

Pairing: Spike/Xander

Rating: R / NC-17 in later parts

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Warnings: Rape, Bloodplay, Violence. Because Angelus is a right bastard.

Summary: Angelus leaves Buffy a Valentine's gift, but she isn't the one to open it. AU from the Season 2 Episode Bewitched, Bothered & Bewildered

26,330 words

The Collar

by

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Part One

"You're going to win us a new kitten, my Spike." Dru danced around the bed laughing.

"Am I now, Pet?" Spike asked smiling up at her, enjoying the slight sway as she worked herself into a frenzy of movement.

"The stars whisper to me that my kitten is coming, you're going to win him. We mustn't tell daddy though. Daddy will take our kitten away for himself, and I want to watch you play with him for me. The stars tell me you're going to frolic and play with the kitten long after I'm gone, but I want to watch you play first. Maybe take just a drop or two before I go."

"Well now, we wouldn't want daddy to ruin our fun, but where will you be going, luv?" *And just why the hell do I wanna play with a damned kitten?* "I think you're

right. A regular vamp's night out with the boys. Some poker and some mayhem would be a right treat."

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Xander had spent the last several hours groveling his rear end off. He'd really messed things up with that damned love spell, and spent every waking hour trying to make it up to his girls and their respective guys. Willow was avoid-o-girl, Giles was busy distracting Jenny, Oz was, well Oz, and Buffy was off with her mom, probably trying to explain about the 'treasure hunt'.

Since he couldn't really make anything up to Willow, and Cordy still hated him with a passion, Xander decided to do one of the few things he did well, whittle stakes, to make it up to Buffy. He settled into a seat with a trash can under him and a stack of wood on the table next to him and prepared to get to work when a small velvet box caught his eye. It was blood red and settled next to a stack of books Buffy had forgotten the day before mid spell. There was a small tag with 'Buffy' written on it in elegant script.

Curiosity overriding good sense, he reached over and opened up the box to see a small silver choker with a tiny intricate charm on it. He couldn't quite make out what the charm was supposed to be, it looked almost Egyptian one minute, then maybe Celtic the next, as it caught the light differently. Intrigued, Xander picked up the necklace to get a better look.

When he touched it, his eyes lost all semblance of life. Like an automaton he put the small choker around his neck and hooked the clasp. As he did life came back into his eyes for the brief second before they started glowing green. In another second he disappeared entirely. In his place sat a cocoa brown kitten with fluffy hair and brown eyes; Intelligent brown eyes that screamed out 'Oh Crap'. The kitten was wearing a collar very similar to the choker in design.

After several long minutes of frantic running around, and attempting to 'paw' off the offending collar, the small brown kitten started looking for a way out, looking for help. He scratched at the doors to the library, but obviously had no way to move them. After several unsuccessful tries to jump up to the counter where the phone

sat, the kitten threw itself down on the floor and wrapped both paws over it's eyes.

It was still laying there, asleep now, when one of the custodial staff, a mierkalla demon, picked it up by the scruff and tucked it hissing into a small pouch that hung off his hip.

"You'll make a real niccce buy innn, felllla." He mumbled to himself while dumping the trash can and wandering off with a new spring in his step, his head filled with thoughts of tonight's game.

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Spike got comfortable up against the table and took in the competition, or lack thereof. There was a friendly looking bloke who reminded him of an overeager shar pei, a couple vamps, and a mierkalla who looked right anxious. The two minions who'd helped him get here were 'standing guard' out in the main part of the bar waiting for orders.

The mierkalla was the toughest competition that night. The lucky bugger had started out with one cocoa kitten and by the last hand of the night both he and Spike were fairly well even stakes wise. The shar pei bloke, who apparently went by Clem at least according to his blushing self introduction, had quit the game first with a pair of tabbies left to his name. The two other vamp's were up and down over the course of the evening, but by the final hand of the night, it was down to just Spike and the mierkalla.

He'd gotten the better of Spike and taken the last hand, but unfortunately for the mierkalla, he owed some pretty heavy hitters several litters worth of kittens. They saw fit to collect right before the start of the last round, leaving him with just the cocoa beauty he'd started out with.

"Oye mate, how bout one last hand?" Spike asked, eyeing the plump morsel cowering alone in the mierkalla's basket.

"I would love to Massster Ssspike, but you arre out of kittenssss," he said with a regretful voice.

"Well now, my princess wants a kitten, and I'd love one more hand before this wheelchair turns into a pumpkin, so ta speak. What say I wager some actual cash against that chocolate drop you got left. One hand, winner takes all?" Spike dropped a couple fifties into the center of the table.

"Yesss, Massster Ssspike, one morrre hand would be lovvvely. Winnerrr takesss alll."

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From the moment he'd gotten his hands on the kitten, it just felt wrong. Very un-kittenlike, flat out terrified of him, and generally too damned smart for a feline. Then there was the collar. He KNEW he'd seen a design like that before, but he couldn't remember for the life of him where. "Oh well, Dru wanted a kitten, and I certainly delivered."

He sat in his infernal wheelchair waiting for the strength to move to the bed. While he waited he took the time to check out the cat. "You know, Pet, as kits go, you're kinda pretty. I mean you got those big brown eyes an' all that long fur."

He scratched under the kittens chin then along one ear, and for about five seconds the kitten seemed lost in the pettings, then shook it's head, as if trying to clear it. That task completed, the kitten turned on the scratching finger and bit, hard.

"Oye, whelp, none o' that. Yer a right feisty little bugger, aintcha?" Holding the kitten by it's scruff, he sat it on the bed carefully. It watched him with wary, intelligent eyes, and licked its lips and whiskers, cleaning up the few drops of vampiric blood it had managed to draw with its sudden assault.

When Spike pulled himself out of the chair and turned to settle in on his own bed, the kitten seemed to rouse itself and ran for cover. In this case, under a beat up old dresser in one corner.

"Oye, cat. I ain't coming down there after you. I'll just let Dru take care of you, since you was her bloody vision and all. You be a good kitten and I'll have the

minions pick you up some milk or fish or something tomorrow night."

Miserable, scared, hungry, and alone, Xander Harris curled around himself under Spike's dresser and prayed for safety, or barring that, a quick death that wouldn't end with him rising to murder everyone he loved. It was a very long time before he slipped off to sleep.

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Xander woke up with something tickling his nose. He twitched one ear and sleepily reached out one paw to bat at the tip of his own tail. He yawned then scratched his side with his back paw before settling his tail around himself tighter and settling in for more sleep.

Wait... TAIL... PAWS... WHISKERS... Oh Hell.

Now totally awake and unfortunately reminded of his less than ideal circumstances, Xander tried to figure out what time it was, and how to sneak past an oddly snoring Spike, when the door of the room opened to let in a pair of delicate bare feet.

Xander heard humming and then cowered as far back in the corner as possible when he realized just who had entered the room.

OhcrapohcrapohcrapitsDru ran through his head several times before the feet made their way to stand in front of him. The pale feet arched up to tip toe straining and dark brown hair appeared as she bent her body over double. The tendons and muscles in her legs and feet moving in ways the human body couldn't possibly move. Maybe she had been a dancer at some point. He'd have to remember to ask Giles. *If I live that long*, he thought as one dark eye peeked at him through the fall of her hair.

"There you are my dark kitten. It's very naughty of you to hide from me. I want to meet the one who's going to take care of my Spike when I'm gone. Maybe have a taste or two. I've been thinking of you since the naughty spell broke. Thinking of tasting you, of keeping you forever, but you're not mine now. Maybe I'll just take a drop or two. Would you like that my dark kitten? Just make sure Daddy doesn't find

you, or he shan't take me away."

With true vampire speed Dru grabbed Xander and pulled him out from under the dresser. She stood upright and dangled a terrified Xander by his scruff, head tilting from side to side as she studied him.

"How bout it kitten, do you want forever? No I think that's still up to my Spike. Maybe if I ask her nicely Ms. Edith will let me have you. You look so tasty, kitten, and I wanna have just a drop or two. The stars won't mind too much if I change their song, just a little."

Xander's thoughts were echoing loudly through his own head, and were fairly simple and to the point: *Oh God, oh God, She's gonna EAT me.*

She snapped her jaw at the kitten almost playfully before she started swaying her head back and forth. Xander found himself unable to look away.

The next thing Xander realized he was falling through the air, and landing on his side. *I knew that 'always land on their feet' stuff was crap.* As he got back to his feet and returned to his hiding place, he heard Spike coaxing Drusilla down onto the bed with soft words.

After he calmed down enough he realized Spike was explaining to his crackpot girlfriend why vampire kittens were a bad idea. He huddled as far back into the corner as he could, and spent the next two hours praying she listened to Spike.

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After distracting Dru, who went off to hunt, Spike rounded up a couple minions and send them out on a food run. It wasn't until they'd returned that he'd realized they must have been a pair of Dru's minions, cause like his lady love, they were utterly barmy at times.

He'd asked for milk and fish.

They'd brought back a chocolate milkshake and sushi.

Spike contemplated the value of good minions, the helplessness of his current situation and then finally the food. He decided what they'd brought was close enough and set about putting some down for the wee whelp.

He filled a couple bowls, then put the leftovers in the small fridge he kept his beer in, pulling out a beer for himself. Wheeling himself over to the dresser that had become the kitten's safe haven, he leaned as far out of the chair as he could and settled the two bowls on the floor. That done, he wheeled to the bed and struggled to get settled on it. By the time he was situated against the headboard, the kitten had come out to 'examine' his dinner.

"Go on and eat, luv. Except for being a bloody stupid dinner for a cat, there ain't nothing wrong with it."

The kitten gave him a look that so obviously said *Yeah right* that he had to laugh before continuing. "What's a matter, you don't like chocolate?"

The *Yeah right* had become *Are you stupid* and finally the cat lapped up some of the very melty milkshake. After a moment it went on to very delicately eat several bits of sushi, before returning to the milkshake.

Spike cracked open his beer and settled in to watch the cat eat, trying to decide if this was normal cat behavior. After the cat had finished all the milkshake and most of the sushi, he licked his lips and with a wary eye on Spike and slipped back under his dresser.

Part Two

Warnings: This chapter contains non-consensual sex and bloodshed.

Xander woke up disoriented in the near dark, and the sounds of fighting were the only familiar thing, until he recognized the voices and realized it wasn't his parents

fighting for the last beer.

"Come on Will, my boy, time to take your medicine." Angelus practically cooed in the ear of the smaller man who was struggling underneath him.

"Piss off," he hissed, voice tinged with desperation.

"Now now, my boy, I think you need to show some proper respect. After all, I did see to your duties tonight. Wore our Dru right out, I did. Course that's probably cause she hasn't had a proper seeing to since the last time I had her." The larger vamp leered at Spike, before licking his neck. "Maybe if you're a good boy I'll let you taste her on me. Would you like that my sweet William? To taste how I satisfy her, to taste how I make her bleed?"

Spike struggled to buck him off, but Angelus's weight and his own injuries made it impossible. A harsh back hand knocked him against the wall, stunning him for a moment. More than enough time for Angelus to pull his pants down and drag him over the edge of the bed, his injured legs dangling uselessly as he was re pinned beneath his insane grandsire.

"I'll take that as a no," he said with a sneer before ramming into Spike hard and dry. After a thrust or two the spilling blood of his now injured insides began acting as a poor, but at least somewhat helpful, lubricant. Angelus began a harsh ride that left the unbreathing creatures both panting, one in excitement, the other in pain.

Xander watched, helpless to look away. His previous anger and rage at Angelus had been a match light compared to the bonfire of hate that burned within him now. Never since Jesse had he felt anything but loathing and hate for a vampire, and now he prayed to Gods he was no longer sure he believed in for the ability to help this one.

Yes it was Spike, and yes he was a murderous bastard who'd tried to kill them, but that only earned him a stake to the heart. Something quick and painless. This was neither. This vampire, this man, had been kind to him. Yeah that probably meant he was keeping his furry ass around as the vamp version of a pudding pack, but still. He lost track of how long it went on. Hours, days, years? Angelus may know, but Xander certainly didn't, and neither did Spike.

He lay beneath his grandsire, silent. Unwilling to give in to tears or begging, already knowing either would only prolong the vicious attack, and certainly make the bastard enjoy it more. Angelus planted his feet firmly and began thrusting harder than ever. After several of the harsh deep thrusts Angelus threaded his fingers through his victim's hair, then made a tight fist and pulled his neck back roughly. He held him like that, bent painfully backwards, for several more moments, then slipped into his true face and buried his fangs in, deeply drinking as he came in his grandchilde's bloody, and, thanks to vampire healing, always virgin hole with a satisfied groan. He drained the younger vamp almost to the point of passing out, but not quite giving him the satisfaction of oblivion.

He pulled out, cleaned himself on the remains of Spike's clothes, and then smacked Spike's battered ass, before tucking himself away, and leaving with a satisfied smirk on his face. Before closing the door he turned to enjoy his handy work one last time.

His Will hung off the side of the bed, useless legs unable to hold him up. Blood dripped from his well ridden ass and his throat. His clothes were a bloody, cum stained mess. No tears though, unfortunately. *Oh well, there's always next time*, he thought as he shut the door. Before retiring for the night, he left order's with the minion's that 'Master Spike' was not to be disturbed, even for a feeding, until Angelus gave word. Satisfied, he left for his own rooms, where a deliciously shackled Dru awaited her daddy's attention.

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Xander waited, listening for Angelus to return; praying he didn't. Finally he gathered his courage and crept out from under the dresser. Having a day or two to get used to his feline body slightly, Xander was now able to handle small jumps.

He jumped up onto a small stack of old books beside the bed, then onto the bed. Spike lay unmoving, his eye's open, his neck no longer bleeding, but not healing either. Not really having a plan, nor realizing just how dangerous it could be, the small feline padded his way over to the still small vampire and laid one paw atop his outstretched hand, trying in some small way to offer comfort.

With inhuman speed the small animal was pulled towards his mouth, and Xander had enough time to curse his own stupidity before William the Bloody, one fourth of the 'Scourge of Europe', and Master Vampire Spike of the Aurelian Line pressed his face in Xander's small furry side and began to cry silently.

Xander lay stunned, held in place by the crying vampire who absently stroked his head with one hand while his tears soaked the fur along Xander's side. Vampire or no, his own soul would allow him to do no less than offer whatever comforts he could to the suffering creature, and for the first time, he began purring.

When the vampire's sobs abated some, his slender fingers began scratching and petting along Xander's neck. Xander stretched and twisted against the fingers, enjoying the contact. The weakened vampire's pettings became slower and slower as the blood loss finally claimed him, but as he slipped from consciousness one last drowsy scratch triggered the latch of the collar and allowed it to fall from Xander's neck. Spike passed out a moment before a dizzy Xander found himself human again, and cuddled under a practically grey vampire.

