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## **Predatory Acts**

**by**

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### **Part One**

**April 1997. New Orleans.**

In the past he had compared her skin to every white flower that ever blossomed, to snowfalls, doves and moonlight. Her pale cheeks had flushed delicately with pleasure; not at the words themselves, halting and trite as they were, but at the devotion and adoration in his low, husky voice. Now he looked at her and was silent. She was dying, caught in a slow slide back to the grave. Words could not change that and the rage built up in him every time he stroked her lank, tangled hair or kissed the hand

that tried to find the strength to touch his face and failed.

“How did we come to this, love?” he asked her, despair making him cruel, “and why are you just letting it happen? Why won’t you feed? Why won’t you fight it? You want to leave me? Is that it?”

He was trembling now, stalking around the bedroom, hands squeezed into fists with nothing to hit. His anger would have excited her in the past; his jealous suspicion would have made her purr with satisfaction, but now she winced, her eyelids fluttering as his loud voice sent ripples of pain through her head. He saw her face pucker up and sank to his knees beside the bed, penitent and ashamed, resting his head against the soft quilt.

“My sweet boy,” she whispered. “You worry too much. I read the cards last night –”

His head jerked up sharply. “You promised me you wouldn’t! That’s why you’re so tired today. Why do you do it, Dru? It can’t help you, you know that.”

She shook her head, groping for his hand. “I felt the stars were in place; I had to know. They told me where I must go. You will go first to prepare the way and I will follow.” Her eyes sparked for a second, with a feverish light. “You will betray me – no, hush, you must. It’s needed. It will be for me that you do it, you’ll see. You’ll know when the time comes.”

“Dru! There’s never been any woman but you, you know that.” His voice was hurt but tinged with guilt. It had been so long since he had taken her – but he hadn’t given in. Hers until the second death, that’s what he was.

Her lips curved in a knowing smile. “I know that, my darling. No other woman. And now I’m hungry.”

“You are?” He jumped up eagerly, her words forgotten. “I got you something nice. Been keeping her quiet as a surprise. I’ll go and get her.”

He left the room and came back with a young girl, hands bound tightly behind her. Terror had robbed

her of the strength to struggle and apathy was providing a merciful numbness as her heart beat out its final strokes. Spike dragged her over to Drusilla and laid her so that her neck was inches away from Drusilla's mouth. Keeping her in position, he curled his arm around Drusilla's thin shoulders, lifting her up. "Go on, love," he urged. "Feed. Be strong."

Drusilla's face twisted and her fangs appeared. He smiled with encouragement and then sighed as she failed to bite hard enough to break the skin. "Let me help," he said. The girl watched his handsome face alter and found breath for one gasped plea for mercy before he bit down, delicately, carefully. The warm blood flowed into his mouth and when it began to trickle down his chin he pulled away and bent to Dru, kissing her softly, letting the blood pour from his mouth to hers. He fed her like that until the girl died in his arms.

"Rest, pet," he said, tenderly smoothing the covers over Drusilla, rejoicing in the faint flush of pink on her waxen face.

“I feel better,” she whispered. “Spike? What month is it?”

“It’s April, love, why?”

“Spring...the time when all that lives comes back to life again. Not my time. I’ll be well again in autumn, when everything is dying. But you must go there now, Spike. Promise me. Find out what it is I’ll need. Make sure there’s a place for us, a welcome mat laid.”

“You never told me where, love.”

“The Hellmouth, of course. Where else?”

Spike gaped at her in shock. “Sunnydale? Dru...you know what the Master said last time we went there.”

She tittered, the borrowed blood invigorating her. “Said you were a disgrace to the line.”

Spike looked sulky. “He said Angel and you had a lot to answer for when you made me and he trained me. Pillock.”

“He was pleased about the Slayer you killed,” she offered.

Spike brightened. “Yeah, I think he was...it was a good fight. Did I tell you how she had me and then the lights went out?”

Drusilla smiled, snuggling down and closing her eyes. “Yes...but you can tell me again. I like that story.”

“Well, I got her cornered on this subway train—”

**April 1997. Sunnydale. Tuesday afternoon.**

Xander walked down the corridor towards the hyena cage, resisting the urge to look back and see if Buffy and Willow were watching him with admiring glances. They probably weren't, so if he

didn't look back he could imagine they were without feeling that he was being a complete loser.

"There is a method to my patheticness," he muttered. The corridor opened out into a large area, fenced off at the far end. Four people, who really did deserve the label 'loser' and would have it tattooed on their foreheads if Xander were ever World Dictator, were holding Lance over the fence, and scaring the life out of him. Xander sighed. Some would say Lance asked for it, but he hated bullies with every fibre of his being. Vampires were worse and demons in general pushed them down to third on the list but still, yeah, bullies were bad. He should know.

He walked over a weird symbol painted on the concrete floor in a truly revolting shade of red, and grabbed at Lance, pulling him to safety. He was just enjoying some verbal sparring with Kyle when the world around him shifted.

The hyena growled –

And Xander wasn't alone anymore.

## **Tuesday Night.**

Xander left the Bronze, heart hammering with pleasure at that last vicious jab. Willow's face...why had he never realised how exposed people were, how easy it was to bring them down with just a few words? And they were starting to fear him now – he watched in amusement as they scattered out of his way, the girls glancing at him appraisingly through down swept lashes; the boys just failing to meet his challenging stare.

Fun though it was, he wanted out. There was something stifling about the club tonight, something that made his throat close up as he was accidentally brushed by bodies that weren't kin to him. Kyle and his friends were still in there but he had stayed away from them, still resisting the call to join them. They were his pack, yes, but they were

still playing. Xander wanted to do more than play.

The alley beside the Bronze was dark, but not for him. Tonight his eyes twisted the blackness, squeezing out every droplet of light from the stars above and the streetlights below. He sniffed the air, raising his head to catch every message it brought him, a thousand whispers merging in a soft, cool breeze. The scents in this alley were singing to him, plucking at his sleeve and brushing his face. Blood, death, food; it stank of these things. He had never walked down it alone after sunset before.

Xander turned into the alley, quickly swallowed by the shadows, a giggle forcing its way between his lips. It was so funny to remember that he'd been scared to walk here. When a clump of shadows began to move, he carried on walking, lips twisted in a grin. Two shapes, writhing in a parody of affection, desperate moans and whimpers from one, a low growl from the other.

A feeding vampire. And he still wasn't scared. Just hungry. How funny was that?

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Spike swallowed, and turned, an incredulous glare on his face. He had an audience? What was it with this town? He'd spent the day listening to stories about a new Slayer in town and too many hours negotiating safe passage with a minion of the Master's. The ugly old bugger wouldn't even see Spike face to face. Just passed on a warning that Spike was only allowed to feed once a night and he might find time to see him tomorrow. As if there was a shortage of food! He knew what the Master was trying to do; get Spike so angry that he left, or gave him an excuse to kill him. Temper rose within him and he threw a punch at the youth, his fist moving so fast it blurred. The boy just stood there, swaying out of the way of the blow, still with that stupid laugh bubbling out of his mouth.

“Do you mind?” Spike said acidly. “Some of us are trying not to get hiccups.” He cocked his head, studying the youth in front of him. Human, but with

a tang of magic about him that made Spike feel a tremor of unease. The boy's eyes...dark under thick eyebrows, eyes that looked at the world and saw a toy made to be broken and taken apart. Scary eyes. Familiar eyes.

"Is she dead?" The boy tried to sound indifferent but there was an edge of excitement roughening his words.

Drusilla's eyes. Yes. The same wilfullness, the same indifference to anything that interfered with gaining pleasure or inflicting pain.

"Will be soon enough. Look, mate –"

The boy looked at him directly for an endless moment and Spike felt the stirrings of a lust too long unsatisfied. It might have ended there – not the time, not the place, and the boy was disturbing him on many levels – but the woman's blood had sprayed over his face and the hand he had clamped over her gasping, gaping mouth. Without thinking, he brought his fingers to his mouth to lick them

clean. The boy was close and he moved closer, capturing Spike's wrist in strong fingers and bringing the stained fingers to his mouth.

Spike felt a tingling anticipation spread through his body at the first warm touch. Twisting within the boy's grasp, he placed the palm of his hand over the lad's mouth and nose, letting him take the scent of the blood. Spike was hard already, and as the warm breath sighed out to cover his hand, he had to bite his lip to cover the moan that rose from him.

"That's right, boy," he whispered, as a tongue lapped eagerly around his fingers. "That's – hey!"

The dark eyes were blazing now and the grip on Spike's wrist was painful. "Don't call me that."

Spike pursed his lips, his own temper rising. "Wasn't planning on formal introductions, mate but whatever. My name's Spike and my hobbies are biting people until they stop asking me not to and keeping up with the footie. You?"

The lad looked confused for a moment and Spike raised a cynical eyebrow. “Jones? Smith?”

“Xander.” The word was dragged out of him with difficulty, as though it was a word he’d known once but forgotten.

“Well, now we’re best friends, so let’s get on with it before we have company.”

The mood shivered, like a glass vibrating as a high note sounded. Just before it shattered, Xander’s grip loosened and he bent his head, drawn to the enticing scent of fresh blood. Spike felt the rasp of his tongue begin again and decided to speed up the cleaning. Parting Xander’s lips with his fingers, he slipped two fingers inside the furnace of his mouth. Xander seemed oblivious to the sensations he was evoking, intent only on the unfamiliar, intoxicating taste, but the process went on long after Spike’s fingers were bare of blood. Xander was sucking and biting, his tongue swirling around the cool fingers that had invaded his body so casually. Spike let it go on a moment longer before pulling them out.

Xander's eyes were glazed, less human than before and Spike wondered, fleetingly, just what had been done to him. Did it matter? Well, maybe. Spike didn't fancy waking up all furry.

He'd forgotten the blood that lay in an intricate webbing across his cheek. Xander hadn't. He leaned forward and nuzzled against Spike's neck, making the vampire flinch before his arm came up to circle around Xander's shoulders, pulling him closer. Xander's busy tongue explored every contour of Spike's face, finding and cleaning every dried droplet. His breath was blood scented and every exhalation was surrounding Spike with a cloud of mingled scents.

Finally, Xander began to pull back, his job done. Spike's arm held him in place and his eyes, gleaming with arousal, told him wordlessly that he had gone too far to retreat. Spike's other hand came up and his thumb traced a line across Xander's eyebrow and down to the strong clean lines of his jaw. Finally, it hooked under his chin, tilting Xander's head up slightly, exposing his throat.

“You scared I’m going to bite you, pet?” Spike said in a throaty, humming voice that wriggled inside every opening Xander’s body had and made itself at home.

Xander shook his head. He was scared but not because of that. He was frightened because his body wasn’t quite his any more. Forces were moving within him, reshaping emotions and desires, simplifying and refining all he was.

“It’s good to be a little scared, you know. I won’t mind.” The voice was insinuating now, mocking but not unfriendly. Xander wanted it to stop it talking. He was having trouble with words; trouble making them fit what was inside his mind. He was shedding concepts as a snake sheds skin and he had a feeling that if he thought about what he was doing he might find a reason to stop. He didn’t want to stop.

“Going to have you now. Last chance to run. I’ll catch you, of course, but I’ll let you try.”

Xander grinned, feeling assurance flood back, as though the very idea of running away had freed him from fear. It was his lips that took Spike's, a simple hard press of skin on skin at first. He'd kissed girls before – not many, but some. They had giggled, noses and teeth bumping his own awkwardly, mouths gaping like foolish fish. He had done his best to match their movements but he couldn't say that it had been as much fun as he'd expected. This was different. The lips against his were cool and firm, opening up just enough to let their tongues meet. The kiss deepened and suddenly Xander was moaning, little whimpering noises, wrapping his arms around Spike, feeling Spike's hands move down his back, palms flat, stroking him through his cotton shirt. The hands pulled impatiently and his shirt came untucked. When Spike's hands slid against his skin Xander felt his hips jerk forward reflexively. When the vampire's nails scored his back, raking it from shoulder blades to waist, he threw back his head and howled, the sound torn from him, leaving him emptier of humanity than he had been before.

Spike laughed, eyes sparkling with appreciation. This was going to make up for the long journey and all the crawling he'd had to do. The lad was such an intriguing mix of naivety and lust. No time to teach him much, but Spike decided that he wanted more than he could take in an alley. He thought of Drusilla but she was far away and this – this was nothing. It didn't count.

“Listen, mate. This place is going to be crawling soon when they kick the kiddies out of that club. Let's go somewhere quieter.” Spike caught Xander's arm and tugged at him.

Xander annoyed him by looking down at the body on the floor, hesitating at the thought of leaving her. The woman was starting to move, her hands groping, scrabbling pathetically against the ground. Spike cursed mildly and went to her, dropping to his knees and looking up at Xander. “Come on then – do it fast.”

Xander fell to his knees beside Spike, head tilting as he looked at the woman. “She's dying...”

“Yeah, think I took a bit much. She’s not going to make it.” Spike’s fangs flashed as he grinned. “Be a kindness to put her out of her misery.” With a swift, practiced, movement he bent his head and tore out her throat, drinking for a moment before thrusting her at Xander.

Xander stared at him, the body of the woman lying across his thighs. “You’re sharing food with me,” he said slowly. “Why? You’re not one of my pack.”

“Don’t know what you mean, pet, but we’re the same. Can’t you see it?”

“I’m not a vampire.”

Spike’s eyebrows lifted, his mouth expressive. “You’re a human with something else inside you. You want blood. I’m a vampire with a demon who wants it too. When the sun rises it might be different but tonight, right here, right now – we’re the same.”

Xander looked down at the body. “She smells good.”

“Sure she does. And she’ll taste better. Feed.”

And Xander did. He was drawn to the wound Spike had left, the skin already opened by teeth so much sharper than his own. He worried away at the flesh, ripping off shreds, feeling the cooling blood gloss his lips and coat his fingers. Spike stood guard, a little disdainful but approving. The boy wasn’t exactly neat but there was something exciting about watching him. Spike wondered if he would have cared if the woman were still alive. Probably not.

Xander was lost in an experience so intense that it left no room for any emotion other than pleasure. When Spike’s hand fell onto his shoulder, shaking him roughly and then pulling him away from his meal, he growled angrily, baring his teeth.

“Someone’s coming and best we get the hell out,” Spike said. “I promised someone I wouldn’t hunt more than once a night while I was here and he’s

not the sort of person you disappoint. Come *on*”

Xander was still resisting, snarling and trying to carry on feeding, when suddenly he went very still, his face turned towards the high, light voice of one of the people approaching.

“Buffy, are you sure Xander came down here? On his own? I mean, even with you here, I’m all terrified and –”

Xander sprang to his feet and looked around wildly. Spike’s eyes narrowed but he didn’t waste time asking questions. They left just as Buffy and Willow arrived, the sound of their footsteps drowned by Willow’s scream as she stumbled over the body.

## **Part Two**

Xander didn't talk at all until they arrived at the windowless basement room Spike had rented for the time he was in Sunnydale. It should have felt claustrophobic but instead it was surprisingly cosy. A cave or a coffin? Either way, it was sanctuary for both of them.

Spike closed the door and flipped the lock before walking over to a table holding glasses and two bottles. He poured out some vodka, splashing the liquid into a tumbler with a generous hand. Xander was standing, staring at nothing when he felt the glass shoved into his hand.

"Drink this and start talking," Spike said. "I'm still in the mood to be entertained but I want to know what you are first."

Xander took a cautious sip and choked as it burned his throat. Spike sighed impatiently. "Not got anything to go with it," he said. "Vampires; not known for our skill with a cocktail shaker, you know. You're lucky I get a taste for something other than blood now and then."

Xander felt his legs begin to give way as the need to sleep overcame him. His stomach was full for the first time in hours; he was safe, and his eyelids were weighted with a drowsy contentment. He made it to the bed in a controlled stagger, brushing past a startled Spike, and fell asleep at once, the glass dropping from his hand.

Spike watched him in disbelief. The bugger was out cold. And taking up more than his fair share of the bed. He poured himself a drink, kicked Xander unceremoniously to the floor and flopped onto the bed, reaching out for the remote. He had no desire to go out again. The streets would be full of spies for the Master, only too keen to get him into trouble. He wasn't all that popular with the minions. Strange, that. Or possibly not, as he'd been the cause of more than a few of them dying in the past. Word got around.

When he'd discovered that there was nothing at all of interest to watch he took a long sip of his drink, put it down on the night table and rolled over to

look down at his comatose guest. A grin lit up his face like a candle illuminating a jack o' lantern carved by Satan. Well, he had something to play with at least.

As the sleepiness that followed feeding wore off, Xander woke up, stretching out lazily, eyes still shut. There was a metallic jangle and he froze, trying to identify the unfamiliar noise. Flight or fight – which was best? Opening his eyes he saw that he was still in the basement room, still with his new companion and neither option was available. There had been some changes while he slept. He was naked now, his clothes in an untidy heap by the door. That would have bothered him yesterday, but now he felt more concern over the fact that he was cuffed to the bed frame, his arms spread uncomfortably wide.

Spike was sitting cross legged at the foot of the bed, his hands wrapped around Xander's ankles possessively. He was partially stripped, his torso palely gleaming in the light of two lamps, one beside the bed, the other on the table with the

bottles. He still wore black jeans, clinging needily to his thighs, but his feet were bare. The animal in Xander panicked and he began to thrash, pulling down hard with all his strength, trying to snap the cuffs. The metal headboard creaked but held, as did the cuffs. Pain flared in his muscles and he felt the skin on his wrists begin to chafe against the metal. He managed to jerk his feet free and send Spike off the bed in an undignified scramble as the vampire avoided his frantic kicks, but he couldn't release himself.

"Calm down," Spike advised from the carpet. "I'll let you go when you've answered a few questions." Xander heard his words but they made no sense. He was trapped; held down, fear choking him, robbing him of all rationality.

Spike glared at him. "I \_said\_ stop it." His voice was cold now, each word a threat. Recovering his grace, he stood up in one effortless movement and walked to the head of the bed. Grim-faced, he bent and gripped Xander by the throat, squeezing hard. The pain brought Xander back to himself as words could

not, and he made an effort to relax and lie still, placating the creature who was controlling him. The pressure eased and Spike knelt by the bed and laid his lips gently against the red marks his fingers had made for a fleeting second. Xander felt a tremor run through him at the brush of those lips, remembering the kiss in the alley.

“That’s better,” Spike murmured, with an approving pat on Xander’s shoulder. “Can’t play till I know. Not safe.” He grinned, sitting back on his heels and looking at Xander. “So what’s a nice little human like you doing eating people? And no need to make it a long story.” He ran an appraising hand down Xander’s flank and chuckled. “Looks like you agree with me that there’re better things we could be doing.”

Looking down his body to an erection that was practically sitting up and begging – not to mention drooling – Xander had to agree.

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When Xander had finished talking, his words halting and laboured as he fought to explain what he didn't comprehend, Spike looked uneasy. "So, this pack of yours can track you? Don't really want visitors."

Xander shrugged. "I don't know if they will or not. I'm still not –" He paused. He still wasn't one of them, not wholly, but it hurt to admit it. Before the change they'd already been a pack. He was one of them by chance and he had been on the outskirts, his motivations far different from theirs when he walked into the hyenas' cage. The change was working on him in different ways because of that. He felt anguish that still, *still* he was an outsider. They would stay away until he called to them and at the moment he didn't want them. Spike had fed him, had captured him. The vampire was alpha in Xander's eyes and Xander didn't want his pack to see him like this for fear of losing their fragile trust. If he concentrated he could feel their thoughts dimly. They had finished with the Bronze and they were going home, scattering for the night through habit. By tomorrow the change would have bitten

too deeply for them to part again but tonight enough humanity remained to allow routine to supercede instinct.

“They won’t look for me tonight,” he said with certainty.

“Good. Well, I don’t know what happened to you exactly, or if it’ll last, but it doesn’t sound catching. Not like something bit you.”

Xander craned his head to look at Spike who had walked to the end of the bed and was casually peeling off his jeans, his back turned to him. “It doesn’t bother you? That I’m ...possessed?”

Spike turned his head and Xander saw his vampire face appear and then fade away. “What do you think?”

Xander lay unmoving as Spike sauntered over and began to undo the cuffs. “Could you – could you leave them on?” he whispered, his voice plaintive. The restraints freed him, he saw that now. Without

them he would have to fight or leave and he didn't want to do either. With them he could stay; guiltless, helpless...but the conflict in his mind was crippling him. He wanted what Spike was offering, craved it as he had the woman's blood, but the idea of being weakest was frightening. The weak died first.

Spike shook his head. "No."

"Why not?"

The eyes that stared down into his were awash with many emotions but not one of them was mercy.

"Because everything you do to me and let me do to you is going to be your choice. You don't get to console yourself with the thought you couldn't help yourself." Spike took the second cuff off and held the curved metal in his hand, weighing them as he watched Xander try to think this through. Then he hurled them away and sprawled on his back beside Xander, arms crossed behind his head.

"Go on, then," he said lazily. "Get started."

Xander moved to kneel beside Spike, looking down at the slender, strong body. He reached out a hesitant hand, letting it hover above the waiting flesh and swallowed. Spike frowned. "If you're trying to wind me up – oh God, I don't believe it."

"What?" Xander said, feeling confusion fog his mind.

Spike sat up, poking Xander in the chest as he spoke. "You – are – a – virgin. A possessed, under age virgin. Fucking you is corruption of a minor, not to mention bestiality and the whole loss of innocence bit." He threw back his head and shouted with laughter. "You know that saying about being illegal in fifteen states or whatever? Fucking you is illegal world bloody wide mate, for one reason or another. I love it!" He paused and looked at Xander's stricken face. "Ah, come here, pet. I'll show you what to do."

## Part Three

Xander's head came up sharply. "I don't need you telling me anything," he said, the uncertainty in his voice contradicting his words. "I'm just not sure I want to –"

"Not sure you want to fuck the undead your first time out?"

Xander shrugged. "Had my eye on someone else."

Spike frowned, puzzled at the way that made him feel. Possessive jealousy wasn't new to him; watching Dru flirt her way across every continent did that to a man, but he barely knew Xander after all. "This someone else - another bloke?" he asked casually, leaning back on the bed and pushing the pillows up behind his head. He watched Xander try to lie, a grin twitching his lips. The boy was so bad at it, it was funny.

“A – no! Girl. She’s a girl. Woman. She’s mine. I knew it from the moment I saw her.”

“How very romantic,” drawled Spike, rolling his eyes. “And is she going to like the new improved version that eats dying women, or will that make seducing her just that little bit –”

Xander flung himself at Spike, hands reaching out for his throat, anger revealing the animal as wrapping paper torn away shows the gift inside. Spike let him do it, laughing helplessly. “Can’t kill me that way, pet,” he choked. “And you’re leaving yourself open.”

He proved his point by digging his nails into Xander’s balls, making him cry out with shock and pain. His hands slipped away from Spike’s neck and he reached down but Spike’s grip slackened at once. Spike waited until he was sure Xander’s rage had died away and then his hand began to stroke instead, moving higher, gripping and pumping until Xander’s eyes closed and his teeth bit into his lip.

“Feels better than you thought? Someone else doing it for you? Doesn’t really matter whose hand it is, does it. You’re so randy you’d come if it was me, or your girl, or just about anyone. But you want it to be me because I’m like you, aren’t I? And I’ll make it good, pet.” His hand never stopped moving as he rolled Xander onto his back, propping himself up on an elbow and flinging one long leg over Xander’s thigh, holding him still. Xander’s hands reached out, blindly searching, and Spike shifted so that his own cock was within reach. Xander took it and began to work it awkwardly, unable to get a rhythm. Spike moved on top of him, his mouth hungry against Xander’s, his body like a cool sheet on a hot night.

It had been months since Spike had made love and even then Drusilla had been so fragile that he had hardly dared to move once he was inside her. He knew he was hurting Xander, knew that no matter what strength the animal spirit was giving him, a human body was too breakable to withstand a vampire’s pleasure...but he didn’t hold back. Much.

Xander might have begged him to stop, but his mouth was busy and he'd waited so long for this –

Time slowed after they came for the first time, after they had the taste of each other's come in their mouth, the smell of it on their fingers, the sounds of each other's climax in their ears. They lay motionless, not done, just waiting. Blood trickled down their bodies from a dozen cuts and bites, lips were swollen and full from kisses that had bruised as much as they caressed and they were both still hard, still ready.

Xander reached out a finger and laid it against Spike's mouth, brushing it against lips he'd torn with his teeth until they bled, just so that he could lick them clean. Spike pursed his lips in a mockery of a kiss, eyes glinting with challenge. Xander grinned back, feeling relaxed and wanting more.

If he'd still been capable of abstract thought that would have puzzled him. He'd just had wild, rough sex with a vampire. A male vampire. An hour or so after eating human flesh. Relaxed? He should have

been curled up in the corner shaking. Dimly he sensed that, but it didn't seem relevant. The body beside him, stretching out with a languid, feline grace, was enough to wipe his mind clear of anything but a humming lust, buzzing in his ears, raising the hair on his body in an atavistic response. Curiosity filled him and he leaned in, snuffling at Spike's neck and making the vampire laugh, tasting and smelling every hollow on the sleekly muscled body, committing them to memory.

He stopped and ran his finger over Spike's body, feather touches, tickling and teasing until Spike moaned, hips lifting off the bed just a fraction of an inch. His hand locked around the base of Spike's cock, lifting it from where it lay against his flat stomach. Dipping his head he licked at it, tonguing it roughly, enjoying the way it felt inside his mouth. The contrast of the hardness at the core and the thin, delicate skin surrounding it was fascinating. He drew it inside as far as he could, catching the flesh with his teeth, inexperience and eagerness combining to make him clumsy. Spike hissed with pain and Xander did it again, this time on purpose,

his ardour edged with a cruelty as inherent and impersonal as a child's.

Xander wanted more than a hand coaxing him to climax now and his own erection was demanding attention. Abandoning Spike's cock abruptly he moved up his body until he was straddling Spike's chest. Slipping his hand behind the blond head, he raised it, shoving pillows behind it to support Spike's neck. Holding his cock, feeling its familiar weight against his palm, he moved so that it was just out of reach of Spike's lips. Power was tingling through him, raw and rich. When Spike opened his lips, waiting, ready, he didn't hesitate.

It had been a while since Spike had done this and never with someone so new, someone who didn't care that his rapid deep thrusts gave his partner no chance to breathe or to swallow. Xander might have been forgiven for thinking that a vampire didn't need that luxury but Spike was willing to bet it hadn't even crossed his mind. Xander was lost in pleasure, as he had been when he fed from the woman. Spike had ceased to exist for him, apart

from his mouth, and Xander's eyes were squeezed tight shut, oblivious to anything but what that mouth was doing to him.

Spike endured it, fury bubbling up inside him. His hands were free and he began to use them, gripping Xander's hips to try and control his violent thrusts, listening to the harsh gasps as Xander built up to a solitary, selfish, climax. He could have thrown Xander off him, could have bitten down hard and punished him, but he was paying for his earlier pleasure, paying for his betrayal of Drusilla and part of him welcomed the discomfort.

Xander came at last when Spike lost patience and pushed a finger knuckle deep inside him, brutally fast and hard. Xander cried out, his cock slipping free of Spike's bruised lips, and came, covering the vampire's face with sticky wetness. Spike pulled his finger free and turned his face into the pillow to wipe it clean. Xander moved off him and looked down, his eyes hazy with pleasure, empty of guilt. He saw that Spike was still hard and reached out for him but Spike's hand swept out, knocking Xander

away from him.

Xander stared at him, startled out of his euphoria.  
“Don’t you want me to -?”

Spike stood up his face passionless and cold. “I don’t want anything from you.”

He walked to the bathroom and slammed the door shut. Xander heard the screech of a tap being turned and then the hiss of a shower. He ran his fingers through sweat-damp hair, watching the door, perplexity clouding his face. Standing up on legs still shaky, he walked to the door and turned the handle. It wasn’t locked and he pushed it open and went inside. The room was small, with a shower over the tub. There was a plastic shower curtain with a dolphin theme but Spike hadn’t bothered to pull it. Spray was drifting out and wetting the tiled floor making it slippery underfoot. Spike was standing, head bent, one arm stretched out, hand flat against the back wall, bracing himself. The water was pounding the back of his neck, hitting the bare skin and cascading down the long curve of his

back. Spike's other hand was around his cock and he was jacking off as if it was a job that needed doing, as exciting a task as flossing.

