

Thank's to [👤justabi](#) and [👤breneten](#) for the hard-core beta, and [👤roxymissrose](#) for telling me that I can DO IT!

# Compass Rose

by  
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## Part One

So, he can kill demons. And really, he's been so frustrated lately that he's bouncin' off the walls and can't stop himself from nattering at the boy and the witch to go out and kill some *more*. *Right now!* Red-witch doesn't want to go but the boy finally sighs and rolls his eyes and says yes, fine, *anything* to make you shut up.

So they walk Red-witch home and then hit the cemeteries - the alleys - wherever they might find some likely candidates for Spike to work out some frustration on. Five dead vamps and two dead demons later Spike is feeling pleasantly tired and sated and the adrenalin buzz has settled to a comfortable hum somewhere in the back of his head. If he were with Dru, they'd go home and spend the rest of the night in bed, touching and kissing

and fucking until they couldn't move. And *fuck*, Spike misses her, misses her so *much*.

He looks at the boy speculatively out of the corner of his eye but he kinda doubts Harris wants to get fucked, so he settles for nicking a bottle of whiskey from the Quickie-Mart. Harris gets some sort of weird grape drink and they wander back towards his house. When Spike breaks the seal on the whiskey and takes a long drink Harris shoots him a look.

"What?"

"You stole that."

Spike rolls his eyes. He pulls a three-pack of cigarettes out of his pocket. "Stole this, too. Evil, remember? Haven't **paid for** a smoke in...sixty years. Not gonna start now." Spike wrestles a pack free of its 'Buy Two Get One Free' wrappings and lights up, and Harris sucks down some more grape stuff, swirling the cup a little.

"You know, some places make you pay for stuff that's missing out of your paycheck," Harris says, and Spike thinks about that for a minute.

"So? That's stupid. People nick stuff all the time - should have that worked into the overhead or some such."

"They *do*. It comes out of the paycheck of the guy on duty." Harris says this like it's important, and Spike smokes in silence for a bit, thinking it over. He decides Harris cares because he's worked jobs like that, and probably had to pay for missing stuff a time or two. But that's neither here nor there, since right now Harris is doing the job-search thing again. And he's bummed about it, Spike can tell, 'cause the Slayer made a little joke about it today. Nothing nasty, just... The sort of thing a college-girl might say to a townie, aiming for flip but arriving at snarky. And Spike's been watching, and he knows Harris doesn't lose the jobs because he's not competent. He loses them because he's nineteen and he needs more sleep and better food and a break from the perpetual on-call state that is Scooby-dom. The Slayer and the witch curl up in their dorm at night, all snug and safe, and the Watcher has his flat, which is surprisingly quiet, considering he's surrounded by people on all sides.

But Harris has the cramped quarters of the basement and his mother coming down at odd hours to do laundry and bitch about the state of the bathroom and his father coming down to nag about the rent - which he can't

*believe* they charge their own kid - and then the two of them doing their own warped version of Ozzie and Harriet at the top of their lungs more nights than not. Or maybe it's more like Alice and Ralph, he can't really decide. It's enough to make Spike want to put somebody through a wall and he can't believe that Harris hasn't taken a baseball bat or a *gun* to them some night.

But he hasn't and he doesn't. He just drags out the BonAmi and scrubs the shower that's too old to ever *really* be clean, and ponies up his hard-won cash with nothing more than a shake of the head. It's the screaming and the breaking of things that get to him, and his shoulders hunch almost up to his ears and he turns the TV up real loud. So loud that he can't actually sleep.

It's late, and Harris is stumbling a little - yawning every other breath and looking ready to drop. Long day doing Slayer stuff that really the Slayer should be doing, and now this extra late-night patrol. Spike doesn't feel guilty for dragging the boy out, but he decides that maybe, when they get back to the basement, he won't turn the TV on or try to pick a fight.

For once Mr. and Mrs. are quiet - just the perpetual drone of the TV that Spike can hear from upstairs but

figures Harris probably can't. He settles into that fucking Barcalounger and watches the boy stagger around, washing the fork and cup that he used when he had his nauseating microwave meal earlier, loading up the washing machine with clothes and getting it going and then taking a fast shower. He pulls out the sofa-bed and crawls under the covers and he's asleep so fast he doesn't even tie Spike up. Which is good, 'cause Spike's got plans. He goes upstairs and liberates the bankbook from the laughable lockbox under the bed in the master bedroom and saunters out, sparing a glance for the two drunks sprawled on the couch, looking like the dead in the blue wash of a TV channel that's gone off the air.

The bankbook has a healthy sum in it - more than he imagined when he first spied it - and he knows a demon who'll take it and touch the paper - leach some trace of who owns it off the fake leather cover and *become* them - and clean the account out. For ten percent, he'll give Spike the cash tonight, and when the deal's done Spike heads for Willy's bar with close to 17,000 dollars in his inner pocket. Tonight - as much blood-and-bourbon as he can hold and his car out of storage and tomorrow - the world. Well, maybe not *tomorrow*. It'll probably take a week for him to be really ready. He grins, and hopes somebody wants to fight. He's feeling good. He ends up

spending the day in a fairly comfy lair under an old bakery. The vampire that lives there is a long-legged Amazon of a girl and Spike is pleasantly exhausted come dawn.

Scooby meeting and Scooby meeting and patrol and patrol and patrol, and it's closer to ten days, really. And it's getting worse. The 'townie vs. university' jokes keep happening. The job situation doesn't change. Mr. and Mrs. discover the broken lock-box and holy hell breaks out. Spike watches Harris get quieter, smaller - more tired. It's just...not right. Spike ignores the demon when it objects to the sympathy. Harris never shuts up but he tends to run in and save the day - or at least try to. He's devoted to his girls, and maybe getting a crush on the Watcher, and Spike just knows there's more to him than meets the eye. For some reason, he wants to make Harris - better.

*I'm just bored*, he thinks, and goes back to looting the corpse of the demon he just killed.

He's got it all worked out - he really does - but suddenly everything spins out of control. They bust the Initiative - send them packing and Spike has a moment of utter joy that's swiftly tempered by the knowledge that getting

that damn military piece of crap out of his head just got a lot harder.

But then - wham, bam! - there's some sort of *god* running around Sunnydale, making people crazy and threatening the Slayer and her little group - trying to find some *key*. And Spike is pissed, 'cause he's had to wait, and wait, and *wait* to make his plan work. Mr. and Mrs. have never gotten over their bank-book being stolen and they give the boy grief over it at least once a week.

And Harris - just gets more brittle. Late at night Spike frets about it in his crypt, and he tries to make the boy feel included - invites him along on a poker night, once - plays pool with him. But Harris just can't seem to let go of - things. And the job situation is making him desperate. He'd had something good in construction until too many late nights and pointless trips for 'research' got him fired, and now, it seems, he's just hanging on by a thread. Pale, getting too thin, getting too quiet.

But the Watcher finally comes through for them. Discovers that the god was put into a *human*, to keep her under control. And he's found a way to divine who that human is. Killing the human - kills the god. Buffy vetoes it almost out of hand. Willow also can't imagine killing a human. Tara doesn't say a word, but the fierce glint in

her eye says it all, and Spike nods his head at her, just the once. She knows, and so does he. It's Harris who voices what they won't say - that killing this one human means saving the world. He's drowned in argument - pummeled by shocked horror. He bows his head to it, and gives up.

Later, Spike has a private word with the Watcher, who has Harris come around the next day, and they watch Rupert do the divination spell; are shocked to silence by who the god's vessel is. They *know* the human - a nurse at the hospital, who helped when Joyce was ill. It'll be easy to find him - lure him. Spike thinks that because of the god in him, he won't be all human, and therefore Spike can take him out. The Watcher isn't sure, but he's willing to let Spike try. Harris just looks at him until Spike finally snaps.

"What are *you* starin' at, mate?" he says, and Harris shakes his head, real slow.

"If he's all human - you'll get hurt. I mean - if you actually do something like grab him and - and break his neck, won't the chip - " Harris stops, and his heart is pounding, and Spike wonders what, exactly, is going on in the boy's head.

"Won't kill me. It'll hurt, sure, but -" Spike shrugs. "I can take the pain."

"Why *would* you?" Harris asks, and Spike shrugs again.

"Won't have this thing in my head forever. Even computer parts break down. Want there to be an actual *world*, when I'm myself again. Not some - hell dimension. Not a nice place for a vampire, really." Spike shudders ever so slightly and Harris's eyebrows go up. "Besides - taking out a god - that's somethin', isn't it? Better than a Slayer, even." Harris just shakes his head, but there's a hint of a smile in his eyes, and Spike smiles back. But the smile doesn't last, because Harris and the Watcher - they like this Ben. It's too bad, Spike thinks, but he really has to go. He doesn't say that out loud, because the guilt is already near to killing the two humans. But he does push them gently in the direction of a plan, and at last they hammer it out.

In the end, it happens almost too fast. Harris gets hurt on patrol. Nothing too awful, just a cut along his back. But it's deep enough for stitches and Spike just growls at him when he suggests the little butterfly bandages and a beer. He's *trying* to make the boy take better care, and he's furious with himself for not getting his own victim

killed fast enough to help Harris out.

"If I could stitch you up myself, I would," Spike says, dragging him along. "But I can't, so just let them do it so we can go - so you can go home." Harris just glares at him but he lets Spike chivvy him to the ER and he lets the doctors do their thing. Twenty-seven stitches later and they're wandering around the labyrinth of the hospital's basement, trying to find some blood. Spike knows they throw a lot away here, and he's going to find it. Harris is grumbling and dragging his feet and suddenly Ben is there, saying hi, looking surprised. Spike doesn't even hesitate. He hits Ben like a striking cobra, heel of his hand to the human's nose and as Ben's head snaps back, blood already pouring, the chip *fires* like a gunshot from the inside and Spike goes down as well.

It's a good thing they're in the hospital - when Spike comes to he can barely walk and Harris drags him back into some storage room and leaves him there - comes back ten minutes later with a carrier-bag full of blood. Spike drinks and drinks - notices, finally, that Harris is... That he's sitting on the floor with his arms over his knees, his head down. His hands are dangling out in front of him and there's blood on them and it's Ben-Glory's blood, and Spike scoots over to him and touches his shoulder.

"Did I do it, mate? Did I kill her?"

"M-mostly," Harris rasps, and Spike can smell tears. "He - I had to..." Harris's voice chokes off, and Spike looks at the line of his bowed back - at the dark fall of longish, wavy hair. At the long, callused fingers that are smeared with dark-brown, drying blood.

"Yeah. Where's the body?"

"Incinerator. He - he was *her*, at the end. She didn't look - right." Spike nods silently - realizes that Harris can't see that, so he reaches out and rubs his shoulder again. Harris shivers and sighs, and they go to the Watcher's and tell him, and Giles pours them all a glass of Scotch. For the first time since he's known him, Spike sees Harris drink alcohol, and he can tell he hates it. But it's something you do, and he falls asleep on the Watcher's couch.

