

Pairing: Spike/Xander, mentions Buffy/Angel

Rating: *Adults Only/Mature*

Spoilers: *Through Chosen for Buffy and All's Well for Angel. Completely ignores the comics.*

Summary: *After the battle against Wolfram and Hart, Spike's life is a mindless routine of helping Angel fight the lingering evil in LA and Buffy train new Slayers until one day when he gets a call that changes everything, thrusting into a mystery he has to solve before someone ends up dead.*

Warnings: *Descriptions of violence and slash.*

Word Count: *2,350 for this part.*

Author's Note: *The prologue was originally written as a drabble by Andrea, [ladycat777](#), and when I read it, I knew I had to finish it. So the prologue is mostly what she wrote. The rest is my take on the idea. So that will explain the change between the prologue and the remainder of the fic. Her = awesome, me = the rest. *g**

Author's Note 2: *Much love and thanks to [greenstone_j](#) for being the most awesome beta ever! This fic wouldn't have been half as good without her help, opinions and input. You really are the best.*

Author's Note 3: *This is set after both shows but ignores the comics since I haven't read them and only have a very basic idea of what is going on in them.*

13,008 Words

Hunted

by
Strickensgirl

Prologue

Spike could hear them through the floor above him, screaming at each other like they were actually furious at each other. They weren't. Well, no, they *were* angry—Angel didn't know jack about dealing with a woman and the Slayer wasn't good at telling when something was wrong—but it was all *strum and drang*. They'd be kissing and more, soon enough, and he'd be left alone, down minding the bloody phones like he was a sodding secretary.

Saddest part was, they weren't wrong. Three years and he was still out of sorts, no sign that it was going to change soon, either. It'd been okay, the first few months back. He'd had Angel mostly to himself, then. But then Buffy got sick of being teacher and, as he'd told her bloody over and over again, started missing the rush of the fight. So she teamed up with Angel after the ponce tried to send LA to hell.

Yeah, okay, there was a bit more to that, since Angel's curse was circumvented or stepped over or something due to the mess with the Black Thorn, but that was the long and short of it.

Not that he'd held out hope, of course. Angel was her one and only and that was the way it was supposed to be. Taken him too long to figure it out, but he had. But she wasn't with Angel, back then, and no indication she ever would be again, so Spike had allowed himself to hope. Well, not even hope. But Angel'd been there, acting the way he never had and Spike had always wanted, when he let himself think of things like that. Like, well, a brother. Or something. Like someone who cared.

And Spike, of course, saw the finger and decided he wanted the whole bloody hand.

That was years ago, though, and he'd dealt with it. Well, hid it. Gotten much better at that, the last three years, and neither Buffy nor Angel, who knew him better than anyone else, could see beyond what he let them. So he hid, sliding deeper and deeper behind the mask, every time the phone rang.

Like right then. Bugging thing wouldn't let a vamp brood in peace, would it, always ringing and disturbing him out of a right good snit.

"What?" So he made a crappy secretary. It was part of his charm.

"Is there a Spike there?"

"Yeah, what?"

"Uh. . . this is Spike?"

"What the bloody hell do you want?"

“Do you know an Alexander Harris? This is Dr. Werstminer of L.A. hospital. He’s a patient of ours, and according to his records, you’re listed as next of kin.”

Spike lifted the phone away from his head, shook his head and then the phone, before putting it back to his ear. “What?”

“Is this Spike—”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m Spike and you better repeat what you just said or I’m gonna come down there and make you.”

“I *want* you to come down here,” the doctor snapped, temper snapping almost audibly. “That is, if you are the Spike who’s listed as Alexander Harris’ next of kin.”

Xander had done what?

And then right on the heels of that thought, *Xander was in the hospital.*

“I’ll be there in five.”

The sewers were fast enough, if you knew how to navigate them, and luckily enough, Spike did. He'd spent enough time hunting whatever baddie was lurking around when his Sire and the Slayer got a little – well – loud. Yeah, Spike knew the sewers well. Well enough to get him to the hospital in under five minutes.

Next of kin. He knew what that meant.

“Spike, here to see Alexander Harris,” he rapped out to the receptionist, making sure he looked every inch the imposing character. The leather coat and eyeliner made for a better impression, he thought with nostalgia, but given the mousey squeak and instant compliance from the girl, Spike wasn’t complaining.

Navigating the hospital’s picture windows was tricky, but he’d become very good at that over the years. Except why were they leading him up, instead of down?

“Ah, Spike. I’m glad you’re here.”

The doctor—thin, balding, obviously holding onto his patience with teeth and toenails—offered a smile but not a handshake. Spike looked at him, then the closed door that Xander lay beyond. He only just barely picked out the unique scent under the layers of antiseptic and other noxious smells, but it was there. Xander was in there.

Xander who'd skipped off to Africa despite the Witch and the Watcher moving off to England, the 'bit to law school, and the Slayer to parts unknown. He found and taught the new Slayers, Andrew'd told him, but hadn't been specific. Of all of them, Xander had kept the least in contact.

When the doctor's arm came up to bar his entry, Spike almost shifted right then.

“What'd you bring me down here for, if not to see him?” And what the hell was this next of kin business? Shouldn't have that been the Witch? Buffy, maybe, since she was the most mobile or Giles as the head of the Watchers. Him? Xander hated him. “Well? Let me in!”

“Not until I get you to sign his release forms.”

That halted Spike's overwhelming urge to go inside, to see Xander, who'd named him next of kin. “Release?”

“He'll need a lot of help and support as he recovers.”

“Recovers?”

“Yes. He'll be fine, we removed the wood in time.”

Spike felt something crawl in his gut. “Wood?”

“Yes, he was stabbed in the chest—they were aiming for the heart, we think—with a sharpened piece of wood. Fortunately, he's in remarkable health and should make a complete recovery. He's having difficulty speaking at the moment—he was beaten although most of the other injuries are superficial—and it took us nearly a week to understand that you were the one he was asking for.”

“Asking for?” He realized he’d been echoing everything the doctor said and shook himself. “Right. Beaten, stabbed, but he’ll be o—he asked for me?”

The doctor nodded and opened the door. “He’s right in there.”

Spike entered the room with a vampire’s grace and silence, not wanting to disturb him if Xander was awake. He was. Lying on the bed, half-covered in white bandages, Xander’s eye met his squarely and a tiny grin appeared on dry, cracked lips. “Remember,” Xander whispered carefully, the effort due to a huge black bruise to the right of his adam’s apple.

And then Xander touched the empty socket still covered in a black leather patch.

Spike nodded and smiled.

Part One

Spike stood looking down at Xander, broken and bruised, familiarity twisting at his gut. The hospital smells taking him right back to the last time and it felt like mere days since he had stared down at a face covered in a huge white bandage. That time, the boy had been sleeping, peacefully drugged after the doctor's had cleaned and debried the ragged, empty socket.

Now Spike looked down at a man, his skin golden and glowing, even beneath the pallor brought on by intense pain, too harsh lighting and nearly a week hidden from the sun. A chair pressed against the back of his legs and the vampire slowly sat, turning to glower at the doctor smiling at him.

"Don't let him try to talk too much," Dr. Werstminer said, glaring at the pair of them. "Maybe he'll listen to you. I'll have someone bring the papers into you momentarily."

Spike nodded, still staring at the single brown eye sparkling at him. Once the door clicked shut, the vampire was on his feet, pulling the sheets down and the stiff hospital gown up.

Xander began to chuckle at the treatment, but the sudden laughter caused him to cough and choke. Spike rubbed the man's chest, trying to will down the coughing, his movements gentle and soothing, until Xander was breathing easily again. Satisfied that he wouldn't cause another attack, Spike began to inspect the bandages covering the wound. His instinct was to rip them off, to see the damage, verify what the doctor had said, but Spike knew it was true.

Xander had been attacked by a Slayer.

