Disclaimer:
The following pages are not for minors!!
The fanfic on these pages contains m/m slash (male on male sex), bondage, BDSM, rimming, oral sex, anal sex, bloodplay, and violence.
For adults, this is a nice little fantasy. For children, this is a good way to really warp your sense of sexuality!!
If you're not of legal age, go read something else.

I don't own any of these guys and I don't make money off this. I'm just having some fun.
Oh, and if you're looking for abuse, rape, torture, chan, or sexual violence, go somewhere else! My guys like what they're doing, and they don't do anything unless both partners are getting off on it!

Irony

by
Litgal

Part One
I remembered waking up and thinking I was in a hospital, but the bed I was laying on was more than even hospital uncomfortable, it was prison cell uncomfortable. Not that I knew anything about prison cells, except of course of a couple nights in the brig for punching a superior...that was straight from my soldier memories. Then the two lab coats came.

“The demonic traits exhibit atypically blah blah blah,” offered Dr. Pencil Neck.

“We had thought to bypass examining this target, believing him to be unaffected by aberrant genes yadda yadda,” replied Dr. Too Many Ho-Ho’s

It took me a while to remember, to overcome the effects of the tranquilizer dart, to figure out what I’d been doing that could have attracted the attention of the Initiative. Luckily, I had the time. Hours strapped to a table and now days sitting in a cell staring at the same four walls, at least when they weren’t poking, prodding, sticking, pulling, or burning me. Oh yeah, I remembered and made my little mental hit list. People in white were at the top followed by Riley and then Spike.

Sitting in the white room watching the white coated scientists discuss me as if I were nothing more than an animal to be dissected, I just couldn’t miss the irony.
That’s right, irony. Everyone thought I slept through class, and maybe I did my time desk-drooling with the best of them, but I occasionally listened. Irony: when one takes an action and then gets the opposite of what one intends or expects. Woo Hoo—2 points for the Giles impression.

Yep, irony. I still remembered the night in the hyena house, the demon being pulled from my body, the sight of Willow with that painted geek holding a knife to her throat trying to prove his worthiness to carry the hyena spirit. Dr. Nutso thought he could attract the demonic hyena spirit by committing violence. Instead, the sight of my Willow in danger had made me rage and feel such a desire to kill the bastard that the hyena had been sucked right back into me.

And Buffy. Sweet girl, not always the brightest. She’d killed Dr. Nutso thinking to save us all. Instead, by the time I figured out that the laughing barks weren’t memories, the one human who would have taken the spirit off my hands had already passed through various digestive tracts on the way to rejoining the natural world in the form of hyena poo.

And then the hyena itself. It thought it was getting some blood-thirsty fighter who would feed its appetite. Instead
it got stuck in the Zeppo, the loser, the “would you like that pizza to go ma’am” moron. And without a pack to back it, encourage it, call it up, it just cowered in a corner of my mind popping up at inconvenient times.

Of course, the scientists were discussing their own form of irony out there on the other side of security glass where people were allowed simple things like clothes. Silly me, I thought gym class with Larry had provided enough humiliation in my life, but no, the universe had to stick me in a cage naked as fully dressed soldiers marched by. Okay, the soldiers did the actual sticking, but the universe in general had never gone out of its way to help me in any way, shape or form.

Truthfully I’d only partially listened. The first day I clung to every word like a lifeline, but I’d discovered that understanding what they planned for the day’s testing just made things worse, so I tended to create my own little imaginary dramas. Right now I had just finished a dialogue where Dr. Pimples confesses his love for Dr. Pencil Neck right before Asshole Riley walks in on them making out.

I was doing a pretty good job of amusing myself until I heard Willow’s name. Well, Willow’s and Tara’s actually. Riley with his famous reports had told them that the girls
were witches and were heading out for a coven retreat. That had the scientists getting all steamy in the underpants, and ew, really need a new metaphor for that. There would be no steamy underpants around his girls, unless they were mine. And my underpants hadn’t seriously steamed for anyone since Faith. Well, sort of. Anya certainly got the equipment moving even if the lust didn’t extend beyond my cock. Anyway, the Initiative thought to grab the girls so that it would take Buffy a week or so to notice them gone.

I tried not to make a face at that news. Damn this electrified cage that kept me from ripping their heads off. Usually I frown on the whole violence thing, but a couple of days of electroshock, starvation, experiments, and nakedness left me feeling a little grouchy. Damn scientists who thought they could diagram and count and measure everything. They wanted to get my Willow and her Tara and cut them apart to measure their magic, maybe force them to work for the Initiative or maybe just kill them because they’re all cowards down deep. And damn vampires in general. My capture was his fault. Why did Buffy always ask me to patrol with Spike? Most of the time I blamed this whole mess on the Initiative, but when I got bored, Spike and Buffy took their fair share of the blame too.
Yep, damn Buffy with her “Please Xander, you don’t know how hard it is to patrol with both Riley and Spike. Just go with the Bleached Wonder and remind him that if he does anything he doesn’t get paid and he’ll have Mr. Pointy to deal with.”

And damn Spike. When the Initiative soldiers had shown up, all I had to do was play it cool. Yeah, Spike would get caught, but I’d faked hateful for so long it should have been second nature. Fangless, Impotent One, Willie Wanna Bite, I had the names down. I should have been able to fling off an insult and walk away, or run away and get Buffy. That would have been the smart move, but no one ever accused me of being smart. Well, this teacher in the third grade did once, but I proved him wrong by sticking chalk up my nose.

Anyway, what did I do? Did I run for help? Did I call Buffy? Nope. I went all green-eyed growly and tried to take out the whole damn unit by myself. I’ve had this discussion with my hyena friend many times. Yes, Spike is one strong bastard who’s survived more than most vampires ever will before turning to dust. But Spike hates me, which is fine with me because it makes it easier to pretend to hate him. But, and this is a big but, I’m going to have trouble convincing anyone that I hate Spike after I went all protective over him. I’m pretty sure I killed one
of the soldiers, not that I’m having a case of the guilts. I’m having trouble even caring. In fact, the hyena is practically bouncing over the fact and my soldier memories are all stoic about known risks and dying in the line of duty.

But none of this helps me now. Now I’m sitting on the floor naked, listening to two Mengele wanna-be’s talk about Willow and Tara like their new prized heifers about to be brought to the farm. Spike obviously had his own accommodations down here somewhere, unless the scientists had dusted him, and I could hear myself growl at that thought. Oh great, I just gave the scientists another happy as they got to write down another aberrant behavior. Humans don’t growl, I reminded myself, but the hunger and the fear and the knowledge that I had failed Spike made it difficult not to growl. Made it difficult not to throw myself against that electrified glass, and you would think I would be better at repressing after all these years of practice, but nope.

Here comes Ms. Piggy right on cue. I refuse to do it. Hunger and my hyena see the piglet that’s been lowered into my cell as one big hot dog on legs, but I remember the last time I did that, and I never quite got over it. Well, that and the fact that the pack had gone from the school mascot to the principal. I still had trouble eating bacon
without thinking of Mr. Flutie, so I really wasn’t eating another pig no matter how hungry I got or how many scientists wanted to observe my “aberrant behavior.”

When the scientists finally gave up and used another tranq dart to send me to la-la land and retrieve the pig, I had reached a breaking point. I wanted to kill them was my last thought as I sunk into darkness.

Part Two

“Mornin’ whelp,” came a familiar voice, and for a minute I thought I had dreamed the whole getting captured, attacking the soldiers and being experimented on until my skin hurt thing, but when I opened my eyes I saw white. Just white. I closed my eyes again.

“Ya goin’ ta lay there all day?”

“Yep,” I answered. Since I was still naked, I was guessing Spike was naked, and I was so not ready to deal with that yet. He answered with a snort, and I really wished that the hyena gave me some cool power like eyes in the back
of my head so I could see his expression. Then again, considering he had a full view of my backside, maybe I didn’t want to see his expression. After all, I’m the loser, the townie, the low-status male at the bottom of the pack, so as long as I kept my eyes closed and didn’t look, I could pretend that the bleached on just might want to take this opportunity to sneak a look. Lord knows I wanted to. Just didn’t have the balls to do it, not worth the risk of seeing Spike utterly disinterested.

The silence had become familiar and mind numbing before the sound of metal sliding over metal and a familiar squealing noise interrupted my whole fantasy where I wasn’t completely fucking stupid and where I hadn’t gotten captured just to die next to Spike while soldiers plotted against the girls.

“Bloody hell, fresher than usual this time,” Spike said with amusement as the sound of piggy feet scrambling over concrete interrupted my doing of nothing. When the pig bumped into me, I scooted closer to the wall, turning on my side so that I took up less floor space.

“Probably for me,” I finally said as the pig noises echoed off bare walls and left my predator spirit crying for meat. How long had it been since I had food, anyway? A day? Two days? Four days? Honestly I had the hyena habit of
eating any time food was available, and right now my stomach had passed empty, stomach-cramp hungry, and nauseous with hunger. I had the weak-legged hunger that left the hyena demanding some pork on the hoof.

“What? You into eatin’ your meat rare these days?” Spike asked with a derisive snort, and I decided that was it. I would lay here and ignore the pig that smelled of food and ignore the vampire that smelled of leather and smoke even now and quietly die. Well, unless the Initiative had more tests in which case I would lay here until they drugged me, dragged me out, and tortured me. The dying of starvation thing actually sounded pretty damn good considering the alternative.

“No, that would be why I’m ignoring it...if I was into eating it, I’d eat it, which I’m not, so I’m ignoring it.” I scooted closer to the wall so that Spike wouldn’t see my ‘oh shit’ face. Yeah, I know when I’m babbling and sounding like a complete idiot, I’m just genetically incapable of stopping myself. Another snort suggested that Spike found my humiliation amusing.

“Right,” Spike said in a tone that sounded like he was talking to the local idiot at the nutso farm. Of course, I have a secret crush on Spike, so I think that qualifies me for the nutso farm. “So why assume the pig’s for you?” I
ignored the sound of little pig feet scrambling and the increased volume as the pig screams started coming from somewhere above me. Either Spike had picked up the pig, or the thing was able to levitate. Hey, pigs could be flying right now, but I wasn’t going to check considering that Spike holding a pig wouldn’t have any hands free to cover parts that I really didn’t want to see. At least, I didn’t want to see them under these conditions.

“They’ve been dropping pigs in my cage for a while now,” I finally answered as the pig gave one final shriek and then the sucking noises started. “Okay, that’s just ew.” Unfortunately for me, the hyena had another thought, and I could hear her scrambling toward the surface, demanding survival, demanding meat. The sucking sounds stopped and a heavy thud told me that Spike had finished dinner.

“Right, so why’d they nab you anyway?”

“Oh, I don’t know…maybe because I’m stuck hanging out with a vampire all day.”

“Harris, you bloody stink at lying. So, want to take another shot at it?”
“Or what? You gonna torture the information out of me pig-breath?”

“When I get this chip out…”

“Oh, here comes the death and mayhem speech again. Let’s see. Revenge, kill, torture, blah, blah, blah. Heard it before oh castrated one.” I knew that I had struck a nerve when Spike hissed, but this wasn’t the time for big secret revelations ala Jerry Springer. Of course, I was also taking out my own frustration since the smell of fresh blood had my hyena fairly screaming.

“What bug crawled up your arse and died, Harris?”

“Ask the white coats. They’ve jammed so much stuff into me that I’m sure they’re familiar with every inch. Even inches I’m not familiar with.”

“Wot the…” I expected more Spike-style profanity, namely words I didn’t understand spat out in an accent thickened by anger. Instead a hand landed on my naked arm, and funny, I’d always expected his hand to be cold, but it wasn’t. It wasn’t really anything, just a pressure pulling me away from the wall. I tried to ignore him and stay in my corner, but hey, vamp strength versus the Zeppo, and vamp strength won.
I found myself forcibly turned so that I found myself eye level with his family jewels as he squatted next to me. Okay time to find something else to stare at. The pig was an obvious choice since my own hunger could drown any insipid lust the might leave me humiliated in the most personal of ways. I really blame the hyena for the gay thing. Of course I kinda had the hots for Angel before the hyena, but boy, once I got to know the brooding bastard, that crush cleared right up and allowed me to return to the happy land of denial. The hyena and her attraction to Spike—not so easy to clear up. If Angel was that weird craving for bananas and peanut butter, Spike was...chocolate induced acne or that really bad foot fungus I got off the locker room showers. Hard to get over and annoying as hell.

“Wow...I always thought you’d be a messy eater,” I commented as I examined the two small puncture wounds on the silent pig. Now that Spike had killed it, would it really be the same thing? I mean eating dead pig was closer to eating hot dogs that to eating a live squealing animal....right? Damn, losing focus because Spike just said something I totally missed.

“Well?” he demanded.
“Well what?” I tore my eyes from the pig and looked at Spike’s eyes. Spike’s blue eyes. Spike’s crystal eyes, Spike’s brilliantly sparkling blue crystal eyes, and oh god time to look at the pig again.

“Don’t bloody ignore me ya little bastard. I asked what the hell is up with you. You’re not smellin’ right and you look ready to tear that pig apart. Not to mention the fact that you’re here at all. So whatever is goin’ on you’d better bloody well tell me or I’ll find a way to make you sorry.”

“I’m already sorry; I’m stuck with you,” I quipped as I pulled back on my arm, but Spike didn’t let go. I just earned myself a sore arm, and from Spike’s grimace, gave him a headache.

“Start talkin’.” This time Spike narrowed his eyes and flashed me the yellow, which was far less interesting than other things Spike was flashing right now, but I was just not going to look...much. And geez, was that normal what with the skin going all the way to the end like that?

“Make me.” I had all of two seconds to consider my mistake before Spike started singing at the top of his lungs. He started singing with great relish and absolutely no talent. I’d heard Spike sing in the shower, so I knew damn well he could carry a tune, but from his current
performance, I wouldn’t have gotten anyone else to believe me. I could hear loud sounds from other cages as demons protested this new torture, but I just focused my eyes on the pig and tried to ignore him. The whole ignoring Spike thing? It doesn’t work. It never works. I’ve never seen anyone so impossible to ignore. He just added dancing to his act, pulling me along so that we became like two naked idiots locked in a cage and dancing. Yeah, not so good with similes; I do much better with irony.

“Spike, stop it,” I snarled, and he ignored me. “Spike!” I wrenched my arm away, but I only succeeded in pulling Spike with me so that we were now chest to chest, and no, that wasn’t intentional.

“Havin’ a problem there, Harris?” Spike whispered in my ear as he looked down toward my cock, and between the exhaustion and the hunger and the fear, I’m man enough to admit that I might have had a small problem, not that I’m small because I’m not. Anya is very appreciative of my equipment; she called me a Viking once, and I’m thinking that’s a compliment. Unless of course she mean a Viking in winter with all that cold and the whole shrivelage factor, but I’m assuming she meant Viking in the big manly impressive Thor kind of Viking way. I hope.
“Bloody hell, you really do have a problem there,” Spike said as my cock twitched and struggled to react.

“Getting a little personal, Spike. You want to back off a bit before I give you a problem because the chip, that’s a one-way deal. I can still hurt you just fine.” I find when all else fails, insulting myself and threatening the vamp are the two best diversions.

“Say that again.” Spike tilted his head so that we were face to face.

“Chip no workee on me, so back off or I’ll hurt you. What? Are you going deaf now? “Cause I’m thinking you already have enough problems.”

“Bloody hell, you’re soddin’ starving.” Spike’s sudden expression of something resembling concern caught me so off guard I couldn’t quite make my tongue work again.

“Um, huh?” Yep, the Xan-man is as articulate as ever.

“Can smell the sour stomach on ya. You need food.” Spike let go of my arm and reached down for the pig as he dug fingers into the little piggy body and pulled the skin back. My eyes said ewwwwwwwww, but my stomach growled in anticipation. I think it was my stomach anyway. Spike suddenly turned and gave me a
sharp look, so the growl might have been an actual growl type growl.

“Losin’ your mind there Harris,” Spike shoved a piece of meat at me, a huge chunk of whitish flesh clinging to a single rib bone, and I had to grab my hands to keep from ripping it from Spike.

“Haven’t lost enough of it to actually eat that though,” I pointed out.

“You have to eat something, you’re bloody starving to death. How long’s it been since you ate?”

“Not really sure what with the long periods of unconsciousness,” I conceded as I watched that meat still held in Spike hands. No gore, no blood, no mess, just thick, rich-looking meat. I could almost taste it.

“Yeah, well this is a mite undercooked, but the worst you’ll get is worms, and we can worry about those later. So stop being a git and eat the damn food.”

“Spike, so not a good idea. Me and pig meat—not a good combination,” I said even as I felt my hyena surge forward so strongly that I physically rocked forward.
“Bloody hell, what’s wrong with your eyes?” Oh shit, that little bitch had slipped out. Babble and distract...babble and distract.

“Nothing, they’re just eyes what with the being round and brown and fitting in the head.” Oh shit, he was looking at me like I’d just grown a second head. Just go back to ignoring me like a good little vamp, I prayed as I tried to breath deeply enough to shove the hyena back down into my psyche.

“They’re not bloody human mate. When did you get a demon upgrade?”

“It’s not a demon,” I vehemently insisted about two seconds before my brain pointed out that saying that just confirmed I had something in me. It so sucks being slow.

“Well it’s bloody well not human. Never seen human eyes start glowin’ like that before, so it’s time Mr. Kill-all-demons fessed up about whatever little secrets he’s got in his closet.” Spike crossed his arms and leaned back against the wall in a gesture of determination that would have worked...if he hadn’t been dangling raw meat from one hand and dangling his danglies from...the place where danglies dangle. Oh yeah, hunger and lust conspire to rob me of my last active brain cell’s attention.
“I might have a very small, small as in insignificant piece of hyena spirit in me,” I admitted as quietly as possible. I didn’t hear the white-coats squeal in joy, so maybe they didn’t hear. Of course, they were probably recording us, but after the whole ‘taking out the soldiers’ thing, I wasn’t going to be able to claim human purity anyway.

“Wot? Like a primal?” Spike’s eyes went comically large.

“Maybe.” I answered cautiously since the lack of Spike insults made me entirely too suspicious.

“And no one bloody told me? Feel left out and unappreciated,” Spike put on his best pout face, and I temporarily forgot about the hunger as I tried not to laugh.

“Spike, we always leave you out,” I pointed out.

“Yeah, but I find out your stupid little secrets anyway. This time I didn’t bloody find out. Feel left out, I do. Could’ve been insulting your hyena’s lack of taste and your own bloody incompetence to carry a primal this whole time. Lost out on prime ‘teasin’ the beast with raw meat’ opportunities.”

“And that would be why we didn’t tell you, or actually, I didn’t tell anyone that I still have the thing, but I’m telling
you now, so you should feel special what with the sharing.”

“You’re telling me because I already found out, wanker, but what do ya mean you haven’t told the others?” Spike tilted his head, and I focused on not> thinking words like cute and sexy.

“Telling the others would mean that I told the others, I didn’t tell the others, which means I didn’t tell.” Yep, trying for funny but with the hunger and the meat right there and the lust and Spike right there, the funny just wasn’t coming for me. That probably explained Spike’s expression.

“Bloody loon,” he said as he cocked an eyebrow up.

“Yes, there is that,” I agreed. “So now you see why I’m not doing the whole pig thing,” I pointed out.

“Bloody well don’t see. If you have a primal, you should be ready to tear into this meat.” Spike waved the rib, and I found myself staring at it as my nose flared so that I could scent the meat. Okay, going a little overboard with the primal thing, I decided as I once again tried to shove my spirit girl into her corner.

“I kinda am, but that’s why I’m not doing it.” I spoke through clenched teeth, but Spike just kept right on
waving the meat. Wanker. Yes, it’s his word, but the fact is that it describes him well: both literally and figuratively, and I lived with him long enough to know this quite well. Not that I was listening when he did that because I wasn’t….much.

“That’s logical only in the brain of a moron or a member of the Harris family, if that isn’t redundant. You bloody well need food, and this is right up your alley.”

“Enough with the waving dead pig around. Spike, if I eat that, the hyena will just get stronger.”

“That’s the idea, idiot. Two of us against them, and keepin’ strong is the first step in winning.” My hyena almost yipped in pleasure at the thought of Spike joining the pack, but I squashed that reaction before my throat could actually make the sound.

“Spike, trust me, you do not want the hyena getting stronger.” I tried for calm, but I was coming closer to psychotic. Of course the sound of the damn hyena yipping in my head made me want to scoop out my own brains, and that should be a really gross image, but the thought of raw brains is just making me hungrier, and at that point I decided I was so damn damned, it almost didn’t matter.
“Bloody do want it stronger. If we want to get out of here we both need to be up to fighting speed, or I need to be up to fighting speed and you need to be strong enough to run without fallin’ on your face, which right now, you couldn’t do.” I knew Spike was right about how weak I’d become, but I also knew that sinking my teeth into the rich, juicy flesh of that pig would strengthen the hyena who was already rattling her cage more than she had since I’d inherited her from that zoo.

“I can’t, Spike.”

“Wot? You’d rather lie down and die, let these wankers pull you apart on cell at a time rather than strengthen the demon in ya?”

“It’s not that simple, *you* don’t want this thing lose, Spike. Trust me when I say that me plus free hyena is not of the good.” I bit my tongue as I realized that I had said slightly more than I’d intended.

“You bloody coward. You’re goin’ to let these arsewipes get their hands on Red and Glinda because you’re too bloody prejudiced to use the tools you got in that empty head of yours. You’re a worthless clod.” I was torn between retreating to lie in the corner again and defending myself against Spike who had an expression
that made it clear if he didn’t have the chip I’d last about 2 seconds.

“Spike, this thing has instincts,” I tried explaining.

“Everything has instincts. Every living or unliving thing in the world has instincts. Instinct to live, to kill the enemy, to hide from those that are stronger, but you’re bloody pathetic pretending that if you ignore this it’ll just go away.” Spike’s words I could ignore; however, he kept gesturing with the hunk of meat, waving it close so that the hyena whined. Then he’d pull it back away from me.

I finally couldn’t take it any more and the vision of the meat being pulled away again short circuited every thought in my head as I slammed into Spike, grabbing the meat and growling as my vision shifted just enough to tell me that I was certainly showing my hyena spirit. My ears could pick up the sound of cameras whirring and clicking, and Spike froze with an expression of surprise as I held the meat in one hand, forgotten for the time being as I pinned him against the wall with my knee and my elbow. He pushed back, and I growled as I felt my frustration that he didn’t submit. He should submit. Why didn’t he submit? He growled back, and a wave of fury and lust and desire left me wanting to throw Spike to the ground and force him to submit, but then it occurred to
me I was having naughty Spike thoughtage, and I practically threw myself backwards as I grabbed back control.

I retreated to the far side of the cell which was a good six whole feet away before sinking into the corner, the meat still grasped in my hand. Closing my eyes, I leaned my forehead against the cool concrete and waited for the earth to open and suck me in. Surely the universe wouldn’t be cruel enough to make me live after this, but then the universe and I have never agreed much. The floor remained solid, and I finally brought the meat up and started to eat.

And yep, the universe hates me because here came the white coats. I should’ve expected them after my little display, but I just keep forgetting that I’ve been turned into a sideshow freak. Luckily, little geeky guys with bad complexions and white coats keep showing up and reminding me. Yeah, lucky, lucky me.

“...most exciting display of aberrant behavior since the night of the capture. You were certainly right about the proximity of the second demon acting as a catalyst,” Dr. Pimples jabbered as his brisk steps ended right in front of my current cage. I kept my back to them as I brought up the meat for a second bite. I really was starving in the
literal sense, and the food both upset my stomach and filled an empty ache inside.

“I wonder if I really was. Your idea with the pig might have been the actual trigger for the atypical behavior, but we may have failed to consider the possibility that subhuman nature might be scavenger rather than predator.”

“I still believe the presence of this demon is the critical change, even taking into account other variables. Danger to this one led to the original display of demonic traits,” Dr. Pimples replied I groaned at their little circle jerk; this was the sort of sickening discussion that had led me to ignore their actual words as I created a little secret fantasy life for them. If they weren’t sleeping together, they certainly both wanted to. And when *I* can tell someone’s putting out signals, that’s pretty bad considering Anya finally just had to give up and show up at my house with condoms.

I tuned out for a minute, but when Spike jumped forward growling, I found myself twisting around with a growl on my own lips as I expected imminent attack. Instead I saw two geeks on the verge of peeing their pants and a hysterically laughing Spike. I never thought I’d miss that nice square cell I had all to myself, but I did. A nice quiet
cell without Spike where I could make up my little stories between bouts of Xander-torture. I turned back around and continued gnawing at my meat.

“Behaviorally sympathetic responses...” Dr. Pencil Neck finally managed to warble out and I smiled as I ate my rare roast pork. Calling it that really didn’t help, but I tore another piece off and chewed anyway, the hyena reveling in every bite...that and the lack of clothing and the chance to growl at enemies and the presence of a worthy male. Hell, she was in hyena heaven, except of course for the whole caged, tortured, starved, and bored stupid parts.

“Perhaps pack behaviors,” Dr. Pimples said in an even less steady voice, one that at the end spiked up like a girl’s into an uncertain squeak. I heard Spike snicker, and I could just imagine the smug expression on his face. Personally I had other matters to worry about, like the pain in my mouth from the bone splinter I’d just rammed into my lip as I cracked the rib bone with my teeth. Idiot hyena. Of course that didn’t stop me from working the marrow out of the bone. I couldn’t eat any more meat without risking throwing up, but the rich, nutritious marrow was too good to pass up, and it took so long to get to that my stomach would have time to digest a bit.
Okay, that’s what I told myself later; at the time I was thinking more “Mmmm marrow.”

“Mutually protective or directional imperative?” Dr. Pencil neck mused, his voice now returning to normal after being scared out of five year’s growth by Spike’s antics. Obviously these idiots didn’t normally deal with Spike or they would have expected that. I wondered how many demons they worked with. God, I hope I hadn’t been given to some lower ranking flunkies who dealt in the harmless demons. My hyena growled at the very thought of being labeled harmless

“We know that the younger male will kill in order to protect the vampire. Perhaps we should see if the instinct is mutual under controlled cirum....” The voices faded out as the white coats wandered down the hall, and I was just as glad. I knew damn well Spike wouldn’t put himself on the line for me, so I didn’t even want to know what was about to happen. I finished with my bone and turned around to toss my scraps back into the corner where the pig body lay with the flesh ripped from one side, and I was really bothered by the lack of being bothered by the sight. I was also disturbed by the expression on Spike’s face as he looked at me.
“What?” I finally asked after several minutes of an absolutely undecipherable expression.

“You bloody killed someone?” Spike asked, obviously stunned.

“Yes, I killed one of the soldiers; I’m not a complete incompetent. As you pointed out, everyone has instincts, and I have a few killer instincts of my own, I’ll have you know.”

“Killer instincts, huh?” Spike looked thoughtful, and I rolled my eyes at his skeptical expression.

“Yes, killer instincts.” A sly smile crossed Spike’s face, and I waited for the insult. And here it came…

“Not buyin’, mate. You have the killer instincts of a rabbit.”

“As you would say, ‘ha bloody ha’.”

“Not even one of those wild jack rabbits that ate up big chunks of Australia, either. One of those long haired bunnies with big floppy ears that fall over its eyes.” Spike illustrated his point by holding his hands down over his eyes, and I had an overwhelming urge to knock his head off. Maybe then he’d quit talking crap about me. Probably not.
“Which is still scarier than a chipped vampire,” I snapped back, but the sound of the air gun stopped the conversation as I found a fuzzy, red tranq dart stuck just to the right of my right nipple.

“Hey, that hurts,” I complained. Spike made some sort of noise, but either they’d tranqed him too or I was going down faster than usual because the sounds didn’t make any sense.

Part Three

And again with the white—don’t these people have any other paint colors? I groaned my way back to consciousness, and then wished I hadn’t. Yep, that was one mighty big, nasty-looking nasty in that cage across the room. Even I had enough imagination to understand this test, especially considering Spike leaning against the far wall.

So, decision time. Lie down and let that thing eat me as I hope it’s over fast, or try and fight until the thing breaks
my neck and eats me as I hope it’s over fast: decisions, decisions. I pushed myself up to a sitting position on stiffened muscles, and my stomach rolled unhappily. The tranquilizer made sure that the first meal I’d had in days threatened to come up all over me with five guys watching through the tilted glass ceiling. Dr. Pencil Neck and Dr. Pimples and Dr. Too-Many-Ho-Ho’s all stood watching along with two guys dressed in military fatigues. Hmm. No Riley. Hadn’t see Riley yet, not that it mattered much. As long as Willow and Buffy didn’t have to watch me die, I really didn’t care much who did.

I looked down to examine the short chain that attached my ankle to the wall, and I knew that I could never get free. The hyena started growling, and I let my head thump back against the wall. Little late for growling because as soon as the geek boys got bored, they were going to get that thing out of its cage, and that thing’s tusks were going to rip me to shreds. And Spike? I felt a brief moment of regret that the last thing I ever said to him was a reminder of how these sadists had crippled him, and again with the irony. I was feeling sorry for a mass murder because he was getting picked on. And when did I get so strange? But it was too late to change anything with me and Spike, so I didn’t even bother.
I pulled my knees up and rested my chin as I considered the boar-demon in the cage: four legs with tough-looking brown skin, thin snake-like eyes, two tusk things coming out of the lower jaw, and a snout that looked like a pig face that had been sharpened at the end. Okay, I had to smile just a little. I didn’t like to eat pigs, but a pig was about to eat me. A pig with a face only a mother could love too, and I knew Spike wouldn’t go up against a big, tusky, boarish demon without having weapons. He liked his own skin in one piece too much for that; besides I’m the one with the reputation for throwing myself into impossible fights. I tried to ignore the voice that pointed out that I’d survived until then, so Spike should be willing to at least try. Spike wasn’t me; he wasn’t going to fight the impossible fight. Hell, the thing probably weighed 200 or 300 pounds. Well at least this was an end to their tests. I wondered if the white coats would get chewed out or written up for getting their test subject killed.

“Finally found a way to shut ya up,” Spike said from across the room, and I turned my head to consider him. Even naked he had a presence that screamed his confidence, and I longed to take that confidence for my own, but who was I kidding? Damn hyena gave me dom-y delusions, but I knew full well that I wasn’t even in his league, so let him get his last jabs, it’s not like it was
going to make me any more or less dead here in a few minutes. Knowing this was the end, I let myself do the one thing I’d denied myself the whole time I lived with Spike and the whole time I’d stood in a 6 by 6 foot cage naked arguing with him: I ogled.

And damn if that vampire wasn’t worth ogling. I stared at the long leg muscles that rippled slightly as Spike shifted in anticipation. His weight was on one foot, so his other foot arched gracefully as he stood with just the toes resting on the ground. His hipbones were visible but rounded by the muscle just under the skin, and his arms had the subtle curves normally seen on someone who works all day long in some physical job: a farmer or rancher or stock boy. Okay, maybe not stock boy because that did not describe the muscles that very clearly weren’t for show but for action: lithe, wiry, compact and coiled. His stomach muscles rippled once and then twice as I watched, and then I allowed myself to look down at the thing I had generally avoided. His cock hung limply and perfect. The foreskin made it look slightly alien since I had grown up without my own and all my furtive glances in the locker room had encountered other circumcised cocks. He looked about the same size as me, and I wondered what he looked like hardened by desire. Unless he was a real sadist who got a jolly by watching
me get torn apart, I didn’t think I was going to have a chance to find out.

Spike’s body shifted slightly, and I examined the line of his ass where his butt curved down into his thigh, and the son of a bitch had a butt dimple. It was totally unfair that he was so completely perfect nude, and as I looked up into his face, I could see that he knew just how perfect he was.

“See somethin’ ya like Harris?” he smirked with that one eyebrow that lifted in challenge. Okay, I’ll admit it; I have spent a *few* minutes staring into a mirror trying to get my eyebrow to do that. I would take my finger and push one eyebrow up as I struggled to get the right combination of muscles to make that face on my own because reaching up with a finger to do the eyebrow thing was just pathetic. Or rather doing the finger thing in public would be pathetic. Oh, who am I kidding? Doing it in my bathroom with the door locked and Spike tied to the chair outside was pathetic. And no, don’t ask how many minutes because I am not pathetic enough to admit to a number on that little activity. Suffice it to say I got a cramp in my leg from leaning over my counter so long. Yep, that’s me—disgraceful to the end. But right now I looked right back at Spike and answered.
“Yep.” Wow, I caught the vampire off guard. At least, I think that’s Spike’s ‘off-guard’ look because I’ve never seen it before. Spike just stared back, not that he could see anything with me huddled into a ball on the floor, but then he wasn’t about to die, so I wasn’t about to give him a free show. After several minutes of silence, I took a long breath.

“When you get out of here,” I chose my words carefully. “Let them know I’m sorry about the whole keeping secrets thing,” I asked. Spike was a survivor; I couldn’t let myself think for a minute he wouldn’t make it.

“Bloody hell,” he said softly, and I waited for him to tell me how pathetic I was, not that I really needed reminding what with the chained naked to a wall thing, but it was tradition. Spike’s face had a shocked look that didn’t match any expression I’d ever seen on him before; hell, not even a hint of smirkage when I’d expected the whole smirk buffet, but then his features rearranged themselves. He looked at me as though he wanted to say something, and I could just imagine the insults he was forming in response to my self-outting.

