I grabbed a bunny at bunny_grabber

Bumblebee
**Pairing:** Spander (of course)
**Rating:** NC-17
**Warnings:** Bad language and explicit sexual m/m activity.
**Summary:** Xander is wrongly convicted of murder and sent to Riverview Correctional Institution where
Spike is a guard.
Disclaimer: I own none of the characters or products named in this story and sadly, make no profit.

Authors notes: This story was written as requested by Ladyvirgo. Hope it is what you wanted, Sweety. Also: This is a more plot than sex based story so, although there is sporn, if that is the only reason for reading, you will be disappointed

Banner by Petxnd

Hard Time
by
BmblBee

Part One

Xander paced the length of the small room repeatedly, which, considering the fact that the space was less than 12x12, took very few steps. Although officially designated as 'Conference Room A', it was nothing more than a secure, windowless
room that adjoined the main courtroom.

There was no possibility of escape if one were so inclined. It was a room, locked and guarded by deputies, for lawyers and their clients to meet, strategize, and wait.

And waiting was what Xander had been doing impatiently for the past six hours. Six hours since his county appointed attorney had completed his closing arguments to a trial that had lasted less than two weeks. A relatively short time for a murder charge.

He looked around at the clinical, gray walls and knew, with some relief, that no matter what today's outcome, this would be the last time he would be here in this dreaded, ugly room.

"So, you really think we have a chance?"

"Hmmm?"

Xander stopped walking and looked toward at his
overworked, underpaid, and probably very incompetent lawyer and wished, not for the first time that he could have afforded to hire a real attorney. Unfortunately, they all wanted huge retainers, daily fees and clients with deeper bank accounts than Xander's $503.29.

Guilty or innocent was not a criteria.

Crossing his arms over his body, Xander leaned back against the wall and again asked the question that he had repeated at least a million times since the night of his arrest. "I said, do we have a chance? Do you think the jury will find me innocent?"

Mr. Loomis removed his glasses and rubbed his hands over his tired eyes. He laid down his pen and discreetly closed the folder in front of him so his client would not see that he had already moved on to the other fifty cases and presumably innocent clients he had been assigned.

"Certainly. No worries. No jury is going to convict without the presence of a body. All their evidence is
circumstantial. I guarantee, you will be home tonight for supper."

As usual, Xander clung to the hope that his lawyer was right. "But what if they find me innocent and then the body washes up on shore say, a year from now? Can they arrest me again? I don't think I could do this again."

"No. Absolutely not. That's double jeopardy. When they find you not guilty, that's it. It's over. Whenever the body does surface, it won't make a difference. However, if....."

Whatever else he was going to say was cut off with the knock on the door and the deputy who stuck his head in. "Gentlemen, I've been asked to advise you that the jury is returning with a verdict. The judge will need you back in the court room in ten minutes."

Xander leaned back, oblivious to the cold of the cement wall that seeped through his borrowed suit and into his clammy skin. This was it. He had spent
the last six months in a nightmare, climbing the craggy walls of the foreign terrain of this judicial mountain. He had lost ground and on rare occasion, gained it. He had slipped, tripped and stumbled, not understanding the landscape, but now, here he was at the peak.

The end of his journey and his fate was about to be determined by twelve strangers that could either throw him a life line to freedom or push him over the edge and down to the pits of hell.

He was still stumped. How could he have ended up here? How could anyone think he had murdered Jessie? He had loved Jessie, and even if they were broken up, he could never hurt a soft brown hair on Jessie's head. Sure, they had had some bad times, especially at the end when Jessie's drug use had gotten so out of hand, but murder? It was just unthinkable.

"Jessie" Xander whispered the word so softly that his lawyer never paused in his fussing about with his papers and notes, tossing them, for the last time
into his ratty, overused briefcase.

The night of Jessie's death had been the worst of his life followed by the confusion of his arrest and now the trial. He hadn't even had the chance to mourn.

He hadn't been allowed to attend the memorial service. His attorney advised against it and Jessie's parents specifically prohibited it. They had always hated Xander. Claimed their son was never gay till he moved in with Xander Harris.

Xander blinked back the tears. He refused to cry now. He would NOT go back in there and appear weak. Not now. Later. Later when he was allowed to leave and he was a free man, then he would cry. He would scream, sob and get rip roaring drunk. And he would grieve. Grieve for the tumultuous relationship and the man that he would never again go home to.

"Well, you ready?" Tom Loomis placed his hand on Xander's shoulder, startling him out of his musing. Putting on his best optimistic face, Xander smiled
and nodded.

"Yeah, let's get this over with."

The court room was packed when they entered from the side doorway and again took their seats at the front table. They watched as the jury filed in, faces blank and unreadable and they took their chairs, immediately followed by the judge who, like a God in his own personal universe, rose, ascending the platform to his throne. Xander waited while the room went quiet and the judge finally spoke.

"I understand the jury has reached a verdict?"

The foreman, a tenth grade science teacher, rose and handed the bailiff a small folded piece of paper. "Yes, your honor, we have."

The bailiff handed it to the judge who read it before handing it back. "Will the defendant please rise for the reading of the verdict."

Xander and his lawyer stood. His hands felt sweaty
and his blood pounded so loudly in his ears he was afraid he would not hear the words. He hadn't eaten or slept in two days. All he could think was *Thank God this will soon be over.*

The bailiff cleared his throat and began. "In the case of the State of California versus Alexander Harris, on the charge of second degree murder, the jury finds the defendant, GUILTY"

Xander's world went white. His knees buckled and the last thing he was aware of before collapsing to the floor, were the flashbulbs and the shouts from both side of the room. Somewhere off in the distance, through what sounded like a dark tunnel, he vaguely heard his attorney call his name. "Xander? Xan....."

**Part Two**
Spike dropped his bag on the floor by his feet and settled in at one of the long tables in the aptly named, multipurpose room. His shift didn't start for another fifteen minutes but the state required, and paid for, officers to be present and accounted for fifteen minutes ahead of time for roll call procedure.
It was a time for exchanging information from the previous shifts, relaying to the oncoming C.O's details any disturbances, real or rumored, and any changes relevant to their assigned work posts.

Spike smiled and looked around him, enjoying the rowdy comradery of the other officers, joking with each other, betting on the next big pro game and regaling the others with exaggerated war stories. Spike couldn't imagine working anywhere else.

It was an odd occupation. One fraught with daily danger, often life threatening, and nothing the average citizen would want any part of. Still, when he was asked if he liked his job, he had found the most honest answer to be that it really wasn't the type of job you like, but it was the type that suited
him very well.

Unlike most of the state prisons, this was a relatively small facility consisting of eight separate living units, each with a specific population. It was an experimental building constructed in the late 1970's with the goal of rehabilitation rather than punishment.

It was, therefore, built with a school attached as well as several work programs that had, due to budget cuts, been long discontinued and left empty and dust covered.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, can you please shut the hell up and pay attention so we can get the fuck out of here?"

Spike's attention was drawn to the older, black man standing at the front of the room, a stack of papers in his hands. The roll call opening wasn't very dignified, but it was both tradition and effective. Everyone settled in and waited. Unpredictability was the operative word in this job and any
prewarning or heads up as to what they were walking into was crucial.

Sgt. Gates began with "E" unit, the gang unit, advising them there had been several minor skirmishes in the exercise yard. Nothing serious and no weapons involved, but it needed to be watched.

He continued with "C" the sex offenders and a found stash of pornography, "B" unit, the smaller, younger offenders and read today's list of suicide watches. He advised the C.O.'s from "N" that the mental unit was true to form and had spent most of the morning kicking their doors and shouting profanity.

Angel kicked back knowing there would be no exchange of information from the inmates on his unit. As senior C.O. he had, as soon as C.O.Henning retired, bid on his spot on the honors dorm. It was a cushy spot. Fifty of the biggest butt kissers in the California penal system.

Mostly white collar and similarly skinned inmates
that simply wanted to do their time as easily and quietly as possible. Trouble and altercations on this housing unit were usually confined to name calling and the occasional shove. Angel prided himself on the control he believed he exerted. The other C.O.'s knew better. These were the cunning inmates. The clever ones that knew how to play the game, say all the right things and appear to be strictly on the up and up.

"Spike. As soon as role call is over, you need to report to the basement. We have a van arriving in about ten minutes. You'll have three new ones coming in. Go ahead and process them, get them showered and into blues. After they get their cell assignments, I'll have the nurse do their physicals."

Spike nodded. He had been working intake for the last year. Except for the druggies going cold turkey, he liked this spot very much. It was his job to get the new arrivals acclimated to the system, evaluate them, and at the end of their three month stay on his unit, send them on to the general population housing dorm they were best suited to.
Spike nodded and accepted the file folders the Sgt. handed him, glancing through them as the roll call wrapped up.

#1. Daniel Osborn, age 25, arson to an occupied structure causing personal injury. Sentenced to 5-7 years.

#2. Adam Steele, age 32, Three counts of attempted murder with gun specification. Five previous felony convictions. 15 - 20 years.

#3. Alexander Harris, age 23, second degree homicide. Sentenced to life.

Spike frowned, he remembered hearing about that case. There was apparently no body found but the evidence against the boy was overwhelming. Forensic's had a laundry list. Discarded victim's clothing stained with both the offender's blood and the victim's were located on the beach. They had been seen arguing earlier and when a search warrant had been executed, Harris's shoes were
covered with sand.

It was assumed that they were lovers. Harris admitted as much. The prosecution contended that they fought and Harris murdered him, tossing the body out into the ocean where the undertow could carry it far and away to be served up as fish food. Harris had sworn that when he left the victim alone on the beach that he was still very much alive. His attorney had failed to convince a jury that some other perp had come along later and done the deed.

Although interesting, it actually mattered very little to Spike. He never concerned himself with the specifics of an inmates case. He was no one's judge and jury, that job had already been done. Spike was only concerned with the man and the here and now.

He only cared that the inmate follow the rules, adjust to the system and not cause any problems for the staff or other prisoners.
Spike slapped the folders against the palm of his hand, scooped up his bag from the floor and headed out. Nope, he didn't care if Alexander Harris had made his honey walk the plank or not. Besides, sharks have to eat too. That's what the Discovery Channel says.

Within the next few minutes, he would just be another inmate and Spike would make sure that Harris understood that. No more high profile. From now on, he was #2694502. Property of the State of California.

Part Three

Spike stood in the basement receiving area and watched the grainy, black and white image on the wall mounted monitor from outside the fence. He saw the county van pull through the two automatic gateways and into the compound.
When everything was secured, he opened the garage door and stood to the side as the van backed in and the door again closed.

The driver's door swung open and the large, black man hopped down, snuggling a New York Yankee's ball cap on his head.

"Hey, Spike. How they hangin'?"

"Loose and free, Burt, loose and free. How's the wife?"

Burt slapped Spike on the back as he walked to the rear of the vehicle, unsnapping his key ring off his belt as he went. "Hell, you know Toots, she keeps me on a short leash and plies me with sugary baked goods. Damn woman has put fifteen pounds on me in the last year."

Spike patted him on the belly's new paunch. "Doesn't appear you've been trying too hard to resist."
Both men shared a laugh as Spike followed him, standing guard while he removed the padlocks allowing the back doors to swing open. Spike looked in at the three men sitting on the side benches, shackled together at the feet.

Burt dropped all humor from his face and jangled the keys in his hand. "Listen up gentlemen, I'm gonna take my chains off your legs so you can jump out. The belly chains and cuffs stay on. Keep in mind, there ain't no place to run so let all those thoughts float right out of your little pea brains. This here is Officer Pratt. You do exactly what he tells you and everything will be all right." He then reached in for the prisoner closest to the door. "O.k., Sweetheart, you're first."

Spike chuckled. He had heard that exact same speech a hundred times. He watched as Burt reached first for the smallest man, a redhead, unchained his feet and helped him down. The dark haired one was next and the one built like a fucking mountain was last. From reading the files, Spike
would bet a paycheck that that one was Steele. A big bad. No problem, there were plenty other big bads to keep him company.

"Welcome home, Gentlemen. I'm Officer Pratt and I run intake. You will be with me for the next three months while you are evaluated. Tests will be done by our medical, psychology, and educational departments before it is determined which housing unit you will be permanently assigned to in general population. You will be advised of several simple rules that we require you to follow. Basically, gentlemen, you don't start any mess and there won't be any mess. Are we understood?"

Spike looked at his new charges. The redhead sighed calmly. Obviously he had been in this situation before. Spike liked that. The dark haired man appeared shell shocked. A first timer. His eyes were bugged, the pupils pinpoint small and his whole body shook. Before he had a chance to speak to him, Steele stepped forward.

"Fuck you! Don't nobody tell me what the fuck to
do! You fuckin' foreign cocksucker......"

Quickly Spike spun around, not to verbally respond to the almost expected profanity laced declaration, but to stop what he knew it would trigger.

Instantly, Burt pulled a small black leather sap from his back waistband and in a smooth, often used move, he smacked it across the huge man's back, striking him in the kidneys and sending him to his knees screaming in pain.

Spike huffed, his hands on his hips. Although pretending disgust, both officers knew establishing themselves with the biggest asshole in the group simplified matters and alleviated misunderstandings right off the bat. "Damn Burt. Now I gotta call medical and get him checked. You know that throws my whole schedule off track."

"Oops, sorry."

Burt just shrugged as all eyes watched the quivering man fight the urge to cry and struggle to get back to
his feet. Finally, Spike and Burt each grabbed an arm and jerked him up.

"Well, now that we have that out of the way, we're headed to procurement for State issue. Clothing, bedding, hygiene, and shoes. Then on to the showers. So, say bye bye to the nice driver and get in a straight line."

Everyone instantly and without question, complied. Steele grudgingly and silently stood last, glaring at Spike with what he hoped was his most intimidating look. Spike snorted. He had seen better. Much better.

Burt laughed at Spike's little pep talk, waved his hand and climbed back in the cab of his van to complete the transfer paperwork before the return trip to County holding.

Xander was numb. His body had hit the wall of horror overload and completely shut down. He couldn't fathom what, in his short twenty-three years, he could have done that would cause him to
deserve this nightmare. He still had not been able to wrap himself around the concept of this being the rest of his life.

He did know one thing for sure. It may not be today, this week or even this year, but at some point, when the opportunity presented itself, Xander would end it all. Death at his own hands was the last shred of personal control he had and he intended to prove his future was still his own choice. There was no possible way he could spend the next sixty years in this hell.

After the verdict had been read, he awoke to an ammonia stick under his nose and two burly deputies dragging him back to his holding cell. Within four hours he was chained and tossed into a van for the trip here. His attorney had said something about an appeal, but Xander knew better than to hold his breath.

The entire trip here had been a nonstop litany by the big guy of how many women he had raped and killed, the hard drugs he had injected and the cops
and prison guards he had in his back pocket. He had unlimited tales of violence and death that apparently took place on a daily basis at Riverview Penetentary.

After the first hour, Xander had stopped listening. Whether all that was true or just being tossed about for shock value didn't matter. Xander was as deep in shock as he could get.

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**Part Four**

The next couple hours progressed smoothly. Each of the new inmates were issued their basic material needs that would supply them till they had the opportunity to purchase extras from the prison commissary. If they had anyone on the outs that cared enough to send money. Xander didn't.

They were all three following Spike's instruction to
walk, without conversation, in a single file line. When all the other issues had been addressed, the last thing on the agenda was their shower. Their civilian clothes would be laundered and boxed up to be shipped home or donated to charity and they would be dressed in prison blues.

Spike pointed toward the small basement shower room and announced. "Strip, gentlemen. You have five minutes. I want to see your hair washed. Lift your balls and clean your privates, then scrub between your butt cheeks. You are going to be living in very close quarters with the other inmates and I will not permit trifleness on my unit."

He then stood back and watched. Spike had learned over the years that you could tell a lot about a man by watching him naked with other men. Osborn was comfortable. He undressed quickly and calmly began to wash neither paying attention nor ignoring the other two.

Harris was very different. His hands shook and he hesitated, having to be told twice to move his ass.
When he did turn on the water, he cringed at the cold assault. His eyes were down turned and he tried to hurry. Steele was like a jungle predator who had clearly caught the scent of wounded prey.

He continually bumped Harris, mumbling vague threats, singing loudly as he lathered his huge, muscular, hairy body and dramatically shaking his soapy cock in the other's direction. All actions designed to intimidate. And it was clearly working.

Spike allowed it to continue. As long as there was no direct physical contact or attempt to assault, he would not intervene. Harris needed to learn quickly that this was not life on the outs and no C.O. would be around to protect him every minute of the day. He had a lovely set hanging between his legs, now he better learn to use them fast.

When the group finally finished, they took the back stairway to the first floor, down a hallway to an area that had four steel doors. Two on the left side of the corridor and two on the right. Without hesitation, Spike went to the first on the left and, using his key
opened the door then stepped to the side to allow the new inmates to enter. "Welcome home gentlemen."

The doorway opened up into a large, round open area obviously set up as a communal dayroom. It was full of activity that stopped and silenced as the newbys entered. Card games froze in middeal, the television was ignored and conversations stopped. After about thirty seconds, it all returned to normal. The group had evaluated the new arrivals and deemed them uninteresting.

Shoving the other two aside, Steele marched in first and scoped out the territory trying to decide if it was worth claiming and planting his flag of dominance. The first two rows by the t.v were filled with the dorm's blacks. They owned the remote and deferred to no one. Steele grinned. This was a challenge he could relate to.

Osborn entered next. When he looked around he spotted two other men he had previously done time with. He gave them a slow tip of the head which
they returned. Oz was in.

Xander clutched his bundle of clean linen, hygiene, and one change of clothes tightly to his chest. He felt like he had tumbled on to the surface of Mars and the totality of it all was beginning to dawn on him. His eyes darted wildly around the room and he knew with absolute certainty that if he had to live here for the rest of his life, he would go insane.

As a low whimper came from his throat, Xander took a step backwards, bumping into Spike who had planted himself there for just that reason. He could feel the panic and near hysteria rolling off the man and knew if he didn't check it quickly, they would both be having a very bad day.

"No, no, Harris. Don't do it."

Quickly, Spike shoved Xander to the side and into a small glass surround area used as an office. When he did, Xander noticed a female corrections officer look up and smile.
"Hey, Spike. You get our new fish all checked into the hotel Riverview?"

Spike chuckled easily. "Yeah, almost. This here is Inmate Harris. Inmate Harris, this is my partner, Miss Lehane. Faith, do me a favor and get those two into a couple cells. I think Harris and I need to have a bit of a pow wow before he goes in."

Faith looked Xander up and down and knew he was about to crack. She had seen it before and it could set the whole population into a frenzy. "Sure. Where do you want them?"

Spike checked the cell chart. "Put Steele, the big one, in with Rug Barnhart. They should be pretty well matched. #3 is empty. Put the redhead on the top bunk and when I'm done with this one he can go on the bottom."

Faith nodded and went to collect her charge. When the door closed behind her, Spike dropped down into his chair and propped his feet up on the small desk. "Listen to me, Harris. How you start out here
sets the tone for your whole sentence. Now you go out there and act like a bitch, before long someone is going to make you one. According to your file, you pulled life. That's a long time to be kicked around and pissed on."

Xander still fought not to cry. His breath burned in his lungs and his heart slammed against his rib cage. "You don't understand. I'm innocent. I shouldn't be here. I don't know who killed my friend but I swear to God it wasn't me."

Spike waited, letting him get it all out before slowly rising from his seat. He then turned and pointed out into the dayroom. "Look out there Harris. You're looking at forty-nine innocent men. Every jury made a mistake and none of them should be here, but the fact is, they are. Just like you and until you get another trial, or something happens to change that, I suggest you find away to accept and absorb it or you won't make it."

Suddenly Xander was swamped by a whole new emotion. Frustrated fury. He was mad at the
system, the injustice and especially the fucking asshole in front of him that had no brains, compassion or common sense.

"Fine! Look, just let me go to my cell and leave me the fuck alone."

Spike's eyebrows went up. "No problem. Just a few things first. One, you will NOT use profanity when speaking to me or my partner, two, you will follow all the rules of the institution. Oh, and Harris, I know you're gay. Don't let us catch you selling, trading or giving your......favors. Sexual activity, even consensual, is prohibited within the institution."

Xander was floored. He was horrified and humiliated but he gave no answer past a hateful glare.

Spike reached around him and opened the office door. "Go see Officer Lehane about your cell assignment."
Xander Harris had been dismissed.

Part Five

Spike felt great. There was a bounce in his step and a song in his heart. He was just coming off his two days and they had been VERY relaxing. He had gone down to Mansfield to the gay bar district and really cut loose. He got brain slamming drunk, let a good looking steel worker pick him up and together they had gotten off a record number of times.

It wasn't what he wanted to do for the rest of his life, but sometimes, in order to blot out all thoughts of a stressful job, it was what he needed to just blow off steam.

Unlike a lot of the C.O.'s he didn't hang with them
on the off hours. He had gone out a few times for an after work beer or five, but he knew better than to make it a habit. Spike's personal life was his own and he liked it that way.

Kicking back happily, Faith joined him at roll call. "Well, don't you look smug. Get lucky?"

Spike chuckled. There were few people he would talk to like this but a partnership in this type of job built a trust and connection that went beyond 'I've got your back'.

"Maybe. Let's just say I hope your days off go as well." Spike waggled his eyebrows and Faith laughed out loud. Before they had time to get into specifics, roll call was started. Patiently, the partners sat back and half listened as the Sgt. read through the usual list of fights, gambling rings discovered, gang scrolls confiscated and food fights in the dietary.

When he got to the new inmates added to the red flag list, Spike was shocked to hear one of them was
his. Leaning over, he whispered to Faith. "Who has medical red flagged?"

"New guy. Harris. He won't come out of his cell and he has refused all meals."

"Fuck! Has anyone talked to him?"

"We tried. So far, no response. Psych is holding a meeting today to decide whether to put him on suicide watch."

"Son of a bitch!"

"Don't know. I never met his mother."

Spike rolled his eyes at her attempt at humor. His good mood had melted away and he couldn't wait for roll call to be over. He had been on duty one time, nearly three years ago when there had been a completed suicide in the institution and he swore it would never again happen and NEVER on his unit. Not if he could help it.
Minutes later he entered the housing unit, marching straight to the office where Riley Finn was waiting impatiently to go home. "Hey, Spike. Damn, I'm glad to see you."

He grabbed up his bag and headed for the door where Spike stopped him before he could leave. "Wait. I hear Harris is red flagged. You try to talk to him? You try to get him to eat?"

C.O. Finn just shrugged. "Nah, way I figure it if he gets hungry enough, he'll eat. Look, anything else you want to know is in the log, I gotta go."

Spike watched with disgust as the day shift officer disappeared through the steel door before turning his attention to the activity in the dayroom. Looking around, he quickly found what he wanted and called out. "Osborn! In the office! Now!"

The other inmates watched the redhead rise and walk through the group, most were curious as to what he was being called in on, all were glad it wasn't them.
"Close the door behind you."

Oz did as he was told and waited calmly.

"What's up with your cellmate?"

"Up?"

"Yeah, I see he won't come out and he won't eat. You talk to him about it?"

"It?"

"Don't play fucking games with me. Is he cracking up or not?"

Oz tipped his head slightly and looked into Spike's eyes. He had been locked up a dozen times beginning from the time he was twelve years old. Since then he had seen all types of guards. Good ones, bad ones and the ones who were only here for a paycheck.
The jury was still out on this one. The other inmates had said he was fair, but that wasn't enough. Oz was not a squealer, and he sure had no intention of admitting that he had been sleeping, spooning his cellmate just to stop the gut wrenching sobs that started at lights out and stopped at morning head count. No, some things between cell mates were best kept behind locked bars.

"Don't know about cracking up, but he is taking a while to adjust."

Spike was alarmed. Not by the words, but by the look in Osborn's face. Harris was sinking fast and if someone didn't get to him with a life raft soon, he may just drown.

After dismissing him, Spike turned to his partner. "Watch the dayroom, I'm going to go down and see what I can do. Also, call down to dietary and have a supper tray sent up. Tell them medical approved it. If they check, I'll take the heat for the lie."

Faith nodded and picked up the phone as Spike left
the office and headed down the long hallway that ran off the center of the dayroom. There were fifteen cells on each side of the hall and an emergency escape door at the far end.

Spike stopped at cell #3 and, using his key, opened the steel door. Reaching in, he flipped the switch flooding the room with light. Harris laid, curled in a fetal position, on the bottom bunk, face to the wall.

"Harris?"

He got no response and really hadn't expected one. Walking over, he kicked his foot against the metal bed frame causing it to jostle. "HARRIS! Look at me when I talk to you."

Immediately, Xander flipped over and scowled, glaring at him with red, tear swollen eyes. Spike was immensely relieved. He was at least still responding. "I can't let you do this, Harris."

"Do what?"
"Die."

Xander wiped his nose on his pillow and the tears again rolled down his face. "I can't do this. I can't live like this."

Spike sat down on the edge of his bunk and rested his forearms on his knees, clasping his hands together.

"I don't know what to tell you. You're here. Period. We are not going to let you die and only you can find a way to live. Now, in about ten minutes, my partner is going to take the rest of the unit to chow. When they're gone I expect you to get up, wash your face and come out to the dayroom. I ordered you a supper tray and I am going to make sure you eat it."

"I don't want any...."

"Harris, this is not negotiable and I didn't ask what you wanted. Now, you have ten minutes. Don't make me come back down here."
Xander watched the guard leave the cell and he sniffed. Without thinking why, he dragged himself out of the bed and went to the sink to splash some cold water.

Part Six

Xander stood, his arms hanging limply at his sides. He faced the inside of his steel cell door and he waited. He knew why he had agreed to get up and follow the guard's orders. It was because he simply didn't know what else to do. His life was no longer his own.

After a couple minutes, the familiar buzzing and metallic click sound signaled the automatic release of his cell door lock so he pushed it open and stepped outside. He turned and faced toward the now quiet dayroom and, again, he waited.

"Let's go, Harris. The meatloaf is getting cold."

Xander clasped his hands behind his back, hung his head and walked up the long hallway. When he
stepped into the brightly overlit area, he was greatly relieved to see it empty with the exception of C.O. Pratt.

"Come on, Harris, relax. Have a seat. You must be hungry."

"No, sir. No thank you."

"Bull shit. Get your arse over here and eat something. Believe me, it's a lot better than having medical run a feeding tube down your throat and force feeding you."

Xander flinched. He didn't know if that was true or not, but it wasn't something he wanted to test. Easing forward, he sat down at the round game table where his food tray sat, the lump of grey-brown meat was gelling in an odd smelling gravy. His stomach betrayed him by growling loudly, eager to be filled.

His breath hitched in an attempt to not start crying again and he picked up his plastic spork. He stabbed
the meat a couple time and when he was certain that it would not squirm away, he cut into it.

Spike watched him silently. If the man was not completely broken, he sure wasn't far from it. "You know, Harris, a lot of people have been able to adjust to life here and have, in fact, found new purpose. You can't let this beat you."

Xander threw down his multipurpose utensil and stared into the clear blue eyes imploringly. "But I'm innocent. I didn't do this! I loved Jesse and I would never hurt him. Someone else killed him and the killer is still out there."

Spike sighed and handed him the spork encouraging him to continue eating. "Harris, I'm not the one you need to convince. I don't have any authority in your case. My job is all about the here and now. Look at it this way. If you were in a car accident that was NOT your fault, but you were hurt, say paralyzed, it would be a life altering event. It's not what you planned and it's not what you wanted for your life, but it's what you're stuck with. Now, you need to
stop wishing for what isn't and face what is. The longer you hide out, the harder it's going to be."

"I'll never have a job. I'll miss my friends and family."

"In time, you can get a job here. Your family can visit and write you. You can make friends here."

Xander dropped his head and placed his hands in his lap. "No one will ever love me."

Spike placed his hand on the inmate's shoulder. "You don't have to be in prison to fear that. Listen to me Harris. You are here. Period. Now, you can make your time hard or easy. It's all up to you. Your celly, Osborn, knows the system. Take advantage of that and use him."

Xander immediately blushed. He looked away, hoping the guilt wasn't obvious in his expression. He was NOT about to admit that Oz had been comforting him when he cried. It was just too girly.
Spike picked up on the look and interpreted it immediately but incorrectly. He assumed the guilt was over a sexual relationship that was developing between the two men. Policy deemed they should be unbunked if there were any indication or suspicion of sexual activity, but Spike quickly made a decision. For now, he would ignore it.

If that was the only thread holding Harris to sanity, who was Spike to wield the scissors and cut it? No, he would leave it alone and try to encourage Harris to stand on his own. When he was stronger, beginning to adapt and function, then he would unbunk them.

"Tell you what. You eat everything on your tray and stay out in the dayroom for the rest of my shift and before I go home, I'll go down to the vending machines and get you a chocolate bar."

Xander's eyes lit up and he almost smiled. He hadn't tasted chocolate since he had been locked up in county during his trial. It was a kindness and human connection he had all but given up on. Quickly, the
red tint to his eyes and nose darkened as he again fought the need to cry. Dropping his head, he nodded and dove into the nasty, tasteless food.

Within minutes, the steel door flew open and the voices of the inmates as they counted themselves through the door way boomed, followed by the rowdy sound of activity. Each group claimed their designated area and the bullshit challenges began.

Spike saw the flash of panic as it crossed Xander's face and he knew the man was about to bolt. Acting quickly, Spike rose from the game table and began working the room. He joked easily with the other inmates who bombarded him with questions about their rec period and how they could get new shirts, shoes, or why the commissary was late.

Xander watched intently, noting that C.O. Pratt allowed them to call him 'Spike'. He wondered if he could summon up the nerve to do the same.

Spike fielded it all and paused when he came to the card table where Oz sat dealing a hand of spades.
"Hey, Osborn, seems medical has finally cleared your celly. That flu bug he had is gone, how about you let him sit in on a hand or two?"

One of the other inmates at the table frowned. "Flu? Whuz up, Oz, man? You never said he was sick."

Oz tipped his head for Xander to take the empty seat and continued to deal. "Yeah, well if I told you he came in sick, you bitches woulda acted like he was a leper or somethin'. Now you gonna play or what?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm gonna play. Just don't want him coughin' on me or nuthin'."

The table relaxed and Xander cautiously sat down. Any curiosity or interest the others had in him died quickly and the dorm program was soon in full swing.

Spike returned to the office and joined his partner who had been watching the whole thing through
the glass wall. "Well, well, appears you have done your good deed for the day."

Spike chuckled. "Yep, another problem averted."

Silently, Spike took a few minutes to watch. Only one thing about the whole scenario still bothered him. Spike had had thousands of inmates profess their innocence to him over the years, but this one....... Something about the look in those deep brown eyes....... 

Spike shook his head to clear his thoughts then focused his attention on his paperwork and upcoming head count, dismissing all other ideas as irrelevant.

Part Seven
Oz laid on his top bunk, hands behind his head and watched silently as his cell mate paced back and forth. Both men were dressed in their white, state issued boxers and were ready for bed. It had been a very interesting afternoon.

He had patiently lost three hands of spades till Xander had caught on to the card game and been able to hold his own. He had clued his cellmate in to the fact that you had to raise your hand and wait for permission before using the communal bathroom and he had watched Xander's back as the unit lined up for the nighttime lock down. His celly seemed totally oblivious to the dangers of the jungle around him.

Oz was glad the man had left his cell and had finally joined the rest of the population, but he couldn't help but wonder what had inspired the transformation. Not that he would ask. Didn't need to. He had learned long ago that you could find the answer to any question through silent observation. So he waited. He could see from Xander's restlessness that the reason would make itself
"What time do you think it is? I hate not knowing what time it is."

Oz just shrugged in answer. "Dunno. Does it matter? You got a bus to catch?"