He took stock of his surroundings, noting only subconsciously the general lack of an escape route that didn't take him right past that bastard Angelus. Instead of 'making a run for it' anyway, Xander thumbed the woefully pathetic lock on the bedroom door, and slipped into the small attached bathroom. He filled a bowl with warm water then grabbed a washcloth, soap, and a large towel.

Returning to the bed, he pulled the remaining clothes off of his undead patient, and gently, and quite self-consciously, cleaned his body. That done he dried him off, then examined the still gaping neck wound. Angelus hadn't bothered licking it closed, and Spike's dangerously low levels of blood weren't enough to trigger any sort of healing. There hadn't been any sort of first aid supplies in the room, so Xander simply cleaned the bite and then moved on to wash the tear stained face above it.

He returned the items to the small bathroom, and then looked through the dresser finding mostly jeans and t-shirts, but stuffed back in one corner, he found an old button up shirt he thought he could get the vamp into without too much difficulty. Grabbing it, he dressed the vampire and got him up into the bed right.

The grey coloring was even more apparent now that he was clean, and Xander looked around the room worriedly. A small switchblade on the dresser caught his eye. While one part of his mind called him six kinds of a fool, another part simply processed what was needed and sterilized the knife with some of the booze supply stashed around the room before settling himself on the bed and slicing into the fleshy part of his arm.

He let the blood drip into Spike's mouth, while the other part of his mind kept up the 'what the hell are we doing' shtick. After a few moments of the blood dripping down his throat, Spike roused enough to latch on to the offered arm, teeth sinking into warm flesh with a moment of pain. After the initial bite, Xander felt only warmth and a sense of giving. He let the vampire feed unhindered for a few moments, then pried the still weak and only half conscious demon off his arm. As the vampire was pulled away, his tongue slipped out to lick over the bite, stopping it from bleeding even as he tumbled back down into the safe depths of unconsciousness.

Xander pulled back, exhausted beyond the point where panic could reach him, he only wanted to curl up and go to sleep. He very nearly went with the urge, but something was digging into his back, and he sleepily pulled it out. It was the collar. Jerking back to a semblance of awake, he examined the piece and bit one end of the latch to bend it slightly. Hopefully that would allow his cat self to 'paw' off the collar if he needed to.

He hated the idea of becoming a cat again, but Drusilla's madness aside, he was probably much safer as a cat while in proximity to Angelus, than as the Slayer's Xander-shaped friend. After pulling the covers up to Spike's chest he slipped on the collar and waited for the transformation to take place, wondering for the first time if it would still work, or if the 'spell' had been a one time deal. Before the thought had completely worked itself through his mind, he was furry again.

He would have loved to stay on the warm fluffy bed to nap, but figured a hungry vampire, not to mention his crazy singing girlfriend or Deadboy, who now by the way creped him out on a whole new 'GAAAH!' level, would be bad things to wake up to. Instead, he yawned, purred at his patient, then tumbled off the bed and back to the far corner of the dresser, where he curled up and dropped into a fitful sleep.

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Spike woke up feeling better than he had in a long time, but something about feeling so good bothered him. Then he remembered the events of the previous night. As he did his hand snaked up to touch his neck, expecting a gaping wound or at least an ugly scabbed mess. Instead he felt unbroken skin, no sign of the damage that had been inflicted. Something wasn't right.

He'd suffered under Angelus's tender mercies countless times before, and had never woken up the next day feeling this good. Besides that, he had a very clear memory of hearing Angelus order the minions to leave him alone, well aware that he'd be in no shape to help himself. Considering the damage done to him, he should still be unconscious, or be coating the bed in a dusty sort of way.

If he couldn't still smell blood and cum in the room somewhere, he'd have thought the whole thing one vastly horrific nightmare. He moved to get up, to find what still had his bastard of a sire's cum on it, and burn it, when he realized what he was wearing. An old button up dress shirt, certainly nothing the big bad would dress himself in. He smelled a mystery afoot.

He slowly pulled himself to his feet, and was nearly delighted to realize that as long as he held onto something, he could move around the room without the bloody wheelchair. He tracked down the foul smell of his own blood and humiliation, finding it in a bundle next to the door. The 'still locked from the inside' door.

Still curious, he picked up the offensive clothes and holding them well away from his body with one hand, he used the other to help steady himself on the way to the bathroom. He grabbed a small bottle of lighter fluid from the dresser. Once he got to the bathroom, he pulled his lighter out of the ruined jean's pocket, squirted down the offending items, and then proceeded to set the clothes ablaze in the deep marble tub. Leaning on the sink, he watched them burn. Satisfied he made his way back to the bedroom, eyes checking any possible hiding places before settling back in the bed with a beer and trying to remember the end of the night before, while forgetting the horrid events prior.

Just as he went to take a taste of the beer, he realized there was already a rather tantalizing taste in his mouth, one that explained at least something of the mystery, if it opened up an entirely new line of questions. He was tasting human blood in his mouth. Powerful human blood. The shocking thing was the reason for its power. It had been freely given.

There were many different nuances and types of human blood, and yeah vampire here, all of them tasted good, but some, oh yes some were oh so much more than good. Blood filled with adrenalin and fear was always a tasty eat. Better still was blood filled with endorphins and lust. The most potent, the best, the purest, was blood given freely, given in love or the hope of healing. That's what he was tasting. Something far more powerful than the pitiful rations he'd had since Angelus' return.

Try as he might, all he could remember from the night before was crying on the kitten and a brief glimpse of warm brown eyes. Familiar brown eyes.

Things began tumbling into place, and he looked around the room, planning his strategy. He cleaned the two bowls he'd used yesterday, then retrieved the leftover milkshake and sushi from the small refrigerator beside his bed. That done he settled into the bed and called for the kitten.

Xander had slept through Spike's waking, still weak from the blood loss of the previous night, but woke up to Spike calling for him.

"Here ya go, Whelp. Got some dinner 'ere for ya. Come on up 'ere kitty. Time to eat."

Xander peaked around the room cautiously before moving over to the bed and ascending the same way he had the night before, a jump to the stack of books, then a jump to the mattress.

Instead of putting down the food, Spike picked up the kitten and settled it on his chest. He scratched behind one ear lightly while he studied the collar intently. Once the cat relaxed enough to start purring, Spike slipped his hand down and unlatched the collar, setting it to one side, in the moment before he found himself underneath one shocked and suddenly terrified Scooby.

"Hello, luv."

Part Three

Xander looked down at the man, the vampire, beneath him, completely unsure what to do or say, and as such kept it simple. "Um... hi?"

"So you're my mysterious benefactor, eh pet? Gotta say I certainly didn't expect such a lovely gift. Thanks for that."

"You're uh, welcome." Xander replied, completely thrown now, but had to ask, "Um... what gift?"

"The blood last night, pet. Very potent stuff, that."

Xander could have kicked himself as he remembered what he'd done and where he was. He quickly pushed off the bed and backed away babbling away. "What oh that old stuff, nope not potent at all, nah kinda sickly really. You must have me mixed up with someone else."

"What say you calm down and have a seat, pet." Spike said patting the bed beside himself.

Instead of taking the seat, Xander dove into full blown rant, as the week he'd been having caught up with him. "Calm down? Calm down? You have no idea what kind of week I've had. I break up with my girlfriend, on Valentine's Day no less. Talk a witch into casting a spell to make her love me, which promptly goes the way of the wacky and makes every woman except her fall for me, including your reality challenged girlfriend, who wanted to turn me, by the way. Then, luckily, the spell breaks before the lot of them can kill me and my ex in fits of jealousy, but oh no that's not enough. You see all my friends are girls, and if they're not girls they're

you know DATING girls, so every one of my friends is either angry, ashamed, or just plain old sick of me. So I try to fix that and get all kittenfied for my troubles. And then the Janitor shoves me in a basket and loses me to YOU in a freaking poker game, and can I just say what's with the kitten poker fixation for demons?"

Spike could do nothing but stare at him in shock for a moment, "Oye whelp, I thought you was human. Don't you need to breath or something from time to time?"

"It's a Willow thing." Xander said absently, "You hang around with her long enough you learn to babble just to keep up."

"Right, then." Spike said calmly, as if that explained everything. "Now, luv, why don't you settle yourself down on the bed, and have at these leftovers. The sushi ain't getting itself any fresher, and I'm not sure when I can get anything more, being as how I don't particularly want to draw attention to myself just yet."

Xander settled himself on the furthest corner of the bed and nibbled at the remaining sushi and generally tried to remain as small as possible. Once he'd ate the remaining edible sushi he slurped at the completely melted milkshake and took subtle glances at Spike, who had no use for subtle and simply watched him eat.

After finishing what he assumed to be his 'last meal', Xander turned to face Spike, forcing himself to meet the vampire's gaze head on before speaking. "Look, I figure I'm about two minutes from dead here, but if by some chance you're taking requests, could you, you know just finish me off and not bring me back, or let Deadboy have me? Cause really not loving his idea of eternity here."

"Just why the hell would I wanna drain you, whelp?" Spike asked, honestly stunned by the request.

"Well the fangs and the forehead were the giveaway. You vampire, me useless loser, doesn't take a lot of brains to do that math."

"Yeah well apparently you flunked that class, whelp. I got no need, or desire to take what's already been freely given. And I sure as hell got no burning desire to make Angelus' bloody week by turning you over to his tender mercies. Besides, I got my own plans for you."

Xander was thrown for a moment trying to figure out just what Spike had in mind, then his eyes went to the spot where the previous night's floor show had taken place and his eyes flashed as he jumped from the bed and hit the farthest wall. "No, no way, no, you'll have to kill me first," he said quickly his chest tightening in fear, as he slid along the wall looking for a weapon, or an escape.

"Whelp, what the bloody hell are you on about?" Now totally baffled.

"You're going to..." Xander's throat closed up as a panic attack over took him and he couldn't go on he could only point to the spot and push himself into the corner, eyes wild with fear, knowing there was no way he'd get away from Spike, even injured.

Spike watched him, smelling the pure panic and fear coming off Xander in waves, and finally what he meant registered, and he didn't know whether to be shocked, offended or amused. "Oye, I'll have you know I have never raped anybody. 'S not really my bag, rape. Now, hell yes I've eaten my fair share of tall dark and handsome young men like yourself in my day, but I ain't never once 'ad to force 'em into my bed. And that's certainly not what I had in mind for you."

"It's not?" Xander squeaked.

"No, it's not."

Xander felt some measure of relief for about five seconds then suspicion and fear kicked up again. "So what do you want with me then?"

"I just figured out you were here, pet, it's not like I've had time to really think things out." Spike replied, eyes taking in Xander's body slowly as he relaxed bit by bit.

"So could I just you know... go?" Xander asked.

"I don't think that's such a good idea right now, whelp. Angelus is in a right tear over your slayer friend, and if he finds you, you'll end up sent back to her in pieces. Even if I could get you out of here, he's got every minion on the lookout for you."

"Why's he looking for me?" Xander asked, terror rising again.

"You've been here a couple days, pet. Apparently Slutty thinks he's responsible for your 'untimely disappearance', and has made it her goal in life to beat the crap out of him until you're returned, unharmed. Naturally he wants to find you and send her bloody bits for a year. He never was all that smart." Spike said, grinning up at Xander.

"So what do I do?" Xander asked quietly.

"Come here, let me put this collar back on you, and then settle in while I scratch your ears some more like a good little whelp." Spike said, his tone suddenly serious, despite his words.

Silently, Xander walked forward, sat down on the bed, and waited while Spike adjusted the necklace.

"Good, pet." Spike said as he picked up the cocoa kitten and once again scratched around his ears.

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Days of sleeping as a cat, usually on Spike's chest or under the dresser, and nights spent talking melted together. Xander wasn't quite sure how long he'd been living the life feline, and was wondering how he'd deal with school and home if he managed to survive Angelus' warpath.

The time spent with Spike was unusual to say the least. They talked about their lives. Xander told him about his friends and his family, never giving details that might come back to bite them all in the jugular. Spike told him stories about his life and times. He didn't go out of his way to gross Xander out, or scare him, but he was honest about the things he'd done. That had been, aside from the whole Buffy loving thing, the biggest problem he'd had with Angel. He liked to pretend that he'd never done anything wrong, only admitting to things when it was dire, hell not even then half the time.

The Spike and Drusilla thing was just one example. For crying out loud he'd sired Dru and had helped sire Spike. He'd run with them for God knows how many years. There was no way he didn't have information that would have helped Buffy finish this crap months ago. Not that Xander particularly wanted his new sort of almost kinda friend dusted, but still he wouldn't be crying any rivers if dear old Dru was ready for ye olde Dustbuster.

For Spike's part, he'd stayed in the room one night after the attack, then got dressed and wheeled himself out. He sent a minion out for a few things for the whelp and allowed his sire and grandsire to see him still alive and kicking. If Angelus was surprised he wasn't a big pile of dust, he didn't show it, which started a nice solid round of ignore the cripple that lasted for the next two weeks.

Unfortunately, like always, it didn't last.

He'd been visiting with his princess when she'd gone stiff all over and looked at her damned doll with wide fearful eyes, then grinned, bounced and clapped her hands. When she looked straight at him he realized once again just how crazy she was, and he knew what was coming.

"Daddy's going to punish us, just like the old days," she said reverently before she kissed Spike and danced off to 'get ready for daddy.'

He'd tried to wheel himself out of the line of hurricane Angelus, but he'd been too late. He'd slammed Spike out of the chair and onto the ground in one lightening fast swoop that stunned Spike so badly that even his nearly healed self couldn't quickly recover from it. When he finally managed to start pulling himself up, Angelus reared back with a sharp kick to the ribs that made him bite back a scream.

~*~*~*~*~

Xander had been nervous for the last hour. He wasn't sure why, but he just felt jumpy and scared, more than he'd been the rest of the time here. He was still in cat form, and the fur along his back was standing on end. Something was wrong.

He could hear footsteps coming up towards the door, and knew there were too many

to be just Spike, and too heavy to be Drusilla. He scrunched back under the dresser as far as possible, while the door was kicked open and two vampires he hadn't seen before stepped into the room and threw down whatever they'd been carrying between them, onto the floor. A minute later one rolled the wheelchair in and shoved it into a corner. That done, they shut the door. The moment they'd retreated enough, Xander ran out to see what they'd dumped.

It was Spike.

He was naked and covered in blood and other body fluids Xander so very much didn't want to think of. There were rips and welts and cuts everywhere, and several obviously broken bones. His white blonde hair was now a streaked and gory red. His throat had been bitten, and once again he'd taken on a grayish tint to his pale skin.

Xander struggled out of the collar, pawing at it anxiously, nearly in tears of frustration when he thought it wouldn't come off. Once it finally dropped, he rushed to the door locking it, then grabbed the knife off the dresser. He carefully pulled Spike to cradle him in his lap and then sliced into the flesh of his hand.