Before I had a chance to try and decipher that look, I heard a clicking noise, and my eyes went to the room’s other inhabitant. The long chain that connected his cage
door to the ceiling slowly tightened one click at a time as the slack disappeared. I stood. I had no chance of surviving this, but I’d be damned if I was going down without a fight. I didn’t do that with the master or with Spike and I wasn’t going to go down without a fight for the Initiative. All the slack was out of the chain now, and each click brought the cage door open another fraction.

Ya know, I was almost embarrassed to die in such a damn cliché, stupid scientists stole this right out of Star Wars. Feeling very much like a full size action figure being played with by those watching geekoids, I didn’t hear the second sound right away. When I did notice the scratching sound, I turned to see a door slowly sliding open. Of course, I got staked out as the sacrificial lamb, and Spike got an exit back to safety. Survivors survive, and Spike showed his membership in that category by slowly sliding toward that door. Oh, he stopped when I pinned him with my best pissed off expression, but for that expression to work, he had to give a damn. Spike didn’t, so after gazing into my eyes for just a second, he started edging closer to the door again.

Yeah, I knew Spike would do that, but some little part of me had hoped...hoped that he cared enough to try and save me. Maybe a token effort or a suggestion about the beastie’s weak spot. Hell, at this point I’d settle for some
pithy last words. Nope, Spike just left me. Rather than have Spike walking away imprinted on my brain as my last memory, I turned back to look at the beast whose nose now pushed against the half open door in an attempt to escape. Yep, I’d rather watch my own personal death approach. Why can’t I fall for someone who actually gives a damn for me just once? Did I do something horrible in some past life: dump a girl on Valentine’s or rape someone or try to kill a lover? Yeah, bitter much, I asked myself with a snort. My last thoughts are going to be about how the world picks on me, and how pathetic is that? Don’t answer that.

The cage door was three-quarters up now and the beast kept pushing it up with its snout so that the cage thumped and clanged as it rose and fell. Now I could see a long line of drool hanging down one side of the beast’s mouth, and I took a deep breath as I realized the damn thing was seconds away from escape, and yep, here he came. The creature sprang from the cage snarling and whipping around as it considered all the sides of the room. It spun toward the open door, which promptly slammed shut with Spike on the other side. It whirled toward me. It turned to the observation window and tilted its head to the side.
I braced myself for the shortest fight in history...well unless you count that time that I tried saying “no” to Larry and never got past the “n” sound because Larry’s fist interrupted the whole me talking thing. That was short. I hoped to at least make it a little longer than that just so that my last moments on Earth wouldn’t be recorded by Dr. Too Many Ho-Ho’s as “pathetic subject squealed like a girl, collapsed in fear, and got eaten in 1.7 seconds.” Things like that are bad on the male ego.

The monster swung his heavy head my way, and I backed up two or three inches until I had plastered myself against the cold, white wall, but I did manage to stay upright and keep my hands up in some pathetic attempt to defend myself, so I’m calling the whole thing successful; oh, and I didn’t wet myself, I actually *was* proud of that one. The creature snuffed once and then twice before it started backing up to take the corner farthest from me, his whole body collapsing to the ground so hard that I could feel the floor vibrate. Huh? What is up with that? I watched as the thing settled in with an expression of wariness that clearly shouted, ‘I won’t try to eat you if you don’t try to eat me,’ and that was one deal I would gladly take. In fact, I didn’t even make eye contact as I edged as far away as I could...in other words, three whole inches. I could tell the
scientists were a bit put out too because Dr. Pimples was wildly gesturing and Dr. Too Many Ho-Hos had an expression that looked like a cross between nausea and embarrassment.

The animal’s head zeroed in on the door as it scraped open again, and I expected to see Spike creep back around now that Fido had turned out to be a Fifi, but the door just opened about a foot and then stopped. Okay, either I totally didn’t understand their test or something had gone terribly wrong—not that I had a problem with that because woo hoo for someone else’s life getting screwed up for once.

I jumped when the chain fell off my ankle, setting me free, and my motion attracted Fifi’s attention because he swung that wide head my direction. I froze. I’d like to say that was some sort of thought out plan, but the fact is that the sight of that thing considering me left my legs so weak I could barely even support my weight much less move. After several minutes of staring at me and snuffing heavily, the beast turned his attention to scanning the room, and I took the chance to slide like a crab toward the door.

Just move slowly and don’t piss off the demon, I willed myself as I headed for the exit. Oh god, I hoped it was an
exit. I froze against the wall wondering what was on the other side of the door. Maybe it wasn’t an exit. Maybe this was only the start of the test and I was safer with Fifi. Maybe I really hated tests because no matter how much I studied, I always ended up failing, and I had the feeling I couldn’t afford to fail this time. Funny, I really did think that when the day came for me to be tortured to death that Spike would get the honors.

I crept up to the door and used my foot to push it open far enough for me to slide into the new room while keeping an eye on Fifi who seemed very content to let me leave. At least we agreed on that.

“Close the door ya wanker,” a voice demanded, and I turned to see Spike sprawled on a low bench built into the far end of the room.

“You cowardly piece of shit,” I nearly shouted, and before I could even take a breath to continue my impromptu rant on why Spike sucked, he had sprung up and pushed me to one side hard enough to send me to the ground as he yanked the door shut using the huge metal handle.

“S’not what you...” he started as he pulled the door closed to the sound of something huge hitting it from the other side. His words ended when I leaped up and
shoved Spike as hard as I could...so hard that his head bounced off the inside of the door before he turned to face me in full game face and growling.

Okay, I’m the first to admit that I might have lost it at that point. I growled right back and before I could even think things like chip and unfair advantage and bully, I threw myself at Spike ready to rip him to pieces with my bare hands if need be. I’d made a good start of it by getting him on the ground where he growled even louder as he flipped me over onto my back, but when he suffered the chip shockage, I slipped free and dug my teeth deep into the back of arm so that he howled in anger, and then the sharp little pain in my ass told me that neither of us were going to win this fight.

“Assholes...” I slurred out as I released Spike’s arm and felt my body slump down onto Spike who was either already drugged or way too willing to play pillow. I really missed falling asleep on my own, I decided as the drugs started to take effect and pull me down into the darkness that was the only reprieve from the endless world of white. At least this time I had a nice pillow as I fell asleep on top of the still growling Spike.
Part Four

“Wakey, wakey,” a voice called faintly, and I shifted to try and get away from the sound, but my arm grew increasingly uncomfortable, like it was caught in the sheets or something. I managed some sort of incoherent groans, and the tightening on the arm increased.

“Oi, no hidin’ from me now,” I heard that, but I couldn’t quite figure it out. Hiding? Not likely in a little white cell, but the pressure on my arm increased again until I squirmed.

“Not hiding. Tir’d,” I finally muttered.

“Up!” a voice demanded, and I finally figured out that someone was squeezing my arm tight enough for it to hurt. Really hurt. Really as in how the fuck is Spike doing that kind of hurting me hurtage.

“Hands off, fangless,” I demanded as I pushed myself up to sitting, and great, back to the tiny cell with the one glass wall, and didn’t these people know what kind of damage they could do to a person’s psyche with shit like this, but I had more important worries, like how a
chipped vampire got away with the hurtage of humans. Right now, that vampire was still squatting down next to me, and I brought one hand up to rub the soreness in my arm.

“Something wrong, pet?” Spike asked in his silkiest voice, and I just knew. I knew why he could hurt me, and hey, my earlier expectation of getting tortured to death by Spike was about to come true after all. Of all the times to finally be right…

“Little heavy handed there,” I said, verbally feeling my way around the monster in the room, and why had I let bright blue eyes and one damn cute ass distract me from the fact that Spike was a monster? Of course, my stupid hyena was all yippy and happy about the fact Spike was free of the chip, but I wasn’t so sure “happy” was an appropriate response here. Terror and fleeing seemed more appropriate, even if one was pointless and the other just a little bit impossible. Stupid Initiative.

“Got me an adjustment,” Spike said as his smirk deepened and his eyebrows both flicked upward.

“Great,” I pulled myself up into a ball again so that I could cover as many privates as possible as I closed my eyes and leaned my head back against the wall. So,
escape was a no and now the chip wouldn’t protect me...at least it couldn’t get any worse.

“Wot? Ya aren’t goin’ ta ask?” Spike’s accent thickened until it dripped, and I realized that he was in a mood to play. Great. Well, that would be the “any worse” I knew it couldn’t get. Being that I was the only toy in the room, I figured I was about to have a very bad day.

“So, what happened?” I asked dully. Hell, it’s not like I had anything else to do than play Spike’s mind games.

“They turned down the voltage. Thought they’d give me a chance to defend myself from the big bully that knocked me arse over teakettle after I saved his sorry hide, so that means I can do some hurtin’ now.” I opened my eyes and found Spike inches from my face which put him inches from my neck which was miles too close for my liking.

“And which bully would that be because the only thing I remember is beating this coward who ran out to save his own sorry hide.” I could hear Spike growl low in his chest, and I just stared back into those blue eyes which showed occasional flecks of yellow that betrayed either his aggravation or his hunger. Hell, he hadn’t had human blood from the source for months, so maybe this would be quick after all.
“Wanker...didn’t even give me a chance to talk.” Oh, that was rich. The vampire who regularly cut me off with curses and insults and occasionally with objects thrown at my head accused me of not listening. Every nerve in my body itched with a need to knock him on his ass, and I started pushing myself up despite how that left certain... parts... rather vulnerable. Spike didn’t even bother standing and that pissed me off even more, like I wasn’t even dangerous enough to be worth facing off against, and yeah, with him being unchipped I posed about as much threat as that bunny rabbit he called me earlier, but that didn’t mean I wasn’t offended...and a little aggravated with the fact that he kept crouching down and possibly checking out my privates, which were supposed to be private, hence the term privates.

“You wanna talk, fine. Talk.” I tried to sound strong and resolute. I came out closer to grouchy and whiny, but at least I didn’t come off terrified and puny since that’s how I was really feeling.

“If that’s what you really want, mate.” Spike’s voice held a depth I’d never heard before, and I looked down to see the top of his head as he continued to stare at my privates which were actively carrying out a mutiny by responding despite my very clear orders to ignore the sexy demon kneeling in front of me. I reminded my
hyena that Spike wasn’t submitting, he just happened to not stand up when I did; however, the sight of Spike squatting with his eyes lowered made my cock fill with both blood and desire.

“Spike, knock it off,” I hissed because there was no way he was doing this by accident, and while I couldn’t help becoming a vampire chew toy, I really didn’t feel like playing ‘Humiliate the Zeppo’ games. I’d gotten enough of that from Buffy lately...yeah, like her grades were any better than mine, the only difference was that she had a mom who paid for her college.

“Wot?” Spike now slowly stood, his eyes moving up my body, and I tried not to flinch under his gaze. Tried and failed, but I at least tried.

“You are an asshole,” I informed him once his gaze reached my eyes, and his smirk just deepened.

“Interestin’ choice of words, pet. Got somethin’ on your mind, do ya?” I would have claimed ignorance about the whole man-love thing only my hyena chose that moment to grab the reins and surge upwards, and I could tell both by the distorted colors and the widening of Spike’s eyes that my own eyes went all glowy at the thought of Spike and assholes, and yes, I did have something on my mind.
“Only thinking that you talk big when you’re facing me instead of...oh, I don’t know... a three hundred pound pig. I think that’s actually the definition of coward, Spike.” I watched as Spike’s eyes flashed entirely yellow and I tried not to hyperventilate. Sadly, I felt myself breathless both from fear and lust, and how sick am I?

“I bloody saved your sorry arse from the pep’tuli, and now I’m wondering why,” Spike snarled as the ridges appeared, and damn if he wasn’t even more stunning in his game face.

“You ran like a little girl,” I contradicted him.

“I made a tactical retreat.”

“Crying ‘wee, wee, wee’ all the way home.”

“I was tryin’ not ta piss the bugger off.”

“Like a yellow-bellied dog.”

“The way you’re pissin’ me off now.” I opened my mouth to reply, despite actually being out of insults, but suddenly Spike’s hands grabbed me by the shoulders and slammed me back into the wall. I didn’t even think. If I had thought, I would have decided that my next action was pointless and stupid, but luckily I didn’t think. I just brought my knee up as hard as I could. Spike noticed at
the last second and threw himself to the side, but I still got in a good enough hit to take him to the ground with me falling on top of him. Spike growled as he pushed up, and I did something I’d never done before: I gave the hyena free rein.

I let the hyena instinct guide me as I reached down and bit Spike on the shoulder as hard as I could, which turned out to be hard enough to break the skin and I suddenly had the taste of blood in my mouth. Oh, I’ve tasted blood before: the pig, the second pig, and a little incident senior year that I’ve sworn to never share even with Willow. This, however, was like nothing I’ve ever tasted. This blood was had more zing to it than blood should. It tasted stronger, and as I fed, I could feel my cock harden, a response that didn’t lessen when Spike dug his own teeth into my shoulder and the pulling sensation seemed to reach down through my body so that I felt it everywhere. It was like that pulling a scab when it hurts but it’s just so damn good you can’t stop, and boy I didn’t want to stop. At least not until it occurred to me that this was Spike as in evil and vampire and hating me.

I yanked my shoulder back and the sight of Spike in game face with my blood on his face really shouldn’t look so damn good, and again I’m blaming my hyena for my sudden lack of taste because I’m supposed to be turned
on by Seven of Nine and Buffy and cheerleaders, and not a demon covered in blood. And oh god, I just drank vampire blood. I just bit a vampire and sucked vampire blood. I just attacked a vampire and loved drinking the blood. Oh yeah, irony pokes its evil little head up again. I started backing up, and Spike practically sprang up after me as I retreated, and I really thought I was a goner from the look of hunger in his eyes. He leered and reached out to grab me, and I spun away while planting the heel of my hand right into the side of his face as hard as I could.

“You bloody git,” Spike snarled, and I kicked out only to find my leg caught in an inescapable grip as I suddenly found myself falling backwards. I heard my own head hit the wall shortly before my back hit the floor, and I lay there winded and dizzy as I tried to check in to see if my body was still all in working order. Before I’d had a chance to come up with a better plan than lying on the floor like a big dead fish, Spike was straddling me, his legs trapping my own, and oh god I am *so* not looking at our cocks lying side by side, and I will not notice how hard they are and I will not brag about the fact that mine looks a fraction larger than his and boy it sucks that I can’t even brag about that. I don’t think Buffy is ready for me to tell her that I’ve compared my fully erect penis to
Spike’s as they lay side by side, and hey, was Spike talking?

“Are you even listenin’?” Spike demanded, and I dragged my gaze up to his face. Trying to focus that far away made my vision go funny what with the multiple Spikes that sort of wavered in the center of my vision and just how hard had I hit my head, anyway?

“No,” I answered truthfully and he got that frustrated expression my father always got when trying to explain algebra...that’s why I went to Willow. She has one heck of a resolve face, but that woman has no impatience face. She actually has no end of patience, as I proved over and over as she got me through math class. Spike on the other hand has a very limited supply of the stuff. “It’s what happens when you knock someone’s brains out,” I added as Spike obviously struggled for words. I paused, looking up at him. “Did that even hurt you at all?”

“It didn’t hurt me enough to keep me from slammin’ ya into the wall again if ya don’t start listenin’ to me.” Uh oh. That thick accent meant that Spike was pissed. He used to get that tone in his voice when he cursed out that one character on Passions.

“I didn’t abandon you to the pep’tuil demon...”
“Ah-huh,” I protested weakly as the three Spikes swimming in my vision started gathering into one solid form. Dr. Pimples...he was the biggest sadist, I bet he turned the damn chip down.

“Bloody listen!” Spike snarled and I suspected that my attention had wandered again, but hey...head injury here. “Pep’tuils are harmless as long as ya don’t bother them; they use those soddin’ huge tusks of theirs to pull up roots. They’re from the Irerth dimension and you can walk a couple of feet from where they’re feedin’ and be safe as houses as long as you don’t threaten them. Two of us would’ve been a threat, so I tried to get out of the way so the beast didn’t feel like it had to attack.”

“You didn’t just leave me?” The minute the words were out of my mouth I wanted to suck them back in because they just sounded so damn needy. Besides, what was Spike going to say? ‘You caught me, I’m bloody lyin’, I’m so ashamed of myself.’ Okay, that wasn’t going to happen, and I didn’t know enough about demons to know whether he was telling the truth or not. After all, he kept winning all those kittens in his poker games, so he was obviously good with the lying, and besides, I really *wanted* to believe Spike, which made me suspect my own judgment.
“ Didn’t leave ya. Already got the Initiative on my arse, don’t need the Slayer comin’ after me for lettin’ her donut boy get eaten.” I know, dozens if not hundreds of people have called me Donut Boy, Cordelia so many times that I should be used to it by now, but hearing Spike say those words opened a hole in my chest that hurt so bad I actually had to look down to see if he’d done something like open a hole in my chest. Told ya, hyena made me want things I had no right wanting, and wanting Spike was just going to end in chest opening pain if not actual chest opening injury. He obviously saw me as the loser; I wonder if Spike would have gotten a hard on by sucking his warm human blood out of a bag? And oh shit, how was I supposed to explain mine? Not that there was anything to explain right now since my cock was apparently sensitive to comments of the donut boy variety.

“Whatever, so either eat me or get off me,” I finally said, and even I was shocked by the hatred in my voice. I braced myself for the strike and the bite, but instead Spike stood up so that he straddled my body, and I had a rather interesting view of his entire groin area from the thighs up. And what a fine piece of equipment it was too, but I wasn’t ever going to be invited to play, so all I wanted was for him to go away.
Rather than try to fight him, I just turned to my side so I was facing the wall. Spike stood there for a moment, no doubt reminding me of my place in the food chain now that he had a longer leash, and my hyena whined in need.

Finally Spike stepped away to his own side of the cage, and I scooted closer to the wall. Yep, low-status male rank for me, so take up at little space as possible, try to please everyone else, and ignore my own needs. I knew how to play this game. The hyena however made unhappy noises in my brain. A male shouldn’t be over her; *Spike* shouldn’t be over her. Spike should be under her, and I really tried to ignore the various naughty positions she suggested. Damn it, she was going to break my cock doing this inflating-deflating act. Boy, that’d be hard to explain to a doctor. ‘Hey doc, I think I broke my cock because the primal hyena inside my head and I keep having this disagreement over a local vampire.’ Yeah, I don’t think my medical insurance covers the loony bin, at least not for the length of time they’d throw me in there.

I heard Spike make an unhappy noise of his own, but then he really didn’t have anything to be unhappy about, so whatever. Okay, maybe he had a thing or two that might make him unhappy what with the whole captured thing, but hey, no one was ripping his heart out, although
right then I would have tried if someone would have loaned me a dull butter knife. Since that wasn’t an option, I just wanted to be left alone. Of course the scientists chose that exact moment to lower in the latest version of Miss Piggy. Eww...bad image. I had a sudden flash of me ripping the synthetic stuffing out of a wide-eyed puppet pig as I stuffed the cottony material into my mouth. Well, that’s one show off the rerun list of goodness.

I heard Spike and Miss Piggy making the typical pig-killing noises: squealing, cursing, sucking. The pig did the squealing; Spike did the cursing and sucking.

“Here,” Spike said as he kicked my back. Okay, it might have been more of an emphatic tap with a foot, but still I wasn’t in the mood for rude foot action.

“Go away,” I suggested, and then closed my eyes as I realized the stupidity of the request.

“Stop sulking like a prat and eat,” Spike insisted, and I just continued to lie on the floor. “Bloody get up and eat.” This time Spike snapped his command, and I felt myself dragged upright by my arm.

“Knock it off, witless,” I snapped back as I turned to him in time to see the tightening at his eyes that suggested
he was in pain. Served him right; he left finger shaped bruises on my arm and my whole shoulder ached from his manhandling.

“Eat.” Spike thrust a meaty rib at me, and I’d opened my mouth to refuse when I just froze. The meat. I stood transfixed by the meat. The hyena was practically howling her hunger and frustration, and I finally couldn’t take it, so I grabbed the meat from Spike and then turned my back to him.

“Wanker,” Spike said behind me, but at least he left me alone. “Thank you Spike for providin’ food since I’m too big of a nancy-boy to kill it for myself,” Spike said in a nasally sing-song, and it took me a second to realize he was imitating me. Yeah, I thought it was about time for the mockery to start—one donut boy comment would never be enough for Spike to get out his frustrations. The hyena growled at the thought that Spike considered her too weak to hunt, but I had pushed her down far enough to ignore her complaints. Spike just kept right on with his little comedy act.

“‘You’re welcome. S’only right since we’re in this together.’ ‘Well I just want to express my gratitude for giving me food and making sure the demon pig didn’t eat me and for putting up with my shitty attitude.’ ‘No
problem mate, know how it goes when you’re down.” Spike finished his little sarcastic conversation with himself and then the cell went silent except for the sounds of my eating. I had nearly finished the rib, and I swallowed hard. It was difficult to get the pork down with all the crow I was about to eat.

“Thank you,” I nearly whispered, and really I hoped Spike had fallen asleep. No such luck.

“You’re welcome. Need ta get your strength up, mate.”

“You mean the demon’s strength?” I asked. I knew full well what Spike wanted: a partner in any escape attempt. I had to remind myself not to need more from a creature who wouldn’t give more.

“You’re a Primal; they’re strong and bloody good in a fight. You need to feed and let that fightin’ spirit out some. We need as much help as we can get here.”

“Right.” That word came out more bitter than I had expected, but I really couldn’t miss the irony of Spike wanting me as an escape partner and not wanting me in any of the ways that really count. But then again, I was the Zeppo and he... well, he was Spike.

I tossed the empty bone and curled up in my corner to have an nice long talk with my hyena about what was
possible and what wasn’t because I didn’t care if both of us lusted after Spike, I wasn’t going to play bottom boy for yet another person who only thought I was good for fetching pastries. Hyena and I kept arguing that over until I finally fell asleep.

**Part Five**

“I do believe I’ve won our little bet.”

“You had an unfair advantage with your history in Section 15,” a nasally voice responded, and I groaned under my breath - great, another visit from Dr. Pimples and Dr. Pencil Neck. “The vampire’s superior strength made the assignment of dominance a rather easy task,” the first bragged, and here we go back to the land of the circle jerk. I wondered if the other scientists got as tired of this as I did. Of course, if they did, one of their colleagues would have put strychnine in the coffee long ago.

“So, did you finish the tests on seventeen?” the second voice asked, and I perked up my ears without actually perking my ears or perking anything else since I was trying to be all stealthy with the fake sleep.
“Oi, you lot mind holding down the noise before I go get the super?” Spike complained from the other side of the room, and yep, there went the stealth. With a heavy sigh I sat up and looked through the glass at the two men who had tried their best over the past... god, who knows how long we’ve been in here, but anyway they’ve tried to turn me into a pin cushion, an ashtray, an electrical circuit, and any number of other things the human body was never meant to be. Well, not unless you're into kinkier stuff than I am because the blood from my last fight with Spike was about as kinky as I got, and oh god, don’t think about the blood. Too late. I squirmed as my cock filled again, and I almost felt sorry for whatever scientist was in charge of coming up with a theory to explain my amazingly headstrong body part.

The scientists ignored Spike and continued their conversation. “Yes, I did think it was a waste of time to repeat the same tests we’ve conducted on two dozen other vampires, but Dr. Childs did insist on being thorough given the subject’s aberrant behavior. Have you finished with 223?”

“No, not yet. I do wish I could keep 17 around a while longer though. 223 has exhibited more deviant pathology since being housed with 17.” As the words sunk in, I turned to look at Spike. I don’t know what I expected to
see, but his face had gone emotionless so that he appeared to be utterly indifferent to the two scientists who were talking about not keeping Spike around, and I really didn’t have any illusions about them retiring Spike to the Old Vamps Home. As I watched the scientists consult some numbers on their charts I felt an overwhelming urge to rip their guts out. Well, actually I felt an overwhelming urge to rip out their guts and then eat them, but I’m trying to stay in denial about that second part for as long as possible.

“When will you take 17 down to Disposal?” Dr. Pimples asked as calmly as if he were talking about the weather rather than talking about destroying Spike. I mean, yes, he’s annoying and snarky, and a giant pain in the ass, but he’s a pain in the ass with a personality and hopes and desires and frustrations, and a good 80% of all those things that make us human. Destroying him was like...okay, it was like staking a vampire which I personally did as often as possible, but I *knew* this vampire and staking him just wasn’t an option.

“After 17 has been disposed of, where will you be transferred?” Dr. Pimples asked, and I realized I had just missed a rather important answer because I was too busy growling at the two scientists who stood inches from a very slow and painful death. Hyena were actually
rather famous for playing with their food, not that these
Guys were food because calling people food was very,
Wrong in the getting you locked up for the rest of
Your life kind of way.

“I hope to get a transfer to Aberrations permanently,”
Dr. Pencil Neck responded.

“Oh, that would be nice; I have to admit that I’ve enjoyed
Working with you.” Okay, I just couldn’t take it any more.
I couldn’t take their callous discussion of Spike’s
death...well, Spike’s dusting, what with the whole already
Being dead thing. I was sick of their insensitivity, casually
Arranging Spike’s “disposal” right in front of us. I was sick
Of their constant tap dancing around each other when
They obviously just wanted to get it on. I think my next
Comment may have actually qualified as a snap.

“Oh for God’s sake I am so sick of hearing you two suck
Up to each other. Either rip each other’s clothes off and
Start fucking like horny weasels or shut the fuck up,” I
Snarled without even bothering to stand up. Both
Scientists froze in place, but Spike’s instant deep laugh
Rang down the halls. I turned to see Spike leaning against
The wall laughing so hard that little tears appeared in the
corner of his eyes, and if the joke wasn’t that funny, I
Wasn’t going to call him on it. If I’d lived through a
hundred and twenty years of Angelus and Darla and revolutions and massacres and hunters just to get taken out by geekoids like these, I’d be approaching hysterical too.

“Bloody hell, whelp. Didn’t know you had it in you,” Spike finally commented as the two scientists bustled off in a chorus of ‘hrumphs’ and ‘well reallys’.

“Sick of listening to them,” I said with a shrug.

Spike paused and looked over at me. “Seem to have a problem there, mate.” I glanced down at myself down and really, I couldn’t exactly deny what he said, what with the fully erect cock that all but bobbed between my legs.

I dropped my face into my hands, sighing. “Fine, just get the insults over with...what’s it going to be today? Do you want to point out how I’m not really a man since I’m Buffy’s butt monkey even though she treats me like the party guest that no one wants around? Or maybe you’d like to point out my lack of non-humiliation jobs. Say, how about the time I had to dress up like a hot dog to advertise the new hotdog-on-a-stick booth? With all the pork on the hoof around here lately, that should be good for a laugh or two.”
Yep, when all else fails it’s full babble ahead for the Xan-man.

I absolutely refused to look at Spike because I didn’t want to see the mocking expression. Of course I also felt like the biggest heel in the world for picking a fight after the latest bombshell, but at least I managed to bite my own tongue before making chipped vampire jokes, which means for me the day was actually a diplomatic success. Yeah, I know, I’m pathetic. Thank god no one ever relied on me for my diplomacy skills, because that’s a big no on the ‘Xander being tactful’ front. Hell, my tactful scale went from “blatantly insulting” to “obliviously rude”. Yep, that was about my range.

“Bloody hell, not sayin’ anything of the sort, ya wanker. Ya really aren’t very good at hearin’ what I’m actually sayin’, are ya?”

“Nope, and that would be why my third grade teacher wanted me to repeat the grade. However if you have a new one to add...maybe something about how I can’t take care of myself or hunt my own food, you just go right ahead and jump in here.”
“Pet, look at me.” The gentleness of his voice surprised me and I looked up before I could even catch myself. Spike was squatted down like he so often did, but of course the whole lack of jeans thing meant that his squat was so much more interesting than when he did it on patrol, which was of the good, because if Spike squatted like this on patrol with his danglies all dangling I would definitely get eaten by something. Hell, I might not even notice getting eaten. I would just die happy looking at Spike’s cock. His fully engorged cock. His beautiful head poking out of the foreskin with a single drop of precum just gathering at the slit, and oh my god. Okay, unless he had done something really kinky on the other side of the room without me hearing, there was no reason at all for him to have that response. However, my own inflating, deflating wonder, which had deflated during my tirade, was now inflating again at the sight of Spike so hard and needy.

“Spike?” I asked uncertainly even as my body made some rather salacious suggestions.

“Right; I know the Primal’s doing some hijacking there, and you’re safe as houses, Xander. You’re a great bloody pain in my arse, but ya tried to protect me, which is more than most anyone else, so thanks mate.” I sat, stunned and still trying to understand the first half of Spike’s
statement when it occurred to me that he was saying goodbye. No no no. I was not going to let him get away, not when I’d just figured out something important. At least, I thought I had just figured out something important. Either I’d figured something out or I was about to make the biggest fool out of myself in the long history of Xander Harris’ making a fool of himself.

“Wait, Spike, you think the Primal’s the one who’s... well... yeah, you know what I mean.”

“You’re a soddin’ adult, Harris. You’re allowed to say the big bad naughty words now.” I felt myself blush deeply.

“Fine, you think the Primal is the one who’s lusting after you.”

“Not like I can help noticin’ the conflict of opinion there.” Spike gestured toward my groin, and I blushed even deeper. Who knew I had this much blood for my cock with enough left over for every square inch of my body to turn beet red?

“Not planning to jump you, so you can just relax,” he finished calmly. Oh, I so totally wasn’t even worried about him jumping me, that wasn’t the real danger, I thought as I started to smile. Right now I was thinking he had a lot more to worry about than I did what with my
whole jumping Spike fantasy that now started running on in my head. Knowing what Spike looked like naked really did make the naughty fantasies a whole lot more interesting.

I took a deep breath. “It’s not the Primal, Spike.”

“Wot?” Spike had that wonderfully cute confused-as-hell expression: head cocked to one side with his brows beetled together.

“Primal wants sex... can’t say that she really cares where it comes from. Last time she came out to play I liked Buffy, so the Primal chased after Buffy and tried to take her as a mate. This time, I like you, so the Primal keeps trying to push me into... you know.” I just couldn’t look Spike in the eye and admit my fantasies including throwing him to the ground and pinning him down until he showed me his neck and yielded to my claim. Oh god, I almost broke my cock at just the thought of that. Ow.

“Well that’s a bloody insult,” Spike nearly whispered, and that took care of my cock problem right away. Yeah, I should have known he’d be insulted at the lust of the donut boy, but I hadn’t thought that even Spike would be rude enough to say it. Okay, I had thought it, but I had hoped he would have at least some courtesy, like not saying it in front of god knows how many scientists who
would now know that William the Bloody was insulted by the attentions of Xander Harris, Zeppo extraordinaire, and hey, did I just miss something?

“...like me has no business chasin’ after Slutty the Vampire Lay-er. I mean really, I’m a hell of a lot sexier than that bony twat.”

“Huh?” Okay, so that was a yes, I obviously missed something important.

“I *said*,” Spike gave an exaggerated sigh as he looked me in the eye, “anyone who has the good sense to fancy me has no business goin’ for Slutty.”

“What, you mean you aren’t insulted that I...” I stopped when I saw the eyebrow go up.

“Okay, fine I’m being stupid, but I really think I need to know where I stand here,” I said as I stood up and crossed my arms. Spike mirrored my actions on the opposite side of the room as he stood. Oh god, stop looking at his cock I ordered myself. When my eyes wandered up to his face, I would see that sly, amused expression he sometimes got when he knew something that no one else did. Okay, I think I could assume I wasn’t being subtle with the whole cock-staring thing.
“Fine, from where I’m standing I want to throw you down on the floor, feel you writhe under me as I lick the sweat from your body and then slam my cock into you so deep that you beg me to make ya whole.” Spike looked straight at me as he said it, and I couldn’t help but let the hyena up a little to meet the challenge; I felt my vision shift as the hyena surfaced. Then I suddenly found myself looking at a game-faced Spike.

“I don’t think you can do it,” I told him. “I think it’s more likely that you’ll be laying under me, begging me for my cock right before I fuck you into a quivering mass of need and frustration, never letting you actually come until you yield to me,” I answered, shocked at my own mouth, and hoping Spike’s last act wouldn’t be to tear my tongue out of my mouth for even having the fantasy in my head much less the temerity to say it to him. Spike started growling, and I growled back as he stepped toward me, but somehow I just knew physical harm wasn’t on the agenda although physical action might be. Rather than retreat, I stepped forward so that we were chest to chest, and I used my height to look down on him.

“Don’t think ya have it in ya,” Spike said with a snarl, but it didn’t scare me at all. In fact, I was very close to throwing Spike down and fucking him like a cheap whore right in the cell, cameras or no cameras, scientists or no
scientists. However not all my luck had changed because at that moment I felt the tranq hit my thigh. Spike looked down at the tuft of synthetic fur decorating his own tranq dart before he looked back up at me.

“Sorry we won’t have the chance ta find out, pet.” Spike’s legs collapsed and he went to the ground like a sack of cement, the only ungraceful move I’ve ever seen him make. It took me a moment to realize that I’d fallen to the ground myself. I expected the abyss to take me, to pull me into the nothingness, but at the same time I fought it. They were going to take Spike; cowards who wouldn’t even face him were going to take him and kill him. I struggled to keep my eyes open just far enough to see his face as he lay crumpled next to me.

