “Good, good. Stay with me. Listen, the Bronze is right around the corner. Find your friends. Go to the hospital. Tell the police about the guy. You fought him. You were really brave and strong. You fought hard. You got away. You’re very brave. You got away. Do you understand?”

The girl stared. Then looked at Spike and her attacker. The guy was trying to wail on Spike. Spike was darting every swing and kick, laughing, playing. The girl turned back to Xander. She nodded.

“Good. Can you walk?” He helped her to her feet and took the first few steps with her, helping her adjust her blouse and skirt. She gazed into Xander’s eyes one more time, and Xander saw something broken in them. His stomach churned again. “I’m sorry. I should have been quicker.”

The girl gave him a very quick weak smile, the lack-of-expression not changing in her eyes, then continued the walk around the corner on her own. He followed her to the end of the alley and watched as she entered the Bronze through the back door, then he went back to where Spike was still mock-sparring with the guy.

Xander watched for a minute, then his thoughts drifted back to the girl. He pictured her falling into the arms of a girlfriend in the club. The friend going into wiggins-mode, then super-hero-mode as she collects their other friends and they drive the girl to the hospital. He pictured the nurses and doctors treating her with kid-gloves, tending to her wounds, and discreetly producing a rape-kit as they close the curtain around the examining table. The cops show up and she tells her story. Tells about how she fought back, and how she gave up for a moment, then how something snapped in her brain and she was able to get him off of her and get away. She describes the guy as slightly older than her, but super sweet as he picked her up at

the bar. They had macked on the dance floor, then in the darkness off the bathroom hallway. He had then coerced her into the alley, and that was when he really changed and got violent.

Xander pictured the girl doing all of this with that same vacant broken look in her eyes. And he remembered that he was looking into her eyes when she had broken. He had seen the light leave her eyes. Her life. And Xander was suddenly tired of Spike toying with guy. It was time for this guy to end.

Xander stepped forward. Spike pulled a punch that was about to connect with the guy's face when he saw Xander come up behind him. Spike took a step back and Xander sucker-punched the guy in the back. The guy stumbled forward a bit, then spun around and Xander hit him as hard as he could in the face before he could register what was going on.

“Two of you, now? Bring it on.” The guy stood in a ridiculously clichéd fighting stance between Xander and Spike that reminded Xander of Angel. It made him giggle.

Then Spike let loose. And it wasn't a simple fight in an alleyway, anymore. It was a human being beaten by a vampire. It didn't take long before the guy was on his knees, too weak to stand. Too weak to lift his head.

Spike looked from the guy to Xander, and Xander nodded, ready to play his part.

Xander moved behind the pathetic shape of a man and lifted him up by his shoulders. He backed them both up to lean against a couple of tall crates. He wrapped one arm around the guy's waist to hold him up and held onto the guy's wrists behind his back, twisting his arms up so that his hands were between his shoulder blades.

Spike took a couple steps forward, 'till he stood about a foot in front them, then morphed into game-face. “Wake him up,” the vampire said softly.

Xander hadn't realized the guy had passed out, but he shook him hard, twice, and finally the guy lifted his head and went completely rigid as he found himself staring into the vampire face in front him. He started to struggle, but Xander found new

strength that he hadn't known he possessed and tightened his grip. The guy winced. Spike showed his teeth.

Xander leaned forward and started whispering into the guy's ear. "Like hurting girls, do you? Like playing the sweet suave guy and getting them to trust you? Like to make them weak? Helpless? Like to be the big man? To be in control? Got news for you. What you were doing to that girl...that had nothing to do with control. That was about you trying to prove something to yourself. Trying to be important. And, guess what? You failed miserably. Cause, you know what? That girl is going to be fine. She'll heal, and she'll forget all about you." A part of Xander's brain was screaming at him for lying. But mostly he didn't care. "You were just a blip in her life. You are insignificant. You are pointless."

Spike closed the distant, and sandwiched the guy between them. Xander slipped his hand off the waist and moved the guy's head to the right, exposing his neck. He grinned at Spike before speaking again. "You're lunch."

The vampire lurched forward, and Xander watched the fangs slide into the guy's neck. He saw the enamel disappear into flesh and immediately got hard.

Is that what it looks like when Spike enters me? He was barely aware when the guy stopped screaming. Xander's entire focus was on the lips that were pressed against skin. He was transfixed by the slight movement of Spike's upper lip as he sucked. A trickle of blood leaked out from the seal of lip and skin and flowed slowly down the back of the guy's neck, pooling a little at the collar of his shirt.

Xander tilted his head to an uncomfortable odd angle. He leaned forward and put his face into the small space between the vampire's face and the guy's shoulder. Xander's tongue involuntarily darted out, and he found himself licking the area where Spike's mouth met his food's flesh.

Spike's lip was warm and the blood dripping from beneath it was bitter and coppery. Spike groaned. Xander groaned.

Then before Xander knew what happened, the guy was no longer between them. Spike had Xander's upper arms held tight in his fists and the vampire was panting. This time it was Xander who closed the gap between them and brought his mouth to

Spike's.

The kiss started hard and stayed that way. Xander plunged his tongue into Spike, gathering the blood that remained there. Tasting tobacco and whiskey mixed with the copper. Spike returned the kiss in force, pulling their bodies even closer. Xander ran his tongue lightly along one of Spike's fangs and felt it melt away, back to a normal tooth.

It was forever before they pulled away.

Spike's eyes glistened blue. The vampire ran a finger down Xander's cheek and across his lips. "Beautiful boy," he whispered.

Xander grinned. A part of his brain was knocking in his skull, trying to come forward. Xander recognized it as Mini-Xander #6, and made a, probably inadvisable, conscious choice to not let it resurrect itself, giving it a second death. Who gave a fuck about consequences, guilt and shame, when he had a vampire with bright blue eyes staring at him with such desire, such affection. He felt good. That was really all that mattered, right?

Suddenly, the scar on the right side of Xander's neck started to itch. And Spike's look changed. They were back to a more familiar feeling.

But Xander refused to push aside the part he had just played in the rapist's death. He glanced down at the lump of a body at their feet. For a moment, he expected to feel the bile rise into his throat again, but it wasn't there. Xander felt absolutely nothing for the object on the ground. It was just leftovers.

He looked back at Spike, placed a hand on the back of his head, and brought the vampire's human mouth to rest on his burning scar. Spike suckled there for a moment, before thrusting his hips into Xander.

They kissed again. A heat came through in that kiss that whispered of promises and changes ahead. Xander held on. Not wanting it to end, yet wanting something more, something new.

But whatever it was that was about to happen, Xander knew he didn't want it to

happen in an alleyway. Next to the body of the rapist they had killed.

Xander broke away. “Not here,” he pleaded with the vampire.

Spike looked confused for a moment, then he nodded. He took Xander’s hand and guided him home. To Spike’s home.

13 Coming Home

As it turned out, they were only four blocks from an abandoned factory. Xander knew instantly that it had, until recently, been filled with Spike’s minions. The place had the stench of death. It was eerily quiet and, Xander wasn’t positive, but he thought that there were a few dead bodies piled into clumps in a couple of the darker corners.

Spike still held his hand. They walked through a couple large rooms, one with a long rectangular table surrounded by many tall-backed chairs. It was an oddly formal addition to the dust and dankness that made up the factory. Xander wondered briefly what they had made here when it was functioning, but abruptly ended that train of thought when it landed on creepy looking dolls whose presence on the Hellmouth made them come alive and eat their owners. He really had to stop with the late night horror movies whose writers probably didn’t have much of an imagination, but probably lived on their own Hellmouth somewhere and were just documenting facts.

Then they rounded a corner and Xander was being pulled down a flight of stairs. *Oh, goody. I’m being taken into the dark basement of an abandoned factory by an evil vampire. Willingly. When did this become my life? ... Oh, yeah.*

The room was pitch black. Spike was standing in front of him, one hand on Xander’s arm, fingers of the other hand rubbing the burning scar on his neck. Xander heard Spike take a deep breath, then let it out like a sigh. It was quite uncharacteristic of him.

“You alright?” Xander stepped up closer to him and wrapped his arms around the vampire’s waist.

“It’s still thick with her scent,” Spike said softly. “Hard to believe she’s only been gone one day.”

Xander backed away from him quickly. “We can go someplace else. If you...we don’t have to be here.”

Spike turned around and walked to another part of the room. Xander lost track of him in the darkness. Then there was the flick of metal, the brief scent of acid, and a soft glow illuminated one side of the room as Spike lit a candle.

The vampire stood in front of a chest of drawers. The top of the dresser was littered with dolls, and Xander was creeped out that his thought earlier of the use of this factory might actually be true.

But walking up next to Spike and seeing the look on his face, Xander realized that the dolls had belonged to Drusilla. They were all dressed in long frilly dresses and some had black strips of fabric over their eyes or mouths. They seemed just the playthings for a crazy homicidal vampiress.

Xander placed a hand on Spike’s shoulder. “Really, we can someplace else.” He sounded sincere, he was sure, but his scar was screaming at him for release and his arms were starting to itch just a tad. He rarely had to wait when he was pulled toward Spike. They were usually in the same room when it happened, or he was able to get home within ten minutes of the initial itch.

Spike turned and sat on the end of the bed. Big, four-poster monstrosity of a bed. Xander took the lighter out of Spike’s hand and lit a couple more candles around the room, exposing more dust and cobwebs. The room was draped in pieces of red and black cloth. The manacles wrapped in black velvet that were attached to the wall at the head of the bed completed the gothy-vampire look. It was creepy and clichéd. It fit what he had heard about Drusilla perfectly. Xander sat down next to Spike and held his hand.

With glazed eyes the vampire spoke to the room, “I wonder how much she knew. Did she know she was going to die? Did she know that we would never see each other again?” Spike laid back, then scooted up the bed, so his head was on a pillow. Xander followed suit.

Spike turned his head toward Xander and smiled. An honest genuine smile that Xander had never seen before.

“The last time we shagged, right here in this bed, I was thinking of you.”

“Me?”

“Of course.” Spike sat up and tugged off his duster, tossing it across the room to land on a chair. He leaned down over him and Xander reached up and ran his hand over Spike’s cool chest, still shirtless after all this time. Xander barely remembered what Spike looked like with a shirt on.

“I’m sorry that you weren’t concentrating on her, it being your last time and all.”

Spike shrugged. “I think she did know. That it was our last time. She spoke of you afterwards. Not by name, of course. It was all metaphors and riddles. But she knew.”

The vampire leaned down and captured Xander’s mouth in a hungry kiss. When they broke away, Spike pulled Xander’s dirty come-and-Spike-blood-stained t-shirt off of him. Xander wondered briefly why he had put that shirt back on in the crypt.

Spike’s look of revulsion matched Xander’s feeling of disgust. Not over what they were doing, or about to do, but over Xander’s sticky smelling body. All of the craziness of the last couple of hours had helped Xander forget that he was still covered in the aftermath of his encounter with Angel.

“Ick,” he mumbled.

“Agreed.” Spike nodded toward a darkened doorway on the other side of the room. “There’s a shower through there.” Xander clamored off the bed and snagged a candle. He heard Spike call from behind him, “Make it quick.”

And it was. Remarkably quick for a young man who’s recent showers had been long and meticulous. And although speedy, by the time he emerged, the pull toward Spike was terrible-strong, this being the longest they had ever had to go before

being sated. All of twenty minutes.

Setting the candle back onto the bedside table, Xander was greeted with a full view of Spike in a naked glory that he had never seen before. Xander had never taken the time to actually look at the vampire. To really see him. And he was beautiful.

Miles of pale skin, not broken by tan lines or clothing. Long thin legs and arms with soft light-brownish hairs, muscles hard and defined. Hard six-pack abs that Xander had spent many hours simply running his hand over, marveling at the definition and wishing he could make his stomach look feel like that. Spike's neck was the perfect curve, that led up to the hard lines of his face and eyes. Everything about this man/monster was angled and hard. Except his touch.

The vampire lay so still, blue eyes transfixed on Xander. The only movement came from his right arm, that pulled hard and fast on his cock. It was the speed at which Spike was moving that really caught Xander's attention. In the past, he had been so slow and precise in his sexual acts concerning Xander. But this...it was frantic.

"I like that," Xander heard Spike whisper. "Keep looking at me like that."

Xander tried to stay put and look like Spike wanted, but he didn't last very long. Just moments later, he pounced on the vampire, and they fell into routine.

Their familiar routine of knowing how to touch, how to move, how to lick and taste to make it feel good. But this time there was speed and kisses. Mouth kisses. Some light, some hard. Lips and tongues touched and it was perfect.

Xander got lost in the feeling of Spike's cool skin under his hot fingers. He moved with a precision that he knew the vampire would appreciate. And if the noises were any indication, it was working. If he listened carefully, he could hear the beginnings of words among the grunts and moans. Things like *Xan* and *yes* and *please* and *there*, but Spike seemed to be biting his lip to keep the words from actually coming out.

They melted in each other's scents and tastes. They were panting with desire, and Xander experienced a kind of comfort that he hadn't let himself feel before. The ease of being in the arms of a lover. Xander felt a warmth from Spike that couldn't

possibly have existed. He felt his own heat returned and saw not one speck of evil in the blue eyes that met his. It scared him and comforted him. It gave him permission to give in and treat it like forever. At least for forever, for now.

In a quick subtle move, Spike produced a tube of slick from a drawer in the side table. With Xander still on top, Spike slid a finger into him, pushing a groan from Xander, that he felt sure filled the factory. The second finger entered and Xander felt little pieces of his brain exploding as Spike stroked his prostate. By the time the third finger made itself known, Xander was pleading with Spike.

“More, more, I need more, Spike. Please, please. Need you inside me, all of you.” Xander gasped when the fingers suddenly weren’t there, but almost instantly there was another presence. Spike’s cock breached Xander’s entrance, but then the vampire stopped.

Xander opened his eyes, unaware that he had closed them. He saw the passion in Spike’s eyes, but Xander was frustrated at the sudden stillness. Then the vampire managed to speak.

“I need you. Want to be inside you.” He shifted his hips slightly. Xander whimpered. “Make it happen, Xander.”

Xander gasped. Then pushed down hard and took Spike all the way in. They stayed that way for a moment, just staring at each other, feeling the heat and skin and Xander’s blood pumping with such force that he was sure his chest would explode.

When Xander started moving, Spike grabbed Xander’s erection and stroked in the same rhythm. Neither said anything more, but they both knew so much. Knew that it was just the beginning, that only Xander’s death would end this feeling, and Xander was finally okay with that. Happy with it actually.

Soon, Spike’s hips were lifting up to match Xander’s thrusts. All memories of sex with Angel disappeared from his brain and he felt like he was being fucked for the first time. He felt like he was being loved. The moans coming from Spike were the most honest noises that he had ever heard the vampire make. Xander felt lost in Spike. He wanted to tell him. Wanted to speak words of encouragement and devotion and power and sex, but he was so lost in the feeling. He thought he would

have time. He just figured that it wouldn't end. Why should it?

Then he was pulled down and Spike sucked on the burning scar. When the teeth sunk in and they both exploded their release, Xander's brain somehow remained functioning throughout the entire act. He felt it all, felt a part of Spike.

He didn't know how long they stayed that way. To move would be to break the trance. But all too soon, Spike slipped out of Xander and then he felt the teeth retract. Xander continued to lay on top of Spike, feeling empty. By the time he slid off and laid on his back, he was too tired to think anymore and just fell asleep.

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A few hours later...

“What happens now?”

“More of the same, I expect.”

“But you're not coming back to Angel's.”

“Fuck, no. I like it here.” Spike got up, crossed the room and fished a cigarette out of his coat. Instead of lighting it, though, he put it behind his ear and went to the dresser. “Dru's here.”

Xander nodded. “I need to go back. Get cleaned up. It's Monday. I've got school today.” Spike ran his hands over the line of dolls. “Only one more week until Christmas break,” Xander continued like Spike was listening and cared.

Spike picked up one of the dolls and sat down on the end of the bed. “Miss Edith. Bought this for Dru in Italy. Was trying to win her affections back from some git she and Darla were shagging.” Xander scooted down the bed and kneeled behind Spike, wrapping his arms around the vampire's waist. Spike leaned back into the embrace. “Worked, too. She loved this doll. It was her favorite. Would talk to it and listen to it as it whispered half-truths and riddles into her brain.”

“I’m almost sorry that I never got to meet her.”

“Oh, she would have loved you.”

“Yeah?”

“Would have kept you chained up for weeks. Learned your body by biting every inch of it.” Xander tensed a bit. “Oh, don’t worry. She would have made it good. Would have had you begging for her teeth.”

“That’s creepy and gross. Imagine me...craving a bite from a vampire. Just ridiculous.”

Spike laughed. He turned around and pushed Xander back onto the bed, setting the doll down next to them. He pressed a light kiss onto Xander’s lips before turning toward the doll.

“What do you think, Miss Edith? He’s pretty, isn’t he?” The doll just laid there, eyes covered with a thin strip of black cloth, mouth sealed shut. “Yeah. You can’t have him, though. He’s mine. I’ll turn him one day, then you can meet him. I know we’ll like his demon. I almost met it last night.”

Xander pushed Spike away and scrambled off the bed. He found his jeans and struggled into them before turning to look at the vampire.

“We’re not talking about last night. That happened. I know. But I don’t have to think about it. And as for you turning me...”

Spike waited for a moment for Xander to finish, then got up and put Miss Edith back on the dresser. “You’re gonna be late for school. Sun’s coming up.”

Xander made a move toward the stairs, but stopped with his back at the vampire and told him, “I don’t want to die.”

“Everybody dies. You’ll die, Xander. Then it won’t matter anymore.”

Xander continued up the stairs and out of the factory.

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The walk back to Angel's in the post-dawn hours was cleansing. Perhaps a little too cleansing. As he watched the minor hustle and bustle of Sunnydale go about their daily lives, he felt entirely disconnected. There were secrets in this town, and Xander didn't know who was keeping them. Who was living the real life? The soccer moms and teenaged Doublemeat Palace workers and white-shirted business men and street sweepers? Would it have been better to have remained ignorant of the Hellmouth dealings? Was this a world that he could exist in and not be found out?

Was his secret any bigger than the soccer mom who was having an affair with her kid's coach? Than the fast food flunky who never washed his hands? Than the embezzling business man or the drunk city worker?

Who was it that participated in the death of a rapist last night? Certainly not Xander Harris. Not this boy. At the moment, Xander didn't know which he wanted more. To fall back into his role as a seventeen year old boy, or to crawl back in bed with a century old vampire and loose his boyhood to the night, whatever the darkness may hold. Oddly, they both seemed equally appealing.

Angel was asleep by the time Xander got home. Choosing not to wake him to find out how it went with Buffy, Xander simply took a shower, got dressed, gathered his books and left for school. He arrived just as the first bell rang.

Thankfully, his first class was economics, which he did not share with Buffy or Willow. He also managed to avoid them for his second period history class by spending that time in the janitor's closet with Cordelia.

And Cordy was being particularly enthusiastic today. His body was still sizzling from his new encounter with Spike, and this girl's touches were sparking some naughty desires that Xander was more than willing to explore.

Naughty desires. It was fascinating to Xander that he completely separated these feelings that he was having for Cordy from the feelings he had toward Spike. With

the vampire, it was all about just what felt good. He didn't think about it, didn't analyze it, just let it happen. But with Cordy, he felt like a normal boy. Like he was being touched like this for the first time...again. Her touches were so hesitant, so delicate, like she was afraid that she'd break Xander if she went too fast or too hard. In fact, it was very similar to how Spike touched him. Or used to touch him. Touched him at the beginning. The separate feelings for Spike and Cordy were starting to blur. That wasn't good.

But to be touched by an innocent. That was quite different. Cordy touched him like she wasn't sure of herself. Xander adored that part of her. She was a big talker with the boys, but he knew she was a virgin and that actually made him crave her just a little bit more.

Xander also knew that things can never stay innocent forever. Things moved forward. Things changed.

At the moment, she was pressed against him, his lower back digging into a metal shelf. She had one hand on his back, the other between them on his chest, and her kiss was getting deeper and stronger. A moan escaped the back of her throat and Xander's semi-erectness came to full attention, making its presence known against her stomach.

She broke the kiss and pulled back from him slightly, a look in her eyes like he had not seen on her before. But he'd seen it on Spike.

Xander let his hands slip from her head and shoulder down to her lower back and ass. He pulled her hips into him. She gasped. A tiny part of his brain tried to tell him to hold back a bit, to let Cordy stay innocent. Unfortunately it was the part that had died yesterday, so fuck it.

"Cordy." It came out throaty and harsh and she bit her lip. He spun them around and pressed her back into the same metal shelf. He took over the biting of her lower lip, then thrust his tongue into her mouth a few times, showing her what he could do, what he wanted.

She wiggled against him and made noises he didn't recognize. She grabbed the hand that was on her back and pushed it between them, invitingly resting it on her

upper thigh. Her skirt was loose and short and he found his way up to her panties in no time. When his fingers touched the wet material, he finally broke the kiss. Xander watched her face as he made the first stroke along the softness that hid beneath the cloth.

Cordelia was beautiful. A goddess before his face and under his fingers. Her breath was deep and scattered and she wasn't the queen for that moment, but a princess at the mercy of the prince.

But Xander was no prince, he knew that. He wanted her at that moment more than anything. On the tip of his tongue were words that he was sure she didn't want to hear. Words like, *I want to fuck you, I want to feel my cock inside your tight body and make you scream my name when you come.*

He wanted to push her onto the floor and plunge inside of her. Feel her rip and bleed and beg for more as he sunk his teeth into her neck.

Something sharp thumped in his brain and he broke from her completely, propelling himself to the other side of the closet, gasping for breath and feeling Mini-#6 trying to break its way to the surface to berate him for what he was just thinking.