Spike's cool, pale fingers probed the white gauze while he searched the man's face for discomfort. Finally, Xander flinched and gasped and Spike knew he'd found the spot. It had been a close call. The stake had punctured Xander's sternum instead of finding its way home between his ribs. Just a mere two inches and Spike would have found the boy in a bag instead of a bed.

Content for the moment, Spike began to search and catalogue the rest of Xander's injuries. Bruised ribs, three fingers broken, left shoulder dislocated. At least the boy had fought back, he thought with more than a little pride. The worst was the bruising around his neck. Someone had wrapped their hand around his neck with enough pressure to damage the larynx.

Someone with small thin fingers.

Girl's fingers.

Spike slumped back down into the chair, sighing as his head fell forward into his hands.

"Done?" Xander asked, his voice quiet and cracked.

"Done."

They sat in silence, simply staring at each other until a small nurse slipped into the

room, thrusting a clipboard in front of Spike's nose. Slowly, she directed him through page after page of forms, pointing out where he needed to initial and sign his name over and over again.

"Why all the forms?" he snapped. "And why're you Nightingales pushing him out of the nest if he's obviously still not well?"

The nurse politely smiled, her eyes hard as steel. "He's being released at his own request. The need for the forms is because he's leaving against medical advice, just so you don't come back and sue when he dies."

At Spike's growl, she corrected herself, "I mean *if* he dies. Besides, he refused to let us bill any insurance or even tell anyone he was here, except for you of course."

"Of course."

Spike decided he hated this nurse and from the look on Xander's face, he didn't care for her much either. There was just something about her that made the vampire's skin crawl.

"Now," the nurse declared once she'd collected the last signature, "if you'll excuse me, it's time for Mr. Harris' medication."

"Not going anywhere, Ducks," Spike stated with a smirk as he leaned back in his uncomfortable, hospital issue chair. "Do what you need to do."

Little Nurse Ratchet glared for a moment before reaching into her pocket to pull out a small syringe before emptying the contents into Xander's IV line. A few scribbled notes in the chart and then she was gone.

Spike watched as the drugs began to work. Xander's features slackened and his breathing evened out. Hades Inc must have supplied the chair, because Spike had known rocks with more give and racks that were less tortuous. As he shifted to find a better position, a tape-covered hand shot out to wrap tightly around his wrist.

"Don't leave," Xander rasped.

"Not leaving, Pet," Spike soothed. "Just trying to get comfortable in this god awful place, is all."

Xander smiled before he whispered, "Book," as the drugs tried to pull him under their control.

Spike shook his head. "Book? What book?"

Unable to lift his hand, Xander looked toward the small locker across from his bed. Spike followed the path of the chocolate eye and asked, "In there?"

At the human's slight nod, Spike pried the now limp fingers from his wrist to go to the locker. "Familiar as rifling through your worldly goods is, think it's a first that you've given me permission," he griped as he dug through Xander's meager possessions. Finally, at the bottom of a battered duffel bag, the vampire found a worn photo album.

"This what you're talking about?"

Spike knew he'd found it by Xander's brilliant smile.

"Now," Xander whispered, "now you'll see too."

Then sleep pulled him under.

Spike checked on the boy one last time, making sure his breathing and heartbeat were normal before settling down with what appeared to be Xander's only possession besides a change of clothes. He opened the album and began to look through it.

~*~*~*~*~

The young nurse looked into the room and cursed under her breath. This was bad. She pulled the phone out of the pocket of her crisp white dress and steadied herself before dialing.

"Hello. It's Kari."

She cocked her head as she listened intently.

"Yes, he's still here but there's a problem."

...

"No, nothing like that, but the vampire's here – the blond one."

...

"Yes I'm sure. I felt it the second I walked in the room. It felt just like you said it would."

...

"I don't know who contacted him but Dr. Werstminer asked me to have the vampire fill out the release forms."

...

"I understand that, but I can't be here all the time. I can't work every shift, that would be too suspicious. Things are getting out of control here."

...

"No, I don't want you to come here, but maybe you need to send someone else to help."

...

"No. No, please don't. I just. . .I just can't do this all on my own. I'll keep an eye on them. I promise. Please, just let me keep my power."

...

"Thank you. Yes, thank you. I promise."

...

"I promise."

Part Two

Spike flipped through the album, slowly looking over the evidence of Xander's life over the past few years. It was an honest glimpse into the boy who had now become the man before him, broken but healing.

The first few pictures had Xander with Giles and Willow in England. Xander had obviously helped Giles in supervising the reconstruction of Watcher Central. The boy looked good, smiling as he walked around with his toolbelt strapped around his waist, ordering a bunch of blokes about, obviously enjoying himself.

There were a few pictures of him with Andrew and some of the Slayers, most of whom Spike couldn't name or remember. They seemed pleasant enough, but Xander didn't look happy in them, not really.

Then there were pictures of Xander in Africa. Spike had heard from Andrew that the boy had been sent to track down new Slayers and bring them back to the Watchers for training. Idly, Spike wondered how Xander had taken the request. Had the boy thought they just wanted him out of the country, didn't want him as a real Watcher, or had he accepted it as an honor, that Giles had trusted him with something truly important?

He'd try to ask him later.

But pictures don't lie and Spike knew Xander had enjoyed his work hunting new Slayers. There were pictures of him tan and dirty, his smile wide and white while he stood next to a very young girl. Sometimes they were accompanied by family and

friends, sometimes not. Several times, Xander looked a little worse for wear, tired or bruised, but there was a joy shining out of him that Spike hadn't seen since before. . .*that* night.

Looking up at the man in the bed, Spike thought about that night. It had been a rough time for both of them. Spike had stood, silent and still as the dead, watching over the boy after the Witch had left, sure that Buffy would show. But the Slayer never did.

Spike had known the crazy Preacher wouldn't be after the boy, wouldn't try to finish the job, but that didn't stop him standing guard. His soul had ached, knowing that Xander had suffered such a devastating loss because he was too slow – again. He prayed he wouldn't have to live that night over again and again like he had when he failed both Dawn and Buffy. The weight on his soul was crushing.

He'd decided to sit in the ugly, bedside chair vacated by Red. It turned out to be as stiff and lumpy as it was ugly and when he'd shifted, a tape-covered hand had shot out to wrap tightly around his wrist.

"Don't leave," Xander had whispered, his voice breaking.

"Not leaving, Pet," Spike had answered. "Just trying to get comfortable in this god awful place, is all."

Slowly, Xander had released the vampire's wrist and Spike had sat down, staring at the dreadful bandage on the boy's face.

"I'm sorry," he'd whispered.

"For what?"

His pale fingers had reached up to trace the round bandage hiding the damaged eye socket, slowly, sadly.

"You didn't do that," Xander'd said.

"Should've been faster," Spike had explained. "Should've been watching. Should've

taken care of you."

Xander had laughed then, bitter and ugly.

"You couldn't take care of all of us, Spike. There were too many of us and there were too many of them. I wasn't ready for that fight, but I followed Buffy anyway. We all did. You, me and all those girls. I'm just expendable guy who got in the way one too many times."

The vampire had moved fast that time, reaching out to grasp the boy's chin and turn it toward him. "Don't you ever say that again."

That had shut the boy up, much to Spike's surprise.

"Make you a deal," Xander had offered.

"What's that, Pet?"

"I'll never say that again if you forgive yourself."

It was Spike's turn to laugh bitter and ugly then.

"Okay, I'll forgive myself if you remember that I've your back from here on out. Deal?"

"Deal."

"You'll remember?"

"I will if you will."

They'd shook on it then, sealing the deal. The rest of the evening was spent talking, mostly stories they hadn't already heard – Xander reminiscing about the early days before the Slayer came to town and Spike weaving tales of Angelus or his own uneventful human life. Even after Xander had dozed off, too high on pain meds to stay awake, Spike had stayed, determined to ward off any demons, real or imagined.

They'd learned something about themselves and about each other that night and Spike realized, as he stared at the black patch disguising his failure, that he was going to do everything he could to make sure he didn't fail Xander again.