Of course, nothing ever goes *right*, does it? The Slayer finds out, and then the witches. They're relieved, that Glory is gone. They're coldly scathing of Spike's instant reaction - vampire, evil, soulless, after all - but they're incredulous about Harris's part in the killing. And their

attitude - shifts. They treat him...*differently* and Spike has more than one screaming row about it up and down the aisles of this or that cemetery with the Slayer. But she won't budge, and Willow won't. Tara still treats Harris the same - touches his hand, smiles at him. Joyce and Dawn - were never told, and they love Xander like the son and brother they never had. Giles tries to argue the Slayer down off her high horse, but she's having none of it, and Spike wishes fiercely that he could just *smack* her. That he could break some bones until she *listens*.

The witch and the Slayer cutting him out - Spike can tell it hurts him worse than anything ever could, and the first time Buffy tells Xander she doesn't really want him on patrol with her is the beginning of the end. Giles can't fix this, but Spike thinks *he* can.

At the Watcher's flat, and Harris is hunched and miserable, looking a little ill. He's got a bruise on his arm and on his jaw and when Tara asks he tells her that he and Spike did a second patrol so Spike could kill some demons. Buffy gives Spike a fierce glance but doesn't say anything and Spike watches Harris slump a little lower. He stinks of sadness and pain, of hopelessness and fear, and Spike knows it's now or never. No patrol tonight - all research, and Spike wants to be out of there. He makes a

quick, furtive phone call on the cell he got from Willy - half an hour, tops, and they can go. He spends the next thirty minutes pacing the flat, watching the boy, snarling at the looks he's getting from the rest. Tara just smiles at him, sympathetic and tired. Finally, times up, and he kicks the side of Harris' shoe and stands there, waiting.

"Let's go kill something, yeah?" he says, grinning, and a faint answering grin lifts Harris' mouth and makes his eyes light up before he scowls and looks away.

"Yes, go kill things," the Watcher murmurs, turning a page, and Harris gets up and shuffles out, Spike right on his heels. They go maybe a half a block before a demon leaps up out of the bushes, brandishing something. A wand? Or maybe a pencil, it's really hard to tell. And Harris yelps, jumping back, and Spike growls, and the demon says something, pointing, and Harris tumbles to the ground. Spike manages to catch him before he smacks right onto the concrete and then his DeSoto is there, rumbling up to the curb. Spike loads the boy in, and pats Clem on the back, and nods once to the Azulth demon that cast the sleep-spell. Takes the little proffered bundle for the other spell and they're off - driving fast and hard, *The Clash* screaming out from the stereo and Harris curled over in the seat, the wind pushing his dark

hair back and forth across his face.

Harris wakes up when they're somewhere southeast of L.A., the desert stretched around them like stained and rumpled linen, the moon small and cold and far, far away. *The Clash* has been replaced by Lou Reed and Harris stirs and makes a moaning sort of noise - sits up gingerly, rubbing his head.

"What the hell?" he mumbles, and then he sees Spike and the desert flowing by outside and his eyes get wide, and then narrow in speculation.

"Spike? What the hell are we doing in - well, in what I can only guess is your car? I mean, nobody else would have this many empty bottles of JD in one vehicle and still be alive." Harris sounds dead-tired, and not particularly angry, and Spike turns the music down a little and looks over at him. Takes the cigarette out of his mouth and tosses it out the window.

"We're goin' to see somebody. And you're getting' out of Sunnyhell for a while. Got a problem with that?" Harris just sighs and shakes his head.

"Spike - just go back. You know they'll come looking. And

Buffy really *does* want to stake you. And - you can't actually stop me, you know."

"Sure I can," Spike says. He reaches over and prods the bruise on Harris' jaw - ignores the sick little sizzle of pain that flares through his head when Harris flinches away.

"Where'd that come from, Harris? Didn't get it on patrol," Spike says, and Harris looks at him for one long moment and then turns away, staring out the window, squinting a little against the still-warm air that pulses in.

"None of your fuckin' business, Spike. Just take me home."

"Fuck that," Spike says, and turns Lou back up. Harris just sits there, not even *trying*, not even *moving*, and Spike finally jerks the wheel to the side, slamming on the brakes and coming to a skidding halt on the verge. Harris is thrown forward and his hands slap onto the dash, then he's recoiling and his back hits the seat *hard*, driving the air out of him in a startled *ooof*.

"Spike! What the fuck -!" he squeaks, but he's not really pissed, he's just startled and Spike gets out of the car and roars, game-face to the stars.

"*Christ!* Harris, what the fuck is *wrong* with you? Aren't you pissed off? Don't you want to *fight*?" Harris just stares at him, pale face gone thin and drawn, smudges under his eyes like the junkies that lived in Central Park and Spike opens the door - drags Harris out by his shirt and shoves him, stumbling and flailing, into the gravel-dirt-sand of the verge. There's wiry grass there, and spiky looking plants and maybe even cactus, and Spike wonders if he'll get pissed if he *falls* on one. Harris skids and wobbles but ends on his feet, glaring at Spike.

"What. The *fuck*. Is *wrong* with you?" he grates out, and Spike grins at him, loving the little flinch back from fangs and demonic eyes.

"You need to pull yourself together, Harris. Hanging out with you was really getting old. You just - gave up! It's boring."

"I don't *believe* this!" Harris shouts, and Spike thinks maybe he's finally gonna *do* something but after a minute he just kicks savagely at the dirt - goes and leans head-down on the roof of the DeSoto, shoulders tight and shaking.

"Just take me *home*, Spike. They'll come looking and you'll just get dusted and -" Harris doesn't finish that, and Spike stalks over to him and jerks him around - pushes him up sharply against the car and leans in close - close enough to feel the heat coming off the solid, rangy body.

"You just want me to get you home quick before you're gone too long. 'Cause if I keep you out here for four or five days and you get back and they didn't even *notice* - that's gonna really hurt, isn't it? And you're afraid that's *exactly* what's gonna happen, aren't you? That they won't even *notice*. Won't care." Harris's eyes are wide and panicked and dry, and Spike wants to lean in a little closer and breathe in his scent, that's earth and wood and dust, blood and misery. But he doesn't. He just stares at the boy and Harris stares back until he can't anymore.

"Fuck you," he mutters finally - roughly - and he pushes Spike away - starts stomping down the highway, not even in the right direction.

"Can't leave, Harris" Spike says, leaning against the car and watching him, and Harris spins around, scowling.

"Watch me, Spike! You've got a lot of fucking nerve,

dragging me out here - telling me shit about my life! It's a bunch of bullshit! You don't know *anything* about my life - or anything!" He spins around again - strides on for five, six more steps - and suddenly he's reeling, yelling - falling to the dirt, his body shuddering in pain.

"Told you, boy. You can't leave. Better get back here closer to me." Spike watches as the boy writhes - crawls. One foot, then two, then three and he shudders to a stop, panting.

"What did you do, what did you fuckin' *do*?!" he gasps out, and Spike slides one hip up onto the bonnet of the DeSoto. He takes his time lighting a cigarette and taking the first few puffs. Harris is up on his butt now, knees canted wide and tucked into the bend of his elbows, right hand clasping left wrist. His hair is down in his eyes and his shoulders are shaking, but he's quiet.

"Just a spell, Harris," Spike says finally. And it is. A small spell, really. When Harris gets too far away, the spell kicks in. And it hurts. It hurts a lot, apparently, but Spike doesn't care about that. He just wants it to hurt *enough*, so the boy will know it's serious. There's a little glyph on the back of Harris's neck, painted in the demonic equivalent of henna.

"You try to get away - get in a car, say, or a bus - it'll just get worse and worse, the farther away you get. After about...a mile, I think? It'll kill you." Harris flinches -look up at him and his face is almost cartoonish with shock and horror.

*What's it like, then, havin' a choke-chain on?* Spike thinks savagely, and some of that shows on his face.

"You bastard," Harris says, but his voice is shaky and whispery and weak, and Spike flicks the butt of his cigarette away - gets off the car.

"Get back in, Harris. We've got some drivin' to do."

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Rio is just like Spike remembers it - loud and hot and mad - and he knows why Dru likes it here. He's been following rumors and leads and a faint, faint trail for a week or more when he finally finds her. She's got herself a pretty little house in Ipanema, right near the edge of Lake Lagoa. Living high - living *rich* - and Spike wonders if she's still with that Chaos demon, or if she's moved on.

He knocks on her door, tense and suddenly angry, although he's trying not to be either, and she's *there* - just there. Opening the door and looking out at him, her eyes going wide and wondering, her smile curving up in that way she has, that makes her look like a child on Christmas morning.

"Spike?" she breathes, and then she flings herself on him and holds him for one glorious moment, scent of oranges and musk and vanilla and blood. But then she's backing away, her fingers sliding off his shoulders and her chin going down - her eyes flashing up at him in that look he knows so well. The one that she would give him when she'd sway off with the bastard Angelus.

"Hullo, love," he says softly, and she nods a little - looks over his shoulder.

"You came back, Spike," she murmurs. "Is that my present for being a good girl?" Her dark eyes are sparkling and Spike reaches behind him and finds Harris's wrist. Pulls him up to the door.

"No love, sorry. He's mine. Gonna ask me in, Dru?" He can feel the boy shaking, just a little - can hear his heart

pounding too fast, and he strokes his thumb once over the pulse-point in the boy's wrist. Xander twitches ever so slightly.

"Course you can, Spike. You can *always* come in. Just make sure you can get *out* again." Dru drifts back from the door, her white gown wisping around her, her hair gleaming dark and rich as a raven's wing. Spike feels a wrench of longing go through him, but he pushes it away and strides in, pulling Harris along.

"Shut the door, Harris," he says, and he hears it click shut and sighs. Harris - is worse, maybe. Spike can't really tell. His apathy is amazing - his depression getting blacker. He'd tried, for the first week, to get away. Even stole a car, but he'd crashed it writhing in agony, lucky to escape with only a few bruises. After that he'd settled down. He's almost stopped talking - which is, frankly, terrifying - and he lets Spike do whatever he wants - lets Spike tug him here and lead him there and push him into bed, push him into a shower. No modesty and less energy and Spike is getting desperate.

*At least he gave up on trying to get away, Spike thinks.* The spell he bought was only good for about two weeks, anyway, and as often as Harris had tried it he was pretty

sure it wouldn't work at all now. And the demon-henna had all worn away.

"I know why you're here, Spike," Dru says, settling herself light as a feather on a straight-backed chair. It's a lair- a *nest* - in the flat. Stolen clothes and jewelry and gee-gaws everywhere. Crystal vases full of dead flowers, bowls full of change and keys and rings from her kills. Heavy draperies, swathes of lace and velvet and it makes the room seem dark and secret and old - as old as this ancient city.

"Why *am* I here, love?" Spike asks, settling opposite her on a low, overstuffed couch. Harris just stands there, staring at his shoes or maybe the carpet, who knows? Still too thin and too pale, but he *does* eat, and Spike orders him vegetables and keeps a net bag of fruit in the car. He doesn't remember much about being human, but he's watched enough television to know what's what. He makes him drink juice, too - no more soda. Harris doesn't seem to notice.

"You've been a *very* bad dog, Spike. Caught you and kenneled you, didn't they? Hurt you...oh..." Dru puts her long, thin hands to her head - holds her temples and keens, a nasty sort of sound that makes Spike grit his

teeth and makes Harris actually twitch, looking up.