Cordelia stared at him. The look of ecstasy on her face changing immediately to hurt, then anger.

“What are doing, Xander?”

“This...this isn't a good idea, Cordy.” He could see her start to protest. Could see the words almost leave her mouth, but then she blinked and took a deep breath, looking around the tiny room.

Then she was the queen again. In control and in denial. “Yeah, like I'd ever let you touch me in this dirty closet,” she snarked and straightened her skirt. She began looking for her book bag, finding it shoved onto a shelf near the door. “It's not like it would be any good anyway. Like you have any idea how to touch a woman. Don't even know why I bother with you.”

Well, that took care of #6. No guilt or shame here. But how about a little anger?

Yeah, anger was something Xander definitely had plenty of at the moment.

Just as Cordy managed to get the door partially open, Xander slammed his hand onto it and banged it shut, rattling the metal shelves. Then he had her pressed up against the door by the shoulders. Fear flittered across her eyes for a moment, then she was looking at him with complete casualness. A look that, again, reminded Xander of Spike.

“I know more than you can imagine, little girl,” Xander growled at her.

“Oh, yeah? Show me.”

Without thought, Xander plundered her mouth and brought a hand up under her shirt, wrestled a breast out of the confines of its bra cup and squeezed the nipple hard. Cordelia gasped into Xander’s mouth, then he tasted his own bitter blood as she bit his tongue.

He let go of her and backed away, letting her fix her underclothes and blouse. Wiping the blood from his mouth, Xander let go a deep sigh and met her cold eyes.

“I’m sorry, Cordelia.” And he truly was. But he heard the words come out in a different tone than he expected. He wouldn’t beg for her forgiveness. She had challenged him and he had shown her. He was prepared to show her much more. He continued in the same tone of serious determination. “I would never hurt you, please know that.”

Some of the coldness left Cordy’s eyes, but not all. She nodded and made no attempt to leave, perhaps expecting more apologies or explanations.

“Okay, here’s the deal,” Xander racked his brain to find words for what he knew needed to be said. “I like you. God help me, but I do. Don’t really know when that happened. Things are kinda crazy for me at home right now, and I look forward to seeing you at school every day. You bring a sense of normalcy to my life that you’ll probably never understand. But I want more. I want to be able to walk with you down the hall. I want to be able to dance with you at the Bronze. I want to win you a ridiculously cheap stuffed animal at a boardwalk carnival and have you name it Smoochy or some stupid thing like that.”

A grin flashed across Cordy's face before she could suppress it. Xander grinned back, then let it fall to show the next part was important, too.

“And I want to be able to touch you like there's the promise of something more. I want more than a closet romp a few times a week.” He stepped up to her, placed a hand on her cheek and let his voice drop on octave. “I want to show you.” Placing a chaste kiss on her lips, he continued, “Let me?”

Cordy looked into his eyes, letting the glaze in her own show her answer. Xander smiled and they kissed again, soft and passionate. Then he back away again and picked up his own book bag off the floor.

“Can I meet up with you at lunch?”

Cordy nodded, then opened the door and walked out into the hall. Xander followed soon after, and a minute later the bell rang, dismissing second period.

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Xander managed to avoid Buffy and Willow the rest of the day. He skipped the classes they shared and sat with Cordelia at lunch, trying to help her ease him into her circle of Cordettes.

By the end of his last class (fucking chemistry final test that he didn't study for *again!* - he was so going to fail this class), his Angel-scar was starting to burn. However, instead of going home, he was determined to endure it for a little while so he could talk to Giles.

Xander found the librarian in his office as per usual and knocked on the door lightly to get his attention.

“Oh, Xander. Where have you been all day?”

“Around. You talk to Buffy?”

“Yes, yes, I did. She’s quite upset.”

“What does she know? Did Angel explain?”

“I’m afraid she wouldn’t let him. I…” Giles removed his glasses. “I told her myself. I’m sorry, Xander.”

Xander nodded. “It’s okay. You think we should have told her from the beginning?”

“That’s hard to say.” Setting his glasses on the table, he gestured for Xander to sit in the unoccupied chair. Crossing his arms over his chest, Giles continued, “Sex is a tricky thing.”

“And the understatement award goes to…”

“May I ask you something?”

“Not like we have a lot of secrets, Giles.”

“Perhaps that’s true.” An exuberated sigh, then, “Do you consider yourself a virgin?”

Xander allowed himself to be taken back by the question, then leaned back and prepared himself for a very revealing conversation. “No.”

“But you’ve never had sex with a woman?”

Sigh “Right.”

“And it wasn’t your choice to start having sex in this manner.”

“True.”

“Do you consider yourself to be gay?”

That one took a little more thought. “No. I mean, I’m not attracted to other men. And I still like women.”

“But you are attracted to Spike and Angel?”

“I’m attracted to Spike.”

“Not Angel?”

“No.”

“Buffy told me...She interpreted what she saw in the crypt as a...very...intimate encounter.”

“Was I enjoying myself? Yeah, I was. The irony of the situation being that that was the very first time in all these months that Angel and I got that...intense. Just happened to be what Buffy saw.”

“But you don’t consider yourself in a relationship with either of these men. Vampires.”

“Relationship? What’s up with this line of questioning, G-Man?”

“You need to talk to Buffy. You need to let her know that it’s okay to continue her relationship with Angel. That you two are not a couple.”

“I’ve never been a big supporter of the whole Buffy/Angel thing. I’d come across as a hypocrite.”

“Perhaps. But right now she’s convinced that the reason you’re against them is because you want him all to yourself.”

“Ew.”

Giles grinned at that and put his glasses back on. “Indeed. Now...should we talk about this attraction you have for Spike?”

“I’d rather not.”

“Fine. But you know you can still come to me whenever you need.”

“I know. Giles?”

“Yes?”

“Does Willow know?”

“She does. Buffy insisted Willow stay in the room when I told her. You’ll need to talk with her, too, I’m afraid.”

“Joy.”

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After they said their goodbyes, Xander’s scar was screaming at him to get home. However, he felt oddly determined to defy the pull (for no other reason than to practice the control that he felt he should have), and instead of going to Angel’s, he made a detour to his parents’ house.

The house was quiet, even though his dad’s truck was in the driveway. Without his mother there, Xander couldn’t steal from her purse. And he wasn’t about to take from his dad’s wallet, wherever he may be in the house. So Xander found the old hillbilly-esque coffee can that was stashed behind the baked beans and spinach and liberated eighty dollars. Enough to get by for a few weeks, but hopefully not enough to be missed when they checked. Before replacing the can though, he took out forty more, remembering that he was about to start openly dating Cordelia and would have to keep her in the style to which she was accustomed.

Shame then, that it was that last minute decision that got his hand caught in the cookie jar. The basement door banged open just as Xander was replacing the plastic lid, hand still clutched around a fist of twenty dollar bills. He locked eyes with his father and he felt a fear that he had not known since his first encounter with Spike.

Tony Harris approached his son slowly and Xander found himself frozen. But instead of yelling or hitting, Tony simply took the money out of Xander’s hand,

stuffed it back in the can and put the can back into the cabinet. The man then grasped his son's upper arm firmly and dragged him to the boy's bedroom.

He left Xander there for a moment, then came back into the room with a large suitcase, throwing it on the bed.

"I know you don't have much more left here. You take a little more each time you come back. You haven't lived here for a long time, Alexander, and you will not get my support, financial or otherwise. I'm going out to meet the boys for the game and by the time I get back, this room will be empty of everything that reminds me of you. You want to be independent, that's fine by me. But no halfway. I will not be made a fool."

Tony held out his hand. Xander took it without thinking. His father gave it one quick pump, then released.

"Goodbye, son." Xander watched the man walk away. A sadness began to bubble up in him from his gut, but he crushed it before it took hold.

He thought briefly of his mother and what she would think of this new development. Numbly, Xander began to pack. As he gathered the small collection of friend photos that were stuck around the edges of his mirror, he came across one of him when he was about twelve. He was standing between his mother and father, and the three had their arms around each other, grinning madly. It was taken at Yellowstone, site of their first and last camping trip together. He couldn't remember who had taken the picture and, oddly enough, couldn't remember much else about the trip either. Xander left the picture among the other pointless debris scattered around the room, knowing that it was as forgettable as the long gone photos of his dead grandmother.

He was at peace when he left the house.

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By the time he got home (his only home, now), his body was itching all over, and Angel pounced on him the moment the door opened.

“Where the fuck have you been?” the vampire growled as he tore off every stitch of Xander’s clothes, shedding his own pants at the same time.

Xander let himself be manhandled this time. He fully accepted being taken over the back of the couch, but at the same time he let his mind absorb the thoughtfulness and precision that showed in Angel’s touch and strokes. A light kiss was placed on the back of Xander’s neck before Angel’s fangs entered him, and they groaned as they came, feeling truly satisfied for only the second time in all their couplings.

It wasn’t until they were cleaned up and lounging on either end of the couch, each half-dressed, that Angel noticed the suitcase.

“Did you clean out your room? There isn’t enough room for all you to keep all your things here.”

“Guess you’ll have to make room. I live here now.” Angel scrunched his eyebrows. “Dad kicked me out.”

“Why?”

Xander got up, retrieved his suitcase and started pulling out the last of his clothes, comics and knickknacks. “Doesn’t really matter. That part’s over.”

“Wait.” Xander stopped and looked at Angel. “Don’t unpack.”

“You kicking me out, too? Great. Guess Giles is getting a roommate.”

“No. I mean, I’ve been looking around, and I found another place for us. It’s kinda small, but it has three bedrooms so we can be apart more often and not drive each other crazy. I can probably get the paperwork finalized by the end of the week.”

“Oh. Well...that’s good.” Xander sat back down on the couch. “Don’t think we’ll need the three bedrooms, though. Spike’s not going to be staying with us.”

“You know where he is?”

“...Yes.”

“We’ll have to get him back. Find a way to keep him secure.”

“Yeah, I don’t think that’s gonna happen.”

“Can’t let him roam around.”

“He’s not a dog.”

“Yes, he is. Rabid. He’ll kill.”

“True.”

“You telling me that doesn’t bother you?”

“Of course it bothers me. But...it’s Spike.”

“What the hell does that mean?”

“Come on, Angelus. You know better than anyone that you can’t hold a good vampire down.”

“Think you’re clever?”

“I know it for sure.” Xander let the vampire stew in his own brood juice for a minute. “Get the apartment, Angel. I’ll take care of Spike.”

“Think you can handle him?”

“With whipped cream.”

“He’s not your toy, Xander. He will kill you.”

“Yeah. Well...I’m still leaning toward the ‘someday but not now’ theory. Let’s leave it at that.”

Angel got up and headed toward the bedroom to finish getting dressed.

Xander turned around and shouted after the vampire, “Oh, and pops...I’m gonna be needing an allowance. Got me a girl that needs pampering.”

14

Girlfriends and Boyfriends

Xander was exhausted. Funny thing. He thought it would be the sex that would eventually wear him out. Spike. Angel. New touchy-feely places with Cordy. But, in the end, it was the talking that laid him out.

By the time he and Angel got settled into their new apartment on Sunday afternoon, he was crashed out on his own (private!) bed, replaying all the conversations he had had that week.

Talking with Angel was easiest. He still felt no real emotional connection with the vampire, even though their sex had gotten better. It was finally something that he could enjoy and not dread when he started to feel the pull.

There had been an ongoing fight this past week over the fact that Xander refused to tell Angel where Spike was. The vampire’s argument was that it was dangerous for the Sunnydale populous and it was dangerous for Xander. He was having to explain to Angel that he trusted Spike not to kill him, without actually using the words “trust” and “Spike” in the same sentence. The elder vampire was getting increasingly frustrated that Xander couldn’t give him a solid enough reason for keeping Spike’s hideout a secret.

And now that Xander had some time to himself to ponder, he was trying to come up with a plausible reason for himself. And he supposed that he could come up with many different scenarios that might be the reason, but in the end, he figured that he knew. Even if it was a bit of a scary thought.

Friendship. Now, Xander and Spike didn't always get along. They had a habit of bickering over the littlest things. Like what constituted good television and why Xander's graphic novels were clearly better reads than Spike's "classic" novels. But over the past few months, Xander had been coming to the realization that he really enjoyed Spike's company. He was actually a pretty easy-going vamp when he wasn't snarking with Angel.

And in the past week, he found himself getting a little excited when he felt the pull toward Spike. Xander would go to the factory basement and Spike would be waiting for him. Usually naked. Hard as a rock, but not touching himself. Just smoking and watching the stairs. Xander would get naked, too, and then stretch out almost on top of Spike, letting their bodies touch and mold to one another before their hands would begin to roam.

The time on Friday evening had included talking. This was one of the conversations he was playing over in his mind.

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"Spike, can I ask you something?"

"Only if you can do it without stopping what you're doing."

"Do you feel the same way I do?"

"At the moment all I'm feeling is your hand on my dick. If you shift up here closer to me, I can make you feel the same."

"That's not what I-...yeah, sure, okay."

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"What I meant was, do you even like me?"

“We have to have this conversation right now?”

“Yes. It’s the only time I can keep you in one spot for any length of time to actually have a conversation.

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“You going to answer the question?”

“Oh, bleedin’ hell, Xander, can’t we just do this without the talking. Here, put something in your mouth.”

“Stop it, Spike. I just want to know...I guess I really got my answer, didn’t I?”

“Hey! Where you going? You can’t leave. We’re not done.”

“Yeah, well, maybe I don’t want to finish.”

“Doesn’t work that way, mate. You know it. Take your pants off and get back in bed.”

“Or you’ll what? Come after me and get yourself off? Or finally just kill me?”

“Fuck, this is not happening.”

“You know, I’ve got Angel around for emotionless needy sex. But with you it’s different. And I just wanted to know if you feel anything for me at all that’s beyond blow-up-doll status.”

“When did you turn into a sniping little girl?”

“Not being a girl. Just trying to figure out my life.”

“Then get therapy, little boy. I’m not your soddin’ boyfriend. Now, strip so I can fuck you.”

“No.”

“You honestly think you’re getting out of this building without both of us getting off?”

“Well...no. But I’m trying to make a point here.”

“Then make your point while naked.

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“Better, innit?”

“I can’t think when you do that.”

“Thank you for making *my* point.”

“I still want to have this conversation.”

“There is only one thing I want to hear out of your mouth right now.”

“And what’s that?”

“Oh god yes fuck there fuck me Spike fuck me fuckme...”

“Good boy.”

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Later...

“Now what did you want to talk about?”

“Huh?”

“You were making a big fuss before. Don’t you remember?”

“Oh, yeah. That...Do you even like me?”

“Let me think. I like your arse. I like your cock. I like your mouth, when it’s not babbling incessantly. I like your fingers. I like the noises you make. I like your smell when you’re about to come. I like that your blood tastes like...”

“Yeah? What does my blood taste like?”

“D’know.”

“Bullshit. Describe it.”

“You’ve kissed me after I’ve drank from you. You know how you taste.”

“I know how I taste to me. How do I taste to you?”

“What’s this got to do with anything?”

“Well, I’m not sure, but you brought it up with the whole ‘tasting’ thing, so now I’m curious.

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“Hey! No falling asleep. Start talking, vampire-man.”

Groans “Copper. Metallic. Little salty.”

“Yeah, that’s what I taste, too. Don’t different people taste different?”

“What gives you that idea?”

“You said that you liked the way I tasted. Am I the same as everyone? Or is there

something special about me?”

“You really do need therapy.”

“Probably. I’m having this reoccurring dream where I’m on this train going through a very long tunnel. I’m sitting there smoking a cigar, then this champagne cork pops. Tell me, Dr. Spike, what do think it means?”

“The doctor is definitely out.”

“Tell me how I taste.”

Sigh “Thick.”

“Talking about my blood, here, not my dick.”

“So was I, whelp.”

“Oh.”

“Thick. Tangy. Chocolately. Freedom. Pain. Sorrow...Power.”

“Wow. Really?”

“Yeah.”

“You can taste those things?”

“Yeah.”

“How do other people taste?”

“...Different. Everybody’s different. Only one thing in common among all humans. The fear. Everyone dies afraid.”

“Well, yeah.”

“Not you, though.”

“What?”

“You were never afraid.”

“Yeah, I was.”

“Maybe. But you didn’t taste of it.”

“...Is that...why?”

“Yeah. That’s why.”

“If I ever become afraid, or taste afraid, in the future, is that when you’ll kill me?”

“Moved beyond that now. I’ve got different reasons for killing you.”

“Care to share that info?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“You’re not ready to know.”

“What makes you think you know what’s best for me? You’re not my dad. Not that he knows what’s best for me either, but you get the sentiment.”

“I don’t care what’s best for you.”

“So this thing, then. The sex we have, the feeling good...Damn it, Spike! You make me feel good, and I don’t know what that means. I have a girlfriend, you know. And I really like her. We’ll probably have sex soon, and I’m so looking forward to that. So why do I like being with you so much? It can’t just be this pull thing, cause I don’t feel this way about Angel.”

Shrug

“I just don’t understand. You’ve become this part of my life. You’re inside me all time, and I like you there. You’re comfortable. I can feel you, like you’re with me and watching me as I live my life. I can’t shake you.

“And I’m not a fool. I know that you go out at night. I know you feed and kill. And it bothers me on a moral level, really it does, but I somehow can’t bring myself to make an attempt to stop you. Don’t look at me like that. I know I wouldn’t be able to stop you, but Angel and Buffy could. They could find some way to restrain you, I know they could. And yet, I haven’t told them where to find you. Why do you suppose that is?”

“No idea, luv. But it’s appreciated.”

“Maybe I’m not doing it for you.”

“No?”

“I don’t know. I like coming here to you in this basement. Where Drusilla’s scent still lingers. Where I don’t have to think about Angel coming in. Just you and me.

``*`*`*`*`*`*`*`*`

“Should have always been just you and me, Spike.”

“Then why the girlfriend? You really need a third sex-partner?”

“...Don’t know. Maybe just the fact that she’s a girl. With girl parts. I like girl parts. And I really do like her. It’s different. I chose her. Haven’t been forced into anything. I like the...control.”

“Yeah. That doesn’t surprise me.”

``*`*`*`*`*`*`*`*`

“Listen, mate, this has been enlightening and everything, but I’ve gotta go out. You should take a shower and go home.”

“Yeah. We start moving into the new place tomorrow afternoon, and I’ve gotta get up early for Christmas shopping. Start spending the old vamp’s money.”

“What are you getting me, pet?”

“Gee, I don’t know. What do you get a vampire who has everything?”

“An unlimited supply of virginal blood wrapped in pretty little girl packages?”

“I’ll think of something.”

“Hey, Xander...”

“Yeah?”

“I like you.”

``*`*`*`*`*`*`*`*`

Now, Xander was stretched out on the bed in his own room, feeling pretty good about things. Well, mostly pretty good. He had talked to Buffy and Willow this week, too, and those talks were harder, but things were getting better.

It had started at Willow’s house. Wills and Xander were sitting cross-legged on her bed, facing each other and playing a pointless game of double solitaire. They hadn’t spoken much the past couple days at school. Just superficial stuff about classes and holiday plans. Two more days until the break and they knew they needed to get things out in the open. Hence the invite from Willow for card games and conversation.

After much silence, Willow finally began.

“So...what do you want to start with? The vampire-thing or the Cordelia-thing?”

“Um...you choose.”

“Okay...Cordelia?!”

“Ow! What’s with the hitting?”

“I’ve seen you around school. Since when did you start pawing the evil undead? And I’m not talking about the vampire-thing, yet.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you about it before.”

“How long has this been going on?”

“Um...about a month or so. We were keeping it a secret. Nobody knew. It took awhile to admit it to ourselves, even.”

“So, what changed? And I’m still stuck on the whole ‘why?’ factor.”

“When it started, it was just kind of...hormonal. Don’t give me ick-face. I’m seventeen. I’ve got hormones. And then the things that used to annoy me about her, became things that I liked about her.”

“Vapid shrews get you off?”

“Well, yeah. That speak-her-mindness that she does...very hot. I never have to worry about what she’s thinking. She doesn’t have any secrets. She wants something, she tells me. It’s almost a brainless relationship. I need brainless at the moment.”

“Well, I still don’t get it, and I don’t like it.”

“I’m not asking your permission, Wills.”

“You know, we used to not have any secrets from one other. We used to be best friends. What happened?”

“Come on, Wills, we’re still best friends. This stuff that’s happening with me...well most of it is stuff that I’m not fully prepared to deal with right now. If I talk with you about it...then it becomes real.”

“But, Xander, we don’t live in some fantasy-bubblegum-rainbow-land where everything is always as it should be. We live on a Hellmouth. It’s scary and creepy and sometimes apocalyptic and very very real. We shouldn’t try and get through it alone. I want you to talk to me.”

“You’re amazing, Willow. I wish I had your strength.”

“Strength? I’m terrified.”

“Maybe, but you’ve survived this long. And you’ve been there for me long before we knew about the Hellmouthy stuff. I’m sorry that I’ve been less than honest with you lately. I’m ready to come clean. You’ll keep me grounded?”

“Just call me your kite string.”

“Hug it out?”

“Yes, please.”

Hugs

“Ow! And we’re back to the hitting!”

“Angel?!”

“Giles explained, didn’t he?”

“I want to hear it from you.”

Groan “Okay, here’s the deal. I’m having sex with Angel and Spike. But it’s not like I want to. It’s the bite thing.”

“I get that part. Giles is good with the exposition. What I don’t get is that Buffy said you were enjoying yourself.”

“Okay, Willow. We’re talking about sex. Sex. And we have to go back to the whole teenaged boy hormonal thing. I’m a seventeen year old boy. Having sex. Do you honestly believe that I wouldn’t enjoy it?”

