

Rating: R - NC17

Disclaimer: Not mine - I just like to play with them.

Pairing: Spike/Xander

Spoilers: None

Challenge: Caliadragon's challenge #24.) Spike has been chipped and taken in by the Scoobies. Just as he and Xander are beginning to become friends something happens and they're both hurt and it's up to Angel to save and care for them. The twist is, it's Dru that saves them and brings them to Daddy.

A/N: No Anya in this story. Let's pretend she never came back after graduation, shall we?

Bonded

by
Jameschick

When Xander woke up, his first thought was "What the hell hit me and did anyone get the license number?" His second thought was "Where the hell am I?" It all came rushing back to him in vivid Technicolor as he opened his eyes to a sea of white.

"Shit! Spike!"

"Wha..?"

Xander turned his head at the groggy sound behind him and wasn't sure if he should laugh or cry. Laugh because he was happy that Spike was there and he wasn't alone, or cry because Spike was there and hadn't escaped and notified Buffy of the situation.

"Wake up Blondie. We're in biiiiig trouble."

Spike groaned and turned over before opening his eyes. Once he did, he sat up in alarm and then slumped in defeat.

"Bollucks. Hoped I'd never see the inside of this place again."

Xander gaped at him.

"What? That's it? Bollucks? Where's the rage, the indignation? Shouldn't you be pacing and snarling and trying to claw your way out?"

Spike snorted at him and then made a wide sweeping motion with his arm.

"No way to claw out, no point in snarling and getting in a snit. We're not getting out unless they let us out."

"You got out last time."

"I got lucky last time. And they know that. Anything I try, they'll be ready for."

Xander sighed and put his head in his hands.

"Spike? Do you think they realise I'm human?"

"Yeah, Xan. I'm betting they do."

"I thought as much. So now what?"

"We wait. For what it's worth, I'm sorry you got dragged into this; don't know what they grabbed you for."

Xander remembered the previous night; they were walking back from the Bronze - having snuck off to shoot a game or two of pool and have a few beers. The girls didn't realise that since their forced cohabitation they had become somewhat reluctant friends. Both having nothing else to do in their spare time, they spent it together. They had been less than two blocks from Xander's basement apartment when it happened.

Out of nowhere, a bunch of Initiative soldiers came at them. Xander grabbed Spike and pushed him towards the house yelling at him to run. He figured if Spike made it inside then he'd be okay, and the soldiers surely wouldn't bother with him - he was human after all. Unfortunately, there were more soldiers waiting by his house - like they knew that he lived there, and that Spike lived there too. It reeked of a set-up.

One of the men grabbed Xander and punched him in the face, Xander staggered back under the force of the blow but he didn't fall. He drew his arm back to return the favour when he heard Spike roar and then he was jolted with enough electricity to run Willow's laptop. He saw Spike get zapped just as he slid into unconsciousness.

Xander blinked and shook off the memory. He looked at Spike quite seriously and then shook his head.

"There's a reason I'm here, and it can't be good. Those guys were at my house Spike. They were waiting for me - for us. They knew that you lived there, that we would be coming back. Spike, we were set up."

Spike growled and knocked his head back against the wall.

"Slayer's soddin soldier boy. I knew he'd suss it out eventually, bloody wanker."

Just then a doctor in a lab coat appeared, followed by what looked like a couple of orderlies and two soldiers who were well armed and looking for an excuse to fire. The doctor pointed toward Xander and the soldiers trained their weapons on Spike. The door opened and the orderlies stepped inside. Spike made to move in front of the boy but stopped as one of the soldiers stepped closer and took aim.

"One more move demon and I shoot you. Then I shoot him."

He cocked his head toward Xander and smiled when Spike's eyes flashed but he remained still. The Doctor cleared his throat impatiently and the orderlies grabbed Xander and man-handled him out of the cell.

"Be a good little vamp and we'll bring your boy here back in one piece. Or close to it."

The soldier chuckled nastily and stepped out of the cell. The glass wall partition slid back into place and Spike heard the electricity humming through it once again. He realised as soon as the soldier git had said it, that they had assumed that Xander was Spike's lover - or his thrall. So it was his fault that Xander was there, and whatever happened to him would be his fault as well.

"Bloody hell."

Part Two

By the time Xander was brought back from wherever it was he had been taken, Spike had worked himself into a frenzy imagining all manner of things they could have - and probably had - done to the young man. He was told to stand in the far corner of the cell as the door was opened and Xander was flung onto the floor. As soon as the door closed and the soldiers left, Spike rushed to him and rolled him over onto his side. He gasped at the sight of him.

Xander's face was pale; he had a few nice bruises on it as well. Spike could smell blood; he began to check the unconscious man for injuries, thankful when he encountered no broken bones and only a few minor cuts and scrapes. He had several painful-looking needle marks on his inner elbows and finger shaped bruises around his upper arms.

"Oh, Xan. I'm so sorry."

Spike took off his coat and laid it on the floor before rolling Xander onto it and trying to make him a bit more comfortable. As soon as Spike turned him onto his back, Xander moaned in pain and Spike's sensitive nose picked up the lingering scent of semen. His face shifted and he snarled in impotent fury. The bastards had raped him.

There was nothing Spike could do to change what had happened to him, but he could try to make him more comfortable. He rolled the young man back onto his side.

No sooner had he finished his arrangement of the human, then the soldiers came back. The Doc and the orderlies were nowhere to be seen. Spike narrowed his eyes in hatred and memorised their faces. Someday they would pay for what was about to happen, for what they had done to his friend, and for anything else they did to them in the future.

"So. It's to be one of those visits is it?"

The first soldier - a tall well-built black man stepped forward.

"Come along quietly and we just take you. Make a scene and ... Well, next time we won't be so easy on your boy."

Spike snarled and bared his teeth at the soldiers; unfortunately, as soon as his brain provided the image of their bloody deaths, his chip kicked in. He heard the door open and felt the sharp blow to his head before he blacked out.

Part Three

When Xander came to, he found himself curled up on Spike's coat, but the vampire was nowhere in sight. He sat up and winced at the flare of pain in his ass. He couldn't believe he had been raped. He was a man; men raped, they didn't get raped. He took a moment to wonder why he wasn't more upset; he should be freaking out about now. Right? Then it occurred to him that he was probably in shock. Denial. It really was more than just a river in Egypt.

He turned his thoughts away from himself - if he didn't think about it, it didn't happen. The pain he was feeling was from something else entirely. It was just that he'd been constipated, that was all. Like when he was younger and had eaten an entire pound of cheese. He hadn't gone to the bathroom for a whole week and his parents had taken him to the hospital. They'd given him an enema. He had hurt for days afterwards.

That thought firmly in place, Xander closed his eyes and pictured their rescue. Buffy would come to realise they were missing and she'd storm the base and save them. Except that she was dating one of them. And she had no idea where the base was. Xander shook his head. It was hopeless; he knew Buffy. She would assume Spike was behind this - that he'd found a way to get the chip out and had killed or turned him.

"Damn it!"

Xander pounded his fist into the floor and then winced as his knuckles split and blood ran down his hand. Just then, the doors opened and Spike was thrown inside. Xander looked up in horror at the faces of the two men who had... Not going there, he decided. He looked at Spike, saw the condition he was in and all the rage and anger he had been suppressing came to the surface.

"You fucking bastards! You assholes! He can't even defend himself!"

Xander flew toward the door but it was already closed and all he got was a severe jolt for his efforts. He flew back from the door and landed hard beside the crumpled form of the vampire. The soldiers laughed.

"Aww, isn't that sweet. He's all worried about his boyfriend. Don't worry, lover, we took real good care of him."

Xander shot them a murderous glare and turned his attention to Spike. He heard the soldiers walk away and sighed in relief. He needed to make sure Spike was okay, and he didn't want the soldiers to see how much he did care about the vampire, it would only make things worse on them.

"Spike? Oh, God. Spike, are you okay?"

There was no answer. Xander brought his hands to the vampire's face and lifted his eyelids. No response. His knuckles were still bleeding slightly and he gently brushed them over the vampire's lips. He almost shouted for joy when a pale pink tongue slipped out and licked the smear of bright red away. There was no other response from the still form, so Xander did the only thing he could think of; he dug his fingernail into the worst of the cuts - opening it further - and then stuck the bleeding wound into Spike's mouth.

Part Four

Spike tasted blood. Sweet, hot, delicious, and totally human blood. Something he had missed desperately since becoming chipped. Something that haunted his dreams and followed him into his waking moments. Something he'd thought he'd never taste again. If this was a dream, he didn't want to wake up.

He had to wake up, though; had to know how badly those wankers had worked him over, if any of the damage was permanent. That and he needed to know if Xander was okay. He could smell the boy's scent so he knew he must have been taken back to the cell after passing out for the second time.

"Xan...der?"

Spike croaked and then swallowed. His eyes flew open in shock. Not a dream. He had tasted blood, Xander's blood!

"Spike? Oh thank God!"

Spike felt himself pulled into strong arms, and the shock of being hugged by Xander Harris was wreaking havoc with his higher brain functions. He wanted to ask him if he was okay, why he was bleeding, why he had fed his own blood - even if it was just a small amount - to a vampire, to him. But he found himself enjoying the feel of being held, the heat from the human seeping into his cold bones.

"I was so scared you weren't going to wake up."

"Shhh, pet. I'm all right."

Spike managed to extricate himself just a little from the warm embrace and looked up into Xander's eyes, suspiciously wet with unshed tears, and offered him a small smile. Had Xander been about to cry? Over him?

"Are you okay, Xan... What those bastards did... I'll see them all dead for it. I promise you that!"

"Spike..."

Xander croaked, and then found himself unable to speak any more. His throat tightened and the tears finally spilled from his eyes. He shook with silent sobs as the events of the previous hours finally caught up with him. He felt Spike's arms tighten around him and was insanely grateful that the blonde understood.

"S'okay, luv. Let it out, I've got you."

Spike purred softly and petted the crying man until he finally fell into an exhausted sleep. He licked his lips and a soft smile graced his face. Xander cared about him; it was more than just not wanting to be alone. Blood didn't lie.

Part Five

Waking up with a warm body in his arms was a novel experience for the Master vampire. One he thought he could get to like a lot more than was prudent for him. Xander was still asleep, his hot breath gusting across Spike's neck; his heart beat a steady thump in his chest, the sound of it rousing Spike from his slumber. He was hungry. But Xander wasn't food to him, hadn't been since they'd become friends. You didn't eat friends - it just wasn't cricket.

A new scent invaded Spike's senses and he sat up, gently displacing Xander from his chest. There on the floor was a tray of food. Scrambled eggs, toast, a carton of orange juice and a Styrofoam cup filled with coffee. Cold coffee most likely, as Spike had no idea how long the food had been sitting there.

"Xan, wake up, pet. Looks like room service has been by."

Xander stirred in his sleep and blinked open sleepy eyes. He smiled up at Spike and then reality came crashing in on him. He sat up in alarm.

"Oh god. It wasn't a nightmare."

"No, it wasn't. Come on, now. Panicking isn't going to help. If we're going to get out of here, we need to keep our wits about us."

"I thought you said there was no hope? That they'd be ready for anything you tried?"

"Yeah, well, I'm not going to just stand by and do nothing as they..."

Spike trailed off and turned away from Xander.

"I can't just sit here and wait for them to come back. I won't let them hurt you again, not if I can help it."

Xander swallowed the lump in his throat and tried to lighten the mood.

"So, what did we get for breakfast? I'm pretty sure I put in an order for eggs Benedict."

Spike snorted.

"You got what appears to be scrambled eggs, toast, juice and coffee. Stone cold most likely, but at least they plan on feeding you."

Xander looked at the tray and then at the vampire.

"Spike..."

"No worries, Xan. I can go awhile without feeding. Eat up, need to keep up your strength."

Xander nodded and picked up the tray, the thought of cold eggs and soggy toast doing little for his appetite, but Spike was right. He needed to eat.

Part Six

They had been there for three weeks. Three weeks in which they had been poked, prodded, cut, electrocuted, and run through tests that Xander had no idea what they were for. No one spoke to him; the doctors talked over him as if he was an object rather than a person. But at least the soldiers that raped him hadn't been back.

Xander scratched at the scab on his inner elbow. They had taken enough blood from him to keep a vampire alive. So much so, in fact, that they had had to give him a transfusion.