He pried open Spike's mouth and made a fist until blood started dripping into Spike's mouth. They stayed like that nearly ten minutes before Spike roused enough to swallow the accumulated drops. His blue eyes peering up at Xander, not entirely aware. After another few moments he swallowed again and this time pulled the hand towards his mouth. Instead of the expected bite, he ran his tongue over the slice in Xander's hand, healing it, then pulled himself up to a slouched sitting position.

Xander reached for the knife again, but Spike's hand on his stopped him. "No more. You're not my bloody food, pet." he rasped out.

He was trying to struggle to his feet when a stunned Xander reached out and grabbed him, carefully pulling him back down. "What am I then?"

Spike thought about that for a moment then grinned, although it looked rather gruesome with his injuries, before speaking, "You're my friend."

Xander grinned stupidly at himself for a moment, then looked at Spike and picked up the knife again. Spike opened his mouth to protest again, but Xander held up his hand, "Look, we're friends, as weird as that is to think about, and friends help friends. So shut up and have a drink, I got a pint or so to spare and you need it."

Spike tore his eyes from the knife to look into Xander's and tried again to talk him out of it. "Xan, luv, it's ok, I'll be ok without..."

Xander held up his hand again, cutting him off mid sentence. "You may be ok eventually, but this will help you now, right?" He asked. When Spike slowly nodded he continued, "So you're going to take some. You may not know this, but if we're gonna be friends you're gonna need to learn this face." He pointed to his own. "This is the patented Willow resolve face. It means my mind is made up and you're either gonna drink the blood I'm gonna give you, or I'm going to drip it all over the damned floor and you'll have to clean it up."

"Ok, luv." Spike said, tears in his voice as well as his eyes. When Xander made a move with the knife, he stopped him. "Let me bite, it won't hurt as much," he offered.

Xander looked at him a moment or two before he tilted his head to one side and waited.

Spike slowly moved up until he was leaning across Xander's chest, nose flared as he delicately sniffed the skin he was going to taste momentarily. "Are you sure?" he asked, blue eyes meeting brown. When Xander nodded he darted forward and bit.

Xander automatically reached one arm up to cradle Spike's head, and gasped as he let the sensations from the bite wash over him. He felt warmth and love and need. There had been a sharp pain in the first moments of the bite, but that had quickly faded to something resembling euphoria, contentment. After a moment Spike tried to pull away, but Xander held him in place. After another couple minutes Xander began to feel very very relaxed, A moment later he realized he was feeling horny, but was too tired to care. Another moment later and Spike finally managed to push himself away, licking the wound.

He held Xander at arms length and looked at him. Xander smiled dopily at him, and

Spike began cursing under his breath. "Damn it all to Hell, Xan. You let me take too much." He slipped one thumb across a still elongated canine and slipped it into Xander's mouth. "Drink." Xander began slowly sucking Spike's thumb. As he watched, despite his slowly healing injuries, Spike found himself getting excited by the look and feel of Xander drinking from him.

After a few moments, Xander seemed to pep up a bit and climbed to his feet. He helped Spike stand up and walked him into the bathroom. "Go ahead and get cleaned up," he told Spike, then went to dig out some clothes. He threw a pair of jeans and a t-shirt on the counter before going back into the bedroom.

He eyed the shoddily locked door a moment before moving a chair to sit under the doorknob, realizing that wouldn't stop a vampire, he hoped it would at least give him time to hide if someone came calling. Less than satisfied, he moved on to the next job that needed done, cleaning up the blood where Spike had been laying. He wiped it up the best he could with an old towel, then threw it away, grimacing at the amount of blood and gore on it.

Once he finished, he scooped up the collar and sat down on the bed to study the latch. He didn't want it falling off, but if he needed to swap from kitten-shaped to Xander-shaped in a hurry he'd need to adjust it a little more. By the time he was satisfied with the results Spike had finished with his shower.

Spike checked him over carefully, and Xander wasn't quite sure how to take the assessing looks. "Did I grow a set of horns or something?" he asked with a grin.

"Not yet, pet, but if you're set on that look, I know a couple demons who owe me favors. I could probably have you a set within the week," he said smirking at the now squirming Scooby.

"I think I'll pass, I'm already horny enough, thanks." Xander quipped, then blushed deeply when he realized what he'd said.

Spike laughed and then walked around to the other side of the bed and jumped in. He laid down on his back, hands behind his head, and his ankles crossed, with a small smile on his face. Xander spun where he sat on the other side of the bed so that he was facing Spike and the headboard.

"I'm probably soo very much going to regret this, but I gotta ask. Did you really mean it, or was that the incapacitating beating talking earlier?"

Spike didn't ask what he meant, he just sat for a moment and thought before answering. "I meant it."

"Good" Xander said, "Cause I know this is a really bad idea, but I consider you a friend too." Spike nodded and Xander spun himself around in the bed so he was laying next to Spike, but not quite touching him. "So... Angelus?" he asked after several quiet minutes.

"Yeah." Spike said quietly. "It seems your slaygal has been making the rounds again trying to find hide or hair of you. 'parently she caught Angelus out again. I believe the threat went something like, 'If I don't get Xander back in perfect health I'm gonna shove a stake so far up your ass you'll be coughing up splinters for a year'. I swear if it hadn't led to the bastard taking his frustrations out on me an' Dru I'd laugh my ass off. Oh to hell with it, I AM laughing my ass off. Mind you I still can't stand the slayer, but her making Angelus into her bitch is almost worth the price of admission."

Xander joined him grinning for a moment, then let exactly what he'd said sink in. A slightly watery look came into his eyes and Spike wasn't sure whether he was going to laugh or cry. "What's up, pet?"

"I don't know how I should feel. I mean on one hand I'm really glad that Buffy still likes me enough to try to find me, despite all the crap I caused with that spell. Did I tell you she got turned into a rat because of it?" Spike nodded and he continued, "I mean I just have to wonder why she'd bother, why any of them would bother, but I felt really good, cause they still care. Then I realized both times were my fault."

"I'm not following you here, whelp. Both whats were your fault?" Spike asked, confused. Xander couldn't look at him, instead he turned away, trying to hold off tears Spike could already smell. "Oye, just what do you think is your fault?" He asked again.

"Angelus attacked you both times because he was pissed about Buffy. Buffy went

after him cause she was trying to find me. It's all my fault that he was mad and that he hurt you like that. It's all my fault." He jumped up off the bed and headed towards the door.

Spike was too flabbergasted by the twisted logic to react right away, but was up in a shot and across the room before Xander could finish removing the chair from under the knob. "What in the bloody Hell do you think you're doing?" he asked with deadly calm.

"Just let me go. I'll go after Angelus, and maybe by some fluke I'll catch him by surprise and dust him. More likely he'll start sending my bloody bits to Buffy, and she'll dust him for me. Either way, he doesn't come after you again. Please, just let me go."

"Got it all figured out have ya now, Whelp? Think you're the only reason Angelus has ever laid into me? What about the thousands of times before your parents were even born? What about all the times when you weren't a thought in his over styled head? He does what he does because he's a right bastard and a bully. That is the beginning, middle, and end of the story, luv. He's an overgrown bully with poofy hair and a caveman's forehead. He's been like that for as long as I've known him, and one Xander Harris isn't going to change him one iota." Spike's eyes were blazing as he spoke.

"But this time, I set him off. I made him hurt you." Xander had lost the battle and tears were running down his face. "This time it WAS my fault."

"This time it was Angelus' own bloody fault, both directly and in the roundest of round about ways like you try to claim. Do you know where yer slayer got that bloody collar from? It weren't no secret admirer, Whelp. Angelus sent it to her, with a bloody compulsion charm on it, so that the first person to open the box would put it on. He figured it'd be her. That's why he was waiting outside her house on Valentine's Day, and that's what your triple damned spell prevented. So what if it hadn't been you who found the box and opened it, huh? What then? He'd have the slayer here to kill and maim at his mercy, or what about that little red headed friend of yours? Would you want her left up to his tender loving care?"

Xander couldn't speak his mind too clogged up with horrible scenarios, he just

shook his head.

"It wasn't your fault, and if you could change things, it might only end up worse for those you love. Come on back and sit down, OK luv?"

Xander nodded and followed Spike back to the bed. Spike sat down then pulled the younger man down to settle in between his legs and wrapped his arms around him while Xander cried onto his chest.

After a long while the tears stopped, and Spike realized Xander had fallen asleep. He pulled Xander over to lay on the bed, and after finding the collar, Spike slid in beside him and pulled him close once more. Spike held him for most of the day, his ears listening for anyone approaching the bedroom door, constantly at the ready to re collar Xander if it became necessary to keep him safe, unwilling to give up the feel of his body next to him just yet. Eventually the warmth was just too much of a good thing, and he slipped off to sleep himself.

Part Four

Xander woke up that night feeling better than he had in a very long time. Someone was holding him close. Someone had their arms around him, and a hand in his hair. Someone who smelled good, who was strong, and someone who would protect him, even from his own stupidity. He knew all that before he opened his eyes. He still knew it when he finally did bring himself to open them, and found himself staring into Spike's eyes.

"Hi." Xander whispered huskily.

"Evening, Pet." Spike rubbed his hand through Xander's hair once before he pulled away and sat up.

His sitting up counted as a minor miracle in Xander's way of thinking, because the minute he'd ran his hands through Xander's hair his normal morning semi decided to come to full attention. Xander blushed lightly and shifted himself.

Spike tossed him the collar. "You might want to put that on, pet. I'm gonna head out for news and some food for you."

Xander nodded, then stood up and put the collar on. Once the transformation was complete he slipped back under the dresser and proceeded to try and figure out just when he'd started liking guys.

"Take care, luv." Spike said before unblocking the door, getting into his wheelchair, and heading once more into the breach.

~*~*~*~*~

A week went by and Xander stayed Xander-shaped unless Spike went out. Spike came back to the room one evening acting very strange. If Xander didn't know better he'd think Spike was worried. He put the food in the small refrigerator then plucked a couple glasses off the nightstand and grabbed a bottle off one of the shelves. He patted the bed, and when Xander was next to him he quickly thumbed off the collar. He filled both glasses then handed one to Xander.

"Pet, I got some bad news while I was out. It's about one of the teachers your lot always palled around with. The gypsy bint."

"Ms. Calender?"

"Yeah that's her. I guess Dru got a vision about her, about something she was going to do that would stop Angelus. There's no easy way to say this, pet. Angelus caught her and he killed her. The bastard was bragging about laying her out for the Watcher to find."

"Oh God, Giles. He's gotta be going nuts. Fucking Angelus." Xander cried out voice breaking.

"I'm sorry, pet, there's a bit more. You're gonna need to be especially careful, Angelus is on another tear. Seems Watcherman had some stones after all. He tried burning down the factory with Angelus in it. I gotta say, the man does good work, even if he can't seem to close the deal any better than your slayer. Course the fact

that he managed to singe a bit of Angelus' hair means he's gonna be hell on the rest of us for awhile, but still good work all told."

"Is he going to come after you again, Spike." Xander asked, quiet fury blazing in his eyes.

"He might, but don't you go all knight in shining armor on me, luv. I been dealing with Angelus a lot of years, and you're not going to get yourself killed on some half arsed suicide mission. We wait and we bide our time and I take what he has to dish. When the time is right, we'll destroy his arrogant ass completely, but not until. You got me, pet?" Xander mumbled something not even vampiric hearing could make out. "What was that?"

"I got you. I so don't like it, but I got you." Xander said fighting the strong urge to sniffle. "Besides, it's not like I'd be more than some fly buzzing around Angelus."

"Not that I'm encouraging that sort of thing, but you gotta be underestimating yourself, pet. You've helped that slayer of yours for a couple years now right? You gotta know some moves then."

"Sure I know a couple moves. I fetch a mean donut, I snore in the books with the best of them, and my specialty, glaring at Deadboy." Xander said with a snort of derision.

"Bollocks, you've got more heart than just about anyone I've ever met, maybe the watcher just isn't a very good teacher."

"Giles is a Librarian, not a teacher." Xander said, a little pleased by the compliment, but confused by the conversational shift.

"Not that sort of teacher, Whelp. I mean the fighting stuff. That sort of thing is dead easy to pick up with a little time and effort, you can't possibly be that bad of a study."

"The only fighting stuff I learned from Giles was how to wear padding and fall down while Buffy pummels you." Xander said with a small smile.

"You're bloody well joking aren't you? They let you lot out at night on the bloody Hellmouth to fight the good fight, and no one saw fit to teach you the tiniest bit of self-defense?" Spike asked, halfway between stunned stupid and completely furious.

"Well we know the, um, pointy end goes in the heart, and hey I can fall down with the best of them, but you know probably not exactly the kind of training you're meaning, huh?"

"No it's bloody well not. Come on, pet. It's time you learned how to tussle, all proper like." He jumped to his feet and shoved the bed to one side of the room, with Xander on it. "On your feet. We're gonna have us a go."

They spent the next several hours with Spike working on his non-existent fighting technique. By the time they were finished Xander still doubted he'd be able to take on even a confused fledge, but might just be able to give the jocks something to think about before they pummeled him bloody.

Sweaty and sore, Xander let Spike lead him to the bathroom. "You've been in these clothes too long, pet. Strip and climb on into the shower, and I'll dig around that old dresser for some clothes.

He found an old faded pair of jeans that had been in the dresser when he got there, and one of his t-shirts that was a little on the big side. He sat them on the sink with a clean towel and with one final glance towards the shower, he went back and picked out a clean t-shirt and jeans for himself. That done he returned to the bathroom and debated with himself over what to do next; for all of ten seconds.

"Need me to wash your back, Whelp?" he whispered into one soapy ear.

Xander jumped as if shocked, but before he could say anything Spike took the soapy washrag from his hand and started rubbing small circles across his shoulder blades. Xander stood stock still for a moment, his racing heart like a drumbeat in Spike's ears, then relaxed into Spike's touch. When his back was done, Spike moved on to his hair, massaging shampoo through his dark brown hair gently. After a minute or so, Xander began pressing back into the touch, very much like he did when scratched while in his cat form.

Smiling to himself, Spike just washed him, then shuffled them around slightly so that he was under the water, and he began washing himself. After a minute, Xander reached out, plucked the soapy washrag from his hand, and used it to wash Spike's back. That done he reached for the shampoo and washed his hair as well.

While Spike rinsed his hair, Xander stepped out of the shower and dried off. By the time Spike had shut off the water, Xander had on the tight jeans and held out a towel in Spike's direction.

"Thanks, mate," he said, and began to dry off. Xander rinsed his mouth out with a tube of ancient toothpaste and his finger over the sink, then smiled at Spikes non reflection in the mirror. He pulled the shirt on and went to slide the bed back into it's proper place in the room before throwing himself down on it.

A few minutes later Spike settled in on the other side of the bed. Slowly, as if neither realized they were doing it, they moved to face one another each still on his own side of the bed. With slow deliberation, Spike leaned across the distance and kissed Xander gently on the lips. "G'night, pet." he whispered before returning to his side of the bed and closing his eyes.

