

The Hour Series

by
Yin Again

**Madness and Joy
Fullness and Freedom
Reckless and Dangerous
Anchors and Holds**

Madness and Joy

*O something unprov'd! something in a trance!
O madness amorous! O trembling!
O to escape utterly from others' anchors and holds!
To drive free! to love free! to dash reckless and dangerous!
To court destruction with taunts - with invitations!
To ascend - to leap to the heavens of the love indicated to me!
To rise thither with my inebriate Soul!
To be lost, if it must be so!
To feed the remainder of life with one hour of fullness and
freedom!
With one brief hour of madness and joy.*

*From "One Hour to Madness and Joy"
Walt Whitman Leaves of Grass*

Part One

Xander took another swallow of his beer and counted to ten in his head. Then he counted to

ten in his head in Spanish. Then he did it in Fyarl, handily using up his entire vocabulary in that particular language. He thumped the beer bottle down on his kitchen table and looked at the bleached vampire sitting opposite him. Clear blue eyes stared back at him, and the expression in them was...anxious?

"Could you repeat that?" Xander asked. Spike sighed and toyed with his beer bottle, slender fingers picking at the edge of the label. He looked down at his hands, then back up at Xander. "I said that I'm trying to make peace - with you, with everybody." Xander started counting in his head again, and then suddenly stopped. "Everybody...everybody who?" he asked.

Spike sighed again and went back to picking at the label. "Buffy, Dawn, Red, Rupert, Angel," he enumerated in an even tone. Xander stared. "So, everything is cool with all of them? Clean slate? Forgive and forget?" His tone was incredulous. "Even Buffy?" Spike nodded, and there was a glint of satisfaction in his eyes. "Especially Buffy." Xander snorted. "What exactly did you do to make Buffy forgive you for trying to rape her?" He was pleased to see the vampire flinch. The flinch didn't last long. A hard glint came into Spike's eyes, and he leaned forward. "I got a fucking soul, Harris, and it wasn't easy. It still isn't. That was enough for Buffy."

Xander swallowed audibly; Spike was kind of scary like this. He decided to push his luck. "So, you two are back at it?" he sneered. Spike's expression didn't change, but he sat back in his chair. "No, Harris," he said, enunciating clearly, as if he were speaking to a particularly stupid child. "We are not back at it. We never will be. That bridge is thoroughly burned. Neither of us wants to go back there."

Xander digested that tidbit of information for a moment, and then shrugged. "What did you have to do for the others?" he asked.

"Apologize."

Xander goggled at Spike. "That's it? All you had to do was apologize?"

Spike nodded. "Yes, I asked for their forgiveness, and they gave it."

Xander sipped some more beer. "And how surprised were you by that?" he asked.

Spike looked at him for a long moment, and then a small smile flitted over his face. "Pretty fucking surprised," he admitted.

They looked at one another and each drank some more of their beer. Xander was startled to find that his was empty. "Another?" he gestured at Spike with his bottle. Spike drained his bottle and handed it to Xander with a nod.

Xander returned to the living room and handed Spike one of the two beers he carried. He sat down heavily on the sofa and let his head hang, elbows on his spread knees. After a few minutes he looked back up at the vampire. "I'm sorry, Spike, but I can't do it. You could give me the most sincere apology in the whole world, and I could tell you that you're forgiven, but it would be a lie." He paused. "I don't think I have it in me." Spike nodded and drank some of his beer. "I know you don't. The others, it didn't cost them anything to forgive me. You and me - men of action and all that. That's why I thought of another way." Xander raised one eyebrow and waited.

"Right," Spike said. "Here's my idea. You can do anything to me for one hour. Sixty minutes. You say it - I do it. You dish it - I take it. But when it's over, we start over; clean slate. No more taunting me with past behavior, no more treating me like garbage. We don't have to be friends, but no more bullshit."

Xander thought about the vampire's words. "Anything?" he asked.

"Anything," Spike agreed, "as long as I'm not dust at the end."

Xander sat, thinking. Spike finished his second beer and sat the empty bottle on the table. Xander's eyes were downcast, and the vampire

could almost see the wheels turning in that dark head. What would Harris choose? Spike knew that the kid had a mean streak, and was actually slightly afraid of what that creative, devious mind might come up with. He'd known that Xander would be the most difficult. Well, after Buffy. But she felt so awful about using him that she'd been happy to forgive him. Her asking for his forgiveness had been a shock, but he'd agreed readily. Willow and Giles had been easier, but still awkward. Dawn had acted as if she wanted to refuse, but had suddenly broken down crying in his arms, sobbing her absolution on his shoulder. Spike knew that he could expect no such reaction from Harris.

Spike knew that Xander was still choking on his rage over the vampire's involvement with both Buffy and Anya. Those slights would not be remedied with a simple apology. They demanded a sacrifice, and Spike was willing to offer whatever was necessary. He didn't know how things had gotten so bad, but he really did want another chance with Xander. Perhaps, in the future, they could be...friends. It was really the most he could hope for.

Spike was so lost in his own thoughts that he didn't even notice Xander leave the room until the human returned. He was holding a rolled magazine in his hand and shifting his weight from foot to foot. Spike could smell the burst of

pheromones rolling off him. Fear, shame, nervousness, longing and arousal were swirling around, intoxicating the vampire's delicate sense of smell. *What in the hell was going on*, he wondered.

Xander cleared his throat and looked down at Spike. "There's something that I want, and I think you're the only one who can give it to me." His voice was low and strained, and his brown eyes met Spike's, and then skittered away, only to come back again. His hands clenched and released on the rolled magazine until finally, with a nod, he tossed it to land at Spike's feet. Spike picked it up and unrolled it. It was a bondage magazine. The cover showed a blond man holding a leash attached to a darker man, who crouched at his feet, eyes downcast.

Sucking in an unnecessary breath, Spike looked up at Xander. "What exactly do you want, Harris?" he asked, with an edge to his voice. Xander shuffled his feet and didn't answer. With lightning speed, Spike was on his feet, one cool hand reaching out to wrap around Xander's upper arm. His lips were less than an inch from the human's warm ear. "How far do you want to go, mate? You want to stay with bondage and domination, or do you want to get into the heavy S&M? You want me to bleed for you, is that it?" he demanded through clenched teeth. Xander's wide eyes met Spike's narrowed ones, and he

had to try twice before he could make words come out of his open lips. "I want...I want you to..." his voice trailed off, and Spike suddenly got it; like the pivotal puzzle piece slipping into place, the big picture was spread out before him.

He had to be sure. He shook Xander slightly by the arm he held. "What do you want, Xander? In the nasty little picture in your head, which one are you? Dom or sub?" Xander's eyes remained downcast, and Spike shuddered when the single word dropped from his pink lips to hang suspended between them: "Sub." Spike very carefully unwound his fingers from Xander's arm and took a short step back, then sat back in his chair. "Right," he said. "Sit down - we need to talk about this." Xander sat, but wouldn't meet Spike's eyes.

"Look at me," Spike said, and he put just a little bit of steel in his tone. Xander's eyes snapped up to his, and he couldn't help the small smile that curved his lips. *Lovely boy*, he thought. "Why me?" Spike asked. Xander swallowed hard. "We, um - Anya and I experimented a little, but she's so..." Spike laughed. "She may be an ex-vengeance demon, but she's still a tiny little girl, right? You want something with a little more ...authority." Xander nodded. "No matter what, I knew it was just a game with her. I need it to be..."

"Real," Spike finished his sentence for him, and then nodded again.

"I can make it real, Xander," Spike said, keeping his tone even, his voice low. "I can make it very real. This is a game I know well. However, if you're looking for serious torture, I'm not your vamp anymore." Xander swallowed audibly, and Spike smelled fear enter the heady mix of pheromones. *Good, he thought, he's not asking for hardcore. He just wants to be dominated.*

"It's OK," he said soothingly. "I get what you want. You, the one with the overdeveloped sense of responsibility, who always carries the weight of the world, want to be free. You want all of the decisions taken out of your hands. You want to give me all of the control so that I can keep you safe, take care of you. But you want more. You want me to take you places you'd never go on your own. You want me to push your limits and show you what you can have, what you can endure, what you can be. Am I right, Xander?" The human licked his lips and nodded, and Spike smelled the fear recede, to be replaced by relief and more arousal.

Spike reached out and took one of Xander's hands in his own, holding it lightly. He was gratified that the human didn't pull away from the contact. "I can do all those things, Xan, but there's going to have to be some preparation. Will you trust me to take care of the details?"

Xander's eyes flicked up to Spike's and then back down. "Yes, Spike," he whispered.

Spike smothered a smile at the boy's show of submission. *He's going to be beautiful,* he thought.

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Two nights later, Spike showed up at Xander's door. The human ushered him inside with a shy smile that made Spike's jeans feel suddenly too tight. They wound up sitting at the kitchen table in easy silence, each with a beer. Finally, Spike brushed his hand lightly over the one of Xander's that rested on the table. At the touch, Xander looked up, but did not move away. "Saturday," Spike said. Xander nodded. He drew in a shaky breath. "What do I do?"

The vampire pulled his hand away and reached into his back pocket. He handed Xander a plain white card that had an address engraved on the front of it. As the human turned it over and over in his hands, Spike began to speak. He kept his voice calm, but bolstered the words with a little authority. "You'll go there at 10:00 on Saturday morning. You will speak only if you are asked a direct question. You will be taken care of and prepared for me. I'll meet you there at 7:00." He

paused and looked at Xander, who met his eyes steadily.

"For our hour together, you will keep your eyes down, unless I direct you to look at me. You will call me 'Spike' or 'Master' - your choice. You will not speak without permission. You will do everything that I ask of you." He paused again, noticing a flush spreading on Xander's face. "I'll take care of you, Xander - I promise that you won't come to harm. I'm not saying that there won't be any pain, because I know you want that, too." The flush darkened, but Xander didn't drop his eyes. "Do you have any questions?"

Xander thought for a moment. "Spike, do we...need a safe word?" he asked.

Spike shook his head. "No. Either you trust me to do this or you don't." He knew that Xander needed total surrender; he also knew that he had no intention of doing anything to the boy so drastic as to require a safe word. He knew he'd been right when Xander nodded and said, "OK."

They finished their beers, and Spike rose to leave. As he passed behind Xander's chair, he laid his hand lightly on the back of his neck. He leaned in so that his lips were behind Xander's ear. "Oh, and one other thing," he said casually, "wanking off after I leave will be the last time you come until Saturday night, so make sure you enjoy it." The vampire whirled and walked out of

the apartment, leaving Xander sitting at his kitchen table with a burning face, an open mouth and a raging erection.

He entertained the idea of not beating off - for about a second. In a daze he stood and walked over to the sofa, sprawling at full length on it. With one hand he pushed his sweat pants to his knees, with the other he reached under the cushions to find the tube of lubricant that he knew was there. He opened the battered tube and squeezed a dollop into his palm, rubbing his hands together to warm it. He couldn't help the low moan that was torn from his throat as he pushed his cock through the warm, slick circle of his fingers.

He tried to go slow, but Spike's words were reverberating around in his head, making him breathless with need. He drove himself relentlessly, squeezing and rubbing his thumb over the crown of his cock, his other hand tugging at his balls. He thought about what Spike had said; that this would be his last orgasm until Saturday night. Xander's hands tightened on his flesh painfully as the full implications settled over him. He was gonna come on Saturday night. Spike was gonna make him come during their hour together. That thought sent him spiraling over the edge and he came hard, shooting against his own abdomen and chest, a long groan torn from his lips.

In the hallway, Spike stood with both hands and his forehead pressed to the door, listening. He'd heard the boy's haste to get to the couch and get started, and heard the sounds. That had been expected. What had been unexpected was hearing his own name groaned as Xander climaxed. Spike reached down and rubbed his own erection harshly. He was painfully aroused; those few rough strokes were all it took to make him come in his pants like a schoolboy. With a snort, he turned away and pulled his jacket closer to cover the spreading wet stain on his jeans. Lighting a cigarette, he strode down the hall to the stairs.

Part Two

Xander hesitated two steps from the door. He turned and paced on the sidewalk. Over the past two days, he had been remarkably at peace with his decision, but in the face of the final step he was scared. He knew that this was something he wanted, something he needed, but he was still afraid. He was about to relinquish total control to Spike. Who was chipless and could kill him easily if he wanted to - soul or no soul. He paced a few more steps.

As he turned to pace back the other way, the door opened and a young man in jeans and a white silk shirt stepped out and looked at him. "Are you Xander?" he asked. Xander stopped in his tracks and stared. The man was lithe and thin. He had wavy black hair and fair skin, and his green eyes snapped with humor. He smiled. "Master Spike said we may have to come out and get you. Will you come with me?" He gestured toward the door. In that moment, Xander made his decision. If Spike knew him well enough to anticipate his behavior, then he saw no reason to distrust him. As logic went, it fell much more on the "insane troll" end of the spectrum than most kinds, but it worked for Xander. He nodded and preceded the man inside.

They passed through a small, featureless foyer to a plain door. The man waved a card to a sensor and the door slid open. They walked into a lobby that could have been any spa in America. The walls were papered in a subtle print, the floor was weathered stone. One corner of the room had a gorgeous waterfall that fell into a fountain, surrounded by lush plants. Comfortable chairs were scattered around, flanked by small tables that held magazines or pitchers of water and glasses. Wall sconces held candles that gave off a light, relaxing scent. Xander's escort told him to take a seat and help himself if he wanted a drink. Xander sank into a chair next to the waterfall and poured himself a glass of water.

The cut crystal pitcher was beautiful; the water had paper-thin slices of lemon and lime floating in it.

Xander sipped his water and looked around curiously. There were two other people in the waiting area, a man and a woman. The man was slim and slight in build, and he wore tailored black trousers and a starched white dress shirt. At first glance, he looked no more than sixteen, but upon closer inspection Xander decided he was in his mid-twenties at least. He sat on the edge of his chair with his back upright, his posture impeccable. His feet were together, his hands folded in his lap and he looked at the floor. The woman had a long, honey-blonde braid flowing down her back. She stared at the screen of the notebook computer on her lap through a pair of glasses that perched on the end of her nose. She wore jeans and a t-shirt and had sneakers on her feet. Xander looked at his own black jeans and black t-shirt and decided he looked OK.

A different man, this one short, stocky and dark, approached Xander. He introduced himself as Neil and asked Xander to go with him. Xander set his glass down and followed. Neil wore black jeans and a white t-shirt and was barefoot. He led Xander through several corridors. They passed several rooms with closed doors, another, smaller waiting room, what appeared to be a

fully stocked salon and several smaller rooms. Neil stopped at an open door and led Xander inside. There was another man there, standing beside a hospital-type bed. Neil turned to Xander. "Xander, this is Al," he said. Xander nodded, and Al stepped toward him. Al was ebony black and had a shaved head. His smile was huge and blindingly white. He looked at Neil. "He's just lovely," he said, in a surprisingly soft voice, and Xander felt himself blush. Al gestured toward Xander's arm and asked, "May I?" Not knowing exactly what the man meant, Xander nodded anyway. Al lifted one arm and ran his fingers up it, brushing against the light dusting of hair. He made a "hmmmmmmm," noise, then reached into a wall cabinet and pulled out a white terry-cloth robe, which he handed to Xander. "We'll step out and you can get undressed," he said, and before Xander could process that little tidbit both men were in the hall and Xander was alone.

Shrugging, Xander stripped off his clothes, stuffing his socks into his tennis shoes and piling his folded garments on top of them. He slipped the robe on and wandered around the room, checking it out. On a side table he found what looked like a high-tech crockpot. He lifted the lid and smelled the clear liquid inside. Paraffin. Suddenly he understood why Al had looked at his arm. He was going to get waxed. For a second he wondered how far this was going to go. Then he

realized that it was probably going to go all the way. Gulp. He sat on the end of the bed and tried desperately to find some sort of convenient place in his mind to file a folder marked "getting waxed so you can be sexually dominated by your vampire nemesis".

After a soft knock on the door, Neil and Al reentered the room. Al looked at him for a moment. "I think I'm going to start with your eyebrows, Xander - they need a little shaping. If you're not shy, you can just lose the robe. I'll give you a sheet to cover your naughty bits and then we can just work our way down." Xander thought about that for a second, then stood and shucked the robe, handing it to Neil. He lay back on the bed and let Al drape a folded sheet across his groin. The black man placed a small pillow under Xander's neck to tilt his head back. Xander felt something cool being lightly rubbed onto the skin around his eyebrows. It felt tingly. "It's an herbal gel that stops this from hurting," Al explained. "Neil's going to start putting it on your arms." Xander nodded and closed his eyes.

He felt Neil begin to rub the gel onto his arms with long, firm strokes. It felt good. *His hands are so soft*, Xander thought. *Softer than even Anya's, but much stronger*. He found he wasn't even slightly wigged that two different men were touching him. Good grief, he thought, look at me. I'm totally into guys. I was denial-boy for so

long why? Al took a small wand and began carefully applying the warm wax to Xander's unruly eyebrows. Xander felt him press a small cloth strip over the wax, and then tensed as it was snatched away. He was surprised to find the procedure completely painless and relaxed. Al worked on his eyebrows for a few minutes, and Neil finished his arms and started rubbing the gel onto Xander's chest. The two men moved around the bed in tandem, and within twenty minutes Xander found himself with neatly groomed eyebrows and hairless arms, chest and legs. Neil lifted one of Xander's arms over his head, and said, "I'm going to use the clippers for a sec, don't be startled."

Xander winced at the buzz of the clipper, but didn't move as his underarm hair was shorn, then waxed. Neil said, "Well, since the clippers are already out ...Xander, are you ready for this?" Xander saw where Neil was looking and swallowed audibly. He gave the other man a quick nod, and then screwed his eyes shut. Neil pulled back the sheet, and Xander lay perfectly still as his pubic hair was shaved down to a quarter-inch. When the clippers turned off, he opened one eye just a little. He saw Neil smoothing more of the gel onto his hands and immediately slammed the eye shut.

His face burned as Neil smoothed the gel into his skin with efficient motions, lifting his cock, which

had decided to embarrass him further by getting half hard, out of the way so he could put more of the gel on Xander's scrotum. Xander bit back a moan. Even this clinical touch felt wonderful. For a moment he imagined it was Spike touching him and he had to stifle another small sound. Al moved in with the wax, and Xander found himself hair-free in that area as well. When he was told to roll over, he sighed in relief. The gel and wax procedure was repeated over the back of Xander's body, and he was relaxed until the sheet was once again swept away. He couldn't help the small moan that slipped out of his mouth when Neil's hands slicked the gel over his ass and down his cleft. Xander bit his lip when the other man's fingers rubbed over his asshole, and he had to fight the urge to press back into the contact. The gel tingled, and the brush of Neil's finger against his hole was causing sparks to shoot up his spine. He wondered if Spike was going to fuck him tonight. He wondered if he was suffering from a psychotic break when he found himself hoping that the vampire would.

Finally, the waxing was done, and Xander was instructed to put his robe back on. Neither member of his audience seemed concerned about Xander's raging boner, so he tried to forget about it himself. Neil touched his elbow and led him down the corridor to another small room. During the next two hours, Xander was given a barber shop-quality shave with a straight

razor, complete with hot towels; a steam facial; and his first-ever manicure and pedicure. He was then led into a small room that held a table and two chairs. There he was served a light lunch and a glass of wine. The room had a selection of books and magazines and an attached bathroom. Xander admired himself in the large mirror for a while, marveling at the absolute smoothness of his body. He was also pleased with the way the technicians had been able to make his construction worker's hands look elegant and well cared for. Back in the room, he found an interesting book and read until Neil came for him.

He was led to another treatment room. This one was warm and dark and held a massage table. Neil told him to lie down on his back, and Xander quickly dropped his robe and complied. For the next ninety minutes, Neil used his considerable skills and a half a bottle of lightly scented massage oil to turn Xander into a completely relaxed puddle of goo. Having never had a massage before, Xander was surprised to find that he enjoyed having his hands, feet and scalp rubbed almost as much as he enjoyed the large muscle work on his back. He didn't even flinch when Neil's strong hands kneaded his buttocks, giving himself over to the sliding sensation of the oil and the languor that crept over him.

He didn't even realize he'd fallen asleep until he was awakened by a soft touch to the middle of his back. "Come on, Sleeping Beauty," Neil teased. Xander sat up groggily, and gratefully accepted the glass of juice he was offered. After handing back the empty glass, he hopped off the table and stretched, unconcerned with his nudity. He donned the robe Neil held out and followed the man through a long corridor to yet another room. This one seemed to be far from the others, and the hall held only four doors. "This is your suite," Neil told him, opening the door. The room was beautifully decorated in dark colors and lit only by candlelight. A large, opulently hung bed dominated it, and a leather sofa and two chairs were nestled in one corner. Another corner held a bar and a high table with two stools. Neil led Xander to another door and opened it to reveal a huge bathroom. He walked them over to a frosted glass door.