Spike wasn't faring any better. He had been put in a room with seven other vampires – well-fed vampires - and forced to fight for his life. He had come out of there barely conscious, but he had won. With no weapons, no stakes, just his own bare hands, he had torn the other vamps to pieces. That was one of the better tests he had been forced to endure. The electro-shock, and the freezing had been painful, the broken bones and sliced off skin still weren't healing despite the fact that they had finally fed him. Of course, he wouldn't tell Xander that it was his blood they were forcing him to eat, it was just one more pain that the human had to endure that was his fault.

When nightfall came and the hours of tests and pain were over, the two found themselves curled together in the far corner of the cell. With no one there who mattered to see them, they took comfort in each other, holding onto the other throughout the night knowing that come daybreak the cycle would begin anew. There seemed to be no end to the inventive tortures the Initiative doctors could come up with.

Part Seven

It was sometime in the middle of the fifth night of their fourth week of captivity that Xander woke up with the odd sensation of being watched. He looked out into the dimly lit corridor and froze. There just outside his door was a very large soldier with a stun gun and a key card. Images of his brutal rape flashed before his eyes and he whimpered and squeezed his arms tightly around the sleeping vampire, startling him into wakefulness.

"Xan? Wha..."

"Shhh! We're being watched.

Xander whispered and Spike turned his head to see the large man at the cell door. The soldier's eyes flashed yellow for a brief instant and Xander's mouth dropped open in confusion. Spike sniffed the air and sat up in shock. The door opened and the soldier put his finger to his lips in a silencing motion. Spike nodded and got to his feet. He pulled Xander up to stand, and covered his mouth with his hand, before leaning into him and whispering in his ear.

"Not a word, luv. I know you have questions but keep 'em 'til we're outta here. Okay?"

Xander nodded and Spike removed his hand from his mouth, instead using it to take Xander's hand and lead him out of the cell. They followed the vampire down an empty corridor and up a ladder. The soldier paused at the top and keyed in a code on a trap door in the ceiling. It opened to reveal a dark, star-filled sky. Xander almost shouted in joy.

Up they climbed, emerging in a field on the UCS campus. The soldier closed the door and pointed toward a pathway off to the left. Spike grinned, squeezed Xander's hand and pulled him along. The soldier followed, keeping an eye out behind them.

In a dark patch of trees a figure in a long white gown stood looking up at the sky. Her head turned toward them as they approached and she smiled. The soldier ran toward her and she opened her arms.

"Such a good boy, mummy's so proud of you."

She kissed the soldier and Xander looked back and forth between the vampire at his side and his crazy Sire, who was sucking face with a vamped-out soldier.

"Uh, Spike? Would now be a good time for those questions?"

Drusilla pulled away from her soldier and giggled. She gave Spike a wicked grin and crooked her finger at him. He grinned back, and releasing Xander, reached out for her. When she stepped into his arms, he kissed her soundly and spun her in circles. Finally he set her back down on her feet and stepped back, looking her up and down.

"Dru, baby? How did you know we were trouble?"

"The stars, my Spike. They told me I had to come. They talked to me of wicked things, of pain and despair. They told me of your bonding."

Spike looked worriedly back at Xander and then gave Dru a look that clearly told her to shut up. Her eyes widened and she gave a gleeful chuckle.

"Oh! A secret!"

She clapped her hands and bounced on the balls of her feet.

"I like secrets. Such wickedness, and so much fun when they come out into the light."

"Yeah, sure, pet. Wicked fun."

Xander who had been following all of this closely was about to open his mouth and demand answers when Dru began to whimper.

"She's coming, have to go now. Daddy will help you. Spike, you must trust me. Bring your pet and follow quickly. The slayer has blood on her hands and it's not sweet. It's foul and wrong. She'll hurt you."

Spike had no clue what she was rambling about, but he knew enough about Dru's visions to do as she said. He grabbed Xander again and began to run. Through the trees and over a fence they ran, never stopping until Drusilla's soldier came to a halt in front of a black SUV and opened the doors. Spike looked warily at the new vampire and finally had to ask.

"Dru? Who the bloody hell is that?"

"He's mine. I found him in the park, and kissed him sweetly - like I did to you so many years ago. His name is Graham, and the stars told me he would save you."

Spike and Xander exchanged a look and then shrugged their shoulders before getting into the backseat. Dru got in the front with her Childe and they drove off.

Part Eight

The shock of the night's events began to wear off and Xander found himself unable to remain silent any further. He was grateful to Dru for saving them and all, but he wasn't too comfortable sitting in a car full of vampires. Plus there was the bit about Buffy; he wanted to know what the crazy vampiress had meant about her having blood on her hands. Seeing that Spike was sleeping beside him, Xander took a chance and spoke to Dru.

"Um, excuse me? But could you maybe answer a couple questions?"

Dru turned in her seat and looked at him.

"Of course, deary. What would you like to know?"

"Uh, okay, well first, I assume you meant Angel when you said "Daddy" so are we going to LA?"

"Yes."

Xander nodded to himself and then took a deep breath. He let it out slowly and then calmly asked the question he really wanted an answer to.

"What did you mean about Buffy? You said she would hurt Spike, but she's my friend. She wouldn't hurt him, not if I explained everything."

Dru's eyes flashed gold in the darkened interior of the moving vehicle; she hissed and Xander sat back into his seat abruptly. Spike stirred beside him and he unconsciously began to run his fingers through his hair in a soothing motion. Something he had discovered calmed the vampire over the past few weeks. Dru's Child - Graham - looked to his Sire for approval and at her nod he cleared his throat and spoke.

"The slayer has been compromised. Agent Finn was assigned to get to know her, measure her strengths and weaknesses, assess her fighting skills and report back to Professor Walsh. He did his job well. Professor Walsh brought the slayer on board, she joined the Initiative freely, but that was the last thing she's done of her own free will. The Initiative's main goal is the capture and study of HST's. To learn their strengths and how to kill them. The other thing the Initiative does is modify the behaviour of HST's, through implanting them with microchips. Maggie - Professor Walsh - has expanded her experiments to include human subjects, as well. Finn, Gates, the slayer, myself, and a handful of others have been implanted. The devices we were given, boost our adrenaline levels and imbalance our hormones, causing us to be overly aggressive, and easily controlled. My device stopped working when I died. The slayer no longer fights against the forces of darkness, she kills

indiscriminately. Just like I did, just like Finn does, just like Gates and the others do. Incidentally, it was Gates and Cole who worked you and Spike over. On Professor Walsh's command."

Xander sat stunned. It was a lot to take in, and he had no idea what to do. He immediately thought of Giles and Willow but was scared to ask what had become of them. What if Buffy and Riley had killed them, or worse, taken them in to be studied?"

"Giles? Willow?"

Xander's voice cracked as he spoke, he was terrified of the answer, but he had to know.

"Dead. They didn't survive Walsh's attempts to extract their magical properties. She wanted to know what made them powerful, and if it could be transferred to someone else. They fought it and it killed them."

Xander choked back a scream and curled himself into Spike and sobbed silently as the vehicle continued toward LA. Spike slept on but instinctively wrapped his arms around the boy and held him tight.

Part Nine

When Xander awoke next, he was lying on a sofa with a blanket over him. He could hear voices in another room; they sounded like angry whispers. He sat up and scratched his head before attempting to stand. His legs felt like rubber and his temples throbbed. He felt like he was going to throw up. Suddenly he remembered what that Graham guy had told him and he ran from the room holding his hand over his mouth. He barely noticed Angel as he came barrelling out of the doorway and Spike grabbed at him. The blonde steered him into the bathroom just in time as Xander leaned over the toilet and threw up.

By the time Xander's stomach had emptied and the dry heaves had finally tapered off, Spike was standing ready with a glass of water and some aspirin. He sat the boy down on the closed toilet lid and handed him both the pills and the water. Xander grimaced at the feel of the tablets sliding down his raw throat and Spike gave him a sympathetic smile.

"You feeling better, luv?"

"Buffy..."

"I know. Dru and her pet filled me in after I woke up. I'm so sorry, love. I know how much the witch meant to you, and Rupes was like a father to you. I can't do or say anything to make this better, but I'm here for you. I'll take care of you, if you'll let me."

Xander nodded his head and allowed Spike to pull him to his feet and into his arms. It felt safe there, like nothing in the world could hurt him as long as Spike was holding him.

Angel watched from the doorway as his Grandchilde soothed and petted the distraught human boy who had been the bane of his existence when he lived in Sunnydale. He didn't know what the Initiative had planned by bonding those two together, but he had to help them deal with the repercussions. Spike might not have been his favourite person in the world, a round of torture by hot pokers could make you dislike someone something fierce, but he was still family and for as much as he disliked Xander Harris, the boy needed help. Angel knew how it felt to lose your family - though, technically he was the one who killed his. Besides, he'd need them both if he were to stand a chance in saving Buffy.

Part Ten

Angel's apartment wasn't very big; in fact, it was kind of on the small side and it only had one bedroom. Angel had been stunned when Spike had put Xander to bed in his room and then informed him in no uncertain terms that Angel would be sleeping on the couch, as there was no way all three of them would fit in the bed. Then Spike had turned around and gone back to the bedroom and climbed into the bed with the almost asleep young man.

Angel shook his head in wonder as Xander easily opened his arms and Spike settled against his chest. It looked as though they had been sharing a bed for ages by the ease in which they arranged themselves and fell asleep. He had to wonder what all had happened in that cell at the Initiative complex. Spike hadn't been very forthcoming, and Dru and her newest Childe hadn't wanted to stay any longer than necessary. Angel had been torn, not knowing whether he should have let them go or dusted them. In the end, Spike had made the decision for him when he'd told Angel that it was only because of Dru and her Childe that he and Xander had escaped and would he just let them go, so that he could put Xander down somewhere, and then pushed his way past him and inside the building.

Angel got a spare pillow and blanket from the closet and lay down on the couch. It would be daybreak soon, and he was exhausted. The couch wasn't exactly built for someone of his size to sleep on; he just knew it was going to be a long day. 11 12 13 14 15

Part Eleven

Xander woke first and spent a few moments just watching Spike sleep. The blonde had obviously gotten up at some point after he had fallen asleep and undressed because he was now wearing nothing but a pair of silk boxers. Angel's silk boxers if the size of them was any indication. He grinned. He never figured Spike was the underwear type or that he would care enough about Xander's sensibilities to bother with wearing them. Then again, things change. After what had happened to them both, maybe Spike wasn't comfortable being naked in a bed with another man either.

The blonde stirred in his sleep and wrapped his arms tighter around Xander while simultaneously flinging one leg over Xander's hip. He rubbed his cheek against Xander's chest and purred lightly. Xander grinned in spite of himself and wrapped an arm around Spike's back. He knew that this wasn't normal behaviour for two friends, especially for two friends of the male persuasion, but it felt... right somehow.

He didn't understand it, but ever since they had been captured, he had started feeling a pull toward Spike. When they were separated during the day, he felt antsy and his head hurt. He only calmed as he was taken back to his cell, and then only if Spike were there waiting for him. He had assumed it was just a reaction to his environment, that he associated Spike and their cell with safety because they were left alone while they were in there. But now? Now he was free and in LA, far enough away from Sunnydale and the soldiers that he could think about things rationally. And it just didn't make sense. He knew that there was something going on here, something... different than just taking comfort in the arms of a friend.

Dru had mentioned a bond; he remembered that. He also remembered the look on Spike's face when she had said it. He had looked almost afraid, and then angry as he turned toward her and glared at her. He had just chalked it up to the ravings of a loon, but now he was beginning to wonder if there wasn't more to it than that.

"Mmmm, Xan."

Spike mumbled in his sleep and the purr kicked up a notch. Xander's eyes flew open in shock as Spike moved and he felt the vampire begin to thrust gently against his hip. He swallowed hard and squeezed his eyes shut as his own traitorous cock filled and lengthened in response. He didn't understand what was happening; he wasn't gay, and yeah, he liked Spike - they were friends - but he didn't like him that way. Except that his body seemed to be telling him something else entirely, and it was freaking him out.

Finally, Xander was able to take control of himself and he slid out from under Spike and fled the room. He was thankful that Angel was nowhere to be seen as he ran into the bathroom and jumped under the cold spray of the shower - clothes and all.