Xander chose to ignore the sarcasm. He walked back to his cell door and tried to peer out the six inch wide piece of plexiglass despite knowing the only view he had was of the cell door directly across the hallway. "No, I just wondered."

Before Oz could wonder what he was fussing about, the intercom system in the cells blared with C.O. Lehane's voice announcing:

"TEN MINUTES TO LIGHTS OUT, GENTLEMEN. TEN MINUTES."

Oz rolled over on his side and watched his celly sit down on his bunk. He waited to see if the tears would start. Selfishly he kind of hoped they would.
Oz had spent years off and on in lockup and knew that next to the sex, the hardest thing to deal with was the lack of physical touch. No human being can exist without the touch of another and stay sane.

Finally, when Xander had given up all hope, the door buzzed and popped open. He jumped to his feet as the C.O. entered. "Did you think I had forgotten?"

Xander positively beamed at the sight of the handsome Officer Pratt with the chocolate bar in his hand. "No. Well, yeah. Wow, thanks."

Spike laughed. "No problem, Pet. You did good today. Now, when I come in tomorrow afternoon, I expect to see you out there in the dayroom with everyone else."

"Do I get another candy bar if I do?"

Spike just rolled his eyes and chuckled as he closed the cell door. Oz continued to watch without
comment. Five minutes later when everything went dark, he hopped down and Xander quickly scooted over, making room.

Tonight, instead of facing the wall, Xander laid on his side, his head propped up on his hand and even in the dark, Oz could see the big grin on his face. "What do you think about him?"

Oz sighed. He did not like where he knew this was going. "I DON'T think about him."

"But he's nice. Don't you think he's nice? Nobody else cared if I lived or died and he did."

Oz pulled the rough, scratchy blanket up to his waist. "Xander. He's a screw."

"A what?"

"A cop. A guard. A C.O. Xander, it's them on one side and us on the other. Don't ever make the mistake of thinking it isn't. He got you out of this cell because if you off yourself he loses his job."
Period. Don't go thinking there's more to it than that."

Xander frowned. The cell was dark but he could see Oz's eyes and knew there was no malice there, only his perceived truth. Xander flopped over and Oz automatically cuddled up. With his face toward the wall, Xander popped a square of the chocolate in his mouth and handed a piece over his shoulder which Oz took silently.

"How come the other inmates call him Spike instead of Mr. Pratt?"

Oz licked the candy from his fingers and waited to see if another piece would be offered. "Some are like that. Last place I was locked up in, you got thrown in solitary if you called them by their name. Said it was disrespect. Place before that, they all wanted to play that buddy buddy shit. You got to be adaptable to survive, Xan. That means look and listen before you do something stupid."

Xander carefully folded the wrapper down around
the rest of his candy bar, saving it for the next day. "I still wish we could know what time it was."

Oz realized there would be no more chocolate coming his way so he wrapped his arm around Xander's waist.

"When you get assigned to a unit in general pop you can have your family send you a radio or even a television but you gotta be careful."

"Of what?"

"Of strong armers. You don't get nothing you aren't prepared to fight for. And I'll tell you something else. Don't never borrow anything. Somebody here will offer you candy, hygiene or cigarettes and act like they're your friend but they aren't. They'll tax you to death and you'll never be able to pay them back. You need something you ain't got, you either get it from the outs or you do without."

Xander listened to all the advice Oz was giving him and he could feel his good mood quickly sliding
away. There was so much to learn, so many dangerous twists and turns. This was not the life he wanted to live.

Finally, with a yawn, Xander whispered in the dark. "Hey, Oz."

"Yeah?"

"If you hate it here, how come you keep getting locked up?"

Oz snorted a puff of warm air against the back of his cellmate's neck. "Damn if I know. Guess I haven't figured out how not to."

Part Eight

The next two weeks passed by with a predictable, daily pattern establishing itself. The nights were still
long and often punctuated with times of claustrophobia and depression, but the days.....the days were full of joy, hope and anticipation.

Xander knew there was no future for them and Oz had certainly been generous with criticism and admonition for the way his cell mate was acting toward C.O. Pratt, but Xander didn't care.

What else did he have to look forward to? What other reason was there to allow his heart to continue to beat? There was nothing except the large round clock on the wall of the dayroom that ticked agonizingly slowly till the three o'clock shift change.

That's when his world would again started to turn. The solid, gray, steel door would swing open and HE would walk in. C.O. Pratt. Spike. Xander had practiced saying it all morning. He would whisper the name under his breath. The others called him that, why not Xander?
When he finally gathered up the courage, it rolled off his tongue like butter. He had raised his hand and called out. "Spike, bathroom." Spike had pointed his affirmative response and Xander was thrilled. It had felt so natural. It had seemed right. He wondered if Spike ever called any of the inmates by their first names.

Outside rec period was heaven. Each housing unit had a forty-five minute time to go out to the compound. A large two acre area surrounded by two thirty foot high fences topped with razor wire that glinted like diamonds on the California sunlight.

Two corners were set up with round cement circles containing basketball hoops. These were always claimed and dominated by the more aggressive men who needed the opportunity of controlled, physical assertiveness.

It allowed them the release of shoving, cursing and exhausting themselves, all the time establishing who had the strength and power and who didn't.
Xander avoided these areas like the plague. Instead, he chose the worn, grass free, oval walking track in the center of the yard. Lap after lap he walked. Sometimes alone, sometimes with Oz or one of the other inmates he had found companionable.

Often, with Spike.

It had become the pattern that by Xander's third lap around the quarter mile track, Spike would join him and walk alongside. They would talk about Xander. His adjustment to prison, his life on the outs, his few friends who wrote to him and why his parents didn't.

What was surprising to Spike was that Xander actually had very few complaints. He said he missed knowing the time and he wondered if maybe someone on the outs would send him a radio if he asked. Beyond that, he seemed to be starting to accept his situation.

Spike always listened patiently. He encouraged Xander to talk and he walked alongside quietly,
always watching the rest of the exercise yard intently and without criticism.

It helped tremendously to get everything off his chest, but Xander seldom discussed his case. He had professed his innocence and knew Spike didn't believe him. What could be said beyond that?

This was, to Xander, the best time of the day. Fresh air and sunlight. Freedom, for just a little while, from the claustrophobic feel of the cement block walls closing in on him. And it was spent with someone he liked very much. Maybe too much. It was what he lived for.

Oz had watched all this form and develop with great concern. He had promised himself he would not interfere, but knew Xander was about to make the biggest mistake of his life.

Faith had watched all this form and develop with great concern. She had promised herself she would not interfere, but knew Spike was about to make the biggest mistake of his life.
They had been partners for two years and after a string of other C.Os, he was easily the best one she had ever worked with. She was one of the few people in the institution that knew he was gay but to Faith it didn't matter. After all, how was that any different than her working with male inmates? She knew there was a clearly defined line. She would never dream of crossing it and assumed Spike felt the same.

"Damn, it's been a long week. I'll bet you're ready for your days off aren't you?" Faith had propped her feet up on the small office desk. Her paperwork was finished and the unit was locked down, lights out. They were fifteen minutes away from shift change and she felt the time had come for a heart to heart.

Spike unhooked the heavy, thick belt from around his uniformed waist and tossed it onto the long counter that served as a desk. "Yeah. I think I'm going to spend one of those days just sleeping."

Faith chuckled. "Um, Spike, you know I think you're
arguably the best C.O. in the institution and a great partner right?"

"Uh, Oh. What did I do?"

Faith took a deep breath and dove in. "It isn't what you have done but it's what I'm afraid of what you're about to do."

Spike bristled. "And what is it you think I'm going to do?"

"Inmate Harris. The other cons are starting to notice."

"Notice what? What are you accusing me of, Faith?"

"Nothing. Look, Spike, all I'm saying is that these inmates have all day to study us and look for any weakness they can exploit. They're beginning to talk about the amount of time you and Harris spend together and I just wonder if it wouldn't be a good idea to put some distance between you. Let me deal with him for a while."
Spike knew what she was saying was true, but something about the man drew him in. He found himself getting into his uniform an hour before time to drive in. He automatically looked around the dayroom as soon as he entered the housing unit, seeking and searching for the man who'd wormed his way into Spike's life and mind. Spike was undeniably attracted. Worse yet, he was infatuated.

Still, Spike wasn't stupid. He knew he had stepped onto thin ice and was close to breaking through. He needed to jump back. Quick. He had to get some solid ground under his feet and if Faith and the other inmates were noticing, he better do it now.

Faith waited. She hoped he would take her advice in the spirit in which it was given. "Look, maybe I'm out of line. I just...."

"No. No, you're right. I got caught up in feeling sorry for him, but that's all it was. I can see where that sympathy might have been misconstrued."
Faith smiled and winked. "Go somewhere this weekend and get laid. I hear Mansfield has some great bars where the beer is cold and the men are hot. Why not swallow a few of each?"

Spike laughed. "I think that's an excellent idea."

Part Nine

Saturday. 4 p.m.

Xander stood in line in the dayroom and waited. He hated days like this. Days that carried nothing worth anticipating. He had refused breakfast, choosing to remain in his cell while his roommate went for the puddle of yellowish, scrambled, almost eggs that laid in a watery pool on a tray. It was usually accompanied by a slice of dry, burnt toast. Xander passed.
When he finally did come out, his afternoon had been spent watching BET and hour after hour of the humping, grinding, mindless videos of gangsta rap. It gave him a headache, but as one of the few white boys on unit, what say did he have?

Now, at least, it was outside rec time. He knew without Spike to walk with him it was not the same, but at least it was out. It was a chance, for just a few precious minutes, to pretend that he was free. That he had come to a park near his house to stroll and feed the pigeons. That his life was still his own.

The fifty prisoners lined up in the center of the dayroom, hands clasped behind their backs, voices silenced and waiting on C.O. Lehane to count them out the door.

When he stepped outside, the warmth of the sun hit his face and Xander tipped his head back, smiling. He immediately headed for the walking track thinking that today might be the day to break into a jog.
With his mind on the outs, Xander failed to heed Oz's constant warning to keep one eye open at all times. Before he had made two complete passes, Xander realized he was not alone. He now had two companions. Men on the housing unit that he stayed far away from. Gang bangers in for drugs and rape. Citizens of an America Xander had never traveled to.

"Yo, honey. Wuz up?"

Maurice McDaniels, better known as Mo Mac, fell into step on Xander's right, throwing his arm around Xander's shoulder.

Xander's head snapped to the right. His heart pounded in fear and his brain knew better than to allow his mouth to answer.

"Yo. You got no words for my boy?"

Xander's head turned now to the left where Leroy Brown had crowded in on his other side. Xander
looked straight ahead and continued to walk, the smile and joy completely forgotten as every muscle in his body went on alert. He knew by ignoring the dangers and pretending he was not here, he had made a serious mistake.

Although there was no threat, yet, Xander braced himself. He subtly glanced around and was dismayed to see C.O.s Lehane and Finn on the far sides of the compound. He was on his own. He continued to walk. Thinking back to last night, Xander clearly remembered Oz explaining the concept of 'woof tickets' to him.

Oz had said that a con will sell a 'woof ticket' to anyone he thinks will buy it. It is an implied threat. You never actually knew if it was real or bullshit unless you bought it. There was one thing for sure, if you buy it, it will come again, ten fold.

Xander also knew the way he handled this could make or break him, and with forty more years to go, he wasn't about to be anyone's bitch. "You're wasting your time. I don't have anything worth
MoMac's fingers squeezed Xander's shoulder painfully. "Damn, Leroy, I think our bro here is dissin' us. You callin' us thieves, Whitey?"

Deciding that, for now, these two did not want to draw attention to themselves, Xander reached up and removed the hand from his shoulder. "I'm saying, say what you want then leave me the fuck alone."

Leroy chuckled angrily. "That ain't what your Momma said when she spread her legs open for my big black dick."

Xander just snorted. Insulting the parents that had never cared for him and had now all but abandoned him was a tactical error on the intimidator's part. "Yeah? Well, she always was full of surprises."

Knowing how volatile his partner could become, MoMac jumped back in before this could spiral out of control. "Chill, Roy. Our boy here will think we
don't like him. So, Harris, what say we get down to business. We've been watchin' you and it seems that you have a certain pig in your pocket, or maybe your pants, either way we think that's some interesting shit."

Xander frowned. His brain scrambled to translate the foreign language and when the script rewrote itself, he was stunned. 'Denial' was his only hope and he responded calmly. "I don't know what the fuck you're talking about."

MoMac grinned. He knew he had hit the target in the center of the bulls eye. "Riiiiight. See we hear Pratt been givin' you candy and God knows what else. Makes us wonder what you been doin' for him in exchange. Makes us wonder if you been suckin' his dick or maybe bendin' over for the man. Cause I gotta tell you, I sure wouldn't mind them soft pink lips wrapped around my piece of black meat."

MoMac grabbed his crotch and groaned loudly as he massaged and worked it through the rough fabric of the blue prison pants. Leroy roared with
laughter. Xander swallowed his fear, keeping his eyes straight ahead as he kept moving. "That's a lie. There is nothing between me and C.O. Pratt. NOTHING."

Leroy bumped Xander causing him to stumble. Xander quickly recovered and picked up the pace of his step. His companions easily kept up. "Well now, that's too bad cause we sure wish there was. See the way we see it, you put out some man pussy and Pratt gives you whatever you want and in turn, whatever WE want. We could all be business partners."

Xander suddenly stopped walking. After two steps alone, the other two spun on their heels, returned and stood just inches from Xander's nose. Both C.Os across the compound noticed and started moving in that direction.

"Are you saying you want to pimp me? FUCK YOU! I'm no one's whore! You can't make me....."

MoMac's tense lips snarled back, showing a row of
white teeth. "What I'm saying is that we can make your time easy or we can make it hard. Your fuckin' choice, but if you're thinking of saying 'no', then maybe you better fuckin' think again."

"FUCK Y..." Before the expletive could finish, a steel fist rammed into Xander's back and another punch struck him across the face. In automatic reaction, Xander swung and heard the cartilage crunch of a broken nose.

Stereophonically, from speakers all around him, all three combatants heard the blasting siren that signaled trouble in the compound. Panic shot his adrenalin through the roof as Xander fought for his life.

He could no longer hear the shouts of the other prisoners as they cheered for one side or the other. He never heard the army of C.O.s that charged forward, demanding that all three stop and hit the ground. He was, however, eternally grateful for the hard leather sap that struck him on the back, knocking him to the grass.
Part Ten

Saturday evening.

Spike had enjoyed his day off. He had taken his uniforms to the dry cleaners and picked up some groceries. He had cleaned his apartment and mowed the grass, doing his best to block out all thoughts of a certain dark haired, handsome inmate.

He had acknowledged to himself that everything Faith said was right and he needed to get some space between them in order to clear his brain. He needed a wild night out. Just like old times.

He had never before felt any attraction to a convict and tried to understand what was different with this one. Harris was gorgeous, but he had seen good
looking before.

Harris had an innocence about him, but that meant nothing. Lots of inmates had led perfectly normal law abiding lives till one day they just snapped, committing a crime that landed them in Riverview. Guilty or innocent was neither here nor there.

It was something else. It was more. It was an inexplicable, dangerous attraction that grew in intensity day by day. Spike was drawn to him, despite knowing he was playing with fire. Luckily, Harris had not picked up on or returned the attraction. For that small fact, Spike was enormously grateful.

In a need for self examination and understanding, Spike stood naked in front of the full length mirror. He was still damp from the shower and his clothes were laid out on the foot of his bed waiting for him.

His hair, wet and falling loose, dripped rivulets of water that ran down his back between his shoulder blades, landing and pooling in the dip of the small of
his back before continuing down the round cheeks of his butt.

Reacting to the cold of the air conditioning that blew across his wet skin, Spike shivered, his flesh erupting in goose bumps. Still, he remained naked.

He studied his physique. Small, tight, firm, his stomach flat and his arms corded. Even before he took this job, Spike had always prided himself on keeping his body in top shape. He belonged to a gym and seldom missed a day, even if it were only for a quick hour of cardio. The exertion did as much for his mind as his body.

Spike ran his fingers through his hair, slicking it back against his scalp. His breathing picked up as he allowed his mind to wander. He wasn't interested in building a mental scenario. He didn't waste time creating a world of opportunity or romantic fantasy. He only wanted release.

Closing his eyes, Spike could see him, standing tall and straight in front of him. "Xander" He whispered
the name quietly. It echoed off his bedroom walls as though he had shouted it at the top of his lungs. His voice quivered as he said the forbidden name.

He had heard a few of the other white inmates call Harris that and he had caught himself more than once almost saying it.

"Xander."

His fingers, now wet from his hair, trailed moist paths down the sides of his neck, collar bone and chest till they reached his sensitive nipples. His cock immediately reacted to the message being sent.

Spike stepped his feet apart. He continued to watch his body's reaction in the mirror as he lightly brushed over the hardening nubs. Slowly, his cock filled and lengthened, lifting away from the heavy sack that swayed between his legs.

"Xander."

The name was said breathlessly, wantonly,
experimentally. Spike's hands slid down his sides to the tops of his thighs. The muscles in his legs went tense as the head of his cock, now full and thick, touched the top rim of his nest of blond, pubic hair.

Spike scratched his fingernails sharply on the sides of his bag feeling his nuts roll and shift. It started a tingle that vibrated from the base of his cock, through his balls and back to his hole.

"Xander."

The name came out with a moan. Unable to resist any longer, Spike wrapped his hand firmly around the shaft of his rigid cock and he squeezed. He ran his fist up and slid it back down, watching intently in the reflective glass as the foreskin pulled back and the head poked out, swollen, purple and seeping.

Sweeping his thumb over the blob of precum, Spike spread it around his cock and quickly resumed his masturbation. His body rocked slightly as he squatted, using his left hand to massage his balls, his hole pinched shut, winking and searching for,
"Xander"

The name was said with confidence. Ownership and possessiveness. His breath had picked up and each stroke forward was accentuated with a small grunt.

He wanted to close his eyes but he needed to watch. He wanted to see himself in the throes of charged sexual bliss. Through the fog of pleasure, he knew he was wrong, so he stopped thinking. He allowed himself to just feel. His cock's thick head held no brain that could conceive the morality of what it wanted.

He imagined dark hair and even darker eyes. He remembered watching as the man showered, his cock long and pink. His skin was sweet smelling and clean as he dried himself off. Spike had often caught Xander standing just a moment longer than necessary before he dressed.

"Xander."
The name felt right, familiar and comfortable as though he had said it on the cusp of a thousand orgasms. His stroke picked up speed and purpose, urging his release closer. His hand traveled the well known terrain of large, protruding veins, brushing the tender, sensitive nub of nerves and lightly pinching his thumb and forefinger over the slit, squishing the ooze between his fingertips.

His left hand released his balls and slapped against the mirror as he leaned forward, staring into his own blue eyes, sweat beading up on his freshly washed skin. His hot breath fogged the glass.

"Xander!"

The name was shouted as he jerked. His hand stopped moving and the rigid meat in his fist jumped, pulsed and began erupting thick, white streams of fluid that splattered against the glass, running down and dripping onto the hard wood floor with the force of a garden hose. Time and time again it spurted till eventually he was spent, deflating and drained.
"Xander."

The name was said quietly in a tone that cried out for a similar response, but none came. There was no answering "Spike" and he remembered sadly that there never would be.

Spike shook himself off and dropped his towel onto the wet spot on the floor. Confused and depressed, he knew exactly what he would do. He would dress, go out and get brain floating drunk. Then he would find a handsome, innocent looking dark haired man and take him on around the world night that neither of them would soon forget.

Sunday morning he would take two aspirin for the hangover and blame any stupid thing he had done on the jack and coke and get ready for work on Monday morning.

Part Eleven

The three convicts stood, well guarded, in the hallway outside the warden's office. Their hands
were cuffed uncomfortably behind their backs. All had been strictly threatened against speaking to each other or causing any further disruption.

They had been to the medical department and patched up as well as the limited facility could manage. MoMac had a broken nose that was taped and swollen, both his eyes were black and puffy and two fingers on his left hand were fractured.

Leroy had several cracked ribs. The direct result of his resistance to the responding guards and their persuasive riot batons. He also suffered a broken toe and a fat lip.

He shifted his weight from one foot to the other as he waited. He had been in this situation often and was not concerned in the least.

Xander was shell shocked. He had never been faced with so much aggression, hate and violence in his life. The fights and arguments he had had before were school yard scuffles. Slaps and swats that usually ended in more name calling than fists flying.
This was new territory. He was totally confused. How could someone he didn't even know hate him so much?

He had suffered bruised kidneys from Leroy's initial punch that resulted in painful, bloody urination and a minor concussion from one of the nameless guards who, Xander suspected, was just enjoying a bit of sport at the chance to whack an inmate.

His fingertips gingerly ghosted over the stitches in his head and his swollen lip as he flinched in pain.

On top of everything else, he was terrified of what awaited him inside the office of the Warden. If he had thought about it, what could they really do to a man serving a life sentence?

"HARRIS!"

Xander jumped at the sound of his name. The warden's office door swung open and C.O. Baxter shoved him forward. The other two convicts snickered, awaiting their turn.
Xander stumbled, caught himself, and walked in. He stepped up to the desk and heard the door slam behind him. He saw a manilla file folder with his name and prison number written across the top. Looking down at the name plate on the huge oak desk, Xander read the gold and black lettering, WARDEN R. GILES.

He wondered what the proper way to address the man would be. 'Your honor?' 'Mr. Giles?' 'God?' He finally settled on 'Sir.'

"Inmate Harris."

"Yes Sir?"

"How long have you been here?"

"About a month, Sir."

"And you are already causing trouble."

"No, Sir, I...."
"SHUT UP!"

Xander took a step back. "Please, Sir, if I can explain."

"I am not interested in any of your explanations, Mr. Harris. What I am interested in is identifying and dealing with the trouble makers that try to disrupt and control my institution. You have been here less than a month of a forty year sentence and you have already been a problem with your threats of first attempting suicide by refusing to eat and now you cause a fight in the exercise compound."

Xander was frantic to try and explain himself. He again felt the injustice of being accused of a crime he hadn't committed. It felt like Jesse all over again. "No! No, Sir, it wasn't like that. I was minding my own business. They started the fight. They threatened me. They tried to blackmail me."

Giles sat back impassively and let the inmate ramble on professing his innocence. When he had heard
enough, he made a note on the man's file and slammed it shut, shoving it to the side. "I find you guilty of putting the institution at risk by your actions, jeopardizing security and creating a disturbance. Your punishment will be five days cell confinement. I'm going to be watching you Mr. Harris."

"Please, Mr. Giles."

"OUT!"

C.O. Baxter clamped his hand around the back of Xander's neck and shoved him through the doorway and past the other two who were waiting to be seen next. Xander was returned to his cell. The place he detested. The place he would not leave for five long days.

"Officer Baxter, please show the other two inmates in."

On the Warden's command, Baxter shoved the other two forward. "Thank you Officer. Please wait
outside while I speak to these men. I will call for you when we are finished."

Baxter paused, slightly confused, but complied, closing the door as he left. When he was certain they were alone, Giles slouched back comfortably.

"What the fuck do you two morons think you are doing?"

Unable to breathe through his nose, MoMac tipped his head up and took a gasp of air. "Fuckin' little bitch! All we was doing was having a little business meeting with him and he went and got all stupid with us."

Leroy nodded vigorously. "Yeah, like he said. We was mindin' our own. You feel me?"

Giles slapped his palm down on his desk and jumped to his feet. "Your only business deal is the one you have with me and don't you forget it. Now if you think you can do better as a private contractor, you say so right now and you will both
be on your own. All agreements off. No more protection, no more privilege. I can NOT afford to have any attention drawn to me or to either of you. We made a deal when you two came in here. If you are backing out, you say so right now. If not, then I'm telling you both right now that if you do anything this stupid again, I can promise that you may just both be the victim of a very unfortunate accident. Now, you feel ME?"

Both convicts stood silently. It was a question that needed no affirmation. Leroy had come in here on a drug charge and a 3-5 year sentence. MoMac had the same with and additional 5 years for a gun spec and a parol violation.

Their first week in lock up, they had been summoned to the Warden's office and given a proposition. It meant a shortened sentence and a big chunk of money in a bank account on the outs. All they had to do was one little job.

With a brief conversation between them, they had happily agreed. It was nothing that they hadn't
done before on the outs for free. It was a deal that served all parties involved. Well, all but one. The one involved who didn't know he was.

Giles stood behind his desk with his arms crossed. "Tell me right now, Gentlemen. Is our deal on or not, because I can get someone else to do this job for me in a snap" Giles snapped his fingers to emphasize his point before going on. "Then, I can always have you transferred to a housing unit and a job in the machine shop. Of course the shop is a dangerous place. All sorts of nasty accidents happening in there. Usually when you least expect it. So, what will it be?"

Both men faces lost all signs of humor. MoMac tipped his head back and he gasped for air.

After the two were taken away, Giles wandered over to gaze out of his window. Slowly, a smile crept across his face as he considered just how this whole situation could play so well into his plans. Even this unexpected twist was a turn in the right direction.
Before he could scribble a memo, setting things into motion, his intercom buzzed.

"Warden Giles? Your daughter, Buffy is here to see you. Can I send her in?"

Part Twelve

Spike had spent the entire day on Sunday stretched out on his sofa. He couldn't believe what all he had done to, and with, the man he met at Moots Bar. He knew some of it had to be illegal. They had danced, grinding and humping on the dance floor before leaving together when the whisky kicked in.

They had gone through both condoms Spike had with him and a few that Tad, or Todd, or Tim, or whatever his name had been, had in the glove box of his car. Spike had fucked, sucked, reamed and rammed him then turned around and taken the
It was more sex than he had in months. It was probably more sex than is healthy or humanly possible. As promised, he blamed it on the drink.

Faith glanced over as he dropped down in the chair beside her and waited for the roll call to run it's course. Despite himself, he had gotten up this morning not only feeling better but excited about coming in to work. He was in control of himself again and nothing could change that.

"Have a good weekend?"

Spike chuckled and winked. "Let's just say I took your advice and could barely drag myself off the couch yesterday."

Faith slapped her hands over her ears, pretending to be horrified. "No! Stop! No details! At least not till later when we're alone. Sooooo, are we o.k?"

Spike lightly punched her in the arm and nodded.
"We are more than o.k."

Faith chuckled and visibly relaxed. "Good, cause I would hate to have to kick the shit out of you in front of the inmates."

Any retort Spike was about to make was interrupted by Angel snagging the chair on his other side and scooting up with a very smug grin. "So apparently you two don't have such an iron grip on Intake as everyone thought."

Spike checked any automatic expression he may have shown, instead using his best poker face. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"What? Your partner didn't tell you about the near riot that your cons caused out in the compound Saturday?'

Spike felt an uncomfortable niggle of fear stir inside him as he turned to Faith. He kept his voice low and controlled "We had an incident?"
Faith scowled at Angel hoping to shut him up. "Yeah, no big deal. I'll tell you about it later."

The rest of roll call dragged on for, what seemed to Spike, like hours. He was further concerned when the stats for Intake included three inmates with injuries and cell confinement. No names were given. When the shift commander finally dismissed them, Spike all but ran to the housing unit. Faith was hot on his heels.

When he stepped into the unit and took a visual of the activity in the dayroom, he took note of who was not there and he knew. "What the fuck happened?"

Faith quickly shut the office door. "Lower your voice! It was a fight, Spike. The kind that happens every day in this place. Let it go. Don't you dare do something stupid. What the fuck is wrong with you?"

Spike no longer cared what Faith thought. He needed to see Xander. He needed to make sure he
was alright, and then he had other inmates to deal with. "I don't know. I don't know what's wrong with me."

With no further explanation, Spike left the office and marched through the dayroom and down the hall, stopping at the third cell on the left. Opening the cell door, he flipped on the switch. Oz, who was stretched out on the top bunk reading a paperback, sat up when Spike entered and ordered. "OUT!"

Oz hopped down. Reluctantly, he picked up his shoes and started to leave, pausing to look back at his roommate who still lay with his face turned to the wall. "He's o.k., Spike. Let him be. It will only be worse if you....."

"Get out, Oz."

Oz shook his head sadly and left the cell.

Xander had been lying, just as he had for the past two days, face to the wall, hurting, lonely and depressed. He had allowed his mind to become
complacent. He had forgotten where he was. Now, reality had slapped him in the face and he knew. He knew this was his life for the rest of his life.

He had let his mind find joy in a joyless world and now he was paying. But, at least one good thing had come of this. He would never let himself feel false hope again. He was through with fantasy and happiness. He would remember where he was and the next time he would be ready.

Xander had heard Spike come in to the cell but refused to turn around. He prayed that he would just go away. He heard him order Oz out and still he refused to roll over. When he felt the depression on the side of his bed and the gentle hand on his shoulder, he felt his resolve running through his fingers like warm spring rain.

"Xander." The voice was quiet, soft, low and concerned. "Xander, turn over and talk to me. That's an order."

Although it sounded more like a plea than an order,
Xander complied. Spike gasped when he saw the bruised, swollen face, highlighted with a row of red angry stitches. "Jesus Christ."

Gently, Spike placed the palm of his hand on Xander's cheek. The warmth of his hand and the compassion in Spike's voice combined to nearly crack the wall Xander was trying so hard to build. Despite himself, the tears welled up in his eyes and he was stunned to see matching ones in Spike's

Before Xander could think of all the inadvisabilities of it, he threw himself forward, wrapping his arms around the hard, trim body of the prison guard who, after a moments hesitation, grabbed the convict and held him close.

Spike rubbed his face against the side of Xander's hair. He wanted to say he was sorry. Sorry it had happened. Sorry he hadn't been there to stop it. Just.....sorry. All he could do was hold on. Together their bodies rocked slightly while Spike whispered, "Shhhhh." gently in his ear.
To Xander, it was all worth it. The pain, the punishment, everything. If it led them to this, this comfort, this revelation, then he had no regrets.

Reluctantly, Spike loosened his grip and pulled back slightly. When he did, before he could think, before he could speak, he looked into the deep brown eyes and he dove in for a kiss.

Xander gasped, his mouth automatically opening and Spike's tongue shoved in. It tasted every inch of the inmates mouth, now warring, licking and sliding against Xander's.

The kiss was hungry, driving and overwhelming. Only one thin, tiny, silver strand of control kept Spike from shoving the man onto his back on the bunk bed. His body surged. He wanted to climb on. He wanted to climb in.

Both men moaned, hot, horny, desperate and clinging, Xander was the first to reluctantly come to his senses and push back, breathless and gasping. "Stop. Spike, stop. You can't be caught like
this. You'll lose your job."

Stunned, Spike was speechless. The shocking reality of what he had just done, let alone what he wanted to do, caught him totally off guard and he suddenly wanted to run. He was dizzy, lightheaded and confused. Spike stumbled to his feet and staggered back.

"Oh, God. Yeah, Sorry. I shouldn't have.....I gotta go."

Xander watched sadly as C.O. Pratt straightened his uniform, his hands shaking as he pushed back a stray hair, and rushed from the cell.

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**Part Thirteen**

The rest of the shift had been awkward and uncomfortable. The easy connection and
compatibility that Faith had always felt toward her partner was now strained and tense.

Spike had spent all afternoon edgy and irritable. A concerning change from the relaxed air he had come in with and she had a good idea why.

She knew the entire incident between Harris, McDaniels, and Brown was about much more than a gambling debt or a misunderstanding as all had claimed and that somehow Spike was involved. She also feared there would be more repercussions.

When the supper trays arrived, she insisted on taking them down. She did not know what had happened inside cell #3, but her imagination conjured up the worst. She also did not want Spike feeding the other two combatants residing in cell#10. She really didn't think he would do anything stupid, but she did consider he might just spit in their meatloaf to make a point.

When 10:40pm came around and lock down was complete, Faith sat down across from him. She
could see in his eyes that something had changed. He had never been secretive with her. They had been able to talk about anything. She knew he was gay. He knew she had cheated to pass a college course. They had talked about things no one else knew.