Xander took one step and Spike said, "Out", his hand still busy, his face grim. Xander ignored him and took another step. In that room, it was enough to bring him close enough to touch Spike. He reached out his hand and Spike spun around, grabbing him by the throat with the hand that had been against the wall. His eyes were dull with tears, threatening to spill down a face contorted with loathing. The animal in Xander knew fear and began to panic. Spike stepped out of the bath, pushing Xander backwards, and thrust him towards the door.

Xander's bare feet skidded on the tiles and he fell to the floor, landing heavily on his back. Spike watched him impassively, having released his hold on him as soon as he began to fall. He rolled onto his front and Spike pounced. Xander was pushed down against the tiled floor, a sleek damp weight against his back, a hard cock prodding against him. He felt

him start to push inside with one savage, shallow thrust that pulled a scream of pain from him. Spike hesitated. He knew that sound of despairing violation. It had come from his throat in the past. He couldn't do it. The weight left Xander abruptly and from the floor he watched Spike walk past him to the table and reach for a bottle of vodka.

Xander sighed, resting his face against the floor for a moment before getting to his feet. He was confused, angry, and now that the lust had simmered down, he was aching and sore, but he could see that Spike was distraught and that bothered him. He'd enjoyed hurting people in the Bronze, watching them flush with embarrassment as he derided their bodies, their clothes, their dates or lack of them. They weren't in the pack. Spike wasn't either, not really, but he was strong, they had shared food and sex and Xander saw him as an equal. Within the pack, giving comfort was expected. They were one. What hurt one, hurt all.

He pulled a towel off the rack and walked over to Spike, who turned away silently, putting the bottle

back on the table. Ignoring the rejection, Xander began to dry Spike with the towel, starting with his shoulders. Spike flinched at the first touch and then stood still, head bowed. Xander didn't make more of it than it needed, didn't try to turn it into foreplay. It was as instinctive as a cat washing the face of his litter mate. He rubbed the soft towel over damp, smooth flesh, standing behind Spike as he dried his neck and back carefully. He towelled each arm and then went to his knees so he could reach Spike's backside and legs, eyes level with flesh marked by his own teeth and nails in a dozen different places.

Then he stood and walked around to face Spike. He began with Spike's chest, scrubbing at the defined muscles with a distant admiration. When he went to his knees again he didn't ignore Spike's cock, hanging heavy now, but he didn't linger over it. He stood again and looked at Spike's hair. It was almost dry so he settled for giving it a brisk rub, tousling it up into curls.

Spike's head jerked up. "Watch it!"

Xander stepped back, hands raised in automatic placation. Spike's face softened for a second and he sighed, smoothing his hair down. "Not your fault, mate," he said. "Well, partly your fault for being such a selfish bastard –"

"Huh?"

Spike glared at him half heartedly. "Get a blow up doll, next time," he advised. "They don't care if you're just using them to get off."

Xander flushed. "I'm sorry."

"Liar. You had a great time. But if you want seconds, you might want to reconsider your technique in the future. Some advice? When there's a set of teeth around your dick, it's not a good idea to piss off the bloke who owns them."

Xander winced but Spike waved a magnanimous hand and carried on. "Not really you that's got me worked up. It's Dru. My girlfriend. Do you know

how long I've been faithful to her? Years, mate. Bloody decades."

Xander felt vaguely flattered. "So I'm the first person you've had sex with, apart from her, in like a century?"

Spike snorted. "Not likely! But she was there watching, or she set it up. Not the same. This is behind her back and if I tell her, it'd hurt her. She's hurt enough, is my princess. But she's got this thing, see? She looks inside you. Literally with some of 'em and she can pull things out of your mind –"

"Are we still being literal here?"

"Sometimes."

Xander threw the towel in the direction of the bathroom and sat down on the bed. "So, why me?" he asked. "And sorry that you're going to die horribly and it wasn't much fun, by the way."

Spike arched an eyebrow with pretended surprise.

“What makes you think Dru’s going to blame *me*?” he asked.

Xander thought about that. It should have scared him but it didn’t. It was too remote a threat. The here and the now; that was all that mattered and it was more than enough for him to deal with.

“And I don’t know what you’re like as a human but you’ve got...possibilities the way you are now. Trust me, you’re too tasty to leave on the plate.”

Xander swallowed. Spike’s voice was like an extension of his hands. It was soft, suggestive and it made him shiver and quiver. He was finding that he responded less to what Spike said than his tone. The hard edged voice made him feel like whining in supplication, the velvet sheathed one made him want to squirm and beg.

“If she tries to hurt me, Buffy will stake her,” he said, discovering that even with a hyena’s soul his mouth still said deeply stupid things. Spike stiffened in every body part but one. Xander could almost see

the pieces slotting together and he began to scramble away from the slowly advancing vampire, every sense he had telling him that he'd just made a bad mistake.

“Girl in the alley was calling to a Buffy and you took off like a greyhound who's spotted the rabbit.” One step. “All the demons are talking about in the bars is the new Slayer.” Another step. “Seems she's called Buffy too.” Last step. Spike's face was inches away, his eyes flat, like scribbled blue crayon in a paper white face. “You're friends with the Slayer aren't you.” It wasn't ever a question.

Spike's fist moved too fast to avoid and Xander's head slammed back against the door. Spike saw him slump down unconscious and pursed his lips.

“Sorry, mate, but you just moved from being a treat to being bait.” He sighed. Dressing a limp body was a bugger but he couldn't carry him through the streets like this. Marvelling over Xander's taste in boxer shorts – glow in the dark reindeers with red noses – he began to dress him, ready for the trip to the Master's lair.

## Part Four

Spike hesitated, one hand on the door, the other gripping Xander's shirt. It had taken him a while to dress Xander and he'd had time to reconsider his initial strategy. That was a rarity for Spike. He tended to make a plan and execute it without second thoughts. If the plan didn't work he made another. Eventually the problem went away, usually because everyone who had been a problem was dead. It was messy, but effective.

He had been going to offer Xander to the Master; the perfect lure for the Slayer. In return, he wanted the use of Dalton for a while. Dalton, a thin, **balding** vampire who looked meekly at the world through old fashioned glasses, would have been dust decades ago were it not for his skills in translating arcane texts and doing research into prophecies and portents. He was invaluable but the Master owned him. Only a **prize** like a Slayer would persuade him to release Dalton from his task of looking for ways to free the Master and look for a cure for Drusilla instead.

That idea was still a good one but it would end with Xander's inevitable death and Spike wasn't sure he wanted that. He remembered Xander's face as he bent to lick the blood from his hand, intent and serious, and his fist clenched in a reflexive spasm, as it had done around the boy's neck. He wasn't done with Xander. He wanted to see him fight the hyena until it was under his control; he'd sensed that it wasn't, not yet. He wanted to tame the animal without breaking the boy and enjoy them both. As a human, he'd been denied a lot of his dreams, as a vampire, never. Eternity could get dull and Xander would be entertaining for a while.

He thought about turning him, wondering what he would be like as a vampire, and then shrugged. Xander already had the blood lust, the cruelty and an alien soul. What would be the point? Besides, an ally who could move around in the sunlight would be useful. Dru probably wouldn't mind. She might take one of her fancies to him – Spike's thoughts broke off abruptly. The Slayer. He didn't know her, and he'd never heard of a Slayer having people

close to her before, but if the boy was telling the truth, this Slayer might not abandon him, even after what had happened. Or she'd hunt him down and kill him fast out of kindness. That was about as kind as a Slayer got to a demon.

Spike sighed, leaning his head against the wall and resisting the urge to bang it hard against the plaster. It was getting complicated. "All I wanted was a bloody shag," he muttered. "This stupid, fucking town. People turning into hyenas, Slayers getting pally with the plebs, politicians who've sold their souls – well, maybe that's not just in Sunnydale."

Xander stirred restlessly and Spike drew back his foot, intending to kick him back into unconsciousness but found he couldn't. The boy looked so helpless. Xander moved again, his eyes opening slowly. He squinted up at Spike and held out his hand in a wordless request to be pulled to his feet. Spike took it, feeling a tingle as their palms met, and hauled Xander up. Xander was heavier than he expected and his weight pulled Spike off

balance. With a snarling smile, Xander ploughed his fist into Spike's stomach, doubling him over.

"Bloody hell!" said Spike, staggering backwards.

"Mate, listen –"

"You betrayed me," Xander said, each word weighed down with hurt and disillusionment. "We were pack and you were going to –"

"I was going to use you to save the woman I've loved for five times longer than you've been sucking in air. Don't expect me to feel guilty about that." Spike's face was so still now that it reminded Xander of an action figure; perfect, plastic, dead.

Xander shook for a moment, trembling with reaction. Spike stepped towards him, his open hand extended. To Xander the hand seemed to waver as though a heat haze surrounded it. Silly. It was a cold hand, a dead hand. His eyes moved upwards and met Spike's. Those eyes weren't dead. There was pain in their depths, an ineffable weariness. Even human, Xander would have been uncomfortable

with the charged emotions sparking in the air. As he was, he took refuge in the cruelty that ran through him as a pattern runs through fabric. He laughed in the vampire's face, watching the pain vanish as anger replaced it. Anger he could deal with.

"They're coming for me," he said. "Once you hurt me, they knew. They'll be here soon."

Spike sneered. "Your little puppy pals don't scare me. What are they going to do, piss on my shoe?"

Xander's eyes were distant now, as though he were listening to something far away. He turned, pulled open the door and ran up the short flight of stairs to the back street. Standing in the open, he threw back his head and howled a shrieking, arrogant cry to his pack. Spike cursed, locking the door to buy some time. Five humans he could have handled. Five humans with Xander's ruthless strength might be a handful. Moving quickly, he kicked the bed aside, lifted the trap door leading to the sewers and disappeared into their noisome depths.

Never sleep where there's only one exit, especially if it only leads to the outdoors. Good rule for a vampire and one that had saved him more than once. "But you better watch your back, Xander," he muttered as he twitched his long coat out of the way of a patch of dripping mould. "You owe me and I don't plan to forget it."

He hesitated at the junction of three tunnels, getting his bearings, and then strode off. Time to call in some favours.

~\*~\*~\*~\*~

Xander's pack mates found him soon. They surrounded him, fingering his bruises, making little whimpering noises of comfort, easing his sadness. They went with him to Spike's room but they could tell that it was empty before they broke down the door. The scent of sex lay heavy in the air and they looked suspiciously at Xander. With a new found certainty he ordered them to leave, to go home, and to meet him at school the next day. They

protested, but he was adamant.

School was where Buffy would be.

### **Wednesday Night.**

The spell was broken and Xander felt the hyena spirit leave him. He staggered, silently screaming in pain at what he had lost. Memories flooded back, this time unfiltered through an alien intelligence. He fell to his knees.

“Xander! Are you hurt?” Willow exclaimed, ignoring the fact that she’d just come within moments of having her throat cut.

Xander’s lie was instinctive. “I don’t remember...what are we doing here? Is the trip over?”

Willow looked at Buffy and Giles, swallowing. She laid a soft hand on his. “It’s over,” she said. “W-we can fill you in on what’s happened later. It’s all over

now.”

He let them lead him away, listened to their story with artfully raised eyebrows and gaping mouth, apologised profusely to Buffy and was forgiven – and avoided Giles’ ironic but sympathetic looks. Giles knew but he wouldn’t tell. He understood that it hadn’t been Xander who did all those things.

It was all over.

## **Thursday Night**

Xander waved goodbye to Willow and Buffy and walked away towards his house. It had been good to go to the Bronze, get back to normal. There had been a few odd glances from people he’d insulted, girls who didn’t understand how he’d gone from loser to sexy and back again but the Hellmouth factor was kicking in. Flutie’s death was the big news and he wasn’t involved in that. He had a lot to think about but that was one memory that he didn’t have playing over in his head in full technicolour. He

had three others to haunt him instead.

That woman in the alley. He gritted his teeth, swallowing. He would *not* throw up again. The taste had gone, drowned by mouthwash and gum. His hands were clean. He hadn't killed her...the vampire had. He refused to think about that, moving on to the second memory.

Trying to rape Buffy. Watching the fear in her eyes, then getting comprehensively beaten up by her. A Slayer was tough. He'd never realised quite how tough before. It meant that any chance he'd had with Buffy had just gone out the window but at least he hadn't done more than scare her. It wasn't as if they'd had sex...which brought him back to the vampire again.

Memory three was the worst. it shouldn't have been. Eating human flesh, trying to rape someone; they should have ranked higher on the guilt meter than sex. Even if it was with a vampire. "I am not gay," he muttered. "I went right out there and tried to rape Buffy. That proves that I'm – the biggest jerk

in history.”

He sighed. He hadn't been lying entirely when he said he couldn't remember. The memories were there and the guilt was intense but they seemed far away, like the recollection of a dream. They were fading and he took comfort in that. He'd been possessed. Happened all the time. Not his fault. Could have happened to anyone and it would have been just the same. No way to fight back.

“I would get possessed by a gay hyena,” he said aloud.

The figure following him shook with silent laughter. Spike was close enough to hear Xander's soliloquy. The demon he'd paid to follow the boy in the daylight had passed on the news that the possession had ended, much to his annoyance, but he decided he wanted to see how the lad was taking it.

Xander was almost at his house when an arm snaked around his neck and a voice whispered

teasingly in his ear. “Did you miss me, pet?”

Spike’s hand wandered down Xander’s chest to his jeans, fingers tracing the outline of his cock.

“I see you did.”

## **Part Five**

Xander stood as still as if the hand lazily tickling him was a tarantula. Huskily, his voice emerging in a tense whisper, he said, “Back off.”

The hand continued to roam, the arm around his neck tightened. Xander closed his eyes and prepared to die. He’d have to fight first of course, but he didn’t have much doubt about the outcome. Before a strategy could even form in his mind, Spike

delicately nipped at his neck and he moaned softly, goose bumps springing up on that side of his body. Spike chuckled, satisfied, and released him. “Still fancy me then. Good. It’ll make it easier on you.”

Xander turned around and glared at Spike. “I’m not even going to ask what you mean by that because it’s disturbing enough without the details.”

Spike considered him for a moment, standing relaxed with his hands in his coat pockets, just a friendly neighborhood vampire out for a stroll. “Does this mean it’s all over between us now you’re human again? I’m deeply hurt.”

Xander felt his hands curl into fists, nails digging deeply into his palms. “You seem to know I’m not possessed anymore. You can’t think I’m still interested in doing anything but stake you.” Spike’s eyebrows rose in an eloquent commentary on just how that could be interpreted and Xander flushed. “With a wooden stake. Through the heart. So you turn to dust,” he clarified.

Spike pouted, the full lower lip pushing out. He looked wistful but his eyes were full of deviltry, brimming over with mockery. “That how you treat all your dates? No wonder you were so...pure.”

Xander’s fist lashed out and swept through air. Spike had simply faded backwards, avoiding the blow easily. Xander stumbled and caught his foot, falling forward. Spike let him fall, looking down at the sprawled figure with detached amusement. He didn’t offer Xander a hand this time and Xander struggled to his feet, rubbing a bruised knee with a grazed hand.

Spike’s nostrils flared and Xander found himself wondering if the vampire could tell that his palms were bleeding slightly. That was creepy.

“I’m leaving town tomorrow night,” Spike said abruptly. “Got what I came for and I’m going back to get Dru ready for the journey.”

Despite himself, Xander was curious. He remembered Spike rambling on about his girlfriend

being sick but to his possessed mind it had seemed unimportant and he'd tuned out a lot of it. "You've got some medicine or something?"

Spike shrugged. "Not exactly. Got a few leads on what she'll need but nothing definite yet. No, what I really wanted was to know I could bring her here safely. Seems she'll heal better here. Might be all she needs. A holiday on the Hellmouth." His voice broke slightly as he mentioned Drusilla but he recovered his poise at once. "The Master can be a funny bugger sometimes. Took a bit of slaughter to get him smiling but I can be very charming when I want." He smiled at Xander, inviting agreement. "Can't I?"

Xander swallowed. Spike's voice was affecting him as much as it had done before. Images flashed through his mind: pale limbs splayed out against the dark blue sheets, blue eyes misted over with tears, a damp towel rubbing fleeting warmth into a cool body... "Yes," he said honestly. "But I'm guessing ninety percent of the time you can't be bothered."

Spike grinned. "Maybe. Aren't you curious who I slaughtered?"

Sickness spread through Xander and any arousal he'd felt fled in the face of the reminder that he had shared more than sex with Spike. They'd done lunch.

Spike cocked his head to the side, watching the emotions flicker over Xander's face like cloud shadows over grass. "Might have been your hyena pals. They left enough scent behind in my room for me to know them, track them down." Xander's eyes flickered with a shamed relief. His four pack mates hadn't been in school but he'd assumed the police had them. That was one of the first lessons you learned in Sunnydale. You didn't talk about the ones who went missing. Did he want them to be dead so that no one would find out that he could remember what happened? Was he really that selfish? "Or it could have been one of your other friends."

Xander stepped forward and shoved Spike roughly. "Tell me. Stop playing games."

Spike laughed at him. “Don’t worry, they were minions. Thinned the herd a bit. Did him a favour. He gets bored of the same old faces. Unless they’re as good looking as mine, of course.”

“You really do think you’re something, don’t you?”

“Yes.” The word ‘duh’ hung unspoken in the air.

Silence fell and Xander wondered what to do. Back away slowly and run home, where he’d be safe? He frantically tried to remember if he’d ever said anything to Spike that qualified as an invitation home. “So - you’re happy, I’m human again, let’s just forget you played with your food and I promise never to mention it either.”

Spike studied him. “You can’t forget it, can you?” he said quietly.

“Well, it’s only been a day. I think parts are fading though. In fact there’s one school of thought that says you lose all memories of times when you’re

possessed. I think it's worth considering, taking on board—"

"No. You don't forget your first taste of blood. Ever."

Xander looked at him. A car went by, the engine noise fading away and leaving them locked in silence again on the empty street. "It's not the blood I'm having trouble forgetting," he said, the words pulled from him.

Spike's eyes widened. "Go on," he said, his voice calm and reassuring. It had the opposite effect. Xander felt bewildered at the sudden change from flippancy to sympathy and was about to take refuge in a joke when he saw the tension along the line of Spike's jaw. The vampire was nervous?

"What we did was, I mean it wasn't what I expected. I like girls. I'm not —"

"Oh, spare me!" Spike said. "Do I look like a therapist or a friendly bloody ear?"

“No.”

“What do I look like?” Spike demanded, grabbing Xander and pulling him towards him in one violent, possessive movement.

Xander was so close he couldn't see anything but Spike's eyes. With a doomed feeling, he told the truth again. It was getting to be a really bad habit. It brought him nothing but trouble. “My worst nightmare.”

Spike chuckled. “That'll do.”

He didn't even have to move to kiss Xander. Somehow the gap between their lips was so small that when Xander opened his lips to reply, he brushed against Spike's mouth. Instant lust. Knee buckling, intense, crippling lust. Xander felt it pour over him as though someone had a bucket of the stuff poised above his head. His brain was drenched in it, losing all ability to think coherently. His hands were soaked in it, grabbing at clothing, pulling and

tugging, trying to reach that cool, hard body. His cock got what was left, absorbing it, springing to life, quivering and eager.

Spike pulled back his head, hissing with frustration. "Why is it always outside when you come on to me?"

Xander felt the exhilaration recede and sanity creep in. Spike saw his expression change and shook his head. "No. Not again. You come with me and we finish this tonight."

"I can't. Not with you. Not with a vampire."

Spike's hand reached down between them and caressed Xander's erection. "Want to have regrets for something you did instead of something you missed?"

"Prefer to have no regrets at all, really," Xander gasped.

"I can do that too," Spike said casually.

“Huh?” Spike moved away a little and hauled something small and glittery out of his pocket. It looked like a silver marble. “What’s that?”

“Memory charm. Set for me. Got it today from someone who owes me from the last time I was in town.”

Xander frowned, intrigued. “What does it do?” he asked.

Spike smiled slowly, watching Xander’s face for a hint of his feelings. “Once it’s activated it’ll wipe out any memory of me. You’ll lose from the time we met in the alley to when you left the room and from just now to whenever we’re finished.”

Xander shook his head. “That’s impossible,” he said, certainty in his voice.

“No, just magic. Pretty fancy magic though. A memory spell - that’s simple. Specific memories though - that’s harder. Cost me.”

“You said you called in a favour.” Xander objected.

Spike pushed up the sleeve on his coat, exposing a curved symbol carved deeply into the flesh. “The spell needed to know who I was to work,” he explained. “Needed my blood.”

Xander shuddered. Even for a vampire that had to have hurt. His thoughts raced. He was tempted by Spike – no point in denying that - and his hyena experiences were too close for him not to feel drawn to gratifying his desires rather than ignoring them. The thought of losing the memory of feeding on human flesh was a definite plus. He stood thinking as Spike sighed impatiently and then nodded, not meeting the vampire’s eyes. “I’ll do it.”

The words slipped out easily, catching him by surprise. He seemed to have lost his caution and his fear of consequences. He wondered if the spell to reverse the possession had really worked. This wasn’t like him. He was Xander, vampire hater. It was burned into him the first time he’d seen one of

the creatures and seen what they could do. They were cockroaches and he was friends with the exterminator.

Then he looked at the vampire in front of him and the scared hatred fell away, leaving only the fascination and the hungry desire.

Spike tossed him the charm. “Here. You keep it. Just need to activate it when you’ve had enough and I’m out of sight.”

Xander looked at him in surprise. He’d expected Spike to hold on to it as a way of keeping him under his control. Then he remembered how Spike had stopped himself in the bathroom. The memory steadied him. He didn’t trust the vampire, not really, but he didn’t fear him either. Maybe that wasn’t a good thing.

“Activate it how?”

“Swallow it.”

“I’m not swallowing it! It could be poison or something,” Xander protested.

Spike grinned. “Don’t worry. I had them make it cherry flavour just for you.”

## **Part Six**

It didn’t take long to walk to Spike’s room. Nowhere in Sunnydale was far from anywhere else. Xander might have wished the walk took longer, but the silence that had fallen as they moved away from his house was so nerve wracking that he found himself hurrying instead. The route took them to a part of the town that he didn’t know well. Alleyways that seemed to be dead ends turned out to have small openings, leading into a labyrinth of narrow streets with doors that did their best to look like part of the walls. Not many windows. The last time he’d come

here he'd been so overwhelmed by his first taste of blood that he hadn't really paid attention. His instincts had carried him out of the maze safely then but he wasn't sure he could retrace his steps as a human.

Shadows and faint noises combined to make him on edge. He sensed that as they walked people were moving out of their path only to reappear behind them, tracking them as though Spike were the Pied Piper. He wanted to turn around but the first time he tried, Spike's hand shot out, gripping his arm. "Never look back," he said. "It doesn't help, believe me."

The shadowy entourage melted away as they reached the steps leading down to Spike's room and Xander sighed with relief. Spike looked at him curiously. "Don't come here much, then?"

Xander shook his head. "I've lived here all my life and never realised the truth until I met Buffy."

"What's that then?"

Xander looked at him. “The demons are at the heart of this town. It’s theirs, isn’t it?”

Spike shrugged. “It’s on the Hellmouth. What did you expect?”

He opened the door and Xander walked inside for the third time. An old saying flashed across his mind. Third time’s the charm.

He pushed the door closed and turned to face Spike. The vampire had shed his coat, throwing it carelessly across a chair. He stood, relaxed and confident, a smile tugging his lips upwards. Xander watched him suspiciously. “Relax, mate,” Spike drawled. “Got my word I won’t hurt you.”

“Pity you didn’t give me that last time,” said Xander.

The smile vanished and Spike looked almost troubled. He walked to Xander, slid his hands under the collar of his shirt and then began to unbutton it. Xander stood still as Spike slipped the shirt back

over his shoulders and down his arms, gathering it in one hand and tossing it aside. Spike's eyes travelled slowly over Xander's chest and arms and then he walked around to study Xander's back. Xander bit his lip as he felt fingers trail gently across his skin, following the livid bruises that he had glimpsed in the mirror but had been too sore to twist enough to see properly.

"Did I do these?" Spike asked, his tone neutral.

Xander turned to face him. "No. Well, some, maybe. Mostly below the waist are from you. The ones you can see are mainly from Buffy."

"The Slayer hit you? Why? Thought you were mates."

Xander met his eyes. "We are. That's why when I tried to rape her she let me live."

Spike looked startled and then nodded understandingly. "When you were still possessed." Xander didn't bother answering. "She's a forgiving

type for a Slayer. You can count yourself lucky.”

Xander’s voice was bitter. “Oh, I do, believe me.”

Spike pursed his lips. “Time grows short. Do you want to talk yourself into tears or fuck until you scream for more?”

Xander gaped at him, struck by the brutal simplicity of the question. “I want to ...” His voice faded, unable to form the words and give them substance, and his eyes pleaded for help.

Spike waited in silence and then seemed to relent. “Tell you what,” he said. “I wouldn’t let you stay in cuffs before but this time I’ll help you out.”

“Y-you’re going to tie me up?” Xander asked, his voice blending fear and fascination in equal quantities.

Spike shook his head. “No need.” He took Xander’s face between his hands and kissed him, a searching, lingering kiss that left Xander gasping. Spike pulled

away and laid a finger on Xander's warm mouth, tracing the outline of his lips, dragging his cool finger across the moist skin. "Sshh..." he said. "No more words until I say you can speak. You can moan, you can whimper, you can cry out, you can scream, but no words. Do you understand?" Xander nodded. "Good boy. See; now you can't argue or persuade me not to do what I'm going to do. It'll all be the fault of the nasty, evil vampire."

Xander heard the faint disappointment lurking behind the mockery and wanted to say something, take back the responsibility for his actions, follow through for once in his life. Loathing at his own cowardice swept through him and he looked up, only to see Spike's knowing eyes. He had been tricked into guilty obedience as a punishment for wavering. Anger, hot and raw, replaced his self loathing.

"Don't be like that," said Spike. "Any time you want to stop being a wuss, you know what to do. You'll have to take the consequences of course." He shook his head, like a dog shaking off rainwater, and his

vampire face emerged. “Do I need to spell them out?”

Xander found that his teeth were clenched so hard together to stop the words from pouring out that his jaw was aching.

“Enough. I want you naked by the time I am. Don’t make me wait.” Spike’s voice was easy, even friendly, and his face was human again, but Xander didn’t trust either tone or appearance. He reached for his belt buckle and then hesitated. Spike had skinned off his T shirt in one shrugging movement, not hurrying but not lingering either. He sat down on the bed and reached down to undo his boots, giving Xander a curious upward glance as the boy stood unmoving. Xander swallowed. Moving slowly he walked towards Spike, fell to his knees and brushed Spike’s hands away, taking over the task of unfastening his boots.

“You do that and I’ll beat you,” Spike murmured, managing to cram more alternate meanings into seven words than Xander had ever thought

possible.

Ignoring him, Xander pulled off first one boot and then the other, placing them neatly to the side. Spike's bare feet were like the rest of his body; elegant and fined down. He sat back and pushed himself up, watching as Spike copied him. They unbuckled belts, eased down zippers and stepped out of jeans. Spike stood naked; Xander had managed to pull his shorts down with his jeans but still had socks on. Spike began to count aloud and panic, unreasoning and terrifying, tore through Xander as he stood awkwardly on first one foot and then the other, trying to yank off his socks. It wasn't dignified but he managed it as Spike reached nine.

"Going to make you wish you hadn't done that," said Spike, coming so close as he spoke into Xander's ear that the words themselves reached out to tickle against his skin. "Nine...that's a lot. Brace yourself."

He took Xander's arms and pushed them back, making him lock his hands together in the hollow of

his spine. “Don’t move. Not even a little bit.”