By the time his erection had waned, he'd peeled off the wet clothes and washed on autopilot as his mind tried to puzzle out his sudden attraction to the vampire. Two months ago, he had hated Spike, then Giles had forced him to take the vampire in for a week. They had begrudgingly called a truce and from there a tentative friendship had formed. It was an odd friendship to say the least, filled with biting insults, beer drinking, and games of pool at the Bronze. When they had been captured, they had become closer; after the rape when Xander cried in Spike's arms, the vampire admitted that he had been visited by the soldiers as well.

It had seemed natural to turn to the vampire for comfort, to let those strong arms wrap around him and hold him close. Every night they had fallen asleep in each other's arms, revelling in the only kind touch available to them. But even then, he'd never thought of Spike in a sexual way, didn't think Spike was attracted to him like that either. So what had changed?

It could have been something the doctors had done to him, God knows he had a lot of strange tests performed on him, he'd been given any number of different drugs, had blood, hair, tissue, and even semen samples taken from him. He'd been cut, stitched, submerged in a sticky gel-like substance with scuba-type gear on him, left to dry out to the point of dehydration under heat lamps, and the blood...

He'd been forced to drink blood. Suddenly it all made sense. The blood, the bond, the feelings of anxiety, the sexual attraction, everything. The bastards had bonded him to Spike. Xander felt the first of many hot tears spill down his cheeks as he slumped to the bottom of the shower stall. He hadn't spent time around Giles and his books without picking up a few things about vampires. A bond with a vampire was permanent and it changed you.

After everything else he had learned in the past twenty-four hours, that was just too much to absorb. His body began to shut down and he barely managed to turn off the water before he let the darkness wash over him.

Part Twelve

Spike came to in a blind panic. Something was wrong - he could feel it. It took him a minute to realise that Xander wasn't in the bed, and when he did, he jumped up and ran from the room. Spike followed the sound of a beating heart into the bathroom, and his eyes widened in shock at the sight that met his eyes. Xander was curled up - naked - in a foetal position in the bottom of Angel's

shower. Spike wasn't sure what had happened to him, but he knew he couldn't leave him there like that.

Steeling himself against his baser nature, Spike lifted the wet and naked young man into his arms. Carrying Xander back to the bedroom, Spike returned to the bathroom for some towels.

Once he had dried and dressed Xander in a pair of Angel's sweatpants and a loose, white tank top, he went to the kitchen to make something for Xander to eat. He shook his head and rolled his eyes at the lack of actual food in his Grandsire's cupboards, before settling on some instant soup. He put the kettle on to boil while he heated himself some blood. Once he had fed and made the soup, he went back into the bedroom and gently shook the sleeping man.

"Xander, wake up now. I've made you some soup."

Spike shook his head at his lame attempt at offering comfort. He was pretty sure that whatever it was that had caused Xander to faint in the bathroom, soup - instant soup at that - was not going to cure it. All the same, as the dark brown eyes opened and fixed on him, he smiled softly and held out the mug.

"It's chicken noodle."

Spike almost rolled his eyes at himself. He'd spent the better part of a century charming the knickers off any mortal he wanted, and now he couldn't even find one comforting thing to say to the man he was bonded to. It was pathetic.

Xander sat up and studied the vampire as he seemed to be having some kind of internal debate. He wondered if Spike was aware of what had been done to them; and if he was, was he ever planning on telling Xander? That and he wondered why Angel would have chicken noodle soup, when he never ate anything.

"Spike? You plan on giving me the soup or are you going to hold onto it all day?"

The vampire snapped out of his thoughts and thrust the mug into Xander's hands.

"Sorry, Xan. Got side-tracked for a moment."

"Hmm."

Xander sipped at the soup and watched Spike from underneath his eyelashes. It suddenly occurred to him that he was back in the bed and wearing... Angel's clothes. He realised, to his utter embarrassment, that Spike must have found him in the shower and dressed him before putting him back to bed. That, of course, brought back the reason he had fled the room in the first place and the conclusion he had come to in the shower. He choked on his soup, and was relieved that vampires

had fast reflexes as Spike snatched the cup away and began slapping him on the back before he spilled soup everywhere or managed to kill himself.

"Easy, luv; it's all right."

Spike let off on the back slapping and settled for rubbing soothing circles as Xander caught his breath and smiled sheepishly.

"Not one of my finer moments. You'd think I'd be able to feed myself without choking by this point in my life."

Spike snorted and then smiled back at him.

"No worries, pet. I won't tell no one."

Xander fell silent and closed his eyes. He knew he had to ask Spike if he was right about his assumption, if they were actually bonded. But he was afraid that he already knew the answer - and it wasn't one he wanted to hear.

"Spike?"

The vampire looked up into Xander's eyes and sighed.

"Yeah, pet. What is it?"

"You know what they did to us, don't you?"

The panicked look on the vampire's face answered his question better than any words ever could have. He lowered his head and flinched away from Spike's touch as the vampire tried to comfort him. Spike bit back the snarl of rage at being rejected. He knew that it was instinct to want to be close to Xander, that even though he had not initiated the bond, it was there and his demon now saw the boy as his.

"Xander, look at me. I didn't do this to you. It was done to both of us. I would never bond with someone against their will."

Xander finally looked up at Spike and saw the truth in his eyes; he reached out for him and felt a wave of relief crash over him as Spike wrapped him in his arms.

"How'd you know, Xan? I mean, I only figured it out because you fed me that first night, so I knew the taste of your blood. After a few days it changed; I could taste myself in it."

Xander chuckled against Spike's chest.

"I didn't. Not until this morning. I was in the shower and everything just clicked into place, the blood they forced me to drink, the way I feel safe with you, the discomfort when you aren't nearby, and..."

Spike could smell the boy's embarrassment and wondered what he was thinking. He finally had to ask, as it didn't seem Xander was going to provide the answer.

"What else, Xan? What else happened?"

"You... This morning, you were... Hard."

Spike blinked and then nodded his head.

"I get it. Sorry, luv; I hope I didn't scare you."

"No, I, I got hard too."

Xander whispered that last part so softly that Spike almost didn't hear it. He gave the boy a gentle hug and kissed the top of his head.

"Natural reaction, Xander. This kind of thing is usually between lovers, a way for a vampire to keep his mate with him without having to turn them. Most Vamps mate with other vamps - if they take a mate at all. So it isn't done much. To tell the honest truth, I don't much understand it myself. Angelus was into all the lore and whatnot. Me? I just wanted to kick arse and have fun. "

Xander couldn't help but laugh; Spike could have been the poster boy for vampire ADD. He had the patience of... Cordelia at a shoe sale. Spike reluctantly released Xander and looked at him seriously. He never would have initiated a bond with Xander, but now that it had been forced on them, he wasn't all that upset by it. The past few weeks had shown him a different side to the Scooby that he admired and respected. He was worthy of the bond, and if Xander started to come around to the idea of them being together, he would welcome it. He was tired of being alone and falling in love with the wrong people. Xander had turned out to be a good friend; he was sure he would be a good mate as well.

"I think we need to talk to Peaches. He might be able to fill in a lot of the blanks. I know I have questions, so I'm pretty sure you have a few hundred as well."

Xander nodded and lowered his eyes from Spike's face. His body's reaction to the vampire's close proximity was making him uncomfortable. He wanted to touch him, to hold him in his arms - not that that wasn't something he'd done before, but the urge to kiss those pale pink lips and see if they were as soft as they looked, to find out how they tasted, that was new. He needed to get someplace where other people were around, lest he give in to temptation.

"Good idea, let's do that now."

Part Thirteen

Doyle and Cordelia had just gotten into work, so Angel hadn't had time to brief them on the current situation or his temporary houseguests. Needless to say, they were both shocked to see Spike come upstairs into the office with Xander right behind him.

Remembering the last time the peroxide blonde had paid them a visit, Cordelia immediately pulled the flask of holy water from her purse as Doyle grabbed the crossbow he kept under the desk. Xander acted on instinct and put himself between his enraged ex-girlfriend, her weapon-wielding cohort, and the vampire.

"Angel, man! You better get out here, we've got company and it ain't the friendly kind."

"Oh my God! You turned Xander? I'm so gonna dust you!"

Doyle and Cordelia both hollered at once. Xander almost laughed at the idea of him being a vampire, but the look of hurt on Cordelia's face made him stop. He stepped toward her and then froze as the guy with the crossbow glared at him.

"Cordy, I'm not a vampire. And Spike isn't here to cause trouble. We came to see Angel."

Angel saved him further explanation when he burst into the office and told Doyle and Cordelia to stand down.

"Spike's been rendered harmless; he couldn't hurt you if he wanted to, and Xander's human. They came to me for help, and we're going to give it to them."

"You've got to be jokin' man. He's evil, you can't trust him." Doyle shouted and looked at Cordy to back him up. Cordy was looking at Xander sceptically.

"You're still human? Not possessed or anything?"

Xander smiled.

"Not possessed. Promise."

"Okay. Fill us in, then we'll decide if we're helping or not."

Angel opened his mouth to speak, but she cut him off.

"You can do as you like, but until I know what is going on, I'm not making any deals to help the fashion-challenged undead."

"Oi!"

"Please, you are so 70's retro. Get over it."

Xander chuckled and pulled Spike with him to the other side of the room and sat him in a chair. He took the seat next to him and listened as Angel brought his team up to date. It didn't take long before Doyle signed on to help. Spike whispered to Xander that the guy was a half-breed, and that the Initiative would be very interested in him. Xander agreed.

Cordelia also agreed to help; she hadn't exactly been close with the scoobies - her relationship with Xander notwithstanding - but to hear about their deaths, and that Buffy was taking a walk on Faith's side of the street, made her decision.

Doyle volunteered to shake down some of his contacts, see what kind of information they had on the Initiative while Cordelia started a search on-line. Spike took the opportunity of their absence to question Angel about vampire bonds.

"What exactly do you want to know?"

"Anything - everything. I don't know anything about it, neither does Xan. We were hoping you could explain things to us."

Angel looked at his irate Grandchilde and then at the tense expression on Xander's face and sighed.

"All right. But not here. I'll meet you two back downstairs in a few minutes; this is a personal matter and I doubt you want Cordelia eavesdropping on our conversation."

Spike grinned as he picked up a soft, indignant 'hey!' from outside the door. Angel obviously heard it as well, as he gave Spike a pointed look. Grabbing Xander's hand, Spike stood and pulled the boy behind him as he headed back downstairs to Angel's apartment.

Part Fourteen

Xander fidgeted nervously and paced back and forth. Spike sat watching him with a somewhat amused expression on his face. He could smell Xander's arousal, and caught the subtle looks he kept giving him. He knew that this wasn't easy for the other man, not being inclined that way and all. He was thankful that as a demon, he had no such hang-ups. Sex was sex; the gender of his partner mattered very little. Hell, species rarely mattered either. He drew the line at mucous demons though. They were too drippy and smelled funny.

"Xander, sit down fer Christ's sake. You're making me dizzy."

Spike snagged the young man around the waist as he passed him and pulled him down onto the sofa beside him. Xander blushed and tried to scoot away from him, but Spike held on tight.

"I'm not gonna soddin' pounce on you! Just sit. Here, take my hand."

Spike laced his fingers through Xander's and squeezed.

"Now, doesn't that help? Feel a bit less antsy?"

Xander was stunned. He did feel better.

"Yeah. Wow."

"I know this is hard for you luv, but the bond requires that we... Physical contact will help alleviate some of the pressure to... "

Spike huffed in annoyance. He was trying to be delicate here, but it wasn't easy.

"Spike, I get it. I know what the problem is, you don't have to pussyfoot around the subject. Sex. Okay? I said it. Sex sex sex sex sex!"

Spike bit his lip to hold back a grin. Xander was cute when he was flustered. Xander dropped his head into his hands and groaned.

"I can't believe I just said that."

"S'okay, Xan. I won't tell anyone."

Xander could hear the laughter in Spike's voice and lifted his head to glare at him.

"This isn't funny. I'm not gay, Spike. I'm not, but everything in me is screaming out at me to touch you. Naughty touching. And, and I don't know if I can keep fighting it."