I didn’t even notice the unfamiliar grinding noise until a black boot stepped in between me and Spike so that my vision was filled with the boot of the thing that was going to take Spike...kill Spike....turn my mate into dust. Mate? Yeah, we may not have worked out the details, but the challenge had been issued, and he had responded. I reached into myself, and I didn’t just allow the hyena to come up, I pulled at her. I could feel the drug dragging me toward oblivion as I struggled to make my limbs answer, and I found myself praying to be able to find the strength to do one thing right in my life. I promised to
forgive myself for every mistake I’d ever made if I just did this one thing. Staking Jesse, falling asleep on Oz-watch, the whole clothing fluke, thinking that magic made for a good post-breakup revenge, poor Cordy falling through those stairs: I’d forgive myself every stupid thing I’d ever done if I could just not screw this up. If I failed Spike… well I just wasn’t going to even think about that. I couldn’t bear it. Not now.

The drug clouded my eyesight as the boots faded to gray, and I struggled to stay awake as I opened myself up and pulled the hyena into me. No more her versus me, no trading off time in the body, no negotiation, just one merged creature strong enough to fight the drug and save the mate. I opened myself totally, both surrendering to and commanding the hyena, and she surged forward in triumph just as I began to lose my grip on consciousness. The world tilted dangerously, and I actually had to throw my hand out to steady myself which really was kinda stupid since I was laying on the ground so the chances of me falling were not so good. Luckily the guards didn’t notice, but then I was just the Zeppo; I wasn’t the dangerous one. Yeah, I think they missed a memo there somewhere because I suddenly didn’t feel like a Zeppo.
My eyesight cleared and sharpened as two uniformed soldiers bodily hauled Spike off the floor and dropped him on a gurney. A white-coated tech had just fastened the first strap when I boiled up from the floor and darted out of the cell before the soldiers could lock me in again. The hyena’s power and rage pounded through my body as I grabbed one soldier and cleanly snapped his neck before I even realized what I was doing. That sounds like an excuse, but I didn’t need an excuse for taking out these men who tortured and killed without remorse or pity. They were as evil as demons, almost worse in way because these were humans who were supposed to have souls.

Anyway, I hardly knew what I was doing with blind instinct taking over, and the other soldier didn’t realize what I had done either because he turned with his buddy’s name on his lips and then stood frozen for that critical second as I reached forward. He grabbed for his gun, and my left hand went down to trap the weapon in the holster even as the scientist-techie screamed and took off running down the hall.

Realizing that I didn’t have much time, I slammed the soldier’s head against the wall hard enough to either stun him or crush his skull, I’m not sure which. This time it was my turn to freeze- part of me wanted to chase down the
fleeing white-coat prey, and another part wanted to just grab the mate and escape.

Deciding that I really didn’t have time to stop the alarm from being raised, especially with two bodies lying in the hallway for anyone to see, I grabbed Spike up and threw him over my shoulder and ran for the exit sign, and god please let these soldiers be anal retentive enough for the exit to actually be an exit. And should they really have big glowing exit signs in a demon prison? Are there building codes for secret government torture labs?

I slammed through the door a half second behind the blaring alarm, but I just started climbing stairs with Spike thrown over my shoulder, and damn, look at all those stairs, I told myself as I considered the nearness of that sexy butt dimple. My arm gripped his firm waist, his hips and legs bounced against the front of my body as I ran, and who knew how lickably soft a vampire’s skin could be? I thought being regular teenager made me horny enough, but the hyena’d up me? Very, very horny. Horny and naked and holding a naked Spike which sounds pretty damn tasty, until you consider all the soldiers out to kill us.

I could hear steps pounding down the stairs from above so I took the first door off the stairs into a level that was
all white doors and hallways... big surprise there. These people seriously needed to hire a decorator. A desperate giggle rose in my throat at a sudden mental image of the “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy” boys tut-tutting as they swished around the labs. Right, so not gonna happen. And so not helping me and Spike right now. And how the hell was I carrying a passed out Spike up stairs without even breaking a sweat? And oh god, I had just completely lost my mind as I thought as I stood in the middle of the Initiative trying to figure out what to do.

Just then a familiar scent hit my nose, and I turned my head to the left, nostrils twitching, and how weird was that? I really couldn’t even figure out what I was smelling since the whole sniffing the air thing was kinda new for me, and oh god, was that wonderful smell Spike? I glanced at the ass draped over my shoulder and had an overwhelming urge to mate, but then he wasn’t conscious, and doing the not moving dead guy...so not a good mental image. And really, I should probably be thinking of escape, so back to the familiar smell...anything familiar in this place was of the good. Taking a quick sniff to get a location, I turned to the left. Shifting Spike’s limp body higher up on my shoulder, I took off down the left hallway, turning at the second hallway on the left and then again at the third hallway on
the left, and how big was this place anyway? Shouldn’t someone have noticed the government digging a frikkin’ city under the frikkin’ city?

I had just taken another turn when I skidded to a halt as a door opened and the familiar smell snapped into my memory like a rubber band that breaks and hits you right between the eyes.

Riley.

Part Six

“Xander? What th... What are you...” You know, you’d think that crack commando teams would be, I don’t know, more crack. First the guy who didn’t even react to me until I’d bashed his head against the wall and now Riley with the stammering thing, and I was starting to think that these people were not getting their money’s worth on the whole commando front. Riley must have realized just how wrong things looked what with me being naked and Spike being naked and me touching a
naked Spike because his hand went to his sidearm, and I reached out and grabbed his wrist as I pushed him back into the large room he was trying to leave. I could already tell from the smell that there weren’t any other people in there, and one hiding hole looked pretty much like any other. Of course, if I couldn’t get the brain to work a little better, a hiding hole wasn’t going to actually help us for long. Following my nose...brilliant plan for dogs, not so good for people. I gotta remember that next time.

“Xander what are you doing here?” Riley finally finished a complete sentence as I dropped Spike to the ground and tightened my grip on Riley’s hand. Spike might wake up bruised, but at least he would wake up.

“Where else should I be, Riley?” I asked him right back as his eyes tightened in pain even thought he wouldn’t loosen his hold on the gun.

“Seattle.” Okay, that threw me.

“Why would I be in Seattle?” I asked, and I was so surprised at that answer that my grip loosened and Riley took that opportunity to try his moves. To his credit, the moves were good with a slide to the side with a blow with his free hand to the inside of my elbow. Two weeks ago, the move would have worked. Hell, ten *minutes*
ago the move would have worked. However, I was just starting to figure out that I was a good deal stronger now.

So, my elbow only bent slightly even as I grabbed Riley’s free hand and put enough pressure on the inside of his arm using my finger tips that he gasped. Of course the gasping was a little less important than the letting go of his gun part, and I quickly reached across his body and grabbed the weapon before backing up a step.

“And again, why would I be in Seattle?” I asked him as I trained the weapon his head. I didn’t plan to actually shoot him, well not unless he did something stupid like breathe or look at me wrong.

“You got that construction job supervising the site. You called Buffy last night,” Riley said even as he rubbed his sore arm and looked at me in a way that made it clear that given a chance he’d break my neck, which was fine by me because he wasn’t getting the chance.

“Never happened,” I said as I backed up some to look down the aisles in a locker room. Yep, lockers. I don’t know what I was expecting, but an elevator with the words “Secret Escape Route” would have been nice. “Where is everyone?” I asked as I realized that the scent of wet hair and male sweat was still fresh in my nose.
“They’re responding to the alarm, which I have to assume is for you.” Riley’s voice suddenly dropped into a more friendly tone, and I immediately turned all my attention back to him. I’m not stupid enough to think Riley would be friendly to me without some ulterior motives what with the hating him and taking him hostage and making fun of him to Buffy. Some guys get cranky about stuff like that. “You’re nowhere near an exit here, Xander. Whatever reason you have for saving the vampire, just look at this logically. You’re in the Initiative and every exit will be covered by now. You need to just give me the gun and let me take Spike into custody.” Um, okay, as far as arguments went that stank… even I could come up with a better argument than that.

“And then you’ll let me go back to Seattle where I have the wonderful construction job?’ I asked sarcastically.

“Exactly,” Riley agreed with such honesty that I realized he could never fake that level of concern. Say what you want about Riley, he wasn’t a liar. Even when he wanted to lie he sort of sucked at it, like worse than me sucked, and I haven’t been able to keep a secret from Willow since second grade. Well, other than the one, and that doesn’t really count since I was lying to myself most of the time. Told myself that the hyena was going away and didn’t really bother me, and I don’t think I can believe
that anymore since I could now feel the hyena needs not at a tingling in the back of my mind but as part of Me. Very of the creepy making. I looked at Riley again, seeing him not as an Initiative soldier but as one more sap in the middle of a giant pile of demon poo.

“Well this is ironic, but then that term has been popping into my mind quite a bit lately,” I said to Riley who looked at me as if I’d slipped off my gears. Maybe I had.

“Xander,” he said in that tone of voice that psychologists on TV use to try and talk someone out of jumping off a building.

“It seems like I know something about the Initiative you don’t. They’re following a new mission statement, and someone forgot to give you the memo.” Riley looked at me suspiciously and then glanced toward the door as footsteps pounded past.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about Xander, but the fact is that Spike is a hostile… even if he is harmless, he needs to be destroyed. It’s us versus them. Humans versus demons.”

“Well, the Initiative seems to have redefined humanity and Willow and Tara and I don’t fit into their new definition. I’m sure Buffy and Giles will be following soon,
and then who knows, maybe you’ll lose your pure human card for sleeping with a slayer.” With a shudder I realized just how ugly this was about to get. Giles never talked about the whole demon community in Sunnydale, but me plus bored had equaled following him on more days than I care to admit, and he had some pretty interesting friends and business partners, and I *knew* Giles wouldn’t work with people who were dangerous. Well, he wouldn’t work with people who were dangerous in the actively killing people kind of way. Like that tiny old woman with skin that would go all bluish when she was arguing prices with Giles, that wasn’t very damn human, but I couldn’t see the government dragging some 90 year old woman or demon or whatever she was into a lab. Some things are just wrong, even when it comes to demons.

“Xander, someone’s obviously said something to confuse you...” Riley interrupted my thoughts.

“Confuse me?” I asked, indignant. For once, I knew I was right and knew for a fact I *wasn’t* confused which was a new feeling for me. I hovered on the edge of hysteria and I tried to swallow down the fear and the pain and the helplessness until a time when I could feel all those things without some soldier taking advantage of the moment to throw me back in a cage.
“I’ve never been to Seattle, Riley, but I’ve been to a few
interesting places around here.” I held out my arm. A
dozen track marks wandered up until they faded into the
thickest part of my bicep, a strip of still healing pink skin
a half inch wide and two inches long covered the area
just above my elbow on the inside, and the wrist had
faint burn marks. I had grown used to these injuries
earned one at a time but as I watched Riley’s face pale, I
looked down and realized that the arm was a roadmap of
torture that left my stomach feeling knotted and heavy.

“Oh shit.” Wow, managed to make Riley speechless. But I
had more important fish to fry.

“You told them that Willow and Tara were going on a
Wicca retreat this weekend...have they gone?”

“Xander, it’s only Thursday,” Riley said in a ‘what an idiot’
tone of voice, and maybe the hyena made me more cool
because my old reaction would have been to splutter and
protest and babble, but instead I just looked at him with
my best imitation of the patented Spike one-eyebrow-up
expression. He glanced at me, did a double take, and
then his face sort of melted into this expression of
embarrassment. And there’s another shout out to irony
because I was usually doing the blushing and wishing the
hell mouth would open thing, and I wondered if my
normal expression looked at stupid as Riley’s did right now.

“But I guess you don’t know the day,” he said softly. I should have just let it go and kept doing the cool silent thing, but the hyena’s powers were obviously too limited to overcome the Xander dork factor entirely.

“No duh, ya think so?” I asked, realizing a minute too late that I had just left the land of cool with that statement. However, it must have been the right thing to say because Riley shook his head and I could see the tension going out of him even though I still had the gun trained on him.

“It really is you.” He said with a sort of sad wonder, and I felt partially relieved that I had won at least part of the battle and partially offended because Xander Harris with a gun was not worthy of relaxing around. I’m big, I’m bad, and I’m dangerous, damn it! He should’ve been terrified of what I would do in my righteous anger about my treatment. Instead he turned his back to me and went over to the door without a word, and HEY—guy with the gun here. I was just about to point out that hostages really shouldn’t be checking the hall without at least ASKING the hostage taker, but after he stuck his head into the hallway, he pulled it back in and asked me
a question before I could get my indignant thoughts together.

“How did you know about the girls if it wasn’t you that called Buffy and Willow last night?” Riley asked, and yeah, it hurts that the girls couldn’t even tell the difference between me and some Initiative poseur. I tried really hard not to be utterly offended.

“I knew because two of the scientists were discussing them. The Initiative is planning on waiting until they get on the road and then bringing them back here for ‘study’.” I made the little air quotes in the air with one hand while the other still held the gun steady.

“But our mission doesn’t…” Riley just stopped mid sentence, and I watched a number of expression cross his face in lightening flashes, and it made me glad not to be a lightning rod because his last few expressions were filled with fury and determination. “Never mind, it doesn’t matter; what matters is getting you out of here and letting Buffy know what’s going on.”

“Spike too,” I hurried to point out

“Xander, we don’t have ...”
“When are you planning on getting the message: Initiative, bad...Initiative, bad... Initiative, bad. I’m not leaving Spike in here.”

“Okay Xander, calm down.” I would have told Riley what to do with his calm but just then I heard a soft moaning sound and I lowered the gun to point at the floor while I knelt next to a waking Spike.

“Did they take you together?” Riley asked, and I wondered what the hell difference that made. Captured is captured.

“Soddin’ unfair, I shouldn’t have to put up with Captain Cornfed even if I am in hell,” Spike groaned and I tried to stifle a hysterical giggle. He was okay enough to complain, which was of the good.

“Whatever, just stay out of my way,” Riley snapped as he walked past us and went to the lockers, and again with the HEY! Guy with the gun here! But Riley ignored my indignant expression, or rather he didn’t notice because he didn’t bother to look, and I nearly snarled when something touched my arm. Looking down I realized that Spike had put a hand on my arm and was looking at me a little strangely.
“Not worth it, pet,” he said even as he started to pull himself up. What? I would asked him what the hell he was talking about except I really didn’t want to look even more clueless in front of Riley who was pissing me off to a level I had never experienced pissed offness before.

Here, put these on, Riley said as he tossed clothing at us; I caught the ugly brown shirt and started pulling it over my head. Spike’s snort was the first indication of a problem, and the fact I couldn’t get it all the way on was my second.

“Wanker,” Spike said without even a trace of our former animosity as he yanked the shirt off hard enough to make me yelp.

“Watch it blondie,” I snarled, perfectly willing to take my frustration in general out on Spike. I don’t know what I expected, but Spike leaning over to give me a quick kiss wasn’t it. Oh sure, I’d had plenty of fantasies about that, but those fantasies were still distant enough that you couldn’t really call them thoughts that crossed my mind. With the brown shirt still in hand, Spike just leaned in and pressed his soft, cool lips against my own, and in the space of one second, I was once again hormonally raging, and shit, Riley was in the room. Spike pulled back and slipped the shirt over his own head, and when his face
reappeared, the smug expression on his face told me everything I needed to know.

“You asshole, what are you doing?” I demanded as I realized I now had a hard on that even Riley couldn’t ignore, and that boy seemed pretty capable of ignoring much of reality.

“Wot?” Spike asked with a flip of his eyebrow, and I heard a growl coming from me before I even realized that I was capable of the sort of full growl that I heard from Spike every time I used all the hot water.

“You did that on purpose.”

“Yep,” Spike agreed with a smile as he thrust a hideous green pair of slacks at me, and that was not the type of thrusting I wanted here.

“Asshole,” I repeated as I slipped the pants on and tried to get angry enough to make my hard on go away.

“Seem a bit obsessed with that word,” Spike pointed out, and I just snarled at him. A banging locker announced Riley’s imminent return, and yep, that took care of one problem right there. Spike was just pulling uniform pants on when Riley reappeared with two pair of boots.
“Put ‘em on,” Riley said before he went and checked at the door again.

“Really? Thought I might use ‘em for target practice. Stupid nit.” Spike snarled under his breath, but Riley was ignoring him too, so at least I didn’t feel singled out by Riley’s threat assessment of me that placed me somewhere between 5 year old girl and bunny rabbit. You’d really think I could get at least a little respect with the whole taking his gun thing, but nope. Since I obviously wasn’t winning the intimidation portion of the day’s festivities, I stuck the gun in a pocket and grabbed the shirt Spike held out.

Spike and I slipped on the boots, and with the addition of some stupid hats, we could almost pass as soldiers. Well, except for the bleach blond hair and the body odor and the way the clothes almost but didn’t quite fit. We were *so* going to die, but at least I had the pleasure of knowing we were taking Riley down with us.

“Okay, we’re going to try for the portal room. Give me the gun back.”

“Not a chance” and “What the soddin’ hell’s a portal room” came out at once.
“Will you two shut up before you get all three of us killed?” Riley hissed. Oh yeah, feeling a real desire to pull all his hair out by the roots now.

“I’m not giving you the gun back. I took it fair and square.” The minute the words came out of my mouth I realized that they only made sense in a hyena sort of way what with the strong taking whatever they were strong enough to keep. In human terms, that argument really didn’t work, but I wasn’t about to back down to Captain Cardboard.

“Xander, I’m not walking around with an empty holster; that screams hostage, so give me the gun.”

“Take off the holster,” I countered.

“Xander.” Great, now Riley was using that frustrated tone of voice my mother used when I didn’t clean my room, and I hated that tone from my mother, but from Riley it made me damn near homicidal.

“Bloody hell, you two can play ‘who has the bigger dick’ later, right now I just want out of this soddin’ hell hole.”

“You’re just...” Riley started, and I could tell from the expression on his face that he was about to say something I was going to have to kill him for.
“Riley,” I snapped louder than any tone I’d ever before used around the soldier, “I’m not giving you the gun so you can get rid of the holster or keep the holster or eat the holster, but you’re going in that hall without anything *in* the holster.” Riley actually stopped talking, which surprised me, and looked at me as if he’d never before seen me. He gave me that look that two guys in a bar give each other when they like the same girl. And yeah, the irony there wasn’t lost on me since my days of girl gazing had just come screeching to a halt if my cock’s reaction to Spike was any gauge. It’s not that I didn’t still think girls pretty, but after the whole Cordelia/Willow thing I tended to lust after one person at a time, which left me with one ex demon sized problem, but one disaster at a time. I’d just have to deal with Anya later and hope I got through with all my parts still attached. She’d had this whole Lorena Bobbitt altar thing that made me worry about her reaction—demon powers or no demon powers.

“Fine,” Riley finally said through clenched teeth as he went back into the lockers. One good slam later he came back without the holster, and he stormed past us into the hall without another word. I looked at Spike with my best ‘not my fault’ expression, but he just gave a quick snort and followed Riley out into the hall. Still worried about
whether I had pushed Riley too far, I trailed the other two, my hand in my pocket where I wrapped my fingers around the butt of my gun.

The trip walking through the various hallways and passages all painted the same exact shade of white... one of the worst memories of my entire life, and I have a few really bad memories up there. However bug ladies and Angelus and bloodthirsty demons all together didn’t scare me as much as these humans who so coldly considered my death an acceptable loss in their little war. When Spike had been on the other side of the evil fence, he was just being Spike. Not that he was really on the not-evil side now. He was just on the vegetarian evil side of the fence, unless the upgrade put him back on the hunt, and I so don’t even want to consider that as a possibility. But back to the point, Spike was just following instincts that said humans were a food source. That wasn’t evil; it was just...creepy and predatory. But these scientists had no instinct to cut me up and use me like their bottom boy; they did it because they were curious or they enjoyed it or some combination of the two. *That* was evil.

“Now just be quiet and let me do the talking,” Riley said as we came to a stop outside one more door that looked exactly like every other door in this whole damn place.
“Like I want to talk to any of you wankers,” Spike said with a sneer, and I only hoped that Riley didn’t hear the nervousness in Spike’s voice. Of course anything that made Spike nervous left me wanting to collapse into a puddle on the floor. If asked, I would have sworn that my stomach actually did flop around a bit in my stomach, but I tried to keep a stoic face as I followed Spike and Riley into a large control room. God just please don’t let this be the place where Riley turned us in to the demon Nazis I thought as the door closed with a soft snick behind me.

Part Seven

There was only one tech in the lab, sitting at a computer that looked like a prop from the set of Star Trek: TNG with flashing things and glowing things and gauge things and a whole lot of other things that I also didn’t understand. I felt an urge to kill the tech, or at least injure him enough to make the room safe. Yeah, hyena power...not completely of the good obviously, since the
tech was some poor kid just doing his job. Now Dr. Pencil Neck? Him I could kill.

“Have you isolated target 337?” Riley asked, in the same bored tone of voice a person might use to discuss the weather.

“The portal isn’t quite stable enough yet, but the energy levels are rising and we expect to be able to send your team through at 22:30 hours, sir.” The techie’s words meant exactly zero to me, but from Spike’s expression, I was guessing this was not of the good, in an apocalypsey sort of way. Obviously portals meant something to him.

“I don’t want any screw-ups like with 213. Run the sequence now,” Riley ordered. The tech glanced over at me and Spike, and I tried to look like I belonged…I put on the blankest, stupidest face I could.

“Are they on your team?” the tech asked, and my inner soldier-self noted that he was being as pointed as he could be without being insubordinate.

“Jafo,” Riley whispered quietly enough that humans wouldn’t have heard from across the wide room. Then he snapped out a brisk, “Do your job, soldier.” Spike looked at me, and I nodded back reassuringly. Yep, that’s us, just another fucking observer or two, so go right ahead and
ignore us, I thought at the tech. I didn’t think mind control was going to be one of my new powers, but hey, ya never know.

The tech’s fingers fiddled with a knob and pressed a button and typed in a series of commands and then fiddled more and pressed more and typed more, and whatever kind of portal he was opening was so very not user-friendly because that was entirely too many buttons to press. Thank god I hadn’t followed my instinct to get rid of one more white-coat, because then none of us would have been smart enough to figure out that machine. That was Willow type techie stuff, and to be perfectly honest, none of us had Willow type brains.

“All systems are responding,” the tech finally announced.

“Power levels?” Riley demanded.

“37.2, Sir.”

“Excellent.” I have to give Riley credit here...he moved so fast that I didn’t know what he was planning until he had the tech in a choke hold. The panicked tech’s feet kicked at his chair so that it went skittering across the room and crashed into the far wall, and then his struggles became more and more sluggish as Riley put pressure on the side
of his neck. Eventually the tech stopped moving and Riley lowered him to the floor.

“Time to go,” Riley announced as he turned a key and flipped a toggle switch that made a door slide open on the far side of the room.

“And where exactly would we be goin’ then?” Spike asked even as we both followed Riley into a huge empty room where purple and blue and black swirls were starting to form at the far end.

“L.A.” Riley said tensely and then the swirls suddenly came together into a giant whorl shape on the wall. And hey, I always though that classic Trek had really cheesy special effects, but ironically enough, the swirls growing on the far wall looked just like those time travel thingy from that Trek episode where Kirk has to let the love of his life get hit by that car, and let’s just hope it wasn’t some omen cause the whole lettin’ a loved one die thing….I so wasn’t going there. Of course, it might just be an omen that I really watched too many sci fi reruns. Before I could make a decision on that one, Riley walked forward right into the whorl and disappeared.

“So, we trust the wanker?” Spike asked as he turned to me. Yeah, like I had any answers.
“Any place is better than this,” I said with a shrug.

“Don’t say that, pet. There are places out there ya don’t want ta see.” Okay, I had been perfectly willing to walk into a wall before that, but Spike’s doubts made my heart jump, and we were back to anything that scared Spike turned me into a pile of jello. But just because my legs were jello didn’t mean I wouldn’t still go. Right. So go.

I stood and looked at the wall. Spike held out his hand and for a moment I resented the idea of being held by the hand like a child, but then he took a deep breath, and I realized that he was just as scared, probably more so if the whole forgetting he didn’t need to breathe thing was any indication. After all, he was putting his life in Riley’s hands, and great, now I made myself even more nervous. It’s hard to trust the guy who got ya locked up even if he didn’t mean to.

So, I put my hand in Spike’s and we walked forward into the vortex without making eye contact. It’s a guy thing; when doing something unguyly, it doesn’t count as long as we don’t make eye contact. It’s like women with ice cream—if they eat it out of the container it doesn’t have calories. Same theory of physics involved. And I have been hanging out with way too many girls because a guy simply should not have access to that line of logic.
I felt the cold rush of wind, which was funny because there wasn’t actually any wind, and then I dropped out into another room, and oh shit—Demon Central. Riley was already backed up against the wall brandishing a broken chair with two or three angry, bleeding demons circling him. I pulled the gun, Spike snarled menacingly, and the angry bleeding demons spread out a bit to take all of us into consideration.

“Riley?” I half asked, half accused in a slightly sharp tone of voice.

“Whoa there, no need for a Jean-Claude Van Damme impression from the newcomers,” a smiling green demon insisted as he pushed his way smoothly forward. His hands were up in the surrender position, but I didn’t let that distract me from aiming my gun between the demon’s little red horns. Riley seemed to have the same thought because he shifted stance to square off against the speaker.

“Hey, you said Caritas was safe,” a demon from the crowd complained, and that answered one question. We were on Caritas, and as soon as I got back to earth I was going to kill Riley for getting us lost. I’ll admit, I once ended up in Bakersfield instead of LA when I started driving because I got the whole north-south thing
confused, but at least I never ended up on another frikkin’ world.

The green guy waved a dismissive hand and beamed a hospitable smile towards the heckler. “Darlings, Caritas is the sanctuary where you can let go of all your worries, this is just a little glitch in the magical programming. I’ll have it fixed faster than Samantha can twitch her pretty nose, but right now let’s all just put down our weapons. Durthock, I believe you promised me a Clint Black number,” and damned if he didn’t wink at a big hulking demon, and that’s when noticed the stage, and oh god, this was a hell dimension. I just knew hell would have karaoke.

“Now cutie, just put the gun down and get Billie there to stop snarling at the customers. Caritas doesn’t permit violence by demons and starting tomorrow, we won’t allow violence by humans either.” At first I thought he was talking to Riley because yeah, I did notice that Riley was kind of cute….stupid and way too willing to follow orders, but cute in a way I’m never again going to admit noticing.

Then I realized that he was looking at me what with me being the only one with a gun, and some demon did not just call me cute. What the hell was it with me and
demons anyway? At the speaker’s urging, others started wandering back to the scattered tables to listen to a Clint Black song get mangled so bad that even I didn’t even recognize it. Since the guy did seem to have saved us from death by demon mob, I eventually slipped the gun back in my pocket. The green guy didn’t miss a beat, though; he turned with that perfect-host smile and said, “sweetie, guns aren’t allowed here at Caritas so either check it with the doorman or I’m going to have to throw your cute ass out.” He glanced at Riley and continued, “and you need to put the wood down. Too many demons in here have an intense aversion to sharp bits of wood.”

I snapped a quick look at Spike, unsure what to do, but he’d put on his carefully neutral expression. Was getting thrown out of a demon bar really such a bad thing? Of course there was the whole demon world out there, and it had to be pretty bad if demons were seeking sanctuary in here. Okay, decision suddenly pretty easy, here. I took the gun out of my pocket and handed it butt-first over to the demon.

“Harris!” Riley snapped, and I involuntarily flinched at the tone and then I involuntarily felt an overwhelming rage at being publicly questioned, and then I very voluntarily turned around to do what I had wanted to do since the first Initiative soldier had appeared in that cemetery
where Spike and I had been captured: I swung my hardest punch at Riley’s head. Yeah, I probably shouldn’t have done that since the hyena meant I had the whole super-strength thing, and like Spiderman found out, super powers require super responsibility. But the man had told the Initiative where we hunted, and he had given information about the girls that was going to get the girls captured, and he had gotten us lost in some other dimension so I couldn’t save the girls, and I was just having a bad day. Somehow I didn’t feel bad at all about taking it out on Riley.

However, the day got worse when my punch somehow missed Riley altogether and I found myself launched backwards and landing in a table. Yes, *in*, as in I hit the table and then promptly used my ass to break the table so I landed *in* the broken remains. And Harris luck was running true to form because the sudden pain in my ass suggested that not all of the table stayed on the outside. And here comes Harris luck again because that was Riley ready for a counter attack with his own piece of chair. I suddenly had a whole new appreciation for Spike’s whole not being able to attack people thing. If I couldn’t attack Riley, Riley sure as hell shouldn’t be able to attack me, and yet here he came with his wood. It wasn’t fair, but that was just my luck, especially today.
“Listen you little shit, I just threw my career away to try and save Willow and Tara, but I’m perfectly happy to call the Initiative and tell them where your pet vampire is.” I heard Spike growl from behind him, but strangely enough Spike seemed to have more patience than I did because he didn’t try to knock Riley’s head off. And even more strangely, Riley ignored the growly vampire in favor of yelling at me. “I don’t know what’s going on with you and Hostile 17, but the more I see, the more I think you’d be better off if someone removed him from your life. When Buffy and Giles discussed keeping Hostile 17 at your house, I warned them that you were too impressionable to trust with a job like that, and I think you just proved my point. He’s gotten to you, Harris.”

You know how people talk about seeing red? I always thought that was a stupid expression. Really, who sees red literally? Well, I can tell you that I literally saw red as my hyena vision cut in to such an extent that the whole world was reduced to sepia tones with the warmblooded critters sort of a deeper reddish brown than the objects like tables or the unliving like Spike. I felt the growl from the bottom of my soul, and I pushed myself up. I wouldn’t lie on the floor with an enemy over me.

“Mate, think it’s time for you to be leaving,” I could hear Spike, but the reasonable tone of voice and lack of
cursing didn’t quite seem very Spike-like. I started walking toward Riley, so angry I was almost vibrating. I expected him to go nose to nose with me, but he didn’t, he started backing up so fast that he stumbled into a table of tentacled demons playing cards...and were those Heinekens on the table? Did they have an Off-world Export Division? I shook my head as I looked around he room.

The karaoke machine was a Toshiba, the demon had been singing Clint Black, and the tables were all sized for humans despite the inhuman occupants. I turned to the green- skinned host who had just returned with a much larger demon, who looked like a big pile of rocks.

“Where are we?” I demanded, entirely too angry to play nice.

“You’re in Caritas, the sanctuary in the middle of the rough and tumble city of the angels.” Okay, for a half second I thought angels as in...well...angels. Then it occurred to me that the land of angels probably wouldn’t have demons, but the City of Angels had plenty. After all, Buffy’s own Angel had had gone to LA just to fight them.

“We’re in LA,” I said.
“And now that you have your bearings, it might be time for you to find some other place in LA to destroy. They have some nice bars about three blocks down on your right where the owners replace the furniture on a nightly basis. I’m sure Elashi can point them out.” The green demon gestured toward the huge brown beast at his side who started lumbering forward.

“Oi, we didn’t do anything, get rid of Captain America there,” Spike protested as he crossed his arms in an ‘I’m not moving’ gesture.

“You sure as hell have done something to Harris, and when we get back to Sunnydale, I’m going to make sure you pay for that,” Riley growled at Spike.

“Why are people talking about me like I’m not here?” I demanded, but only half-heartedly as I looked around at the demons playing cards and listening to horrible singing and clapping politely as the creature finished. Some of them looked close to human, maybe vampires or primals or half-breeds, which didn’t make them less dangerous, but just the idea of the Initiative taking them made my vision shift toward the browns and reds again. I shook it off and tuned back in: Spike and Riley were busy snapping at each other while the green guy talked about

“You planned on capturing all these demons and sticking them in your labs,” I said to Riley right in the middle of Spike’s diatribe on Riley’s parentage.

“That’s confidential,” Riley immediately turned to face off with me, leaving Spike sort of spluttering to the side, and I sympathized because having an enemy turn its back on you was really infuriating. Again, Spike showed more patience than I had by simply turning his own back and storming over to the bar. From the looks of things, he was trying to intimidate the bartender out of a drink.

“No, that’s despicable,” I corrected Riley. “If you want to kill demons who are attacking people, I’ll stand on the side and cheer you, I’ll carry your ammo, I’ll give you a hand, but you’re planning on attacking demons who seem more interested in cards than apocalypses.” Yeah, and only a child of the Hellmouth would know the plural for “Apocalypse”.

“Wait a minute there, tall dark and grouchy, what are you talking about?” Green guy asked.

“The Initiative…a group of soldiers whose mission is to capture, experiment on, and kill all demons.” Okay, that
got a few people’s attention. Several heads of various shapes, sizes, and colors turned my way.

“Harris, we need to get back to Sunnydale.” Riley put on his nice, reasonable tone. Yeah, I’d heard that before. Didn’t like it then, either.

“You’re right, we do. Because you gave the Initiative information on Tara and Willow, we have to save them, but that ‘we’ doesn’t include *you*.”

“So you’re going with him?” Riley nodded toward Spike, his tone dripping disgust and hatred in every syllable. Spike responded with a two-fingered salute.

“He’s more trustworthy than you are,” I pointed out.

“He’s a vampire, you can’t trust him.”

“I didn’t say he was trustworthy in the being willing to trust him, I said he was just more trustworthy than you,” I snapped back, and I was incredibly proud that I had managed to say all that without one babble, stumble or stutter.

“Okay, enough with the pissing contest, boys, there’s one sure way to solve this. Sing.” Wow, had I missed something? It sounded like the green guy wanted me to sing, which made sense of the ‘not even’ kind.
“What?” Riley demanded, and I silently seconded that even if I wasn’t about to publicly agree with anything the soldier said.

“It’s my gift. The name’s Lorne, and this little piece of heaven where you can get the best Sea Breeze in town is where I provide readings for creatures great and small, but I can’t read the aura without you providing the sweet sound of music first.”