Xander closed his eyes, waiting for the blows, the pain. He was hard but he had been since the door closed and locked him in with Spike. “Eyes open, love. You can give me that much at least.” The voice flicked at him, stinging and goading. Xander wasn’t sure how Spike had known that his eyes were closed but he opened them obediently and stared ahead through tear-blurred eyes. Spike appeared in front of him, startling him. He frowned, puzzled, and then gasped as Spike knelt and cupped his balls in one hand, the other gripping the base of his cock firmly. Xander felt exposed and vulnerable and unbearably aroused all at once. Spike leaned forward and began to lick the head of Xander’s cock, gentle, smooth licks that covered every square centimetre with agonising precision. Nine licks, the last one with Spike’s tongue darting inside the slit of the head, making Xander’s hips thrust forward helplessly. The touch was too tightly focused to be anything other than tantalising. It left Xander so hard it hurt. Spike stood, his face absorbed, and leaned in to kiss Xander’s mouth, that clever tongue

flickering against his in a deliberate echo of his previous action. Spike's arms were around him now, his hands roving, roaming, reaching out. Xander ached with the need to touch him back but kept his hands in place, determined not to let Spike win.

They stood like that for endless minutes, Xander a living statue, motionless, unable to respond with anything but his parted lips. Spike rarely kissed them, lavishing his attentions on every part of Xander's body but his mouth, standing or stooping, kissing each bruise and scratch, licking and biting, scratching softly until Xander's body was alive with sensation, screaming out with need.

"And that was nine minutes," said Spike suddenly. "You did well, pet."

The praise and the affectionate tone were as painful as the blows would have been. Trembling with reaction, Xander bent his head down, the tears beginning to fall. Spike's hand slid under his chin and raised his head. "Move now," he said. "And talk if you like."

“You manipulative bastard!” Xander screamed, bringing his fists around to slam into Spike’s body. Spike let them land on him, wrapping his arms around Xander in an unbreakable embrace. Xander tried to push him away, failed, tried to carry on punching him and couldn’t. They stood for a moment and then the rage ebbed and Xander kissed Spike as he had done in the street, with open, avid lips.

They landed on the bed, in a tangle, desperately trying to have as little space between them as possible, legs scissored, arms pulling each other together so tightly that they couldn’t move or caress, could only kiss until they tasted the same. The kisses moved from frantic to feather light and the grips loosened, letting them fall apart like paper peeled from a candy bar.

They were both hard, their cocks touching as they shifted position, the slight friction almost too much for Xander. Spike, with over a century of lessons in control at his back, couldn’t resist teasing him,

running a finger slowly from root to tip and then wrapping his hand around its length, squeezing it firmly before flexing his wrist up and down with a languid, practised motion. Xander's head went back and he made a sound too visceral to be coherent. "Do that again and I won't be able to –"

Spike wriggled down the bed, did it again with his tongue in just the right place and dealt with the result without spilling a drop.

"Too...fast," complained Xander in a breathless whisper.

Spike shrugged. "Want to bet I can't get you hard again?"

"No. I don't bet on certainties. My Uncle Rory taught me that."

"Clever man." Spike murmured, kissing his way back up until his face was level with Xander's. "In the minute or two until you're ready to go again, suppose we think about me? If I remember last

time, you owe me.” His eyes flashed from summer sky to setting sun so quickly that Xander blinked in confusion.

Guilt swamped pleasure and he nodded. “I was going to make a very predictable joke about giving you a helping hand but I’ll make that a little more —” He hesitated, lost for words, and then said simply, “Any way you want it, Spike. You choose.”

Spike growled and changed, the demon fighting its way to the surface. “You sure about that, Xander?”

Xander kept his eyes open and his face calm as he leaned forward to kiss the fanged mouth. Spike waited until he was sure Xander wasn’t going to flinch and let the vampire face sink back. Xander paused then and whispered, “Why did you do that? I would have done it.”

“That’s why,” said Spike. “Oh, there’re plenty of humans who get a kick out of doing it with us in game face the whole time but I don’t figure you for one. Just don’t forget, Xander. Don’t trust me.”

“Choose,” Xander said flatly, ignoring the warning.

Spike studied him for one long moment and then nodded. He twisted around and opened the drawer in the table by the bed, pulling out a tube. Xander guessed what it was and tensed without thinking. Spike paused and raised an eyebrow. “Second thoughts?”

“About a hundred but don’t let that stop you. Really.”

Spike tossed the tube to Xander. “Then you go first and see how it’s done.”

Xander weighed the tube in his hand, not meeting Spike’s eyes. He flicked the top and squeezed a little out onto his fingers, rubbing them together experimentally. Raising his fingers to his nose, he sniffed and then examined the tube again. “Wild Cherry?” he asked incredulously. “Have you ever heard the saying, ‘funny once’?”

Spike grinned. "I'll move you up to chocolate raspberry if you like."

Xander shook his head in disbelief, closed the tube and pushed Spike onto his back. He found that what he had on his fingers was enough to cover Spike's cock. "I meant you could have me first, you know. Or do you need a refresher course in what goes where?" asked Spike, watching Xander's fingers sliding over his erection and shuddering slightly with need.

"Nope," Xander replied, flicking open the tube and handing it to Spike again. "But I think I'll let you take it from here."

Spike shrugged. He'd given Xander enough chances and he was too aroused to stop now. Xander swallowed and rolled onto his stomach, spreading his legs slightly. Spike looked at him with a lust that would have terrified Xander if he'd seen it and slipped a slick finger into Xander, gently, carefully until Xander's legs were wider and his back arching into the bed. When he had taken three fingers,

Spike paused. Xander was as ready as he would ever be but he didn't know whether to leave him like this or give himself the pleasure of watching Xander's face as he took him. Xander moaned and Spike's control snapped. Before Xander had chance to panic, Spike had pushed against his opening and slid home in a series of gentle but forceful nudges. Xander cried out but Spike knew what pain sounded like and this wasn't it. Biting his lip, he rocked slightly, feeling Xander clench around him. He began to move, a series of long, slow thrusts that had Xander's hands clutching at the sheets as the sensation stopped being an intrusion and became pure pleasure. Spike's movements increased in speed, his hands on Xander's hips, holding him still, not letting him push back. "Take it," he said, "Take it like I did."

Xander's eyes were squeezed shut, his world shrunk to the bed, the feel of the bunched up sheets in his fists, against his knees, the nails digging into his flesh and the relentless presence within him. He was sharing his body with someone else and for a moment he wasn't lonely or left out. He heard a

mewling sound and recognised, dimly, that it came from him. Spike's hand slapped against his backside, stinging and sharp. "Now you can move. Show me what you've got, pet. Scream for me."

One last surge of defiance as his body responded. "Make me," Xander panted.

"Well, since you asked so nicely –"

## **Part Seven**

The early morning sun illuminated Sunnydale and Xander stirred, the drowsiness that had held him motionless for hours sliding off him, leaving him chilled and exposed. He was lying sprawled across the bed, his leg hooked over Spike's and one hand resting on his chest. His hand lay shielding the place Buffy would aim for and the thought made him feel

both protective and guilty. Pushing the confusion aside, he squinted at a clock on the bedside table. He had a few hours before school. He really had to go home and pretend that he'd got in late, rather than not at all. He wondered sourly if his parents had even noticed that he was missing.

Spike lay sleeping, his face turned away from Xander, the sheets, so dark against his candle-pale body, pulled up to his waist. Even looking at him made Xander feel a baffled, aching longing. He was exhausted, his body a living record of the hours of sometimes brutal sex, but he knew that if Spike turned and reached out his hand, his body would rouse and respond.

It was the most frightening thought he'd ever had.

He wanted to wash, to eat, to brush his teeth, to restore normality to his world. He'd showered in the night but it hadn't been quite the same. He'd never showered lying down in a wide, long tub, being teased and tickled by a judiciously aimed jet of water. It had turned into a bath, with Spike

tipping in a generous dollop of bath gel that foamed up and over the sides of the bath. Spike, covered in bubbles, with his sleek hair spiked up by Xander's fingers, had looked so human, so young...then Xander had thoughtlessly told him to look in the mirror and his face had hardened as he cupped his hands in the water and smoothed his hair down again.

Xander had done things he'd never heard of during the dark hours, had used his hands, mouth and ass to give Spike pleasure and taken satisfaction in every gasp and moan he'd forced past those cool lips. He'd been guided and instructed by someone incapable of shame, skilled and unpredictable. Spike had shown him what a thousand fevered dreams had only hinted at, shown him with a lack of self consciousness that had drawn and demanded the same from Xander.

He had hurt Xander sometimes, forgetting that the body writhing beneath him was human, not vampire. His body was mottled with small dark bruises left by Spike's finger tips. Only once, though,

had Spike hurt him deliberately, when Xander, goaded by Spike's sulky silence after they left the bathroom, had mentioned Drusilla. Spike had turned on him, game face on and bent Xander backwards, his fangs at his throat. He had kept him like that, lying face up across his knee, painfully arched, one arm holding him pinned, the needle pointed teeth grazing his flesh, kept him while his free hand worked Xander's cock mercilessly, forcing it to respond. When Xander had come finally, Spike taking care that none of it touched him, he had been pushed contemptuously to the floor. Spike had stalked to the bed and flung himself down, his face expressionless.

Xander had returned to the bathroom, cleaned up the splatters of come from his body and leaned against the basin, breathing slowly. Then he filled up a jug with icy water, walked over to the bed and tipped it over Spike. The sight of Spike leaping to his feet, outrage and disbelief making him splutter incoherently had been enough to make Xander giggle helplessly. Spike was restrained from biting him, less because of his promise, more because –

well, once couldn't eat someone when they were laughing so hard the tears were rolling down their face. Just wouldn't feel right. He settled for giving Xander rug burns and then making him strip and remake the bed.

Now it was over. Xander eased himself free of Spike and went into the bathroom. When he came out, Spike was sitting up, looking sleepy and with a hint of wariness in his eyes. Xander nodded to him and picked up his clothes, getting dressed quickly. Spike watched him cover up the body he'd explored so thoroughly and did nothing to stop him.

Xander couldn't just walk out into the sunlight without saying something but looking at the silent watcher made his mind narrow down to a single thought and somehow he knew that if he voiced it he would never leave.

"I -have to go now," he said finally. "I wish -"

"No, you don't," said Spike. "You were fun but it's over. Push off now, O.K?"

The bored disinterest in his voice slashed Xander bone deep, driving him speechless from the room and into the dazzle of daylight, allowing him to find his way through the empty streets with eyes too aching with tiredness and unshed tears to pay attention to his surroundings. Without thinking about it, he made his way home, stumbling up the stairs to his room and falling forward onto his unmade bed. The sheets smelled musty and stale as he used them to soak up the tears that had lost patience with waiting to be shed. He couldn't remember the last time he'd cried but he thought it had been for much the same reason – a sense of bewildered loss. Oh, yes. His father had given away his pet rabbit, letting him come home from school to find the empty hutch on the sidewalk waiting for the garbage men. His frantic sobbing had earned him a slap from his father and an impatient, fleeting hug from his mother. He hadn't bothered to cry again after that.

Rolling over onto his back, Xander stared up at the ceiling, the tears drying on his face, their job done.

He was calm now as his fingers slid inside his pocket and pulled out the charm.

The sunlight slanted through the window and struck the silver surface, spinning off in a prismatic display that made Xander blink. His hand moved towards his mouth and the scent of cherries filled the room. His thoughts caught at something half heard in his dreams, something Spike had whispered, when he'd been too sleepy to respond.

“My only love, sprung from my only hate.”

‘Love’? His hand fell back.

### **New Orleans. Saturday.**

Spike stood outside Drusilla's room, curtly questioning the vampire who had been caring for her while he was away.

“So she's been eating then? Good. She'll need her strength. Bring me someone fresh. I'm not going

out again tonight and I'm hungry."

The vampire nodded and walked away, leaving Spike staring at the door. In his hand was a gift for his princess – a necklace the Master had given to him, studded with garnets like little drops of blood. He allowed himself a moment longer, touching the memories with a gentle hand, savouring each sound, each glance, each caress, regretting nothing but the last look of hurt as the boy left. No, not even that. Then he opened his hands and let them fall away.

"Could never hurt you, Dru," he murmured to himself just before he pushed open the door.

Drusilla was sitting up in bed, her cheeks a delicate pink, still frail, still fading, but with an eager, tremulous smile on her lips. "Spike! I knew you would come back today. I felt you moving to me, so fast." Her face fell. "Did you see him? Did you meet him?"

"The Master was kind, my sweet. Eventually. Here –

he sent you this.” Spike laid the necklace across the white blanket, expecting Drusilla to catch it up in delight. Instead she ignored it, pouting at him.

“You know I don’t mean him! The boy, the betrayer...tell me.”

Her voice was sharp and Spike frowned, puzzled. “Don’t know what you mean, love. What boy?”

Drusilla looked at him with quick suspicion, her fingers fluttering out to touch him and bring him closer. Concentrating, her eyes veiled with long lashes, she delved into his mind, peevishly stabbing and prodding and then looked at him with surprised pleasure. “You didn’t betray me...It didn’t matter but I think I’m glad you didn’t. I would have had to kill him and that would have been tiresome.”

Spike shook his head, smiling indulgently. “Dru, love, there’s only you. Only ever will be you. Now don’t I get a kiss?”

He leaned in to kiss her, gently brushing her pale

lips with his.

“You taste of cherries,” she murmured drowsily, snuggling back down.

### **Sunnydale School. September 29 1997**

Xander struggled in Angel’s grasp as he was dragged towards Spike, an unwilling prop in his plan to infiltrate the besieged school. His thoughts were chaotic, desperate. Since he’d heard that Spike was back he’d known this meeting was inevitable but this wasn’t quite how he’d imagined it. As Angel grabbed his hair, yanking on it to expose his neck, thrusting him at Spike, he waited for the moment when the ice blue eyes would warm with recognition and he would be exposed as the traitorous, perverted, addicted, besotted fool he was. He looked up at Spike, twisting his head awkwardly, and slowly the fear, the anticipation and the terror drained from him leaving - nothing.

The blue eyes were empty of recognition. It wasn’t

an act; Spike wasn't protecting him. He just didn't know him. Throughout the fight that followed, and the lonely walk home, Xander clung to one thought, letting it set the rhythm of his steps, letting it carry him along. The words drummed endlessly in his mind until they lost all meaning, all sense.

"Tonight. I'll take it tonight."

He knew he wouldn't.

**The End**

## **Preying On My Mind**

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## Part One

### Sunnydale November 1999

Spike sighed as he settled himself into the chair, trying to anticipate which position would be most comfortable for the long hours ahead before he was tied in place. The last two nights had been enough to teach him that it was unlikely it existed. He'd wrenched his neck trying to scratch an itch on his nose the first night, his backside was still numb from the second and if Xander made the ropes bite in any harder tonight, they'd snap.

Silent, his face puckered with distaste, Xander came over to Spike and began to wind the ropes around him. As Spike had guessed, he pulled them tight.

“Why do you hate me, Xander?”

The words came out with a thread of genuine interest woven through them and Xander's lips

thinned. “You’re a vampire, dumbass. Your kind’s killed more of my friends than I can remember.”

“Yeah, whatever. Wasn’t what I asked. Why do you hate *me*? What have I ever done to you personally? Apart from knocking you out that time. Oh, and the night -”

“Maybe you talk too much, Spike. Yes, in fact you do. Maybe I should gag you as well as -”

He paused. Something dangerous had flared in Spike’s eyes and his hands curled into fists. When he spoke, his voice was mild, almost gentle. “I really don’t advise it, Harris.”

Xander backed down but the sullen anger in him smouldered as he finished tying Spike’s ropes. As if it wasn’t bad enough that he had to let Spike stay here, now he was getting threatened by him.

“So - no answer. Figures. Not got the balls to admit you just get off on all this?”

Too much. Two nights of pretending to sleep with Spike a few yards away had exhausted Xander. He was losing the last scraps of control over a situation that time had failed to make easier to bear. Making a noise that was halfway between a sob and a curse, he stalked over to a locked cupboard, opening it and fumbling around inside. He came back to stand in front of Spike, mutely holding out a small object. Spike frowned as he recognised a memory charm. “How’d you get hold of one of those?”

“You gave it to me.”

Spike’s eyes flew up to meet Xander’s, startled and wary. “I bloody well didn’t, [mate](#). Do you know how much they cost?”

Xander’s lips curled disdainfully. “Didn’t cost you much. He owed you a favour and you traded it for one of these. Except it wasn’t one. It was two. Not that I knew that of course. Not then.”

Spike groaned with frustration. “You’re not making

any sense. You'll have to do better than this. Tell me straight or shut the fuck up."

Xander's fist whipped across Spike's face, throwing his head back against the chair. It was the first time he'd touched him, skin on skin, and it felt good to hurt back, good to leave his mark, if only for a moment. "You want to know? You sure? Want me to tell you all about the night – two nights – we spent fucking each other till we couldn't stand? How you gave me this so I could forget about it all? You want to know now but you chose, deliberately chose, to wipe it out of your memory. You wiped me clean away, Spike. What's the matter? Big Bad can cope with the memories of a century of slaughter but not with anything involving feelings or, or..."

Xander's tirade faltered, his face working helplessly to stop the tears from spilling down. He sat down on the edge of the bed, one hand clenched on his knee, the other cradling the charm protectively. Spike stared at him, silent in the face of clear insanity. "You've got to be kidding me," he said at

last, forcing a sneer to his lips in an effort to hide his reaction. “Nice one, Harris. Almost had me there. ‘Course the fact that you’d cut your bloody dick off before you’d let it touch any part of my tainted, soulless body was a bit of a giveaway. Now piss off. This just isn’t funny.”

Xander looked up, anger stemming the tears. “Oh, it’s touched you, Spike. It’s been in your hand, your mouth, your ass. It’s rubbed against your body in a dozen places. I came over your back, your front, your face. The air in the room was thick with our scent. You filled me, held me, made me think I wasn’t alone. Said we were the same, even when it was just me, not the hyena, you said it. Then Angel offered you my neck that night and your eyes....they were empty. You didn’t know me, you didn’t care. All you were interested in was him. Just like Buffy. All she saw was him. I was nothing.”

The bitter, furious words sputtered from his mouth. He felt drained, spent, but it hadn’t helped to leech the poison from his soul. He was empty and hollow. He’d given Spike enough ammunition in one minute

to fuel years of taunting but it didn't matter. He'd felt like a child who had breathed on a snowflake and made it vanish. The only thing he'd had left were his memories and now he'd flung them at Spike's feet to be ground into the dirt.

Spike opened his mouth, a dozen questions demanding to be asked, changed his mind and then said simply, "When?"

Xander brushed a shaking hand across his eyes and sighed. At least Spike wasn't laughing. In fact, he looked – concerned? That couldn't be right. "Years ago. About five, six months before you came here with Dru. We met in an alley behind the Bronze. I was possessed by a hyena spirit – God, even the field trips are dangerous in this town – and you were, well, you were feeding. The blood called to me and you – shared. We fed and you took me with you, back to your place."

Spike closed his eyes, letting himself go back to that night. "Yeah, I remember that woman, but not you. I fed, went back to my digs, got drunk...spent a day

or two kissing up to the Master and went back to Dru.”

Xander shrugged. “Yeah. You said she was ill and you were going back for her. Well, we all know how that turned out. She dumped you. Guess you chose the wrong one.”

Spike glared at him. “You stupid, useless wanker. You don’t know jack about what happened and you don’t get to comment. If what you say is true, though God knows I’m having a hard time accepting it, then there’s only one reason I can think of that I can’t remember it.”

“What?” said Xander, a flicker of interest in his eyes. Spike being insulting was soothing, a return to their normal relationship. He could cope with him angry or sarcastic.

“Dru. She would have plucked you out of my memory like an eyeball from a skull. She’d have come for you. If I took one of those charms, and I suppose I did, I saved your bloody life, mate. Trust

me on that.”

Xander looked at him, biting his lip. There had been too many nights spent restlessly fingering memories until they became dulled with handling, too many days spent denying everything the brief time with Spike had taught him about himself. Accepting that Spike had acted out of concern meant releasing a grudge that had turned into a prop.

Spike watched him think, his own mind working furiously as he came to terms with what he had learned. Xander and he had been lovers? And Xander must have felt something or he wouldn't have bothered to hate him so much. Spike knew better than anyone what excesses frustrated love could produce. A faint warmth kindled in him. Wanted. He'd been wanted. It wasn't much in the wasteland that his life had become but it was something. His eyes raked Xander appraisingly, approving the strength of the body, remembering the courage he'd shown in a dozen fights. Lad had a mouth on him, of course, but so had Spike. Xander's description of their time together had made him so

hard, so ready, that he was having trouble sitting still. He felt his muscles tense and relax in a rhythm that matched Xander's breathing, as he tested the ropes that bound him.

"It doesn't matter," Xander said finally, breaking a long, thick silence. "You forgot, and I should too." He looked at the silver sphere and then directly at Spike. "Going to get rid of you, Spike," he said, his voice taunting and vindictive. "Going to forget you –"

His hand moved towards his mouth and Spike felt the demon rise. His. Xander was his and he was going to break that link? No. Wasn't going to let him. With a low growl, he pulled against the ropes. The knots had been tied cruelly tight but it didn't matter. Spike could always have broken free if he'd wanted to. Just didn't seem worth mentioning. Xander glanced up in alarm as the ropes snapped and Spike came for him, game face on, golden eyes blazing with anger and desire. Spike's hand clamped firmly but gently around Xander's wrist as he bent over him, going from a rush of speed to stillness in a

heartbeat. “Drop it. Now.”

“No,” snarled Xander. “Not going to suffer like this any more. Do you know what it’s been like? Watching you, wondering if you’d remember, if you’d tell them all. Wondering if you were pretending, just waiting for the right moment. Wishing I could just ask you, but not daring to. Too much. It’s just too fucking *much*”

He squirmed, trying to break Spike’s hold, but the vampire clung to his wrist. “Xander, I keep this up and the bloody chip’s going to have me on my knees. Please. Give it to me and give me a minute to think.”

Xander’s lips set stubbornly and Spike let the panicked rage surge up inside him, riding out the pain that sizzled through his head as he squeezed Xander’s wrist hard enough to numb it so that the charm fell to the floor. Spike pinned Xander in place with a warning look and then slowly bent to pick it up, slipping it into his jeans pocket. “Right. Now suppose we fill in some details.”

“No.”

“Oh, I think yes.” His limited patience exhausted, his head throbbing, Spike gathered Xander’s shirt in his hands and hauled him up the bed, letting him fall and straddling his body. Xander could have thrown him off easily enough but he lay still, dark eyes searching a face that had sharpened with emotion until it looked all straight lines, angular and hard. Spike leaned forward slowly, sliding his hands along the crumpled sheets, not touching Xander’s body. He could feel Xander’s cock harden beneath him, see his breath catch in his throat; hear the pulse hammering away in the hollow of his neck. With a deliberation he’d forgotten he had, Spike paused, straightening his arms so that he hung over Xander, suspended above a body that was quivering with need against his. “You’re still mine, aren’t you? Don’t know what I did, but it marked you. Tell me. Tell me what we did.” His voice was husky, slow and knowing.

The last flicker of defiance in Xander’s eyes was

quenched when Spike dipped his head and nuzzled into his neck, letting his body rest lightly against his. “I’d bite you just here if I could. You know that?” Tongue and teeth worked his flesh ruthlessly. “But I can’t. Can’t do anything any more.” Anger roughened his voice, “And you tell me you’re going to turn your back on me?” The edge smoothed away and he chuckled. “Only when I tell you to, Xander. Not until.”

Xander stared up at him. “I thought you didn’t want me,” he whispered. “Thought I wasn’t – good enough.” There it was, all the pain in two short sentences. Spike felt the words pierce him. Not wanted. Not good enough. Oh, he knew all about that feeling. He was getting the sense that he was almost there, almost solving the puzzle that he’d wondered about now and then – that deep down look of scorching anger in Xander’s eyes. He should probably take it slowly, not jiggle the precariously poised pieces but that wasn’t his style. He could be subtle, but patient? Not so much.

Spike sighed, sitting up again reluctantly and

smoothing back his hair. “Doubt it. If I’d just fucked you, Dru would’ve understood. Made me pay, mind you, weak as she was, but she’d have not cared all that much. No, must have been more to it than that, but unless you open up, I’m not going to be able to tell you.”

Xander closed his eyes. “Get off me then,” he said. “How can I think when you’ve got me so fucking hard it hurts?”

Spike laughed. “Ten out of ten for honesty, mate, but don’t expect any sympathy. I’m not exactly relaxed myself.” Xander’s eyes flicked down automatically and Spike grinned, knowing that his cock was thrusting eagerly against the soft, worn denim, his arousal on display. Rolling off Xander, he lay beside him on the bed and waited. After an endless silence of about ten seconds he heaved a weary sigh and slid an arm around Xander’s neck, pulling him close. “There. Now you don’t have to look at me. Talk. Or I’ll...”

“What?” said Xander, breathing in a scent he

thought he'd remembered and discovering he hadn't come close to capturing it in his memories. "What can you do to me now?"

Spike grabbed his hair, pulled his head back and leaned in to kiss him, his lips hard, rubbing away another layer of denial. "What *can't* I do?" Spike murmured.

Xander's mouth opened under his and just for a second, it felt familiar to Spike, but it was like trying to catch water. The ghost of a memory hit the barrier of the spell and dissolved into nothingness. Spike pulled back, frowning, but before he spoke, Xander came to a decision.

"I'll tell you. Some of it, well, it's fuzzy. Once the hyena spirit left I could still remember everything, but they weren't my memories in a way. I can't relate to them, so they don't seem real."

"Whatever. Just talk."

"You know it already. We spent two nights

together. The first night I was possessed, the second I wasn't."

"Hang on. I can see the first night happening but you came back for more? I wasn't chipped then. Weren't you scared of me?"

Xander smiled at the affront in Spike's voice. "Terrified," he said. "Scared stiff that you'd lick me to death."

"Hey!"

Xander propped himself up on his elbow and looked at Spike. "You came up to me on the street. Said we had unfinished business and if I'd let you finish it, you'd give me the charm. Meant I could forget I'd fed on a human. I could do whatever I wanted with you – and that covered a lot of ground, trust me – and then forget it all. You'd go on your way and I'd be happier. Didn't tell me you had a charm too." He lay back against Spike's shoulder, the tiredness tugging at him. So comfortable here, so safe...

Spike frowned, his hand stroking Xander's back automatically, feeling him curve against him. "So why didn't you take it, Xander?"

The final puzzle piece fell into place as Xander's drowsy voice answered automatically. "I thought you loved me."

Spike groaned. "Oh, God."

Xander froze, his body going from pliant to rigid as his own words echoed in his head. "I didn't mean that! I just didn't want to forget, that's all. Didn't trust you. Could have been poison or some weird magical mojo."

"Too many reasons. Keep it simple when you lie, pet."

Xander shrugged off the arm around him and sat up, his face tight with anger. "I'm not your pet. I'm not your anything. We had sex. Two years ago. It was hot, yes. But it's nothing that we have to do anything about. You tell anyone and I'll dust you."

Spike made a contemptuous sound that flicked Xander's raw nerves like a whip. "No you won't, and yes we do." He studied the flushed, furious face, noting the panic, and set himself to calming him down. "Strip."

"What? No!"

Okay, it hadn't worked. "Xander, you're so jumpy you're making the bed shake. Let me just —"

"Fuck my cares away? Not going to happen."

Spike shrugged and skinned off his T shirt, his hands going to his belt. Xander's eyes got large. "Stop that!"

"Nope. Getting comfortable. Do you sleep in your clothes? Not a good idea."

Spike's jeans followed his shirt onto the floor and he lay back on the bed, relaxed and at ease. Xander gritted his teeth. "Very clever."

Spike smiled happily. “Like what you’re trying very hard not to look at, pet? Going to tell me I’ve lost weight, or I must have been working out?”

Xander swallowed and then deliberately relaxed, letting his eyes wander openly, taking his time. “You look about the same. Probably something to do with being an ageless, undead vampire.”

“You think? Can still get out of shape you know. Have to work to look this good. You *do* think I look good, don’t you, Xander?”

Xander nodded casually, refusing to respond to the smirk on Spike’s lips. “You look good for your age, yeah. So?”

Spike crossed his arms behind his head and stared up at the ceiling. “You think I’m trying to tease you. Or seduce you maybe? I’m not.”

“Then why are you naked in my bed with certain bits of your anatomy standing to attention?”

“You were an animal. You know what I’m doing.”

“Help me out, Dr Doolittle.”

“You’re not working with me here, are you? You’re clothed, I’m exposed. You’re in control, I’m open. I’m trying to make you feel better.”

“Well, it’s not working! All I feel is...is...”

Spike glanced over at him. “Yes? Share a little, huh?”