Now there was an elephant in the room that she refused to continue stepping around, pretending it wasn't there. Things needed to be said and they needed to be said before that elephant put on a dress and danced the tango, something everyone in the institution would notice. "Look, Spike, I can see you shooting holes in the bottom of your boat and I just want you to know that no matter how much I like and respect you, I have no intention of sinking with you. I like this job and it pays a hell of a weekly check. If you're planning on chucking it out the window for a piece of ass, let me know now so I can bid to another unit."

Spike was silent as Faith waited for his denial and outrage that she would even make such an outrageous accusation. Her stomach twisted in a
knot as she realized no denial would be forthcoming.

Spike leaned forward in his chair. He looked into the face of his partner and he knew he was gazing on honesty, decency, reason and rationality. All the traits he thought they shared but apparently he was greatly lacking. He did know one thing for sure, no matter how she felt, nothing he said to her would leave this room. "Faith, I don't know what the hell is happening to me. There's just something about him. He says he's innocent of the crime that sent him here and for some odd reason I believe him."

"Oh, for pete's sake, Spike......."

"I know, I know, they all say that but this is different. I've spent a lot of time with him, talking to him, and listening to him. I just don't believe he has it in him to kill someone. He's warm, honest and real."

"Don't you fucking believe it, Spike. Under the right circumstances, we ALL have it in us to kill. Besides,
guilty or innocent, what the fuck is the difference? It just can't be, Spike. It CAN'T happen!"

Spike nodded his agreement, casting his eyes downward, his voice was barely above a whisper. "I kissed him."

Faith jumped to her feet and kicked her chair to the side. Spike never moved or flinched. "FUCK! You fucking WHAT?"

"I kissed him. When I went to his cell. I just.... he was....I don't know. It just happened. It won't happen again. I promise." His eyes stared at her imploringly.

Faith grabbed up her belongings and headed for the door. Her fury had reached the boiling point and she needed out. At the last minute, she turned and looked him in the face. "You're right, it won't because as soon as your shift starts tomorrow, you are going to talk to him or do whatever the fuck you have to do to end this. It is done, Spike. It's done. When I come back from my days off I want this
fucking insanity all cleared up and I want things back to normal. You make sure he understands that, Spike, or I will. You got it?"

Spike sat silently and watched her leave. He knew one thing for certain, no matter how much he wanted it to be done, it wasn't. Things between him and Inmate Harris were far from over and the knowledge both thrilled and terrified him.

~*~*~*~*~

Angel sat in the front row of the tv section of his dayroom. He had sent all his inmates down for lock up early because he wanted to watch the newest episode of Criminal Minds in peace and quiet.

Running the honors dorm had perks out the ass. None of his inmates would cross, argue or question any of Angel's orders for fear they would be transferred back to the violence of general population.
Mostly white collar criminals, they were men unaccustomed to the world that exists behind bars. They had struggled, taken abuse and survived just for the opportunity to receive a transfer here and were not about to fuck it up. Besides that, a stint on the honors unit was a sure ticket to time off for good behavior and an early release. It was a win/win for staff and inmate alike.

Angel threw his arms over the back of his seat and stretched his legs out in front comfortably. His whole life had become a pretty sweet deal. Not only did he have the cushiest job in the institution, he was about to become engaged to Buffy Summers, millionaire stepdaughter of the warden himself.

He would have money, power, position and all the pussy that went with that sort of lifestyle. It was just too fucking good to believe. Sometimes when he thought about it all, he got a raging fucking hard on.

Angel rubbed the front of his uniform pants. Right now was apparently one of those times. Glancing
up at the clock he calculated he had about fifteen minutes before the next shift would show up. More than enough time to duck into the communal bathroom and tug one off.

After that, the future Mrs. O'Connor will pick him up in the parking lot and he can go back to her place and count his blessings again. Maybe a couple times if she wore that pink thong he liked so much.

Yep, a pretty sweet deal.

Part Fourteen

The next day found Spike anxious to come to work. He knew what he should do and he was well aware of what Faith expected. The shift commander had assigned C.O. Conway, a young first year hire to assist as Spike's back up and that suited Spike just fine.
He knew there would be no questions, observation, or scrutiny. It would thankfully be a respite from chit chatty conversation, at least for the next couple days. Spike could lose himself in his thoughts and decide what to do.

One hour into shift, he knew. No decision could be made until he spoke to Xander. Not for the inmates input, but to see if what had happened between them yesterday had been a fluke. Possibly a smidgen of residual sexual energy left over from his wild night of debauchery.

Possibly, like Ebenezer Scrooge, a bit of undigested beef.

Spike checked the night's schedule and plotted his opportunity. After that, he played it cool. When the restriction supper trays arrived, he had Conway disperse them. When medical came to the housing unit to check injuries, he sent Conway down to assist. Spike stayed out of the cell hallway completely.
Finally, as late afternoon approached, he could hardly contain his excitement. With an air of boredom he stood in the center of the dayroom and made the announcement of. "Line up for outside rec, Gentlemen. Television off, mouths shut, check your hands. I want two straight lines and a clear count as you go out the door."

He then took the lead, Conway in the rear, and the unit filed out into the exercise yard. After about five minutes of assuring himself that it would be a calm rec, Spike called Conway to the side.

"Hey, shit, I need you to watch the group for a minute. I left my radio on the desk and you know what a no-no that is. Fuckin' shift commander will have my arse on a platter if he catches me."

C.O. Conway nodded conspiratorially, "Fuck, yeah, I got written up for that last week. No sweat, go get it."

Spike smiled sheepishly and headed back for the
building. Wasting no time he rushed back down the hallway, keys in hand and onto the apparently empty housing unit. He bypassed the office and made his way down the hall to cell #3.

Unlocking and opening the cell door, Spike found Xander standing by his bed, head and arms resting against the frame of the top bunk. When the steel door swung back, Xander spun around in surprise. "Spike?"

"Shhh" Spike put his finger to his lips as he stepped in. He knew the other two restrictions were in their cell down the hall and sound bounced off the walls like a domed cave.

Xander took one step closer, not sure why the C.O. was there or what he wanted. He could hear the combined noise of both their breathing, loud and ragged as Spike's feet moved again.

When they were finally nose to nose, Xander understood. He could see the heat and passion in the guard's eyes and he knew the same look was
reflected in his.

All the whys and why nots escaped through the bars and flew free. There was no cell block, no razor wire. They were no longer prisoner and guard. They were two men who felt a driving urge for the lips and hands and body of the other.

"Fuck!"

The word blew breathlessly out as though it had come from the depths of Xander's lungs. Heat rushed through and between them as they finally gave in and slammed their bodies and mouths together.

As the larger, heavier and more solid of the two, Xander stood anchored as Spike tried to climb him like a chimp on a coconut tree. His hands were everywhere. Clamped to the back of Xander's head to prevent his lips from pulling away, down his back, touching and mapping out the expanse of the convict's broad shoulders and back.
Working their way down, his fingers found and fumbled, feeling the wonderful firm flesh of Xander's ass before slipping his thumbs into the elastic waistband of the issued trousers and sliding to the front.

Finally, and without pause, Spike broke the kiss and started to tug Xander's pants over his hips. When the realization of what Spike was doing oozed into his brain, Xander was stunned. "No. Spike, no. Jesus Fucking Christ, we can't. You can't"

Spike knew he was too far gone to stop and time was dangerously short. Besides that, he wanted this. He needed this. Leaning in quickly, to silence him, Spike again claimed the kiss puffed lips as his hands efficiently unbuckled his own heavy uniform belt.

Releasing his heavy, rigid cock, Spike dropped to his knees in front of the flabbergasted inmate. He pulled the state issued cotton pants down along with the white, cheap underwear. Spike's nose could detect traces of the laundry bleach smell
triggered by the moist heat of Xander's crotch and he inhaled deeply before freeing the hard, anxious, beautiful cock.

Xander wanted to stop him. He knew they would both suffer the consequences if caught, but the sight and promise of a warm mouth and willing lips wrapped around a cock that had had no pleasure other than his own had, was more than he could resist.

Spike moved quickly, wasting no time on words neither man needed. His mouth claimed and pleased one cock as his hand worked the other. Both men, aware of their setting, stayed silent, their bodies screaming and singing with a wrenching, muscle twisting need.

Within minutes, Xander felt Spike's mouth gasp and shudder around him and he allowed his body the release he had been holding back. Slamming into him like a tsunami, the orgasm nearly knocked Xander off his weak, wobbly knees as Spike licked and swallowed every bit.
Then, with the same speed and practiced skill, Spike redressed them both, kissed Xander's lips with a sharp sour smelling breath, and headed for the door. "Look, I gotta go. I promise we will work this out somehow."

Spike rushed back for one last kiss as Xander laughed. "You better brush your teeth." Before Spike resecured the cell door and disappeared.

Down the hall, in cell #10, two listening sets of ears pulled back from where they had been pressed against their cell door and they shared a high five.

MoMac dropped down onto his bunk and scratched his balls. "Well, well now. Ain't this interesting as fuck. We was right after all. This whole situation just smells of money. I say we stick this info in our back pockets, do that little job for the warden, then see how this plays out. What you thinkin', Roy?"

"I'm thinkin' fuck the money. We got us a C.O. handin' out blow jobs, I want one too."
Both men roared with laughter.

Part Fifteen

Xander had been floating on air. There were no bars that could restrict him as his heart flew free. The titillation of a forbidden affair thrilled and excited him and for the first time in months, he felt really happy.

"This fucking room stinks." Oz had just returned to their cell from the outside movement to get ready for showers. Earlier, he had silently watched as C.O. Pratt left the rec compound and later, when he returned, Oz noticed the man was flushed and his uniform wrinkled.

He had prayed his suspicions were wrong but the blush on his cellmate's face and the pungent, stale
odor in the air told the story.

Xander waved his arms dramatically as though that would fan away the evidence. "Sorry. You were all outside and I figured I had some free time and, well, a guys gotta do what a guys gott...."

"Save it, Xander. I never pegged you for stupid. Or maybe that's it. Maybe you're just playing him to get some. Hell, I can understand that. He willing to take it up the ass for you?"

"NO!" Xander felt his temper flair. He and Oz had never had cross words and there was no one else he wanted to share this small confined space with, but now he stood, his back straight as a stick and his fists balled up, forcing himself not to swing. "It isn't like that. Spike and I have real feelings for each other and I don't care what you think of me, but I won't let you bad mouth him."

Oz just shook his head. "Look, Xan, this ain't none of my business but I'm gonna tell you something. I been in and out of institutions all my life. First foster
homes then juvie, then adult lock up and I seen this happen before. Sooner or later, the shit always hits the fan and when it does, who do you think gets the shitty end of the stick? The fuckin' con, that's who. Pratt will get transferred to another State job and you'll be left here to face the worst of it. You'll get extra time in solitary, probably moved to the sex offender unit and every other inmate in here will want to either fuck you, make you suck his dick or kill you. There is NO good way out of this. You seriously need to end it now before anyone else finds out."

Xander turned his back on the small redhead and crossed his arms protectively around himself. "I know what you're saying, but damn, Oz, what else have I got? They've taken away my life for a crime I didn't commit and now, just when I thought I had nothing, I found him. I watch him all day long. He's funny, honest, fair and he's really a good guy. Now, he says he cares about me. ME! Even on the outs, I didn't have that. If I only have that for a week or a month, I'm gonna take it. He's the best man I've ever met and I want any part of him that I can
Oz climbed up on his bunk and stretched out. "Yeah, well, ain't my business anyway. Do whatcha want."

Xander glanced up. "You won't say anything to anyone?"

Oz flopped over, wearing an expression of deep offence. "Hey, I ain't no stoolie. Anybody drops a dime on you, it won't be me. Hell, fuck who you want, ain't no skin off my dick."

Xander smiled. Next to Willow, Oz was easily the best friend he had ever had. It was funny how much he had gained when he lost his freedom. Before he had the chance to respond, the intercom blasted with the familiar, silky accent that slithered down Xander's spine and stirred the memories of those lips around his cock.

"TEN MINUTES TO THE START OF SHOWERS, GENTLEMEN. THREE AT A TIME. WHEN YOU HEAR
YOUR DOOR, YOU TAKE YOUR SHOWER. YOU MISS IT. TOUGH. NO SECOND CHANCES. STARTING IN TEN"

Xander's face broke into a huge smile that caused Oz to roll his eyes and groan. Hopping down off his bed, Oz quickly stripped and wrapped a towel around his waist. "You are such a fucking girl."

Xander laughed. He had been called worse. When Oz tossed his trousers to the side, several envelopes fell out, floating down and landing on the floor. "Oh, hey, I forgot. When we got back from rec they passed out the mail. You got a letter."

Oz tossed one of the envelopes to Xander who picked it up with a hesitant reach and a confused scowl. "A letter? For me? You sure? Nobody writes to me." He turned the small white envelope over, looking at both the front and the back.

It clearly had his name printed on the front in a squiggly, unsteady handwriting that he did not recognize. It included his resident address of
Riverview Correctional Institution, but did not have his prisoner identification number which meant the office downstairs had had to look it up by hand. That always caused a delay so there was no telling when this letter had arrived.

The really odd thing was that there was no return address, just a blank corner where the sender's name should have been. The center post mark was stamped from Naco, Arizona. "What the fuck? I don't know anybody in Arizona. Shit, I don't know anybody outside Sunnydale, California. Who the hell sent this?"

When his door buzzed, Oz jumped on it, not wanting to miss his turn. Just before walking out of the cell, he glanced back. "Hey, I got a real crazy idea. Why don't you just read the fucking thing and maybe it will tell you who wrote it."

Xander stuck his tongue out and Oz shook his head, mumbling. "Such a fucking girl."
Xander sat down on the edge of his bunk and opened the mysterious envelope, shaking the single sheet of paper out. Unfolding it, he held it up to the light. It read:

Dear Xander,

I am sorry you are serving time for something I did. I never wanted it to happen like this and I really thought they would find you innocent. I wanted to speak up, but when they sentenced you to so much time, but I was afraid.

Please forgive me.
Xander was stunned.

**Part Sixteen**

Xander was stunned. He couldn't wait till Oz got back to the cell from his shower. For the first time since this whole nightmare started, Xander had hope. Hope that the real killer could be caught and he would be free.

He paced restlessly, constantly checking out the small twelve inch wide plexiglas window in his cell door. When he finally heard the buzzer, he nearly jerked Oz's arm off tugging him in.

"What the....?"

"Oz, look, shit, look!"

Xander shoved the letter under his cell mates wet nose.

Oz read it's few lines quickly, turned it over to check the back for more, and when he saw that there wasn't any, he handed it back. "Huh. That's odd."
"Odd? ODD? That's all? Holy fox on a chicken, Oz, this is my proof! It's my way out! It's a 'get out of jail and go free' card."

"Now wait a minute, Xan. I don't....."

Xander couldn't hear a word Oz was trying to tell him. He knew Spike would be in the hallway monitoring the showers and he wanted him to be the first to know that he was about to be a free man.

"SPIKE!!"
Xander began banging on his cell door, not caring that that was a move usually considered, and punished as, an attempt to disrupt the unit. It was well known that when one inmate kicked his door, it set off a chain reaction that saw the entire unit screaming profanities for hours.

Within less than a minute, it got the desired result. Spike unlocked and snapped the cell door open.
"Hey! Knock that shit off. If you get the rest of these knuckleheads beating on their doors and yelling, I'll kick your ass!"

Xander just laughed. "Yeah, yeah, I hear you. Look."

He shoved the letter into Spike's hand. With annoyed curiosity, Spike shook it out and read it. "So what's this all about then?"

"Someone sent it. The real killer. I just got it today and it proves I'm innocent. Whoever really killed Jesse must be hiding out in Arizona. It's proof, Spike. It's proof."

Spike stood silently and obviously NOT sharing his lover's confidence or excitement.

After a minute, Xander snatched the paper back and scowled. "Well, obviously you two aren't as interested in my release from Monster View as I am."

Spike glanced up the hall to make sure Conway was
handling the shower situation and sighed. "Xa...Harris, I know you think this means something, but I just don't want to see you get your hopes up. Your case was news all over the country. Crackpots attach themselves to people like you and send crank notes and love letters all the time."

"Crackpots? People like me? Love letters? Does this look like a love letter to you? It's a fucking confession! It's from a killer!"

"And what if it is? How would you prove it or find him? Are they going to let you out to go look?"

Oz dropped his towel to the floor and calmly pulled his institutional flannel sleep pants over his small body. "I'm afraid he's right Xan."

Spike knew he had to get back to his job but hated to leave Xander so angry and frustrated. "Listen, maybe you could call your lawyer. He might be able to....."

Xander took a step back, an expression of shock
flushed his face in a red hue of fury. "Oh, My, God. You think I'm guilty. Don't you? That's it! I TOLD you I was innocent and you pretended like you believed me but you don't. You think I'm guilty and you probably think I wrote this letter myself! Well, fuck you!"

Spike knew there was nothing he could say. Every cell door in the hallway had ears pressed to them, trying to catch the conversation for future gossip to be spread throughout the entire institution. Spike knew what a dangerous situation this could quickly escalate to. "Look, Harris, we'll talk about this....."

"No! No, we won't. Get the hell out of my cell, Officer Pratt!"

Spike looked imploringly to Oz, who merely shrugged and turned his back. Spike gritted his teeth and stared into Xander's eyes. Quietly, so no one could hear, Spike whispered. "You are a fool, Xander." He then slammed the cell shut, a rare show of temper that few inmates had ever witnessed.
Marching up the hall toward the office, Spike passed C.O. Conway who asked with concern, "Everything alright?"

Spike just snorted. "Yeah, sorry, little buggers can certainly get under your skin at times. Hey, showers are almost done, just the last three cells waiting, can you finish? I need to make an outside call."

"Sure, no problem."

Spike nodded and headed for the office.

Two hours later, both men settled in, uniform belts off, housing unit lights dimmed and feet propped up. They had less than fifteen minutes before their relief came in on the midnight shift and Spike couldn't wait to get out. He had agreed to meet the man he phoned earlier and did NOT want to keep him waiting.

"Not a bad shift."
Spike glanced over. "What?"

"I said, not a bad shift. I always like working with you cause you seem to have a better grip on your unit than some of the C.O.'s."

"Yeah, well, I've had some rough day's too. It just takes time to find your pace. You'll get there. It'll be easier when you get some seniority under your belt and are assigned to a permanent housing unit rather than floating around."

Conway took the remark as part encouragement and hopefully a smidgen of an invitation. "I sure wouldn't mind being here. Your partner isn't planning on going anywhere is she?"

Spike cringed. "You just never know. Listen, I'm going to make one last hallway check before we leave to make sure everything down there is cool. Wait here, it will only take a minute."

Conway smiled and nodded. Yep, he could sure find a home here. He relaxed and watched as Spike
walked down with his flashlight looking in each cell window.

Spike hated to leave it like this. He didn't know if there was anything he could say or do, but he needed to assure himself that Xander was all right.

He wished he could clear up the misunderstanding. It wasn't that he really thought Xander was guilty. Spike paused, wondering, did he? Did he think Xander was a murderer? In the big picture, did it matter? This wasn't about some suspicious anonymous letter. This was about trust.

When he reached cell #3 he slowed and took his time. Shining the beam of light in, he was dismayed to see the top bunk empty and both men again cuddled up on the bottom. He felt jealous. He felt depressed.

Spike snapped off his light and walked away.
Part Seventeen

Giles paced around his office waiting. The front desk receptionist had called up and announced that Buffy was on her way up to see him. His step-daughter. His lovely, simpleminded, nearly twenty-one year old bank roll.

No, that wasn't fair. He really did care about her, but things were so much easier when she was younger. She was more dependant, more trusting. More content to allow him free reign with her trust fund.

He had married her mother when Buffy was twelve. It was a tenuous time for all of them. Giles had known Joyce had cancer when he married her, but he didn't care. He just wanted to be there. He wanted to take care of her, and her five million dollar fortune.
When he had been introduced to Joyce at the Governor's party he was intrigued. When he learned about her father leaving his fortune, amassed in the steel industry, to her, he was hooked. When he learned of her terminal illness, they were married.

Now, however, he could see it teetering dangerously on the edge of a cliff and that plebeian Liam O'Connor was about to shove it over. If he were allowed to marry Buffy, he would want to take charge of her and her money. The trust fund had dictated it.

In her final days they had discussed the terms of Buffy's trust. Joyce had wanted to have control of it turned over to her daughter at age twenty-one. Giles had successfully argued that Buffy would be too irresponsible. They should add a clause stating she would gain control of it only when she reached the age of twenty-one AND were married.

Giles was certain that would allow him veto power of any man who tried to impose himself into their
lives. He hadn't counted on Buffy's obsession with, of all things, a prison guard.

It was a thought that left Giles shuddering. He was used to the good life. The mansion he had grown very comfortable in, belonged to the Summer's family and the happy couple would, no doubt, want to live there alone.

He would be out. Out of the mansion, out of the money he spent so freely, out of the BMW he drove, out of his position in the upper crust of society. He would be forced to live on the paycheck of a government employee.

It was all so fucking unfair. After all he had done for the family, to be cast aside like an old shoe. Well, he was not having it. He had given the situation a lot of thought and come to a decision.

He knew what he had to do. Simply telling her she was not allowed to see O'Connor would not work. Not at her age. No, this had to be dealt with delicately. This was a problem that needed a unique
solution.

And in the long run, Buffy would appreciate what he was about to do. She would come to see the error of her judgement in selecting O'Connor as husband material and things could go back to the way they always were. It really was all for the best.

"Morning Rupert." Buffy breezed in and dropped her expensive handbag down on the chair across from him. She then danced around and hugged him, planting a lipstick kiss on his cheek. "Hey, what's with the big frowny face?"

"Buffy, dear, this is a very serious job. I am responsible for the health and well being of several hundred inmates as well as all of the employees who work here. This is not the place for frivolity."

"Blah, blah, blah." Buffy rolled her eyes, then instantly her face returned to it's bubbly grin. "Well, I've got some great news, Mr. Grouchy Pants. It's something that will make your whole day just peachy keen!"
"Oh, please, do tell, My Dear. I haven't experienced a moment of 'peachy keen' for longer than I can recall."

Buffy wrinkled her nose. "You know I hate it when you talk all smart like that. But, that's o.k. cause nothing you can say can poop me out today."

Giles stood in front of the huge office window that flooded the room with light while overlooking the massive prison compound that he loved so much. He removed and polished the lens of his glasses and he waited patiently for her to tell him about some 'really scrumptious heels' or a 'totally yummy pair of capris'. She would ask for the money to run out and buy whatever it is that has caught her eye, and after a lecture on frugality, he would generously agree.

"Well. Mr. Smarty pants, you know that darn piece of paper you gave me? The one you said Angel had to sign before we get married? What did you call it? A preemie? A preamble? A..."
"A prenuptual agreement, Buffy. A prenup." Giles sniffed as though a skunk had just let loose in the room. Discussions of money were so undignified. Inwardly, however, he smirked with pride. The idea of the prenup had been a stroke of genius.

Rupert Giles was of the conviction that Liam O'Connor was a golddigger. The lowest of the low. The type of person who married for money, for selfish personal gain, not for the love and devotion of a good woman.

Therefore, it was up to him to protect Buffy's fragile emotional state and financial wellb...
cause we are in this for the long haul. Angel says you did him a favor cause he took it to his lawyer and now he knows exactly where we all stand. Angel says as soon as we are good and married he is going to thank you properly. Angel says....."

"Yes, Buffy, I get the point." Giles picked up the signed, witnessed and notarized stack of papers. He was disappointed but not totally shocked. He had thrown down the gauntlet and O'Connor had not flinched. It was, apparently, game on.

"So, now with all that silly man stuff out of the way, I HAVE A WEDDING TO PLAN!!!"

Buffy let out a squee of excitement that pierced the air, but Rupert Giles never heard. He had turned away from her, clasped his hands behind his back and looked out his window where Liam O'Connor walked in the exercise yard with the convicts of his housing unit.

Giles watched the C.O. strut like the cock of the
walk and he thought. *Fine, Liam, you had your chance. Now we go to plan 'B'.*

**Part Eighteen**

The next two days dragged hour by hour, feeling like a month. It was the last of Xander's cell confinement and it gave him way too much alone time to think and brood.

He regretted yelling at Spike and knew Oz was right when he said that Spike was in no position to stand in the cell doorway and argue his feelings. Assuming he had any. A point Xander and Oz agreed to disagree on.

It cut through him like a knife that Spike had made no more effort to come and look in on him, sending his partner down the hallway with his restriction trays. He desperately needed to see him, to talk to
him, to see if something between them could be salvaged or if he was again faced with desolation.

Finally, it was Thursday evening. Xander could hardly control his excitement. He knew that when he arose on Friday morning, he would be allowed to go to chow with the rest of the housing unit. It was a ridiculous reason to be happy, but Xander had resolved to take his pleasures where he found them.

He was alone in the cell as Oz had just left for the supper movement and Xander sat waiting on his tray, hoping against hope that Spike would be the one to bring it. When he heard the sound of the keys turning in the lock of his cell door, Xander jumped to his feet only to be disappointed when C.O. Lehane stepped in.

After handing him his tray, she paused and he knew from the look on her face she was pissed. Although low and discreet, the tone of her voice left no confusion as to the emotion behind it.
"Let me tell you something, Harris. I don't know what type of game you're playing, but you're done playing it with Spike. If you think fucking with him will make your time easy, maybe by him giving you privileges or sneaking in contraband, I'm here to tell you that won't happen. When you come off restriction tomorrow, I'm going to be watching you like a hawk. Fuck up one time. Please, just one time cause I will personally make sure you are transferred to "E" unit and tossed to the gang bangers like Alpo to starving pit bulls. You understand me?"

Xander was too stunned to speak. He stood in the center of his cell with his supper tray cooling and smelling in his hands. He nodded his head. It was all she needed and he could tell there were no words she wanted to hear. C.O. Lehane turned and slammed the cell door shut.

He set his tray down on the small desk that extended from the wall. He had lost all interest in the odd puddle of noodles and pink sauce that
coagulated on his dinner tray as his thoughts spun. *What did Spike tell her?*

He could feel his heart beat race along with his brain. *Spike thinks I'm with him just to get over? Is that why he wouldn't come down and talk?* *She wants me transferred. Does Spike want that too?*

The last thought was the one that scared him the most. He knew that typically, an inmate only spent three months on intake, but he also knew there were exceptions.

Catfish, down in #12 was a permanent fixture on "I" unit for PC. Born with extreme physical deformities, he had at least twenty operations all through his life to try and give him a somewhat normal appearance. The result had been a face that was wide and flat, his eyes too far apart and a double hairlip that was as good as it was going to get. Catfish had told Xander that he was a work in progress.

Xander understood that Cat was one of life's victims and, if thrown into general pop, would be caught,
hook, line and sinker and devoured within days. Still, if Cat could stay, why not Xander?

Haven't he been through enough? Wasn't serving time for a crime he hadn't committed cruel enough? Xander knew that his little episode with MoMac and Leroy was just a taste of what he would suffer every single day in the jungle of general pop. He had already come to terms with the fact that he would have to either give up who he was, becoming like them, or die. To be honest, he hadn't chosen a side yet. Xander's good mood was dead and buried.

~*~*~*~*~

Angel breezed through his dayroom, surveying his kingdom. It was all quiet and calm, just the way he liked it. A few inmates were back in a corner, reading, four more playing spades, and the majority were watching television.

He knew the card players were probably betting on
the outcome of the game and the book readers either touching each other or whispering about naughty illicit things, but Angel didn't care. His inmates were not on his unit because they were the best in the institution, they were here because they understood.

They understood that you could do what you had to do as long as you kept it on the q.t. Low key, quiet, under the radar, so to speak. If you gambled, you paid your fucking debt and didn't put it out there for the staff to know about. If you fucked your cellmate, you did it quietly and with his permission.

It was not a life that most Riverview inmates wanted. There was no violence, strong arming and street crime, but it suited these men. And it certainly suited Angel.

"O'Connor! Telephone!"

Angel returned to his office, stepping in and accepting the phone from his partner. "O'Conner here."
"Yes, officer O'Connor, this is warden Giles."

Angel smirked at the terse tone in his future father-in-law's voice. He knew Buffy had probably returned the pre-nup and he had the old man by the short hairs. Game on, he thought. "Yes, sir. what can I do for you?"

"You can prepare for two new inmates. I have checked the numbers and your unit is low on pop. I am going to send two men from Intake. They were on restriction and I don't want any further problems when they come off tomorrow."

Angel was caught totally off guard. "What? No! No, my unit is for positive program inmates. You send me thugs and they'll disrupt the whole housing unit. No, you can't....."

"Officer O'Connor! I am the warden of Riverview and I make the decisions. Whatever authority you believe you are exercising does NOT extend to the running of the prison. Do you understand what I am
Angel sputtered. He understood perfectly. He had sent the ball into Giles court and Giles had skillfully lobbed it back.

"Now, don't concern yourself that they will cause too much of a disruption. In fact, I will personally come to the housing unit and speak to them about their behavior, and the good news is, they will only be down there for a week or so till I have an opening elsewhere."

What could Angel say? He was beat. For now. "Yes, sir, Warden. You're the boss."

"Yes, Mr. O'Connor, I do believe I am."

Part Nineteen
Five am dawned bright and beautifully on the glorious, much awaited Friday morning. Xander was up, washed and dressed an hour ahead of the voice that boomed it's wake up call over the cell's intercom system.

He hadn't been outside this small confined space in five days and the chance to go to the dietary movement with the rest of the unit seemed as wonderful as a trip to Cedar Point when he was a kid.

He never would have believed five days could seem so long. Besides the boredom and loneliness, the worst parts were eating alone and then having to lay your head down on a pillow that was just a few short feet away from the cell toilet where you just took a dump. That was cruel and unusual punishment if ever there was one.

He had listened to Oz and this time, he would heed his warnings. He knew the situation between him and Leroy and MoMac was not settled and the odds that it would flair up again was Vegas betting high.
Nearly every inmate on unit had commissary items wagered on the outcome. Few would collect if Xander won.

He took Oz's advice and vowed to follow his instructions.

Do not respond to any verbal confrontation with them.

Do not be alone in any area of the institution.

Do not use the communal bathroom.

Do not run to the staff with your complaints or problems, and most of all,

Do not show fear.

Xander heard the crackle of the intercom and knew it was almost time. Despite his concerns, his exuberance soared.

"Morning wake up call, Gentlemen. Fifteen minutes
to chow. You miss the movement, you don't eat. Fifteen minutes."

Xander literally bounced with excitement as he watched his celly yawn, stretch, scratch his balls and drag himself over to the toilet.

"Takin' a piss there, huh? Good. Good. Hurry. We only have a few minutes till chow. Notice I said 'WE'. Yep, the Xanman is off restriction and can't wait to wrap his mouth around that pool of yucky yellow substance laughingly referred to as 'scrambled eggs'.

Oz frowned and looked back over his shoulder as he shook the last drops from his still snoozing dick. If he had any thoughts of a sarcastic reply, it died on his lips as the sound of an argument down the hallway caught his attention.

He recognized the first voice as C.O. Riley who was yelling the loudest. "I said pack it up NOW! I don't give a fuck about your breakfast. You will eat when your move is completed. So, get your shit together
or it gets left behind."

He then heard MoMac and Leroy both tossing about random threats of 'Don't fuckin' rush us', 'We got the fuckin' right to eat.' and of course the ever present. 'Get the fuck out of our fuckin' faces.'

The interesting thing to Oz was not so much that the inmates were being transferred to another housing unit, or that it was being done at such an odd time of the day. No, the thing his sensitive ears picked up on was the tone of the convict's voices. There was the required bitching, but it lacked surprise or outrage. Oz would bet his gambling money on the fact that Leroy Brown and Maurice McDaniels were fully expecting this. And wasn't that an interesting tidbit.

