

First Spander post

Go ahead and be brutally honest in criticism. Plus, the more specific you are the more I can do about it.

Cursed

by

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Prologue

Xander slunk into his empty apartment feeling the worse from too much drink and too little sleep. It had been more than a week since the wedding debacle and there was still no sign of Anya and he'd run out of places to look. If he could just see her, know she was all right, explain. Then he looked up to find that his empty apartment wasn't so empty after all. There was Anya in full living color right in front of him. So he let loose with the speech he'd practiced in the mirror at least fifty times. It wasn't as big of a success as he might have hoped.

“Do you still want to get married?” Anya's question silenced him and he watched her face fall.

“Ahn, it’s a very complicated question.” Even as he said it he realized it was useless. That line never worked.

“No, actually, it's really not, it's kind of an either or deal. Do you want to get married?” Tears were making their way down her face and her voice was quiet and choked.

Now he was really lost. This was so far off his practiced speech it wasn’t even on the same continent. What did she think he could say? ‘Let's trip on down to the chapel of love right now. I put us both through this unbelievable hell as a big April Fool’s joke.’ Didn’t she realize he could never hurt her that much without it ripping his guts out? They weren't ready, couldn't she see that?

His silence apparently was answer enough. He'd never seen her look quite so broken as she turned away.

“I’m sorry Anya. I wish things were different.”

At which point Anya turned around and Xander took in her new, veiny appearance and had a second to realize just how big a mistake he’d just made. “Done.”

Xander’s last thought before the world slid away was that even demon faced, she was still beautiful.

Part One

He was aware of several things simultaneously. He was naked except for a thick chain collar, kneeling on a cold, cement floor with his head in the lap of someone, someone with a manly bulge prodding his cheek. And above him he heard the voice of the man whose lap he was half in.

“...I mean we’re like bloody ranchers here,” Spike said.

What he intended to do was to shove away shouting, "Hands off, Fangless!" What actually came out was more, "Hands oof," as he was pushed back down with a hand on the back of his neck. And it hurt. He could practically feel the finger shaped bruises forming on his throat. Shit. His mind really couldn't proceed much past that single word. He was at the mercy of an unchipped Spike. Xander had a very clear idea, in that moment, of how a mouse feels in the claws of an owl. He was afraid that if he tried to make a sound he'd squeak like one too.

A quick review of recent events led him to the inescapable conclusion that Anya had cursed him. Why couldn't she have just turned his insides into writhing snakes like a normal vengeance demon?

"What's the matter with your pet, Spike?" Spike's companion asked, his tenor voice sounding only mildly interested.

"Don't know." He sounded ticked off and the grip

tightened fractionally. Xander struggled not to whimper. “He just suddenly went over all skittish.” Xander couldn’t see him but he could feel Spike tense and then relax. “Probably nothing.”

Spike’s companion resumed the conversation as if there had been no interruption. “Personally, I enjoy the easy life, you’d think defending your territory would keep you from missing the hunt so much.”

“It’s unnatural I tell you,” Spike released Xander’s neck and began running his hand down his back in long, languorous strokes that could only be termed petting. Xander remained stiff but he didn’t move, afraid that movement would bring that punishing hand back to his neck. He’d seen Spike snap the necks of creatures twice his size with one smooth twist. It was all too easy to imagine what those hands, gentle as they were at the moment, could do to his own vulnerable flesh.

His perception of his surroundings was limited by his position. Soft, worn denim brushed against his chest and cheek as Spike stroked him. The scent of

stale beer and old blood hung in the air along with the sounds of grunts and growls punctuating the quiet murmur of conversation. The scarred, metal table blocked his view of Spike's drinking buddy and he couldn't catch much of Spike out of the corner of his eye but he had a decent view of the room. Very definitely a demon bar. The few humans scattered through the place were naked except for collars as well, some were serving as footstools, one was... he very much did not want to see or even know about that one. At least he wasn't contorted into what looked like agonizing positions like a number of the others were, or subject to the attentions of two or even three demons. Embarrassment at being naked was entirely swallowed by how exposed and vulnerable it made him feel. He was in a room full of demons with no weapons or defenses. He'd gladly swallow the humiliation if Buffy would just walk in right now.

“Besides, the wankers around here aren't as much challenge as a good, old fashioned mob,” Xander was pressed so close against Spike he could feel his voice reverberating against his skin. It added a

disconcerting tingle to the whole stark terror of the situation.

“Thank hell for the arena or you probably would have burned this city down by now just to relieve your boredom,” the other man’s voice sounded exasperated. “Although you have to admit there are other things to hold your interest, like your pet there, how long have you had him?”

Spike ran the back of his hand down the side of Xander’s face. “Magnificent innt he? Four years, found him a few months after the Hellmouth opened.”

At mention of the Hellmouth, Xander’s mind was flooded with alien memories. Images of hiding out while vampires and other demons prowled the streets. Hunger and thirst so bad they were like living animals clawing at his throat and stomach. These things hadn’t happened to him but they were suddenly as solid in his brain as any other memory he possessed.

“I’d brought Dru there, hopin’ to cure her, but she turned to dust in my arms,” Xander couldn't help but hear the pain in Spike’s voice when he said this. “So I stayed out all night, contemplated watching the sun rise.”

Xander remembered braving the grocery store in the hour before dawn. It was the time when demon activity was at its lowest ebb. He thought he might be able to sneak into the abandoned store and steal enough food and water to keep him going just a little longer. Hopelessness and desperate loneliness was fast becoming a way of life and he wasn’t sure if he even cared about going on any more.

“Don’t know why I was in the soddin’ grocery store, maybe all the windows appealed at that point, but I heard a noise and found Xander here in the canned goods.”

He remembered looking up and seeing death finally come for him. Oddly enough, looking just as miserable as he felt. He gave running little more than a fleeting thought. Really what was the point?

So he stood up and staggered forward.

“He was a wretched little thing then, half starved. Don’t know how he’d avoided the patrols til then. But he wasn’t scared of me at all. He walked right up to me and laid his head on my shoulder.”

He remembered draping himself on the vampire’s shoulder, offering up his neck. Maybe if he didn’t struggle it wouldn’t hurt so much. He was surprised at how good surrender felt. Then the lightheadedness from hunger and fear took over and he passed out.

“Never had a pet before and here was this delicious stray throwing himself at my feet. So I took him in the back, fed him up some and claimed him,” there was a note of pride in Spike’s voice now. “Haven’t regretted it once. He’s amazingly responsive. And he’s got a fantastically talented tongue.”

That was so much more that Xander ever wanted to know.

“So, when are you going to let me have a taste of him?” The other voice held more interest now, Xander noted with growing unease.

“Told you before, Tony.” Spike spoke as if repeating an old argument. “I don’t share ‘im.”

Spike was bad enough but he was a known, quantifiable evil, who knew what kind of scaly paws the other might want to put in unmentionable places. Xander felt a rush of gratitude that he wasn't to be handed over to anyone who took a fancy to him, it was laced with self disgust but it was gratitude nonetheless. Even that evaporated when Spike’s hand slipped from his back to parts of himself Spike should never touch so familiarly.

“Hey,” he got that much out and was scrambling to his feet again when Spike’s fingers were around his throat. It was just one hand, the thumb on his spine and the tips of the fingers just barely spanning his Adam’s apple. Spike was exerting just enough pressure to remind Xander how little effort it would take for the vamp to crush his throat. He stilled

instantly, choking back any other words. He fought down the twin urges to vomit and scramble away; he was in no position to get away at the moment. He simply had to play along until an opportune moment and hope like hell said moment made an appearance before he had to “perform.”

“Bloody hell!” Spike exclaimed, “That does it, I’m taking 'im home, sort him out there. Something in here is setting him off tonight.”

He released his grip and Xander darted his eyes up to Spike's face. That was the beginning of a towering rage if he was any judge.

Spike clipped a leash to his collar then turned and said goodbye to his drinking buddy, a demon sufficiently hideous that Xander felt a fresh wave of relief that he would not be forced to “entertain” him.

Tony smiled and saluted Spike with his glass. Spike didn’t say a word to Xander, but he kept the leash short. Due to their height difference Xander had the

choice of craning his neck forward or nearly walking on Spike's heels. Neither was comfortable but he judged that the latter was less likely to piss Spike off further so he opted for it.

They exited into a quiet, tree lined street. There was an old, established feel to the place that convinced him he wasn't in Sunnydale anymore. That and the crisp, cool feel of the air on his naked skin.

Definitely colder than a Sunnydale Spring evening. What really arrested his attention though was the population that roamed the sidewalks. Vampires were the most prevalent but there were assorted other demons that would never be able to blend into a human crowd. The few humans were easily identifiable by the fact that they were all naked, except for their collars. Xander was used to spotting weirdness while those around him were oblivious, here normal seemed to have left the building. A few of the non-humans exchanged greetings with Spike. Xander thought there was a note of deference towards Spike in these exchanges. Once they noted Spike's mood they quietly faded back. Xander had to struggle a little to keep up with the brisk pace

Spike set. He noticed the ivy covered brick wall in passing but couldn't really take the place in before they suddenly stopped at the iron front gate where Spike fussed with his keys.

Beyond the gate was a brick mansion with a slate roof. A small garden flanked the path on either side of the ornate front door. Moments later the gate and front door were resecured behind them and Xander found himself in a living room with dark paneling and a grand staircase to one side. He noted these things in passing but his attention was all on Spike's hand as it went to his collar and unclipped his leash.

“Go on upstairs, I’m nippin’ over to check on the larder,” Spike growled while slipping off his coat and throwing it over a convenient chair, “When I get upstairs you’d best have an explanation for your little performance, and it better be good.” Then he stomped out of the room.

Xander walked up the first couple of steps mechanically until Spike was out of sight. The smart

thing to do would be to play along til daylight, or even better, after Spike fell asleep and then slip out. Even as these thoughts went through his mind he had reversed course and was running out the door, pinballing off the doorframe in his haste. He had a glaringly vivid idea of what Spike would want to do when he came up to meet Xander in the upstairs bedroom and there was no way he would be there for that. He scrambled over the wall, not even feeling the scrapes and cuts he picked up in the process. And then he ran as if something particularly vicious was after him. He could tell he was attracting attention as he pelted up the street and he knew he had to get out of sight. He ducked into an alleyway after a few rapid changes of direction when he was pretty sure no one was looking his way. The irony of hiding from the monsters in a dark alley was not lost on him. A pile of boxes gave him enough cover if he squatted down. He watched the traffic on the street begin to thin as he got his breathing under control. He scanned the alley for something useful. He'd seen dozens of shows where the hero found himself alone behind enemy lines, at this point there should

be a handy clothesline with appropriate clothing waiting to be stolen. As things stood the buildings around him were empty of clotheslines and clothes.