Tearing his gaze away from the man in the bed before him, Spike continued through the album. He noticed the way Xander subtly changed in the photos. Gone was the boy who had gotten soft and flabby with the undemanding desk job. He was replaced by a sleek, trim man with a wide smile and roguish good looks. The long, curling sable-colored hair paired well with the dark patch and tan skin. Hard-earned muscles stood out from beneath tight t-shirts, slick with sweat.

Spike looked up, sneaking a glimpse of the hint of muscles under the hospital clothes. Xander had grown up and done it well.

If the pictures were any indication, Spike wasn't the only one who'd noticed either.

There were both men and women hanging onto the young man, all obviously wanting his attention, even if the human remained oblivious.

Then Spike spotted it — the indication that Xander had noticed someone. A very male someone — dark skin, long arms, and a wide smile that mirrored Xander's own. There were several pictures of them together in different places. They'd clearly been together for some time and something rose up in the vampire.

Not knowing if it was anger or jealousy or maybe both, Spike slammed the book closed for a moment before throwing it open once again. When the pages flew apart, several pieces of paper fluttered to the floor. When he bent down to pick them up to shove them back inside, Spike noticed the first headline:

GIRL, 4, BREAKS SISTER'S ARM IN ARGUMENT, MOTHER SAYS

Shocked, Spike skimmed through the article, discovering that the four-year-old in question had apparently gotten mad at her sister when her favorite doll had gone missing. The small girl twisted her eight-year-old sister's arm behind her back until it broke in three places. Authorities considered taking the girls out of the home until the four-year-old broke her bedroom door off during a fit.

Confused, Spike looked at the next article.

*REPORTED GIRL SQUAD TAKING REVENGE ON BULLIES, CAUSING FEAR
IN SCHOOL*

Three girls in a New York school got together and decided to take on bullies themselves after they discovered they had developed "superpowers". The problem was they didn't just stop at bullies. They had turned their wrath on anyone that they deemed wrong including boys who made passes at them, girls they considered competition or too "skanky".

Now Spike was starting to get worried. Article after article told the same tale. Girls with power — too much power, power they didn't understand — were in trouble, causing trouble.

A ten-year-old girl died when she jumped off her roof, thinking she could fly.

A five-year-old killed a classmate when she threw a ball in gym class and knocked him over so hard that his head was split open.

"See?" Spike heard the whisper and looked up to see Xander watching him, tears forming in his eye. "Now do you see?"

"It's still a bit higgly-piggly, Pet."

"We made them. Now we have to unmake them."

Part Three

They stared at each other, the silence stretching out between them. Slowly, the pieces began to fall into place for the vampire.

"The spell," Spike whispered. "Red's spell. It was too much."

Xander nodded sleepily. "We made them all. All of them are Slayers – every potential. They can't handle it, don't know what to do. We did that."

"You figured it out..."

"...And now they want to kill me."

"Bloody hell!" Spike raged. "That's why you called me. That's why no insurance or Watchers or Slayers or Witches. You think they're trying to kill you."

Xander nodded slowly.

"Slayers don't want to lose their powers and Watchers don't want to lose their Slayers. Any idea which tosser it might be?"

A single shoulder shrugged in response.

"Can't call anyone. Please." Xander begged sleepily as he drifted off again.

Spike didn't bother to respond knowing Xander wouldn't hear or see him anyway. He needed help but he hated to play that card. But this was Xander.

And he remembered.

The phone was opened and dialled before he consciously thought about it.

A female voice answered the phone, just like he knew it would.

"What do you want, Spike?"

"I want to talk to Peaches if your majesty doesn't mind," he snarked back. "It's important."

"Of course it's important, Spike," Buffy taunted. "It's always important especially when we're occupied."

"Occupied, is it? Was it your mouth this time or maybe your cu..."

"Spike!" Angel shouted, interrupting. The blond vampire flinched and hoped he could circumnavigate the usual lecture about his lack of respect towards Buffy. Angel couldn't understand that they enjoyed teasing each other, and it kept them the necessary distance apart not to inspire Angelus' legendary jealous streak.

"Sorry, Peaches," Spike apologized quietly as he turned back toward the bed to make sure the human was still sleeping. Assured that Xander was still dozing soundly, he whispered, "I need you here."

"What?"

Spike sighed loudly, frustrated at having to repeat himself. "I said I need you here."

"I heard you, Spike," the older vampire growled. "I just wondered why I'd care."

"Let's just say it's a favor, alright."

"A favor or a debt, Spike?"

Wanting to slam his head against a large, solid object, preferably Angel's face, Spike took a deep breath to keep his temper from boiling over — for Xander. "Please," he begged, "I need your help — Sire."

The single word seemed to freeze the vampire on the other end of the phone. After several long minutes, Angel asked, "Where are you?"

"L.A. Hospital," Spike explained, relief coloring his voice. "And Angel — don't bring the Slayer."

"Why not?"

One look back at Xander and Spike's forehead creased and he replied, "Don't rightly know, but it's important."

"I'll be there in five."

Spike slid the phone back into one of the many pockets before settling back into the hospital chair from Hades to wait for Angel. He had a good ten-minute wait, more if Buffy pitched a fit. Girl didn't like any interruptions, when they were... occupied. He might be in for quite a wait.

~*~*~*~*~*~

She had heard it all. She really loved all this recon, spy-type stuff. It made her feel like those girls in the movies, like a young, not as hot Angelina Jolie, without all the tattoos and kids and Brad Pitt.

She waited until Angel left before pulling out the Blackberry she'd been given for messages like this.

Blond 1 has called in Brood vamp. Just left. Will text when target is in the building.

Giggling, she slipped the shiny device in the pocket of her hoodie before racing down the stairs. If she didn't hurry, she was going to be late for training and she couldn't have that.

Part Four

Spike and Angel stood, shoulders brushing as they stared down at the young man lying in the large, soft bed. The silence stretched between them until Spike finally cleared his throat.

"Xander appreciates this, I'm sure."

He left the rest unsaid – thanks for clearing out the fifth floor for Xander, thanks for not telling Buffy, for understanding, for not questioning, for... everything.

"Yeah," Angel answered.

"You saw the book?"

"Yeah."

"What do we do?"

"We wait for him to wake up and tell us the rest."

Spike hated that answer. "Bollocks."

"Yeah."

Fingers flexed as Spike fought the urge to pace, rage, or break something. He wasn't one for waiting.

"I wondered why we didn't see him," Angel whispered as a few moments passed.

"What?"

"When they came – the Slayers. I thought Xander would be with them, but he wasn't."

Spike remembered all too well. Angel had taken his ragtag team and had declared war on Wolfram and Hart, nearly destroyed them all in the process. Wes was gone, dead at the hands of the mage, Blue fought like the hell god she was, taking as many monsters with her as she went down and Gunn lay in the street, bleeding to death, his blood diluted by the pouring rain. They were going to die, he'd thought at the time.

They were all going to die.

But then, a miracle happened. A portal opened in the middle of the battle, streaming light and heat into the cool, wet night. Red came out first, her hair gleaming white, radiating power and grace as she pulled apart time and space to come to them. Buffy had followed then; an army of Slayers at her heels, all armed to the teeth, ready for battle.

That had turned the tide, given them the advantage to overcome, to win.

Spike looked up after gutting the last foe just in time to see Angel slay the dragon he coveted, Buffy at his side. Once again, he'd lost out to his Sire – odd man out. He knew that story well.

After the battle was over, they discovered there had been a prophecy that brought the Scoobies to them – all of them except for Xander. Giles, Red, Buffy, even Andrew had slipped through the portal to help, but Xander was no where to be seen.

The fight, the mess, the bloody cleanup had come next and Spike forgot about the missing boy until the call came, rousing him from the awful complacency that was drowning him.

And now he had the missing boy before him, broken and bruised, trusting him, counting on him. Now Spike had a mystery on his hands, one he had to solve before it got Xander killed.