"This is the steam sauna," he explained. "I'll set the timer for twenty minutes. Once the steam stops come back out here and take a bath or a shower - whichever you prefer. Then you are to rest until I come for you. It will be a couple of hours, so nap if you can. You should be relaxed enough. The bar is stocked. If you need anything, pick up the phone by the bed and press 9, and I'll come to you, OK?" Xander nodded and stripped off his robe, which was pretty well covered in massage oil. Neil took it

and gestured to two more just like it that hung on hooks next to the sauna. Xander nodded again and stepped through the frosted door.

The steam was great. Xander lay down at full length on the wooden bench and felt every pore in his body open up and sweat freely. It felt like all of his concerns and worries were being pulled out and swept away. He realized that he felt wonderful. He'd been pampered for hours. Xander was usually the one who took care of others, so having so many people focused on him was intoxicating. He felt like a show dog. Then a thought struck him. That's exactly what he was to these people - a prized pet. They all thought he was a vampire's cherished fuck-toy, being readied for his Master. Xander laughed when he realized that description was not far off the mark. He was a vampire's fuck-toy. The beautiful part was that he had absolutely no control over the situation, so he had the freedom to let go and enjoy the sensations, and so far, the sensations had been, well - sensational.

Too soon the steam stopped hissing into the sauna. He exited reluctantly, surprised to find himself a little lightheaded. He padded out to the main room naked and got some more juice from the well-stocked refrigerator under the bar. The liquid made him feel better, and he returned to the bathroom for a shower. The shower was huge and made of marble. It had a full array of

bath products, which Xander was perplexed to find were all completely unscented. He puzzled over that for a while before he realized that since this place catered to non-human clientele, they would obviously not offend vampire senses with artificial scents. He washed and conditioned his hair, and scrubbed the massage oil away with a luxurious bath gel. The feeling of his own hands sliding over his hairless body was wonderful, and he had to fight the urge to touch his erection.

After the shower, Xander dried off on the biggest, fluffiest white bath towels he had ever seen, and tumbled onto the huge bed. The wanton slide of the silk sheets did absolutely nothing to dim his arousal, but he fell asleep in minutes anyway.

A soft knock at the door was followed a moment later by Neil's entry into the room. The dark-haired man walked to the refrigerator and poured Xander a glass of water. He brought it to the bedside table and shook Xander's shoulder. He was sleeping completely uncovered on his stomach with his head buried in the pillow, and finally turned his head toward Neil, rising up on his elbows. Neil gasped softly, and Xander tilted his head in question. The other man ducked his head. "I'm sorry, Xander," he said, "You just look so...damn, you look gorgeous like that. Your Master is going to fall over when he sees you. He's a lucky man." Xander's expression changed

to a shy smile, and when Neil looked back at him, Xander nodded in thanks.

Xander sat up on the bed and drank his water. Neil walked into the bathroom and got him a robe, which he put on. They left the room and walked back to the main part of the spa. This time they stopped at the salon, and Xander was shown to a chair. Two other men joined them. One began running his hands through Xander's tousled hair while the other stood back watching. "I can see why we aren't allowed to cut the length - it's wonderful just as it is. I'm thinking a trim and just a few reddish highlights."

The other man said, "Burgundy; with his skin tone it will be fabulous." They argued back and forth, but Xander tuned them out. Eventually, they came to a decision. The first man misted Xander's hair with water and began the trim; the other left the room and returned a few moments later with a bowl of foul-smelling hair color.

Once the trim was complete, the second man began separating small sections of Xander's hair and brushing on the color. As he finished each section he wrapped it in a small square of foil. Once he finished, Xander was brought a light snack and a soda to enjoy while the color took effect. Neil stayed by his side the entire time. Xander decided he like the masseuse, and that he didn't mind his presence. A timer sounded,

and the colorist returned. He pulled all of the foil out of Xander's hair, and then led him to a sink. Xander leaned back, and the man washed his hair three times with the unscented shampoo to remove any trace of the chemical smell. He rubbed a handful of unscented conditioner over Xander's hair, and then rinsed it with cool water.

Xander was returned to the man who had cut his hair. Twenty minutes later Xander stared into the mirror dumbstruck. His hair was still long, falling well past his collar in the back. It was shaped into artfully tousled waves; he looked like he'd just woken up. The burgundy streaks were very subtle; they gave his hair dimension and glinted in the salon's lights. Xander reached up to touch a lock and found it was as soft as silk. He nodded and smiled at the two hairdressers, who fussed over him and told him he looked fabulous.

Neil led Xander back to his suite. Once they arrived, Neil told Xander to go to the bathroom and do "anything he needed to do", because this would be his last chance before his Master arrived. Nodding, Xander left the room. He used the bathroom and washed his hands, then brushed his teeth for good measure. He looked at himself in the mirror and tried to quell his rising panic. He started when a soft knock sounded on the door. He opened it and Neil stepped inside. Laying a hand on Xander's arm, the shorter man smiled up at him. "It'll be OK,

Xander," he said, his tone warm and reassuring. "I know you're new to this, but you don't need to be scared. Your Master is going to be so happy with you. Any Master would be." He turned Xander to face the mirror. "Look at you. You're just gorgeous; what's not to like?" Xander smiled at Neil's teasing tone and laid his hand over the other man's for a moment. They exchanged a nod and walked back into the main room.

Xander immediately noted that some changes had been made. The bed had been restored to its original, pristine condition, his empty glass had disappeared, and, more ominously, there was another person present. Neil introduced Xander to the other man, who was named Paul. Paul spread a white sheet on the floor and asked Xander to step to the center of it. Neil held out a hand for Xander's robe. Xander stripped and did as he was told. Xander was truly stymied when Paul began brushing a light powder all over his lower body with a big, fluffy brush. It tickled. While Paul powdered his legs, Neil stepped up in front of Xander.

"Xander," he said, still using the same reassuring tone, "I need to put this on you." Xander looked at what Neil was holding and blushed. He knew what it was; there had been pictures in his magazine. It was a leather cock ring. Xander looked down at his dick and thought that it was probably as far from hard as it had ever been.

Neil's glance followed his, and then came back to Xander's eyes. "Do you want to..." he hesitated. "Or do you want me to..." Neil's voice trailed off, but he had his answer when Xander's cock suddenly decided to join the game by twitching and beginning to fill. Neil wrapped one hand loosely around Xander's shaft and stroked him into full hardness easily. Xander couldn't stop himself from thrusting eagerly against the other man's hand; it felt so good. Neil's hand was warm, and his skin was unbelievably soft. With his other hand Neil snapped the ring into place.

Vacillating wildly between embarrassment and arousal, Xander hardly noticed the ring being attached. Neil released his cock, and glancing down, Xander could see a matching erection pressing against the other man's zipper. He was stunned that he could elicit such a reaction in another man, and also very aroused that it was so. Xander remained lost in thought as Paul powdered the rest of his lower body. Once he was finished, Paul reached into a large box that sat on the low table and pulled out a pair of black leather pants.

The pants were completely open down both sides. Instead of side seams, they had a row of tiny eyelets. The two men worked in tandem to put them on Xander. Neil held them at the waist while Paul crouched at Xander's feet and began lacing one leg of the pants with a leather thong.

The leather was butter-soft and beautifully supple. As he laced, Paul smoothed the leather and pulled it tight across Xander's body. Xander noted that the knees of the pants were strongly reinforced; they were intended to be worn by someone who would kneel a lot.

Paul deftly laced the pants to the top of Xander's thigh, and then paused. With an apologetic smile, Neil reached in and arranged Xander's erection so that it was prominently displayed against the plain front of the trousers. Once he finished, Paul resumed lacing, tying the thong at the low waist of the pants. The action was repeated on the other side. The two men circled Xander, making small adjustments. The pants were skin-tight. In the back, the leather flowed over Xander's buttocks and clung to the cleft of his ass

Once the pants were perfect, Neil rubbed a light coat of unscented oil onto the rest of Xander's body to make him gleam in the candlelight. Paul reached back into the box and brought out a pair of leather gauntlets. He placed them on Xander's wrists. They covered him from the base of his wrist to halfway up his forearms. The cuffs fastened with snaps, but also had eyelets attached to them. Xander wondered about them for a moment, but got his answer when Paul pulled his hands behind his back and laced the two cuffs together. His arms were stretched

back, pushing his chest out. The position of his wrists allowed his hands to clasp together naturally, while defining every muscle in his arms, shoulders and back with a minimum of tension.

Neil led Xander off of the drop cloth, and Paul swept it up and folded it. Walking him back to the center of the room, Neil told Xander to kneel on the floor. Xander complied, and Paul stepped forward to clasp a black leather collar around his neck. It was thick and supple and plain; it closed with a simple silver buckle, which Paul positioned at the base of Xander's throat. Neil crouched in front of Xander as Paul gathered up the supplies and prepared to leave. "It's been nice helping you, Xander," the dark man whispered. "You'll do beautifully. Eyes down now, your Master will be with you soon." Xander cast his eyes down, and Neil patted him on the shoulder and followed Paul from the room. The door shut behind them and Xander was alone.

Part Three

He concentrated on breathing slowly and not panicking. He kept repeating the phrase "no choice" to himself. Xander had no idea how much

time had passed when he heard footsteps approaching the door. There was a low murmur of voices, and then the door opened. Xander knew it was Spike by the faint smell of tobacco. The vampire closed the door behind him and stepped into the room. He deliberately did not look at Xander, who was facing away from him. He stripped off his jacket and folded it over the back of a chair. He unlaced his boots and removed them, and then his socks and his t-shirt, leaving him clad only in a pair of old, faded jeans. He walked over to the bar and poured himself a short glass of JD. Carrying his drink, he walked to the bed and sat on the end of it. Finally, he looked at Xander.

The boy was more beautiful than he had imagined, he admitted to himself. He was on his knees, with his hands bound behind him and his head hanging, eyes on the carpet. His skin gleamed in the candlelight, and Spike could see every muscle of his back and arms. Construction work had been good to Xander, broadening his shoulders and melting off his layer of baby fat. Spike was pleased to note that his very specific instructions regarding Xander's hair had been followed. He liked it over-long and shaggy. Spike scented the air and smelled only arousal and nervousness, but no fear. Finishing his drink, he stood and walked around in front of Xander.

Spike let his eyes wander over Xander's chest and abdomen admiringly, then looked down to the front of the leather trousers. Xander's erection was fully outlined by the skin-tight leather; Spike could even clearly see the cock ring. Fighting the urge to run his fingers down the impressive length, he instead started running them lightly over Xander's shoulders and chest, mapping the smooth planes with soft touches. His fingers trailed along the thick leather band of the collar, and Xander swallowed hard. Spike worked his way around Xander's body, getting the boy used to the feeling of Spike's hands on him. As he touched golden skin, Spike noted any and all reactions.

Finally, his exploration finished, Spike stood in front of Xander and spoke his first words since entering the room. "Xander, unbutton my jeans with your teeth." A shudder ran through Xander's body, and Spike saw him clench his jaw. Spike repeated his demand, and Xander clenched his jaw again. In a flash, Spike's open hand rocketed against Xander's cheek with a loud "crack". The strike was hard enough to knock the bound man back slightly, but Spike did not miss the twitch of Xander's lips. That twitch told him that his reaction had been correct; that like a child or a puppy, Xander was testing his limits and reassuring himself that Spike was fully in charge. Spike looked down and thought he'd never seen anything so beautiful. Xander's eyes were

downcast, his hair hung in loose waves over his forehead, and the vivid red imprint of Spike's hand showed plainly on his face. Spike seriously thought he was going to come in his pants.

A second later, Spike was surprised when Xander leaned in and rubbed his cheek against Spike's hip. The vampire tangled one hand in his silky dark locks and leaned into the contact for a moment. "It's OK," he said. "I forgive you." Xander gasped when Spike's fingers tightened brutally in his hair. In a no-nonsense tone the vampire continued, "I will have your obedience, Xander. Don't defy me again. Are you going to do as I say? Answer me."

Xander whispered, "Yes, Spike."

"Good boy," Spike replied. "Unbutton my jeans with your teeth. Now." Xander leaned forward and grasped the material with his teeth and pulled. The jeans were so old and worn that the top two buttons came undone easily. Xander pulled again and the other buttons slipped free. Spike shucked off the jeans and threw them behind him to stand naked before Xander.

Spike stepped forward so that Xander had no choice but to be up close and personal with the vampire's hard on, since it rested against his cheek. Spike's hand was back in his hair. "Open your mouth," he commanded. Xander complied, and Spike used his other hand to guide the head

of his cock to rest against Xander's lips. "I know you've never done this before," he continued, "but I will tell you how to please me. You want to please me, right? Answer me."

Again Xander whispered, "Yes, Spike."

"Good," the vampire said, pressing his cock more firmly against the boy's mouth. "Lick it." Eyes still downcast, Xander licked firmly around the head of the vampire's erection, following the line of the foreskin and dipping into the slit. Spike's eyes drifted shut, and he bit back a moan at the incredible sensation of Xander's tongue on him. The boy continued to lick at Spike's flesh, growing bolder and running his tongue as far down the shaft as he could reach.

"That's it," Spike hissed. "Make me wet. Suck me." Xander's mouth opened wider then closed on the head. He started to suck gently, and this time Spike moaned aloud. "So good, God, Xan, your mouth is so hot." The vampire knew he was babbling, but he wanted to make sure Xander knew exactly how much he was enjoying it.

"Open your mouth wider and try to relax your throat. See if you can take it all in." Spike kept his hand in Xander's hair, but let the human go at his own pace, bobbing his head forward a little more on each stroke.

Xander had absolutely no idea what he was doing, but was shocked to find that he enjoyed

the sensation of having Spike's cock in his mouth. The vampire's erection was cool, and his skin tasted clean and slightly spicy, with a hint of bitterness that Xander didn't want to think about too much. He followed Spike's directions, and tried to relax his throat. He tried to do all the things he remembered that he liked having done to him, so he drew back a little and sucked powerfully on just the head, then leaned in to engulf as much of the shaft as he could, while slipping his tongue around and around the flesh in his mouth.

When Xander sucked him hard, Spike came up on his toes and yelped, then hissed when the boy leaned forward to try and deep-throat him. He couldn't help thrusting just a little, and smiled when Xander gamely tried to accommodate him. Finally, Xander's nose was nestled in his pubic hair, and Spike thought the top of his head was going to blow off from the extreme pleasure. Tightening his hand in Xander's hair, Spike pulled him back a little. "Look at me, Xander," he said, sounding a little breathless. Xander looked up, and Spike saw that his eyes were so dilated with passion as to appear black. They widened at the expression he saw on Spike's face, and he smiled around the cock in his mouth. Xander was seriously aroused by the needy, hungry look on the vampire's face, and also that it was because of him.

Blue eyes met brown; both were sparkling in the candlelight. "Xander, you're so good. You feel so good. I'm gonna fuck your mouth now. I won't hurt you. I'll warn you before I come, but I'm gonna come in your mouth and I want you to swallow it." Seeing both shock and acceptance in Xander's eyes, Spike put his other hand on the back of his slave's neck and said, "Eyes down." Xander immediately dropped his gaze and braced himself. He was surprised when Spike began thrusting gently into his mouth; he'd expected a brutal ride. The pace increased as Spike felt his orgasm building. He would have liked to continue this game for much longer, but he could tell that Xander was tiring, and time was passing much too quickly.

"Xander, I'm gonna come. Oh, God...I'm gonna...fuck, yeah...so good ...coming now!" The last word was a strangled scream as Spike tightened his hold on Xander painfully and climaxed, pumping spurts of semen into the human's hot mouth. Xander tried to catch it all, but some slipped out of the corners of his mouth as he swallowed repeatedly. Spike continued to thrust gently until his cock was completely soft, and then pulled away. Xander panted harshly, and Spike fell to his knees. Placing his hands on Xander's shoulders, he leaned in and licked up any traces of his own come that were left on Xander's face, neck and chest. As soon as the human's breathing returned to normal, Spike

gave in to his earlier urge and caressed the leather-encased length of Xander's erection. He slid his hand up and down the shaft; stopping to trace the outline of the cock ring, and dipping down to cup Xander's balls.

Spike continued to trace Xander's cock through his pants, and leaned in to lay his cheek against Xander's so that his lips were brushing the human's ear. "You want me to take care of this for you, Xander?" he asked, adding, "Answer me," as an afterthought when he wasn't answered right away.

Spike felt his erection return when Xander whispered back, "If it ...pleases you, Spike." For a moment, Spike harbored a fleeting thought, wishing that this were real, that Xander truly did belong to him. The boy would make a wonderful slave - he was obedient, responsive and eager. But, Spike knew that he wasn't looking for a slave. What he really wanted was an equal, a mate, a lover. Shaking off his reverie, he brought himself back to the matter at hand.

Rising gracefully to his feet, Spike leaned down. "Stand, Xander," he instructed, and helped the human to his feet. Having his arms bound behind him made it hard to balance, and his legs were stiff from holding the kneeling position. Once Xander was on his feet, Spike untied the leather thongs that laced the sides of his pants and

slowly peeled the leather away. The vampire stood for a moment and simply stared. Xander's cock rose from the black leather cock ring and stood almost flat against his belly. The skin was a deep rosy hue, and drops of fluid stood out on the head. Spike wrapped one hand around the base of the shaft and squeezed, causing more drops to pulse from the slit. He slid his hand up the length, and swept his thumb over the head to collect the fluid, which he then tasted.

He crouched down in front of Xander and ran a teasing finger between the human's now hairless balls. Xander shuddered and shifted his stance slightly, spreading his legs to give the vampire better access. With a hand on his hip, Spike turned his slave around. He found himself looking at a gorgeous backside, with Xander's bound hands clasped just above it. Spike grabbed both of Xander's hands and pushed them up, causing the human to bend over slightly. "Stay there," he instructed, then released Xander's hands. With his thumbs, he parted Xander's buttocks and leaned forward to brush his lips over the human's hole. Xander groaned. Spike then darted out the tip of his tongue to tease the opening.

Spike smiled as Xander bent over further and pushed into the contact. Spike licked delicately for a few seconds, and then abruptly thrust his tongue in deeply. Xander's entire body stiffened

and he bit his lower lip to avoid screaming Spike's name. The vampire pushed his tongue into Xander as far as he could, stretching and laving his soft inner skin. He could feel the human's legs trembling, and Xander's ass clenched rhythmically around his tongue. Finally, Spike pulled his face away, smiling when Xander moaned to protest the loss of contact.

Spike took Xander's arm and led him to the bed. "Kneel up in the center of the bed," he instructed, and steadied Xander as the human complied. Spike opened a drawer in the bedside table and pulled out a tube of lubricant. He knelt on the bed, arranging them so that he was at Xander's side, with one of the boy's hips pressed into his abdomen. Spike opened the tube and coated both hands with the slippery gel. "You've been such a good boy, Xander. I've got a reward for you." They both moaned as Spike slipped one hand around Xander's erection and the other between his legs from the back.

Spike stroked Xander's cock slowly, while circling his hole with the index finger of the other hand. Every few strokes he would slide his finger over Xander's pucker, pressing but not entering. As soon as the human started pressing back against his finger, Spike breached him completely in a sudden motion. Xander yelped and stiffened, holding his body perfectly still. Spike held his

finger motionless, but jacked Xander a little faster with the other hand.

Holy shit! Xander's mind was whirling. *Spike's got his finger in my ass, he thought. And his hand on my dick and earlier he had his tongue in my ass and before that I blew him and swallowed his come. Holy shit!* Spike's finger started pumping in and out of him, and Xander was infinitely thankful for the cock ring. It hurt like a bitch, but it kept him from coming. And he was pretty sure that coming without permission would earn him more than a little slap. Both of Spike's hands sped up, and Xander's brain shut off as a second finger joined the first one inside his tight channel. The fingers twisted and crooked, and Xander saw stars and gasped as the vampire rubbed over his prostate.

Suddenly, Spike stopped moving, and the only sound in the room was Xander's harsh panting. "Xander," Spike said, and his tone held just a little uncertainty. "Xander, the hour is up." Neither man moved for a long moment, and Xander nearly laughed at the absurdity of reality intruding on them when he was bound and collared, with a naked vampire simultaneously jacking him off and finger-fucking him in some sort of demon-friendly bondage spa. Xander waited. Spike's head came down to rest on his shoulder. "Xander, do you want me to stop? Or do you want to finish this?" Spike waited, then

whispered, "Answer me." Xander kept his head bowed and his eyes screwed shut. He took a long, shuddering breath and said, "Finish it...Master."

At that word, the one Spike had been certain he would never hear from Xander's lips, the vampire pressed himself against the human and resumed moving both hands at once. He slid his own erection against the hollow of Xander's hip in time with his strokes on the boy's cock. His fingers brushed the cock ring, and he realized that Xander would probably be hurting by now. He pulled his fingers from Xander's ass, and let out a low chuckle when he heard a moan of protest.

"Relax, Xander," he said. "I'm not stopping. You can't come with this ring in place. I'm going to take it off, but don't come until I tell you. Do you understand? Answer me." Xander breathed out and sighed, "Yes, Master." Spike trembled at the sound of that word again. He used one hand to release the cock ring and the other to grasp the base of Xander's erection firmly. He knew that the sudden loss of pressure would be impossible for the boy to withstand, and didn't want him to come before he could help it. As soon as the tremors that racked Xander's body subsided, Spike leaned in again. "Do you have control? Answer me." Xander gulped and said, "Yes, Spike."