Spike suddenly felt bad. Here he was enjoying the boy's embarrassment and it never occurred to him how badly this was affecting him, especially after what those soldiers had done to them. It was nothing to Spike; he'd had far worse as a fledgling. Darla had presented him to the Master's court, and he'd been passed around from vamp to vamp until he was too loose and weakened to be any fun anymore. But for Xander, that was probably the worst thing he'd ever experienced. He probably wouldn't be so frightened, if not for that.

"Xan, you know I'd never hurt you, right?"

Xander looked up at him, pain shining in his eyes.

"Yeah, but... It hurt, Spike. It hurt so fucking much. I don't want to do that again; I couldn't stand it if you hurt me like that."

"Oh, Xan. C'mere, luv."

Spike took Xander in his arms and shushed him with soft touches and soothing sounds. When Xander calmed and relaxed into the embrace he spoke to him softly.

"It doesn't have to be like that. That was rape, Xander. Not sex. Not love. It was meant to hurt. I would never hurt you."

Spike tilted Xander's face up and looked him in the eyes.

"It can be good, pet. So good. Like nothing you've felt before. I'd have you begging me to take you. You'd be so ready, there'd be nothing but pleasure. You would scream my name as I took you to heights of ecstasy you never dreamed of. You have no idea how good it can be; I could show you things, make you feel things you didn't know were possible. If you let me, I'd give you everything."

Xander's mouth was dry and his eyes were wide, his hands were clenched into fists as he hung on Spike's every word. He couldn't break away from the blonde's penetrating gaze as he inched forward until they were a mere breath away. Slowly, his eyes closed as Spike brushed his cool lips over Xander's warm ones and he sighed in satisfaction.

Spike could hardly believe what he was doing. He was kissing Xander! He hadn't meant for this to happen. He only wanted to assure him that he wouldn't hurt him, that it wouldn't be some horrific experience for him. Quite the opposite, in fact. Kissing had never played into it, but there he was, gently trailing his tongue along Xander's soft bottom lip, hoping to be granted entrance to his mouth.

Xander's lips parted on a sigh and Spike slipped inside the warm, moist mouth and sought out Xander's tongue. He twined them together briefly before pulling back a little and hoping Xander

would follow. As Xander gave himself over to the kiss, Spike brought his hands into play. He didn't want to rush, or pressure Xander, but he did want to touch him, he needed to touch him.

Xander felt Spike's arms around him, his hands trailing lightly up and down his back. He hesitantly ran one hand down Spike's back and around to the side to rest on his slim waist. He was going crazy, he was sure of it. Nothing had ever felt as good as this gentle meeting of lips and tongue, Spike's hands touching him, and the feel of Spike's body under his hands. He wanted to do so much more.

Part Fifteen

Angel came down to his apartment and froze at the scene in front of him. Xander and Spike were locked in each other's arms, kissing and petting one another. Low, lust-filled sounds accosted his hearing and he almost turned around and left them to their business. Then he remembered what it was that he hadn't smelled on them. They had yet to have sex, which meant the bond was incomplete and could still be broken - if somewhat dangerously. A small part of him - Angelus most likely - enjoyed the idea of Xander being mated to a vampire for eternity. It would serve the little prick right for all the trouble he'd caused him and Buffy. Angel stamped down on that part of himself and shook his head. He was a good guy, a saver of souls and helper of the helpless. Or was that hopeless? Either way, Xander and Spike fit that category to a tee. Knowing that Spike was going to be pissed, he cleared his throat and stifled a grin as Xander leapt away from Spike, and the blonde glared at him.

"Sorry to interrupt. I believe you had questions?"

Xander was mortified. He couldn't believe he had done that! Worse, that a part of him was wishing that Angel hadn't come in and put a stop to it. He peeked up at Spike through his lashes, his eyes locked on the soft, swollen lips he had just been kissing. He felt his penis throb in his pants and moaned softly as Spike's tongue swept out to lick his lips. He wanted Spike. It was all so confusing, but at least he wasn't in it alone; the kiss had left no doubt in his mind that Spike wanted him just as badly.

"Xander? I understand what's happening to you. The urge to complete the bond is probably overwhelming right now, but you have to concentrate. It isn't too late yet, this can still be stopped."

Spike snarled at Angel as his game face appeared and he pulled Xander to him and held him tight.

"Mine!"

To Xander's shame, the demon's possessive claim only served to make him that much harder. He couldn't suppress the passionate moan that rose from his throat or the shudder that followed it as Spike licked a path up the side of his throat to the shell of his ear.

"Spike! This has to be Xander's choice. If he wants to try and stop this, you have to let him."

Angel watched as Spike fought to control his baser instincts and his human face finally reappeared. As Spike loosened his hold on Xander and looked away from him, Angel continued.

"As I was saying. There is a way to stop the bond from going any further and to make it recede completely. I won't lie to you, it's dangerous and it could possibly be fatal to you both. It's your choice, Xander. If you want to stop this, I'll do what I can to help you."

Xander thought for a moment and finally looked up to meet Angel's eyes. He saw only sincerity in the vampire's eyes and it confused him. He was sure that Angel would refuse to help them at first; he hadn't exactly been Mr. Supportive of him and Buffy. But he could tell that he honestly was trying to help them. It unnerved him to say the least.

"What... What would we have to do to break the bond? I mean, is it that difficult?"

Spike tried to keep the hurt he was feeling from showing. He hadn't gone into this freely, and at first, he would have opted for breaking it too, but after that kiss, he thought Xander wanted him, that for once in his unlife he might actually get something - someone he wanted. He looked up at Angel and knew that the older vampire had read his expression. Surprisingly, he saw only concern and sympathy on his face, not pity or laughter.

"There's a ritual; it's complicated, and it could possibly kill you. Both of you. And we'd need Dru. I could do it, as the next in Spike's bloodline, but it would be easier on the two of you if Drusilla performed it." "What exactly is it? Do I have to drink blood again? 'Cause that was totally gross and so not looking forward to doing that again!"

Xander scrunched up his face in disgust and Angel looked at Spike with his eyebrow raised. Spike shrugged and held his hands up in a 'don't ask me' gesture. Angel looked back at Xander and tilted his head.

"Xander? Are you saying that you didn't like the taste of Spike's blood?"

"Uh yeah. I mean, blood... Eww, you know?"

Obviously Angel didn't know as he still looked confused.

"Am I missing something? I mean, was I supposed to enjoy it?"

Both vampires nodded and Xander sat back in alarm.

"Why?"

"Dunno, luv. Never met a human yet who didn't like the taste. S'why it's so easy to turn you lot, the blood tastes good. Otherwise you'd spit it out, right?"

Xander blinked.

"You know, that actually made sense. Maybe those doctors did something to it, or it had gone off or something."

Spike seemed to consider this for a few minutes before nodding to himself and quickly switching to game face and biting the pad of his thumb. He held it out to Xander as the human watched the blood slowly run down the digit and into the palm of his hand. He smiled as Xander stiffened with resolve and leaned in to take the proffered digit into his mouth.

At the first taste, Xander was lost. This was nothing like what he'd been forced to ingest in the labs. It was like comparing unsweetened baker's chocolate to the finest Swiss chocolate. Like comparing Spam to Fillet Mignon. He actually whimpered as the wound sealed and the blood stopped flowing.

"Guess that answers that question, huh?"

Spike shifted in his seat as his cock grew painfully hard. Having Xander drink from him was almost as good as sex. He'd really like to know how it would feel to have the boy feed from him while he fucked him through the mattress. Of course, that wasn't really helping his hard-on to go away so he shelved that particular fantasy for another time.

"Wow. I mean, I'd remember if it tasted like that. It did not taste like that."

Angel smiled at the flustered human and then crossed to the stairs leading back up to the office.

"Take some time to think about it, Xander; when you've made a decision let me know."

That said, Angel left the two alone to speak in private while he went to check on Cordelia's progress with her internet search. He doubted she'd find anything; she was no Willow when it came to hacking. At the thought of the gentle redheaded witch, Angel winced. He was going to miss her; she'd always been nice to him.

Part Sixteen

When Angel reached his office, he had yet another surprise waiting for him. Whistler. And he wasn't alone.

"Drusilla, why are you back here? I thought you and your Childe were leaving?"

Drusilla looked toward Whistler with a scowl and then faced her sire.

"The ugly little man said I had to help you save the nasty slayer. He said he'd take my boy away if I didn't."

Dru pouted and Angel bit the inside of his cheek to the point of pain to keep from smiling at the look on the demon's face when his crazy Childe had referred to him as an 'ugly little man'. He turned to Whistler and cleared his throat before speaking.

"Is this true? Why? What can Drusilla possibly do to help me save Buffy?"

Whistler was examining an interesting-looking paperweight on Angel's desk; he set it down and nodded his head.

"It's true. And I asked her because her boy is the only one who has the information you need. He's one of the Initiative's bestest and brightest. 'Course, that was before she got hold of him. He was a good kid, clean background, a little naive perhaps - otherwise he would have known what they were doing was wrong, but he saved Xander and Spike, and he's going to help you save Buffy."

"What did you mean when you told Dru that you'd take him away if she didn't help?"

Whistler looked down sheepishly and mumbled something. Angel cleared his throat and tapped his foot in annoyance. Finally, exasperated, Whistler looked him in the eye and spoke.

"Okay, so I lied. It's not like I could take him away from her, but I could tell you who he was and then you as her sire could claim rights over him, claim him as yours. Then he'd have to listen to you; either way, you get the info you need, and the slayer gets stopped. The Powers aren't too happy about the situation, that thing with Faith awhile back was bad, but this... I've never seen someone so cold. I liked Buffy, she was a good kid, real solid and all. What she is now though, she makes Faith look like a Girl Scout."

Angel swallowed and tried to visualise his Buffy as a cold-blooded killer. Angelus approved of the thought with a hearty 'Hell yeah!' but it made Angel's guts twist. If he managed to get to her in time, she might be able to come back from this, but if he were too late, how much of Buffy would be left? He decided the sooner they did this, the better.

"Okay. We'll work with Dru and her boy. But one slip..."

Angel turned to look at Dru and changed faces.

"... and I take the boy as my own. This is too important to let you screw up."

Dru nodded and in a moment of almost sanity she leaned up and placed a quick kiss to Angel's cheek.

"Don't worry, Daddy. I'll be a good girl, and my boy will be a big help. He'll make you proud."

Angel seriously doubted that he'd be proud of a new vampire, especially one of Dru's childer. Spike had never made much of an impression on him, except to piss him off. He couldn't see Graham being any better.

Part Seventeen

Back downstairs, Spike sat and watched as Xander seemed to be lost inside himself. He longed to go back to a few minutes earlier when things had been simpler, Xander had been in his arms, kissing him, and he felt at peace, like everything was falling into place. Now, his demon was in an uproar. Angel's announcement that their bond was incomplete and therefore could be broken had caused him to over react and grab onto the boy. He hadn't missed the arousal pouring off of him, but the fact that he was considering breaking their bond, at risk to both their lives, hurt. Was the thought of being with him so awful he'd risk dying?

Xander, for his part, was reliving everything that had happened to him over the past few weeks. The easy camaraderie he and Spike had shared while playing pool and drinking beer at the Bronze that night, the soldiers coming after them, being shot. Waking up in the Initiative, being raped by two of the soldiers, the feel of their fists pounding him, their feet kicking him, their cocks tearing him open and then blessedly the darkness as a sharp point was felt in his arm.

He remembered coming to in the cell again, Spike being gone. He had panicked at first, thinking the blonde was dust. Then he realised that his coat would have dusted with him, so Spike was just... gone. He had never been so thankful to see him when the soldiers had dumped his lifeless form back into the cell.

The weeks of torture flew by in his mind, only the memory of being forced to ingest blood stood out vividly. Now that he knew the taste of Spike's blood, he knew that had they just given him the

blood - without doing anything to it first - he would have happily drunk it. Even now, he could still taste it, his tongue searching for every last trace of it in his mouth.

The nights of holding one another, curled together in their little cell as far from prying eyes as they could get, was something Xander had held onto during the endless hours of torture. He knew if he could just make it through the day, then the night would come, and Spike would be there, and everything would be okay again. Or as okay as it could be as long as they were still there. He'd given up hope of rescue.

Then there was today. Waking up with Spike was par for the course now. Waking up in a bed was new; he definitely liked that addition to his morning. But then there was the thing that sent him running from the room. Spike. Humping his leg. It was more Xander's reaction to what Spike was doing that had freaked him out. He had been aroused by it, and it had scared him.