"Still hurts, still hurts, ooh...like bees, like acid bees..."  
Dru twists her head from side to side, squeezing her eyes shut. But then she suddenly opens them - stares straight at him with a sly smile coming over her face.

"But it's all *lies*, Spike. I don't trust these things I can't see - tiny little monsters that make you sick? Tiny little engines that make you hurt... But only *sometimes*, isn't that right, Spike? Only sometimes."

"That's right, pet. Only when it's humans."

"*Humans*," Dru growls, and Spike smiles at her. She reaches out and blindly picks up a long sliver of wood - a chopstick that has an inlay of Mother of Pearl down the sides. She winds her hair up and stabs the chopstick through it, showing her long and slender neck. Harris has gone rigid, and Spike can smell the panic rolling off him.

"They think they're so clever, humans, but they're *not*. No, not at all. It's all about *seeing*, my darling - all about knowing *just* what you're looking at." She tilts her head to one side and then the other. "I can *fix* it, Spike, I can."

"Can you, Princess? I'd do about anything for you, if you could," Spike says, leaning forward, and Dru smiles at him - flicks her glance to Harris and back and Spike sighs, rubbing his hand over his neck.

*Of course. Damn it. Bloody HELL...* "Dru, love, what do you want exactly?"

"I just want my due, Spike. I just want - what I *should* have had." She's smiling *that* smile again, sly and mocking and seductive all at once. Harris's heart is really *pounding* now, really going, and Spike's sure that that only adds to Dru's desire.

"How do you figure you *should* have, love? I already told you he's mine."

"But he was mine too, Spike! You remember, don't you boy? You remember, kitten." Her voice drops to a seductive purr and Dru gets up and glides over to Harris, who's still standing there; staring wide-eyed at her, hands clenched in fists and his breath coming in pants, now. "Remember, my love, how I told you I wanted you? How I fought Daddy for you?" Harris flicks a glance of utter panic at Spike and Spike sighs again - pushes himself to his feet and goes over to the boy - gets himself

wedged a little between the two of them.

"Dru - what are you talking about?" he asks, but it's *Harris* that answers.

"There was a spell," he husks, his voice dry and cracking, and Spike looks at him. "Every woman in Sunnydale wanted me - including D-drusilla. She came to Buffy's house and almost - got me."

"Did you, Princess? I suppose I was stuck in that sodding chair, then."

"Yes, poor thing, you were," Dru says, but there's a hint of old malice there, and he clicks his teeth shut hard to keep from snapping at her. "Trapped and broken like that boy I put in the trunk... Remember? In Venice? But you got *better*. He never did." Dru pouts at that old memory, and Spike starts feeling for his cigarettes.

"He didn't get better 'cause you didn't *feed* him, love. I told you he had to eat or he'd die. Listen -" Spike gets his smoke lit and takes a hard drag, and Dru watches the coal flare and die - lifts her hand up, fluttering her fingers uncomfortably close to the cherry. The scent coming off Harris is sheer terror, and Spike reaches out and casually

squeezes his shoulder - smirks when the boy starts wildly, jerking away.

"Dru - if you can fix me - we'll figure something out, right? But you have to fix me first." Dru pulls back, her fingertips smoking ever so slightly. She glides away to a box sitting on a table - lifts it easily.

"I *knew* you were coming, Spike my love - I knew it! So I'm all ready. All we have to do is put a glamour on the world, and that little machine - it won't know what's true and what's not!" At her words Spike stills, and then he follows her, pushing lightly on the box until she sets it down.

"Dru-love, you can't put a glamour on the *whole world* - this thing is here in my *head*, pet!" Dru grins at him, and her hand reaches up to caress along the edges of his cheekbones - trace his eyebrows.

"Silly boy. Don't question me *now*, Spike - I have secrets you've never heard! Now you must sit widdershins of the North Star, and the kitten must sit deasil or it's all for nothing." Dru turns back to her box, opening it and taking out a silver cup, a clay bowl - bits and bobs - and Spike draws furiously on the cigarette and stalks away

from her. He sprawls down on the couch and suddenly Harris is there - Harris sits down next to him, looking freaked out and *awake* for the first time in days.

"Did you - are you *giving* me to her? Is that what this is all about? You dragged me down here and - and put a fuckin' *spell* on me and - just so your whacky girlfriend could *eat* me? She's gonna fix your chip and -and I'm gonna be dead." Harris stares at him, furious, his hands clenched hard into the knees of his baggy jeans, his whole body shaking with suppressed emotion. "You *bastard*," he adds, and Spike has to laugh.

"Harris, you wanker -"

"My name's *Xander*, damnit! Answer me!" Harris snaps, and Spike's eyebrow goes up in surprise.

"Look - *Xander* -no, I didn't bring you here to give you to Dru. I don't know *what* it is she wants from you but I promise I won't let her drain you, okay? No draining and no turning."

"Like I believe that! You're a fuckin' -" Harris's mouth works like he's too angry to even form the words.

*Vampire. Evil soulless vampire. Go on, say it Harris, end my fuckin' suspense.*

"A fucking *liar* and I *don't* believe you! I know you're gonna kill me when she - does whatever." Harris looks like he might actually be near tears - or near screaming, one - and Spike sits up, looking him straight in the eye.

"I keep my word, Harris. I've *always* kept my word when I've given it. I'm giving it again. I swear to you that she will *not* hurt you or turn you. And neither will I." He just stares at the boy and Xander stares back and suddenly he slumps - looks away - and Spike wonders what the hell now. *And why in bloody hell did I tell him THAT? I might want to suck him dry to prove her spell worked... Or, yeah, I might not.*

"Why did you - why am I *here*, Spike? I just want to go home." His voice is tired again - lifeless - and Spike shakes his head.

"I've told you, mate," Spike sighs, slumping back on the couch. And he *has*. For some reason it just won't stick. *Considering you've told him in detail what you'll do when the chip's out - are you really surprised? Considering we've hated each other for... Well. Not since Glory, really*

- *not since BEFORE that, really...* That's a whole new concept to Spike - one he hadn't really thought about, for some reason. *Old habits*, he thinks, and flicks a glance at Dru.

"Tell me why *again*, maybe I'll finally understand the super-secret vampire code you're using," Harris snaps, and Spike gropes for his flask - stops when Dru turns to him, a frown drawing her eyebrows down.

"None of that, Spike," she calls, crumbling something into the clay bowl. "You can have you *Aqua Vitae* when we're done and not before." She looks at a small bone thoughtfully - snaps it in half. "Tell kitten what he wants to hear, my darling - can't you hear his heart breaking into pieces? You've got to mend it quick or he'll never wear the golden spurs." She nods, still frowning, and turns back to her work, humming tunelessly under her breath. Spike just stares at her for a moment, and then he looks over at Harris, who is - who is looking uncomfortable and a little belligerent.

*Bloody hell. And what am I supposed to make of all THAT? Dru, I love you but I wish you could tell the bloody difference between signal and noise, sometimes.*

"Look, Harris -"

"*Xander*. Harris is my father." Mouth in a hard line but heart pounding fast, and Spike files that away for future reference.

"All right. *Xander*. I brought you along because - because you were *wasted* on the Hellmouth! You kept - fighting and saving your friends and - and working - and it was all so bloody *boring*! Look -" Spike leans forward and Harris - *Xander* - leans back just a little and then stills. "You don't have to play second fiddle to the Slayer's funeral march, you know? You don't have to - beg for scraps from them. I *know* what that's like, *Xander*, and it just grinds you down and grinds you down until you're..."

"The zeppo," *Xander* says softly, and Spike blinks.

"Yeah - I suppose. Listen. You backed the bloody *Angelus* down - don't you remember? In the hospital. He raved about *that* for days. Was fuckin' hilarious. And you brought the Slayer back to life that one time, too - and you came into the lion's den - got the Watcher out... I *saw* you, you know." Spike fingers the flask in his pocket, glancing at Dru, and then lights another cigarette in irritation.

"How do you know about Buffy?" Xander asks, and Spike grins at him.

"The Watcher knows sod-all about chains and vampires. Not like I stayed in that bloody bath when he wasn't there. I read his Watcher's diaries."

"You did? I'm - in there?" Xander asks, wide-eyed. And then the tone of the question - the little-boy-lost quality of it - comes clear to him and he frowns - looks away. Shuts down, and Spike blows a stream of smoke at him, making him flinch and glare over at him.

"Course you're in there, you nit. You saved the Slayer, didn't you? When Souled-and-Solemn *couldn't*. He wrote all *sorts* of things in there about you." Spike raises an eyebrow - twists his mouth a little in a kind of leer and right on cue Xander blushes, staring at him.

"He did - not! He - he's a -"

"He's a child of his times, mate, and don't you forget it. What sorts of things do you think he got up to, when the whole world was tunin' in, turnin' on and droppin' out? He got his share of free love, mate, and no mistake."

"But - what?" Xander looks lost and Spike has to laugh. He's talking, and that's *good*, and he's fighting, and if it takes terror of imminent death to keep him awake then they're set, because Spike can provide *that* in spades.

"Before your time, mate. Just believe me when I tell you that the Watcher wasn't always a stuffed shirt and you're not so bad under those bloody awful clothes."

Another blush, practically radioactive, and Spike smirks to himself and stretches back on the couch, luxuriating in the whisper-hum of power and familiarity that is Drusilla. The one that made him, and he supposes he'll always feel...

*Owned. Loved. Chosen.* He looks over at Xander and wonders if that's what the boy needs, and contemplates Xander Harris as a vampire. *Could be great fun. Bet he'd be... But, no. I promised.*

"Stop looking at me like that," Xander says, and Spike blinks at him - looks around for someplace to put out his cigarette and finally grinds it out on the heel of his boot.

"Like what?" he says, and Xander rubs his hands back

through his hair.

"Like - like you just realized I've got the key to the chocolate factory," he says, and Spike laughs.

"Could be you do, mate." Xander looks like he wants to say something else but Dru claps her hands sharply, standing upright by a small table where her spell components are arranged.

"Now boys, no time for that. Come sit. Spike - you sit here, the leopards' spot, and kitten, you sit here, the right hand of God." Dru points imperiously and they move into position, settling cross-legged on the many carpets she's layered haphazardly over the floor.

She begins again with the humming - tuneless and deep-throated, a strange noise, and Spike watches her - watches her fine-boned, thin hands dance over the components and burn something here, drown something in wine there. She slices her thumb with a fang and drips the blood into the mess she's made - pulls the chopstick from her hair and stirs it. Then she picks up something, small and white, and Spike sees with discomfort it's a wafer from church - Holy Communion wafer, and it's already singeing her fingers, sending up near-invisible

tendrils of fine white smoke. She pushes the wafer into the slurry in the clay pot and then pulls it out, and it drips a muddy scarlet.

"Eat of this, for it is my body..." she whispers, and holds it out to Spike. He casts her one incredulous glance and then opens his mouth - winces when she drops it in. He crunches once and swallows, and it's like swallowing a live coal. Sullen heat starts in his belly, ratcheting upwards until he's sure his torso will crack open and flame will gout out. Xander is staring, wide-eyed and open-mouthed, and he almost laughs, but the pain is awful and a groan comes out instead.