After washing his hands and pulling on his trousers, Oz rooted through his shelf of the wall locker for a clean shirt. "Well, looks like you lucked out. Seems as though your problems are being removed from the housing unit."
Xander watched out the window as the two men, carrying their bed mats rolled around their personal belongings traipsed past, both taking the time to glare his way. Leroy smacked his hand against the plexiglas window causing Xander to jump back.

Xander kept his voice so low, Oz could barely hear. "You think Spike did that?"

Oz pulled his shirt over his head. Neither man expected him to answer although both had an opinion.

Breakfast was wonderfully companionable. As soon as Xander sat at a table, he was joined by Catfish, Geek, an older con doing a short stretch for creative bookkeeping, and Flash, a young hispanic man that shared Oz's abiding love of fire.

It was cheerful, relaxing, and Xander couldn't have been happier if they had been sitting at Micky D's, eating a breakfast burrito and downing coffee.

When they returned to the unit, Xander hustled
around, finding a deck of cards and a sheet of scrap paper to keep score. He and the boys had a rousing game of spades scheduled.

"Harris! Office!"

Xander looked at C.O. Riley and fear flushed his body. His brain sifted through the morning's activities to recall what he could have done wrong and prayed it wasn't something that would land him back on restriction. Then another terror struck him. What if he was being moved too.

Cautiously, he got up from the card table and moved toward the office. Standing in the door way, he waited as Riley pulled a card off his desk and handed it over.

"You got a visitor. Here's your pass. C.O. Miller will take you to the visitation room. Give the guard there your pass and he will tell you where to sit. You got that?"

Xander brain had stalled on 'you got a visitor'. No
one had come to see him since he had been arrested. Willow had sent a few letters but he knew she was busy with school and a new girlfriend. His parents, in the beginning, had accepted his collect calls, but soon after, put a block on their phone. He wanted to think it was because of the cost, but in his heart he knew better. The outside world keeps turning without you.

Following instructions, he took the pass and accompanied C.O. Miller down the steps, through unfamiliar hallways and into a small room he never thought he would see the inside of. He sat where he was told and he waited.

Within moments, the door on the opposing wall opened and a smartly dressed, good looking gentleman walked in. He sat his briefcase on the table between them and he extended his hand.

"Alexander Harris? My name is Wesley Wyndham-Pryce. I am an attorney and a private investigator. I have been asked to look into your case and speak with you."
Xander just blinked.

He finally stood up and shook the offered hand, looking his visitor up and down head to toe as he did. Dark hair, good looking face and a nice body. Expensive suit and an English accent. Nope, Xander had no clue but he sat when told to.

Xander stared at the man now sitting across from him and waited for something to make sense. There were a million questions he wanted to ask, but none of them more than the one that sparked the dying ember of hope in his heart back to a flame.

"You really think you can help me?"

Wesley nodded for the guard to sit at the desk in the far corner. It gave him visual contact for security, but assumed he could not overhear what was being said between attorney and client.

"I'm certainly not making any promises but I did agree to take a look at the facts of your case."
Wesley removed a yellow legal pad from his case and began making notes.

**Part Twenty**

Xander sat patiently for nearly a minute before deciding he couldn't stand the suspense any longer. "Who did you say hired you? I mean I hate to ask, but I gotta be honest, Mr. Pryce, I don't have any money. That's why I had a public defender at the trial."

Wesley stopped writing and folded his hands on the paper. "Yes, I read the transcripts and I must say, if nothing else, we can immediately file an appeal on the grounds of ineffective council. To put it quite bluntly, your solicitor was a moron. Never the less, I believe I would like to try this other angle first. As to the financial arrangements, I had assumed you
would have spoken to William. He is the one who hired me."

Xander shook his head in confusion. He didn't know any William, did he? Well, there was William Vickers in the fifth grade that liked to eat boogers, but somehow Xander didn't think Booger Vickers had hired him a high class lawyer just for old times sake.

Part of him wanted to stand up and tell this man that he had apparently asked for the wrong convict. The bigger part told him to shut the hell up and take what was being offered. The decision was an easy one. "William? I'm sorry, I don't know who that is. I think you have the wrong....."

"C.O. Pratt. William Pratt. William is my cousin and he called me asking if I would take on this case. After looking into the particulars of it, I do believe you were wrongly convicted."

"You believe me? You think I'm innocent?"

Xander was so thrilled to finally be believed, he
could have dove across the table and kissed the stuffy British man dead on the mouth. A second look at the C.O. standing guard at the door told him that move would probably land him back on cell restriction, and this time it would be a lot more than five days so he settled for, "Thank you. Thank you".

"No, Mr. Harris, I didn't say that. I said that there was not enough evidence to have convicted you. The attorney that was assigned you did not give you an adequate defense."

Xander was only slightly disappointed. Fact was, whether this man believed him or not didn't mean squat. If he could get him out, that was all he cared about. That and the fact that Spike......no, that was a matter for later consideration. "Fine. You said you wanted to look into the other matter. What other matter?"

"William says you received a correspondence from out of state that you believe relates to your case. Do you have that with you?"
Xander nodded and reached into his pocket. He had studied the letter a million times and kept it close, hoping the next time he looked at it, he would see something he missed. Carefully, he unfolded it and handed it over. Like everyone else, Wesley turned it over in his hand, disappointed that it was really nothing to go on. The post mark, however, may be a lead.

"You say you don't know anyone in Noco, Arizona?"

"No, hell, I never even heard of Noco before. To be honest, I would have trouble finding Arizona on a map. Geography was never big on my list of priorities. Do you really think you can help? Do you believe you can find the real killer?"

Wesley pulled out another paper from his briefcase and pushed it over in front of where Xander sat. "I won't make any promises, Mr. Harris, but I will do what I can. First I need you to sign this paper so I can file it with the court. It states that you wish to fire your present attorney and retain me as council."
When that is done, I will get started on your appeal, a request for a new trial, and possible civil action against the idiot who handled your original defense."

Xander had never written his name faster before shoving it back. He held Wesley's pen like a sword of vengeance waiting to sign anything else the man asked of him. Wesley handed another over.

"This one requests that my fee be covered by the state of California as I am taking the case pro bono. William has, as I'm sure you know, offered to reimburse all expenses and costs not covered by the court."

Xander was shocked and hardly knew how to respond. "No, I didn't know. He...I....I didn't know."

"Our time today is limited Mr. Harris. I read your statement, but I would appreciate you telling me now, exactly what happened that night."

Xander nodded and took a deep breath, allowing his
mind to go back. It was a night he wanted desperately to forget, but he knew till all this was put right it was a memory that could not rest.

"Jesse and I had been lovers. We met on a construction job we both worked and dated less than a month before moving in together. For two years everything had been nearly perfect. We had some minor arguments, and I knew he was not always faithful, but hey, no one's perfect. I really thought I was falling in love with him."

Wesley had stopped writing and gave Xander his full attention as the inmate continued a story he had told a thousand times.

"So, anyway, I thought we were happy. Then, a few months ago, he started to change. He stayed out late, sometimes not coming home at all. He was a mess. He lost weight, his eyes were always bloodshot. I thought he was on a drunk. I thought he had found someone else. When he stopped going to work, they fired him and I had had enough. I asked him if he was fucking around on me and he
laughed. He said yeah, he was having an affair with crystal. I didn't understand at first that he meant crystal meth. Jesse had turned into a first class junkie but the worst was yet to come. He started stealing from me. Money, my bank card, I came home one night and found he had pawned my television and computer. That was it. I tossed his sorry ass out."

Wesley watched the emotions in Xander's face as he recounted his preprison life. "Was that when it happened? Was that the day he died?"

Xander shook his head. "No, I didn't see him for nearly two weeks after that, then one night I was at a bar down by the beach and he came in. Christ, he was so trashed, I swear, I almost didn't know him. He sat down across the table from me and I knew he wanted to talk. I bought him a beer that he drank in one gulp. His hands were shaking so bad he nearly spilled it. When he sat the glass down, he kept looking all around, then he asked me for money. I gave him $20. but he threw it back at me and said he meant REAL money. Said he owed
almost three grand to a dealer and if he didn't pay, his ass was grass."

Wesley briefly interrupted. "You said in your deposition that he gave you the dealer's name?"

Xander shrugged. "Not really. Said his name was Warren. People like that don't use last names. I told him I didn't have that kind of money and even if I did I wouldn't dump it down the same shit hole as my tv and computer. He screamed at me. Called me a fucking selfish fag. I yelled back and the argument got ugly. Everyone in the bar heard it before the bartender threw us out. I remember it was dark out. I tried to ignore him but he followed me. We walked along the beach and continued to argue. Next thing I know, he pulled out a knife. And it wasn't just a small pen knife, I mean a big ass, double edged, serrated, O.J. fucking Simpson knife. I about shit!"

"Did you try to call for help?"

Xander spread his hands out on the table and Wesley could see him reliving the terror in his mind.
"I did, but we were at the water's edge and there was no one around. When I yelled, it was like the sound was sucked up by the roar of the crashing waves and the night. He started waving it around and lunging at me. Finally I grabbed his arm, we struggled and the knife cut my hand and him on the side of his leg. I think the shock of the pain brought him back to himself and he started to cry and apologize. I offered to take him to the hospital but he refused. I know I was wrong to leave him there like that but I just wanted to get away. I swear, I didn't think he was cut that bad. I don't know what happened after I left. He either passed out and drowned or someone else came along and finished the job."

"Did the police ever look for this Warren?"

Xander shook his head. "They said they did, but I think after they got me in their radar, it was bombs on target, fire away. Do you think you can find him?"
"I don't know, Mr. Harris, but I do believe I have a few places to start. It is too late today, but first thing Monday morning, I will go to the courthouse and begin filing the writs. I promise I will keep you informed."

**Part Twenty-One**

Wesley gathered up all the paperwork, including Xander's precious letter and placed them back in his briefcase, snapping the locks shut. He then sat back in his chair and took the time to give the inmate across from him a visual inspection before speaking. This time the tone of his voice was less professional and more personal.

"William is like a brother to me and I love him dearly. He has never before asked me to look into an inmate's charge and I wonder why he has this time. Is it because he truly believes you to be innocent, or is there another, much more concerning reason behind it?"

Xander looked away, his eyes darting to the C.O., satisfying himself that the guard was still unable to
hear before he spoke. "I don't know. I hope he thinks I'm........."

"That really wasn't a question that cried out for a response, Mr. Harris." The curt, lawyer affect had returned and Wesley stood, holding out his hand.

Xander also rose to his feet and took Wesley's offered hand. "I know you don't care Mr. Pryce, but I promise you, I am innocent."

"Yes, of course. I'll be in touch."

With that, he turned and nodded his completion to the waiting C.O. before exiting through a doorway prohibited to inmates. Xander waited to be taken back to his unit. He couldn't control the smile on his face or the song in his heart. Spike believed him. He was going to get out.

He turned to the nearby guard.

"Sit back down. It's nearly shift change and I have no intention of taking you clear back to the housing
unit. We're going to wait here. I've already called down and someone from afternoon's can come for you after roll call."

Xander followed the C.O's instructions and dropped back down into the chair. It took all his restraint not to run around the room squealing and waving his arms like a loon. Now, all he had to do was find a way to get Spike, to talk to him again and they were well on their way to....To what, he wasn't sure, but that was a fine point for sharpening later.

And later came sooner than he thought.

Within minutes, Spike came strolling through the door, his eyes briefly connecting with, then darting away from Xander's. "Thanks, **Mate.** I'll take him from here."

"Great, thanks Spike."

Both men watched while the other C.O. walked out of the room and the door swung shut. Immediately, Xander jumped to his feet. It took all the self control
he had not to rush over, throw his arms around Spike's neck and cover him in kisses. "Oh, God, Spike how can I ever thank you? Christ, this is going to save my life. He's incredible. He's... he's..., shit, he's a real lawyer. The kind you see on tv. This is great....."

"Hold up, Pet. There are a few things we need to discuss first."

Spike pointedly glanced up to the camera mounted on the wall in the corner of the room. "Sit back down and don't forget, we are being watched."

Xander nodded and did as he was told, checking the beaming smile that threatened to explode all over his face. "You believe me. God, Spike, you can't imagine how much that means to me."

Spike sat across from the inmate, careful to present a professional appearance. With no audio, the only impression of what was happening in that room was the video feedback that played on one of a dozen monitors in the communications center. "First, Wes
is doing this as a personal favor to me."

"And because you are paying him."

Spike looked a bit surprised. "Yeah, he wasn't supposed to tell you that part, but yes, I am covering some of his expenses. He looked over the transcripts and feels you have a very good shot at a new trial, but I'm sure he explained all that to you."

Xander nodded waiting for Spike to continue.

"Wesley is a very good lawyer and he's in high demand. His office handles thousands of cases a year and he has some very high profile clients. I guess I'm just trying to tell you that you are more than lucky to have him. Now the down side of all that. Because his practice is so busy, he has very little time off. When I talked to him, he agreed to take a weeks vacation and go down to Arizona to check this lead out personally, but he can only take a week. That's it. He can't give it any more time than that. If at the end of the week, if he hasn't found anything he will come back and more than
likely just pursue the new trial angle."

Xander was conflicted. On one hand he was charged, excited to think that Wesley might actually go down there and find the real killer. Prove his innocence and allow him to walk out the front gates a free, exonerated man. It tickled him to think of this Warren person occupying his bunkbed.

Well, minus the Oz cuddles, of course.

On the other hand, a week wasn't much time. It was almost like finding a needle in a haystack. Made even worse by the fact that the needle was intentionally hiding out. Still he had the promise of a new trial to pin his hopes on. He knew that it may take months or even years to work it's way through the system but shit, it wasn't like he was going anywhere in the mean time.

"I understand. I don't know how I can ever thank you. I feel so ashamed for the way I acted the other night. I know the whole world thinks I'm guilty, but it only matters to me what you think. When I
thought you looked at me like I was a killer, it was just too much."

Spike wanted very much to reach across the table and take Xander's hand, but knew he didn't dare. "Look, Xander, we need to go. It's going to start to look suspicious if we stay here."

Xander suddenly looked him straight in the eye. "Then where can we go?"

"What?"

"Come, on, Spike, you know every inch of this institution. There must be some place we can go to where there aren't cameras watching and I can show you my gratitude."

Spike stood up to go. His expression hardened. "No. I didn't do it for you to feel you have to...."

"Fuck, Spike. HAVE to! I want you to touch me so bad my whole body craves it. Whenever I see you, I have to focus on something else just to keep from
getting a hard on. I'm grateful for all you're doing, but the way I feel has nothing to do with that. I just want you to fuck me."

The last sentence was so blunt and heated, it caught Spike off guard. "Well, that is certainly an interesting request. Come on, Harris, we need to get back to the housing unit where I can give it some thought."

Part Twenty-Two

The next few days were odd. When he returned from the visitation area, Xander was floating several inches above the floor. His brain raced with thoughts of freedom.

He could easily picture that murderer, Warren, on trial. He could see himself on the witness stand. He would leap to his feet pointing an accusing finger in
the direction of the defendant's table and he would shout. "That's him. That's the dirty rat fink that got my Jesse hooked on drugs then offed him when he couldn't pay. HANG THE BASTARD!!"

But that was his brain. His heart was travelling down a different road. Spike believed him! When no one else did, when the rest of the world turned their backs on him, Spike stepped up to stand at his side and fight with him. It was an incredible rush.

Xander was stunned. He had no idea how much a top notch lawyer like Windym-Price cost but, even with the cousinly discount, it had to be plenty. Xander vowed that when he got out, he would repay every single penny Spike had put up for him.

'\textit{When I get out.}'

It was a thought that plastered a permanent smile on his lips and a bounce in his step. It was hope. It was a hope so deep that none of Oz's warnings to not count on things too much could dampen. It was a hope that felt right.
Then there was Spike.

After their short conversation, Xander allowed his imagination to run wild. He saw them now as a couple. They had come to an understanding and were together, if not in body, at least in soul. More than once, Xander had to chuckle that perhaps Oz was right. Maybe he was a bit of a girl, but he didn't care.

He was in lo.....no. He wouldn't say it. He wouldn't even think it. Not until he was free.

Not until they could move in together. Not until he woke up in the morning, snuggled next to the short, muscular, sexy as fuck, blond. Not until he cooked him breakfast, sewed on his popped buttons, and anointed his feet on oil.

And he assumed Spike felt the same way.

When he returned to the housing unit, Xander rushed back to the card table. He couldn't wait to
tell Oz the amazing news. When asked who financed this new legal endeavor, Xander stuttered, finally claiming an Uncle Bill, a favored relative on his mother's side had taken pity on his situation and put up the money.

The brief flash of intuitive understanding in Oz's eyes was gone as quickly as it appeared, but Xander saw and knew. Right now, however, Oz's approval or condemnation was at the bottom of Xander's list of things to care about. His whole world had shifted and he could almost hear the keys turning in the locks of the front gates.

When he did allow himself to look over at Spike, he was slightly disappointed to see nothing in the beautiful blue eyes except professional observation. Spike was working the housing unit dayroom as though nothing had happened. As if Xander had never made the request that they consummate their relationship. As if the earth hadn't acquired a second sun that was now blasting the world in brightness.
But, he mentally asked himself, what else did he expect?

Did he think they would boot the innercity contingency from the front of the television and snuggle up with popcorn and watch a Lifetime movie? No, secretive was not something Xander was used to, but he knew it was the only way. Spike had put up a ton of money for him and he cared too much for the man to do anything to jeopardize his job.

Xander would play it cool. Uninterested. Bored. At least until he got desperate.

And desperate was what he was beginning to feel when, two days later, nothing had been said, no indication from Spike that anything had ever been discussed or occurred between them.

Xander was becoming confused and frustrated. Had he imagined the whole thing? Was he starting to lose his marbles? Did some fancy lawyer with a corporate name, a snotty accent and a thousand
dollar suit even come to see him, or had he made all that up in his wonky little brain too?

By three o'clock on the third day, his mood had soured considerably. "I thought you said you had five books? You only made three and we're going to lose this fucking game again." Xander slapped the rest of his cards down on the table and glared at Oz across from him.

Oz just shrugged. "Yeah, well if you hadn't cut out that jack, I woulda."

Xander grudgingly knew Oz was right. He had fucked up. Again. Fucking story of his life. As his grumbling and fussing continued, Xander never noticed the steel door open or the two afternoon corrections officers that headed into the glass enclosed office.

Officer Conway dropped his bag on the floor under the desk, his grin and youthful exuberance filled the small space with energy as C.O. Riley just rolled his eyes, gave a quick report and headed for home.
Spike let his eyes scan the dayroom till he found what he was looking for, then did his best to suppress the smile that tried to wiggle up the corners of his mouth. He had been as low key and discreet as possible till Faith's days off had finally rolled around.

They had talked in length and come to an uncomfortable understanding. Faith had been furious when she saw Xander had not been transferred, but her alliance and connection to her partner made her reluctant to leave him. Besides, bidding to another unit was not as easy as it seemed.

The only openings were on the worst spots in the institution. They were the ones given to the new officers, and the good positions were taken by C.O.s with seniority. No, leaving was not an option. Job protection, however, was.

Faith had been more than clear that if Spike made any improper move, gesture, hint, or action toward
Inmate Harris while she was on duty, she would run so fast to Warden Giles, that the soles of her ugly black work boots would leave skid marks in the buffed and polished hallways.

She loved her partner and couldn't believe this was happening. In her heart, Faith was certain that if she just stayed away from this situation and gave him some time, Spike would come to his senses and realize what a mistake he was making. She also knew that anything that blazed this hot and fast would more than likely burn itself out quickly.

If her foolish partner could just keep his heart and dick under the radar and out of the range of the dozens of surveillance cameras within the penitentiary till all this ran it's course, they just might survive.

Faith kept her fingers crossed. Before going on her two days off, she gave one last admonition. "Please, Spike, keep it together. Keep your hands to yourself, your lips on your coffee cup and your dick secured in your polyester uniform pants."
Spike laughed and assured her that she had nothing to worry about.

Part Twenty-Three

Spike had been jumpy and edgy all morning. He awoke early and had no interest in breakfast. His hands shook as he fumbled with the buttons on his uniform shirt and despite his hot shower, every inch of his skin felt cold and clammy.

He had been too nervous and preoccupied to jack off.

He had made a decision and he had formed a plan. Sort of. It was the stupidest and most dangerous thing he had ever considered in his life. It went far beyond the stupidity of the time he and Wesley decided to try bungy jumping.
At least then, they had, at the last minute, come to their senses and backed out. And that was what kept running though his mind now. It still wasn't too late to back out, to change his mind and act as though such an ignorant thing would never have entered his brain.

The thoughts spun through him as he ran his weekly errands, stopping first at the post office to buy a money order, scribble a short note and drop it in the post addressed to the Riverview Correctional Institution.

By the time he reported to roll call, he had decided to let the flow of the powers of the universe decide for him. If they blocked the opportunity, or if they sent signs that he would be caught, he would know it wasn't the right time. He would metaphorically flip a coin, hoping chance would make the call.

The butterflies in his stomach felt as though they had grown fangs, turned to vampire bats and were attempting to chomp their way out.
"Shut the fuck up, people. Let's get this roll call moving."

Spike sat back quietly and waited as the shift supervisor continued. He gave the floater Officers their days assignments and Conway was assigned to second on Spike's unit.

*One point on the yes side.* Spike thought.

"Listen up people, it's that time of year again for the State audit and the bigwigs are gonna be here next month to evaluate us and give us our yearly accreditation."

A giant, collective groan filled the room as every officer rolled their eyes and threw up their hands. They all knew what a pain in the ass the entire process could become. Every department was scrutinized, assessed, and usually on the first round, found wanting. It meant twice the work and three times the chaos.
One point on the no side. Spike frowned.

"Knock off the fucking bitching you fucking bunch of little girls. Oh, sorry. No offense to you women officers."

Cathy and Janet glanced across the table to each other and shared a He is such a fucking chauvinist pig look before silently turning back as the supervisor continued.

"So, here's the breakdown. Honors unit just got two new inmates and are having some problems with them so we are going to try to do some shuffling around and get them moved today. Therefore, Honors and "E" units have a pass. The fuckin' psychos on "N" were up all night howling at the moon so they need both C.O.'s. "B" unit, I want you to take one of your thugs to the dietary area and strip and buff the floors. "I", take one of the newbys down into the old education area. I want a full report on the condition of the place and what it's going to take to bring it up to snuff. Oh, and take someone you can trust and a radio cause that's in
the old shut down area that doesn't have cameras installed."

Spike was stunned. The scales that had been evenly balanced, now tipped so far over they rolled off the table and under the desk. It was a sign from Apollo himself that the Gods had made a decision. Who was he to defy the Gods?

Quietly, he leaned over to Conway. "Tell you what, I'll get the unit settled in for the afternoon then I'll do the detail. Gives you a chance to run the show by yourself for a while. You want to give it a try?"

Conway's eyes lit up and he bounced in his chair. "Hell, yes! You'll see. I can do it! Thanks!"

Spike just nodded, his brain screaming, Thank you!

The whole trip to the housing unit had Spike jumpy as a frog on fire. His skin twitched and his cock threatened to spring to life as he did his best to give an appearance of normalcy and boredom.
When they settled in, Spike yawned and went about the tasks that would ensure the dayroom ran on autopilot for the next hour or so. When he was confident that all the inmates were reasonably content, he returned to the small glass enclosure.

"O.k. Everything is smooth. Now why don't you pick out someone for me to take down to do the inspection. Your choice."

C.O. Conway grinned as though he had been given the medal of honor. He stood in the office and surveyed his kingdom.

"Catfish?"

Spike wrinkled his nose. "Nay, the boy has an odor about him and supper is only two hours away."

Conway snickered, "Oz?"

"Too lazy. I don't want to be down there all day."

"Geek?"
"Talks to much. Fucking drives me crazy."

"Harris?"

"Hmmm. Yeah, I guess I could deal with Harris. Good call, Conway."

The young officer sparkled with pride and frankly couldn't wait to get rid of the seasoned officer and prove, mostly to himself, that he had what it took to run a housing unit.

With no further delay, Conway banged on the glass window to get the dayroom's attention, pointed at Harris and wagged his finger, indicating the inmate was wanted. Spike felt a shudder run through his body as he watched the man rise from the card table and walk toward him. Fucking sexy as hell.

"Yes, sir?"

Xander kept his attention on the new officer, ignoring the man who had not spoken to him in two
days.

"Tuck your shirt in and check your hands. You're going to go on a work detail with Officer Pratt. Go wait by the door."

Spike nodded his approval and Conway beamed with pride. Spike felt as though he were standing on the platform looking down. The bungy cord had been strapped around him and the harness was securely in place. This was it. The moment of decision. Does he jump or does he, like the time with Wes, chuckle nervously, climb back down the ladder and go get drunk?

It was a hell of a choice that Spike knew he had already made. His knees were weak, and his breath burned in his lungs. His heart pounded so loudly he was surprised no one could hear.

Finally, he stood and walked out of the office, looking back just once. "Stay calm and they will be calm. They read their mood from you. If it even looks like you're about to have a problem, call me
on the radio and I'll be right back."

Conway shooed the senior officer with his hands and grinned. "Go! Go! I got this."

Spike looked at the waiting convict and wondered if he wished Conway would ask him to stay. Xander's brow wrinkled in a frown as he waited in confusion. Oz dealt another hand of cards and shook his head.

Xander stood complacent and quiet. His shirt was tucked in and his hands clasped behind his back assuring he was presentable for an off unit movement.

He watched out the corner of his eye as Spike walked past him, unlocked the unit door and indicated he was to follow. Spike spoke casually to other officers he passed in the hallway and, for all intent and purpose, one would have thought he had all but forgotten about the inmate trailing behind.

Xander listened to them bitch about something called an audit and wondered what it was and if it
had anything to do with this little stroll through the park that they seemed to be taking.

When they turned a corner and walked through the dietary area to a doorway in the rear, Xander's interest was peaked. He had never been in this part of the institution and had often wondered what lay beyond. Oz had given him the old adage about curiosity and dead cats.

Without pause, Spike unlocked the door and they passed on through. Finally, Xander couldn't stay silent any longer. "Where are we going?"

"Shhh. Not yet."

Hitting a breaker switch, Xander could see that they were in a long hallway. There were doors on either side and the entire area looked like it hadn't been used in years. A Bic lighter of hope flicked on and a small flame started to warm inside him.
"What is this place?"

"The old school training areas." Spike visibly relaxed, pointing first in one direction then in another. "There's a machine shop over there and an auto body repair garage to the left. It was a program for training and rehabilitating convicts before their release to help them find jobs."

Xander peeked in each room they passed and marveled in the possibilities. "Why don't they use it anymore? This would be great."

"Budget cuts. State financial priorities."

Xander followed as they turned down another corridor and opened one more steel door. Inside, they took a small stairway down into a large storage room. There were tables, desks, old outdated
computer parts and rolls of carpet. Everything stacked neatly and covered with a thick layer of dust.

"There are no cameras back here."

Spike waited to see how Xander would react and it didn't take long. Spinning around, he placed his hands on both sides of Spike's face and kissed him soundly. This was exactly the opportunity he had prayed for and he wasn't about to waste a single second of it on questions.

Spike felt the thrill of fear shoot through his body as he jumped from the bungy platform and prayed the rubberband cord would not snap. His tongue took charge. It licked and tasted everything Xander had in his mouth. A hot slick, willing tongue, a ridged roof and a row of white clean smooth teeth. It was heaven and it warmed his cock with affection and a rush of blood.

Finally, Xander pulled back and gasped for air. His voice was breathless and raspy. His hands had
already started fumbling with the buttons on the crisp, pressed uniform shirt.

"What can we do? God, Spike, how far can we go?"

Spike's trembling hands stopped Xander's and he forced the inmate to look him in the eye despite the fact that his entire being was surging forward with need.

"Wait, wait, Xander. This is the worst thing we can do. If we get caught I'll lose my job, my career and you'll be sanctioned severely. I don't want you to feel like you have to do this. Please, tell me you're sure. If you don't want to, I'll understand. I won't say a word about it."

"Fuck, Spike. This is ALL I want, and it's worth everything they can do to us. When I watch you walk, I think about you fucking me. When I sleep, I dream about you fucking me. When I jack off, it's with the wish that your cock was rammed deep up my ass."
Spike whimpered as the whoosh of sexual need slammed through him. Quickly recovering, he immediately began unbuckling his belt and pants, watching as Xander picked up on his green light and did the same.

Both men stood facing each other, naked from the waist down, shirts open and hanging off their shoulders, cocks hard and beginning to ooze in anticipation. Quickly Spike fished through the pocket of his folded, discarded uniform pants and retrieved a condom.

Xander frowned. He wanted to be able to feel it with nothing between them. He wanted to hold the fluid inside him to take back and enjoy as it slowly dribbled out his ass. "Do we have to use....."

"Yes. We do. It's for both out protection and because we can't afford to leave any evidence." Spike glanced up at the huge round clock on the wall. "Look, Pet, I wish we had time for soft words and foreplay but the fact is...."
Xander laughed and shook his rock hard cock. "Ready to cut diamonds here, Spike." He then turned and bent over, gripping the sides of an old school desk and tipping his ass as high in the air as he could.

The whole ugliness and wrongness that should have turned him off made Spike hornier than he had ever been in his life. The sight of Xander, poised and waiting to be mounted like a bitch in heat, caused Spike's final brain cells to shut down.

He suddenly wanted to drop to his knees and eat that hole till the saliva dripping from his chin matched the precum dribbling from his throbbing cock head.

When Xander heard the crinkle sound of the foil being torn, he moaned, scooted his feet further apart and pushed back in encouragement. He already had a handful of his own cock and just the anticipation had him well on his way.

Unable to resist, Spike bent down and licked.
Flattening his tongue he swiped, feeling the ready hole flex and jerk, he played with the deep puckered wrinkles till Xander's pitiful begging caught his ear. "Please, Spike. We don't have time. Fuck, I'm so close, I need it in me."

Knowing his partner was right, Spike pulled back slightly before spitting on the opening for lubrication. He then placed one hand on Xander's hip and the other on his own cock just under the head. On the second try, it popped through the tight ring of muscle.

Spike gasped at the tight heat. Xander groaned at the wonderful, pained burn. Spike rose up on his toes and slid home. Xander jerked. He felt as though he were being split in half and almost told Spike to stop. Reading the signs, Spike held still, running his hand soothingly up Xander's back and whispering softly. "Relax, Love. I know it hurts. Sshhh. Just give it a mo, yeah?"

The gentle touch and soft words went straight to Xander's heart like the sweetest love poem he had
ever heard and his body opened itself up to the man inside him. Feeling the difference, Spike pulled back experimentally, then pushed forward, hitting the sensitive nub of his prostate. Although more out of accident than design, neither man cared.

Xander's head snapped up and his butt shoved back greedily. "Fuck. That's it. Right there. Hit it again."

Spike did his best to do just that. He slammed it as deep and hard as he could, every nerve ending on his cock screaming with the squeezing, massaging pleasure a hot tight hole brings. He wanted to ride this heavenly arse forever.

"Bloody hell! Xander, you feel so good."

Xander's hand knew what his cock needed. It instinctively stroked, pinched and flicked in a practiced and perfected sequence he had performed nearly every day of his post pubescent life.

But now, combined with the delicious pain/pleasure
of a hot, hard, long cock ramming into him, the warm tingling promise of an enjoyable release became an entire body changing experience. "Hard, Spike I need it hard."

The tension in his legs now caused them to start to shake from the exertion. His knuckles turned white as they gripped the edge of the table and his forearms felt as though he had just done a thousand pushups.