“Forget it,” Riley said with a snort as he backed away...which seemed to be Riley’s reaction to anything new. I bet his mother never made him try new foods; I bet that's where his life went wrong. Personally, I figured the worse thing that could happen was that I would embarrass myself publicly, and frankly I’d done that so often lately that it hardly mattered anymore. At least I had some clothes on for this humiliation, which made a nice change.

“I’ll make you a deal, you let me call Sunnydale to tell my friends they’re in danger, and I’ll sing whatever you want,” I offered.

Lorne considered that and then smiled, head tilted. “I think you just might have an interesting enough story to make that a good deal. Phone’s by the bar.” Spike was already there, I noticed, hoisting a pint mug containing
something that sure didn’t look like beer. I headed over and stood beside him.

The bartender slid me a phone, and that’s when I noticed the smell. Blood. Fresh human blood. Spike had an expression of pure, utter bliss on his face as he drank. Good for him, and please let that be volunteered blood, not that Spike would care, but my conscience was about ready to pop with guilt already, what with the Anya issue and the danger to Willow and Tara and the whole three year secret thing that I obviously had to ‘fess up about, because Riley wasn’t going to keep his mouth shut for longer than two seconds. If it wasn’t for the fact that my girls were in trouble, I would have voted for heading towards Canada and not looking back. Then again, I tried that whole extended road trip thing once already, and didn’t get very damn far. Being that I had no car at all now, I couldn’t imagine even getting out of the city.

I quickly dialed, and the phone in the dorm rang three times before the answering machine picked up. Okay, if the Initiative was tapping the phone, I needed to leave something simple enough that the girls would get it without tipping off the government.

“Hey girls, look, I’ve been thinking about that retreat, and I think it’s a bad idea in an Ampata kinda way, and I’ll
try to catch you later.” I hung up, smug that I’d dropped a hint about not everything being what it seemed. Then it occurred to me that the government knew we’d escaped so any message I left would probably be erased before the girls got it. Stupid, stupid, stupid. Okay, try again, Xan-man. I dialed the Magic Box.

“Magic Box, how can I help you spend money?” Oh yeah, that’s my Ahn.

“Anyá, it’s Xander.”

“Are you calling to beg my forgiveness?” she demanded in a hard voice that sounded far more demony that a non-demon really should.

“Uh...what?” I know *I* didn’t do anything beg-worthy, but who knew what the imposter had said?

“If you aren’t prepared to crawl back and beg for my forgiveness, I just don’t see why I should talk to you.”

“Anyá, you don’t un....”

“You broke my heart and crawling from Seattle to here on your hands and knees so that you show up with bloody and torn limbs would be a good start.”

“I need to talk to...”
“And if you think that means I’m just going to take you back, you’re wrong.”

“An...”

“Because I am a liberated woman, and I will not wait around for you to decide whether or not you’re ready for a commitment.

“Jus...”

“And I don’t care how many good orgasms you give.”

Dial tone.

Spike snickered, and my guess was that he’d heard the orgasm comment. My day was just getting better all the time.

There was no answer at Joyce’s house, and no machine picked up. Damn. I left a message with Willy, but from the completely unconcerned tone, I guessed that he wasn’t going to break his neck getting in touch with Buffy to pass it on. I hung up the phone and put my forehead down on the bar. Actually, I would have liked to hit someone, but that hadn’t worked out so well last time, as the throbbing pain in my ass reminded me.
“I think we need to find a way to get to Sunnydale,” I said to Spike without lifting my head.

“Considerin’ it’s day out there, I think I’ll be stayin’ here,” Spike answered in a contented tone of voice, but then he was drinking human blood for the first time in months, so from his point of view all was right with the world...or at least all was better.

“Fine. Riley, how much money do you have?” I turned around, but the table I broke and the chair that Riley broke and Riley himself were all gone, and come to think of it, the smell of Riley was quickly fading under all the other smells, not the least of which was me. Spike could get away with not bathing, I obviously couldn’t.

“So, will that be a bit of Metallica or maybe a classic Beatles song?” Lorne asked as he appeared at my shoulder. I turned back to the bar and promptly put my head back down. I heard Spike snicker, and suddenly a song came to mind. Also a coffeehouse, and someone with a guitar and an earring that looked like it might be a clip-on. Perfect. I lifted my head, looked at straight at Spike and started singing.

“No one knows what it’s like to be the bad man, to be the sad man, behind blue eyes.
No one knows what it’s like to be fated, to be hated for
telling only lies.
But my dreams they aren’t as empty, as my conscience seems to be.”

I hummed a bit where I didn’t know the words before I picked up again.

“My name is vengeance, that’s never free-ee-eee.” As I stopped, I wondered if I’d even gotten the words right. Spike had a sour expression on his face, and I just smiled sweetly at him. No sense being embarrassed myself if I couldn’t dish out a little to him, too.

“Oh ducks, you’ve got quite a path in front of you.” Lorne started. “If you don’t succeed, more than just Sunnydale is going to suffer. And on a personal note, you and your vampire here need to get a few things worked out before the world puts an end to your Romeo and Juliet act.”

“Yeah, Juliet,” Spike said in the most salacious tone possible, rolling the name in his mouth like it was the naughtiest thing that ever... uh, naughtied.

“Hey, I’m the Romeo here,” I retorted.

“Pet, you don’t look like the kind to do the seducin’, you look more like the seducee,” Spike grinned and stepped close so that we were once again chest to chest, so very
close that I could smell the blood on his breath. One wicked eyebrow was raised in challenge, and oh boy, hyena instincts knew what to do about that.

“I’ve read the Watcher’s journals, Spike. The only person you ever seduced into your bed was Harmony, and I’m not so sure I’d be bragging about that,” I pointed out with an evil smile of my own.

“Had my wicked plum for over a hundred years, didn’t need ta seduce anyone else, but I’ve had hundreds willin’ ta crawl in my bed. You’ve had exactly one, and she would’ve settled for anyone who could’ve helped her become more human.” That was a little mean, but I didn’t back down.

“Had two, actually... can’t forget a certain Slayer. Plus I’ve had more demons chasing me than you can shake a stick at, including your wicked plum.”

“That was a soddin’ spell, and she wanted ta eat ya, not set up house.”

“She offered me forever.”

“She was out of her mind at the time.”

“She was always out of her mind.” At that Spike flashed his game face at me, and I felt myself shifting into my
own glowy-eyed face. I wanted to throw him down right there on the bar, and prove just who was going to seduce who. Though “seduce” was maybe a little on the mild side, considering just what I wanted to do to the sexy, muscular, incredibly good-smelling demon who-

Lorne was suddenly right there, green hands gently but firmly pushing us apart. “Boys, boys...when I suggested you two needed to figure this out, I didn’t mean in the middle of my club.” My vision slammed back to normal when I realized people were watching us. Holy shit, what had I almost done in the middle of an entire room full of people who were watching with great interest, and that should not be exciting me even more. My cock strained at my pants so painfully that it actually balanced out the soreness in my ass from falling into the table.

“Right, need to find a way to Sunnyhell.” Spike said, switching gears immediately. “Any ideas?”

“None that you’d like,” I said as I tried to think disgusting thoughts. Problem was that most of my favorite delustifying images were no longer as disgusting as I remembered them being. Blood, guts, and gore had taken up residence in the “wow that makes me hungry” side of my brain, and I couldn’t come up with an image to make my stubborn dick go soft.
“Right, need to find Angel,” Spike said, and bingo...there’s an image to make a man’s cock deflate. Mine, anyway.

“I so wish I didn’t agree with you.”

Part Eight

I stood in the afternoon glare on the street looking up at the building where, according to Lorne, everyone who was anyone knew about the vampire with a soul. Personally, I’m thinking that with as many enemies as Deadboy has he should consider keeping a lower profile, but that’s just me. Taking a deep breath and then immediately wishing I hadn’t because of my own smell, I braced myself and then pushed open the door. Oh yeah, stereotypical private dick’s office with the dirty windows and 1950’s furniture, and why was I so amused at Angel obviously trying so hard to be the perfect dick? Still amused by my own joke, I wandered toward a door where voices now started to rise in frustration.
“...walked all over you, again” proclaimed Cordelia’s shrewish voice, and I flinched in memory of just how much damage that voice could do. No, no, no, no, no. I’d agreed to face Angel, who could so easily make me feel three years old and 2 inches high. I never agreed to face Cordelia, who’d honed that same skill until she could make me feel 2 years old and 2 centimeters high. Oh shit... too late, she’s seen me. Just don’t show fear, I reminded myself.

“And look who’s back from Seattle, did they get tired of having you around or were you just not as good at getting bagels and lattes as you were at getting donuts and sodas?” Okay, I could do this. And I could do this without getting bitchy about everyone buying the whole Seattle story, and I did not just think of myself as bitchy.

“I need to talk to Deadboy,” I said as I walked farther into the room. No fear. Nice and calm, yeah, just keep thinking it and maybe you’ll believe it, I told myself.

“Xander,” a voice said from the door. Yep, just as I remembered- Angel’s famous knack for managing to make my name sound like a greeting and a request for me to go away all at once. No one could say the vamp didn’t have talents.
“Angel,” I replied, trying to sound as neutral and friendly as I could. Spike had insisted that Angel would do anything to help his precious Slayer and her little friends, and I really hoped that was the case. Either way, I wasn’t going to piss him off before asking for a favor... of course, from his tone just seeing me seemed to have pissed him off.

“What do you want?” he asked with a sigh as he walked all the way into the main room, and I took that as a good sign, I mean four words in a row was positively talkative for Broody Boy.

“Buffy and Willow are in trouble.”

“Yeah, well she can just get herself right back out on her own, can’t she?” Cordelia snapped, and okay, her response in general didn’t surprise me; it wasn’t like those two loved each other, but for all of Cordelia’s bitching, she always came through in the end. The real surprise was the look on Angel’s face. Instead of the worried concern I was expecting, he looked like someone had slipped lemon juice in his blood, and I can say that from experience since I once did that to Spike after he kept using the last of my shampoo without telling me. The trick was to clean the whole place with lemon-
scented cleaner first, but right... Angel... saving girls... don’t think about Spike.

“Angel?” I asked, unsure about what would cause such a strange reaction from a vamp that normally started drooling on himself at the mere mention of Buffy’s name.

“She knows how to take care of herself,” Angel announced offhandedly before turning around, and this was so not the plan.

“Did you not hear me, or did I slip into a freaky version of my world when I went through that portal?” Seriously, this was confusing.

“Xander, I know you haven’t been talking as much with Buffy and Willow since you’ve moved, so I’m sure they forgot to mention that Buffy and I have decided to stay out of each other’s way and each other’s cities.” From the way Angel refused to face either me or Cordy, I could imagine his expression- broodier than ever, with a side order of hurty. Part of me wanted to cut him some slack while another part really wanted to kick him while he was down. A big part. A really, really big part. I shoved those thoughts down by reminding myself that I needed his help, so fun with Deadboy would have to wait til later.
“Okay, one-I never moved, and two- who are you and where the hell is Angel?”

“Xander…”

Upset won out over reason, and I didn’t even listen to what he started to say before babbling on. “You’re always the one jumping on the ‘save Buffy’ bandwagon, well except for that time when you didn’t because you were all ‘it’s her destiny to die’, but you even came through then, and you can’t go all ‘Moving On Guy’ now, because they need you!”

“Well, he’s not the one who’s moved on, is he?” Cordelia asked, and then I realized what bug had crawled up Angel’s ass.

“You’re mad about Riley? He’s a creep,” I said, and I couldn’t keep the anger out of my voice. Not that I tried very hard.

“It’s not about…his name’s Riley?” Angel turned back toward me with an almost amused expression on his face.

“Yeah, stupid name. Riley Finn. Of course his name is perfect compared to his job, which is working for a secret government organization that traps, tortures, and kills demons.”
“She’s made her choices, and I have to make mine.” I couldn’t believe what I was hearing- maybe this was some weird alternate reality after all. Angel turned to walk away again, and I dashed forward and put myself between him and the far door where he was heading.

“Not so fast there, buddy. Are you really saying you’re okay with the whole government operation because seeing as how you’re a demon yourself, I would think you would frown on the whole demon-torturing plan.”

“Buffy called me back when Spike showed up. They’re doing what they need to do to keep the Hellmouth safe.”

“They’re planning on taking Willow and sticking her in a lab,” I snapped back. If he didn’t care about Buffy because of some star-crossed lovers shit, fine. If he didn’t care about the vampire he’d all but sired getting tortured and dusted, fine. But he had no right to ignore Willow being in danger.

“Willow’s never done anything other than try to help you, and you’re doing your whole broody, my girlfriend’s gone and left me country music … thing.” My voice got slower at the end as I sort of lost track of my own train of thought, and why did Angel always make it hard for me to talk without turning into a babbling idiot? Stupid vampire.
“Buffy’s boyfriend is after Willow?” Okay, that expression was almost funny, in a this really isn’t the time to be amused at Angel’s confusion kind of way.

“Sort of… I think he wants to help Willow and Tara, but he filed reports on them being witches, and now the Initiative put them on the ‘not entirely human’ list, which is not a good list to be on what with the torture and the experiments and the lack of bathroom facilities.”

“That’s where you’ve been,” Angel said in a totally shocked voice which was different from his normal voice in that it actually had emotion in it. “You've been in the Initiative.” He didn’t look quite as broody now. In fact, that face looked almost angry.

Cordelia snorted. “Oh please, Xander’s as human as you get. His only claim to fame is that he is totally unfameworthy with his normalcy.”

“Xander hasn’t been totally human for several years now,” Angel answered quietly, and I couldn’t have been more surprised if the floor opened under my feet. Not exaggerating, I’ve seen the ground open up under me, and I was actually less surprised. Of course on a Hellmouth, you expect the ground to open under you, and I never expected Angel to be the one who noticed anything different about me.
“What’s that supposed to mean?” Cordelia demanded.

“Did you merge?” Angel asked me, and I didn’t even try to pretend I didn’t understand.

“Kinda had to. It was either that or be trapped down there getting needles shoved in me while they took Spike out in a dustbuster.”

“Which is where Spike belongs,” Cordelia added, and I turned to her and growled. I thought I was expressing myself in a completely normal way; however, Cordelia’s little shriek and sudden retreat behind a giant desk left me thinking I might have gone off into hyena logic again. Okay, note to self: no growling at people.

“Where is Spike?” Angel interrupted.

“Still at Caritas, we had a small problem with the whole sun thing, so he decided to stay behind. Well, that and he finally found a place that would serve him human blood.” I gave an exaggerated stage shudder and a goofy smile for Cordelia’s benefit. It bothered me that she looked at me like someone she didn’t even know; even with the hyena, I was still Xander. I mean, it’s not like she didn’t know about demons and primals and things that go bump in the night. Then again, she’d had a front row seat
for my old pack eating the principal, so maybe I couldn’t totally blame her.

“Angel, you are not thinking of helping him.” Cordelia said imperiously--and that’s the Queen C. I remembered still immune to my powers of charming dorkitude.

“Cordelia…” Angel had his tired, “please just don’t make me fight about this” tone of voice… and I found myself actually feeling some sympathy for the guy, remembering the days when Cordy had made me that tired, and thank god I’ve now got the hots for Spike instead of her. Frankly, he’s a lot less scary.

“Fine. That’s just fine, Angel. Faith tries to kill you and you forgive her. Buffy walks all over you, and you’re still defending her right to treat you like...like you aren’t a person, and you know what I mean so don’t even say it, and now you’re going to help the bleached idiot who stuck hot pokers though you...do you see a pattern here, Angel?” She was on a roll.

“I’m not helping Spike, I’m helping Willow and Buffy.”

“Why do I bother? Just don’t come to me if all these people you try to help end up treating you like the dirt on their shoes.” She made her little washing-my-hands-of-this gesture.
“Hey, I wouldn’t…” I started, but Cordelia cut me off with a glare. “Okay, maybe I would have, but not any more,” I amended myself. God, Deadboy torture was one of my favorite hobbies, and she was just sucking the fun right out of it by making it sound almost wrong.

“And what has changed?” Man, she wasn’t backing down.

“I need his help?” I went for cute-but-clueless, but from her expression of doom, I think I missed the cute part. Luckily, Angel saved me by interrupting again.

“Come on, we’ll go to Caritas through the sewers.”

“Okay, I know you did not just say sewer.”

“Don’t worry; wading around in some sewer water can only make you smell better,” Angel answered, and I was momentarily struck dumb at the sight of Angel making a joke...a bad and overly obvious joke, but an actual joke nevertheless.

“Hey! It’s not my fault I haven’t had access to a shower for a while.”

“Yeah, just stay downwind.” Angel told me. “Cordelia, get the car and bring it over to Caritas, and if you can find
some extra clothes, I really don’t want to have to smell Xander all the way to Sunnydale.”

“Hey, standing right here,” I protested, and somehow Angel always managed to do that...to talk around me or over me or just as if I wasn’t in the room. I realized that was why I had never liked him...well that and the whole he got Buffy and I didn’t, which was so not fair. I never would have gone totally evil on her like he did, but then girls are always attracted by the tortured souls. Which didn’t explain Riley, because he was more into verbally torturing Spike than he was into being a tortured soul himself. And really, I wasn’t all that interested in attracting girls anymore, so Angel’s ability to command all the attention in the room shouldn’t bother me. But it did anyway.

He got Buffy, he had Cordelia doing the whole “no one gets to torture you but me” thing that was so part of her flirting behavior, even if Angel didn’t notice it. But the one that really bugged me? He was Spike’s sire. It’s like everywhere I wanted to be, he got there first. Well, except Cordelia; I never got there at all... hell, I never made it past second base with her, and for the sake of all the innocent souls in L.A., I hoped Angel didn’t either, flirting or no flirting. Realizing I’d stopped listening to the pointless sniping that sounded so much like what we
used to do in Sunnydale before the girls went all collegey on me, I focused again. They were still discussing my body odor, even as Angel started for the elevator.

“You try smelling nice after a while in the Initiative. They’d probably cut off all your hair.” I finally answered. I could have imagined the shudder in Angel’s shoulders as I followed him into the elevator, but I didn’t think so.

The travel through the sewers was nasty and disgusting and smelly and so much more pleasant than the reunion between Spike and Angel. One hour, countless “bloody wankers”, three death threats, two drinks, and one Barry Manilow song later, Angel finally agreed to go with us to Sunnydale to help and Spike finally agreed to let Angel come to Sunnydale and help. Of course Angel had already agreed to go and Spike had sent me to get Angel to help, but they had to do their little ritual mutual pissiness, so I just leaned back and listened to the sound of the two of them figuratively bashing heads as I tried to figure out just how large of a splinter I had jammed in my ass.

Once all the mutual flashings of gameface and bringing up of hundred year old grudges was over, Lorne even offered to let us use his rooms to clean up. I’m guessing it was either his attempt to keep Angel and Spike from
scaring customers away with the yelling, or me from driving them away with my odor. Despite Angel’s oh-so-funny prediction, I did smell worse, but that might have had something to do with the broken grate on the bottom of the sewer that Angel forgot to mention until I was face down in the muck. I hate that vamp. Okay, hate is a strong word, but he annoys me until I want to pull out all his hair one strand at a time.

All of which led to this moment as I listened to Spike and Angel argue as I stood in a bathrobe. And again with people talking about me while I’m standing right here.

“You bloody wanker, he’s still soddin’ mortal and that wound could get infected.”

“And what exactly do you care, Spike? I won’t have you playing games with him.”

“Who’s playing games? He risked his neck to get me away from those butchers, which is a damn sight more than you ever did.”

“You thought I’d do something after the way you treated me last time?”

“You bloody had it coming after you took Dru away from me.”
“You took her back just fine… right about the same time you worked with a Slayer to send me to hell.” I flinched at that one. If Angel was calling Buffy “a Slayer”, things were not of the good.

“The other option was stakin’ ya.”

“You don’t have it in you, William.”

“If ya mean a heart cold enough ta stake my own sire, you’re probably right. I’ll leave that bit up to you, mate.” Wow, that was once big flinch on Angel as he reacted to that comment. Spike had told me enough about Darla that I knew staking her was a lot harder than Buffy had ever understood. However, none of this helped me.

“Guys,” I started.

“William, yer treading on thin ice, boy.” Oh god, that had more Angelus than Angel in it, I thought as I heard the accent thicken.

“Guys!” I nearly shouted this time.

“What?” Four yellow eyes turned to me as each vampire snarled the same answer.

“This isn’t getting the wood out of my ass, so Angel, get out and Spike, some help please.”
“Xander, I don’t think…” Angel started, and Spike cut him off mid-sentence.

“That’s the thing— you never did think, except with your dick of course.”

“Hey, enough, both of you,” I insisted as I slipped a hand in under the robe and felt the trickle of blood that wouldn’t stop now that I had gotten out of the shower. Yeah, I knew something was wrong, but I was thinking splinter-something, and instead I got chunk of table-something. “Spike can pull the thing out since he’s already seen me naked more times than I can count,” I said as I felt the edge of the wood sticking out of the lower part of my ass, and suddenly I realized what I had said.

I looked up, and Angel was staring at me with an absolutely unreadable expression, well, unreadable with hints of shock and horror.

“…with the being locked up together naked like animals and not enjoying it all and really not enjoying it in a together kind of way because we were definitely not together, well we were together in a cell but not together and in together and just no.” Okay, every bit of cool I’d acquired while dealing with Riley was now officially out the window, and I bit my tongue to keep
from saying more. I hadn’t even done anything yet and I was already freaking about the gay stuff, and really the gay stuff wasn’t even a blip on the freaking-out radar. Spike just snickered as he physically shouldered Angel out of the room, clearly enjoying it.

“You’ve just been uninvited, so sod off, Peaches,” Spike announced with a final shove before he slammed the door to Lorne’s room with Angel on the other side. He turned to me with a smirk over what he clearly hoped was an innocent expression. “So, let’s see your ass there, pet.”

“Spike, I just need the wood out... we don’t have time for anything else.”

“And what ‘anything’ ya got in mind, pet?”

“Spike,” I said in my best warning voice, which never actually worked in the past, but now it made Spike stop and look at me thoughtfully. I pretended to be Willow with her resolve face; from the twitch in Spike’s lip, I suspected that I probably just looked constipated.

“Right, but time for anythin’ later?” Spike cocked his head to one side, and for one brief shining moment I would have sworn he looked almost unsure... okay, that really shouldn’t have been a shining moment since
enjoying Spike’s uncertainly just sort of makes me seem petty and kinda like a big jerk face as Willow would say. But after a lifetime of feeling like I’m always the one trying to fit in, it felt good that someone actually wanted to fit in with me…and I am so not thinking about things fitting because I need the wood pulled out of my ass. Oh god, now I’m babbling to myself. Stupid, sexy vamp.

“Lots of anything,” I promised just as Spike’s face was starting to take on a guarded look. Oops, less introspection, more reassurance. “Just get the wood outta me, huh?” I asked as I dropped the robe and then flung myself face down on Lorne’s bed before Spike could see anything interesting, like maybe a cock that was already half hard and rising quickly despite my insistence that this just wasn’t the time. Yeah, Spike had seen it before. No, I don’t know why I felt like hiding now. And no, Xander-logic doesn’t have to make sense, apparently.

I heard Spike’s footsteps behind me and then the bed tilted as he climbed behind me. I kept my head buried in the pillow, trying to think unlusty thoughts, but I could still sense him leaning over me. Then I felt his cool hands lightly touch my ass, and yep, that’s me waving the white flag on the trying not to get hard front. His hands sent shivers of need and pleasure that traveled the length of
my whole body… right until he poked the skin around the shard and then it felt like he was sticking me with a rusty nail.

“Hey!” I protested as I tried to sit up.

“Oi, stop squirmin’.” Spike pushed me back down, and my first instinct was to fight him, to sit up, to show him that I wasn’t going to be told what to do. However, my first instinct wouldn’t get the wood out of my ass so I let him push me back down, and to make his point clearer he actually straddled me. I was painfully, hornily aware of the coarse fabric of the stolen uniform rubbing against the backs of my naked thighs as he lowered his weight on me, pinning me down. I swallowed a growl even as his next couple of prods were a little more gentle, his cool fingers gliding across my hot skin as he shifted slightly to get a better look. I stifled a tiny moan of frustration, both at how turned on I was getting, and how long he was taking to pull the damn shard.

“Spike, I want you to pull it out, not make friends with it,” I snapped.

“I’m tryin’ to figure out the angle it went in so I don’t tear a bloody hole in your arse tryin’ to get it back out.” Okay, that made sense… it didn’t help my cock, which was going
to get a cramp if I didn’t stop laying on it when it was so exquisitely hard…but it made sense.

After that he mumbled some more under his non-existent breath, but instead of paying attention I just gritted my teeth and tried to ignore Spike’s various curses directed at shoddy craftsmanship, incompetent carpenters, and mostly at one Riley Finn.

Finally Spike seemed to decide on his plan of attack, and those long, elegant hands had settled in on either side of the shard so that one rested on my lower back and one was on my upper thigh and I was so not getting hot or horny or libidinous or salacious and thank you, Ahn, for teaching me the words for what I was not feeling as Spike’s fingers moved over my flesh. He was leaning in closer, I could feel him blowing over the heated skin, the air cooling it as the breeze angled in to tease the sensitive skin between my cheeks, and what the fuck….

“Spike, what the hell are you doing?” I demanded as I tried to push up even as I twisted around to see Spike in full game face centimeters from my ass.

“Wot?” he asked as he turned yellow eyes my way, but that expression was entirely too innocent. Spike never looked innocent because he never was innocent and that feigned look of innocence just wasn’t.
“Don’t have tweezers, do we?” I opened my mouth to complain, but actually, no… we didn’t. “Have ta trust me then, won’t you?” Spike asked with a grin, which combined with his game face looked more demonic than trustworthy. And that so should not be turning me on even more, but it was.

“Just… you’d better not bite me,” I said as I bowed to the inevitable even as I lay back down, “without permission,” I added without even thinking. Spike snickered, but I was too busy fisting my hands in the pillow on either side of my head, bracing for the pain and trying to ride out the lust because this was just not the time to be wimpy or lusty.

“We’ll see about that,” he said, and I would have responded, but suddenly the piece of wood was yanked free, and I yelped in pain as the rough edges scraped over the sore wound that was already swelling and heating with infection.

“Oh sweet Jesus,” I yelped as soon as I could catch my breath to speak. Spike dropped a bloody piece of wood on the silk sheets... a fragment as thick as my thumb and nearly as long, disgustingly slick with blood, and how the hell did I walk with that in my ass?
“How’s that for gratitude? I fix your ass, and you go thankin’ the wrong bloody dead guy.”

“How?” I managed and then I felt a satiny, soothing coolness glide across my sore wound, leaving behind a damp trail that evaporated and calmed the feverish skin. “Guhya,” would be the closest description of the sound I made as the sweet touch came again. It was only the fourth or fifth pass, when the touch wandered south down the curve of my butt toward the valley that it occurred to me that Spike didn’t have a cloth back there.

“Whoa, what are you doing?” I demanded as I twisted around. I tried for shocked and horrified, but I think it actually came out kinda breathy, which was understandable considering I was literally trying to catch my breath at the sight of Spike with his yellowed eyes and ridged forehead running a long tongue across my hot flesh. Half naked Spike with his eyes half closed as he licked me in a sensual caress, and when the hell did he get half naked, not that I really cared since I now had a wonderful view of his muscles flexing and cording as he moved up my body, still licking so softly. He finally raised his head and looked right at me.

“Just helping with the infection, vampire saliva,” he said with a wicked smile which shifted into a leer as he
opened his mouth and ran his tongue from my leg, up and over the curve of my ass and finally down into the naughty valley and oh definitely panting now. Spike growled low in his chest...a much more rumbly, deep sound than his normal “I’m going to kill you one day, Slayer”-type growl, and wound be damned.

So, the vampire wanted to play...and the vampire wanted to get at *my* ass... and the vampire wanted to growl at me. And actually, that sounded fair since I knew that was exactly what I wanted. But if he wanted my ass, he was going to have to have more than just a talented tongue. I started a growl of my own, and I could see Spike’s gaze dart up to catch mine even as I half turned towards him. When Spike pulled back to start the lick lower down, I twisted hard and got a foot on his shoulder, which I used to kick him off the bed entirely, and thank god the whole unfair spell thing didn’t work back here.

Spike stumbled back and caught himself on the dresser with one hand so that he leaned back in a very James Dean sort of pose. Rather than tell me to stop, he lowered his head so that he looked from under his lashes, and even from the bed I could see the bulge in his pants, which was fair what with my cock bobbing like one of those stupid little toys that jocks put in the backs of their cars. When Spike started to smile wickedly, the tip
of his tongue appearing from between his lips, I launched myself at him with a growl.

I was hoping to take him down in a single shoulder thrust to the stomach, but Spike twisted out of my way so that I got more wall than Spike with my strike. With a feral grin he leaned into his own attack, pressing me into the corner between the dresser and the wall, as he twisted the arm he’d grabbed as I charged. A series of clinks and tinkles suggested that we had just knocked over everything on the dresser, but who the hell cared? I was caught between admiration for his maneuver and frustration that his refusal to submit was keeping me from my own goal. As Spike pushed me harder into the wall, I let my limbs go limp for just long enough to surprise him, and then I dropped to the floor and rammed my shoulder into his crotch. All’s fair when it’s love and war. Besides, from the bulge in his pants, I certainly hadn’t hit him hard enough to distract him from the main event.

When Spike’s feet went out from under him in a torrent of curses, I lifted so he was thrown over my shoulder with his head hanging down my back. Before he could figure out to bite me… which he would as soon as he recovered from the whole shoulder-crotch move… I bodily threw him on the bed and then flung my whole
weight over him, strategically placing my knee in his crotch as I struggled to grab his wrists. Considering one of his hands had my hair and was pulling my head to one side while the other was digging bleeding furrows into my arm, this really wasn’t easy. Spike writhed when I captured the hand that had bloodied my arm, and I realized he was driving fangs toward my now-exposed neck, and I used my knee to warn him that I wouldn’t submit so easily.

“Enough,” roared a voice from the door that made both of us freeze mid-mutilation. I looked up to see Angel standing in the doorway, his nostrils actually flaring either in anger or maybe because of the blood smell which was pretty strong with the now-open wound in my ass and the lines of red decorating my arm.

“What the hell are you doing?”

“Ah, Spike was just helping with the infection,” I answered just as Spike snarked, “Surely you remember what it looks like even if ya don’t get to do it anymore.” I pushed myself up and off the bed as I scrambled for the robe I’d earlier dropped, and I pulled it on before Angel had even stopped shaking his head.

“I don’t deserve this... I really don’t,” he announced to the air over his head. “The sun is down and I’m leaving
for Sunnydale in five minutes. Personally, I hope you two don’t get dressed by then because I’m not explaining this to Buffy.” Spike opened his mouth to comment on that, but Angel spun on his heel and left, slamming the door a whole lot harder than he needed to. I looked at Spike, and he just shrugged as he rebuttoned the top of his ugly green pants, and for several seconds the need to get to Sunnydale battled with the need to rip those pants off.

“Move your arse, I’m not goin’ to listen to the pouf complain about us makin’ him late the whole way up there,” Spike said as he threw a shirt at me. Nice…Angel brought me the most god-awful shirt in creation: green with weird upside-down lookin’ leaf things, and who wore shirts this ugly? Right. Back on track. Sunnydale. Business first and then… well, just ‘and then.’

I gave Spike a wicked smile of my own as I pulled on the shirt and went hunting for the jeans Cordy had brought.

**Part Nine**

I made sure Spike's head was tilted toward the rear view mirror before I brought my injured arm up to my mouth and slowly licked the small drop of blood that had formed. Okay, “formed” might be the wrong verb since I had actually been pinching the arm to keep it bleeding as I sat in the back of Angel's convertible. From the way the
mirror reflected the empty passenger side seat where Spike was sitting, I knew he could see me as I closed my lips over the wound and sucked. Spike softly growled before Angel's hand snapped up and readjusted the mirror so that he could actually use it as a rear view mirror. Even with the wind rushing by, I could catch wisps of lust coming from the front.

I smiled sweetly from my place in the middle of the back seat as if I had no reason to feel bad about anything. I briefly wondered if my innocent look looked as uninocent as Spike’s. Angel’s deep sigh certainly suggested that he wasn’t buying the act.

I sat back pinching my arm to bring more blood to the surface as Spike grabbed the cigarettes he’d gotten off some guy in the bar. He fumbled with them and then shoved them back in his pocket. He worried at the quickly fraying edge of a cuff on that army-issued shirt that just looked so damn wrong on him. And Bingo! Spike’s hand went up the mirror readjusting it, and I brought my arm up to my mouth, this time slowly licking the length of the wound. Oh hell, I hadn’t had this much fun since... okay, I hadn’t had this much fun since I still believed in the whole Santa Clause fraud. Spike choked back a soft moan, and Angel’s hand nearly broke the mirror snapping it back into its original position.
I indulged myself by sticking out my tongue when Angel’s head was bent toward the mirror, and I could hear the mightily put-upon sigh even over the sound of the air rushing by, which was really quite loud what with the windows all rolled down, and melodramatic much there, Deadboy? Of course I didn’t actually say that out loud, since I really didn’t want to walk home, and now that we were driving past the Sunnydale sign, getting kicked out of the car was an actual possibility. Spike glanced at the sign as we went by it, and damned if he didn’t look a little wistful, and what was all that about?