"Dru love, it's going to *kill* me -"

"*No*, my darling boy. Wouldn't do that to *you*." She bends over him and kisses him, and her lips are like ice. "This will fix it. Drink, for this is my blood," she whispers, and she's holding out the silver cup, and he can smell blood and wine and something else, and he snatches it from her - drains it in one long gulp. Dru watches him, her eyes narrow, slightly crouched as if she's going to leap upon him at any moment. The liquid from the cup is cool - sweet - almost weightless on his tongue and he can feel it dousing the fire - can feel the coolness spreading out

from his belly exactly as the fire had a moment ago. He closes his eyes for a moment, it feels so good. He licks his lips - opens his eyes again and looks at Dru. She's shining like a negative sun - some weird white light behind her, herself a blackness with gold-glowing eyes - a twisted figure with tattered wings stretching up and out and streaming away in wisps at the ends - no real edge, just darkness bleeding into darkness, haloed by that light.

He blinks, his mouth gone dry as dust - turns to Xander. The boy is staring at him, head cocked over in puzzlement, and he's got that light behind him as well. But he's something like Anubis - jackal-headed and gleaming, hung with weapons, his heart pulsing with scarlet fire, visible through ribs like silver glass. It's bizarre and terrifying and beautiful and he looks helplessly back at Dru - down at his own hands, which are like black smoke and grey, all twining together. The edges of his duster, lying over his legs, have become a mix of smoke-soft feathers and long spines of a poisonous blue and he reaches to touch one. It pricks him, and it burns.

"Spike?" It's Xander's voice, soft but urgent, and Spike opens his eyes with difficulty. Finds himself flat on his back, staring at the ceiling which Dru has stuck full of

glow-in-the-dark stars. Xander's dark eyes are red-rimmed and troubled, and Spike can feel a damp cloth on his forehead - on his temple.

"Xannn...." he croaks. He coughs - swallows - tries again.  
"Xan-der?"

"Yeah. *Fuck*. You okay? God - " Xander sounds upset - *looks* upset, and Spike pushes himself ever so slowly upward, until he's sitting with his legs sprawled, arms braced between them on the rugs. There's the smell of blood in the air, and church incense, and *sex*, and he looks up slowly to see Dru, standing near the window. There's a faint glow of light coming around the edges and Spike can feel the sun, somewhere behind and to the right, just clearing the horizon.

"Dru? What...was that? I saw -" He looks at her - at Xander and shakes his head, wincing in pain.

"What did you see, Spike? Did you see angels and devils, my sweet boy - did you see nightmares and fantasies?"  
Dru is holding herself very still - is *watching* him - and he feels uneasy and a little sick.

"I - don't know what I saw. It was -"

"It was the world at two degrees of center. It was the world through the looking glass. It was - Einstein and St. Catherine and Thomas Aquinas and Hawking, Spike - gods and scientists, the devil and the deep blue sea..."  
Dru lifts her hands; a warding gesture, as if Spike is preparing to strike her.

"Effulgent. Remember, dearest love, my sweetest leper, my lovely, lovely murderer? *Effulgent*. You'll burn out the eyes of every sinner you meet. Take it, take it, *take it*, Spike! Take it and *go*." She is trembling now - game-face and growling - and she gestures frantically towards a long hump on the floor. A body - a human - trussed and lying there, bloody about the mouth, unconscious but breathing.

"She went out - it's the middle of the day, Spike. You were out of it for hours." Xander has been silent this whole time, but he is afraid, and Spike is wondering if maybe he should be, too. Dru - is spooking him. He pushes himself slowly upright, and takes a step towards Dru, and she shrieks and skips back - stops and holds herself, shivering and smiling - a teeth-baring sort of rictus that makes him go cold.

"Too far, love, too far. I've turned it too far and you're spilling out all over. Don't be here when the sun goes down, sweetling, don't, don't, don't." She turns and flees, slamming a door between them and Spike just looks helplessly at Xander, who is trying to untie the person lying there.

"Is something wrong with me?" Spike asks, and Xander looks up at him, slowly shaking his head.

"You look the same - everything's the same. You just - were in some kind of - coma, or something. It was weird." Xander can't work the knots free and he gives up, watching Spike. Spike walks carefully towards him, his legs shaky and his head pounding. He kneels slowly beside the person on the floor and lifts - him - by his shoulders. He's awake now, blinking dazedly, the trussed body tensing in fear. Dru's scent is all over him and Spike knows she had him, before she left him here. And he's...different, too. A strange sort of mist over him, writhing like snakes and his face distorts, becoming something else. Something leonine and alien and Spike knows it's the glamour. The glamour that will fool the chip - make him a vampire again. Spike leans down, mouth pressed lightly to the soft skin of the man's neck and lets the demon come forward. He waits for a long,

long moment. Poised to strike but afraid to do it.

"Spike - don't. Please don't. Please, *please* -" Xander is muttering - whispering - begging - and Spike spares him one golden, emotionless glance and then he sinks his fangs in and drinks. And it is so very, *very* good.

When he's done he lets the body back down onto the carpets and licks his fangs - lets the demon face slide away and looks at Xander again. The boy is leaning back against the couch, and his eyes are dark and unhappy and wet.

"Guess I'm next, huh? Guess -"

"Xander - I told you that I wouldn't hurt you," Spike says, and he moves until he's leaning against the couch too - leans on the boy, letting his head fall down onto Xander's shoulder, letting his body relax. "My head hurts. Let's just - rest. We'll go at sunset."

"Spike -" Xander whispers, agonized, and Spike burrows close - twists just enough to get his arm across Xander's waist.

"Promised, mate. Let me be awhile, yeah? Just let me be."

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When they leave Dru's house the sun is just down, and Dru is silent and hidden in her bedroom - doesn't come out for anything at all. They walk to the car and get in, and Spike starts the engine and begins to drive. They'll go up the coast tonight, far as they can. North, and out of here. Xander sits slumped in the passenger seat, silent. As they leave Rio behind and get out into the country, he puts his hand out the window and lets the air lift it - up and down, side to side. Playing in the slipstream.

"Spike? Did you - when was the last time you read Giles' diary?" he asks softly, and Spike grins to himself, getting his flask out so he can take a sip.

"I took a look a day or so before we left. Why?"

"Did - did Giles say anything about - about Ben? About me - killing Ben?" Spike glances over at him but he's facing out the window still. His eyes are closed.

"Yeah. He said - he wished you hadn't had to do it. He said..." Spike struggles to remember, picturing the page of precise, tiny handwriting in his mind. The Watcher's diary had continued to be a source of information for him and he'd sneaked looks every chance he got.

"He said - you did what you had to do. That you saved the world, and that - you deserved better than you got. He said - he was proud of you."

Silence, and then a soft sigh. "What did Dru mean about - golden spurs?"

"Huh? Oh - squires, when they got knighted, they got gifts; a lance, a sword - a set of golden spurs. Meant you were a knight, right and proper." Spike puzzles over that - over what Dru meant. This boy is *already* a white knight - promised to the cause and set on his course. Maybe - he'll save the world again. Spike looks over at Xander, who's smiling now. A soft smile, that makes him look younger, and happy for the first time in weeks. Yeah - save the world. What else could a boy like that do?

## **Part Two**

*Mirrors*, Spike thinks, *are very tricky things*. He lays with his eyes closed in the back seat of the DeSoto, feeling it

being buffeted by the wind - feeling the **tires** skid and catch and slide. Thinking about that morning in the hotel, and him standing in front of the mirror, staring.

Staring at *himself*, and he's not supposed to be able to do that, but then again, it's not *exactly* himself, is it? It's Dru's - thing. Dru's glamour. And it's...

"Fuck," Xander whispers, coming up behind him, and Spike has to nod - has to agree.

*'Fuck' 'bout sums it up* He is *there*, spectral and faded as a ghost. Himself but...smoked glass and ash. Pale blue fire burning along bones that shine through skin like quartz. Wings that lift and arch and span half the room - that cut through the walls and disappear but are still *there* somehow, with feathers like the charred remains of butterfly's wings. And the spines; sprouting from his shoulders and back and wrists, curving up and out and around - protective and fierce. White-blue fire - or smoke - or *something*, where his hair should be. And holes of smoke and lapis for eyes, glittering like the sea. It's eerie and it's insubstantial and he can't see it all the time but it's *there* and Xander is there, as well - jackal-head turning to study him, the fiery pulsing of his heart a ruby flame. Spirals of stars and winking galaxies in skin that is

the burnished carapace of a brass beetle - a carapace he can see through with every shift of Xander's body - every rise of his chest with his breathing. Xander as is phantasmal as Spike - as daunting.

Spike has to turn and look - make sure - and Xander's plain human face stares back at him, eyes wide, lower lip caught between his teeth.

"Is that what you see all the time now?" he whispers, and Spike shakes his head.

"No, just - the mirror."

"Which is a whole 'nother kind of weird," Xander says, and Spike has to agree again.

They gather their meager belongings and go, Spike ducking out of the hotel under a camping blanket, crinkly silver cloth smelling strongly of chemicals and plastic. Heading out, going north, driving through the day and most of the night, sleeping when they can't stand to be awake anymore.

It's *cold*, and Spike is glad the DeSoto's heater works so well; it roars out dry, burnt-smelling air better than any

car he's ever been in, and even Xander doesn't complain. Sighs happily and holds his hands to the vent when he gets back in from pumping gas.

Right now the boy's heart is beating too fast, and they're going too slow, and Spike risks a quick peek out from under the blanket. A peek that becomes a long look, because it's so overcast now that it's *dark* and totally safe. Spike sits up, looking out of the space scraped free of paint in the front window. There's snow driving across the highway - snow being pushed along the ground by a fierce northern wind that rocks the heavy car on its shocks. The highway is crusted with it, the lanes half-buried. Xander is driving with a look of intense concentration, his hands gripping the wheel so tightly his knuckles are white. They hit a patch of ice and slowly revolve, drifting to the left, and Xander carefully, carefully corrects, turning the wheel just so, letting off the gas. After a minute or so they're straight again and he pushes gingerly on the gas and they go forward. The tunnel of snow that's lit by the headlights is a restless, hypnotic swarm - dancing specks that draw your focus further and further away until you wouldn't notice a building ten feet in front of you .

"Where'd you learn to drive in this?" Spike asks,

surprised that this SoCal boy knows what he's doing, and Xander smirks a little, easing the gas on some more.

"I spent some time with my Uncle Rory, up in Reno. I'd drive him when he was too drunk to do it himself and it snows up there sometimes, so - I had to learn."

"What time is it?" Spike has tried and failed to gauge the time - he can *feel* the sun, but he can't get his bearings at all, and the cold is making him muzzy.

"It's a little after noon. It's been snowing for - two hours. I thought maybe it'd ease off but it's not and my head is killing me. I need to stop. Can you see anything? There was a sign - said there'd be a motel in three miles and it seems like it's been three, but..."

Spike moves sideways a little so he can see Xander's face. His brows are drawn down in concentration - his lip caught and held between his teeth. Spike reaches out and tangles his fingers in the hair that's lying over Xander's flannel-clad shoulders. He squints out the window, watching. A moment later he sees it - neon-red like a dying cigarette, fading in the white-out.

"There - *motel* and *vacancy*. To the point, at least."