Xander lay awake for a long time before finally giving in to sleep. When they woke up, he was in Spike's arms and felt safe.

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The next few days fell back into routine, but the routine itself had changed. They'd wake up together, unwrap themselves from each others arms. Xander would put on the collar. Spike would wheel himself out to feed and send a minion out to fetch real food, which he would then make a show of enjoying before tucking it down beside himself in the chair. He'd avoid Angelus as much as possible, and make sure Dru was properly taken care of. Then he would slip off back to his room to uncollar Xander. He'd drink a beer and watch Xander eat. They'd talk a little, and then they'd spend a couple hours knocking each other around the room while he trained the boy. They'd shower together, then slip into their own sides of the bed.

Early in the fourth evening of their new routine, things changed again.

Usually Xander always woke up first and would shift away just enough to hide the results of his body's growing attraction to Spike, and the very human need to pee. This time Spike woke up first. He woke up to warmth and arms and legs entwined, and he woke up to one rather impressive erection pressing into his hip.

While his brain was screaming 'This is a very bad idea.' his hand seemed to have other plans and slid down to lay over the bulge in Xander's pants. *You can stop at anytime, you know, before you scare him.* His mind told his hand again. Just then Xander's cock twitched under him, and instead of his hands falling into line, they began rubbing that hot length, and apparently talked his mouth into rebelling too, since it leaned forward all on it's own and captured Xander's mouth in a kiss.

His tongue danced over Xander's lips, tasting, begging entrance while his mutinous hand stroked. Two brown eyes were suddenly seeing him, and the chaste mouth opened either in protest or invitation. His mouth didn't care which. His tongue slipped in to explore the new realm as his hand stroked again. Brown eyes showed the shifting mind; sleepy confusion slipped into shock which melted into pure lust as his hand moved again.

Suddenly his tongue wasn't the one doing the exploring. A hand slipped up to his face, fingers exploring. Another stroke and the hand moved from feeling his face to cupping his head, fingers threading through bleached hair, pulling them closer. Xander's other hand slipped down and fumbled with his own jeans. He unbuttoned then reached for the zipper, but Spike pushed his hand to the side and reached for the zipper himself. Xander's free hand hung there just out of the way, as if waiting for orders. After a moment or two, Spike squeezed it in his hand then pulled it over and laid it on his own painfully hard erection. The kisses went on and on while cool and warm hands stroked.

It felt like they'd spent forever exploring each other's mouths then Spike pulled away. Before Xander could protest, or say much of anything, he was gasping at the next contact as Spike nibbled from his earlobe to his neck, then slid his shirt off and kept moving. Tongue and teeth teased their way down his body, stopping randomly to entice some secret spot always bringing a moan of pleasure from Xander's throat.

Spike pushed Xander onto his back and slid his pants down his hips, then off entirely before kneeling between his legs. He started stroking again while nibbling his way down Xander's stomach. His tongue darted out to lick up several drops of precum that dripped off the end of Xander's hard cock. He was only mildly offended to hear semi-hysterical laughter above him.

"What's wrong, luv?"

It took a moment or two for Xander to get past the giggles in order to speak, but he finally did. "I was just thinking about how someone somewhere was having a really good laugh at my expense."

"You know I might start taking offense here in a minute." Spike said, hands still stroking and roaming over Xander's body. "So why is someone laughing at you, pet?"

"It's just you know I gave Bu... Oh yeah do that again, please... Buffy soo much crap when she didn't stake Angel, and when she dated Angel, and when she... well no not when she made love to him, cause you know what with the screaming and the rocket launchers and the blue bits, that would have been in really, really bad taste, but you know what I mean. I think I gave her the biggest hard time about being in lo... in love with him, and now here I sit, in the same position, except I haven't even got the excuse of a soul, not that that kept Deadboy from being a jerk, but still." He trailed off as he realized Spike had stopped moving completely.

He was staring at Xander with the strangest expression. "Say that again."

"What part?" Xander asked, looking down at Spike.

"The sodding part where you said you loved me, granted in a totally round about totally Xander bloody Harris type way."

"Oh... yeah, I um... I love you." Xander said, silently waiting for the denial, or the let down, or, considering the object of his affections, the bloody mayhem. Instead he found himself pounced upon as a very emotional vampire began kissing him again, passionately.

Minutes later when the kiss broke, he almost missed the softly spoken, "I love you too."

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"We've got a problem luv." Spike said as he watched Xander eat a slightly cold cheeseburger.

"What problem?" Xander asked.

"Acatla."

"Gesundheit"

~*~*~*~*~

Spike had spent as much time as he dared sussing out any and all information to be had about Acatla, which left Xander alone most evenings. He'd been sleeping on the bed as a kitten when she'd busted through the door with one harsh kick. He tried to make it back to the dresser, but didn't get quite that far before she cut him off. He skidded to a halt and changed directions, running under the bed instead. As he tried to figure out what way to go something caught the collar, and it slid off his neck onto the dust bunny covered floor. 'Not NOW.' shot through his head as his body began the shift back to human form.

He laid out as flat as he could, working his hands down to reach the collar that was now poking him in the ribs. He'd just managed to get his hands on it when the whole bed flew off of him. Drusilla stepped back and began bouncing and clapping while he climbed to his feet, the collar in one hand. He quickly stuffed it in his pocket, knowing it might be his only chance of getting away.

"So, Kitten wants my Spikey. Wants to be petted and loved forever. Wants what's mine."

Xander was slowly easing away from Dru, struggling with his fight or flight instincts, knowing if he ran she'd be on him in less than a second. Of course he forgot the golden rule when dealing with Darling Dru: 'Crazy, not stupid.'

Before he'd got more than five feet from her, she was on him, pinning him against the wall, her teeth snapping at his neck and just missing the really vital bits. She held him like that for what seemed like a long time, sniffing at his throat, her grip like iron. Xander prayed someone would come along. Spike, Angelus, anyone. Spike could be scary, yeah, and holy fuck was soulless deadboy a crazy psycho-killer, but there were levels of crazy, and Xander would take garden variety psychopath over full on batshit any day of the week and twice on Sunday.

Dru was humming against his neck, and to be quite honest if he wasn't so busy pissing himself and, yeah lets face it, dealing with the whole 'sudden love of dick' issue, he'd be getting excited by her attention. Unfortunately, the lack of horndoggedness didn't last. *Hey teenage male here still*, he thought to himself as little Xander started twitching along with her humming.

Come on, Spike. Come get your girl. Please? Ohfuuuck tee - he thought to himself, cutting off abruptly as teeth stopped riding over skin and sunk into it. The pain wrenched a scream from him. Not exactly manly scream of the year, but Dru's hands were sliding south while her teeth was dug into his neck. Now was so the time for girly screaming and much calling for help.

Or so he told himself, until the so very not reassuring laughter of Angelus registered past the mewling at his neck and the pounding of his remaining blood in his ears. His vision blacked out as teeth left his throat and darkness overtook him.

~*~*~*~*~

Xander woke up to aching arms stretched over his head by shackles and chains. Dru was setting nearby looking at him. She was smiling and humming to herself, weaving a little from side to side. After a few minutes she went to where he hung, and walked around him, slowly.

"Daddy wrapped you up so pretty. He used my favorite chains. A special treat for

my special boy. You want to take him from us, don't you pretty one. You will. That's why I was so cross before. I'm going to lose my favorite toy, and I get ever so cross when I lose something. Don't you?"

Xander kept silent as she continued circling him. "My Spike and Daddy are arguing over who owns my kitten. Who do you want to own you little kitty? Do you want to belong to my Spike, or do you want to let daddy turn you into the cheese? Lead the little slayer right into his trap, then SNAP. Broken bones and broken necks and then my sweet, then, the cheese will stand alone. So alone, little one. You could see such pretty things alone. You could stand on the edge of the end of the world and watch as it burns down to lovely embers. Such decisions, my kitten."

Suddenly she went stark still, and a door opened up behind him. Spike was shoved into the room, his chair rebounding off the wall. Xander struggled against the chains trying to get to him.

Spike's eyes flew to his. He pressed his lips together and shook his head slightly, his eyes trying to send a very clear 'keep quiet' message to Xander.

When Angelus began to speak Xander realized he so needed to reevaluate his crazy meter, cause Deadboy was pinging it somewhere above and beyond Dru.

"So what are we going to do with you, Harris? What's appropriate for this situation? I could turn you into the most pathetic minion ever? Course that would make it far too quick on the old Buffster, wouldn't it. A quick end, and then the knowledge that you're dead? We could go with the bloody bits plan, but somehow that's just lost all it's shine for me. It's so... impersonal you know? It just lacks something. Course, it'd still be fun." He vamped out and darted towards Xander for a moment, then pulled away laughing.

"I could turn you into a childer, that has certain merits, but you know I just can't stand the idea of having you around forever, even if it would so righteously piss off my girl. Of course so would the knowledge that you left them all for a stint in Spike's bed. Just think of how disgusted they'd all be. Hell I'm right there along with them." He leered at Xander then stepped over to Dru who shuddered either in disgust or ecstasy. "Course my boy always did have such excellent taste. Maybe I should give you a try, eh? Sample the goods before I make a final decision? Maybe

that ass is worth keeping around forever."

As Angelus moved towards Xander, he started shaking and struggling with the unforgiving chains trying to pull away. Before Angelus could reach him, Spike chimed in. "No, you won't be touching him, Sire" he said, calmly, almost spitting out the word sire while forcing himself to not look at Xander.

"What did you say to me, boy?"

"I said no, Sire. You gave me the boy freely and under no duress, your poncy soul has no bearing on it. He's mine. Mine to court, mine to woo, and mine to make consort. You have no right to interfere and once the ritual is done, you'll have no right to bed him, no right to kill him, no right to turn him, and damned sure no right to use him in your various schemes to mess with that idiotic slayer chit."

"You're going to abandon you're claim on our Dru, for a human... for Harris?"

"You already have prior claim to Dru, but this one is mine free and clear by Aurelian tradition. And sire he's ever such a lovely pressie." Spike added with a smirk.

"Fine, William, you want him, claim him. Do you really think he'll do it willingly? Go for it then, my boy. Here and now, or I'll challenge your claim, and take him for my own." The false face of a doting patriarch dropped into a leer of pure taunting lust. "Oops, maybe you need my help anyway. I mean your stint as rollerboy means you're not exactly up for the ritual, now doesn't it? Shall I help you out, Will?"

The explosion Angelus was expecting didn't happen. Instead Spike smiled beatifically up at his grandsire, and then stood up and walked over to where Xander had been struggling with the chains. He quickly snatched them off Xander's wrists. With one quick glance to make sure his audience was watching he kissed Xander soundly, before whispering in his ear, "Sorry, luv, but you need to trust me, it's the only way to keep you safe." Angelus roared with rage behind them at the sight of the kiss.

It was only a second or two before Xander pulled his head down and began nibbling on Spike's ear, then whispered back, "If it gets Deadboy that mad, I'm game."

Spike grinned at him for a moment before slipping back into worry and turning to face Angelus. "I will claim my consort, sire, but I need a few moments of privacy with my betrothed to prepare him for the ritual, and coach him on his lines."

Angelus was too stunned by the current turn of events to argue and simply nodded and walked out of the room, taking Dru with him. Only when Spike could no longer hear his footsteps did he turn back to Xander.

"I'm sorry, luv, so sorry. We have no choice now, well, we do, but it's a bloody poor one." Spike said, running one hand on his arm and petting his hair with his other hand.

"What's going on, and what do we need to do, and what choice?" Xander asked, head unconsciously leaning into the hand petting him, almost as if he were still a cat.

"The choice is me or Angelus. He's challenged my claim on you, which means we do the ritual or he claims you and probably makes you his vampire bitch before sending you out to torment Slutty."

"So not seeing an actual choice there." Xander muttered as he buried his face against Spike's neck. "You. I choose you, Deadboy is soo not an option. So what am I choosing you for, and what do we do?"

"Remember during that parent teachers night thing when he offered me your neck? Doesn't matter that he intended to double cross me, he made the offer and I'm accepting it. If I claim you, he can't touch you. The thing is claiming a consort is, well its permanent. There are side effects, that are more pronounced since you're a human, and the ritual won't be entirely pleasant for you."

"Side effects?" Xander squeaked out.

"Yeah, pet. You won't age, you won't die, unless I do. When I die you die, when you die I die. It doesn't make you invulnerable, but short of dismemberment odds are you can slowly recover, faster if you drink my blood." Xander opened his mouth to protest, but Spike was faster and simply cut him off. "You won't BE a vampire,

pet. Your soul is safe, and you can still walk in the sun. You just might get perks. Increased speed and stamina, the whole hard to kill thing, and maybe your senses will peak up a bit."

"How unpleasant is the ritual?"

"It calls for congression in blood, sharing of blood between you and me, and a tiny bit of magical vows at the end."

"Congress in blood?" Xander asked, confused.

"It means I have to fuck you, pet. In front of anyone who wants to watch, and the only lubricant I can use is our blood mixed. I don't have to be rough, and I swear, luv, I'll be as careful as I can, but this is your only real chance. It has to be your choice though, Xan. Since you're human, if you're unwilling the bond won't form. So if you can't... if you don't want to be tied to me, to a monster, tell me now and I'll do whatever I can to get you out, to get you safe. I promise. Will you still trust me?"

"Apparently, I'm going to be spending a long time doing that." Xander said, before pulling Spike's mouth to his own and kissing him deeply.

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Angelus watched the ritual with equal parts arousal, disgust, and pure fury. Arousal at the sheer blood lust before him. Disgust at the tenderness despite the blood. And fury bordering on animalistic rage that William would dare take a human consort against his wishes, more to the point, specifically to cross him. And that it should be Harris was insufferable. He watched certain the ritual would fail. If there was one thing he could count on the boy blunder for, it was his hatred of all things vampire.

Unfortunately, he was wrong.

The ritual completed successfully. The now mated pair lay panting, Spike still inside Xander, arms and lips still entwined. Spike never saw his enraged Sire rear up with the sliver of wood meant for his heart.

Xander however did. With a strength born of sheer terror, he managed to reverse positions with his lover, putting Spike on the bottom, and taking the stake meant for him in between his ribs and puncturing a lung. Fury raged across Spike's face as he pulled away from Xander, and looked at his stunned grandsire over Xander's now slumping shoulder. Xander kissed him again and mouthed the words, 'Love you' before passing out.

As gently as he could, Spike slipped out from under Xander. His mind flew in the two directions that screamed out from the furious whirlwind that threatened to consume him. Protect mate... Kill who hurt mate... He could do neither it seemed. Angelus had shaken off his shock, and to Spike's utter fury, had walked away. As he did, he threw down a final taunt, designed to push Spike to attack him, and leave Xander to die.

"Guess he was good for something after all." Angelus said as he slipped out of the room with a smirk.