Xander rolled on top of Spike, grabbing his wrists and holding them in place. “I feel like I want to kill you.”

“Not from where I’m lying you don’t.”

“Didn’t say I wouldn’t fuck you first.”

“That’s my boy.”

## Part Two

Xander moved off Spike and started to pull his shirt over his head. In the brief moment that it was covering his face, Spike rolled onto his side and kissed Xander's flat stomach, swirling his tongue against the skin in a thoughtful, lazy lick.

Xander froze, still blinded by fabric. "Don't stop," said Spike. "Take it off. Take all of it off. I want to look at you." His fingers began to move against Xander's skin, cool and supple, exploring and caressing. Xander remembered the bruises those fingers had left on his arms, bruises that had taken days to fade completely. He had measured Spike's pleasure with his pain, each mark driven into his flesh by climaxes too intense to leave room for control. He couldn't find it in him to blame Spike; his own teeth had drawn blood, his nails had dug

deep. The wounds Spike made just lasted longer – and they hadn't all faded.

As soon as he fought free of his shirt, he reached for the button on his jeans. Spike slid further down the bed so that his head was level with Xander's hands and looked up expectantly, like a cat looking to be fed. Xander laughed, his fingers stalling. He was so hard that unzipping was something to be done very carefully but he made it even slower than he needed to until Spike growled a warning. The sound sent a shiver through him and his hands jerked away, as though the metal of the zip had flared white-hot. Spike glanced up again, surprise giving way to approval, and used one hand to delicately fold back the jeans so that he could reach Xander's cock. He studied the boxer shorts that were all that covered it, and then ignored them, licking and mouthing through them until the thin fabric clung damply to the hardened flesh. Xander gasped for air that seemed to have left the room, his hips jerking and thrusting upwards helplessly. He was wondering how Spike managed to stay so calm when his hand fell against the sleeked back hair,

moving down to grip the back of Spike's neck. The combination of caress and control seemed to shatter the vampire's fragile composure, and as Xander watched, he hooked his fingers into the shorts and tore them open.

Xander had memories of being held in place by nothing more than an accepted dare as Spike spent an hour teasing him to a climax with tongue and mouth and fingers. He had begged, writhed and screamed for mercy and enjoyed every minute of it. Now he was discovering that when he put his mind to it, Spike could produce the same effect in under thirty seconds. Spike was too aroused to bother with technique. If he wanted the taste of Xander in his mouth and on his hands as soon as possible, he got it. Xander came in silence, too caught up in pleasure to be capable of sound, shuddering as Spike released him from the cool prison of his mouth.

Spike's face replaced the ceiling as he moved on top of Xander and filled his vision. His face was so blank of expression that Xander felt a chill run through

him until he saw the lips tremble and Spike's teeth bite down savagely to still the quiver. Xander realised that Spike was on the edge of losing control and seemed to be terrified by the prospect. He decided, with motives that included kindness, though it was far down the list, to give him a little push. Holding Spike's wild eyes with his own, he dragged his thumb nails down Spike's back, pulling the blood to the surface in two wavering lines. Spike arched his back and cried out as Xander's hands cupped his ass, spreading him open and holding him like that for an endless moment before letting his fingers drift between and inside. Spike surged against Xander, his cock frantically seeking enough friction to trigger his release - finding it and coming, in less time than Xander had taken.

Spike let his head fall against Xander's shoulder and lay still, unspeaking. The curve of his shoulders was eloquent enough. Xander waited a moment and then said, "Spike? Are you O.K? Because some of us need to breathe and you're a dead weight. Umm. Didn't mean it like that. Well, maybe a little. Listen to me. I'm babbling."

“Yes. You are. Shut the fuck up.”

Spike peeled himself off Xander and lay back, moodily mopping up his wet stomach with what Xander couldn't help but notice was his shirt. “Uh, that's ...oh, never mind.”

Spike wasn't showing any signs of leaving but Xander felt uneasy as the silence continued. Tentatively he reached over and touched Spike's shoulder. “Spike?”

“What?”

“Took the words right out of my mouth.”

“Is that right.”

“We can play this game of answering a question with another all night but you know, I think sleeping sounds like more fun. I can dream that this was a nightmare. Won't tell you to get back in the chair but don't hog the covers and the no biting rule still

applies.”

“Why are you acting as if nothing happened?” Spike said. He sounded bewildered and Xander frowned.

“I’m not. Plenty happened and I’m lying in a damp patch to prove it. I just don’t know how I feel about it right now and – oh shit, yes. I’m doing a great job of messing it all up for the second time, aren’t I? Sorry. This isn’t easy for me, you know.”

It was Spike’s turn to frown. “I’m talking about me having the self control of a bloody kid. Spoiling it for you like that. I’m not usually...well, am I? Was I? Oh, God. It’s the chip! I can’t kill and it’s making me come too fast!”

Xander stared at him, mouth hanging open for three full seconds before howling with laughter. “Spike – you, oh that’s just too funny. What about me? Between us we both came in less time than it takes me to brush my teeth but so what? It was good.”

“You don’t count,” said Spike, not unkindly, but as one stating an obvious fact. “You’re human.” He looked at Xander, eyes pleading. “Tell me I was better before?”

Xander considered the possibilities inherent in that plea. Revenge. It was within his grasp. So was Spike’s body though and he knew first hand which was tastier served cold. “Want some statistics do you?” he asked offhandedly. “Something to compare to current performance?”

“Well, I don’t know – what statistics? Are you trying to tell me you kept *notes*?”

Spike’s voice squeaked with outraged disbelief and Xander bit back another chuckle. “Not exactly. Just had a long time to think it all over.” Like every night and a large part of the day for an endless succession of weeks and months. “Let’s see. We were in that room for a total of fourteen hours over two nights. Asleep for some of it of course. You came nine times, I came seven. Average time from commencement of foreplay to ejaculation was –”

“Xander! Shut up.”

“Won’t. Let me see, yeah, about 13 minutes twenty five seconds. Positions used, well, were there any we didn’t try? Don’t think so. Want diagrams? I can sketch them if you like.” He waited for Spike’s defeated shake of the head and then reached out and gently patted his shoulder. “It’s not about time, Spike. It’s not about performance. It’s about ... connecting. We had fun. I probably made it into more than it was because it was my first time, but still –”

“‘First time’? With a vampire? With a bloke?” Spike watched the blush spread over Xander’s face and grinned, self esteem restored. “I was your first anyone?”

“Yes. I was only sixteen!”

Spike looked at him appraisingly, the smile fading. “So you were.” His voice was soft as he asked, “Was I – nice to you?”

Xander looked at him. “You were – are – an evil vampire. What do you think?”

Spike’s eyes flickered. Shame or regret, Xander wondered? Probably not but he didn’t look happy either. “I think I hurt you.”

Xander thought back to the bathroom tile smooth and cold against his face as he watched Spike walk away from him. “You could have. There was one point, when I was possessed and you were angry with me, you nearly forced me to – but you didn’t. After that you did nothing to me I didn’t want you to do.” He pulled Spike to him, his face serious, his arms wrapped around the tense body beside him. “Nothing. And believe me, we did just about everything.”

Spike shrugged. “Have to take your word for that, won’t I?” His eyes darkened as he studied Xander. “So what did I teach you?” He ran one finger along Xander’s collar bone and then cupped his shoulder. Pushing against it, he sent Xander to his back and

looked down at him. “What did the big, bad vampire teach you to do, hmm? And have you forgotten any of it? Better not have.”

Xander listened to his voice, silky and insinuating, impossible to ignore, and felt his cock stir to life again. “Shouldn’t we talk about this, think about what we’re doing?” he asked. “Shouldn’t we – oh God, do that again!”

Spike arched an innocent eyebrow. “What, this? I don’t have your advantages, see. I don’t know what you like, so I’m going to have to find out all over again.”

“I like that.”

“Thought you wanted to talk.”

“Later.”

“Later’s good. And it will be bloody later, too.”  
Xander was barely able to speak over the buzzing in his ears as Spike’s fingers wandered his body, but

he managed to raise a questioning eyebrow. Spike bared his teeth in what might have passed for a smile in the dark. “Going to improve that average. You come too fast and I’ll rip your balls off.” He glanced down and looked disappointed. “That was a joke, you know. Give me something to work with here.”

“Yes, teacher,”

“Oh, you’re just asking for it now.”

Xander pushed Spike away, reached into the drawer of the night table and tossed a small bottle at Spike.

“No. Now I’m asking.”

Spike looked down. “Unscented? Not very adventurous.”

“I’m all out of wild cherry.”

Xander’s voice sounded odd and Spike glanced at him. “Is that a joke I’m supposed to get?”

Xander opened his mouth and shut it again.  
“Doesn’t matter.”

Spike looked down at the lube and several excellent places to apply it and then back up at Xander’s shadowed face. The bottle landed on the floor and Spike had Xander in his arms before the first tears fell.

### **Part Three**

Spike had forgotten how hot tears could be. Xander’s were trickling over his skin, his head was resting in the curve of Spike’s neck and he had his arms wrapped around him as tightly as he could. If Spike had stopped to think, the conflicting emotions probably would have had much the same effect as the chip firing, but instinct had made him pull Xander close, give him a place to hide the tears so

that he could pretend they didn't exist if he wanted to. Xander was crying as silently as he'd come, his body shaking, his chest heaving against the unmoving rock that was Spike. Spike's eyes fell and he watched his hand moving in a rhythmic pattern against Xander's back. He heard a voice whispering soothing nonsense, recognised it as his own and felt the confusion melt away.

Xander was hurting. Xander was his. He had to make it better. Spike had no hang ups about tears. Vampires didn't cry as a rule but their victims did. They cried, they begged, they screamed for mercy. It was a human thing. Deciding that Xander had cried enough, he forced his head up and studied the wet face. After a comprehensive glance he said tersely, "Sniff. Better, but not good enough. Here. Blow on this."

"That's my shirt."

"I got it messy anyway. Blow."

Xander obeyed him and was about to mop up his

face with a relatively clean bit of shirt when Spike took it from him and tossed it on the floor. "I'll do that." Leaning forward he stroked the tears from his face with the back of his hand and then gently closed Xander's eyes, brushing the last of them away and kissing Xander's mouth as a grace note. Xander's eyes opened for a startled second and then shut on a sigh as the kiss deepened. When Spike's teeth bit into his lip, tasting the salt, he moaned and pulled Spike back with him so they were lying on the bed, legs tangled and hands free. The kisses grew harder, their hands more demanding, and when Spike found his arms pinned above his head as Xander's other hand blurred on his cock he decided Xander was feeling better. When Xander leaned over and snagged the discarded bottle of lube, smoothing it over himself in a way that suggested he'd had a lot of practice, he was sure of it. Xander entered him with one long steady thrust, his teeth clenched to hold back a whimpered moan, and Spike grinned up at the contorted face above him and whispered wickedly, "You'll scream before I'm done with you and that's a promise."

Xander curved down to bite Spike's shoulder, tasting his own tears. "You first."

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Xander sighed sleepily, one arm flung across Spike's chest, his mind and body both finally relaxed enough to find the rest that had eluded him. As he sank into an exhausted sleep Spike studied the face of a man he would have sworn was his enemy and smiled ruefully. Full of surprises, this place was. It took the Hellmouth to make William the Bloody fall for a human but it looked as if that was what had happened, if not two years ago, then in the last two hours. His smile faded. The lost memories were a problem. It infuriated him that he couldn't smash down the wall that separated him from what had happened. He wanted to know, wanted to find out just what had happened. His love for Dru had been strong enough to endure for over a century and yet he'd felt enough concern over Xander to rob himself of what sounded like a couple of wild

nights. Why? Another look at Xander gave him no clues. His life had changed so much in such a short time. Dru had gone. Left him after more than a century of what he had believed to be mutual love. It had been. It was Angelus coming back that had unsettled her, made her leave. Spike found himself growling as the memories twisted around him like brambles, painful and clinging, and stopped as Xander's forehead creased with worry, his hand reaching out blindly. Spike covered it with his own, squeezing gently, watching the frown smooth away.

Sighing, he settled down to sleep.

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Xander woke with his dreams rolling away like jewel coloured marbles dropped from a bag, vanishing in the dusty corners of his mind. Finding that Spike was still curled up against him forced a hasty re evaluation of some of the dreams. Memories. Real. Not his fantasies any more. He felt a tingling, grinding heaviness as his cock, for once brighter

than the rest of him, worked out the correct response to what was probably the vampire sign language for 'good morning'. Spike's fingers curled under his balls and Xander frowned. Was that something to do with how he took his coffee?

"Morning, pet," Spike murmured, his fingers gently prowling as Xander's clouded eyes began to clear.

"White, two sugars."

"I beg your pardon?"

Xander smiled. "I'm still half asleep, ignore me."

"Suit yourself." Spike rolled over, his back to Xander, and stared at the wall.

Xander opened his mouth to protest and then studied Spike's back. It didn't look offended. It looked...expectant. He reached out to hug Spike, letting his hand trail down over ribs and stomach to an erection that matched his own, nuzzling and nipping at the curve of his neck. Spike shuddered

and he bit down harder, his hips matching the movement of his hand as he rubbed his cock against Spike's ass in slow, sleepy upward thrusts.

Spike leaned back enough for Xander to kiss him. The angle was awkward but the kiss made up for it. Spike twisted around and the kiss turned from tender to fierce, desire blazing up from embers that hadn't cooled overnight. Xander knew how this would end but it was the middle that was so full of unknown possibilities.

"Xander," Spike said, his tongue doing its best to make a shower unnecessary – or possibly essential – "Someone's coming."

Xander went numb with horror. His first thought – that Spike was joking or giving a running commentary – died as quickly as his erection. He could hear Willow's high voice making polite chit chat with his mother and he knew that it was only a matter of moments before they exhausted all they had to say to each other and she came down the stairs.

“Spike! It’s Willow! Do something!”

Spike gave him a disgusted look and slapped his backside hard. “Calm down, Harris.”

The slap didn’t do the trick – far from it – but being called ‘Harris’ did. Xander took a deep breath and jerked his head towards the shower. “Go in there. Don’t come out until she’s gone.”

Spike opened his mouth to argue and then shrugged. Rolling off the bed he strolled towards the small bathroom throwing in a gratuitous wiggle of his backside that had Xander transfixed for precious seconds. As soon as he was out of sight Xander grabbed the first clothes he could find and skinned into them. The lube he slid under the pillow, he threw the covers up over the rumpled sheets and when Willow entered after a pro forma knock, he was lying on the bed watching TV.

“Top of the morning to you my little Willow tree!”  
Too enthusiastic and hyper. Willow frowned. “Too

much coffee,” he added, trying to scale down his twitchiness. He heard the shower start and relaxed a little.

Willow continued to stare. “Xander? Why are you wearing Spike’s T shirt...back to front?”

“Spike’s? This isn’t...oh, so it is. Didn’t sleep well, no I did sleep well. I’m still half asleep. I’m – Willow, did you want something?”

Willow’s eyes widened. “Giles asked if you could go see him later, if you’re not busy. He’s trying to put up some shelves and they keep falling down.”

Xander nodded, trying to keep his eyes on Willow instead of the door Spike had gone through. “Sure. He couldn’t have phoned, though? Since when did you become his messenger?”

Willow said gently, “Your phone is off the hook.”

Xander glanced at it and remembered just how it had got that way. Bent over the table, pushing it out

of the way as he collapsed forward with Spike lying on him like fluff on a rug. A blush spread over his face as he turned towards it and he was just getting it under control when Willow drew in her breath sharply. Time slowed as Xander watched Spike come back into the room, a skimpy towel wrapped around his hips, a larger one drying his hair. Willow was too busy gaping to notice Xander's reaction which was just as well.

Hair all soft and mussed (want to smooth it down and mess it up again). Skin all damp with water drops here and there (want to lick them up, drink from him). Towel clinging, outlining a slowly stiffening cock (want to fall to my knees and pull it loose with my teeth to get at what's underneath). Xander swallowed and summoned the strength that had kept him alive on the Hellmouth.

“For the love of God, Spike. Put some clothes on. I haven't eaten yet and you're making my eyes hurt with all the dazzle. Haven't vamps heard of fake tan?”

The words were edged with panic and came out sounding so vicious that Willow flinched. “Xander!” she protested. “There’s no need to be so mean.” She turned to Spike and gave him one of her goofy grins; the ones that made her look cuter than anyone had a right to be. “Though he does have a point. You’re awfully...bare.”

Spike’s face softened. “For you, Red, I’ll get dressed.” He flicked his eyes at Xander. “If I could have my gear that is.”

Xander peeled off the shirt and threw it at him in a wadded up ball. Willow glanced between them, worry plain on her face. “This isn’t working is it? I’ll tell Giles he has to have you back, Spike and –”

“No!” Xander smiled weakly as the word came out at twice the volume he’d intended. “No need for that. I’m just a bit cranky with Spike snoring all night. I’ll call Giles; tell him I’ll be over later. Thanks Will.”

Willow nodded and backed away. “I’m late for a

Wicca meeting. I'll...I'll see you later, Xander."

She left quickly, the door slamming behind her. Xander dragged his eyes off Spike who was still holding his T shirt, still half naked and walked up the stairs. Bending over he shoved the wedge he'd whittled under the door. His mother had refused to let him lock it and this was his small rebellion against that order. Going back down the stairs to face Spike was the most difficult thing he'd done in a while but he did it anyway. He hated himself for doing it, but he attacked instead of apologising.

"Did you have to embarrass me like that in front of Willow? You couldn't have stayed in there a minute longer?" Actually, now he said it, he thought he had a point.

Spike shrugged, his eyes empty. "Can't help it can I? I'm an embarrassment so I embarrass. Or are you going to try and say you're proud of the fact you spent the night fucking the undead?"

"I'm not saying –"

“Forget it.” Spike began to walk towards Xander, the towel starting to unwrap. Xander watched it fall to the floor and couldn’t help following it. By the time Spike reached him he was on his knees, lips parted.

“Good boy,” Spike murmured. “You know I won’t believe anything you say so you tell me you’re sorry a better way.” He held his cock in his hand and brushed it teasingly against Xander’s lips. Then he turned away and went over to his jeans, lying in a heap beside the bed. “Sorry, mate. Going to take more than that.”

Xander was left in the middle of the room feeling rejected and foolish. The humiliation might have turned to anger but he knew that everything he felt Spike had gone through too. Standing up, he walked over to Spike and reached out a hand to touch his arm. “Spike? I *am* sorry. I was scared and I panicked.” Irritation flared and he added. “But there was still no need for you to come out! It was bad enough you tried to bite her last month; you

didn't have to flash her too."

The coldness melted away and Spike pulled Xander to him, kissing him with a possessiveness and hunger that left him trembling. "Want to change your mind about my apology?" Xander asked when Spike pulled back enough to let him speak.

Spike looked as if he was about to agree and then shook his head reluctantly. "Later. Got to talk."

"Talk about what?"

Spike looked at him incredulously. "There's the little matter of my memories? Not to mention there's still a lot you're not telling me."

Xander flushed. "Can't we just forget about that?"

"No, we can't just forget about it! Do you have any idea how I feel? I've got to know what happened. Come nightfall, we're going to see that demon."

Xander gaped at him, floundering in confusion. "You

want to remember?”

“No reason not to. Not like Dru’s going to pop up again.” He sounded resigned rather than bitter.

“Why do you need me?”

“Just do,” said Spike evasively, drumming his hands against the night table. “And you’d better bring your charm with you.”

Xander glared at him. “You wouldn’t be thinking of making me take it, would you? Because that’s just so not going to happen!”

Spike laughed harshly. “Now that never even crossed my mind.” He looked at Xander. “You’re not going to be allowed to forget me, you understand?”

“Didn’t I just say –?”

Spike was on him in a heartbeat, arms tight around him, teeth digging into his neck, just below the chip’s boundary. “Mine...” he whispered. “I think

you need reminding of that before you go off to see your little friends.” Xander felt Spike’s mouth high on his neck, sucking fiercely. He knew exactly what Spike was doing and why and he stood still and let him do it.

Spike broke away, his eyes glazed as he fought to stay in human face. “Get out and go see Giles,” he said. “Be back before sunset. I want this over with.”

Xander dressed in silence and left Spike lying on the bed, his face averted, moodily flicking through the channels on his TV.

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Giles greeted him with an awkward smile. “Xander! There was no rush, really. Anytime would have done. You said some time ago that if there were any odd jobs I needed doing – paid of course. I don’t expect you to work for free.”

Xander waved a dismissive hand. “If you just want

shelves putting up and you've got all the supplies, it's on me, Giles."

"Well, we'll see about that later. I've put all the wood and such in my room upstairs. Now I no longer have my office at school I find I'm —"

Xander tuned out Giles' gentle babbling as he followed him upstairs, wondering if he was going to be able to make it through another hour without going back to his room and lying down next to Spike. He flinched as Giles said his name sharply and smiled. "Sorry. Didn't get much sleep."

Giles looked at him with concern but said nothing. Xander was shown the lumber and set to work, asking Giles a few questions about the distance apart he wanted the shelves and then getting on with it, trying not to wince as he filled the holes Giles' earlier attempts had left in the walls.

After a while Giles appeared at the top of the stairs. "Thought you might like a drink," he said, holding out a can of soda.

Xander took it gratefully, popping it open and then turning his head to nod at what he had done.

“Going to look good, isn’t it?”

The light from the window fell on his neck, illuminating the mark Spike's teeth had left. Xander heard Giles make a small sound but his mind was already back on his work. He set the can down and turned back to the shelves. Two steps and Giles was behind him, his body so close that Xander felt dizzy with the heat he radiated.

“What did he do to you?” Giles said in a voice Xander had never heard him use before, crackling with icy rage. “Answer me!”

Xander tried to reply but Giles’s hands were on him, tearing at his T shirt, ripping it up to expose his back. Xander began to struggle but Giles locked one arm around his neck and forced Xander to turn so that his back was bathed in the sunlight. Xander knew what Giles was looking at, knew whose nails and teeth had written words of love on his back in

crimson letters.

A hand rested against the small of his back, warm and gentle. "I will kill him for this," said Giles softly.

### **Part Four**

Xander felt fear take him, dimming his vision, buzzing loudly in his ears. Giles could do it. Giles *would* do it. Spurred on by the sure and certain knowledge that Spike would be dust within the hour if he didn't force his body to work again, he wriggled enough to make Giles loosen his arm lock and turned to face him. They were so close that it should have been awkward, embarrassing even, but Giles didn't step back and Xander had nowhere to go. He could still feel the warm hand on his scratched back; still hear the rage and disgust in Giles' voice echoing in his head.

"Giles listen to me, let me explain," Xander said, the words coming out in a frantic whisper. He tried again, achieving a slightly higher volume. "It's not

what you think.” Oh, wonderful, he thought. I sound so convincing.

Giles raised his hand as if he were going to hit Xander, fist clenched, knuckles gleaming white where the skin was dragged thin over bone. “How can you know what I’m thinking, Xander, when I don’t know myself? What can you possibly say to make this seem right?” He glanced at his hand as though it belonged to someone else and Xander flinched away, less from the expected blow than from the idea of Giles being angry enough to strike him.

Giles moved back, his face going slack with shock at what he had almost done. Xander saw him struggle with the emotions that swirled around them both, as abrasive as sand in the wind, and watched helplessly as Giles twisted away and drove his fist against the wall, his lips peeled back in a soundless grimace of pain.

Xander saw his fist come back again and grabbed at his arm, seeing the blood oozing from the torn skin

of Giles' hand. "Stop it, Giles! Please..."

It was like trying to hold back the sea. Giles shouldered him aside and rammed his fist against the wall again, the noise of the blow merging with the guttural, deep sound he made as his knuckles were scraped raw.

"Fine! You want to hit things? I can do that, too Giles. But I'm not stupid. I use this."

Xander grabbed the hammer he'd been using and smashed it down, inches above Giles's hand as it hit the wall for a third time, overriding Giles' violence with his own, forcing him to retreat.

Giles turned to look at him, his eyes searching Xander's face, the anger giving way to a dull, disillusioned expression. He stood silent, automatically nursing his injured hand, his lips tight as the pain began to seep through.

Xander spoke quietly. "Two years. I've loved him for two years, Giles. Why kill him now?"

The metallic glint in Giles' eyes faded and Xander was looking at Giles again, just Giles. The man who scolded him, corrected him, used him as an errand boy. The man who had taught him, protected him and loved him for years. For the second – or was it the third? - time in less than a day, Xander felt tears sting his eyes. To have Giles look at him like this – his eyes tired and desperate – to know that Giles had been about to kill for him, to risk a confrontation with a vampire who was still far from safe –

Giles reached out suddenly and pulled Xander to him, his arms going around him in a brief, infinitely comforting hug. Xander rested his head on Giles' shoulder, needing to hold onto someone, just for a moment, just until the room stopped whirling around him. Giles patted his back and pulled away gently.

“I think we need to discuss this calmly, Xander. I can't promise, but I'll try not to –”

“Kill him?”

The dangerous look came back, the brief reconciliation over. “No. I was going to say, lose my temper again. I’m still going to kill him.”

Xander had had enough. Maybe it was his turn to have a tantrum. “You go through me first then. Or are you going to drop the Ripper act and listen? Since when did my love life become your business?”

“‘Love’?” Giles gave an incredulous, scornful laugh. “Are you mad, Xander? This is Spike we’re talking about. He’s incapable of the emotion.”

Xander stared at him, meeting his eyes without flinching. “Maybe. But I’m not.”

Giles was left wordless for a moment. He moved away, his shoulders slumped and stared out of the window. Xander watched him, wondering just when his legs had started trembling. It had all happened so quickly...

“I don’t understand what you mean. Two years?”  
Giles had recovered his composure enough to ask questions, Xander thought wryly. That had to be a good sign.

“It’s a long story full of Hellmouthy goodness.”

Giles turned his head. “I have time to listen. It’s still an hour to sunset.”

The threat implicit in his words made Xander’s head throb as he forced back the hot anger. “Giles, you are not going anywhere near Spike like this. Understand?”

Giles took off his glasses to polish them, a ritual Xander had seen a thousand times. Without them he never seemed to peer around uncertainly or look as if the world had turned blurry. Giles was always focused, always in control. Changing his mind would be a challenge. The glasses slid back on and Giles studied Xander’s face for a long moment before gesturing at the door. “Let’s go and make ourselves comfortable then and you can tell me what you

think I need to know.”

Xander frowned at that phrasing and hung back, suspicion flaring. Giles noticed and sighed. “I assure you, Xander, my concern for your well being doesn’t include pushing you down a flight of steps to get you out of the way while I go and find Spike.”

Xander shrugged. “You just had me in an arm lock, Giles. I’m not big with the trusting right now.”

Giles ducked his head but not quickly enough. Xander saw the hurt flash across his face and winced. “I’m sorry –”

Giles held up a hand to ward him off. “No. I deserve that. I acted impetuously. I had my reasons but even so it was wrong of me. I’m sorry.”

He walked out of the room before Xander could reply, not looking to see Xander’s reaction. Xander stood for a moment before following him, looking at the abandoned project, the neatly stacked wood. He wondered if he’d ever finish it.

~\*~\*~\*~\*~

Once Giles had dealt with his injured hand, rinsing it and wincing as he doused it with antiseptic, they settled down in the living room, both choosing to sit as far apart as possible. Xander felt unable to begin talking. Where could he start? Giles knew about Spike but he didn't want to see his face when he found out all of what had happened. Giles sat expectantly, his hands loosely clasped, leaning forward slightly in his chair, but Xander, huddled into a corner of the sofa, could only look at him.

“Xander?” Giles said eventually. “I know this is difficult for you, but if you really want to plead Spike's cause you have to actually use words. Try your best.”

Giles being sarcastic was blessedly familiar amongst the chaos of the day. Xander smiled. “You know me, Giles. I can talk and talk and never say anything worth listening to. Not so good with the persuading

people not to kill things though.”

“I think you underrate yourself but no matter. Perhaps it will help if I tell you how very sorry I am.”

“Sorry for what?”

Giles stared at him. “I sent Spike to you. Forced you to invite him in. It’s my fault that this has happened.”

Xander jumped up. “No way! Giles, you can’t take that on yourself. You needed some space with Olivia coming over, I had room, and it’s not your fault. Besides, this began long before that.”