Part Five

It had been a tough couple of days, trying to stay off the Slayer's radar. It was mostly his fault, of course – he'd always made it a habit to be right in the middle of

things, trying to be the wrench in the works between her and Angel. It was fun, about the only sport he had anymore, besides training with the newly-made Slayers. Now he was out of sight, but obviously not out of mind.

Buffy had stormed worthy of a natural disaster when she found out that Angel had given him free reign of the fifth floor. In front of the newbies, when Angel had announced that no one, Buffy included, had access to the entire floor.

The shade of red that crept up Buffy's face had been beautiful; nearly the color of the Witch's flaming hair.

The Slayer had tried to argue but Spike pointed out that the Slayers had the entire basement for training and Angel had remodeled most of the second floor just for her. Satisfied that he had won, Spike had told Buffy to put on her big girl panties and get over herself.

He laughed just thinking about it. Of course, laughing jarred the broken ribs he was still sporting and the compulsory fractured nose, but some things were just worth it, he decided.

"What's so funny?"

Spike looked down and smiled at the recovering invalid. Xander was finally able to talk more than two words at a time without his throat closing or having a massive coughing jag. It was a nice change.

"Just thinking 'bout the look on the Slayer's face when Angel told her about the new living conditions."

"You still can't get over that, can you?"

"Used your line, didn't I?" Spike smiled, despite the split in his lip. "Big girl panties – priceless."

Xander smiled then, wide and bright. He was still in pain but healing well. Now they needed to decide what to do next.

But first things first.

"So – sponge bath then, yeah?" Spike asked, shifting slightly, trying to fight down the nerves creeping up his spine. He shouldn't be so antsy – wasn't like he'd never seen a bloke naked – hell, wasn't like he'd never seen Xander naked, thanks to his sentence hiding in the basement from hell, but still... this was different somehow.

Of course, Xander didn't even seem to notice.

"God, yes, please," he said with a small chuckle. "I'm sure I reek. I really hate hospitals and that stench just doesn't seem to want to go away."

Slipping off his own jacket, followed by stripping away the warm blankets from Xander, Spike prepared to clean his patient and change his dressing just like he'd promised to do. He dubiously picked at the thick tape keeping the gauze in place on the man's chest. Bit by bit the tape peeled away until Xander finally slapped at Spike's hands.

"Ow," Spike complained quietly as he shook out his hand.

"Don't pick," Xander complained. "It's a bandage, Spike. You have to rip it off quick or it hurts. Do it fast, like a, well, Band-Aid."

Spike pulled at the thick tape until he could get a piece of it away from the skin.

"Ready?" he asked. When Xander nodded slightly, he counted, "One, two..." before wrenching the entire bandage away.

"Sweet holy mother of Delenn!" Xander shouted. "That hurt!"

Spike chuckled as he cleared the last of the bandage away, picking softly at the remnants of tape clinging to the boy's skin. Now that the tape and gauze were gone, Spike got a close look at the damage beneath. The wound was ugly – still red and raw around the edges, black stitches holding the skin closed. Black ink in a thick swirling design sat just above the edge of the injury.

Slowly, Spike traced a finger around the edges of the intricate design.

"What's this?"

Xander looked down; watching the cool finger as it danced over his skin. "Tattoo."

That earned the boy a small smack to the head. Spike smirked as Xander complained lightly, "Hey!"

"Know it's a tattoo, Whelp. I asked what it was."

"Protection charm," Xander explained. "It guards the person from certain spells."

"You? With the magic? And what type of mojo you dodging, Filch?"

"Tracking spells."

Spike sat back and let that sink in for a few moments. Finally, he asked, "Red?"

Xander's nod was short and staccato.

Picking up the bowl of water full of suds, Spike sat on the edge of the bed before easing the sheet down enough to bare the boy to the waist. He picked up the cloth submerged in the water before squeezing out the excess. Silently, he wiped the cloth up and down the warm flesh, gently cleaning the boy's skin.

"Maybe you'd best unravel your tale," Spike whispered.

A quiet gasp passed from between Xander's lips at the gentle treatment.

"Later," he whispered, his eye falling shut. "Later, please."

Spike stared at Xander's face, the joy and calm there, shining through the pain.

"Alright, Pet."

He lost himself in the motion of rinsing out the cloth, dipping in the sudsy water, before tracing over the warm skin, cleaning Xander's face and neck. He didn't look dirty, the hospital had obviously cleaned the boy of all the blood and dirt some time

during his stay, Xander was probably lucky to still have all his parts if the sweetness and light that had been little Nurse Ratchet been sent to bath him. Although not out and about yet, Xander said he could feel the sweat and grime clinging to his skin. And Spike wasn't about to fail him in by withholding this little comfort.

Xander sighed softly, making Spike smile, as he cleaned between each finger before working his way up his arm. He was meticulous, cleaning every inch of the warm body exposed to him above the sheet, before helping Xander turn over. He gave the young man's back the same treatment, cleaning it gently with simple, soft strokes.

He paused for a moment before pulling the sheet away to expose Xander to him completely. He tried not to look or linger on the swell of the perfect globes of Xander's ass – tried, and failed.

But Xander never said a word. He just let Spike clean him, stroking gently with the warm cloth.

Finally, satisfied with his thorough job on the back half, Spike helped Xander settle on his back to complete the job. Starting at his feet, Spike slowly worked his way up the strong, muscular legs, smiling to himself as he discovered that Xander was apparently very ticklish behind his knees.

He inched his way up until he reached the boy's groin.

"Do you wanna finish yourself up or..."

"I think you're doing a pretty good job yourself there, Spike."

Spike paused, staring at the boy.

"Fine," Xander sighed, smirking at the vampire as he took the cloth from his hand. Quickly and efficiently, the boy cleaned his cock and balls before tossing the cloth back in the bowl. "There. All done."

They smiled at each other for a moment until Spike finally said, "Good. Right then. Let's get you dressed."

As he helped Xander slip on a t-shirt and pair of sweatpants, he tried not to dwell on the smirk gracing Xander's face or the way he kept licking his lips.

He had to be imagining it.

He had to.

Part Six

Seven steps forward. One step to the left to avoid the sunlight shining through the window on step four. Drag off fag. Exhale with a heavy sigh. Turn. Seven more steps with a single step to the right to avoid the sunlight. Another drag. Another sigh.

Rinse.

Repeat.

"You're making me nauseous pacing like that," the voice complained behind him.

"Sorry, Pet," Spike whispered as he crushed the burning butt under his boot. "Don't like the wait, yeah?"

"You could have just woke me up if you were that worried, you know."

Spike chuckled lightly. "You were sleeping so peaceful like – didn't want to disturb you is all. You dropped right off after your bath. Must have needed your rest."

"Been resting," Xander complained as he stretched, his arms pulled high over his head. "Tired of resting."

Spike smiled at the man worked his sore muscles loose. As Xander sighed and groaned at the delicious ache of the stretch, Spike stared as the sheet rode low and the t-shirt slid high, exposing a tantalizing strip of skin. Warm and tan with a slight dusting of hair leading down into the loose sweatpants. The vampire wondered how it would taste if he just. . .

"Hello," Xander drawled teasingly. "My eye is up here, mister."

Realizing he'd been caught, Spike dropped his head as he laughed at himself.

"Sorry, Ducks. You just looked so nice all spread out like that. Can't blame a guy for looking."

They shared a soft smile before the vampire pulled a chair over to the side of the bed and settled in.

"Ready to tell me your tale?"

"Ready to hear it?"

Spike nodded, hoping he truly was.

Reaching over, Xander pulled the book from the side table before opening it and handing it to Spike.

"That is Jawad," Xander explained. Spike looked down at the photo of Xander smiling, his arm wrapped tightly around the other man's waist. It was all so ideal: the pose, the smile, the comfortable way they fit together. It made something seize in his chest, knowing that Xander had found something so comfortable finally, but with someone other than him.

"That's when it all started," the man whispered, drawing the vampire out of his silent contemplation. "Jawad's sister was a Slayer."

"Was?"