Spike refused to let himself be goaded and took stock of his boy's health. He pulled the stake out of the boy, gritting at the scraping noise it made, and bit open his wrist, letting some of his blood fall into the wound at first, and then into his consort's open mouth. After a few moments he threw on jeans with preternatural speed. He slipped the stake covered in his consort's blood in one pocket of his duster, and fished the collar out of Xander's pocket and stuffed it in the other. He wrapped Xander up inside the coat and made their escape from the mansion.

He ran as fast as he could to the hospital, and then after calling for help, he quickly examined the choker's clasp to ensure he could work it off if necessary, and slipped it around his neck.

The resulting tiny pale kitten tucked himself into the duster's large pocket and waited for the help he could hear coming. His tiny tongue rasped over the stake that had pierced his consort, taking comfort in the taste of Xander's blood, and in the promise that he would bury that very stake in Angelus' black heart.

Part Five

"The hospital staff has tried to get the cat away from the patient, but the cat was quite vicious and every time they tried the patient's vitals would go through the roof," said a voice down the hallway, waking Spike from where he was sleeping next to Xander on the hospital bed.

"If it is him, I don't recall hearing him mention a cat, but it could have been something he acquired during the time he was missing. I'll just have a look then, and see if this is possibly our missing friend."

Spike recognized the second voice after a moment or two. *Bloody watcher, come to suss out my boy.* he thought before realizing just where he was sleeping; right smack dab in the middle of a sunbeam shining in the window. *A dead bloke could get use to this,* he thought as he luxuriated in the warmth, before stretching and padding his way over to check on Xander.

A nurse and the watcher came in the room behind him, and he carefully walked down to settle in next to Xander again, watching the watcher, gauging his reaction to seeing the boy again. He seemed to grow a spine almost; his dejected shoulder slump of expected failure slipped away. There was what could quite possibly be the start of tears in his eyes when he turned to the nurse to speak again.

"This is our friend. How long has he been here? What's wrong with him exactly?" The nurse looked dazed by the oncoming questions and said she'd send in the doctor when he made his rounds, then slipped away.

Giles stepped over to examine Xander for himself. He was laying on his side, and Giles slid the hospital gown to one side to look at the bandage on his back. He pulled it to one side to look at the wound. There wasn't one. The bandage had blood on it, and there was an abundance of bloody packing that had been in the wound, but the skin was smooth.

Giles put the bandage back on, then stepped back, trying to think. His eyes landed on the cat, who was intently looking right back at him. The charm on the collar

caught the setting sun's light, catching his eye. He stepped closer intent on examining it when the cat batted his outstretched hand and backed away, hissing softly.

Giles stepped back murmuring in a placating manner, then suddenly darted forward to snatch the cat up by its scruff. Spike hissed and spit and struggled, but ultimately failed to lay so much as a paw on Giles. He carefully reached out and pulled the collar off his neck, then promptly dropped him as the transformation began.

The two men both stared at each other in shock for a moment before Giles pulled a cross from his pocket and drove Spike backwards. His hand fell into sunlight and he hissed in pain diving to one side. Giles advanced on him again, cross held before him.

Suddenly a dry damaged voice croaked out behind them, stopping them both short. "Giles leave him alone." His eyes pleading with his friend, his father. Pleading for trust, for acceptance. When he looked beyond Giles and saw Spike, saw his hand, he was up out of the bed like a shot. "Love, what happened?"

Giles stood stunned as Xander swooped past him and pulled William the Bloody over to the other side of the hospital room and began to administer first aid to his burned hand.

At the same time Spike was struggling to check Xander over. "How are you feeling, pet? Is the back all better? Do you need anything, anything at all?"

"Why don't we get you fixed up first, Spike, then we'll see about getting us a nice wedding present. Do you think Deadboy's ribcage would make a nice conversation piece?"

Giles fully expected a squadron of flying pigs when he heard the answering laughter coming from Spike.

"Sure it will, pet. 'And this lovely set of bones was from the bastard who stabbed me on my wedding day, isn't my husband so romantic.' I can hear the appreciative gasps now."

"Wedding day... husband... Xander what have you done?" Giles was completely and utterly at a loss.

Xander ignored him for a moment holding his wrist up to Spike's mouth. "Drink, love. That burned flesh smell is turning my stomach."

As Spike bit down Giles surged forward, determined to stop him, but Xander's free hand went out holding him at bay. Giles changed tactics and tried pulling Xander to him, but Xander would not be moved.

Spike took a sip or two, then licked across the bite. "Enough, luv. Thank you," he said before kissing Xander. Giles dropped the hand he had been pulling on and stepped back, wary.

"Xander, what have you done?" he asked again, fear stealing across his face as the kiss went on.

After a moment Xander pulled away and looked at Giles. "I swear I'll explain everything, but we need to get out of here before dark, and we need your help." Giles stared at him a moment and then nodded. Xander eyed Spike critically then continued. "Is there a way to get you out of here in the daylight Spike? I don't trust the sewers."

"Yeah there is actually, I'll be needing that bauble back now, Watcher." He pointed at the collar which was still dangling from Giles' off hand.

"How's that going to help us, Spike?" Xander asked taking the collar from Giles.

"I put this on and you carry me out pretty as you please, luv. It makes me a real live boy... well cat while I wear it. No sun allergies."

"Wow, really? That's kinda cool. Next problem, what do I do about clothes? It's a bit drafty in here, you know?"

"We can't wait long, and I didn't think to grab anything but you, pet. I know, wear this till we can get you something more befitting your station." He smirked at Xander now.

Spike was slipping off his jacket when Giles spoke up. "I want one good reason right now why I shouldn't stake you, Spike. Why I should help Xander protect you, why I should LET Xander protect you."

"Well then we'll just stick to the main important reason, eh Watcher? If you kill me, you kill my consort."

The shock and horror in Giles' face just about shattered Xander. "Never mind, sorry Giles, we'll go, try and do it alone. Come on Spike, help me downstairs before you change." He'd turned to leave the room, Spike struggling to keep quiet, to not hurt Xander any more turned to follow.

They got as far as the door before Giles spoke up, promising to help if he could.

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They silently left the hospital, Xander wrapped up in leather with the kitten curled to his chest. No one spoke until they were at Giles' car. Finally Xander had to speak.

"Giles, we heard about Ms. Calender. I wanted you to know how sorry I am. She was... she was special, and I know she really cared for you, and I'm just so sorry about what that bastard did." Tears were welling up in his eyes as they climbed into the car.

"Xander, thank you, and I want you to know we'll do whatever we have to in order to get you out from this spell. Do whatever needs doing to make you remember your true feelings. You have my word."

"Giles, there isn't any spell on me... well there is, but the feelings were there first. We had no choice with the spell, Angelus and Dru found me, there was nothing else we could do. I know you're disappointed in me, but this was my decision, and I don't regret it. Once we get rested and regroup, Deadboy is gonna be dust, for Ms. Calender, for Buffy, and for Spike. The bastard's over, he just doesn't know it yet." He was looking out the window and petting Spike while he spoke.

"I must know what happened while you were away, Xander. Help me understand, please."

"We'll tell you everything Giles, once we're somewhere safe. Deadboy is gonna be looking for us at sundown."

"We'll go to the library."

"Can't he get in there? From what I heard about, well you know, then she was at the school, and we all know Angelus can get in there."

"Right now it's the only place I can think of, Xander. I'm not going to have William the Bloody over for tea and crumpets."

"Right, sorry, forgot about that. The school it is. Could we at least get me something to wear?" Xander asked, fingering the hospital gown with distaste.

"I'm sure that can be arranged."

They drove in silence for several minutes and then Giles stopped at his place. He returned with some clothes. Some very familiar clothes.

"Giles, what are my clothes doing at your place?" Xander asked while he slipped into his jeans.

"Oh, yes well you see... that is to say in your absence your parents felt..."

"Felt like tossing all their worthless son's stuff out to the garbage and Willow rescued it all for me cause she's ever the optimist, but then didn't have room to keep it and conned you into keeping it for her with threats of the puppydog eyes?"

"Er... yes quite."

"Cool, thanks."

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Xander held kitty Spike tightly as they entered the library. His voice caught at the sight of it. It felt like coming home. Willow was huddled behind a stack of books, just the top of her head visible. Buffy was off to one side stretching.

Willow was the one who spoke first. "Did you get to see the latest John Doe? They didn't give you any trouble getting in to see him did they?" There was just a touch of wistful hope in her questions.

"Yes I did get to see him, and no not too much trouble. Of course when they find out I ran away with him, I'm sure they'll be quite cross with me." Giles replied dryly.

"Who'd you run away with... Oh my God, Xander!" Buffy screeched before she launched herself at him, intent on giving out a slayer strengthened hug.

Willow gasped then jumped to her feet and launched herself too. Within seconds he was being squished from either side, while struggling to keep Spike from being crushed by his best gal pals. Each of them was demanding the hows and the whys in a tangle of babble he didn't even bother to try to make out.

"Why don't we give him a little room, yes? He's probably still sore from his injuries." Giles said, the calm amid the girly shrieking storm.

"Yeah, your right, G-man, I'm still a little tender. Stake to the lungs will do that to you."

At that both girls jumped back looking guilty, then ushered him over to a seat. He sat Spike down on the table, and Buffy reached over to pet him. He let her scratch his head, and then very deliberately turned and bit her finger.

"Ow! Vampire kitten much?" she said, sucking the bead of blood off her finger. Spike just preened.

"Funny you should mention that." Giles said scowling at Spike.

"There aren't... are there?" Buffy asked, eyes wide. "Please tell me there aren't poor

little kitties being vampified, Giles. That'd be just too wrong."

"No there are not kittens getting turned into vampires. Oddly enough, this week it seems to be vampires getting turned into kittens," he said cleaning his glasses.

Buffy started poking around for a stake, her eyes on the kitten that Xander was pulling back into his protective grip.

"Don't even think about it," he warned.

"She wouldn't slay a kitten... would you?" Willow asked her own eyes already wet over seeing Xander again, refilling as she looked at the cat in his arms.

Spike for his part was shifting between glaring at Buffy and shooting pitiful looks at Willow. Xander had began scratching his head again while trying to organize his thoughts.

"Everyone needs to calm down. I have some stuff to tell you guys, and I know you're not going to like it, but I need you to hear me out. Okay?" he asked, giving off puppydog eyes.

Buffy settled down into a seat, her eyes locked on the kitten, but she nodded. Willow settled in beside her. "We're listening, Xander."

"Good. First things first, Buffy I'm gonna take this collar off and I need your word that you won't slay who it turns into."

"But what if it's something completely slayable?" she asked with a pout.

"Oh I guarantee it is someone you'll very much want to slay, but if you do you will kill me, so I need your word," his eyes were more serious than either girl had ever seen.

Buffy nodded slowly, "You have my word, Xander."

"Ok, now for you," he said speaking to Spike. "I love you, and if you hurt any of my friends, I may not be able to kill you cause of the you know loving you bit, but I

can certainly kill myself, and I will 'cause you hurting them will be my fault. Are we understood?"

The cat nodded solemnly, drawing gasps from both girls. Xander reached around and pulled off the collar, leaving a very serious Spike looking at Xander.

While Buffy dove for a weapon, he crouched on the table, looking at Xander a moment before he spoke. "They're your family, pet. That makes them safe as houses around me, as long as they don't go trying to hurt you, you know by breaking their promise and staking me and killing you."

A very guilty looking Buffy dropped the stake that had been poised to do just that.

Spike smirked, then kissed Xander on the forehead before jumping down to stand next to him. "I always knew I'd get on with the in-laws," he said, putting a hand on Xander's shoulder.

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It only took five demands from Buffy of 'Giles, fix it', twelve 'But Xander's not gay', and a whopping fifteen 'Shut up, Spike' for Xander to wish they were both back in Spike's room at the mansion, constant threats of Angelus and Drusilla be damned. By the time Cordelia and Oz had joined the fun, he'd had enough.

"Guys..." he started, only to be totally ignored by everyone except Spike and Oz, who both looked at him, waiting. "Guys..." he tried louder, with still no luck. "Hey, guys..." If anything the room got louder.

"Oye you lot, shut it, my Xan has something to say." That shut them all up.

"So is it the Brit speak or the attitude?" he asked Spike, pleased and more than a little turned on.

"My sheer animal magnetism," he said with a smirk.

Xander smiled and turned back to his friends. "Look, I know you guys are upset,

and I get that this is insane even for Bizarroland, but it's how things are, and if you guys can't handle it then we'll do what we can about this whole Acatla thing, then leave. That's not how I want things. I love you guys. I'm just not going to be made to feel stupid all the time because of who I love. I think I was pretty good about not doing that to other people and I deserve the same thing."

"Oh right, like you were all hearts and roses over Angel." Buffy said with a sniff.

"First off, Buff, not liking a guy, and by the way souled or not I loath the bastard, just for reference, and giving YOU a hard time over him are two totally different things. I don't expect you to like Spike. Second, I wasn't just talking about you. Everyone at this table has had a shit relationship that they regret, but they had the right to have the damned things in the first place. Am I right, guys?"

"I guess so, I mean Malcolm wasn't the best relationship ever." Willow said reaching out for Oz's hand.

"I suppose I might have made better choices than Ethan." Giles added drawing a 'look' from everyone in the room.

"Devon." Cordelia and Oz said at the same time, then looked at each other for a moment, before shrugging and looking back at Xander.

"Well if we're all in share our sordid past mode, I guess Dru wasn't the brightest idea I ever had." Spike said with a sheepish smirk.

Xander leaned over and kissed him. "Yeah but we wouldn't be together if not for her. 'Sides, she wasn't too bad when she wasn't actively trying to make me into her next chew toy."

"That's my girl, she always did have good taste, with one glaringly notable exception."

"You know as cozy as this is, most of our ex mistakes had souls, Xander. Speaking of, why don't we try out that nifty little spell you found, Willow? Since Xander was good enough to bring us a guinea pig and all. What say we get with the animal testing?" Buffy said with a nasty little smile on her face.

The room went a bit nuts at that point. Oz and Giles were the only two not saying anything.

"You're bloody hell not doing any damned mojo on me, and especially not some sodding spell you've never even tried before."

"You are so not doing any damned spell on Spike, and how is it that Willow is doing a spell? I wasn't gone that long, was I?"

"You mean you're still gonna try that stupid soul thingie? I thought we all agreed it was too dangerous with the happiness clause. When the hell did we undecide that?"

"When Xander showed up carting his furry little lab rat. I say we slap a soul in Spike here to make sure it works, then take care of Angel."

"Don't you mean Angelus?"

"No I mean Angel. Once he has his soul back, everything will be fine, and he can help us undo whatever creepy mojo Spike tricked you into."

"Buffy, I have loved you since the day I first laid eyes on you, and I'm well aware of the fact that you have super powers, not to mention the fact that it's not ok to hit girls, but so help me God, I've never wanted to slam your petty little head into a wall more than I do at this moment."