He was keenly aware of the need to get moving again. He was still too close to Spike's house. It was at this juncture that he realized he didn't have even the beginnings of a plan.

There must be some kind of human resistance but he had no idea how to find them. The first order of business had to be getting out of the city, then he could find himself somewhere to lay low until he figured things out. He peeked out again. The sky was growing visibly lighter and he saw other humans, solitary humans, walking around. Which meant blending in looked like a true option. He wished he had a clipboard for true invisibility.

The idea of willingly stepping back out on the street without a stitch on gave him cold sweats. What was inescapable however, was that any attempt to cover up would immediately draw more attention than he could afford.

humans weren't allowed to wander about unescorted unless they had papers or a different collar from the one Xander sported. They had gotten very excited when they had seen his collar and started babbling in a language he didn't understand, except for one word, Spike. One ran to the phone while the other locked him up. So now he sat waiting for Spike, who would be one very pissed off vampire, to come pick him up.

Their set up turned out to be the city pound. The kennels were more secure but the overall feeling was the same, as was the hopeless and resigned looks in the eyes of the occupants. He doubted he looked much better, he felt filthy, grimy and a bit scraped up from his fruitless struggles against his captors. His overlong hair was plastered to his back with sweat, dirt and, quite probably, blood. Looked like it hadn't been cut in years, and what was up with that? After walking the cell, looking for weaknesses and finding none, he huddled against the wall contemplating escape or rescue and another memory flash hit him. Buffy lying blue and cold in the Master's lair staring up at him

sightlessly; the Hellmouth beast breaking free of the high school to rampage; Giles lying in a pool of blood in the library; one lime green sneaker resting in a pool of blood and gore. He was almost glad he didn't have to see Willow's body as well, the abandoned sneaker told him all he needed to know.

Part Two

The memories, so real, fresh and inescapable, were a body blow he was unprepared for and he curled over his drawn up knees, breathing in ragged gasps. He spent what felt like hours just trying to keep from screaming, then he felt a hand rest lightly on his shoulder and heard a soft voice beside him whisper, "Xander."

At the touch Xander glanced up and released his knees to launch himself into Anya's arms, overjoyed to see her beloved face in this dark, desolate place. "Ahn!" he was so happy to see someone he loved alive he hugged her close, assuring himself of her

reality.

She patted him in an awkwardly soothing way while he got himself under control. When his grip lessened marginally she pushed him away slightly. "Xander, we have to talk."

She was using her all business tone and it sent a chill up Xander's spine, reminded him that she was the reason he was here in the first place. He pulled away and leaned back against the wall staring at the ceiling. There was no hope of either comfort or rescue in her presence. Really, there was only one reason she could possibly be here right now. "Come to gloat have you Anya?" he asked, trying to put a nasty edge in his voice to cover for the way he'd practically been sobbing on her.

She turned away from him, hugging herself. "I really should be. If I was in really proper form that would be exactly why I was here." She turned back to him, arms dropping to her sides, eyes blazing with indignation. "You hurt me, Xander. You hurt me very badly."

“So, I leave you at the altar and you get your vengeance back on,” he spat out, leveling his eyes on her again, hoping righteous indignation would cover for his earlier weakness.

“You didn’t just leave me,” she said in crisp, precise tones, “you abandoned me. Humiliated me in front of my friends, disgraced me in front of your family. Do you have any idea the things your parents said to me? The things your mother accused me of? Your father insisted that the whole thing had to be my fault, loudly, and he wasn’t paying for a wedding that wasn’t going to happen and they left. But someone had to pay all those bills, Xander, and someone had to tell all our guests there wasn’t going to be a wedding. You abandoned me to face all of that alone while you wandered off ...” Her voice broke and she began sobbing.

He could all too easily imagine his parents ripping into her at her most vulnerable moment. Add to that losing her hard earned money, the only security she had left. In some ways, particularly

emotionally, Anya was still a little like a child. She'd always relied on him to explain things that she found incomprehensible. His anger melted thinking of how scared and confused his abandonment must have left her. He really couldn't bear to see her cry like this and so he only hesitated a few moments before he folded her into his arms, her head resting on his shoulder.

"I'm so sorry I hurt you, Ahn, but do you really think sending the whole world into hell was the answer?" He used the quiet, reasonable tone he'd mastered when dealing with Anya's less than human responses.

"It wasn't supposed to be like this," she said, wiping the last tears from her eyes. "We don't always know what the results are going to be, we just set a few parameters. Usually they come from the person making the wish but yours was so wide open I just sort of nudged it." She'd worn the same expression when she backed the car into a light pole, knowing she'd done something wrong and daring him to call her on it. "I didn't think it was even that bad. I had

so many ideas and they were all conflicting, part of me wanted to never have met you and part of me wanted to make you marry me and another part wanted you to suffer, and another part..."

"Ahn," he gripped her hand to stop her as she ramped up to full on babble mode. "What did you do?"

"I made it so you were never a hero," she said in a small voice.

Xander stared at her like he'd been poleaxed.

"Anya, I've never been a hero. I'm just the guy who gets the snacks and fixes broken stuff."

She glared at his flummoxed expression, pulling away from him and putting her hands on her hips. "Well, obviously, you were more important than you thought because that's why the world's like this. Think about it Xander, what got broken that you didn't fix here?"

Xander blinked. Buffy, he hadn't saved Buffy and

the Master opened the Hellmouth. His brain pretty much froze at that thought, he didn't even realize he'd given voice to the thought until Anya blurted, "Exactly. It's really not fair; the other part was for you to be at the mercy of someone you humiliated. I was thinking of Cordelia or, here's a wild idea, ME. But because you didn't do that one little thing, the only real candidate was Spike."

She seemed genuinely incensed at his lack of consideration. Under other circumstances he might have found it cute. "OK, so you're not happy, I'm not happy, it's time for the big do over, right?"

Anya suddenly became very solemn. "That's why I'm here." She lifted the chain for her pendant over her head and placed it in the palm of his hand. "You have to smash it," she explained while fighting back tears. "Then everything will go back to normal. You won't even remember it."

Xander grinned broadly as hope surged inside him, gripping the pendant in his fist he asked with confidence, "Then you'll be human again?"

Anya shook her head and looked down. "No."

The grin died as a new fear rose in him. He gripped her shoulders. "D'Hoffryn won't kill you, will he?"

She swiped at her nose, "Oh no. He won't let me off that easily. He'll want to make an example of me."

He lifted her chin, trying to get her to meet his eyes. "What will he do?"

"Please, Xander," She looked up at him with large, tear filled eyes. "I'm going to spend centuries being tormented, do I have to think about it now?"

"Whoa," he gripped her shoulders more tightly, "what's with the torture? Can't you just end this? Like Halfrek ended the trapped in the house spell?"

"It doesn't work that way, Xander. That was localized, a minor curse. Halfrek never was in the big leagues." Even in her misery a momentary smug look passed over her face. "This is an alternate

reality, the only way out is to destroy my power center."

Xander stepped back and leaned against the wall, staring at the pendant resting in his hand. "I don't understand, why would you be willing to go through torment to break the curse?"

"Because nothing is turning out the way its supposed to," she practically wailed. "This is some of my best work, I'm up for a commendation for it! But I see you, scared, miserable, and I hate it. I think I'd rather be tortured than watch you be hurt and know it's because of me. It hurts, and it's not fair at all because once you smash it you won't even know you should feel guilty because of my noble sacrifice."

It was such a typical complaint he couldn't help but smile. He slipped the chain back over her head.

"We'll think of another way."

"I told you, there is no other way." She was looking at him as if he was saying something intensely

stupid. Maybe he was but he didn't care.

“Can you change the curse?” he asked, saying whatever came into his head, anything to avert the hideous picture Anya alluded to. “Give me a nice case of boils or something and we call it a day?”

Anya stepped back a couple paces in shock. “I don't have that kind of authority, only D'Hoffryn can do that. But Xander, you'd still be cursed.”

He closed the small distance between them again and slid his hands up and down her arms in an attempt at reassurance. “Listen, there is almost nothing worse than being Spike's boytoy but on that very short list is having Willow, Buffy, Giles ... almost everyone I care about dead because of me. Only slightly higher on the scale of never gonna happen is you going through centuries of torment because I was an idiot. With those as my choices I say bring on the boils.”

“I'll speak to D'Hoffryn. But it'll take time, maybe a month or longer,” she said desperately upset. “He

of the compound and into the street. Spike ignored the entreaties of the facility's other occupants but Xander was struck speechless as some begged to become a part of his larder, touting the quality of their blood. Just what awaited them that being dinner was a superior alternative? Once outside, Xander made an attempt at speech, explanation, apology or protest he really wasn't sure; but a quelling look from Spike kept him silent.

The neighborhood they were walking through was pleasant, if you discounted the fact that the majority of their fellow pedestrians were demons, lined with well maintained hedges, ivy covered walls and even a white picket fence or two. Too bad strolling through wasn't Spike's agenda. He cast baleful glares at anyone brave enough to greet him and kept going.

It had been almost three years since Xander'd been afraid of Spike. Funny how fast it came back to you. This Spike carried an air of implacable menace about him, reminding Xander that his first inclination during his initial meeting with the

vampire had been to run. He had seen Spike in this kind of mood before. During the summer Buffy was gone it meant a night of ripping demons to pieces. This was not a reassuring thought.

The minute they were inside the house Xander was thrown into the nearest wall.

“What in the hell did you think you were doing!?” Spike growled.

Xander started to reply but it was apparently a rhetorical question as Spike gripped his hair and thumped the back of his head against the same wall he'd just rebounded from hard enough that his vision blurred. Spike's game face was a bare inch from his own. “Might as well ring the dinner bell for the wankers! You're damned lucky it was Bradley and Sam what caught you. Would have taken me hours to track you down if one of the scavengers nabbed you.”

Xander was shocked to hear what sounded like concern in Spike's snarl. He didn't have long to

consider this possibility though as he was slammed down to the marble floor of the foyer. He glared up at Spike from his prone position. It was clear the vampire was in no mood to listen. Xander had no intention of being beaten to death without ever striking a blow in his own defense. He climbed to his feet and threw a punch at Spike's face, with predictable results. He was slammed back to the floor with bone crunching force. The fact that he had fought back seemed to enrage Spike. Groggily, Xander watched as Spike grabbed a leather strap from a peg by the door. He barely had time to curl into a ball, trying to protect his face and groin, before the first frenzy of blows fell. The strap cut into the backs of his legs, his backside, his shoulders in a completely random fashion. He could feel the blood oozing from the fresh stripes as he cried out at each lash. He had never experienced such a beating in his life. It seemed to go on for hours.