Spike resumed a leisurely pace, stroking Xander gently, going easy on his over-stimulated flesh. He rubbed his own weeping cock against the flat of Xander's hip, swiftly bringing himself back to a fever pitch. As soon as he felt his own orgasm rising, he sped up his pace and pressed his fingers back into Xander's ass. A few more strokes and he was at the edge. "Come, Xander. Right now, come with me," he moaned, rubbing the boy's nub hard. "Oh, fuck, yeah! Fuck!" Spike came with a strangled shout, and Xander groaned and shot all over Spike's hand and the top part of the bed, his ass clenching strongly against the vampire's friction-warmed fingers. Xander sagged into Spike's arms with relief, and Spike pulled his fingers out and carefully laid him down face first on a clean patch of the bed to unlace the gauntlets and remove them.

He shifted Xander over onto his back and cradled the human's head in his lap. Xander's eyes were closed, and he was still panting. Spike rubbed his arms, and then reached to unclasp the collar, laying it gently on the bedside table. He shook Xander's shoulder and said, "Look at me." Xander's eyes opened languidly, and he looked up at Spike and smiled. The smile was returned. "Go start the shower. I'll be there in a minute. I want you on your knees in the shower when I get there." Xander's eyes blinked once and his smile broadened a tiny bit. He rolled off the bed and padded to the bathroom. Spike picked up

the phone, dialed 9, hung the phone back up and followed Xander.

Spike entered the walk-in shower to see a breathtaking sight. Xander was kneeling on a thoughtfully provided rubber mat just outside the reach of the cascading water. His eyes were downcast, and his hands were clasped at the small of his back. Spike stepped up to him and urged him under the water with a hand on his shoulder. "Stand up and unclasp your hands," he directed. Xander complied, and Spike tenderly washed his hair and body with the unscented bath supplies. He stepped back to wash his own hair when Xander lightly brushed his head against the vampire's shoulder. "What is it, Xander? Answer me," Spike said.

"Let me," Xander said, and Spike nodded and handed him the shampoo bottle. The slight difference in their height allowed Xander to wash the vampire's hair without raising his eyes too much, and he washed him gently, fingers skating lightly over Spike's hard body.

Spike turned off the water, and Xander stepped out of the shower, returning with a towel. He carefully dried Spike, and then went back for another towel for himself. When they exited the shower again, they returned to the main room to find that the bed had been changed and straightened, and that their folded clothing and a

large shopping-type bag sat on the end of the bed. They dressed in silence. Spike finished first and walked to the bar. He poured himself another JD and got Xander a glass of juice. They drank in silence and placed the glasses on the bar. Spike gathered the bag and gestured for Xander to precede him from the room. The hall was empty and so was the lobby. They got into Xander's car, and he drove them back to the apartment.

They sat in silence in the parking lot. Xander could hardly believe that it was only quarter past nine. He sighed, and looked at Spike. "Clean slate, then?" he asked.

Spike turned to him and smiled. "Really?" he asked.

Xander returned the smile. "Yeah." He hesitated. "Can I ask you a couple of things?" Spike nodded. The human drew in a deep breath. "Did I do OK?' His tone was uncertain.

Spike took in an unneeded breath. "God, Xander - you were...unbelievable. You did great." Xander's smile was a gorgeous combination of pride and embarrassment.

"How come, through all that we did, you never kissed me?"

It was not the question that Spike was expecting. He didn't know exactly what question he was

expecting, but that was not it. He mulled over possible responses in his head and then just went with the truth. "Because you had no choice, Xander, and when we kiss it will be because we both want it, no excuses."

Xander thought about that for a moment. Spike had said "when we kiss", not "if we kiss". Spike wanted to kiss him; he just knew it. He had to believe that a guy who wanted to rim you at least wanted to kiss you a little bit. "OK. What's in the bag?"

Spike handed it to him and he dug through it enthusiastically. It held the leather pants, gauntlets, cock ring and collar, as well as a set of the unscented bath products and a jar of the powder that had been used to assist in the putting on of the trousers. Xander nodded. They sat in silence for a long moment, and then the human turned and opened the car door. He made as if to stand, and then turned back to Spike. "It's still pretty early. You wanna come up for a beer?" Spike nodded.

They drank a couple of beers each and watched an old monster movie that was on cable. After it was over, Spike rose to leave. Xander walked him to the door. When the vampire reached for the doorknob, Xander intercepted his hand and used it to spin him around and press him up against the door. Just before their lips touched,

Xander whispered, "My choice." The kiss was tentative, soft and sweet, and about a thousand times more erotic than anything else they'd done that night. Xander released Spike, and pulled him away from the door. They said goodnight, and Spike headed home. Standing by the door, Xander absentmindedly reached into the back pocket of his jeans. There were two white business cards in the pocket. One of them was the one that Spike had given him with the address of the spa. The other was exactly the same, except it had a phone number and a name scribbled on the back. The name was "Neil". Laughing, Xander tore that one into small pieces and threw it away. He put the other one carefully into his wallet.

The End

Fullness and Freedom

Part One

The sun had set, and the only empty space was on the back steps at Buffy's house. Everyone

else was inside, talking, planning, plotting - trying to ready themselves for a war with the vilest thing that ever did evil. And Xander? He was sitting on the step, drinking a beer and running his left hand up and down his hairless right arm, his fingers gliding up and down the smooth, tanned skin. Awakening just past noon he had realized that for once he hadn't felt Anya's absence like a weight on his chest. He'd rolled across the large bed and stretched, feeling languid and relaxed. The slide of his body against the worn cotton sheets had reminded him of a few things he no longer had: body hair for one, and it seemed as if a few inhibitions had been plucked and waxed away also.

Lying in the tangle of sheets, he'd relived every moment of the previous day in about two minutes, and then spent half an hour reliving the sweet, gentle kiss he'd shared with Spike before the vampire had turned away with a bemused smile and left the apartment. He'd passed most of the day in a gentle haze, his mind coming back to the kiss and the look. The look that had been an amalgam of surprise, happiness, and sensuality; the look that had lingered on the vampire's face. The vampire's pretty face. Men weren't supposed to be pretty, but Spike was - damn pretty. His face was too sculpted to be handsome, too defined to be rugged or manly, too beautiful to be called anything else but beautiful - or pretty.

Spike stepped out onto the porch and watched the nimble slide of the human's fingers. He remembered what that firm, silken skin felt like. He walked silently to Xander's side and sat next to him, deftly removing the bottle from his hand and taking a swig before replacing it. He allowed himself to lean slightly against the warm body beside him. "Hey, Xander," he said in a low voice. Without thinking, Xander returned the lean and said, "Hey, Pretty." Spike lightly knocked their heads together in answer and again appropriated the beer. Xander plucked it from his hand before the vampire could drain it. "I said you were pretty, not special," he smiled, and drained the bottle himself. "Thank you, Spike."

The vampire didn't turn his head, but kept staring out at the lawn. "For what?" he asked.

Xander chuckled. "Don't be coy, you know for what. For yesterday and last night. And for tonight."

Spike turned a quizzical look on him then. "What have I done for you tonight?" he asked.

Xander stood and held out a hand, pulling Spike upright. When they were face to face the human said, "I dunno. Why don't you walk me home and you can ask me in the morning?" They turned and left through the gate, not wanting to go through the house and draw unnecessary attention to themselves. They walked in

companionable silence through quiet streets for a while.

"What are we doing, Xan? " Spike asked.

Xander turned and smiled grimly, without breaking his unhurried stride. "It's going to be bad; you know that right? This war with the First is going to be bad and some of us are going to get dead in the process. Buffy thinks she can keep everybody alive if she has enough control - if she gets every single detail perfect. She's wrong. There's going to be bad shit happening." Spike nodded; he knew that the human was correct in his analysis of the situation. The First was ruthless, and not all of them were going to make it out the other side of the upcoming confrontation intact. It was just a fact.

Xander continued, and his tone was lighter. "So, I thought, what with the gathering apocalypse, we should try and have a little fun." They had arrived at Xander's building. He opened the door and gestured for the vampire to enter. At the top of the stairs, Xander turned. "Last night you gave me something that I wanted very much." His voice dropped. "Is there something you want, Spike?" The vampire contemplated the question until the door of the apartment shut behind them. He stripped off his jacket and handed it to Xander, who hung it and his own side by side in the hall closet.

Spike hooked his thumbs into the pockets of his jeans and looked at Xander. The human was wearing baggy cargo pants, a loose sweater and hiking boots. With a grin he made a decision as to how he wanted to play this new game. He crossed his arms over his chest. "So, we're going to play 'I've always wanted to...' huh, Xan?" Xander mimicked Spike's stance and began rocking back and forth on his heels, grinning and nodding.

"OK, then - here's what I want. I want you to go into the bedroom and put on the tightest pair of jeans that you own, and the tightest white tee shirt you own. No shoes, no socks, no underwear. Oh, and I want a beer." Spike turned, seated himself on the sofa and grabbed the remote. Xander's grin broadened even more, and he went to the refrigerator. He walked back into the living room and handed the beer to Spike, placing one for himself on the low table. He turned and left the room.

In his bedroom, he stripped. Way in the back of a bottom drawer, Xander had a pair of jeans from high school. They were faded, threadbare, and so tight that he had to lie down on the bed to zip them. He pulled on a tight, white undershirt, and gave up the idea of tucking it in. Looking in the mirror, he tousled his hair a little more and licked his lips. *The vampire wants a*

tight outfit, he thought; let's give the vampire what he wants.

Spike was sitting exactly where Xander had left him, but the overhead lights had been turned off, leaving the room lit only by a couple of small lamps and the television. Xander did his best imitation of Spike's own hip-shot strut until he was standing directly in front of the vampire, who gave him an appraising look and a sly smile. "Let's see the rear view," he prompted. Xander held his arms out at his sides and pivoted slowly. With his back to Spike, he looked over his shoulder and winked. Spike laughed out loud. Xander finished his turn and bounced onto the sofa next to Spike, taking a long pull of his beer.

Spike took a sip of his beer and ran his hand up Xander's thigh. "You're up," he said, sitting back abruptly.

The human's eyes had lost focus during the brief caress, and he shook his head as if clearing cobwebs. "Huh?"

Spike laughed. "It's your turn. What do you want? What have you always wanted to do, to see, to know? Your wish is my command." Xander thought for a long moment, then grabbed Spike by the hand, pulled him off the couch and dragged him toward the bathroom.

"What's this, then?" Spike protested weakly, but allowed himself to be manhandled into the bathroom, where Xander started running water into the sink. While waiting for the water to heat up, the human reached into the shower and pulled out the bottle of unscented shampoo. He waved it at Spike. "Stick your head in the sink, bleach boy - I've always wanted to see what your hair looks like without all that crap in it." The vampire crossed his arms and scowled, but Xander pointed at the sink adamantly. "If I can wear pants that cut off my circulation, you can let me see you without your hair-armor." With a long-suffering sigh, Spike complied.

Xander stepped up next to the sink and carefully wet Spike's hair, pouring a handful of the shampoo onto it and scrubbing softly to break up the stiff gel. Spike simply relaxed and enjoyed the warm water and the exquisite feeling of Xander's fingers on his scalp. Too soon the shampoo was rinsed away and Xander was gently towel-drying the blond locks, which immediately separated into a riot of curls. Xander hung the towel with a flourish and exclaimed, "Gorgeous! I love it!" His open smile was infectious, and Spike found himself smiling, too, even though he was sure he looked like a friggin' Q-Tip. Xander put a tiny dollop of hair gel into his hands and rubbed them together. He ran them through the roots of Spike's hair and arranged the resulting waves for a moment. On

impulse, he leaned in and gave the vampire a tiny kiss on the end of his nose. "Tag, you're it," he said, then turned and ran from the bathroom with Spike in hot pursuit.

Spike easily caught Xander in the living room and shoved him toward the couch. Xander stood next to it and waited. He then noticed what the vampire had in his hand - Xander's digital camera. "Strike a pose, Xan - gotta save this for posterity." Xander ducked his head shyly, and Spike caught the shot as he peeked up through the tousled waves that the motion had brought forward. The vampire lined up a full-body shot and snapped again. Xander held out his hand. "My turn," he crowed. Spike handed the camera over, admonishing, "If anyone sees these, I will kill and eat you." Xander laughed, and then darted forward to kiss Spike soundly. As soon as their lips parted, Xander took his shot, capturing the vampire's expression - blue eyes cloudy with passion; lips reddened and swollen, curved into a shy smile. He snapped another photo as Spike reverted to form, smirking and raising an eyebrow.

After taking the camera and setting it on a nearby shelf, Spike paused to kick off his boots and socks, and then sat on one end of the couch. He grabbed one of Xander's hands and pulled him down, arranging them so that the human was lying on his back with his head in Spike's

lap. He shifted a bit until they were both comfortable, and then began carding his fingers through Xander's thick hair. *What the hell, the vampire thought; I've wanted to do this for a while now. Boy likes it too, he's practically purring.* Xander's dark eyes were closed to thin slits, and he turned his head slightly from side to side to lean into the touch of Spike's cool fingers.

"That feels so good, Spike," Xander said in a low tone. "Is it my turn again?" Spike's fingers stopped moving.

"Yeah, Xan - your turn," he said.

Xander made a small, frustrated noise. "Bad vampire. Don't stop." They shared a smile and Spike resumed his rhythmic stroking of Xander's hair.

"Why the tight clothes, Spike? It's not like you haven't seen me naked." Xander stated. He looked up into the clear blue eyes above him.

The vampire smiled. "I dunno - I just wanted to see what you look like without those baggy pants and eye-bleeding shirts. Wanted to see you wear something that would make me want to peel it off you out of horniness rather than self-preservation."

Xander looked up at him and cocked an eyebrow. "And ..."

Spike smiled down into his eyes. "This'll do nicely," he leered. "Look at you, Xander - you could have any girl, or guy for that matter, if you dressed like this and acted as confident as you are right now. Why do you hide?"

Xander laughed ruefully. "Fear. Habit. Self-preservation." He sighed. "I never really spent a lot of time analyzing it - it's just what I do. Sorry that's not very deep. Your turn."

Spike thought for a moment, still running his fingers through Xander's hair. Every few strokes he would turn his fingers so that his blunt nails scraped down the boy's scalp, smiling when the dark head turned into the contact. He leaned down and brushed a soft kiss across Xander's forehead. He spoke hesitantly, reluctant to break the playful mood. "Um ...Xan, what part of last night did you like best?"

Xander's eyes flew open in surprise, but then his face relaxed into a smile. "Do you mean the prep or the main event?" he asked. Spike shrugged, to let him answer in his own way. Xander's eyes were sparkling, and Spike could smell him heat up with arousal.

"Well," Xander started. "During the day, when they were getting me ready, the best part was the massage. I don't think I've ever been so relaxed in my life. It was great." His eyes closed

dreamily. "I actually fell asleep." His eyes opened and they shared a smile.

"And the - er - main event, as you put it?" Spike prompted.

Xander's eyes darkened and he licked his lips, which had suddenly gone dry. When he finally spoke, his voice was husky. "It was all perfect, Spike, but the very best thing was when you slapped me." Spike's eyes went wide, and his mouth opened but no sound came out. Xander continued, "Not that I'm saying I want you to smack me around, but when I refused you and you slapped me? That made it real. That was when I committed to, well, everything. I felt so ...free." Xander snaked one hand up and around Spike's neck and pulled the vampire's head down to his.

Their lips touched softly, just sliding together lightly. Xander reached out with the tip of his tongue and traced Spike's full lower lip. Their mouths opened against one another and their tongues met in the middle. The kiss stayed light and exploratory - neither was ready to go further at the moment, wanting to draw it out, but knowing that finally, inevitably they would wind up in Xander's big, soft bed together. As their lips parted, Xander traced Spike's cheekbone with his fingers, and the vampire trailed light kisses from his lip to his ear, nipping the lobe

lightly as he straightened, still winding Xander's hair around his fingers.

"What about you, Spike? What part did you like best?" Xander's tone was light, and he was unprepared for the shudder that ran through the vampire's body. Spike's eyes were icy blue, and they glittered in the half-light. Xander reached up to touch his cheek with a startled look.

Spike closed his eyes and swallowed audibly. When he opened his eyes, they were darkened and dilated with lust. His voice was husky. "When you called me "Master". That was so, God, Xan - that was so hot. I was sure that you'd never say it - that was why I gave you a choice of what to call me. And then you said it, twice. And the way you said it." He shuddered again. "Your voice, the way your body felt with my fingers inside you - that was...incredible."

Xander couldn't tear his eyes away from Spike's, even though he knew his face was flushing, both with arousal and embarrassment. He'd gotten used to Anya's bluntness, so he was surprised that he could even flush anymore. But the intimacy of Spike's words, coupled with the obvious lust in his eyes and voice, touched Xander deeply. He couldn't believe that the vampire was opening himself up, stripping himself bare for Xander and risking ridicule, dismissal and hostility. When their lips met this

time, it was rougher, harder. Spike's tongue swept around the inside of Xander's mouth, taking advantage of a moan to push deeper, mapping the contours of the roof of his mouth, nipping at his lips and kissing him breathless before pulling back just enough to let the human gulp in some much-needed air.

Xander smiled up at the vampire and reached up to run his fingers through the now-dry curls that fell over his pale forehead. "Your turn," he prompted. Spike opened his mouth to speak, and the phone rang. Both men groaned and shot the handset a dirty look where it sat on the coffee table. Xander picked it up reluctantly. "Hello? Hey, Buff." Spike and Xander exchanged a grimace, but the human made no move to shift from his position with his head in the vampire's lap. With a shrug, Spike continued to card his fingers through Xander's hair. He could easily hear Buffy through the phone.

"Xander, have you seen Spike? He's missing. I'm worried," she said, and Spike winced at the shrillness of her tone.

"Chill, Buffster," Xander said lightly, "he's here. What happened? Did he miss a head count or something?"

Buffy sighed. *"God, Xan, am I that bad?"*

He felt a small pang for being flippant with her when he knew her stress level was through the roof. "You've got a lot on your mind. Don't worry about us - we're just having a manly man bonding evening. Consider it a well-earned break from the both of us."

She sighed again, and then laughed, and Xander was glad to hear some genuine mirth in it. *"Does that mean you're drinking beer and watching 'Baywatch'?"*

"Something like that. If he doesn't make it out of the man-pit by dawn I'll keep him here and deliver him to you tomorrow evening, OK?" he said.

She paused, and for a moment Xander was afraid she was going to pry for a less flip answer. Instead, she said, *"I miss you, Xander. I miss us - the Scoobies. Can we have a movie night or something soon? Maybe just you and me and Dawn and Willow and Spike and maybe Giles - if I can get those two in the same room without bloodshed? I need Scooby-time."* She sounded so sad that Xander was tempted to tell her that he'd be right there. Before he could speak, she said, *"I gotta go - Dawn's home and we're going to try to do sister stuff. Don't OD on testosterone, 'K?"* And then she was gone.

Xander pressed the "off" button on the phone and tossed it onto the table. He looked up at

Spike, who was frowning. He reached up and ran his finger along the vampire's lips, which immediately curled into a smile. "Don't worry about Buffy," he said, "she's OK."

Spike opened his mouth and licked at the tip of Xander's finger. "I know. So, you'll deliver me to her, huh?"

Xander smiled. "If I have to. I guess that sort of broke the mood, didn't it?" he said.

In answer, Spike closed his lips on Xander's finger and sucked it. Releasing it with a pop, he said, "Nope," and kissed Xander again.

Part Two

They both knew that the game was over - this was real. They'd done atonement, they'd done tentative sweetness, they'd done playful and fun; this was the first step off of the cliff that would tumble them into the abyss. Neither had any thoughts for the future, beyond what they were going to do to each other and for each other in the hours until dawn. All that mattered was lips and teeth and tongues and hands and fingers and skin, whimpers and moans, gasps and growls.

They stood, and Xander took Spike's hand and led him to his bed. Standing there, in the dim light coming from the living room, they struggled with their tight jeans and tossed their clothing away. Finally, blessedly naked they stopped a foot apart and looked at one another for long moments. Spike stepped forward and dropped a chaste kiss onto the top of Xander's shoulder. Xander groaned and brought his hand up to cup the vampire's cool cheek, bringing his head up so they could look into each other's eyes. "I just wanted to be sure that you know why I'm doing this," he said. Spike raised an eyebrow at him. "My choice - our choice. No excuses. I just wanted you to know."

The vampire nodded. "I know." They shared a long look, and then Xander smiled.

"Good. Then get your ass on the bed."

Spike turned his back to Xander and crawled across the bed, pausing to look over his shoulder at the human standing dumbfounded in his wake, staring at his ass. "Like what you see, pet?" he drawled, raising an eyebrow and swaying his hips slightly.

"Urk," Xander said, and pounced. Spike found himself pressed flat into the bed by Xander's warm weight. He groaned when the human's erection pressed against him, lining up against the cleft of his ass. The groans turned to growls

when Xander latched onto the back of his neck, biting and sucking.