“But isn’t sex...I mean, I’ve always thought that sex was about this emotional connection with someone. You can’t enjoy sex with someone without love.”

“Fantasy-bubblegum-rainbow-land, Will?”

“Are you saying that you’re enjoying the sex with the male vampires because we live on a Hellmouth?”

“No. The sex-thing *started* because we live on a Hellmouth, and Spike is the most evil vampire in existence. I’m enjoying the sex because it’s sex. Feels good. It’s sex.”

“Okay, you have to stop saying ‘sex.’ And what about Buffy? Your having this enjoyable se-...fornication with her boyfriend.”

“Yeah, what about Buffy?” Willow and Xander turned to face the new voice in the room. Buffy stood in the doorway, arms crossed tight against her chest.

“Buffy!” Xander got up off the bed and stood awkwardly, not knowing where to put his hands and finally shoving them in his pockets. “We have to talk, huh?”

“We could do that, sure. But what could you possibly say that is going to make this okay?”

“I have no idea. But, Buff, you’re unhappy and I can’t stand to see my friends unhappy.”

“That why you’ve been all avoidy the last few days?”

“Partly. Also, this is really hard to explain. I wish you had let Angel talk to you.”

“That’s not gonna happen.”

“Buffy, Angel loves you.”

All of Buffy’s strength and resolve dissolved at that and she stumbled all the way into the room and collapsed in a chair. Xander knelt down in front of her and clasped her hands.

“Does he, Xander? Does he love me?”

“He does. Really.”

Buffy’s voice got small and tears began to fall. “I saw you. You and Angel. And...the things you were saying, Xander. The things you were saying to my boyfriend.”

“Yeah. You know that my mouth and my brain have never been very compatible. Sometimes I just talk. Those things that I said...those are just things I say when things...get...intense. I’m so sorry that you walked in on that, Buffy.”

“So am I.”

“But, listen, this really doesn’t effect your relationship with Angel.”

“How can you say that!? How can I ignore the fact that you’re sleeping with Angel? You are still doing it, right?”

“Um, yeah, I am. We are. Don’t look like that, Buffy. I can’t help it. This is something that my body is forced into. Spike did it. He made it happen and it doesn’t end until I die. I can’t stop it!”

“Does it have to be sex? Why can’t he just bite you, like you’ve been telling us all this time.”

“Because a simple bite will kill me. If either one bites me without the distracting sex stuff, then my body gives in to the death. But when sex is involved, I have the

ability to control what my body does. And right now, I'm big on the not-dying thing. So, I'm sorry Buffy, but until Giles finds a cure for this, then me and your boyfriend are going to be fucking."

"Xander!" This came from Willow.

Buffy removed her hands from Xander's. "He's not my boyfriend, anymore."

"Well, that's a shame. Because he's not my boyfriend, either. Angel's feelings for you haven't changed. He's a pretty miserable vampire, but you make him tolerable. Maybe we'll actually see him happy one day. But not without you. He needs you."

"I don't know if I can deal with this."

"Listen, we're moving into a new apartment in a couple of days. Bigger, so we're not on top of each other all the time. Figuratively speaking. Why don't you and Willow come over on...say, Tuesday? A Christmas Eve Eve celebration."

Willow spoke up from her place on the bed. "I don't want to be in the same house as Spike."

"He won't be there. Spike's not staying with us."

This got Buffy on her feet. "You mean he's not back chained up with you guys?"

"Um...no."

"Well, where is he? He can't be out roaming the streets. And...and that means that you're spending time alone with him?! What kind of morbid death wish do you have, Xander?"

"Christ, you and Angel really are two peas in a pod. Listen, I have Spike under control. And that's the end of it, okay?"

"No, not okay. I need to be sure he's not killing anyone."

"Buffy. You are great at your job, really. Go, Vampire Slayer! But leave William

the Bloody to me.”

“I can’t do that, Xander.”

“Tough shit, Buff.”

“Xander!”

“I’ll give you the address and phone number to our new place tomorrow. We’ll see you Tuesday night? About six?”

“We have to talk about this Spike thing some more.”

“No we don’t. See you Tuesday.”

``*`*`*`*`*`*`*`*`

The CD changer shuffled and a choppy guitar riff poured from the crackly old speakers. Xander groaned as the scar on the left side of his neck started to itch. A few minutes later, Angel appeared in Xander’s doorway, hard-on visible under his chinos. Xander sighed.

“Who’s this?” Angel nodded his chin at the stereo.

“Some local band. Willow went out on a date with their guitarist.”

Angel listened for a few moments. “Not very good, is he?”

“Not really.”

The vampire unzipped his pants. “We gonna do this?”

“Angel, you sweet talker, you. No. wait. Not here.”

“Not here?” He looked around the room, confused. “Wanna go to my room?”

“No. How about the third room. We’ve got the old mattress in there, right?”

“Yeah, sure. Fine.”

They walked awkwardly down the hall and opened the door to the unused bedroom. It was piled with empty boxes that were waiting to be taken to the recycling place, and the mattress from the old apartment was leaning up against one of the walls. It hadn’t taken much to convince Angel to buy them both new beds. It felt like they were making some kind of fresh start, even though nothing had really changed except the location. Xander kicked some boxes out of the way as Angel pulled the bed down.

As soon as Xander had stripped his shirt off, Angel stepped up behind him and wrapped his arms around the young boy’s waist. He held there for a short time. Long enough for Xander to get a little uncomfortable.

“Hey, there, Deadboy. Whatcha doing?” He felt Angel’s responsive shrug.

“Just wanted to see what this was like.”

“Usually the cuddling comes after.”

“Do you and Spike cuddle?”

“Um...sometimes. But it’s not like...”

“Not like what?”

“I don’t know. He’s not my boyfriend.”

“Mm-hm. You’ve got a girlfriend now, right?”

“Yeah.” Angel’s hand crept slowly up Xander’s chest, thumb finding and stroking a pert nipple. The other hand moved down, rubbing Xander’s hardness through his Dockers. Then the vampire’s head was pressed next to his and Xander heard a low moan breathed into his ear.

“Um...Angel? What the fuck are you doing?”

“Just feeling it. Like you told me to.”

“Yeah, good, but...this is...ohh....um. This is...not like you.”

Angel’s hand had crept down into Xander’s pants and his touch was soft and slow. He was doing all the things that he liked, all the things that Spike did.

“Listen, Angel, I don’t think-” He was cut off when Angel flung him onto the mattress. The vampire had them both stripped and was nuzzling at Xander’s neck before he could finish the thought.

Hands were everywhere. Touching his chest, his neck, his thighs, his balls. Fingertip teasing his hole while a tongue lapped from scar to earlobe.

“Jesus, Angel, what the...fuck, Angel.”

“Don’t you like this?” Angel had made his way down, now, and was licking Xander’s stomach, chin grazing his hard cock and making him gasp. Then, in one quick move he engulfed Xander from tip to root, held him there and sucked hard.

Nonsensical sounds escaped Xander.

Angel stayed at Xander’s crotch for several minutes, licking, sucking, making Xander squirm with a joy that he'd never had any intension of feeling for this vampire. Suddenly the mouth was gone, and Angel left Xander for just a moment to get the ever-present lube from his pants pocket, then returned with the appropriate appendages slicked, sliding a finger into Xander in one smooth skilled motion.

By the time Angel had moved completely on top of Xander and was pounding into him with quick and controlled thrusts, Xander was a pile of useless flesh, left limp from Angel’s thoughtful and precise touches, inside and out.

Xander’s orgasm was so strong that he honestly didn’t feel Angel’s bite and had to touch his neck afterwards to feel the rapidly closing holes in the scar to make sure that it actually happened.

Five minutes later and they were resting side by side on the sheetless mattress. It took that long for Xander to get his breathing under control and ask, “What the fuck was that, Deadboy?”

“Just trying something new.”

“Yeah, ok, good, but...why?”

“Thought you wanted to make it better. You know...bearable.”

“I did. But it was already fine. That was just...just...”

“Thank you?” Angel’s hand scooted across the mattress and clamped down lightly on Xander’s hip. He held it there for a few moments then started stroking his thumb over the cooling flesh.

“Angel...”

“Hm?”

“Please don’t touch me.”

“Oh. Sorry.”

Xander got up, gathered his clothes and threw them into his bedroom before getting into the shower.

Later, he found Angel in the living room, slouched on the couch and staring at the wall. Xander made an attempt to move past the weird after-sex moment.

“So, we should Christmas this place up if we’re gonna have people over in a few days. Should get a tree. And maybe get one of those veggie trays from the supermarket. Can you pick up champagne or something? Something the girls would like.”

“Xander...”

“We should have some other kind of food. Can you cook? I mean, something other than breakfast. Don’t get me wrong, you make a mean omelet, but this is a dinner party, not a breakfast party so-”

“I think I’ve lost her, Xander.”

Xander fell onto the opposite side of the couch. “No, Angel. She’s coming to the party, isn’t she? That’s a good sign.”

“She’s coming here for you, not me.”

“I don’t think that’s-”

“I miss her so much. How did this happen? How can I justify what we’re doing? How can I be with her? She used to...want me. She couldn’t keep her hands off of me. And now I can’t even get her to talk to me.”

So...Angel was horny for his girlfriend. Well, he supposed that made sense...Wait. Something clicked. “Is that what that was about?” Xander pointed to the back bedroom. “All the touching and intimacy. Christ, Angel, I’m not Buffy.”

“I just miss her so much.”

Xander got up, leaned down in front of Angel and scooped up the vampire’s collar in his fists. “Don’t you dare ever touch me again like I’m Buffy!” Xander let go and started pacing the room. “We can get through this. We can make Buffy understand, but not if you give up. And certainly not if you decide to replace her. My god, Angel, you are such a coward. Grow a fucking spine! Buffy doesn’t understand, right now, but she will. And if you give up on her after only one week, then you never deserved her in the first place.”

“You know I love her.”

“Do you? Cause that’s what I told her, but I’m not seeing it. You gotta have a little faith, man. You gotta trust her. Trust her enough to give her time to process this. There’s no manual for how a person is supposed to deal with this kind of thing. If

you love her, Angel, really love her, then you'll give her the time and space she needs. Trust her to come back to you."

Angel looked to be thinking that over for a little while. Xander got tired of the broodiness in the room and went to the kitchen to start a list of what they would need for the party. About five minutes later, Angel appeared in the doorway.

"Add mistletoe to the list," the vampire suggested. "Isn't a Christmas party without mistletoe."

15 Mistletoe

In Xander's head, there were only two ways a party could go. Either completely successfully, or completely disasterly. That's why this one was a bit of an anomaly to Xander. It went mostly...ok.

By the time Tuesday rolled around, the Slayerette-core party had morphed into a Christmas/dinner/house-warming thing, that required a little more planning and a lot more food.

Willow showed up first, with her new guy, Oz, in tow. He was very polite, brought a cactus (the house-warming gift of choice for two men), but not really the talkative type, so couldn't rely on him to distract everyone with idle conversation. And because he wasn't in the Hellmouth-loop, it was hard to talk openingly around him.

Giles and Ms Calendar were next, and spent the majority of the evening discussing the mold encrusted ancient books littered on Angel's bookshelf. Xander had never taken the time read the titles, but the Watcher was practically drooling over the collection.

Then Cordelia arrived, wrapped in a low-cut red dress that left Xander

contemplating the logistics of getting her alone in his room for a couple hours without being missed at the party.

Angel was held up in the kitchen, putting the finishing touches on an alfredo sauce for the linguini, when Buffy came in, almost an hour late.

“There you are,” Xander accused. “Thought you’d changed your mind.”

“Decided to do a quick patrol before I came. Ran into a overly excited fleg-,” she saw Oz, “...flag-waver. He got all patriotic in my face. I had to take him down.”

“Patrolling for patriots?” Oz quipped. “You’ve got an odd sense of duty. Are you Canadian?”

Buffy grinned sheepishly and shoved a pile of brightly colored packages at Xander.

“Ohh! More booty.” Xander arranged the newest gifts among the others under the rather modest looking tree that he and Angel had procured and decorated with plain red plastic ball ornaments (the ones that were on sale at Wal-Mart).

By the time dinner was served, the tension in the room was like molasses. No one knew where to tread for fear of being sucked down further into the muck. They couldn’t talk about slayage, what with Oz in the room. Nobody wanted to talk about school, especially since Xander had failed his science class and was a bit depressed about repeating it next semester. Willow and Cordelia kept giving each other scornful looks, neither believing that they were at the same social function with the other. Giles brought one of Angel’s books to the table and was completely engrossed in its contents, irking Ms Calendar, and having no clue about the awkwardness at the dining table.

And Buffy, well, she had been staring at Angel and Xander since Angel had emerged from the kitchen, clearly looking for some kind of sign that they were going to do something inappropriate. Xander prayed that they wouldn’t be pulled together any time in next few hours, not that he ever had any control of it in the past, but one could only hope.

Of course, this was the Hellmouth and one had to very careful what one wished for.

Because halfway through dinner, his scar started to burn and he immediately got hard. For Spike.

So Xander sat there. Trying to enjoy his linguini and being very uncomfortable. He did his best not to look at Angel so that Buffy didn't get the wrong idea and racked his brain for a topic of conversation that would lighten everyone's mood.

“So, uh, Oz...Dingoes playing the Bronze again anytime soon?”

“Three weeks.”

“Ah...” *Big help, Oz, thanks.*

It wasn't until they were gathered in the living room and opening presents that the tension finally broke. Christmas will do that. Xander played Santa and passed out the gifts, mostly because it kept him moving and hid the fact that he was getting increasingly twitchy.

Willow was giddy as she tore the wrapping off her gifts, although she continued to remind everyone that she was Jewish and that these here “holiday” presents, not Christmas presents. Her Jewishness didn't prevent her from taking advantage of the mistletoe that hung at the entrance to the hallway. She and Oz shared a small chaste kiss when they passed each other going to and from the bathroom. It was incredibly sweet and romantic and Xander had to adjust himself in his pants because any form of touching was going to drive him nuts.

Which was why Xander found himself dragging Cordy into his bedroom when she insisted on running her hand along his thigh at one point during the gift frenzy. He had her on the bed, grinding his dick into her hip and kissing her frantically before she could gather her senses, do the appropriate thing, and push him off.

She stood up, smoothed her dress out and pointed at him accusingly. “Major party faux-pas, Xander.”

“How so?”

“One, you are a host, you have guests, and you should be doing host-like things.

Two, you should not be horny in the middle of a Christmas gift exchange, it's tacky and very un-Christmasy. And three, you wrinkled my dress!"

"Well, if you weren't wearing it, then I wouldn't wrinkle it."

"Xander! This is so not the time or place."

"Come here, gorgeous. I have a present for you."

"Gross! I'm leaving."

"No, no, no. I mean a real present. Look." Xander took the small box out of his pocket that had been poking into his hip all evening.

"Ooh. Is it jewelry?"

"Is there any other type of gift?"

"I have you trained well."

"That you do."

Cordelia sat on the bed next to Xander. She gave him a kiss on the cheek as she took the box and opened it.

"Oh, Xander. It's beautiful. Here, put it on me."

She pulled her hair out of the way so he could secure the clasp around her neck, then stood up to admire herself in the mirror over his dresser. The chain was the perfect length. It allowed the silver heart to rest enticingly between her breasts and the cut of her red dress framed it beautifully.

They shared several more minutes of kissing-bliss before Cordy patted him on the butt, took his hand, and led him back out into the mass.

By the time the party broke up, two hours later, Xander's insides were twitching so hard for Spike that he was starting to feel like he did that night he found the

vampire waiting for him in his backyard. He had a growing red mark on the back of his left hand caused by constant scratching at an itch that refused to be quelled. Angel and Giles were the only two that noticed how increasingly uncomfortable he was becoming, but neither could do anything but give him sympathetic looks.

At around midnight, everyone left the apartment, including Angel and Xander to walk Buffy and Cordelia home. The four couples were all hand-in-hand by that time. Angel and Buffy seemed to be doing better after the gift exchange. Angel had given Buffy a ring that had some kind of significance, and he wore a matching one on his finger.

Cordy and Xander spent some more time kissing on her front porch, until her dad flipped on the porch light and opened the door, pinning Xander with a fatherly glare that gave Giles a run for his money. Cordelia grinned shyly and shuffled passed her dad, leaving Xander to mumble a “Mr Chase,” in recognition, and tip his imaginary hat before skeedadling off the porch and into the cool night.

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Spike wasn't in the basement. Or anywhere in the factory for that matter. Xander was having a severe panic attack as he wandered the streets looking for his vampire, closely inspecting every pile of dust he came across, praying that each one wasn't Spike, and not knowing if he would even recognize Spike as a pile of dust if he was one.

It seemed a miracle that he found him. Just ran into the vampire walking down the sidewalk of a very affluent neighborhood, going toward nowhere in particular. Spike was walking with some kind of determination, but Xander was so relieved to see him, that he didn't care what the purpose was.

Spike received a slap on the shoulder when Xander finally caught up to him.
“Where the fuck have you been?”

“Figured you'd find me.”

“Yeah, well. Don't give me such a wiggins next time, geez... Where are you going?”

Come on, we've been feeling like this for hours. Let's go somewhere and do this thing."

The vampire continued to saunter down the sidewalk, not looking at Xander. "You say the sweetest things, really."

"What's going on? Where are you going?"

"Figured I'd distract myself while you had your little soirée. My invite musta got lost in the mail, huh?"

"That's what this is about? You upset I didn't invite you to the party?"

"Don't give a flying shit about your party. Just got tired of waiting for you. Got hungry."

"Hungry?" It was finally at this point that Xander noticed that they weren't alone in the night. There was a young blond woman, headphones on, strolling leisurely ahead of them about half a block. "Oh, fuck."

"No. Just food."

"No, no, no, Spike, listen, you don't have to do--"

"Go back to the factory and wait for me there."

"No, but, wait--"

"This isn't your call, Xander. Not tonight."

"But, you're not going to kill her, right? Don't have to kill to feed. You said."

"Haven't killed anyone in over a week. Got into a lot of fights, drank a lot of blood, left a few people in comas, but didn't kill. But the not killing thing - I'm over it."

"But why her?"

“Stupid, isn’t she? Middle of the night. Alone. Headphones. Hellmouth. Easy.”

“But-” Xander was cut off when Spike stopped abruptly, grabbed him by the shoulders and pulled them together.

“Listen to me very carefully. You don’t have control over this. Not this. Not me. Do you understand?” Xander nodded slowly. “Okay. Now here are your choices. You can shut the fuck up, let me do this without the bloody commentary. Or you can help.”

“Help? Isn’t there a third option? I’ll go back to the factory now. Like you first suggested.”

“You lost that option when you got on my nerves.”

“But-”

“Bollocks! Where is she?”

Relief poured through Xander. But before he could congratulate himself on his stalling abilities, Spike gripped his hand, and he was being pulled violently down the sidewalk. They caught up with the woman quickly when they rounded a corner and saw her turn onto the walk of a large well-appointed red brick house with a yard filled with tall leafless oak trees.

“Better make up your mind, Xander. No halfways.” Spike told him just before they reached her. He put a strong arm around her shoulders, causing a small shriek to escape her lips.

The next part happened too quickly for Xander to process, however he felt a strange déjà-vu of his first encounter with Spike as he watched the vampire drag the woman into the side yard of her own house.

By the time he followed them there, Spike was leaning against a brick wall that was green with moss. Clearly this side of the house got very little sun. The woman (who was, now that Xander could see her face, actually just a girl, no more than eighteen) was being held tight against Spike, her back to his chest, one arm around her waist,

pinning her arms, the other hand covering her mouth. Discman and headphones discarded somewhere in the dirt.

“Well, Xan? Which is it?”

Xander ignored Spike and inspected the girl. The fear he saw in her eyes was entirely too familiar. Too reminiscent of the fear in the eyes of the red-headed girl they had encountered a week and a half ago. *Everyone dies afraid.*

Xander took several steps forward, until he was standing just in front of the girl.

“Hey. Listen to me.” The girl was shaking terribly, so he tried to make his voice sound as non-threatening as possible. “I know. I know you’re scared, but you have to listen to me. Are you listening?”

The girl’s eyes finally focused on Xander and she nodded her head once.

“Good. Spike here is going to take his hand off your mouth and you’re not going to scream. Right? No screaming?”

Another small nod. Spike removed his hand and readjusted his arms so that he was just holding her wrists. The girl took a quick sharp breath in and Xander had his own hand over her mouth before the scream could escape.

“What did I just say? Let me explain something. We are not going to hurt you. I know it looks like we are, but we’re not. Right, Spike?”

Spike rolled his eyes. “Yeah, whatever.”

“Okay, don’t listen to him. Listen to me.” Xander slid his hand from her mouth and stroked the girl’s cheek. She didn’t show any signs of calling for help for the moment so he kept talking. “I want you to understand that it’s not about you. You were just in the wrong place at the wrong time. And, agreeing with Spike here, walking alone in the middle of the night, with headphones on, no less, pretty stupid.”

The girl surprised Xander by looking ashamed for just an instant, then her eyes

shifted back to fear. He felt so sorry for this girl. Just a girl, who was about to become another statistic of the Hellmouth. Death by blood loss, evidence of severe neck trauma, written off by the police. Another unsolved forgotten murder.

“What’s your name?”

“Cindy,” she answered quickly without thinking.

“I’m Xander. That’s Spike.”

“ello, lovely,” Spike growled into her ear, causing a visible shiver.

It was Xander’s turn to roll his eyes. “Ignore him. Cindy, I’m sure you’re a sweet girl, and I know that you don’t deserve this, but I want you to remember one thing. We’re not going to hurt you. We’re not going to touch you in any inappropriate way. We won’t hurt you.” He peered passed her at Spike, who, after a moment, nodded slightly.