Now though, he knew the truth of it. He and Spike were bonded. Almost. They were one crucial step away from bonded. Sex. They hadn't had sex, and if you had asked Xander yesterday, he would have said that they never would either. Today he wasn't so sure. He had kissed Spike, a lot. And he had enjoyed it. That was probably an understatement if there ever was one. Enjoyed it didn't even begin to describe what he'd felt. It was like the perfect moment, like everything was happening the way it was supposed to; it felt natural.

He had a huge decision to make. He could still call this off, put a stop to the bond, and hopefully not kill both himself and the vampire in the process, or he could continue, have the sex, and make the bond complete. It was a tough choice. There was a voice in his head - it sounded a hell of a lot like his father - that kept screaming at him that he wasn't a faggot. That he had to put a stop to this perversion, and the sooner the better. Then there was another voice, this one sounded like Willow. It told him to accept himself, not to turn away a good thing just because it was different and unexpected. Of course, his penis had it's own ideas and very much wanted to get back to the place where he and Spike had been before Angel interrupted them. Then there was the logical part of his brain that told him it wasn't worth the risk to either of them to stop now. That Spike was his friend, possibly more, and even if they didn't die, putting an end to the bond would change their relationship. He might lose Spike's friendship as well; the vampire had made it quite clear that he didn't want to call an end to this.

Part Eighteen

Spike was beginning to think Xander was never going to snap out of it when he shook his head and turned to look at him. His eyes held such pain and confusion, more than a hint of longing as well, that Spike was wrapping his arms around him before he even realised what he was doing.

"You okay, luv?"

"I don't know. Everything's so... I'm confused."

"You wanna talk about it?"

"Not really. Can I ask you something?"

"Of course. You can ask me anything."

Xander paused for a moment, and looked deep into the vampire's eyes. He tilted his head, and looked a bit more, then he seemed to make a decision. Xander leaned in and kissed him, a mere brushing of lips before pulling away.

"Do you love me?"

Spike was taken aback. He hadn't expected that question. He thought about it for a few seconds and then smiled.

"I do. Didn't realise it until just now, but yeah. Is that what you wanted to hear?"

"I'm not sure, I think it is, I mean, I feel things - for you - that I never thought I would. I mean, I think I loved you, even before all of this bond stuff clicked into place up here."

Xander tapped his head with his forefinger.

"It was the way you held me at night. When I was scared, or when I was hurt, you made me feel safe; even in that place, you made me feel like we'd be okay as long as we were together."

Xander sighed and pulled at his hair.

"This isn't coming out right. What I'm trying to say is that I think even if they hadn't bound us together, sooner or later, I would still feel this way about you. If you still want to continue with the bond, I won't go through with the ritual."

Spike tried to keep the joyous expression off his face but knew he was failing miserably. He wanted to pull Xander to him and kiss him breathless. He didn't though. First, there was something he needed to know.

"Xander? Do you want to bond with me? Be my mate for eternity? If you want out, I won't hold it against you. I understand if you're frightened, luv. I would never force this on you."

Xander smiled at Spike and hugged him tightly.

"Thanks, Spike. I'm sure, though. I know it won't be easy, and I might still be a bit wary about the actual sex, but I know how I feel and I want to do this."

"All right, luv. As for the sex, there's no rush. We have time; when you're ready, luv, and not before."

"Okay. But can you kiss me again?"

Spike answered him by sealing their lips together and holding him even closer as they fell back so that Xander was on top of Spike. Xander pulled back a fraction and looked at Spike inquisitively.

"I told you, luv, I'm not going to rush you. You're in charge; we don't do nothing you don't want."

"Thanks, Spike."

Xander thanked him again by pressing his lips to Spike's throat and placing a line of sucking kisses up to his ear before tracing the shell with the tip of his tongue. He felt Spike shudder beneath him so he did it again. He would have gone farther if they hadn't been interrupted once again.

Part Nineteen

Doyle was the first one down the stairs and therefore the one to see Xander and Spike lying on the couch, arms around one another, kissing like there was no tomorrow. He blushed and turned away.

"Er, ah, excuse us, lads. But we need to talk to yer."

Xander sat up with a blush and surreptitiously wiped his mouth before meeting the amused green eyes of Angel's employee. Spike was less subtle; he growled at the man and remained flat on his back - his erection obvious to anyone who happened to look. Which Doyle did and turned away hastily as Xander smiled and reached out for Spike, pulling him up into a sitting position.

Angel came down the stairs after Doyle and took in the flushed and aroused state that Xander and Spike were in and shook his head with a slight grin.

"I take it you've made up your mind then?"

Xander nodded and hesitantly took Spike's hand. Spike grinned stupidly and looked up at his Grandsire with a smirk. Then he stuck his tongue out at him. Xander just rolled his eyes at Spike's childish gesture and squeezed his hand.

"Okay. Well, you both know Dru and her Childe, so I don't need to introduce you, but this here is Whistler. He works for the Powers That Be."

Angel pointed out the funny-looking guy standing apart from the others and Xander waved at him before turning back to Angel.

"The powers that be what?"

"The Powers That Be. They just are, you know, the powers? The higher ups, the good guys?"

Xander continued to look confused and Cordy snorted in annoyance at her boss.

"The Powers are the ones who released Angel from hell, they send Doyle visions of people in trouble and then Angel tries to help them. They speak to him through these two Oracle people, who are, by the way, the very definition of rude, and I would know. I mean, here we work our collective asses off trying to save people for them and do they show us any consideration? No! You'd think they'd send us at least a few paying customers; these looks don't come cheap, after all. I have a career to promote, which I so cannot do wearing last season's fashions..."

Angel glared at his secretary and she trailed off. Drusilla giggled and tried to get Graham to dance with her. He just frowned at her and shook his head. She pouted but then shrugged and went back to watching Spike and Xander as they sat together on the couch holding hands. Xander raised his hand as if he were in school, and Angel nodded at him.

"Um, why exactly are Dru and Graham here anyway? Not that we're not grateful to them and all for the rescue, but I figured if they came back you'd have dusted them, not invited them in for tea."

"I didn't invite them, Whistler did. We're going back to Sunnydale, and Dru and her Childe are coming with us."

"Makes sense I guess. When do we leave?"

Spike shot to his feet in full demon face and snarled at Angel.

"No! There is no way in soddin' hell I'm going back there and risking my neck, not to mention Xander, to save a fuckin' slayer!"

Xander stood and looked pleadingly at his bond-mate.

"Spike, Buffy's my friend; I have to go back and try to help her. I'd like you to come with me, but I'll understand if you want to wait here."

Xander found himself pulled tight against the vampire's body; he felt the sharp prickle of fangs near his throat as Spike buried his face in his neck and breathed in deeply. He knew Spike was scared; he was, too. The idea of being captured and brought back to the Initiative was terrifying, but he owed it to Buffy to try to help her; he owed it to the memory of Willow and Giles, as well.

Spike pulled back from Xander just enough to look him in the eye, his now-human face set with determination.

"Where you go, I go. I don't like this - I think it's bloody suicide, to tell you the truth, but I won't let you go alone, and I know if I tried to stop you, you'd hate me for it."

Xander nodded sadly and was grateful when Spike gave him an understanding smile.

"Your loyalty is just one of the things that makes me love you, Xan. It's part of who you are; don't feel bad for it."

"Thanks, Spike."

Their audience forgotten, Xander closed the distance between them and pressed his lips to Spike's. The vampire grinned and deepened the kiss. It didn't last long, as Cordelia's high-pitched shriek brought Xander's attention back to the here and now, and he abruptly ended the kiss and buried his red face in Spike's shoulder as the blonde chuckled and stroked his back.

Angel took Cordy to the other side of the room and explained what the Initiative had done to Xander and Spike. Cordelia figured Xander would be better off attempting to destroy the bond - even if it meant death - rather than spend eternity with Spike, which she voiced rather loudly. Xander tensed in the circle of Spike's arms and Spike growled in her direction but otherwise continued to try to soothe Xander.

Part Twenty

The trip back to the Hellmouth was made in two separate vehicles, Spike and Xander opting to ride with Dru and Graham, leaving the LA gang and Whistler to ride in Angel's convertible. Xander couldn't help but chuckle as Graham muttered to himself about the idiocy of a vampire driving a convertible.

"It's just not tactically sound."

Spike clapped the younger demon on the shoulder at that last remark and chuckled.

"That's Peaches for ya, 'not tactically sound' pretty much sums him up. Dru ever tell you about the time he tried to suck the world into hell?"

As Spike regaled the young vampire with tales of Angelus' stupidity, Dru turned her focus onto Xander. Xander was a little freaked to have her looking at him, remembering the time that Dru had offered him immortality. Stupid spell, he thought to himself.

"The stars tell me you are confused. They say you fear the bonding, you think Spike will hurt you."

Dru looked into Xander's eyes and he felt himself falling into her gaze. She cupped his chin and then smiled at him. He should have been afraid, that many vampire teeth so close to him and all, but he wasn't. He felt dreamy, sort of drunk almost.

"Look in my eyes, deary. See what I see."

~*~*~*~*~

Xander closed his eyes and then opened them again; he was no longer in the car, but in a fancy parlour. He could see Dru cowering in the corner, a large dark-haired man standing over her. As the figure turned around he saw that it was Angel - or Angelus, he was guessing, by the way he was dressed. He could hear the vampiress' whimpers and then Angelus' voice as he spoke harshly to her.

"Next time, lass, ye'll be listening to what I tell yer, or I'll make this time seem like a gentle caress."

As Angelus stomped off, he watched as Spike - prebleach - came out of the shadows. He couldn't have been more than a fledge at the time; he seemed so unlike the brash, cocky vampire he knew and - he guessed - loved.

"Shh, pet. S'all right now, the wanker's left. I'll take care of you."

"William? Why doesn't daddy love me? Am I a bad girl?"

Spike cradled the woman in his arms and crooned to her softly.

"No, luv. You're wonderful, you're a princess, and I love you. Angelus doesn't love anyone, pet. He doesn't know how."

Spike picked Drusilla up and carried her toward the door.

"Come on, luv. I'll draw you a bath and then brush your hair for you; you like that, don't you?"

"Will you always take care of me, my William?"

"'Til the stars shine no more, pet."

Xander swallowed past the lump in his throat. He knew Spike could be gentle, he'd seen that part of the vampire himself these past weeks; he just never realised that he was being treated with the same care and devotion that Spike had given to Dru for over a century. It suddenly occurred to him that Dru was sharing this memory with him; he smiled and nodded his head.

"I understand. Thank you."

As Xander opened his eyes he found Drusilla smiling at him and Spike looking at him with concern.

"Are you all right, pet? She didn't hurt you, did she?"

"I'm fine, Spike. Dru was just... helping me figure something out."

Spike looked sceptical, but at Dru's gleeful smile, and Xander taking his hand in his, he shrugged and let it go.

"So, you all sorted then?"

"Yeah. I'm good."

Xander smiled and gave Spike a soft kiss. Dru squealed with delight and turned away to allow them a little privacy. Spike took advantage of it by pulling Xander closer and deepening the kiss.

They met up with Angel and company at a motel just outside the city limits. They had decided it was safer to stay outside of town seeing as the sun would rise soon. Doyle and Cordelia were going to go into town in the afternoon and look around. They hoped that Willy might be able to give them some information, or maybe some of his patrons would agree to help them out.

After getting their room assignments, they all headed in to get some sleep. Xander noted that while Angel had booked himself, Dru, and Graham into one room and Doyle and Whistler into another, he and Spike had their own room, as well as Cordelia. He was a little nervous about being alone with Spike, now that he'd decided to complete the bond.

"Come on, luv. Sun'll be coming up soon and I don't fancy catching fire. It's not all it's cracked up to be."

"Yeah. Right. G'night guys."

Xander waved distractedly at the others and followed Spike to their room. It was a standard motel room - two beds, a night table between them, a small table and two chairs set up in the corner. There was a dresser with a TV on top of it, a clothing rack on wheels by the door, and a door that he assumed went into the bathroom. Xander looked at the beds, looked at Spike, and swallowed nervously.

"So... Nice room, huh?"

Spike frowned at Xander and shook his head. He stepped toward him and held out his hand.