"Oh, shit ...that's good, Xan; don't stop, love." Spike's voice was strained with arousal and he arched strongly against Xander's body, babbling madly until the human released his neck. Xander began kissing and licking his way slowly down Spike's spine, sliding his hands down to the vampire's wrists to hold him spread-eagled against the sheets.

"God, Spike - your skin - so soft. You feel so good." Xander shifted up to sit on his heels between Spike's spread legs, allowing his hands to trail up the vampire's arms and then down his back. Spike could feel his hesitation.

"What is it, Xan?" he asked, turning his head.

Xander leaned forward to rest his forehead against the vampire's shoulder, burying his face against the cool flesh. "Um, I just realized that I've exhausted my entire repertoire of gay sex. I have no idea what to do next," he admitted somewhat sheepishly.

Spike craned his neck back further, but the human resolutely kept his burning face hidden. Propping himself up on his elbows, Spike arched his back so he could rub his temple against Xander's cheek. "What exactly was in your

repertoire of gay sex, pet?" he asked in a laughing tone.

"Um, kissing and 'do whatever Spike says'," Xander admitted. His voice cracked a little when he added, "I don't want to get it wrong."

Spike wanted to laugh with delight, but realized that Xander's distress was genuine. He pushed back against the human until he had enough room to roll over. He gathered Xander into his arms and hugged him, settling them on the bed with Xander half on top of him with his face pressed into the vampire's neck. "It's OK, Xan. I got lost in the moment - I forgot this was all new for you." Spike turned them both on their sides, and he started placing soft kisses along the curve of Xander's clenched jaw, throwing in a tickle of tongue or a nip every few kisses, just to keep things interesting.

As Xander began to relax, Spike ventured further, kissing his throat, his chin, the hard curve of his cheekbone, and finally, his lips. Spike took his time, gently mapping the contours of the human's hot mouth, reveling in the slick slide of tongue on tongue, feeling every bit of tension drain out of his partner, not releasing his hold on Xander's lips until air became an issue. He licked and nipped his way to Xander's ear. "Tell me what you want, Xan. I can tell you what to do or we can ...just ...explore a bit." His words

were punctuated with small kisses against Xander's neck, calculated to keep the human distracted enough that he didn't melt into a puddle of embarrassment.

Xander leaned into the contact and panted, "How about a little of both?"

Spike made a happy sound that turned into a gasp when Xander began licking and kissing his neck, trailing his lips and tongue from the hollow of his collarbone up to behind his ear and back down. After exploring the entire cool length with his lips, Xander began using his teeth, nipping and biting lightly. "More," Spike gasped. "Need you to bite me harder. Make it hurt a little." Xander complied, sinking his teeth into Spike's corded neck hard enough to leave marks. He was amazed when the vampire went rigid under him and moaned at the sensation, so he bit down again. He moved his mouth further down and bit Spike hard at the exact spot where the vampire's neck and shoulder met. Spike hissed and twisted under Xander to bring their erections into contact. Both were leaking fluid, which mixed to lubricate the slide of rigid flesh on rigid flesh.

Xander brought his mouth down to Spike's nipple and licked and sucked the tender flesh to a peak. He swept his fingers up to the other nipple and pinched it sharply, keeping up an intense pressure that made the vampire growl his name.

"Oh, Xander - just like that. So good." Spike wailed, and Xander slithered up to whisper in his ear, never letting up the pressure on Spike's nipple.

"That's what I like, too, Spike - the pleasure and the pain together." The last word became a drawn-out moan as the vampire brought his hands to Xander's chest to comply with the oblique request. Spike held Xander's nipples lightly between his thumbs and forefingers then brought his fingers together hard enough to hurt, but not hard enough to damage. "Oh, fuck yes!" Xander wailed, thrusting his hips wildly. Spike made a mental note: *nipple clamps*.

Slowing the pace a little, Spike slid his hands around to Xander's back; kneading the large muscles there while he whispered in the human's ear, "Want your hand on my cock, Xan. Touch me." Xander rolled onto his side and lightly encircled the vampire's erection with slightly shaking fingers, slipping them up and down the shaft, and circling the wet head lightly. Spike shifted under him, muttering, "bad angle," and arranged them so that they were both on their backs, with the vampire's back resting against Xander's warm chest as the human leaned against the headboard in a semi-reclining position. Xander caught on to the idea and wrapped his arms around Spike, splaying one hand across his chest and wrapping the other

around the vampire's cock. Spike grabbed Xander's thighs and sighed, "perfect," as the hot hand began to stroke him.

The angle was perfect - Spike had set them up so that Xander could touch the vampire the way he would touch himself, and the human wasted no time. He made his hand into a loose fist and pumped the shaft experimentally, rubbing his thumb over the slick head to gather the moisture there. Circling the head, he played for a moment with the almost fully retracted foreskin. He slid his fingernail along the edge, making Spike buck into his hand. Xander leaned away for a moment and came back with a tube of lubricant from the bed table drawer. Teasingly, he squirted a glob of the cold gel directly onto the sensitive crown of Spike's cock; making the vampire yelp, then moan as he began stroking again.

Xander proceeded to fist the vampire's cock, making all of the moves he liked for himself, using the breathy moans, hip thrusts and occasional "fuck yeahs" to gauge Spike's reactions. He dropped his other hand between Spike's legs to roll and cup his balls, assuming he was doing OK when the vampire spread his legs wantonly and thrust up harder. The pace was languid, neither in a hurry to end this encounter, but Xander found himself growing impatient for more. He leaned down and whispered, "God, Spike ...wanna touch you inside," and started

biting the back of the vampire's neck again. He was startled when Spike grabbed his forearms and managed to pull them both into a kneeling position, with Xander behind Spike on the bed, his sweaty chest sealed to the cool, muscular back in front of him, his hand still stroking the vampire's cock.

Spike nudged the tube of lubricant back toward Xander and panted, "Yes, pet. Want you inside me. Start with a finger ...or two." Xander gave Spike's erection one last hard stroke, and then eased back onto his heels to put more lubricant on his shaking fingers. Spike was on his hands and knees before him, and Xander marveled at the sight for a moment. He could now understand why the vampire had been so excited at the spa, with Xander bound and kneeling in supplication. To have this awesome creature at his mercy, trusting him, made him feel powerful and tender at the same time. Dropping the tube back onto the bed, Xander leaned forward and kissed Spike softly on the shoulder and, at the same time, breached him with one finger, sliding it up to the hilt into the soft, cool confines of the vampire's body.

Spike arched back strongly, and then let his head drop to hang between his arms, shuddering as his tightness adjusted to the intrusion. Xander could feel Spike's ass clenching and fluttering around his finger and imagined what that tight

softness would feel like around his cock. They both groaned out loud when Xander began pumping his finger in and out of Spike's channel. "Another," Spike demanded, and Xander complied, pulling out and then pushing back in with two fingers. This time, he didn't wait for Spike to adjust and immediately began thrusting in and out. Spike pushed back against him and muttered nonsense words and deep sounds of pleasure.

"Twist your fingers around, Xan," Spike instructed, "see if you can feel a little nub ...ahhhhhh!" Xander had done as he was instructed, and found Spike's prostate, pressing into that tiny bundle of nerves that caused Spike to make a noise halfway between a cry of pain and a scream of pleasure. Xander really liked that noise, so he twisted his hand again, this time allowing his fingernail to lightly scrape the sweet spot. "Holy fuck!" Spike gasped, and swiftly pulled one hand off the bed to grasp his cock tightly at the base. He'd nearly shot all over the bed, and only vampire reflexes had saved him from embarrassing himself.

Xander pulled his fingers out and applied yet more of the slick gel, then carefully worked three fingers into Spike. He desperately wanted to replace the fingers with his cock, but didn't know if Spike wanted him to, or would even let him. The problem was solved when the vampire

twisted his neck to look over his shoulder, with eyes rapidly switching between blue and yellow. "In me," he hissed. Xander hesitated for a moment, and Spike gave him a hard look, which almost immediately softened into a smile. "What? You play the sub one time and give up your driving privileges forever? I don't think so." He wiggled his ass at Xander enticingly and clenched his internal muscles hard on the three fingers holding him open. "In me, Xan - want you so much. Please." It was the "please' that did it.

Pulling his fingers out, Xander slathered lubricant onto his cock and lined himself up to Spike's entrance. He grabbed the vampire's hip, steadied his erection with his other hand, and said a quick prayer to the gods of gay sex that he please not do this wrong. He eased forward, only to be met by a strong thrust from Spike that had him completely buried in the vampire's body in one smooth stroke. He froze. The feeling was incredible. It wasn't like the heat and utter wetness of being inside a woman. Spike was cooler, silkier and tighter than anything Xander had ever felt. The pressure on his cock was almost painful, but the softness of the channel and the pulling, grasping, fluttering motions were indescribable.

Spike panted unnecessarily, savoring the sensation of being filled. He'd not had another man inside him in decades, and never a human.

The heat was incredible. He knew Xander was waiting for a signal to begin moving, but he drew the moment out, memorizing the exquisite feeling of heat and fullness. "Xanderrr," he purred, "I can feel your heartbeat inside me." And he could - he could feel the pulse of blood through the human's cock, buried deep in his body. It was almost like feeling his own heart beating, except that he couldn't remember what that simple function had felt like.

Finally, unable to wait any longer, Spike pushed back. Xander grabbed his slim hips firmly, holding himself in place. He levered back and pulled almost all the way out. He hesitated with only the crown of his erection inside Spike's body, waiting. The vampire stayed still as long as he could, then threw his head back and begged, "Please, Xan - fuck me, please. Need you, want you. Now, please!" Xander slammed himself into Spike and began pistoning in and out roughly. He heard someone chanting, "yes, yes," and it took him a moment to realize that it was his own voice, marking the cadence to which he was fucking his lover, his vampire. Knowing he wouldn't last long, he leaned over Spike's back and reached for the vampire's erection, wanting them to come together.

His hand was brushed away, and Spike growled, "I'll do it - you - focus - keep fucking - just - like - that!" The last word turned into a loud groan as

Xander's change of angle sent the head of his cock smashing into Spike's prostate. He did as he was told and kept fucking. Xander wanted to slow down, wanted to make it last, wanted ...everything all at once. But the unerring rhythm, the sheer tightness of Spike's body, the exhilaration of doing this forbidden, kinky, slightly unbelievable thing all spiraled together to blindside him with the most powerful orgasm of his life. He slammed into Spike one last time and held there as he shot pulse after pulse into the vampire's body. Spike followed him into oblivion within seconds, the flutters and tremors of the vampire's orgasm drawing his own out impossibly.

Finally it was over, and Xander fell onto his side, carrying Spike with him and spooning the cool body against his front. His cock was still inside, and he was unwilling to give up the bond between them. Spike also seemed disinclined to separate; lying in a happy stupor, feeling Xander's breath heaving in and out over his shoulder and his warm lips kissing his neck and shoulder. Finally, he spoke; "How's that repertoire now, pet?" Xander thought for a moment, and then laid a small, soft kiss just below Spike's ear. "Expanded," he replied.

Part Three

"Face the wall, Xander." Spike's voice was low and steely. Xander complied instantly, spreading his legs and placing his hands on the wall. They had rolled out of bed and cleaned up, then headed to the kitchen for a snack. Xander wolfed down two Pop Tarts, and Spike was halfway through a mug of blood when desire had sparked between them again. Neither could pinpoint a cause, but one moment they were sitting in companionable silence, and the next they were tangled together in one chair, kissing wildly. The truth was - they didn't really care.

Xander shuddered as Spike trailed kisses and bites down his back, while his hands curved around the front of the human's body to tease his nipples and stroke him into full hardness. Suddenly, there were warm, wet fingers at his entrance. Xander tried very hard to not think about the fact that he was being lubricated and stretched with microwaved pig's blood. That thought flew out of his head as Spike began to carefully prepare him, gently working his fingers in and out of the human's hot, tight passage. Xander spread his legs further and bent slightly at the waist so he could thrust back onto the fingers inside him. Spike continued licking, sucking and biting at his neck and shoulders as

he worked his fingers into Xander, stopping periodically to dip his hand into the bloody mug.

Finally, Spike pulled his fingers out and replaced them with the head of his cock. "It's gonna hurt a little at first, Xan - just try to relax. I promise I'll make it good for you," he assured the human. Xander turned to look over his shoulder and caught the vampire's sparkling blue eyes. "I know, Spike. I trust you," he said, and his steady stare and earnest voice nearly made Spike lose control on the spot. Xander turned back to the wall and rested his forehead on it, waiting. Spike looked down at his blood-covered erection and gently pressed forward, breaching the relaxed ring of muscle, and then meeting resistance.

They both hissed, but Spike didn't let up on the gentle pressure. Xander felt something inside him give, and then felt himself stretched impossibly wide as his lover entered him. He smothered a shout against the wall and Spike stopped moving. "You OK, love?" the vampire asked. "It ...hurts, but it's...good, too," Xander panted. "Bear down against me, Xan," Spike instructed. Xander complied, and groaned as his action caused the vampire's cock to slide deeper into his body. The feeling was incredible; pleasure and pain mingled until Xander couldn't tell where either sensation began or ended. One last thrust, and Spike's chest was sealed against

his back, his crisp pubic hair brushing Xander's ass.

Spike held himself perfectly still. He didn't want to move, didn't want to stop feeling the incredible heat that surrounded his throbbing cock. Xander's body was tighter and hotter than anything he'd ever experienced; he wanted to speak, to say something to tell the human how he felt, but no words could get past the breathy moans that were torn from his throat. It was all he could do to let his hands slide down the taut contours of Xander's arms to where his hands were splayed on the wall, linking their fingers and squeezing. Xander curled his shaking fingers over Spike's and held on.

The pain eased, and Xander was ready for Spike to move within him. He remembered their earlier coupling, and clenched his internal muscles experimentally. Spike groaned his name. Xander clenched harder and was rewarded when the vampire untangled their hands, grabbed his hips and began thrusting in and out of his willing body. Xander was sure that he was going to fall, but just before his knees buckled he felt a hard arm around his waist. He sagged and allowed the vampire to hold him up. He moaned and howled into the wall as his brain tried to keep up with the rush of sensation as he was emptied and filled over and over.

Spike slammed himself into Xander with abandon, barely able to control himself enough to avoid hurting his lover. He was in full game face, snarling and growling as he lost himself in Xander's incredible heat. Finally, he came with a roar, pressing Xander into the wall as he flooded the human's insides with his cool release. Spike caught his breath for a second, and then spun Xander easily. He pinned the human to the wall, dropped to his knees and engulfed his still-hard cock in a single, supple motion.

Xander leaned bonelessly against the wall and brought shaky hands up to twine into Spike's blond curls. He looked down and realized that his cock was sliding rapidly in and out of a mouth wreathed in fangs, and that Spike's feral, golden eyes were boring into his. When Xander's fingers began tracing his brow ridges, Spike's eyes rolled back in his head and he increased the suction on Xander's cock, taking it all the way into his throat. Xander's brain rapidly flashed through the sensations of the suction on his cock, the impossibly soft skin over the hard ridges on Spike's face, the wild pounding of his heart, the slick feel of Spike's come running down the backs of his thighs and his building orgasm until his entire awareness centered on the tightening of his balls.

With a high-pitched noise, he emptied himself into Spike's mouth and slumped against the wall.

He barely moved when Spike stood and gathered the limp human to him, carrying them both back to the bedroom and rolling them onto the bed. The vampire pulled the blankets around them, and Xander drifted off to sleep surrounded by cool hard arms, with gentle kisses dusting his face.

~*~*~*~*~

Xander raced around the apartment, frantically cleaning and straightening. Buffy had ambushed him at work with a fully-formed plan for "Scooby Movie Night" at his house at 8:00 pm. He'd wanted desperately to protest, in light of the fact that he'd left a naked, sated vampire curled up in his bed after a rousing wake-up blow job; but she was so excited that he didn't have the heart. Luckily, the day had gone well and he was able to leave the site at 4:00. As predicted, Spike was less than happy that he had to get up before dark. He'd come awake growling and grumbling, but had relented when Xander fought dirty and pouted at him.

Xander wondered what the hell he'd been thinking when he'd shoved the vampire out the door minutes after sunset armed with his wallet and car keys to buy snacks and rent movies from the approved list Buffy had thoughtfully provided. He was well into a panic attack when

he heard keys in the door. If Spike was surprised to be greeted with a forceful hug and kiss, he made no mention of it, merely smiling and heading to the kitchen with his burden of bags. Xander followed, immediately poking around to see what Spike had brought. Once the junk food was all put away and the movies shuffled to the side, Spike reached for a bag he'd surreptitiously hidden in the seat of one of the chairs.

"Drop your pants and bend over the chair, love," he instructed in what Xander had come to think of as his "Master" voice. The human hesitated for a bare second, but it was long enough for one of the vampire's hands to shoot out and smack him hard on the ass. Xander spun and did as he was told, pulling down his pants and boxers and bending over the kitchen chair. He groaned as a slick finger breached his asshole and he was roughly stretched for a moment. Spike pulled out and Xander could hear him doing - something - and then he felt something cold and slick at his entrance. With a twisting motion, Spike settled a small silicone butt plug into Xander's hole, and then pulled up the human's pants and boxers. Turning, he left the room.

Xander stayed over the chair for a moment, gasping at the feel of the plug stretching him open. It wasn't very big, much smaller than Spike's cock, but it was long enough to brush against his prostate, sending tingles throughout

his body. He wondered if Spike meant for him to wear it the entire evening, and if he would ever be able to even squeak out one word if he did. Finally, he straightened and zipped up, still adjusting to the sensations inside.

Spike returned to the kitchen, wearing his black jeans and one of Xander's white undershirts and an evil grin. "Go put on the gear on the bed," he said. Xander walked into the bedroom in a daze, terrified of what he might find. He breathed a sigh of relief when he recognized a pair of his loose jean shorts and a plain, emerald green tee shirt. There was no underwear in the pile of clothes, so he stripped off and put on the shorts and tee. The shirt was tighter than he usually wore and emphasized the contours of his chest and abdomen. The shorts fit closely at the waist but were baggier in the hips and legs. He tucked the shirt in and found a belt. Remaining barefoot, he returned to the living room just as the doorbell rang.

He trotted carefully over to the door and admitted Buffy, Willow, Dawn and Giles. The Watcher was subdued, but the girls chattered happily, explaining that Faith and Principal Wood were staying with the potentials. They had brought more snack food and ice cream, and explained that pizza was on the way. Willow carried their offerings into the kitchen and came back with a heavily laden Spike following her.

Xander was surprised and happy that no one questioned the vampire's presence. The girls started setting out the snacks and drinks, while the three men hung back a little. Xander caught Giles and Spike exchanging a series of looks that he couldn't read.

Giles cleared his throat and asked if he could speak to Spike privately. They stepped into the kitchen and returned shortly, minus the palpable tension that had been between them. Xander raised an eyebrow at Spike, who gave him a small smile in return. The doorbell rang again, and Giles went to retrieve the pizza. "What was that all about?" Xander whispered to Spike.

"Watcher apologized," Spike said, with a slightly disbelieving shake of his head. They shared another small smile, and then went to join the others.

The girls chattered happily over pizza, with the men laughingly fitting in a rare word edge-wise. After dinner, Xander and Spike cleared the trash while Giles got beverages for everyone and the girls set about making comfortable movie-watching nests on the floor with pillows and blankets. Giles settled in the chair with a throw blanket over his lap and three bottles of English stout lined up on the table at his side. Xander opened the back door and set the trash bag into the can on the stoop. As he turned to go back

inside, Spike slipped out the door and kissed him. Xander pulled the cool, hard body close and kissed Spike back with abandon.

Spike broke the kiss and turned Xander so that the human's chest was pressed against the door, pinning his hands to the frame with his own. He raised one knee between Xander's legs, pressing the flat of his thigh against the silicone button of the plug that protruded slightly from the human's body. He moved his leg back and forth; drawing gasps and shudders from Xander as his prostate was stimulated. Spike leaned in, hooking his chin over the human's shoulder. "When we go inside, go to the bathroom and remove the plug, then come sit next to me on the couch," he whispered.

Xander gasped, "Yes, Spike," and sagged against the door as the vampire stepped back.

Spike pulled Xander to his feet and hugged him close, licking a long, wet line from his collarbone to his ear and grinning when the human groaned brokenly and tightened his arms convulsively around his body. They separated reluctantly and returned to the apartment. Xander went directly to the bathroom and dropped his shorts. Leaning over, he grasped the base of the plug and pulled it out, stifling a moan as he did so. He pulled his shorts back on and adjusted his hard-on. He left his shirt untucked to try and hide the bulge. After

stowing the plug in the drawer of the bed table he returned to the living room, relieved to find that the lights had been turned off and the movie was just starting.