Xander nods and they finish the drive in silence. The off-ramp is slippery and the parking lot half-deserted and Xander pulls the car into a space and slumps in utter relief, leaning his head back and letting out a shaky sigh.

"Thank god," he murmurs, and Spike strokes the side of his throat, smiling to himself when the boy doesn't flinch away.

"I'll get us a room," Spike says, and he slides out of the car before Xander can protest. The room is cheap, the caretaker old and half-deaf, and Spike gets the key as fast as he can - stalks back outside and leans down, tapping on the driver's window. Xander cracks it open, looking up at him.

"Got us one on the end. Can you go another twenty feet?" he deadpans. Xander just rolls his eyes and puts the DeSoto back in gear. Spike walks fast down to the end, room 14 and he grins when he sees that right next door is room 12. Old superstitions die hard. He opens the door and flicks on the light - moves straight to the heater, turning it on full blast and twitching the curtains closed. A moment later Xander hurries in and slams the door, slinging their bag onto the foot of the nearest bed and standing there for a moment.

"Be warm in a bit," Spike says, unable to hide his own weariness and chill, and Xander rubs his hands together.

"Heat up quicker in the shower," he says, and unzips the bag - pulls out sweat pants and a long-sleeved t-shirt and thick socks. He hesitates for one moment and then pulls out another pair - a pair that's smaller, and black as opposed to grey. And socks, as well.

"C'mon," he says, tossing the black sweats and socks at Spike, and he goes to the bathroom. Spike just stares at his retreating back for a moment and then sheds his duster to the bed - yanks off his boots and jeans and the two flannel shirts he's put on in a vain attempt to stay warm in the back seat. The DeSoto's heater only warms the *front* of the car. Xander's boots fly out of the bathroom and thud to the floor in front of the scratched dresser, and then his clothes come flying, too, hitting dresser and floor equally. The water starts up, and Spike grabs the sweats and socks and strides into the bathroom - shuts the door.

Steam is already obscuring the mirror and warming the closet of a room, and Xander's already under the spray. Spike piles his clothes on top of the boy's on the back of

the toilet tank and slides into the shower. The heat is shocking and incredible and he gasps, and Xander turns to him, blinking water out of his eyes.

"Too hot?"

"No fuckin' way," Spike says, and he moves right up under the spray as well. Catches Xander around the waist and pulls him back when he tries to sidle sideways.

"Got to share it, pet," he says, grinning, and Xander shivers and then relaxes - leans into him, letting his arms go loosely around Spike's waist. He jerks a little at the contact.

"Fuck, Spike - you're freezing!"

"Be warm in a bit," Spike says again, low, and let's his body mold itself to the boy's - let's his cheek rest on one shoulder and his arms link in the small of Xander's back and they just lean there under the pounding spray.

Spike has no idea how long they stand there but suddenly he's jerking his head up with a snap and Xander is blinking at him, swaying on his feet.

"We're sleeping standing up, mate - time to get out," he says, and turns the water off with a sigh. Their skin is the same temperature now, and they're both flushed pink, Spike's fading fast. The towels are thin and scratchy and Spike doesn't like how they feel on his skin. They dry off and dress and Spike shivers a little when Xander opens the door and goes out.

"Should have given me a shirt!" he grumps, and a flannel shirt catches him in the face. He pulls it off and Xander is standing there, his kit in his hand, toothbrush already out.

"Sorry," he says, not meaning it, and Spike just flashes him a fangy grin. He pulls the flannel on - it smells wonderfully and thickly of *Xander* - sweet and salt and apples, something crisp and rich - and Spike hugs it around himself for a moment before buttoning it closed. He goes out into the main room and pulls the cheap, nylon-slick duvet back and then the sheets and blanket - slithers fast into the bed, hoping to conserve his hard-won heat. Xander finishes brushing and comes out - snaps off the light. He's left the bathroom light on and the door nearly closed, so that the room is dimly lit by bluish-white fluorescence. Spike is almost too surprised to speak when Xander crawls into the bed with him,

curling up close behind him and tucking his face down into the space between Spike's neck and shoulder.

"What's this, then?" Spike asks.

"M cold," Xander mumbles, already halfway asleep again, and Spike just burrows closer and tucks his head down, too. He imagines the pulsing fire of the mirror-Xander's heart, and fancies that he can feel it against his back. It feels good.

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He wakes slowly, warm all over, comfortable and not wanting to move at all. In sleep he and the boy have moved around and Xander is lying on him; leg between Spike's thighs, arm under his shoulder, chest half on Spike's chest. His face is in Spike's neck, his breath tickling the skin there and Spike breathes in slow - tasting his scent as much as smelling it. Letting his eyes drift shut, letting Xander's body weigh him down into the mattress. It feels so *good*, to be held and anchored - *wanted*. The demon isn't happy about it, but Spike ignores it.

*I'll want what I want. And take what I can get.* That's always been his philosophy. Take with both hands until there's nothing left. It might not be the *best* way to do things, but it's his way, and it works for him. Sort of. Xander stirs, taking a long breath in, and then he's leaning up on his arm a little, looking down at Spike in the dim light

"Tell me why I'm here again," he says, soft, and Spike blinks up at him.

"Because I was fucking bored. Because - you deserve better. Because Sunnydale's a fuckin' graveyard, pet, and you're still alive. Because...they were killing you with their bullshit." Xander blinks down at him, sleepy smile and tousled hair, looking maybe sixteen. His face is all long bones and hollows, his eyes too dark and too big to be real. Spike thinks maybe he'll kiss him and then thinks maybe not. Xander surprises him by leaning down and pressing his mouth to Spike's - a dry, almost chaste kiss. When he pulls back Spike wants him to do it again.

"What was that for?" he asks, and Xander's fingers move a little under his shoulder, flexing. They're probably asleep.

"Because...I wanted to. Because you treat me like I have half a brain. Because you didn't kill me. Because...you're pretty."

"Yeah?" Spike whispers, and Xander snuggles back down onto him and if a human could purr, Xander would be purring.

"Yeah."

~\*~\*~\*~\*~

They're standing in the middle of grassland, and Spike is freezing. The grass is the color of flax and rust and honey, all mixed together and moving like the sea, and there are markers standing up like bones here and there. The horizon is far and hazy and softly rounded against a low, grey sky. Snow is sluicing down, driven by a northern wind that smells of ozone and earth and Spike watches Xander through eyes that are tearing with cold. The air is like champagne in his throat, bright and sharp and intoxicating. He puts a shaking hand to his mouth and smokes, and Xander finally walks over to him, huddled in layers of flannel and thermal, his cheeks fever-bright with the chill.

"You ready? 'Cause I'm fuckin' freezing," Spike says, and Xander nods. They walk fast back to the museum where they've parked the DeSoto and the guard - or maybe he's a groundskeeper, or the head of the fucking museum, who knows - watches them from the doorway, flat black eyes inscrutable and wary. Spike's never seen a real Indian and Xander says you can't call them that, but he can't imagine what *else* you'd call them - *him*. He'd always liked books about the 'red savages' as a boy - had read his copy of *The Leatherstocking Tales* to rags and had wished, with all the fervency of a ten-year-old that he could visit the Americas and see Indians and Mountainmen, teepees and war parties and men who could track deer and humans with equal skill.

Now Xander won't let him talk to the Indian - *Native American* - that is so temptingly close and he's in a bad mood. And he's *cold*, and hungry, and they have an hour to get back to Billings and their hotel - maybe more, if the snow gets any worse.

Spike gets behind the wheel and starts the car - backs and turns and drives away in a seething silence.

"What in bloody hell was that for, Xander? It's bloody

cold out here and you just wanted to, what - look at some bloody *cemetery*?"

"It was Custer's Last Stand, Spike," Xander says, his voice thin and tired sounding, and Spike glances over at him, where he's huddled in front of the heater. "It was - it was one of the only things I remember from History class, okay? I used to think Custer was this big hero but - he was just...trying to make big, you know? Did something stupid, lost it all. I just wanted to see if..."

"If it felt like this?" Spike says, quiet, and Xander sighs and scoots over, until he's touching Spike, shoulder to hip to knee.

"Yeah. Something stupid where I lose it all. But... It's not the same. I felt... It was sad, out there. It was...pointless. All those people died and it all ended up for nothing, anyway, 'cause the tribes still got screwed over and Custer still died and every soldier he had with him."

"You think this is pointless?" Spike asks, and Xander leans his head on Spike's shoulder, and Spike lets one hand go out, to curl over Xander's knee.

"No. It's not. It's...there's life out here. I forgot about that

in Sunnydale. That there's a reason for fighting."

"Cause it's damn good fun," Spike says, and Xander laughs, drowsy.

"Yeah. It's so fun to be smashed into a wall. No, it's 'cause...if I don't, nobody will." Xander sighs again, and Spike squeezes his knee, smiling a little. It's not why *Spike* fights, and never will be, but Xander wanted to come up here and right now that's good enough. He's alive, at least - alive and kicking and making Spike *do* things - making demands and *living*, and it beats the hollow, bruised boy that crept in and out of his basement and in and out of the Slayer's field of vision - that let guilt eat acid holes right through his White Knight armor. Spike thinks maybe he can hear spurs, or maybe it's just loose change down in the seat, but either way Xander's not the same, and that's good.

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Their hotel has a hot tub and a sauna down by the gym and he and Xander go down in their sweatpants, but slide into the hot tub nude. Here, so close to Christmas, the hotel is almost deserted. Spike had to really *hunt* for

his meal and it was fun but he'd never gotten the chance to warm up.

Now, sliding into bubbling water as hot as lava he shivers in sheer bliss and sinks in up to his chin. It's wonderful - amazing.

"Gotta get one of these," he says, and Xander *'hmmms'* at him, eyes shut, head tipped back against the rim.

"Who did you kill?" Xander asks, and Spike slides around the tub a little, until his leg bumps Xander's.

"Some guy. Had to work for him, too - he was good. Some - drifter, I guess. Had a backpack."

"Or maybe he was a student, hitching home for Christmas?" Xander asks, and he's frowning.

"Maybe. Didn't ask," Spike says, and lets his leg bump again, a little harder. Xander shifts and lifts his head - looks at him.

"Why do you - why can't you be like Angel? Drink animal blood?"

"There's so much wrong with what you just said I'm not even sure where to start," Spike says, and he slides away, staring angrily out at the fogged glass of the gym.

"Ookay... You don't wanna be like Angel. I get that. Deadboy is annoying. But - he lives on animal blood."

"If you want to call it *living*. Sure, sure -" Spike raises his hand, forestalling Xander's next comment. "I can live off of animal blood. Just like you can live off of tap water and stale bread. Do you want to?" Xander just watches him and Spike sighs. "I'm not a sodding house pet, Xander. I'm not tame. I'm a predator. It's what I'm *built* for - it's what I *am*. When I couldn't hunt... It was driving me crazy. I was *hungry* all the time. *All* the time. And just..." Spike doesn't know how to explain - doesn't know what words will break through the Scooby mentality that says killing is always bad, no matter what. Even as they kill, and kill, and kill again. It's useless to argue and he leans his own head back and shuts his eyes, blocking Xander out, trying for some measure of calm.