"I don't mind hitting girls, I could take care of that for you, luv."

"Shut it, Spike. Buffy, Angelus is a threat to everyone here. He killed Ms. Calender to stop her from returning his soul, he will kill all of us for the same reason. You pushing that damned spell is going to get us all killed. Not to mention all he has to do is think happy happy thoughts and that soul flies off to Neverland without him."

"I might be able to do something about that." Willow said quietly.

Heads whipped around to face her. "What do you mean, Willow?" Giles asked.

"I mean the happiness clause is just that, a clause. There isn't any good reason to leave it in the spell, if we don't mind losing the threat of the loss of his soul. We could test it out and make sure it works first, maybe play around with the wording a little."

Giles looked pensive, Buffy hopeful, both Oz and Cordelia simply looked bored, but what worried Xander was the look of resignation on Spike's face. He'd promised to keep Willow safe, and she was bound and determined to force a soul back into his body, wanted or not. The sheer helplessness on that face pissed Xander off.

"Willow you will NOT be testing that spell on Spike. You want to try animal testing, I say stick with Deadboy, or find yourself a minion or six, but you will not be doing it to my mate. Are we clear?"

Huge overly bright eyes were now locked onto his face. Pleading, puppy dog, *how could you think that of me, aren't I your bestest friend*, eyes met firm brown ones. "You are my best friend, Wills, but I know you. You'll settle in and get to thinking its 'for my own good' and then your quest to know to learn to figure it all out will lead to you trying the damned spell on Spike. I'm telling you now, don't. I have loved you for what might as well be my whole life, but so help me, if you do this we'll be done, forever."

Willow's overly bright eyes were now overflowing as she realized her best friend was telling her the absolute truth.

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They'd gone round and round for hours, with no more of an idea of what to do now than when they'd first started talking. Finally, Giles sent everyone except Spike and Xander out on patrol. Before they'd left both Willow and Buffy had cornered him trying to make him see their side. When he couldn't take the arguments anymore he simply kissed them both on the cheek and said he'd see them tomorrow.

Xander stepped into Spike's arms after watching them leave.

"You know, I think I like that ex of yours." Spike said with a small smile.

"Cordy? What'd I miss?" Xander asked, curious.

"She pulled me aside and threatened to chain me up, then visit every Chinese place in town for chopsticks. Said she'd soak 'em in holy water then poke me with em till I looked like a porcupine... all before she got into the more serious realms of pain," he explained, still smiling.

"Oookay bonding over torture methods I can kinda get, I guess." Xander replied, clearly confused.

"No you git. She said she'd do that if she found out I wasn't treating you right."

"Oh," he said, a small sweet smile on his face.

A few minutes later, Giles stepped out of his office. "Spike, I think we need to discuss a few things."

"Yeah, watcher, I thought you might feel that way. We're also gonna need a place to hide out, before my dear old sire comes looking for us."

"Xander, why don't you go on into my office and get comfortable, you look about done in." Giles suggested.

"Yeah, pet, go on and have a sit down."

"You two just want me to go away so you can threaten each other, don't you?" Xander asked defiantly.

"Yup."

"Yes, actually."

"Ok, just so's we're all clear there is to be no bloodless corpse or pile of dust when I come back out here." Xander said with his best resolve face before yawning and stumbling into Giles' office.

Once he was gone Giles began straightening up the library, while watching Spike carefully.

"You can stop with the staring anytime Watcher, I gave my boy my word regarding you lot. You're all off the menu so far as I'm concerned. I may be an evil demon, but I'm a demon of my word." Spike said while boosting himself up to sit on the check-in counter.

"Not to impugn your honor, but I think I'll stay on guard, thank you. At least until my questions have been answered to my satisfaction."

"Fair enough, watcher. Ask away, but you should know I've got a few questions of my own to ask."

Giles took off his glasses and a hardness came across his features when he looked at Spike. He stared for a moment or two before speaking. "Well my first question would be just how stupid do you actually think we are?"

"Oh good, a question I know the answer to. Stupid enough to send children out prancing about with your bloody slayer on the Hellmouth every night of the week for more than a year without a drop of self-defense training. How's that, Watcher? Is that the proper level of stupid?" Spike asked with a vicious sneer.

"Be that as it may, do you really expect me to believe that you, William the the Bloody, are planning on betraying your sire for the love of a human boy?" Giles sneered right back at him.

"First off you bloody idiot, he's me grandsire, and secondly, why don't you tell me? Tell me how I can chose a man who risked his life and spilled his blood willingly to save my life three times over the so called sire who raped me and left me to dust twice, then got so angry he tried to stake me and only failed because my mate loved me enough to take a stake meant for my heart. Yeah, Watcher, I must be bloody well crazy to throw over my grandsire for that."

"What do you mean Xander took a stake meant for your heart?" Giles asked.

"Just what I said, Watcher. My wonderful grandsire was pissed because I claimed

Xan. He waited till we finished the ritual, and while we were still recovering, both of us buck naked, and my bloody back to him, Angelus came at me with a stake. If my boy hadn't seen him coming and spun us around, I'd be a big pile o' dust. He didn't have time to warn me or stop it, so he flipped us over, took the stake instead of me. I had to chose between going after him or trying to save Xan."

"Good Lord!" Giles exclaimed, cleaning his glasses furiously. "His protectiveness does of course make sense if he'd just bonded with you." Giles added after a few moments of silence had passed.

"So what was the excuse for the first two times he saved my unlife?"

"What do you mean?" Giles asked.

"Just after the whelp disappeared your Slayer was making all kinds of noise and sent Angelus into a right state. She pissed all over his manhood, so he had to share the wealth, in a manner of speaking. He took it out on me and on Dru. Course he never did like me much, so after he raped me he didn't rightly give two shits about keeping me on this non-mortal coil. He drained me nearly dry, and left me barely conscious, unable to walk, with a still bleeding wound in my neck, then ordered my own bloody minions to leave me be until he said different."

"Well that's hardly unusual behavior for vampires." Giles huffed.

"It is when a sire leaves his childe so weak an' bad off they'll dust without blood and cuts off any help. Luckily for me, he didn't know about my poker winnings. You should have seen the shocked look on his face when I rolled out a couple nights later. He thought I was as good as dead, and he didn't give a shit, Watcher. Point of fact, he looked right put out that I was still alive."

"Poker winnings?"

"S how I got the whelp. I won him in a game of kitten poker at Willie's. Anyway, I was keeping the bit in my room and he came up to comfort me after my bastard of a grandsire left me there. He must have had to watch the whole thing. Apparently just as I was passing out I knocked off his collar. He cleaned me up and when he realized how bad off I was, he sliced open his own arm and fed me not only enough

to heal up Angelus' tender care, but put a dent in the damage you lot did to me with that organ."

"Dear Lord, how did he survive giving up that much blood?"

"It wasn't all that much, Watcher. Your lot knows about different potency in blood based on how it's gotten right? Take it during sex it has a certain flavor, take it when the victim is scared its a different taste entirely. He gave freely. He gave freely while WANTING me to heal. That's strong mojo, even off the Hellmouth."

"How much?"

"I ain't rightly sure. I was passed out now wasn't I. So far as I can tell it might have been as much as a pint, but I doubt if it were much more. The next day when I figured it all out, he was just a little slow, but that could have been only eating day old sushi and melted milkshake for 24 hours."

"What?" Giles asked, confused.

"Bloody barmy minions."

"I'm going to pretend that makes sense and move along."

"Right. The second time was just about the same. Your slayer pissed off Herr Forehead and he takes it out on me an' Dru. Course he didn't have a pair of day old minions drag Dru off to isolation and toss her on the floor practically drained with more than ten broken bones."

"And I suppose you just couldn't wait for another taste of Xander's blood to fix you right up."

"For your information, Watcher, he sliced open his wrist and dripped it in my mouth while I was unconscious. The moment I came to I closed up the wound and pushed him away. Told 'im he wasn't my bloody food."

"How... noble of you. How long did that resolve last?"

"Til he called me his friend and told me he was either going to feed me or bleed all over the ruddy carpet whether I liked it or not."

"Yes, and I'm sure you would have enjoyed the bloody show." Giles snarled.

"Rupes, what part of 'nearly dust with more than ten broken bones' did you miss? The boy's blood is exceptionally good, but it still takes time to work. If he took it into his head to slash open a wrist or two just then I might, might have been able to close the wounds if I could get to him. As it was, he could have staked me with a toothpick in that state."

"Yes, well, how then did his existence become known to the others?"

"Dru."

"Did she have a vision about his presence?" Giles asked, intrigued despite himself.

"It was because of her vision that he was even there. She was going on and on about me winning a kitten, so I went to the poker game. Later she tried to turn 'im as a kitten... or snack on 'im. She wasn't exactly clear about that. We'd taken to me locking him in when I left the room, and locking us in when I was back, so no one could just walk in, course locks don't mean much to vampire strength, and Dru decided she really wanted to play with the kitten."

"And where, pray tell, were you during this fiasco?"

"I'd snuck off to get him some real food. Between An-fucking-gelus and the slayer most of the minions I'd made were dust. His minions were right bastards and ordered not to listen to me without his express permission, and the ones Dru made tended to be as loopy as she is. I sent hers out the first night for milk or fish, and got a milkshake and sushi. I wanted to get the boy a real meal, he was starting to get scrawny from the scraps I'd been able to get so far. By the time I got back he was hanging from chains and Angelus was debating the possibilities."

"Possibilities?"

"Turn him, kill him, rape him. The usual debate for Angelus. He was trying to

decide which would hurt Xan and your slayer more."

"And what did he decide?" Giles asked, horrified.

"I didn't rightly let him get to the deciding stage, now did I. I laid claim to Xander as a gift from my sire. By the laws of the line of Aurelius he couldn't reclaim something he'd offered me freely, even if he was that poof Angel at the time an' tryin' ta trick me. He challenged my claim and the only choice I had was to claim the boy, all proper like. The bloody poof even tried to interfere in that. He didn't know how healed I was. Offered to 'help me out'. I wish I had a picture of his face when I stood up and went to my boy. Right bloody brilliant that was."

Spike started pacing as he continued talking. "I explained the claiming to him, Watcher. I told him all I know, the good and the bad, and I let him make the choice. Not that there was much of one what with my bloody sire waiting to kill him, but I did offer to try and get him out without the claim. We both knew it wouldn't have worked, but I offered anyway, and I would have tried if he asked me to. No matter what you lot think, I wouldn't have claimed him, not if we'd had any other choice."

"You didn't want to claim me?" The voice was small and sad. Eyes brimmed with tears before Xander turned and ran.

"Bloody Hell! Xan, wait!" Spike jumped over the desk and ran towards the back entrance of the library. Before he got there a familiar voice began chuckling.

"You know, boy, you just keep making the same mistakes. I thought I taught you to guard your perimeter."

"Yeah well someone killed off all my minions. So manpower's just a little low right now, Sire." Spike snarled out the last.

"Seems to me you've lost track of that pretty little consort, William. Maybe I need to take care of him, like I do Dru."

"You keep your bloody hands off him, you bastard!" Spike launched himself at Angelus only to be tossed into a wall. He was picking himself up for another attack when a deceptively calm voice issued an order.

"Spike, do go see to Xander. Angelus and I need to have a few words... in private."

Spike opened his mouth to protest, then got a good look at the watcher and left without another word.

"Now, now, Rupert, it isn't polite to interrupt a conversation like that. I was going to teach my boy some proper respect for family."

"Yes, I'm sure you were." Giles said coldly. "Of course I think you and I need to have a conversation about that very subject."

"Really, Rupert, I'm touched. I never knew you thought of me that way."

"Do shut up now, Angelus." Giles said calmly. "You murdered Jenny. You tried to hex Buffy with that collar. You were going to do unspeakable things to Xander. Not to mention the things you did to your own childe, who is now regrettably a part of my eclectic little family."

"Aww, Rupes, that's kinda sweet. You've taken in another stray."

"Quite right. I have." Giles said agreeably, just as he flung the small water balloons he'd held in each hand at Angelus' head.

"You son of a bitch, I'll rip your fucking guts out and make you watch while I tie them in knots for that." Angelus ranted while hissing and trying to wipe away the burning water.

"Colorful as always. Get out, and don't come back." His voice was like ice as he pointed a rather ridiculous neon super soaker at the very pissed off master vampire.

Hissing, Angelus made a run for the door.

Part Six

Xander had run past four completely unprepared minions without noticing their presence. Spike, however, ran smack into the group and took a full minute to dust them, which is why Xander was three blocks away before he ran straight into a very

upset mate.

"Just where in the bloody hell do you think you're going? At night, alone with Angelus and Dru and lord knows what else that hunts the streets of Sunnyhell roaming about?" he snarled.

"What does it matter?" An equally pissed off Xander snarled back. "Maybe they'd be doing you a favor if they ate me. Rid you of the stupid human, right?"

"I think you're forgetting a few things there, git. Like you die I die an' all that rot." Spike said, still angry but calming down.

"Right, sorry about that. I guess I was supposed to pick door number one, huh? Don't worry, won't happen again, and I'll make sure the gang finds a way to free you from the Xander shaped ball and chain asap."

"Tell me pet, does insanity run in your family, or is this something caused by exposure to the slayer? Maybe the fumes from her hair dye?"

"I get it ok, you don't have to keep insulting me. You don't love me, I was crazy and stupid to think you would. I get it. I'm just sorry I trapped you in this damned bond. I know it isn't what you wanted." Xander was fighting back tears.

"Xan, you are an idiot, and the reason you are an idiot is because you think I don't love you."

"Don't Spike, please don't. I heard you talking to Giles, you know I did. You told him you wouldn't have done this if you had a choice."

Spike pulled Xander into a hug, vampire strength overpowering human struggles for freedom. "Xan, love of my unlife, git extraordinaire, I wouldn't have done this if YOU had a choice. I didn't want to trap you into a bond. I wanted to bond with you because you love me, not because it was the only way to survive my crazy arsed sire. I didn't want to trap you into being sixteen for bloody ever while you watch your friends grow up. All because we had no choice. Just because I regret the shotgun wedding, don't think I regret the marriage, pet."

"Really?" Xander asked.

"Really, really." Spike said, then kissed him long and hard.

"You know I can't decide which is worse," Xander said with a smirk when they broke the kiss. "You quoting Shrek, or the fact that I was Fiona."

"Oye, there's nothing wrong with Fiona. For a green chick she was kinda hot... and she kicked ass." Spike said with a smirk. "Come on, luv. We better go check on your watcher. I left him facing off with Angelus."

"You did WHAT?" Xander screamed.

"The bastard showed up, we had a couple words, he threw me into a wall, then old Rupes came along and ordered me to go collect you. From what I could see he had a couple tricks up his sleeve, but we still need to get back and check on him." Xander grabbed his hand and pulled him down the street towards the school.