When he looked back into Cindy’s eyes, a small amount of the fear had disappeared. At least she wasn’t in severe panic-mode, so that was a start.

“What are going to do to me?” She asked in an startling even voice.

“Doesn’t matter. What ever happens, though, I want you to keep looking at me, okay? Don’t take your eyes off me. Do you understand?”

Cindy nodded again. Still stroking her cheek, Xander took the final step forward and pressed his body against hers, trying to keep his lower body a little further away, so she wouldn’t think his hard-on was for her. He ran a hand over her silky blond hair, gathering up one side of it and pulling it away to expose the lightly tanned skin of her neck.

Transfixed by a visible thudding, which slightly interrupted the smoothness that was revealed, Xander found himself rubbing a thumb over the neck’s pulse-point, causing a gasp from Cindy that he had not intended to create.

He raised his eyes to Spike and tried not to let his hopefully calm expression change

as he watched the vampire morph into the monster, gold eyes glued to the vein that Xander was stroking.

Back to focus on Cindy, Xander let his hands fall to Spike's arms, sliding down and covering the cold hands that were gripping the girl's wrists.

"Cindy. Believe me when I tell you that whatever happens next, you won't feel any pain. We won't hurt you. Do you believe me?"

Cindy's eyes searched Xander for something that only she knew. It took about a minute for her to find what she was looking for. "Yes. I believe you."

"Okay."

Spike took that as his cue. The vampire leaned forward slightly and when the fangs split her skin, Xander felt the air around them still. He watched her eyes carefully and saw no change in them as Spike continued into her, wrapping his lips around the warm skin.

And when Spike started sucking, and Cindy's eyes widened when the realization finally hit her that she was going to die, Xander was so proud of her when he didn't see the fear return.

As her tears began flowing, and sadness and acceptance spread across her face, Xander leaned forward and kissed the wetness on her cheeks. Then without thinking, he pressed his lips against hers, marveling at how warm and soft she was.

Xander didn't know how long he stayed in that position, but he felt instantly when the life left her body. She stayed soft and warm, but the air around her changed. Dead bodies were simply objects. Something for the loved ones to cry over and bury. Aside from the moss growing on the side of the house, Xander was the only living thing in this space.

He pulled away from her, not knowing if the wetness on his cheeks was her tears or his own. He let go of the dead wrists just as Spike did, and the body fell forward into Xander's arms. He held onto it tenderly for a few moments before bending to place it gently in a sitting position against the side of the house.

Two seconds later, Spike had Xander in the dirt and mostly undressed. All thoughts of the dead girl disappeared. Empty gold eyes bore into Xander's as he tried to recognize the human part of the demon that was about to fuck him. He also tried to relocate the part of himself that allowed him to feel fear, because Xander had never been fucked by the demon before. Not seen the face until Spike was about to bite. Would this time be different? Could vampire-Spike control himself enough to not kill Xander? Could Xander bring himself to care?

As it turned out, Spike did have the where-with-all to use the lube that was in his pocket. Then Xander was disoriented as he was flipped over onto his stomach and pulled roughly up so he was positioned on his elbows and knees. And the lube was used, however, Spike just coated himself with it, and it wasn't until Spike's cock was breaching his tight ring of muscle that Xander realized that he had not been prepared.

"Fuck, Spike, wait-" was all he got out before Spike pushed all the way in, in one long smooth semi-slow stroke. Xander's harsh gasp sucked in all the air in the small space. He managed to feel hollow and full at the same time, fingers digging into the dirt as Spike started moving, each thrust more powerful than the last.

And it was powerful and hard, but not harsh or violent. Spike had the talent and control to make it good, so good. The only thing Xander didn't like was facing the dirt. He wanted very much to be watching this demon fuck him. Wanted to see the fire in those gold eyes. Wanted to feel connected and complete. Instead, he closed his eyes and just felt it.

Soon he felt his climax building, thanks to Spike's hand punishing his dick with the same force that his ass was receiving. And when the fangs entered his neck, he was overwhelmed with the same comfort that the bite always brought him. A clear mind, a sense of wholeness, power, control, and of course, general orgasmic goodness.

When he was spent and the world came back into focus, he still had a vampire attached to his neck. Still sucking.

"Spike," Xander whispered, finding his voice a little rougher than he remembered.

No change from the vampire prompted a more forceful, “Spike!” before he felt the teeth leave his skin. Instead of pulling out and away from him, though, Spike stayed put, resting his bumpy forehead between Xander’s shoulder blades.

Xander felt the vampire shift back to human against his skin. It wasn’t until Spike slipped out of Xander naturally that he moved away, allowing Xander to fall flat onto the ground, coating himself with dirt that stuck to every bead of moisture on his skin.

He managed to turn his head enough to take in the image of Spike, still fully clothed and refastening his jeans, sitting exhausted against the wall in a disturbing parody of the dead girl beside him. Xander felt that he should say something. Something profound. Something witty. But all neurons weren’t firing in his brain, so profoundness and general Xander-wittiness were not going to break this silence.

Instead he stumbled to his feet and began looking for his pants, not really understanding how Spike had managed to remove them without taking off his shoes. Spike was standing next to him once he had his clothes in his hands and was attempting to get the dirt off of himself before getting dressed. Spike slapped Xander’s hands away and finished brushing the grime off. Xander let him.

When they were both dressed and presentable, they stepped away from the death in the side yard and into the semi-brightness of the streetlights, Spike quickly pocketing the Discman he found on the ground. Xander couldn’t bring himself to care.

No words were exchanged as Spike walked Xander home. They stood in the hallway of the apartment complex, Spike waiting patiently as Xander dug in his pockets for his keys. But before he could get the key in the lock, Spike slid both arms around Xander’s waist and pulled him in for a kiss.

It didn’t take long for Xander to deepen the kiss, marveling at the taste of whiskey, cigarettes, himself, and dead girl on the vampire’s tongue. It lasted for a long time. Or it seemed that way. Spike was crushing their bodies together and Xander had his fingers tangled in Spike’s hair when the apartment door opened and the door frame was filled with Angel.

They broke apart instantly. Xander saw a flash of guilt in Spike's eyes before it was heavily shielded by indifference. The vampire turned and swept back down the hall and out of sight, coat billowing majestically, causing Xander to smirk as he pushed passed Angel and into the apartment.

Angel closed the door and got Xander's attention as he was heading down the hallway to the bathroom.

"Xander. This is all going to end badly."

Without turning to face him, Xander answered, "Yes. It is."

16

Hot Chocolate and Hot Topics

Three weeks later...

"I don't understand this incessant need to take things to the next level with Cordelia."

"Come on, Giles. You're not that old."

"It's precisely that I'm not that old why I make that statement."

"...Huh?"

"What I mean to say is, as a teenaged boy, you are certainly getting more than your fair share of...satisfaction in that department."

"Is that the stuffy British way of saying that I get laid a lot?"

"Yes."

“All right, yes. I have a lot of sex. But that’s mystical vampire man-sex. It’s not adolescent horny-boy girlfriend sex.”

“And there’s a difference?”

“A *world* of difference. The ‘satisfaction,’ as you call it, that I get from the vampires is simply completing a need. An urge that I get that, under normal circumstances, a normal teenager wouldn’t. And with Cordy, well, it’s what supposed to happen next. You know, boy meets girl, boy hates girl, boy kisses girl, boy gets really horny, boy likes girl, boy gets laid. You know? That’s normal.”

“And normal is the watchword, isn’t it? Listen, Xander...you are an extraordinary young man for coping with a unfortunate situation.”

“And aren’t you supposed to be finding a way to fix this ‘unfortunate situation?’”

“I haven’t forgotten. It’s constantly on my radar. As I was saying, you seem to be coping very well. In fact, perhaps a little too well? This is the first time in weeks you’ve come by my flat to talk. And it appears that you want to talk about your relationship with Cordelia, and not Angel and Spike.”

“What, are you upset that I’m dealing? It’s a bad thing that I haven’t shown up here in a complete nervous breakdown as of late?”

“No, no. I’m glad that you’re doing better. I just don’t understand what happened to cause the change.”

“Can we go back to talking about Cordy?”

“No.”

“Huh?”

“I don’t mean ‘no’ as in ‘not ever.’ I just mean that I would like to talk some more about the more mystical aspects of your life before we move on to the normal parts.”

“Normal part. Singular.”

“I’m sorry?”

“I’ve got one normal part of my life. My girlfriend. My girlfriend who doesn’t know that I fuck two vampires on the side. And even that normal part is tainted because she knows about the bite pull. She accepted it in the same way that Buffy and Willow did. But my relationship with her...it’s about dates and presents and video night and heavy petting on Inspiration Point. It’s normal.”

“Yes, you’ve said. Xander...why did you come to talk to me? It sounds like you’ve got everything with Cordelia under control. I’m certainly not going to give you advice on how to get into your girlfriend’s pants.”

“I appreciate that. That would be entirely too disturbing.”

“What can I help you with, Xander? What’s the problem?”

Xander slumped further down into his chair, cup of hot chocolate forgotten and rapidly cooling on the coffee table. Giles replaced his glasses after a vigorous cleaning session. Light jazz trickled from the expensive stereo speakers. Xander couldn’t look at Giles anymore. All the talk about Cordy was pretense, he knew that. And apparently so did Giles. Coming clean, about this one thing anyway, was the only option. Here goes...

“I don’t want it anymore.”

“...You don’t want what anymore?”

“The girlfriend thing. Cordelia.”

“I see...”

“I mean, she’s great, really. And I like her and I’m attracted to her. Really, I am. But lately...I want something else more.”

“...Spike and Angel.”

“Spike. Not Angel.”

“A month ago, I asked you if you thought you were gay. You said no.”

“The answer is still no. It’s not about being gay or not, Giles. Calling myself gay or bisexual or whatever is so completely beside the point. Those classifications are for real people. People who exist in the world. People who have lives and make decisions and choices. Real people who get up in the morning and have jobs and coffee and lunch dates and grocery lists and normal sex and bowling night and book clubs and faith that their lives have meaning and purpose and-”

“Breathe, Xander.”

Gasp “...I don’t exist in that world, Giles. I don’t exist in Buffy’s world, or yours or Willow’s. There is no classification for me. All I know is that I wake up...and go to school...and fight evil...and in between all that I have intense cravings to have sex and get bitten by two vampires. One who I live with, and fight beside, and hate. The other, pure evil, who hides out from my friends, and I...I want him more than anything I could have possibly imagined...How can that be?”

Giles removed his glasses again, but this time he placed them on a side table and rubbed the bridge of his nose. Soon he got up and poured himself a short glass of bourbon. He paused before putting the bottle away and added a splash to the hot chocolate on the table, then pressed the cup into Xander’s hand. Settled back in his own chair, Giles continued the discussion.

“How long have you been feeling this way?”

“A few weeks. Since...Christmas.”

“Was it gradual or did something happen to prompt, or enhance, these feelings?”

Okay, Xan-Man, time to make a serious choice. How much do I tell? How would the watcher of a vampire slayer react to the fact that a member of his support team actively participated in the killing of an innocent. And that ever since that act, I’ve

been highly attracted to the more evil side of Spike. Been asking him to go into game face before the sex. Been encouraging his stories of killing and maiming and torture, and been treating those as bedtime stories. Been going over to his factory even when I haven't needed to. Okay, we don't have sex unless we're pulled to, but I enjoy the talking.

And of course, there's the bigger secret. I've been joining him on his hunts. Watching him scare, hit, bite. Helped a couple times. Nothing too intrusive. Just immobilized two or three when they tried to get away. And I walked away from bleeding victims. But I did call for help for them later. I did. After the sex, and a little nap...Why did I come here?

“I suppose it was gradual.”

“I see. So...all of that babble earlier about wanting more from Cordelia...what was that about?”

“Well, it's what I should want, isn't it?”

“You want to be normal.”

“I want to feel guilty about *not* wanting to be normal.”

“You don't want to be normal?”

“I like this. This is good. I haven't felt so good about my life in, like, ever. That's not right, is it? Why don't I actually want the normal anymore?”

“I really don't understand what you want me to tell you, Xander. Do you want my approval? Do you want me to tell you that it's okay to have feelings for an evil fiend? Something so evil that it is murdering people, and I'm not so ignorant to believe that Spike has stopped killing. And you're not that stupid either. You want my permission to continue to keep this creature hidden just because you've got warm fuzzies?”

“Geez, Giles, calm down.”

“I will not calm down! Did you read the paper this morning? Two more mysterious deaths near the lake. Every day you keep Spike’s whereabouts secret, more people will die.”

“Spike had nothing to do with those two. And what would you do to him if you did find him, huh? Chain him up, lock him in a cage. Only let him loose to mate? That’s not what you do to people.”

“Spike’s not people!”

“If you can say that about Spike, then you should say that about Angel.”

“Angel doesn’t kill people. And he doesn’t torture his victims by forcing them to perform sex acts on a demon.”

“Have you forgotten Angel’s past? Sure, he’s all angst, guilt-ridden, soul-having, but remember *why* he’s so guilty? And the fact that he’s the one who taught Spike how to do this in the first place. Let’s also remember that Spike hasn’t killed me. After all this time, and he hasn’t killed me, yet. So you and Buffy and Angel will just have to trust me that I can handle the demon in Spike. Maybe not for always, but for now, and that’s going to have to be good enough.”

``*`*`*`*`*`*`*`*`

Giles placed his empty glass on the table and planted a scrutinizing stare on Xander. Xander didn’t flinch. He was so afraid for this boy. This boy who had grown more in the last few months than Giles had seen in the past year. Should he be giving partial credit for that to Spike?

In the past few months, and more specifically in the past few weeks, Xander had been walking with a straighter back. When he entered a room now, he did so with confidence and determination. Like he belonged wherever he was. Whether it’s in the library or a cemetery. His run-on babble had become much more pointed and deliberate, as well.

What about the relationship between Xander and Spike was Xander not telling

Giles? It was something more than the attraction that the boy admitted he had toward the vampire. The time that the two spent together alone seemed to be having a positive effect on Xander. And while things looked to be fine now, how long before that influence on the human would tip to something more dangerous?

Did Xander have a valid argument about not locking Spike up, or was he already being negatively influenced, and were they all being fooled? Every time Xander called on Giles, he made a point of not inviting the boy in. He would just stand aside and let him walk in without the invitation. Giles did this...just in case. But just because Xander hadn't been turned yet, didn't mean that Spike wasn't overpowering him in some other way.

And it was Giles' job to keep an eye on the boy...just in case.

"Xander, I realize that this may be a rather pointless statement, but I would like you to take extra special care around Spike. Remember that the things he says are coming from the mind of an evil demon. He isn't a good man, not like you. You have the power to be in control of your life. And it will take all your strength to maintain that control. Don't forget that you have the support of all your friends and we love you and will be here to help you with anything."

Giles watched a smile spread across Xander's face that frightened him a little. It started as a complacent smirk. And as it grew, Giles saw, for just a moment, evil flash across that innocent face. Then it was a Xander smile. That huge teeth-smile that took up half of his face. Giles quickly deduced that he had imaged the middle stage.

"I know, G-Man. I love you guys, too."

``*`*`*`*`*`*`*`*

Angel rolled off Xander, clearly exhausted and panting unnecessarily. Xander took the slightly crusty towel they kept by the mattress and wiped off his stomach, pitching the towel in the direction of the door as a reminder to throw it into the wash.

“I think you bruised something,” he told Angel casually, wiggling carefully on the messy sheets.

“What can I say. You drive me wild,” Angel deadpanned.

Xander laughed heartily. “Oh, if only you were Cordy.”

“It really over with you two?”

“Yeah. She made that clear.” The cover story that Cordelia had dumped Xander was fairly well-received by the entire gang. Nobody seemed too surprised. It irked Xander more than he was allowed to admit.

It wasn't all false. Cordy really did dump him. But the fact that it was Xander's *intention* for Cordy to dump him was what Xander couldn't tell anyone. And it was so easy. All he had to do was tell her the truth about the nature of his “relationship” with Spike and Angel. Once she learned of the act that always preceded the bite, well that was a reality that the captain of the cheerleading squad could not deal with.

Their parting wasn't angry or fierce, but she did make it clear that she couldn't even look at him anymore. It bothered Xander a little. He felt no shame in what he was doing, so to see the disgust on Cordy's face was disconcerting. But he was able to push past it quick enough and now, almost a week later, Cordelia was a fading memory. Just a blurb in his chapter in Giles' Watcher Diary that Xander knew the old man was writing, even though Giles tried to keep it hidden.

Angel stood up, stretched, then found his clothes and dressed quickly. Xander was on the verge of post-orgasm/bite sleep when Angel stopped in the doorway and turned around to address him.

“Xander, may I ask a favor?” Xander opened one eye, then the other when he saw the seriousness on Angel's face. He propped himself up on his elbows.

“What's up, Deadboy?”

Angel ignored the now-meaningless dig. “Tonight after Buffy's birthday party,

when you go see Spike, could you two stay in? Can you keep him from hunting? Just for tonight?”

Okay, that was an interesting influx of information. Xander blinked. Then blinked again. Those three questions sparked so many other questions in Xander’s brain that he didn’t know where to start.

“What? How? What...what makes you think I’m going to see Spike tonight? I can’t predict the pull. You know that.”

“Oh, please, Xander. You go see him almost every night. Sometimes for an hour, sometimes all night. All I’m asking is that you stay at the factory. I’ve got after-party plans with Buffy, and I’m not going to be able to follow you tonight.”

“Factory? Follow us? You know Spike’s at the old factory? You follow us?”

“Of course I do. My God, Xander. Did you really think I was that stupid? Did you really think that I would let Spike get away with murder in my town?”

Xander climbed awkwardly off the mattress and pulled on his clothes. His mind was swimming. A thick fog had spread across his brain, interfering with the processing process.

“Do you...do you...have you seen me?”

“Yeah, I’ve seen you. I know that you watch as Spike attacks. And I’ve seen you hold a couple guys down for him. I’ve heard you say his name softly when he looks like he’s about to go too far. I know what you do, Xander.”

Xander was shaking. It was the only part of his life in which he still felt a little bit of fear. And as it turns out, it wasn’t the painful secret he thought it was. He felt his knees start to buckle. But instead of hitting the ground, he found himself engulfed in strong vampire arms.

Angel gripped him tight. Tight enough for the shaking to stop. But Xander didn’t cry. He wouldn’t give Angel the satisfaction of seeing that.

It was a long time before Xander's body was fully functional again. Angel seemed to sense when that was, so he let go, and they walked wordlessly into the kitchen. Xander sat at the small breakfast table, and Angel proceeded to make hot cocoa. The silence continued until Angel put the mugs on the table and took a seat across from Xander.

"We're out of the little marshmallows," Angel told Xander apologetically.

"Remember to put it on the list." Xander gestured to the magnetic pad of paper attached to the refrigerator door.

"It's on there."

"I don't know if I really stop him from killing. He probably wouldn't, even if I wasn't there."

"You're wrong. You are the only thing stopping him. Don't worry. After the two of you leave, I get them help. Most are fine. A couple have been borderline, but they got better after a few days."

"Why haven't you stopped him?"

"It's his nature, Xander. If I can't lock him up, or kill him, then I have to monitor him."

Xander took a sip of his chocolate and burned his tongue. He kept his fingers laced tightly around the hot mug and continued the conversation quietly, speaking into the rising steam.

"Why haven't you stopped me?"

"It's your nature, too."

"I'm human. How is it my nature?"

"You're falling for Spike." Xander shook his head in automatic denial. "Yes, you are. And like any young man in love, you want to be around the object of your

affection as much as possible. You find yourself interested in the same things that he is. You want him to like you too, so you show him the ways you two can be together. Show him the ways that you aren't all that different. It's human nature."

"What am I going to do?"

"There aren't any rules for this, as you once told me. No self-help books. The likelihood of an evil vampire and a human falling for each other, well that's about as likely as an ensouled vampire and vampire slayer falling for each other. Unprecedented."

Xander finally looked up from his mug. He smiled, but it faded quickly.

"How long have you been following us?"

"Since just after Christmas."

Okay. A few days *after* the incident with Cindy. Cindy. He was a little surprised that he remembered her name. He made it a point to not think about her that much. He wondered how long it would take him to give over to Spike's urges again. And he wondered why he was able to stop Spike from killing these past few weeks, but why he couldn't, or didn't, stop him that night with Cindy. It made his brain hurt. He didn't share any of this with Angel.

"You tell Buffy?"

"I told you I wasn't stupid."

"Does Spike know?"

"I'm pretty good at tracking Spike without his knowledge. I did it for years when he was a fledge. Was always getting himself into scrapes with the wrong demons. Or the authorities. Never very good at cleaning up after himself."

"Sounds like him." Xander knew he had a goofy smile on his face, but he couldn't make it stop. "Still, though...not sure how I feel, knowing you're right there over my shoulder all the time."

“Not all the time. Just when you two go hunting. I’ve never gone into the factory.”

“Aren’t you worried he’ll kill me?”

“I suspect that when he kills you, he’ll do it because you asked him to.”

Xander stood up, knocking his chair over. “You think I’m going to ask Spike to kill me?”

Angel sat patiently, sipping his hot chocolate. “I told you it would end badly. You’re dealing with evilness, Xander. This isn’t a romantic musical comedy that concludes with trumpets blaring and you two kissing as the curtains close. Evil is evil. It doesn’t change.”

Xander righted his chair and took his seat again. “Unless you get a soul? Right? No more evil?”

“I still have evil in me, Xander. That hasn’t changed. It’s the soul in me that’s changed. And the soul is more powerful than the evil. Evil, by nature, is weakness. Good is power.”

“Profound.”

“I try.”

Xander took his empty mug to the kitchen sink, filled it with water and left in the basin. He leaned on the counter and turned back to Angel.

“So I’m supposed to keep Spike in tonight, huh? What have you got planned with Buffy?”