Eventually, he was unable to maintain his tightly curled position and flopped onto his back in sheer exhaustion. The cool marble of the floor soothed his burning back even as it made the cuts sting

unbearably. All fight gone out of him, he barely had enough strength to whimper. He was certain Spike was going to kill him and it was beginning to sound like an appealing idea. At least the pain would stop.

A hand on the back of his neck made him wince but he offered no resistance as he was pushed upright, his head supported on Spike's shoulder. He felt something wet at his mouth and flinched away.

“Drink it,” Spike demanded, so Xander swallowed when something that tasted like old pennies trickled into his mouth. Gradually it dawned on him that he was drinking from Spike's wrist. He opened his eyes and saw Spike, back in human face, watching him drink with irritation. “What has gotten into you, Pet?”

The flow of blood from the wounded wrist slowed and stopped. Xander licked his lips, catching the last traces as it was taken away. The pain was dulling into background noise and he was having trouble keeping his eyes open. It felt like he hadn't slept in

days and unconsciousness promised relief for his battered body, so he closed his eyes and drifted off.

Part Three

He awoke slowly to find himself in bed, alone. The pleasant fantasy that the previous day had been an anchovy-pizza induced nightmare was quickly dispelled by the unfamiliarity of his surroundings. The enormous bed he found himself in certainly wasn't his. Lying still while he gathered his thoughts he quickly reviewed his last impressions and promptly sat up in a cold sweat. Vampire blood, he'd drunk vampire blood! His tongue pressed on his teeth searching for fangs while one hand flew to his neck searching for a pulse. His questing fingers felt a racing beat and he slumped a little in relief.

"What in the hell do you think you're doing?" asked a high pitched (screeching might not be exaggerating) feminine voice from the other side of the room.

"Gah!" Xander nearly screamed, flattening himself against the headboard. He spotted a dark haired, angry looking girl sitting in an armchair near the bed. "I'm lying here, you have a problem with that?" His nerves felt like they'd gone three rounds with a cheese grater, making him snappish. "How's about a little sympathy for the vampire's punching bag?"

The girl marched over and gripped his leg, rolling him half over and eyeing him clinically. "Looks like he was a bit rough with you, but you'll be fine. He gave you blood," she sounded disdainful as if she didn't think he deserved sympathy.

It was then that the realization hit. He didn't hurt. He'd been thrashed within an inch of his life last night, he should be one big bruise, crisscrossed with cuts. A quick look down his body revealed a few old looking bruises and not much else. The girl, like some Twilight Zone rolodex the not-his memories provided her name, Mary, seemed to think the blood he'd drunk had some sort of healing properties. He would have curled up and quietly wiggled at that but Mary had things on her mind and

didn't seem inclined to leave him to have a nervous breakdown in peace.

"We count on you to keep Master calm. That was not a calm vampire in the larder," she declared in a scathing tone.

"Well gee, sorry to disappoint," Xander's tone dripped venom as he swung his legs over the side of the bed. For the first time he noticed a clink as he moved and a drag on his right ankle. A quick glance revealed his new accessory, a manacle with a chain attaching him to the heavy iron bedframe. "Oh that's just great!" he exclaimed, shaking his manacled foot, making the links jingle. "Apparently, I'm a flight risk."

"Well, what did you expect, running off like an idiot?" There was not the smallest trace of compassion in her face or voice. "It's your own fault! Do you have a clue how badly you pissed him off?"

"Pissed him off ...!" he spluttered.

“Yeah, pissed him off!” she snarled practically in his face, hands balled into fists at her sides. “And we don’t appreciate it one bit! He doesn’t take his bad mood out on you, you know. He takes it out on us!”

Xander edged back from her furious face as he tried to process that. “What do you ...”

Mary seemed unwilling to allow him to complete a sentence. She straightened so that she was looking down on him and in a flat voice said, “He killed three of us.”

That stopped him. He blinked at her for a minute, attempting to get his mouth in gear.

“Rafael had it coming, he’s been a trouble maker ever since Master won him. Figured he’d be the sacrificial goat if Master needed to bleed off some frustration. But Peter just came over to start cleaning up the mess and Master threw him against the wall. Rachel tried to intervene and he snapped her neck just like that.” She snapped her fingers.

“Peter was moaning and Master finished him off. They were a breeding pair, Xander, Master must have been so mad he couldn’t see straight. I’ve never seen him like that.”

“My God,” Xander felt like all the breath had been squeezed from his body. “Where is he now?”

“Well none of us were going to ask where he was going with him in that state, now were we? We just stood perfectly still until he left,” she growled.

“With any luck he’s gone to the arena and he’ll work it off there. Just pray he’s not so upset he gets himself dusted.”

OK, that had his head spinning. She didn't sound like someone who had seen something unspeakably awful, more like someone talking to a teenager who'd just wrapped the family car around a telephone pole. Actually, she sounded a lot like his mother after his dad had been on a three day bender. “Are you kidding me? The only reason I wouldn’t want him dead is so I could dismember him slowly. But I’ll content myself with stomping on

his dust.”

“Philip has been shooting his mouth off again, hasn’t he?” Her dark brows crashed down in disapproval. “He likes to brag about how cushy he’s got it, but I’m telling you everyone’s household is the same. People like to pretend they have it better but it’s all window dressing. We actually have it better than most. At least if Master kills you he does it quick. I’ve heard some of them like to take their time.”

“Wait, after what you just told me, you can’t honestly tell me you don’t want him gone,” he said incredulously.

“Of course I don’t! My God, you have gone insane! Xander, you know what happens to a masterless household.” She stepped back as if she thought he might be dangerously deranged.

“We get out of here, that’s what!” he insisted. “We could escape, hide somewhere ...”

“And do what? Live on the streets like strays until we get picked up and sold for parts? At least if we stayed put we might get auctioned off to another master, and they might even be semi-decent.” She seemed to have decided he wasn’t dangerous because she closed the distance again and gripped his arm, “I don’t know who’s been filling your head with idiotic notions but we have it good here as long as everyone does their part. Any of the larder would give their right arm to be where you are. You’re the one he loves, Xander. It's no wonder he was furious.”

Xander felt like testing his hearing for that one. He'd seen Spike in love, crying into his beer over Dru, mooning after Buffy. Of course, it was all relative. To Mary the very fact that Spike hadn't killed him for his transgressions might be sufficient evidence that he was somehow beloved. Xander really didn't want to bet either life or limb on that shaky proposition. He really didn't see much point in disabusing her of this crazy notion. She probably wouldn't believe him anyway.

Mary seemed to have run out of venom. She shook her head as she moved to the door. "I don't know what's happened to you but get it under control or there's going to be some serious hell to pay." And with that she left.

He lay back down and stared at the ceiling, dumbfounded by that little exchange. He considered his options. He didn't have very many. The chain attaching him to the bedframe pretty much eliminated running again. Fighting wasn't going to get him anywhere except in a world of pain. Not only would it be useless but it put other people's lives at risk. The natives weren't revolting and he had evidently been cast in the role of vampire pacifier. Which meant his options were reduced to doing whatever Spike said like a good little slave. The idea galled him.

Thinking about all this was going to drive him crazy in short order. To divert himself he took a few minutes to really take in the room. It didn't look like anything he would expect from Spike. The décor was all muted earth tones, with deep brick red

accents. The wing backed armchairs and ornate lamps made him think that Spike might be getting back in touch with his Victorian roots. He climbed out of bed and realized that the deep pile of the carpet made it almost as comfortable as the bed. He was pleasantly surprised to discover that the chain attaching him to the bed reached into the bathroom across the room with maneuvering room to spare.

The bathroom was as lavish as the bedroom. There was a shower that could accommodate four people easily, equipped to shoot water at the occupants from every conceivable angle, and a whirlpool tub you could do laps in. It was very much the sort of layout he might enjoy in other circumstances. He turned the cold water tap on the sink and drank from his cupped hands. Movement caught his eye and he caught his reflection in the small mirror above the sink. It took him a minute to recognize the image as his. His hair fell, wild and unkempt, halfway down his back. He ran a hand over his chin where he was sporting a good day's growth. His counterpart obviously kept vampire hours because

his complexion was milky white rather than the dark tan he'd been sporting since he started construction work. While he was taking inventory he noticed his hands. He was used to his own hands being a little rough from working with wood, tools and weapons. These were soft, as if they'd never done manual labor.

The most striking thing though was the collar. It was a thick, silver chain, thicker than anything he would have ever worn. Close examination revealed an alternating pattern of S's with spikes run through them and stylized X's. The chain fell to the top of his collarbone and was welded shut. This was a piece of jewelry never meant to come off. On the right side, half obscured by the collar was a silvery scar that was all too familiar. Buffy bore a mark like that just a little higher up. He wondered if Spike had bitten him or if it had happened earlier. He ran a fingertip under the collar to feel the scar and it sent a warm tingle through him. A memory flash hit him full force with the contact. He felt the agony of Spike's fangs sinking into him, but the agony morphed into an electric current of pleasure with the first

swallow. Warm tingles radiated out from the bite, picking up in intensity until it became nearly painful, exquisite torment. The feel of Spike's mouth draining his life away made him feel connected, needed.

He returned to the present to find himself on the floor and was rather unsurprised to find he now had a raging hard on. Was that what being drained was like? Buffy had never mentioned anything about that. But then she wouldn't, not to him at any rate. Finding out that being bitten by Spike was an experience that rivaled the best sex he'd ever had was something he wanted to repress quickly.

Getting cleaned up promised an opportunity to lose himself in mindless routine for a few minutes at least and the most cursory of searches revealed all the toiletries he would need for the job. A long, hot shower turned out to do wonders for improving his general sense of well being. Coupled with a shave and brushing his teeth he felt almost civilized. He pointedly ignored items that were not part of his normal routine although he was certain they were

part of the other Xander's. The hair dripping down his back was annoying. He was used to doing a quick rub with a towel and being done with it. He was just starting a search for a hair dryer when he heard the door in the bedroom slam shut.

He was fairly certain who was out there but he poked his head around the doorframe anyway. Spike was all of two feet away from him and surveying him like a prime piece of meat. In the fight between his hatred of Spike and his terror of him the beating had flipped the switch firmly to terrified. He slipped back into the bathroom and pressed himself against the far wall.

Spike stood in the doorway and scowled at Xander. His usual outfit pared down to skin tight black t-shirt, jeans and boots he seemed somehow even more menacing. "C'mere, Pet." His tone suggested very unpleasant things could result if he was disobeyed.