Suddenly, all that was blocked out. All he was aware of was the churning, twisting heat that was building in his balls. Closing his eyes and holding his breath, Xander waited, jumping on his small raft and then riding it over the crest of the Niagara Falls of orgasms.

"Oh, FUCK!"

As Xander's body clamped up, his inner muscles rolled and rippled around Spike's swollen cock. Rocking his body forward, Spike stopped moving and allowed Xander to squeeze the trigger that set
his own orgasm into motion. He felt himself jump and jerk inside his lover's body as it filled the little pouch at the tip of the condom.

"AAhhh! Damn, Xander."

Spike wrapped his arms around Xander's belly holding their bodies snugly together in a standing spoon. Endorphins flooded his brain as fast as his cum filled the rubber, and images of flowers, champagne and poems floated through the romantic corner of Spike's mind. He knew reality would intrude soon enough and he just wanted this a little longer.

Gradually, as the blood returned to their brains, both men became aware of the world around them and reluctantly disengaged. After a moment of chuckling and swaying on unsteady feet, they each found their pants and righted themselves.

Neither fooled themselves into thinking this changed anything.
Part Twenty-Five

The sun finally started to dip down toward the late day horizon, promising to bring a smidgen of relief from the unrelenting, scorching heat that had baked the small, open, rental jeep and it's driver for the last two days of this miserable trip.

Wesley tipped up his water bottle and gulped the last swallow before tossing it to land in a pile of like empties on the floor of the back seat. If he hadn't checked and rechecked his driving instructions, one's he personally researched and printed from mapquest, he would have sworn he had taken a wrong turn.

He couldn't imagine how anyone could inhabit such a barren, seared land. There was no green grass, no trees, no rich furtile earth. There was only sand and
dry, parched dirt. Miles and miles of it, made to seem even longer by the fact that the land was so totally flat, and expansive.

Wesley had come to the United States as a teenager with his family. His mother, father, aunt, uncle and his cousin Will. They had all decided to immigrate, hoping for the chance of a better life, leaving behind the small factories of rural England and provide their sons the opportunity at a good education that would ensure an excellent future.

Wesley, as always, did just what was expected of him. He followed his families instruction, selected a career and a college he knew they would approve of and excelled. He completed law school early and passed the bar exam on the first try.

He was, of course, the pride of his family. From the moment he was born, on the exact predicted day, Wesley has had a driving need to please. To accomplish what his parents, especially his father, asked of him.
And he had travelled. He had seen and wondered at all the beauty and diversity that was this huge expansive country. He had skied in the snow of the North West and shopped the small fishing villages of New England. He had been to Florida for spring break and gambled, conservatively of course, in Las Vegas, but this, this couldn't possibly be part of the same country he had adopted as his own.

The desert heat was unbelievable. It was causing Wesley to perspire profusely, soaking his shirt and giving his crotch a damp, sticky, itchy feeling that he would pay a million dollars for the chance to wash off.

The low rent motel where he spent last night should have been a hint as to what his day would be like, but he failed to pick up on all the clues. Things like the fact that the airconditioning in the room was broken and that the on site restaurant served only burritos, tacos and refried beans.

If he hadn't been so confident of the reliability of his maps, Wesley would have thought he had already
crossed over south of the border.

The small towns he passed through showed no signs of the American dream. They were scruffy, small villages full of Mexicans who slipped over, legally or not, in search of a better way of life. What they found was more of what they had left.

There were no jobs, no gold lined streets, no big houses and no open arms welcoming them as the sign on the bottom of the statue of liberty promised. The bitch lied.

In response, they reverted to the life they knew best, constructing small villages exactly like the ones they had left behind. The result was a series of towns that mirrored their homes, sometimes even with the same names as in the case of Naco. It was a scant twenty miles from it's twin, Naco, Mexico.

With a sigh of relief, he recognized the town sign, despite the fact that it had been shot full of holes and hung, swinging, from it's post and missing the top bolt that would have held it upright.
NACO, ARIZONA.
POPULATION 358

Well, Wesley thought, shouldn't be hard to find one Americano trying to hide out in a small village of hispanics. He turned the wheel of his rented jeep and drove slowly down what passed for the main street of town. Although he wasn't sure in the absence of any concrete or blacktop, if this could technically be called a street.

Slowing down, he noticed a sign on a pole that announced: CASA DEL DIABLO

Oh, brilliant, Wesley thought, a bar named house of the devil. This promises to be a place of joy and frivolity.

As soon as he parked and stepped out of the jeep, Wes was immediately surrounded by a dozen small Mexican children, all with their hands out, begging for coins in a language he didn't fully understand, although pesos and por favor were easily
translated.

He resisted the urge to look into the dirty, hungry faces. He knew if he did, if he gave even one of them a nickel, he would instantly be swamped by children and adults alike. He might as well wear a sign that screamed, "Easy mark. Stupid American tourist."

Instead, he took a moment to slap some of the three inch thick layer of road dust from his shirt and pants, and he pushed open the swinging cafe doors and stepped inside.

Taking a minute to look around, Wesley nearly burst out laughing. It was the exact replica of a thousand cantinas that he had seen in countless Hollywood movies.

In fact, his favorite movie of all time, Desperado, could have been filmed here. It had everything. A dark, dirty interior, made even dimmer by the crust that covered the front glass windows, several round wooden tables containing bottles and shot glasses,
and a long wooden bar that had too many bullet holes to count.

And exactly as they do it in the films, right on schedule, all the actors and extras sitting around the room, stopped talking and stared as the stranger stepped over the threshold.

Wesley was absolutely thrilled. The surge of fear and adrenalin that washed through his body was something brand new. The simple knowledge that his very life could be snuffed out at any time and no one in the outside world would ever know what happened to him, left him feeling more alive than he had ever known.

He had no experience in this alternate universe, but knew that everyone was waiting to see what he would do next. They would guage their action on his. Immediately, Wesley channeled Antonio Banderas. He hadn't bought the movie in blue ray for nothing.

Glancing around the room, he held his head high,
gave a snort, a twitch of his back, and a pat to his side pocket as though something dangerous were hidden there. He now wished there were.

**Part Twenty-Six**

Wesley squared his shoulders with a false bravado and casually sauntered over to the bar. "Beer. Cerveza."

Wesley hoped he had pronounced the word right. The damn dollar dictionary he bought just yesterday gave no hint as to the correct syllables. Of course he could always explain the mistakes on his British accent.

The bartender tossed his dingy rag over his shoulder and did as he was asked, slamming the *mug* of foamy, warm beer on the splintered bar. Wes tried not to flinch at the fly floating on the top.

When he skillfully scooped it out and flung it to the floor before gulping half the drink down, he was in and the others in the bar turned their attention elsewhere. Wesley's stomach nearly fainted.
"You got any place to eat in this town? A cantina?" Wes wiped the remainder of the foul drink from his upper lip.

The bartender, a short chubby, Cheech Marin look-a-like, scratched his sweaty armpit and pointed across the street. "Rosie got a place down the road. She serve the best chili. You like it hot? My Rosie, she serve it hot."

Wesley slid the mug over for a refill, despite his brain and stomach screaming, "What the fuck?" He knew he had to look like he belonged here. The bartender poured another glass of piss water and relaxed a bit as he resumed wiping the bar top. "She also run the only hacienda. You need a place to sleep?"

Wes was charged. This was the perfect opening and he jumped on it, careful to keep his voice low. "Dunno, do I? You see I am looking for a friend of mine. Said he was coming down this way and I was hoping to run into him before I move on. Maybe
you know him. An Americano. Young, would have only been here for a few months. Name of Warren."

The bartender stopped wiping, his black beady eyes squinted and his dark moustache twitched. "You policio? No Englise." The bartender threw up both hands and backed away.

Wesley could see he had made a tacticle mistake. He had moved to fast. He immediately tried the only other idea he had. "Oh, sorry, must have been another small town he had settled in. So, how much do I owe you for the beer, this enough?" Wes, palmed a fifty so it could not be seen by the other patrons and watched as Cheech's eyes darted around wildly.

"Si, yes, that looks about right. You say your friend is Americano? a gringo?"

Wes smiled at the save and relaxed slightly, taking a sip of the warm beer. "Yes, he would have shown up sometime after October. I really am anxious to see him. Of course he doesn't know I'm coming so it
would be a wonderful surprise."

The bartender wasn't stupid. He knew these Anglo's were anything but friends. Still, what the fuck did he care. Fifty was more money than he would make in a month working this shit hole bar. It would put food on his table and grateful pussy in his bed.

Laying down his bar rag, Cheech leaned close, all the time watching the other men in the room for any sign of interference. When he was assured of none, he spoke, his foul, rancid breath topping off the taste of the beer and insuring Wes would not be eating any dinner tonight. Or ever.

"Si. A gringo come here about two months ago. He was sick. You know, he had the demon in his body. Carlos let him stay in a small shack out on his land till the man sweat it out. He had no money so Carlos let him stay and work. Carlos has some scruff cows. They not produce much but it puts food on his table. The gringo, he comes to town maybe once a week."
Wesley listened without comment. When he decided no more information was forthcoming, he asked.
"When was the last time he was here? What day?"

The bartender opened his mouth, then closed it again. He knew he was pushing his luck, but what did he have to lose? He shrugged. Wesley slid across another twenty.

"He always come in on Fridays. He come here to drink, he go to the post office and he go to the commissary for coffee and supplies."

Wesley was elated. Tomorrow was Friday and he would be ready. "Do you know his name? Has he said his name was Warren?"

The bartender stepped back. "I don't ask. I don't want to know. You drink here, do I know your name? No, and I no want to know. If asked, I never see you here."

Wesley could see from the bartender's body
language that the conversation was over. He had gotten all his money could buy and it was time to leave. Still, he was thrilled. He had more than he hoped for and a couple more leads to chase down before tomorrow.

With a curt nod of thanks, Wes slid off the stool and walked confidently from the bar. Standing on the street outside, Wes could finally take in a deep breath that was not filled with the stench of smoke, sweat, and a slight blend of something resembling puke/piss.

He squinted his eyes as they adjusted from the darkness of the interior of the bar to the blinding glare of daylight, wondering if somehow this part of the surface of the earth wasn't miles closer to the sun than any other place he had ever been.

When he was able to again focus, he looked down the street in the direction of Rosie's cantina. He would skip the chili, but gratefully accept the room, hoping for the luxury of clean sheets and a shower.
But first he had one other stop to make. Something else the bartender had mentioned stuck in his brain and it was a lead that he needed to check on before Warren tried to sneak in tomorrow.

Wes tugged the brim of his cap down further over his face, knowing it wouldn't do much good. He could feel the top layer of his skin dry, wrinkle and dehydrate with every step he took. He imagined it would only take weeks for his soft, supple, well moisturized skin to turn to the dark shoe leather that covered the faces of all the old men who sat around the village streets swatting flies.

Ignoring the dust that was ruining his Bruno Magli shoes, Wes headed for the post office where another twenty bought him the information that, yes, the gringo came in once a week, usually to mail just one or two letters and sometimes to collect one through general delivery.

With all these details to add to the facts of his case, Wes was anxious to get a room and settle in. Once there, he could write a preliminary report and get a
better look at the overall picture, then he would give William a call.

The most amazing thing about this whole assignment was the way he felt. The conditions in this area were deplorable, like nothing he had ever known, and the fear.......the fear had his adrenalin shooting through the roof.

Yet........

Wesley had never felt more alive in his life.

Part Twenty-Seven

With impersonal efficiency, each man hustled around erasing all traces of their coupling. Xander ducked into the small water closet and grabbed a handful of toilet paper, using it to wipe up every
drop of spilled passion from the floor where he had stood.

Spike took his used condom, along with the wrapper and flushed them down the toilet, then flushed twice more to assure himself that nothing would float back. They took a moment to check each other over and after Spike smoothed Xander's hair and Xander straightened Spike's collar, they each gave their stamp of approval.

Spike then took a minute to jot down some observations that he could expound into a lengthy, detailed report later and they prepared to leave. Neither spoke because, what could they say? "I don't want to go?" "Let's stay forever?" "That was wonderful?"

Neither man was a fool. They knew the first two were impossible and they could easily read the third in both their faces. Then, at the last second before opening the door, Spike turned and clamped his hand firmly around the back of Xander's neck, pulling his face forward and planting a hard,
possessive kiss of passion and ownership on the surprised lips.

Then, with no further delay, they stepped out into the hallway. Even knowing that there were no cameras watching, this was too open an area to be careless. Xander immediately fell a step behind, clasped his hands at his back and dropped his head.

They proceeded toward the steel doorway silently. Then, just before slipping his key in the lock, Spike whispered. "I want you to stop sleeping with Oz."

Xander was totally taken aback. Of all the things he expected Spike to say, that was not one of them. "We aren't having sex. Oz is straight as an arrow."

Spike piercing blue eyes searched Xander's for the truth. "Nothing? Not even...."

"No! Nothing. It's just that neither one of us likes to sleep alone. We talk. That's all."

Spike was fairly satisfied that Xander was telling the
truth, still, he didn't like Oz getting the warmth and affection that should only belong to him. Xander's heart fluttered with happiness.

Finally, with one last longing look between them, they stepped back into the scrutiny and heavily occupied area of the institution as though nothing had happened.

When they returned to the housing unit, Spike could hear the ruckus before the steel door was even opened. When he stepped in, he was stunned to see the chaos. Inmates were in the front of the television area physically tussling over the remote, four quickly ducked out of sight into the communal bathroom and the card tables were loud with challenges and bets tossed about.

Inmates Steele and Barnhart had Geek and Catfish cornered, forcing them to toss a pair of contraband dice and cheering when, no matter what numbers came up, they lost.

And in the center of it all stood C.O. Conway,
shrieking at the top of his lungs for everyone to sit down and shut up.

Spike just groaned and shook his head. He then slammed the heavy door behind him and, with his hands on his hip, shouted "HEY!!"

Like a snapshot, all action froze, everyone locked into place and all eyes turned in his direction. In an instant, the only sound was the laughter and cheering on the television as the audience of the forbidden Jerry Springer show roared.

Xander slid around his lover and had a seat, watching quietly as Spike efficiently went around dealing with all the pockets of negative activity that had cropped up so quickly.

He flushed the shadow boxers and blow job wannabes from the bathroom, he shut off the television and he collected the playing cards. He then sent Rug and Steele to their cell, sanctioning them for attempted strong arm. When order was restored, he announced that the dayroom would be
on a thirty minute quiet time before program would resume.

No one complained. The entire housing unit knew they had gotten off easy.

Last, but not least, he told Conway to go to the office. When he closed the door behind them he took a deep breath before starting. "What happened? Why didn't you call me?"

Conway did his best not to cry. "I don't know. It just all happened so fast. One minute I was walking through the dayroom and the next minute it was like you saw. Fuck! I must be the worst C.O. in the world. Look, I need to go take a break. I'll be back later. I'm sorry, I...."

Spike just laughed and sat down. "Well, first, you aren't going anywhere. If you leave now, they'll read it as a sign of running away. Second, you need to plaster a grin on your face and sit. The most important thing to remember is Do Not Show Fear or Weakness."
With shaky legs threatening to give out anyway, Conway did as he was told. "I don't think I can do this, Spike."

"Sure you can. What just happened to you has happened to all of us at one time or another. What counts is how you handle it. Next time it starts to get out of hand, just run a total lock down and tell them they can come back out when things calm down. After two or three times of that, they will learn."

Conway's face lit up. "It's that simple? The solution is that easy?"

Spike laughed. "No. Problems aren't solved that easily, but you can't let things overwhelm you. You can't let it get out of hand like that. You have to stay in control at all times." Even as he said it, Spike knew what a hypocrite he was.

The rest of the day went quickly. The residual negativity from earlier kept Spike busy and both the
outside rec movement and the supper chow line were wired and uneasy.

At bedtime, Spike made officer Conway run the showers, although as back up, he did walk the hallway, stopping by the shower area just as cell# 3 stepped out. Xander carefully dried himself, never looking at the guards, but allowing his towel to drop to the floor before wrapping it slowly around himself. Oz snorted in disgust.

Lock down was complete. Lights were off and the cells finally quiet, Conway nearly sobbed with relief. "Now can I go smoke a cigarette?"

Spike chuckled. "I didn't know you smoked."

"Fuck, up till now, I didn't"

When his partner was gone, Spike crept down the hall for one last look. Stopping at #3, he aimed his light beam in. Brown eyes, shining on the bottom bunk looked back at him and both men longed for things to be different. Silently, he walked away.
When the clock finally struck 11:00, he left the building, taking a minute to let the cool, damp air seep into his skin. He knew he should be kicking himself in the arse but he just couldn't. That one brief, quick encounter left him feeling more satisfied and complete than all his week-ends of marathon anonymous sex put together.

Flipping the collar of his wind breaker up, he took one step toward his car before the jangle of his cell phone startled him.

"Hello?"

"William? Hello, it's Wesley."

Spike was slightly taken aback by the excited, almost giddy tone in Wes's voice. Wesley Wyndham-Pryce had never, in his life, been giddy.

"Wes? You o.k?"

"Yes, yes, quite. I am down here in the sleazy,
disgusting town of Naco, Arizona and I do believe I have a lead on Warren."

"What? Shit, Wes, that's great. Have you seen him? What does he say? Did he admit to writing the letter?"

"Well, now let's not get ahead of ourselves. My sources tell me he will be in town tomorrow and I will be ready. The reason I called is because I don't want to spook him. I have my cell. When I spot him, I will take a picture and e-mail it to you. If you can, show it to Mr. Harris and see if he know's who this Warren is. I will not let him out of my sight and when we have confirmation, I will confront him."

"Jesus, Wes, you are a natural! That is amazing. It's really more than I hoped for. I mean, it's more than Mr. Harris......."

"Yes, well, we will discuss that later. I'll be in touch."
Nothing Oz could say, despite the fact that nothing was said with actual words, could deflate the buoyant feeling in Xander's heart about the wonderful time he and Spike had shared yesterday.

The grumbling comment Oz had made about "sloppy seconds" as the reason he wouldn't snuggle just made Xander laugh. By midnight, when he thought Xander was asleep. Oz slid in next to him.

The next morning, the sun seemed brighter and the eggs less watery than they had the days before. Xander all but hummed as he lined up for movement and he just shrugged when C.O. Riley told him to wipe the fucking smile off his face. He didn't care that people thought he looked like an idiot. He felt like a king.

After chow, the dayroom was exceptionally mellow.
The television was on a talk show rather than the endless BET video's and the card games were light hearted and easy.

"Mail Call"

The announcement had most of the Inmates attention as they waited for word from loved ones. Xander dealt the next hand. He wasn't bothered. His loved one would be here in less than five hours.

"Harris"

Xander frowned and looked over to where Riley was waving a small brown wrapped package.

"Move your ass Harris, I got people waiting."

Xander walked over and took the package. He turned it over and noticed the return address listed an 'Uncle Bill Harris' as the sender. Xander was stumped. Uncle Bill was a joke. Made up for Oz and laughingly shared with Spike. Uncle Bill did not exist.
He returned to the table where Catfish, with his odd lisp, demanded he open it. NOW. So Xander shrugged and did. Inside was a neatly wrapped box containing a small portable radio. The enclosed note read:

Nephew,

I hope this helps pass the time. It has batteries but you can buy more through the commissary. I put $50.00 in your account. Think of me when you listen to it.

Uncle Bill.

Xander was thoroughly confused. Uncle Bill? Uncle Bill? Finally, when he heard the exasperated sigh coming from his disgusted cellmate, Xander got the hint. "Ooohhh, yeah, good ole Uncle Bill. We've really had some great times, me and Bill."

Catfish was all but drooling at the sight of something as coveted as a real radio. "Thit! Thath
neat ath fuck! You better take that to yer thhell before Thteele tries to thcam you out of it."

Xander dodged the spit that flew from Cat's lips as he spoke but knew the con was right on and he waved his hand as he discreetly tucked the prize under his arm.

"Yo, Mr. Riley. Cell#3"

Riley waved his approval and Xander and Oz scampered down the hall. When the door opened they both hustled inside.

Oz jumped up on his bunk and watched as Xander set it up. "That's fucked up."

Xander carefully turned the dial, hunting for the best country station. "What is?"

"Don't play with me. We both know who sent that."

"So what if he did? Wouldn't it have to go through the business office? That takes days. That means he
had to send the money before we......"

Oz slapped his hands over his ears.
"Lalalalalalalalalalalalalala"

Xander just laughed and continued his search for redneck entertainment.

Oz sniffed as though one of them had eaten something foul that was now coming back to gas them. "You know what that makes you if you keep it?"

"Grateful?"

Xander finally zeroed in on 99.9 and the strains of "Country Man" bounced around the small room. He smiled and Oz tapped his foot. Through silent agreement, both men decided that perhaps the best thing to do was keep the gift in the spirit with which it was given. After all, no one wanted to hurt good old Uncle Bill's feelings.
Spike dragged around his quiet apartment. He had never noticed how lonely it was before now. He had always loved living by himself, coming and going with no explanations to anyone. Now he could almost see someone else crowding in on him, stealing his newspaper, drinking his milk. It might be nice.

He never cared if an inmate was guilty or innocent and to be perfectly honest, he didn't care this time either. He just wanted Xander out. If he had killed his lover, there must have been a good reason. Self defense. Justifiable homicide. Accidental manslaughter.

With Xander on his mind, Spike plugged his cell phone into the port on his computer. He hoped Wesley would be able to take and transmit Warren's picture before he had to leave for work. If Xander knew him and could give them a full name,
it would be a new suspect the police would have to look into.

Wesley had said that Xander didn't get an adequate defense and would surely get another trial. If this thing with Warren what's-his-name falls through, they still might be only looking at a year before the wheels of justice turn and unlock the front gates to let him out.

Spike stopped in front of his full length mirror and stared at himself. "What the fuck is wrong with me?"

He stared at the image. He looked strange, different, almost as though he were another person. Suddenly, he wanted things to go back to the way they were. He knew he had taken a ridiculous risk and was just lucky enough not to get caught.

He had sent money and a gift to an inmate. He had fucked an inmate. "Holy, fucking shit!" The magnitude of it was overwhelming.
Still, through it all, he knew he didn't want to go back. He knew the thought of seeing Xander each day was what had become the driving force in his life.

"Oh, fuck!" He groaned and dropped his head.

Corrections Officer William Pratt was falling in love.

Part Twenty-Nine

Angel sat on the side of his bed wearing nothing but his tighty whities. His arms slumped limply at his sides, his feet dragged on the floor and his cock, despite not being stroked in two days, hung shriveled and sad between his legs.

He hated the thought of dressing and going to work. He was easily having the worst week he had known
in the last five years and there was little hope today would be any better.

Rupert Giles had gotten him where it hurt. Those two fucking, ignorant trouble makers that were put on his precious housing unit had needed less than two days to cause total chaos.

They had muscled a dozen bags of chips, cookies, and soda bottles from his weakest inmates and were now running store from their cell. They had claimed the television remote and Angel hadn't seen Oprah in days. They had to be showered alone to stop the grab assing and chow movement was a constant shuffle of the other cons passing their food to the newcomers out of fear and debt.

Angel was beginning to think he was working in a prison!

"Bullshit! This is fucking bullshit! Giles will NOT ruin this for me. I know what he's doing and it stops today!"
With a renewed vigor, Angel jumped to his feet and snatched up his argyle socks, the ones with the penguins because it was Friday, and he jerked them on his well lotioned and manicured feet. He suddenly felt better than he had all week. Fucking Rupert Giles was going to move those troublemakers off his unit... today!

An evil smile curled the corners of Angel's lips as he considered his position. He had nearly forgotten that he held the straight flush in this game of cards and he knew exactly what threat to use. There was no bluff. Giles was holding a pair of two's and it was time for Angel to go all in and claim the pot. Today was the day for the worm to do his turning!

~*~*~*~*~

Spike wandered from the bedroom to the living room. He had a hot mug of Earl Grey in his hand and his eye on the computer. Last night, before going to bed, he had connected is cell phone to the exterior port, running it through the scanner and
finally to the printer. Now, he waited.

His mother used to tell him that a watched pot never boils. He wondered if that translated into a watched cell phone never rings. Apparently, it did.

After speaking to Wesley, he had gotten up this morning with the hope that Wes would be able to find this man who had murdered Xander's friend, written him the letter and hidden out from the law in a small town dangerously close to the border.

Wes was of the opinion that it was someone Xander knew. Drug dealers and murderers seldom used their real names. They always adopted a street name that made it difficult or nearly impossible for law enforcement to ascertain their true identity, giving them time to get away. Which was apparently what Warren had done.

Yet, the whole tone of the note was personal. It was sent to 'Xander', not to 'Alexander Harris', or even just 'Harris'. Obviously, someone his Xander knew had a secret identity and a life that a person as
innocent as Xander would not recognize.

Even so, Wes and Spike both knew there was nothing Wes could do right now other than watch the man. There was no evidence that anyone but Xander had been on the beach the night Jesse died, but if Wes could put a real name to him, maybe they could build a case, complete with opportunity and motive, and include it all in Xander's appeal for a new trial. A new, viable suspect would add a ton of weight to their case.

The important thing was to make sure Warren did not know he was being watched. Mexico was a scant few miles away and once over the border and out of the country, their chances of getting their hands on Warren was slim to none. Like a greased pig at the county fair, he would be impossible to hold.

Spike stopped and for the tenth time, checked to make sure that, yes, his phone was charged and the computer as well as the printer were on line and working fine. "Damn it, Wes, where the fuck are
you?"

Knowing he couldn't delay any longer unless he wanted to be late for work, Spike sat down his tea cup and reluctantly headed for the shower. His uniform was laid out neatly on his bed and time was running.

~**~*~*~*~

Giles had trouble controlling the big grin that covered his face. His desk was stacked up with paperwork and ordinarily, this time of year would have him pulling his hair out. More than one Warden across the state had lost their job as the result of a negative rating during the accreditation and auditing period.

But, Giles wasn't worried. His institution ran extremely well. It was fairly clean, he had a low number of violent incidents and very few correctional officers collecting workers compensation money, and with the State, that's
what it was all about. The bottom line. Money.

Giles could relate to that because he felt the same way and he wasn't about to let his bank account or bottom line suffer. This time of testing with Buffy and Liam fucking O'Connor was a sort of auditing process. It was a time of bargaining. Check and checkmate.

He did regret that this situation with his step daughter had arisen now, but he had carefully considered all angles and was certain that with the good previous year Riverview had, along with his personal friendship with Ethan Rayne, the State's representative, Giles was confident that, if handled correctly, he could survive one major incident.

He had moved those two thugs onto Liam's housing unit, seemingly to aggravate him. Little did Liam suspect the truth. Although Giles did have to admit, he thought the C.O. would call him before now and demand their removal. Possibly C.O. O'Connor had bigger balls than Giles had imagined. Maybe that's what Buffy saw in him.
He all but laughed out loud at supper last night when Buffy got into her sweat pants and slouchy tee right after dinner. When he asked about her evening plans, she had complained that "Angel is being a real poo poo head. He's no fun and won't, um, play, ya know?"

Unfortunately, Giles knew. Although the mental picture was an ugly one, it thrilled him beyond belief to think that maybe the man was having such a hard time at work, that he was having a very soft time on his off hours. It was confirmation that his point was being received.

Checking the clock on his wall, he knew the afternoon shift would be arriving in less than an hour for roll call. He was positive today was the day. He could feel it in his bony little arthritic toes and the joy of it had him polishing the lens of his glasses in delicious anticipation.

~*~*~*~*~
Thirty minutes. Spike hustled to jerk his uniform pants on, tie his shoes and buckle the thick, leather utility belt around his trim waist. He had just a few more minutes before he had to run out the door or risk missing roll call. He was tempted to kick the computer out of frustration, but knew that wouldn't accomplish anything good.

Really, he told himself, one more day wouldn't matter. It didn't mean that Wes had failed, it just meant that he couldn't get the shot just yet. Maybe Warren wasn't where Wes thought he would be. Hell, knowing Wes, maybe the small town had a day spa and Wes was getting a massage.

Immediately, Spike felt guilty for even thinking such a thing. Wes was doing them a hell of a favor and Spike owed his beloved cousin big time. With one last wistful glance at his desk, Spike turned and reached for the front door to leave.
At the last minute, the phone rang. The scanner hummed and the printer snapped to life.

Part Thirty

Wesley hadn't slept a wink all night. Not because of the lumpy, horse hair mattress and not because of the repeating action of the refried beans he ate for supper at Rosie's cantina.

No, Wesley's sudden insomnia was the result of the incredible epiphany he was experiencing. This whole trip that had started out so badly, now had become the turning point in his previously well organized and mundane life.

The episode in the bar had felt so natural. It was a conversational duck and dodge. Point and counterpoint. It had thrilled and invigorated him and he knew now that by living all these years to
meet other people's standards and expectations, he had cheated himself out of knowing his full potential and destiny.

But no more. He had reached the fork in the road and was choosing for himself the direction he wanted to go. He suddenly knew who he was.

He could envision himself traveling through the dark corners of the underground of society. Lethal, invisible, cleansing the world of the scum of the earth that insisted on victimizing the innocent then hiding out to avoid prosecution.

Wesley would seek them out and bring them to justice.

He was....... Wesley Wyndham-Pryce. Rogue bountyhunter.

It had an amazing ring to it. He could see it printed on business cards. It came with unlimited wardrobe possibilities. Camo pants, trim cut jeans. Doc Martin boots that laced up the front. Possibly a tattoo.
Probably not.

Exotic locations. Dangerous and mysterious characters like the one's he read in books. Wes knew the pay was iffy. Some bounties paid high, others barely enough to cover expenses. He didn't care. He had amassed a small fortune over the years from his practice and could sell out his share of the partnership for enough to support himself for years.

By three a.m. he had given up on all thoughts of sleep and sat at the small battered wooden table in his room, making lists and jotting down ideas. He needed to learn all he could about electronic surveillance equipment. He would purchase a pair of high powered binoculars and good, leather gloves. Oh! He thought. *The cool one's with the fingers cut out!*

Like everything else in his life, Wes would approach this with a well organized and researched determination.
He hoped a false moustache would not be needed, but one could never tell.

He was surprised at how quickly seven am rolled around. He took a quick cool shower and dressed. He decided on a leisurely breakfast at the cantina and a stroll around town. He would keep a sharp eye out and when Warren slipped into town, Wesley would be ready.

"Good morning Rosie. Could you fix me some tea and toast please?"

"Si. Good morning Mr. Wessey. Rosie fix you a desayuns."

Wesley wished desperately that he had stuck his pocket dictionary in his pocket rather than leave it on his bedstand.

"Yes, well, if that means tea and toast, then we are good. Si? Oh, and it's Wesley, not Wessey"

Wes folded his napkin neatly and laid it over his lap.
Within minutes, Rosie had returned with a large plate of something resembling scrambled eggs, piled high with green peppers, onions, cheese and mushrooms. Beside it she sat a large bottle of hot sauce and a steaming mug of what he assumed was tea.

Wesley stared at the plate and his stomach wagged its finger at him in warning, *Uh, oh. Don't even think about it unless you want to deal with me and my downstairs neighbor, Dumpy Bowel.*

Wes looked up at the pudgy smiling face. "Well, this certainly looks, ah, interesting, but I think maybe I will just sip the tea."

Immediately, Rosie frowned. "Senior Wessey no like?"

Wesley buckled. Just because his new profession may require him to be a ruthless killer, that didn't give him license to insult large Mexican women who have generously cooked for him.
"No. No. It looks wonderful!!!" With no further
hesitation, Wesley dug into the plate, scooping a
forkful of spicy omelet into his mouth. His eyes lit
up.
"Oh, my God! Rosie! This is fantastic!"
Rosie smiled. "It is bueno?'
Wesley shoveled in another mouthful. "Si! Si!
Mucho bueno!"
Rosie smiled, patted the gringo on the back and
headed for her kitchen just as Wes picked up his
cup and gulped a mouthful of piping hot, blasting
strong, Columbian coffee. He prided himself on the
fact that it didn't come flying back out his mouth or
nose.
Thirty minutes later, after scraping the plate clean,
Wes peeled of several bills and dropped them on
the table before calling out. "Thanks, Rosie."
He waited for the answering, "Si, Senior Wessey."