"Yeah, that was fun, Slayer. Remind me that you never get to pick the movie again. I felt like a right git renting 'Pretty Woman' and 'Shakespeare In Love'," Spike grouched. Buffy, Willow and Dawn laughed from where they were curled together on the floor; the older girls were sharing a bottle of wine while Dawn settled for a soda. Xander slipped onto the couch next to Spike, who handed him a beer. For the first half of the movie the men ridiculed Richard Gere and ate snacks while the women shushed them and stole their snacks. Eventually, the story drew all of them in. Spike reached over and pushed Xander's shoulder and the human allowed himself to be arranged with his head at the end of the couch lying on his side.

Spike draped the blanket from the back of the sofa over Xander and his own lap. A moment later Xander jumped as he felt a cool hand steal up his leg and into his shorts. He bit the inside of his cheek to stop himself from gasping when Spike's fingers caressed his balls. Xander drew one knee up to give the vampire better access. He had to fake a cough to smother a groan when Spike slid one long finger into his lubricated and stretched hole. Xander fought to keep his eyes

open and his attention on the movie as a second finger joined the first and twisted to scrape across his sensitive prostate. He turned his head to look at Spike, who was calmly watching the movie and drinking a beer as if he weren't finger-fucking Xander into oblivion under the shield of the blanket.

By the time Richard Gere was climbing the fire escape to declare his undying love to Julia Roberts, Xander was in a painful state of arousal and had three cool vampire fingers wedged tightly in his ass. Spike pulled out and casually went to the kitchen for more beer while the girls sleepily discussed the merits of going home versus watching the other movie. Sleepiness won out and they decided to leave. Xander managed to get his hard-on to recede enough to hug the girls goodbye, and Giles began herding them to the door. Buffy stopped to ask Spike if he was going with them. Xander looked over to where the vampire lounged coolly in the doorway between the kitchen and the living room.

"Not just yet, Slayer," the vampire drawled. "I feel like a spot of patrol before I turn in for the day. I'll be in before the sun's up, not to worry." Xander walked them to the door. As soon as it was shut behind them, he found himself being flung back onto the sofa. Spike leaped on top of him and wrestled Xander's and his own clothes off. He flipped them over so that Xander was

straddling his lap and steadied his erection with one hand. Xander swiftly impaled himself on Spike's cock and brought their mouths together in a frantic kiss. Their coupling had no sweetness or softness in it - both the kiss and the fucking were intense and rough. Spike wrapped his hand around Xander's erection and worked it with hard strokes. Xander's release spilled over the vampire's hand just as Spike exploded inside him.

They stayed where they were, forehead to forehead, eyes locked, panting for a long time. Xander raised one hand to brush Spike's hair back. "You're pretty incredible, you know?" he said.

Spike smiled into his eyes. "You inspire me, pet. Shower? Bed?" Xander nodded and stood, groaning as Spike's softened cock slipped out of him. They supported each other as they stumbled tiredly toward the bathroom.

In the hours before dawn, Spike held Xander against his chest and watched the mortal sleep, wondering what was to be. He lost himself in the infinitely interesting minutiae of cataloguing the sensations of his fingers carding through thick sable hair and across warm skin; the gentle brush of breath across his chest; the deep contentment of holding this boy, this man in his arms. Whatever the sunrise brought, he was sure

that he'd not forget these stolen hours in the sheltered lee of the looming apocalypse. As dawn approached, he reluctantly disentangled himself and dressed silently. Sitting on the side of the bed, he shook Xander gently awake. "Have to go, love - it's almost light," he whispered.

A warm hand came up to cup his cheek, and Spike leaned into the contact. "M'kay," Xander murmured, "See you tonight?"

Spike nodded and kissed Xander's palm. "Tonight," he agreed.

The End

Reckless and Dangerous

Part One

"We've got a new player in town," Buffy said, standing in front of the group with her arms crossed over her chest. "Dresses like a preacher. Calls himself Caleb. Looks like he's working for the First. He's taunting us, calling us out. Says he's got something of mine. Could be another girl, could be something else. Don't know, don't care. I'm tired of talking. I'm tired of training.

He's got something of mine? Fine. I'm getting it back, and you guys are coming with me."

That's how it had started. Xander had arrived at the Summers' house shortly after dark, having worked late and then rushed home for a quick shower. His hair was still damp on his neck as he stood listening to Buffy exhort the troops. He and Spike could only exchange small smiles from across the room as Buffy and Faith swept out to do some recon, leaving at least two dozen scared young girls looking to them for guidance.

Sighing, Xander gestured for the other non-potentials to join him in sorting weapons and passing them out. He also corralled Rona and Kennedy, who were the strongest and toughest of the potentials, to help.

"Spike," he said casually, "let's get that other chest from the basement, 'K?" The vampire nodded, and they walked down the stairs, away from the chattering of the girls and the quiet voices of Giles, Willow and Andrew. When he reached the bottom of the stairs, Xander turned. Spike was still standing on the last stair, making him momentarily taller than his lover. Xander buried his head in the vampire's hard chest and wrapped his arms around his waist. Spike wrapped his own arms around Xander's warm shoulders and held him close for a long moment. They both raised their heads to look into one another's eyes.

"Hi," Xander said.

"Hi, yourself, love," Spike replied, kissing him lightly on the lips. "You ready for this?"

"Um, no?" Xander answered with a grin. He sighed. "I guess I'm as ready as we ever are for this sort of thing, Spike. I just worry - it seems like Buffy's going off half-cocked. This thing smells like a trap." They separated reluctantly and moved to the far side of the basement to drag the large trunk toward the stairs.

"Yeah, well," Spike said, "I understand her frustration - waiting around is its own kind of hell; she's used to taking action." They hefted the trunk between them and started up the stairs.

"What was it you and Giles said when we headed out to fight Glory?" Xander asked.

As they mounted the stairs, Spike intoned, "'We few, we happy few - we band of buggered'."

Back in the living room, Xander brandished a weapon that looked for all the world like a spiked baseball bat.

"Now remember," he admonished the gathered girls, "we're looking for killing blows only, people. So, chest and throat if it's a vampire. Stomach, chest and face if it's a Bringer." He handed the bat to Rona, who looked at it as if it was a large,

slimy snake and asked, "What if it's something else?" Xander nodded at her. "Could happen. Something other-worldly. And here's a handy rule: don't go for the flashy tentacles just because they're waving 'em about trying to get your attention. Go for the center - brains, heart, eyes. Everything's got eyes."

"Except the Bringers," Dawn said.

"Except the Bringers," Xander agreed.

Molly, one of the potential slayers, had a nervous look on her face. "I don't want there to be tentacles. I'm not good with squishy," she said.

Hefting an enormous sword, Kennedy glowered. "I don't care if it's Godzilla. I want to get in this thing."

Andrew piped up, "Godzilla's mostly Tokyo-based, so he's probably a no-show."

Rona threw Andrew a withering look. "You people are even crazier than her," she said, with a toss of her hair.

"Than who?" Xander asked.

"Buffy, man," she replied. "I mean, taking us right into the bad guy's lair."

Xander gave her a speculative look. "Well, that's where, generally speaking, you'd go to find the

bad guy." His tone held a warning. "And I don't think you came here to fight plaque."

She snorted. "No, I came here for protection."

Xander stepped toward her, and Spike found himself edging closer to the confrontation. "Well, you signed on to fight with -" Xander started.

Suddenly all the tension went out of Rona's body. In a low, miserable voice she said, "Look, I know, but...this plan is trouble. OK, Buffy doesn't care how many of us she puts in danger -"

Xander placed a hand on Rona's shoulder. "Let me tell you something about Buffy. In fact, you should all listen to this." He gestured to the entire group, who were already riveted to the discussion anyway.

"Uh, we kinda were," Kennedy admitted in a slightly chagrined voice. Xander grinned at her, and then looked around the group, making eye contact with each girl.

"I've been through more battles with Buffy than you all can ever imagine. She's stopped everything that's ever come up against her." He cleared his throat in a vain attempt to make his voice less husky with emotion. "She's laid down her life - literally - to protect the people around her. This girl has died two times, and she's still standing. You're scared? That's smart. You got questions? You should. But you doubt her

motives, you think Buffy's all about the kill, then you take the little bus to battle." Xander made a point to focus his gaze on Rona and then Kennedy as he continued, "I've seen her heart, and this time - not literally. And I'm telling you, right now, she cares more about your lives than you will ever know. You gotta trust her. She's earned it."

They all turned as Faith's voice drifted in from the foyer, where she and Buffy were standing just inside the open front door. "Damn, B - I never knew you were that cool."

Buffy stared at Xander with tears in her eyes. They shared a smile, and then she turned to Faith. "Well, you always were a little slow."

With a laugh, the brunette slayer replied, "I get that now."

Buffy looked around at the armed group arrayed across her childhood living room. "All right," she said, "let's saddle up."

As they all swept from the room, Spike stopped Xander with a hand on his shoulder, holding him in place until they were alone in the silent house.

"Just in case I don't see you til after, pet ..."
Their lips came together in a sweet kiss that threatened to turn passionate. Spike pulled away and brushed his fingers along Xander's jaw.

"Don't get dead, Xan," he said. Xander turned his head to kiss the vampire's cool fingers.

"OK," he agreed. "Don't get deader." They shared a grim smile and joined the others.

~*~*~*~*~

Son of a bitch, Xander thought as he heard the signal - lots and lots of yelling - from inside the winery. He was not ready for the sight that greeted him when he and his troops entered the room. Both Buffy and Spike were down, Buffy looked unconscious; Spike was struggling upright in a sea of spilled wine. Kennedy was extracting herself from a jumble of wine barrels, and as Xander watched incredulously, the guy with a bad bowl cut dressed as a preacher easily snapped Rona's forearm and was holding her for a Bringer who was preparing to stab her. Xander fired off a bolt from his crossbow, which pierced the Bringer's forearm. It turned away from Rona to charge him.

Xander managed to hit the oncoming Bringer with two more crossbow bolts before it crossed Faith's path and she lopped its head off with her sword. Xander smiled his thanks to her and ran to Buffy's side, calling her name. She looked up groggily, and then reached for his hand. He steadied her as she regained her feet. They both

turned toward the fight just in time to see Caleb snap the neck of a dark-haired potential and reach for Molly.

"Xander," Buffy said weakly, "get them out of here. We have to retreat. Do it." She cursed as Caleb stabbed Molly and tossed her body casually aside and rushed him. This time the fight was a little more even, and Buffy managed to push Caleb back enough for Xander and Spike to organize a hasty retreat.

Grabbing Buffy's arm, Spike told her, "We're all leaving." He dragged her backward as Xander helped Kennedy up and herded the others out. Spike and Xander exchanged a grim look as the vampire carried Rona's limp form up the stairs, handing her off to the more ambulatory potentials gathered there.

Later, he would remember every excruciating second, every word. In the moment, however, it all seemed a blur. He saw the preacher grab Xander from behind and spin him around. He saw the bastard's lips move as he drew back one hand and shoved his thumb deep into Xander's eye socket. Spike saw the dark blood cascading down his lover's face and heard his heartbreaking scream of anguish. Moving with supernatural speed, the vampire vaulted the rail and charged Caleb, knocking him away from Xander. The human fell to the floor with his hand

covering his injury, whimpering softly. Spike stood over Caleb, ready to kill the man or die trying.

Buffy rushed to Xander's side and helped him to his feet. Spike spared the false preacher one look of murderous rage, then grabbed Xander from the other side and hustled him up the stairs and away from the scene of their defeat. As soon as they got outside, Buffy looked at Spike over Xander's bowed head.

"You got him?" she asked. He nodded, and she went to get the car. The vampire lowered his lover to a sitting position on the ground and tilted his head up. Xander kept his hand over his face, and his remaining eye searched Spike's face wildly.

"Let me see, love," Spike crooned, gently pulling Xander's hand from his face. The vampire raised one shaking hand and brushed the still-flowing blood from the rapidly swelling area, hoping against hope that he would see a shining brown eye under all the gore. It was not to be. Spike slumped as he realized exactly how much damage had been done. He felt so helpless. He straightened and brought his thumb to his mouth. He allowed his fangs to elongate and bit deeply into the base, and then pressed the bleeding digit to Xander's mouth. The human began to struggle.

Spike peered into his face and said quietly, "Drink it, Xan. It won't save your eye, but it'll help you heal faster. You want to stay in the fight, don't you?" Xander nodded slowly. "I promise, it won't hurt or change you." Xander nodded again and closed his lips on the wound, drawing hard and swallowing.

Giles' car screeched to a stop, and Spike helped Xander into it, while others helped the most seriously injured get settled for the trip to the hospital. The vampire squeezed his lover's hand once, then stepped back and let him go. It was one of the hardest things he'd ever done. The car took off, and Spike turned back to the shell-shocked but less seriously injured fighters.

"Come on," he said, "let's get the fuck out of here."

~*~*~*~*~

Xander looked at the clock on the VCR that was attached to the TV that hung over the foot of the bed. Hanging there on its bracket, it looked like an electronic vulture - squatting, waiting for him to die. He thought maybe they'd given him too many drugs. The red numbers on the clock's digital readout were blurred. It was either eighty-five minutes past one or four-thirty. He couldn't tell and he couldn't really have given a fuck. His

eye - or lack thereof - didn't hurt. As a matter of fact, that entire half of his head was numb. They'd given him numerous shots in his face, none of which had hurt after the first one.

The medical professionals had poked and prodded him. They had flushed, cleaned and bandaged the bloody cavity where his left eye had been. They had put little bags of stuff on poles and run lines into his arm. They'd taken his clothes and given him a thin cotton gown, which he'd stripped off and hurled into the corner as soon as Willow had left two or twenty hours ago. Finally, they had left him the fuck alone, and he'd only had to scream it at them twice.

He had not cried. He'd kept it together when he'd heard those final words from Spike as he'd drunk the vampire's blood while sitting on his ass on the dew-covered grass of the winery. "It won't save your eye..." He'd stared stoically straight ahead as the doctors and nurses had calmly discussed the complete destruction of his left eye and remarked that he seemed to have very little surrounding damage, and that he seemed to have minimal trauma to the area. He had closed his remaining eye for a second at that - he no longer had two eyes; he had an eye and an "area". He wondered if he'd ever feel anything but numb ever again, but he hoped not.

He'd barely been able to speak to Willow - her agony and guilt were living things, sitting on his bed and clutching his hand as surely as she was. He'd spared her a couple of sad almost-smiles and pretended to be drifting in and out of consciousness until she'd finally gone away, leaving him with a small kiss on his numb forehead. Xander leaned his head back against the pillow and stared at the door, willing Spike to be there. He closed his eyes for a moment, and when he opened them again, the lean, blond vampire was there, looking wildly uncomfortable.

Xander blinked rapidly, then lifted one hand to gesture Spike into the room. Spike entered, closed the door and walked to the side of the bed, peering intently into the human's battered face. Xander met his eyes.

"You're the first one other than doctors who's looked at me straight on since I got here," he observed.

"I'm not much for shyin' away, Xan," Spike said in a low voice. Xander nodded once.

"K. Sit," he gestured at the open patch of bed next to his hip. Spike sat gingerly and raised one hand to his lover's face. He eased the bandages away from the wound and looked at it carefully, unflinchingly. He gently put the bandages back into place.

"You're healing pretty good. You should take a little more of my blood, though, if you want to get out of here by tomorrow night," Spike said. Xander nodded.

"I want out." Dispassionately, Spike tore into his own thumb again with his fangs and held it out to the human. Xander wrapped both hands around Spike's proffered one and licked across the wound before closing his lips around it and sucking hard. He drank two full mouthfuls of the vampire's blood, and then held his lips against the wound as it closed and healed. He then kissed the spot and released Spike's hand.

"Thank you," he said formally, allowing his own hands to drop back by his side.

Spike cleared his throat. "Watcher wants me to take Andrew up to the mission in Gilroy - looks like the preacher-man's been there. I'll be back tomorrow night. You going back to your place after you get out of here?" His tone was studiously casual.

Xander nodded, "Yeah." He looked up at Spike and tilted his head. "Will you come there when you get back?"

Spike returned the human's stare for a long moment. "If you want me there, I'm there," he replied. Xander nodded again, and then sank back onto the pillows tiredly, closing his eye and

rubbing his hands over his face. Spike placed one long hand onto his lover's shoulder and squeezed gently, and then he turned and walked out of the hospital room.

Part Two

The "Welcome Home" banner looked hastily made, and the girls were a little over-dressed, but Xander appreciated the effort as much as he could through the pervasive numbness. He was mostly happy to be out of the hospital. "Oh, God," he whispered, surprised.

"We didn't have time to do more. You have to pretend there's a big party here," Kennedy said. Dawn greeted him with a long hug.

Stretching for a bit of levity he assured Kennedy, "That's fine. Parties in this house, I usually end up having to... rebuild something."

Buffy was standing in the doorway between the living room and dining room, looking harried.

"Welcome home, Xander." She smiled. "I wanted you to be here for this. I think you'll be interested in what I found out."

Willow turned to her and asked, "W-what did you find out?"

Addressing the group, Buffy said, " I-it's about the cellar. Look, I know that night wasn't fun for any of us... but I figured out some things about that place, and I realize now what we have to do. We're going back in."

Xander zoned in and out of the following conversation, in which pretty much everyone in the room tried to convince Buffy she was acting rashly, while Buffy made an ass out of herself by insisting that she was in charge. Xander spent a large part of the conversation trying to remember the appropriate political reference for the situation. By the time he'd realized that the name he was trying to think of was Alexander Haig, Anya was speaking to Buffy, who had just spouted off that the troops needed a strong leader.

"And it's automatically you," the ex-demon said in an even tone. "You really do think you're better than we are."

"No, I - " Buffy protested, but Anya cut her off. "But we don't know. We don't know if you're actually better. I mean, you came into the world with certain advantages, sure. I mean, that's the legacy." She waved off Buffy's attempt to interrupt. "But you didn't earn it. You didn't work for it. You've never had anybody come up to you

and say you deserve these things more than anyone else. They were just handed to you. So that doesn't make you better than us. It makes you luckier than us."

"I've gotten us this far," Buffy said.

At her smug tone, Xander spoke up. "But not without a price," he said, thoroughly sick of the whole discussion. "I'm trying to see your point here, Buff... but I guess it must be a little bit to my left... 'cause I just don't." Her mouth fell open, and suddenly he just couldn't be there anymore. He pushed himself to his feet and walked out the front door. He could hear voices rising inside as he turned down the walkway and headed toward his apartment, and he couldn't muster up the energy to give a shit.

~*~*~*~*~

Spike walked through the mostly deserted streets of Sunnydale alone, smoking a cigarette. He had taken Andrew back to the Summers' house and walked into what was, by his definition, a shit storm. He wasn't particularly proud of himself for having gotten into a fight with Faith, but he also thought that a mistake of epic proportions had been made in sending Buffy away. After the debacle with Faith and the others, he had tracked Buffy to an abandoned

house. He had talked to her as honestly as he knew how, and hoped that his words had made some sort of impact. She had asked him to stay, to hold her, and he had. But, as soon as she fell asleep, he had left her with a hastily penned note, his promise to Xander foremost in his mind.

He thought about the surge of relief he had felt when Willow had told him that Xander had not been a part of the mutiny. Making a choice between his former and current lover would have been hellish - he was glad it was a non-issue. Spike hoped that his words to Buffy had penetrated as he told her in no uncertain terms that he didn't love her, didn't want her, but still believed in her as a person and a leader. The vampire paused outside Xander's building and looked up at the young man's window, the only one that was lit. He wondered what awaited him upstairs.

He walked in and took the stairs two at a time, then knocked at the door. Xander opened the door and gestured Spike inside. The human looked better than he had at the hospital - his face was freshly shaved, and an eye patch that covered most of his bruises had replaced the bandages. His hair was damp, and he was wearing a white terry cloth bathrobe. As soon as Spike shut the door, Xander turned and dropped the robe. He was naked underneath. The two

men locked eyes for a moment, and then Xander fell gracefully to his knees and clasped his hands in the small of his back, casting his eyes to the floor. *Holy shit*, Spike thought, as his cock became instantly erect.

Spike quickly took and released two unnecessary deep breaths, then crossed the floor to walk all the way around Xander, looking at him closely. He choked off a small sound that came to his lips unbidden when he realized the human was wearing the plug they'd used on the movie night. Spike stopped directly behind the kneeling man.

"How long has the plug been in place, pet?" he asked, adding, "Answer me."

Xander's voice was low when he responded, "Couple of hours." The vampire leaned down and pulled it out with a twisting motion.

"Don't want you to get sore," he explained, tossing it toward the sofa. "Bedroom, now, love. On your knees by the bed," he said simply. Xander rose to his feet and walked into the bedroom, head down. He stopped and sank to his knees next to the bed, waiting.

Spike unlaced his boots and took them off. He also took off his duster, socks and shirt, but left his jeans on. On reflection, he was not surprised by Xander's behavior. The injured man needed reassurance; this was his way of getting it. The

vampire walked into the bedroom. Arrayed on the top of the dresser was an assortment of supplies from the same shop where he'd purchased the plug. Spike didn't know when Xander had gone shopping, but he was quite surprised by the human's selections. He glanced over at the bed and noticed that it now had a set of four leather restraints securely attached to the four posts; each ending in a padded cuff. Looking back at the dresser, he took a quick inventory; the black leather cock ring; a set of adjustable nipple clamps with a chain running between them; a large butt plug; a short-handled whip, a supple black leather strap with a wooden handle; a riding crop; a wooden paddle and a leather flogger with soft tresses.