Xander had to force himself to move away from the wall and in reach of those killing hands. When he

moved forward Spike turned away and went to drop into the armchair Mary had so recently vacated. He followed him to the chair and was greeted by Spike's raised eyebrow and his finger pointing to the floor by his knee. Taking a guess Xander dropped to his knees. Spike settled back in his chair and seemed satisfied with this response.

Silence reigned for a few minutes until Xander couldn't take it anymore and did what came naturally when he was scared and nervous, he babbled. "You know, I don't think the ankle bracelet is really a good look for me, not the manly image I want to project, so if we could just dispense with ..."

Shaking his head the vampire took him to task. "What's gotten into you? You weren't this disobedient when I first claimed you. Care to offer an explanation?"

Xander was intensely cognizant of the fact that he was going to keep making stupid mistakes since he didn't know the rules here, he couldn't successfully imitate the Xander of this reality. Even worse, a

mistake he made in ignorance could have consequences for more than just himself. The truth was a big risk but it might get him somewhere. There was always the risk Spike would think he was insane, but then, Spike had always had a soft spot for the insane.

“Because I’m not exactly your Xander,” he blurted.

He never even saw Spike move but he felt the stinging burn his hand had left on his cheek. “Don’t ever deny my claim, boy!”

“I’m not!” he cried out, raising a hand to his aching cheek. “I’m just not the same Xander you had yesterday. Look, do you know what a vengeance demon is?”

"Of course I know what a ..." Spike trailed off and eyed him speculatively. "You saying you've been cursed?"

"Oh, yeah," Xander responded feelingly. "Big time."

Spike leaned back in his chair and made an encouraging gesture.

Xander could scarcely believe Spike's willingness to listen while he explained about Anya and the wedding that wasn't and his subsequent cursing. Occasionally Spike interjected his own commentary. He appreciated the stones it took to take up with a vengeance demon, even an ex one and the stupidity it took to stand one up at the altar. Having little room to argue Xander accepted the truth of this.

Story finished Xander stayed on his knees next to Spike, feeling every inch a supplicant. "So you see I'm not really supposed to be here at all. I'm sure I make a lousy pet, not really cut out for it you see. And what I'd really like to do is leave, join the human resistance or something."

Xander expected a lot of possible reactions to this declaration, in fact he had braced himself for another hard slap. What he didn't expect was the snort, followed by Spike throwing back his head with the intensity of his laughter.

“Um ... what part of that was funny?” Xander let some of his aggravation slip into his voice but he tried to keep it under control, afterall, Spike did hold his fate in his hands.

Spike gaped at him, “You’re serious!”

“Of course I’m serious.” He looked again at Spike’s incredulous expression. “Why wouldn’t I be serious?”

Spike seemed to make up his mind about something. Maybe Xander had just finished off any remaining doubts. “There is no human resistance, Pet.”

“What do you mean? Sure there is, there has to be,” Xander insisted, horrified by the implications if there wasn’t.

“Someone doesn’t understand the definition of apocalypse,” Spike mocked.

“Hey, helped avert seven of the suckers, I’ll have you know,” Xander declared indignantly.

“Well there you are then,” Xander suspected Spike was not attempting to hide his patronizing tone.

“This one actually happened.”

Xander tried to wet his suddenly dry throat. “Um, I’m, uh, not too clear on what’s going on around here. Obviously. Care to fill in some gaps, Spike?”

“Master.”

“Huh?”

“You refer to me as Master, Master Spike if we’re in company and you need to distinguish. If you call me by my name again I’ll have to punish you.” Spike explained patiently. And Xander could tell he really was tapping into the extremely limited store of Spike patience.

Having already had as much punishment as he felt he could actually handle Xander figured he could

make the adjustment. “Could you tell me what happened, Master.” The word felt funny in his mouth.

And Spike told him. He talked in short, precise sentences about worldwide devastation, the enslavement of the whole human race and the Master’s iron rule. Apparently, humans now only existed as pets like himself, as part of a vampire's larder or in a number of even less appealing situations which he wouldn’t have believed prior to his experience in the kennel. There were a few strays that were sometimes rounded up like he himself had been, but there was no organization to them.

“What about the Slayer?” Xander asked, fearing the answer but having a morbid need to know.

“Slayer’s old bat face’s personal pet. Pretty thing by the name of Kendra. I understand if the old boy is happy enough with you he'll let you have a go with her.”

Xander remembered the shy girl who'd called him sir and he shivered to think of her fate. Why he couldn't really say but he had to know, "Did you ever ...?"

"Me?" Spike seemed to think the idea worth some amusement. "Nah, can't abide that lot, all chants and rituals. Makes my skin crawl. Besides, where's the fun in havin' at a broken Slayer if you didn't get ta do the breakin'?"

As comforting statements went it was about as good as he could hope for from Spike. Given the attitude of the humans he had encountered thus far Xander was chagrined to admit he believed Spike about there being no human resistance. Even if such an animal existed the chances of him hooking up with them was vanishingly small. He found himself thinking about the other members of their little band. Were Oz, Tara, and Riley all dead or members of some other vampire's household? And where was Angel? That was an idea worth pursuing. With Buffy dead and the world in its current state it seemed unlikely he'd run afoul of his happiness

clause. A souled Angel was about his only hope for an ally here. That was assuming he remained undusty.

"I can see the wheels turnin', what's going through that head of yours?" Spike asked him.

Honesty had gotten him this far, no real reason to abandon it now. "I was thinking that if Angel still has his soul he might be willing to trade you something for me, Master," laying it on a little thick couldn't hurt at this juncture. "I don't know what, I don't know how that stuff works but it's all I can think of."

Spike seemed to consider this for a moment. Xander really wasn't sure how to characterize the expressions going across his face. It looked like he was weighing up actions and consequences and he kept eyeing Xander in a speculative way that he wasn't sure he liked. Xander stayed perfectly still while his fate was decided. "I've been meaning to pay Angelus a visit for some time now. I think it's time to settle up accounts with him."

Xander smiled for the first time since he got here. This had definite possibilities of being survivable.

Spike slipped from his chair and prowled over to the nightstand. "I'll look into tracking Peaches down tomorrow." He turned back to Xander, a pair of leather restraints dangling from his fingers. "In the meantime, it looks like I get to break you in all over again." He sported a feral grin and Xander blanched.

Part Four

Xander scrambled away from Spike until his back hit the bed. "Look, I know you and the other Xander had one of those "special" relationships but, the thing is, I'm not gay" he babbled, "not that there's anything wrong with ..."

Spike dropped to a crouch in front of Xander. The look on his face was anything but amused. He gripped Xander's face in his hand hard enough to make his jaw ache. "I'll tell you exactly what you are, Pet," he bit out. "You're mine. And if you flinch away from me one more time I'll turn you inside out."

Xander stared at him, his eyes going wide with terror. He couldn't speak or move with his jaw gripped that way but Spike seemed satisfied that his message had been received as he released him and motioned him forward. Xander obliged immediately.

"Hands behind your back."

Xander put his hands behind him and tried to think like a posable doll while Spike sat behind him and buckled the leather cuffs onto his wrists. "You got a lot to learn, Pet. But to sum it all up, everything you get comes from my hands. Your food, shelter, pleasure and pain."

Spike's tone had become conversational but Xander's tension only grew.

“We're going to hammer that into you right now,” he said positioning Xander's arms in the small of his back and clipping the restraints together. Then he reached around and grabbed ahold of Xander's limp cock. Xander could feel all the blood drain out of his face. “This, along with the rest of you, is my toy. Nobody plays with it without my permission including you.”

Xander felt like he was going to pass out when Spike released him and moved him a little closer to the armchair. “No one but me is allowed to punish you either. You're my plaything and I don't play well with others.”

Satisfied with his position Spike rose and moved in front of him. Xander found himself staring fixedly at Spike's crotch, which was perfectly lined up with his mouth. He was feeling seriously light headed. Spike's intentions were all too clear, he was going to

give Spike a blowjob and there was nothing he could do about it.

Spike ran his hand over Xander's damp hair in a gesture he was pretty sure was meant to be reassuring. It wasn't. He dropped his eyes to the floor and waited.

Spike cupped the back of his head, applying slight pressure for him to tilt his head up. Resigned to his fate, he moved with the pressure until he was looking up at Spike. Spike ran a thumb lightly over Xander's lower lip. "You have a very pretty mouth, Pet."

'It can't be that bad, I can do this, I can do this to survive' Xander sought to reason with himself. 'Oh God, what if he's huge?'

Spike moved away to the door and called out to someone named James, then spoke to him quietly. Xander didn't dare move although his muscles had begun to scream with the tension of holding himself so rigid. When Spike turned around he was holding

a plate of food and a glass of milk.

He put the plate and glass down on the low table next to the armchair and asked, "Hungry, Pet?"

Xander was so staggered he couldn't answer. He nodded mutely.

Spike rubbed his finger along Xander's jawline. "Make no mistake, we will get to that. But one thing at a time."

Spike dropped into the chair, Xander positioned at his knee. The smell of the hot food reminded Xander just how long it had been since he'd eaten. He was dying for a bite. Meatloaf, mashed potatoes, green beans. Comfort food. Spike scooped a forkful of mashed potatoes and tried to feed it to him. It was amazingly awkward. Xander kept trying to move to intercept the fork, which nearly led to him wearing the potatoes rather than eating them. Spike kept pulling the fork away until Xander relented and opened his mouth so that Spike fed him like a baby bird. It was humiliating and made

him feel utterly dependent. Which, on further contemplation, was probably the point.

Xander was hungry enough to eat this way without protest and Spike resumed speaking.

“Gonna tell you a bit about yourself, Pet,” he said conversationally, as if feeding him like this was an everyday occurrence. Xander sincerely hoped it wasn’t.

“When I found you in that store you were on your way out. Wouldn’t have lasted another day, maybe not another hour,” he continued matter of factly. “And it wasn’t just hunger, though you were skinny enough. Bein’ on your own had practically gutted you.” Xander flashed back to the absolute despair that had lead his counterpart to offer his neck to the vampire and couldn’t really disagree.

“Made us a pair really. I’d just lost my reason for existin’ an’ you hadn’t had one in too long. So I gave you one. You were so eager to belong, reminded me of a puppy you did. Kept me goin’ til I had my

feet back under me. Because of that I'm cuttin' you slack. My Xander is a devoted pet, coveted by half the demons in the area. If I can't have him back, if you can't be that... Let's just say I don't want to start from scratch but I will."

Xander nearly choked on his milk. Dinner and death threats, great combination. When he could speak he responded, "I understand, Master."

Spike nodded. Message received loud and clear.