He then stepped out into the blazing morning sunlight, mumbling under his breath. "WesLEE, WesLEE!"

He looked all up and down the dusty dirt road that served as Main street. It looked identical, right down to the old men sitting on the wooden benches draped in colorful ponchos. Wesley wondered if they had even gone home last night or if they just sat there 24/7.

The rest of the morning was mind numbing boredom. He wandered up and down the two relatively safe looking streets in the town, avoiding the back alleys and unnamed business that sat there.

He logged time, with the other old men, on the benches that were scattered throughout the town. When the heat of the early afternoon sun started to scorch him, he stepped back into Casa Del Diablo. The patrons inside were already drunk and had been for some time. Wes decided to leave,
wondering if this really was their whole life.

Finally deciding it didn't matter, Wes turned to the left and started toward the post office. There was a small push cart with an old woman selling vegetables and fruit that sat to the right of the government building and Wes headed there. He perused the bright red clusters of hanging peppers and felt up the sacks of oranges casually feigning interest.

When the old woman began to eye him suspiciously he knew he had to either buy or move on so he did both. Just as he turned to go, he saw the dust cloud of an antique old Ford truck rumbling toward him. Quickly, Wes turned his back and ducked behind the thick forest of pepper trees.

Peering around, he watched as the truck sputtered to a stop in front of the post office and the door swung open with a loud creak and a slam shut.

Wes jerked his cell phone from his pocket. He
snapped once as the Americano stepped from his vehicle, his ballcap pulled low over his eyes.

He snapped again as the man took off the hat and wiped the sweat from his forehead on his shirt sleeve.

He snapped a third time when he entered the building and a fourth as he left minutes later. When Wes was certain he had gotten several good pictures for a positive identification, he slipped away.

Part Thirty-One

Angel was restless. He was anxious and irritable. He had paced around so long that he was nearly late for role call, but now that he was here and had made his mind up, he couldn't wait for it to be over.

Any warnings, information and mundane schedules the shift commander rambled on about in his boring, monotone voice sailed right over Angel's head and off into the stratosphere.
He also had no interest in the fact that Spike Pratt was visually twitching in his chair, eager to get out of the room and on to his housing unit. He had often thought Pratt was a tad on the hyperactive side. No doubt the reason he was thin.

Angel shifted his weight to his other butt cheek and he continued to wait. It was the longest fifteen minutes of his life.

As soon as he heard the words, "That's it, People. Let's get to work," Angel jumped up and ran to the telephone that hung on the wall. He tapped his foot impatiently as he waited for an answer, and nearly jumped out of his skin when it happened.

"Warden Giles office. How may I help you?"

"Hi, Tara, this is Officer O'Connor. May I speak to the Warden please?"

Angel prided himself on the cool, collected tone of his voice, when what he really want to do was scream, "Put the fucking, arrogant, prick on the
Goddamn, fucking phone!!"

"Yes? Warden Rupert Giles here. What do you need Mr. O'Connor?" Giles voice was bored, slightly irritated and totally annoyed with the interruption to his day.

The tiny Rupert in his brain, however, was squealing like a little girl in frilly panties and running in circles clapping her hands. He knew EXACTLY what the pain-in-the-ass man wanted. He was just slightly surprised and maybe a bit impressed that it had taken him this long to call.

"I want you to make good on your fucking promise! You stuck these trouble makers on my housing unit days ago and it has been nothing less than a catastrophic nightmare! You have put my inmates at risk and you promised you would move them as soon as possible. Don't think I don't know what this is all about, Rupert. You think you're going to make my life miserable and I'll break off my engagement with Buffy. Well, forget it! You can NOT get rid of me that easily!"
Giles paused, then he came back, his voice apologetic and contrite. "Oh, my goodness, Mr. O'Connor, I genuinely apologize. I have been so busy with this upcoming audit that it just slipped my mind. I would never mix our personal lives with the business of running this institution and, frankly, I am surprised that you would accuse me of such an impropriety."

Angel was startled. It was not the answer he had expected. Maybe he had been wrong. He did tend to be a little on the paranoid side. "Oh, well, no, of course I didn't think......so, are you saying you will move them off?"

Giles nearly purred, his voice silky and smooth as hot butter poured on a Slip and Slide. "Of course I will. I shall check our stats on the other housing units, do the transfer paper work and push it through personally. Now, you realize that it will probably not occur today, but I do promise that first thing tomorrow morning, the day shift will make the move. Is that acceptable to you?"
Angel felt ashamed. He wondered if he had misread the man, not only professionally, but personally too. "Yeah, sure. I can deal with them for one more day. Look, Rup... Mr. Giles, I think I owe you an apology too. Thanks."

"Certainly. Saaaaay, I'll tell you what. Why don't I come down there and speak to the inmates myself. Give them a bit of the old rancid and let them know we will not tolerate their negativity. Would that help?"

Angel was stunned. The king would walk among the peasants. "Wow! Yeah, that would be great. Thanks."

"Of course, Liam. I shall be right down. Good day, Mr. O'Connor."

Angel collected his belongings and headed out of the roll call room. His temper had been deflated so rapidly it made him light headed and confused and he wondered if somehow he had wandered in to
Superman's bizarro world.

As soon as he entered the housing unit, Officer Cathy Peters jumped to her feet, her hair was wild and mussed from her fingers being repeatedly run through it, and her face was showing a new crop of wrinkles from the stress. "Where the fuck were you? Roll call was over five minutes ago and I just want the fuck out of here."

"Now now, let's not be in a hurry. By the way, where are our little trouble makers?" Angel had an unnerving grin on his face as his eyes scanned the dayroom. The tension in the air around the other inmates was thick enough to cut with a knife.

"I locked them down an hour ago. Every time I walked by them, one of them would sniff and the other would meow. I couldn't take it anymore, and DON'T you dare let them back out. Not until my car is out of the parking lot and I am at least five miles down the road."

Angel patted her on the shoulder while making
sympathetic tsking sounds with his tongue. "Not to worry. Your old pal Angel has handled this nasty glitch to our happy little world."

Cathy's haggard face lit up. "Yeah? Really? Don't you fucking play with me, Angel."

Angel leaned against the door frame and snorted. "No playing. I just called Jesus Christ, otherwise known as Warden Giles, and I laid it on the line. I told him we weren't having this shit another day. I told him to get his stuck up, self righteous ass down here and fix this fucking mess."

"FUCK! And he didn't fire you? Damn, Angel, what did he say?"

"The man crawled and apologized like a little bitch. No offense. Then he said he would move them both tomorrow, said he was sorry and that he would personally come down here and threaten them to behave till the transfer tomorrow morning."

C.O. Peters was speechless. When she finally could
respond, the four words that came off her tongue were ones she would have bet her life savings against ever hearing herself say.

"You... are a god!"

Angel dropped down into his chair, locked his fingers behind his head and propped his feet up on his desk. "Yeah, I know."

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**Part Thirty-Two**

Spike's entire body felt tense and wired. He twitched and jerked nervously, waiting for the torture that was roll call to end so he could get to his housing unit.

He only slightly noticed Angel sitting at the end of the table with the king of all puppies on his face. He knew that Angel blamed Spike, in part, for the
transfer of Brown and MoMac to his little paradise, and Spike assumed he was just pouting. On an importance scale of 1 to 10, Liam O'Connor was a - 2.

No, he had other matters that were competing with the hamster on the wheel in his brain. He had three precious pictures tucked safely in the bag that sat on the floor at his feet. Wesley had gotten really good, clear shots of Warren's face and Spike couldn't wait to show them to Xander.

The call had come just as he was stepping out the door. He didn't even think about reading the enclosed e-mail till he was in the car and racing across town. It read:

Will,
Unable to confirm identity by name. Believe this is our subject. Will keep him in visual. Please advise how you wish to proceed. Will await further instruction.
Wesley
Spike was bouncing. He quickly grabbed the printed papers and disconnected his phone, dropping it back down in his pocket. He was now running late and had to hurry which, really when he thought about it, was ridiculous.

He was fucking an inmate. He had sent money and gifts to said inmate. He had hired an attorney to attempt to free his lover-inmate and he was now betraying his loyalty to his partner. Running late for roll call was a '1' on the previously mentioned scale of priority.

All that aside, Spike's only thought was seeing Xander. If Xander could identify the man in these pictures, put a last name to the perpetrator, there was a good possibility that, with Wesley's help, they could put a real case together. Then, when they requested the new trial, there was no way the court could refuse.

Xander was as good as his. Unfortunately, by then, unemployment might also be.
"That's it people, let's get to work."

Before the last word was out of the shift commander's mouth, Spike had grabbed his bag and hurried off down the hallway, C.O. Conway trying his best to catch up. When he entered the housing unit, Spike was thrilled to see all the inmates had been secured in their cells.

"Hey, Spike. What's up?"

"You tell me, Riley. Unit been acting up?"

"Nay, I just put them down for a few minutes. They got outside rec in about a half an hour so I figured this would give you some peace and quiet first."

Spike was delighted. This couldn't have played into his plans any better if he had called ahead and given the lockdown orders.

With a slight scowl on his face, Spike looked around the dayroom. "Um, say, Riley, I know you were probably busy this morning but that dayroom is a
mess. Before you go, why don't you bring a couple inmates out and have them do a quick sweep up. Cell #3 should be all right."

Riley reluctantly agreed. He tried not to read any criticism of his program in Spike's voice, but he did have to admit, the dust bunnies were breeding like, well, like rabbits.

"Sure, sorry." Riley pushed the intercom button. "Harris. Osborn. Get your fucking asses out here and do this clean up." He then hit the door lock switch before grabbing his bag and heading out the exit.

Conway snickered. "You sure put him in his place. Imagine, us having to come into a mess like this. What the fuck was he thinking?"

Spike frowned and immediately checked the rookie. "Riley is a good C.O. Dayshift has a full program and I don't blame him for not having the time to get to it. I know there's a lot of cut throating goes on around here, but you would be wise not to feed
into it. We're all doing the same job and we need each other's support. After all, you wouldn't want someone gossiping about your short falls would you?"

Conway felt as though he had just had the wind knocked from him. He respected Spike more than any man he had ever known, and although he was straight, Conway had no problem admitting to a bit of a man-crush on the blond guard. His chastisement was a slap in Conway's face.

He felt like a two year old caught with his hand in the cookie jar. "Sorry. You're right. I guess I still have a lot to learn. Tell you what, you start the shift paperwork and I'll get these two started on a quick cleanup before our movement."

Not waiting for an answer, Conway rushed to unlock the utility closet. Spike felt his heart soar as soon as he saw Xander step from his cell out into the hallway. He watched as the inmate approached, his smile lighting the dayroom like the high beams on a Lexus.
As soon as their eyes connected, Spike's smile matched the inmate's and his body flushed warm with affection.

Oz shook his head in annoyed disgust. He went to the closet to claim a push broom and began working. He rightly assumed his cell mate would not be joining in the detail.

Spike stuck his head out the doorway, trying to appear casual. "Harris, front and center."

Quickly, Spike pulled the pictures from his bag. Assuring himself that Conway was on the other side of the room, Spike whispered, "I got them. Wes got the shots of Warren. At least he thinks it might be Warren. Shit, just take a look and see if it is someone you may have seen hanging around the beach or maybe someone you knew that associated with the victim."

Xander noticed that Spike still refused to say Jesse's name. He liked that. Taking the pictures, Xander
gasped. He blinked and looked at the next one. When he came to the third, his face went white and his knees buckled.

For the second time in his life, he awoke to an ammonia stick being waved under his nose.

**Part Thirty-Three**

Spike had reacted the second he saw the man's eyes roll up in his head and the papers drop from his hands and flutter to the floor. He had lurched forward, catching the inmate and trying to break his fall. Spike's arms screamed from the strain of trying to hold the dead weight and together they tumbled and landed with a hard 'thump.'

Conway and Oz came running. "What the fuck?"

Protectively, Oz shoved C.O. Conway back and he
dropped to his knees at his friend's side, glaring at Spike accusingly. "What the hell did you do to him?"

Lovingly, Spike scrambled to kneel and lifted Xander's head to rest on his knees before shouting to Officer Conway. "Get the first aid box. MOVE! Give me the ammonia stick and then get the fuck back and give him some room."

Flabbergasted, Conway did as he was ordered, still panicking he ran around the small enclosed office. "Should I call medical? Do we need a wheel chair? Does he need some water? Is he sick? Oh, Lord, Spike, is he dead?"

Oz had retrieved a brown paper towel and soaked it in cool water which he placed on Xander's head. Spike nodded his thanks. "He's not dead, he just passed out. Did you find the fucking ammonia?"

Conway dumped the entire contents of the first aid kit and with shaking fumbling hands finally found what he was looking for. Quickly, Spike snapped it in half and waved it under Xander's nose.
At first it had no effect, but the second time brought the expected reaction. Xander jerked, startled and confused, he tried to jump to his feet only to have Spike and Oz both lay a hand on him. "Whoa, take it easy. Just wait a minute and breathe, Pet."

Xander waited while the familiar terror of the last time this had happened rushed through him before he recalled that that time was long passed. He looked up into the clear blue eyes and felt the fog of confusion slowly begin to float away.

Then, in a sudden snap of comprehension, Xander sat bolt upright. "Fucking Frogs, Spike! Warren my fucking ass, the man in those pictures is JESSE! He's alive. There's no fucking murderer cause there was no fucking murder. JESSE'S ALIVE!"

An expression of shock swept across Spike's face so fast, Conway thought maybe he should snap another stick just to be safe, but before he could act or even speak, Spike jumped to his feet. A move so
unexpected, it allowed Xander's head to drop back and bounce off the hard tile floor.

"OUCH!"

Spike ran to the steel door, shouting orders back over his shoulder. "Leave 'em locked down. I need to run out to my car. Call down to "D" unit and tell O'Connor we're running late on our rec time and need to combine our housing units in the yard. I'll be right back."

Before Conway could ask anything, Spike was already gone and the steel door swung shut.

Calmly, Oz climbed to his feet and picked up his push broom. "You want I should finish sweeping?"

"Ah....I...Um...you...um..." Conway stood by where Xander still sat on the floor rubbing the goose egg on the back of his head.

Taking pity on the C.O., Oz set aside his broom and took Conway by the arm. He led him into the office
and pushed his shoulder, encouraging him to sit.

"Call down to "D" unit and tell the C.O. what Spike said. That means we still have a half an hour till time to move out. I'll take Xander to the washroom and help him splash some cold water on his face. He'll be fine. Do you need to do the same?"

Conway growled at the insult but gratefully did as he was told.

~*~*~*~*~

Angel fussed around his office. They had thirty minutes before rec period and he hoped like hell that Giles got his official ass down here before then. Just as he was suspecting that he had been played...again, his door opened and the Warden strutted in like the Queen at Buckingham fucking Palace.

"Good day, officers."
Every eye in the dayroom snapped to the right. Although not many of the inmates had ever actually seen him, they all knew who the warden was. They also knew his word, like forgiveness from the Pope, could mean freedom from the chains that bind.

Each inmate sat up straight. They closed their mouths and they smiled their best Sunday school smile. Those that had teeth showed them.

"Where are our little troublemakers?"

Angel flinched slightly. "They are locked down, Sir."

Giles was thrilled. It was exactly where he wanted them. Outwardly, however, he raised his eyebrows in disapproval. "Really, Mr. O'Connor, you are well aware that it violates their rights to be on cell confinement without an official sanction."

"Yes, Sir, sorry. Day shift did it. I was just about to let them out. I will enter it into my log that DAYSHIFT improperly locked them down."
"No, no. just leave them in for now. I will speak to them in their cell. This really shouldn't be shared with the rest of the inmates anyway. After I go, though, I do expect them to be allowed to make the outside movement with the rest of the unit. Now, what cell are they in?"

"#12, Sir. Do you want an escort?"

"No, I'm sure I can handle this alone." Giles let his eyes wander up and down Angel's body, making no attempt to disguise the disdain. Angel couldn't have cared less, as long as this nightmare was coming to an end.

Giles passed through the dayroom and acknowledged the murmurs of "Mr. Giles. Good afternoon Sir." with a regal wave of his hand.

When he arrived at cell #12, he stopped and waited till he heard the buzzer of the door lock. He then swung the cell door open and held it at an angle that he knew blocked their view from up the hallway and he kept his voice low. "What the fuck
are you two up to now?"

MoMac scratched his nuts and climbed off his bottom bunk. Leroy rolled over on his side on the top bed and watched. "We ain't done shit. That bitch guard on days got the hots for us and if she can't fuck us, she locks us up. I think we might just file an official complaint."

Leroy snickered.

Giles rolled his eyes. "Shut the fuck up you fucking morons. Now, listen. Today is the day. The whole unit is going to outside movement in just a few minutes. You need to remember to do it when there is another inmate standing by, that way I will make sure he takes the blame and you two will get your early release."

MoMac squinted and stepped up till they were nose to nose. "You fuck with us on this and we both squeal like stuck pigs. You fucking understand? Don't think we'll go out quiet if you welch."
Giles lip curled up in disdane. "Just do what you were told and we both win. You fuck up now and I can guarantee you will never see freedom again, so you can save your weak threats."

MoMac nodded and took a step back. "Yeah, o.k., you got it?"

Giles glanced to assure himself that they could not be seen before reaching into his expensive suit pocket. He withdrew the crude, homemade shank that he had stolen from the evidence room and he handed it over.

MoMac whistled low and slow. "Oh, yeah, this will do the fucking job."

Giles closed the cell door and walked away. There was nothing more to say.
Part Thirty-Four

Wesley wondered if every case he would be going on would be this miserably hot. Didn't fugitives ever run off and hide in the cool climates of the northern states? Fucking bastards.

He shifted slightly on the hard bench outside the small hardware store and he discreetly tugged his sweaty dress pants out of the crack of his ass where they had been stuck for the last two hours.

Squinting, he held his wrist up and flinched when the blazing sun glinted off the expensive time piece that circled his wrist. He had sent the pictures nearly an hour ago and was waiting, less than patiently, for a reply.

Forgetting about the one hour's time difference between the coast in California and this God forsaken little village in Arizona, Wesley had wanted to kick himself in the pants when he realized he may
have e-mailed the pictures too late. Spike might have already left for work and wouldn't get the information until he returned home that evening.

Wesley couldn't imagine sitting here all afternoon. But, then again, if Spike did call and Warren was identified, what did that mean? What was Wes supposed to do? The time here on this uncomfortable bench at least gave him the opportunity to think about his options. At least till his brain fried and sizzled out his ears.

Wesley had positioned himself in this area due to the choice vantage point. He was able to clearly watch the old pick up truck that the subject had come into town in and he knew that the maybe-Warren was still in the cantina. He hoped Rosie wasn't serving him the last of her wonderful, spicy, omelet. Wesley was getting hungry.

Finally, after he had scooted around for the umpteenth time and pulled the damp fabric away from his sweaty nuts, his phone rang, vibrating quietly in his pants pocket. Quickly, he tugged it out
and flipped it open. "Yes?"

"Wes, Christ, Wes, it's me. It's Spike."

"Good Lord, Spike, what is it? Did your Mr. Harris recognize the man? Is this his 'Warren?"

"No this isn't Warren, if there even IS a Warren. This is Jesse, the victim, this is the man Xander murdered!"

Wes sat silently and wondered if his brain, like the famous fried egg, was finally cooked. This is your brain. This is your brain having a fucking heat stroke. "What? Is he sure? How can that be?"

Spike wanted to reach through the phone and grab his cousin around the throat and shake the shit out of him. "Listen to me, Wes. Xander was convicted of murdering this Jesse fellow but they never found the body......"

Wes huffed. "I read the transcripts. I am well aware of the facts of......GOOD LORD! Spike, are you telling
me that this is....."

"Well, fuck, that took long enough! Now, listen, don't lose sight of him! Get as many pictures of him as you can. Don't let him see you, we can't afford to let him get spooked. If he looks like he's leaving town, just let him go. We don't want him to know we're on to him. We need to take as much evidence as we can to the sentencing judge and get the conviction over turned."

When what Spike was asking began to sink in, Wesley groaned. "Oh, hell, Spike, you want me to stay here, don't you?"

"Please, Wes, please. We can't lose him now. I'll take the pictures to the judge first thing in the morning and...."

Wes immediately put personal discomfort aside and let his professional, legal mind step in. "No! No, Spike, you can't. It isn't enough and we will only get one shot at this. We need to solidify our case, carefully collect our information and make sure our
evidence is rock solid before it is presented. If it means Mr. Harris remains incarcerated for another week or so, so be it. That is still preferable to the forty years he is currently facing."

Spike gritted his jaw and paced restlessly. He knew Wes was right, but he want Xander out NOW.

"Yeah, I know you're right, look, I gotta go back in to work. I'm not sure what I'm going to say to him. I don't want to get his hopes up. Fuck, Wes, I can't tell you how much this means to me. I don't think I can ever repay you, but when he gets out, we'll throw you a hell of a party and I will personally pop out of the fucking cake. Gotta run. Thanks again. Bye."

Spike never waited for an answer. He knew he had been out in the parking lot too long and God only knew what Conway was doing on the unit. Checking his watch, he was relieved to see there was still twelve minutes till the outside movement with "D" unit. With luck, his inmates were still locked down.
Spike ran back inside and up to Intake.

It was a good thing Spike hadn't expected an answer when he rang off his conversation, because he wouldn't have gotten one. Somewhere after "hopes up." and "Fuck, Wes." Wesley's hand, and the phone in it, had dropped away from his ear. He had slowly risen to his feet causing the borrowed poncho to tumble to the ground, forgotten.

Wesley's eyes, still squinting against the blazing sun, were now locked on the ones that were staring back at him from across the narrow dirt road that was Main Street.

The young, dark haired Americano had returned to his truck. His hand had gripped the old, worn handle and his thumb was on the button when he stopped. He felt that odd, "I'm being watched" feeling creep up his spine and tap him on the shoulders. Despite the heat that could put Hell to shame, his skin had raised in gooseflesh.

If he were honest with himself, he had been
expecting it. The United State was a huge, vast
country with no corner safe to hide. He knew in his
heart this day would come, he just didn't anticipate
that it would be so soon.

Carefully, he removed his hand from the truck door
and turned around. With the morning sun to his
back, his eyes quickly found the source of his
discomfort.

The only other non-Hispanic around for miles and
Jesse was certain the man was not here to buy
souvenirs. He saw the man was talking, probably
reporting, on a cell phone and watching his truck.

Jesse's green eyes stared as the man slowly,
lethally, rose from the bench and focused on his
target. Fear locked Jesse's legs in place and he
couldn't force himself to move.

The man's poncho hit the dirt and was ground in as
he took a step forward. Jesse's breath filled his
lungs and he forgot how to exhale. His hand
fumbled behind him for the truck handle while his
brain screamed,

"RUN!!"

Choosing to abandoned a 1948 Ford truck that he knew wouldn't start on the first, second, or possibly third try, Jesse took off. Without pause or hesitation, Wesley was now close behind.

The dust under their feet kicked up clouds of dirt that billowed into a choking trail that followed up one street and down another. Wesley was amazed at how much good those cycling classes down at Bally's apparently had done. He was closing in fast.

At the last second, Jesse ducked down an alley and out of sight. Wes followed to find it an area of clothes lines strung from window to window and garbage stacked up everywhere. A stray, feral cat darted by with a rat in it's mouth.

Wesley stopped, thrilled to see the other end of the alley blocked off. It had been a tactical error and Jesse was trapped somewhere, hidden in the filth
and darkness.

Wesley took a moment to catch his breath before stepping in, his voice low and gentle.

"I know you are here Jesse. I'm not going away until we talk. I promise, that's all I want. I'm not here to arrest you or hurt you. I just want to talk."

Slowly, reluctantly, from a far corner, Jesse rose to his feet.

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Part Thirty-Five

Spike rushed back through the institution toward his housing unit. His feet barely touched the ground as his heart and soul soared free, over top the razor wire and past the green fields beyond.

He felt as though he had been the one locked up.
Confined for years, bound in chains and dragging a heavy steel ball around his ankles. Now, suddenly, he was free because Xander was nearly free.

They would....what? Run through fields of clover, singing songs from The Sound Of Music and holding hands? Spike blushed at the cheesiness of it all, then with his hand on the keys that would open the steel door to his unit, he laughed and shouted. "Hell, YES!" before checking his expression and darting in. He was relieved to see the unit still on lock down.

C.O. Conway was even more relieved to see officer Pratt return. He had been terrified of having to let the inmates out of their cells and take them on the outside movement alone.

"Oh, hey, you're back. I was just getting ready to line them up for rec. I could have done it by myself. You didn't need to hurry back just for that. I called "D" unit and O'Connor said that was good with him. He said he had a couple assholes and the extra staff in the yard was a good idea anyway."
Spike nodded and immediately went about the business of prepping the move by hitting the intercom button with his pat announcement.

"Let's go ladies. Get on your cell doors. Two minutes to outside movement. You miss your door, you don't go. Check your hands, tuck in your shirts, no sagging pants and I want a silent movement."

It was a speech Spike gave so often that he no longer even thought about the words as he said them. He just wanted to see Xander. He needed to fill him in, but caution him against too much hope. Wesley had been absolutely right. This had to be handled carefully.

They couldn't risk Jesse knowing they were on to him. There was proof to collect. Pictures, fingerprints, DNA, things that would conclusively prove a positive identification. Then it had to be presented to the court in a manner that judge and prosecution would be receptive to.
It was no sure thing. Innocence may prove lack of guilt but it didn't guarantee freedom.

Quickly and efficiently, the convicts were brought from their cells and lined up. Xander craned his neck around the bigger mountains of flesh that stood in front of him and searched out Spike's eyes. When he found them, there was nothing there to read.

Spike's face was blank. He was all about the business of an outside movement into the recreation yard. Xander was crushed.

Down the hallways and out into the compound, Spike was surprised to see Angel's group already out. After taking a last minute head count he tipped his head for Xander to start on the walking track and Spike strolled casually toward where Angel stood with two of his butt kissers. "Hey, thanks for the rec combo. We were running late and missed our own time. Just one of those crazy days."

Angel watched his group carefully. Something didn't
feel right. The tension bubbled in the air like tar in LeBrea. "No problem. I could use a couple extra sets of eyes. Those two you sent me have been nothing but trouble."

"Roy and MoMac?"

"Yep, those are the ones."

"Listen, Angel, I didn't have anything to do with them being sent to your unit. I know they don't belong there and I was just as surprised as you were."

Angel knew the three other inmates that were sitting next to him on the picnic table had their ears wide open so he chuckled casually. "Yeah, it was a surprise, but don't worry about it. The Warden assures me that they will be moved soon."

MoMac and Roy leaned against the hot brick of the side of the building and watched. The 'G' man hadn't said anything about there being this many staff out in the yard. It changed the whole feel of
the job.

"What do you think? Is it a go?"

MoMac considered Roy's question and he looked all around. The exercise yard was huge. There were four staff members and ninety convicts. Good odds. Still, an insurance policy wouldn't hurt.

"Yeah, we burn his ass today. Later. Come on, I got a idea."

MoMac started to move toward where two of the inmates from "I" were attempting to conceal a game of dice. When they stopped, the two stood. Steele and Barnhart knew a business deal when they saw one. "What the fuck you want?"

MoMac took the greeting by substance and not word and he smiled. "My boy and I need a favor."

"I don't do favors. What else you got?"

"I got a nickle bag and a half page of Revelations."
You interested?"

Steele's eyes lit up. If anyone else had suggested ownership of a small quantity of pot and a page torn from a bible for rolling paper, he would have slapped them for being a liar. But this was a well respected member of the underground.

"I'm interested. Who you want dented?"

MoMac shook his head. "No, nothing like that. All you got to do is stage a little scuffle. Wait till Blondie..." MoMac's eyes snapped toward Spike then back again "...is over here with that pussy sidekick of his. When they come over to break it up, you keep them busy for a few. I just need some quality alone time with my boy over there."

This time all eyes turned toward Angel.

Steele and Rug looked at each other knowingly. The criminality of their brains weighed the pros and cons of the situation and the chances of them being found guilty of any conspiracy. Both quickly came
down on the side of 'nothing to lose and everything to gain'.

"No sweat. You will get your privacy. In exchange, you got one week, taking in account cell restriction time, to hand over the goods. At the end of one week the interest will start to accumulate."

MoMac held out his fist. Steele did the same and they tapped knuckles. Deal struck, arrangement made and about to be executed. With nothing else to say, MoMac and Roy turned and strolled back toward the basketball area of the compound.

Angel breathed a sigh of relief. He had been watching the four and hoped they weren't going to start buddying up together. That was like pouring gasoline on fire.

He glanced over to where Spike had joined an inmate on the walking path and his back-up, Conway was over near the fence. Angel's exterior hearing vaguely picked up Inmate Long who was sitting next to him and
yammering on about his gym shorts needing replaced. Uninteresting.

Angel tipped his head up and closed his eyes. It really was a magnificent, warm, California day.

Part Thirty-Six

As he left the area of the Riverview Correctional Institution that contained the housing units, Warden Rupert Giles tried not to think too deeply about what he had just done, or worst, what he was about to do.

He told himself that it was all necessary for the preservation of his life as he had come to expect it. Anyone else would do the same.

But more than that, it was for dear Buffy's protection. A union with someone as unworthy and probably dangerous as Liam O'Connor was simply unthinkable. This was no different than the time he had bribed the school board to put Buffy on the cheerleading squad despite her failing grades, or the hefty donation he had made to Sunnydale
Community College to insure her acceptance.

He knew she would probably drop out before the end of the first semester, but that wasn't the issue. In fact she had surprised him by lasting out the entire first year. In the end, she had suffered a severe broken nail incident that caused her to miss too many classes and she had to quit. Giles didn't mind. It was only about her happiness. It was always about Buffy's happiness.

No, O'Connor was not the man for her. His threats of financial scrutiny over her trust fund accounts was the perfect tell of where his love truly lay. It wasn't for Buffy and the wife she would become, no his interest was in the money and trying to prove that her loving step-father had mishandled and possibly even embezzled assets that were not his to use. Absurd.

He wasn't heartless, Giles told himself. He really did regret what he knew must be done, but in time, Buffy would recover and she would find someone much more appropriate.
All of this was what was on Giles mind as he walked down the main hallway toward the offices of Administrative Services. At the last turn, before approaching his office, he veered off and entered the steel door marked "RESTRICTED AREA" then proceeded to the seldom used stairway that led up to the gun towers.

During the early 1990's when funding was plentiful, the towers contained specially trained officers that manned the small observation areas 24/7. As the years and the State money passed by, the towers were all but abandoned, used now only during the few hours a day when the inmates were out in the exercise yard.

At that time, one guard, young and untrained was stationed with a loaded, high powered rifle and scope and told to watch the yard. Their orders were to observe the compound. If any of the guards hit one of the alarms that set off the sirens, the tower guard was to continue watching, jacking a shell into the chamber, just in case.
If a full, all out riot occurred, which it never did, then two warning shots were to be fired into the ground, preferably in an open area where the odds of actually hitting someone was slim. The inmates were all instructed that if that ever happens, their best bet is to lay down. Fast.

It was a boring job. Most officers brought reading material.

Giles checked his watch. Fifteen minutes had passed. Pushing open the door to the gun tower, he stepped inside just as the startled guard dropped his Newsweek to the floor and jumped to his feet.

"Warden Giles! Good afternoon Sir. I was just...um, is there something I can do for you, Sir?"