Giles stood as well and brushed past Xander to pour himself a shot of whisky, pouring it carefully as though the precision was all that saved him from filling it to the brim. “I didn’t send him to you just because Olivia was coming,” he said. “I sent him because if he’d been here with me one more night he’d have driven me mad. Do you have any idea how annoying he can be?”

“Well, yes. Can’t argue with that. If you want aggravating, he’s your man.” Xander said.

Giles shook his head in exasperation. “He’s like a child in some ways. He sees the world as a very simple place. He’s lost every weapon he possesses save his ability to use words to hurt and his undeniable physical attraction. He’s helpless for the first time in decades and he’s panicking, clutching at anything to get him back in control.”

Xander thought about the times he’d seen that panic as Spike waited for the chip to punish him for an unthinking shove or an automatic threat. He wondered how different the world looked to Spike now that he wasn’t at the top of the food chain. He remembered the arrogance, the assurance of two years ago and felt the first stirrings of regret, not that Spike couldn’t kill, but that he’d been twisted and bent like a sword warped out of shape until it was transformed from a weapon to scrap metal.

“He even tried to come on to me after threats

didn't work. Seemed to think I'd get the chip out if he – well. I'm sure you can guess what he offered." Giles laughed a little bitterly. "I felt rather sorry for him then, he'd lost so much of his self respect, but now he's tried it on you and you've – God, Xander, do you have any idea what you've done?"

He broke off, gulping his drink and putting down the empty glass. Xander collapsed back on the sofa, trying to make sense of what Giles had said. Giles joined him. The room was full of shadows now as the light faded and it made it easier to talk.

"I can't believe Spike tried to – well, why would he? I mean you're not gay –" Xander looked at Giles who was giving him a patient look, as if he were waiting for him to catch up. "Oh, God. Officially freaked here."

Giles rubbed his forehead. "I'm not gay, precisely, Xander, if that's what's got you blushing. I grew up in an era of, well, we experimented a lot more than your generation seems willing to do. Not your fault perhaps. The fact remains that I've had lovers of

both sexes and Spike was well aware of the fact that I wasn't totally indifferent to him from a physical point of view. Just can't stand the sight of the manipulative little toe rag so turning him down wasn't that much of an effort." Giles raised an eyebrow and said with some asperity, "And if that dropped jaw is because you don't think someone of my advanced age is still interested in sex then –"

"No! Not thinking that at all! Well, maybe a little, but, no. You're, well, you're Giles. Don't tend to think of you and sex and, can I just shut up now? Please?"

Giles grinned for the first time since the conversation had begun. "No, you may not. In penance for your all too predicable response, you may start at the beginning and tell me exactly how you and Spike got to this point. I promise not to judge you and you'll find it difficult to shock me."

Xander gave way to the temptation to try. "I ate human flesh and lost my virginity to Spike after I woke up handcuffed to his bed." He waited

expectantly but Giles just looked at him, his face expressionless. "Aren't you going to say, 'Good Lord!' or something?" he asked, slightly disappointed with Giles' lack of reaction.

Giles forced words out past gritted teeth. "I may be difficult to shock, but if you're going to be deliberately provocative, you may see a side of me that you never suspected existed. Don't push me, Xander. I don't think you'll like the consequences."

Xander flushed. "Sorry. I've had two years to get used to the idea, forgot you haven't." He swallowed. "Think it might take more like twenty though."

Giles looked at him, concern replacing irritation. "I can't believe you never told us about this. Do you – I mean, are you ready now? Would you like me to call Buffy or –"

"No! No way, Giles. Just you. If I tell them they'll know that I lied to them."

“Lied about what?”

Xander met his eyes. “You always knew but they didn’t. They think I can’t remember trying to rape Buffy, they’ve never said a word about it. He offered me a lot but he couldn’t do anything to take that memory away.” Xander shuddered, his hands locked together.

“Who offered you – Xander, would you please just tell me in simple sentences what happened? You’re talking about the time you were possessed by the hyena? But Spike wasn’t even in Sunnydale then.”

“He was, you just didn’t –” Xander broke off as the front door opened and Spike walked in, kicking the door shut behind him. Xander stood up, looking at Giles, also on his feet, with a clear warning on his face. Giles’ eyes were bright with renewed anger as he walked quickly towards the vampire.

Spike smirked at him, realising by his expression that Giles knew what had happened, in part at least. He turned to Xander, the mocking smile turning

genuine for a moment. “There you are, pet. You’re late. I told you to be back by sundown.” Spike’s face was a smooth mask of polite amusement as he turned back to Giles. “Hope you had fun playing with him, Rupert but it’s time he went home. Got a lot to do tonight.”

Spike’s gibe shattered Giles’ forced composure. “You really think I’m letting you near him again?”

“Not up to you, is it?”

“I think I don’t really care about the niceties of it all.”

Two steps and Giles was grabbing Spike’s coat in rough hands, thrusting him against a wall and glaring down at him. Xander watched, wanting to help but unsure if his intervention would make things worse. Spike’s head slammed against the plaster but he kept smiling, his tongue flicking out teasingly. “Now, then Rupert. Let’s not get hasty.” His eyes flicked down and his nostrils flared, the smile vanishing. “If you got your hand bloody on

Xander I'll rip it off and make you eat it."

Giles rolled his eyes and let go of Spike, dislike radiating off him. "Save your concern and your empty threats. The only bruises he has are the ones you left on him."

"I didn't hurt him. Or have you forgotten the chip?" Spike growled, his eyes fixed on Giles.

"Oh, I think you're more than capable of hurting him still. Or you were until I found out –"

Xander heard the angry voices dim as the room began to swirl around him as it had done upstairs. "Standing right here, people," he said, forcing the words out. "Getting tired of being fought over –"

He swayed and grabbed onto the back of the couch. Spike and Giles both moved towards him but Spike got there first, holding Xander up without any difficulty and dumping him unceremoniously on the couch. He stood and shot Giles an accusing glare. "So you didn't hit him? What did you do then?"

“Giles didn’t do anything to me, Spike. Just not feeling so good.”

“You’re sick? You should have said something, not come here and worked your arse off for this incompetent wanker.” Spike sneered at Giles. “Should have thought you were good at D.I.Y, Watcher. Or did you finally get some once I’d left you in peace with your English bit?”

Giles looked at Xander and visibly held back the words that rose to his lips. He jerked his head towards a chair. “Sit down and keep your mouth shut, Spike. Xander has something to tell me and until he’s done, he’s not leaving. If you try to interfere I will hurt you. Do you believe me when I say it would give me more pleasure than anything else you said I could do to your body?”

Spike grinned sourly. “When you look like that? Yeah. I believe you.” He sauntered over to a chair, his eyes going to Xander’s face. “It’s all right, love. I’m not going anywhere without you.”

Xander stood up, looking between them both, stricken and lost. "I can't do this. I can't –"

Spike was out of his chair instantly and Giles made a sound that was close to a growl. "Sit down, I said." He looked at Xander. "And that goes for you, too. Sit down before you fall down." He sighed. "I need a drink. God, do I need a drink."

"First sensible thing you've said since I came in. Get the lad something first; he needs it more than you. Brandy maybe. And while you're at it, I'll have one too. Not fussy what. I'll give you this; you've got good taste in booze."

Xander saw Giles' outraged face, began to laugh and couldn't stop. Giles swore and he felt the edge of a glass against his chattering teeth. The fumes from the brandy and the fiery burn as he swallowed some helped calm him and he sat back and looked at the two concerned faces watching him. "Sorry. Been one of those days." He took another sip. "I'm going to tell you this story just once, both of you,

and if anyone interrupts me, I'll get unpredictably violent, okay?" Two heads nodded and he sighed with relief.

"We were on a field trip to the zoo..."

## **Part Five**

Giles relented and let Spike move beside Xander on the sofa. Spike sat with his arm across Xander's shoulders and Giles wondered if the embrace was designed to annoy him or reassure Xander. He refused to even think about it being something Spike was doing for his own sake. When he looked at Spike his knuckles throbbed with pain because his hand automatically doubled into a fist. Xander did seem calmer with Spike touching him though, especially when he described feeding off the

woman and ended up gripping Spike's hand hard enough to make the vampire wince, though his hand remained still under Xander's. Giles was able – barely - to keep his face expressionless, but he was aghast at the size of the burden Xander had been carrying for so long. What he had dismissed as a gruesome but fairly small scale occurrence had done more damage than he realised.

Xander's story had been faltering and confusing at times, though the brandy might have been partly to blame. Giles had given him a larger measure than he'd intended and he frowned as he saw Xander gulp it down, shuddering slightly as it burned his mouth, relaxing into the cushion it provided.

Giles hadn't understood at first why Spike didn't help Xander out when he searched for words. He wasn't usually so reticent. Then Xander described the memory charm and Spike's reasons for taking it, and he drew in his breath sharply, looking past Xander's face, haunted with old memories, to Spike. "You still don't know? The memories have completely gone?" he demanded.

Spike nodded. "Thought the lad had gone off his rocker last night when he told me about it. Still trying to get at them but...I can't. I know they're still there but –" He shrugged, his frustration evident.

"You're talking," said Xander looking at them both reprovably, his eyes heavy as the brandy seeped into his blood. "I'm not done yet."

Spike nuzzled into his neck with a casual affection not lost on Giles. "Sorry, pet. But you've done the bit that only you know about so I can take it from here if you like."

Xander smiled at him. "It's just killing you keeping quiet, isn't it?"

"I can be quiet!" Spike said, hurt.

"No, you can't," said Giles. "At least not in the time you were under my roof. I've had leaking taps that drivelled less."

“Was bored, wasn’t I? Easy enough to shut me up if you give me something more interesting to do with my –”

“That will do, Spike,” said Giles, his voice hard. “Xander knows that you did your best to entertain me while you were here but there’s no need to dwell on it.”

Spike raised his eyebrows. “You told him? Rupert, sometimes you surprise me.” He studied Giles and smiled, open and friendly. “Offer’s off though. Missed your chance there.”

Xander looked at him. “Would you really have done - that - to get your chip out?”

His voice was high with hurt and Spike frowned. “That would bother you?” he said doubtfully. Giles cast up his eyes in disbelief. Could even Spike be so clueless?

“Too many ways to list, yeah.”

“Why don’t you start at the top and work down,” Giles suggested a little snidely. “I have a feeling Spike might not be seeing things in quite the same way as you and it could prove instructive.”

Xander swallowed. “Well, I –” He turned to face Spike, his movements slow and slightly exaggerated. Giles leaned back against the arm of his chair, watching them both in the low light of a single lamp. Spike was still touching Xander, as if he couldn’t help it, his thigh against Xander’s leg, his hand resting on his shoulder and Xander was doing more than passively allowing it, he was welcoming it. Three days ago they would have been at opposite ends of the room, the hostility between them a living thing. Giles was still trying to organise his thoughts. Clearly there had been a bond forged when Xander was possessed, severed by Xander’s belief that Spike had rejected him and now reforged. From what he gathered, Spike and Xander had only fed from the woman, not each other. Giles tried to think of anything in vampire lore that applied, but so much of it, even after centuries of research, was guesswork.

Xander seemed to find his courage and began to speak, choosing his words carefully. "I don't like the idea of you bargaining with your body. You shouldn't have to do that. I don't like you ... teasing Giles. He deserves better than that. And sorry, but if you didn't have the chip I'm not sure where that would put us so I don't like you planning how to take it out. Well. Guess the list wasn't that long after all."

Giles cut in. "It's academic anyway so perhaps we can just leave it there. We don't know how to remove it, Spike. And for what it's worth, I don't approve of the chip, though obviously I'm relieved that you're no longer killing."

"What, not sporting enough for you? Prefer a good old fashioned staking?"

"Frankly, yes. The Initiative scares me more than you ever did."

Spike looked as if he couldn't work out if this was a

compliment or not and Xander snickered. Spike glared at him. “Not wanting to break up the ‘remind Spike he’s fangless’ party but I didn’t come around here just to be bloody minded. I need Xander with me tonight. Got a demon to see. We should push off. It’s getting late”

Giles welcomed the move to a less emotionally charged subject but Spike’s words made him sit up straight. “Not bloody minded? You stalked in here as if you owned the place! And I suppose tattooing, ‘I belong to Spike’ all over Xander’s neck and back was done from the purest of motives?” He stood up and walked behind the sofa deciding that he did need another drink after all.

Spike smirked, leaning back with arrogance clinging to him as tightly as his jeans. “Got that right, Rupert. Pure possessiveness. Lad’s mine and I didn’t take kindly to – hey!”

“He is not yours, Spike,” Giles said, separating the words with a deadly calm as he gripped the back of Spike’s neck and dug his fingers into the cool skin.

“If you ever hurt him based on the mistaken belief that his body is yours to mark, I will carry out my earlier promise and kill you.”

“Giles! Don’t,” said Xander, reaching up to tug at Giles’ arm. “I let him do it. If you’re going to get mad, get mad with me.”

Giles let his hand slide away and sighed. “Xander –”

“No. I know why he did it, my neck I mean. Willow came by with your message and we were –”

“Getting the marks on your back?” said Giles dryly, taking his revenge for Xander’s earlier attempt to shock him.

Xander’s eyes widened and then he grinned a little shyly. “Some of them. I – I was scared. I –”

“You shoved me away, like I was something to be ashamed of,” Spike said bitterly. “Then you talked to me like –”

“Like I always do,” Xander said, not looking at Spike.

“Ah. I see, Spike. I can understand how galling that must have been. You spent the night together and then in the morning light Xander seemed to change his mind. My heart bleeds.”

Spike picked moodily at a loose thread on his jeans as Giles’s sarcasm bit deep. “I got angry.”

Giles slapped him across the back of his head. “Doesn’t excuse you being bloody childish,” he muttered. “Love bites! Did you scrawl Spike and Xander in a heart on the wall outside?” He frowned. “You didn’t, did you?”

Spike gave him a scathing look. “Must you treat me like a punching bag? And what do you mean you promised to kill me?”

Xander leaned forward and patted him on the knee. “S’okay. I shaved –saved- you, Spike.”

He giggled as he slurred his words and Spike looked

at him with quick suspicion. “Xander, are you drunk? How much of that brandy did you have?”

“All of it and then you were yapping away with Giles so I drank yours too.”

“Oh, well that’s just great! We’re supposed to be going to do a spell, remember?”

“‘Spell’?” Giles asked sharply. “You really do plan to take Xander to one of your demon friends? Might I ask why?”

Xander was snuggling down amongst the cushions, his eyes shut, a small smile on his face as he went from awake to asleep with a childlike abruptness. Spike sighed. “Just look at him. Should’ve known this would happen. Lad’s not slept properly for days and he left the house without eating – no wonder it went to his head. I blame you, Giles.”

“Oh, for God’s sake, Spike! You sound like his mother.”

“Oh, please. Have you ever met his mother?”

There was a short silence as Giles remembered his few encounters with the woman. She had flirted with him almost mechanically, ignoring Xander with an indifference that spoke volumes, and Xander had flushed with embarrassment before hustling him down to his dingy basement. “Point taken. Well, no matter what your plans were, they’ll have to wait. I’ll put him up in the spare room for the night. If his parents see him like this -”

Spike glared at him. “I don’t think so. I can get him home.”

“You can’t protect him if you’re attacked en route and I’ve had one too many to drive you.”

“Cautious, law abiding Giles,” Spike sneered.

Giles kept his temper. “If it were vital, I’d drive but as it isn’t and he’ll be quite safe here -”

“I’m not leaving him.”

The words came out with more desperation than Giles had ever heard in Spike's voice, startling him out of his automatic hostility. "Spike? I don't understand –"

"You can chain me up again if you want but I'm staying, O.K?"

Giles reached out and touched Spike's arm fleetingly, surprising himself with a sudden flash of empathy for the vampire. He was still perfectly willing to stake him if it were in Xander's best interests, but listening to the story Xander had told him had both piqued his curiosity and made him cautious. If they were linked he wasn't sure how Xander would be affected by Spike's removal. Xander had seemed to be drawing some kind of reassurance, some strength from Spike's presence and Giles was reluctant to take that away from him. He was also taken aback by how genuine his dislike of the Initiative was. Their methods might have rendered Spike harmless in one way but what the long term effects would be was something they

could not foresee and probably hadn't bothered to try. "You can stay. With him. Now help him upstairs. I want to talk to you."

By the time Spike came back down Giles had brewed coffee and was sipping at it slowly. "Is he settled?"

"Yeah. Not drunk enough to throw up or anything. He's just tired out. Do him good to get some sleep."

"This is a new side to you, Spike. You'll pardon me if I find it a little hard to accept as genuine."

Spike sat down beside Giles, stretching out his long legs. He'd taken off his coat and boots while he was upstairs and Giles noticed that he'd left them by the door, as though prepared to make a hasty exit. He didn't read too much into that. He had the feeling that Spike had left quite a few places at a dead run.

"Doesn't matter what you think, does it? Xander knows it is."

Giles frowned. "Tell me about this demon," he asked abruptly, his eyes never leaving Spike's face. "What spell are you planning and why?"

"Giles, if you can't work that one out for yourself after everything you've been told tonight –"

"The charm? You want your memories back? Why? You gave them up voluntarily!"

Spike shrugged. "Wouldn't you? And I don't give a toss what I did two years back. I worked it out that I did it because of Dru. She's not in the picture now, is she, so I can please my bloody self. And I want them back. My first time with him? How could I not?"

"It's pure supposition that you took the charm out of a desire to help Xander. Shielding yourself from Drusilla's wrath is more likely," Giles said coldly.

Spike glared at him. "She was dying! Couldn't have laid a finger on me, you stupid git. But a human? She'd have gone for him, hunted him down or got

someone to do it for her. Dalton, now, he'd have lain down and let her walk all over him, that one. But, fair enough, I don't know for certain, just a feeling I've got, you know?"

"Not really but I can understand why it's frustrating you to know of the gap in your memories. Whatever prompted Xander to tell you after all this time?"

Spike shrugged. "Far as I can make out, he just cracked. He's been carrying this guilt around for so long and it just got too much for him."

"Guilt over the woman in the alley? Spike, tell me and please don't even attempt to lie, did Xander have any part in her death?"

Spike's eyes widened. "And just what would you do if I said 'yes'? He was possessed, remember? Not playing with a full deck. Besides, everything he did got edited out by the spell so I'm just going by what he said; I killed her, he got the scraps. Not his fault."

Giles gave him a hard look. "I wouldn't 'do' anything

to him. It would just help if I knew how much he had to forgive himself for. I'm also certain that you're a large part of his guilt. Look at you! A vampire, a killer. You've attacked his friends and him on numerous occasions and yet he's spent the last two years with the knowledge that you and he —

“Fucked?”

Giles's mouth twisted. “I imagine that's an accurate description, yes. It explains a lot.”

“Unless you were hidden under the bed, Rupert, you don't know what we did. If last night was anything to go by it wasn't just —”

He looked away and Giles watched him search for the words before giving up and growling with exasperation.

“You and he made a connection, perhaps?” he offered softly, his eyes intent, measuring. “One that's prevented Xander from entering into a

relationship that lasted?”

Spike looked up, his eyes curious. “Maybe. Who’s he been with then?”

Giles smiled despite himself. “Xander’s love life is the stuff of legends. He seems to unfailingly fall in love with the most unsuitable people and they with him. No, that’s not a gibe at you, although you certainly fit the description. The last one was a former vengeance demon turned human. She seemed to take quite a fancy to him but from what I gathered, it didn’t get much farther than a one night stand.”

“Huh.”

“Is that all you can say?”

“Dunno. Can probably manage a few more words but I’m as knackered as Xander to tell the truth. You try kipping tied to a chair. Softer than your bloody bath but that’s about all you can say for it.”

Giles studied him. He did look tired. "I have more questions but they can wait. Go to bed. I'll get you some blood in the morning and you can stay here tomorrow if you like."

"Why are you being all welcoming, Giles? Thought you couldn't wait to get rid of me?"

Giles stood, picking up his mug. "You know very well why I sent you away, Spike," he said tersely. "I wish I hadn't but it's too late now. The damage is done."

Spike surged to his feet, energised by his anger. "What damage? He's been happy with me. I've not hurt him and I don't plan to."

"It's only been a day, Spike," said Giles impatiently. "You don't love him and no matter how beneficial it is for him to confront the events of two years ago, I can only see a host of problems in front of us."

Spike met his eyes. "Don't know if I love him or not. It's why I want to reverse the spell, so I can find

out.”

Giles laughed shortly. “If you’re capable of love –”

“I am. Capable of just about anything, Watcher.”

“Then you should know how you feel without the memories.”

Spike bit his lip. “I’m not asking you to take my word for it, but something happened back then. I can feel it. Something was triggered. I’ve asked Xander and he won’t tell me in enough detail.”

“You didn’t perform any rituals, didn’t feed on him?”

Spike glared. “Have you been listening at all? I. Don’t. Know.”

“But – oh, the hell with it. Tomorrow we’ll get this sorted out. Now I’m going to bed.”

He made it to the foot of the stairs before Spike

spoke, his voice hesitant. “Why are you helping me?”

Giles didn't turn around. “I'm not. I'm helping Xander. Any benefit to you is an unfortunate side effect.”

Spike's chuckle followed him as he climbed the stairs.

## **Part Six**

Xander woke in stages, each sense returning slowly to a body that had been deeply, dreamlessly asleep for hours. Confusion followed as the information they gave him failed to match what he expected. His body was bare under sheets crisp with newness, scented with an unfamiliar detergent. The room was dark but the deeper shadows where furniture

stood showed him that it was smaller than it should be. Finally, memory caught up with consciousness and he turned his head to see Spike smiling at him, his head propped up on his hand.

“Morning, pet. Wondered if it was going to take something drastic to wake you.”

“A kiss is traditional, a wet sponge will bring nothing but trouble.”

The smile broadened. “You *are* feeling better. Good.” Spike’s free hand reached out and smoothed back Xander’s hair from his forehead. “No hangover?”

Xander swallowed. His mouth was dry and sticky at the same time. “Thirsty but that’s about it.”

Spike nodded. “Water’s on the table beside you. Gussed you’d need it.”

Xander rolled over and reached out for the glass, welcoming the chance to rinse out his mouth. The

water was tepid but he didn't care. He put the glass down and turned back. "Did I make a fool of myself last night?"

Amusement made Spike's husky whisper even deeper. "Not really."

"Oh, that's very reassuring!"

"Shh, keep your voice down. Don't want to wake the Watcher, now do we?"

"What time is it anyway? It's still dark."

"Sunrise is in ..." There was a pause as though Spike was consulting an inner timetable. "Half an hour or so."

"Not like you to be so considerate."

"Huh?"

"Not wanting to get Giles up this early," Xander clarified. He didn't know why they were talking. His

head ached slightly and he just wanted to wrap himself around the cool body beside him. He could imagine how good it would feel, how Spike's hands would stroke him, stealing away the heat and leaving a delicious stripe of freshness wherever they travelled.

Spike chuckled. "Want him to stay asleep so I can fuck you without you getting shy thinking he's listening."

"That's not going to happen," Xander said firmly, forcing down the inevitable reaction to hearing Spike say 'fuck' when he was looking at him with appraising eyes. "Not here, not in this bed."

"He's asleep. I can hear him breathing, nice and slow. He knows I'm here with you anyway. I think he's prepared to do laundry when we go."

Xander felt arousal battle toe curling embarrassment. "That's Giles you're talking about!" he whispered urgently. "He wouldn't understand. Let's just get up quietly and get home."

Spike stretched lazily, putting his arms behind his head and arching his back. The sheets slid down obediently. “Wouldn’t make it in time. And I think he understands now that when I look at you the only thing on my mind is getting you naked and - ”

“In theory! Yes! Not actually happening a few feet from his room!”

Spike sighed. “Fine. Whatever.”

Xander felt an unreasonable pang of disappointment that Spike had given in so easily but it was swamped by a far greater relief.

“I’m glad you’re seeing it my –Spike? What are you doing?”

Spike pulled the covers up as far as they would go and disappeared beneath them. In the slowly lightening room Xander watched a Spike shaped mound move until it was between his legs. “Spike!”

Two hands gripped his thighs, pulling them apart, and Xander's mouth opened too. Spike had skipped all the teasing and the foreplay and had taken as much of Xander's cock in his mouth as he could in one greedy, succulent mouthful. Xander felt his muscles tense under the spread fingers that held him open, felt his teeth drive into his lower lip and his hands claw at the sheet he lay on.

Spike's head bobbed up enough for him to speak. "Yeah? Kind of busy right now."

Xander wanted to transfer his death grip from the sheets to Spike's hair, wanted to push that head down again, command that clever mouth to lick and suck, kiss and bite, hard and gentle, over and over, until he came. There was a simplicity to it that appealed more than he had words to express. Instead he threw back the sheets that hid Spike, exposing the bow of his back; a clean line of spine curving down to the cleft his tongue and fingers had explored and prepared for his cock two years and two nights ago. Spike moved one hand and wrapped it around the base of Xander's cock,

holding it away from his stomach, close enough to his lips that when he spoke they brushed against it like feathers, softly fluttering. “Well? Want to watch, then?”

Xander wondered if Spike had deliberately chosen those words knowing that each ‘w’ made his lips pout outwards. It hardened his resolve even as it stiffened his cock still further. “I said, ‘no’, Spike. We’re not doing this.”

“Nearly right. You’re not and I respect that choice. I, on the other hand, am, and if you just lie back and think of, well, me, it’ll be over in no time.”

He bent his head enough to capture the thickened, aching flesh again and Xander’s hands fisted in his hair, pulling him back. “That would leave me with a happy memory but what about you? No, wait. By then I’d be agreeable to returning the favour?”

Spike grinned up at him, flexing his fingers and moving them gently up and back down again over tongue slicked flesh. “Something like that.”

Xander felt his lips stretch in a tight smile. For the first time since he'd told Spike what had happened between them he felt in control and he decided, with a curl of anticipation that made him shiver, that it was time he set some boundaries.

“Spike, we can lie here and talk, cuddled up nice and close, but nothing more, or we can get up and see what Giles has in the way of breakfast. Your choice.”

Spike looked up at him, his gaze taking in every inch of Xander's body from thigh level and up. “I think we've moved past that or hadn't you noticed?”

Xander kept his voice level and sat up enough to take him out of reach of Spike's mouth. “I noticed you ignoring what I said. I'll accept that you didn't realise I meant it and I'll say it again. I'm not fucking you or letting you do me in Giles' bed.”

“Spare bed. Or it'd be crowded. Interesting though. I'm game if you are.”

“You’re not amusing me. Last chance. Choose.”

“Fuck off.”

Spike started to get out of the bed, the sheets tangling around him. Xander grabbed him around the waist and pulled him to him. “Where do you think you’re going?”

“You don’t want me, I’m going. Should’ve thought it was obvious, you stupid git.” Spike’s face was averted, his voice indifferent.

“In what universe does asking you to come and hold me translate as not wanting you?”

“The universe where I’ve spent the last hour harder than I’ve been in years, waiting for you to wake up, keeping my hands away from me, from you, waiting, just watching your face, thinking about how it’ll feel when you touch me –”

Spike twisted until he was lying beside Xander and

carried on talking. Xander felt the words trickle over him like juice squeezed from a ripe fruit, sticking to him, coating him with sweetness. His arms were still around Spike and he pulled him closer until Spike's head was resting on his shoulder, letting Spike's hand start to touch him, swirling patterns on his skin as the words were doing in his mind.

“And you'd let me do anything I wanted, you'd move for me, give me that look that says 'now' and 'please' and I'd do it, all of it, everything and you'd bend and twist and writhe under me, over me...”

Xander lost the ability to talk and forgot how to breathe. He'd gone from righteous anger to ... this, this state where a voice, blue eyes and a hand were all that kept him from floating away as the need took his body in gentle, insistent hands and made it weightless, hollow, waiting to be filled...

“And you'd beg, so nicely and I'd –”

“I'd do what?”

Innocent face. Hand going lower, surreptitious and swift. Xander reached down and grabbed his wrist. “You nearly had me then. Nearly. Spike, you pout and I swear to God, I’ll –”

“What?” said Spike, lips pushing forward in what could only be described as a pout.

“Right!” Xander grabbed Spike and pulled him over his lap in a flurry of limbs and sheets. He got in two hard slaps on what had to be the most biteable backside he’d ever seen before Spike stopped struggling and lay still. Somehow that took the fun out of it.