“You two need to dial it back before we get to Buffy’s. Xander, she will not take your new attitude well if you can’t tone down the primal instincts.” Angel sounded gruff. I decided to go on playing innocent, just to piss him off, which was always fun especially since I had sort of promised not to torture him about his whole soul-having broodiness, and I wasn't willing to take on Cordy even with a primal spirit.

“What are you talking about?” I asked as I casually licked my arm. That’s when it suddenly occurred to me that as of two days ago I wouldn’t have taken an attack as foreplay, and I wouldn’t have taken a punch at Riley, and I really wouldn’t have growled at Cordy. Lusting after Spike? Okay, that I would have done, but I’d have been a
lot more private about it. And yeah, the licking my own blood... maybe Angel had a point.

I stopped and put my arm in my lap. “Oh.” I amended my answer, “yeah, I can do that.” Spike snorted.

“Don’t start anything,” Angel said through clenched teeth, and for a moment I thought he was still talking to me, but nope. That one was for the bleached wonder who promptly flipped Angel a two-fingered salute, and why do the English use two fingers? Isn’t the one good enough for them? I counted up English weirdness based on the few English people I knew until Angel pulled up in front of Giles’ apartment.

That’s the point at which I knew Angel didn’t have to worry about me because just being back here made me feel like the Zeppo again. How many times did I have to deal with these inadequacy issues before I started feeling like... okay, I’d settle for not feeling like the muck on the bottom of Cordelia’s shoe. Although really in all fairness it should be Anya stepping on me at this point, so I don’t know why Cordy’s little jabs always had a way of slipping past my defenses.

“Pet?” a concerned voice called, and I looked up to discover the two vampires were halfway to the door and looking back at me. Oh, great. Way to hide the
insecurities there, Harris, the soldier thoughts kinda sneered out at me. Great, I’m even insecure around myself. Or parts of myself. Ya know, there could be a real growth industry in demon psychiatry on the Hellmouth.

“I am not going to growl, I am not going to growl, I am not going to growl,” I sort of chanted as I got out of the car, fighting down a need to growl at a pack that hadn’t even noticed me gone.

“Xander?” this time the concern came from Angel, which was definitely freakier than the concern from Spike. Spike had hated the old me in a ‘wish I could eat you’ kind of way, but Angel had always hated me for being me. Concern from him was just... wrongness in all kinds of ways.

“God, I’m fine already,” I snapped as I stalked past them and rang the doorbell. Giles opened the door. Same old Giles with that same old constipated expression and the same old glasses coming off his nose just to polish them despite the fact they were clean so why did I suddenly feel this creepy crawling feeling looking at him? Oh yeah, the hyena instincts were going to be hard to get used to, but I did my best to be good old Xander.

“Hey G-man. What’s the word?” I asked with a big goofy Xander-grin as Giles stepped aside. I took that as an
invitation, walking in to see Willow and Tara sort of hovering over each other on the couch, and I was never so happy to see anyone in all my life. They were safe. The Initiative didn’t get my girls. Of course, the Initiative must have freaked them out because Willow had the wide-eyed near panic expression and Tara's eyes kept darting around the room nervously. Yep, serious upset vibes here.

“Wil....” I would have said more but a small, solid weight hit me from the side, and talking suddenly dropped on my priority list. I heard myself growl even as I twisted around to return the attack. They weren’t going to take my Willow without a fight any more than they took my Spike without a fight, and no I was not going to think about just how badly that had gone.

I had no more than twisted in my adversary’s grip and reached around to grab and rip at the vulnerable throat when I let myself freeze for that vital second as I spotted my attacker. Unfortunately, Buffy didn’t freeze, and I found myself stomach down with her straddling my waist like I was her pony. Okay, I’ll admit that there was a day when getting squeezed by Buffy thighs was a fantasy, but one-demon man here. And in my fantasy, my face wasn’t pushed into scratchy apartment carpeting that smelled
like demon goo. Before the hyena, I might not have noticed that, but now I couldn’t escape it, and ew.

“Buffy, what the hell are you doing?” I demanded as I tried to push up to a hands and knees position. She grabbed my hair and yanked it back with what must have been slayer strength because damn that hurt. As in bringing tears to the eyes kinda hurtage.

“Hey, watch the human!” I shouted, and that’s when I noticed the non-humans in the group. Spike was flinging himself against an invisible doorway where his invite had obviously been revoked and Angel was having limited success in trying to keep him back. Angel's back was to the invisible barrier and obviously he didn't have an invite either because the barrier wavered as he braced himself against it and struggled to grab Spike's body as Spike struggled to get in. Giles had a crossbow aimed at the door. My instincts said fight to get to the mate, but I also knew that look on Giles’ face- he was in Ripper mode. Deciding that I needed to, for once, use the few brain cells I actually had access to, I let myself go limp in Buffy’s determined hands.

“Geez, nice welcome home party,” I complained as my hands were wrenched behind my back, and cold steel snapped around my wrists. “Anya keeps trying to get me
to try this stuff, but I have to tell you it really isn’t my kink,” I tried to joke as Buffy pulled me to my feet. I struggled against a need to lash out before she could finish making me as helpless, but I took deep breaths and tried to control the non-Zeppoly instincts.

“It’s okay, Xander. Whatever Spike’s done, we have books on thralling and possession, and we’ll fix this.” I could tell from the voice that Willow was crying, but I was facing Spike who now that the fight was over stood outside loudly growling his displeasure in game face. I could tell he was still struggling to reach me, his legs shifting and flexing even as Angel held his upper body immobile in his much larger embrace. I couldn't look away from his expression of fury and near panic.

“Spike hasn’t done anything. You guys on the other hand, I’m thinking I may need to start a list for you guys.” I tried for a non-confrontational, look-at-Xander-goof-around kind of tone, but from the way Giles turned to give me that Ripper look, I’m assuming that came across kinda bitchy... I mean cranky because I’m so not the bitch here.” I shot a quick look over to Buffy before I returned my gaze to Spike who had broken out of Angel's grasp and threw himself against the invisible barrier again.
“Giles, as much as I would like to blame Spike for this, he hasn’t done anything wrong... *lately.*” Angel said wearily, as physically grabbed Spike by the neck.

“Get off me, you over-gelled poufter!” Spike complained, but the words came out a little muffled since his face was still shoved under Angel’s arm. I had to restrain my own need to growl as Angel physically manhandled my man... vamp... *mate*.

“I am not likely to take your word, now am I?” Giles said coldly as he turned back to Angel. Oh yeah, now that was the full on Ripper glare. And now I was really starting to wonder just what the hell was going on here because there was too much testosterone in this room, I could feel the need to fight making the hairs stand up on my arms.

“Spike hasn’t done anything except save me from a peptide demon and fix my leg and there was that one time when he threw me into the wall when I accused him of being a coward, but with his headache and all that kinda evened out,” I babbled, quickly glossing over the whole longer-leash-on-the-chip issue.

"Pep-tuli demon ya git, and as I never touched your leg, pulled a hunk of wood out of your arse," Spike corrected me from outside, and I tried to ignore the need to
answer his challenge since I was still chained up and Giles still had the crossbow, and the girls still looked a little panicky, so I just kept right on with my interrupted tirade.

“And then we have the friends who didn’t notice I was gone and who knock me down and chain me up when I show up again. Gotta say, not feeling the love here people.” My head knew that they hadn’t really turned on me. Riley's comments made it really clear that the Initiative had tricked the Scoobies, but the pack instinct left me feeling betrayed. I would never have accepted some Willow voice on the phone no matter what it said. If she had been upset enough to leave, I would have followed her to the ends of the earth to find out why. And yet, she accepted a Xander voice that wasn't even Xander.

“I think you’ve made your displeasure with us perfectly clear,” Giles said in tones so frosty that I wondered if he wasn’t an evil twin. Hey, weirder things have happened.

“Um, I think I haven’t. Whoever you’ve been talking to on the phone wasn’t me.”

“Riley told us about your claim about being in the Initiative, but we all talked to you.” Buffy broke in at this point. She also nearly broke my arm giving me a little tug
on the chain. Gotta hate slayer strength, well except when it’s saving the world. “If you want to worm your way out of this, you’re going to have to find a better lie. But whether or not you’re a complete jerky idiot, which you are, you’re still our friend and we’re fixing whatever Spike has done. Right before I introduce Spike to Mr. Pointy.”

“Touch him and I’ll string your guts, slayer,” Spike growled from the other side of his invisible barrier, and Angel sighed heavily.

“Not helping, Spike,” I pointed out.

“If you are not controlling Xander, I fail to see why you should be so concerned,” Giles pointed out with ice practically dripping from his words.

“Spike, stop it or I’m going to throw you in the trunk until morning,” Angel snarled with a quick flash of gameface as he jerked Spike’s head up roughly. I was the only one who had a right to hurt the mate! I snarled and pressed forward to challenge Angel only to have Buffy jerk me back from behind.

“Right, he hasn’t done anything at all. You’re the same old human Xander,” she snapped in a sort of breathy voice, and I realized she was struggling to hold me back. I
pulled to get to Spike, and she held the chain between my wrists. I shot Angel a dirty glare, a glare that pointed out that Spike was mine and I was the only one who had a right to make him submit. Spike quieted and Angel let him go. And damn it, seeing Angel succeed in making Spike submit where I’d failed just made me hate the brooding bastard more. I pulled harder, this time getting a good two or three inches forward in my quest to rip Angel apart. In fact after Spike’s performance, I might rip a few guts out of him too for submitting to Angel right in front of me.

“Good heavens,” Giles exclaimed as he looked at me, and suddenly I noticed the colored lighting when Giles didn’t have colored lighting, and oh yes. Once more I prove that I have the self-control of a gnat. I stopped pulling so suddenly that Buffy didn’t have time to compensate and we both ended up sailing backwards. In keeping with my recent luck, we both crashed ass-first into Giles’ coffee table. Yep, in as in Buffy’s butt going through it first. At least this time she was the one risking ass injury instead of me.

“Are you okay?” I asked as I sprawled on top of her. A section had managed to stay together, so my legs were awkwardly hiked up over two legs and a piece of wood
connecting them, and with the chained hands, I really couldn’t do anything other than squirm a bit.

“Holy shit, stop moving,” Buffy swore and Willow and Tara appeared in a flurry of words.

“Oh goddess!”

“Are you o-o-kay?”

“Just hold on, I’ll get you right up.”

“I have his left arm.”

The girls pulled me up and I turned around to see Buffy lying in the ruins of the table.

“Damn it, this was a new blouse and now look at it,” Buffy complained as Willow and Tara helped her up. She put a finger through a quarter-sized hole to illustrate her point. “What were you even thinking, Xander? The council should give a clothing stipend, this is just unfair.” Oh god, and there was the Buffy poutage.

“Are you alright?” Giles asked her anxiously, totally ignoring the clothing tirade.

“Better than your coffee table,” Buffy admitted. Giles rounded on me.
“And when exactly were you planning on telling me you’d become a primal?” Giles demanded in a tone that made me physically step back. Hey, not stupid when it comes to keeping my skin in one piece. Maybe I sometimes look stupid in the self-preservation portion of the slayage, but if I didn’t look after myself, I would have been eaten long ago. And those instincts were telling me that Giles was about two seconds away from taking pieces of my skin off in large hunks.

“That’s what I’ve been trying to explain. Xander never stopped being a primal after the hyena incident.” Angel interrupted. “Spike didn’t do anything to him; Xander hasn’t been totally human for a number of years. That’s why the Initiative took him.”

“Oh good lord.” Giles sat down heavily on the nearest surface, which happened to be a large stack of books, but I don’t think he even noticed that.

“A primal? An animal primal with the spirits and the super strength? Like when he tried to... you know... with Buffy? Oh goddess.” Willow retreated to the couch and Tara followed, soothing her mate with small touches on the arm. Buffy just stood there looking shocked.
“So, can we come in now?” Angel asked mildly. Spike just leaned against the wall silently, but I could smell the fury and the frustration rolling from him.

“Angel, Spike, come in, please,” Giles said in quiet voice with a vague gesture of his hand toward the living room.

“Oi, about bloody time. Rude leavin’ guests…” Angel and I both issued a curt, “Shut up, Spike” at the same time.

“I think we need to talk,” I suggested. I scooted a step closer to Spike and Angel before I then inching back toward Buffy. Okay, I admit it, I had no idea where my loyalties lay, and as much as I still wanted Spike, his submission to Angel had a small part of me wanting to beat the shit out of him. Time for that later. First order of business was getting unchained. These stupid handcuffs were really digging into my wrists.

Part Ten

“Um, can we lose the chains maybe?” I asked, stomping on that part of me that felt like demanding and ordering
and quite frankly growling. I’d earned the right to growl, but I didn’t think any of these people were ready for me to be growly Xander. Of course that didn’t change my desire to bite both of them when Giles and Buffy traded wary looks.

“Guys, this is me, the Xan-man. And the Xan-man is getting chafed wrists here, so maybe a little less with the deep meaningful looks and a little more with the keys.” I watched Angel’s hand close around Spike’s forearm, and again with the need to growl. I hadn’t needed this much self-restraint since Buffy wore that polka-dotted bikini with the little spaghetti straps that weekend in eleventh grade.

“I’ll get the keys,” Giles finally said with a deep sigh, and I swear if they didn’t hate each other so much I would say Giles and Angel would be the perfect pair. They could sit around trying to out-sigh each other and complain about how the people in their lives weren’t perfect. Of course that would definitely not be of the good in Queen C’s eyes since she was already staking her claim on Angel. If he didn’t watch it, he was going to end up the world’s first henpecked vampire, and it couldn’t happen to a nicer guy. However, if Angel didn’t get his hand off Spike, Angel was going to be a henpecked pile of dust.
After rattling around in the kitchen, Giles came out with a large key, and I turned around to let him get the chains off.

“We thought you were all possessed... again.” Willow offered apologetically.

“As opposed to possessed still,” Buffy said, and that sounded a lot less apologetic than pissy.

“I know I should have...” I started.

“Not telling us was immature and utterly unforgivable,” Giles interrupted as he took the chains over to the heavy weapons chest, dropping them to one side. What? Did he think he was going to need them again? The trust and love in the room was underwhelming.

“I wouldn’t go as far as...”

“I just don’t know why you thought you had to hide it. We would have understood, right?” And Willow’s teary words still had the power to cut me to the innermost part of my soul. I swear, you’d think that inheriting a badass alpha predator would be some protection from Willow-tears, but no. I opened my mouth to explain myself when Giles cut me off.

“And just how serious is this problem now?”
“He has a good deal of control.” Angel said.

“Primals are notoriously dangerous.”

“He hasn’t shown signs of dangerously aggressive behavior.” Angel said to Giles at the same time Willow turned her power of pout onto me.

“Xander, did you think you couldn’t trust us?” Willow asked, and I was starting to feel like the tennis ball in the middle of the court.

“Hey, standing right here, people. It’d be nice if people actually talked to me instead of discussing me,” I snapped at Angel and Giles. I sort of ignored Willow since I was angry enough that everything I said came out with an edge of snarl, and I would never be able to recover from the guilt of snarling at Willow. She was Willow, snapping at her was like mooning a nun, which was entirely of the wrong. Well, not as wrong as Angel’s eating of nuns, but oh look, everyone was looking at me and I was wandering off into mental babble land.

“Look, I didn’t know the hyena was still there at first. I thought I was just having some vivid memories of what people smelled like through a hyena’s nose.” I settled down on the second couch. Angel had already sat at the end with Spike sort of perched on the arm, and yeah I
didn’t miss those two making with the united front. So much for Spike being over his sire. I took a deep breath before continuing, conveniently leaving out the part where people smell a little like meat.

“When I finally decided that I still had the actual hyena-hyena instead of just the hyena memories…”

“I thought you didn’t remember anything from being a hyena?” Buffy challenged me, and I shot Giles a ‘save me’ look. Yep, heavy sigh, cleaning of glasses, and Giles to the rescue.

“Yes, well Xander and I discussed his discomfort with both his behavior and your reactions to him after the hyena was *supposedly* out of him. I agreed to keep his secret and allow him to prevaricate on the issue.”

“So you lied?” Buffy turned to me with this big hurty shocked kind of expression, which was so much harder to deal with than the pissy expression.

I shifted a little, uncomfortable and starting to feel the kind of sweat that not even Rightguard could battle, not that I was actually wearing any. “Um, I thought Giles just covered that, or did I get the meaning of prevaricate wrong? I’m kinda guessing from the context it means being on the ‘so not’ side of honest. Besides, I didn’t
want you guys being all weirded out around me because of the things I did that were kinda weird-worthy.”

“And that certainly does sound like our Xander with his ability to massacre the English language,” Giles said dryly as he stood and went for the cabinet where he kept the good liquor.

“About soddin’ time for the good stuff,” Spike said, and Giles just ignored him as he poured himself a shot. The man did have practice at ignoring Spike, but a little tiny piece of me whispered that Giles didn’t have practice dealing with a Spike on a significantly longer leash. The whole Giles turning his back made that clear. When Giles didn’t react to Spike's comment, Spike continued, “You could bloody share that, watcher.”

“I could, yes. But I chose not to.” Giles returned to lean against the wall with his drink, and I really had no idea what to do to make things go back the way they were supposed to be. Giles was looking too tired to even clean his glasses, Willow was giving me these big watery anime eyes, Tara wasn’t looking at me at all, Buffy was glaring at me while throwing in a side of frown at Angel. Spike was obsessed with that fraying cuff, and Angel just sat like a statue. A broody statue.
Oh yeah, this was comfortable. I squirmed a little in my seat. Spike exploded into motion as he sprang up and headed for the kitchen, and I didn’t blame him at all. I’d run for another room too, except I suspected everybody would just follow me. I could hear him pawing through the refrigerator looking for either blood or bizarre English snack foods.

“Can we just get over things that happened years ago, please?” I turned pleading eyes first to the girls and then Giles.

“And why you never thought to tell us, Angel, I will never understand.” Giles complained as he turned to Angel. Oh yeah, my little plea had worked real well. Hey, things *were* getting back to normal what with the me being ignored part of the evening.

“It was his business. He wasn’t losing himself to the primal spirit,” Angel said evenly. Giles made a sound between a snort and a cough.

“And I supposed you fancy yourself as an expert on such matters?”

“Guys, hey! You couldn’t do anything anyway,” I interrupted before the Giles versus Angel thing overtook the Me versus Everyone thing, and yeah, in hindsight I
should have just let Angel take the bashing and slunk away on my belly like a good little beta male. I think the hyena made me more stupid than usual, and considering my starting point, that was not a comforting thought. Giles was now glaring at me, so I stumbled on. “You and Willow said that it was a good thing that crazy painted guy took the spirits since it took a human host to draw it out. What were we going to do... pick some schmuck off the street and put the primal in him?”

“We could have found another way.” Willow’s little hurt voice so didn’t make things better.

“Willow, I didn’t want you guys to worry. And besides, it’s helped me out from time to time.”

“Well, we’ll just have to try and lure it out now. Perhaps we can use some sort of avatar to lure the spirit out and into some sort of vessel.” Giles had his resolve voice and Willow’s features settled into her resolve face, and Tara gave me a small smile and boy did I feel like a jerk for yanking that rug out from under them.

“It’s a little too late for the whole lure plan,” I interjected, and Giles turned weary eyes my way.

“Xander?” he asked slowly, drawing my name out into about five syllables, and I really hated it when he did
that. Hated it like when I was six and my mother would scream my full name down the street when I forgot to put my toys away. Having the whole block know what a lame middle name I had? Not of the good.

“Um.. we merged?” I said uncertainly, the Zeppo instincts and the hyena instincts at direct odds on how to handle this. But truth be told I’d been a loser a lot longer than I’d been a primal, so Zeppo instincts won. I cringed a little as I waited for the reaction.

“How could you,” Giles exploded, his hand slamming his drink down so hard on the nearby shelf that the liquid slopped over the sides and the picture of his on-again, off-again lady friend fell down face first with a crunch.

“It was merge or die since at the time all these white coats were trying to figure out how to torture me into going primal,” I yelled right back. Yeah, that got surprised looks all round, and it suddenly occurred to me that I don’t ever stand up to Giles. Not until now. Even Spike appeared in the kitchen doorway, mug in hand and with an expression of amused anticipation. Yeah, well, dream on Bleach boy, because I’m not starting a knock-down drag out fight with Giles.

“What I can’t figure out is how they knew you had this primal spirit at all,” Buffy pointed out, brow crinkled. She
looks so cute when she’s thinking hard that I almost had to forgive her for the whole hair-pulling, hand-cuffing thing. Almost.

“They didn’t. Riley sent them after Spike, and when the soldiers attacked, they noticed that I wasn’t entirely human.” I so wasn’t going to tell them exactly how they noticed, and what had triggered my hyena to emerge. I sneaked a glance over at Spike, who sipped his blood and kept quiet, and was he trying to look innocent? Honestly, that was a slightly creepy expression.

“Okay, that’s enough with the anti-Riley brigade. He is the man *I* chose and I’m tired of you tearing him down.” Buffy glowered and took a threatening step forward, and I stood before I even realized my brain was sending my legs the signals. My brain often didn’t communicate well with the rest of me, but usually the miscommunication involved number 2 pencils and bubble sheets. This was a first for the body and the brain actually not communicating at all, and I clamped down on the instincts that suggested things like eliminating the female who had brought the enemy into the pack. Yep, even I could spot that one as hyena logic. Go me.

“I’m not tearing him down,” I said through clenched teeth as I tried to separate the hyena desire to attack
from my own healthy anger at being totally ignored. I hadn't torn Riley down. Trust me, when I tear Riley down, people notice. I had just stated facts, and I needed to stay calm before someone got hurt, like me. I took a deep breath and continued even though Buffy had her armed crossed with that 'don't fuck with me' expression. "He actually put himself on the line to get us out of there, or rather me since he was all 'woo hoo' about them killing Spike." <i>Deep breath, the mate is fine, don't growl.</i> "But the fact is that he’s been turning in reports. *He* told them where to find Spike. *He* told them that Willow and Tara were witches. *He* told them about the coven retreat thingy.”

“And we’re supposed to believe you?” Buffy didn’t mean that; I know she didn’t. Buffy has this really big pseudo-Cordelia inner bitch that sometimes snaps out these horrible things that she never, ever means. We’ve even sat in a big Scoobie pile on Willow’s bed watching bad foreign films and talking about Buffy’s past as a Cordy clone. She always said she felt guilty over her lapses into Cordy-level insults. But damn, that still hurt.

“Yeah, Buff, actually you are. See, I’m not the one who believed some imposter who obviously said stuff that made you believe I was some sort of uber-jerk, and I’m not the one who left you to get cut up and electrocuted
and injected and drugged by people claiming to be doctors, and I’m not even the one who tells your secrets to a government that obviously has some major issues. So, I guess I thought I had earned your trust." I left off the 'I'd earned it more than the guy you chose' even though I was thinking it loud enough for everyone to hear it if they listened.

I heard Willow gasp, and I watched as Buffy’s face collapsed in on itself, the anger transformed to pain and regret in a heartbeat. Unfortunately, I just couldn’t bring myself to play my usual part and make with the big joke that would smooth over all the rough edges. It wasn’t just the hyena that was hurting.

“Riley said you *killed* someone,” Buffy said quietly, and suddenly I understood the pain and the anger. I didn’t appreciate her attitude, but I understood.

“I did, Buffy. At least two that I know of, maybe three. I was defending myself from people who attacked me and hurt me and wanted me dead.” I tried to keep my voice calm, but even I could hear as my voice wavered between anger and pain. "I was defending myself and I was defending Spike, who in case you haven't noticed is one of us with the helping slay and the making of bad jokes." Out of the corner of my eye I caught Spike's
movement as he put his mug down quickly and looked at me with wide blue eyes. Yep, I still want you, so you can go to your damn sire and when he kicks you to the curb you can know that you picked him over me. Yeah, too bad I was too big a wuss to say that out loud. I bit my lip to distract one pain with another.

The whole room froze, and I felt the urge to either flee or attack rise up so strongly that the room washed out into now-familiar sepia tones. Buffy gasped and stepped back towards Willow and Tara who moved closer to each other. Right, not one of them any more. Not pack. Message sent and received. I turned around and headed for the door.

“Xander.” Ironically it was Angel who called out my name and managed to sound almost concerned. I stopped at the doorway, but honestly, I was just too pathetic to turn around and look at those faces. If I was about to lose just about everything I had ever loved in the world, I didn’t want to see it. I paused for a moment with my hand on the door and then I opened it and walked out into the night.

“You soddin’ worthless pieces of...” I heard Spike start in, but I didn’t feel like sticking around for him either. He had his sire, and I was finished with playing bottom-boy
also-ran. I started running as I let the predator instinct rise up and guide my steps as I chose my hunting ground.

Part Eleven

Before I’d had a chance to consider that hunting alone on a Hellmouth infested with soldier boys was maybe a bad idea, I found myself slowing to a walk in one of the less reputable parts of town. The scent of demons was heavy, and I shook my head to clear it of a particularly acidic odor. Definitely not prey there.

I stopped outside a familiar building and paused for a minute before pushing the door open. Standing in the entrance I could smell demons: several vampires, a half demon, and something that smelled like... chicken? Okay, I know everything is supposed to taste like chicken, but smell? I wonder if... no, not going there, I do not eat demons, I told myself sharply as I walked over to the bar. Most of the patrons had gone silent. Oh yeah, they *thought* they knew me.
“Hey, Xander. Look, people are a little edgy, so now might not be the time.”

“Save it Willy,” I snapped. This is where I belonged now, and given my past, I just had to wait for someone to start a fight. Oh yeah, no doubt any number of demons wanted to eat me after years of helping the slayer thin out their numbers.

“Oh, hey, no serving minors here, I got enough trouble without getting the cops in here.” Willy complained as I took a stool at the bar.

“Don’t push me tonight, Willy.” I allowed my vision to shift so that my eyes would glow inhuman green. Time to let the demon community know they had grown by one primal demon.

“Hey, did you know there’s something wrong with your eyes?” I just growled my response

“Right, I take it you’re checking out life on the other side then. I’d be happy to spring for a drink for the newly turned. So what was it? Demonic spell? Possession? Primal? Vampire? Don’t normally see the green eyes on a vampire, but it could be a new clan.” He had his usual chirpy tone now. That Willy, always ready to roll with the punches. Often literally.
“You looking for information to sell?” I asked as I narrowed my eyes in challenge.

“What? Me? No, this is just my natural curiosity. So what will it be?” I had to think about that one for a moment. I knew what I wanted, but I didn’t know if I could actually drink it without wimping out, and I really didn’t know just how far ‘out’ I intended to be with the rather rough-looking clientele which now eyed me like a piece of dead meat that hadn’t figured out to stop talking yet. Oh yeah, this was going to be a good fight. I was craving it. And since when did I look forward to a fight?

“Blood. Animal, something herbivore if you have it,” I finally ordered.

“Okay, got cow or horse then.”

“Whichever. And throw in some whiskey.” Oh yeah, if I was going for dark and dangerous, I wanted to do it right. Do it James Dean style. Do it without looking like someone let their pet Zeppo out for the night.

“So, slayer find out about this then?” Willy was going for a casual tone as he fetched a glass and polished it showily.

“Yeah.”
“I can bet she’s not thrilled. So her and the witch off trying to find some big cure?” Willy's voice had this false carelessness about it that made me growl softly.

“How much are you planning on selling this information for?” I asked with my own fake causal expression that Willy's wide eyes suggested didn't sound very casual at all.

“What, I’m just being friendly.” Willy held up his hands in surrender, the glass clutched tightly in his sweaty grip.

“How much?” I snarled.

“Geez, you can’t even ask…” I reached out and snagged his collar before dragging him half across the counter. Two vamps behind me started growling and I slid off the stool so I would have room to counterattack if they jumped me from behind.

“Depends,” Willy immediately answered, and I could smell the fear. I smiled at knowing that one person in this town now knew to not fuck with me. The smile seemed to disturb Willy because he stuttered out the rest of his answer. "All total with the regulars about $300.”

“Then you can start a tab for me with a $150 credit,” I said as I dropped him. I didn’t turn to look at the vampires, which probably pissed them off even more,
but their smell didn’t have that tang that came right before an attack. I had smelled that so many times on patrol with Buffy, but I had somehow ignored my hyena’s help and instead called it some sixth sense developed on the Hellmouth. Really, it wasn’t sixth as much as me actually using one of the five.

“Right, always willing to work a deal with a good customer,” Willy said as he bent down under the counter. I could smell the metallic scent of blood at the same time that I heard the pop of a bottle top. Willy stood up with a glass nearly full of blood and put it on the counter. Reaching to the shelf behind him, he picked up the whiskey and added a healthy shot of it to the blood. “Here ya go.” I took a deep drink and regretted the whiskey almost immediately. That was quite a burn going down, but the thick creamy blood at least soothed the sting and fed the craving that had left me considering chicken flavored demon. Ew.

“So, to answer your questions, I’m a fully integrated primal, Willow and Giles wanted to try to undo this but can’t, and Buffy knows, but she’s taking a hands off approach right now,” I answered when I put the glass down on the counter half empty.
“Yeah, well don’t take that no-stake policy too far, buddy. She’s the slayer, and it’s built into their genes. Of course, this one did have that fling with Angelus, so her demon radar may be whacked enough to let you slide.” I just grunted.

I didn’t think Buffy was a physical danger to me, but just withdrawing her approval had left me shaken. And the way Willow, Tara, and Buffy had instinctively drawn together against me said a lot. It said that I wasn’t one of them in a pretty basic way. And then of course the whole Spike situation. I didn’t even want to think about what it felt like to see Spike submit to his sire. Angel and I were… well, we didn’t care about each other on good days, and on bad days we had the whole mutual homicidal hatred thing going on. If Spike submitted to Angel… I stopped my thoughts before I could reach a natural conclusion there. Yeah, this day had officially sucked worse than normal.

A yellow demon with strange blue eyes walked up to the bar several stools down. Willy went down to fill his drink, and I turned my back to the bar so I could check out the possible opponents. Another drink and I felt ready for the fight. I put my glass down again.
The two vampires I had heard growl still stood near the jukebox in game face. A human-looking but demonic-smelling person sat nursing a beer and trying not to make eye contact. A lumbering demon who actually looked a little like a lumberjack in a plaid shirt with a hat pulled down shading his glowing yellow eyes watched me warily. Right, I was putting money on the vamps.

“ Aren’t you the slayer’s puppy dog?” a gravelly voice asked and good thing I didn’t go to Vegas much because Lumberjack was the actual winner coming in by a nose. The two vampires even jumped a little, and I guessed they thought they were going to have a chance to pick a fight with me. Well, it didn’t matter to me since I just wanted to fight and I didn’t care much about who was on the other side of my fists. God, I haven’t ever felt like this, but I had to admit I liked the rush of adrenaline and the feeling of squaring off against something bigger and badder but not nearly as tough as me. And the big bonus: no Willow tears to make me feel helpless.

“ I’m not anyone’s puppy,” I growled back as I let my vision go demony again. “ I worked with the slayer and spent my evenings staking the worthless vampire population around here, but that’s not the same thing.”

“ Traitor,” Lumberjack hissed.
“That assumes that I should feel some loyalty to demons, and that would be a no.” The two vamps moved forward now.

“So you think you can come in here without a slayer to hide behind?” skanky vamp one asked.

“I think I don’t need a slayer for you three,” I answered sweetly. Willy had just started to say something about not starting anything in the bar when the first vamp attacked. It was the clumsy strike of a fledge with a simple lunge intended to take the prey to the ground. Back in LA I had slipped a stake into the back of my stolen pants, and now I slipped it out of my waistband, twisted my body so that the vamp would be thrown to the side, and sunk the wood into his heart in one fluid move. Damn that felt good.

Before skanky vamp two could react, I jumped toward him. Instinctively he backed up, but not fast enough. I slid the stake in without much resistance, and I have to say, disappointed here. That wasn’t a fight; it was an execution.

“You’re going to die,” a deep rumbling voice informed me, and I turned to see Lumberjack shedding his shirt to reveal a total of four thickly muscled brownish arms coming out of a solid, massive body. Okay, might have
bitten off more than I could chew, but I did say I wanted
a fight. That same acidic odor from outside assaulted my
nose as the demon flexed each of the four arms at the
same time, and I dropped into a crouch and growled
loudly.

Lumberjack tossed a table out of the way; I retreated to
the jukebox.

Lumberjack pitched a wooden chair at me, and I dodged
as a half hysterical, half hyena laugh broke out. The chair
splintered harmlessly against the wall.

Lumberjack growled angrily and lunged across a table. I
threw myself to the ground and scrambled under the
table only to come up the other side and sink my stake
into the back of the demon’s calf before retreating to the
middle of the room. And wow, that was one serious
bellow the big guy had on him.

Lumberjack snapped up off the table and turned to me
with his eyes glowing brightly. I smiled and lowered my
head. Off in the distance Willy was blithering on about
something, but I ignored him. The sharp odor increased
as Lumberjack picked up a chair in his two right arms and
made a fist with his two left arms. And really, not looking
so much like a lumberjack now. He actually looked more
like some monster out of marvel comics, and he smelled like a chemical spill.

“Wow, bathe much?” I sneered and the chair came swinging at me. Using every bit of speed I could muster with all my hyena upgrades, I bounded backwards and threw a chair at the demon’s legs as he stomped after me. The chair collapsed under his tree trunk-looking legs, and I held the stake out in front of me as I retreated. Right, I just remembered that hyenas were pack hunters.

“You’re going to die, traitor,” the demon rumbled, and I made a circuit, ending up back near the jukebox.