"Was – is – whatever. She was nine when we did the spell. The dreams hit her first. Prophetic dreams, dreams of memories of other Slayers, dreams of vampires and demons and monsters. She thought she was going crazy. Maybe she was."

Xander was silent then, quiet and still. Spike waited until finally, he couldn't take it anymore. "What happened?"

"I found her," Xander answered, his voice low and flat. "I explained that she wasn't

really crazy, that the dreams were just telling her of her destiny, that she had the power to fight the monsters in her dreams."

"Did she believe you?"

"Yeah," Xander whispered as he stared at the hands folded in his lap. "She believed me."

Reaching over, he turned the page to reveal the picture of a simple but very sad looking funeral. Spike stared down at the tiny body draped with a beautiful white cloth. "She died," he whispered.

"Killed herself," Xander clarified. "Threw herself off a cliff. It was painful to see the family go through all that pain. She was a beautiful little girl and she would still be alive if we haven't activated her."

"There was no way to know that the spell was going to do that – that it would turn all those little girls into Slayers. We couldn't know."

"We should have."

The moment stretched out between them as they sat in silence until Spike reached out to lightly touch Xander's hand. Warm fingers grasped his as if the human needed something to hold onto, a lifeline to keep him going.

"Jawad asked me to stay," Xander continued quietly. "I told him that I needed to do my job, find other girls, to help them. He understood that more girls could die because they wouldn't comprehend what was happening to them. So he asked to go with me."

"And you left him behind," Spike whispered, trying to be considerate and supportive.

Xander's bark of laughter shocked him.

"Are you kidding?" Xander laughed. "You did see the picture of him, right? The Arnold body with the Denzel face? I totally said he could come with me."

"Then what are you getting all maudlin on me for? You were doing a pretty good impersonation my Sire for a minute there."

"Hey," Xander complained. "Comparing me to the Broody One is hitting below the belt there, Blondie. Why don't you just let me tell the story?"

"Tell it then."

Xander mock-glared at him for a minute before he continued. "After Siena's death, I checked in with my contact, a guy named Timothy. He was a real nice guy for a Watcher wanna-be. . . or don't wanna-be as the case may be. He was from a big Watcher family and so it would seem obvious that he should follow in the family business. Timothy had other ideas."

"Sounds like someone else we know."

"Yeah. Anyway, he wasn't in training or part of the Council so he survived the mass Watcher genocide when the First starting hacking up Englishmen. Giles and Andrew recruited him when they were rebuilding. Guy knows his stuff, you know, for growing up with it all his life. He was my contact. So I asked him. That's when all the bad things started to happen."

Spike forward in his chair. "What bad things?"

"Weird things like I was suddenly being sent to areas that were known war zones or my flights were being rerouted and my travel plans were all wonky. At first I thought it was just the normal 'Xander screwed up' wonkiness until my second plane crash."

"Second?!" Spike shouted, squeezing Xander's hand so hard he could nearly feel the bones creak.

"Ow!" Xander complained, shaking out his hand. "Still human here, Spike, and alive I might add. No need to squeeze so hard."

"Sorry, Pet," the vampire apologized. "Just not real happy about the whole multiple

plane crash idea."

"Yeah, not so crazy about the scenario myself, Spike, but you wanted the story."

"Yeah, I wanted the story. Go on."

"I had confessed to Timothy that I was worried about what we had done and asked him to look into the spell we'd done. He found out that Willow's power had overloaded the scythe and instead of just activating all the Slayers that were old enough, it activated all of them. Hundreds of them: babies, toddlers, and little girls with power they didn't understand and couldn't control. He found a way to reverse the spell."

"And then..."

"And then he was dead. He got sent out into the field with three new Slayers and was skewered by a Polgara demon which is really weird since Polgara's don't like cold, wet weather so you'd think they'd be plenty far away from England in October since it's not exactly like Cancun, you know?"

Spike chuckled. "I know."

"So the warning lights were flashing bright in the soldier part of Xander's brain and he starts putting things together. Giles is the one who sent Timothy out into the field, thinking he was ready for the hand to hand when obviously the hand to massive chest poker was beyond his fighting skills. I'm being sent all over by Willow as she tracks the new Slayers with the Wiccan powers and internet mastery and suddenly I'm having issues with my planes falling out of the sky and worrying if I'm walking my way into the middle of a civil war."

"Explains the mojo on your chest."

"Yep, got a matching one for Jawad. Didn't work though. In Zambia, we were attacked by a pack of wild dogs that looked an awful lot like they might be human for their day jobs."

"Damn."

"Yeah."

Xander sighed and was taking a deep breath to continue his story when Spike held up a hand to silence him. Luckily, Xander quickly complied and fell silent as the vampire listened intently. There was someone just outside the door and Spike was going to find out who and why.

With stealth and grace, the vampire stalked to the door before throwing it wide open, revealing a surprised Angel hold a bottle of water in each hand.

"What the fuck!" Spike yelled as Angel cried out, "Christ, Spike!"

Xander just about killed himself laughing.

Part Seven

Xander was clutching a pillow to his chest as he tried to rein his laughter in. Spike and Angel continued to yell at each other until Spike finally heard the young man complain, "Ow. Just ow."

Rushing to the bedside, Spike rubbed his hands over the heaving chest and back until Xander's breathing was back under control. "Sorry, Pet. We didn't mean to hurt you or anything."

"Oh no," Xander giggled. "I wouldn't have missed that for the world, Spike. Funniest thing I've seen in weeks."

Turning toward the vampire still standing in the doorway, Spike snapped, "What did you come up here for anyway?"

Holding up the bottles, Angel replied, "He's human, Spike. They need water among

other things, you know."

"I know," Spike complained as he walked over to pull a bottle of his Sire's hand. He snapped the top off before thrusting it at the boy in the bed. Once he was sure that Xander was sipping his water, he returned to his seat, glaring at Angel. "Anything else?"

"I just want to help," Angel said quietly.

Spike looked from Xander to Angel and back again before sighing dramatically. "Fine, but if the Slayer gets a whiff of this and causes the boy any trouble, it'll be your head."

"Down boy," Xander warned quietly. "If Angel's been willing to do this much for us, he's not going to go and ruin things for us now, is he?"

Spike watched as Angel and Xander stared at each other, almost as if a silent communication was passing between them. Finally, Angel nodded.

"So," the dark haired vampire said as he stepped farther into the room. "Fill me in."

Instead of listening to Xander tell the entire story again, Spike decided to sum up.

"Boy hooked up with a bloke whose sister got the power too young and offed herself. Giles Jr. found out the spell put all the girls on overload and now everyone around him's dropping like flies. That about it, Pet?"

"Pretty much. . .I guess," Xander answered quietly.

"Well," Spike prompted. "Wrap this up so we can find out how to fix it."

"Timothy – that's Giles Jr.," Xander clarified for Angel, "Had sent me a copy of the spell. Once he died, Jawad, that's my – bloke – I guess, decided to find someone else to perform the spell. I remembered that Wesley had been working with you guys and figured we'd see if he still had the mojo working for him. The day I booked the plane flight with the Watcher credit card, we were attacked by what the government called a pack of wild dogs. They killed him. Ate him alive."

Spike reached out and tipped the bottle of water back up to the boy's lips, making him take another drink. Xander sniffled, coughed and wiped his face before finishing.

"That's why no insurance, no credit cards – nothing except my change of clothes and my book. I ended up canceling my flight after Jawad died, just to be on the safe side. I bought a ticket with the bit of cash I had on me and made sure my flight plan had several different layovers – some lasting a couple of days. I'm sure I was pretty nasty by the time I landed in LA. I was three blocks from the hotel when I was attacked."

"Could you see who it was?" Angel asked intently.

Xander shook his head. "Knew it was a Slayer by the fighting style: strong, fast but obviously shorter than me. She took me completely by surprise."

Suddenly something struck Spike as odd. "When did you book that flight, Pet?"

"Almost two months ago. Sometime in October – the 12th or something."