*What do you care, anyway? Not like you need to justify what you are to the little brat. Should have drained him in Brazil - stuck with Dru.*

*Dru didn't want us around*, he reminds himself, and twitches in startlement when he feels Xander's hand on his ribs - when Xander's weight is suddenly on his thighs. He opens his eyes and the boy is right there, straddling him, groin to groin, his hands moving in a slow slide from hip to rib to shoulder.

"I know what it feels like," Xander says, and Spike just stares at him. "What it's like to want to...do that. When - there was this time - I had a hyena in me. And it wanted to kill - it *did* kill. It wanted to just take and take... And it was all for the pack - all for..." Xander stops, and leans down and kisses Spike. Slow and gentle, tongue teasing at the underside of his upper lip and then pushing in and Spike let's his mouth fall open a little - lets his head tilt a little and Xander kisses him deeply. After a minute or so he pulls back, resting his forehead on Spike's.

"You taste like blood," he says, and Spike's hands come up and grip Xander's hips, and his thumbs are rubbing in the hollows there.

"I always will," Spike says, and kisses him back. This time Xander's hands tangle in Spike's hair - grip his neck - and Spike crushes Xander close to him, wrapping his arms around him as far as they can go, feeling hipbone and

thigh and knee pressing into him, feeling the blood in him filling his cock and sending it up and out, to push against Xander's belly. There's an answering hardness pushing back, and he wonders how far this will go.

"I never forgot wanting to kill people," Xander says, and one hand has slipped down between them and is tracing delicately over Spike - is discovering foreskin and balls and sending little electric pulses of pleasure all up and down Spike's body.

"I never did either, pet - it's the nature of the beast. Would you ask for it back, your beast?" Spike lets his own hand wander, and he is kneading the taut muscle of Xander's buttock in one hand - tugging at the length of him with his other. Liking the solid heat of it, the weight.

"No," Xander sighs, arching his back. "I wouldn't."

They're both so desperate - they've both *ached* for it, for so long. Their hands move, almost in unison, stroking and tugging, free hands exploring whatever they can reach. Xander's kisses are sharp-edged and devouring and breathless and Spike turns them, pinning Xander to the side. He ducks down and takes the water-hot, blood-hot flesh into his mouth, tasting the salt-spice of pre-come

briefly on his tongue. He sucks, bobbing his head, holding the pumping hips in his hands and a moment later he's swallowing and swallowing, the taste of blood and the sea in the back of his throat. He lets go and slides up Xander's heaving body, listening to the rapid pounding of his heart.

"Spike," Xander says, and jerks him close, kissing him almost desperately, his hands hurtful and exquisite on Spike's cock and he thrusts with impatient need into Xander's grip - into his belly - and then he's coming as well, slicking under Xander's palm and gasping into his mouth. And *Christ*, it feels so fucking good.

"If you don't go to your room you'll get kicked out," someone says, and it's the guy from the front desk, looking red in the face and agitated and Xander just laughs - laughs so hard Spike has to pull him up and hug him close to keep him from drowning.

### **Part Three**

Xander hangs above him in the gloom of the shuttered hotel room. To the demon's eyes he practically glows - pale-tan skin a buttery gold, his hair like a cowl of softly curling silk. And his eyes - the jackal-gods eyes, green-glowing flame.

Spike is seeing Dru's glamour on the boy, from time to time. Usually only at this moment - the moment when Xander is arching, writhing, clenching his body around Spike's cock and making this noise - like a cat, or a small lion. A wonderful breathy mewl that makes the hair stand up on Spike's arms and makes his stomach clench in anticipatory delight.

Xander shudders all over, fucking himself down and back in a sudden, rhythmless frenzy and his body is so *tight* and his neck is arching, a creamy bow of perfect flesh and Spike clamps his hand down hard, feeling the surging pulse of Xander's cock under his fingertips.

"Oh fuck, fuck, *Spike*, don't - let me, for fucks sake -"

"Not yet, not yet...one more time," Spike murmurs, and Xander is trembling over him, his thighs so weak he can't lift himself anymore and Spike uses his other hand to stroke the heaving belly and trace the ribs that come and go with each panting breath. Smooths the strands of hair that have grown long, down over his collar-bones. His own orgasm fiercely held back, because he never gets *enough* of this, and because he can, and because the lust and need pouring off the boy are like a shot of fucking

heroin straight to his veins.

He moves, rolling them, lifting the long, muscled legs and inhaling sweat and musk and blood-scent. Xander's nails have cut his thigh - have cut Spike's shoulder - and the thick, old-iron smell tingles through him.

He laps at the dark circles of the nipples - lays his tongue flat to them and sucks and the staccato flutter of blood and come pulsing under his fingers has eased now, and he slowly lets go. Xander heaves a shuddering sigh and pulls Spike's head up to him, fingers digging into the hair that's been raked to a nest of knots and soft, white thorns. But good boy that he is, he doesn't touch himself and Spike begins again, the slow withdrawal and slow thrust, twisting a little, and Xander's mouth on his is hot and wet and greedy, sucking him in.

The kiss is so good, so sweet - and the demon *hates* that - that Spike just pushes in as close as he can, groin to Xander's ass, tight and hard, and *kisses* - breathes in the boy and breathes him out again until Xander is whimpering, mewling, twitching beneath him. His hands are moving over Spike's body in a desperate, sharp-nailed plea for movement, for *something* and Spike finally lets go of his mouth and starts to move, hard and

fast this time, watching.

He watches for the glamour and for the wide-open eyes to close in utter bliss. He watches for the hands to clench into fists and *twist*, tearing the bleach-white sheets. He watches and waits.

"Spike, let it be now, let it be now, now, fuck, *please*, now, fucking *now*, now - Spike, Spike, Spike -" Half-choked whisper, ragged and raw, his name like a prayer on lips bitten and swollen and *god*, it's too fucking good, it's too perfect. Spike *pounds*, Xander's calves hot and heavy on his shoulders, and Xander is keening a high, breathless wail and then that convulsion, that long, twisting arch and clutch that is like nothing, *nothing* he's ever felt.

The sea-salt-and-blood scent of come sharpens and Spike feels the jet of hot fluid spattering on his chest - on his belly - and he lets go himself, shooting his own seed up into the clenching heat and it's so fucking *good*.

Xander is whispering his name again - is stroking a hand over and over Spike's cheek and jaw and Spike eases the boy's legs down - leans in for a leisurely kiss as his body slowly pulls out and Xander groans.

"Empty, fuck, feels -"

"I know, pet," Spike whispers, and he slips down a little, to lick at the cooling liquid on Xander's ribs - sinks his fangs into the top of Xander's thigh and takes a slow mouthful of blood and Xander moans, his belly fluttering as his body tries to come again, but can't. Spike knows it still feels good, though. He licks the blood away from the wound - rubs his cheek along the curve of Xander's hipbone.

"Well get you a nice toy, pet. Something long and thick you can wear all the time..." Spike pushes a finger inside Xander, stroking softly, and Xander's breath hitches. "You think? So you won't ever feel empty. So you can pretend it's me in you, all day, every minute..."

"Fuck you're twisted," Xander gasps, but Spike can hear his heart, still tripping along, and can see his eyes, half-shut and dreaming, and he laughs. He slithers up the bed and coils himself around the hot, sweat-slick flesh, and Xander is trembling, and Spike knows he'll be so sore, but he knows he loves it. Xander's hands have crept up to his and are twining there, stroking his knuckles and rubbing

callused fingers over and over his palms, and it's soothing, and Spike drifts and dozes and finally sleeps.

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They go into Central Park at night - they ghost along the bridle paths and trails - climb the rocks and lean over the bridges, looking down into still, dark water. They chase whatever prey happens to be out there with them, and Xander doesn't mind this hunting. He crouches in the bushes and watches this pack and that of young boys - sweating, eager, hard as horses and deadly as snakes - stalk each other through the whispering trees. Watches Spike dive into the midst of them and take his one or two or three. When the prey is something else - some street-dweller, some foolish late-night jogger, some woman walking her yippy dog - *Xander* dives in as well, finding the terrified human and reassuring them with his big smile. Leading them to safety and out of sight of Spike, demon's face to the fore and bloody around the lips.

Being a hero, sort of - being a White Knight. Afterwards, they get Chinese or steaks or a greasy diner breakfast and talk about nothing - about everything. Talk about the city and the rest of the world. It's snowing on and off - or

raining - a cold, cold November and Xander buys himself a big wool coat and Spike steals him a scarf, striped red and gold.

"Why red and gold stripes?" Xander asks, staring down at it, and Spike grins at him.

"'Cause you're Gryffindor, aren't you?" he says, and Xander looks at him in utter bewilderment.

"I'm what?"

Spike rolls his eyes - starts explaining Hogwarts and the Houses - Dawn was a huge fan and she needed *somebody* to talk to, didn't she? - and Xander just laughs.

But when Spike steals him a copy of the first book he blushes, and then when Spike wakes up the next evening Xander is lying there on his stomach, the book propped open in front of him and the scarf wrapped around his throat. A small, wondering smile on his face. Spike calls him Harry sometimes, and Xander points toothpicks at him and whispers spells, grinning. It's like he never *played*, before, and Spike likes that he's doing it now. With him.

Of course, they don't *always* get it right, and the second time they lose the prey - although Spike supposes others might think of them as *victims* - Xander is silent and distracted the whole way back to the hotel. When he's on his back under Spike - serious and panting, his body trembling under Spike's hands and fluttering around his cock - he fixes his eyes on Spike's and doesn't look away.

"I changed my mind," he says, and Spike looks at him in utter shock.

"You don't want me to fuck you?"

"No, you freak. About the beast. About - having it. I want it - want it back." Spike just *looks* at him - leans down and kisses him breathless and then fucks him into a daze. When the edges of the window are glowing with sun-rise and Spike is drifting off, Xander pokes him.

"I want it back," he whispers.

"No you don't, pet," Spike whispers back, curling close around him. Xander stiffens and then sags against him, sighing.

"Yes I *do*. If I had the - the beast... If you *turned* me, then

we wouldn't - there's no way we'd lose anybody. The two of us, we could -"

"You wouldn't care about that anymore, pet. And I wouldn't either, if you were a vampire. You'd make a lovely vampire..." Spike drifts for a moment, picturing it, then focuses on the here and now again. "But you wouldn't want to save the weak ones - you'd want to cull them, just like I do."

"But *you* don't kill them - why would I?"

Spike sighs. "I don't kill them 'cause...you don't want me to, pet." There is a long silence, and Xander turns in his arms - faces him, and Spike knows there's enough light that Xander can see his face. Can see he's serious.

"Why am I here, Spike?" Xander asks, so soft, and Spike leans up and kisses his mouth - his cheek.

"'Cause you deserve a life, pet. 'Cause you're better than they ever thought you were. 'Cause I like to see you happy...." *'Cause I need you now. Need you.*

"'Cause you were bored," Xander says, smiling, his fingers tracing patterns on Spike's chest, and Spike grins at him.

"Cause I was bloody bored. You don't need the beast, pet - you're fine." Xander watches him for a moment, his eyes searching Spike's face for - something. For truth, he guesses. Finally the boy leans in again, and kisses him so sweetly. Sighs and snuggles down, holding on.

"I love you," he says, and Spike has to breathe - has to take a hard, shaky breath and just *wait*, for a moment.