“Just some private time for us. Can you stay at the factory all night?”

“Oh. ‘Private time.’ Subtle, man.”

“I’m not planning anything specific. Thought it was time we have a quiet romantic

night. Girls like that kind of thing, if I remember correctly.”

“Man, when was the last time you romanced it up for a girl?”

“Um, that would be...never.”

“Well, Soulboy, if you want romance then you are going to need a little bit of planning.”

“Yeah, I suppose you’re right...Any suggestions?”

“You’re in luck. I just finished dating a cheerleader. I know very much how to knock a girl off her feet. Come, young Padawan, you have much to learn.”

17

Asking For It

Xander practically skipped down the stairs into the factory basement. It had been a great party, and he was in a terrific mood. There were presents and cake and music and dancing and cake and laughter and cake and spiked punch and, what else? Oh, yeah, cake.

His head spinning with a sugar high, laced with touches of vodka-infused raspberry punch, it took Xander several moments to notice that something was different in the basement. It looked cleaner. No, not cleaner. There was still dust and cobwebs and crumpled bed sheets. Not cleaner, but less cluttered.

Spike was crouched in a far corner, head cast down and not facing the doorway. The candle light flickered across the vampire’s black t-shirt clad back, giving the illusion of movement, but Xander could tell that Spike was holding very still.

“Hey, Spike,” Xander started as he moved slowly toward the vampire, eyes

glancing around the room, trying to figure out what specifically was missing. He figured it out when he passed the dresser.

The top of the dresser was completely wiped clear. No dolls, no lace doilies. The large red hat with the oversized black flowers was also missing. Xander looked closer at the rest of the room. The pieces of red and black silk that had been draped over everything and tied to various candlestick bases and the four posts of the bed were gone. The manacles that were attached to wall above the bed were still there, but the black velvet that had been wrapped around them was missing. Also, the pipe on the far side of the room that had been the make-shift closet rod for Drusilla's many long lace dresses was empty.

Now the room had more of a dungeon-of-doom look to it, rather than the welcome-to-my-parlor feel that it usually exuded. With the exception of the messed black sheets on the bed, that is.

Xander reached the slumped figure of Spike and saw that the vampire was kneeling in front of a large dark wood chest. It was filled to the brim with all things Drusilla. With all her possessions concentrated in one place, Xander could easily smell the jasmine and old blood wafting from the trunk. He felt oddly comforted by the two odors, and saddened that he wouldn't smell that particular combination anymore once the trunk was closed.

Spike hadn't moved. He was holding one last item tightly in his hands before committing it to the darkness under the lid. Miss Edith.

Xander knelt beside the vampire, his hand resting on a slim wrist as Spike stroked the doll's small worn cheek. Xander waited patiently as Spike said whatever he needed to say to Dru in his head.

Soon, the doll was placed gently on a bed of red cloth, and Spike closed the lid. He latched it in two places with heavy duty combination locks, then broke off the spinnny combination part of each. He then moved gracefully to the bed and laid down on his back, left arm folded under his head, right arm outstretched onto the pillow beside him.

Xander crossed to the other side of the bed and settled himself next to Spike. He

rested his head on the vampire's right shoulder and Spike folded his arm down, pulling Xander closer. They stayed that way for a while.

"It was just time," Spike finally answered the unasked question. Xander nodded. Spike sighed heavily. "What happens now?" It was a startling question.

"You're asking me?" Xander reached across Spike and rested a hand on his left hip. "I'm just along for the ride. Isn't this your plan?"

"This stopped being my plan a long time ago."

"You telling me that this roller coaster ride is out of control."

"That analogy is a tad too spot on. And clichéd." Spike brought a hand up to stroke Xander's hair. "But, yeah. That's what I'm saying."

"Are you afraid?"

"No. Are you?"

"...No."

``*`*`*`*`*`*`*`*`

After a short time, Spike grew restless. Xander knew what that meant. Soon, Spike would get up and pull on his duster and lead Xander through the streets looking for some kind of violence that would curb his itch to kill. But Xander was doing another vampire a favor tonight. And hopefully this favor would be a good thing for Buffy, too. If there was one thing that girl needed for her birthday, it was to get laid. She had way too much tension in her life.

So...how to settle Spike without leaving the factory?

Just as it seemed Spike was about to jump off the bed, Xander squeezed hard on Spike's hip. At the same time he tilted his head up slightly and latched his mouth onto Spike's neck, and sucked.

That worked. Spike was so easy. Xander felt the vampire's dick grow hard quickly under his wrist, and at that moment it occurred to him that he had never felt that before. Usually they were already hard when they started touching, or it was after the sex when they were soft and just resting in each other's arms. So this was new.

Xander moved his hand from Spike's hip up and under his shirt, loving the feel of cool hard lines, and getting aroused himself when he felt Spike's nipple perk up under his fingertips.

What comes next? More touching. Good touching. Sex. But...no reason for sex. Not feeling a need to be bitten right now. Just turned on by this vampire. Feeling an attraction that had been floating around them for quite some time. But as often as they had had sex in all this time, they had never done it of their own free will. Is this a step that Xander was ready to take?

Ready or not, this was happening. Because Spike had turned toward him and was crushing his mouth into Xander's. Their full hard bodies were pressed against each other and Xander was feeling a burn that was starting not in his neck, but instead in his stomach and groin. And brain. And heart.

They stopped kissing for just a moment to allow shirts to be removed. Then lips were back on lips, a little softer now, while hands tried to find new places on well-explored bodies. Xander found that his hand molded perfectly into the curve of Spike's waist. When he pulled them even closer, Spike moaned into Xander's mouth and Xander felt his heart pound harder than he thought it could.

Spike closed a hand lightly around the side of Xander's neck, gently covering his scar, and pushed Xander slowly onto his back, rolling with him until he was blanketing Xander, shoulder to hip, his legs inside Xander's.

Xander instinctly thrust upward, and Spike mirrored the move, but stayed pushed down, pinning Xander's hips into the mattress. Xander finally broke the kiss, panting heavily and refocusing his eyes to see Spike.

"Xander?" Spike questioned, a mild look of panic in his eyes. Xander smiled.

“Evil vampire,” Xander stated simply.

Spike cocked an eyebrow.

“Evil vampire wants me.” The smile broadened.

Spike scowled and shifted into game face. Xander’s smile didn’t break. The vampire found an unmarred space on Xander’s neck and ran his fangs across the hot skin, leaving thin traces of blood in his wake. As he did so, Xander gripped the back of Spike’s head and held him in that position. Spike had no choice but to lick away the blood the he had exposed.

“Wants me,” Xander mumbled into Spike’s ear. He felt the vampire-face fade away and a smooth tongue lick his ear. They each suckled there for a few moments.

Shortly Spike was pumping his hips, then fumbling between them for buttons and zippers. When Spike lifted off of him slightly to remove the offending garments, Xander took advantage of the vampire’s off-balance-ness and flipped them over. Spike seemed too startled to protest as Xander finished the job of disrobing them.

Shoes took longer than he expected, but Spike waited patiently, and once they were naked, Xander settled himself on Spike’s thighs. He sat back and scrutinized the body beneath him. He ran his fingers and palms over the cool flesh, cupping the angular bones of Spike’s hips and ribs, kneading the tight muscles of stomach and chest.

He wrapped his hands around each side of the vampire’s neck, just above the collar bone, and lowered himself onto Spike’s chest, his face hovering above blue eyes which reflected his own lust. Xander shifted his hips until their cocks were lined up next to one another. He thrust gently once, then stilled.

“This is good?” he asked. Spike smirked at him.

“Any doubt?”

“I don’t mean this.” Xander pumped his hips a couple more times, stilled again. “I mean this.” He closed the small gap between them and kissed Spike with the heat

that he felt in his heart. Spike returned the kiss in kind, panting heavily as Xander broke away. “Good?”

“Dangerous,” Spike warned, but there was no threat in his voice.

“You’re worth it.”

“Why?”

“Passion.” Xander surprised himself by knowing the answer. Spike gave him that same questioning look. “I’ve never known anyone with as much passion as you have. When you want something, you put every ounce of energy you have into getting it. It burns in you, this passion.” Xander slipped his hands from Spike’s neck to underneath his shoulders. “It makes me happy, too. ‘Cause part of your passion is me. I don’t know when it happened, but I became part of you at some point. I’m in you. More than just my blood. I’ll never be a part of anyone like I’m a part of you. That’s why you’re worth the danger. You make me live.”

Spike wiggled his legs until they were outside of Xander’s. Then he wrapped them around the boy’s waist, crossing his ankles to hold him close.

“How do you know me?” Spike’s voice was quiet and almost frightened.

“I didn’t know I did,” Xander answered, still a bit surprised. “I purposely hadn’t given it much thought. Until just now.” He looked at Spike curiously. “Will you keep me alive? For a while longer?”

“Yes,” Spike said without hesitation.

“Why?”

“Faith. I admire your faith.”

“I’m not sure that I believe in God.”

“Not talking about God. Talking about Faith. You believe, Xander. In everything around you. You believe that your friends will always win their fight against the

forces of evil. You believe that Red will love you above all people, no matter what. You believe that even Angel's soul cannot restrain the monster inside him, if he's pushed hard enough. You believe that you can stop me from killing, simply by saying my name. You believe that one day you'll cross the line again, and not say my name. And you know that, when that day comes, it will be you who I'm killing. You believe all that, yet you're still here, now. You believe in the good and evil in every person. You have such strong faith in yourself, that you know all that, yet you can still walk around every day and live your life. Be a person on the Hellmouth. Live in two separate worlds and still be a whole person."

"I'm not a whole person."

"You are. You have to believe that, too. You're stronger than you know. You've survived everything that I've put you through and come out the other end of it loving me. You're extraordinary, Xander."

Their mouths were crushed together again and erections renewed as they rubbed and pumped into each other.

Xander slid his body down slightly and stroked his cock in the groove of Spike's ass, pre-come slick making the movement easier. Without breaking from Spike, Xander fumbled on the nightstand for the ever-present lube, flipping the lid and coating his fingers in a messy move that he was sure left more stickiness on the sheets than on his hand.

Neither hesitated as they shifted and Xander pressed the first finger into Spike. It didn't occur to either of them that this was new. That it was significant. Xander found that little bump inside Spike easily and made him moan like this was what they did every day. He pushed in a second finger, then a third, the entire act seeming so natural.

Spike's skin was burning, and for a moment Xander had a flash of the passion consuming them both, an internal fire exploding that would engulf the bed, the factory, the town.

Then his brain shifted again and he needed to be inside his vampire. Now. Xander removed his hand and gathered more of the lube that had spilled onto the sheets,

coating himself with it. He felt a momentary resistance as his cock pressed against Spike's hole, then he was inside, continuing to push forward slowly and steadily.

Stopping a couple times to pull back, then push in again, slightly harder and deeper, he closed his eyes and just felt it. The tight muscle that surrounded him was a sensation that he could die with.

When he was fully sheathed, he stilled completely, brown eyes finally focused on heavy blue, realization hitting both at the same time.

"You feel good inside me," Spike hissed out as he squeezed hard on the intruding member, causing Xander to gasp and buck.

"Good?" Xander managed to laugh.

"Good. Move now, Xander. Fuck me." Xander's body took over like an obedient dog and began grinding into Spike, almost uncontrollably.

Spike grabbed Xander's hips and Xander was able to pull himself together, focus, bringing his pumping under control and soon they were moving together. A pace was set that was hard enough to cause grunting, but slow enough to prolong the inevitable outcome.

"Oh, god, Spike. Want to be here forever. You're so tight, so hard." He grasped Spike's cock and stroked him like he knew Spike liked. Hard and slow.

"Yes, touch me, feel me, fuck me. Harder, Xander, more. Fuck."

Xander didn't know how much more he could give, so he just kissed Spike, tongue invading in the same way his cock was. When he came up to breathe, he was able to gasp in just one breath before Spike grabbed the back of his head and pulled Xander to his neck.

Without thinking, Xander bit down. When he tasted the blood, he came without knowing he was even that close. He felt Spike's semen spill out over his hand, but that sensation was lost when Spike's semi-warm blood flowed into Xander's mouth. He swallowed roughly, then sucked more out of the rapidly closing wound.

They stayed still for a while. When Xander finally rolled off, his only thought was that it all happened too quickly. He didn't feel enough. He wasn't paying attention.

"Fuck," was all his brain allowed his mouth to say.

"Yeah."

"We're doing that again."

"No objections here."

"Later. After a nap."

"Not going anywhere."

Mission accomplished, Xander thought as he drifted to sleep.

``*`*`*`*`*`*`*`*`

The arguing and jostling of the bed was what woke him.

"Shut up, children," he mumbled at the fighting vampires, his sleep-addled brain telling him it was two months ago when the three of them were in their cramped basement apartment.

Then he was hit with a frying pan, so his mind took a little while longer to piece together the events as they were unfolding. He first realized that it wasn't a frying pan that hit him, it was a fist. When he managed to open his eyes, he was confused even more.

Spike's arms were raised above his head at an odd angle. Following the line of those arms, Xander saw that the manacles were secured around the vampire's wrists, blood dripping from beneath the metal as Spike thrashed. Xander's eyes slid all the way down the angry body and found that Spike's ankles were similarly bound, by cuffs that Xander didn't remember noticing before.

Then his cheek exploded again when a fist came at him from his right side. Xander's head flew hard to the left and he met Spike's gold eyes before he turned back to face his abuser.

Angel stood by the bed, his right hand balled into a fist and a look of utter calm on his face.

"What the fu-" Xander was cut off when the fist connected with his eye. The rest of his body finally shook off the sleep and he scrambled to a sitting position. "Now, wait! Just hold on a second." He held his hands out in front of him, trying to stop time so he could figure it out. "What's happening here? What happened? Angel?"

"You awake?" Angel responded.

"What's with the hitting?"

"Just wanted to make sure you were awake for this."

"For what?! What's up with you? Why is Spike chained up?"

Angel's fist flew forward again. Xander tried to dodge it, but he wasn't fast enough. But instead of landing on his face, the fist opened up and a hand closed around Xander's throat. Pressure was on Xander's windpipe immediately. He tried to gasp but no air got through. Xander's hands flew up to latch around Angel's wrist, pulling with all his might to get the hand away and being very unsuccessful.

Angel was looking at Spike. The elder vampire began talking in even cold tones. Xander didn't recognize the beast choking him. The long buried fear began to bubble up like searing lava.

"I was impressed at first," Angel was telling a still thrashing Spike. "Involving the poor tortured soul in your little melodrama. But I gotta tell ya, it got boring real quick. I kept waiting for you to end it. Yet the boy kept breathing. Day after day after day." The cockiness in Angel's voice as he punctuated each word was grating. Like the vampire was bored with the world. "Sure he was a good fuck, but I've got better things to do."

Suddenly the grip on Xander's neck was loosened, and he was able to gulp in two huge swallows of air before the hand closed down, sealing his windpipe again. Angel glanced at Xander before turning back to Spike.

“Can't let him die that quickly. After all, I do owe this boy a bit of gratitude. Did you know I would never have gotten into dear Buffy's pants if it hadn't been for your boy here? I gotta admit, not even close to the best lay I ever had, but I suppose it was enough for soul-boy. If I'd known the trick to losing that pesky curse before, then I wouldn't have had to put up with myself for the last hundred years.”

The hand was gone and Xander quickly replaced it with his own, trying to rub the pain away and breathe in as much oxygen as possible just in case he was deprived of it again soon.

Spike finally stopped thrashing and looked to be thinking hard, which was a new look for Spike.

“Angelus, if you want to tango with me, then leave the boy out of this. He's dead weight.”

Angel laughed hard. A laugh that Xander had never heard before and made all his hair stick up.

“You've got to work on your negotiation skills, Spikey. Besides, this isn't about you. It's never been about you. You're the dead weight here. I'd off you both here and now, but I've been buried way too long. I have some things to make up for. Plus, like I said, I owe the boy.”

“Hey! Evil dead guys! ‘The boy’ is sitting right here! Angel, what the hell are you trying to prove?” Xander's answer came in the form of another punch to the face. He felt something split this time and warm blood trickled down his cheek.

Having had enough of this, Xander scrambled down the bed, intending to hop off, find his clothes and get the fuck away from the feuding vampires. That was his intention. He didn't get far.

Halfway down the bed, a hand closed around his ankle and he was pulled backwards. His lower half fell from the bed and he found himself kneeling over the side, a hand pressed into his back and a heavy weight pushed against the back of his legs.

Xander looked up at Spike and the expression on the vampire's face caused white hot fear to explode through Xander's body. Because Spike was scared. He could tell that Spike was trying to hide it, but even in vamp-face, Xander could see the panic in his eyes.

The younger vampire started thrashing again. Blood flowed down from the metal-encased wrists, coating Spike's arms like candy canes. He calmed down quickly, though, and focused on the vampire standing behind Xander.

“Angelus, what's the point of this? What will this accomplish, huh? Listen, let me go, I'll kill the boy, and we can leave this town. Got the bloody hell out of Sunnydale. Nothing left for us here. Come on, mate. What do ya say?”

The weight left Xander, and he heard the very familiar sound of a belt and zipper. He made another attempt to get up, but that hard heavy hand managed to grab both of Xander's wrists and twist his arms behind him and up his back, a move that Xander was also all too familiar with.

With his muscles twisted like this, he was completely useless. He was still watching Spike, who was watching Angel. “Spike,” Xander whispered out, but the younger vampire didn't shift his focus.

The weight had returned to the back of his legs, this time accompanied with the hard cool skin of Angel's cock, resting firmly in Xander's crack. Xander's face was wet, even though he didn't remember when he had started to cry.

“You're right, Spike.” It sounded like Angel was smiling as he spoke. “This will accomplish absolutely nothing. But you once told me that I had forgotten how to be a vampire. Well, little fledge, I've forgotten absolutely nothing.”

Angel pulled back, and when he slammed forward, the pain was so fast and sharp that Xander almost passed out. Shortly, he wished he had.

“No!” He finally screamed out for the first time. But he barely heard his own voice, and he wasn’t entirely sure if he said it out loud.

For just a moment Xander tried to tell his body to relax and maybe it wouldn’t hurt so much, but Angel wasn’t giving him enough time to make any kind of decision. He could feel the ripping of his skin and muscle and it was wetter now, but blood didn’t make the best lubricant. He just felt sticky.

And somehow he managed to feel every part of this. He felt it more than he had felt with Spike earlier that evening, and that allowed him to be angry on top of the fear and pain.

His ears started working again and he heard screaming, quickly realizing it was his own. And Angel kept pounding. Xander was being torn apart and he could do nothing but lay there and feel it. His eyes were closed. He couldn’t bear the thought of seeing Spike right now. He just felt it. And screamed.

For a brief moment, Xander wondered if he would meet Cindy in heaven anytime soon, then quickly realized that he would be going no where near heaven. Hell had a special place reserved for him. Was it worse than this?

It didn’t end. Would it ever end? Was he going to die in this kind of pain? Maybe this was the hell he had expected. Maybe he was already dead and this was going to be his routine for all of eternity. He somehow realized that, until that moment, he had never been fucked by a vampire before. Sure, he had had sex with Angel and Spike. And Spike had fucked him in game-face, but that was nothing. That was just sex. This...this was death.

Oddly, he didn’t notice when it was over. Angel simply wasn’t there any more. Xander heard movement around the room, but it seemed insignificant. His eyes opened without him asking them to. Spike’s expression hadn’t changed, but now he was looking at Xander.

Suddenly, Angel was pressed down over Xander’s back, mouth too close to his ear. The whisper that came next was wrapped in odd heat and stale cigarette smoke. It was not Angel’s familiar breath.

“That one was free, boy. Just the return favor. The next one, you’ll be expecting...and needing. I’ll kill you then. Unless, of course, you’d rather I kill you now. Would be quick and easy, if you want death now. And all you have to do...,” Xander’s body shivered as Angel’s tongue stroked his ear, “...is ask for it.”

Xander sucked in a large breath of air and choked on it, coughing into the sheets. He turned his head so that he was looking into Angel’s cold heavy brown eyes.

“Angel,” Xander began, his voice more steady than he expected, “within twenty-four hours, one of us will be dead. I honestly don’t know which one. But I can guarantee you one thing. If it’s me...it won’t be you who does it. You won’t hear me asking for it. Ever.”

“We’ll see.” Angel grabbed Xander’s left hand briefly, then he was gone.

Xander’s body gave up on him. He slipped from the bed and crumpled onto the floor. Noticing his hand was closed in a fist, he opened it and found a small silver key pressed into his palm.

Then, without giving much thought to anything else, Xander passed out.

18 Sacrifice

When Xander woke up, nothing had changed. He was still crumpled on the dirty floor. A key was still held in his hand. And a pool of blood had spread out beneath him, coating his right hip. The pain scorched his body like smoldering coals and he smelled of blood and semen and death.

His stomach lurched a warning just once, then he was throwing up vodka and fruit punch and cake. After several long minutes, Xander made an attempt to stand up,

but he couldn't find his footing, and he slipped to the ground again, a hand landing in his vomit.

So he stayed there and tried not to cry. He felt the tears fall down his cheeks, but he wouldn't let the emotion follow them to the surface. He buried it behind the only thing he could find. Anger. And pain.

Xander Harris was no fool. *Just like Dad*, he thought pointlessly. Xander knew the pain was there for Angel's amusement. Evil amusement that had been hidden under the façade of a soul. How much of the last two years had been a game? Who was winning? Was the game still in play? Or was it over, and Angel the clear winner?

Xander was in pain.

He wiped his hand on a blanket, then gripped the edge of the mattress and found the strength to pull himself up. Standing produced all sorts of new stings as he felt something else tear inside him and more blood flow down his legs.