“Probably, but I doubt you’ll do it,” I answered, a six inch stake between me and Mr. Stinky. Oh yeah, hyena had short-circuited the brain for sure, ‘cause I wasn’t taking the blame for this bit of stupidity.

The demon lumbered forward, and at the last second I reached down and grabbed the broken chair back. The demon let his weight fall forward towards me. The idiot probably thought I was cringing in horror, but I’d faced bigger and badder even before going all primal-y. I jammed the dull edge of the broken wood into the edge of the juke box and the demon nicely impaled himself on the sharp end as I scrambled away with another cackling laugh.
The demon turned toward me with ooze spurting out of the wound and a gurgling noise from its mouth.

“Traitor,” he said as he stumbled forward. His right arms dropped the chair, and I picked up a bar stool and swung with all my might. The stool connected with the demon’s injured midsection with an unhealthy sounding squish. The demon also caught me by the wrist, and oh shit.

I pulled back, but the demon’s hand tightened to the point that I could almost feel bones crunching against one another. Ignoring the pain, I brought my left leg up and kicked the demon’s injured midsection as hard as I could. My foot not only landed solidly in the center, but broke the skin and now there was thick, yellowish ooze all over my boot. Unfortunately, one of the demon’s left hands caught my foot so that now I was held by my right hand and my left foot and this was becoming a strange upright game of twister.

I grabbed a chair with my free hand, and the demon, who was moving very sluggishly now, brought up one of his two free hands to cover his face. Instead I braced my weight with my arms and brought up my right leg to kick at the injured midsection. I got in a good three kicks before the demon could grab my second leg.
Now I knew this had to look funny because I hung limply from the demon’s grip, unable to do much other than punch ineffectively at a leg with my left hand. But the demon was fading quickly. Three of his hands were busy holding me, and he was leaning on the bar with the fourth to keep upright. As the oozing increased to flooding, I used my free hand to push myself away from the demon’s body because oh my god that smelled like the worst stuff I had ever smelled. Probably because it actually was the worst stuff I’d ever smelled, which was saying something, considering all the time I’d spent in sewers lately.

The demon sank to its knees, and my butt made contact with the floor. I scooted away from the growing pool of ooze and waited for the creature to weaken more. Eventually it dropped my right leg and then my left. I got to my feet and pulled my hand free. The creature’s skin was fading to grey, and the stench was overwhelming, which would explain the empty bar, empty except for Willy who stood with a shocked expression on his face.

Without waiting for the creature to actually die, I headed for the door. I felt a hell of a lot better, but I still had some aggression to work out. A visit to one or two cemeteries would help.
“Hey,” Willy cried out when I reached the door. I turned back to look at him. “Who’s going to pay for all this?”

“He is,” I said nodding toward the body which was quickly disintegrating into grey ooze. Outside I started running again, looking for any prey unlucky enough to run into me.

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I wandered into the park about the time that the horizon started sending tendrils of pinkish gold into the sky. Several dusted vampires and two dead demons later I had definitely worked through the anger, so that all that was left was this pain of being alone, without pack. Yep, that would be hyena logic, but it still hurt just as much.

I watched the false dawn feeling worse than when I’d left Giles’ place. Well, there went that last hope. I remembered when I was about four and I insisted I was going to run away from home. I really wanted my mom to follow me, but instead she stayed inside watching soap operas and I ended up curling up in the front seat of her car. God, I really was pathetic because fifteen years later I just felt like curling up because no one had followed me.
Okay, be honest. I felt like curling up because Spike hadn’t followed me. Shit. Things had looked so good until Angel came back in the picture, and I would really think that the whole hot pokers incident would put that relationship back on ice, but nope. Angel and Spike had closed ranks like *pack* last night. And my own pack… Yeah, so not going there.

I wandered over to the swings and settled in on the rubber seat. The metal S hooks on either side of the seat dug into my hips since I was a bit larger than the standard swing swinger, but I just pushed off. And let gravity pull me forward and back. I gripped the chains and leaned all the way back on the upswing, pointing my toes and throwing my weight. On the downswing I dragged my feet through the sand. Feet? I looked around and realized that the stolen boots had disappeared, which was not of the good in several ways. I guessed that my stuff was all gone so replacement shoes could be a problem, plus there was the whole ‘when the hell did I take off my shoes’ thing. Couldn’t do anything about it now since I didn’t see the boots anywhere in the park.

So, back to swinging and toe dragging through the sand.

“Hey, I thought I’d find you here.” I stuck out my heels and dug them into the sand to stop the swing. Great
predator I turned out to be, the slayer comes up behind me and I’m too busy swinging to notice.

“Buffy.” I answered. Noncommittal enough to be both noncommittal and rude.

“You missed a fun night,” she said as she took up a seat on the swing next to mine. I just grunted my noncommittally answer.

“Spike tore us all new ones about how you were the loyal one and we were all ungrateful, and may I say that getting ripped into about friendship by a vampire is a new experience. I don’t think they cover that in watcher training, either.” I looked over at her curiously and she gave me her best wicked smile, the smile she got when she was about to do something really mean to someone we both didn’t like. Usually it meant that she was about to slip a plastic spider into Cordy’s convertible or her specially prepared lunch or her locker.

“Giles got all smarty insulty like. He called Spike puerile and inconsequential and a bunch of other stuff that sounded like it came out of that SAT prep class Mom made me take. Then Spike said it would be worth the headache to eat Giles, and he actually jumped at Giles. Luckily Angel got to Spike before Spike got to Giles.” Oh great. A Spike and Angel story, and wasn’t that was sure
to put me in a better mood. I glared at Buffy, but I don’t think she noticed. Either that or I was just so grouchy in general that my glare didn’t look any different from my glance at this point. Buffy started twirling her swing so that the two seat chains wrapped around each other in a spiral.

“Spike and Angel started really tearing into each other and Giles threatened to stake both of them if any more furniture got broken, so they went out on the lawn where things got really interesting. I thought we had Angelus there for a minute because he went all Irish on us and said something about ‘do chirping don dials’ which Giles told me I really didn’t want translated, and he called Spike an ‘amadan’, which Giles said meant ‘idiot’.

“And then it got really, really interesting because one of Giles’ neighbors called the police and Spike and Angel had to run for it because they didn’t want to get in some high speed chase in Angel’s convertible. Well, actually Angel didn’t want to get in a chase, and he had to drag Spike away. Angel ended up calling on his cell phone later and talking to Giles.”

“That must have been a fun conversation,” I said as Buffy pulled up her feet and let her swing twirl her around.
“Yep,” she agreed when the swing stopped. “Giles said that Angel said something about these really dangerous portals, so we’re going to have another meeting tonight.” Buffy fell silent, and I spent the time watching the shadow on the monkey bars float across the slowly moving merry-go-round. I couldn’t think of anything to say. Well, I could, but it wasn’t nice. Besides, part of me felt like Buffy deserved some discomfort for the whole trust comment.

“Xander,” Buffy said in a strained tone, and I turned to look at her. “I’m really sorry. I didn’t mean any of it.”

“I know,” I said. Well, there went the whole making her suffer plan. Yep, when it comes to the women in my life I am one giant marshmallow, which might make it a good thing that I’ve decided to swing the other thing, no pun intended what with me being on a swing talking about swinging while swinging and that would be a babble. At least the hyena gave me one very handy superpower: keeping my mouth shut while babbling.

“When Riley said you’d killed....” Buffy stopped.

“You went right to the Faith thing,” I finished for her.

“So totally.”
“I’m not proud of killing those guys, but I’m not going to lie about it because I really didn’t have a choice.”

“They were *people*, Xander.”

“Yeah, people who were actively trying to kill and-or capture me. I’m not feeling good about them being dead because they were just soldiers and I know what it’s like to get crappy orders. But they declared this war and they decided I was on the other side, so I’m not going to lose a lot sleep over it.” Okay, that was a lie. I was losing major sleep over it, but I still knew I had done the right thing.

“The Xander I know would have been horrified.”

“I suppose a part of me is, but you have no idea what the Initiative is capable of, and I do, of course I still think I would be suffering nightmares to end all nightmares if I could actually fall asleep,” I admitted. Yeah, so much for being cool and keeping up the tough image.

“Oh, Xander. I am so sorry we believed them. I’m never going to forgive myself for not knowing that you needed help.” Her eyes were big and shiny now with unshed tears. That put me right over the edge from “make her suffer” to “comfort my friend.”

“Xander in distress, slayer to the rescue,” I quipped.
“Well, except when you come to the rescue,” Buffy said and I looked over at her in surprise. I didn’t usually get that kind of support, and I have to say it felt kinda good. Okay, it felt really, really good.

“The imposter—pretty bad?” I asked.

“Oh yeah.” Buffy had that tone of voice that told me that not only did she agree but she was ready to multiply my comment by about a hundred. “He pointed out that we had left him behind and asked him to do things that made it difficult for him to keep a job, and we didn’t even know when he had a job, and he got fired for being late again because he was doing the whole patrol thing because Willow and I were studying. He said that Anya was more interested in having a man to make her feel normal, which she so wasn’t, than she was interesting in actually having a relationship. And he said that he wasn’t going to spend his life putting his life on hold for the rest of us. It was pretty harsh.”

“Ouch.” I said. I wanted to say things like ‘no duh’ and ‘you just now figured this one out?’ but I limited myself to saying ‘ouch’ and thinking all the other things without saying them. I wondered if that was Oz’s trick. Maybe my inner hyena had taken secret lessons from his inner wolf when I wasn't watching.
“Like I said, oh yeah,” she said sadly. And there was the silence again. I never understood that song about silence echoing, but I could believe it. Usually silence with the Scoobies was this comfortable thing where we were all tired and relaxed and recouping from major demon poundage. Now I could hear the silence in a not so good way.

“Riley never showed up,” Buffy said quietly. I was about to go into my standard Riley abuse when her tone of voice registered.

“Was he supposed to?” I asked just as quietly, and she stopped twirling her swing so that her back was to me. Oh boy, hiding feelings was never of the good.

“He said he had made emergency plans with a friend in the Initiative, another soldier named Graham. He said he’d sent a signal and Graham would give him a ride back to Sunnydale and drop him off at Giles. He even used a secure Internet line he’d set up with Willow so no one could track him.”

“But they tracked him anyway.”

“I think so. If they know that he helped you escape...”

“He’s in serious shit.” I finished.
“I’m not sorry he helped you; he did the right thing getting you out, but I can’t just leave him in there. And now I’m feeling even worse because I *did* leave you in there.” Buffy swung her seat around and I could see stress and pain that would have looked natural on a 60 year old survivor of the civil war in Ethiopia.

“I don’t blame you,” I said, and I honestly meant it. “I just want you to accept me like I am now. And while I still think Riley is a jerk with funny hair, I will help you get him out,” I finished. She graced me with one of those smiles that still lit the world even if she wasn’t my whole world anymore.

“Maybe he is a little too into rules,” she said as she wrinkled her nose in disgust. “But the hair is a low blow, mister.” Buffy backhanded me gently and the world suddenly seemed a much brighter place. Of course sunrise might have had something to do with that too. Now I just had to break it to her that I was gay... or bi maybe... and lusting after a vampire... and kinky... and depending on what had happened when Spike and Angel ran for it, this just might be a moot point. I thought of how they’d drawn together in the face of the Scoobies’ hostility, and I had to wonder whether by submitting to Angel, Spike wasn’t trying to send me some sort of
message. Right-one disaster at a time, and Riley had moved to the front of the line.

Damn. There were days I hated being the white knight.

Part Twelve

"Earthquake?" Buffy asked as she bit her lip. I gave her credit for suggesting it seeing as how she hated earthquakes, but even I thought that was going a little too far.

"Fire!" Willow excitedly threw in, "We always have fires around here, or maybe a mudslide. That would be good." Willow actually bounced a bit on the couch where she sat next to Tara. Willow was a little too into the creating a natural disaster scenario; there were days I worried about that girl. Tara just smiled and patted her on the arm as though she’d said something cute, and Willow must have gotten the point because she ducked her head.

"A flood would make them evacuate." I pointed out.
"And drown every loser in this part of the state. Still say we should blow up the bloody building with them in it." Spike's words weren't any different from hateful things he'd said a thousand times before, but now part of me wanted to fold in on myself as he rejected me again and another part wanted to rip his head off for basically calling me stupid in front of the whole pack... group... whatever.

"Spike." Angel's warning voice took on a deeper tone since this was at least the fourth time he'd had to threaten Spike for saying the same damn thing.

"Yeah, Spike," I growled in support of Angel. Hey, wait, I'm not supposed to be supporting Angel. Spike narrowed his eyes at me and I just glared right back. Yeah, exactly why were you and your sire an hour late to the meeting, idiot vampire of mine? I would have asked that out loud only I really didn't want to know the answer. And yes, he clearly wasn't mine, but the inner hyena still wanted to make a claim.

"Please let's stay on topic," Giles sighed unhappily. "We need a way to get the Initiative people out of the Initiative building."

"I still like fire," Willow almost whispered.
"Without destroying the town that's built over their facility," Giles amended himself. The man stood leaning against the wall polishing his glasses with his eyes totally unfocused. I suspected that I was the one he really didn't want to see. Ever since I showed up a good hour before the Aurelius twins, had had looked at everything but me as I wandered the room waiting for the idiot vampires. Now that the whole gang had finally shown up, he didn't have to look at me at all. Eventually I just settled on a corner of Giles' desk. I turned away from Giles who still had that unfocused look and glared at Spike who spent a fair amount of time glaring back.

"Maybe fake some sort of nuclear emergency?" Buffy said with even more gnawing at her lip. I said it before and I'll say it again: I love her dearly but she can say some pretty stupid stuff.

"I'd like to avoid glowing in the dark, personally," I threw in at that point.

"Lot easier to hide that way, innit?" Spike drawled and I looked over to see a vicious grin on his face.

"I don't know. You have a lot of experience with hiding since every demon on the Hellmouth wants you dead, what's your take on it?" I shot right back. A little part of me curled up and whimpered and just wanted to crawl
into a corner, and in the past that part probably would have made me find a dark corner, but now my anger overrode that inner Zeppo.

"But then again, flooding could be of the good if it was a rising water table kinda thingy with the water rising instead of flooding from above, right guys?" Willow babbled as she stood and 'accidentally' backed up so that she blocked my view of Spike. I gave a short snappy growl and she darted back to Tara. Shit. I took a deep breath in the silence of the room.

"Um, yeah, rising water would work," I offered her with my best smile, trying to undo the damage I'd done by growling at her. She stood in the circle of Tara's arms and looked at me with those wide eyes and I felt about two inches high... again. I heard Spike snort, but the sight of Willow's wide eyes sort of short circuited the hyena need to beat the shit out of Spike.

"I'm not sure the base would actually flood," Giles said, and military specs and building codes flashed through my mind courtesy of my soldier.

"You'd have to use some C-4 to crack the foundation in one or two spots to compromise the integrity of the subbasements so that the flood would cause the utilities to shut down. If you did it in an unused section of the
building a controlled explosion might be mistaken for a small earth tremor." I said without interrupting my current glare at Spike. The room went silent again, and when I looked around everyone was looking at me. "Hey, soldier memories, remember? Rocket launcher, security codes, ordinance specs?"

"Yes, indeed," Giles added, and I really wondered when Giles was going to put his glasses *on* since they'd been off and his hands had been polishing since I had shown up with Buffy, oh I don't know, an HOUR before Spike and Angel.

"Can you do that?" Angel asked me, and I stomped down on another growl.

"I know where to steal some shape charges," I said hesitantly, not that I was hesitant about stealing from the base since the hyena upgrades meant that I could pretty well ignore their security. I had other concerns though. "The problem is that shape charges are designed to go *on* the wall, which means being *in* the Initiative."

Okay, call me a coward, but I really wasn't anxious to go back in there, and as much as I hated to admit it, I was even unhappier about the thought of Spike in there. His leash might be longer, but the fact is that he still got hurt when he hurt humans. I wasn't sure how much it would
damage him if he actually killed someone, but in the Initiative there were plenty of chances for him to find that out firsthand.

And I think I was losing my mind because I was concerned about Spike getting hurt when quite frankly I wanted to do some serious hurting of Spike myself. Of course, I also told myself that it was pretty reasonable for Spike to get back with Angel since Angel had the big hotel and the fancy car and the broad shoulder, and who am I kidding, I was just not a big enough person to see those two together without feeling jealousy and anger tear through me. I thought I'd known envy when Cordy had gone macking on that guy, but that was a little breeze of jealousy compared to the typhoon I felt right now.

"Oh goddess, that's not good." Willow sighed, and I had to do some quick thinking to catch up with the conversation about the shape charges because hello, distracted much?

"B-but the charges would work from either side of the wall?" Tara asked hesitantly, and I could have kissed the girl.

"We could plant them on the outside of the wall," I finished for her, and she smiled her approval. That girl
was a real looker when she smiled. "That is, if we could tunnel though several hundred feet of solid rock and dirt," I finished and her smile slowly faded. "Please tell me there's some magic solution because I so do not want to dig for the next six months." Tara ducked her head slightly.

"We could move the dirt with a spell that speeds up the molecular activity," Willow started with lots of Willow excitement, but then her words trailed off. "But that would kinda be a really big explosion that would make the whole secret operation a little unsecret. Moving that much mass in a controlled reaction would be really, really hard."

"But with the coven..." Tara said quietly, and yep, there went Willow's resolve face. The minute Tara made any suggestion, Willow was going to find a way to make it happen, and I wondered if that was one reason why Tara was so quiet because honestly, Willow could be a little scary in these resolve moments.

"I have a better suggestion," Angel broke in. "Tarhul demons." I turned and gave Angel my best 'huh?' expression.

"I'm not sure that's wise." Giles broke in at that point.
"They can move the earth quickly and quietly. The Initiative won't even notice."

"They are notoriously unreliable."

"I know how to handle Tarhul."

"The way you knew how to handle primals?" Giles snapped back, and someone was going to get an ulcer over this, and I was beginning to think it was going to be me.

"I'm going with Giles on the not trusting demons part, but what are Tarhul?" Buffy asked Angel, and I couldn't catch myself before I flinched. Even worse, Angel caught it. Great. Nothing like showing your sensitive underbelly around the enemy. Well I should have known that it wasn't going to be easy to get the Scoobies to just overlook the whole "Xander as a demon" groove I had going on. God, I really was a demon. Of course the whole kicking demon ass thing was a hint since the non-demon me was more of the kickee than the kicker, but I rolled that idea around in my head a few times. Xander, demon; demon, Xander. Nope, it still sounded wrong.

"They carve out subterranean living spaces and live in clans," Angel explained
"And they are infamous for turning on anyone who trusts them," Giles injected.

"I've worked with them before, and I don't trust them. However, if I challenge a few of them and win some fights I can earn their respect. I think they'll do this."

"Ya mean we'll do it. I owe the bloody wankers, and the Tarhul understand revenge," Spike added, and my vision shifted again. Riiight, you just want to go with your sire out of revenge as opposed to feeling loyalty to the sire. Not all the wankers in Sunnydale were in the Initiative.

"I'm in too," I added, and again with the everyone looking at me like I had lost my mind.

"I hardly think Angel will need your assistance." Giles said tartly as he finally slipped his glasses back on and gave me an 'oh, please' expression.

"I'm going." I crossed my arms and looked from Giles to Angel to Buffy who all stared at me blankly. Finally Angel cracked.

"These are dangerous demons, Xander. They believe in a code of single combat and if you offend one of them I can't protect you."

"IF?" Buffy snorted. I glared at her.
"I can take care of myself, and if you don't believe me, call Willy." I said back rather smugly.

"Right, ya got a real good track record on that front," Spike threw in. My hands clenched and my insecurity about the apparent lack of acceptance got washed aside by a burning rage at Spike calling me weak. If he thought Angel was stronger than me, I couldn’t do a hell of a lot about that since there was the whole Angel actually being stronger than me thing, but I'd already proved myself with Spike. I'd proved myself and I'd earned his respect even if I wasn't going to have his submission.

"And you're doing really well yourself. Got captured by the Initiative what? Twice? Seems like last time *I* had to save *you*," I snapped at him.

"Only bloody in there because of you lot," Spike snarled back as his eyes started turning yellow.

"Well if we're so much trouble you're welcome to leave," I snapped right back even though I had no idea what I was going to do if he took me up on that threat. The fight didn't feel the same this time. In Caritas our fight had been vicious and biting and utterly hot. I wanted to tear Spike's clothes off and push him over the bar. Now, as he stood next to Angel, I just wanted to tear him apart, punish him for choosing Angel over me just like Buffy
had, just like Cordy had, just like... okay, I was out of 'just likes' but I wasn't out of blinding anger.

"Spike, I'm thinking Xander's right. We really don't need you here for this; it's not like you can fight the soldiers," Buffy added as she got up and stood beside me.

"Not walkin' out in the middle of a fight," Spike snarled, and I suddenly wasn't sure which fight he meant: the Initiative or me.

"Oh that's right," I quipped with an evil smile of my own. "I forgot, it's everyone else that walks out on you, isn't it?" I said, and the minute the words were out of my mouth I wanted to take them back. Spike's face flashed an expression of pure pain and then he went into game face, his lip pulled up to reveal his white fangs as he snarled hatefully.

"Xander LaVelle Harris!" Willow squeaked, and great, Willow decided to side with the vampire rather than the best friend who's verbally torturing that vampire.

"You soddin' little... " Spike lunged at me, and Angel caught him around his waist just in time to send both of them crashing the floor in an undignified heap. I whirled away from the desk snarling, my own hyena spirit coming to the fore.
"And Riley thought they were flirting? He's been in the military way too long," I heard Buffy say, but I was busy growling at Spike as Angel fought to keep Spike on the floor and Giles yelled something about broken furniture and angry neighbors and leases.

"Enough!" Angel practically roared as he got an arm around Spike's neck. Angel struggled to his feet while using his hold to keep Spike in front of him, kneeling on the floor. Spike gave a few more yanks before settling back into his human features and sitting back on his heels. He pushed at Angel's arm again, and this time Angel stepped back as Spike got to his feet, but Angel's hand landed on Spike's shoulder holding him in place. Please, it's not like I couldn't take care of myself against Spike.

"Bloody wanker," he snapped at me as I continued to growl at him. He'd chosen Angel; he'd submitted to Angel. A person couldn't be in two packs at once.

"Angel, maybe you being here is a mistake. I know you want to help, but the Initiative is our problem so why don't you just take Captain Peroxide back to L.A. with you," Buffy suggested with her arms crossed over her chest in the 'I am Slayer' pose. I couldn't even figure out how to respond to that because on the surface I’m sure
she was trying to help what with the whole Spike trying to kill me thing going on, but I needed something from Spike, even if it was just him saying 'piss off.'

"We need help with this," I said weakly, aware of just how pathetic that must have sounded considering the Initiative was just a pimple on the ass of someone of the bad guys we'd faced. From the expression of disbelief on Giles' face, pathetic didn't cover it.

"I think we can handle this one; you are the one always pointing out the problems Spike tends to cause."

"Well, he is a pain in the ass—" Spike interrupted me with a loud growl

"Really Spike, I would remind you that you can't hurt humans, so no matter how much you threaten, your behavior is not intimidating." Yeah, some days Giles missed the train right along with Buffy.

"He's not human now, is he?" Spike asked silkily, flashing me a grin that promised a rematch later. It felt like the temperature in the room dropped several degrees as I realized that Spike wasn't playing.

"Giles, we need help, and I'm going with Spike and Angel to make sure they don't do anything weird."
"Okay, that's vaguely fox and chickenhousish," Buffy commented with raised eyebrows, and I tried giving her a 'who me' expression of complete normalcy, but she just continued looking at me with raised eyebrows while Giles sighed and took the glasses off again even though he continued to look at me.

"I'm going to go try and find the Tarhul clan that lived here before I left for L.A." Angel said, no doubt anxious to get away from the group since even I could smell the sharp scent of aggression gathering in the small room. Angel closed his hand around Spike's arm and started pulling him toward the door while Spike resisted at every step, continuing to sneer at me until Angel physically took him by the shoulders and turned him toward the door.

"I'm going with you," I said, pushing past Giles who stood looking at me as though he'd never seen me before. Maybe it was just now sinking in with him that things had changed. I wasn't the same Xander, or at least I didn't have the same Xander instincts because I was not letting Spike walk away. We needed to get this settled because I was stuck somewhere between wanting to kill Angel and take Spike and wanting to kill Spike and walk away from Angel, and this was not a good place to be.
"Um, maybe you should stay here," Willow suggested.

"Oh he should definitely stay here," Buffy added. I ignored both of them as I continued walking toward the door in the wake of Angel and Spike.

"It's fine; I won't let them kill each other," Angel called out and I had to suppress a growl at Angel's attitude, but he was busy pulling Spike to the car so I don't think he even noticed my anger. It was time to take care of this one way or the other. Part of me actually regretted that Angel had his soul because I had a strong suspicion that the way it was going to end was with me walking home alone. Angelus would have been kinder.

**Part Thirteen**

Angel drove the car through the empty streets and the atmosphere was just about the opposite of the previous night, not that Angel seemed any happier now. In fact the great broody one seemed even more aggravated as he slammed the car around corners and hit the brakes way harder than necessary at every red light. Spike just sat silently in the front seat with his arms crossed, and I sat in the back seat behind him equally silent. Yep, the Xan-man could in fact be quiet, when I was angry enough. And talking about myself in third person borders on pathetic.
I put up my hand to brace myself against the seat as Angel hit the brakes again, this time next to a dark playground where moonlight on the empty swings and monkey bars cast strange blue shadows. I looked around for anything that might be a den of demons. Nada.

"Okay you two, out," Angel ordered as he opened his car door and slid out before slamming it shut a whole lot harder than the door really needed in order to close properly. I didn't bother with the passenger side door since that would have meant getting near Spike. I sorta crawled over to the driver's side and threw a leg over the side of the car to get out. Angel had already walked around to the passenger side, so I followed him, and why was I here again? The middle of some demon city with Spike and Angel was not sounding like much fun. I really couldn't figure out which part of my brain had voted for going on this little jaunt.

"Right, where are the demons?" Spike asked briskly as he started walking into the park, and he just looked smaller without the leather coat. Instead he had on black jeans that looked poured on and a black t-shirt. It actually would have been good camouflage in the dark except for his shocking white-blond hair.
"Right now the only demons I care about are you two," Angel said through tight lips, and it took me a couple of seconds to realize that I was one of the two demons. Still didn't sound right.

"Bloody hell, Peaches, just keep your nose out of it."

"No, I don't think so. I'm not liking this new Xander much, and I’m liking you even less, boy."

"Can't say I care," I snapped at the same time that Spike gave Angel a two fingered salute. Angel just sighed, but at least Spike stopped and leaned against the ladder portion of a tall slide.

"What happened between last night and now?" Angel demanded as he crossed his arms. Spike pulled a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket, and I started wishing I smoked, well not in the smelling of smoke part of smoking, not that Spike smelled *bad* when he smelled of smoke, and I had just lost my train of thought again.

"Xander?" Angel demanded and I narrowed my eyes at him as the darkness suddenly became much less dark through my demon eyes. If Angel wanted to talk to Spike about that fine, but he wasn't in my pack. I didn't have to answer him. "What is wrong with you?" Angel asked as
he stepped closer to me, and I sidestepped away from the car and brought my hands up close to my waist.

"Oh for god's sake, I'm not about to attack you," Angel sighed heavily and turned back toward Spike. I dropped my hands to the side and leaned a hip against the car as I waited to see Spike brought to task by his sire. I suppose this was going to be the one advantage of having the two of them keeping their clan ties: watching Angel torture Spike. Of course I got myself so distracted that I didn't actually notice Angel's attack until strong arms wrapped around my upper body, trapping my arms next to my side which is what I had been trying to avoid in the first place.

I snarled at Angel, but he just manhandled me away from the car and toward the park, glaring down at me in game face as I struggled against his grip as he held me in a bear hug, which huggage from Angel... so not okay with that.

"Stay out of this Spike," Angel ordered harshly, and I assumed Spike had made some move, but I was a little busy to stop and actually check since I was trying to wiggle my way free.

"Since you won't talk this out like a human being, I guess I'm having this discussion with your demon," Angel said and his teeth made his voice unfamiliar, foreign, and
waaaay too close. Angel bent his head down and I realized what he was going for. Oh no. Not submitting. Really, really not submitting to Angel. I did the only thing I could; I bit Angel's arm as hard as I could, which was really hard. I could feel the silk of his shirt catching in my teeth and taste the zing of vampire blood through the awful chemical tang of his fabric softener, but Angel completely ignored me.

I struggled harder as I felt the teeth go into my neck. And I brought up my knee as hard as I could. Angel grunted his pain and went to his knees, dragging me down with him. And now I really started squirming because DAMN, that bite hurt. Angel pushed me the rest of the way to the ground, and I could feel one particular rock digging into my shoulder blade and I squirmed. He pressed me into the cold damp ground, and I tried to bring my knee up again, but I just didn’t have the right angle. My leg just sort of flopped ineffectively. Oh, I could get my heel around to kick at the back of Angel's calves, but it didn't seem to do any good at all. Changing tactics, I tried to strain to one side and flip us, and that just got me a sore shoulder as Angel bit in even harder. Fine, it was time to pull out the big guns.

"Damn it Angel, if you want to know why I never liked you, this would be it. Hello, you're supposed to be the
good guy as in you don't go around biting people any more, or did Spike actually manage to make you happy enough for a return visit of our favorite psycho?"

Okay, I don't know why it never occurred to me before, but Angel and Spike probably meant sex and add that to their sudden new interest in sticking together and the biting and then you come to the “holy fucking shit” portion of the evening. I bucked up as hard as I could and struggled to get my arms free, but I couldn't do more than wiggle uselessly under Angel's body pinning me to the soft ground. And really the pinning worried me a lot less than the biting which felt like he was taking my throat out, and hey, if we were talking Angelus, throat ripping was a very real possibility. I wiggled harder.

Ironically, with the demon upgrade I could smell my own fear. Something else that was new: I could feel a strange, nameless compulsion rising up. It's like when I have a really, really intense craving for chocolate. I had this really bad case of the flu when I was a kid, and I *knew* I shouldn't eat anything, knew in the “projectile vomiting” kind of knew. But I had found my mother's stash of old Halloween candy, and that chocolate just called me like I had absolutely no self-control. I knew I wouldn't be able to keep it down, I knew I was going to be sorry, but I just couldn't NOT eat that damn chocolate. I felt that feeling
rising up only magnified by about a thousand. The need to tilt my head and acknowledge Angel's strength just pissed me off.

"Buffy is so going to stake your sorry ass, you pathetic excuse for a vampire," I hissed as I doubled my efforts. Simple math fact: zero times two still equals zero, so I still didn't get anywhere. See, I can do math. I felt myself stilling, and I forced my body into fighting again, struggling this time to dig my heels into the ground and push myself away from those teeth that had clamped onto my neck. The zero times anything rule still applied because I made zero progress there, too. I panted with the effort of fighting: both fighting the vampire currently attached to my neck and fighting with my own need to not fight. It would just be so much easier to submit, but I couldn't. Spike... maybe. Angel... not a chance in every hell Giles had ever described.

Eventually I let my body go limp and settled for trying to rein in my hyena instincts. I just had to hold on and fool Angel into cutting this little exercise in demon dominance short. Wait him out. Let him get off and then run like hell. Just wait. I focused on trying to breathe, my gasping breath whistling through my teeth which I kept clamped as I tried to hold on, not submit, wait him out. Angel growled and dug his teeth a little deeper and the dam
broke. The air flowed out of me in a giant sigh as I went limp and tilted my head to give Angel access to my neck, and god I hated vampires. In particular, I hated one over gelled, know-it-all, manipulative son-of-a-bitch who bit down a fraction more making me flinch before he pulled his teeth out.

I felt the tongue on my neck, and I shuddered, but I also couldn't do anything. Two or three swipes and Angel stood up, which left him conveniently standing over me looking down. He held his hand out, and I half rolled to my side before getting up on my own. I moved away to the monkey bars, and how convenient... monkey bars, butt monkey. Now if we just had schmuck bars for Angel we'd be all set.

I stood mostly facing away, but I couldn't help but keep an eye on Angel as he wiped blood off his lips with something that looked like disgust. Ya know, the only thing worse than having some vampire use you as a midnight snack is having a vampire use you as a midnight snack and then not like your blood. It's ungrateful. And kind of insulting.

"Now, I'm not going to take any more from either of you. Is that clear?" Angel demanded. I don't know what Spike did, but I just broke eye contact and looked at the
ground. I didn't want to look at the ground, but my eyes just kind of did that on their own.

"Now, Xander. You're starting. Exactly why did you go from trying to jump Spike to trying to kill him?" I held out. Oh, I wanted to say something, but the very fact that Angel was asking also made me want to say something rude about Ireland and stupid European football which is really soccer because football is a man's game with lots of tackling and broken bones. So, I settled for saying nothing. I knew I was dealing with Angel when my silence got a sigh and not a bone-crushing backhand.

"Xander, so help me I am running on my last nerve here so you either start talking, or I will drive you back to Giles and let him deal with your demonic mood swings." I considered my options, but Angel was right. I wasn’t controlling my emotions and I really didn't want the others to see that. Giles would start with the polishing and then Willow would give me those big watery eyes, and I simply had no defense against the power of Willow-eyes. And I didn’t even want to think about how Buffy would react; my wrists were still sore from the last time.