Spike let the fork clatter on the empty plate and stood. Xander stayed perfectly still, unsure what was next on the agenda. Spike placed a hand lightly on the back of his head and tilted it forward so Xander was looking at the expensively carpeted floor. "When I enter the room I expect you to assume this position. I like creativity and initiative but when I tell you to do something I expect you to do it. I don't care to repeat myself," Spike instructed. He paused, as if contemplating his next move. Then he leaned over Xander's shoulder and unhooked the manacles. "Here endeth the lesson,

at least for now, I'm knackered."

Xander watched without changing position as Spike went into a bone popping stretch. He eyed Xander briefly then said, "Take those off and put 'em away."

With clumsy fingers Xander undid the buckles on the cuffs. It was difficult to do one handed but he tried to be quick. When they were back in the nightstand drawer he looked back to find Spike had already shed his boots and t-shirt and was undoing his belt.

"Get on into bed then." Spike nodded toward the piece of furniture in question.

Not daring to argue, Xander slid between the crisp, cool sheets that smelled freshly laundered. He couldn't stop his mind from playing images of what was to happen next. He wondered if Spike would make it hurt. If he screamed in pain would that be taken as disobedience? He lay on his back and watched Spike divest himself of the last of his

clothes. He couldn't help looking and was relieved to see Spike was only average sized, then Spike turned off the light. Xander jumped a little when the mattress dipped with the weight of Spike's body but kept himself from flinching again.

Spike draped an arm over Xander's chest and pulled him to spoon in front of him. Pulled tight against the vampire's hard chest Xander tried to relax. It was easier if you relaxed. Spike nuzzled into his neck, heaved a huge sigh and went still. Completely still. After several minutes of no other movement Xander came to the amazed conclusion that Spike had gone to sleep. He appeared to be safe for the remainder of the night. Not that he expected to get any rest himself.

Xander was on his knees on the big bed, his hands manacled to the headboard with his arms stretched over his head as if he was about to dive over it. His legs were spread to the point a deep burn had taken up residence in his upper thighs but they perfectly framed Master who knelt behind him, buried balls deep in his ass. Xander moaned in deep pleasure as

Master was conducting some type of meeting at a conference table surrounded by vamps and one or two other types of demon. Xander was curled up on a cushion at his feet. He felt Master's tension rise and lifted his head to survey the situation. No one was openly threatening but Master was grinding his teeth in frustration. Xander placed his hands on Master's thighs and began kneading, waiting for the reaction. Master glanced down at him and smiled. Encouraged, Xander put his head in his lap and rubbed his cheek along the other leg until he felt Master start petting him. He felt Master relax and smiled, pleased he'd done his job well.

Xander stretched and opened his eyes to find Master was already up and gone. He was about to get up to go look for him when the movement of his leg made the links of the chain attached to his ankle jingle. At sight of the manacle and attached chain the previous day came back to him in a rush. He fell back on the bed breathing hard. He'd lost himself in the other existence and he still wasn't sure which

memories were his and which were the other Xander's.

It took him an hour to sort through the various disputed memories, to wrest his actual life free of this imposed reality. When he had it all straight again he was unsure which disturbed him more, the fact that his actual life seemed hazier than it had yesterday or the relief that it appeared sex with Spike wasn't going to be as painful as he had feared.

Trying to put disturbing thoughts onto a mental back burner was complicated by the staggering boredom he now faced. The Xander that belonged here had free run of the house. There were a multitude of ways to entertain himself downstairs, people to talk to, books to read, pretty much any source of amusement he could want. However, trapped in this room he had nothing but his own company. He spent an hour exhausting himself with exercise, trying to shut his mind down. It worked for a little while but, ultimately, worry overtook his brain again. He spent time in the grand bathroom. This time he went through all the routines his

double did. Refusing to acknowledge his true circumstances seemed a surefire way to be punished and it seemed stupid to set up more pitfalls for himself over something so small.

When he exited the bathroom he discovered that while he'd been scrubbing away someone had been in and changed the linens and left a bowl of fruit on the table. He debated eating the fruit for some time, suspecting it might be meant as decoration rather than sustenance but the growling of his stomach eventually decided the issue and he started in on an apple. Unfortunately, eating didn't take much attention at all. Deciding that ignorance was not bliss he started poking about the room while he munched. He looked through the nightstand drawer that housed the leather restraints and found nothing more exotic than Anya had in her box of sex toys at home. Not that Anya's collection was lacking in the exotic but it was a relief to be able to recognize each toy and have a fair idea of its use. Better than the wild torture devices with which his mind had been populating it.

The dresser contained nothing more remarkable than underwear, socks and t-shirts, all black naturally. The closet revealed that this Spike's dress sense wasn't much more varied than the version he was accustomed to.

He'd been reduced to examining the two abstract paintings on either side of the bed, trying to find recognizable shapes in them when he heard the door open behind him. Spike stood in the doorway clad in the black jeans and t-shirt which appeared to be his uniform around the house, his head tilted to one side as though he were considering the view, a slight smile gracing his lips indicating he didn't find it unappealing. Xander was so glad for someone to interact with, even if it was Spike, he smiled dropping to his knees and assuming the position Spike had shown him the previous day. Spike made a slow circle around Xander, making him feel like he was undergoing an inspection. Spike put two fingers under his chin and lifted. If it was an inspection he seemed to have passed because Spike was practically beaming at him. Xander found himself grinning back.

Desperate for input from beyond these four walls he asked, "So what did you do today?"

"I've been setting up a little visit to LA." A shadow fell over Spike's eyes briefly but Xander had the impression it wasn't displeasure at him.

"Is something wrong?" Xander asked, all too aware that the vampire's moods now had a significant impact on his own well being.

Spike shook himself a bit and the shadow left his eyes. "Nothing you need be concerned about."

He reached out and snagged a lock of Xander's hair. Rubbing it between his fingers, a pleased smile returned to his face. He released the hair and ambled into the bathroom to emerge a moment later with a large brush. He plopped into what must be his customary chair and shoved the table in front of it to one side. "Com'ere, Pet."

Xander scrambled up and resumed a kneeling

position in front of Spike who gestured for him to turn around. After a moment's fumbling he was sitting Indian style between Spike's knees with his head tilted forward. Spike began making long, practiced strokes with the brush. Xander had never paid more attention to his hair than a brisk toweling and a few swipes with a comb. He was surprised at what a pleasant sensation the brushing was. Spike brushed in an unhurried fashion, when he hit a tangle he carefully teased it apart rather than pulling.

"Used to give Dru's hair a hundred strokes every day." Spike's voice was distant with memory. "She had the most lovely, thick hair, I could spend hours playing with it."

The feel of the brush over his scalp and the soft cadence of Spike's voice was so soothing that Xander felt bold enough to ask a favor. "Master, could we dispense with the ankle bracelet." He jingled the chain for emphasis. "I promise I won't try to run away again."

Spike's hands never changed their rhythm. "Bored today were you?"

"Stupefyingly," Xander said with feeling.

"And you'll be bored again tomorrow. It's your punishment," Spike said while teasing out a tangle.

The gentleness Spike was currently showing made Xander dare to ask, "What, the beating wasn't punishment enough."

In the same calm, even voice he'd been using Spike said, "That wasn't punishment, that was stress relief."

A cold shiver went down Xander's spine as he realized he'd probably say the same thing, in the same indifferent voice, about the three people he'd killed that same night. Just for a moment he'd forgotten he was in the hands of a monster.

A soft knock at the door spared him trying to find a followup remark.

"Enter," Spike called out. Xander noticed the easy authority in Spike's voice. It was a voice that expected to be obeyed. He'd never thought about the hesitancy that had crept into the other Spike's voice.

The soft sound of bare feet on the deep carpet stopped behind him and Xander tried to sneak a peek at the newcomer. "Eyes front, Pet," Spike instructed and Xander shifted back to staring straight ahead. But he could hear the sounds of dishes being set down on the table and smell the delicious aroma of sizzling steak, which made his mouth water. The few pieces of fruit he'd eaten had taken the edge off his hunger but he was more than ready for a real meal.

Spike gave his hair a few more strokes then said, "Right, ready for supper?"

"Yes, Master," he said eagerly.

When Spike rose and headed for the nightstand

Xander shifted to kneeling where he'd been fed the previous day. Spike returned with the leather restraints and Xander put his hands behind his back without comment. As he'd just been reminded, making Spike angry was a very dangerous pursuit, besides, putting up a protest would merely delay dinner and he was hungry.

"While you're bored tomorrow you can figure out what you're going to do to please me," Spike said while he fastened the cuffs. "I'm interested to see what you bring to the party."

With some difficulty Xander forced that to a back corner of his mind. As Spike suggested, he'd have plenty of time to mull it over when he was alone. No use panicking about it now.

Eating was less awkward than it had been the previous day. It still felt weird but he wasn't fighting it so much this time. The food made up for the strangeness in any case, the medium rare steak was tender and prepared exactly how he liked it and the steamed vegetables did justice to the phrase tender

crisp. It was exactly the sort of meal his mother had never prepared. In fact, he'd only had something this good the handful of times he'd taken Anya to a fancy restaurant when they were celebrating.

While he ate Spike told him about the household. He talked about what could be found in the library, the game room and gardens. He told him about the pool. As he listened Xander felt the other memories surface and he didn't try to beat them back down. The memories told him things Spike didn't say, things he probably didn't know. For instance, Mary ran the kitchen, she'd been a chef in pre-apocalypse days and she was responsible for the gourmet meals. Pablo and Fritz kept the place clean with military precision, Spike probably wasn't even aware that as soon as he left the bedroom they changed the linens, put away any clean clothes and generally put the room in perfect order for his return. Xander wondered if any Initiative soldiers had found their way to Spike's larder, then realized he'd be the only one to get the irony.

Roughly one hundred and twenty people comprised

Spike's larder, most of whom slept in the former dormitory across the street. There was only one cage in the whole place and that was only for discipline cases like the late, and apparently unlamented, Rafael. Spike liked order in his home and didn't like to be bothered with the details. James was in charge of the details. He ran the household with ruthless efficiency and carried automatic and unquestioned authority. The strange thing was the lack of vampiric minions. Spike claimed they weren't to be trusted. As it was, the humans kept things running while Spike provided. The humans living under his rule were well fed, had a comfortable place to sleep and lived under the protection of a master who wasn't overly prone to indiscriminate culling of the herd.

Xander knew that there were things inherently wrong with being content with this state of affairs but he was having trouble defining what they were by the time the last bite of food was finished. The meal had been scrumptious and Xander could feel the other Xander very close to the surface.