Xander took a step and almost fell down again. He managed to grab the post at the end of the bed. Slowly, he made his way to the other side of the bed, holding on to everything he could find.

Spike watched him the whole time, body frozen in the same position it had been in throughout Xander's entire rape.

Rape. His mind was able to say the word and not explode. Xander wondered why that was. Wondered what it was about himself that allowed him to survive that.

The two didn't speak as he used the key to release Spike, although Xander saw his own hands shaking as he did so. He knew that the vampire was in his own kind of Angel-induced pain, but Xander cared surprisingly little about that.

Spike's bones cracked when his arms fell to his sides, causing him to sit still for a few moments twitching lightly. Xander handed him the key, and Spike used it to free his ankles, the shackles falling back between the mattress and the bed frame, where they had been hidden. Then he sat on the edge of the bed and placed a hand on Xander's non-blood-soaked hip.

“I’m proud of you,” Spike told Xander with unusual kindness in his blue eyes.

“Fuck you.”

“I mean because you didn’t break. You’re still you, I can see it.”

“Nothing to break,” Xander glared at Spike. “Was already broken.”

Spike stood up and wrapped his blood-stained arms around Xander’s sticky body. “No, you weren’t. You’re my Xander. One hundred percent whole.”

Xander pushed Spike away. “You don’t know me.”

Spike embraced him again, a tighter painful hold. “I know you. Always have, always will. You’re me. And you won’t break. Ever.” He came forward and placed a small kiss on Xander’s lips, then leaned up slightly and kissed his cheek in the same way.

His lips stayed on Xander’s cheek and licked there for a minute. Xander let it happen until he realized that Spike was healing the split skin. He pushed Spike away again, a part of him wanting to keep the scar that the small gash would create, although he refused to acknowledge why.

As Xander began the long journey toward the bathroom, Spike tried to put an arm around his waist, but Xander wiggled away from him, so the vampire simply walked behind him, a hand coming up to steady him when it looked like Xander was about to fall again.

When they made it to the shower, Xander made a minor attempt to tell Spike that he would rather bathe alone, but the stern look on Spike’s face stopped him. By the time Xander was standing under the hard spray of water, one hand on the wall, the other on Spike’s shoulder, he finally found words to say, “I’m not you.”

“More than you know, luv.”

“I *will* break...if he does it again.”

Spike was coating Xander's body with heavy layers of soap. They both knew that even the purity of Ivory couldn't wash away the filth in Xander's skin.

"Maybe," Spike responded, and Xander heard the lump in Spike's throat when he said it.

When his front was as clean as it was going to get, Spike turned Xander around and began working on his back with an even softer touch.

Xander tensed when he felt Spike fall to his knees behind him. "No, Spike, don't."

"Shh. S'okay. It'll make it better." Xander's head fell hard against the tile in front of him as Spike's tongue touched the first tear at his hole. He tried to concentrate on his own breathing while Spike was licking him. He attempted to picture the times that Spike had done this and it had felt good. It had been many times, but for some reason Xander couldn't find any of those memories. He felt the empty tears fall down his cheeks again, but he tilted his head back into the shower spray to wash them away.

Shortly, he did feel a little better, but when Spike stood up and turned him around, it was a tad too rough and something shifted inside him that caused more pain and blood.

Spike's eyes went dark when he smelled the fresh blood and he pressed their foreheads together. The only thing they saw was each other's eyes and the pain and sorrow reflected in each. Maybe they were the same person. At the moment, Xander couldn't tell where he stopped and Spike started. Is this what Spike meant when he said that Xander was whole?

Xander used to be a good man. Spike used to be pure evil. If Spike had the right amount of goodness in him that made him care this much for Xander, then how much evil did Xander have in him? Enough to not break when he was being raped? Enough to kill?

What did he believe now? Did he believe that good will always triumph over evil? And if so, what did that mean for himself? Would Willow really love him forever if

she knew what he was, what he'd done?

Xander was tired. "I have to go the sleep."

Spike stepped away a bit. "We have to get out of here."

He thought about that for a moment. "You want to run?"

"I want you safe. I'll fight him when he comes back, but if he gets lucky..."

"Why would you fight him? He was right. The pull will kick in and we won't have a choice."

"He won't want to satisfy the pull. He'll want to end it."

Xander nodded. "We'll go to Giles. Angel has never been invited there. What time is it?"

"Mid-morning."

"I'm not leaving here without you."

"There's tunnels to that part of town. I've got a heavy blanket. Can run the rest of the way."

"Spike..."

"Yeah?"

"This isn't meals-on-wheels. No hurting my friends."

Spike rolled his eyes.

``*`*`*`*`*`*`*`*`

Ten minutes later, Xander was being guided through the pitch blackness of

Sunnydale's infamous sewer system. Their progress was slow. Spike had an arm around Xander's waist and every once in a while Xander would move in a certain way that caused a fire bolt of pain to surge through him. Spike allowed them to stop whenever that happened and Xander would pant heavily until the pain subsided, then they would continue. Neither spoke.

After a time, Spike and Xander let out twin groans when they both felt the burn inside them that pulled them toward each other. Xander said a silent amen that it was for Spike and not Angel.

Spike took care of it quick, with a firm touch on each of them and Xander's back pressed gently against the tunnel wall. Just as they came and Spike bit into Xander, they heard an unfamiliar voice speak up near them.

"Any leftover for me?"

Spike closed Xander's wound patiently, which calmed Xander's suddenly quickening heartbeat. Xander was already staring at the intruding vampire when Spike turned toward it, still in game face.

"I don't share," Spike stated simply, then stepped over to the clueless fledge and, in one quick motion, ripped it's head off.

When Spike turned back around, Xander grabbed him and kissed him, knowing that there was no way he could put as much passion into the kiss that he wanted to.

``*`*`*`*`*`*`*`*`

In the shade of Giles' apartment door alcove, Spike whipped the smoking wool blanket off his head as Xander knocked. Xander felt a welcoming warmth when he saw Giles' familiar smile. The librarian's expression fell when he saw Xander's face, then turned into a sneer when he saw Spike.

"Xander?"

"I'll explain, just let us in, okay?"

Giles stepped aside and Xander took careful steps into the apartment. He heard Giles sigh out a held breath, then a hand came down gently on Xander's forearm.

"Dear Lord, what happened?"

"You have to invite Spike in, Giles."

"Not bloody likely," the Watcher scoffed.

"Please, just-," Xander was cut off as Giles guided him slowly toward the couch, wincing when he was sat down. He turned around and saw Spike still lingering in the open doorway.

"Xander, you're shaking. And there's blood stains on your jeans. What did that bleached menace do to you?"

"Sod off, Watcher!" Spike cried out. "You think that if I hurt the boy I would have brought him here?"

"Then what-"

"Can you just invite him in?" Xander heard his own voice sound more desperate than he expected. "I'll explain what happened."

"No, I will not. I've never had a vampire in my house, and I sure as bloody hell am not going to start with Spike. I'd have Angel in here way before William the Bloody."

Xander stiffened at that, and Spike punched the invisible barrier of the entryway. Giles looked from Xander to Spike and back again. He grasped Xander's shoulders and searched his eyes for an explanation. Whatever he found there, Giles' angry expression changed to concern. Letting go of Xander, he got up and went to his weapons chest. Pulling out the crossbow that was sitting on top, the Watcher aimed it at the vampire.

"Come in, Spike."

Spike was by Xander's side instantly, kneeling in front of the couch, both hands on Xander's legs. Giles watched scornfully as Xander gripped one of Spike's hands.

With crossbow still in hand, but held down to his side, Giles sat down next to Xander again. "Please tell me," he said softly, placing a hand on Xander's forearm.

Xander felt the comfort of the two men who were holding onto him. Two men, complete opposites, who both loved him in very different ways for very different reasons. Xander opened and closed his mouth several times. He heard the words in his head over and over. Rape, pain, blood, death. But he couldn't actually speak them out loud. Finally it was Spike who spoke.

"Angelus is back."

Xander and Giles both looked at him, confused. Spike was looking at the Watcher.

"That bloody soul that you white hats prized so much has flown the coop."

"What?" This came from Xander. Spike shifted from the floor to the couch, sitting next to Xander, then positioned them both carefully until Xander was leaning against the vampire, back to chest. He wrapped his arms around the human and pulled him as tight as he dared.

"My dear boy. Did you think that was Angel? It's true that one doesn't have to be soulless to commit evil. But your Angel? He's a puppy. All that soul knew was guilt and broodiness. Angel's not capable of rape. Plus, the leaving you alive part, that's a signature Angelus move. In his head, killing you would have been kind. What happened to you was pure evil. Trust me. I know."

"Rape?" Giles' voice was small, not even a whisper. Just a breath. His face had fallen and held a blank expression for several long moments. His grip on the crossbow was loose and slipping. Then in an instant the Watcher was back and in fix-it mode. "We have to get you medical attention."

Xander shook his head violently. "Spike helped. The rest will heal on its own. Eventually."

“I’ll take care of Xander, Watcher,” Spike told Giles. “You have bigger problems.”

“An un-souled Angel,” Xander said, more to himself than to anyone else. He turned to Giles. “There’s a vampire out there who’s been in a cage for a century. He’s out and looking for a little fun. I’m guessing he’ll work his way down his ‘to do’ list pretty efficiently. It’s a safe bet that Buffy’s on the top of that list.”

Giles contemplated this insight. “Not only that, but he’s going to be looking for you again soon. Am I right?”

Xander nodded. “Don’t know when, but it will be some time today. Unless this new soulless version can control it somehow, which I doubt, then I imagine we’ll be seeing him just after dark.”

With the threat identified, Giles made phone calls to the gang. He told Willow and Ms Calendar to suit up and get to the apartment as soon as possible, he’d explain when they got here. He couldn’t get hold of Buffy.

Shortly after Ms Calendar arrived, about half an hour later, Willow and Oz walked into the apartment. Oz had been in Willow’s company pretty much non-stop since he found out the truth about the Hellmouth a couple of weeks ago.

Willow had been helping Oz pack up his van after a gig when a vampire had attacked. Oz pushed Willow out of the way and attempted to fight back, just like any good boyfriend would do when a mugger jumped from the shadows. Oz must have been working off adrenaline, cause he didn’t even pause to consider anything when Willow threw a drumstick at him and shouted, “Stab it in the chest!” The subsequent explosion of dust left Oz momentarily dazed, but he accepted the explanation fairly easily, and ever since then, wherever Willow went, so went Oz.

Upon their arrival, there was a minor wiggins when they saw Spike. Explanations were short. Xander and Spike didn’t say anything. They simply gripped each other. Willow got over her fear of the vampire very quickly when Giles told her what happened. She saddled up close to Xander’s free side and wrapped her arms around him, nudging Spike out of the way slightly. Spike let out a brief soft growl which Willow promptly ignored. Xander stayed still. The attention was beginning to get

under his skin. The room was quiet as Willow silently sobbed.

Though it was barely noon, both Giles and Ms Calendar were each sipping scotch. Oddly, it was Oz who finally broke the silence.

“I don’t understand.” His soft voice sounded loud in the room. “How did this happen? I mean, what would cause Angel’s soul to disappear?”

“It was me.” The new voice in the room came from the doorway. All eyes fixed on Buffy. She was in the same party clothes she had worn the evening before, only she was much more rumpled and way less party-y.

“Buffy, I tried to call you...,” Giles’ eyes narrowed. “What do you mean it was you?”

The Slayer stepped in the room. In lieu of an answer she asked, “How do you all know the soul’s gone? What the fuck’s he doing here?” She was pointing at Spike with a stake.

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If Xander really took the time to think about it, he’d realize that, strangely, honesty was not this group’s strong point. So the fact that Xander’s rape, his affection toward Spike, and Buffy’s loss of virginity were all the topics of discussion, probably constituted the strangest hour this little Scooby Gang ever spent.

Buffy looked devastated as she was reiterating a conversation she and this new creature Angelus had shared earlier that morning. Apparently he had reappeared hours after abandoning their bed and belittled their little roll-in-the-hay as pointless and bumbling. The gang was giving her sympathetic faces, but when Buffy’s eyes met Xander’s, he heard his own mouth saying,

“Gee, Buff, that man sure can hurt with the words. I remember that the worst part of my rape was how unkindly he spoke to me afterwards.”

Everyone stared at him with an odd mix of cruelty and sympathy, but he couldn’t

find it in himself to take it back or apologize. He leaned further back into Spike's arms and closed his eyes, wishing it all away.

Another half an hour later, and the gang was still trying to figure out the connection between sex with Buffy (which was the last time anyone saw him as Angel) and the losing of the soul. Willow's theory was that something must have attacked Angel between his apartment and the factory that sucked his soul away. It would be a good theory, but Buffy, who always took the brutal weight of the world on shoulders, insisted that her Angel would never have cast her off after sex, especially to go find Xander when the pull wasn't involved.

Xander, reluctantly, agreed with Buffy. Of course, that could only lead to the conclusion that Buffy had something to do with the soul's vanishing act. It was all a mystery Giles didn't know how to begin researching. That is, until Ms Calendar spilled the beans.

Giles had just said, "If only we knew more about the curse itself. Clearly there was a loophole of some kind. Perhaps a trigger word or phrase. Angel never spoke much of the gypsies themselves."

"Gypsies are private folk," Ms Calendar added casually while pulling a couple more books off of a shelf. "Especially the Kalderash people. You'll find very little written about them." When she turned back from the bookshelf she startled to see all eyes trained on her.

Willow spoke first. "Kalderash?"

"That's the name of the gypsy tribe?" Buffy sounded doubtful.

"Jenny...", Giles stepped up beside her, but didn't touch her arm as he usually did, "what do you know?"

"I...I, nothing." Ms Calendar shook her head for emphasis.

Then there was a flurry of activity as Buffy vaulted over furniture and was suddenly clutching her teacher by the throat.

“What do you know?” the Slayer demanded in a thicker tone than Giles had used.

Other things were said, but Xander had quickly grown tired of the entire event and whispered to Spike to help him to a bed. No one seemed to pay them much mind as Xander stepped slowly into the hallway toward the small guest bedroom behind the kitchen. Spike followed close behind, a steadying hand on his back.

A short time later, Xander was dozing on his side, knees curled up slightly and arms wrapped around the arm that was wrapped around him. Spike had molded himself tightly against Xander’s back, and though these were his normal sleep hours, the vampire was wide awake, propped up on one arm, watching his boy rest fitfully.

Xander awoke with a start and an angry groan when his Angel-scar began to burn. This was not a sensation that Spike could feel, but he did know what the groan meant, so he simply pulled Xander closer and kissed him on the cheek.

Xander was thankful for the comfort, and did not want Spike to leave his side, but could not suppress the anger that slipped out once in a while. As the burn spread thoroughly through his body, Xander expressed his frustrations.

“If the pull isn’t satisfied, I’ll die, right?”

“Right.”

“Slowly? Painfully?”

“...Yes.”

“It’s your fault I’m gonna die.”

“True.”

“This doesn’t bother you?”

“Not as much as it bothers you.”

“Are you gonna turn me when I die?”

“Do you want me to?”

“No.”

“Then I won’t.”

Xander turned around in Spike’s arms until they were face to face. He brought a hand up and traced a sharp cheekbone on a face that held very little expression.

“I don’t believe you.”

Spike smiled then. Broad and genuine. He leaned forward and kissed Xander firmly on the lips. The contact was short, and when he pulled away Xander found himself completely lost in the blue eyes that filled his frame of vision.

Why the fates saw fit to turn this god-like creature into an evil fiend, Xander truly wanted to know. He decided that he would one day ask the powers-that-be that question, while at the same time thanking them for giving him this gift of raw emotion and power that he felt with the vampire. In the course of knowing Spike, Xander had gone through every feeling known to him, from purest hatred to purest love, and now, laying here in his vampire’s arms, Xander felt every one of those emotions flow through him again. He was confused and sated at the same time. It made his brain hurt, so he closed his eyes and concentrated on the burning itch inside of him, taking his thoughts away from Spike and giving them to Angel...Angelus...whoever.

Xander rolled onto his back, holding onto Spike’s hand which now lay gently on his chest. He stared up at the white ceiling and let his mouth translate his thoughts.

“I always thought that with Angel we were dealing with just a muted down version of the vampire he once was. I guess I never really understood about the soul, even when he tried to tell me. I just figured that he made a conscious choice not to do bad stuff.

“But now I think I understand about evil. Evil is unstable. It’s action, not reaction. Evil is easy. I think that people in the real world have to work hard every day to

maintain the goodness that has leaked into their hearts. That's what gives them power. Every day that they get up and go to work and play sports and love their family is another day that good wins its battle over evil.

“People do this every day, and they don't even know it. But creatures like Angel and you and me...we know. And Angelus, he isn't fighting any more. Angel did. More than anyone else. But Angelus gave up. And I think that means one of two things. Either he'll die, or he'll kill us all.”

Xander glanced over at Spike and saw a look of wonderment on the vampire's face. It made him smile. He lifted up slightly and began to lean in for a kiss, when a shadow darkened the dimly lit doorway.

“It will be dark in a few hours,” Giles announced softly. “Would you mind joining us out in the living room again? We have some items to discuss.” He then turned quickly and disappeared down the hallway.

The two on the bed faced each other again, and Spike asked with utter seriousness, “Can I eat him?”

Xander grinned. “No.”

Spike shrugged. “Pity, that.”

They climbed off the bed and left the room to join the others.

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It was five minutes after sunset, and everyone sat watching the door expectantly. Angelus did not disappoint. The rap at the door was amicable and very Angel-like. Knowing that pretending no one was home was rather pointless, Giles opened the door to the visitor, but just stood and glared, mouth tight and crossbow at the ready.

“Hey. Can Xander come out and play?” Anyone who had met Angel in the past would know instantly that the figure in the doorway was not their friend. The voice was wrong, tone and inflection, the eyes were wrong, wider and more playful, and

mostly the smile was wrong. Angel didn't smile. But apparently this Angelus did.

Buffy scoffed at the vampire's flippancy. She stood beside Giles in Slayer-stance, arms across her chest and stake in hand, but from behind, Xander could see that her shoulders were slightly slumped, a tell that the young girl who had been dissed by her first love was seeping through.

It had been five hours since Xander and Spike had rejoined the group. In all that time, a feasible plan had not been devised. They had plenty of ideas, sure. But every plan had all led to Angelus being dead, and no one would accept that as an option.

Giles suggested going to the factory to retrieve the manacles that had held Spike so well the night before, but Spike informed them that Drusilla had magicked the chains to the wall and bed, hence the vampire's helplessness when shackled.

Of course, Spike didn't use the word "helpless." Instead, he colorized the conversation with a string of curse words that made Giles blush and clean his glasses. At that point Ms Calendar, who was still in the apartment, but sitting off to the side on the stairs, and usually only spoke when spoken to, had the misfortune of choosing that moment to speak up and say with pure sarcasm, "Well, that's *one* excuse for not helping Xander while that monster raped him."

Spike was across the room and had a hand around Ms Calendar's throat in an exact impression of Buffy earlier that day. It took Xander's soft touch and quiet, "Spike, we talked about this," to get the vampire to release her. When he was calmed, the vampire easily turned his back on the teacher with a dismissive, "Stupid bint."

So now, with Angelus grinning at them on the other side of the door, they all stood their ground like fools. Feeling angry and powerless, they envied Angelus's giddy mood, and prayed that his day of hatching plans was as fruitless as theirs.

Angelus scanned the group, his face filled with amusement when his eyes landed on Spike. "Well, well. Looky who got an invite. Now tell me who's the vampire here and who isn't."

In a cartoonish flash, Spike flew out the door, collecting Angelus in his arms and molding them into a ball as they rolled across the courtyard. Fists flew faster than

any could see.

Willow stepped up to Buffy. “Don’t let them kill each other!”

Buffy shrugged. “What am I supposed to do? Call a time out and send them to their corners?”

Xander was sitting in a chair at the table watching pieces of the fight through the bodies blocking the door. He had faith that Spike wouldn’t kill Angel. But he could only hope that Angel wouldn’t kill Spike. It bothered him that Buffy wasn’t doing anything, but the situation was confusing, and he wasn’t sure he would know what to do either if he were in her shoes. So he again felt powerless. The action unfolded around him like he was moving in slow motion. The red mark on the back of his hand where he had been scratching a phantom itch was growing. He was shaking.

Oz stood beside him and rested a small hand on his left shoulder. Xander leaned into it and Oz’s fingers slipped and touched his neck, brushing the Angel-scar. Xander’s breath hitched, and he reached up and grasped Oz’s hand, pressing it harder into the mark. The heavy touch soothed the itch slightly. But not for long. Xander continued to shake.

The commotion in the courtyard stopped, and Xander was at the door quickly, fearing he would see only one vampire. Angelus’s face was marred by three long scratches down his right cheek. But he was still standing. Spike was not. The younger vampire was on his side, next to the ivy wall, one leg folded at a wrong angle. Xander didn’t know knees bent that way.

Spike split his jeans open along the twisted leg to inspect the wound. All the humans grimaced and groaned when they saw the bone protruding from the vampire’s knee.

“Bugger,” Spike complained softly, then laid down all the way on the Spanish tile and worked on breathing through his pain.

“Well, that was exhilarating.” Angelus wiped away the blood on his cheek with the palm of his hand. He took a step forward and Xander felt vindicated that the step caused him to stumble. The vampire took a moment to regain his footing, but didn’t

attempt to walk again.

Xander and Angelus stared each other down. Xander was reminded of that time in the crypt when the patch of sunlight separated them. Only this time, the look on the vampire's face was one of determination, not desperation.

After several minutes of quiet, Angelus spoke again. "How long you gonna keep us waiting, boy? I know how tortured you feel right now. What are you trying to prove?"