"He submitted to you," I said grudgingly. I still couldn’t bring myself to look at either of them.
"Bloody wanker had me by the neck, slayer'd stake me if I actually damaged her pet vampire," Spike said with disgust in his voice.

"Boy," Angel growled and then Spike gave a rather rude response back which I think is physically impossible because sheep are actually not... no don't go there I ordered my brain as I considered the logistics of Spike's comment.

"Xander, I took over siring him from Drusilla. My demon is older and stronger." Angel was calm, and I was kind of hating how my demon seemed to be nodding inside. It made sense, but I didn’t have to like it.

"Older, mate- not stronger. You have about a hundred years of drinking soddin' rat while I was dining on the good stuff. Killed my way Europe after you left, drank socialites and left their corpses in the alleys of Prague." And that would be the cocky Spike talking, and no I don’t want to think about Spike in terms of cocky, and yes I’m babbling to myself again. God.

"I thought we settled this earlier tonight, Spike. If you need another lesson, *boy*, I will be happy to give you a rematch." Spike fell silent, which for Spike was speaking volumes.
"Xander, just tell us what you were thinking. Primals aren't vampires even if we have a lot of the same basic instincts." Again with the calm, reasonable voice. Stupid vampire.

"You can't be in two packs," I pointed out, and then it dawned on me. Angel had just claimed me away from my pack. I felt my knees go weak and I sat down on one of the lower bars.

"You thought that by submitting to me he was rejecting you," Angel said. I just looked at him. I didn’t want to say it out loud.

"Oi, boy's not that stupid. My unlife is bad enough without you comin' in and pretending to be sire. You bloody walked out on me once and I'll stake myself before I ever trust you again.” Spike actually sounded... pissed?“ When I get this chip out, I'll take my boy and go somewhere so you can't come chargin' in and playing the high and mighty 'I am sire' bit."

Whoa. Didn't see that one coming. I just stared at Spike as I considered what he was declaring. He submitted to his sire but he rejected his sire and that wasn't normal. Or actually, maybe it was. Hell, I wasn't a vampire, and maybe I'd done a little too much assuming.
"I'm thinking that now I'm really confused," I admitted.

"You bloody thought I'd pick the brooding pouf over you?" Spike asked, and his tone of voice shifted from angry to worried almost immediately. I opened my mouth, but I really couldn't find anything to say to that.

"I have to go see some demons. You two work this out, and I don't care how as long it takes as you promise to never tell me the details," Angel said as he turned his back and walked to the car.

"But what did this... " I struggled to find a word that described what had just happened between me and Angel. "What do you want?" I finally settled on. Angel stood with his hand on his open car door looking right at me.

"Xander, I don't want anything. You and Willow and Buffy and even Giles became my clan when you gave me something to fight for, when you gave me a reason to climb out of the gutter." Angel's voice cracked slightly on Buffy's name, but other than that he presented the same unemotional face that he always showed. Only now, demon instincts in me understood Angel's declaration as being the deepest emotion a demon could hold.

"You were my family even if I was too scared and maybe even too jealous to ever really push my way in. *You*
were the only one who never saw that, Xander. You were so busy being insecure and angry and quite frankly childish that you didn't see anything except what you wanted. So as far as I'm concerned, nothing's changed. You are still part of my clan the way you have been since you broke into my apartment with that cross and that absolute conviction that you were going to stand with Buffy even if it got you killed." Angel got in the car and started the heavy roaring motor. "And you still annoy the shit out of me," he added, yelling a bit over the engine noise as he put the car into gear and started down the street.

I sat with the monkey bar rung nearly cutting off circulation and with my neck still throbbing. Wow. I had really fucked that one up. I hadn't ever screwed up this bad, except for the time when I was doing the whole kissing on Willow thing when Cordy saw us or the time that I tried to rape Buffy or possibly the time I drove the whole female population insane with that love spell, and I was just going to stop thinking there because I had really screwed up a lot more than one person should.

I tilted my head a bit so I could see Spike who watched me with undisguised shock.
"We need to talk, pet. You really thought I was pickin' the pouf?" Spike stepped closer, and I stood up and got to the side of the monkey bars. Already been chewed on my one vampire tonight, and I was not keen to make it two.

"Well... yeah."

"Moron," Spike said as he took another pull at his cigarette and leaned against the far side of the monkey bars.

"Yeah, well excuse me, I'm kinda new at the whole demon thing. And that is *still* not sounding right," I complained.

"Wot?" Spike cocked his head to the side and words like cute and flawless and sexy floated up, and yeah, Spike would kill me if he knew I even thought words like cute when I saw him. Didn't stop me from thinking them.

"I spent the last four years fighting demons. It just doesn't sound right to call myself one. I feel like I should be grabbing an ax and chasing myself down the street although I was actually the one who usually ran from demons so that should probably be me grabbing an ax and running from myself down the street."

"Loon."
"Probably."

"Thought you got back with your mates and had second thoughts about declarin' an interest in me." He sounded casual, but his eyes were burning into mine. I shivered.

"Oh, I had second, third, and fourth thoughts because Buffy, she is so going to kill both of us. But all those thoughts aside, I still am interested in you. Not even fear of Willow eyes and slayer fury could change that." And oh god, was I starting to blush? Great.

"Red does have a pout on her, doesn't she?" I looked over and Spike had this odd wistful look on his face, and given my knowledge of the Evil Undead, that was not a comforting expression.

"Spike?" I demanded in a tone that promised much pain and no sex if he didn't cough up the information.

"What? I just always thought I'd get to have Red as my own. If Angel and Slutty hadn't stopped me, the minute she did her love spell, I'd have made her my first childe." He'd actually mustered a look of hurt innocence in his sexy blue eyes.

"Of all the... I'm telling you how much I care about you, and your answer is to tell me how much you want to kill
my best friend? Please tell me you see a problem here." Spike just got an obstinate expression on his face.

"Always had a soft spot for Red, but it doesn't change how much I want you. Besides, I said I'd turn her, not kill her. Why the hell do you think I took *you* with me that night? I certainly didn't need you to do the spell, but I thought you two would make a vicious pair of childer for me to take home to my plum."

"I don't even have words for how wrong that is," I spluttered.

"What? To want to have you with me? I planned on taking you as my childe so we could hunt together through the centuries. Course now that you're a demon, I figure I don't even have to turn ya. Makes it safer if one of us can go out in the sun." And how wrong is it that my demon was agreeing with him on the last part, there?

"Why did I have to fall for the psychopath?" I asked the stars, but unlike Drusilla, I couldn't hear their answer, which was probably of the good. I had enough problems without adding that one. And funny enough, there was this little part of me that practically danced at the thought that Spike wanted me, even without the hyena he'd wanted me. "Wait, I thought you hated me," I
pointed out as the memory of those horrible weeks in the basement assaulted me.

"Hated that you refused to bloody submit, hated those soddin' names you called me." I looked over in surprise, but he just gazed back calmly, and boy had I gotten that one wrong.

"I called you those names to try and make my hyena stop yapping about wanting you. I figured *you* hated *me*, so I needed to make her back off."

"And now? That hyena of yours still yappin'?" Spike took another step forward, and I pulled up my fists and squared off my feet. I was not going down easy. At least, not again. In fact, if I had my way, I wasn't the one going down at all.

"Nope." I watched confusion flash across his features and smiled.

"Hyena's gone, or rather part of me. There is no what she wants versus what I want."

"So, we just have one matter to work out then," Spike said with a lascivious grin.

"Actually, two," I corrected him. "First, promise me that you will never go after Willow."
"She'd make a beautiful vampire; she's got depths of darkness and a love of chaos hidden in that little body."
That wistful expression went across Spike's face again, and just ew. The guy I lusted after should not be lusting after Willow because that was just wrong. The thought of Willow and Spike in a bed crossed my mind, and I shuddered at the thought of that red hair against a pillow lying next to Spike's pale arm as he leaned over her and my own hand reaching across.... Oh no no no no no. Just no. Focus damn it, I ordered my libido, which hadn't actually hijacked the brain since tenth grade.

"And you're never, ever going to set it free," I demanded as I pulled myself out of that fantasy. No thinking of naked Willow because that way just led to despair and destruction, and with her new powers and recent gayhood, possibly shriveled genitals.

"Fair enough. Red and even Glinda have a free pass no matter what happens, even if Slutty comes after me again. So, on to matter number two," Spike stepped closer and that wicked grin, the hint of tongue, the sliver of white teeth, the smell of desire and the bulge in his jeans left me breathless and damn near brainless. Luckily I still had one or two grey cells on the job.
"Right, matter number two would be the Initiative soldiers moving this way," I pointed out as I sniffed the peculiar stench of gun oil and testosterone in the air.

Part Fourteen

"Bloody hell," Spike snarled, turning his face into the breeze. And I saw the moment when he caught the scent because his face took on this feral sneer/snarl that would have scared the crap out of me if he had pointed that face at me.

"I'm thinking running would be of the good," I suggested.

"Right." Without another word, Spike dashed across the park away from the street and away from the sound of human footsteps, and I followed behind, allowing my instincts to take over, since me and running usually resulted in much stumbling and falling. With the hyena instincts pulled up, I could feel my body contact the earth and then push off again in one graceful motion. At first Spike held back, turning his head to several times, but he
quickly noticed that I could keep up, and he put on a burst of speed that forced me to push myself to keep up.

We dashed across the baseball diamond attached to the park and then through the stand of trees behind it. I twisted my hips to maneuver around the obstacles; my night vision helped me duck under branches that would have decapitated me before. Then Spike's feet were suddenly at my eye level and I put out my hands as I sort of collided with a brick wall hidden by the trees. Note to self: not even hyena instincts can totally overcome Harris clumsiness.

I stepped back to get a better angle and then jumped for the top of the wall. My fingertips caught the edge and then cool hands grabbed my wrists and Spike hauled me up, my feet scrambling for purchase. For one second as I reached the top, my body pressed into his and we stood face to face. He let go of my arms, and I couldn't help it; I leaned forward so that my lips just barely touched his. I don't know what I expected, but the back of his knuckles gently brushing my cheek surprised me so that I actually pulled back and looked into those brilliant blue eyes. In the distance, I could hear heavy footsteps on the hard packed dirt of the baseball field, but the trees still gave us some shelter.
"Bloody tease," Spike whispered with his hand still on my cheek and I just smiled. Then the magic of the moment passed and he jumped down and started running with me close behind. Spike practically flew up a chain link fence and I gathered my legs under me, leaping most of the distance before using my arms to practically throw myself over the rest of the fence, and hey, that was actually cool because I know I couldn’t have done that before.

I followed Spike into what appeared to be some sort of factory area with a number of smaller buildings connected by overhead ductwork, and now I could hear the footsteps on the concrete behind us. They paused at the fence and I could hear the rattling as we gained a lot of ground. But once the soldiers cleared the fence, they immediately began running toward us. Damn, they must be tracking Spike's body heat, or lack of it rather.

Spike put on a huge burst of speed that left my lungs aching and my muscles burning for oxygen. When he dropped down into some sort of delivery bay, I was ready to admit defeat and ask him to slow down. Before I could catch my breath, Spike had opened a manhole cover into the pitch-black sewers. Oh yeah, let's just see whether the soldier boys have stones or pebbles in their pants.
I opened my sense of smell to check out the darkness, and almost gagged from the smell of sewer, but hey at least that was all I smelt. Taking one last deep breath of fresh air, I dropped down into the darkness. I landed with a splash and had to catch myself with one hand on the ground, which meant that most of me went in the sewer water as Spike pulled the manhole cover closed from the top of the ladder he was perched on. Ladder. Right, probably should have used that. I tried to catch my breath as Spike dropped from the ladder and started down the sewer. I wanted to ask if he was picking a direction at random or if he had some sort of plan, but I just couldn’t get enough breath. Besides the stench, the air was strangely warm, which probably wasn’t helping with the stinkage.

Spike jogged down the sewer for several minutes before taking a sudden turn to the right down a narrower tunnel, one where I had to duck my head a little and the little spikes on his head brushed against the grime on the ceiling. Trusting that Spike wasn't just running blind, I followed as the temperature kept rising until I could feel sweat forming at my waistband and the back of my neck.

Up ahead I could see a dim light, and then the smooth concrete gave way to rough rock as the tunnel widened out into a dimly lit cave.
"Um, where the hell are we?" I asked as Spike jumped down a couple of feet into a pond.

"Hellmouth makes all sorts of interesting caves under the town, and most of 'em are prime demon real estate," Spike answered as I jumped down and nearly jumped back out again. The water was hot, like Jacuzzi kind of hot. I scurried after Spike before I started cooking.

"Oi, duck down and get that muck off ya before you come up," Spike groused, and I looked down at my favorite Babylon 5 t-shirt which now had big blotches of discoloration. Oh hell, it was my only shirt since the Initiative had so thoughtfully moved me only without telling me where my stuff was. A single shirt I'd left at Willow's and a pair of jeans borrowed from Angel were the sum total of my worldly possessions and now I was down one shirt. Life sucks, and not the good kind of suckage either.

"Um, yuck," I offered as I backed up a step and ducked under, doing my best to scrub my shirt clean, because even Clorox has a limit, and I doubt they've tested the stuff against sewer water and demon goo. Not a big laundry concern because most people just avoid those things. Well, they avoid sewers, and they'd avoid demon goo if they actually believed in demons, which would
require that they give up denial land, and people were way too fond of denial land. I should know seeing as how I was the king of it at one time.

"I think your head needs a quick dunk, too," I pointed out helpfully when I came up the second time. Yep, time to get out of the water before I started turning red as a boiled lobster. Soldier boys definitely weren't going to track the temperature of anyone in this steam bath, if they’d even made it into the sewer, which I doubted.

"Fucking hell," Spike swore when his fingers explored his hair and found the muck. I laughed as he waded back in and did a quick job on his own head before coming back out dripping and muttering. And here I thought Angel was the one who was touchiest about his hair.

"Right, we need to get back to Buffy," I pointed out.

"Yeah, hate to say it, but we do." Spike started walking toward one of the tunnels leading off the cavern.

The tunnel led to the back alley of Willy's place, and Spike pulled himself up out of the sewers and retucked his t-shirt into his jeans as if looking good was his only concern. And quite frankly after he had run his fingers through his hair, he did look good- one of the advantages of years of practice in not being able to use a mirror, no
doubt. I doubted that I had gotten through the run quite as stylishly. It really wasn't good for the ego when dead people consistently looked better than you. Oh hell, who was I kidding, the dead people I hung out with always looked hot. Not fair.

"Right, just time for a drink before we head back to the slayer's," Spike declared as he strode around to the front of the building before I'd had a chance to do more than open my mouth.

"Spike, this is so not a good idea," I said as I dashed around the side of the building just in time to see him open the door.

"Don't be a ninny," he suggested before disappearing inside, and I followed.

"Hey, no, we don't need any trouble tonight," Willy said as I stepped inside, and I could see Spike cock his head to the side in confusion even though he had his back to me.

"I'm just here to collect my vampire and leave," I said sweetly.

"Well just do it without breaking any more furniture. You owe me for last night." Despite what he was saying, I couldn't help but notice that Willy’s hands were still up in
a submissive “hey, no trouble” gesture. I admit it, the hyena in me felt kind of smug.

"I don't owe you anything, I told you to take it off the other guys," I pointed out testily. I had, right? I reviewed the night, and yep, I may have lost my shoes, but I had clearly remembered to tell Willy to charge the dead guy. The one who’d been dissolving into stinky grey ooze as I left.

"Oh yeah, maybe I should have taken it off the two dead vamps whose money turned to dust the minute you staked them, or maybe I should have gotten my arm burned down to the bone trying to pick a wallet out of the remains of a Yinth. Not likely." Willy’s hands were flat on the bar now, and he really didn’t look very happy. Sheesh, where had he picked up a backbone on sale.

"A Yinth?" Spike turned to me with eyebrows halfway to his hairline. Behind him I saw two shapes move out of the shadows: two familiar shapes. They should be familiar what with the four arms and the thick bodies and the glowing eyes, and boy did they look pissed. Okay, that would be Willy's source of confidence I realize as it dawned on my Willy had just sold me out as the local Yinth killer.
"You killed the tribe father," one grumbled unhappily and I started backing away, which seemed like a Zeppo thing to do until I realized that Spike was backing up with me. The things kept walking closer and the closer they got, the bigger they looked.

"Pet?" Spike said quietly from right in front of me, and we had both now backed to the door.

"Yeah?" I asked, hoping he had some wise advice.

"Run." Oh yeah, I could do that. I turned and fled down the street towards Giles' apartment, and I could hear Spike right behind me. Luckily the two tree-sized demons following couldn't run nearly as well as the Initiative guys because we seemed to be alone by the time we slowed to a job as we neared Giles' place. It was obviously one of those nights where nothing was going to go right, and I should know seeing as how I've had so damn many.

I rang the bell on Giles door, which swung open to a very cranky-looking Giles.

"Where the hell have you two been?" demanded an angry voice, and I looked over Giles' shoulder to see Buffy with her hands on her hips in full pissed off mode.
"Oh, just running for our lives from the Initiative soldiers, that's all," I answered as I walked by Giles and walked over to the empty couch before collapsing.

"Right, which is the polite way of sayin' back the hell off, Slayer," Spike snarked as he followed me in, throwing himself next to me on the couch. Not quite touching.

"Spike," Angel warned with just the name and a nasty tone of voice. If Angel started that whole parental unit using your name as a curse thing in front of others, I was so pulling all his hair out, submitting or no submitting. I squirmed a little as I realized how uncomfortable that made me. Okay, so I would insult his hair, I decided. Yep, if Spike could submit and then make fun of the hair, I could too. Right now Spike was suspiciously quiet.

"Damn it Angel, I told you it was a mistake leaving them out there. This is my town and my friend and my... " Buffy paused. "Okay, Spike isn't my anything, and I'd be perfectly happy if he disappeared, but the point is you can't come in here and pull this 'I know everything' crap. Things have changed." Oh wow, I looked over at Angel to see his reaction, and part of me felt like cheering on the Angel torture, while another part of me felt like defending the pack from the pack, and I was beginning to think I was on the road to turning out as nutty as Dru.
"You've made the changes perfectly clear, Buffy," Angel said calmly. Too calmly because that was a creepy sort of calm. I looked over at Spike who was sitting up with an excited expression, and oh yes, this was bad. Spike tended to get excited by things like decapitation and evisceration. I figured I’d better say something, anything, to try and defuse the situation.

"Buffy, we're fine, and besides, I'm not going to live in fear of the Initiative. Well, they won't be around much longer hopefully, so that's one reason, but I'm not some helpless sidekick who's going to hide just because there are big bad baddies out there," I pointed out without standing. My legs were still a little too wobbly for that, but at least I could breathe.

"Until we take care of the Initiative..." Buffy started with her own 'I know everything' voice, but Spike cut her off before she could finish.

"Boy's lying through his teeth, which I normally find admirable, but the Initiative only started the chase. A pair of Yinth demons trying to kill us finished it." Spike sounded pretty damn perky, like he’d enjoyed the chase as much as he liked bragging about it. Which I kind of got, actually. Feeling the hyena strength and grace as I ran was... well, it felt amazing. Still didn't change the fact
he had ratted me out and I glared my displeasure at him, displeasure which seemed roll right off him as he gave me a self-satisfied grin. Bastard.

“Yinth? What? Are you sure?” Giles broke in at that point, and there really were too many alphas in this room, I thought as I sighed and gave Spike the dirtiest look I could manage. Great, now I had Buffy AND Giles ripping into me.

"Nice one, fangless. Got anything else you plan on spilling?"

They're soddin' dangerous, and you pretending like it doesn't matter just makes you loonier than Dru." Spike snarled back before turning to the others. "He killed one in a bar fight at Willy's last night and now the wanker's kids are out to eat him." Oh yes, I could feel the heat of anger growing as I glared at Spike. Oh I was so not going to let this slide.

"Listen Deadboy Junior, I don't need you to run and tattle just because you got your panties in a bunch."

"Yeah, well if you hadn't been a complete an’ utter git the other night, this wouldn't be a problem. Are you off your rocker taking on a Yinth demon on your own? Ya
coulda been killed." Spike turned toward me with quickly
yellowing eyes.

"I took care of it on my own, so you can just mind your
own business. No one has to look after me," I snarled
back and shifted on the couch. Spike needed to learn
that I was the dangerous one; I was the demon to avoid
pissing off. And hey, calling myself a demon actually
sounds kinda cool there.

"It *is* my business if you get yourself killed, you little
ponce, and if you go pickin' fights with Yinth demons, you
obviously do need a keeper." Spike declared, and I could
hear the possessive tone in his declaration. He stood, and
I leapt to my feet ready for the attack. Oh yeah. It was
time to settle this once and for all.

"Guys, maybe we could just all calm down," Willow
suggested even as my eyes went into demon mode and
my cock went into full lust alert. I could smell Spike's
desire and it only fed my own as I slid away from the
couch so I would have more freedom of movement. The
remains of the smashed coffee table had been cleared
away, so there was plenty of room between the two
couches for me to force Spike to submit. I whined happily
at the thought of pinning Spike to the carpet and feeling
his body helpless and squirming under mine.
"Uh, Angel, Buffy, some help please?" I heard a voice say from some distance, but really I was too focused on Spike to process the meaning. Spike was in game face with that sexy leer that made me want to nail him to the nearest surface. Voices continued in the background and a little nagging voice started nagging about something, which is what nagging voices generally did, but I focused on my opponent to the exclusion of all else. Let the pack take care of whatever had Willow's voice raising an entire octave in concern.

Suddenly a blonde form darted between us, and I saw the stake come up. I lunged forward grabbing for Buffy's stake arm, but someone grabbed me from behind, sending me crashing to the floor as my feet got tangled in something. I struggled to push hands off me, but every time I got one pair of hands off me another seemed to grab me. Normally, getting grabbed by girls in random body parts would sound good, but I was growling in frustration as I tried to pull free. I could hear Spike hissing somewhere and I shoved one of the people grabbing at me away as I turned to try and reach him.

"Enough," roared a voice that left me ducking to the floor defensively before my conscious brain could even process. Okay, that would be Angel. One very pissed Angel. And damn, why was my neck throbbing again?
I looked around and Willow was sitting on the floor next to the second couch looking dazed. I was face down in the carpet for the second time now only this time Tara had her arms wrapped around my waist and was practically laying on me. Spike was pushed up against the wall, held there by Angel with one arm while Angel's other hand held Buffy's wrist where she held a stake, and oh yeah, that was her “stake first, ask questions later” face. Oh god, I had almost lost him. I should have protected him, and instead I almost got him killed. I shivered in fear at the sight of Spike moments from turning to dust in front of me, and I had never been so happy to have Angel in my pack.

I turned toward the kitchen and Giles stood with his crossbow, looking ready to shoot Angel. Of course, it didn't actually take much to make Giles reach for the crossbow when Angel was in the room, but this time he somehow looked way more ready to use it. Funny, I'd been in the room the whole time so how did I manage to miss so much?

"I thought I told you two to take care of this," Angel said wearily, and I was pretty sure I knew the two he was talking to, and it sure didn't include Buffy. Angel slowly backed away while Buffy and Spike both held their positions, glaring hotly at each other, the not good kinda
hot. Not that there *was* a good kinda hot when Buffy and Spike glarage was concerned because ew.

"Ah, Tara, you mind getting off me?" I asked in my best sheepish voice. I didn't actually feel sheepish, but I thought it was the voice most likely to get her off me.

"Are you going to g-go after Spike or Buffy?" Tara asked hesitantly, her arms still locked tight around me.

"I promise to be good," I said with my best doofus smile, the one that usually convinced teachers that asking me the answer was just a monumental waste of their time and proof that the American education system was failing. She got up slowly and then retreated to Willow's side, and oh shit. It suddenly occurred to me that I had either pushed or hit Willow, and there was just a special brand of hell for Willow hurtage.

"Willow, I'm really sorry," I said as I stood up, but she wouldn’t even look at me as she moved up to the couch and sat in Tara's arms. God, why did I have to keep fucking things up?

"Buffy, let's just sit down and talk," Angel said soothingly, his body still hovering protectively close to both Buffy and Spike even though he had let both of them go.
"And again, I'm reminding you this is my town," Buffy pointed out without lowering her stake, and Giles kept his crossbow aimed at Angel, who was remarkably calm for a vampire getting threatened by pointy bits of wood. Spike wasn't taking it as well as he snarled and showed his fangs in a more typical reaction. Wow, not feeling the love in this room.

"Buffy, please," I asked quietly.

"Xander, I am still waiting for an answer," Giles said, and this was suddenly starting to feel like one of my nightmares. The really bad ones where you go to math class to find a test and you don't remember any of the symbols on the page, and the teacher asks you something only you don't have any idea what she asked you, and then you find yourself naked. I glanced down just to double check since this *was* a Hellmouth. Yep, still with the wearing of clothes. Dirty clothes. Dirty, stinky clothes. Dirty, stinky clothes that were all I owned in the world.

"Um, what was the question?" I asked.

"What happened to your neck?" Oh shit. I shot a look over to Angel who had a stony look on his face and then back to Giles who looked ready to pull the trigger, and with their history, I didn't think it was really beyond Giles
to actually do it now that Buffy didn't seem to need Angel. And strangely this bothered me.

I slowly moved between Giles and Angel. "This isn't what it looks like," I said carefully. Yep, me standing up for Angel, not what I thought I would do when I woke up in Buffy's basement with a spider crawling on my arm. Then again, maybe the spider should have been some sort of omen because today was just not going well. Actually, I'd had better days inside the Initiative. Almost.

"It looks like one or the other of them bit you, and rather hard at that," Giles commented dryly.

"Okay, maybe this <i>is</i> what it looks like, but not for the reasons you think," I amended myself and Giles narrowed his eyes. "Look, Angel and I had a little fight. I bit him, he bit me, we decided to call a truce in the 'Angel kicked my ass and told me to stop acting like a spoiled brat' kind of way."

"Oh goddess." Well, at least that got Willow to look at me again.

"Angel, what the hell are you even thinking? I can understand that kind of stupidity out of your bleached brat... I would have staked him, but I would have understood. What the hell are you even thinking?" I
turned around and Buffy had squared off against Angel. She had dropped her stake hand to her hip and glared at Angel who only looked at her sadly.

"Hey, remember the ‘whole accepting me like I am now’ thing from the park?" I interrupted.

"I am accepting you in the not biting you kind of way, Xander. Angel, however, doesn't seem to accepting you nearly as well."

"Believe me, there was no grudge involved. This was..." I stopped because I suddenly understood why Angel was always so quiet. How the hell did I explain this one to her? "This was two demons who really needed to beat up on each other." I finished weakly. She turned to look at me with incredulous eyes. "Did that sound as pathetic to you as it did to me?" I asked with a small smile.

"Yep," she answered.

"Look, I'm not holding a grudge for the biting, Angel's not holding a grudge for the four years of me being a jerk, and maybe we can all just put the weapons down. We have a boyfriend to get out of the Initiative." I turned back to smile at Giles when my brain finally processed what I'd just said. I turned back to Buffy quickly. "Your boyfriend, not my boyfriend, not that I would have a
problem with having a boyfriend because hey, big supporter of the whole gay experience here. Not that I've had one. Gay experience, I mean." Buffy started smiling, and I heard Willow's little snuff of laugher behind me, the type of noise she made when she was trying to be polite and not laugh at me to my face, which was one of the reasons I loved her because I knew full well sometimes I deserved to be laughed at.

"Yes, well if Xander is through NOT outing himself, we do have plans to make." I turned around and Giles had lowered the crossbow, even though he still had a tight grip on it. "So, did you make contact with the Tarhul demons, or was your mission a complete failure?" Giles asked Angel so calmly that a person who didn't know better would think that Giles was actually calm. Yep, back to normal with my screwed-up little pack.

"They're willing to help. We just have to get the charges." Angel looked at me and I gave a quick thumbs up as I headed back for the couch.

"No problemo. Military security sucks. I stole from them even before the hyena."

"You know, Oz thought you were pretty cool for that," Willow added from the couch as an olive branch, probably for laughing at me.
"Right, so now we need an actual plan to go with the explosions.” And that was our Giles, all business now that he had a normal non relationshipspy problem to solve. When he became a watcher, I wonder if he knew he was going to be adopting such a weird group of people. I have to think that as much as he tried to protect us and as much as he loved us in his own uptight, repressed English way, he would have run the other way screaming if he'd had any clue at all. “Girls, I assume the coven can handle calling up the water levels?"

"No problemo," Willow echoed my words and gave me a small smile. "Floods, fire, killer winds, easy stuff." I was starting to think Spike was right about Willow having a little too much love of dark and chaotic, but I pushed that thought aside as we sat down as one dysfunctional family to plan the destruction of the Initiative and their dimension/space portal thingy.

Part Fifteen
Okay, the invasion scene is always supposed to be the big exciting part of the movie with bad guys leaping out from behind closed doors and gun fights and huge battles. So, the question of the day, or night rather, was why was I bored stupid? Ironically enough, it was turning out to be the most boring night in a long time. Well, since before the whole Initiative thing started, and truthfully it felt like *years* since all this crap had started.

Follow Angel, bump hips with Spike who kept walking entirely too close, follow Angel, open a sealed security glass wall for a demon Angel calls safe, follow Angel, briefly run a finger down the soft skin inside of Spike's arm making him shiver, follow Angel, ignore the cool hand sliding across my back up under my shirt, follow Angel. Seeing a pattern?

Okay, it wasn't entirely boring, but still. Soldiers gone, emergency lights only dimly illuminating the passages, various demon cries echoing off the concrete. I mean, please. Anyone who watches alien invasion movies knows that something bad has to happen in a setting like this, and yet nothing... nothing... and yes, more nothing. Well, unless you count Spike leaning back against the white concrete wall and slipping a hand down the front of his black jeans with a lascivious grin and yellowed eyes.
"William," Angel hissed as he passed a row of glass-fronted cages containing some pretty big and nasty-looking things. Black skinned snaky things with heads that look like emaciated babies, and just ew. Yeah, not opening those cages.

"Wot?" Spike demanded in his 'righteously indignant' voice. Angel just sighed deeply rather than point out the behavior that was annoying him. Okay, maybe "annoy" was the wrong word since Angel was throwing off nearly as many pheromones as Spike, and Spike was smelling lusty enough that the scent of horny Spike actually overpowered the Gin'tauk demon stench from one unit over.

I walked by him and casually brushed my hip against his groin which stuck out conveniently as he leaned his shoulders against the wall. I shot him a dark look, and he just ran that tongue along the inside of his lower lip creating a ripple effect. And that smell would be my pheromones.

"I told you two to settle this before we came here," Angel said between clenched teeth, sounding just like my father complaining because I hadn't used the bathroom before we got in the car for the annual visit to the in-laws and my stupid, stinky cousin Rigby-Pigby. The idea of
Angel making parental noises because I hadn't actually gotten around to the sex what with all the stealing of explosives and planning the destruction of a military base? Oh, that was funny. So funny I started giggling, or chortling rather because as a man I do not giggle.

"Boy's barking mad," Spike complained as he pushed off from the wall and started down the hallway after Angel, but that sexy leer out the side of his eye suggested that he wasn't minding at all.

"Oh come on, he's getting after us for not having sex, tell me that isn't funny," I protested, and Angel seemed to be walking even faster.

"In my day, he used ta get on me for all sorts of things: leaving bodies laying around the house, forgettin' to unchain Dru, letting blood dry on the whips. Can't remember he ever complained about me not gettin' off, though." And now Angel was definitely walking faster, not sparing more than a glance for the demons in each sealed cell we passed. Angel unlocked a few of the doors with a small fetish of the goddess Culsu. Willow had spelled it to open doors since Culsu was the goddess of gates or locks or something. I giggled... or manly-chortled rather when I thought that the small statue of the goddess was a fetish.
"Having fun with your fetish up there?" I called cheerfully as I chased after the two vampire members of my pack.

"He always enjoyed a good fetish, he did, but usually it was somethin' with more leather," Spike replied with a grin over his shoulder as I hurried down the dim halls. I had to hurry with Angel moving so fast that he wasn't even taking time to stop and explain to the few demons he released where the exits were. I got hung up with a mother and daughter with big floppy ears who were obviously too scared to figure out they could track our scent backwards to the Tarhul tunnel. Once I explained that, they took off down the hall at top speed.

"You're welcome," I yelled after them before chasing after Spike and Angel. I was about to launch into a snark on the itsy-bitsy size of Angel's current fetish when both vamps froze. I instantly went into a half crouch with one hand on the floor and the other resting on the wall, my vision clicking over into demon-sepia. I couldn't pick up any vibrations, and I couldn't hear anything, and I couldn't really smell anything under the cloud of demon pheromones in the hallway, but Spike and Angel exchanged wary glances that made the hairs stand up on my arms.
Oh yeah, this would be when some brain-sucking demon from outer space jumped out from some dimly lit hallway, and I so should not have let my guard down on the Hellmouth.

"You smell that?" Angel asked warily

"Yeah, mate, I do." I moved forward slowly despite the fact that part of my brain was screaming things like 'run' and 'flee' and 'please don't eat me.'

"I'll take care of this," Angel said with a strain in his voice that revealed his strong emotion despite the calm tone of voice.

"I don't bloody think so, this one's mine." Spike said as he stepped forward. I took the last few steps to close the distance and reach Spike's side, but Angel's hand stopped Spike so I had to awkwardly stop mid step. That left me pressed right up against Spike, and I really needed to keep my mind on killing because Spike's ass was awfully distracting.