"Xander, come here."

Xander took a step toward him and grabbed his outstretched hand. Spike pulled him into his arms and ran his hands soothingly up and down his back. He could feel the tension and nervousness pouring off the young man and was trying to get him to relax.

"What's got you so tense, luv? Was it whatever Dru showed you?"

"No. Actually, what Dru showed me was nice, it helped me decide something."

"Then what's wrong? I can feel the tension in your muscles, Xan. I can almost taste your nervousness."

Xander drew back and looked at Spike in shock.

"You can?"

"Well, yeah. Vampire here, comes with the whole super-senses package. So, spill. What has you all tied in knots?"

Xander blushed and lowered his eyes.

"I, I was thinking about this bond thing - you know the... sex part of it? Well, I'm still a little wiggled about it, but I want to, you know, do it. I mean, I know that you said you wouldn't hurt me, and I believe you, but a part of me was still freaking out about that, and then Dru said the stars told her I was afraid, and she showed me how you took care of her after Angelus would hurt her, and now I understand what she was trying to show me, that you love me. Yeah, you said you did, but now I get it, you care for me - take care of me - the same way you did with Dru, and I guess I want to... I dunno, show you that I trust you, that I believe you won't hurt me, and that I... that I love you."

Spike blinked rapidly and finally caught up with everything that Xander had said. It had been awhile since the boy had full-on babbled like that. As he finally assimilated the last sentence Xander had spoken, he smiled happily.

"I love you too, Xan. But don't think you have to shag me to prove it, eh? I told you, we have time. No rush."

"I know. Not rushing; I want to. I'm just a little nervous. I mean, I've never done this before."

Spike kissed Xander and held him tight to his chest.

"You sure about this?"

"Very."

"Then just relax, let me do the work. I promise it'll be good, Xan."

Xander nodded and let Spike pull him toward the closest bed. After he was gently laid down on it, Spike removed a small tube from his coat pocket and set it on the nightstand before tossing his duster on the other bed. At Xander's raised eyebrow, Spike shrugged.

"Dru. Apparently the stars told her we'd need lube on this trip. Wonder what else the bloody stars are telling her about us."

"Does it really matter? I mean, so far the stars have been on our side, so who cares?"

"Yer right. Better things to do and all that, anyway."

Spike leered at his lovely boy and waggled his eyebrows. Xander laughed and reached out and snagged his hand before dragging him onto the bed and rolling on top of him.

"I believe we were about here before we were interrupted back in LA?"

Spike grinned up at his soon-to-be lover and pulled his head down for a kiss. As Xander lost himself in the feel of Spike's lips moving against his own, the vampire's hands were pulling his shirt out of his pants and trailing up and down the expanse of warm flesh underneath. Xander groaned and flexed his hips against Spike, making the vampire groan as well and thrust up against him.

"Xan, luv, feel so good, pet. Just, just let me..."

Spike pushed Xander up so that he could divest him of his shirt. He pulled his own tight black T off as well. Xander reached out and trailed his fingertips lightly over Spike's chest from shoulder to waist. He licked his lips and then leaned in toward him, placing his mouth over one of the pale flat disks and teasing it with his tongue. Spike threaded his fingers into Xander's hair and purred at the warm, wet sensation.

"Oh, that's bloody marvellous, Xan. God, you're so fuckin' warm."

Xander released the tiny nipple and kissed his way across to its neglected twin before giving it the same attention. Spike was breathing heavily by this point and wondering if this was what Xander was like when he was nervous and afraid, what he'd be like once he was comfortable with the whole guy/guy thing.

Xander was pretty sure he wasn't nervous anymore, in fact he seemed to be quite happy with exploring this new part of his vampire. Spike was in awesome shape - even when he'd hated the vampire he'd been envious of his physical attributes. He wondered how it would feel to lick along those hard ridged abdominal muscles, to dip his tongue into the indentation of his navel, to follow that little trail of golden hairs to the prize trapped in too-tight denim. Only one way to find out.

Spike was sure he'd died and gone to heaven, as Xander licked, kissed and nibbled his way from chest to abs, dipping into his belly button and twirling the tiny hairs beneath it with the tip of his tongue. He didn't dare hope that the boy would go any farther than that, even as he felt his button open and his zipper being lowered. He let out a shout as a hot wet stripe was painted on his throbbing cock.

Xander grinned and licked his lips. Spike tasted good. Kind of like his blood did, only not nearly as strong. He'd have to do a lot of licking, maybe even some sucking to determine if it was the same flavour for sure, though.

"Bloody. Fucking. Hell!"

Spike's eyes rolled back in his head and his hands gripped onto Xander's skull as the young man blew his mind. Never, would he have thought Xander'd do this the first time out. Still, wouldn't do to let the boy pleasure him and get nothing in return.

"Christ, luv! I'm going to bloody pop if you keep that up!"

Xander released his hard flesh with a soft chuckle and then squealed as he was quickly pulled up and then over. He looked up at the shocked yellow eyes of the demon above him with a sheepish grin.

"You. Are just full of surprises aren't you?"

Xander shrugged his shoulders and grinned unrepentantly. Spike grinned back, and wary of his fangs swooped down and kissed his lover gently. As Xander slipped his tongue into Spike's mouth, the vampire managed to shift back to human visage. He hated the fact that he had to be so careful, but a chip-blast would definitely put a damper on the mood.

"What say I see if the rest of you tastes as good as your lips, then."

With a quick kiss, Spike moved away from the tempting lips and began trailing wet, open-mouthed kisses along Xander's jaw, and down the soft, tempting expanse of his throat. He longed to see his mark on the man, to know the feeling of sinking his fangs into the sweet skin beneath his lips. He also knew that to even try it would fry his brain, so he put the thought aside, and continued with the things he knew he could do. Like make Xander forget that he had ever doubted completing the bond.

As Spike's hands and mouth mapped out the contours of Xander's body, the man in question was reduced to helpless babbling and nonsense words. He couldn't remember why he'd thought this was a bad idea, let alone why he'd wanted to risk death over this. As Spike rolled him over, a brief flare of panic rose up from deep within him, but Spike was right there, whispering in his ear that everything was all right, that he would never do anything to hurt him, and to trust him to make him feel good.

Xander relaxed as Spike's skilled hands rubbed the tension from his shoulders, travelled down his spine and finally landed on the soft rounded globes of his ass. He moaned as cool thumbs dug into the crease and gently separated his cheeks. At the first touch of Spike's tongue on his hole, Xander understood what Spike had been trying to tell him. This was nothing like what he'd experienced at the hands of those soldiers; this was Spike, his friend, his lover, his soon-to-be mate, making love to him.

"God, Spike."

That was the last coherent thing Xander said for a while as Spike put his tongue to good use, and Xander forgot how to form words again.

By the time Spike stopped rimming him, Xander was more than ready for anything Spike wanted to give him. As the first slippery finger made its way inside him, he sighed with relief. He had been expecting pain, but there was none.

"Won't hurt you, pet. But this next one might burn a little bit. You ready?"

"Yes. Ready. Please."

Xander panted with the effort of not just thrusting himself back on the fingers gently nudging his opening. He knew that Spike was trying not to hurt him, and he appreciated the thought, but the bond was screaming inside him. He needed to have Spike inside him; he needed it like he needed to breathe.

Spike was no better off. He was in demon face and had bitten through his bottom lip in an effort to hold himself back. But here was his mate, or the man who would be in a few minutes, on all fours, open and practically begging to be taken, and all he wanted was to bury himself deep inside of him and ride him hard and fast. It was taking everything he had to stop from doing just that. He had promised Xander he wouldn't hurt him, and he intended to keep that promise.

Spike had three fingers buried in Xander's ass and the man was writhing and moaning and pushing back towards him on every thrust. He wriggled his pinky finger inside as well and gave a few more deep thrusts before he figured Xander was ready to take him without any pain.

Xander whimpered as he felt Spike withdraw his fingers from his body; he turned his head and saw Spike, in all his fangy, yellow-eyed glory, shakily applying lube to his rock-hard penis. He sighed with relief, knowing that finally, he would be taken, claimed, bonded.

Spike placed one hand on the small of Xander's back and then slid it down and around to his hip; he held him still as he used the other hand to line his cock up with Xander's stretched and ready entrance. With a deep breath he pushed the tip inside and both men moaned at the sensation.

"Jesus, luv. So fucking hot and tight. Try to push me out, Xan. It'll make it a bit easier."

Xander did as he was told and Spike slid in slow and easy. Once he was completely sheathed in Xander's body, he bent over his back and placed a series of soft kisses across his shoulders.

"Love you, Xander."

"Ungh, God, love you too, Spike. Move, please."

With one last soft kiss to the back of Xander's neck, Spike straightened up and began to thrust slowly in and out of the human's warm body. He couldn't get past the heat, the tightness, of this man. Knowing that this was his, that Xander was his now, for as long as they both lived, was almost too much for him to bear.

Xander's entire world had shrivelled down to the feeling of Spike's cock in his ass, the way it brushed that spot inside of him that made him see stars. He giggled and wondered if they were telling Dru things about what was happening in their bed. Then he forgot why he'd been giggling as Spike began to go faster, and one hand left his hip and came around to work his cock as the thrusts became almost brutal. The soft brushing of his prostate became a constant banging and his balls tightened in anticipation, and then he was cumming, pouring his orgasm out over Spike's fist and shouting his love for the demon behind him.

Spike roared as he felt the hot splash of Xander's cum, heard his shouts of love and passion. As the walls around his shaft clenched and fluttered he drove himself in twice more and then emptied himself inside of his mate. It was finished, complete. Xander was his now, and no one or nothing could change that.

Part Twenty-Two

In the next room, Cordelia put yet another pillow over her head and swore she would get Angel for putting her in the room next to Xander and Spike. Maybe she had been less than understanding about the two of them, but this was a punishment worthy of Angelus. She just knew he was going to act all innocent about it too, as if he didn't know that that was going to happen.

"Just you wait, mister. I'll get even with you if it's the last thing I ever do!"

Cordy mumbled to herself from beneath the extra three pillows on her head.

~*~*~*~*~

Xander and Spike slept the day away and were awakened at dusk by the sound of angry knocking on the door and the shrill voice of Cordelia threatening to come in and drag them out of the room naked if they didn't get a move on. Spike wasn't concerned about his own nudity, but decided he didn't like the idea of everyone seeing his Xan-pet in the altogether.

"Come on, luv. Up and at 'em. No need to give the wankers out there a free show."

Xander was thinking similar thoughts. It didn't help that two of the people - vampires - out there had already seen his mate naked. He felt a flare of jealousy rise up at the thought and was shocked by the intensity of it. It was crazy; he knew going into this that Spike and Dru had been together forever, and he wasn't stupid about Spike and Angelus either. They might not have been "lovers" in any human sense of the word, but he knew that sex had been a part of their relationship as well. So why was he suddenly feeling so murderous toward them?

Spike watched as Xander glared at the door and he couldn't help but feel good at the obvious jealousy on the boy's face. It was nice being wanted again, but he figured he'd better explain what was going on to him, before it got out of hand.

"Xan, reel it in, yeah? It's natural to feel protective of me, and jealous about my past lovers. I'd feel the same way in your shoes. If it weren't for the fact that I know you and little miss sunshine never got past second base, I'd likely be trying to tear her face off for even suggesting she come in here while you're naked."

Xander spluttered and looked at Spike in shock.

"How'd you know that Cordy and I never..."

"Could smell it. When I took you and Red that time, I couldn't decide which of you smelled better; you were both so pure and full of innocence. You being passed out probably saved your virtue, luv. I needed Red for the spell, and I like my... conquests, alert so they can enjoy it."

"You... You would have raped me?"

"NO! Would have seduced you, never had to rape anyone, I'm irresistible, ain't I?"

Xander tried to keep the stern expression on his face but couldn't. He cracked a grin and then chuckled lightly.

"Yeah, you are."

Spike leaned in and kissed him before throwing the blankets off them and sitting up.

"Natives are getting restless, pet. Get your kit on and let's go get this soddin' rescue over with so's we can get back to the important stuff - namely you, me, naked and in bed."

Spike leered and Xander groaned as his already hard cock twitched at the idea.

"Sure, say things like that and then expect me to get into jeans. Thanks, love you too."