Giles smiled. The guards incompetence and noted dereliction of duty would just be another piece that would fit nicely into his report. "Yes, as you are aware, the audit is next week and every section of our building will be under examination by the State
Accreditation Committee. One of the areas of additional funding that we are requesting is for training and manning of the tower post. Therefore, I felt it important that I spend a few minutes up here and get a better idea of what is now being done and what updates and changes we need to make."

To the C.O. on duty, it all made perfect sense, although he cursed his luck at being the one stuck on duty with the snoopy old fucker. "Certainly, Sir, glad to help. As you can see, "D" unit has just entered the yard and all seems to be well."

Giles looked out of the tower opening and down on the staff and inmates that milled around. He immediately located the players in this little production of his and he blocked out everyone else.

C.O. O'Connor was standing by the picnic table talking to a white inmate while his back up, Officer Jackson, was over by the basketball court. McDaniel and Brown leaned back against the far wall. Everything was in motion. He told himself it couldn't be stopped now if he tried. It was out of his hands.
Just when everything seemed to be perfectly on track, Giles saw the doorway swing open and another group of inmates file out. He was furious, but tried to maintain his composure. "What the hell is this? There should never be more than one housing unit out at a time. Who authorized this breach of security?"

C.O. Lineman shuddered. "Sir? I'm sorry sir, but it's done all the time. If one of the units needs additional assistance in the yard or if a unit misses their scheduled time, they double up."

Giles slapped his hands on the open frame and leaned out. He knew even if he ran down it was too late to stop it. All he could do was hope the idiots would not do anything now. It was just too risky. He stared into the yard with an intensity that sent a wave of fear through the confused guard.

Fuck! Wouldn't you know that fucking Pratt would be the fucking fly in my ointment. Giles brain continued to curse as his blood boiled and he
vowed to fire the man as soon as this fiasco was over.

Then, something else caught his eye and sparked his interest. He watched as his puppets strolled over and spoke with two thugs from Pratt's unit. "What the fuck?" he murmured quietly, cursing that there was no sound to accompany this picture he watched on this wide screen.

His two hired hands appeared calm, smug and confident. Giles allowed himself to relax but only marginally.

Lineman looked out and tried to see what the Warden found so interesting but there was nothing extrodinary. Just the same old same old. His last thought before it all went to hell was, "Why doesn't he go back to his fucking office and sit his fat ass down?"
Part Thirty-Seven

Wesley tried his best to keep his eyes focused on the crouching, thin, desperate man that stood trembling in front of him. He forced himself to continue breathing despite the wrenching, sour stench of the rotting, spoiled food that spilled out of the barrels lining both sides of the alley.

He struggled to ignore the heavy, moving piles of maggots that rolled and swirled like a pool of white, living scum only inches from his feet. He knew he had to move closer, slowly, carefully and he understood that there was no way to do that without causing a squishing slime that would stick to his shoes forever.

"Jesse? Is your name Jesse?"

"Who are you? What the fuck do you want?"

Wesley stepped in, wincing as the maggots
crunched and oozed under his feet. He held his hands up, showing he held no weapon and meant no harm. Jesse's eyes darted around wildly and he looked as if he would bolt at the first opportunity.

"Jesse, my name is Wesley. I'm not from the police. I just want to talk to you. Can we do that? Can we talk?"

Jesse snorted, a sound intended to convey disgust, it sadly came out more as a helpless sob. "Fuck. I almost wish you were the cops. How did he find me? I knew he would but shit, I didn't think it would be this quick. Did he send you to kill me or just bust me up?"

Wesley frowned in confusion. "He? Who do you think sent me?"

"Don't fuckin' play with me! I'm not stupid! Warren sent you. Somehow he found out I was alive and Warren sent you here to find me. Well fine. Just fucking shoot me and be done with it!"
Jesse suddenly stood straight up and threw his hands out at his sides as the tears ran freely down his anguished face. "I'm fucking tired of waiting and looking over my shoulder anyway. Please, just pull the fucking trigger and put me out of my misery."

Wesley cautiously eased closer. "No, Jesse, Warren didn't send me. I'm not here to hurt you. I promise. Look, no gun, no weapons." Wesley turned in a 360 to show there was nothing concealed on his body. "I'm here because of the letter you sent. The letter to Xander."

Jesse's expression suddenly turned to surprise then fury and he slammed his fist against the brick wall, tearing the skin and leaving a bloody smear that caused Wesley to cringe in sympathy. Immediately he closed the gap between them and he pulled a crisp, white, well ironed linen handkerchief from his pocket, wrapping it around Jesse's injured hand.

Jesse didn't respond or fight off the unexpected physical contact. Wesley took that as a good sign and he gently tugged Jesse toward the mouth of the
alley. "Why don't we go somewhere a bit more comfortable? What say we go to Rosie's and have a spot of tea and a bit of a talk? Can we do that Jesse?"

Jesse held his cloth covered injury close to his chest and nodded. Together, the two men walked back out into the searing sunlight and down to the cantina.

Selecting a table in the back, Wesley ordered tea and kept an eye on the now despondent, silent man. When he felt Rosie was out of ear shot, he began. "My name is Wesley Windham-Pryce and I have recently been retained as Alexander Harris's new attorney. We plan to request he be given a new trial based on several points of law and have hopes that he will soon be released. When he received your letter, Mr. Harris believed it to have been sent by someone he knew that was using the alias of 'Warren'. We all believed Warren to be the real perpetrator of the crime Mr. Harris was convicted of. Now that we know you are very much alive you do understand that I cannot allow the
situation to go uncorrected."

Jesse sat, still silent. The tears ran from his downturned face and his shoulders slumped in defeat. When he finally did speak, his voice was barely above a whisper. "I never wanted it to be like this. I loved Xander. Hell, I still love him. Everything just got so crazy. It all started spinning out of control and there didn't seem to be any way to stop it."

Reaching over, Wesley patted Jesse's uninjured hand. "Why don't you tell me all of it and possibly we can figure this out together."

Jesse knew there was no solution, but he was almost relieved. He had wanted to tell his story to someone for a long time. The power of it had threatened to explode inside him if he couldn't let it out. He sighed, nodded and began.

"It started two years ago. Me and Xan was together and it was great. He was working at a site and I just got hired on. We knew right away that we was
meant to be together. Only arguments we ever had was that he was a home body. Never wanted to go out and I always did. You know, some dancing, some drinking and a little ugly bumping to some music. Nothing serious, just flirting. Xan hated that. Always thought I was fucking someone else. Sometimes I did, but it was just 'standing in an alley' type stuff. Didn't mean anything. You know? Anyway, one night one of the guys gave me some meth, said it would keep me dancing all night. Fuck if he wasn't right. Best fucking feeling in the world. One fucking time and I was hooked."

Jesse's eyes darted up to Wesley's to search for condemnation, when he didn't see any, he continued.

"After a while it got real expensive. I spent every cent I had and whatever of Xander's I could get my hands on but it was never enough. Especially after I got fired from my job. That's when someone introduced me to Warren. He let me run book. Owe him. Sometimes he would fuck me and take a few dollars off the tab. Once when it got too high, he
broke my nose, threatened worse if I didn't pay. I stole an antique ring Xander's grandmother left him and paid it off. I don't think Xander knew."

Wesley was torn between feeling sorry for the boy and wringing his neck. "And you still owed more? You continued to use?"

Jesse nodded again. "I owed thousands. No way I could pay. I remember I just gave up that night. I burnt up every speck of meth I could find trying to snuff myself out. When that didn't work, I went to Xander and begged him to help. I knew he couldn't but he was my only hope. We got thrown out of the bar and ended up on the beach, still arguing. I didn't even realize I had the knife till I pulled it out. Somehow, in the struggle, we both got cut. After he left, I was done. I stripped off and walked out into the water to end it. Imagine my fucking surprise when I woke up, washed ashore a mile down the beach. I just ran and hid hoping people would think I was dead. When Xander got arrested, I felt bad, but shit, there was no way he should have been convicted. I wanted to tell. I wanted to save him,
but if I did, it would be signing my own death certificate. Warren would find me."

Part Thirty-Eight

Wesley leaned forward. "Who is Warren? What's his last name? Where can we find him?

Jesse shook his head. "All I know is, 'Warren' is what he called his 'white' name. It was a joke to him. A game. He used to say that he was all things to all people. When he dealt with Hispanics he was 'Carlos'. When he sold to corporate types, he answered his phone saying, "Mr. M. here. How may I help you?" Then he would laugh like hell. I once heard one of his boys call him Mo. That's all I know."

"Well, then we will have to skip the moniker and go for other identifying factors."
"Huh?"

"What does he look like? Describe him. Tell me as much about him as you know. Do you mind if I take notes?"

Wesley had already pulled out his notepad and the officialness of it gave Jesse the willies, but he knew it was too late to back out now, so he sighed and continued.

"Well, he's big. Maybe 6' 2". He's black. Really black. You know dark skinned. He shaves his head and has little ears. He's not so much with the bling like the lackey's that serve him and he always has at least four with him, but I don't think it's really a gang. Like Bloods and Crypts type shit. I think he is more an independent player."

Most of that, Wesley had been able to sift through and translate, except..."Bling?"

"Yeah, you know, jewelry, rings, chains, gold flash,"
Wesley resolved to take a course in street lingo before embarking on his newly chosen profession. "Certainly. Bling. Anything else?"

Jesse tried to think, but came up empty. "No, whenever I did see him, I was usually scared shitless. The only other thing I know for sure is that his fists feel like hamhocks when they smack you in the nose."

Wesley laid down his pen. It really wasn't anything to go on. Nothing they could take to the authorities and seek an arrest warrant. "Would you know him if you saw him again?"

A huge wave of fear rolled through Jesse's body and he shuddered. "Fuck, yeah. I see that ugly fucking face every night in my dreams."

Wesley knew this would not be easy, but he also knew something had to be done. "Jesse, you know I can't just walk away from this. Even if Alexander"
were not my client, as a representative of the court, I am sworn to uphold the law. I simply can't let this injustice continue."

Jesse's eyes opened wide before filling with tears. "So that's it? You force me to go back and toss me to the wolves? Xander goes free and I'm a dead man?"

"Absolutely not. I promise to track down this Warren character and bring him to justice. I will see to it that it is safe for your return to California. I am a bit of a rogue bounty hunter."

Jesse nodded. He wasn't sure exactly what a rogue bounty was, but Wesley had found him easy enough so the man must be good. Besides what choice did he have?

Finishing his tea, Wesley wondered one other thing. "Why here, Jesse? How did you end up in a God forsaken place like Naco, Arizona?"

For the first time since Wesley had met him, he saw
a smile small cross Jesse's lips. It was a good look for the young man and Wesley felt something stir inside him. Something he immediately stomped down as Jesse began his story.

"When I was younger, thirteen, I was just starting to really know there was something different about me, but I wasn't sure what. The other guys were starting to talk about tits and pussies and things that didn't interest me. I just didn't get what the fascination was. So, anyway, my parents sent me to Oxnard for a week in the summer while they went on vacation. I stayed with an aunt and uncle and my cousin, Neil."

Wesley smiled and nodded. On the surface, the story seemed at best dull, mundane and every day, but Wes could see in Jesse's eyes that this had been a turning point for him and Wes was fascinated.

"And what happened to you that summer?"

Jessie blushed slightly, stammering before he continued. "Um, well, apparently Neil could see
what I couldn't. He was older. Only sixteen, but to me that seemed almost grown. Anyway, we shared a bedroom and one night he asked me if I liked to read. So, I said yeah, and he gives me this small paperback book. It was called "Deadwood Dick." It was a western and I loved cowboys and Indians. Only it wasn't just that. Seems Deadwood and his sidekick were more than just friends."

Wesley chuckled. "Oh? And just what did your cowboys get up too?"

Jesse grinned. "Pretty much each other."

Both men laughed easily and realized that beyond the oddities of their meeting and all the obstacles, they really enjoyed each other's company. Wesley wasn't ready to discuss his own proclivity towards his same sex, but he wanted Jessie to be comfortable discussing his.

"So you discovered your joy of....reading?"

Jessie actually barked out a laugh. "Yeah, there
were, I think, six books in the series and I read them all. By the time I got home, my reading aptitude had greatly improved alongside my personal acceptance and understanding. I was gay. I knew it as sure as I sit here. Gay, gay, gay. So, to answer your question, when all this happened, I looked on the map and tried to find a place that would seem like the old west. A town I could play cowboys in and hide out till I found an answer to this crazy problem."

Wesley relaxed and pushed aside his empty cup. All the time Jesse had been talking, Wes had been thinking. This would be tricky, but he was sure they could find a solution. Together. He knew within a very short time, if he played this right, Harris would be free, Warren would be behind bars, and Jesse could go on with his life.

"Jesse, I need you to come back to my room with me. I'm going to ask you to give me your fingerprints, a DNA swab, and a statement of the facts of the case. I will present it, in a highly confidential manner to the court along with the filing for an overturned verdict. I think we can keep
you safe till we find Warren. Will you do that? I know I'm asking a lot and I know you are scared but....."

"I'll do it. To be honest, I'm tired of being scared. Let me go back to the ranch and tell them I'm leaving. I'll meet you back at your room in two hours. Then, we can do whatever you think is best. If this ends with him breaking my neck or putting a cap in my ass, at least I won't be scared anymore."

Wesley frowned. Was Warren gay also? What exactly was a "cap" and how would he put it in one's arse?

Part Thirty-Nine

Xander burst out into the exercise compound with a vigor and lust for life he hadn't felt in months. The
sun was brighter, the birds sang louder, and everything seemed more crisp and alive than it had since that terrible night on the beach.

His heart soared with renewed hope for the future and it was all he could do not to throw his arms out and spin in circles screaming, "Jesse is alive! Jesse is alive!"

After his little 'spell' Spike had tried to insist he be checked out by medical, but Xander talked him out of it. He had fainted from shock alone and no Tylenol or Ex-Lax would cure what was wrong with him. His cure would be in the proof that Jesse was not dead and Xander was certainly NOT a murderer.

It made Xander crazy. He wanted to leap over the razor wire and run to where Jesse was hiding, drag him out by the scruff of his neck and prove that there had been no crime of unspeakable horror, as the Sunnydale Press liked to call it.

Xander stood outside in the center of the rec yard, surrounded by high fences and watched by a gun
tower with a high powered rifle, yet he had never felt more free.

His heart and soul sailed high over the confinements of the prison walls and Xander knew the first thing he wanted to do when he walked out that front gate was give Spike the biggest kiss he could, then, uppity cousin Wesley Windham-Pryce better fucking pucker up cause he was second on the lip list and the third thing was to shove his foot several inches up Jesse's ass.

Xander frowned slightly wondering why his friend/lover would have set him up like that. He had to know Xander was on trial for his murder. Did he just sit back and laugh? Was he that angry about being denied the money?

Spike had told him to keep his mouth shut for now, and oddly, Xander agreed. He believed actually saying the words out loud would jinx him. It was a well known and accepted rule of the universe.

Happily, Xander headed for the walking track. He
knew by the third time around, Spike, HIS Spike would join him. Someday soon they would be doing this in a city park, maybe walking a dog, maybe....

"FUCK YOU! YOU MOTHER FUCKIN' FUCKHEAD!"

Xander slowed his gait as his attention was drawn back to the world he lived in. Off to the rear of the compound, he spotted Rug Barnhart and Weed Steele squared off at each other. Rug had shoved Steele back and Steele was coming on fast, fists raised. Both men shouted curses and threats.

Spike was the first to notice the altercation. At this point it didn't look to be anything too extreme and the accepted procedure dictated that because they were Spike's inmates, he would be the first respondent. As back up, Conway was to begin to round up the rest of "I" unit and keep them from becoming involved.

Angel stood up from his bench. He checked the location of C.O. Jackson and nodded his head to signal to her that they would keep the "D" unit
inmates calm. It was a bit premature to consider running them back inside.

Spike continued walking in the direction of the scuffle that was still not much more than harsh words and shoved bodies. When he was still several feet away, he shouted, "All right! That's enough! Separate and lay down! Now!

When the convicts heard their C.O.'s voice their reaction was immediate. Unfortunately, it wasn't to follow instructions, it was just the opposite. Rug swung, landing a hard punch squarely on Steele's jaw causing him to stumble and spit blood before he flew back, leaping on top the huge skinhead and the two of them rolled on the ground exchanging wild punches and kicks.

"SHIT!"

Spike took off at a run closing the distance between himself and the fight, reaching for the black sap that swung from his wide, thick, leather belt. When the other inmates in the yard realized one of their own
was about to get the leather kiss, they also began moving in, some to watch and some to assist. No one really cared which side they came down on, they just wanted to be part of the excitement.

"No! Get back here! Please?"

C.O. Conway might as well have been whistling in a rain barrel. Few inmates heard him and fewer cared. Jackson and Angel quickly recognized the potential severity of the situation and formed a perimeter. They began moving toward each other from opposite sides of the yard in an attempt to corral their prisoners.

Then, as if reacting to some unheard signal, the cons in the yard exploded.

With his back turned to the main part of the yard, Spike could now hear what sounded like a stampede of buffalo behind him as nearly a hundred feet hit the sod and pounded a path toward the action. Voices shouting, threats feeding the fires of unrest.
It was an all out riot.

Spike reached his hand up to the microphone that was clipped to his lapel and pushed the small, orange button. Within seconds, a blasting siren began to wail. It gave everyone, con and guard alike a start. It split through their ears and bounced around their brains blocking out all other sound in the yard.

It resounded throughout the entire institution, signaling a total prison lockdown and sent every available guard to the area of trouble. Unfortunately, that took time. Minutes that felt like hours to the men, guards and inmates alike, who were soon fighting for their lives.

In the chaos that was now totally out of hand, no one noticed Leroy and MoMac rushing toward Angel from his blind side.

The yard had escalated from skirmish to fracas and now peaked at riot conditions. Shouts and threats
strained to be heard over the brain busting siren that continued to blare. Some of the convicts were using the confusion to take revenge on other inmates they had beef with and the yard was a cluster of countless struggles, scuffles and out right fights.

Reaching the two from the catalyst, Spike wasted no more time with attempts at verbal strategies. Swinging with all his strength, He brought his sap down on the back of the head of Barnhart who was, for the moment, on top, knocking him instantly unconscious.

With a grunt, Steele shoved the fat, limp body off himself and rolled quickly away. He immediately hoisted himself to a sitting position and curled his split, bloody lips into a huge grin and began to laugh.

Spike knew, with a sickening horror, that they had been had.
Part Forty

Giles leaned so far forward out the opening of the gun tower, that C.O. Lineman was afraid he just might topple over. He wondered casually if it was in his job description to pull him back in.

Finally, the guard noticed what had held the warden's rapt attention. Two inmates in the far corner of the compound were arguing and shoving. From their distance above, they were unable to discern specifics from the yard other than the sound of voices, shouting, yelling and the general anonymous noise of a crowd. It seemed no different than if they were in a ballpark enjoying a pleasant afternoon.

Even though he was fairly new and inexperienced, Lineman could tell this was no group of fans
cheering on their favorite team. No, something about this rec period was beginning to feel wrong.

The two men in the tower watched as C.O. Pratt started toward the fight which had quickly escalated. They watched with unease as the other inmates failed to respond to the verbal commands of the other officers to get up against the walls.

Giles breath quickened and his heart began to pound as he watched the players on the field begin to shift position. Almost like actors who were prepared to find their stage marks, a huge group of the inmates formed a rolling wave of human flesh that began to rush toward the action.

At the same time, the sound lifting upward changed. First, a low hum of voices, it then next fell temporarily silent before it roared to life like one fierce growling monster.

No longer concerned with the Warden's approval of him, Lineman reached for the red button on the console of his desk. When his fingers were less than
an inch from it, the siren blasted, catching him off guard and causing him to stumble back before realizing that one of the officers in the yard must have pushed it.

He knew the situation below them was becoming dire.

Turning quickly back to his post, Lineman suddenly realized he was still clutching the high powered rifle in his clammy hand. "Sir, should I...."

"NO!" Giles legs shook and his armpits were soaked with sweat. His stomach and bowels were twisted in a knot and he knew this was it. Timing was everything. Off to the left, he now saw his two puppets charging toward the area of the picnic tables. They were moving around and behind where Angel and one of his inmates stood, their attention focused on the action in the center of the yard.

Giles then saw C.O. Jackson who had clearly understood what was happening. Her mouth opened wide as she attempted to warn her partner.
Her face strained in horror as she realized she was too far away and nothing she was shouting could be heard. Angel remained oblivious, thinking the danger was in the altercation by the fence..

"Come on. Damn it, come on." Giles voice was low as he pounded his fist on the window frame and muttered.

Believing the warden to be praying for assistance and back up, Lineman aimed the high powered rifle toward an area of the yard far from the activity. When he realized what was about to happen, Giles grabbed the barrel of the rifle and jerked it out of the startled officer's hands.

"No! I said don't shoot! Are you that stupid? Haven't you been properly trained in this type of situation?"

"I'm sorry...no, Sir, I....."

Pulling the rifle from the officer's hands, Giles clutched it to his heaving chest and he continued to
watch. He only hoped he didn't drop dead from a heart attack before this was all over.

~*~*~*~*~

Xander had completed his second lap and was about to begin the third when he was surprised to see Spike heading in the opposite direction. Instantly he became annoyed. He had a million questions and wanted to talk. Stopping, with his hands on his hips, Xander looked in the direction that Spike was going and soon noticed the verbal challenge between the inmates in cell #10 had escalated.

After watching for less than a minute, Xander was stunned to see one punch the other and Spike taking off at a run. Fights in the yard were common, everyday experiences, but this one was different. Only the weaker cons openly fought. Major players like Steele and Barnhart settled their conflicts in other ways. Low key, undercover ways that flew under the radar.
"XANDER! NO!!"

Oz shouted at Xander's retreating back before turning himself and dashing to stand obediently against the nearest brick wall. Whatever happened, Oz wanted no part of it. He wanted to survive to see another day.

Just steps away, Xander saw Spike swing and slam his sap down across the back of Rug's head and the inmate flop to the side. He caught a glimpse of the bloody grin on Steele's face before two more convicts jumped on Spike's back, knocking him to the ground.

Xander immediately pulled one off and Spike came up swinging, slamming the solid weapon across one inmate's stomach and the other's face. Xander ducked just in time. Together, they stood, side by side against the chaos that escalated around them.

MoMac and Roy hadn't counted on the all out riot that the fight had caused, but it couldn't have
worked out better. Hate and violence were comfortable to them and allowed them to move about unnoticed.

Smelling death in the air, the "D" unit inmate that had, up to now, clung closely to Angel's side for security, began backing away with a look of horror in his eyes. Angel responded to the strange expression with curiosity and confusion. "Hey, what...?"

Flying around the perimeter of the action, Leroy reached C.O. O'Connor first. Grabbing him from behind, he slammed the startled guard flat against his body and held him tightly in a head lock with his forearm against Angel's throat and cutting off his air.

Angel barely had time to realize what had happened and begin to struggle. Without pause, MoMac ran up on them and shoved the shank deeply into Angel's body.

"SHOOT! JESUS CHRIST, SIR, SHOOT THE FUCKING
GUN!!"

Giles knew it was too late for warning shots and the back door of the yard had just burst open, flooding the compound with armed, charging officers, all in full battle gear and fanning out in all areas.

Immediately, he took aim and pulled the trigger.

CRACK!!

From his lofty vantage point, C.O. Lineman gasped as he watched the back of MoMac's skull explode into bloody shards. Before he could comment, Giles swung marginally to the left and fired again, this time causing Leroy Brown to fly up and off his feet before dropping to the ground just as three of the riot squad reached them.

C.O. Jackson shoved them aside and screamed as she looked down on the three men lying on the ground in a growing pool of combined blood.

Part Forty-One
"FUCK! Oh my God, Sir! What have you done?"

Giles whole body flushed cold as though ice water had been shot, like one of his bullets, through his veins and he knew he was probably in shock. His face was white as a sheet and his hands shook uncontrollably.

His brain constantly repeated a litany of "I did it. I did it. Fuck, I actually did it!"

Staggering backward, he turned his horror into fury and directed it towards the only other person in the room, slamming the weapon painfully against Lineman's chest and into the guards hands.

"I did what the fuck you should have done. And now your fucking incompetence just cost three men their lives and I hope you know you will pay for this."

Using the last ounce of strength left in his legs, Giles marched from the gun tower, running on fear and adrenalin he headed toward the killing field.
Spike had turned all his attention toward the inmates who were taking advantage of the out of control situation to vent their frustrations and anger on any guard they could reach, which at the moment, was him. It was their chance to exact revenge for any perceived injustice or disrespect they had ever suffered in their miserable, fucked up lives.

As he battled for control and for his and Xander's lives, he neither heard or saw the shots that rained down from the gun tower overhead. He did, however know something had changed when suddenly the convicts began to drop like flies to the ground, lying spread eagle on their stomachs and no longer combative.

When he looked up, Spike saw the small army of armed guards rushing toward him and he could have easily kissed each one till he remembered the other inmate still standing. Xander had fought like a champ and still stood, fists raised and ready to take on all comers.
"Get down!"

"What?"

Spike shoved Xander, telling him again to hit the dirt for his own safety. He knew the padded, weapon wielding guards would swing first and ask questions later. When he saw his lover frozen on the spot with fear, Spike spun a round house kick taking Xander's feet out from under him just seconds before the first swinging blackjack whizzed mere inches above the back of his skull.

The riot squad was well organized and practiced. They had hit the recreation yard like storm troopers and quickly spread out, each with a designated task. The majority of them rounded up and marched the cooperative inmates inside for immediate lock down before returning to the yard to deal with the few hardcores that refused to concede defeat.

The C.O. back ups located the original officers in the compound and went to them to assure their safety
and assistance. The triage officers searched for the injured and directed medical to the most urgent cases, all the while the ear splitting siren continued to wail.

Jerking his small portable radio off his belt clip, Giles shouted to the communications officer as he rushed out to the recreation yard.

"Shut down that FUCKING racket!"

In mid blast, the siren stopped.

The sudden silence that blanketed the yard caught everyone off balance. It cleared their heads and gave them a sense of renewed cognitive control that strengthened as the ringing in their eardrums slowly faded.

"MEDICAL EMERGENCY!! WE NEED MEDICAL STAT. ONE OFFICER, TWO INMATES DOWN ON SIDE YARD, QUADRANT "B"

C.O. Riley's voice cracked across every inch of the
institution, through every radio and speaker attached to the Urgent Response System. Quickly and efficiently, the remaining inmates, like cattle, were rounded up and hustled back to a lockdown of undetermined duration.

As he took off across the distance of the yard, Spike glanced back just once to see one of the guards snatch Xander to his feet and rush him away with the others. Assuring himself that his lover was safe, Spike now turned all his attention to the scene of the carnage.

Spike was more than aware that his body was flooded with adrenalin which, for now, was covering the pain of an arm he knew was broken and a few ribs he prayed were only bruised. None of that mattered. He was alive and so was Xander, but from the amount of blood he could see up ahead, someone wasn't.

What terrified him now was the thought that one of his fellow officers had fallen in the line of duty. Shoving his way through the circle of uniforms that
surrounded the bodies, Spike looked down into the face of the man he had stood side by side with for the last five years.

Often a jerk, sometime a pain in the ass, but always a brother.

"Angel"

Before he could say more, Dr. Robert Walker, head of the institution's medical department shoved through and dropped to his knees, Julie, his assistant was at his side and Warden Giles was attached to his heels. Walker's competent, take charge attitude was exactly what the situation needed.

"Get that one out of here. There's nothing we can do for him." He pointed to MoMac and the fact that the entire back of his head was missing confirmed the expert diagnosis.

Giles stood trembling. His head pounded and he was certain that at any time now his bladder would
let loose and his legs would give out. He tried to slow his breathing and wondered if the guilt showed on his face. *One down* he thought. *Pronounce the other two dead and I'm home free.*

Dr. Walker never glanced up. "Is the compound secured?"

Riley looked all around the area before answering the doctors question. "Yes Sir. All inmates are out of the yard."

"Good. Get the emergency gates opened. I have two ambulances on the way. As soon as they arrive, get them over here. We have two alive. One guard with a collapsed lung and an inmate with what appears to be a gun shot through his spine."

The limited good news sent a wave of tense jubilance through the crowd and they flew into action. The call was sent to communications to release the locks on the double gates as several guards ran to await the ambulances they could already hear rapidly approaching.
Doctor Walker knelt beside Angel, ignoring the pool of blood and MoMac's brain matter that was soaking into the knees of his crisp linen trousers. He packed gauze pads firmly around the shank that was still embedded in the guard's left lung. They all tried to block out the sound of his gasping, wet wheezes as he tried to breathe.

It was an unspoken blessing that he was not conscious.

Leroy was not so lucky. As Nurse Page rolled him over onto his stomach, he quickly came back to himself and immediately he began squirming and screaming. He thrashed his head from side to side and clutched handfuls of grass, ripping it from the ground.

They were all aware, including Leroy himself, that nothing below his waist moved.

Giles took a step back. All the frantic activity around him seemed surreal. He felt as though he had
floated out of his body and he were watching from a distance, uninvolved and unattached. All the voices seemed to be hollering into a deep tunnel and his vision was centered and weak.

Rupert Giles now realized plan "B" had flaws.

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**Part Forty-Two**

Wesley paced the small room restlessly. At some time during the morning, when he was out, Rosie had slipped in and made his bed. She had dusted the perpetual layer of film that settled on everything and she had placed a new bar of soap on the side of the sink.

Wesley cared about none of it. His understanding of human nature had him less concerned with Jesse's promised return than it did with his lack of responding communications with his cousin.
He had, over the course of the last two hours, left at least a half a dozen voice mails and had no indication that any of them had been received. He knew Spike was still at work, but surely, over that length of time, considering the urgency in his voice earlier, he would have found the time to call back.

Picking up his phone, Wesley prepared to dial again when a small, quick knock on his door caught his attention. He jerked it open and was very relieved to find his young, handsome fugitive waiting, a khaki, stuffed duffel bag at this feet and a nervous smile on his face.

"Jesse, good, good. Do come in."

Wesley stood aside while Jesse slung his bag over the threshold. As soon as he entered the room, Wesley threw the chain and the deadbolt locks securing the door.

Jess grinned comfortably. "So, what's the plan, Sherlock?"
Wesley smiled. If circumstances were different, he might happily consider Jesse for the part of Watson in this little play called Wesley's life. Quickly, though he remembered the seriousness of the situation. He had, in effect, taken Jesse's safety into his own hands and he did not want to make a mistake.

"Well, I have been giving this a great deal of thought and I believe our best course of action would be to travel to Phoenix under cover of night. I personally know an agent of the F.B.I. who is stationed there and I think we need to sit down with him. After a full disclosure of the facts, I believe he could be persuaded to not only build a case against this 'Warren' but also, in exchange for your testimony, enter you into witness protection. Most importantly, your positive identification and sworn statement would assure Alexander's freedom."

Jesse frowned. "Just disappear? They give me a new name and I just go away? So then I would never see you....I mean, any of my friends again?"
"Sadly, yes, that is the way it works. At least for the time being. At some point, when an arrest is made and the problem resolved......"

"Oh, well, yeah, sure, we want to do the right thing. Speaking of which, you must do this a lot. You know, hunt people down, cause you are really good at it."

Wesley puffed up at the praise. "I do find my work as a rogue bounty hunter rewarding."

"Yeah, you sure had no problem finding me. Unfortunately, thanks to you, I am out of a job now. You think you might need an assistant? I could work for you and you could protect me."

Wesley smiled. He would like that very much. Perhaps a bit TOO much. However, reality and practicality had a way of muscling happiness to the side. "Sadly, no. I'm a lone wolf, Jesse. That and the fact that you will be living incommunicado makes such a coupling nigh to impossible."
Jesse's nose wrinkled and he scratched his head. "Fuck, do you even speak English? See, you need me to translate 'stuffy Brit' into 'American street' and back again."