"Got a surprise for you, Pet." Spike had a mischievous smile on his face as he produced a black scarf from beside the chair.

Alarm bells went off in Xander's head as the cool, slick material, which he guessed was silk, was tied around his eyes but it was like their clappers were wrapped in cotton balls. He was nervous, certainly, but the terror that he was pretty sure would have gripped him just yesterday failed to surface. Instead, he let the influence of the other Xander have freer reign.

"Open your mouth, Pet," Spike said, seductively.

Xander obeyed.

The cool metal of a spoon entered his mouth and was withdrawn slowly, leaving behind something creamy and decadent with the slight bitter edge of really fine dark chocolate. It was, without doubt, the best chocolate mousse Xander had ever tasted and he moaned in appreciation.

Spike chuckled as he fed him another spoonful.
"Figured you'd like that."

Xander would have replied but that would have meant pausing from savoring the dessert so he makes more appreciative noises instead.

It was hard not to feel pampered and Xander didn't try. When Spike's fingers ran along his shoulder he was concentrating on the last bite of mousse. When they skimmed over his mark it sent tingles through his shoulder. Spike's fingers made gentle, small circles over the mark that nudged his collar to the side. The tingles turned into warm waves of sensation that settled very happily in his groin. They were so distracting that the first indication he had that Spike had moved behind him was when he leaned in and whispered in his ear, "Figured you'd like that too."

Spike's tongue replaced his fingers in kitten licks across the mark. The pleasantly arousing sensation turned into something akin to an electrical charge. Xander laid his head back on Spike's waiting

shoulder, granting freer access.

"That's right, precious boy," Spike paused to tip Xander more fully against his chest, "just relax and let me make you feel good."

Some distant part of Xander's mind wanted to protest that this was not something he should be enjoying but found itself outvoted as he rested almost all of his weight on the hard chest behind him as Spike renewed his attentions with long, slow strokes of his tongue.

Xander was seconds away from orgasm and had given embarrassment and shame a hearty "sod off" in his own head. Which meant that Spike's hand encircling the base of his cock, cutting off his release, was cause for a heartfelt groan of protest.

"Not without leave, Pet," Spike instructed. He sounded almost kind when he continued, "Do you need a cock ring?"

Xander had enough brain cells still firing to realize

that disobeying Spike brought unpleasant consequences. It was enough to pull him back from the edge. "I can manage," he told Spike.

"Don't worry, Pet, I won't make you wait too long." Spike sounded genuinely pleased and kicked his attentions up a notch by nibbling with blunt teeth.

This elicited a moaned, "Master" from Xander that he would freak about later. Somehow Spike had gotten one arm under his knees and, without relinquishing contact with the mark, lifted Xander and landed them both with a springy bounce on the bed. One arm held Xander tight to Spike's chest and the teeth that worried the mark were now sharp and pointy.

"You may come," Spike said just before plunging fangs into the mark.

Xander screamed with the force of his release as Spike drew on the wound. When Spike withdrew his fangs Xander was as limp as a rag doll from the

blood loss and afterglow. He was asleep before the blindfold was removed.

Part Five

The smell of bacon woke Xander. He smiled and had a full body stretch. He opened his eyes a second later when he heard the door click shut. He surveyed the room briefly and his eyes lighted on the massive breakfast laid out on the low table. He hopped out of bed and dug in, sitting Indian style at the table. Downing a large glass of juice as he upended a pitcher of maple syrup over the pancakes he glowed with satisfaction. Master was pleased with him and when he was pleased he had no patience for protracted punishment. Today would be his turn and when he was done pleasing Master the loathed chain would be gone. He smiled to himself remembering how good last night had felt. If that was what it felt like to get bitten why weren't willing victims lining up? Then he remembered the vampire whorehouse Buffy had

destroyed and understood the allure for the first time.

Xander shook his head as his noncursed and cursed memories collided with each other. His double's memories and emotions had a firm grip on his perceptions. It was disorienting. He began eating methodically as he tried to get his bearings. He meticulously reviewed everything he could remember of the past five years. It was disturbingly difficult to sort the real from the fake memories. Months of hiding out in Sunnydale, knowing he was the only one of their group left, was too fixed in his mind to be easily dislodged by the euphoria he'd felt when Buffy took her first breath while he was giving her CPR. His failure seemed so much more likely than the last minute rescue. It was certainly in keeping with the memory of his first devastating failure which burned bright in both versions, the image of Xander's stake disappearing into Jesse's chest and his friend turning to dust before his eyes. When Spike had found him in the grocery store he'd hoped for a quick death. Once he realized that wasn't what Spike intended he'd accepted that he'd

been a coward to think he deserved such a merciful end. It seemed entirely appropriate that he pay for his arrogance and incompetence by becoming a vampire's plaything. It seemed so damned poetic, not only for Jesse but for his inability to swallow his pride and ask for Angel's help in locating the Master's lair.

The memories kept overlapping and jumbling together, making the length of time he'd been here feel more like months than weeks. Even after his breakfast was long finished and a couple hours of concentrated effort he still wasn't quite sure he'd gotten the two realities completely separated right. It felt like he'd been here months rather than weeks and some memories refused to sort at all. He couldn't figure out if he had hidden from a fyarl demon in an abandoned warehouse in his Sunnydale or the post-apocalyptic version?

The panic that he had postponed for today didn't surface. He nudged at the fact that he'd enjoyed Spike's attentions but couldn't muster much more than a token protest. His practical side insisted that

“No time like the present.”

Xander nodded as he stood. Coming up to Spike he carefully removed each article of Spike's clothing, folded it and put it aside. Spike was very amenable to moving however Xander directed. Once he was naked Xander took him by the hands and backed towards the bed. Spike started to flop down onto his back but Xander held onto his hands. “On your stomach please, Master.”

Spike cocked an eyebrow at him so Xander assured him, “You’ll like it, I promise.”

With a look that clearly said ‘I’d better,’ he lay on his stomach scooting to the center of the bed at Xander’s urging.

Xander poured a healthy amount of the massage oil he’d found into his hands to warm it before straddling the vampire’s hips. He spread the oil over the broad part of Spike’s back then began working at his shoulders. He pressed his fingers deeply into the knotted muscles of shoulders and neck, feeling

them relax under the pressure. A groan of pleasure rewarded his efforts as he moved down the back before him aligning the spine as he went. Xander knew he was good at this. He'd taken a course on sports massage while still in high school just to have a legitimate excuse to put his hands on Buffy's body. Needless to say there had been a lot of call for post slayage backrubs. Post high school, Anya had kicked it up a notch, requesting more erotic elements to the routines he'd learned, but the tension releasing, deep muscle backrub was still his most requested skill.

"Damn that's good," Spike moaned and Xander smiled in satisfaction. He'd always had to be so careful not to use too much pressure with Anya. Spike soaked up his most vigorous kneading with appreciative moans. In under an hour he'd reduced him to an amiable puddle of vampire goo and delayed the more unsavory activities one more day. From what Spike had said the previous day it sounded like the trip to see Angel was imminent. It couldn't be soon enough. He was starting to feel not so weird about the idea of Spike and naughty

touching and he wasn't sure how many tame tricks he had up his sleeve. Even worse, he wasn't sure he'd be suitably horrified when Spike pushed things to the next level.

Spike broke into his thoughts while Xander was working on his calves, "We're heading out at sunset," he mumbled into the pillow.

"To see Angel?" Xander couldn't contain his excitement, putting even more effort into unknotting the muscles under his hands.

The effort was not wasted as Spike made further appreciative noises then added, "That's the plan, Pet."

That good news warranted the special foot rub of doom. He nudged Spike to flip over onto his back, which he did with obvious reluctance, to give him a better angle.

"Very resourceful Pet," Spike conceded. "But next time I pick the activity."

Xander's stomach dropped a little and his eyes shot up to Spike's face. Spike was practically purring in an indolent sprawl and showed no sign of being upset or, for that matter, moving so Xander dropped his eyes back to what he was doing.

It was hard to tell with a creature that didn't breathe but Xander was pretty sure that Spike dozed off for a little while. He kept up some light strokes just in case. He lost track of how long he did this as he sank into thoughts of how to mitigate the next round. A light knocking at the door roused Spike who called out, "Come in."

Mary entered carrying a plate of food. At the sight of Spike's cat that ate the canary smile she smiled at Xander. Looked like all was forgiven if he kept Master happy.

Spike motioned for her to put the food on the nightstand, "Time for dinner, Pet."

There was no way he was going to jeopardize the

vampire's good mood by disobeying so he slid off the bed and knelt beside it near the head, hands behind his back. Spike scooted back to the edge of the bed propping himself up on pillows without giving up his languid posture. The restraints weren't pulled out, or mentioned. Xander wasn't certain what that meant but kept his hands behind him regardless.

Dinner was all finger food so Xander was fed without utensils. This strange way of eating was becoming easier and the meal was nearly finished when Mary crawled onto the bed next to Spike and presented her neck to him. Spike pulled her onto his chest and grabbed the padlock that held her collar closed. Mary froze. Spike pulled the simple chain out of his way and sank his fangs into the base of her neck even as he fed Xander a chicken finger, which Xander choked on. Spike didn't seem to notice, as he was intent on feeding. Xander fought down the ingrained urge to rip Spike away from her throat. The moment Spike bit her Mary relaxed as if this was an everyday occurrence. Around here it probably was.

Remembering his own experience he calmed himself, he was relatively certain Spike didn't intend to drain her. But the memory also made the act feel too intimate to watch and he found a spot on the edge of the bed to stare at until he heard the shifting of bodies on the bed. Mary was a little glassy eyed but she was breathing and the bleeding from the bite was barely a trickle. Spike actually seemed to take some care to arrange her comfortably on the bed.

“Want any more?” Spike asked, indicating the mostly empty plate. Xander shook his head, certain he would be unable to choke down another mouthful.

“Right then,” Spike swung his legs over the edge of the bed and stretched. “Got a long trip ahead of us.

Clothes were redonned with a minimum of fuss. Xander held position, deeming that the safest option. Spike stuck his head out the door and called for James. A tall, graceful man entered carrying a

duffle bag.

“I’m traveling light,” Spike told him. The man nodded and piled a few changes of shirts and extra pair of jeans into the duffle. Spike opened the nightstand and pulled a few items out which he tossed into the duffle. He looked at Xander speculatively then pulled out a length of chain which he clipped onto his collar. Xander could feel himself flushing with humiliation. Once he had the leash attached Spike unlocked the manacle around Xander’s ankle.

“Make sure she gets plenty tonight,” Spike told James, indicating Mary, “I have my cell, keep an ear to the ground. If anyone tries to move in while I’m gone I’m only a few hours away.”