Shooting a look at his Sire, Spike and Angel shared a look.

"What?" Xander demanded. "What?!?"

"October 13th was the day that Buffy decided she was willing to start training Slayers again," Angel explained. "She'd said when she first got here that she was done teaching all the new Slayers. But all of a sudden, she's demanding that we remodel the basement for a training facility. Before I knew it, this place had teams of teenage girls coming and going. I don't even know all their names."

"Damn," Xander whispered. "This is bad. Really bad. Like a - don't know who to trust - Keyser Söze - kinda way."

"Yeah," Spike whispered. "Now what?"

"Well," Xander said, "Now we get Wesley to do the spell and get everyone back to

normal."

Spike and Angel shared another look.

"Oh no," Xander whispered, his head falling into his hands as he groaned in frustration.

~*~*~*~*~

She cursed under her breath as she hurried down the hallway, working hard not to let the vampires discover her presence. Once in the safety of second floor, she approached the other girl who was waiting for her.

"Kari," she whispered. "They know. They've pieced it together. If it comes out that all three of them are working together, we're dead. We're going to lose our power."

"No we're not," Kari said as she stalked across the room. "We're going to do this right this time. Like we were taught. He dies and if that means the vampires have to die too, then so be it."

"But Buffy. . ."

"Buffy will get over it!" Kari snapped at the other girl. "She got over it before, didn't she? Once she's realizes what we've done for her, she'll thank us. We can't let this get anymore out of control than it already is."

The other girl nodded. "Okay. Tonight?"

Kari smiled before dialing her phone.

"It's Kari again," she said quietly, trying to keep the trembling from her voice. "You'd better come to the hotel. He's here."

Part Eight

"I really am sorry," Xander whispered.

"I know, Pet," Spike replied, still facing away from the boy on the bed. "You didn't know. I can't believe Rupes didn't tell you."

"I can't believe Angel reacted like that."

Spike snorted, running a hand through the rough curls of his hair. "He took Wesley's death hard – all of them, really: Wes, Fred, Charlie, Cordy, Harmony. He blames himself for dragging them all into it. Not like he would have been able to stop them, mind you, but he doesn't see that."

"I wish someone would have told me," Xander lamented. "Do you think Angel will be able to find the witch he used before?"

Spike turned to face the bed, surprised to see the boy sitting on the edge, legs hanging down, feet swinging gently. "Yeah, he'll find her."

"Think she'll be strong enough?" Xander asked, his voice concerned.

"Strong enough?"

"Willow did the original spell," Xander whispered, staring at his hands. "It changed her – all that power. You know how she is, Spike. You know what she can do. You think this witch of Angel's can undo the spell?"

"You were willing to trust Percy, weren't you?"

"Percy," Xander snorted, laughing lightly. "Yeah. Yeah, I was."

"Then trust Angel, Pet. He'll get the job done."

Slowly, Xander slid off the edge of the bed, his feet settling on the soft carpet.

Spike was instantly at his side, steadying the young man as he stood. "What're you doing, Luv?"

"It's called standing, Spike. I was sure you'd heard of it before."

"Berk," Spike chided teasingly. "Just trying to figure why."

Xander sighed as he leaned against the vampire's solid weight. "I need to be up and doing something. I can't have you and Angel being all heroic-y and saving the day. I have to do this for Jawad and Timothy and Siena."

Spike nodded as he helped Xander walk over to the window. Reaching his hands out, Xander braced himself against the frame to look out into the early evening.

"Makes sense," Spike whispered. They stood in silence for a moment, staring out at the city at night, a gentle breeze blowing through the open window. Suddenly, Spike had a thought. "Do we need the scythe?"

"What?" Xander asked quietly.

"For the spell," Spike clarified. "Do we need the Slayer's scythe?"

"Timothy said it wasn't necessary for the spell. Willow needed it because she was channeling the power of the scythe into the Potentials but we are simply pulling the power away. It'll know where to go. I am worried though."

"Bout what?"

"Buffy."

"What about her?"

Xander sighed, leaning harder against the window frame. "Timothy said the spell would restore the one true Slayer."

"And that's Buffy," Spike clarified.

"Maybe. Or maybe it's Faith. Buffy's died – twice. She shouldn't be the Slayer anymore. What if. . .what if this spell takes her power and makes her a normal girl?"

"It's what she always wanted."

"Yeah," Xander whispered, "But I don't know if she knows how."

Spike fell silent then, satisfied to just stare at the young man, framed by the glow of the evening lights. Unable to resist, pale fingers reached up to card through the shiny, sable locks.

"Need to get you in a shower, Pet."

"Wow, Spike. That's a little kinky for me right now. What do you say we start in a bed or something?"

The vampire laughed as his hands trailed down to slide around the young man's waist. "I meant you need your hair washed, but that's not a bad idea." When Xander chuckled, Spike squeezed lightly. "Who are you and what have you done with Xander Harris?"

Xander turned around slowly in the circle of the vampire's arms. "Is the lack of my wiggins out freaking you out?"

"Well – yeah, actually," Spike admitted.

They laughed softly before Spike leaned in slowly, lips slightly parted, when he heard a horrendous scream coming from downstairs.

"Angel! Spike! Get down here!"

Quickly, he helped the injured boy to the bed before racing downstairs. As he jumped the last few steps, he saw two girls, bruised and bloodied, crumpled on the lobby floor.

"What the..?!" he yelled, staring at the chaotic scene before him.

Buffy whipped around, her face hard and tight. "Where's Angel?" she demanded.

"Out."

"Out?"

"Yeah, out. I'm not his keeper. Thought you had that job nailed down."

"Very funny, Spike."

Frustrated, the vampire snapped, "Is someone going to tell me what the bloody hell is going on?"

One of the girls looked up, her lip split and her eye swelling. "We were attacked. Kari and I were just heading out to patrol and we were jumped by a group of fledges. At least I think they were fledges. They went down pretty easy, but some of them got away. They were yelling about getting back to their Master or something."

Spike stared at the redheaded girl. "Who the hell are you anyway?"

"Spike," Buffy practically growled. "That is Cassandra. She's our newest recruit. Andrew sent her just a couple of weeks ago."

"Right," Spike drawled. "What's the plan?"

"Spike, you go with Cassandra and see if you can find out where they went," Buffy ordered, "I'll stay here with Kari and wait for Angel. When Angel gets here, we'll find you."

"I'd rather stay here," Spike argued.

"Spike," the Slayer warned, her glare stopping the vampire cold, "I'll stay here. You go with Cassandra."

"I'll go with him," the girl on the floor said as she stood. "I think I know where they're going."

"Are you sure?" Buffy asked, helping the girl to stand.

"Yeah, I'll be fine. Besides, I think Cassandra hit her head. She might have a concussion."

"Fine," Spike grumbled. "Who're you now?"

"Kari," the young slayer said with a half-smile.

Spike didn't like this plan but he didn't see anyway out of it. Besides, Xander was safe on the fifth floor and Angel would be back soon. Nobody even knew the boy was there. He'd just go dispatch the nest and be back before Xander even knew he was gone.

It would be alright. Spike wasn't going to let Xander down again.

"Come on, then," he snapped as he strode toward the front door. "Let's do this quick."

He was moving so fast he never heard the young Slayer whisper, "Oh, it'll be quick alright."

Part Nine

Spike walked down the sidewalk, his boots pounding the pavement as he hurried to get wherever it was they were going. Finally he stopped and turned toward the girl following behind him.

"So?" he demanded. "Where are we going?"

The young Slayer smirked as she skipped past him.

"This way," she sang as moved past the vampire, quickly heading down the street.

They walked quickly, the girl lightly humming to herself as she strolled. Finally, Spike asked, "Where were you attacked?"

"It's not far," Kari replied, moving faster, putting distance between them. Suddenly, she slipped around a corner and into an alley.

Spike snorted at the girl's antics and hurried to follow her. He rounded the corner and didn't see anyone in the dark corridor. Stepping farther in, he called out, "Kari?" When he didn't receive a response, he stepped farther in the alley and whispered, "Where are you, you daft bint?"