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"I assure you, Xander, I'm quite alright." Giles insisted for the fourth time.

"I'm just so sorry I overreacted and ran off. You could've been hurt or killed or anything, and I made it ten times easier for him by splitting us up."

"As you can see I'm fine. Now the matter of where you will be staying. If you're both alright with it, and considering your belongings are already there, the pair of you might as well stay in my spare bedroom until such time as we can find a more suitable place for you."

"Thanks, Giles, really."

"Yeah, Watcher, that's right neighborly of you. 'preciate it, mate." Spike said quietly.

"Yes, well, I think its high time we head home then. It's been a very long night and

some of us have to be at work in the morning." Giles said before leading the pair out to his car.

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While not quite normal, things were at least quiet for the next few days. They were all ostensibly searching for clues about Acatla, but Willow was looking just a little too attentively at a book on vampire rites. Spike stifled a good glare in her direction. He knew what she was actually looking for and was fully prepared to call her on it when he began to feel a strangely familiar itch. "Slayer are you doing anything... funny? Some sorta weird mojo or meditation out o' body crap?"

"What the hell are you going on about now, Spike?" she said raising her head up from the book she'd been napping on.

"Well, it's just I can see you there, and feel the weird slayer vibes you put off, but I can also sense you out towards the front of the school, moving this way pretty quick."

"Right... everyone grab a weapon," she ordered facing off with the door. Spike and Xander both remained comfortable and slipped back into reading. "Wait, is this some kind of joke, Spike? Wind up the slayer? Cause I'll have you know, its truly amazing what things you can live through... for example-"

Spike cut her off with a gesture towards the library door. "What was that you lot said to me again? Oh yeah 'Double the slayer... no waiting.'"

The library door opened just then and they all turned to face the newcomer, while Spike settled back snuggling up to Xander and watched.

"Kendra!"

"Mah watcher sent me. There is a-"

"Dark power rising?" replied Buffy, Willow and Xander at the same time.

"Yes. Is dere a reason we are not killing dat vampire?" she asked and gestured towards Spike.

"Yes." Buffy replied. "For now at any rate."

"Buffy!" Xander said angrily before turning to Kendra. "I am Spike's consort, Kendra. It's a long story, but he's helping us now, and killing him will kill me, so make with the nice, please."

"Yeah, we aren't allowed to slay Xander's souless wonder." Buffy said with a glare.

"Of course it's Buffy's souless wonder who's trying to end the world, not mine." Xander replied with an answering glare. This argument was getting so old even Spike had begun to ignore the digs. He did, however, give Xander's hand a squeeze under the table.

Kendra blinked owlshly at the lot of them before settling in next to Giles without another word.

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Later that night, Spike got Giles alone.

"Look, Rupes, I know you lot hate me, and just so's you know feeling's pretty much mutual, but I need to know you can do something for me before we do this dance." Spike looked decidedly nervous, something which both scared and intrigued the Watcher.

"What do you need me to do?" he asked cautiously.

"We're going up against two master vampires here at some point. I know I'm good, but they both got quite a few years on me, and no need to protect the puny humans. Your slayer is too hung up hoping for the souled wonder, and I'm not sure I could really hurt Dru when push comes to shove. So when things go wrong, I need you to have the stuff ready for this ritual." He handed Giles a battered old book. "Make sure you and the witchling both have the stuff handy and the instructions ready.

You'll need this, too." He dropped four airline liquor bottles into the Watcher's hand. Each was filled about halfway with blood. Two had an S etched into the lid, and two had an X. "If things do go bad, perform the ritual, and break the bond so I don't drag him down with me. The timing is shite, but you might have as long as fifteen or twenty minutes to do it up right, so you have to be ready."

Giles looked from the book to the blood then back to the vampire before him, a stunned look on his face for a moment before he shook it off. "Why?"

"Why, what?"

"Why give us this, now?"

"Oye I just told you. This is starting to look like the end of the sodding world, mate. I'll do what I need to to stop that, but I won't be takin' any bloody hitchhikers with me, if I have to go. Besides it only works if one of us dies... would Xander forgive you if you killed me just to break the bond?"

"Thank you."

"Got no use for your thanks, Watcher. Alls I need is your word that you'll do it if it needs doing, and to know if it comes to that, you lot will take care of him right. None of this poncy donut fetching, you train him up right and keep him safe, or I will find a way to make the lot of you sorry, even if it's just choking you to death on my dusty remains."

"Very well."

"Also, remember if you try it before I kick it, you'll have three master vampires to deal with, along with a very brassed off Scooby. If something happens to Xan, don't bother with the ritual, it'll just save me a little effort." Spike finished grimly.

"Surely you don't mean, that is to say I don't think he would want..."

"What he would want won't mean fuck all if he's dead, Watcher. If he goes I go, it's that bloody simple."

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They'd spent the next day researching with very limited luck. Then Angelus sent a flaming invitation which Buffy insisted on answering. Alone.

When they attacked Xander didn't know which way to run. He shoved Cordelia towards the back entrance. "Get help!" he whispered as he turned to assess the situation. A vamp flew at him knocking him into a bookcase. He managed to stake it, but felt the case coming down behind him. Spike shoved him out of the way as the case tipped precariously forward, pinning Spike between it and the rail.

He rushed back to help pry the case off Spike when he heard his Willow scream. With every ounce of strength Xander shoved at the shelves, toppling them backwards off his mate. Without pausing he rushed at the vamp who had dared to lay a hand on one of his.

Willow was down, but still breathing. Oz was guarding her so Xander turned to help the others. Two vamps grabbed Giles and ran. Spike was fighting another pair of minions, and Dru... Dru was doing something to Kendra. Xander ran towards her yelling, but was too late for the swift strike of the blade. Suddenly, Spike was there pulling Dru away halfway between fighting her and begging her to leave. Xander tried to ignore them while he worked on stopping the blood flowing down Kendra's neck.

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Spike had dusted the pair of vampires and was going to go after the two who'd grabbed the watcher, but then he saw his consort flying towards his sire. He couldn't let one kill the other, so he dived forward and pulled her away from the bleeding slayer. One scent of the blood flowing down her sliced throat and Spike was hard and dropped to gameface. There was nothing in this world sweeter than slayer's blood, with the exception of Xander's, and Drusilla had been going to just let it drain away.

"Dru, luv, you have just proven to me how insane you really are. I mean you attack here of all places, then you kill a slayer and don't even bother to taste her? That's just wasteful, that is."

"It's going to burn so bad, Spike. It's going to itch and make you hurt. Your kitten will try so hard to claw it out for you, and will feel so sad because he can't. His tears will be like wine, even while he laughs he sobs, when he knows making you happy won't help. Can I taste them, Spike? Can I taste him?" Dru began swaying now, a look of longing on her human face.

"You can't touch him, Dru. I'll have to kill you if you do, and I don't want to do that." He didn't dare take his eyes off her. Instead he concentrated trying to remember everything she was saying.

"He'll claw for the clause, over and over, but shan't taste the bitter success that would set you free. He would let you go to take the burning away, such a dish he'll feed you. Oh the kitten's heart is so true it burns to look at. You both fall and never want to stop, but the men in white will want to stop you, will want to take you all to pieces and put you together like a puzzle. Such a lovely puzzle you'd make." She slipped into her true face and hissed at nothing. "The spark alone is unnatural, but what they want to do is an abomination to all things dead and undead. You mustn't let them, Spike. You mustn't, or they shall end the world." She slipped back to her human face and look almost ready to cry.

"You an' daddy got a lock on that already, don't you, Dru?" Spike asked, not fooled by her tears.

"Of course, my Spike, but we only need the key to open the lock. I have to go help daddy find his key. He'll get so frustrated unless I can show what needs to be seen." With that she turned on her heels and glided out of the library.

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Spike grabbed a rag they'd been polishing sword's with just minutes ago, and pressed it up to the slit Xander had been desperately trying to hold closed. He quickly bit into his wrist while putting vampirical pressure on the cut. Xander

quickly opened her mouth and helped her swallow several mouthfulls of Spike's blood. That done Spike let off the pressure and licked across her bloody throat. As the slayer blood popped and sizzled in his head, he pushed Xander towards Giles' office. "Call for help, luv. We've done all we can for her. The witchling needs help too."

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It took ten minutes before they could hear the sirens. Kendra had gotten very pale during that ten minutes, but the bleeding had slowed to nearly nothing. It was almost as if the siren's signaled something in the slayer. Just as Xander recognized the waaah waaah noise, Kendra's body began convulsing. It took both Spike and Xander to hold her down, and when her body stilled, it stilled completely.

"Pet, her heart's stopped, what was that CRP stuff you did for Buffy? Do you think that would help?" Spike said, praying they could revive her before the blood he'd given her started changing her.

"CPR, and I can try." He began breathing into her mouth, then doing compressions, all the while ordering her to wake up and kick some vampire ass, and reminding her that if her watcher frowned on boys and friends, he'd be totally against dying on duty.

After a very long minute and a half, Spike pulled Xander back against him, awe evident in his eyes. "Her heart's pumping and she's breathing, Luv. You did it again."

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"We told the police strangers with bumpy faces had attacked us. Before you can say 'Holy Cover-up Batman' they were giving us the good old 'Gang's on PCP' excuse." Xander told Buffy. "Willow's resting but ok, and Kendra seems to be stable, so a big yay for slayer healing. Oh and that fucking troll Snyder tried to pin it on you. Me and Spike made sure they knew you weren't even there. Spike does a mighty

impressive snooty Brit guy voice when he wants, and I think TV has trained us to trust that sorta accent, cause the cops just ate it up."

"We need to get Giles back." Buffy said wiping her eyes. "Plus, I stopped at Giles's place and ran into this Whistler guy. He gave me this blessed sword thingie. I probably should have let him finish telling me about it, but he was being a big jerk."

"Well I guess we best pick up the Watcher. He might have an instruction manual somewhere."

"Yeah, we do. We had the girls put in the same room, and Oz and Cordelia are gonna watch over them. I say the rest of us cowboy up and go get Giles."

"Xander, its too dangerous-" Buffy started.

"Not so much, Buff. You're forgetting about Spike and me, now. I took a stake to the lungs a week ago, I could have gone dancing the next night. I'm coming with you. You can't fight Angelus, Dru, the minions, AND get Giles out. You need us and we are going."

"The boy's right, Slayer. He's also damned good in a fight even without the upgrades. WE are going with you. You go get the wolfling's keys; We'll need a ride if the watcher's been hurt. I need to talk to the boy's ex a minute." He spun on his heels and pulled Cordelia off to the side. Buffy and Xander looked at one another, shrugged, then went to get Oz's keys.

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"Oye, princess, we need to talk. I have an important job for you." Spike said quietly, leaning close to Cordelia.

"Whatever in the world makes you think I'll be your little errand girl, Spike?" she asked, not intimidated in the least.

"Look, this is for the boy, not me. Might just keep him alive if this all goes to shite," he said earnestly. "There's a spell that can be done, if a bondmate dies, that

will keep the other mate alive. The Watcher and the witchling were supposed to have the ingredients ready to do the spell if something happens to me. I know the witchling left her supplies at the library, I want you to get them, and keep your cell handy. I'll make sure the slayer knows to call you if I get dusted. If she calls, have the witchling do the spell or Xan is gonna play Juliet to my Romeo."

"Why do I always get to be the girl?" Xander asked catching the last thing Spike said when he came walking up behind Spike and hugged him from behind. "Maybe I want to be Ernie to your Bert... although all things considered, I guess I'd be the Ernie to your Count, huh?"

"Git." Spike said before turning around and kissing Xander hard. When he pulled away leaving a dazed mate he looked over his shoulder at Cordelia and nodded.

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The three of them got to the mansion an hour before sunset. Spike wore the collar until they were in the long shadows of the house. Buffy and Xander stood watch as he transformed then pocketed the choker.

"Alright then, we get in, get the watcher and get right the fuck back out, yeah?" He asked.

"Unless they've figured out how to wake up Acapulco." Buffy said, determination in her voice that didn't quite make it to her eyes.

"That's Acatla, Slayer, but you're right. If they've found out how to wake him, we send the watcher out with Xan and send the fucker back to sleep permanently."

That decided they moved into the house quietly. Sniffing delicately Spike turned and headed after the scent of Giles' blood. Buffy and Xander followed weapons at the ready.

Oz reached out and took Willows hand as she called his name. "It's ok. You're ok."

Cordelia slipped into the room, smiling at the cute couple a moment before

flouncing to the bed and setting the bag of spell materials in Willow's reach. "It's about time you woke up, lazybones. You got a spell to get ready, just in case."

"Huh?" Willow said looking at Cordelia owlishly.

"Buffy, Spike, and Xander went to get Giles, cause Spike's crazy ex ho took him. Spike told me to get the stuff to break the bond in case something happened to him."

Willow started looking through the bag and her eyes lit up. "I have all the stuff here to do the re-ensoulment. And there was something in this book, that might help us too." She started flipping through the pages of the book Spike had given Giles. "Here it is. This says it's a spell to merge soul and beast. That should work to keep the soul in place permanently, you know, if they're all mergy. I use the orb to call up the soul, then use the merge spell to send it to merge with Angel."

"Whatever, just be ready to do the other spell if you need to."

Oz helped Willow prepare the two spells she would be doing. After a few moments her face scrunched up as she started working over the details. Shuffling through the supplies she relaxed and continued working out the logistics. After a few moments, she pulled the table in front of her and picked up the Orb of Thessula. She could only hope.

They found Giles in terrible shape. As Buffy moved in to pick him up he began insisting they weren't really there.

"Sod it all, Watcher, I know how bad Dru can fuck your mind, but you need to snap out of this. Why would you imagine the three of us? I'm sure there are better fancies in that head of yours, than the likes of us."

Mind a little clearer, Giles looked up at Spike. "You're quite right." He shook himself a little trying to clear his head, while fine tremors ran through his overwhelmed body. "Angelus knows how to wake Acatlha, we must stop him." he managed before collapsing into Spike and Xander.

"Giles?" she whispered. He turned to look at her and she held up the sword Whistler

had given her. "I got this blessed sword that's supposed to help. What do I do?"

"If you can't stop him, stab him with it," he said, his voice barely loud enough to hear.

Buffy kissed his forehead then turned to Xander. "Get him out safe."

"I will, Buffy."

She looked at Xander, then Spike, seriously. "You both say I can trust Spike, and well, I don't, but I trust you, Xander. So I'm going to trust you about this. Spike, I need your help, I can't stop this alone."

"I've got your back, Slayer. No need to embarrass us both with a load of sentiment, yeah?"

"Yeah." She took his hand briefly, then looked at Xander again. "Get going."

Xander took off as fast as he could towards Oz's van, Giles in tow. Buffy and Spike made their way towards Angelus and Acatla.