James nodded again. Xander wondered if the man still had his tongue.

“Should be back in a couple days,” Spike said to the silent James while tugging Xander to his feet. He took the duffle from James and then they were

moving at a good pace out the door and to the street where Spike's Desoto waited. Xander climbed into the passenger seat without protest. Spike seemed in a hurry to be gone and this suited him fine.

Spike put something loud and raucous into the stereo and was merrily singing along to it. With that as musical accompaniment Xander tried to plan his next move. It didn't take very long. It wasn't so much that he didn't have the ability to plan, but he was struck again by his utter powerlessness in the situation. He had a pretty good idea that, however much he and Deadboy hated each other, he wouldn't leave him in Spike's hands. That being said he wouldn't trade someone else for his release, not that Xander would want him to. He had no idea what else Spike might accept in trade and asking him might weaken Angel's bargaining position. He hated playing the damsel in distress but he was just as helpless as any heroine in a dime store romance.

Turning his attention to the landscape streaming past he noticed they were on the I-5 heading south.

At least he presumed the road sign was still accurate. Spike had ejected his first CD and was sorting through a stack looking for another. It seemed an opportune moment for conversation. It might encourage Spike to return his eyes to the road.

"What did you mean when you told James to keep his ear to the ground?" Now seemed like the best time to get questions answered, in a few hours he wouldn't have an opportunity.

Spike stopped fumbling with the CDs and glanced at Xander as if he was considering whether or not to respond. Apparently deciding that the conversation didn't need a soundtrack he turned back to the road. "I'm leaving my territory undefended taking this trip. None of the other masters know I'm gone but if they figure it out they might make a move."

Xander was horrified at this deadpan delivery of dire consequences. He flashed back to Mary's description of what happened to masterless households. Once again, it seemed, his actions had

put the humans in Spike's care in jeopardy. "Master, I, I didn't realize, maybe it would be a better idea to send him a message ..."

Spike gave a humorless laugh. "No Pet, what Peaches and I have to discuss has to be handled face to face. Don't worry, James is more than capable of manufacturing my presence for a couple days, if that fails he'll call. With luck I'll get home before much damage is done."

"But..."

"It's decided, Pet," Spike said with finality, "leave it be."

And that was the end of that conversation.

Xander cast about for something else to talk about, something that, with luck, would take the grim expression off of Spike's face. Back home he and Spike had been united on one topic, their mutual hatred of all things Angel. Best to ditch him as a topic then.

"Why Spike!" Angel exclaimed from the staircase, sauntering down to join them. "You've brought me a present."

"That I have." Spike's tone held no warmth and Xander wondered what was going through his mind.

Xander noted Angel's leather pants with trepidation, but this wouldn't be the first time Angel had put on a show. Angel's attention seemed riveted to Xander as he started a slow circle around him. Xander didn't dare turn with him. "Willow wanted to look for you but the whole place was coming apart so I told her I saw you die. Came up with a real heroic death," he sneered. "Good thing too. We lost Jenny before we even made it out of Sunnydale, but Cordy and Willow made it here."

Xander was having trouble catching his breath. "Willow's here? And Cordy?" he said with rising hope. Even if Angel didn't bargain him away from Spike it was all worth it to know they were safe. But Angel was far from finished.

“Well, that's the thing,” Angel said, with mocking solicitousness. “We set up here for a few years, took in strays, kept them safe like a good little tortured soul.” Angel made himself comfortable on the nearest couch and waved to Spike to come join him. Spike pulled Xander closer to him. Xander was straining too hard to hear the voice of either girl in some upstairs room to notice.

When Angel spoke again he had Xander’s full attention. “After things settled down, we all started to relax. Cordy always had a thing for Soul Boy. He put her off for two damn years, mooning over his lost slayer. But she got him in the end.”

The bottom fell completely out of Xander’s stomach. He didn’t need the confirming statement but it came anyway in a soft, pleasant voice. “And then she got me,” Angelus gloated.

Xander closed his eyes. Suddenly, he didn’t want to be here anymore. He certainly didn’t want to hear the little tale Angelus was so anxious to tell.

“So that gypsy curse had an escape clause, eh?” Spike asked, pushing Xander slightly behind him. Xander was far too numb to bother resisting.

“Yep.” Angelus put his hands behind his head and leaned back on the couch and returned his attention to Xander. “Had some time to make up for then. First thing I did was tell Willow I hadn’t seen you at all the night the Hellmouth opened. When she realized she'd left you behind it took the fight right out of her. Then I tied her up and gave her a demonstration of what she had coming. Cordelia had a great scream but she couldn’t cry like Willow.”

Xander wanted to curl up and die where he stood. She had been alive and he hadn’t looked for her. He’d found a fucking shoe and just given up. His self-loathing took second place only to the consuming need to make Angelus pay.

“I tell you, my boy,” Angelus flowed off the couch like a snake and stalked towards them. “You’ve

brought me a marvelous present. I thought this one was dead years ago. I plan to take my time with him.”

Xander felt Spike’s hand pressed against his chest as Spike pushed him further behind him. “You're not going to take anything else away from me.”

Angelus’ grin grew vicious. “I’ve got a score to settle with this brat. So get out of my way like a good boy.”

Xander didn’t have to see Spike’s face to know a feral grin decorated it when he said. “Make me.”

That was all it took for the two vampires to go at each other. It was a mismatch from the start, Spike had more grace and speed but Angelus’ size and power made his blows more devastating. It wasn’t long before Spike was spitting blood. "Bloody bastard! Your blood could have saved Dru, but you wouldn't lift a finger. Didn't care. She was your childe and you let her die!" Anguish laced Spike's voice while he tried to pound his grandsire's face in.

"She was a broken toy," Angelus snarled back. "The mad bitch sure as hell wasn't worth risking being dusted over. One thing me and Soul boy agree on."

The insult to Drusilla seemed to drive Spike mad. He charged Angelus, screaming in rage, only to be caught by a meaty fist on the chin. He flew back into the wall with a shattering of plaster.

"You never learn, do you, William? Guess I'm just going to have to beat it into you again." Spike was now too weak to deflect the blows as they rained down.

Watching the beating Spike was taking enraged Xander. Sure, Spike had made his life deeply unpleasant but against Angelus there was no question who he was rooting for. If Spike died any chance of revenge, never mind survival, died with him. With that in mind, he searched for something to use as a stake. He wanted to douse his own sense of failure by drenching Angelus in it and setting fire to him if possible. Roasting marshmallows over his

blazing corpse had an exhilarating appeal. So it was with a growing sense of frustration that his search came up empty.

A look told him that the fight was lost. Spike was limp in the older vampire's grip. A wave of numbness overtook him as he realized Spike might be dust in the next few seconds, not only because he'd be left alone to face the protracted torture session Angelus had scheduled for him, but because Spike represented the last shreds of his old life left to him. There was comfortable familiarity to Spike even with the less enjoyable aspects.

In the absence of the crossbow he wished he could shoot across the room, he shouted, "You're a miserable coward! He expected too much of you, Deadboy!"

Well, he had his attention now. Spike's unconscious form was dropped and Angelus wheeled on Xander who pulled himself to his feet, he wanted to look the monster in the eye while he spoke his last words. "You left the girl you supposedly loved to

face the Master by herself. I bet you ran out of Sunnydale so fast you were invisible."

He didn't bother struggling when he was lifted off his feet, a grip as hard and implacable as death, only not so bony, around his throat. Struggling would be useless and he didn't want to give Angelus the satisfaction of watching him squirm.

"I'm going to make you last for days," Angelus hissed in his face. "We'll see who's the coward when you're begging for mercy."

If he could goad Angelus into killing him now he'd deprive him of his fun and games. It looked like the only revenge he was likely to get. "I won't beg you," he choked out. "You're too pathetic to scare me."

Xander was slammed into the floor. If he lived long enough his entire back would be bruised. "How about I show you what I did to Willow," Angelus asked in a sickeningly pleasant voice. "Think I might hear some begging then?"

Years of fury came spilling out of Xander as he tried to push away the terrifying image. This was a case where he was almost certain his imagination couldn't keep pace with the demented cruelty of reality. "Think you're a big man with your billowy coat and pretty face? You weren't worthy to lick Buffy's shoes." A slap snapped his head back but didn't still the rush of words. "In a stand up fight she'd send you straight to hell. You're a sneak thief. All schemes and mind games you're ..."

The look of utter astonishment on the brunet vampire's face as it disintegrated stilled the words as his fists could not. Behind the cloud of dust stood Spike, a stake clutched in his left hand.

A maelstrom of emotions threatened to overwhelm Xander. The murdering bastard was gone and that evoked a wave of gratitude with a strange little eddy of disappointment that it was over so quickly. The self-loathing evoked by the realization that he had left Willow to die crashed against the relief that his own death was no longer eminent. He wanted to scream, to dance a jig in Deadboy's dust, to vomit

until he turned inside out, to cry himself dry with grief. He wanted to do so many conflicting things that he was unable to move at all. Questions about what the next step should be swirled through his brain in a dizzy confusion.

A cool hand on his shoulder pulled him out of the whirlpool that was trying to suck him down. Spike looked at him with lust-soaked eyes, his desire evident in his too-tight jeans. Slayers weren't the only ones who got horny after a fight it seemed. The simple carnality of Spike's desire snapped his brain into a new pathway. His feelings on the matter were irrelevant. The next step wasn't his to decide because he was owned. Spike could grant him safety or swift death at his pleasure, he determined Xander's place and purpose. It was a strangely giddy and calming sensation being someone else's responsibility.

"Thank you Master," he breathed, not sure if he meant it more for killing Angelus or quieting the screaming in his head. It didn't matter: he knew what his master wanted and it was his place to

satisfy him. The idea didn't repel him anymore. He dug his chin into Spike's groin. The moan that issued from the chest above him inspired a repeat.

No further encouragement was needed for Spike's hands to start tearing at his fly. Xander reached up and took over undoing the buttons until Spike's cock sprang free. As he gripped the base tightly in one hand he gradually slid his lips over the head. It was a brand new sensation and it was something he'd done a hundred times. The Xander who had been Spike's pet for four years knew exactly what to do and was given free reign. Swirling his tongue under the foreskin produced a moan that filled him with satisfaction. His free hand dancing along Spike's balls and perineum produced a full body shudder. He could practically time the gasp as he tilted his head, relaxed his throat and swallowed him down, amazed at how powerful he felt, on his knees, Spike's fingers tangling in his hair, pulling him closer. A swirl of tongue in just the right spot, pressure and then suction judiciously applied and he could make Spike incoherent. Under perfect circumstances he could make a session like this last

for hours. But the tremor in Spike's legs wasn't solely due to what Xander was doing to him and his own aches and pains were beginning to make themselves felt, so he stepped up the pace. Swallowing while Spike's cock hit the back of his throat he felt Spike shudder and roar as he came. Xander swallowed him down greedily, enjoying the heady sensation of having pulled Spike's orgasm out of him. When Xander met his eyes Spike smiled as if he'd just gotten exactly what he wanted for Christmas as he helped Xander to his feet.