"Right here," the girl answered, now standing in the mouth of the passageway. Spike stared for a moment, taking in the aggressive stance and cocky smirk as a shiver passed down his spine. It felt familiar, the sensation he used to identify the threat of the one meant to destroy his kind.

But there was something else. Something he remembered recently. Something. . .

"Little Nurse Ratchett," he whispered, all the pieces finally falling into place. "That was you at the hospital. Thought something felt off. It was you."

The young Slayer laughed, a mean, nasty twitter that caused the vampire's hair to stand on end. "Damn, Spike," she teased, "Took you long enough to figure it out. But I guess you've been living with Slayers too long. Couldn't even tell I was a Slayer when I walked in the hospital room."

She stepped closer and Spike nearly flinched at the manic gleam in her eyes. "But I could feel you, Spike. I could feel you inside me. It hurt to be around you – hurt to be that close to you and not just kill you. But that's okay. I get to make up for it now."

Spike tensed as the young Slayer came flying at him. He waited until she moved in to strike before moving quickly to the side and knocking the girl off balance.

"Nice one," Kari practically growled as she pushed herself up off the dirty pavement, "But I'll chalked that one up to a lucky break for you. Cassie took things a little too far trying to make it look like we'd been attacked. That girl has some serious anger issues."

"So you weren't attacked?" Spike asked, readying for the next attack.

"Nope, but it was the perfect setup to get you out of the hotel and to explain your death," Kari explained as she launched herself at the vampire again. Spike went to dodge the blow but the young Slayer seemed to anticipate the move and she caught him with a strong blow to his solar plexus.

If he'd needed to breathe, Spike would have been out for the count but he quickly jumped up and landed a few harsh blows of his own. It was a fierce battle, both opponents landed harsh blows.

Normally, Spike wouldn't worry about a fight like this. He'd been a Master in his own right for too long to worry about a tiny, little girl but this girl was different. She fought with less grace than Buffy but more fire, more anger. She was practically growling and spitting as she threw herself at the vampire over and over again.

She seemed to know Spike's moves, anticipated certain fades or swings the vampire relied on in the fight. She knew him but Spike was sure he'd never faced her before, probably had never even seen her before she waltzed into the hospital room to have him sign the release forms.

She just kept laughing and smiling at him, even as the blood poured from her broken nose or trickled from the split in her lip.

A brutal kick to his right kneecap finally took Spike down. He landed flat on his back on the dirty concrete, his leg buckled beneath him and his head ringing. Suddenly, the Slayer's lithe body was straddling his hips, the tip of the wooden stake pressing against his chest.

Kari leaned in, her lips nearly touching Spike's ear as she whispered, "I missed his heart, but I won't miss yours, vampire."

His vision sharpened as his fangs dropped and his real face slipped to the fore. He lashed out with a preternatural speed and flipped the girl over his head and onto the pavement. In an instant, he was on her, hand around her throat, pinning her to the ground.

"It was you?" he asked, shocked that this little girl, this nobody, had nearly taken his boy out. "Why?"

The girl coughed and struggled against the fingers holding her tight. "I was under orders," she choked out.

"Orders?" Spike asked. "Whose orders?" When the girl refused to answer, he shook her, banging her head on the concrete. "Whose orders?!"

She laughed again, light and breathy. When Spike slammed her head into the pavement once more, she finally groaned out, "Buffy."

"Bloody hell," Spike whispered as he leapt to his feet, yanking the young Slayer up with him. He began to drag her along as he rushed back to the hotel as quickly as he could with a broken kneecap and a nearly incapacitated girl at his side.

He had to get to Xander before Buffy did. Hopefully he wasn't too late.

Part Ten

Spike burst through the front doors of the hotel, dumping the dead weight of the injured Slayer in the entryway of the foyer. He tried to listen, to feel, to tune in to the Slayer's call, knowing he'd feel Buffy in the hotel, wherever she was hiding.

He could feel her, most likely on the second floor. There was another Slayer somewhere, not far from him but she was trivial compared to Buffy. Spike was torn

on what to do first: find Xander or find the Slayer. He decided to confront Buffy first before checking on the fifth floor.

Racing up the stairs as fast as he could with his wounded knee, Spike practically broke open the door to the suites his Sire and the Slayer shared.

He froze instantly.

Buffy was there, suspended in the air, enveloped in a trap, glowing bright green. Her eyes were open but unseeing, staring at Spike but not seeing him. Spike stepped forward warily, torn between concern for the girl and worry for his own safety.

"Buffy?" he whispered.

Suddenly, he was thrown to the floor by a brutal kick to the backs of knees. He crumpled to the carpet before deftly rolling over, trying to predict the next attack. He looked up to see the redheaded Slayer standing over him, a frenzied glimmer in her eyes.

"Buffy's not available at the moment," she laughed, high and wild, her mouth twisted in an unnerving smirk. She raised the long axe in her hands above her head, ready to swing it down to end the vampire.

"Oh, bugger this," Spike cursed before kicking at the girl's ankles, breaking them both in a single move. Cassandra went down, screaming in pain, the axe forgotten on the floor.

Spike stumbled back to his feet before shuffling over to the Slayer still hanging in midair.

"Buffy," he called, not really expecting an answer. When she remained silent, he took a moment to look at her and was not surprised to see that she had put up a fight. A bright purple bruise was spreading beneath the skin of her left cheekbone and bright red scratch marks stood out on the warm, tan skin.

Somewhere in the hotel, he heard a sound; a thump, then another. Quickly, he turned, leaving the Slayer to hang in her bonds as he ran as fast as he could to the

fifth floor.

Not knowing what to expect, he threw the door of Xander's room open, gaping at the sight before him.

"You?!" he whispered in disbelief.

Xander lay on the bed, his hands scratching and grappling at the hands holding the pillow tight over his face. Spike ran to leap at the attacker when he was abruptly frozen in midair by a single spoken spell – "Arresto Momentum."

Hanging, unable to move, Spike watched as Xander thrust the pillow from his face, the man taking huge gasping breaths as they both stared at their attacker.

The man laughed, walking back and forth, arms spread.

"Didn't think it was me, did you?" Andrew asked. "You didn't have a clue. I totally had you convinced it was Buffy and Willow and Giles, didn't I? I am *so* good."

Spike stared in shock, unable to believe that the mousy little boy could have done all this, could have tried to kill him and Xander, was capable of such evil.

"Why?" Xander asked, his voice sounding raw and rough again.

"Why?" Andrew mocked back. "Because. I finally fit in. I'm finally someone. Someone that matters. People listen to me. People have to do what I say. You were going to take that from me. I wasn't going to lose my Slayers."

"But Giles wouldn't just fire you," Xander reasoned. "He'd still need you."

"Right," the young Watcher laughed. "Just like Warren needed me or Jonathon needed me? No. This time I'm making sure that my place is secure."

"But there is so much wrong with what we did, Andrew," Xander plead. "We have to make this right."

"Right?!" Andrew shouted, his voice high and cracking. "If there's one thing I've

learned it's that there is no wrong and right – just power." He turned and looked first at Xander, then at Spike. "The question is – who dies first?"

The young Watcher smirked as he stalked toward the vampire trapped in his spell. "I've learned how to be pretty handy with a stake, Spike. Would you like to see?"

"No!" Xander shouted with as much force as he could muster.

"No?" Andrew asked as he turned to regard Xander. "You can't tell me what to do anymore, Xander. Giles' trusts me. Why do you think he let me set up the patrol schedules? I'm the one who convinced him that Timothy was ready to take the Slayers out into the field."

Spike flinched as he listened to the crazed man's monologue. He knew that Andrew's words were aimed to hurt Xander, cause him more pain than the physical he'd already had to endure.

"And Willow – it was so easy to get her on my side. She was more than willing to let me handle all your travel plans, manage your tracking spell, find all the Slayers you needed to collect. I could make you go anywhere I needed you. It was so nice of her to need time to do her own thing and not have to worry about taking care of the token human anymore."