Crossing the room, Spike kneeled down in front of Xander.

"Look at me," he commanded. Xander complied, and the vampire was shocked at his blank expression. "Explain. What's this all about?" Spike asked, laying his hands on the human's knees.

Xander took in a deep breath and exhaled. "I...I need you to help me." His voice was low and had very little inflection. "I can't feel anything anymore."

Spike smiled kindly. "Are you sure it's not the painkillers, Xan?" he asked.

"No. As soon as they took out the IV I stopped taking them. I palmed the pills. I haven't had any drugs other than antibiotics in over eighteen hours." His voice started to waver. "I can't feel anything, Spike. I need you to make me feel."

Spike sighed and leaned forward to cup Xander's chin in his hand. He leaned in and kissed the mortal's forehead, then his lips. "Eyes down, love, and wait for me to get ready." Spike saw the quick flash of gratitude on Xander's face before he complied and smiled tightly.

Spike walked into the bathroom and retrieved two fluffy white towels. He folded one and laid it across the pillows on the bed, then stripped the top sheet and blankets off. He placed the other towel in the center of the bed. He walked back to the dresser and picked up the nipple clamps and chain. He was glad to see that they were adjustable. He returned to Xander and knelt down. He licked his fingers, and then ran them lightly around the human's left nipple, which immediately hardened under his ministrations. He pinched it sharply, and then fastened the clamp just tight enough to make Xander gasp. He repeated the action on the other nipple. Then fastened the chain between the two clamps, running it behind Xander's neck instead of across his chest.

Standing, he said, "On the bed, Xander - face down." Xander complied, and Spike quickly secured his wrists and ankles in the restraints so that the human was spread-eagled on the bed with one towel under his face and the other beneath his groin. Spike gently reached around and removed Xander's eye patch.

"Comfortable?" he asked. Xander nodded.

Spike walked back to the dresser, and selected the black strap. The leather was supple and soft, and it had been carefully made to insure that no sharp edges remained to cut delicate skin. He ran the length of leather through his hands for a moment as he returned to the bed. He leaned down so his lips were near Xander's ear.

"OK, love. You have my permission to speak or make any noise you want to. The building's practically deserted - most humans have left Sunnydale. For this particular occasion, the safe word is 'enough'. Are we clear?" Xander nodded.

Spike placed the strap directly between the human's shoulder blades and drew it gently down his back, letting it trail down the crease between Xander's buttocks and allowing the edge to tickle the taut globes of his balls, barely visible between spread legs. Spike smiled as the restrained man shuddered visibly. He flicked the strap twice more, and then eased it away. He braced one knee on the bed, drew his arm back

and brought the strap down across Xander's buttocks with a resounding crack. The human's entire body stiffened, then relaxed against the mattress; he didn't make a sound.

Spike drew back again and lashed the strap against Xander's body precisely one inch higher than the reddening stripe he'd made previously. He continued the motion mechanically, using a moderate amount of force - not wanting to injure the man spread out before him. He paced his blows evenly, lashing Xander from just below his shoulder blades to the backs of his knees. Spike worked silently until, after several minutes, he heard the human break, sobbing openly into the towel under his face. Spike sat down on the bed and ran his fingers through the tousled sable waves that spread out on the pillow, comforting his lover as he let out the pain and frustration of the past two days. When the sobs began tapering off, Spike went to the kitchen and returned with a sports bottle of water, offering the straw to Xander, who sipped gratefully. The vampire picked up a corner of the towel and wiped his lover's face.

"Xan?" Spike asked, "Are we done here?" Xander shook his head resolutely and turned his face into the towel. The vampire nodded and stood again, taking up the strap from the bedside table. He resumed his previous position and went back to work, this time overlapping and

crisscrossing his strokes. At the first crack of leather on his reddened skin, Xander let out a yelp, and then continued to vocalize, moaning, gasping and crying out as the leather hit him. Spike could smell his arousal, and also the tangy scent of his release when the vampire angled the strap so that its edge snapped against the human's balls with just enough force to sting.

Without giving Xander a chance to recover from his orgasm, Spike continued his punishment, watching avidly as the human flexed and relaxed his entire body against his bonds on each stroke. He began speaking in a low voice, his words in counterpoint to the sharp slaps of leather on flesh.

"Use the pain, Xander, just feel it," he said. "Pain is like fire - it's a living thing. It moves and breathes and acts and reacts. Let it ripple across your body, let it run over you and through you. Let it - let me - bring you back." Spike worked his way down the human's back one final time, and then flung the strap across the room. He stripped off his jeans and crawled onto the bed, straddling Xander's body.

Spike took all of his weight on his hands and knees, leaning down until his lips were at Xander's ear.

"Xander," he hissed. He shifted so one hand was free, and ran it down to the first line of welts on

the human's back. His fingers closed on the edge of one mark, eliciting a loud groan from the prone human. He repeated the action until Xander was writhing under him, his moans and yelps growing in volume. Finally, the human threw his head back and begged.

"Enough, Spike, please - fuck me - now - hard! Please." Moving with blinding speed, Spike released all four restraints and hauled Xander up onto his knees. The vampire reached over to the bedside table and snared a tube of lubricant. He hastily spread a handful over his erection. His fingers bit into the tender flesh of the human's hips as he lined up his cock and slid home with one hard thrust.

Xander made unearthly noises each time the head of the vampire's cock brushed his prostate; howling Spike's name and sobbing as he was roughly fucked. Spike's hips churned as he buried himself over and over in Xander's hot, soft channel. He leaned over the human, knowing that the contact of his cool chest would soothe the abused skin of Xander's back. Spike felt his own orgasm building and wanted Xander to come with him. His eye was caught by the glint of the chain at Xander's neck. He looped it around his finger and gave it a quick tug, wrenching both of the human's nipples sharply. Xander climaxed immediately, and the muscles in his ass clamped down on Spike's cock, pushing him over the

edge. Before their mutual spasms could end, the vampire once again tore into the base of his thumb with his fangs and fed Xander his blood.

As soon as Xander released Spike's thumb from his mouth, the vampire rolled off his lover. He turned the human onto his side and released the nipple clamps. He swept the towels off the bed and carried them to the bathroom, returning with a warm, wet washcloth. He cleaned Xander carefully, and then covered him with the sheet and blanket. Spike slipped into bed in front of Xander, and smiled when the human curled around him and pulled him back against his warm chest.

A warm kiss brushed the vampire's cool ear and Xander whispered, "Thank you, Spike."

They remained curled up together for a long time, neither speaking but both remaining awake. Xander's large hands gently explored Spike's chest and abdomen, petting and soothing him. The vampire gave himself up fully to the sensations, lying limp against his partner. Finally, the soft strokes became harder, and Xander's hand found Spike's jutting erection and stroked it languidly.

Arching into the contact, Spike whispered, "Oh, that's good, love - your hand feels so good on me. Don't stop." Xander chuckled.

"I have no intention of stopping, unless it's to do ...this." On the last word, he swept his hand down to cup and tug at Spike's balls, eliciting a groan. Spike attempted to turn over, and Xander stopped him with a hand on his hip.

"Nope," he said, "Stay like this, I like it. Be a good little vamp and stay still." Spike laughed out loud. "What's so funny?" Xander asked.

"Nothing, pet," the vampire replied. "It's just good to have you back." His voice caught on the last word, and Xander relented, allowing Spike to turn in his arms so he could clutch the slighter body to his chest and wrap him in his arms, holding him close. Xander was startled when he realized that the vampire was shaking. He pulled back slightly so he could look into stormy blue eyes.

"Are you OK?" Xander asked. Spike gave him a small smile and took an unneeded breath. The vampire ducked his head against his lover's chest and got a grip on his emotions.

"It's just been a hell of a couple of days, pet, and I'm just so damn glad that you're alright." It took great effort to keep his voice level. Xander tightened his arms around Spike and rocked back and forth gently.

"I'm OK, Spike. Why don't you tell me about the rest of it."

Spike sighed and started talking. He told Xander about the trip to Gilroy and what he and Andrew had discovered at the mission. They laughed together over the vampire's exasperation with the formerly evil nerd. Spike related the happenings at the Summers' house and after he'd tracked Buffy. Xander listened, but didn't offer much comment, other than to ascertain that Buffy was safe. Spike assured him that he'd made sure the house she was staying in was secure. Over time the pauses in the conversation got longer, and the two men clung together, exchanging gentle touches and kisses until they fell asleep, wrapped safely in each other's arms.

Part Three

"It was Spike." Buffy's words were quiet, but they cut Xander to the bone. He felt his knees give, and Andrew helped him to sit on the ground. It was Spike, and Spike was dead, deader, dusted, gone. It was Spike.

It was Spike who had held him in the predawn hours and shared laughter and sweet words and touches. It was Spike who had woken him up yesterday afternoon to spread Willow's healing

liniment onto his abused back with cool, strong hands.

It was Spike who had sprawled under him as the two men made love for hours.

It was Spike who sent him off to the Summers' house to gather the others and look for Buffy.

It was Spike who had been on Xander's mind when Buffy returned with an injured Faith and the other girls. It was Spike who Xander had overheard talking to Buffy in the kitchen.

It was Spike who had joked, "Honey, you're home."

Buffy's reply was a subdued, "Yeah."

Spike looked at the weapon she carried. "And you did it. Fulfilled your mission, found the holy grail, or the holy hand grenade, or whatever the hell that is."

She held it out to him. "Right now we're going with scythe. You like?"

He shook his head a little. "Pointy and wooden is not exactly the look I want to know better, but it does have flair."

Buffy had stopped, and rested one hand on her hip. "Got your note," she said, her tone holding just a little hurt.

"I'm sorry about that," Spike said. "But it doesn't matter. You're back in the bosom, all's forgiven, and last night was just a glitch. A little cold comfort from the cellar dweller, let's don't make a thing out of it."

Xander listened while they had a stilted conversation about discovering the origin of the weapon until finally Buffy had left. From the stairs he'd called out a quiet, "Hey." Spike turned, and a brilliant smile lit his face.

"Hey, yourself," he said, and walked over to the stairs, lounging against the rail.

"Look," Xander began, "I don't know how you're feeling about last night..."

"Terrified," the vampire said, looking away.

"Of what?" Xander asked. Blue eyes met Xander's worried brown one.

"Last night was... God, I'm such a jerk. I can't do this."

"Spike..." Xander whispered, suddenly afraid of what he might hear.

"It was the best night of my life," the vampire said. Xander's eye widened, not understanding. His eyes welling, Spike ran a hand through the human's hair and cupped his cheek. "All of it, Xan, all of it. You asking me to help you and me

actually being able to come through for you. And then after - when we were together. I've lived for sodding ever, pet, I've done everything -- I've done things with you I can't spell, but I've never... been close. To anyone, until last night. After all was said and done, all I did was hold you, and watch you sleep, and it was the best night of my life. So I'm, yeah. Terrified." Xander laid his hand over the cool one on his face.

"You don't have to be," he assured his lover.
"Maybe, when this is all over..."

Spike laid a gentle kiss on top of Xander's head.
"No. Let's just leave it. We'll go be heroes - it's what we do. We'll worry about after...after, OK?"
Xander nodded and allowed the vampire to pull him to his feet. They shared a sweet kiss in the dimness of the kitchen.

"Well," Xander said. "Hero time - let's follow her and make sure she gets what she needs." Spike nodded and they swept out of the house.

It was Spike - or rather, Spike's nose - that had led them to the temple, where they witnessed Caleb's death and Buffy and Angel's reunion - where they had first seen the amulet.

It was Spike who had walked Xander home, telling him that he would return soon.

It was Spike who had returned two hours later, with the amulet in his pocket, after having left

Buffy sleeping alone on his cot in the basement. It was Spike who had carefully explained to Xander that he would be their champion, as unlikely as that sounded.

It was Spike who had stared into Xander's face calmly, knowing that there would be no happy ending, no riding off into the sunset - and also knowing that Xander knew it, too.

It was Spike who had held him close through the predawn hours. It was Spike who had told Xander stories of his youth, stories of his early days as a vampire, stories he'd undoubtedly made up on the spot while the human's warm fingers traced his ribs and hot tears painted his chest.

And it was Spike who had cried silently against Xander's back as they made slow, sweet love one last time, unable to look at each other without shattering from the emotion on their faces.

It was Spike who had made Xander pack a duffle bag with the few possessions he thought the human would want to keep, and it was Spike who surreptitiously slipped his old Zippo lighter and the digital camera into the bag as it sat on the table.

It was Spike who had held Xander's hand as they walked through the deserted streets in the false dawn on the way to the Summers' house and

kissed him softly in front of the door before they entered the house.

It was Spike who had smiled at him and winked, eyes filled with sorrow as he herded the potentials into the school basement.

It was Spike on Xander's mind as he spent a last Scooby moment with Buffy, Willow and Giles; as he fought next to Dawn; as he looked for Anya's body in the wreckage; as he boarded the bus; as the world ended and as he crumpled to the ground, bereft.

It was Spike.

The End

Anchors and Holds

Part One

Xander's fingers were twisted tightly into the white-blond hair of the man kneeling in front of him. He threw his own long, dark curls out of his face as he slammed forward, burying himself

brutally into his partner. He lunged forward, mouth open, zeroing in on the spot where neck and shoulder met.

"Spike!" he groaned, as his orgasm thundered through him. Just before his teeth could connect with tanned skin, the blond man spoke.

"Christ, Xander - no biting - I have a shirtless scene tomorrow!" Xander rolled to his side, still unable to speak through the loud panting of his release. He stripped the used condom off of his softening erection and flung it toward the trashcan. It missed.

The blond rolled in the opposite direction and reached onto the bedside table for a bottle of water. He looked at the dark man appraisingly.

"I know we're just fuck buddies and all, Xan, but if you aren't going to call me by the right name, could you just fall back on the generic "Baby" or something? You're gonna give me a complex." Xander reached up to resettle his slightly askew eye patch, and then tucked both hands under his head. He looked into the other man's green eyes, which were shining with suppressed mirth.

"Jason," he said patiently. "You are an actor - I'm not gonna take responsibility for you having a complex of any kind." Jason pouted for a moment, then smiled and relaxed onto the bed. He reached out and tousled Xander's hair.

"Who's Spike?" he asked kindly. At the question, Xander sat up and propped himself against the headboard. He rubbed one hand across his face.

"He was ...my friend, my lover. He died." Jason reached out again and squeezed Xander's shoulder.

"Oh, man. I'm sorry. How long ..." Xander cut him off with a short laugh.

"We knew each other for five years or so. We were more or less friends for a year or two. We were lovers for six days."

"Is that his name or something?" Jason asked, gesturing to the small tattoo on the back of Xander's right wrist. It was a Chinese character, located where the face of Xander's wristwatch would cover it. Jason had noticed that Xander always rubbed it after they had sex, but this was the first time he'd asked about it. This was also the first time Xander had called out a name during sex. Xander looked down at his own fingers as they traced the strokes of the mark. He smiled.

"It says 'six days', actually," he said in a low voice, "so I don't forget." Jason nodded.

"How long has he been gone?" Xander took a deep breath and released it slowly.

"A hundred and forty-one days today," he said. The blond man considered that for a minute.

"Oh - did he die in the earthquake?"

~*~*~*~*~

The earthquake. Xander snorted to himself as he stepped into the hotel room's shower after kicking Jason out. That's how the rest of the world had categorized the closing of the Hellmouth and the destruction of the entire town of Sunnydale. Earthquake. Biiiiig earthquake. He giggled helplessly for a moment, and then got a grip on himself before the giggles could turn to sobs. Nudging the handle to make the water just a little bit cooler, he grabbed the bottle of body wash and scrubbed himself clean.

The body wash was an expensive designer scent for which he paid entirely too much. Xander didn't care. One benefit of the whole earthquake ruse was that Sunnydale had been declared a state and federal disaster area. Both FEMA and the State of California had flitted around, handing out checks to any "Sunnydale Survivors" they could find. Xander had collected one of each happily, and then had been shocked to receive several more - he had been listed as Anya's beneficiary. He'd gotten not only her disaster relief checks, but also her fairly large life

insurance policy and her very impressive investment portfolio.

Buffy, Dawn, Willow, Robin, Giles, Andrew and those of the new slayers who had established residency in Sunnydale had also received checks. The money had gone a long way to ease the transitions they were all going through. Buffy and Dawn had settled in at the hotel with Angel. Buffy and Angel were trying to get to know one another as friends, while the girls were trying to reconcile with their father. They were both in school. Buffy had started at UCLA, and Giles had found a private school that catered to a diverse student body - Dawn was taking both college prep and ancient and demonic language courses.

Giles had taken Willow, Kennedy and Andrew with him to England to help rebuild the Watcher's Council. Willow was to be Kennedy's Watcher, while also teaching magic at the Watcher's Academy. Andrew, who had become much more serious and subdued after the final battle, was working as the Council's librarian. Faith and Wood had struck up an odd but solid romantic bond, and had taken a group of slayers to Cleveland, to patrol what was now the main Hellmouth. Some of the other girls had returned to their parents, some had gone to England, and a few had stayed in LA to work with Buffy.

It had seemed to Xander at the time that everyone except for him had a place. Angel and his crew were busy running their formerly evil law firm (a concept Xander still couldn't get his head around); the slayers and proto-Watchers all had things to do; everyone had a life to lead. Except him. Xander found himself, for the first time ever, with the freedom and resources to do pretty much whatever he wanted. As it turned out, the first thing he wanted was to drink himself into an exquisite state of numbness every single night for three weeks.

After the twentieth night in a row that Angel or Wes or Gunn or Buffy had pulled Xander's limp form out of the bushes and into the hotel in the early morning hours, his friends had staged an intervention of sorts. Their main argument had been that "Anya wouldn't have wanted him to be like this". He couldn't argue there - she probably wouldn't have. Not that he cared. He told his friends what they wanted to hear, then went up to the roof with a gallon of water and a bottle of Advil and stayed there until he was completely sober. It took a while.

During that long day, he had forced himself to sit in a lounge chair on the roof of the hotel and let the feelings come. He had cried until his shirt was soaked, then laughed until he cried again, remembering every single detail of the six days that he and Spike were lovers. Then he went

back and tried to remember every snide remark, insult or joke the arrogant vampire had ever tossed his way. Finally spent, he had closed his eyes and slept. When he awoke, the sun was rising. He looked into the first rays of the sun and admitted to himself that he loved Spike. He whispered the words onto the soft breeze that heralded the sunrise, then gathered up his things and walked downstairs to start his new life.

That afternoon, he had gone scouting for a new apartment, settling on an overpriced one-bedroom three blocks from the beach in Santa Monica. He had called around to some other "Sunnydale Survivor" contacts and had found a job as a construction foreman for a television production company. He had done the LA thing - going to IKEA and blowing \$6000 on quirky Scandinavian furniture and accessories. He had then blown twice that much on electronics, simply because he was male and had the money and he could.

Upon moving in to his new place, he had finally completely unpacked the duffle bag that had accompanied him out of Sunnydale. The moment his fingers had closed on Spike's Zippo, he'd lost it, folding himself onto the floor and sobbing like a brokenhearted child. The digital camera had sat untouched for days, because he knew what it held. In a moment of disgust with himself for being such a pansy (ponce - he had thought to

himself, giving the word a special Spike inflection) he had downloaded the pictures to his brand new, state-of-the-art computer and printed them on his brand new photo printer. He had tucked the two of himself into a drawer. He had spent a good hour staring at the two of Spike.

The one of the just-kissed vampire drew him strongly, but the other - the one of Spike's typical sardonic, too-cool-for-the-room countenance had torn him apart. He couldn't stop the tears. Xander had sat on the edge of his bed and let them flow, mourning his lost love. When the storm of emotions had passed, he had gone out and purchased wood and tools, then spent the next two days making a pair of beautiful frames for the photos, placing them on his bedside table with the lighter.

His new job was fun - building sets for one of the weekly shows produced by his company, a military drama. Xander made friends with a few other crewmembers, and a couple of the actors, one of whom was Jason, the male lead of the series. Jason was openly bisexual, vain, and flighty, and Xander found him easy to be around. Jason rarely asked Xander to reveal anything personal; he was much more interested in detailing the wild and crazy life of a successful young star to his quietly amused friend.

Xander counted the days. On the fiftieth day after Spike's death, Xander had gotten the tattoo. On the one hundredth day, he had gotten completely drunk with Jason and several other friends, and had woken up with a massive hangover, accompanied by the particular brand of soreness and lethargy that indicated that he'd gotten royally laid the previous night. He had called Jason in a blind panic. The actor had assured his friend that they had been safe, that their friendship was unaffected and that Xander had been a tiger in the sack. Xander had hung up the phone and stumbled to the bathroom to throw up until there was nothing left inside him.