Refusing to admit that was probably very true, Wesley decided a change of subject may be the best idea and he pointed to a small wooden chair in the corner of the room. "SIT Jesse. This is not an issue open for discussion. I'm going to try again to phone my connection in California."

Jesse sighed and did as told. "Mind if I turn on the tv?"

Wes waved his hand as a go ahead and Jesse began flipping through the channels till he landed on FSTV where Max, the newscaster caught both the men's attention.

"We interrupt the regularly scheduled programming for this update on the riot that took place this afternoon in the exercise yard at the Riverview
Correctional Institution in California."

Wesley snapped his phone shut, snatched the remote from Jesse's hand and turned up the volume as he sat down on the end of the neatly made bed.

"Sources inside the prison advise us that the entire institution is on a full inmate lockdown. It is reported that the incident began when two housing units were outside in the compound when apparently some sort of altercation erupted between two convicts of the Intake unit. It is suspected that this was a planned incident. At that time several more skirmishes broke out. The four Corrections Officers in the yard were all assaulted in their attempt to control the violent outbreak and in the scuffle one officer was allegedly stabbed with a makeshift weapon."

Jesse and Wesley both sat silently waiting to hear the worst and praying for the best as the newsman continued his report.
"We have it on reliable authority that when all efforts to control the situation failed and when it became apparent that one guard had been stabbed, shots were fired from the gun tower. We have been advised that the situation is under control and a prison spokesman tells us the condition of the persons injured is as follows...."

There was a slight pause in the news report while four pictures were flashed on the screen. They were shown along with their present condition in the hospital.


Wesley and Jesse both leapt to their feet and pointed to the screen.

"Good Lord! Spike!"
"Holy Fuck! That's Warren!"

Part Forty-Three

The next week was the hardest of Xander's life. It was worse than the days that immediately followed his arrest and it was every bit as nerve wracking as the quickie hearing that was jokingly called a trial. It was the unknown.

The isolation from contact and information of the real world. Within the hour of the riot, a full sweep had been done of the cells and all radios and televisions had been confiscated to prevent the news of MoMac's death from inciting further unrest.

Xander had begged they not take his radio, his only tangible proof of 'Uncle Bill's' affection but the C.O.
was unmoved. Xander was given a standard inmate property receipt and the promise that it would be returned when the institution resumed normal operating procedure.

Xander was frantic. He knew Spike had been injured and he had not been to work. He tried asking C.O. Lehane but she refused to answer. She would shove their meal trays at them and slam the cell door. Oz had advised him to "let it be," but he didn't think he could stand it.

And while the days were tortuously long and empty, the nights were worse. He was less concerned with the outcome of his incarceration when Jesse proved he was not dead than he was with Spike's health and wellbeing.

He was frustrated, furious and frantic and again found himself curled up, crying while Oz cuddled his back and soothed his fears. Xander knew he had no options.
So, for the next six days, he waited while the lockdown continued.

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"That's who?" Wesley's brain was befuddled. Jesse was bug eyed and waving an accusing finger towards the screen as the newscaster continued to give limited facts and generalizations about the violence that had exploded within the small, maximum security facility.

"That's Warren. That convict, the one they say got his head blown the fuck off, the one they called McDaniels, MoMac, that's Warren!"

"Are you sure? Jesse, you must be absolutely certain."

Jessie spun around and put his hands on his hips angrily. "I know the fucking creep that beat me up and busted my fucking nose, Wesley."
The left corner of Wesley's mouth twitched up at the sound of his name as it rolled so comfortably off Jesse's lips.

The contemplation of the clues made the deduction elementary and Wesley immediately began throwing his belongings into his suitcase. "Hurry up and toss your bag into the back of my car. If we take turns driving, we can make it back to California by tomorrow night."

Jesse let out a whoop of freedom and excitement. The shadow of doom and fear that had hung over his head for the last few months was now gone. He could go home. He could do the right thing. Wesley had shown up and saved his life and now he could pay it ahead and save Xander's. Maybe someday his good friend could forgive him for his cowardice.

It took all of five minutes to load the car, snacks, bottled water, and a suitcase of hastily mixed dirty clothes with clean, something Wesley ordinarily would have laid down and died before doing. It was
all shoveled onto the back seat.

Jumping in, with Wesley behind the wheel, the two prepared to start out. Then, before turning the key, Wesley turned to his passenger. "You know, it has just occurred to me that I don't even know your last name. Not that it's imperative that you tell me. It just strikes me odd that I don't recall reading it in any of the reports or....."

Jessie grinned. "It's James."

Wesley blinked then groaned. "Oh, dear, please don't tell me....."

Jessie laughed out loud and reached over to pat Wesley affectionately on the shoulder. "That's right, Wes. You are riding off into the sunset with Jesse James."

Wesley shook his head and laughed. It couldn't have been more perfect if he had planned it and written the script himself. Starting the car, he spun the tires, throwing dirt and gravel everywhere as he hit
the road and headed for home.

For the first couple hours, Wesley drove and the two men just talked. They compared lives, backgrounds, and occupations. They had nothing in common. A minor point that bothered neither of them.

For the next few hours and into the darkness, Jesse took the wheel while Wesley prepared the paperwork for their presentation to the judge and prosecutor. He let Jesse dictate his statement while Wesley listened and wrote without comment or condemnation.

He marveled at the man's inner strength to beat an addiction that consumed thousands of lives every day.

Around midnight, Jesse was nodding and Wesley knew he was burnt out. They again traded places and Wes divided his attention between the long stretch of desolate highway ahead and the beautiful, wonderful young man sleeping beside.
By the first hint of the pink light of dawn, Wesley pulled in to a small diner and the men shared a comfortable breakfast. It felt as though they had been traveling together for years.

"You want me to drive for a while? You haven't gotten any sleep." Jesse stepped outside the restaurant pausing to yawn and stretch before he started toward the driver's side of the car.

"You can drive, but I really don't think I could sleep if I tried. I am much too wired up. Jesse, um......"

"Yes?"

"Nothing. Well, let's be going. At this rate, we should be home in another eight hours."

Jesse noted happily that Wes's voice held a tinge of sadness at the coming end of their road trip. Quickly, before rushing off to jump in the car, Jesse leaned over and planted a kiss on Wesley's startled lips.
He then sternly snapped his fingers and pointed between his companion and the car.

"Get in the car, Old Man. We have just spent the last twelve hours talking about the past and the present. I think now, we will spend the next eight hours talking about the future."

Wesley happily complied and ten miles outside the Sunnydale city limits, Wesley and Jesse got a room.

**Part Forty-Four**

Spike rolled over in the small, narrow, hard, institutional bed and he wondered if he had somehow ended up in one of his cells. He was groggy and gratefully still full of pain medication. He could vaguely recall the ambulance ride to the hospital and the doctor who examined him. After
that, everything had seemed an odd combination of slow motion and rapid action.

The pain, when it had finally kicked in, had been incredible. Every inch of his left side felt as though it were shattered and each fleeting, light touch of the doctor's fingers sent waves of agony shooting through him. He had not been too proud to scream.

Finally after hours/seconds, a lovely, matronly nurse had hustled in and slipped an IV into his good arm.

Instantly, the cold rush of morphine slid through his veins bringing him blissful relief and a semi-sleep state where no hurt or unhappiness lived. Spike had no memory of the surgery, but as he slowly came around, he was aware that it was morning and he had tightly taped ribs and a huge, heavy cast on his left arm.

His brain was full of smoke and shadows and he felt as though he were stumbling around in there seeking familiar points of reference as he tried to remember what had happened to put him here. He
desperately needed a cigarette.

"Well, look here. Are we awake?"

Spike squinted at the huge sumo nurse that stomped into his room and loomed at the side of his bed, casting a giant shadow over his smaller frame.

"Um, yes? I mean, yes. We are awake. Well, I'm awake and I assume since you're here, you're awake too."

Lifting a paw in his direction, Spike flinched till, the large hand gently brushed the hair back from his forehead. The compassion in her voice belied her ominous presence. "You had a really bad day, didn't you, Hon?"

Bad day? Spike forced himself to ignore the splitting headache and concentrate. He had almost convinced himself that he had been in a car accident but the tone in Nurse Buxom's voice lent other indications.
Suddenly, a semi-truck with failed brakes and carrying a cargo shipment of horrible memories, crashed into his brain and Spike sat bolt upright. The full day, spelled out in flashing color images, exploded behind his eyes like fireworks.

And the color he saw was red. Blood red. Flowing, pooling, running and pumping forth from a pile of bodies that didn't move.

"Angel! Where's Angel?"

"Whoa, easy, Hon." Quickly and soothingly, the nurse placed a hand on his chest and encouraged him to lie back. The draining, piercing pain co-signed on that idea and with a moan, he eased down.

"The other guard? He's all right. Well, not exactly all right, but he is alive and stable. Your Doctor Walker saved his life by packing and immobilizing the knife that was stuck in him. If it had moved even a fraction of an inch in either direction, it would have hit his heart. The surgery was long and his recovery
will take some time, but his prognosis is very good."

"And the inmates?"

The nurse was unsure as to what his feelings toward them were so she kept her voice unemotional and simply gave him the facts.

"Inmate McDaniels, the one who apparently did the stabbing, was killed by a gun shot fired from the tower. Inmate Brown was touch and go for a while. The bullet struck him in the spine and although he will live, he will be paralyzed from the waist down for life. The state investigators have been talking to him both last night and this morning. They're keeping his statements very hush hush but I get the impression he is cooperating with the authorities fully."

Spike nodded and struggled to keep his eyelids open. Ultimately, he failed and he yawned. He closed his eyes and dozed off as the heavy nurse smiled and continued to pet his forehead.
The next time he opened his eyes, it was late and he was aware that he was not alone. Turning his head to the side, he noticed Faith standing by the window with her arms folded across herself. She had an odd expression on her face and she looked at him sadly.

"Hey"

"Hey."

"How long have you been here?"

"Just an hour or so. How are you feeling?"

Spike took a mental inventory and although stiff and sore, he actually wasn't in all that much pain and thankfully his mind was clearing and he was able to think. "I'm o.k. In fact, I'm brilliant. So tell me, what's the fallout back at good old Riverview?"

Faith saw Spike squiggle around trying to sit up so she stuffed a couple pillows behind his back and pushed the button to raise the head of the bed.
"Are you kidding? Haven't you watched the news?"

Spike could see the lovely light of "have I got some gossip for you" in her green eyes and he laughed. "No, been a bit out of it. So what's happening?"

Faith grabbed a small chair and pulled it up alongside the bed, anxious to share, like old times. She had missed her friend.

"Well. Leroy Brown has been locked in a room with the Feds for hours and the word is that he's singing like a drunk blond at karaoke night. We don't have the particulars but Warden Rupert Giles himself was escorted from the prison and put on administrative leave during the investigation. Nobody can figure out what his connection is, but I do know that a bigwig from the State Police was in the operating room for Angel's surgery to take charge of the shank as evidence. Someone that saw it swears that it's one from the locked file in our own contraband case of weapons."
Spike was stunned. "What? How the hell did they get it? They don't suspect Giles of...."

Faith just grinned and raised her eyebrows. "Apparently, consensus is that he isn't looking forward to his future son-in-law joining the family."

Spike laughed and promised himself that tomorrow he would shuffle down the hall to see how Liam was doing.

Standing up, Faith pushed back her chair. "Hey, I gotta go. Some of us poor slobs still have to go to work so you malingerers can lie about. Oh, shit, I almost forgot. Your cousin Wesley has been trying to get hold of you. He called the prison and I talked to him. He said he'll stop in and see you about.....THAT MATTER." Faith dramatically made air quote signs with her fingers.

Spike lit up. Xander! *It must be good news.* he thought. *It has to be!*

Before she left, Spike called to her. "Faith."
"Yeah?"

"How's Xander?"

Faith briefly considered not answering, but he was still her partner. "Harris is fine. All the inmates are still on lockdown."

Spike hated what he was about to do. "Faith would you tell him....."

"No, Spike, I won't."

Spike nodded. He understood. "O.k. Thanks for coming."

Part Forty-Five
On the morning of the third day after the riot, Spike was able to sit up and, using one hand, feed himself a delightful cup of orange jello. His ribs still ached when he breathed but he knew how lucky he was and refused to complain. His arm hurt like a bitch.

He had been following the unfolding reports of the prison uprising on the news channels and planned to trot down the hall to visit Angel. The nurse said Liam was still on bed confinement and Spike knew he was probably ready to climb the walls.

At 10:00 am, the door to Spike's room burst open and Wesley, with a young man in tow charged in. Spike's eyes lit up and he shoved his tray aside. "Wesley, goddamn it, where have you been? What the fuck is happening? What did you fine out? Who is.......wait a fucking minute! Is that who the fuck I think it is? You brought that fucking shit head here?"

Spike immediately started to climb out of bed, fully intending to club to death the weasel that had stood by while his Xander was sentenced to life.
Quickly, Wesley stepped in between them as Jessie took a tentative back step toward the door. "William! Stop it. Sit your nearly naked arse back in that bed and let us explain."

Spike scowled, giving both his visitors the evil eye that he hoped they took as a threat. Jesse did. Wesley snorted.

"Now if you are finished, I believe we have some news for you. Mr. James here has accompanied me this very morning to a meeting in the chambers of Judge Ethel Spies and the City Prosecutor. He has given full testimony as to his situation. Due to the extenuating circumstances and under the threat of his life, both he and Alexander Harris have been cleared of all charges. There is one condition of this court action. None of the parties involved is permitted to discuss it until the papers of release can be prepared. It should take no more than two days."

"WOOOO!" Spike let out a whoop of joy. The only
part of Wesley's long winded speech he really cared about was the part that said Xander would be free. Two days. He would be released by then and they would both be free. "Get your fucking arse over here and give me a hug. You're a hell of a fucking lawyer, you know that? It was worth whatever you charge me."

Wesley complied and threw his arms around Spike carefully. When he pulled back, he sat on the edge of the bed and, smiling, reached out his hand for Jesse to join them. "Actually, William, there will be no charge as we have some other news also. I am giving up my practice and starting a new business. Jesse here has agreed to be my partner and we are going to be bounty hunters."

Jesse leaned down and kissed Wesley softly on the lips. "Rogue bounty hunters, Wes."

Spike sputtered. There were more wrongs in that statement than words, but what the fuck. He had fallen in love with one of his inmates so who was he to judge.
At Jesse's tugging insistence, Wesley jumped to his feet. "Yes, well, I'm sure you need your rest and Mr. James and I have some, ah, particulars regarding our alliance to iron out, so we'll be going."

Jesse winked. An expression totally unnecessary as Spike knew the blush on Wesley's face to be a dead give away. All he could do was laugh and call out his thanks as the two men hurried out the door. Spike wished desperately he could call Xander and give him the news.

~*~*~*~*~

Down the hall, Angel groaned and tried to shift slightly, hoping to relieve the pressure on his back and hips. He had been in and out of awareness since the stabbing and was told he would not be allowed out of the bed for another five days. He thanked God the catheter had been inserted before he woke up.
"Good morning, Liam."

Angel's head snapped to the side and he blinked, trying to focus on who was entering his room. With his eyes starting at the floor, he noted the ugly, sensible shoes, moved up to the knee length grey skirt, the hand holding the briefcase, the loose white blouse buttoned up to her neck, the black glasses and the hair tied back in a bun. "Yes?"

Sitting at his bedside, she slapped the briefcase up by his leg and unsnapped the lock. That's when he finally got a good look at her face and terror and confusion shot through his brain. Angel wondered if he wasn't still sleeping and suffering a drug induced nightmare. "Buffy?"

"Of course it's me. I was told you were sufficiently recovered to engage in a rational conversation."


Buffy sighed, disgusted at his lack of
comprehension. "I can see you are confused so let me spell it out for you. This damn trust fund that I have been waiting on has several stipulations that I have been unable to work around. Therefore I found it preferable to continue playing the bimbo act for my step-father rather than tip him off and possibly lose even more of my assets before my twenty-first birthday. He had no idea I had continued my studies at night school and earned my bachelor's in economics. Now, unfortunately there is no codicil referencing a change if he is convicted of a felony. The main requirement of marriage still remains. Therefore, I still need you and you still need me. Now, I have brought along a marriage license for your signature, and I have secured the services of a Justice of the Peace to marry us here, in your room, tomorrow. I frankly refuse to waste thousands of dollars on a showy ceremony."

Buffy slapped a pen and the license out. With shaky hands, he signed. Efficiently she returned both to her briefcase, snapped it shut and rose to leave. Angel was still totally bewildered as to what had just happened. "Yeah, but what? How? Who?"
Buffy sighed in disgust. "It's not that difficult, Liam. We get married, I get my inheritance, you get a lifestyle and an allowance and we are both happy. Of course you will be required to keep receipts and be subject to regular audits, and the pre-nup that Giles so expertly drafted is very much in effect. Now, I have some plans to finalize so I'll see you tomorrow for the vows."

Buffy straightened her skirt and headed for the door, stopping at the last minute. "Oh, and Liam?"

"Yes?"

"You know that thing I do with my tongue? The one you like so much?"

"Yeah?"

"Well, I won't be doing that anymore."

Then, as one final slap in his face, Angel glanced down at her butt as she reached for the door
handle and noticed the outline of something that sent shockwaves of horror coursing through his body.

'GRANNY PANTIES!'

Angel moaned and rolled over. He suddenly felt weak and lightheaded.

**Part Forty-Six**

The morning of the seventh day had been highly anticipated by every inmate in Riverview Correctional. It was the end of the long, tortuous lockdown and the resumption of their seminormal life.

Xander was especially agitated. He had heard nothing from Wesley or Spike and it was driving him crazy. He needed to see Spike. To assure himself that the man he loved was whole and safe and his curiosity and hopes were riding on Wesley's back. Did he find Jesse? Could he prove Jesse was alive?

Looking out the small window, Xander estimated
the time to be around 4 am. Needing to talk, he was ready to shake his celly awake when, unexpectedly, his cell door lock opened and the door swung wide with C.O. Riley standing there holding his prized Uncle Bill radio. Riley shoved it into Xander's hands. "Pack your shit, Harris."

Xander blinked, then felt a cold rush. He was being moved to another housing unit! "What? No."

Riley just shrugged. "So you don't want to go home?"

"HOME? WHAT? FUCK YES!!"

"You got five minutes. I'll leave your cell door open. Come up front when you're ready." With no further explanation, C.O. Riley turned and walked away.

Not pausing to question the order and afraid examining it might be a jinx, Xander rushed around the cell only to realize that the radio was the only thing worth taking. He owned nothing else.
Oz rubbed his eyes and stared at his best friend. "So, you're leaving?"

Xander's joy was tempered with sorrow at leaving Oz behind. Xander knew if it hadn't been for his cell mate, he would have lost his mind or worst during that first horrible month. "Looks like. Damn, Oz...."

Oz shrugged. He was a product of the system and he knew this was the way it worked. You came in alone and you served your own time. "No sweat. So where you going? You still got a home?"

Xander shook his head and laughed. "Nope. I lost my apartment and my job. I got nothing, but you know what? I couldn't care less. I'll hitchhike into town and sleep under a bridge if I have to. At least I'll be free."

Oz hopped down off his bunk and hugged the man, remembering the feel of him in his arms. This was the hard part. Where they would promise to write, to stay in touch, and for a short time they would, but soon...... Oz sniffed and pushed his friend
toward the door. "Look, you better get your ass moving."

Xander nodded and started to leave. At the last minute he turned and shoved the radio in Oz's hands. "Here, Uncle Bill would want you to have it. Just don't tell Catfish. You know how jealous he gets."

Oz's eyes lit up. "Damn straight he is. Thanks!"

And it was just that simple. A few more signed forms at the front desk. A small state envelope containing $58.00, and he was shown the front door. With tears in his eyes, Xander stepped out into the first light of a new day. He stood on the steps and he took a deep breath of something he thought he would never smell again. Freedom.

"You gonna stand there all day?"

Xander's attention was snapped to the car parked at the side lot and the man leaning against it. Dressed in a tight black t-shirt and loose, torn at the
knees jeans, it occurred to Xander that he had never seen Spike out of uniform. Other than naked.

Casually, as if he had all the time in the world, Xander shoved his hands in his state issued pant pockets and he walked over to him, staring at the heavy cast on his arm.

"You o.k?"

"Couldn't be better. You need a lift somewhere?"

Xander shrugged happily. "Got no place to go."

Spike stepped in closer. "Kinda thought you might go home with me."

Xander tipped his head in the direction of the mammoth, secure building behind him. "Might not look too good for you to be seen with me."

Spike smiled that dazzling smile that made Xander's knees weak, his heart warm and his cock hard enough to chisel oak. "What can they do? You're an
innocent man, Xander. A free, over twenty-one and sexy as hell man. So, what do you say? Want to come with?"

"Yeah. Sure. I think that might work. Besides, you'll need someone to take care of you. Feed you. Bathe you. Undress you. Tuck you in at night, all tight and deep."

Spike sighed and nodded happily before tossing Xander the keys. "You drive, arm still twinges a might."

It seemed a logical excuse and within minutes they were out on the highway and headed south. "You'll have to tell me which way we're going."

Spike scooted over on the seat and, to Xander's surprise, lowered his head in to Xander's lap. "Just stay on this road for ten more miles." And he unzipped Xander's cheap blue inmate pants.

"Whoa! What the fuck are you doing?"
"What I've wanted to do for weeks. Taste you again, smell you, feel you. I figure it will take about fifteen minutes to get home and five minutes to get you off. Now if you don't mind, I'm a bit busy here so you just drive and let me take care of my business."

Xander couldn't think of one good objection, so he smiled and lifted his hips slightly as his cock was already starting to fill and grow. Spike felt it jerk in his hand as soon as his fingers wrapped around it and freed it from the confines of the rough cotton pants.

Xander thought briefly about Spike's cast and the fact that he had only one usable hand, but guilt just wasn't a sustainable emotion as he tried to focus on the road ahead. He didn't even care if he was headed in the right direction. All he cared about was the warm breath and the cool fingers getting closer to his heated flesh. When he combined that with the fresh air of freedom and a sensation in his heart that was warm as sunshine, Xander knew he had too many blessings to count.
"Christ, Spike, I've dreamed about this. Not necessarily blow job this, but being with you, this. I was afraid to believe it would really ever happen."

Spike mumbled something indiscernible that was as close to an agreement as either man needed.

Xander kept one hand on the wheel and the other on the soft blond curls, pushing down, encouragingly. Spike complied by licking a long slow swipe across the moist knob causing Xander to grunt and jerk forward.

Spike moaned. He had dreamt of this too. Gently he held the beautiful rock hard cock in his hand and rubbed his cheek on the shaft, inhaling the damp, musty smell of sweaty balls and cheap institutional fabric. "Fucking wonderful," Spike whispered, his lips brushing across the swollen, leaking head before he dropped his face straight down, stopping only when the rigid cock head hit the back of his throat.

"Fuck!" Xander swerved into the left lane. Luckily
the early morning traffic was still light. Quickly, he got the car under control. His whole body joined in the pace of rocking in time with the suction that worked his cock. His leg muscles weakened with the strain and his face grimaced. His voice was breathless and his speech incoherent. "Oh, oh, yeah, damn."

Spike used every trick he knew. He swallowed, sucked, licked and flicked his tongue over the bundle of nerves that quivered just under the head. His usable hand slipped inside Xander's pants and massaged his balls till he felt them draw up sharply.

Xander couldn't have delayed the moment if he tried and truth was, he didn't want too. Clutching the wheel in an iron grip of the suggested ten and two, he slammed his hips up as the rush of hot semen spurted straight up and down Spike's throat.

"AAHHH!"

The car slid across two lanes and onto the berm kicking up a shower of dirt and gravel. He hit the
brakes, skidding to a stop and flopping back limply in the seat. With a grin, Spike raised up, wiped his chin, and looked out the window.

"Well, well, we're making good time. We're almost home."

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**Part Forty-Seven**

"TEN MINUTES TO CHOW MOVEMENT, GENTLEMEN! YOU MISS YOUR DOOR, YOU MISS THE MOVEMENT"

The C.O's voice caused Xander to awake with a start, nearly toppling from his bunkbed. He immediately jumped to his feet in a desperate panic. "NO! Fuck! NO! I was out. I was free! LET ME OUT!"

Xander began pounding on the steel door and
screaming frantically. Quickly, Oz ran over and tried to shut him up, grabbing for his flailing fists.

"Damn! Stop it, Xan! You'll get the fucking guards down here and they'll hit first and ask questions later. Stop it"!

"NO! LET ME OUT!!! LET ME OUT!! Xander continued to yell and beat his hands on the unyielding door as Oz tried grabbing and holding his arms at this sides.

"Stop it. Xander. Xan, Love, wake up. Wake up, Xan" With a jerk, Xander's eyes popped open and he looked up into the loving concern of Spike's safe blue ones.

The dream. It was only the dream. Just the damn dream, he told himself repeatedly as he tried to slow the pounding of his heart and felt the sweat cool on his body.

"You o.k. now? Was it the same one?" Xander nodded at Spike's soft gentle voice.
"Yeah," He gave a weak chuckle. "Guess nightmare monsters come in all shapes and forms. Shit you wouldn't think it could still scare me so bad after all these months."

Spike laid on his side facing the man he loved. His own physical injuries had healed much more quickly than Xander's emotional ones and it broke his heart. "What can I do to help?"

"Just talk to me, Spike. Ground me so I know you're real and the nightmare isn't."

Spike kissed Xander lightly on the lips. "I can do that." Xander relaxed slightly as he pushed and nudged till Spike took the hint and rolled over, his back to Xander's chest.

Then he smiled as he remembered something that might lighten the mood. "Do you still miss Oz?"

Xander frowned, wondering if Spike was still a little jealous. "Yeah, some. He was a good friend."
"Well, then, I forgot to tell you. I gave him a new cell mate yesterday and wouldn't you just know it? Rupert Giles is one hell of a spooner."

"Ex-warden Giles?" Xander blew out the tension in his body and laughed as he started to relax. He then leaned forward and kissed the blond gently between the shoulder blades. Spike moaned at the feel of the erection that was beginning to grow and press against his butt crack. Xander wrapped his arm around the smaller man's body. "Keep talking, Spike," he whispered softly, now kissing the back of his neck.

"Huh? Oh, sure, um, well, I talked to Wes and he said it looks like the State is going to make an offer to settle your wrongful conviction suit. Oh, he and Jesse are headed to Cleveland to track a big money bounty. Wes thinks it will be....oh, that feels good."

Xander's ears heard the words, but his brain discarded them as unimportant. "Oh, yeah?" He nuzzled his nose in the back of Spike's soft, ungelled
Spike shuddered at the feel of the large hands that had blistered then calloused upon returning to the physical labor of construction. His fingers gently brushed over Spike's nipples, then pressed harder as they wandered down over his flat stomach to scratch his nest of crisp blond curls.

Spike reached down and adjusted his growing cock, giving it room to stretch. Xander wrapped his hand around Spike's and together they squeezed the fat, fleshy meat that was sending signals of 'want' and 'need' to Spike's brain.

Just as Spike had started to hump, sliding his cock in and out of Xander's fist, Xander disappointed him by removing his hand from the heated flesh.

"Xan, please, don't play. Don't tease."

Xander again kissed his lover lightly down his spine and smiled as the violent shudder ran through
Spike's body. "Oh, I'm not playing. I mean business."

Xander's rough, strong hand slid down the soft back, leaving a trail of warmth in its wake. It grazed over the swell of Spike's firm round butt cheeks, then his middle finger slid between them and flicked over the tight, wrinkled hole. He then patted and pushed on the underside of Spike's thigh. "Lift your leg, Baby."

"Yeah, Xan." Spike raised his top knee up toward his chest, opening himself up and pressed his hand between his legs feeling the growing urgency.

"So nice. So good." Spike's new angle gave Xander's hand access to the back of his lover's sac and the soft skin behind it, which he rubbed and tickled then cupped the balls, weighing them as they grew heavier. Xander leaned forward and clamped his teeth down on Spike's shoulder. Although not breaking the skin, it was a show of dominance that got the expected response. Spike's body jerked, his hips canted back and his breathing turned ragged.
"Fuck, Xan."

Xander chuckled at the pathetic tone in his lover's voice. "You stopped talking. Come on, Baby, tell me what you're going to do today."

"I'm going to beat you with my billy club if you don't fuck me, that's what." Spike quickly grabbed the lube and passed it over his shoulder.

Xander wanted to tease him. Ask him what that was for and maybe make him beg, but not this time. Not now. Everything in Xander craved the deep warmth, security and tight pleasure that he found inside Spike.

With his left arm immobilized under Spike's head, Xander was no stranger to working single handedly. He quickly inserted the tube between Spike's cheeks and squeezed a blob of warming oil into his tight hole. Spike's hips instinctively began humping.

"Oh, Baby wants fucked." Xander wet his fingers in the oil as he slipped one fingertip inside. Spike's ass
slammed back and he sighed as the finger slid in further. Immediately, Spike started whimpering and wriggling his hips as he tried to force the intruding digit to seek out and rub the deep, special spot that would send shockwaves of pleasure rocketing through his body.

Xander pulled out and, without pause, shoved two back in. He hurriedly stretched the willing hole open to relax it. He wanted to give his lover what he needed, but not with his hands.

"Are you ready for me? Do you need me?" Xander whispered puffs of hot air against Spike's cool skin. He had again pulled out his fingers and was quickly lubing up his cock. The questions were rhetorical. Even if Spike would have answered, Xander couldn't hear over the buzzing in his ears and the lack of blood to his brain.

When Spike felt the thick spongy, mushroom head press against his resistant hole, he leaned forward and lifted his leg higher. "Push it in. Push it deep. Hell, yes. Fuck me."
The second his cock breached Spike's hole, Xander tucked his forearm under Spike's leg. He pulled his lover back as he pressed forward and the hot, rock hard cock slid in at just the perfect angle to bump Spike's swollen spot.

Spike squeezed his eyes shut and clamped his hole tightly around the wonderful intrusion. His whole body reacted to the burning ache that filled his bowels and his heart by equal measure. For a brief moment, his own cock was forgotten as he gripped handfuls of the cool cotton sheets.

Soon, however, it again took his attention when his slit rubbed the inside of his leg, leaving a slimy streak in its wake. Spike coated the palm of his hand in the slick precum and began stroking himself as his lover grunted and quietly cursed with each thrust of his cock in and out of the snug opening.

The sounds they made were no longer coherent words, only syllables, consonants strung together in a series that the other interpreted and understood
completely. The bed rocked with their motion, squeaked and moved in time with their passion while Xander's cock slammed and pumped into Spike's sore, happy hole.

Spike felt it all first. He sucked in and held a lungful of oxygen when his balls began tingling and drawing up. At the same time Xander's movements became faster, deeper, more erratic. Both knew they were on the brink of ecstasy and without hesitation, they tumbled in, washed away on a flood of warm love and hot sperm. It filled Spike's body and overflowed his hand, wetting the bed as it dripped off his fingers and out of his ass.

Xander snuggled in closer and made no attempt to pull his deflating member from it's squishy sheath. He knew when it shriveled enough, it would slip out on it's own. Till then he was perfectly content.

When it did slide out, Spike rolled over on his other side. Xander's eyes were closed and his face slack, looking for all the world like a man deep in sleep.
but Spike knew better. The small smile at the corner of his lips gave him away. "I love you, Xander."

Xander's smile grew and his brown eyes slowly opened, locking with the blue ones just inches away.

"I love you, too. I guess I am just a prisoner of love."

Spike groaned at the corny line that was absolutely Xander and decided to match it with one of his own.

"That makes two of us, Xan. Both serving life."

The End