"What was that for, then?" he says finally, when he can.

"Cause you're pretty," Xander murmurs, sighing into sleep, and Spike smiles.

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But he hasn't forgotten it, not by a long shot, and he starts to ask questions. *Why* does Spike care? *Why* does he stop himself? *Why* doesn't Spike just kill him and go back to Dru? until Spike is starting to wonder why, himself. He doesn't really know - he's just following what his heart says - want, take, *have*. And he's savvy enough to know that *having*, with Xander, means certain things. It means...following a rule - just one - and after one

hundred and forty-plus years he figures he can deal with one rule. But the questions are annoying.

"I don't *know*, Xander! Fuck's sake!" Spike snaps, sitting upright at the bar, flinging back a shot of JD. "Listen - when Dru was bent on havin' the Judge prowling around and I got him all assembled for her, he almost killed us. Said we had too much humanity in us." He utterly ignores the looks he's getting, and so does Xander who's watching him, wide-eyed, the tasseled ends of his scarf tangled in his fingers.

"So maybe Angel's not so special, huh? Maybe we still have our souls, or maybe - our demons just like life too much." Spike signals for another shot and the person next to him edges slightly away.

"You really think you have a soul?" Xander breathes, and Spike shakes his head, lighting a cigarette.

"I dunno, pet. Never gave it much thought. I know Dru made me and she was - special. I know I loved her like I loved...someone...before I met her." The shot comes and Spike downs it, stiff-wristed bolt that he learned from Angelus.

"I wonder if we could find out," Xander muses, taking a gulp of his beer, and Spike shakes his head again, taking a long pull from his cigarette. The smoke puffs out with his words and he's a little drunk now, 'cause he finds that amusing.

"No fuckin' mojo, pet. Not fer me and not fer you. Not after what Dru did. Who fuckin' knows what'll happen if we cross her spell?" Xander nods - smiles at him, his fingers smoothing and smoothing the scarf, and Spike has to lean forward and kiss him. A nice long kiss, tasting beer and lime and tequila, tasting salt and apple-sweet.

"Taste so good, pet," he murmurs, his hand high on Xander's thigh, and Xander grins at him.

"Fuckin' perverts -" somebody growls, and Spike feels a hand fumbling at his shoulder. "Get outta here, fucker," the guy says, and Spike turns slowly, glaring at the drunk who's daring to paw him.

"Piss off, fuckin' gobshite," Spike hisses, and the man scowls and lunges. Spike kicks him in the knee and hears a satisfying *crack* and the man is down and writhing, bellowing in agony. "Can't a man enjoy a fuckin' drink in peace?" he complains to the air, and Xander is slipping

off the stool and edging away and when the fight starts for *real* he's in a safe corner near the end of the bar.

They get back to the hotel just before dawn and Spike unloads seven wallets and two Rolex watches from his duster pockets. Xander takes out all the cash, wipes the wallets down and puts them in a grocery bag. He'll drop them somewhere - in the front seat of a patrol car, most likely - the next day. The watches Spike shoves away again, because it's always good to have something to pawn.

"You think if you turned me I'd be like you or like...Angelus?" Xander asks, scrubbing his hair under the shower spray and Spike leans against the tiles and watches him.

"Dunno. Angelus wasn't so bad the first time around. All that soul business fucked him up good an' proper."

"He said once that - he was a lot like his human self, after he was turned." Xander blinks water out of his eyes, and pours more gel into his hand - motions to Spike who turns and braces against the wall, tipping his head back. Xander's strong, callused fingers start to massage in the shampoo and Spike makes a small, groaning sound of

contentment.

"He did? Well... I didn't know him. When he was human, I mean. According to some he was a drunken lout of an eldest son, good for nothing. 'Course, when Darla said that she was usually pissed..." Spike hisses in pleasure at the leisurely scratch of nails over his scalp and Xander pulls him not-too-gently under the spray by fistfuls of soapy hair and starts rinsing.

"So, are *you* like you were?" Xander asks, and Spike doesn't know what to say.

*Only in a few things. Only in the things that really matter. Love, loyalty, hurt.* But he isn't sure he can say that, so he doesn't say anything, and Xander rinses his hair - pushes him hard into the wall, grinding his cock into Spike's ass.

"Promise me something," he says, and the scent of lemon verbena and eucalyptus is thick in the air.

"Promise me," he whispers, the blunt head of his cock probing and pushing, sliding *in*, hitching glide, and Spike lowers his head between his shoulders and pushes back, arching his spine, spreading his legs. So fucking good, so fucking incredible.

"Promise, pet," he says, sucking in mouthfuls of steam - of sweat scent and his own arousal, and Xander's.

"Promise if I get hurt - if something happens - and I'm too fucked up to live, you'll turn me." Xander is pulling back, slow as he can, his fingers hurtfully tight on Spike's hips and Spike turns his head enough to see him - to see the look of intense lust, the look of utter conviction on his face.

"Said I wouldn't, though. Promised you I wouldn't," Spike murmurs, and Xander pauses for a moment, the head of his cock the only thing inside, sweet burn and stretch that makes Spike shiver.

"I didn't know, then. That doesn't count anymore. So promise."

"I promise, pet," he says. Xander slams back in, his eyes wide, and Spike wants to bend right over - take him so deep he can taste him.

"And if I'm lucky and nothing happens to me - you'll turn me in ten years, no matter what." Xander's voice wobbles as he thrusts again and again, hard as he can, and Spike groans and drops his head - pushes back and

feels the shift - wishes they were face to face so he could bite the succulent, living skin.

"Fuck, Xander - yeah. Promise," he gasps, and Xander's thrusts somehow get harder and one hand from Spike's hip slips around to his cock - the other slides up his back and Xander's forearm is in his face.

"Love you," he says, pushing against the fangs, squeezing and tugging on Spike's cock and Spike bites deep and hard - arches like a bow, his orgasm swift and exquisite, and Xander's come is hot inside him, if only for a moment.

Later, in bed, Spike asks him if he meant it, and Xander grins at him.

"Course I did. Love you."

"No, you git. You really want me to turn you?"

"Yeah. I think - what you start with counts more than what you get. I think I'd be okay," Xander says, and Spike just laughs, and pulls him close. He thinks Xander would probably be okay too. He wonders if they make holy armor for an undead Knight.

## Part Four

Spike is watching Xander watch a vampire, and he has to admire the slow and subtle hunt that's been going on for half an hour. The vampire thinks he's hunting *Xander* - thinks he's going to take that lean and muscled, long-haired man outside and have him. Thinks he's going to push him into a wall or over a car-hood and taste that succulent blood - have that perfect ass. It makes Spike grin, and the vampire flicks a glance at him.

Aware of him, as Spike is aware of every vamp in the room. But he's made himself aloof - apart - and the vampire in question thinks he's just watching the fun. And he is, but this vamp's gonna get a surprise.

Xander pushes away from the bar, finishing the drink he let the vamp buy him. He turns that open, wide-mouthed grin on the stalking vamp and pulls him close - whispers something in his ear. The vamp laughs and they start to make their way out of the club, Xander's fingers curled in the waistband of the vamp's jeans, his body attuned to the body behind him - bumping a little into the vamp's groin, touching his cheek. Seducing, because it's more fun this way, and because it gets them both so turned on.

They slide through a knot of dancers and are gone, and Spike stands up and follows. A couple of younger vamps - obviously some sort of bodyguard, and Spike sneers at that - casually follow him. When they're all in the long, dim hallway that leads to the back door Spike watches Xander and the other vamp go out and then turns to the two following him.

"Better wait a couple minutes," one says, a female trying to sound casually threatening, and Spike has to laugh.

"A couple minutes? That's all? That's bloody pathetic! I think I'll go show him how it's done." Spike turns and saunters on - hears the two bodyguards start to come after him and he spins and lashes out; easy movements, well practiced. The vamps go down, clutching their throats, and Spike casually stakes them - tucks his razor away. Then it's down the hall and out, into a back alley that's piled with empty liquor boxes and a few broken chairs - overloaded dumpsters. There's movement and noise right over *there*, in a recessed doorway, and suddenly the other vamp reels out into the alley, his stomach spilling entrails over his clutching arms. Xander follows, his own razor glinting in the sodium-glare of the street-light. The vamp recovers - lunges for the human - and Spike is right there, yanking him back by his boy-

band hair, twisting his neck around so that it's almost snapping.

"Not nice. Got my boy out here on false pretenses. He *was expecting* a good fuck and *you* tried to bite him!" Spike grins down at the gaping vampire and shifts his grip - *twists* - and the vampire dissolves into a scattering of dust. He brushes his hands off and looks over at his boy, who's lounging back against a loading dock, elbows propped on the [stained concrete](#). He's grinning too, and a sliver of pale-tan, densely muscled belly is showing from under the rucked hem of his wife-beater. Tight, worn jeans, steel-toed boots, his hair brushed casually back and falling to his shoulder-blades. He's fucking beautiful, and he reeks of the vamps who've touched him tonight. That's going to change very soon.

"You get any?" he asks, and Spike moves closer, the heavy, humid air of a New York summer pressing down onto his bare arms, making even *his* flesh warm.

"Got two. Some kind of half-assed bodyguards." Spike gets up close - kicks Xander's feet apart and leans into him. It's the fifth club - the eleventh vamp - and Spike's had enough. He's done his own hunting in between-times and he's not hungry for blood anymore.

"You look fuckin' delicious, pet," Spike murmurs, dipping down to rub his cheek along Xander's, and Xander gasps softly - pushes his hips up into Spike's. "Been watching you all night and I think I've been...very good."

"Have you?" Xander murmurs, and Spike grabs him - spins him and pushes him over the dock, bending him down.

"Yesss..." Spike hisses softly, his hands deft on the button and zip of Xander's jeans. "The question is, have *you*," Spike says, and he grabs Xander by the hips and pulls him back, grinding his crotch into the bare, taut muscles of Xander's ass.

"Fuck no," Xander gasps, hands white on the concrete edge, legs as far apart as they'll go in the hobble of the jeans. "I let that red-headed one feel me up...*fuck!*" He jerks as Spike's hand closes down on his cock, tugging and stroking roughly - finding the leather and steel that's wrapped tightly around the root. Another game they play, and sometimes it's Spike that's wearing it.

"That's why you're all tied up, pet - can't trust you," Spike whispers. He pushes his hands up under the shirt,

bunching it under Xander's arms, scratching his nails down the arching back and twisting nipples that have gotten sensitive from repeated caresses.

"You gonna make me sorry?" Xander asks, looking at Spike over his shoulder, his eyes wide and his lip caught between his teeth. He's humping back against Spike and *fuck* that's hot, and Spike brings his hand down sharp and hard on Xander's ass, watching his boy's eyes darken and go half-lidded - watching his mouth come open in a silent gasp.

"Course I am, pet. Gonna make you *so* sorry." Spike undoes his own jeans, pushing them down just far enough, and leans into Xander, pushing his cock into the tight, slick heat that's been waiting for him all night. "Fuck, Xan, that feels so fuckin' sweet."

"Just for you," Xander says, pushing back, his arms rigid on the lip of the dock. Spike slides in until he's as far as he can go and just waits there a moment, feeling the tremors in the muscles around his cock as Xander's body fights him and then accepts him.