After a weekend of self-recriminations, Xander had dragged himself to work, where the crew hounded him about his alcohol consumption and Jason acted like absolutely nothing had changed. Xander spent two days studiously avoiding his friend until Jason cornered him and demanded to know what the problem was, laughing away the awkwardness and explaining to Xander that sometimes you just needed a fuck buddy in this weird world - it didn't have to mean anything if they didn't want it to. They'd slept together four or five more times, never in Xander's bed, and the arrangement suited them both.

This most recent encounter happened while the show was shooting location work in upstate New York, where Jason complained endlessly about

the lack of nightlife and excitement until Xander finally invited him into his hotel room with an offer of "something to put in your mouth so you'll shut the fuck up." Jason happily accepted. They had four more days to go on the location shoot, and Xander found himself missing his new home acutely.

Once out of the shower, Xander slipped into workout clothes and pulled his wet hair back into a short ponytail. He smiled as he did so, remembering his vow to kill Dawn if she referred to it as "My Pretty Ponytail" one more time. She had laughed and threatened to find a baldness curse for him if he tried. He grabbed his keys and cell phone, dropping the instrument on the floor when it rang as soon as he picked it up.

"Harris," he barked into the tiny phone.

"Xan, it's Buffy."

Xander smiled, happy to hear from his friend.

"What's shakin', Buff?" he asked.

"Um, when are you coming home?" Her tone was uncertain.

"About mid-day on Friday," he replied. "Why, you need me for something?"

She hesitated. *"There's something here that you need to see,"* she said.

"Gosh, Buff - evasive much?" he replied. She sighed, but didn't say anything. He waited, and then spoke, "Is this Hellmouth-y stuff?"

She sighed again. *"You could say that."*

He nodded sharply, forgetting that she couldn't see him. "OK. I'm there. I can probably get a flight out tomorrow afternoon. I'll call you when I get into town."

Her relief was almost palpable. *"Thanks, Xan,"* she said.

He smiled into the phone. "I'll be there as soon as I can. Love you," he said.

"Love you, too," she replied, and disconnected the call.

Xander closed the phone and placed it back on the dresser. He smiled as he thought of Buffy's parting words. Since the "earthquake", all of the Scoobies had gotten much more demonstrative - exchanging kisses and hugs hello and goodbye, and always telling each other "love you" when they parted. Even Giles had gotten in on the overflowing Scooby-affection, though in typically British fashion. He was more likely to give Xander the "One-armed Hug of Uptight Manliness" and he signed off his telephone conversations with either "take care" or "be well", but it was progress.

The LA gang had been completely freaked out about it at first, but Cordelia and Fred had jumped right into the spirit of things quickly. Angel, Wes and, to a lesser extent, Gunn were still terribly uncomfortable with the casual affection and bore the occasional spontaneous hug from the women with good grace and pained expressions. Dawn in particular loved to torment Angel, making a point of hugging him at least once a day, which made her the coolest person alive in Gunn's eyes. The two had formed an odd sort of friendship and often spent hours on the Playstation in the hotel lobby. Dawn seemed to help take the edge off Gunn's standoffishness, and Xander often thought that she helped ease the dark man's pain over the loss of his sister.

Xander picked up his phone again and called his boss in LA. He explained that he had a "family problem" to take care of and received permission to leave the set and take the rest of the week off. He then called his lead carpenter and gave instructions for the rest of the work to be done, as well as the dismantling of the sets and their shipment back to California. Several phone calls later, and he was hurriedly packing for a late flight that would get him to LAX in the early hours of the next morning.

After the plane landed, Xander stumbled through the airport along with the other late-night travel zombies and decided that he'd call Buffy as soon

as he got up later in the day. He fell asleep during the cab ride home, over-tipped the driver, and then dragged himself to bed. Waking at about ten-thirty, he was happy to see the early fall sunshine of his home state - much appreciated after the overcast dreariness of New York.

He showered, shaved and dressed in a pair of impeccably fitted khaki shorts, a blue, silk tee shirt and expensive leather sandals. The girls had insisted that part of his newfound wealth be spent on a decent wardrobe, and Xander had to admit that the clothes did indeed help to make the man - he looked good and he felt good. He left his hair unbound, knowing it would dry into loose waves that had been artfully cut to frame his face and partially cover the eye patch.

Xander exited his building and stopped at the Starbucks on the corner, grabbing a complicated coffee drink and a huge muffin before retrieving his car from the underground parking. In light of the beauty of the day, he put the top down and cranked the stereo up to top volume. He ejected the CD that was in the player, a mix of Patsy Cline, Blue Rodeo and Leonard Cohen that Buffy called the "Disc of Despair", and replaced it with the latest effort from Fatboy Slim - a gift from Dawn. Halfway to the Hyperion, he realized he had forgotten his phone. Oh, well, he thought, somebody's bound to be up and about.

Twenty minutes later he was ready to offer a ritual sacrifice to the gods of parking when a space opened up only a block from the hotel. He pulled in, put the top up and levered himself out of the car, brushing muffin crumbs out of his lap. He walked to the hotel and let himself in through the ornate double doors.

"Hello? Anybody around?" he called. Buffy came bounding into the lobby and flung herself at her friend. He lifted her off the ground and swung her in a circle, kissing her lightly on the lips before setting her on her feet. She was wearing a halter top and shorts, her hair was clipped messily on top of her head, and she was barefoot.

"You made it!" she exclaimed, "And so fast - you're like Superman."

Xander gave her a look of mock offense. "I'll have you know I wear my underwear under my pants, thank you very much." He took her hand and they started walking through the lobby. "So, what's the big what that made me get on a plane in the dead of night?"

Her hand tightened on his convulsively for a moment and she gave him a nervous smile. "There's something you need to see, Xan. In the courtyard," she said. Xander followed obediently, not really noticing her nervousness. They approached the doors to the courtyard, and Buffy

released his hand. She turned so that they were face-to-face, and she looked at him very seriously. "There's nothing I can say to prepare you for this, Xander, so I'm not going to try. Go out there - there's someone waiting for you." He tilted his head and opened his mouth to ask a question, but she cut him off. "Just go." She started pushing him forward. As he opened the door he glanced back at her. "Love you, Xan," she said, and turned and walked down the hall.

He stepped out into the bright sunshine and saw a person standing in the center of the courtyard with his back to the doors. Xander took in the man's bleached blond hair and black jeans and tee before his legs buckled and he sank to his knees on the ground with the words "Love you" still falling from his lips.

Warm hands caught Xander's upper arms, and glittering blue eyes peered into his face. Xander's mouth fell open, but no words came. Spike smiled and dropped to his knees, still holding Xander up.

"I missed you, love," he said quietly. Xander raised his right hand and placed it in the center of Spike's chest. He stared open-mouthed while Spike's heart thudded strongly beneath it.

"Are - are you real?" Xander asked, staring up into his lover's eyes. Spike gently enfolded the shaking man in his arms.

"I'm real, and I'm alive, and I'm back, Xander. I'm here with you." Xander wrapped his arms around Spike and crushed the slighter man to his chest.

"I love you," he whispered. "I love you, Spike. I love you."

Part Two

They stayed on their knees in the courtyard for long moments, clinging together until Spike finally shifted away and rose to his feet, pulling Xander along. The dark man wiped his face and ran his fingers under the patch to brush away the tears there. Spike stepped back and swept his eyes over Xander from head to toe.

"You look good," he drawled, leering. Xander's laugh threatened to turn into a sob, but he got control of it at the last second.

"You...you look pretty good yourself. A sight for sore eye, even." They exchanged a smirk.

"A hundred and forty one days and you don't have a better eye joke than that?" Spike asked.

"A hundred and forty two days," Xander corrected automatically. Spike tilted his head.

"Nope, today is a hundred and forty two - but it doesn't count, now does it?" Xander placed his hand on Spike's face. "You're so warm. It's so weird," he marveled.

Spike laughed and covered Xander's hand with his own. "It has taken some getting used to," he said dryly. Their hands moved together gently against Spike's cheek, and the blond's eyes closed in pleasure. He opened his eyes and looked into Xander's face. "Did you mean it, pet?" he asked, his voice cracking with emotion.

Xander leaned forward and rested their foreheads together. He swallowed convulsively. "Yeah, Spike, I meant it. I mean it." He stepped back and put a little space between them. Xander reached down and pulled off his watch.

Spike looked down at the uncovered tattoo. He reached out one finger to touch it. "What's it say, Xan?"

Xander reached down and traced the tattoo with one finger alongside Spike's. "Six days," he said quietly. Spike brought the other man's wrist to his mouth and kissed the spot with warm lips and a tiny hint of tongue. Xander shivered. Their gazes locked and heat flared between them.

Spike released Xander's wrist, and they each took in a deep breath.

Xander was ready to pull the slighter man to him and kiss him senseless when Buffy's voice came floating through the courtyard.

"Yeah," she said, "let's eat out here - it's not like we're gonna get Spike out of the sun anytime soon, anyway." Her comment was met with appreciative laughter from Fred and Cordelia, who trailed behind her.

Xander took a self-conscious step back from Spike and turned to meet the two brunette women with hugs and kisses, which they happily returned. Buffy led the group over to a large picnic table situated in the shade, where they all settled, with Xander making sure to sit next to Spike, leaning slightly against the other man to reassure himself that he was real. "Where's Dawnie?" he inquired casually.

Buffy turned and grimaced at him. "I made her go to school - she had a test this morning."

Xander grinned at her. "Fyarl or Babylonian?"

Buffy's grimace turned into a rueful smile. "Math," she said.

Xander's eyes widened. "Ooooooh, scary!"

Buffy nodded her head. "No kidding. She better not flunk it, either!" They laughed together.

Spike looked up at Buffy hopefully. "Did you say something about lunch, Slayer?" His voice was pitiful, but his eyes shone with mirth.

She reached over and patted him on the shoulder. "Relax, Food-boy - Wes is bringing Thai," she said in a teasing tone.

Spike and Xander both said, "Yum!" and then laughed at each other. Xander was happy to see that Spike and Buffy treated each other more like friends or siblings than former lovers.

As the girls chattered happily, Xander looked at Spike. "When do I get the story?" he asked.

Spike took the other man's hand under the table and squeezed it. "Over lunch - some of the others have bits and pieces, but it'll be easier if I just tell it through once." Xander squeezed back, and the two men exchanged brilliant smiles. Neither noticed all three women's "Awwwww" looks and soft smiles.

The doors to the courtyard opened, and a bag-laden Wesley strode out, followed by Dawn, who was skipping along beside him, carrying a large tray full of paper plates and beverages. Dawn plopped her burden onto the table and flung herself at her sister. They hugged.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you for letting me come back after my test - which I'm pretty sure I passed!" Dawn squealed. The bouncing teenager made a circuit of the table, exchanging hugs and kisses with everyone. She squeezed herself between Spike and Xander, who parted reluctantly, and started dealing plates around the table like cards. Wes and Xander exchanged more subdued greetings, and Cordelia and Fred unpacked lunch and passed paper cartons around the table.

Xander laughed out loud at the sheer volume and variety of food that Spike placed on his plate. The blond grinned at him and dug in. They chatted and laughed while they ate, passing the cartons around, stealing from each other's plates and generally having a friendly meal. Finally they packed all the trash away and everyone's eyes turned to Spike, who preened under the attention until Dawn dug an elbow into his ribs.

"OK, OK - keep your sharp little bits to yourself, Bit," he complained. "I'll tell." He shifted around on the bench, and then looked longingly at the sun-drenched green lawn outside the shady area where they were seated. Xander noticed and spoke up.

"Hey, can we move out in the sun? I've been in the New York fog for days and my tan is

suffering." Amid laughter they relocated to the lawn and sprawled into comfortable positions.

Spike leaned back onto his hands and looked up at the blue sky.

"I still can't believe I'm in the sun. " His tone was so quiet and wistful that the others unconsciously leaned toward him, and Xander pressed his shoulder lightly against Spike's. The blond man looked around at the faces of those gathered and smiled.

"I woke up in a hospital - a loony bin, really. They said I'd been there for a week, in a coma. Once I woke up, I couldn't remember much. I - uh, well, apparently, I freaked out the first time the sun fell on me." He ducked his head against his shoulder, and Xander was startled to see a faint blush on the other man's pale skin.

"Screamed like a schoolgirl, I did," Spike continued. "'Course, once I realized I wasn't on fire I noticed a few little things like having a heartbeat and a pulse and all.

"Over the next few days I started remembering things a little at a time. I slept a lot. They eventually started telling me stuff. There were several other people there who'd been found in the desert after the 'earthquake'," Spike snorted, and there were rolled eyes and nods from the others. "I was brought in by campers who found

me - about a month ago." He shook his head, still not able to believe all the things that had happened in such a short time. "Over the three weeks I was awake at the hospital I remembered things little by little. Two days ago I finally remembered a key piece of information - Angel's cell phone number. I called, and he sent Watcher, Jr. here," he gestured toward Wes, who grinned, "to pick me up. Any questions?"

"Yeah - what happened to you under the school?" Xander asked.

"The amulet channeled sunlight - it went through me and killed all the uglies," Spike explained. "That was the 'cleansing power' Angel talked about. It burned right through me and vaporized everything. It was ...it was awesome. And it hurt like hell." Dawn laid her head on his shoulder and wrapped her arm around his waist.

"Where did you go after that?" she asked.

"Dunno, Bit. I don't have a bloody clue - all I know is that I woke up in hospital with everyone lookin' at me and asking me questions." Spike ran his fingers through Dawn's long hair and twirled a lock around his fingers.

"So, what exactly happened?" Xander asked. "How can you be alive?" He couldn't keep his voice from cracking just a little on the final word.

Wes looked at Xander. "Shanshu," he said.

"God bless you," Xander joked. "No, seriously; what's a shanshu?"

Wes sighed. "There's a prophecy that the vampire with a soul, once he has completed his purpose, will be made human. We, um, always assumed it referred to Angel." Everyone was quiet for a moment.

Dawn broke the uncomfortable silence. "What did you remember first?" she asked.

Spike frowned. "I would remember faces and voices, then odd little flashes - like I remembered sitting in my old crypt with you, telling ghost stories, but I couldn't remember who you were. I remembered being chained up in the Watcher's bathtub. I remembered being inside the Initiative. Everything was out of order." Xander noticed Spike's pensive look and decided to introduce a little levity.

"So, you freaked about sunlight ...what else made you, ah, 'scream like a schoolgirl'?" he asked. The blonde scowled at him playfully.

"Well, being hungry for food for the first time in a century was different. Then I realized that everything tasted so good - even hospital food!" The others laughed at the joy in the former vampire's voice.

"Yeah, but now you're gonna have to work out, so you don't get fat," Xander teased, and Spike

laughingly cuffed the other man on the arm. They all chatted happily, asking questions and offering advice for the new human until Cordelia glanced at her watch.

"Oh, crap!" she exclaimed. "It's nearly four - I have an audition." The others struggled to their feet and hugged her goodbye. Dawn and Gunn took the trash from lunch and excused themselves.

"No Playstation until your homework is done!" Buffy hollered after them, but they both pretended not to hear her.

Xander turned to speak to Spike, but noticed that the blond was deep in conversation with Wesley and Fred, the three of them sitting cross-legged in the grass. A small hand slid around Xander's waist, and he turned and lifted his arm so Buffy could slide under it.

He smiled down into her face, noting the worried look in her eyes. "Angel's not taking this well." It wasn't a question.

She frowned. "No, not really. He - he wanted to be the one to wear the amulet, and I said he couldn't. He's ..."

Xander took and released a deep breath. "Jealous," he supplied.

Buffy nodded. "I mean, he's happy for Spike, but he's ...broody. Major, intense broody."

She looked miserable, so Xander hugged her to his side and dropped a kiss on top of her head. "Is there anything I can do?" he asked.

Her green eyes sparkled as she looked up at him. "Yes, there is," she said. "Can Spike stay with you for a few days? Then maybe I can get Angel to come out of his room."

Xander couldn't help the grin that spread across his face, but decided to play coy. "What makes you think I want to room with the newly human?" he said.

"Um, experience?" she said. "Both with Spike and the newly human. That and the fact that you're in love with him?"

Xander's mouth fell open, and he closed it with a snap. "That obvious, huh?" he asked ruefully.

She shook her head. "No, not to regular people - just people who know either one of you. He loves you, too, you know. You're the first one he asked about when he got Angel on the phone, and he kept asking when you were going to get here."

Xander felt tears prick behind his eye. "Are you OK with that?" he asked.

She gave him her most brilliant smile. "Yeah, Xan - I'm great with it. I want you to be happy. I love you both and I want you both to be happy. Besides, I'm pretty sure I'm in love with Angel again," she mumbled, looking down.

He reached down and tilted her face back up to his. "I heard that," he said. "You forget that I speak "fast mumble" - I have known Willow for twenty years." He searched her face and, seeing only happiness there, he smiled down at her.

Spike, Fred and Wes chose that moment to join them. Buffy and Xander broke apart, and Xander rested a hand on Spike's shoulder. "You want to come stay with me for a while so Angel can brood in peace?" he asked the blond. "I live near the beach," he added in a wheedling tone.

Spike rested his hand atop Xander's briefly, then said, "Thanks for the hospitality, Buffy, but I got a better offer."

She laughed. "Can't blame you, Spike - you'll love Xan's swinging bachelor pad."

Spike excused himself to go gather his few belongings from the hotel; the others meandered into the lobby, where Dawn and Gunn were playing a martial arts fighting game on the Playstation. Fred disappeared upstairs, and Wesley followed soon after. Buffy and Xander sprawled onto the couches and rooted for Dawn

to kick Gunn's butt. Within a few minutes Spike came down the stairs, resisting the urge to slide on the banister, but looking at it longingly. Xander noticed, and they shared a mischievous smile. Spike was carrying a small duffle bag. Xander gestured to it. "Is that it? Oh, we've got to get you some stuff - you can't be a human without a bunch of stuff!" he exhorted the other man.

They said their goodbyes and stepped out of the hotel. After a couple of steps, Spike turned. "Xan, what's with all the hugging and kissing with the coming and going? That's new."

Xander laughed and threw an arm around Spike's shoulders. "Yeah, after the end of the world everybody got a lot more free and easy with the affection - life's short and all that," he explained.

The blond shifted his bag to his other hand and wound his arm around the taller man's waist. "I like it," he said, smugly.

"Me, too," Xander agreed. "This is us," he said, gesturing to his car. Spike's eyes lit up and he looked up at Xander.

"I'm guessing you want the top down?" he laughed.

Once they were settled in the car, Xander turned. "Spike, I..." His voice was stopped by the touch of lips on his own. Spike wound his hands

into his lover's long waves and pulled their mouths closer together. Xander's hands came up to the blond's shoulders and he crushed their upper bodies together, opening his mouth to deepen the kiss. Their tongues tangled, and Xander could only marvel at the heat of Spike's mouth and the absolute joy of holding this man in his arms again. Eventually, they both needed air and broke the kiss. Neither one wanted to move away, so they stayed, mouths a scant inch apart while they panted.

"I lied," Spike said, breathlessly. "When Dawn asked me what I remembered first - I lied. The first thing I remembered was you, Xan. For a day and a half after I woke up I remembered every single thing about you. I remembered every touch, every kiss. And finally, finally I remembered your name - it was the first word I said." Xander cupped a hand around the back of Spike's neck and peppered his face with small kisses, overwhelmed by emotion. He pushed the blond head down on his shoulder, and buried his face in his lover's neck.

Once the pounding of his heart slowed and he got a grip on himself, Xander straightened in his seat and placed both hands on the steering wheel in the two and ten o'clock positions. "OK," he said, blowing out a breath, "we have things to do. You need stuff, there is no food or beer at my house, and we'll get arrested if we do what I

want to do right now, here, on the street, in a convertible with the top down."

Spike also straightened in his seat, and then reached down to adjust his erection. "Right there with you, love," he said. "Bank, then food - everything else can bloody wait."

Xander turned the key in the ignition, nodding, and then turned to look at Spike. "Bank?" he asked. With a flourish, the blond pulled a familiar-looking envelope out of a side pocket of the bag on the floor. Xander opened it and pulled out two disaster relief checks made out to William Montgomery. "Who's William Montgomery?" he asked.

Spike smirked. "He's me." At Xander's look he added, "OK, he's kind of me. I had a couple of sets of ID, and Montgomery was the one in my wallet when I was found. Angel had set it up for me a long time ago. Turns out that Mr. Montgomery owned a house in Sunnyhell. The hospital reported me, and some nice government chaps brought me these lovely checks. They also paid my hospital bills." Xander smiled, then smirked, and then laughed out loud. Spike joined in, crowing at the irony.

An hour later, they were at the door of the apartment. Xander flung it open and gestured for Spike to enter. The blond hesitated at the doorsill, and then snorted when he realized that

he didn't need a verbal invitation. He took two steps into the foyer. "What's this?" he asked, taking in the fully decorated apartment.

"IKEA - summer catalog, pages 88 through 94," Xander said. Spike's quiet laugh was cut off as the taller man pushed him up against the back of the door, hemming him in with large, tanned hands on either side of his head. Xander stopped with his lips an inch from Spike's and savored the feel of the other man's warm breath ghosting across his lips. He looked into his lover's bright blue eyes. "Have I mentioned how good it is to see you, Spike?" he asked, his voice husky.