Xander's frame filled the doorway. Giles, Buffy, Willow, Oz, and even Ms Calendar all had a hand on him, touching his arms and back. The touches were meant to show support and love, but they didn't know that any kind of touch was also soothing, lessening the itch slightly. Xander felt some of his power come back. Angelus didn't have anyone who would touch him like this.

Xander felt in control enough to answer, "Not trying to prove anything. Just not looking forward to the dying part."

"Now, now," Angelus sounded agitated, "never said I was gonna kill you."

"Yes, you did."

He thought on that for a moment. "Okay, yes. I did say that. But I've changed my mind."

"Oh, really? So what's plan B?"

Just then footsteps could be heard coming down the stairway into the sunken courtyard. All the humans shouted, "No!" but Angelus was too quick. A second later, two grocery bags were spilled across the tile and Mrs Franklin was gasping for breath. Being choked by a vampire was definitely one of the unknown hazards of being neighbor to a Watcher.

The woman's eyes were darting from her attacker to the mangled figure on the ground to the group huddled in the doorway, not helping.

“Plan B is this,” Angelus carefully explained through a shit-eating grin. “Xander comes here to me, I let this lady go, and we do what it takes to ease this pull. Then the boy and I leave town, and I keep him around for as long as it suits me. Oh, and Spike dies. No negotiating that.”

Buffy pushed passed the group and stood several feet in front of Angelus. “Not gonna happen.”

“One more step and I’ll snap her neck.” The vampire’s grip tightened, but the Slayer stood her ground. “You prefer to let this innocent woman die? Didn’t think you had it in you, Buff.”

Buffy turned to Mrs Franklin. “You’re not going to die.” But the woman was already growing weaker and her eye lids were starting to droop.

“First she’ll die,” Angelus was saying, “then another, and another. I’ll kill one an hour until Xander comes to his senses. And it will be your fault. All of you.”

The woman went limp. Angelus held tight.

Xander stepped forward. “I’m here. Let her go.”

Mrs Franklin fell to the ground, and Buffy was by her side in an instant checking for breath and heartbeat. Both were there but faint. While carrying her into Giles’ apartment, Buffy paused by Xander. “Don’t do this,” she whispered. “I’ll fight him.”

Xander turned toward his friend. “Game over, Buffy. The fight’s done.”

“No-”

“It’s done.” Xander stopped hesitating and went to Angelus. The vampire gripped the boy’s arms and both hissed as the contact sent electric bolts across their skin.

Angelus leaned forward and licked his scar, causing a loud moan to escape from Xander. The vampire’s voice was dark and angry against his ear.

“Just imagine it, Xander. You and me, on the killing fields. I know what you’re capable of. I’ve seen it. I’ve felt it. Let it go, Xander. Give it to me. The burn that you’ll continue to feel when Spike is dead will turn into ecstasy for me. I’ll see to it.”

Angelus looked past Xander for a moment to see that Spike was making a poor attempt to crawl toward them. He hadn’t gotten far. The elder vampire wrapped his fingers into Xander’s hair and pulled their faces close. Angelus continued to speak as his eyes morphed to gold.

“I’ll be your teacher, boy. And I won’t turn you. Don’t need to. You’re evil. I can feel it. I’ll rip the rest of the good right out of you.”

Xander reached up and clasped Angelus by the back of the head. He pulled forward and brought their lips together into a punishing kiss. A small part of his brain heard a whimper coming from somewhere behind him, but he couldn’t tell who it was.

“Angel,” Xander breathed when they finally pulled apart, “you don’t get it, do you?”

Angelus’s eyes narrowed slightly. Xander moved his hand from the back of the vampire’s head to his cheek, smearing the blood that was left there from the healing scratches.

Xander continued speaking a little louder, knowing he had an audience. “It’s not about good and evil.” Xander took a small step back and brought his other hand up between them. “It’s about power.”

And Angelus only had time to growl once in anger before he disintegrated into dust.

Xander was left standing alone with a stake in his hand, the one he had concealed down the front of his pants, hard wood competing with his own.

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The moon was high in the sky and the activity in Giles’ apartment was just dying

down. Spike was resting in the guest room, being attended to by Willow. The two had put up a minor fuss when the Watcher had paired them as medic and patient, but Giles had been insistent, so Willow had set about setting the injured leg while Oz stood watch with a crossbow.

Ms Calendar had been dismissed, disappearing into the night quietly and without an escort.

Buffy gave herself the task of a late patrol, claiming a need to beat the crap out of something, but Xander had his suspicions that she was at home on her bed, crying her eyes out. He didn't blame her.

After getting Mrs Franklin back home and convincing her that she had slipped down the stairs and the rest had been her imagination, Giles was making phone calls and rereading many books for the fourth or fifth time, in hopes of finding the clue to Xander's cure that had eluded him for these many months.

And Xander sat. Not sleeping. Not awake. He felt his fear consume him. The clichéd fear of the unknown. He was scared to know how painful this burn was going to become. How long he could survive it, and when it would be easier to just die. He lied to himself and thought that perhaps it wouldn't get that bad. How foolish was it to have killed Angelus? How was the whole mess going to end? A part of him missed Cordelia. Why was that?

Xander sat with his eyes closed. He let his mind wander, not caring which thought it landed on. He sat. Blood began to pool under his fingernails as he scratched at the burn.

Giles slammed the phone down. It was mid-afternoon, and he had finally gotten hold of an old retired Watcher in New Zealand, but the information he had been promised turned out to be superfluous. He reached up to remove his glasses, only to

discover they were already sitting on his desk. Rubbing the bridge of his nose, he sat back in his chair and gathered the strength to get up and make more tea.

Just as he removed the whistling kettle from the stove, Giles heard a growl from the back bedroom. Task abandoned, he darted into the dark room to find Oz standing tall with the crossbow aimed at a struggling Spike. The vampire sat on the edge of the bed and was attempting to stand on his injured leg. Willow stood as far from him as possible, but was still trying to reason with her patient. The bone was no longer poking out of his skin, but it had yet to settle back into its original position. Standing on it now would cause a serious setback. Spike continued to growl.

“What happened?” Giles addressed Oz.

“Don’t know. He woke up and just started making that noise.”

Spike finally focused on the other three in the room. “You, morons! Hasn’t anybody been paying any attention? Xander’s bleeding!”

Giles and Willow ran back to the living room. Xander was sitting in his chair. He had been so still that Giles had almost been regarding him as part of the furniture these past few hours. Earlier in the day, he had offered the young man something to eat or drink, but Xander had quietly refused, and that had been the last time they had spoken to one another.

Guilt poured over Giles as he fell to his knees in front of his young friend. Spike was right. Xander was bleeding. The back of his left hand and a spot just above his left elbow and below the hem of his t-shirt sleeve had been scratched raw. The fingers of his right hand were soaked in blood. There were red streaks on his cheeks, but Giles could see those were not from cuts, but just transfer from Xander’s hand as he had tried to wipe away tears that flowed easily down his face.

Giles wrapped his own hands around Xander’s, accepting the blood from each. “My dear boy,” he choked out, “when did it get so bad?”

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Xander didn't know. How much time had passed? An hour? A day? A week?

"Angelus was dust barely twelve hours ago," Giles answered the questions that Xander hadn't known he'd asked out loud.

Xander looked down at himself for the first time. His eyes widened. "This is new."

Giles turned toward a terrified Willow. "Get the first aid kit...NOW!" he shouted at her frozen form.

Willow jumped and ran back to the bedroom to gather the kit she had recently been using on Spike. Xander heard his vampire shout expletives at his friend, but did not hear Willow respond. When she returned, Giles set about cleaning Xander's wounds.

"How's Spike?" Xander asked Willow, but got nothing in return as she stared at Xander's arm. "Willow!" Her eyes lifted to meet his. "How's Spike?"

Willow's brow wrinkled into an expression that Xander had rarely seen. Then it was smooth again and she answered, "Better. He can't walk yet, but it won't be long."

Xander stood up quickly, causing Giles to fall back in alarm. He was almost to the bedroom when Willow caught his uninjured arm and spun him around.

"What is with you, Xander?"

"What? Spike's hurt. I'm going to see him."

"Okay. That's it. You're acting crazy. Sit." Xander glared at her. "SIT!"

He hesitated for just a moment, but seeing the look of resolve on his friend's face, Xander obeyed, taking a seat on the couch closest to the hallway. Giles immediately sat next to him with the first aid kit and resumed his duties. Willow kneeled in front of Xander and rested her hands on his knees. Xander was beginning to feel like a false idol.

“Xander, I love you. But this crush-thing you apparently have on Spike, it ends now. It’s weird and creepy and against all laws of humanity. He’s evil. He’s a killer. And he caused the whole mess happening to you. How can you go to him willingly? He’ll only kill you in the end. Can’t you see that? We’re only helping him to heal because you’ll need him soon, and, well, because 3rd degree fractures are gross, but he’s gone once we cure you. You know that, right? Xander, answer me. How can you love him?”

With eyes fixated on his friend, Xander reached out with his right hand and ran a blood-soaked finger down her cheek. “Sweet Willow. I could spend the next hour sitting here trying to explain myself to you. Trying to explain where these feelings came from and when and why I fell for that vampire in there. But to be honest, it really doesn’t matter, and I don’t have the time. Giles isn’t going to find a cure. With Angel gone, this itch is going to consume me. Over the next few days, I’m going to be dying a very slow and painful death. I want that time to be spent surrounded by the people I love. So this is the way it’s gonna go. We’re not going to fight. I’m going to love whomever I want to love, and that includes you, Giles, Buffy and Spike.”

Without finding a logical conclusion to that speech, or waiting for a response from Willow, Xander got up again (his left arm and hand were now cleaned, but not bandaged, so blood still leaked out) and disappeared down the hallway and into the guest bedroom.

Willow fell back onto her heels. She and Giles stared at each other for a long time. Shortly, Oz joined them and held onto Willow as she wept.

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The moment Xander stepped into the room, the burn inside of him shifted and he felt the overwhelming pull of needing both Angel and Spike. He had no idea how this was going to work. It had been months since they had had a threesome, but that thought seemed rather pointless now. Could he be even remotely satisfied with just one of them? *Well, let’s find out.*

He moved to the side of the bed and into the glow of the bedside lamp. Spike was sitting propped up on the headboard, one hand resting on the bed sheets, the other on his own stomach, rubbing gently. His face flashed its ridges as his glowing eyes ran up and down Xander's body, landing on his left arm. "You're bleeding," he said softly while licking his lips.

Xander grinned. "Don't sound *too* sympathetic, Spike. Oz here will think you've lost your edge."

Both men turned toward the quiet figure in the far corner of the room holding the crossbow.

"Get out," came from Xander, trying not to sound too aggressive, but not succeeding. Oz gave a simple nod and gracefully slipped out of room, closing the door behind him. Xander felt a newfound respect for his friend's boyfriend. He wished he would have found the time to get to know him.

Spike carefully shifted over on the bed, and Xander accepted the invitation to sit next to him. He stretched out his legs, careful not to touch Spike's healing knee. They turned toward each other and Spike placed a hand firmly on Xander's hip.

Xander lifted his right hand in front of his vampire, palm up and blood dripping from the tips. Spike groaned and snatched onto the hand, bringing the first two fingers into his mouth and sucking hard.

They melted into the ecstasy. Xander needing the touch. Spike needing the blood.

With his other hand, Xander ran his fingers under Spike's shirt and up his chest. Spike eased Xander's fingers out of his mouth when the blood was gone, and pulled them together for a long deep kiss.

When they broke, Xander pressed his forehead against Spike's bumpy one. "Make it stop, Spike. Please."

Spike let a growl escape his throat. "Forever?"

Xander kissed him again, then traced a finger across the vampire's lips and over a

sharp fang, causing a prick and a few drops of blood to flow.

“For now,” Xander answered. Spike tried to hide his disappointment as he nodded, but Xander saw it anyway.

They stripped each other with precision, both careful not to disrupt their healing wounds. Gripping each other’s aching cocks, they took their time to appreciate the passion in their touch.

Xander wondered briefly if this would be the last time he would touch Spike. Spike's brain didn't stop to worry about such trivialities. Their strokes were harder than they had been the day before in the tunnel. Xander felt a pang of disappointment that he wasn’t healed quite enough to have Spike inside of him. The longing in his vampire’s gold eyes reflected that need.

The eye contact only broke when Spike leaned into his scar and broke the skin as they came. He didn’t take much blood, as he knew that Xander had very little to spare. He closed the bite quickly, slipped out of game-face and attached himself to Xander’s lips.

Xander thought of nothing but the kiss. And for a while, just a little while, the burn was gone. But of course, the moment that Xander let himself believe that it was over, his Angel-scar made its presence known again with several lightening bolt shots of pain, then the familiar continuous throbbing that immediately burned throughout his body.

Xander heard a whimper, but wasn’t shocked it had come from himself. The fucking uncontrollable tears fell and mingled with the saliva on their lips. Xander pulled away when he felt a third kind of wetness, one that tasted of blood and salt. He knew instantly that the wetness on Spike’s cheeks was the vampire’s own tears.

Then Spike said something that he had never said before and would never say again. “I’m sorry.”

It was so soft, and Spike choked on it before he could finish both words, but Xander heard him anyway. Instead of responding, Xander occupied himself with trying to find something to clean themselves off with.

Spike wasn't angry when Xander didn't acknowledge the apology. In fact, he appreciated it. The sorry was just something a part of him needed to say, and if confronted with it, Spike would have denied it had ever escaped his lips. Xander seemed to know this, and that action alone pushed away any doubt in Spike's mind that Xander was more extraordinary than any creature he had ever met.

This wasn't supposed to have happened. Spike had a plan once. Didn't he? When had he fallen for this little human boy? And why was it mutual?

And why, of all the living breathing happy-meals out there in world, did Spike have to ruin this one?

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The progression was fast. Much faster than anyone expected. Giles later concluded that it was Angelus's death that caused it. If Xander had just been abandoned, then it would have taken much longer.

Xander hadn't even known he was doing it. But by the time Spike woke up to the smell of Xander's blood, again, the boy was already soaking in it.

Buffy came back to the apartment a few hours after dark. She had not contacted anyone that day, choosing instead to wallow in the loss of her love, and work through her anger with an early patrol that left several fledges screaming in pain from broken bones and missing parts before they were dusted.

She was much calmer as she stood at Giles' door, but the moment she entered, she smelled the blood. It appeared that Giles, Willow, and Oz hadn't noticed. She wasn't sure if it was her Slayer-senses that brought the strong scent to her attention, or perhaps the other three had unconsciously gotten used to the smell, so they didn't notice when it had become overpowering.

Either way, the gang barely had a chance to acknowledge her presence before she flew passed them and into the back bedroom. Giles and Willow were behind her in an instant, and if Giles had not remained the level-headed Watcher that he was,

Spike would have been dust just seconds after Buffy saw them.

The scene played out like this. Buffy saw the blood. Xander's left arm was a mess of flesh and muscle. There was a tear at his neck that looked to any casually-observing-Slayer to be a messy bite mark gone wrong. The vampire himself was gripping both of Xander's hands, enduring the fingernails that were digging into the backs of his hands. Spike was whispering something into Xander's ear as Xander panted heavily. They were both naked.

The stake was inches from Spike's chest before Giles had a chance to grab her arm. She fought her Watcher so hard that he had to use all his strength to throw her across the room, just to get her attention. When the Slayer's blood-lust was curbed, Giles laid a hand on Spike's shoulder, startling him out of his focus on Xander. The vampire hadn't even noticed how close he had been to dust.

"Let us help," Giles told the obviously distraught vampire. It took a full minute for Spike to fully comprehend that there were other people in the room and acknowledge that they were his boy's friends. And he needed their help.

"He won't stop scratching," Spike told Giles, and the Watcher nodded, plans already formulating in his head on how to make it better.

Buffy stood up from her confusion on the floor as understanding penetrated her anger. She stepped up to the other side of the bed and slowly extracted one of Xander's hands from Spike's, allowing Xander's fingernails to dig into her and giving one of the vampire's hands a chance to heal.

Willow stood behind Buffy, trying to get Xander's attention. But Xander sat, the perfect model of a catatonic. Eyes open, but vacant. Hands twitching lightly in an attempt to be released from their strong hold.

The next half hour was spent cleaning and bandaging Xander. If Spike or Buffy let go of one of Xander's hands for even a moment, it would immediately go to the ugly tear at his neck. The Angel-scar wasn't even visible anymore. Xander had managed to rip the skin completely open before Spike had woken up.

Giles assigned Willow the task of cutting Xander's nails. They were never really

that long to begin with, but clearly it didn't take long girl-like fingernails to cause the type of damage Xander had done to himself. Even though Willow had cleaned Xander's hands before she began, the skin she found under the nails as she was cutting had twice sent her running to the bathroom to vomit.

Throughout the entire process, Spike continued to whisper in Xander's ear. No one knew if Xander heard any of it, not even Spike. And no one knew what it was the vampire was whispering, except Buffy. Buffy heard it all.

So no one knew that it wasn't Xander's condition that was causing the tears to fall from Buffy's eyes. It was simply Spike's words. Words that had been spoken to her as recently as two nights ago from her very own vampire.

Buffy wept for her loss. She wept over the inevitable death of her friend. And she wept for the pain that this evil vampire was going to endure when the end finally came.

With blank expression and empty eyes, Xander sat.

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Xander lost track of the world. Some time after his last encounter with Spike, just when he thought he had fallen asleep, something attacked his brain. Maybe attacked wasn't the right word. Took over? Was that right? It was part dream, part hell.

He lived in a hallway with endless doors. The doors on the right were locked. He tried them all. But the ones on the left opened easily. Effortlessly. But behind them all was pain. Each one opened to blood, pouring out onto his bare feet and staining his skin. He tried to stop opening the doors, but he couldn't. He couldn't because he knew that behind one of those door would be his deliverance from evil. He just had to get through all the pain before he found it. The pain was his penance.

So he waded through the thick blood in the hallway, getting deeper and deeper with every door he opened. He couldn't scream. The pain tore through his body like razor blades, but he couldn't scream.

And there was whispering coming from the right side of the hall. Behind the doors that he couldn't open. It called to him, trying to tell him nice and good things, but the blood was rushing in his ears and he couldn't hear it. It was frustrating. He stopped trying.

Maybe the next door would be his salvation.

The earth shook. Xander fell into the river of blood and it was deeper than it should have been. His feet couldn't find the ground and his head couldn't find the surface. He choked as the blood flooded his lungs, then the river became his sea and he was breathing it. Was this it? Had he found his home? Where he belonged? The pain was the same here. But it felt...almost...good.

Then all the doors on the right opened, and the blood went flooding out. He turned and tried to swim away, back toward the left, but the current was too strong. One of the doorways engulfed him and suddenly he was on dry ground. He opened his eyes and found Spike.

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After Xander was bandaged, everyone stopped puttering and found seats in the room. Spike and Buffy were still at Xander's side, holding his hands which continued to try to pull away and rip open his bandages. Giles brought in chairs from the other room and the other three sat and watched and worried. Spike continued to whisper in Xander's ear, and Buffy continued to listen.

Suddenly Xander bucked hard, throwing Spike and Buffy off the bed. He began thrashing uncontrollably, blood pouring from his mouth as he bit his tongue. Then he was gasping, and everyone reached out to grab a limb in an effort to try and control the seizure. But even with super-strength, Xander could not be contained. His flailing bruised anyone who came near.

They were all shouting at each other, attempting to convey ideas or instruction. Finally, Spike roared for everyone to step back. He blanketed himself on top of Xander and plunged his teeth into his scar on Xander's right side.

Xander screamed.

Spike took no more blood than the little that leaked out. Xander stilled, his breath suddenly easy and even. When he opened his eyes, he saw Spike's blue eyes staring back at him. Xander smiled. "Hi, Spike."

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The room stayed quiet as Spike rolled off Xander, but kept him in his arms. Xander acknowledged everyone else in the room silently, smiling his thanks.

Oz asked the question, "Is that it? Is it over?"

Giles and Willow smiled. Spike and Xander sighed. But it was Buffy who knew.

"No," she stated and that earned her glares from everyone.

But a minute later, Xander knew it was true. He smiled at Buffy. "Would have been too easy, huh?"

Buffy nodded, sat back down on the bed and took his hand again. It was then that Xander saw the healing fingernail-shaped cuts on both her and Spike's hands. He looked closer at the group and saw the bruises on each and the tired and terrified look in their eyes.

Giles sat near the end of the bed and rested a hand on Xander's leg. "I'm sorry to say this, but I believe we need to put you in restraints. Buffy and Spike will soon tire of holding onto you. No matter what they think." He added that last sentence quickly as the two in question began to protest.

"No," Xander argued. "I don't think I'll be scratching anymore."

Willow mirrored Giles' position on the other side of the bed. "But, I thought it wasn't over."

"The pull's still here. The burn. But the itch is gone. Don't know why. And if it

comes back, then yeah, restraints seem to be the way to go. But it's not the itch that's gonna kill me. It's the burn."

Buffy placed the back of her other hand on Xander's forehead. "You're not hot."

"It's inside me, Buffy. It's mystical. You can't feel it. Just me."

Oz stood at the end of the bed, hands resting on the footboard. "How will it kill you?"

"It will melt my insides. All of me, from the inside out. I'll disintegrate."

The Watcher removed his glasses to clean them, but his handkerchief was missing. "How do you know?"

"I don't know. I just do."

"Are you in pain?" Willow asked, tears starting again.

"A little, but different than before. It's not sharp like razors. It's just a dull heat. If I wait too long, it will scorch me."

Buffy's grip on Xander's hand tightened. "If you wait too long?"

"It won't get that bad. I won't let it. Spike's gonna kill me."

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The uproar was to be expected. Giles, Willow, and even Oz began to shout out alternatives, but each seemed to be along the lines of "wait and see" and "more research is in order." Buffy and Spike remained quiet. They knew.