Spike didn't answer, but the dopey look on his face said more than any words could have anyway.

Part Twenty-Three

They found the others at the roadside diner next to the hotel. Cordelia was complaining at the lack of healthy food on the menu, Angel was sipping coffee and trying to keep Dru from drawing too much attention to them with her crazy ravings. Doyle and Whistler were adding a little "Irish" to their coffee and pretty much ignoring everything else around them, while Graham sat silently watching the door. He looked up as Xander and Spike walked in, and nodded at Spike before going back to watching the entrance.

"It's about time!"

"Good morning to you too, Cordy. Geez, who pissed in your Cheerios?"

Doyle covered a laugh with an extremely unbelievable cough, and Cordelia growled at Spike and Xander. With her eyes narrowed, she glared at them both.

"I got stuck in the room next to you. Your... Sexcapades kept me awake, and then I had to go into town with Doyle this afternoon, so you'll excuse me if I'm a tad on the grumpy side!"

Xander flushed with embarrassment but Spike merely smirked at her. He met his Grandsire's inquisitive look and smiled at him. Surprisingly, Angel smiled back. Maybe the old poof wasn't so bad after all.

Whistler excused himself from the table, and draping an arm over Spike's shoulders, led him away from the others for a moment. Once they were out of earshot of even the vampires at the table, he took a deep breath and looked Spike in the eye.

"The Powers have a proposition for you."

Spike tilted his head and studied the demon's face carefully; whatever it was, the demon was uncomfortable with it.

"What is it? What exactly do the Powers want from me?"

"They want you to join Angel and fight the good fight."

Spike burst out laughing and clapped Whistler on the shoulder.

"Good one, mate. Pull the other one."

"No, seriously. They want you on their side. They think you have potential."

Spike was shocked by the serious look on Whistler's face. He thought about that for a minute - there was no way he could go back to being "William the Bloody" now that he was bonded with Xander; his mate was a white-hat, and it would kill him to have to live with Spike killing humans again. He sighed heavily.

"Right then. What's in it for me?"

"That simple? You aren't going to refuse, throw a temper tantrum, or tell me to "sod off"?"

"Nope. I figure Xander will want to keep helping the good guys, and where he goes, I go, so really, no point in arguing the inevitable."

"You're more reasonable than I've been led to believe."

Spike chuckled and shook his head.

"Yeah, well, don't let that get around. I've got a rep to maintain, you know?"

"Sure. I get that. Look, there's more I need to tell you, but we're running out of time. You're just going to have to trust me; you'll understand it all later."

Before Spike could answer, Whistler grabbed his head in both hands and with a roll of his eyes, kissed him on the mouth. As he pulled away, anyone looking would have seen a trail of purple mist flow into Spike's parted lips. Of course, no one saw, because they were all focused on the howling man struggling in Angel's arms.

Xander was furious; first the ugly little demon man took his mate away and now he was kissing him? He was going to kill him. He howled and leapt to his feet but was caught around the middle by a pair of impossibly strong arms. He struggled and tried to free himself; his rational mind knew that Spike wouldn't cheat on him, and that there had to be a reasonable explanation, but the rest of him just wanted to tear the little demon man to pieces and make him eat that stupid hat he wore.

"Xander, calm yourself. You're drawing attention."

With Angel occupied with the struggling man in his arms, he didn't see Dru get up from the table and come up behind him. She suddenly appeared in front of him and placed her hands on Xander's face.

"Hush now, kitten. William is nothing if not faithful; the little man was just giving him a prezzie, no harm meant. The buzzing has grown quiet now, and the red has faded away. You need to be still now, pet."

Xander ceased his struggling just in time to see Spike break out of his stupor and punch Whistler in the face before spitting on the floor and wiping his mouth in disgust.

"Look, mate, I may be batting for the other team now, but I'm a one man kinda vampire. And even if I wasn't, you ain't my type. Be lucky I don't eat your liver for that."

Whistler grimaced at the imagery but held his hands up to ward off any further attack.

"Hey, not my idea either. If it wasn't necessary, do you think I'd ever kiss you? That was the Powers' gift to you. Congratulations, Spike. Your chip is neutralised."

Spike blinked, then whooped for joy. He grabbed Whistler and spun him around before setting him back on his feet and dashing toward Xander. He growled at Angel who quickly released Xander, and then pulled the young man outside with him before taking him into his arms.

"Do you trust me, Xander?"

Spike whispered in his lover's ear.

"Of course, Spike. Why?"

"You'll see."

Spike shifted faces and buried his fangs deeply into Xander's neck. He held him still with one hand and opened both their jeans with the other. As he suckled slowly on the seeping wound, he wrapped his fingers around both of their cocks and began stroking them quickly.

Xander felt his eyes roll back in his head even as his arms went around Spike - one on the back of his neck, holding him to his throat, the other around his back and up under his shirt, where he dug his nails into the smooth, soft skin of the vampire's back.

Spike removed his fangs from Xander's neck and without stopping the hand on their dicks, brought his other hand to his mouth and bit into his wrist. He offered the wound to his mate as he fastened his mouth back over his mark on Xander. He groaned and began stroking faster as Xander suckled fiercely on his wrist. They both exploded at the same time and Spike licked Xander's wound closed

and then reluctantly withdrew his wrist from Xander's ravenous mouth. He smiled at the whimper of protest from his lover as he fished in his duster pocket and came up with a bandanna, which he used to clean them both off with.

When Xander finally caught his breath and lifted his head from where it had fallen on Spike's shoulder, he watched as Spike brought his fingertips to the mark on his neck, and when they touched him, he felt a jolt of electricity flow through his body and pool in his groin. At the look of awe on Spike's face, he brought his hand up and cupped Spike's cheek; turning his face so that he could look him in the eye, he smiled and then kissed him. When they finally broke away so that Xander could draw breath, Spike chuckled and hugged Xander to him.

"Uh, Spike? Not that that wasn't good, great even, but I thought you couldn't bite me?"

"That Whistler chap, the kiss he gave me? Was some mojo from Peaches' Powers. They fried the chip, luv."

Xander stepped back in shock.

"Why? Not that I'm not happy for you, but why would they do that?"

"Want me to work for them, don't they? Figured that you'd want to keep helping out and it's not like I could go back to my bloodthirsty ways anyhow, so why not? This way, I get to put my mark on you..."

At this Spike looked at Xander's neck again and a predatory smile lit his face before Xander clearing his throat brought him back on track.

"...and I get to beat the hell out of demons, and annoy Peaches. What more could I ask for?"

Part Twenty-Four

Angel had made a few calls earlier that day, and was able to obtain some very powerful mystic weapons. One thing the American government wasn't prepared for was a magical attack. They may have had the best security systems available by modern standards, but they were ill prepared for what Angel and his group had done.

With Graham leading the way, the group of demons, humans, and a half-demon infiltrated the base and set up their charges. It had turned out lucky for them all that Drusilla had caught Graham while

he was on his way to the train station on leave that night. He wasn't expected back for a week, and so no one had realised he was missing - therefore his clearance hadn't been rescinded.

They set up the devices that Angel had bargained for - ones that once activated would emit a toxin so powerful it would kill anything it came into contact with. Once that was done, they had set up a spell that would seal the base from anyone getting either in or out once the trigger word was spoken.

Spike and Xander had been put in charge of trying to locate Buffy, while Doyle, Whistler and Angel set up the devices - Dru and Cordelia were stationed outside to keep watch. They hadn't found her, but that didn't mean she hadn't been there; it was a large base, after all. Their time was cut short when the radio Angel was carrying beeped, alerting him that there were soldiers approaching the entrance the girls were watching. He rounded up the others and they made their way back outside just barely avoiding the group of camouflaged men coming in. It was now or never, so Angel gave the command and Doyle spoke the words that would seal the exits and trigger the devices. There was nothing left to do now but wait.

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As they stood outside of Lowell House waiting for the mist to clear, Angel tried to come to terms with what had happened. The Initiative was buried, no way had anything or anyone inside that complex survived. He mourned for the loss of life - innocent people had likely died in there as well as guilty ones. Some of the demons in there were peaceful; he would have attempted a rescue if they were in any shape to recover from the atrocities that they had been put through. All in all, Angel was horrified to think of what Spike and Xander must have experienced. Even at his worst, Angelus wouldn't have done some of the things he'd seen in that lab.

There had been no sign of Buffy or Riley, and Angel was holding onto the hope that she hadn't been inside when it happened. That there was still a chance that she could be saved. He knew that it was a long shot - but until he actually laid eyes on her lifeless corpse, he would hold onto it. That was why they were still there. Once the mist cleared, he was going back in; he had to know for sure if it was all over, because if she wasn't there he needed to find her and try to help her.

Xander watched Angel from beneath lowered lashes. He understood what he was going through; he had once been in love Buffy too. He hoped to God that she wasn't inside the base, but a small part of him wondered if she wouldn't be better off if she was. Even if she could be saved, get the effects of whatever the Initiative had done to her reversed, would she be able to live with herself knowing what she'd done? He didn't think so. Just looking at Angel, knowing that it had taken him almost a

century to come to terms with himself, but that he still hadn't learned how to live with the guilt, pretty much answered that question.

"Xan?"

Spike slid his arms around the young man and pulled him into his embrace.

"You all right, luv?"

Xander snuggled into his lover's arms and sighed deeply.

"No. But I will be. I just want this to be over; I wish Buffy had never gotten involved with Riley Finn. What if she's dead, Spike? What if we killed her? How do I live with myself knowing I killed her?"

"We don't know nothing yet. Besides, if she was down there, she wasn't Buffy anymore. Your Buffy would never have betrayed her friends; what they did to her changed her, made her into something else, something that was no longer Buffy. If she's dead, they killed her, luv. Not you, not us, not Angel."

Xander smiled gratefully at his mate and noticed that even Angel had shot Spike a look of gratitude. They continued to wait in silence for a while longer until Angel cleared his throat and got everyone's attention.

"The mist has cleared. It's safe to go in now; anyone else coming?"

Doyle, Xander, Spike and Whistler all stepped forward. Cordelia shook her head sadly.

"I'm sorry, Angel. I just can't."

"That's okay. I'd rather you didn't see this anyway."

Graham looked from the group of men to the two women.

"I'll stay and keep watch."

"Good. Anything comes near Cordy, take it out."

"Understood, sir."

Xander wondered briefly if Graham was going to salute Angel, but then suddenly didn't care as Doyle lifted the hatch and jumped down into the base.

Part Twenty-Five

The base looked like something out of a horror movie; there were bodies everywhere - some human, some not. As they walked through, turning corpses over to look at their faces, Xander wondered if he'd ever be able to close his eyes again without seeing the carnage before him. He doubted it. At least not for a very long time.

"Angel, I'm thinkin' we should split up, cover more ground. Yeah?"

Angel looked at Doyle and nodded.

"Good idea, you go east, Whistler take west, Spike and Xander can take north, I'll go south. Anyone finds Buffy... Holler."

With nods all around, the group dispersed and began their search. Spike took Xander's hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze as they walked. He would have enjoyed this if it weren't for his mate's misery. All those bloody soldiers and doctors and scientists deserved a hell of a lot worse as far as he was concerned.

The sight of a small blonde woman laying face down a few feet ahead of them had Xander stopping dead in his tracks; he whimpered low in his throat and held onto Spike's hand for all he was worth. Spike stepped in front him, blocking his view of the woman on the floor and cupped his face in his palm.

"S'all right, luv. You wait here and I'll go check, okay?"

At Xander's nod, he kissed him briefly and walked toward the body. He crouched down and rolled it over just enough to see the woman's face before putting her back in the previous position and heading back to Xander.

"Wasn't her, luv. Come on, we still have a job to do before we can out of this hell hole."

They continued their search, stopping to check the face of each new corpse. When they came across Riley, Spike looked at Xander to see his reaction and was surprised by the uncaring look on his face.

"Xander?"

"What? You thought I'd be upset? Not hardly. He's the reason we were captured, Spike. The reason we were tortured and beaten and... I'm only sorry I didn't get to see him suffer."

Spike grinned at his mate and threw an arm around his shoulder.

"Good. I'm glad you aren't feeling guilty over that piece of trash. Fact is, if this hadn't done him in, I'd have hunted the fucker down and killed him myself. Slowly."

"I know."