Five minutes later, they silently stepped into the courtyard where Angelus was preparing to suck the world into Hell. A block away, Xander had just got Giles into Oz's van when Willow began chanting, beseeching help, supplicating the Gods. She poured several drops of blood from two of the bottles onto the orb as she began the pair of spells. After several long moments the room began to thrum with power. As it wound up to a thumping beat, Xander made his way back to the mansion when suddenly his eyes lit up and he dropped to the ground screaming. A white light flew out of him, and towards the hospital. In less than a minute he stood up, sniffed the air growling lightly, then loped towards the mansion.

Meanwhile inside the mansion, Spike and Buffy darted forward. Spike slammed into Angelus just as he reached for the sword. Before anyone could do anything to stop him, Angelus jerked the sword from Acatla's chest and with a maniacal smirk started attacking Spike with it, taunting him with every thrust and parry. Across the room Buffy was fighting Dru and several minions. Suddenly, Spike screamed and dropped to his knees. His eyes glowed white for a moment then a wisp of white

flew from him.

Angelus froze for a moment, staring at his wayward child, but as Spike began to stir, he jumped back to the offensive swinging the sword in a stroke meant to take off Spike's head. Instead of the expected beheading and dust, Angelus found himself with a armful of gamefaced and very pissed demon. There were no words said, no taunts or pleas, just pure animalistic snarls as Spike fought him with all he had. Unfortunately, Angelus had a hundred plus years on Spike.

Angelus used his strength to spin Spike around and pin him to the wall. He darted in for a kiss as Spike cringed away. Before he could initiate the kiss, Angelus found himself flying across the courtyard. A snarling Xander Harris flew at him, slamming him into the opposite wall.

In an animalistic and guttural voice he said only two words before he tore into Angelus. "MY mate."

Surprise was a formidable weapon and Angelus was very nearly stunned stupid. He desperately tried to wrap his brain, which was currently being banged off a wall, around the fact that this wild creature was whiny irritating Xander Harris. Maybe, just maybe, Spike wasn't quite as stupid as Angelus had thought for making this boy his consort.

Aroused despite the beating he was taking, or quite possibly because of it, Angelus re-concentrated his efforts, falling to one side and shoving Xander hard left him an opening. He took it. He slipped out of Xander's hold then spun and grabbed the boy with vampiric speed and pinned Xander to the wall. Seconds later he secured his grip and pressed his body against Xander in an obscene manner. Before he could even start to think about enjoying the situation he found himself once again flying through the air, this time thanks to Spike.

Buffy dusted one of the last minions who'd been attacking while Dru clapped, and turned to yell at Spike and Xander. "Acatla is waking up." She darted forward and slammed Dru in the head before moving towards Angelus and Spike.

The two vampires were exchanging blow after blow, each bloody and snarling. Buffy raised the sword, but didn't have an opening around Spike. Xander was

coming up on the opposite side and was growling at Angelus. A lucky shot sent Spike to the ground. Buffy moved to strike at Angelus, but Drusilla slammed into her from behind. Both women hit the ground, and Buffy lost her grip of the sword.

Xander shoved Angelus towards the ever widening vortex and dived for the sword. He brought it up and lunged at Angelus, only to be expertly blocked and shoved backward by the vampire. He regained his balance and was just ready to dive toward his target one more time when suddenly three wisps of white darted into the hospital room. The two smaller wisps slowly melted into one similar in size to the remaining wisp. Both sank into the orb causing an intense glow as the orb began thrumming with the strain of holding two souls.

Willow chanted the final words to the ensoulment spell and as she finished the Orb of Thessula shattered. The two wisps disappeared.

Cordelia looked at her two companions, silent for just a moment, then asked, "So was that good or bad?"

Neither wolf nor witch had an answer.

~*~*~*~*~*~

Vampire and Slayer alike watched, shocked, as both Spike and Xander screamed suddenly. Each was bathed in their own personal light show as a white light merged with various colors and slowly seeped into each of them. Both had hit their knees in agony as the spell completed, but only Spike remained down. Xander leapt to his feet and parried the blow as Angelus came out of his stupor and returned to the attack.

Behind Angelus, Acatla's maw was growing ever wider and suddenly Xander saw an opening in Angelus' defenses. He thrust forward with the sword, shocked when instead of simply impaling his opponent, he was stabbing Dru through the side. She had darted in front of his thrust, and now found herself skewered right along with her Sire, the sword going through her and into him. Despite the pain she must be feeling, she smiled and pulled Xander into a bloody kiss.

"Thank you, Kitten," she murmured before the vortex sucked her and Angelus in.

The vortex closed and suddenly the mansion was filled with silence. For the longest moment it held, and then there was breathing and sobs and somewhere distant, the gasp as both Buffy and Spike realized the loss of a former lover.

Epilogue

Spike sat on the ground, with his face buried in his knees. He was rocking back and forth, and quietly sobbing. Buffy simply stared at Acatla with a stunned look on her face, as if she couldn't quite grasp what had happened. Xander stood still holding the sword hilt, Dru's blood coating his lips as he tried to figure out what the hell had just happened.

After a moment Xander shook his head as if to clear it, then raced to Spike's side. He put his arm around his mate and held on as Spike continued to cry. After another minute Xander looked up into Buffy's shocked face and pulled her down with them. He didn't know how long they stayed like that, huddled together for comfort, he just held them both.

Buffy's need to know prompted her to speak finally. "What happened?"

"I think I sent them both to Hell." Xander said, his voice raw.

"No. I mean the light show you and Spike put on. What was that?" she clarified.

"Dru was right; It burns. She told me it would, but I didn't understand. Now I do." Spike said, sounding less sane than normal.

"Willow didn't..." Buffy started before Xander savagely cut her off.

"Willow DID, and he's not the only one she tinkered with." Xander spit out.

"What do you mean? What did she do to you, Xander. You already have a soul, how could she give it back to you?" Buffy asked confused.

"Easy, she took it away first." Xander replied grimly, before he stood and started pulling Spike to his feet. "Come on, if there are any more minions hanging around, we're in no shape to fight them, and Giles needs to get to the hospital. Besides, I need a word or three with my bestest friend."

The coldness in his voice chilled Buffy to the bone, and she had no idea what to say that could even begin to make anything better. Instead she simply moved to Spike's other side and helped him to the van.

~*~*~*~*~

Willow and Kendra's room was dim and quiet. Oz and Cordelia had gone for snacks. Willow had been completely excited by the obvious success of the spells, but the amount of magic had taken its toll and she'd dimmed the lights because the flicker was aiding and abetting her magic induced headache.

Xander watched her for a moment, one part of him trying desperately to reason with the other half she had set loose. When he saw a self satisfied smile on her face there was no chance of holding back his darker half and he stormed into the room.

"Xander! Did it work? Did you guys get Giles? Where's Angel?" The flow of a Willow babble in full force died at the stern look on Xander's face.

"Well right now I'd say Angelus and Drusilla are getting the orientation tour of Hell. But yes, your spell worked like a charm. You managed quite a lot tonight, Wills," he said with a feral smile.

"W-well that's good, right?" she asked, "But what do you mean Angelus went to Hell? I wasn't fast enough with the spell?"

"Oh no, you definitely got good timing on the spell front. And your accomplishments tonight? Well it should make you so very proud. You managed to merge a soul into a vampire who desperately didn't want it, set loose something I've

been fighting back for more than a year, and made a perfectly good life long friendship disappear. All in all spectacular results, wouldn't you say?" His hands gripped the side rail of the bed tightly as he all but growled out the last statement.

"Xander, what's going on? I don't understand? What did I do?" She was in tears now and the sight of them did nothing to placate Xander. Instead it only made him angrier.

"What did you do, Wills? You did the one thing I swore I'd never forgive you for." This time he did growl and she shrunk back in the bed as his eyes flashed green. "You hurt my mate, Wills, and that is unforgivable."

Suddenly a growl was heard from across the room as Oz stepped inside. He stalked across the room and wedged his way between Xander and Willow. His growl was met with a matching one from Xander. Instead of attacking, Oz tilted his head to one side.

Xander's eyes slowly faded back to their normal brown and he backed away. "Keep your mate and her magic away from me and mine, Oz. Please, I don't want to hurt her, but I will and we both know it."

Oz nodded and Xander quickly left the room, followed all the way by Willow's confused sobs.

~*~*~*~*~

It had been more than a month since Angelus and Dru were sent to Hell, and both Xander and Spike were still adjusting to the changes Willow's spell had induced. After a bit of Spring cleaning, which mainly consisted of doing away with the corpses and the few remaining minions, the couple had taken up residence in the mansion.

Everyone, except Oz, had tried to speak to Xander on Willow's behalf and while he accepted that it was an accident, the hyena part of him just couldn't forgive and forget the pain she was still causing his mate. Buffy seemed to accept that fact, while Cordelia honestly didn't seem to care either way. Giles simply cleaned his

glasses a lot and left rather quickly when his suggestion that maybe things were for the best was met by twin growls.

Naturally seeing Willow standing just outside the mansion's front door with a brightly colored bag in each hand came as a bit of a shock. It was a few days after the Summer Solstice and thus still very much light out, so Xander was alone when opening the door. He struggled to control the desire to rend and tear, and the long time friends simply looked at one another for several long moments before he broke the silence.

"What are you doing here, Wills?" he asked as calmly as possible.

For once in her life nervous babble failed her completely. She forced herself to take a deep breath and then held out the bags. "Housewarming gifts." she managed to say.

He gave her an assessing look. "What?"

Finally, the babble came. "I know I messed up, and I know you're mad and I totally don't blame you, cause I don't know what I'd do if someone hurt Oz, but I swear I didn't do it on purpose, I wasn't even trying to do anything to either of you. The spell called for human blood and vampire blood and I thought it was just in general, you know like when you put in eye of newt it doesn't generally focus the spell on the newt. Of course if you're using newt eyes the newt's probably not in a position to complain, but I didn't realize that it would end up focusing on you and Spike, I swear."

"I know you didn't mean it, Wills, I really do. There's just this part of me, the part you let loose, that doesn't care. I'm not trying to be mean so please don't cry anymore. I'm trying to get past it, and the Xander part of me totally gets that you were only trying to help, despite everything. And I'll always love you, you're my Willow, but the new Xander, the one you made, doesn't like you very much right now."

"But just for right now, right?" Willow said through tears.

"Just for now," he confirmed. "So housewarming gifts?" he asked while his hyena

bits fought the urge to hug her.

"Oh yeah, well mansion warming gifts I guess," she said with a tiny smile, before handing the bags over.

"So it is." he said with a returning smile before opening the first bag. "Thanks for this... bag of blood?" he asked, perplexed. "Uh, we're doing pretty good on blood, Wills. Giles hooked us up with a decent butcher and, while he hates the taste, we're pretty much stocked up on pig blood."

"Yeah, Giles told us, but that's not pig blood. I talked with someone about what happens with the blood that is either too old or has something wrong with it, from the blood bank. See they just throw all that into the incinerator, and Giles said that the sorts of things that make them unusable for transfusions wouldn't mean anything to a vampire, so I made a few arrangements. I picked up the first batch as Spike's gift. There's a contact number in the card, so you guys can start buying from my source instead of the butcher."

Xander's face lit up at the thought. He knew how much Spike hated the pigs blood, and hadn't known what to do about it. "This is great, Wills. Thank you." The thoughtfulness towards Spike even warmed the hyena up to her... a little.

"So are you gonna open your gift?" she asked coyly.

He opened the second bag to find all his favorite snacks. He got a big grin on his face and pulled Willow in for a much overdue hug, hyena be damned. "Thanks, Willow." They held each other for a few moments and then when he let her go he dropped a kiss onto the top of her head.

She smiled shyly up at him. "There are also a few gift certificates for that pizza place you like. I've gotta go cause it's getting late and I promised Buffy that me and Oz would patrol with her tonight."

"Ok. Bye Wills," he said quietly as he let her out the door.

Just as she walked away Spike stepped out of the shadows. "I should have known the way into your good graces was through your stomach, luv," he said with a

smile.

"Not my stomach, Spike. Our stomachs." He held the bag of blood out to his mate with a smile.

"Too right." Spike said with a smile. "Ours"

The End

Deleted scenes from The Collar

by
Thea Zara
(aka 50ftqueenie)

Xander settled back into pacing while having a conversation with 'little Xander' in his head.

Did he just call me tall dark and handsome?

That is so not the point here.

Still he thinks we're handsome.

Oh for Christ's sake shut UP or I'll make an appointment with the vet and put the collar back on.

So how are we going to do this whole escape thing, and holy mother of Zeus look at those abs.

Focus, damnit.

Spike settled back and listened as the boy mumbled to himself, waiting for a good opportunity to jump into the conversation. After several long minutes, he seemed to finish his 'discussion' and looked at Spike wearily.

"So you're not going to rape us... er me, I mean me."

"Angelus may like things wham, bam, strangle you with your intestines and no thanks to you ma'am, but I prefer a more... willing approach. I ain't letting you leave, pet, but I also ain't gonna force you to do anything like that unless you want it."

"Angelus?" Xander squeaked, remembering what had happened the previous night.

"Right, you know, poofy-haired lunatic, likes include wooing slayer virtue and ending the sodding world."

"Oh right, that Angelus." Xander said quietly.

"Too right mate, that Angelus, and considering just what he'd do with that delicious ass of yours, I'd keep my voice and my head down if I were you. Hell I'd let you go back to your little friends, lord knows I'm going to need a way in soon, but he's on the warpath about you. Seems that lot think he's the one who took you, and in a round about way it IS his fault, and ol' Slutty had been slaying everything that moves trying to either get you back or avenge you."

"Really?" Xander asked, a happy smile on his face for a moment before remembering the whole 'Cat becoming/lost in a pokergame/becoming Spike's new bitch' aspect of the evening.

"Yeah really, apparently she gave him quite the beating before letting him crawl away with the orders to get you back to them, or, and I quote, 'I'll stick a stake up your ass until you're coughing up splinters'. If it didn't mean he was gonna be harder on Dru and me, I'd be laughing my ass off. Oh to hell with it, I AM laughing my ass off. Mind you I still can't stand the slayer, but watching her make Angelus her bitch

is worth the price of admission."

Vampire and human shared a look of pure appreciation before Xander picked up the bottle beside Spike and held it out. "Here's to Slayer strength and Deadboy's humiliation," he said before taking a long slug and passing the bottle over to Spike.

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"It's all my fault isn't it?"

"How's it your fault, Cordelia?"

"I dumped him, didn't I."

"Still not seeing how this is your fault."

"Well duh. If he couldn't have me no other woman measured up, Buffy. It's obvious."

"And once again your ego has stunned me speechless."

~*~*~*~*~

"Not that I want the silly bint dead mind you, but that's just bloody wasteful that is. I mean it's slayer blood innit. Two best bloody meals I ever had."

"You know, Spike, I love you and all, but a little much with the sharing, k?"

End