Part Six

They headed upstairs, keeping an ear out for any minions that might be lurking. They poked through several rooms until they stumbled across what seemed to be Angelus' bedroom. The euphoria of

the fight and the sex were fading and Spike had begun to sag. Once they searched the bedroom for unwelcome guests Spike pulled a lump out of his coat that he slammed onto the door. "Obsero" he incanted and a shimmer like heat lightening went over the door.

"Wizard lock," Spike explained. "Should keep us nice and private."

Xander nodded as he helped him out of his coat and over to the bed. He knew the three steps of undead first aid all too well. He ripped Spike's ruined t-shirt down the middle and eased it off his shoulders then started feeling along his ribcage for misaligned bones. Anything broken had to be set before the healing kicked in, follow with blood and rest and you had a healthy vampire again. He suspected a few of the ribs were cracked but none seemed to be actually broken and all his insides remained reassuringly on the inside. Although the angry, red slashes across his torso would have needed stitches had he been human.

He was about to search the bathroom for something to use for first aid supplies when Spike gripped his shoulders. He found himself pivoted onto the bed and pinned beneath the vampire as sharp teeth sank into his shoulder. This was no seductive tasting, it was white hot agony as he was devoured in greedy gulps. A cut off scream escaped his throat, there was no one to hear and certainly no help to be had, which resolved itself into quiet whimpering. Pinned by the vampire's weight and gripped by the teeth buried deep in his flesh and the ruthless grip of cold fingers on his biceps he felt himself grow weaker. Just as he felt sure he was on the edge of passing out Spike pulled away, his mouth smeared with blood, his blood.

"Now that hits the spot," he said with a grin. Then he drew his fangs lightly over his wrist and pressed it to Xander's mouth.

Xander got a few swallows down before the wound closed. Apparently, today was not a good day to die.

Some deep part of him was outraged at his rough treatment the previous night but mostly he just accepted it as part of his role here. He was inextricably bound to the vampire lying next to him, a fact he decided he was through fighting. It was pointless and could be devastating to the humans of Master's household. Besides, in this cockamamie world there were worse fates. As if awakened by Xander watching him Master's eyes flew open. He took in Xander's appreciative gaze and a slow smile spread across his face.

"Morning Pet," he purred leaning over to run his fingers through Xander's no doubt tangled hair. Catching a quick look at his watch he rolled out of bed and stretched. His stomach and chest were marred by a few streaks of dried blood but the wounds had all sealed over. "No time for fun and games today," he said as he began searching for his clothes. He tossed the ruined shirt aside but tugged on the jeans.

There was a nervous energy to him, like sitting still might be physically painful. "I don't like leaving my

territory unguarded. Let's check this mausoleum out, take what we want and be on our way. When I get you home I plan to give you a very thorough seeing to."

He placed a hand on the lump he'd stuck to the door and incanted, "Apertus" and the lump dropped into his hand.

No welcoming committee awaited them outside the door. The place gave every indication of being deserted. At the edge of the sunlit lobby Xander was handed the keys to the Desoto. "Get the bag, I'll be in here," Master said as he walked to a pair of big, double doors.

Xander walked out into the sunlight, squinting against the glare. The big black car crouched in front of him. He stared at the keys in his hand for a few seconds as the possibilities ran through his mind. And then he obeyed his master's orders.

In the kitchen he was fed fruit and cheese from the rather meager stores of human food they found.

After that, Master found the larder by the simple expedient of following the smell of blood. Mangled bodies, barely alive, were tied in grotesque patterns in one room. "Always fancied himself a fuckin' artist," Master grumbled as he dispatched the victims while Xander attempted to hold onto his breakfast.

Five terrified people were locked in the next room. They shrank away from Master whimpering in terror. He rolled his eyes at them and announced, "I've killed your master. Any of you lot want to join my larder come with, otherwise I leave you here to fend for yourself." Then he turned to Xander and explained, "I'm going to check the place for minions, I'll be back." Then he turned away leaving the door open behind him.

Xander was forcibly reminded of Mary's explanation of what happened to a masterless household and tried to coax the cowering prisoners to come with them. "Master Spike's not so bad," he found himself telling them, then amended, "Well, he's better than

Angelus."

This less than rousing endorsement failed to reduce the terror in their eyes as they pressed themselves against the far wall.

He approached them with his hands out in what he hoped was a calming manner. "My name's Xander, who're you?"

Evidently that was a sufficiently nonthreatening question to be answered and each one gave him their name in a near whisper.

Thus encouraged he renewed his appeal. "Listen, I'm Master Spike's pet," he was a little amazed at being able to say that without cringing. "It's my job to keep him happy and I'm sort of good at it. So if you come with us I promise to keep him on an even keel, I'll keep you safe."

With that promise Xander knew he was embracing his purpose in Master's household, a job only he could do. True, that job consisted of keeping Master

entertained, but wasn't that the sort of job he'd always done? Without the kinky sexual angle that is. And lives depended on it.

He spent hours calming Angelus' traumatized larder. Master checked in to assure him that no minions appeared to be lurking about. Then informed him, "I'm going up to take a shower and get changed. See if you can get this lot sorted, sunset's in one hour."

In the end, three out of the five piled into the back seat of the old Desoto when Master loaded what he wanted from the place in the trunk. The last two opted to take their chances.

The transfer of ownership turned out to be very simple. Master snapped the lock holding the chain collar closed then refastened each one with a padlock bearing his own insignia. Xander ran his fingers over his own, more unique, collar. Feeling it's weight against his throat was oddly reassuring.

He spent most of the ride home with his head in Master's lap, and it didn't feel strange at all.

Epilogue

Sounds too thick and liquid to be called screams assaulted him. All he could see was red: red wounds, red, red hair. Blood coated the walls, the floor, spattered across the ceiling and it was getting deeper. He was sinking into the warm, sticky lake of it; drowning in a roiling sea of it. Just before he sank down the last time he saw her eyes boring into him, pushing him under with their accusation.

“Willow!” he screamed as his mouth filled.

“Xander.”

The voice pulled him to the surface and he found himself in bed with Spike shaking him vigorously. “Master?”

“Thank fuck that’s over,” Spike growled, releasing him.

Xander immediately averted his eyes. “I’m sorry I woke you, Master.”

Powerful arms snaked around his waist and drew him tight against his master’s chest. “S’all right, Pet. Want to tell me about it?”

Xander shook his head.

“Do it anyway,” Spike commanded softly. Spike’s right hand pushed his head back until his head rested on a pale shoulder and his face nuzzled into his neck. Meanwhile Spike’s left hand stoked from breastbone to groin in a soothing motion.

Xander swallowed, trying to clear the cotton out of his throat as he relaxed into the embrace. “What

Angelus did to Willow.” He really hoped that would be enough.

“Shh!” Spike whispered into his hair. “Bastard’s dust. Can’t hurt you or your little playmate any more.”

Xander gave Spike’s collarbone a tentative lick. “Thank you, Master.”

Spike ignored the thanks. “Let’s see if we can’t put more interesting thoughts in your head.” With that one hand began playing over his claim scar and the other danced lightly along his half-hard shaft. Xander mouthed along Spike’s collarbone as he moaned and his hands fisted into the sheets.

“That’s right lovely,” Spike purred. “When I’m done you won’t remember your own name, let alone bad dreams.”

Xander arched into Spike’s light grip, seeking a firmer touch. Spike moved with him, keeping his touch feather light. He continued his torturous

touches until he had Xander writhing mindlessly against him. Then Xander found himself being lowered back onto the bed and opened eyes he hadn't realized he'd closed. Spike reached into the nightstand and pulled out the wrist restraints.

Automatically, Xander raised his hands above his head, eager to feel the soft leather against his skin. It took only a few seconds to secure the cuffs and run the chain through the bars in the headboard. Xander pulled on the restraints just to feel them press into his flesh.

Xander found himself arranged across Spike's lap where he was easily held down with one hand while slick fingers teased his entrance.

A soft knock at the door caused Spike to look up but not stop his attentions. "What is it?"

"Master, do you require anything?" James' incredibly proper voice came through the door.

Spike ran his fingers over Xander's cock and balls

contemplatively. “Enter,” he called out and slid two slick fingers into Xander.

James slipped inside and stood beside the bed with hands clasped behind his back. By the look on his face Spike could just as easily have been knitting as driving Xander into a mindless frenzy of need.

Actually, knitting might have surprised even James.

Spike absentmindedly stroked Xander’s prostate while he spoke. “I want you to find Samantha. Tell her to cook up a memory spell. My pet has had his last bad dream.”

Xander tried to wrest coherency out of his fragmented thoughts. Spike was casually discussing robbing him of his memories. Would he be essentially expunged, leaving only the memories of the Xander from this reality? Even more disturbing, was that a bad thing? His opinion was not sought, and he was presently incapable of expressing it.

James weighed his response very carefully. “A precise spell will take time, otherwise memories

you wish to keep could be excised.”

Spike's face turned back to Xander's lust addled face. With predictable impatience he said, “But he's hurting.” Then he stroked across Xander's prostate in such a way to assure that pain was the furthest thing from Xander's mind.

“A sleep draught could assure dreamless sleep, until the spell is perfected,” James suggested.

Briefly, Xander thought Spike ought to turn James in the next few years because he surely would never be able to run the household without him. Then all rational thought was stolen as Spike began twisting his fingers inside him.

“See to it,” Spike said as if he had just issued an order.

James inclined his head in acknowledgement and turned to leave. He wasn't all the way to the door before Spike shifted between Xander's legs and began pressing his way in.

Xander was pleading to be allowed to cum but he wasn't sure if he was getting more than "please" and "Master" out of his mouth and the intelligibility of even those words was in serious doubt.

"No one gets to hurt you but me, Pet." Spike punctuated each word with a deep thrust. "Not even you."

Xander moaned out something he hoped served as agreement.

It must have satisfied Spike because after three more deep, hard thrusts he said, "You may cum."

Xander exploded, spasming with the force of his orgasm. Moments later Spike found his own release. When Spike pulled out Xander collapsed into a sated puddle in the middle of the bed. He gazed up into Spike's eyes, which burned with fierce possession, and smiled. He trusted Spike to take care of him.

The End