"Always for me," he says, nipping Xander's earlobe, and then he pulls back and starts to fuck as hard as Xander

can take, his fingers sinking into Xander's hips, bruises blossoming under his grip. Xander's head is down between his shoulders and he's gasping and groaning - making that soft mewl of intense pleasure and Spike shifts and pushes a little harder - a little faster. Lets one hand claw and rub over Xander's chest and belly - snakes it up into the mink-brown hair and winds his fist tight in the long strands. He yanks Xander up and back, arching him impossibly hard, *fucking* him impossibly hard and Xander's babbling his name, babbling obscenities and endearments and *begging*. Spike lets his hand slide around from Xander's hip to his cock and pulls roughly, slicking the pre-come that's there over the head - scratching a little with his nails, enough to make Xander hiss and buck.

"*Fuck* you feel good. Wanna come, pet? Wanna feel it? Wanna come with me?" He pushes slippery fingers into Xander's mouth, feeling the contraction of muscles around his cock as Xander gets closer and closer.

"Yeah, fuck - *please* - want to, Spike - fuck me, make me *come* -" Xander's voice has gone hoarse and Spike twists his head over by the hair - gets the swollen, hot flesh of Xander's balls in his hand and pulls the tiniest bit.

"No, pet," he whispers, and *bites*, and pulls down sharply at the same moment, riding the desperate convulsion that runs through Xander's body, his thrusts going erratic and even harder as his own orgasm swamps him; sweat and blood and musk and *want* heavy in the air and Xander's hoarse scream of frustration is like music. He pumps his hips once and twice more - slides out and turns his boy around, watching with an appreciative eye the heaving belly and the quivering muscles of his thighs and chest and arms. He bends down and takes Xander in, tip to root in one long glide and *sucks*, and then he's standing and yanking his pants back up - doing the same for Xander and pushing him back with a *thump* into the dock, kissing him hard enough to bruise.

"Spike, fuck -" Xander whimpers, dazed, and Spike laughs - leans close so he's whispering right in Xander's ear.

"Told you you'd be sorry, pet. We're gonna go home and I'm gonna fuck you until the sun comes up and if you make it real pretty I'll let you come." Xander's heart is pounding hard and fast - he smells sweet and needy and good enough to eat and Spike grabs his hand they go home. And fuck, but Spike loves his life.

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It's their third summer in New York - the tenth since that trip to Brazil and Dru, and Xander is lying on his back in their bed, in their flat. Listening to Johnny Cash and Spike still can't believe he likes that over the Velvet Underground or - hell - *anything* else. But the Man is Black is still a favorite, and Spike only teases him about it sometimes. Spike watches him, like he's been doing all summer. Because this is *the* summer - the last. This September is ten years and Xander has made it clear, time and again - he expects Spike to keep his promise. Turn him.

And Spike has never gone *back* on a promise, and certainly never one to his boy, but it still troubles him. They've spent ten years fighting and fucking and seeing the world - spent ten years learning everything there is to learn about each other and Spike loves him - loves his boy who isn't a *boy*, anymore. Loves this almost-thirty-year-old man who can hold his own in a brawl, who can take out a vamp or a demon without getting a scratch. Who loves *him* - who is loyal to him and who pisses him off and makes him laugh - makes him cry, sometimes, with his sweetness and his wonder at being the one Spike wanted - being the one *wanted* by anyone.

But Spike keeps his promises, and in a week when Xander turns thirty he'll do the deed and make the first vampire he's ever made that wasn't cannon-fodder or dust in a fortnight. He's not sure how that will be - living with Dru for a hundred years was an experience, but it's not likely to help with *Xander* in any way, and he really hopes Xander is nothing like Dru. But the demon takes everyone differently, and even though Xander is still sure - still confident he can be *himself* - Spike is a little afraid. But he won't say that, not to Xander, and not even to himself if he can help it.

*Gonna be all right*, he thinks, reassuring himself, and that's all he can do.

"I want it," Xander whispers, last thing he says, and Spike gluts himself on the blood and then he can only wait, and wonder.

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Xander is watching *him*, and his eyes are sparkling bright in the dimness of their flat - in the last, bloody light of the setting sun. Spike can see the glamour - can see it almost at will, now, after so many years, and it looks...nearly the

same. The pulsing ruby of flame that was Xander's living heart has stilled to a knot of calcined blood; needles of scarlet and black. The jackal-god's teeth are longer - are sharper - and the body of stars and silver glass is threaded through and through with gold and scarlet - cracks in the carapace. And wings of shadow and bone, insubstantial - enormous.

"You look - you *glow*, you -" Xander sits up slowly - looks around himself and Spike catches him as he overbalances. "Everything glows," he whispers, and his eyes are wide and amazed, flicking over the room.

"Goes away in a few days, when you get used to it. Mostly," Spike says, and it's true. Something they never told the Slayer - something no one knows. The world is beautiful through the demons' eyes, and Spike is glad his boy can see it. Wants to show him the *night* - wants to show him everything, and Xander leans against him and just holds him, staring around and around.

"You're so beautiful," he says, touching Spike's hand - his cheek. Leaning up to kiss him and he makes a small squeak of surprise.

"What is that? What do you - why does your mouth -"

"It's blood, pet. That's what blood tastes like." Xander just stares at him, open-mouthed, and then he's kissing Spike again and again, pushing in with his tongue as deep as he can, gathering every trace of blood. Spike had hunted - drunk his fill and then some in the hours before Xander came back, and now he falls back on the bed, cradling Xander close, letting his head tip aside so that Xander can reach his neck and he sighs in bliss as Xander sinks his fangs in and drinks. His first blood and it's *Spike's* blood, swirled like marble with the bitter-sweet tang that is Dru and the lemon-bite of Darla - the richness of Angelus' more earthy taint. All that he is, informing and encoding into Xander. Telling him '*this and no other*', and Xander is shaking in his arms - is crying, and his body is doing a slow, twisting dance down on Spike's, wanting more, wanting *him* - wanting that which made him to undo him and make him again. And Spike does, as slow and as sweet as he can, making this *other* first something to always remember.

"Why am I here?" Xander whispers, shuddering above him, and Spike pulls him down, to whisper the words into his mouth between kisses cool and salt-sweet as the sea.

"Because you're a White Knight and you needed to find

the Grail. Because you are so beautiful that I couldn't leave you behind. Because I need you, need you forever." Xander holds Spike's face in his hands, his fingers cupping the curve of his skull, his thumbs gentle and caressing over his cheekbones.

"Because you were bored," Xander says, and there's laughter in his voice and Spike hugs him tight.

"Because I was bored."

"Love you. Oh, still love you," Xander sighs, and Spike kisses him fiercely, never wanting to let him go.

"What was that for, then?"

"Because you're pretty. Because you want me...want *me*... Want me, Spike - want me more than anything else. Want me *forever*."

"Already do," Spike tells him, and the salt on his tongue is tears, not blood.

~\*~\*~\*~\*~

They're standing outside of some building in Cleveland - some modern office building, and it's ugly. But it's made of glass and Spike can see himself reflected in it - can see the blue fire of his bones and the quartz and smoke of his skin. Can see the *wings*, stretching up and back and out; ragged as a crow's, wide as the sky. His vampire body - his tangible body - is bloody and battered and bruised, but it doesn't matter. They won. Xander comes up behind him, and stares, and for the first time *he* can see what Spike sees. Magic in the blood, and Dru's glamour holding true, is all Spike can think.

"Look," Xander says, staring at himself in the darkened glass - staring and smiling and Spike looks at him.

"What, pet? What is it?"

"You're not a demon, Spike. I'm not. *Look* at us. Angels."

Spike has to laugh. "If we're angels, pet, we're Lucifer's crew, not Michael's."

"You're nobody's 'crew'. You're the Devil himself," Xander whispers, and his hands slide around Spike's waist, stroking up under the tattered remains of his shirt.

"Lucifer, the Dragon of Dawn," Spike murmurs, and Xander slowly kisses his jaw and throat - turns his head so he can kiss his lips.

"Who are you then, pet?" Spike asks, long moments later when Xander lets him go, and Xander shrugs a little and tugs at his hand, drawing him away down the sidewalk, back towards the DeSoto.

"Yours, Spike. That's all." Spike pulls him close, breathing his scent of apple and salt and blood and musk.

"Anubis. He who guides the dead," Spike says, and Xander just laughs. His Gryffindor scarf is tattered now, but he still wears it - still rescues the humans and he's right; now that he's let the beast back in, they haven't lost a single one.

~\*~\*~\*~\*~

Sunnydale is the same as it ever was, and they spend a night prowling its streets - seeing what there is to see. The second night they get into a brawl at Willy's and the third night they come face to face with the Slayer. Only

it's the dark one, not the blonde, and they stand there and stare at each other for long moments before any of them speak.

"So, Xander. Guess you got caught," Faith says, and she's looking at him with a cold and calculating eye.

"Something like that," Xander says, and Spike grins at her. He *remembers* her, and he likes her, but he won't let her touch his boy.

"Where's Buffy?" Xander says, and Faith tilts her head a little, thinking.

"We switch off. Sometimes she's here, sometimes she goes walkabout. When she gets tired of it, she comes home, and then it's my turn to take this show on the road. You looking for her?"

"Not especially," Xander says. "I just wanted to see - what it was like, still. After all this time."

"Hellmouth," Faith says, easy on the balls of her feet, and Xander grins.

"Yeah - we were just at the one in Cleveland. Took out

these guys - all big heads and tentacles? It was wild."

"That was you?" Faith says, and there's an edge of disbelief in her voice that makes Spike growl a little.

"That was us. Xander's still a white knight - always has been. You think him being turned means he's on the other side now?"

"That's usually exactly what it means, unless you got somebody to stick his soul back in him." Spike just snorts, lighting a cigarette and smoking, watching. Gauging the distance and the way he'll move, because he doesn't think this Slayer's gonna let them go without a fight.

"I dunno about souls," Xander says, shrugging a little. "I don't know if mine even left. But I'm still fighting. You can tell them, if you want. Tell Buffy. We might come back sometime." Faith just watches, and then her carmined lips turn up in the sly and sexy smile, and she rests easy on her heels, one hip cocked.

"Willow said - you'd never turn evil. Guess she was right. I'll tell her. Where are you going next?" Spike pulls Xander over close to him, arm around his waist, and there's a flicker in Faith's eyes.

"Heard there were these lawyers down in L.A., givin' Angel a hard time. Though we'd stop in, see if there was any fun to be had." Xander leans into him and presses a casual kiss to his jaw and Faith's eyebrows arch over her eyes, dark and elegant and narrow, just as she is - sardonic, just as she is.

"So that's how it is," Faith says, and she nods - looks over her shoulder at a soft noise and grins, feral and gleeful as any cat. "I've got work to do, boys," she says, turning and walking briskly away. "I'll see you around... Hey!"

"Yeah?" Xander says, turning back, and Spike turns too, tense.

"Why are you - helping? Why - any of this?" Xander looks at her - then at Spike - and he laughs.

"'Cause Spike was bored," Xander says, "and I think he's pretty." Faith just watches them as they turn and walk away, and the Hellmouth's sour buzz is nothing to the feeling of Xander's hand in his, for all the nights to come.

**The End**