The argument could have lasted hours, but since it was three on three, and only the opposition side was doing any of the talking, the fight petered out fairly quickly.

When everyone was finally silent, Xander turned to Giles. "Would you mind calling

Cordelia? And Ms Calendar.”

Giles nodded, then stopped just before he left the room and asked, “Should I contact your parents?”

Xander took just a moment before he shook his head. “My family’s here.”

So two short hours later, the gang plus two sat in a semi-circle around Xander’s deathbed. Willow took Buffy’s place, holding Xander’s hand. This time it was out of love and friendship, not protection. Spike refused his chair, choosing instead to lay next Xander. The two whispered a conversation to each other that Buffy easily overheard.

Their foreheads pressed together, Xander asked of Spike, “Promise me?”

“Already told you before.”

“Promise me.”

“Couldn’t even if I wanted to. All these people around.”

“Promise me.”

“...I promise.”

It was sealed with a chaste kiss that Cordelia couldn’t help but grimace at slightly. No one saw her.

Xander hitched in a sudden breath and everyone tensed. Giles’ grip on the boy’s leg tightened as he asked, “Xander?”

Xander shook off the intensifying heat inside himself and gave his best ‘all’s well’ smile. “Time for the teary goodbyes. Could I get any more Hollywood melodrama?”

Giles bowed his head to hide his smile.

Looking passed Giles to his computer sciences teacher who was huddled in a corner, Xander started.

“Ms Calendar, come out of the shadows.” She stood up and did what she was told. “It wasn’t your fault. Buffy and Giles will forgive you. Just give them time. Okay?”

She nodded automatically, then glanced at her love and his charge. Neither were looking at her. Ms. Calendar nodded again, doubtful this time, stepped back into her corner and sat down.

“Oz, man. You know what I’m gonna say.”

“Take care of your girl?”

“Actually, I was gonna say, ‘Keep practicing,’ but yeah, that one fits, too.” Xander winked at his could-have-been-friend and turned to his ex.

“Cordy.” Cordelia’s eyes were filled with tears. She was trying hard not to let them fall. “I’m sorry I couldn’t love you like you deserved.” That did it. She lost her battle. “Your life is going to be as beautiful as you are. Don’t let anyone tell you that you can’t accomplish anything you want. You’re stronger than any of them.”

She wiped her eyes then looked in horror at the mascara smeared on her hand. She held it out to show Xander. “Jerk,” she grinned through her tears.

“That’s me,” Xander agreed and turned to Buffy. His smile faded. “Buffy. I’m so sorry.”

She was holding onto his other leg, and he was sure a bruise would form, if it had the time.

“He did love you,” Xander felt the need to reassure, but Buffy waved off the need.

“Of course he did. I know that. You didn’t kill Angel. I did.”

“Buffy, no-”

“Stop. Not for you to worry about and not important.”

Xander nodded, tilted his head and looked directly into her heavy green eyes. “For what its worth...I’m glad that you moved to Sunnydale.”

The sobs in the room took over for a moment. Spike buried his face in the sheets so no one could see him roll his eyes.

“Giles...,” Xander finally choked on his words. “Thanks, Giles. Just...thanks.”

Rupert was shaking. He gave up wiping his eyes. “Oh, son...”

Xander couldn’t bare it. He turned to Willow, and his heart broke.

“Wills,” he began, but never finished. Willow darted forward and kissed him hard. Xander unwrapped himself from Spike and fully embraced his best friend. Their lips stayed firm on each other far longer than was comfortable for anyone else in the room.

When they pulled apart, Willow still couldn’t speak. Xander said it for her. “I love you.”

Willow fell back into her chair next to the bed and gripped his hand again. If not for her red swollen lips, which now matched her eyes, it looked like the entire event never took place.

Xander looked around the room. For a moment, he searched desperately for someone else to say goodbye to. There was no one left. Just Spike.

The vampire was entangled with him once again. Spike slid to lay on top of his boy. Xander heard a noise of disgust come from Cordy, but he ignored it. He knew that this last part would be all about Spike, except for his arm and hand which were stretched out and gripped by Willow. She wouldn’t let go, and Xander was fine with that.

Spike kissed Xander again, but this time Spike could feel a wrong kind of heat coming from inside his boy’s mouth. Spike pulled away and wrapped his fingers

through Xander's hair.

Xander grinned up at him, his eyes tired and peaceful. "I hate you," he said calmly and kissed Spike's nose.

The demon came forth and licked a drop of blood that had dried at the corner of Xander's mouth. "I know," Spike responded, a spark of glee flashing from his golden eyes.

Moving to Xander's neck, Spike's teeth slipped into his scar with practiced ease. The blood was scorching and scalded his throat as he swallowed. Xander tasted of burnt chocolate, faith and power.

There was precious little blood left to take. Spike felt the heartbeat slow. The breath was weak. The vampire accepted the life that was given to him freely.

Without taking the time to clean the wound, Spike exited Xander and pressed his blood lips to Xander's one more time.

The kissed lasted too long. Giles stepped forward and placed a hand on Spike's back. The vampire broke away without protest. He got up slowly and sat in a vacant chair next to the wall.

Giles put two fingers on Xander's neck, just above his mangled bandaged Angel-scar.

Spike slumped down in his chair and waited.

Most of the tears in the room were shed silently. They waited.

Cordelia gasped when Giles finally pulled his hand away from Xander's neck. Giles shook his head. "Still a pulse. He's not dead."

Buffy grew angry. She pointed at Spike accusingly. "You did it wrong."

"Oi! Been killing people for more than a hundred years. I know what I'm doing."

"Then why isn't he dead?"

"Excuse me," Ms Calendar piped up from her corner. "But isn't this a good thing?"

"Shut up!"

"Buffy," Giles calmly scolded. He then faced the vampire sitting behind him.

"Spike...", he began.

"Don't look at me, Watcher. I drained him. He should be dead by now. No one can survive with that little blood." Spike got up and stepped from the room into the hallway. He needed the space to pace.

Willow repositioned her hold on Xander's hand so that her fingers found his pulse. It was weak. Slow, but not getting any slower. Or faster.

Giles ran his hand along Xander's unconscious face. "Sweet boy," he whispered, "please don't suffer."

Everyone waited.

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Xander stood in his hallway. Endless doors to his right and left, all closed. He glanced behind him and found more of the same. Stepping to his right, he tried a doorknob. It turned easily. He pushed.

The door fell open. On the other side he saw white. And saw nothing more. And felt nothing more.

On the other side of the hall, Xander did the same to another door. It was the same. White. Pure. No pain. No blood.

Another step down the hall and another right-handed door. The same. On the left. The same.

He stared up and down the hallway. So many doors.

This was going to take awhile.

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The gang took shifts. Giles made a schedule. Willow remained a constant, refusing to let go of her friend until she couldn't feel a heartbeat.

With Ms Calendar fulfilling her hour one duties, the rest sat in the living room, trying to comprehend.

Cordelia turned to Spike, who was sitting on the stairs. "Why don't you just do it again. Make sure he's dead this time, before you stop."

Buffy dropped her head in her hands and Giles took a gulp of scotch.

"Because, half-wit, there's nothing left to take."

"Then how can his heart still be beating."

Spike stood up quickly and practically shouted at her, "Well, I don't know, do I?" He stalked to the door and grabbed his duster which had been politely hung on the coat rack. "I'll be off, then."

Buffy was by his side in a second. Spike held up his hands.

“Watch it, Slayer. We had a deal.”

“I know.” Before the final two had arrived, Xander had asked Buffy to promise not to kill Spike. She refused, and a minor fight had threatened to start until the vampire and the Slayer agreed that all Spike needed was a head start. Without saying, they both knew that meant that Spike would leave town. If he ever came back, the rule book was out the window.

Now, standing at the front door, Spike unconsciously startled when Buffy placed a hand on his arm. He tilted his head at her, confused.

“I’m sorry about Drusilla.” She spoke softly, not daring for Giles to hear.

Spike’s eyes flashed gold, then cooled and he smiled lightly. Nodding, he reached across himself and gripped the hand that was holding onto him. “Angel loved you. It’s wrong that it ended the way it did.”

Buffy took the oddly worded apology for how it was meant. They stepped away from one another, satisfied that the pleasantries were over, and then punched each other in the face.

Blood dripping from both their noses, Buffy returned to the couch, and Spike left.

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It was hour ten. Willow hadn’t slept. Oz had been force feeding her and reminding her to drink water.

Xander’s steady slow pulse had become hypnotic. It was constant, and Willow had the soft percussion pumping through her brain. She had conjured songs that matched its tempo and was resting with her head on the bed, humming *Crash Into Me*, when the song was interrupted by an sudden change in rhythm.

Her first thought was annoyance. *That’s not how that goes.* Then she lifted her head and was met with large brown eyes. “Hi, Wills.”

There was a squeak to Xander's right. He turned his head and saw Cordelia standing with her hand over her mouth.

She lowered it slowly and breathed out, "Xander?"

He smiled at her astonishment. "Hey, Cordy. Pretty as ever."

The surprise left her face, she sat on the bed and grinned foolishly. "You're back."

Facing Willow again, Xander scrunched his face. "So, that was weird."

"How do you feel?" Willow sounded desperate.

"Dead."

The girls gasped.

"Just kidding. I feel...fine."

Suddenly Cordelia stood up and shouted. "Giles! Buffy! Oz! Ms Calendar!"

Before she got to Oz, all four were in the room.

Prepared for the worst, the shock of Xander's smile was met with silence.

Then the commotion was deafening.

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The quiet was deafening. The last time he remembered this kind of quiet was when he woke up in the dirt, where Drusilla had buried him.

Desperate for sound, Spike fished the lighter from his pocket and flicked the lid open and closed. He purposely did not spin the wheel to ignite a flame, though. His self-punishment was the darkness.

With his back slumped against the headboard, Spike sat on his bed in the factory. This bed had seen so much passion. Dru's fervor, commitment, and love. Xander's faith, warmth, and...hope? The bad memories were easy to forget.

Spike thought of his options. Stay or leave. But he couldn't choose until he knew for sure. One way or the other. The wait was terrifying. And necessary.

Something in his chest clenched when he heard the heartbeat. And smelled his boy.

Spike knew a lot. He knew what had happened long before the Watcher and other white hats did. From the moment Giles had pronounced Xander still alive, Spike had known.

Xander was cured. The vampire knew that Giles had already written the reason in his Watcher Diary. Xander was brought to the brink of death. Instead of dying, he woke up cured.

But Spike knew a lot. He knew more than the Watcher. So he sat in fear of what he'd done. And how he was going to be punished.

It had been six days since he had left his boy, drained and alive. Now, hearing, smelling, feeling Xander's presence, he wondered again how it had all gone so spectacularly wrong.

Spike continued to flick the Zippo lid to hide his shaking hands. As the footsteps descended the stairs, he honestly didn't know if this was the beginning or the end.

Xander stood at the bottom of the stairs. He thought of the first time he had entered this basement. However, now the only similarity was the darkness. It no longer smelled of Drusilla, he wasn't horny as hell for Spike, and, now, even without light, Xander knew his way around the room.

He stepped up to the side of the bed and closed his fingers around the Zippo in Spike's hand, silencing the room. Extracting the lighter, Xander walked confidently around the basement, lighting all the candles.

When he turned back to the vampire, Spike gasped. Xander looked good. Really

good. He wore a dark red mock turtleneck sweater and black jeans that fit him well and rested low on his hips. The combat boots looked a little too new, but worked with the outfit. Spike's eyes widened in admiration as he looked his boy up and down, wetting his lips in the process.

Xander grinned and held out his arms. "Like it? Buffy took me shopping."

"Slayer's got taste."

"The Donna Karan of the Hellmouth."

Spike grinned despite himself and tilted his head at the boy. Xander stuffed his hands in his pockets and rocked on his heels slightly. The quiet drew out longer than it should have. Spike made a move to grasp his lighter and start flicking again, but saw that Xander still held it in one of his pocketed hands. With no pointless noise to stop the silence, Spike spoke.

"So...how are you?" *Come on, William...you can do better than that.*

"Great. Good. Fine. Ok." *Sigh* "Things are good. I was only laid up for a couple days. Apparently, I'm healing pretty quickly. Didn't even need a transfusion or anything. Just a lot of orange juice, apparently. Think I've got orange juice for blood, now?"

Spike wanted to avoid the subject of blood for as long as possible. "Where are you staying, now?"

"Oh, with Giles. That part's pretty cool. He contacted my parents and a lawyer and there's paperwork started for legal custody and everything."

"The Watcher's a good man. It's the right choice."

"Yeah."

"So, are you back in sch-"

"Shut up, Spike."

The command was such a shock that Spike did what he was told.

Xander removed his hands from his pockets, straightened his back and sauntered over to Spike with unexpected grace and glide.

He smoothly climbed onto the bed, straddled the outstretched legs and settled back to sit on Spike's thighs. Spike kept his hands on the bed, fearful to touch the inviting body.

He couldn't read Xander's expression. A blankness was in the boy's eyes that scared him. In all the time they had known each other, Spike had never not been able to see all of Xander's thoughts in his eyes. *What have I done?*

Spike opened his mouth to say something (say what, he didn't know), but the effort was interrupted when Xander's hand came down onto his cheek in a hard, sharp slap.

Instinctually, Spike brought his hand up to his face, even though the sting was minor and gone almost instantly.

Xander's face remained blank as he said, "You broke your promise."

If Spike's heart had been beating, it would have stopped. The situation was what he had feared. Xander knew. His vampire-instincts allowed him to play it cool, not reveal his hand.

"Don't know what you're talking about, luv."

"Oh, ok. We're playing that game."

"Honestly, Xander, no game. I really don't-"

Xander leaned forward quickly, cutting Spike off as he brought their faces close together. His voice came out in a harsh whisper.

"Did you think I wouldn't know? Did you think I couldn't taste it?"

Spike gulped. He hoped the fear couldn't be seen on his face. Xander continued.

“I had your blood in my mouth just two days before that, remember? Remember how I fucked you and bit you? I know how you taste. I felt it when you sliced open your tongue on your own fang. The blood that flowed into me was cool in my throat. I felt the empty promise in your kiss.”

Xander's mouth attacked Spike's, and the vampire gave all his control over to his boy. The kiss was harsh and demanding, full of teeth and bite and tongue. Spike sat back and took it.

Pulling away again suddenly, Xander slapped Spike again. Spike's eyes shot open; he hadn't realized he had shut them. There was fire behind the brown eyes glaring at him.

“Stop it!” Xander shouted. Spike raised an eyebrow at the anger. “Stop being afraid. Stop being weak. Be who you are. Be the vampire that I fell in...”

The flame fizzled out of Xander's eyes and they were quickly cast down, searching for words that seemed obvious. Spike tilted his head to see the face, and what he saw was Xander. His Xander. The expression was back. The doubt that masked the confidence. The hatred that masked the love. Such a complex boy. Spike loved every part of him.

The vampire reached up to touch his boy for the first time, cupping his chin and bringing their eyes together again. The pretense was over.

“All your friends said goodbye. How could they do that? More than anyone, your little Scooby Gang should know that death doesn't have to be the end. I wasn't ready for it to end. And I'm used to getting what I want. I didn't know who you would have been as a demon, but you might have been partly you, and that was good enough for me. So I broke my promise.”

Xander brought a hand up to stroke the back of Spike's head. “And why are you scared, now? Why are you afraid of me?”

“Not sure if you can forgive me for wanting to...stop fighting. Have you with me and not fight that eternal battle that you seem to think we’re all fighting. But I failed. Or...I didn’t fail, but the mystical elements in your blood...it’s all very complicated and connected to this bleedin’ Hellmouth, I’m sure.”

He still couldn’t read Xander’s expression. Why was this all making him feel much worse. Wasn’t confession supposed to be good for the soul? Oh. Perhaps that was the problem. Well, no point in stopping now.

“Plus, I don’t know how this might have changed you. You were supposed to be a vampire. You know, evil, and all that. Don’t know if I ended up giving you part of a demon, or what. But mostly, I don’t know...” Spike closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them and tried not to look pitiful. “I don’t know if you like me anymore.”

Xander leaned back again. Spike saw the Xander face that was filled with openness and humor. “Well, I’m not a vampire. So, I’m thinking, big plus there. And apparently, I heal really quickly,” he rolled up his left sleeve to show his unbandaged arm and mostly healed scars, “which is a bonus in my line of work. So thanks for that. And, let’s see, how else am I changed...? Oh, yeah. I’m cured.”

He climbed off of Spike then, and sat next to him, back against the headboard, right leg butted up against Spike’s left.

“Giles came to the brilliant conclusion that it was the draining of my blood that cured me. Wrote it in his diary and everything. I suppose I’ll have to tell him at some point, but...” He shrugged. “And it wasn’t just your blood, right? I mean, if it was just vampire blood, then I would have been cured when I bit you that time. No...it was the turning that did it. You vampires and your wacky rituals.” Xander shook his head. “Seems someone should have known that one would contradict the other.”

Spike took one of his boy’s hands. Despite their current positions, he realized that Xander had not verbally reassured him of his feelings. Spike felt like a big vampire-girl, needing to hear him say it. Before he could say anything, though, Xander continued.

“Will you try again? To turn me?”

Spike sighed heavily. “Not unless you do something stupid and try to die again.”

“Suppose it’s pointless to get you to promise not to.”

“Suppose you’re right.”

Xander climbed on top of Spike again, into the same position he was before. “What exactly was the plan, Spike?”

“Which time?” Spike grinned.

“Any time.”

“Had lots of plans. All the time. Big complicated plans that involved ritual and death and blood and pain and love and sex.” Spike ran his hands up and down Xander’s arms. “Nothing ever turns out the way I expected.” He reached up and pulled his boy down into a long kiss. When they broke he confessed, “Doesn’t mean I’m not happy ‘bout the way things turned out.”

“So what’s next? The next big plan?”

Spike held onto Xander tightly and rolled him over onto his back, then stretched out next to him, one leg over one of Xander’s. He stroked a hand over his boy’s chest. “I’m done planning. It’s exhausting and pointless and everything backfires anyway. You tell me. What’s next?”

Xander examined Spike’s face, his brow furrowing. “Look at you. You’ve gotten thinner. When was the last time you ate?”

Spike shrugged. Quickly, Xander grabbed the vampire’s head and brought it to his neck. Without thinking, Spike morphed and bit into the inviting blood. He only had a moment to notice that his scar was almost completely gone. He made a point of marking a different place on Xander’s neck.

The blood was as sweet as always. Xander blood. And Spike wanted to believe

more than anything that he could taste the trust in Xander's blood. But he realized it wasn't a taste; it was a feeling. After several deep swallows, Spike detracted his fangs and closed the wound. He stayed nuzzled at Xander's neck, feeling the warm hands that were stroking his head and back. He barely noticed that he had grown hard.

"Mmmm," the vampire mumbled against warm skin, "definitely not orange juice."

Xander laughed heartily, then calmed quickly before stating, "Don't suppose I'll be able to do that a lot. But you have to eat. Can't starve yourself."

Spike lifted his head to meet Xander's eyes. "Not drinking soddin' pig's blood. That's rot."

Xander ghosted a finger over Spike's rapidly cooling lips. "Spike. I would never ask you to be less than who you are."

"You'll be coming with me, then? When I hunt."

"No. I can't do that anymore. It's not who I am...Not who I should be.

"Fuck who you should be. Figure out who you are."

"I have, Spike. I'm the fighter. Not like Buffy, of course, but I'm the guy who didn't die. I don't know if I had any control over that. Or, like you said, it was just the mystical element of my life or my body, but here I am. Not dead. Not a vampire. Just me. And me is somebody who's not done fighting."

"So it doesn't bother you that I *am* done?"

Xander pulled the vampire to lay on top of him, and Spike's erection was renewed when he felt a matching one beneath the layers of denim. "Oh, I don't believe *that*," Xander reassured, then kissed him, hard and promising.

Pulling apart, Spike needed to know more before they continued. "What does that mean? How is this going to work?"

Xander's eyes revealed warmth and love. "I have no idea. All I know is how I feel when I'm around you. Happy. Powerful. Horny. Whole. You're a part of me. I don't know if it was the stupid pull that did that, or the turning, or just the fact that I love you, but if you were to go away, then I wouldn't be me. You're somehow my other half."

"Xander..."

"We'll figure it out, Spike. It won't all be flowers and puppies, but we'll figure it out."

"Xander, I don't get how you can love me."

"Oh, don't be such a girl."

"Not a bloody girl. It's just...I broke my promise."

"You still on that? I imagine it won't be the last promise you'll ever break. You're a vampire. Evil. I get that. It's a struggle, keeping that balance between good and evil. There will never be a clear winner or loser. Not in your case, or mine. We'll make wrong choices and deal with the consequences. But we'll be there to figure it out."

They kissed again. Xander's heat overtook Spike, and the vampire stripped them both naked, needing the heat to permeate his entire body. Xander reciprocated in every way.

The sex wasn't as intimate as it could have been. Wasn't tender or overly passionate. But it was hot and hard and needy and exactly what they both wanted. They each came hard, Spike inside Xander with a unseemly grunt that was neither intended nor romantic.

When their orgasm-shaded brains refocused, they grinned at each other. Spike rolled off Xander and pulled him into his arms.

"So," Spike started, before they could fall asleep, "we'll figure it out?"

"Yeah...I promise."

The End

A/N: Well, there it is. This was as happy an ending as I could get. Oddly, this ending didn't come about till I was about half-way through the fic. It was originally going to end with Xander either turned or dead. "The cure" came to me in a flash one night when I couldn't sleep. When I finally had a cure, the key elements in the last few chapters just kinda came together.

This has been so much fun to write, and post, and read everyone's reactions along the way. I can't thank enough for everyone's kind and encouraging words!