The corners of Spike's mouth turned up slightly. "Don't tell me, pet - show me." Millimeter by millimeter, Xander closed the distance between them, watching as Spike's dark lashes closed. Their lips brushed in a feather-light kiss once, and then again before passion overwhelmed them and they crushed their mouths together.

Their arms twined around each other and their bodies slammed together. Spike turned them and pushed Xander back, curling one hand protectively against the back of his head as it impacted with the wall. Rising up on his toes for more leverage, the shorter man pressed his denim-covered erection into Xander's. They both gasped, and Xander's hands came down to cradle Spike's ass and speed the pace. They thrust

against one another mindlessly, hands clutching; lips, teeth and tongues exploring one another's necks and ears.

"Oh, God, Spike," Xander groaned. "You feel so good, want you so much."

Spike sucked hard on Xander's neck, leaving a red mark. "You've got me, love, 'm not going anywhere, I'm right here with you."

Xander snaked a hand between them, freeing Spike's leaking cock and then his own. He wrapped his hand around both straining shafts and stroked them. "So hot," he panted. "Not gonna last."

Spike was on the edge of orgasm, barely able to form coherent thought. He wrapped his hand around Xander's, tightening their mutual grip. He looked up at his lover. "Say it, Xan," he gritted out. "Tell me."

The dark man threw his head back and howled, "Love you, Spike, love you," as he came, spurting his release over both of their hands. Spike followed him over the edge a second later, keening Xander's name.

Their hands slowed and stopped on sensitive flesh, and they rested, foreheads pressed together and eyes closed for a moment. Xander stepped back and pulled off his tee shirt, using it

to clean them up a little. He balled up the shirt and threw it aside, then laughed.

"What's so funny?" Spike asked.

"You," Xander said simply, gesturing to the other man's state of disarray; hair standing up in tufts, shirt rucked up, jeans undone. Spike leaned forward and kissed him softly then pushed off of the wall, trying to straighten his clothes.

"Why don't you go clean up?" Xander said. "I'll put this stuff away and be there in a second." Spike nodded and wandered off toward the bathroom. Xander put the forgotten grocery bags on the table and quickly put away the beer and snack food they'd picked up in a hurry on the way home. Carrying the large tube of lubricant he'd picked up at the store, he headed for the back of the apartment.

When Xander walked into his bedroom Spike looked up from his seat on the bed. He was holding the Zippo lighter and looking at the two framed pictures on the bedside table. When he looked up, Xander could see that his blue eyes were awash with unshed tears. Kneeling on the floor, he took both of Spike's hands. "What is it?" he asked.

"I just ...I'm..." Spike stuttered.

"Freaking out?" Xander supplied, and smiled when the other man nodded sadly.

"I can't imagine how you felt, Xan - when I left you all alone."

Xander enfolded Spike in his arms and crooned softly in his ear. "It's OK. You're here now; you're here with me." He pulled back and looked into his lover's crystal blue eyes. "It was all worth it, because you're here with me." Xander shifted up to sit on the bed and reached into the drawer of the bedside table. He drew out the two pictures of himself and handed them to Spike. As he had hoped, the other man couldn't help the smile that spread across his face.

"Frames," he said. "I need frames for these."

Xander smiled. "I'll make you some." He took the photos and the lighter and placed them on the table. Xander stood, drawing Spike up with him. He tenderly eased the blond's clothes off, then his own. "I'm still a little sticky," he said. "I'll be right back." He dropped a quick kiss on Spike's lips, pushed him lightly toward the waiting bed, and then went into the bathroom.

After a quick cleanup Xander returned to the bedroom. Glancing at his bed, he stopped short. Spike lay on his stomach, with one arm reaching toward the empty side of the bed, the other curled up and around the pillow. His pale skin and hair contrasted beautifully with Xander's navy sheets, which pooled around his hips. Spike's sleepy blue eyes blinked open, and he

smiled. Crossing the room, Xander carefully slipped under the sheet. Spike curled onto his side, pressing his back against the warm body behind him. Xander wrapped an arm around Spike's narrow waist and placed his hand over his lover's wonderfully, miraculously beating heart. He drifted off to sleep, mesmerized by its steady cadence.

Part Three

Xander woke up alone and automatically reached into the empty space beside him. He let his hand rest for a moment in the warm depression Spike's body had left in his bed. He heard an odd sound and cocked his head, trying to identify it. A huge grin spread over his face as he realized what he was hearing. Never in a million years would he have believed that the sound of Spike peeing would make him so happy, but it did. However, the sound of the toilet flushing set off an automatic response in his own bladder, and he levered himself out of the warm bed to avail himself of the facilities.

The two men passed one another in the center of the room and kissed lightly before continuing in separate directions. Xander marveled for a

moment at how normal and domestic it seemed. When he exited the bathroom, he noticed that Spike had not returned to the bed, so he padded naked into the front room of the apartment. He found the blond seated cross-legged on the floor in front of the open sliding glass doors that led to the patio. The night sky was just beginning to lighten in the east, heralding the approaching sunrise. Xander went to the kitchen and started a pot of coffee, then returned to Spike, slumping down on the floor behind him to wrap the smaller man with his long arms and legs.

They sat silently until the gurgling noises of the coffee maker tapered off. Xander got up and reached a hand down. "Come on," he said. "Get some clothes - the view of the sunrise from the beach is much better." With a brilliant smile, Spike allowed himself to be pulled up against his lover's body. After a quick embrace, Spike went to the bedroom, Xander to the kitchen. Spike returned to the kitchen in his black jeans and tee, carrying Xander's shorts from the night before and a clean tee shirt. He found the other man pouring coffee into two large insulated cups, and then liberally dosing one with milk and sugar before pulling on the proffered clothing.

The two men walked back into the main room and found their shoes. Xander grabbed his keys, and they left the apartment, walking the three blocks to the beach in happy silence. They

reached the beach access, and kicked off their shoes. Xander slipped his sandals into his pocket and reached for Spike's boots. He tied the laces together and slung them over his shoulder while Spike rolled up the cuffs of his jeans. They walked across the sand until they came to a natural hollow nestled in the dunes. They arranged themselves so they could see the beginnings of the sunrise. Xander leaned against Spike and felt the answering pressure from his lover's shoulder against his own. They sat quietly and sipped their coffee as the first rays of the morning sun slipped over the horizon.

Once the sky had brightened from dark blue, through a hundred shades of red and orange and pink to the cool blue of the California morning, they turned and looked out over the Pacific Ocean. Spike pressed the bottom of his coffee mug into the sand and leaned harder against Xander. The brunet wrapped his right arm around his lover and dropped a kiss on his temple. "Good morning, Spike," he said.

"Good morning, love," the blond replied. He ran his fingers gently over the tattoo on the wrist that rested on his shoulder.

"Hey!" Xander said suddenly. "This is day seven - my tattoo's obsolete."

Spike looked up from where he was absently drawing patterns in the sand with his big toe.

"You can get a new one," he said. "Maybe this." He dragged his toe in the sand to make a mark that looked like the number eight on its side. "Infinity - except we don't have that." His voice was sad.

Xander rubbed the mark out with his own foot, looking down. "We never did," he said. "You did. Are you sorry it's gone?"

Spike sighed. "Xan, do you know the worst part about knowing you're gonna live forever?" Xander shook his head. "It's knowing that you're gonna live forever. Before...caring about humans was awful. Every time I let one of you into my heart it was just one more I was gonna have to outlive." He looked up into Xander's face. "Being here - being human, alive - it lets me love you without having to hurt for it."

Xander looked down at Spike and smiled suddenly. "So, what you're saying is that you love me?" he asked.

Spike smirked. "Way to distill the complex existential issues down to 'this affects me how?'"

Leaning down until their lips were only a breath apart, Xander repeated, "So, you love me."

Spike darted his tongue out to trace a wet line along his lover's full lower lip. "Yeah," he said quietly, "I love you."

"My tattoo's still obsolete." Xander said, just before their lips met. They kissed softly until they were interrupted by the loud rumbling from Xander's stomach, which was immediately joined by an answering rumble from Spike's. Laughing, they gathered their belongings and turned toward home and breakfast.

After breakfast, Xander pattered around the kitchen, doing the dishes and straightening, to give Spike the opportunity to prowl his new home. The former vampire had been quiet throughout the walk home and breakfast. Xander desperately wanted to glue himself to his lover's side, but also wanted to give Spike some space to adjust to the huge changes he was facing. When he heard the shower turn on, Xander left the kitchen and settled on the sofa with a notepad and a pen and started making a list of items Spike would probably need if they ever got around to leaving the house.

Xander had halfway filled the page when he heard the water turn off. He jotted down a few more items, and then put the pen down. He couldn't stand it any longer. Wandering into the back of the apartment, he was greeted with the sight of his beautiful lover standing in the bathroom wearing only a towel wrapped low on his narrow hips, staring at himself in the mirror. Spike's wet hair was pushed carelessly back from his face, and drops of water were scattered

across his shoulders and back. He was running a finger over the scar in his eyebrow when he noticed Xander behind him and smiled. "Hello, love," Spike said, sighing and leaning back as Xander's arms slipped around his waist.

The taller man leaned down and began licking up the drops of water shining on Spike's pale skin. Xander's tongue paused. "Hi," he said briefly, and then turned back to his task, leaning back to lick up any drops on Spike's back. One large hand was circling on Spike's stomach, tangling in the fine hairs, sneaking up to dip into his navel, tracing the contours of his defined abdominal muscles. Xander's other hand climbed higher and began teasing first one, and then the other pink nipple, rubbing the responsive tissue into taut peaks. Spike stretched and arched his back as Xander's lapping tongue moved down to the center of his lower back then back up to his shoulders again.

Xander stood and wrapped his arms around Spike, at the same time divesting him of the towel and kissing a line up and down the tender, sensitive flesh of his long, pale neck. Blue eyes fluttered closed, and a groan issued from between Spike's suddenly too-dry lips.

"What are you doing to me, Xan?" he asked.

"I'm trying to drive you crazy. Is it working?" Xander's tone was light, but it throbbed with suppressed lust.

"Working...yeah, it's bloody well working, pet," Spike gasped. "Think we can take this to the bed?" Not bothering to answer, Xander kept up his exquisite torment, but he did turn his lover and start walking them towards the bed.

As soon as Spike was standing in front of the bed, Xander pushed him lightly onto it and quickly stripped out of his clothes. Spike started to turn over, but Xander placed a hand in the small of his back to pin him down.

"Nope," he said. "Stay there. I want to play." Spike shuddered visibly, but stayed in place. He shuddered again when he felt Xander's tongue stroke the hollow at the very bottom of his spine. The warm point traced a circular pattern, and then drew a thin, hot line all the way to the blond curls at the nape of Spike's neck. The tongue was replaced for a moment by teeth, which nibbled lightly, making Spike moan into the pillow. The moan became a yelp when Xander's teeth bit hard into the trapezius muscle on the right side of his neck.

"God, that's good, Xan," Spike murmured, and Xander made a small sound of agreement before he started licking his way back down.

Reaching the small of Spike's back, Xander latched onto the skin there and began sucking, pulling blood to the surface to leave a mark. Spike's back arched and flexed, alternately pushing into the sensation and seeking to escape it, while he choked and babbled Xander's name. Releasing his mark with a "pop", the brunet insinuated himself between the spread legs of his prey and sat back on his heels to admire the effect of the hickey staining his lover's alabaster skin.

"Pretty," he murmured, tracing it with hot fingers. He dipped his head back down and slid backward on the bed, stopping with his breath barely gusting over the juncture of Spike's thighs. Xander placed his hands on the firm globes of Spike's ass and flexed his fingers into the hard muscle, eliciting a groan. The squick factor tried to kick in, but he ruthlessly suppressed it, remembering the incredible sensations he'd felt when Spike had done this very thing to him on their very first night together, a million years and a world of pain ago.

He slid his thumbs into the crease and opened his lover's body to his gaze. Spike shifted backward and raised his hips in supplication. Xander placed his tongue flat against the strip of skin behind Spike's balls and licked all the way up to the blood-dark mark he'd made earlier. He paused thoughtfully - it seemed that skin was

pretty much skin; salty and slightly spicy and pure Spike. Xander leaned in and repeated the motion twice more. On the third pass he let the tip of his tongue trace lightly around the entrance to Spike's body and grinned broadly when he received a muffled gasp for his efforts.

Taking a deep breath, he leaned in yet again. This time, he stiffened his tongue to a point and pressed it as far inside Spike as he could. The feeling of hot, internal muscles clenching down on his tongue was different, so he thrust in and out a few times. When he pulled out to catch his breath, Xander was stunned to see that Spike was trembling all over and pressing his face into the pillow.

"Is it good?" he asked, hating the uncertainty in his voice. Spike pressed his fisted hands into the mattress and levered up to look back at his lover. His face was bright red and he was gasping.

"It's fucking incredible! Don't stop now!"

Xander laughed and dove back in. He kept up the torture for the next five minutes, swirling his tongue around, stabbing it in and out, thrusting as hard as he could to touch as much of Spike as he could reach, until the blond launched himself forward on the bed to escape Xander's teasing mouth. Spike rolled onto his back and grinned up

at Xander with one hand wrapped snugly around the base of his own dark, dripping erection.

"No more," he pleaded. "Don't want to come like that - have to come inside you this time. Need it," he panted.

Xander smiled and wiped his face with his hand, pushing back to stand beside the bed.

"Where are you going?" Spike demanded.

"Hello, Spike? You're a human now, and you've probably got the immune system of a kitten at this point. Let me go clean up a little so I can kiss you." He looked down at the straining flesh in Spike's hand. "Hold that thought."

After a quick round of teeth-brushing and Listerine, Xander was back at the foot of the bed. He knelt on the mattress and panther-crawled up the bed, lightly brushing his chest against Spike's for maximum effect. By the time he reached the top of the bed, Spike's blue eyes were nearly black with arousal. Their lips met in a teasing kiss that instantly deepened when Spike curled both hands into Xander's hair and tugged to make him gasp. The smaller man hooked his calf around a tanned thigh and rolled them so that he came to rest on top.

For long moments they simply kissed, relearning the contours of one another's mouths, figuring out how to accommodate the fact that both of

them now needed to breathe, instead of just Xander. Before long, they were thrusting their lower bodies together urgently.

"Need to be in you, Xan - I can't wait anymore," Spike panted, and Xander answered him by sweeping the tube of lubricant off the table and pressing it into his hand. Spike coated his fingers and reached between Xander's spread legs. He let the tip of one finger circle the puckered opening, purposely mimicking the actions Xander had taken with his tongue. Gently, Spike eased just the tip of his finger into his lover and started moving, pressing in a little bit more on each thrust. Soon, he had worked his whole finger inside.

"Jesus, Xan. You feel so good," Spike groaned, and Xander's answering groan spurred him to thrust harder. Pulling out, Spike put more lubricant on his hand and carefully pressed two fingers inside, feeling the tissues stretch to accommodate him. Xander pushed down on the fingers stretching him and began thrashing his head from side to side on the pillow. Spike began twisting his fingers, searching for the prostate. He knew when he found it because Xander bucked hard against him, arching up from the bed with a muffled curse.

Spike kept up the pressure, happy to remain hovering over the other man, watching his every

reaction. He finally pulled back, waiting for his lover's eye to open. As soon as they were staring at each other, Spike smiled.

"You ready for three, love?" he asked.

"God, yes!" Xander groaned, and Spike started working three lubricated fingers inside, carefully stretching Xander wider and wider. Finally, the dark man could stand it no longer.

"Spike, you've got to fuck me now - I can't wait. Please - inside me, now!" he begged. Spike pulled his fingers out of the tight channel, chuckling at Xander's small sound of loss. He opened the lube again and spread a handful over his hard cock. He hooked one of Xander's knees over his elbow and pushed the other leg to the side to open the man beneath him fully. Wrapping his fingers around the base of his erection, he moved the head in line with Xander's hole.

"You ready, love? You want me?" he asked. Xander's lust-darkened eye swept Spike's face and saw the vulnerable expression there.

"Want you. Love you, Spike," he whispered. The admission nearly made Spike lose control. Exerting his iron will, he started the slow slide that would connect the two men fully, not stopping until he was completely sheathed inside Xander.

"Love - you're so tight. Feel so good. There...hasn't been...anybody..." Spike stammered.

"Not this," Xander gasped. "Was never going to be anybody else to do this - not after you. Only you." The words were Spike's undoing. He couldn't stop the emotions that ran through him at Xander's pledge. Bracing his hands on the bed and his forehead against his lover's he began rolling and shifting his hips, driving himself mindlessly into Xander's body. He felt strong arms and legs contracting around him in the same rhythm as the grasp and pull of Xander's hot passage. Sweat slicked both of their bodies, and Xander's cock was trapped between the hard ridges of their stomachs.

Spike thrust in, balls-deep, and stopped. They both held completely still for a long moment, eyes locked on each other's faces.

"I can feel your heartbeat inside me," Xander said, and Spike nearly cried at the look of wonder on his lover's face. They stayed still, and both felt it - once, and then again - their hearts beating in tandem. It was too much. Xander wrapped his legs around Spike's waist and buried his head in his lover's neck as Spike resumed his motion. He fucked Xander as hard as he could, wanting to drive ever more of himself inside.

Xander merely held on and rode the waves of sensation that threatened to engulf him.

Xander felt the sensation pooling in his lower back and knew that his orgasm was near. He threw his head back and found Spike's eyes with his one. "Now, Spike - coming now," he said, and bit his lip as he felt the cock inside him swell and then pulse, shooting Spike's hot release deep into his body at the same time as Xander's spilled between them.

"Love you," Spike said, on a long groan. "Love you, Xan."

Xander floated calmly in a sea of contentment. His fingers moved languidly up and down the staircase of Spike's ribcage, pausing now and then to do Fred Astaire-style kicks and leaps before climbing up and sliding down again and again. Beneath his ear, the steady beat of Spike's heart was utterly normal, utterly human and utterly amazing - all at the same time. The fingers began their climb once again; going halfway up, reversing; a skip, a jump, and then a long, slow slide to the bottom, skimming down to the jut of a hipbone, skating over it; thumb stroking the hollow before moving in to rub against the firm pad of muscle blanketing the center of the pelvis. The fingers joined the thumb, they folded under so knuckles could press into the spot beneath Spike's navel that

made his abdominal muscles jump involuntarily and quiver just the tiniest bit.

Spike's fingers were exploring the infinite variations of swirl and texture created by Xander's thick hair as it slid over and around his stroking hand. The locks separated and reformed under his ministrations; the waves ebbing and flowing to reveal the tender paleness of the scalp beneath. Silken strands caught on the faint roughness of the whorls and patterns of fingerprints, and Spike pressed the pads of his fingers lightly against Xander's skull, as if branding him with those unique imprints, marking the pale flesh with invisible signs of ownership. He mapped the contours of the delicate arch of bone behind Xander's ear, the hidden crease beneath the lobe, the hollow at the beginning of the tanned neck.

Spike sighed. He was loath to break the comfortable silence, but couldn't help himself. The burning, consuming possessiveness of the vampire was long gone, but the ego of the man remained.

"So, there was somebody..." he began; his finger's stilling in Xander's hair.

"Jason. He's a friend. Occasional fuck buddy," Xander explained. His voice was supremely relaxed and even. "It...wasn't you, Spike, but it helped - when things got to be too much. You OK

with that?" Spike's fingers resumed their motion while he pondered his lover's words.

"It's done now, right?" he asked. Xander turned his head to press a kiss to the skin of Spike's chest.

"Duh," he answered.

"Why a...fuck buddy, Xan? Why not..." Spike's voice trailed off. Knuckles dug sharply into the top of his pelvis as Xander levered himself up to look into wide blue eyes.

"Because a fuck buddy doesn't care if I call out your name when I come; he doesn't care that I won't kiss him or cuddle with him after or let him fuck me. Jason is a good friend who likes to get fucked. He didn't care that I was pretending he was you, Spike." The former vampire couldn't help the broad grin that spread across his face. In a completely bizarre, yet completely logical way, it warmed his heart that Xander had sought out a partner that knew he was being used as a stand-in, even when he thought Spike was dead. Xander took in the gorgeous smile and smiled back.

"You like that, don't you?" he asked. When Spike nodded enthusiastically, he laughed and sank back down to his previous position.

"You're a sick twist, baby," he said. "I dig it."

Spike smoothed the dark waves back from his lover's forehead and grumbled, "Formerly evil former vampire, here - don't you forget it." Xander rubbed his fingers lightly over Spike's abdomen.

"There's not one thing I've forgotten about you," he whispered, and the formerly evil one found himself swallowing hard against the lump in his throat. Once he regained his composure, he looked down at the relaxed face pressed to his chest.

"What do we do now, Xander?" he asked.

"You mean that in the 'big, existential question of life, the universe and everything' kind of way, or in a 'what's for lunch' kind of way?" Xander asked.

"The first one," Spike said. Xander watched his own fingers climb up his lover's ribs to rest in the hollow between his pectoral muscles and tap along to the rhythm of his heart.

"That's easy," he said, fingers still tapping lightly. "We live."

The End