“What’s the matter, pet? Don’t stop now; I’m enjoying it. At least you’re touching me for the first time this morning. Course, it’s noisier than what I had planned, so Giles’ll not only hear it, he’ll think you’re a right kinky sod but you’re in charge, wouldn’t dream of – ow!”

Xander smiled with satisfaction as the wriggling started again. This was new territory and despite

what Spike was undoubtedly thinking, it wasn't one of his fantasies. At least it hadn't been. Knowing that he couldn't hurt Spike, knowing that he had a willing victim, took away any guilt. Not that he had much. Annoying, manipulative....

He didn't intend this to take long; he was making a point, drawing a line, but the rhythm of his hand rising and falling, the clean, sharp sound of hand against skin, the heat that began to build, both literal and emotional, drew him in. One more moan, one more whimper and he'd stop. One more perfect slap, just there, just under the curve of that perfect ass. One more involuntary squirm that brought Spike's cock sliding against his thigh. Just one more...

The knock at the door was timed to coincide with the brief moment when the echo of Xander's hand had died down and Spike's whimper had yet to rise. Xander brought his hand down slowly and laid it flat in the exact place he'd planned to hit next.

"Xander?" Giles' voice was casual but he didn't wait

for a response, which was fortunate as Xander was incapable of making one. "I wasn't expecting company for breakfast so I'm ill prepared. I'm going out to get coffee and donuts. I'll be away, oh, perhaps thirty minutes or so." There was a pause and then he added. "I expect to see you both downstairs and dressed when I return."

Spike twisted under Xander's hand and called out, "Make it forty and I swear I'll let you have all the jelly ones."

The pause was longer this time and Xander found himself staring at the door handle, half expecting it to turn.

"Spike, I know full well that you like the sprinkles. Thirty five. Goodbye."

Xander waited until the footsteps had retreated and the front door had slammed before releasing a breath that he couldn't remember taking.

"Well, I hope you're happy now," Spike said. "Won't

say this wasn't fun but –"

"I'm not done yet," Xander said in a voice as inflexible as he could make it.

Spike's head turned, though his body still lay supine across Xander's lap. "Thirty minutes isn't long."

His face was serious and Xander's mirrored it as he slid his legs from under Spike, keeping one hand on the small of his back and moved to straddle him. "Long enough for a good tongue lashing," he said, bending forward. Spike's surprised burst of laughter cut off abruptly as Xander licked the scarlet, stinging flesh in a long, lazy line. After each lick he pursed his lips and blew down on the damp skin, watching, fascinated, as the red faded to rose. As he worked his way across, Spike's body relaxed bit by bit, until he was sighing with pleasure.

Xander sat up and placed his palms flat on Spike's backside, digging his thumbs into the line that divided it, spreading Spike open as if he were splitting an orange. Spike's thighs parted in a

wordless invitation and Xander grinned. He could remember the noises he'd made when Spike had done this to him two years ago and he wanted to see if he could coax them from Spike's throat. Dipping his head down, he ran his tongue around in a deliberately slow spiral before darting inside. Spike threw back his head and howled and Xander curled his tongue in deeper. It had been a good sound but he was sure Spike could do better. Finally, when Spike was bucking underneath him so wildly that Xander couldn't hold him down enough to carry on, he stopped and flipped Spike over to his back.

Spike's eyes were navy blue and he'd chewed his full bottom lip until it was swollen but Xander wasn't looking at his face. Perhaps he should have. Spike had reached his limit. He pounced on Xander, bringing their mouths together in one bruising, half angry, wholly loving kiss, wrapping himself around Xander, arms and legs, bringing him closer until Xander felt himself melt into Spike in a surrender of identity. They were both too close to the edge to stay locked like this. Without speaking, Spike broke

free, cupping Xander's face with his hands and kissing him once more before turning and sliding down to take Xander's cock inside his mouth. The silky feel of a cool tongue and lips against his rigid cock brought Xander's hips surging forward to thrust deeper inside the willing mouth even as he wrapped his hands around Spike's erection and curved in to taste it.

They came together, swallowing frantically, eagerly lapping until the tortured, teased flesh could take no more and they fell apart, too spent to even move together, to hold each other. Spike recovered first, crawling up the bed and collapsing against Xander's chest as though he'd exhausted his strength. They kissed just to taste themselves on each other's lips, wrapped around in a silence neither wanted to break.

## **Part Seven**

Xander pulled on his jeans and watched Spike not moving. "I think Giles had that "I'm going to eat all the donuts if you're not there to stop me' sound to his voice," he said, opening the door.

“Newsflash, [mate](#). Vampire. Does not live on donuts alone.”

“Then why do you like the sprinkles?”

“Crunchy. Sort of miss a bit of texture. Everything I have in my mouth is liquid – well nearly everything...”

Spike smiled over his shoulder, inviting Xander to react to the innuendo. Xander couldn't help grinning back. “You're so predictable.”

“Bored of me already?”

There was a hint, just a tiny suggestion of hurt in Spike's voice and Xander reacted instinctively, moving towards the bed and reaching out to touch Spike's shoulder as he buried his face in the pillow. “No! God, no, Spike. I didn't – you bastard, you're laughing! You devious, disgraceful...”

“Delectable, divine...”

“Depraved and debauched,” said Giles from the hallway, making no attempt to come in. “I’m sorry to interrupt the laudable attempt to improve Xander’s vocabulary but breakfast is ready. Downstairs now, please.” His voice managed to combine a deceptive mildness with the inflexibility of granite and Xander grimaced, recognising the signs that Giles was out of patience.

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Breakfast over, Giles looked across the table at Spike and Xander, his face serious. “I’ll understand if you don’t wish for my help but I’ll offer it nonetheless. Spike, before you go to see this demon, I want to research the charm you used. It might be that we can reverse it ourselves if you’re sure that’s what you want to do.”

“I’m bloody certain, Watcher. How many more times do I have to –”

Xander glared at Spike and smiled at Giles in a complex series of facial contortions. “That would be great, Giles. Honest. So – what do you need? Point us at the books.”

“Not me. I’m not one of your tame research geeks. Demon’s help is good enough for me.”

Xander sighed. “Spike, if you’re done being the poster child for petulance, perhaps you’ll forgive Giles and believe him when he says they were sold out of sprinkles.”

“Might. Might not.”

“Oh, for God’s sake! Xander, go home and bring me the charm. I want to see it. Spike, keep out of my way until he returns or I won’t be held responsible.”

Xander stood up, looking out at the beautifully sunny day and then at Spike, wavering. “Giles? You won’t do anything?”

His meaning was clear, his anxiety palpable, and

Giles sighed, regretting his hasty words. “No. I won’t. Go.”

The door closed behind Xander and Spike eased back in his chair and eyed Giles speculatively. He waved his hand around vaguely. “This helping thing...it’s on the level? Not going to accidentally do a spell and oh, whoops, Spike ended up dusty, what a pity?”

“It’s tempting,” Giles said, an edge to his voice, beginning to clear the table. “My only concern is the effect it might have on Xander.”

He took the dishes into the kitchen and returned, leaning against the wall, arms folded. Spike pursed his lips and hooked a chair towards him to put his feet on. “I’m not getting staked because you don’t want to break Xander’s heart? Never took you for the sentimental type.”

Giles walked over, swept the chair away, letting Spike’s feet thud against the floor, and sat down on it himself. “I don’t give a toss about that. I want

Xander to still be alive to be heartbroken, that's all. These...hints about you being linked are bothering me and neither of you are being forthcoming; you through your memory loss, Xander through a combination of ignorance and embarrassment."

"Ah, so that's what you were up to this morning? Trying to get Xander to see you as a friendly ear? All mates and yes, fuck Spike with my blessings, dear boy? Thought as much. Not that I'm complaining about the end result, mind you."

Giles gave him a look that would have stripped paint. "I *am* Xander's friend and have been for some time. Does that trouble you in some way?"

Spike considered the question and finally shook his head. "No. Lad needs someone looking out for him. Get the feeling the Slayer and Red are too busy for him right now." He cocked his head to the side.

"You're a bit out of the loop too, aren't you?"

"Oh, spare me the sympathy. Yes, my situation has altered and I'm finding life a little dull but somehow

I don't see that state of affairs continuing much longer."

"Come again?"

Giles gave him a slow smile, loaded with meaning. "It's not crossed your mind to wonder what the Slayer's reaction will be to all this?" He sighed theatrically. "I've tried but she still has this worrying impetuosity, a tendency to stake first and apologise later..."

"Bloody better not! Giles, do something." Spike looked petulant rather than perturbed, clearly not overly concerned.

"I rather thought I was," Giles said pointedly. "I'm not staking you and I'm devoting my day to research."

"What? Oh. Yeah. Thanks."

"Please, Spike. Don't get effusive. It embarrasses us both."

Spike grinned and for the first time Giles returned it without considering the source. Then his face went hard.

“What?”

Giles swept off his glasses and polished them on his shirt. “When you get the memories back, by whatever method, it will alter the dynamic of your relationship with Xander.”

“Do you have to talk all fancy like that? Just say it, spit it out.”

Spike’s voice was impatient but Giles noticed that his hand was clenching into a fist. “I mean that you met in unusual circumstances; that Xander was attracted to a person who in a very real sense no longer exists.”

“Seems happy enough with this version. And he wasn’t exactly himself, remember? Should’ve thought you’d be glad I was different too. If I

wasn't, I'd be thinking about turning him; you know that right?"

Giles bit his lip, willing his body to stay still when his instincts were clamouring at him to remove the threat to Xander. "If I thought there was even a remote possibility of that, I'd stake you now, Spike. Believe that."

Spike nodded. "You'd have to try. But if I could turn him, I could take you, remember. No chip."

Giles laughed shortly. "I think we're getting a little hypothetical here, though I confess I'm curious as to why you didn't turn him when you could. But you can't anymore and so I won't be staking you just yet. Let's leave it at that. Now, Xander should be back soon so I think I'll just make a start on finding some books that might be relevant."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Oh? Stopped sulking now?"

Spike stood up and walked over to the bookshelves. "Never started, mate. Just wanted to distract the boy a bit. If he'd blushed any more when you asked if I was sitting comfortably, you could have made toast on his face." He turned and stared at Giles, his lips curving with sardonic amusement. "You're a right bastard, you know that?"

Giles ducked his head to hide an unrepentant smile. "Sorry."

"You tease him again and I'll make you mean that."

Giles jerked his head up. "Are you threatening me, Spike?" he asked softly, his eyes curious, watchful.

"Call it a warning. Xander's got enough to deal with. He doesn't need to be laughed at too."

Giles raised his hand, going over to join him by the bookcase. "Peccavi," he said, the Latin word coming automatically to his lips.

Spike's eyes widened in surprise. "Absolve," he

replied in kind.

Giles looked at him speculatively but didn't comment. "If you like, you can begin to read through these books," he said, passing two over to Spike. He got out paper and pens and they settled down at the table in a silence broken only by Spike's fidgeting. Giles wondered if Spike knew how many times he turned to look at the door, how his face sharpened with anticipation at every sound in the courtyard.

"He'll be back soon," he offered eventually.

Spike glared at him. "What?"

"Xander. He'll be –"

"I *know* that. What makes you think I care if he's gone a while?"

Giles shook his head. "Never mind."

"Stupid wanker," Spike muttered.

“Don’t be so hard on yourself, Spike,” Giles said amiably.

Spike snorted and bent his head back to the book he was reading. Giles began to count silently. Spike’s head had turned before he reached three.

Xander’s return with the charm came as a welcome relief. Spike was out of his chair before the door opened, his face relaxing. He stepped towards him eagerly and then paused. Giles frowned, puzzled, and then saw that Xander was still framed by the sunlight spilling through the open door. Walking over, he casually closed it and sauntered over to the stairs. “Just going to check some books I have stored upstairs,” he said, not looking back.

Xander went to Spike, reaching out his hand unthinkingly. “Well, I’m back,” he said. “Got the charm and –”

“Stop *talking*,” Spike said, his voice ragged. Before Xander could react to the sudden flare of emotion

Spike's hands were cupping his face, barely touching his skin, Spike's lips were on his mouth, brushing it softly, insistently. Xander's arms were by his side now and Spike was standing far enough away that their bodies weren't quite touching. Xander's eyes closed as the cool hands held him still, gossamer light, spider web strong, and the hungry mouth sent him flying, floating, free. Three points of contact and his body was aching for more, but he couldn't seem to move, could only kiss back, the need he felt spinning higher as the kiss grew avid, desperate. He was waiting, just waiting for Spike to move forward, to break the spell that held him still, that weighed down his hands so that they couldn't reach out but Spike seemed as helpless as he was. Xander had to look, had to see...his eyes opened and blazing blue, like a sun scorched summer sky, filled his vision as he looked directly into Spike's eyes. Then Spike swayed forward, his hands dropping to Xander's waist, and pulled him close. Xander felt the need rise within him and stopped fighting it.

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Giles gathered together three books from the neatly labelled boxes and looked around at the discarded lumber intended for his shelves. So much had happened in a day, but life as a Watcher on a Hellmouth had made his priorities shift. No one was dead. It could have been worse. Deciding that he'd given them long enough to get over the hell of being apart for almost an hour and marvelling at his own forbearance, he started to walk down the stairs.

Glancing down at the room below, feeling awkward rather than embarrassed, Giles saw the two figures locked together tightly and flushed with annoyance. "Will you please control yourselves," he snapped. "This will get done much faster if you just – oh God –"

Tossing the books on the stair above him, Giles hurried over, grabbing Spike's shoulders and pulling

him away from Xander. The vampire's eyes were glazed but still human, his mouth clean. Pushing him away, Giles turned to look at Xander. He looked dazed, almost sleepy and as Giles watched in horror he licked at his lips, tasting the blood that was smeared across them.

"It's from me, Watcher," Spike said quietly, his hand going to his wounded neck.

## **Part Eight**

Spike pulled his hand away and stared at the blood on his fingers. "Well, now."

Giles said quietly, "What happened?" Spike stepped towards Xander and Giles reached out and took his arm. "Better not."

Spike's attention was focused on Xander, who was standing with his head bowed, his shoulders curved inward. "Let go, Giles," he said absently. "Think I know what's happened." He stepped close to Xander and brushed his blood stained fingers across his lips, frowning with concentration. Xander's head came up and he breathed in deeply before sweeping his tongue across the fingers, tasting what his teeth had drawn from Spike's neck. Spike let him, murmuring to him softly, too low for Giles to hear. Xander finished cleaning the blood from Spike's fingers and frowned at him, blinking and looking confused.

Giles glanced at Spike's face and saw the confusion mirrored there. "What is it?" he asked, keeping his voice soothing and low.

"This is – I've done this before. Blood on my hand and he's tasting it...can't *remember* it right!"

Spike's frustration was tangible but his attention returned to Xander almost at once. He was swaying, his face contorted, his movements jerky. "Going to

be ... sick,” he said, his hand going to cover his mouth. Pushing past Giles he stumbled into the kitchen and threw up in the sink. Giles and Spike exchanged glances and mercifully left him alone.

“I’m sorry, Spike,” Giles said unexpectedly.

Spike tilted his head, considering the man beside him. Giles had done plenty to him that Spike thought rated an apology, but not recently. “What for exactly?” he asked, listening to the sound of Xander with his head under the tap, frantically swallowing as much of the gushing water as he could.

“When I came down the stairs, I assumed, well, I thought you were hurting him. I forgot about the chip, just went with my instincts, I’m afraid.”

Spike gave him a pitying look. “Nothing to do with the chip. Wouldn’t hurt Xander any more than I’d have hurt Dru. He’s mine.”

Giles’ lips tightened but he said nothing. Xander

appeared in the archway that led to the kitchen, his face pale. "Sorry about that," he said, walking over to the sofa and collapsing on it without looking at anyone.

"Not your fault, love," said Spike going over to kneel beside him, looking up into Xander's face. He touched Xander's cheek, forcing him to meet his eyes. "I felt it too."

Xander's eyes were haunted. "I thought you were...her. I could smell your blood and I wanted it. I hurt you. God, I hate this!"

"Her'?" Giles asked. "The woman in the alley?"

Xander nodded wordlessly.

"Do you think your memory flash is related to that moment, too, Spike? It could explain why you experienced it if there is a link of some kind between you both."

"You think?" Spike's voice was bitter. "Not a whole

lot going on here that makes any sense.” He moved to sit beside Xander, close enough to touch but keeping his hands folded.

Giles sighed. “What happened, then? You were...kissing and -?”

Xander looked at him directly for the first time. “I came in the door and it was fine. Then everything seemed to change. Spike –” he turned to him, “you came to me and I couldn’t move, it was so intense I – and we were kissing, yes, but you tasted like...I just wanted more.”

“So you bit me.” Spike’s voice was reassuring, even mildly amused. “Can’t fault you for that, love.”

Xander gave him a pained look. “Not my idea of a snack, Spike, sorry. Tasted good for a moment but then, well, not so good.”

“We noticed,” Giles said, relieved that Xander seemed to be recovering his composure. “Spike? Do you have anything to add?”

Spike shrugged, "I missed him. Felt wrong with him not being here. When he came in I just went to him, that's all."

Giles looked at them both and shook his head. "This isn't right," he murmured. "Neither of you are behaving as you should."

Xander and Spike exchanged glances. "Thought you were cool with it, Giles," Xander ventured.

Giles glared at him. "Then you thought wrong." He stabbed a finger at Xander and then Spike. "Human. Vampire. Do I need to continue?"

"Then why did you let us, I mean, this morning?"

Xander looked painfully embarrassed. Giles said wearily, "Xander, I'm not your parent. Your love life is none of my concern. I have no right to comment and no inclination either."

Xander stood up, walking over to Giles. "You're my

friend, Giles. Friends get to comment. Or did I get that wrong, too?"

Giles arched an eyebrow. "About us being friends? No, of course not. You, Buffy, Willow, all of you have become very...important to me. It's not what I expected when I took up my duties as Buffy's Watcher, but there it is. I'm still not going to assume that I have the right to meddle though."

"I wish you cared enough to do it anyway."

Xander's voice was almost inaudible but Giles was close enough to hear the words and recognise the plea behind them. Acting on an impulse he reached out and pulled Xander to him for a hug as he had done the day before. Xander returned the hug gratefully and then jerked back, looking scared, his arms falling away. "Giles, don't! Suppose it happens with you?"

Spike was watching them, visibly tense but making an effort not to interfere. This roused him from his role of observer and he said curiously, "Good point.

Sniff him. Do you want to take a nibble or is it just me?" Giles glared at him and he shrugged. "What? Worth knowing."

That caught Giles' attention and he nodded slowly. "True. Until we find out what's happening, we can't risk this happening to someone who matters."

"Well, thank you so much!"

"Save it, Spike. If you expect sympathy for a bite on your neck, well suffice it to say, you won't get it from me."

Spike grinned. "Don't want sympathy. Just like the old days, really."

Giles looked disgusted but resigned. He turned back to Xander who was standing beside him, silently, his face still pale. "Xander, I'm not suggesting that we replicate your actions precisely –"

"Bloody better not," Spike snapped.

“But if you could just attempt to, well that is –”

“I know what you want me to do. I’ll try.”

Xander’s voice was empty of emotion but his hands were trembling slightly. He moved closer to Giles, biting his lip as Giles flinched. “Sorry,” Giles murmured. “This is surprisingly difficult.”

Spike came over to them. “I’m here. Won’t let anything happen.”

Giles wasn’t quite sure how to take that but he shook his head. “You can’t stand too close, Spike. It might confuse...things.”

Spike stepped back a little and folded his arms. Xander closed his eyes for a moment and then moved forward, his hands by his side, his face relaxed. Giles stood still and tried to empty his mind but it was difficult. Xander was walking around him now in tight circles, brushing against him with his body, taunting him. Giles gasped soundlessly as he discovered that Xander was hard, and forced

himself to stand still. With a sick fascination Giles realised that even if Xander didn't attack him he was still seeing him exhibit atypical behaviour, and he took his mind off an experience that was frankly disturbing by considering the reasons for this regression.

Xander was behind him now, leaning in and smelling Giles, nuzzling into his hair and along his neck. Giles shuddered and caught Spike's eyes, seeing them gleam with a growing arousal that matched Xander's and was echoed in his own body to a certain extent. It was impossible to concentrate when his senses were wiping his mind clear of anything but the simplest thoughts. It wasn't Xander himself that was provoking his reaction, more a primitive response to being touched (how long had it been?), another body so close (too close, not...civilised, not done), his scent taken and tasted by a predator (dangerous, deadly, exciting...). Xander licked slowly down his jaw line, his tongue leaving a cool dampness and nipped at his throat suddenly, the sharp pain triggering a confusion of emotions, and Giles broke away, turning to face

Xander, seeing with horror that the boy was smiling with a cruel amusement at his fear and dying, evanescent arousal.

Struggling to find a balance that had fled in the space of a few minutes, Giles found his eyes turning to Spike. The vampire was swaying slightly, eyes half closed, lips parted. His face was still human but he looked feral, wild. Giles made a choice based on instinct. "Spike!" he said sharply, urgently. "Xander needs you."

Spike's eyes opened fully and he shook himself out of the trance that held him captive. His gaze raked over Xander and he looked wary for a moment and then, shrugging, he took two swift strides and punched Xander hard on the shoulder. Spike's shout of pain was music to Giles' ears and triggered the return of Xander's own personality.

"Giles? What did I -? Oh, God, I'm so sorry--"

Giles shook his head. "No. It wasn't your fault; it was, well, not even mine really."

“If you blame me,” Spike said, rubbing his aching head, “I’ll not be responsible for my language.”

“It’s no one’s fault and thank you for acting so promptly, Spike.”

Xander rotated his shoulder. “I forgot to say thanks. No, wait. I forgot to say ‘oww’. Oww. There. Now I feel better.”

Giles gave him an exasperated if indulgent look. “Spike not only jarred you out of whatever it was that was making you act that way, he also confirmed that you’re not possessed by a demon.”

“True, but it still hurt.” Xander smiled at Spike. “You can –”

“If the words ‘kiss’ and ‘better’ emerge from your mouth I’ll get –”

“Tetchy?” Spike offered.

Giles glared. "At the very least."

"Stop talking English," Xander complained. "You're in America now."

"You have a point," Giles said mildly, "but trust me, I'm too old to change my ways. Now shall we get down to business? You managed to find the charm, I hope?"

Xander took it out of his pocket and passed it to Giles who held it gingerly in the palm of his hand. "Hmm. It feels heavy. I'm assuming it's the standard mix of ingredients. What did they use to make it specific to you, Spike?"

Spike's look was indescribable. "If I knew that, Rupert, we wouldn't be in this fix." His voice rose. "I don't bloody remember, you senile git!"

Giles came as close to abashed as Xander had ever seen, removing his glasses and polishing them for an inordinate amount of time. "Ah, yes. Of course. Then best we begin researching." He waited for

them to settle at the table and then said casually, “And Spike? Senile or not, I would appreciate a modicum of respect from you.”

“You earn respect, Giles,” said Spike, not turning around. Xander’s foot must have lashed out because Spike jerked in his seat and added hastily, “Which of course, you have mate. Oh, yes. No problem there and I’ll tear the guts out of anyone who says different.”

Giles rolled his eyes. “I’m touched.”

“So’s my shin,” muttered Spike.

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Two hours later and Giles gave up. “I can’t reverse it without knowing what’s in it and I don’t have the facilities to analyse it. Willow might be able to, but –”

“No!” Xander said forcefully. “I don’t want her

involved in this. She'd freak if she found out about Spike."

Spike glanced at him and then looked back at the book he'd been pretending to read for the last twenty minutes, keeping his face still. Xander gave him a stricken look and began to babble but Spike cut him off with an impatient wave of his hand, slamming the book down and standing up. "Forget it. And forget this too. When night falls, I'm going to Dremar's and get him to reverse this."

Giles looked resigned as he shrugged. He hadn't expected Spike's patience to last for long. "Perhaps that would be best."

"Last time he had to cut you up. Your arm was a mess. And he doesn't owe you a favour anymore, so how will you pay him?" Xander's voice was flat as he fought to hide his concern.

Spike stared at him for a moment and then held up his arms. "See any marks?"

Xander came to him and ran his fingers over the bare skin of Spike's forearm. "They were here. Symbols carved into you."

"Really?" Giles sounded interested. "Can you remember them at all? That might be helpful."

"No," Spike said before Xander had chance to reply. "Told you what's going to happen." He grinned at Xander, touching his fingers briefly to Xander's face. "And you're wrong, pet. He does owe me a favour."

"What?"

"If he helps me out, I won't kill him. I'd say saving someone's life was a big favour, wouldn't you?"

Xander stared at him, shaking his head. "You are so —"

"Incorrigible," muttered Giles.

"Practical," countered Spike. "If he needs some blood, fine, but I'm all out of cash."

Giles pursed his lips and then shrugged again. "I'm sure you'll manage to be persuasive, Spike."

"I'll make sure he behaves," said Xander.

"What? You're not going with him!" Giles said. "I absolutely forbid it. This is Spike's problem and he can damn well sort it out himself."

Spike glared at him and then said reluctantly, "Watcher's got a point. Not keen on taking you with me. Rough bit of town and for all I know he's moved. Might take a while to track him down."

Xander looked at them both and said quietly, "You're both forgetting something. Two things really. First is that when we're split up, I turn into Hyde, and the second is that the counter spell will probably need my blood, not Spike's. He has to get the memories of me back, remember?"

"It didn't need your blood before," Giles objected. "Or if it did, you unaccountably failed to mention

it.”

Spike shook his head. “Can’t help you there.” He looked at Xander enquiringly. “Did I make you bleed?”

His voice was matter of fact but Giles felt fury rise within him. He still hadn’t quite accepted what Xander must have endured at Spike’s hands. Pleasure, yes, but there would have been pain and fear and shame as well. The idea that Spike had hurt him to the point of drawing blood made him feel sick with anger.

Xander looked uncomfortable. “Well, yes. Got a little...rough now and then the first time, when I was still...but you didn’t feed off me or anything.”

“You’re sure?” Spike said. “Because thinking about it, the spell would have needed...oh.”

“Fresh out of it,” Xander said, with an attempt of humour. “Can do you a good deal on Z’s though.”

Giles folded his arms and waited silently, his eyes never leaving Spike's face.

"I didn't know you then!" Spike said, the words defensive, his eyes wary. "I did the best I could for you, got Dru off your back and all that...but the only way Dremar could have worked it is to have taken your blood himself. Tracked you down after I ordered it."

"But he didn't," Xander said. "I'd remember a demon in a Red Cross outfit! And how would he know where I lived?"

Giles's voice was soft, his eyes hard. "He'd know if Spike told him. Isn't that right, Spike? And as to your lack of memory of the event...he's a demon specialising in editing memories. I don't think we really need to look any further for an explanation."

Spike didn't back away from the implicit threat. Giles looked as if he was on the verge of starting a fight and was just looking for an excuse. Spike might not have seen himself in a mirror for over a century

but he'd felt that look on his own face too many times not to recognise it. "Could be," he said. "Only one way to find out, isn't there?" He glanced out of the window. "Sun's set. You coming, Xander?"

The question hung in the air as Xander stared at Spike, disillusionment fighting desire. Spike sighed and turned away as the silence went on too long for him to expect an answer.

He'd made it to the door when Xander took two steps towards him. "Wait. I'm coming with you."

"Changed my mind," said Spike without looking at him, "Might be more surprises you won't like."

"We're all going," Giles said abruptly. "Xander, get some weapons. Spike, stop making a grand exit and tell me what species this demon is."

Spike turned around. "I don't get it."

Giles smiled tightly. "It's not necessary that you do. You and Xander can go into the demon, I'll provide

back up. Now. Tell me what we need to kill it if it comes to that.”

“It doesn’t take anything special to kill him. Sword through the guts, chop off his head...but it better not come to that, or we’ll never get this spell sorted,” Spike warned, his surprise giving way to suspicion.

Giles looked at him steadily. “I think I can safely say that of the three of us, I have the most pressing need for you to get your memories back.”

“Oh? Why’s that then?”

Giles accepted the axe that Xander held out to him, testing its balance in a downward sweep that came very close to Spike’s arm. “Because once I find out exactly what happened I’ll be able to decide exactly what to do to you in return.”

Spike stared at him for a long moment. “Could be you’ll have to stand in line, Watcher.” His eyes drifted to Xander and then back to Giles. “Think you

can do that?”