"William, you can't kill him," Angel said firmly, and I was now officially confused. And oh god I was not smelling what I thought I smelled because life was just not this cruel, or it was, but I'd earned a break.
"Why the hell didn't the soldiers take him when they retreated?" I demanded.

"Maybe they like the clod as much as we do," Spike answered with a snort.

"No, no, no, no, no. It is not in my contract to save Riley Finn. The plan is very clear: we blow things up, Buffy saves Riley when the soldiers haul his sorry ass up to the exit."

"Obviously the plan has changed."

"Well I'm not responsible for other people changing the plan. We had a plan, it was a good plan, and I say we stick with it, people." Spike looked at me like I had morphed into Drusilla and I’m almost sure that was an amused expression on Angel's face.

"Right, I'll go get soldier boy," Spike said as he snatched the fetish from Angel and started down the hall.

"And I'll just go with to go with," I answered as I suddenly realized that Spike's new setting on the chip would be rather obvious if I didn't keep his fangs out of Riley's neck. I didn't have to go far before we found the cell with Riley leaning against the wall and standing as close to the glass as he could without getting an electrical jolt to the head. I'd had lots of those; they hurt.
"Xander?" Riley asked with his hopeful tone, totally ignoring Spike.

"That would be a yes," I said as Spike ran the fetish over the door lock. Fetish. I clamped down on another urge to laugh.

"There's an emergency, we have to get out of here," Riley said the minute the glass door opened. He took off down the hall in the direction of the emergency stairs that led to the surface and the rest of his military buddies. I was so tempted to just let him go, but then Buffy would get all huffy if I let the idiot get himself killed.

"Riley!" I called out.

"We need to evacuate, now." Riley must have seen either the look on my face, or Spike’s 'I know something you don't know' smirk because he stopped in the middle of the corridor just as Angel came up behind us. "What's going on?"

"Um, this would be your rescue?"

"Oi, not down here to bloody rescue him; I'm here to blow things up." And right on schedule there was the Angel sigh as a large hand reached between Spike and me to take the little magical statue.
"Blow things..." Riley's voice just trailed off into shocked silence. He took a deep breath. "This is government property. This project is vital to ensuring— " Riley probably would have continued only Angel interrupted as he continued his way down the corridor checking various cages.

"The only thing this project ensures is that you condemn this entire world," he said in that deep implacable, borderline pissed-off voice of his.

"How would you— "

"And your use of an interdimensional portal to raid other worlds and retrieve demons is outrageous," Angel continued. Riley shot me an angry and shocked look, and I just gazed back blankly.

"Don't look at me, I have no idea what he's talking about, but I have to say that I'm siding with Angel, and don't ever ask me to repeat that out loud because I won't do it." Spike gave a short bark of laughter.

"We bloody had this discussion back in L.A. Pep'tuil demons won't go through a portal on their own. Soldier boys are havin' numbered missions. Any of this ringing any bells?" Spike looked at me with his head cocked to the side.
"Um, no?"

"You were too bloody busy feelin' yourself up to pay attention I suppose," Spike accused me with an eyeroll.

"Hey!" I complained, but Riley had started in again, following Angel as the vampire stoically continued his inspection of the cells although he wasn't finding anything he wanted to let go in this part of the Initiative.

"You have no right to interfere with a government operation. We are on a fact-finding mission that may one day save this world."

"You're weakening the interdimensional membrane by opening a portal in the same spot over and over, and I do not even want to know who taught you how to do that because my patience with human stupidity has limits." Angel stopped to stare Riley down, and I could feel the alpha male vibes reverberating off the walls.

"Weakening as in they'll never be able to open another portal?" I said hopefully because that sounded bad even to me. Spike gave a good loud snort this time.

"Bloody hell, at Caritas we talked about the fact that the soddin' idiots were going to tear open a permanent portal and then anything could come waltzin' in here without any trouble at all. Soldier boys are about to
succeed in creating an open Hellmouth where even the Master failed."

"Where was I during this discussion?" I asked, totally confused now. I mean, yeah, we were coming in to blow the portal up, and woo hoo for explosions because I really kinda liked blowing things up, but I had somehow missed the whole world in danger discussion, and that wasn't normal, even for me.

"Spike was right; you were busy feeling your own ass," Angel offered in a very un-Angel-like comment.

"And again, I say 'hey!' I was injured and trying to figure out the extent of the damage," I protested when I realized that I *had* sort of tuned them out there for a while when Angel had first come to the club. "Besides, you had the whole vampire-a-vampire thing going on as opposed to the mano-a-mano thing and since I'm not a vampire, I just sort of tuned you out."

"Vampire?" Riley asked, and to his credit, he did drop back into a defensive stance.

"Yeah, that'll help," I said sarcastically as I walked between Riley and Angel on my way to inspect the rest of the cages. "Angel, Riley. Riley, Angel," I called over my shoulder as my way of introducing them. Okay, furry
looking thing with big teeth. I'm guessing that's a no. Blue shimmery wispy critter. Oh, who was I kidding, I had no idea whether that was dangerous or not. Luckily Spike was right behind me while Angel and Riley just stood glaring at each other.

"Knowin' those two, they may be a while," Spike said as he opened his hand to show me the statue.

"Nice fetish," I said as I stepped sideways into Spike, pushing my shoulder against his in a deliberate body bump.

"Pet, you have no idea." Spike smiled lazily, and caught his lower lip between his teeth, and oh god, I think I broke my cock. Spike's smile widened, and I suspected that he had smelled my burst of pheromones because I sure could. He leaned in a little closer. "I am going to lay you stomach first over a tombstone and drive into you until you offer me your neck," Spike whispered hoarsely. His blue eyes glittered wickedly.

"I don't even think so," I whispered back. "I think I'm going to chase you down and sink my teeth into your shoulder until you beg me to fuck you." And where the hell did that come from, with the husky voice and everything? If my time with Anya had taught me nothing else, it had taught me that I could not talk dirty even with
her coaching me. Between the blushing and the giggling I’d been sort of hopeless at it. But judging by the way Spike moaned just a little and bit that lip again, it seemed I’d found my dirty-talkin’ groove after all.

"We'll see, pet," Spike said with an even wider smile and he reached up to stroke my cheek. I caught his hand and brought it up to my mouth and then ran my tongue from his wrist to the end of his thumb, nipping at the end, my eyes never leaving his. Spike's lust became so thick that I could almost see as well as smell it as his eyes flashed yellow. I just gave him my best teasing grin and then swaggered down the hallway.

"Just check the cells," Angel yelled in an aggravated tone, and I smiled as I walked away, certain that Spike was in even more pain than I was. We either needed to settle this or we both needed to buy bigger jeans. I could hear Spike unlock a cell behind me, and I dutifully continued to the end of the hall and then leaned against the wall. I watched Spike stalked toward me with every muscle yelling predator in the oh so sexy way he has of moving like flowing water. His eyes darted to each cell, but between each sweeping glance, he would lock that intense gaze on me and I just smiled. Behind him, Angel and Riley had retreated to opposite sides of the corridor where they still glared at each other.
"Do you ever wonder about Buffy's taste in men?" I asked when Spike reached me at the end. He turned around and looked.

"Oi, she can have 'em both. I have what I want." Spike reached out and ran a finger down my zipper, and I had to admit that Angel was right that we really should have taken care of this earlier. Stupid vampire. I hated it when he was right.

"Right. Let's finish this so we can move on to part two of tonight's performance," I suggested with a small growl in my voice.

"Bloody hell, yes." Spike said fervently. He turned away and quickly walked back toward the others. For a second I just had to admire the view, but yeah, we had to get finished. Get innocent demons out, blow up portal room, cast counter spells, fuck Spike. Well actually, the girls would be doing the spells, but the fucking Spike part was going to be all me, and that was motivation enough to get me moving.

"So, first thing's first. Where's my duster?" Spike demanded as he walked right up to Riley and planted himself in front of the soldier. I could see the difference already. When the chip had been at full charge, Spike had been tentative, careful not to get too pushy but instead
sort of snipe at the edges. Now he was back, demanding his due, and even if he would get a headache, I had no doubt he could kill. Hopefully the headache would convince him to just not do it too much.

"Spike, we do not have time for this." And there was Angel with his world-famous sighing again.

"If it was your bloody hair gel missin' we'd make time, and I want that coat back," Spike snarked. He had a point: the duster was damn sexy. I had a sudden mental image of him wearing that coat and nothing under it-nope, not going there. Not now, anyway. My jeans were definitely too tight.

"William." And that sounded like Angel's cranky voice.

"Uh, maybe Riley and I could go get the coat since I kinda don't trust you three together in a room," I suggested, and Angel gave me a hurt look.

"It's not a vampire thing; it's an ex-boyfriend thing," I pointed out before he could go all broody about being untrustworthy. Wait... maybe I should have kept that little bit to myself.

"Wait, Angel as in Buffy's ex Angel? He's a vampire?" Riley demanded angrily, and yep, there was Angel's flinch right on time. I shot Spike a look of “help me out here”
desperation, and Spike started pushing his sire away and back toward the portal room.

"Right, we'll just be blowin' things up like manly men, and you lot trot off and fetch my coat." Spike actually made a little shooing gesture with his hands, but fortunately it went unnoticed with the two alpha-male-Buffy-boyfriends upping the glareage-level at each other.

"Spike." For a change it was me using his name as a warning. He gave me a wicked smile before the two of them turned away and walked toward the control room.

"Xander, what the hell is going on?"

"Oh, wow, there's a lot to cover. Buffy dated a vampire, I'm currently dating a vampire, and a coven of witches made the water rise, but now they pushed it back down so we can evacuate the non-hostile hostiles." I tried for a cheerful grin.

"But... Xander, you're in way over your head."

"Probably, but we need to go get the coat. Spike gets a little weird about the duster. So, where would it be?"

"Spike is manipulating you," he argued without moving. I allowed my demon's eyes to shine in the darkness, and dropped the grin.
"He isn't manipulating anyone, Riely. I am what I am and while I'll have this argument with Buffy and Giles and Willow seeing as how they've known me long enough to give me crap, I won't have it with you. We need to get the duster and get back out through the tunnels before Angel and Spike blow this place to little itty bitty smithereens." I stepped closer, and Riley held his ground and met my gaze evenly. I'll give him credit for having balls.

"I won't let them blow this place up."

"You don't have a choice. Besides, ironically enough, those two demons are trying to save this dimension, and all your good intentions have done is put everyone on this planet at risk. So suck it up, soldier, realize that you fucked up, and move on."

"Our scientists would have—"

I cut him off angrily. "Known exactly zippidy doodah about magic, so let's just stop arguing. Look, I know you're not going to believe me or those two, but let's just get the damn coat and then go talk to Buffy and Giles. I assume you'll believe them at least?" I saw Riley falter at last, his eyes darting to the hallway where Spike and Angel had disappeared.
"If they were the bad guys, they would have just eaten you," I pointed out.

"Hostile 17 is chipped," Riley dismissed my words with a small shrug.

"Yeah, well, his sire isn't, and there's no rule that says Angel couldn't tear your throat out and let Spike drink the dripping blood. But Angel didn't do that because as much as it hurts me to admit this, he’s one of the good guys.” I let that sink in a minute. “So, coat?"

"Personal artifacts are on level two," Riley said in a distracted tone of voice.

"Goody. Now, where's level two?"

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**Part Sixteen**

"Riley!" Buffy screeched loud enough to make me flinch. I brushed the dirt out of my hair from where I'd managed to scrape the top of my head on the Tarhul tunnel as we crawled from the Initiative into the cave. I rolled my eyes
as they embraced, and shot a look over at Spike who now wore his precious duster, his hands shoved into the pockets as he leaned against the cave wall. Yep, I knew which sight I preferred. I muttered a curse as I stubbed my toe on the box of my own rescued property. I mean, I couldn't let Angel blow up my set of Babylon Five collectibles any more than I'd let him blow up Spike's coat.

"Enemy," the bumpy, greasy looking thing in the cave snapped with this hissing voice before clicking some wicked long teeth.

"Yeah, but not the kind ya get to eat," Spike said, and the Tarhul tipped his head to look at Spike with a swirling green eye.

"Some members of the clan you just keep as far away as possible," Angel added. "But he's Buffy's choice, so you will leave him alone." The Tarhul clicked his teeth several times and I'll be damned if I knew whether that was a promise or a threat or an invitation to shag. Spike and Angel didn't seem upset by it, so I just returned to Spike leering, ignoring Riley as much as I could.

"What is going on? Your ex is a vampire? Spike and Xander are officially dating? What is- "
"Spike and Xander are what?" Willow gasped as she came into the cave, Tara close behind with three other women I didn't know. Damn, people who hang pictures of witches with long noses and ugly warts had clearly never seen this coven. Woof.

"Xander?" Buffy turned to me, and where I expected anger, resentment, and another round of bash the Zeppo, she actually looked a little amused. "After years of torturing me about how I had no right to love a vampire, *you're* going out with *Spike*? Oh, you will be tortured for this. I see long nights of bad foreign films and Xander torture in your future." Buffy gave me a small smile. The smile didn't quite reach her eyes, but I at least gave her credit for trying to do the supportive thing.

"Oh goddess, you're gay? And dating Spike?" Willow just sounded out of breath. "And when were you planning on telling us, mister?"

"I didn't think they were being particularly subtle, and if you'll excuse me, I don't think I want to be around for their coming out celebration," Angel announced as he started walking toward the mouth of the cave.

"There's going to be a party?" Willow asked brightly, bless her naïve little heart.
"Bloody right there is, and you're more than welcome to join in," Spike said with a grin and a wink in my direction.

"Oh, no. There will be no joining in on the party unless you're planning on having me cut off your party favors," I said right back to Spike with a glare.

"Oh," Willow breathed softly. "Hey. Um, maybe we'll just, you know, make some nice housewarming gifts for you instead."

"And I'm not sure L.A. is far enough away," Angel threw over his shoulder as he walked out of the cave, the Tarhul following close behind still making those clicking sounds with those four scary big front teeth.

"Riley, I need to..." Buffy stopped. "I just have to talk to him," she finished with her best charming look at Riley, and he froze as she pulled away to run after Angel. Yeah, there's a healthy relationship. I actually felt myself sympathizing with Riley. The man had rejected his own pack to side with us, and now the woman he wanted as mate went running after someone else. Ouch. Buffy was not making points with the boyfriend.

"Yeah, well, I think my boy and I have a thing or two to talk about ourselves. Soldier boys taken care of?" Spike asked the girls.
"The coven cast a confusion spell. Th-they won't bother you." I looked over and Tara was looking shyly up from under her lashes, but then she gave me a very definite wink. I gave a short laugh that turned into a hyena cackle, and everyone turned to look at me with wide eyes.

"Um, excuse me?" I said as I cleared my throat with a couple of fake coughs. Right, no growling around people and no laughing around people, either. I stopped as I considered that logic. Oh hell, it's not like they didn't already know I was strange, I might as well give them the full show. I walked slowly toward the mouth of the cave, looking back over my shoulder at Spike. Making sure that his eyes were focused on just me, I gave a deep rumbling growl of invitation. The whine that came out at the end was a complete accident, but then considering how much I wanted him and how long I'd had to wait, a little whining seemed in order.

And then it was as if everyone else in the cave just fell away. All I could see were the eyes that had flashed yellow the minute I growled, and all I could hear was Spike’s soft answering growl. We stood frozen in that stare and then I saw Spike's hand twitch, and I turned and bolted.
The night air slapped against the bare skin of my face and arms and I used every bit of my demon strength to get us far enough away from the gang to finish this in private, because one more interruption and I was going to reconsider my 'avoid killing' policy. Graveyard. It was close, and was as good as anywhere, especially since I wanted to stop running before I totally ran out of breath and energy. I was going to need plenty of both to get my way with him.

I grabbed the iron fence and vaulted to the top of the short four-foot barrier before leaping over the bushes and back down to the soft earth on the far side. I could hear Spike's boots pounding over the concrete sidewalk, and I ran to a tree where I tore off a low hanging limb.

Planting my feet, I stopped and waited, breathing in the night blooming jasmine and my own musky lust and the scent of freshly turned dirt and the faint perfume of roses wilting on tombstone bouquets. Wait, fresh dirt? Oh, god help the fledgling that even considered it because I wanted this thing with Spike settled. One of us had to submit before we killed each other and everyone else ended up as collateral damage.

Spike came sailing into the graveyard, clearing the fence and bushes with a single fluid movement that was half
leap and half vault with one hand on the top cross rail. His coat flew out behind him, and he landed with a dull thud before starting toward me with his shoulders rolling in that fluid gate that’s peculiar to an excited Spike. He looked like sex on legs.

I dropped into a crouch and held the branch in front of me as I continued to breathe heavily, the scent of Spike's lust now competing with my own.

"Oi, no fair goin' for the wood, pet," Spike complained with an aggravated glance at the branch in my hand. I glanced down, and he sprang. Of course, I had expected him to spring, so I threw myself to the side and used the branch like a bat at his exposed side. It hit with a solid thump, pulling an <i>umph</i> noise from Spike before he grabbed the far end of the branch.

We stood there under the half moon, each holding one end of the branch and slowly circling. I watched the pattern of his feet, judging when he would have the least balance, the least control. When he took another step, I rammed the branch forward, forcing him to push it to one side, away from his body.

He took two stumbling steps back to catch his balance, and I dropped my end of the branch, lunging forward and striking out at his knee. Take out the knees and the prey
is helpless. If Spike had tried to stay upright, my kick would have broken his leg. Instead, he allowed himself to go down onto his back in the dew-damp grass and I threw myself down on top, the sight of him nearly sending me blind with need.

Unfortunately, he was as ready for me now as I had been for him earlier. He pulled his legs up with the knees bent and put both boots deep into my stomach, forcing the air out and neatly tossing me to one side. I landed on my arm and instantly sprang up into a defensive crouch. Spike had done the same and now we mirrored each other again.

Spike growled as he moved stealthily with one hand touching the ground as he slid to the side. I returned his growl with one of my own as I settled my knees to the ground and pivoted to keep myself facing Spike. He circled several times while I regained my breath and considered the land for any possible advantage. The trees with their thick branches seemed the best bet, but I didn't dare turn my back long enough to snap a branch and Spike had thrown my weapon from earlier over the fence and all the way out to the street.

Without warning, Spike dashed forward, and I braced myself with my feet and knees in the ground as my hands
reached for his shoulders and his reached for mine. His legs were spread wide to try and get leverage as he twisted at my arms to get me to flip. My own legs started sliding in the grass, and I widened my stance as I struggled to keep upright. His attack left us face to face, and I gazed into those yellow eyes and the snarling mouth and I wanted nothing more than to kiss it until those eyes closed in pleasure, but I had to earn that right.

Spike must have felt me slipping because he fist my shirt in one hand and slid his hand farther down toward my armpit on the other and pushed even harder. Now it took everything I had not to be flipped.

I felt Spike's hands dig into my arms, my borrowed shirt tightening up under my armpit and pressing into my skin as Spike pulled the fabric. And I felt an irresistible urge to straddle that body and hold it down until it turned pliant under my hands. I realized I couldn't hold out forever, my own need for oxygen was proving to be a real disadvantage. So, I didn't just let myself roll, I actively pushed into Spike's grip rolling both of us and then I kept right on rolling until I got back to my original crouch and could retreat several steps as Spike bounced back up onto his feet.
"Bloody obstinate bugger," Spike snarled at me. “I'm going to pin you to the ground and bloody well make you submit," he said, and yes, this would be the verbal portion of tonight's program.

"Not likely. You're doing the submitting here tonight. I'm going to pin you to the ground until you beg me to fuck you," I returned as I launched myself at his legs, lifting his body and slamming him into the tree right behind him. He made a heavy gasping sound that told me I'd gotten in a good hit. I felt Spike's hands grab at the back of my neck and I started pulling back, but my foot caught on something and I stumbled to one knee. Before I could recover, I felt Spike's weight land on my back, an arm bending around my neck tightly.

And yes, that was that chocolate-craving urge to submit creeping up my backbone, and dammit, I was not going down that easy. Spike lay on my back as I knelt on hands and knees. I could feel his strong thighs closing on either side of my hips, and I had to suppress a shiver at the thought of which of Spike's body parts was now pressed up against my backside.

As I struggled to push myself up, Spike's arm tightened around my throat so that I struggled to pull air into my lungs. I didn't have much chance of pulling his arm away
before I either passed out from lack of oxygen or lost to my urge to submit, so I let myself collapse onto the grass. Of course I hadn't stopped to consider that falling with Spike's arm around my neck might be of the bad. As I hit the ground, his arm was forced up into my neck, and I started coughing as tears prickled my eyes.

Where I had intended to try and fake submission and slip out of Spike's grip, instead I found myself completely freed as Spike let me go and flipped me over onto my back. Made it easier to see Spike's near-panicked expression on his now very human features.

"Bloody stupid..." Spike seemed to run out of words, which, hey, was actually something I'd never seen before, but right now I had other concerns. I let the tears run as I continued the coughing and choking long after the flash of pain in my neck had passed, and now Spike, who still straddled my legs, pulled me up to a sitting position. I leaned forward more as though trying to catch my breath, and I brought my hand up to rub at my neck, and Spike scooted back so that he straddled my ankles as I supposedly tried to get my breath back.

Spike's hands rested on my thighs, and I moved one hand restlessly as though still struggling with the pain while my left hand stayed near my neck. When my wandering
hand came close to Spike's left hand, I snatched his thumb and gave it a brutal twist outward. Spike lunged to the side to try and free his hand, meaning he lunged right off me. As I struggled to my knees, I grabbed that captured thumb with both hands and twisted even harder.

Spike now stumbled to the side, clearly off balance and I half stood, dragging his hand upwards and pushing Spike onto his back. The game face crunched back into place, but I let all of my weight fall into his stomach using just one knee, and now that ridged face registered pain. I felt a brief flash of guilt, but shoved it aside- I just had to get him to submit and then I could spend the rest of my life making sure nothing ever hurt him again.

Spike flailed up with his free hand and grabbed a fistful of my hair to pull me down to him, his teeth gleaming even in the dim moonlight. I let him pull my head closer, but I planted my thumb under his jaw in a very special little spot Oz had once shown me. Spike shook his head to get free of my grip, but he also couldn't bite that way, so I just waited until he stopped and tried to bite me again. He struggled, but I had him trapped at three points- a knee in his stomach, one hand pinned over his head, and his jaw immobilized with that werewolf/Vulcan pressure point thingy. He didn't have a chance. I pressed the spot
a little harder, and now Spike was hissing mad. I smiled into his eyes, saying nothing.

Spike let go of my hair and scrabbled at my hand on his jaw, managing to force it away as he strained upwards, snarling. For all his vampiric strength, though, I still had the advantage of position and it was time to end this. With a growl, I reached over like I was going to press into his jaw again, and when he flinched, pulling his head to the side, I struck.

My teeth dug into the side of his neck, in low near the shoulder. I could feel his entire body shiver at the strike, and his muscles tensed as he tried to throw me. His hands became claws tearing at me, and I blindly reached for his arms, struggling before I could get his wrists captured, struggling even more to pin those strong hands to the ground. I lay my weight on him, and he bucked up, squirming and cursing as I continued to dig my teeth into that powerful neck muscle, tasting the tang of vampire blood in my mouth and sucking at the wound.

Spike tried to roll, but I used my knees to brace us and just bit down harder. Spike's struggles weakened, but I just hung on like one of those remora fish that dangles on the underside of a shark because if I got this wrong,
Spike was going to be on me before I could recover from another mistake.

Sure enough, Spike started another set of struggles, weaker this time, but the cursing got more interesting. I didn't even have time to listen to his complaints; the need to take and have and own tangled in my brain until I couldn't think of anything but feeling him submit. The struggles grew weaker again, and then I felt it. Spike's head tilted farther and his whole body went limp, and I felt this intense... pride seemed a strange word, but it was like I was so damn proud of how beautiful and how strong and resilient and loyal he was because he was mine. And now I could smell the sharply sweet scent of submission and I gave a low deep and very, very happy growl.

I whined and licked the wound I had just made and I could feel Spike trembling under me. When I pulled back, he lay on the ground looking at the stars above, but I wanted those eyes on me.

"Mine," I snarled and those brilliant blue eyes snapped to me, but the demon wasn't at the front, and something wasn't smelling right. I sat up so that I could feel his hardness under my butt. "You're mine," I repeated. Didn't really have the brain cells for much more because I
was fighting every instinct I had that just wanted to strip him naked and take him, drive into him, claim him. I thought the magnified chocolate craving of submission was bad, but this craving was like... it was like something way, way, way, way more crave-worthy than chocolate. This was Spike-craving,<i>mate</i> craving, and I struggled against that instinct as I smelled the first wisps of fear.

"Bloody hell, get on with it then," he snarled, and no, this wasn't right.

"Mine," I repeated. Yeah, I may have mentioned the lack of speak-capable thought.

"For how long then, mate? How long til you get tired of me?" Spike still lay compliant but now I suddenly understood his need to not be the one submitting. I shook my head as I tried to focus on Spike's problem ahead of my own overwhelming urge to mate. I leaned down and licked the bite as he shivered.

"Forever." I whispered. "If you run, I'll track you to the ends of the earth. You're my pack. But you're more, you're pack mate. My mate. You're mine." I sucked at the wound, getting the taste of vampire blood again as he bucked up, the lust once more drifting off him in waves.
"I stuck by Buffy even when she used me." I sucked harder, and Spike started panting in little needy shallow breaths. "I stuck by Willow and Giles." I went back to small licks. "I'll never give up on you." He gave a shuddering sigh.

"I'm bloody love's bitch. Can't give my loyalty by halves." He looked over at me and I could see the lust and the fear and the hope.

"Me too. But not so much with calling myself a bitch, which is funny because I think I technically am part bitch. Or don't they call female hyenas bitches?" I gave Spike a smile and he rolled his eyes.

"Loon."

"Nope, hyena. And you're pack and you’re mine and I'll never let you go," I said as I started working the buttons of his shirt, moving down his chest and reverently kissing the skin I was exposing. He opened his arms and I pushed his shirt open revealing the perfection that was Spike. I whined in half pleasure, half frustration as I indulged myself by taking his nipple in my mouth and nipping sharply before sucking on the offended flesh. Spike responded with a new burst of pheromones and an involuntary rippling of stomach muscles.
I moved down, nipping the skin just above his belly button as he lay there, spread out like a feast and I was a starving man who damn well needed to eat. I flipped the button on his jeans and slid the zipper down revealing the most beautiful cock in the world, and I gently kissed the head. I started pulling his jeans down, not bothering with the boots but instead letting the jeans hobble him because if I had to wait much longer it was not going to be pretty.

I reached down and unbuttoned my own jeans far faster; in fact, it might have been qualified as ripping them off as I toed out of my sneakers. The release of pressure as I finally got my fly open returned some control and I crawled back up Spike's body.

He was fumbling in one of the duster’s pockets, finally producing a small bottle. "Want?" he asked with a knowing grin as he held it up, and thank god one of us thought to be prepared. I snatched the bottle as I bent over and nipped at his pale neck again, causing another shiver.

"Over," I hoarsely ordered, my voice breaking at the end just like my control was about to. He gave me a small leer and started rolling, shrugging out of his coat and shirt at the same time. His back was a smooth expanse of skin
that I wanted to touch and taste and feel moving under me, and I opened the lube quickly, slicking one finger and working it into him as he obediently spread his legs as far as he could. Funny what you can learn on the internet.

I reached inside and felt for that celebrated spot, and yep, I knew just when I found it. Spike threw his head back and arched his back with a hoarse growl, and I pressed again as the little needy sighs from earlier became gasps that imitated life. I could see Spike's legs struggle to open farther, the muscles in his hips and butt surging helplessly against the denim around his calves. When his head dropped back down, he turned it to the side. Now I could see the passion and lust and need in his face.

I pressed the spot again, stroking it more firmly, and when Spike squirmed and pressed back into the touch, I pulled out before pushing in again with two fingers. With my free hand I opened the lube and slicked myself, stroking my cock in the same teasingly slow rhythm I was using to torture Spike. I moaned as he bit his lip, clenching around my fingers and arching his back.

"Not Angelus or Dru. Won't ever leave you. Like you. Liked you back when you were evil. Well, not liked as much as lusted after." I panted as I felt my own need, but
I'd make him see that he was important enough to make me control my demon. Oh shit, I hoped I could control the demon because that new burst of lust and desire was about to override any control I might have once had. Gasping, I found the words.

"Strong mate. Survivor. Sexy as hell. If you'd just shown up at the school naked, Buffy would have stood and stared in awe as you killed her. You took care of Dru. Loyal... to pack..." Oh yeah, losing it. Need. Burning need.

"Bloody hell, just fuck me."

"Don't want you to think..." I struggled to catch the tail of my escaping thoughts. What didn't I want him to think?

"Fucking hell. Got it, feeling wanted already, just bloody get on with it." At the challenging tone, I growled and threw myself over Spike's back, snarling and biting at the wound again as his body bucked under me. I pulled back and slammed into his body, growling at the friction and the tightness. I pulled out and thrust in hard again and again.

"Bloody hell yes, fuck me. Fuck me already." I did just that, pounding in so hard that he was forced down to his elbows, his head resting on the ground as I grabbed his hips and held him still. I growled at the scent of
submission and lust and musk as my cock throbbed with need. My whole world focused in on slamming into that tight embrace and the scent of desire and the muttered chorus of "yeah" and "fuck me" and "bloody hell, pet," that came from below as I allowed my demon instincts to guide me. I arched so far back that I almost pulled out and then slammed in so hard that I could hear the slap of flesh as my hips hit his ass.

"Fuck, yeah. Harder." I pulled back again and pounded in as hard as I could over and over until the need to come overrode the need to dominate and it started, the orgasm robbing me of all human thought as I growled and dropped my body onto Spike's back and bit his nape even as he cried out his own release. The air filled with the heavy thick scent of come as I gave several more small thrusts.

Spike slumped to the ground with a soft growl that sounded suspiciously purr-like. I just allowed my own body to drape over his, my burning lust dissolving under completion and being replaced with a more subtle if still powerful lust. A lust for what was mine. My mate. My pack. Yeah, gotta find new words for those.

I resolved to look in a thesaurus later because right now I just wanted to curl up with the mate. Sunrise was hours
away, so we could avoid Joyce's basement for a bit longer. Certainly no demons were going to come near with the mingled scent of primal and vampire arousal so thick in the air. I wondered if Angel could smell us on the highway as he drove back to L.A.

I slowly rolled to my side and pulled Spike with me so that he was tucked in against my chest, my sweaty skin sticking to his cool back. I curled both arms around his body and held him close.

"Are you okay?" I before slowly licking his neck and shoulder. Yeah, made a bit of a bloody mess there, and that would be my guilt showing up right on schedule.

"Yeah, pet. Perfect now." Silence fell between us at last, and I was happy to just enjoy the moment of relative peace, listening to the cars on the other side of the bushes and a cat prowling through the grass and a fledge on the other side of the cemetery crawling out of a grave. Right, need to come back tomorrow and patrol.

"So, how long were you willin' to wait?" Spike finally asked.

"Huh?"

"You wouldn't take what was yours. Waited for me to ask for it instead. How long would ya have waited, pet?"
"Forever," I whispered, moving up to lick his ear. "I'm just thanking god we finally had a night to ourselves. Between the stealing and the planning and the you negotiating with demons along with Broody McHair-gel, I was really starting to think I was going to explode."

"Well, except for Peaches over there on the mausoleum," he answered so casually that for a moment the words didn't register. When they did, I snapped around and looked at the shadowy building where he'd gestured. All I could see was the angel statue with her wings spread over the stone vault.

"Tell me you're joking," I demanded as I turned back to look at Spike. He sucked in his cheeks and gave me a mischievous grin. "Tell me Angel did not just watch me having sex." Spike remained silent, blue eyes twinkling.

"Consider it payment," he finally said, and still with the casual, damn him.

"For what, biting me?" I heard Spike growl, and I smiled at the possessiveness he still showed even if he hadn't won our little contest.

"Made him promise to sell off some of the old family treasures, give us enough money that we don't end up
livin' in the slayer's basement," Spike admitted with a shrug.

"Family treasures?" I asked dubiously. I didn't even want to think about what a vampire would consider a treasure, images of skeletons like out of the old 50s horror movies came to mind. "Is this treasure in the 'only a demon can appreciate that' kind of treasure?"

"The wanker still has some of Darla's jewels. Bint did love anything bright and shiny, which explains her picking up Peaches along the way, well the shiny part anyway seein' as how he isn't always that bright."

"You're shitting me," I accused my beautiful mate. Mate. I repressed an urge to whine happily. Oh hell, who cared. I went ahead and whined into the neck I was currently licking. It suddenly occurred to me that I might have inherited the whole hyena grooming thing because I could lick Spike forever and be blissfully happy.

"Oi, never joke about money or havin' to live in the slayer's house. Bloody bad for my reputation. Mind, he's not givin' us enough to set us up for life."

"You know, I don't even know what to say. But you were just joking about him watching." I said hopefully. "Right? Spike?" Spike just laughed knowingly, until I gave him a
little nip on the shoulder. He made a sort of gasp that trailed off into a purr. I smiled and pulled him closer, licking the spot I’d nipped.

"You're just never going to make it easy for me, are you?" I finally asked sadly. Strong fingers reached down and interlaced themselves with mine.

"Never," he whispered as he looked up at me. I looked into those sharp blue eyes, and I couldn't keep the stupid grin off my own face.

"Good." I whispered, and for the first time, I truly, deeply kissed him. Lips pressing hungrily against lips. He moaned into my mouth, and god I loved the Initiative for starting all this. How's that for irony?

The End