Xander's acceptance of Spike's nature - his need to avenge the wrongs done to him and his mate by these humans - made Spike proud. It only confirmed what he already knew - that Xander was right for him, that he couldn't have chosen a better mate if he'd done it himself.

The next doorway led to the holding facility. Xander figured this would be the hardest place to enter; some of the demons in this place were as innocent as he was, never having done anything to deserve their fate. It was a shame they couldn't have been saved, but from what Angel had said when he set up the device in this area, they were beyond help.

As they passed their old cell, Spike felt Xander shudder and he pulled him closer in response. This was no walk in the park for him either - but at least when he'd been taken this last time he'd had Xander to comfort him. He couldn't bring himself to regret that; it was the reason they were together now. He only wished he'd been able to save the boy from the things that had been done to him.

"Spike!"

Xander hissed and pulled the vampire to a stop.

"There's something moving over there."

Spike looked in the direction Xander had indicated and his demon features came to the fore as his senses alerted him to what it was - rather who it was. He growled dangerously and put Xander behind him.

"Stay!"

With that command issued, Spike darted forward into the shadows and pounced. Xander listened to the snarling and screaming as he inched slowly forward. He knew Spike wanted him to stay out of it, but he needed to be closer, to know what it was that Spike saw as such a threat. He needed to know what could have possibly survived down there amidst all the carnage. He got his answer as a body suddenly landed at his feet, its neck twisted and body mangled. The face was intact though, and it was the face that made Xander jump back and his eyes bug out.

"Sp-Spike? Is that...?"

"It was. Not no more though, is he?"

"How?"

"Dunno. He was wearing an oxygen mask though, and that rubber suit thingy must have protected him somewhat, too."

Xander looked down at the body of Forrest Gates and felt a part of him come to life again knowing that at least one of the men that had violated him and his lover were dead. He looked at Spike and smiled at him.

"Thank you."

"No one hurts you and lives, Xan. Not anymore."

Spike kissed Xander possessively and then looked him in the eyes.

"I love you. You are mine and I protect what's mine. I may have joined the white-hats, but I'm still a demon. I'll kill to keep you safe; you need to understand that, luv. Can you deal with that?"

"Yeah, I think I can."

"Good. There's no one else here, pet. Let's go see if Peaches or the Mick have had any better luck."

"What about Whistler?"

"If it's all the same, I'd rather not go lookin' for him."

Spike made a 'yuck' face and Xander laughed. He looked around him and thought that maybe he'd be all right after all.

Part Twenty-Six

Angel had about given up on finding Buffy when he heard the yell. He knew it was Doyle, and that he wouldn't be yelling unless he'd found something. He sprinted toward the sound and nearly crashed into Xander and Spike on the way. What he saw when they finally found the Irishman

wasn't what he'd been expecting. Yeah, Doyle had found Buffy, but he'd also found trouble. Three rubber-suited soldiers were pointing rifles at him. Angel didn't have time to do anything but grab for Doyle as Spike launched himself at the soldiers and began tearing into them.

Xander caught the half-demon as Angel tossed him toward him before leaping into the fight to help Spike. There was nothing he could do to help, seeing as he wasn't bullet-proof like his lover or Angel. He looked down and saw that Doyle was watching Angel with the same look in his eye as he had when Spike had first rushed in. He didn't envy the man; falling for Angel was like ripping your own heart out. The man was unattainable; he still loved Buffy more than anything, and even if he did get past that, there was the matter of a pesky little Gypsy curse. If Angel ever loved him back, he'd lose his soul, and if he didn't lose his soul then Doyle would know that Angel wasn't in it for keeps, that he wasn't loved in return. Xander couldn't think of a worse position to be in. Wanting someone so much and knowing that you'll never have them.

The gunfire was deafening and Xander made sure to keep himself and Doyle low to the ground while the vampires and soldiers fought. It wasn't long before the shots tapered off and the only sounds to be heard were Spike's cursing and Angel's soft growls.

"Bloody Hell! Those wankers shot holes all through my duster! Do you have any idea how hard it is to get leather repaired?"

Xander got up and helped Doyle to his feet. He gave the other man an understanding smile and shook his head at Doyle's wary look.

"No worries, I won't say anything."

Doyle sighed in relief and Xander went to join his lover.

Angel fished the bullet out of his shoulder and dropped it to the floor. He looked over at where Buffy's lifeless body lay and felt his demon emerging again as he howled in grief. He was surprised but grateful to feel Spike come up behind him and put a comforting hand on his shoulder.

"Come on, Sire. Get your girl and let's get out of here; we've seen enough death for one day, yeah?"

Angel nodded, scooped Buffy into his arms and turned to go. He stopped as he saw Whistler standing in the outer hall.

"Did you know this would happen? Is this what the Powers wanted? Buffy's death?"

"I didn't know. There was nothing else we could do, Angel; the girl was killing people. Innocent people. She had to be stopped."

"I could have saved her."

"No. You couldn't have. Do you honestly think she'd ever be Buffy again? After what she's done? She helped bring her watcher and her best friend in; they died here because of her. She was responsible for Spike and Xander's capture; she knew they were here the entire time and did nothing. I didn't want to tell you, but the last time she saw her mother, well Joyce was a smart lady..."

Xander sobbed and turned his face into Spike's neck as Spike vamped out in his own grief - he liked Buffy's mom, she was a classy lady and always had a cuppa for him.

"...she knew something was wrong with Buffy. She tried to get her help, but Giles and Willow were already gone, Xander had been missing for weeks; she was on the phone with information trying to find your number when Buffy killed her."

Whistler shook his head sadly and looked up at Angel with pain in his eyes.

"You know what that was like, killing your family. Would you wish that on her?"

Angel's shoulders slumped and he shook his head.

"No, I wouldn't."

Part Twenty-Seven

They were all silent as they left the campus grounds. Angel carried Buffy's body back to his car and placed her in the back seat. He didn't even look at the others as he got in his car and drove away. Cordelia was the first to break the silence.

"Rude, much?"

"Princess, I don't think..."

"No, you don't. I realise that you're hung up on the guy and all, but honestly, Doyle, he had no right to just drive off like that. Sure, Buffy and I were never what you'd call friends, but she saved my life more than once. I would have liked to have said goodbye."

Xander winced in sympathy for Doyle at Cordy's outburst. There was nothing like having your crush exposed to the world by the most tactless woman that ever lived. But she had a point; he'd have liked to have said goodbye as well.

"Well, no point in standing here all night. We should head back to the hotel, see if Angel bothers to come back."

Cordelia turned on her heel and headed for the SUV. Doyle shrugged his shoulders and followed.

"Well, my job here is done. Xander, it was a pleasure meeting you. Spike, remember that just because you can kill, doesn't mean you should." "Yeah, and you remember that just because a bloke's a sexy bugger, doesn't mean you can kiss him."

Spike smirked at the demon's embarrassment and Xander shook his head fondly while Whistler scowled.

"I suppose you'd rather I left the chip alone?"

He didn't wait for an answer - it would have been pointless as he already knew it - he just waved goodbye and walked away. Drusilla, who had been uncharacteristically silent all this time, walked over to Spike and kissed him on the cheek.

"Be happy, my Spike. I have to go now; the stars sing of dark places that scream. Miss Edith is lost and I must go find her; she misses her mummy so."

Spike hugged Dru and pressed a kiss to her lips.

"Take care, pet, and thank you."

Spike then turned to Graham and flashed a bit of fang at him.

"You. Take care of her. She might not be mine anymore, but I'll find you and hurt you if you don't. That understood, pup?"

"Yes, sir. I'll take good care of her."

"Sometimes, she tries to dance in the sunlight, or she puts holy water in the tea. Keep a sharp eye on her."

"Understood."

Spike turned back to Xander and held out his hand.

"Shall we, pet?"

"We shall."

Xander took Spike's hand and together they piled into the SUV with Cordy and Doyle. Graham and Drusilla dropped them off at the hotel just outside of town before leaving for parts unknown.

Part Twenty-Eight

After showering and drying off, Spike and Xander lay in bed in the dark hotel room. Xander's head rested on Spike's chest and the vampire carded his fingers through his mate's damp hair and thought about what they would do next. He knew what Whistler had told him - that the Powers wanted him to work with Angel - but he didn't know how Xander would feel about that, and he wasn't going anywhere or doing anything without Xander. He sighed and wrapped his arms tightly around his lover.

"Xan? What do you want to do now?"

"Sleep?"

Spike chuckled softly.

"Not what I meant, silly bugger."

"I know. Just... I don't know. I mean, Sunnydale's home, always has been, but I don't think I want to go back there. They're all..."

Xander swallowed past the lump in his throat and when he spoke again, his voice was strained.

"...Dead. Spike, they're all dead. I can't go back there. I just can't."

"Shh, luv. It's okay, I understand. We don't have to go back, ever again. I promise."

Spike held Xander tightly and purred softly to him; once he knew that his mate was relaxed again, he released him and rolled him onto his back. Spike then rolled on top of him and looked down into the shining brown eyes of the man beneath him and smiled.

"So, you want to go to LA then? Give this working for the Powers thing a try?"

"Yeah, I guess. We don't really have anything else to do, do we? Besides, it might be fun watching you get Angel all riled up."

Xander grinned at Spike and then suddenly frowned.

"Where do you think he took her?"

"Dunno, love, but I'm betting it was somewhere peaceful."

Xander nodded and lifted his head so that he could press his lips to Spike's.

"Make me forget? I don't want to think of anything right now, except you."

"I can do that, luv. I love you, Xander."

"I love you too, Spike."

There were no more words spoken after that. Spike made sure that Xander thought of nothing but the two of them and what they were feeling for each other as he made love to his mate into the wee morning hours.

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Angel stood in the middle of a clearing about fifteen miles away from anything and took one last look at his love - his soul-mate - before standing back and throwing a match onto the pyre he had built. As the flames grew and began to lick at the flesh of Buffy's face and consume her clothing, he turned his back and wept silently for the girl he loved. He prayed that wherever she was, she was at peace now.

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Cordelia and Doyle shared a bottle of whiskey in his room and toasted the success of their mission. Doyle was feeling pretty down about Angel, especially now that everyone knew how he felt about the guy. After a few drinks, Cordelia slid onto the bed next to him and took his hand.

"I'm sorry. About earlier, I had no right to out you like that to everyone."

"S'all right. I suppose I was just lucky that Angel was already gone."

"No, it's not all right. I know how you feel, and I had no right to do that. If someone had done that to me..."

Doyle looked up in alarm, his eyes wide.

"You, you mean... You and Angel?!?"

"Yeah. I've been stuck on the big stupid jerk for months now. I guess I kind of saw you as competition, just one more person that would take away from me ever having him."

Cordelia smiled sheepishly.

"Pretty stupid, huh? I mean, it's always been Buffy. It will always be Buffy. There's no point you know? Loving him. It's impossible to compete with a dead woman - she'll win every time."

Doyle nodded and took another sip from his glass. Cordy sighed and snuggled into him.

"Maybe we should just forget about Angel, give up on the impossible and look for someone more attainable - someone who understands us."

Doyle barked out a laugh.

"Princess, I'm half demon, we work for a vampire, and fight the forces of darkness. Who the hell is going to understand us? Either of us?"

Cordy rolled her eyes and sighed in annoyance.

"God, you men are all the same! Do I have to spell it out?"

"Yeah, maybe."

Doyle shrugged his shoulders and Cordelia grinned at him before pressing her mouth to his. Doyle pulled back after a moment with an expression of shock and enlightenment on his face.

"Oh."

"Yeah, oh. Is this okay?"

"Yeah, more than."

Doyle pulled her closer and kissed her again.

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As the last of the embers died away, Angel turned back toward his car and began walking. He was sorely tempted to just stand there and watch the sun come up and join Buffy in death. It was only the thought of his friends - Doyle and Cordelia - and the fact that they would need him in their fight, and Xander and Spike - who he was actually happy to have around for once - that kept him from doing so.

He got into the car and drove back towards Sunnydale, back to the motel just outside of town where he knew his friends would have gone to wait for him. He didn't know what his future held for him now; his dreams of ever being with Buffy again were dead now - just like the woman herself - but he knew he had a purpose. There were people out there who needed a saviour; maybe he could still be one. He was going to try. It's what Buffy would have wanted for him, and for her, he would keep on living.

The End