“We’ll have to see,” Giles replied. “Shall we go?”

“Yes, let’s go,” Xander muttered, pushing past them. “Before you two decide it’s past my bedtime or something.”

## **Part Nine**

Xander wasn’t quite sure why he ended up in the back seat while Spike sat next to Giles, but it felt like more of the protectiveness that was beginning to irritate him. Like a bug bite he knew he shouldn’t scratch, his thoughts kept returning to the threats Giles had made against Spike. From there it seemed a natural step to extend the anger to Spike, who might well have put him in danger, whose motives might never have included a shred of concern for

the boy he'd fucked hollow and then filled with longing.

As Spike gave Giles directions that led them down streets that got progressively narrower, Xander stared at their backs and let the resentment burn through him, clearing away the emotional dross, leaving him empty and clean. Leaving room for the predator to return.

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“Think this is it, Giles,” Spike said. “Go on a bit; right, this'll do. It's just down this alley, but you'll never get the car down here. Not that a few scratches wouldn't be an improvement, mind you.”

“It gets me from A to B,” Giles said tersely, laying a reassuring hand against the dashboard as the car shook violently in response to a gear change. “I'll turn the car around and wait for you here, then, shall I? Keep an eye open, listen for screams, that sort of thing?”

“Whatever,” said Spike, sounding a little distracted. “You still awake Xander? Not your usual chatty self. Lack of suspension made you feel car-sick, did it?”

“Fuck off, Spike.”

An uneasy silence fell. Giles glanced down at his empty hands and tried to remember where the weapons were. Most were in the trunk but hadn't Spike slipped a knife into his coat pocket? Spike was obviously picking up the same signals because he turned around, reached through the seats and grabbed Xander's shirt in his fist. “You've got maybe a sentence to convince me you're still you, pet,” he said, “Off you go.”

Xander giggled. They were both so funny. Scared. He could smell it coming off them. He'd scared Giles. That was ... suddenly Spike's face was very close and his head exploded into a pain so intense he welcomed the darkness that followed.

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He woke to find his arms tied behind his back, his head throbbing and an interesting discussion for entertainment.

“—didn’t have to hit him that hard!”

“Oh, so you fancied sharing a ride with someone who’d rip your throat out, as soon as look at you?”  
Beat. “Someone besides me, then? I’ve seen him feeding and it isn’t a pretty sight. Messy. Lad needs a bib. Not to mention the fact that my head hurts worse than his, I’ll wager.”

“Interesting that the chip didn’t fire at once. You don’t think?”

“Nah. I didn’t nut him as much as slam his forehead against mine. Probably confused it.”

“Spike?” Xander’s voice was weak. “It’s me.”

Spike swung around and glared at him. The car was dark but a faint orange glow from a street lamp shone through the windows, enough for Xander to see the suspicion fade to concern.

“Can you let us know when you start going furry on the inside, love? If it’s not too much trouble, that is?”

“Xander, it might be as well if you stay here with me,” Giles said gently. “Give yourself time to recover –”

“No, see, that’s what started me off, made me angry,” Xander said, forcing his voice to remain calm. “Protecting me, not letting me decide for myself. Oh, God. Spike? I can feel the anger, it’s too much, and I can’t stop it from coming...”

Spike was beside him in moments, holding him tightly, kissing him with frantic, badly aimed kisses that landed all over Xander’s face, until he was laughing so hard there was no room for the anger.

Giles stared steadily out of the windshield, his fingers tight around the steering wheel, his thoughts his own.

“Better?” asked Spike, when Xander’s laughter had died down, his hands busy with the knots that tied Xander’s wrists together.

“Better,” said Xander weakly, his hand cupping Spike’s cheek as soon as it was freed. “For Giles’ sake, let’s get out of here.”

“Oh, don’t mind me,” said Giles. “I like having the windows steamed up so I can’t see any demons approaching, really I do.”

“If we’re not back in an hour, it’s the third house on the left,” said Spike. “Knock three times and for the love of cream teas, don’t go mentioning that your job was to make the Slayer better at hers. It’s a conversation stopper in these parts.”

“I never would have guessed that, Spike. What would I do without you to advise me?”

“Lowest form of wit, Giles, lowest form of wit.”

All three got out of the car and walked around to the trunk to retrieve the weapons. Giles wondered privately about the wisdom of arming Xander but decided that the risks were outweighed by the benefits. As Spike thought that visible weapons might lead to trouble, he took just an axe small enough to slip inside his duster and a knife. Xander studied the collection and shrugged. “A stake’s good enough for me,” he said.

Spike nodded, clearly not too concerned that Xander might try to use it on him, and handed Giles a hefty axe. “Best keep this by you. You’re going to be a nice target just sitting here.”

Giles took it with a nod and watched them leave, noting the time. He got back in the car and sat for a moment in case they found the place deserted and came back. After a few minutes he turned the key, heard the engine splutter to life, and then moved off slowly, looking for a good place to turn around.

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Xander followed Spike in silence, feeling his skin crawl. The alley was empty but he still felt as if he were being watched and was in danger. Years of fighting beside the Slayer had honed his awareness of danger, if not the ability to deal with it.

“And here we are,” murmured Spike, turning to face a wooden door, smaller than normal and lacking any kind of lock or handle. Spike rapped on it sharply and stepped back. There was a pause and the door shimmered and dissolved, revealing a dark passageway. Xander swallowed nervously and followed Spike inside, resisting the urge to turn and see if the door was back in place. Somehow he knew it would be.

The narrow hall opened out into a room so full of clutter that Xander gaped in wonder. His bedroom had reached heights of mess that were legendary, but this was something beyond that. In a room

three times the size of his basement, there was barely room for him to stand with his feet side by side. That took artistry.

Spike stood just in front of him and looked around. “This is the place and this is his stuff. Now all we need is...” He reached out and delicately prodded at a stack of books, even his light touch making them sway dramatically.

“Don’t *do* that!” screamed a voice that seemed to come from the ceiling. The ceiling that was so festooned with – was that a stuffed kangaroo?- various items that Xander could only guess at its height. A collection of kites, gaudy and streamer-bedecked, unfolded like an origami puzzle and a head poked out. “One more touch and you are banned! Banned, I say!”

“Keep your hair on, Dremar. It’s me, Spike.”

There was a suspicious pause. “Spike the vampire? Are you sure?”

“Of course, I’m bloody sure! Why wouldn’t I be?”

“No reason, no reason.”

A tiny figure, no bigger than a monkey, slid down one of the streamers and landed on a heap of cushions, sending up a cloud of dust motes. Xander sneezed and then glanced around in panic as his elbow jarred against a shelf stacked high with boxes of microwave popcorn. The creature sighed with relief as the boxes settled down again and contented himself with a glare at Xander that changed to a look of wary recognition. “Ah. I see,” he said quietly.

“You always were quick,” Spike said. “Bet you know what I want before I ask, don’t you?”

Dremar glanced up at him, bushy eyebrows drawing together. Xander thought that he looked like a living illustration from a fairy tale book, a gnome or a dwarf maybe. He’d never been into them much but Willow had loved them. “I’m thinking a reversal of a spell, but what puzzles me is how you know there

was one to reverse.” He looked between them sharply. “Is it a refund you want? Dissatisfied customers?” His voice rose with his indignation. “Nothing but the finest ingredients goes into my memory charms!” he declaimed grandly.

“Including my blood?” Xander asked, folding his arms for safety and glaring back.

Dremar lounged back on the cushions, the outrage gone. “Nice drop it was too, young man and I thank you again for your kind hospitality. The fruit roolly things; wondrous inspiration! I added them to my stock and they sold like hot cakes.”

“I *fed* you?” Xander asked. “You came to steal my blood and I fed you?”

“I didn’t steal it!” Dremar said, a picture of affronted virtue. “The spell needed it and you gave it gladly. For *his* sake.”

He nodded at Spike and Xander flushed. “Then why don’t I remember?” he asked weakly.

Dremar looked wise, which consisted of tapping his large nose with a finger and nodding slowly. “That would be my little secret, young sir.”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake! You shoved a charm down his throat. Admit it. The way he eats, if you covered it in chocolate he’d have had your fingers off, grabbing it.”

Dremar glared at him, his annoyance plain. “What? You expect me to leave hulking humans knowing about me? Secrecy is my middle name.”

“I don’t care what your bloody parents called you. I took the charm, he didn’t. Fix it. Give me back my memories.”

Dremar stared at Xander. “You didn’t take it? Do you know how long it took to- how much it cost – how – why, you ungrateful little whippersnapper!”

“Whipperwhat? I didn’t take it because – well, I had my reasons, O.K? Not a reflection on your, uh, skills

or anything. You can have it back if you like.”

Dremar shook his head briskly. “It’ll be well outside its shelf life by now.”

“It will?” Xander asked, thinking of the times he’d almost taken it, nearly slipped it inside his mouth. “What would happen to someone who used it?”

The bulbous eyes widened until Xander began to wonder if they would pop out on stalks. “Did you eat recently?”

“Not really,” Xander said, flashing back to throwing up in the sink.

“Hmm. Even so. Best not say.”

“Oh, stop trying to scare the lad,” Spike said impatiently. “He’s not your average human; he’s seen worse than that every day and twice on Tuesdays.” He turned to Xander. “Probably just give you a belly ache. Doesn’t matter anyway, does it?”

The look he got back was cool. “No, of course not. You gave me something that turned deadly after –”

“Three days, tops,” Dremar chirped.

“And never even warned me. That’s just so trivial, it’s not worth mentioning.”

“I thought you’d take it straight away! Well, I think I thought that.”

Xander shrugged. “Guess we’ll find out soon.” He looked at Dremar and smiled brightly. “Do you do truth spells as well?”

“I wouldn’t lie to you!” Spike said through his teeth. “Not now. Look, Xander – oh, the hell with it. First things first.” He rounded on Dremar. “Reverse it. I want my memories back.” He hesitated, staring down at his boots for a moment and then looked directly at Dremar. “Please?” he asked, the word giving him difficulty, the emotion behind it plain.

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Giles peered out into the darkness and then looked up into his mirror to check behind the car. All seemed peaceful. He gripped the axe tighter. Peaceful was never a good sign in Sunnydale. The shadows gathered closer, the night grew darker and the car began to shake as a large fist slammed against the windshield. Giles opened the door, stepped out, and tilted his head back.

“What kept you?” he asked, tossing the axe back inside the car.

“I thought it best to eat first.”

“Probably wise.”

“He is with the demon?”

“Yes. Do you think you can do it?”

The laughter was blade sharp. “When did I ever have problems killing things?”

“He’ll resist. I think he’s become quite attached to it, strange though that might seem.”

The figure turned its head and spat. “Such creatures sully the sweet earth. It will be a pleasure to rid it of one this night.”

Giles smiled. “I knew you would see it that way.”

## **Part Ten**

Dremar looked at Spike, curiosity plain on his face. “Falling in love has improved your manners, vampire.”

“What? I’m not in – look, can you do it or not?”

Dremar waved a dismissive hand. “Of course. I can do anything. Well, except throw something away!” He chuckled, wrapping his arms around his knees and rocking back and forth, giggling. The laughter stopped abruptly as he squinted up at Spike. “It’ll

cost you, though. No more favours, not this time!”

Xander glanced over at Spike. Now that he'd seen Dremar, the idea of threatening him seemed too much like bullying. He wondered what reverse charms cost. His savings amounted to, well, half of not enough, probably.

“How much?” Spike said, echoing Xander's thoughts. “And no jacking up the price because you think I'm desperate. I know a witch who could probably do it for free; just coming to you first out of loyalty.”

Dremar raised his eyebrows. “Liar. Only I can undo what I did. You know that.”

Spike flicked a glance at Xander. “I do, yeah. Some other people took a bit of convincing.”

Dremar rubbed his hands together briskly, making a sound like a match being struck. “You want back three days of memories, yes?”

Spike shrugged. "More or less."

Dremar tilted his head and gave him a quizzical stare. "More or less," he repeated. "Which is it to be?"

Xander felt irritation replace amusement. "Tell him the price, demon," he said.

Dremar and Spike both turned to look at him, Spike with concern, Dremar with fear. "Why is he different suddenly?" Dremar asked, his voice squeaking. "Make him go away!"

"It's part of why I need the memories," Spike said. "Hyena possession. You know how it is. I can't stop him getting violent so unless you want the shop trashed, get a move on. How much?"

Dremar kept his eyes on Xander and replied absently, "One grade A memory."

Spike made a complicated sound, something between a groan and a curse, before nodding

reluctantly. “Deal.”

Xander felt the anger fade, to be replaced by worry. “What? No, wait. No deal! Spike, what does he mean?”

Spike reached out and laid his hand on Xander’s arm. “It’s O.K, pet. Just means I lose a memory of a specific event. Not a day, not even an hour necessarily, just has to be...special. It’s worth it.”

Xander shook his head. “It’s not. We’re just going around in circles. Why can’t we just pay him [cash](#)? How much do the ingredients cost, anyway?”

Dremar shrugged, “Oh, as to that...pennies really. In fact, I have the counter spell right here. I always make it at the same time as the memory charm; have to store the memories somewhere, you see. Can’t have them loose or the consequences would be catastrophic.” He smirked. “I have proper storage as well. Stay fresh until the end of the century, easily. I suppose you kept yours under your pillow, hmm?”

The rage was coming back again. Xander just had time to grab at Spike's hand, squeezing it hard, trying to focus on calming down. "You mean," he said carefully, "that you're trying to get something for nothing? There's a word for that. Stealing. What you would have charged for the first spell must have covered the cost of the counter spell; you'd have made sure of that. So he owes you nothing."

Spike pursed his lips. "Lad's got a point." He grinned. "Hand it over, then."

Dremar frowned, making himself still more hideous. "Shan't. And you'll never find it, so don't even bother looking. Memory first, then the counter spell. Not budging on that." He peered at Spike from under his bushy eyebrows. "If you loved him, you'd do it," he said slyly.

Spike froze and then nodded, ignoring Xander's spluttered protests. Dremar produced a simple glass globe and held it out. "Choose your memory, vampire."

Spike closed his eyes. “Got it.”

Dremar wriggled with impatience. “Give it to me then,” he commanded in a hoarse whisper.

He held up the globe, murmuring a phrase that slid past Xander like soap in a hot bath, and it began to fill with a swirling red mist. When it was full, Spike’s eyes flew open and he swayed slightly, his face blank.

“Done,” said Dremar briskly. “Let me just check...”

He held the globe to his forehead and Xander watched, revulsion twisting at his stomach, as Dremar’s face went slack and then contorted as he moaned with pleasure. “I’m guessing that wasn’t you winning the under eight’s sack race,” he whispered to Spike.

Spike shook his head, eying Dremar with dislike. “Doesn’t look like it, does it?”

Dremar let his hand drop away, his eyes glassy. “Goodness me,” he gasped. “You certainly don’t believe in half measures.”

“What will you do with it?” Xander asked, his voice harsh. “Besides the obvious.”

Dremar looked puzzled. “Sell it, of course. Do you have any idea how much I can get for this?”

“For what?” demanded Xander. “What’s inside there?”

Spike said uneasily, “Xander, love...just leave it. I know what it is; just don’t know the specifics anymore. It’s something you’d be better off not knowing –”

“No! I want to know what you gave up. I want to know what was so special.”

Spike’s eyes flashed. “It’s not your concern!”

Dremar cackled, looking at them. “A lovers’ tiff?”

Don't mind me."

He tossed the globe back and forth between his hands like a novice juggler, letting it get higher and higher. It was like a miniature setting sun, ruddy and baleful, a dim flame in the dark room. Xander watched it arc high and smack against Dremar's palm, his attention so focused that sliding past Spike, arm outstretched, placing his hand in precisely the correct place to intercept and catch the globe, and bringing it to his forehead took, well, no effort at all. Spike's shocked face, Dremar's indignant yelp and the cluttered room all faded and he felt the –

smell of smoky air, the roar of a panicked crowd and the taste of blood in his mouth. Drusilla smiled up at him and her lips fastened around his finger, wet with Slayer's blood, laving it clean with a clever tongue, the look in her eyes as arousing as her mouth, as the kill, as –

The globe was struck from his hand and Xander was jerked away from the past. "You – what was that?"

he stammered.

Spike clenched his hand around the fragile container and then forced his fingers to relax. “You know I killed two Slayers.” His voice was flat and he barely waited for Xander to nod. “That was the first. That was my memory of it.”

Xander shook his head. “There was no killing; just you and Drusilla.” His eyes shone with an unexpected hunger. “And the blood...I can still taste it...”

Spike sighed. “So could I, for weeks after, mate,” he murmured. Without taking his eyes off Xander he snapped, “You. Get me my charm. Now.”

“Oh, so we’re not using the magic word anymore, then?” Dremar said. Spike growled in warning and he flinched, scurrying away into the shadows.

Xander smiled. “You scared him.”

“Yeah? That bothers you?”

Xander shook his head, still smiling. “Why should it?”

Spike rolled his eyes. “You’re going to make me hit you again, aren’t you? Look, we’ll be out of here in a minute, just think of, oh, I don’t know. Waves crashing down on the sodding sea shore or fluffy clouds in a blue sky, or -”

“Fucking you until you scream?”

“Whatever works for you, pet. Just calm down.”

Dremar came back in just as Xander slid an arm around Spike’s neck, pulling him close enough to kiss. “Not in here! No, no. Too dangerous. Here’s your charm, vampire; now give me my payment.”

Spike paused, his mouth inches away from Xander’s. “Changed my mind,” he said in a lazy drawl. “Want that memory back. Want all of them back.”

“The door won’t open until you’ve paid in full,” Dremar snapped. “No deal.”

“You saw me and Dru, didn’t you? Saw what we were like?”

“So?”

“Imagine that in here, because the way this lad’s squirming against me, I just don’t think he can wait. Am I right, Xander?”

Xander’s eyes were sparking from human to beast and back again and he turned them on Dremar, staring at him silently before starting to laugh, high and wild. Dremar paled, looking around at the laden, stacked shelves - precariously balanced, perfectly poised. “Very well,” he said in a sulky, grudging mutter. “Very well.”

He came close enough to pass Spike the charm and Spike grinned, pocketed it, and dropped the globe to the floor, crushing it under his heel and breaking the spell. “Nice doing business with you.”

“Never come back,” Dremar said sourly. “That way our friendship can stay a beautiful memory, because I swear, if I see your face again, I’ll -”

“Look, mate, I don’t like leaving behind bad feelings,” Spike said. “I’ll make sure the Slayer gives this place a miss on her patrols, how about that?”

“The Slayer never comes down here!” Dremar said.

Spike’s final words floated back to him, a warning and a threat combined. “Not yet...”

Dremar groaned and kicked out peevishly at a kite streamer, fluttering in the breeze from the alley as the door opened and closed. He missed and his toe tapped against a carefully constructed house of cards. The ace of spades slid down and the structure collapsed. Dremar’s eyes bugged out and he screamed, loud and high. Deep in the shadows, a glass jar shattered, and a hundred marbles rolled free...

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The door closed and Xander grabbed Spike, spinning him around and shoving him against the wall. He was breathing in ragged gasps and his eyes were hot, his mouth avid. Without a word he began to kiss Spike, trailing his mouth from lips to neck and back again, digging his teeth in, calling the blood to the surface. Spike let him, riding the wave, realising that the memory of his kill had shattered Xander's control and that he was dealing with the other Xander again.

Which reminded him...forcing Xander off, he reached into his pocket. "What are you doing?" Xander said, anger and frustration darkening his eyes. "*I want you.*"

Spike grinned. "Hold that thought, pet." He swallowed the charm without hesitation, chewing it once and pulling a face at the bitter taste of herbs before adding, "Second thought; hold me..."

Xander caught him as Spike slid down the wall, following him down so that they lay in a tangled heap on the ground. Spike's eyes were squeezed tightly shut and his hand was fisted in Xander's shirt. Xander felt him begin to tremble and wrapped his arms around him, anger forgotten as concern welled up. Spike's face suddenly changed, the vampire emerging, forcing its way out, eyes opening, fierce and yet bewildered.

Xander had never wanted him more. He had seen Spike like this before, but always with his face twisted with anger, fighting, threatening; an enemy. He had never seen him with his game face on looking lost and unsure. He kissed him, carefully, gently, brushing his lips against ridged flesh and razor-sharp fangs, resting his face against Spike's and waiting for him to come back.

Slowly the trembling died away and Spike whispered his name. Any fear Xander had felt that Spike would change after his memories came back, was lost in relief as Spike said his name again, his

voice stronger. “Xander. You –”

“Right here.”

“You bloody better be,” Spike said, sitting up, his arm snaking around Xander’s neck, game face fading. “Come here. Come fucking *here*”

He stood up, pulling Xander to his feet with an impatient tug; eyes alight with arousal and amusement. “Now I get it,” he murmured. Clever, knowing fingers traced the outline of Xander’s cock, just as they had done when he’d met Xander in the street and offered him the charm. “Now I see why.”

“Why what?” Xander said, the words forcing their way out with difficulty. Spike had him against the wall now, their positions reversed, his hands flat against it, on either side of Xander’s head, his body close but not touching. Spike leaned in, so close that his words tickled Xander’s ear and whispered, “Why every time I’ve looked at you since we met, I’ve only ever wanted to do one thing.”

“Bite me?” Xander asked. Spike was kissing him right under his ear, slow, leisurely kisses that were moving south, still not touching him with anything but his mouth, no matter how much Xander’s hips thrust forward in mute appeal.

“Bite? No. Could have done, of course. Catch you on your own one night, somewhere like this...do you really think you’d have escaped?”

“No,” Xander admitted, his mind full of a tangle of images, screams and blood, heat and terror...

Spike bit down gently, exactly where he would have if he were feeding, and Xander whimpered as the images clamoured for release into reality. Spike’s voice was relentless, every word punctuated with a kiss as he moved across Xander’s throat. “Hated you sometimes, you know. Dreamed of having you begging, bleeding, at my feet.”

Xander felt the memory sear his mind. “We did that already.”

“So we did.” Spike’s voice was thoughtful. “Let’s do it again.” He finally touched Xander, one finger under his chin, pushing it up. “That thing I wanted? I wanted to play with you; fuck your mind, have your body, give you mine.” He smiled. “Like this...”

Xander opened his mouth to say something, to put into words how he felt, but it was too late. This wasn’t the Spike he’d known recently; defensive, bitter, lost; it wasn’t even the Spike he’d first met, arrogant and a little scary. This was someone new, someone drawing on the memories of a time when he had led Xander into a world of darkness and never let go of his hand, someone who knew, beyond doubt, that he was loved. Someone who was remembering what Xander liked and was doing it, falling to his knees, getting Xander ready with a flurry of busy fingers, taking him in, so deep and so fast that Xander’s breath left his body in one wail and he forgot how to do anything but beg and somehow he’d forgotten the words to that song, too.

He came fast, one hand in Spike’s hair, the other

shoved into his own mouth, biting down, needing the pain to anchor him, wanting to taste blood as Spike was tasting him. He let it trickle into his mouth and pulled Spike up to kiss him, blood and come, spit and tears mingling and mixing. Tears? His own or Spike's? It didn't seem important because this time the animal - who had never left, no matter what Giles and Spike believed, merely stayed hidden - was forcing his way to the surface and as Spike vamped out, arousal and blood triggering his change, the hyena met him, snarling and smiling.

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Spike thrust his cock up into Xander's fist, seeking release; needing it, craving it. There was no room for thought when the air was laced with blood and one of Xander's hands was wrapped around him and he was doing his best to mark every inch of Spike's back with the other. They were hurting each other just enough. Spike was venturing further and further with every caress; teasing the chip, daring it to fire as his blunt nails dug in and his fangs

tormented Xander's flesh.

Then a knife was laid against Xander's throat and a deep voice spoke soft words of warning and Spike's treacherous body betrayed him, choosing that moment to come, leaving him helpless to fight, lost in fear and anger.

Xander stilled and turned his head to meet the eyes of his attacker. He saw who stood behind him and his eyes widened in shock. "Giles?"

Giles raised a gun and sent a dart deep into Xander's neck, watching his body go limp in the arms of the man with the knife.

"This is he."

There was no question in the words but Giles still replied. "Yes. That is what must die."

Spike moved back to give himself room to fight or run and glared at Giles. "Rupert, you have got to be fucking kidding me."

Giles spared him one flickering glance. “It’s killing Xander, you fool.” His eyes dropped. “And for heaven’s sake, put that away. This is all your fault, you know.”

Spike zipped up, lit up, and blew a cloud of smoke at Giles. “Of course it is. Nice to see things are back to normal.”

## **Part Eleven**

Giles threw Spike an exasperated look. “We really don’t have time to discuss this, Spike. Help me get Xander back to the car.”

“So chummy here can cut his throat in private? I don’t think so.”

“My intent is not to harm your friend but to save him,” the stranger said, sliding the knife into a sheath attached to his belt. He moved into the faint light from the street, studying the vampire with amused tolerance, towering a full foot above him. “My name is Matthew.”

He turned and walked away. “Why isn’t he sticking around to help?” Spike demanded.

Giles hissed with impatience. “It would affect the ritual if he touched Xander – look, are you giving me a hand or not? He’s bloody heavy!”

Spike said softly, “Take your hands off him, Watcher.”

“What?”

Spike slid one hand under Xander’s shoulders and scooped him up easily into his arms. “You don’t get to touch him after what you did. Not until we’ve had a little chat.”

Giles met his eyes steadily. “Do you really think I would ever harm him?”

Spike shrugged. “Not planning on letting you try.” Giles reached for his glasses and began to polish them, his lips set in a thin line of hurt. Spike relented. “He trusts you.”

Giles looked up, his face hard. “He has never had any reason not to – until now. I assure you that what I’m doing is necessary.”

Spike began to walk towards the car. “Hope so, Giles. I really do.”

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The drive back to Giles’ house had been mostly silent. Spike had opened his mouth and Giles, sensing the imminent inquisition, had said quietly. “I’d prefer to wait until we get home, Spike. Then we’ll answer your questions.”

“Got a fair bit to think about myself,” Spike said.  
“There’s a lot that’s making sense now.”

“Of course!” Giles said. “I forgot to ask...I take it you’re in full possession of your memories then? Good. I have a feeling that will be useful.”

Spike looked down at Xander, lying across his lap, his face slack and empty in his drugged sleep. “Is that right?”

Giles took advantage of a red light to glance back at Spike. “It might make all the difference to Xander, if that matters to you.”

Spike met his eyes. “It matters.” His hand rested against Xander’s chest, feeling the comforting thud of his heartbeat.

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Spike carried Xander into Giles’ house and laid him down on the couch. Giles shook his head. “I’m

afraid we're going to need to restrain him, Spike. He'll be awake soon."

"You're going to let him wake to find himself tied up?" Spike asked, his voice flat and expressionless.

"Yes. Because when he does, he might not be Xander."

Spike digested that and nodded reluctantly, watching Giles bring out the ropes he had felt around his own wrists the week before. "Better hope your knots hold, then. He's strong."

"Stronger than you?" Giles asked, helping Spike place Xander on a wooden chair.

Spike grinned. "You'd better hope not. Could have broken this chair if I'd really tried, you know."

"I'm glad you didn't," Giles said. "It's a matched set." He rubbed his forehead. "There's always the bath tub."

Spike sighed. "Use the chair. I won't let him get free."

Matthew spoke for the first time. He was leaning against the wall, a massive figure, dressed in dull grey and brown, his face deeply tanned, his eyes weary. "We must hurry."

Spike shot him an unfriendly look. "Who is he, Giles, and how did he get here?"

Giles looked over at Matthew for permission and got a small nod. "I called him after you went down the alley with Xander. I thought he would be able to help."

"You live in Sunnydale then?"

Matthew shook his head. "Scotland."

Spike huffed in disbelief and then said, "Magic?"

Giles interrupted, giving Matthew an exasperated look. "He's being pedantic, Spike. He does live in

Scotland but he left there two days ago.” Giles turned back to Spike. “Can you guess when and why?”

“Can you just stop with the games and spit it out?”

Giles pursed his lips. “Oh, very well. He sensed the reawakening of Xander’s beast which coincided – except it wasn’t a coincidence – with the first time you and he, well –”

“Coupled,” Matthew said bluntly.

Spike looked between them, baffled. “I fuck Xander and people can tell thousands of miles away? Did we make the earth move for real?”