Spike fought hard against the bonds as watched a single tear fall down the boy's cheek. He'd love to tear the Watcher wanna-be to pieces for all of this. . . all of this and more.

"But Buffy – oddly enough, Buffy was the hardest to convince. I nearly had to drag her to LA. She really didn't want to come. I had to write this stupid love letter and tell her it was from Angel just to get her here."

He turned toward Spike then and the vampire growled low in throat.

"I nearly made it you, you know, Spike?" he whispered dramatically. "I know how much you'd loved her. We all did. But it came down to who was more believable. Angel won out on that, sorry to say. Besides, she fell for it, right? That's all that really matters.

"But it's alright because you two are the last. The last ones who know that something's going on. The last ones standing in my way. I'll get rid of you two and those two girls who would blab the second they got a chance if it meant they got to keep their power and now Buffy too, I guess, since she's seen me. I'll just make it so it looks like she went crazy. Killing the two of you and the two girls, then herself. They'll all buy it. They've been worried about Buffy for months. And that will be it. That's everyone."

"Not everyone," a voice growled from the doorway. Spike wished he could turn his head to see but he knew who it was regardless. He'd know the voice of his Sire anywhere. He heard the sounds of a scuffle and then silence.

He few whispered words behind him and he was dropped unceremoniously to the floor.

"Ow," he whispered as he took the hand Angel offered to him to help him up. At his feet was Andrew, a beautiful young witch standing in the doorway. "He dead?"

"Not yet," Angel answered, his voice low and deadly.

Spike shuffled over to the bed and sat down heavily next to Xander. "You alright, Pet?"

"Yeah," Xander answered quietly. "If by alright you mean half dead and completely freaked out that the guy I thought was my friend was a complete psychopath and tried to kill us all, then yeah, I guess I'm alright."

Spike chuckled and settled himself down on the bed, pulling the warm body into his arms. Looking up at Angel, he asked, "Think you can handle the clean up without us, Peaches? Xan and I are a little put out and are going to kip for a bit."

"Sure, Spike, go ahead," Angel drawled sarcastically. "You take a nap while I go clean up this big mess you made. Two crazy Slayers and a wacked out Watcher to take care of."

"Don't forget your girlfriend downstairs on the second floor," Spike pointed out. "Is

she still in the green body wrap of doom?"

"Oh no, Buffy!" Angel cursed as he quickly turned and left the room.

The young witch smiled and said, "Guess I should go with him."

"Probably," Xander chuckled.

After they had left, Spike settled against the pillows and pulled the blankets up over the top of the both of them. "Comfy, Pet?"

"Actually, you're kinda sticky and bloody, Spike."

"Oi, saved your life, didn't I?"

Xander stared at him for a moment before whispering, "Yeah, you did."

Leaning in, Spike let his lips lightly brush the warm, lush lips below him. The kiss was soft and tender, almost not a kiss at all. When he pulled away, Xander whispered, "Thank you."

"What for, Luv?"

"For coming to get me, for believing me, for believing in me, for saving me, pretty much everything, Spike."

"Told you I'd have your back, didn't I?"

"Yeah, you did."

Spike shuffled them around again, getting them comfortable, until they settled down, wrapped around each other. He waited until Xander was asleep, peaceful and quiet, before he dared to rest himself. Finally, he'd been there, he'd done enough, he'd been quick enough, made the right decision.

He's saved the boy and kept his promise.

Now he could rest.

Epilogue

Spike moaned as he tasted the salty sweat pooling on the young man's skin. It was everything he'd imagined and more. Trailing his tongue over Xander's strong jaw, the vampire purred lightly at the delicious sounds he was pulling from the human. Slowly, he kissed his way up and over the stubbled chin until he was facing the empty socket he'd always seen as his failure. Now he saw it as a thing of beauty, a mark on his human that made him the Xander he knew and loved.

He carefully moved down, paying extra attention to the boy's neck before attacking the still healing scar on Xander's chest. It was rough and warm beneath his tongue and so different from the rest of his skin but it didn't keep Spike from laving it with attention. He mapped the writhing body with lips and teeth and tongue, loving every whimper and smiling at every whispered plea.

Finally, he found his way down to the trail of dark hair that circled the boy's navel and directed him down to the treasures hidden below. It was delicious, that trail, and Spike hummed with delight.

"Spike," Xander complained, fingers tangled in the vampire's blond locks. "You're killing me."

Spike chuckled as he licked a stripe from the nest of sable curls to the tip of Xander's needy cock.

"Fuck!" the human cursed, his hips jerked hard off the soft mattress.

"Well, alright Pet," the vampire purred as he crawled up the bed. "If you insist."

His fingers cool and slick, Spike circled the boy's entrance, pleased by the needy whine and spread thighs that greeted him. He took his time spreading and preparing the boy, wanting this to be perfect for both of them.

Xander's back was arching as he thrust himself down on the fingers inside him, begging for more and Spike knew he was ready. Slicking his own cock, Spike lined himself up and drove home, slowly filling the boy. He watched as Xander's face contorted with discomfort so he paused, waiting for a sign.

After a few moments, Xander squeezed him, holding Spike's cock tight, making the vampire groan.

"Now," Xander whispered, "Please for the love all things holy, now Spike."

Spike smirked as he pushed himself up on his hands to look down at the delicious display below him before pulling out slowly and thrusting back in to the hilt. They both cried out at the intoxicating mix of pleasure and pain as Spike found a cruelly slow rhythm of thrust and retreat.

Slowly he rolled his hips, brushing the small nub within on every other stroke. They were both breathing heavy, sweat dripping off the human's skin and make him shimmer with salt and musky.

Knowing he was close, Spike growled, "Touch yourself."

Xander reached down to wrap his fingers around his own needy cock, pulling himself in time with the vampire's thrusts. Soon, he was crying out, arching off the bed and coming hard. Spike watched, entranced as the white seed poured over the tan, muscled chest, mingling with the sweat and making Xander shine.

The sight, the feelings, the smell was too much for the vampire and he cried out, his hips jerking of their own accord as he filled the hot body beneath him.

Finally spent, he collapsed atop the exhausted boy.

"Ow," Xander complained feebly.

"Want me to move, Pet?" Spike asked, his face buried in the young man's neck.

"No. Well, yes. My chest. . ."

Spike quickly rearranged himself so he was not pressing on Xander's scar. Curled up against his side, Spike asked, "Better?"

"Yeah, but I'd be really better if I could reach my cookies."

The vampire laughed as he reached over to pull the plate of cookies on the side table closer to the lounging boy. As Xander pulled one off the plate and into his mouth, he asked, "Now better?"

"Much," Xander mumbled around the mouthful of chocolatey goodness.

"How many plates of cookies is Red going to send you?"

"No idea. I'm guessing the Willow-guilt is really strong over the whole 'nearly got me killed' thing. So we'll be having cookies for a while I'm thinking."

"Good," Spike replied, pulling a cookie off the plate and shoving half of it in his mouth at once. "Maybe we should share with Peaches," he suggested suddenly.

"Thought you weren't one to share," Xander teased, chuckling lightly.

"Not with certain things, Pet, but cookies I could do. 'Specially since Buffy did a runner."

"Buffy didn't do a runner, Spike," the boy explained sympathetically. "She just needed some time to think is all. Andrew's revelation that he was the one that had set her up with Angel hit her hard. She just needs some time to realize they were meant to be and come back. Simple."

Spike snorted. "Things aren't that simple, Pet. Never are."

"Why not? Jawad always told me I thought too hard about things, that I just needed to stop thinking and just be. So I am. Now that I'm not being hunted anymore, I'm

just being."

"And that includes being with me?" Spike asked quietly.

"If you want," Xander replied, soft and tender.

And Spike realized that he did want.

"Alright, Pet."

They laid in silence for several long moments before Xander asked, "More please?"

"Sex or cookies?"

"Yes, please."

The End