Matthew surprised them both by laughing, a deep, booming sound. “No, vampire. Not quite.”

Spike’s fists clenched. “Giles, I’ve heard you talk. You can use up five minutes telling someone what the bloody time is.” He turned to Matthew. “Can you do better? I’m not known for my patience at

the best of times and trust me, this isn't."

Matthew shrugged. "Sit. Listen. Learn."

Spike nodded. "I like you already."

"Whisky."

"Make that unconditional approval."

Giles tutted but went to fetch glasses and Matthew and Spike exchanged amused glances. Once settled, Spike sitting as close to Xander as possible and the two men on the couch, Matthew began to talk.

"You wish for a swift story and yet there is much to explain...you know what happened to your friend two years ago?" Spike nodded. "That happened to me. I came close to losing myself in the animal; I killed and fed...the memories haunt me but I fought free of the beast."

"I got in touch with Matthew two years ago," Giles said quietly. "I was concerned about Xander." He

looked at Matthew ruefully. “You assured me that the spell had removed the animal spirit but of course we had no idea...”

“When you met the boy, you shared blood, a death,” Matthew said.

Spike looked pensive. “Yeah...it’s why I let him live. He wasn’t scared of me at all. He licked the blood from my hand...then I killed the woman it came from, and he fed on her.”

Giles shuddered, gulping at his drink to hide his revulsion, his eyes resting on Xander’s limp body with pity and regret.

“Blood...and then sex. You know how powerful both are, vampire, you know only too well...and the animal bonded with you, linked to your spirit. The spell that freed Xander worked well enough but the spirit was not completely banished. It retreated, using you to hide itself. It could not manifest within you; your demon is far too strong, but it could draw on that strength.”

“It hibernated, for want of a better word,” Giles remarked.

“Yes,” Matthew said, “but it was not spring that awoke it.”

“I can guess,” Spike said, his voice tight. He flicked his eyes over to Giles. “That’s why you said it was my fault, was it? If I hadn’t fucked him, he’d still be Xander?”

Giles studied him and then nodded. “It began the process, yes...and Matthew felt it happen and set off to warn me.” He raised an eyebrow. “You should have told me you were still monitoring the situation,” he said in mild rebuke. “Or at least told me you were coming. When I called you and you told me you were at Sunnydale airport...”

Matthew looked unrepentant. “You would have fussed.”

Spike laughed. “See you know our Rupert, mate.”

“He’s my aunt by marriage’s second cousin,” Giles snapped. “And I would not have...never mind.” He took a deep breath. “To make it short – which I am quite capable of doing – the animal spirit woke and that’s what caused Xander’s odd behaviour and the memory flash you got. The link was active again, you see. Xander probably bit you because the sex wasn’t quite enough.” Giles permitted a faint smile to cross his face as Spike looked crestfallen for a second.

“So; we do the spell again and this time we involve both of you,” said Matthew. “Simple enough.” He drained his glass, put it down and stood up. “Where shall I draw the circle?”

Giles looked around the room doubtfully. “Well...”

“This just suits you, doesn’t it?” Spike said, his voice bitter. He stood up and stalked over to Giles, vibrating with fury.

“What?” Giles frowned at him, genuinely taken

aback. "Is this because I said it was your fault? I wasn't really..."

"No! It's because it was killing you to see him with me, wasn't it? One of your precious Scoobies getting all snuggly with a vampire. Again. Because we all know how well it worked out with Angel and the Slayer. Now you can do the spell, get him back and he won't want me any more, will he? Because it was the animal who needed me. Xander hates me, right? Always has done. Fuck it. Just fucking do the spell and –"

Spike's voice broke and he hissed with frustration. Giles gaped at him. Spike's face was alive with emotion, unguarded and vulnerable. Giles saw the deep blue eyes gloss over with tears before Spike shook his head and let his game face well up.

"Spike! Stop that," Giles ordered, gripping the vampire's arms and shaking him slightly. "You're being selfish and you're quite mistaken."

Spike's human face returned and he looked at Giles with loathing. "Let go of me, Watcher."

Giles hesitated and then shook his head. “Look at me, Spike. What do you see?”

Spike cocked his head to one side, his lips set stubbornly. “An enemy. Admit it, Giles; you hate me, too. I could taste it pouring off you every time you came near me when I was here.”

Giles smiled. “Really? And I thought my mother brought me up to be a better host than that. That chip must be affecting you in more ways than we realised.”

“Meaning?” Spike said, the word harsh, standing still in Giles’ grip.

Giles slid one hand down to take Spike’s hand and then took advantage of his surprise to slip the other around his neck, digging his fingers in. “Does this give you a hint?”

Spike choked out, “Only that you need a refresher course. Don’t breath, remember.”

“It’s symbolic, you dense pillock,” Giles said mildly. “I could have chosen here instead –” His hand moved from Spike’s throat to between his legs, cupping him gently and then dropping away. “Except I’m not quite certain which hand I should have used for that...” He stepped back, at ease in the face of Spike’s confusion, smiling faintly.

“I think he’s trying to tell you that he’s a conflicted man where you’re concerned,” Matthew said, topping up his glass. “You should have worked that one out yourself. You’re a crippled, helpless vampire but you’re not dust amongst the daisies because he doesn’t want to end you. Yet, still, you’re a vampire, so he hates you for that. I’ve a feeling he’s not blind to the fact that you’re easy on the eyes but I won’t presume...”

“No, don’t,” Giles said hastily. “Things are confused enough as it is.”

Spike said bluntly. “You want to fuck me, Rupert?”

Giles shrugged. "In my more insane moments, I've thought about it. It's not really important now." His eyes drifted to Xander. "Him, I love. He's part of my life and he's the one of all of them that I worry about most. Even more than Buffy, who, as you're fond of pointing out, doesn't quite need me anymore. You, I don't love. Fancy you, maybe, but not to the extent of caring too much that you're off limits now. I feel a certain...respect for you perhaps. As an adversary, as a fighter, as an individual. You're irritating, indolent, insecure and immature, of course –"

"He likes you," Matthew said confidentially. "I can tell. Now if you've finished chatting him up, maybe we could do this spell?" Spike turned. "Because laddie here's been awake for quite a while, listening."

The still figure in the chair did not move. Xander's eyes were shut and he was breathing steadily. Spike frowned and then stiffened in shock. Xander's eyes stayed closed but his lips were curving in a slow, sneering smile. The room hushed suddenly and

Giles felt the hair on the back of his neck lift in an atavistic thrill of terror. Xander began to chuckle; a high pitched giggle, humourless and grating. Spike stepped forward, his face concerned and Xander's eyes opened suddenly, wide and staring.

They were cold eyes, inhuman and cruel. "You knocked him out," Spike whispered. "He couldn't fight it like that. He's not there anymore." He spun around and glared at the two men. "Find him!"

## **Part Twelve**

Giles looked dubiously at Spike. The vampire was as close to losing control as he'd ever seen him. "We'll start the spell at once," he said quietly. "Once the hyena spirit leaves, I'm sure Xander will be fine."

Matthew began to say something, but a warning glance from Giles silenced him. Spike snorted. "Your friend seems to think it's not that simple, judging by the look on his face."

Matthew cleared his throat. "There have been cases where the spirit left and the human soul was taken

too. The bodies lived but they were...empty.”

“Not going to happen,” Spike said immediately.  
“Not with Xander. He’s a fighter; right, Giles?”

“He has great courage,” Giles agreed. He looked over at Spike. “You might be at risk too, you know. I don’t want to worry you, but you should be prepared for that.”

Spike showed his teeth in a fierce grin. “Prepared for a fight? Never been anything but, Giles. You know that.”

The giggling from the figure in the chair died away and it spoke. “I don’t want you to do the spell, Giles. I like being like this. I’m strong. I’m happy.” It turned to look at Spike. “You met me like this. It’s how you want me. I’m just like you. You know Xander doesn’t like you; why risk losing the first person to love you for yourself?”

“Don’t listen to it,” advised Matthew. “It will try to trick you, but that’s not your friend talking.”

“I think we worked that one out by ourselves, [mate](#),” Spike said. He stared down at Xander’s body, not getting close to it. “I remember meeting you now. You were fun. Selfish, violent; just what the doctor ordered. Wouldn’t have killed you myself, but you know what? I wouldn’t have stopped Dru going after you either.” He stepped back. “I was pissed when I found out the spell had been reversed but you owed me another go so I went after you. Wasn’t you though, was it? It was him. Xander. He wasn’t scared of me either, but it wasn’t because he was too stupid to know he should be, like you. He just – wasn’t.” Spike smiled down, a sneer on his face. “One kiss from him and I’d forgotten you ever existed - and it didn’t take a bloody charm to do it either. No way Dru was sinking her teeth into him. No fucking way.”

Giles caught Matthew’s eye and jerked his head. They moved out of earshot and began to talk in low whispers as Spike carried on, his eyes glittering, his voice gathering strength and certainty.

“And you weren’t there two days ago, either, mate. You weren’t anywhere about when Xander made me see what I was too fucking stupid to see for myself. He wanted me. He needed me. He kept the memory of feeding on a human, kept the taste of blood and warm flesh in his mouth, rather than forget about me. He did that. Not you. Now, don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying I’m in love with him –” Giles overheard this and rolled his eyes. “I’m a vampire, evil to the core...but choose you over him? In your fucking dreams, dog breath, in your –”

“I think you’ve made your point, Spike,” Giles said hastily. Spike was quite capable of forgetting the chip and doing something that would leave him in agony and Xander’s body somewhat the worse for wear. Not his fault of course; the vampire was just a little impulsive. Not to mention melodramatic.

“He won’t be back. Not ever. You’ve lost him,” the hyena said, its voice a whining, vindictive growl.

Spike grinned. “Then I’ll find him again. You don’t know what I’m like when I’ve got my heart set on

something.”

Giles heard this and his head jerked up from the book he was leafing through. Words long forgotten surfaced in his mind... *‘Once he starts something, he doesn’t stop, until everything in his path is dead.’* Angel had said that of Spike and looking at the vampire’s face, seeing the brash certainty blazing out, he didn’t doubt it. Then Spike turned his back on the hyena and looked over at Giles and the mask slipped. Giles caught his breath. Spike looked as he had when he came to them for help after the chip had been put in his head; skeletal, desperate, pleading...

“The vampire is fighting too, but he doesn’t know it,” Matthew said quietly. “We must hurry.”

“Right.” Giles shook off the unease caused by Spike’s vulnerability and began to assemble the ingredients for the spell.

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It didn't take long to prepare the circle, scatter the herbs and recite the incantations. It took about ten seconds longer to realise that it hadn't worked.

"What went wrong?" Spike said, anger and disappointment struggling for ascendancy.

Matthew shook his head, grey hair standing up as he ran his fingers through it in frustration. "Nothing. We did it perfectly. It should have worked."

They looked back at the figure in the chair. The hyena peered out of Xander's brown eyes, a malicious, satisfied smile twisting his features. "Well, it didn't," Giles said bitterly. "And that thing is digging its claws deeper into him with every minute."

Matthew frowned. "It has to be your involvement," he said to Spike. "It's affecting the spell's influence."

"I was in the circle too," Spike objected. "It should have worked on me."

“It wasn’t strong enough,” Matthew said, his voice rising with a sudden excitement. “Of course!”

“Double up the ingredients? Do us both separately?” Spike suggested.

Giles smothered a smile. Spike trying to be helpful was oddly endearing. Then he caught the predator’s eye and his smile faded, replaced by implacable hatred of the thing threatening Xander. A cool hand was laid against his wrist, pulling him back, and he glanced around in surprise, realising that his fist was clenched so hard his knuckles were stretched white. “Don’t let it get to you, Giles.”

Giles managed to nod to Spike, biting down savagely on his lip. He’d been on the verge of going over to that taunting figure, consumed by the need to hurt it, to lash out at the sneering smile. I doubt Xander would thank me if he came back to find himself with a black eye, he thought wryly. Perhaps Spike’s not the only impulsive one...

“I think we might render our friend unconscious again,” Matthew said. “It doesn’t matter for the ritual and I don’t think it would hurt Xander.”

Giles shrugged. “Possibly not.” He prepared an injection and walked over to the chair.

“I’ll do it,” said Spike. He looked at Giles. “Let me. Please.”

Giles gave him the needle and Spike drove it home, watching the light in the hyena’s eyes die away, his own face sombre.

Matthew had been muttering to himself, sitting at the table and searching through a stack of books, discarding them with impatient grunts and finally exclaiming with relief.

“Eureka?” Giles asked dryly, automatically tidying the books again, his hands closing around them protectively. Matthew had been flinging them around like frisbees...

Matthew looked up, his eyes shining. “Listen to this,” he ordered. “The predatory act will vary from case to case, but will in general be grounded in malice, forging a natural link to the awakening beast. In those rare cases where the act is performed by an innocent, the beast’s hold on the victim can only be broken by a corresponding act.”

Spike frowned. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Giles tilted his head and thought. “Xander followed the four other members of the pack to stop them hurting a boy. They were aggressors; he was a defender. They were all possessed because Xander was prepared to fight to rescue the boy and that was enough to include him; he wasn’t seen as prey. He qualifies as an innocent from that point of view.”

Spike opened his mouth and thought better of it. They didn’t need to know that Xander qualified in just about every way. If it was important, he’d mention it, but not until. He smiled sourly. Now he was getting all protective of Xander’s reputation? A wave of impatient need made him grit his teeth. He

wanted this over, wanted Xander back, wanted to drag him off somewhere and yes, fuck him until he couldn't walk, but just be with him. Talk to him, hang out at the Bronze, fight - now he'd found out he could kill demons...just be with him without the hostility. The pleasure his thoughts gave him was shattered as two feminine voices screeched in his ear. Red and the Slayer...they'd have kittens when they found out. Giles hadn't taken it too badly, if you ignored the wanting to stake him, but those two...Spike shuddered and then, as usual, let worries about the future slip away. No sense fretting over it. Might be dead by then. Or they might.

“So, he's pure as the driven; fine. Still don't get what it means.”

“I think in addition to the spell, there has to be a –”

“Sacrifice,” Giles said quietly, completing Matthew's answer. He had carried on reading from the book and he laid it down gently. “Some form of willing sacrifice. Xander risked himself to save Lance and it

will take a similar risk, voluntarily taken, to free him.”

“He risked getting punched,” Spike said. “Don’t mind you taking a swing at me, Giles. Go for it; you know you want to.” He grinned but his eyes were shadowed, anticipating Giles’ shake of the head.

“It can’t be you, Spike. You’re part of the spell. It’s also going to take more than that, I think.”

“This doesn’t make sense,” Spike said. “He did something good and someone else has to get hurt? Where’s the logic in that?”

Matthew sighed heavily. “Magic and logic aren’t always strangers, but they’re rarely friends.”

“Oh, well done! Give the man a fortune cookie to shove that little gem in,” Spike snapped.

Giles held up a hand to halt the hostilities. Matthew was a tolerant man who knew about Spike’s recent history, but he was far from inclined to trust a

vampire, let alone put up with abuse from one. “I’ll do it,” he said firmly. “There is no one else. Oh, don’t look so stunned, Spike; we’re not talking life threatening, I’m not being particularly heroic.”

“You save Xander and I swear I’ll never...” He thought for a moment. “What would you like me not to do again, Giles?”

Giles burst out laughing. “Give me time to draw up a list,” he said, his shoulders shaking.

“One thing,” Spike said. “Just one.”

Matthew looked at Giles. “What do you plan to sacrifice?” he asked bluntly.

Giles pursed his lips. “I don’t have the faintest idea,” he said finally. “Doesn’t it have any suggestions; preferably ones that leave me physically intact?”

“I can think of something...” Matthew said slowly.

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Dremar refused to let Spike in at first, his voice hysterical, almost tearful. “Haven’t you done enough? Do you know what happened in here? Do you? Have you seen the mess? Have you –”

“Dremar, do you know who I am?” Giles asked, his voice calm and measured.

There was a brief pause. “The Watcher? You brought – take him away!”

“I have money and I promise you the Slayer is better as a friend than an enemy. I can make sure which she decides to be.”

“I don’t trust your promises,” Dremar said bitterly. “He cheated me.”

“Did not!”

“That’s beside the point,” Giles said firmly. “You’re dealing with me now and I need one of those memory saving globes.”

“Shan’t! You can’t get past my door and –”

Giles sighed. “Of course I can.”

“How? It’s bespelled to open at my voice alone!”

Giles grinned wolfishly. “I find a chain saw does good demon imitations.”

Spike stepped out of the way with an admiring bow of the head and Giles reached for his weapon. The door opened before he had time to use it.

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The three gathered around and the ritual began. Spike stood, his hands on Xander’s shoulders, waiting for the moment when he would truly be touching him. The hyena, awake again, began to

struggle but strong fingers held him still. Giles was outside the circle, a glowing sphere in his hand, his face peaceful, even happy. Matthew stood, book in hand, his eyes watchful.

“– depart and leave, dissolve to dust,” he chanted, finishing the incantation. Giles moved forward and flung the globe down, letting it shatter inside the circle. The red mist sank down, absorbed into the chalked diagram, vanishing utterly. Spike felt Xander’s shoulders tense and the hyena shrieked loudly, thrashing in the chair. There was a sense of darkness rising within the circle and then it disappeared, fading like a dream, leaving empty air, ringing with silence.

Xander turned his head, craning his neck to look upwards. “Spike? Not that I don’t like it when you get enthusiastic with the hands but - oww.”

Spike smiled and loosened his grip, meeting Giles’ eyes for a moment and seeing his own relief reflected in them.

“And if it’s all the same to you guys, I prefer to save the ropes for more private moments.”

Giles winced. “I could wish you hadn’t shared that,” he said.

Spike reached for the ropes, began to untie the knots, and then growled impatiently and snapped them, releasing both Xander and some of his own tension. Xander stood up, staggering slightly as his stiff legs gave way. Spike grabbed his arm and helped him over to the couch. Xander looked up at the three faces peering anxiously down at him and smiled, flushing slightly. “Well, that was...what was that?”

“You don’t remember?” Giles asked.

“Lot of that going around,” Spike muttered.

“I remember the alley and then this guy came out of nowhere –”

“That would be me,” Matthew said gruffly, his eyes

intent. “I helped Giles capture you so that we could free you of the hyena.”

Xander looked around at them all and tried to speak. Spike hesitated and then sat down beside him. “Don’t worry about it now. You’ve got two doses of knockout drugs in you and you’re fine, trust me.”

Xander turned to look at him and Giles found himself holding his breath as his face puckered with uncertainty. Then Xander slid his hand behind Spike’s head and pulled him towards him, kissing him hard and releasing him a second later.

“You –” Spike seemed at a loss and Giles found himself blinking away, not tears, no, just a sudden prickling in his eyes. All this bloody chalk all over the floor, he thought defensively.

“All’s well, then,” Matthew said heartily. “Now, where’s your *good* malt, Rupert?”

“He has more?” Spike said with interest, his arm

around Xander's shoulders, keeping him close.  
"Thought I'd found most of it."

Giles glared at him. "If I were to look behind the collected works of –"

"Kipling?" Spike suggested. "Now there's a man who knew his stuff." He smirked happily. "Good hunting, Giles," he quoted.

"Spike, you thieving, ungrateful – this bottle was full!"

"Enough left for a toast," Matthew said pacifically.

Giles narrowed his eyes, poured out three measures and then sighed and let the last drops trickle into a fourth glass. Handing them around, he paused and then said, "'Lest we forget...'"

~\*~\*~\*~\*~

Xander left Spike and Matthew squabbling happily

about a soccer game that had taken place before he was born and followed Giles into the small kitchen.

“We should get out of your way,” he said.

Giles looked up from watching the kettle boil for tea and smiled. “There’s no rush but I can understand that you and Spike have a lot to discuss.”

“Tomorrow will do for that. Or maybe next week. Never mind. Giles – I have to know. What was it? What did you give up for me?”

Giles took off his glasses and rubbed at his eyes before sighing. “Does it matter? I did it willingly, Xander. I’d have given up far more than that to save you. I’d really rather not dwell on it.”

Xander hesitated, looking at him doubtfully and Giles forced himself to smile reassuringly. It must have worked because Xander’s face brightened. “Is this where we hug?” he asked.

Giles laughed. “Or exchange a manly handshake.”

Xander thought about it. “Hug,” he decided. “And we never tell anyone we did it.”

Giles patted his shoulder. “Now go, and take your vampire with you,” he said. “I want to catch up on the news with Matthew.”

Spike stood up eagerly when Xander came back and they both made their way to the door. Spike paused, his hand resting on the handle. “Almost forgot,” he said casually. “Decided what you want me to never do again, yet, Giles?”

Giles looked at him steadily. “Yes.”

“Well?”

“Never force me to leave the house unshaven and barely awake in search of sugar-laden donuts I don’t want to eat.”

There was a short pause as Matthew looked puzzled and Xander blushed.

“I don’t get ...oh. Fair enough.”

“Told you he wouldn’t like it,” said Xander.

### **Part Thirteen**

Giles’ door closed behind them and Spike turned to look at Xander. “Where to now?”

Xander yawned. “I’m tired.”

Spike fought back disappointment. It was late and Xander had every right to be tired, but he’d hoped they could –

“So let’s go to bed.”

“To sleep?” Spike said cautiously.

Xander looked at him quizzically. “That’s the first thought that comes into your head? Has the passion gone from our relationship already?”

His tone was light but there was a questioning note in it, a plea for reassurance that puzzled and pleased Spike. “You said you were tired.”

Xander sighed and began to walk slowly out of the courtyard, Spike by his side. “Let’s start over. This has been one hell of a night and yes, I’m tired. Doesn’t mean I want to go to sleep right away. I want to – ” He paused and shook his head. “If I say ‘make love’, is that too girly?”

Spike studied him solemnly, fighting down a surge of amused tenderness. “Maybe. What’s wrong with telling me you want to fuck me?”

“It doesn’t leave much room for misunderstandings but – this’ll be our first time with me not possessed and you with your memories.”

“So?”

“So, I’m nervous. God, make that terrified. And I’ve got stuff to tell you, questions to ask you, a dozen problems waiting to leap out and grab me and –”

Xander stopped walking as he babbled, the words spilling out. Spike put his palm, not gently, against his lips, silencing him. “That’s tomorrow, all of it. Tonight, the only thing grabbing you is going to be – oh for fuck’s sake!”

Xander found himself thrust to one side as Spike launched himself at a vampire who had been about to attack them. “I am trying to have a conversation here!” he howled. “Is a little privacy too much to expect?”

The vampire, who must have died before he reached twenty, didn’t look all that scary even with his game face on. He held up his hands placatingly, whining, “Didn’t know you were a vamp, too – sorry. Kill him, go ahead, just...I’m kind of hungry; can I share?”

“He’s not on the menu, you pillock! He’s my fucking —”

Spike paused, trying to think of the right word. Xander chuckled. “Now see how you like it. What am I? Boyfriend, lover, partner?”

Spike locked his fingers around the vampire’s throat to hold him in place and turned his head to look at Xander. “No,” he said mildly. “Don’t get fancy, pet. You’re mine. Simple as that.”

Xander didn’t move, didn’t say a word, but Spike felt the air between them turn to syrup, sweet and heavy. Without taking his eyes off Xander, he dragged the vampire in front of him, let go, and whispered, “Run.” The vampire gulped and backed away, melting into the shadows.

They were separated by more than a few feet of sidewalk, held apart by years of soured expectation and disappointment, spells and secrets, but Spike knew that if he beckoned and said, “Come here,”

Xander would. He saw it in his eyes; he remembered how it had been before. Xander hadn't endured; he'd enjoyed. Every test, every trial, every chance he'd had to go farther, he'd taken. If he had limits, Spike hadn't found them then. Now? It was different. Spike didn't want that from Xander, not now. He wanted ...

Three steps, and he was close enough to stretch out a hand and have Xander reach out to touch it with his own, but he didn't. Four, and his hand could have rested on Xander's shoulder, against his face, but he kept his hands by his side. Five steps and he was so close that – and Xander kissed him and all thought fled.

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Xander watched Spike walk towards him, his face intent, his eyes unfocused, as though he were dreaming. The word, 'mine' was thrumming in his head, getting louder with every repetition until he wanted to scream or kneel to silence it. Either.

Both. Spike did that to him; challenged him and tested him as he had done that morning, a handful of hours ago that felt as distant as Christmas in July. Xander had refused to surrender control, had drawn a line in the dirt and dared Spike to cross it, knowing he would and knowing he wanted him to, just to see...He'd seen, he'd won, but so much of him had wanted to give in. Two years ago he would have. Two years ago, it would have been Spike's hand on his ass, punishing him for reluctance in a way that drove everything from his head but the need to come. Just that, nothing more. Not then.

He would have gone to Spike, spurred on by that single word, just as his years of dreaming had been fuelled by a single sentence, a quotation he'd meant to look up and never had – “My only love, sprung from my only hate”. There had been plenty of both emotions but one had burned out; silver ashes all that remained of blistering, scalding, scarring hatred. He would have taken those steps, fallen to his knees if Spike had touched his shoulder just so, let the relief and worry slide away as he was ordered, instructed, bound to obey.

Then Spike came towards him. Stood without touching, patiently waiting, refusing to force the decision with a caress or a command, telling Xander mutely that this was how it was going to be – and Xander kissed him gently, kissed him hard, kissed him until they were swaying together like trees in a storm, bodies locked, hands roving, kissed him until Spike’s mouth yielded and his body relaxed, leaning away from Xander enough to look up at him with satisfied, gleaming eyes.

“You’ve done it again, Harris,” he said. “What is it with you and the open road? Too good for a bed, is that it?”

“You...talk...too ...much,” Xander said, punctuating each word with an action. Belt, button, zip...Spike shuddered against his hand and Xander grinned mercilessly as his fingers - busy, deft fingers, eased out Spike’s cock and wrapped around it, with a practised, swift slide of palm and flick of thumb.

Spike’s hands gripped Xander’s shoulders hard,

biting bruise deep, but he managed to whisper,  
“Can’t wait then?”

Xander squeezed hard and jerked his wrist three times fast, forcing out the incoherent moan he knew was lying just below the whisper. Then he leaned forward and kissed Spike again, a teasing, loving kiss. “Can wait. Just don’t want to.”

Sometimes kneeling was just convenient.

~\*~\*~\*~\*~

They woke together, eyes heavy with tiredness. “We need to stop waking up,” Xander murmured, the words shaping themselves slowly in his mouth, emerging as a strangely slurred whisper.

Spike snuffled against the pillow, his hand already blindly reaching out. “Why?”

“Need to sleep. Not fuck.” That had been much more eloquent and logical in his head. Spike’s head

lifted and he turned his face enough for his mouth to be visible. “Oh God, I want you.”

The lips curled up. “Here, aren’t I?”

Xander wasn’t sure he could move sleep-weighted limbs and his cock had been kissed better so often it hurt just to think about it getting hard, but somehow Spike was fitting against him and they were kissing, eyes shut, drifting on a sea of sleepy satiation, pulled down away from the brassy glare of the sun, fathoms-deep, where the sunken waves did no more than rock them gently and ...

~\*~\*~\*~\*~

“What did he give up?”

“What?”

“Giles. You were there at the demon. You know. Tell me.”

“Shit. You remember all of it, don’t you? Said you didn’t but you do. Not just Giles, everything.”

“I was going to tell you –”

“Why didn’t you? Why did you lie?”

“Think about what I was listening to, what I was saying when I was awake...”

*You know Xander doesn’t like you; why risk losing the first person to love you for yourself - One kiss from him and I’d forgotten you ever existed -You want to fuck me, Rupert? Him, I love.*

“He wouldn’t tell me.”

“Now you’re lying.”

“What if I am? Man made a choice. Did it to save you. If I could have, I’d have done it. You know that?”

“I know. But Giles...never thought he –”

“You’re an idiot sometimes.”

“That’s what I thought he thought.”

“Probably does.”

“Hey, we’ve been awake for six minutes and we’re not – ”

“Oh, yes we are.”

“That hurts...no, don’t stop...”

“Never.”

~\*~\*~\*~\*~

And somewhere else Buffy was staring at Willow, as slipping towels, borrowed T shirts and suspicions were poured into her disbelieving ears in a belated, bewildered torrent. Soon after that a Watcher and his Slayer were arguing, with victory – for once –

not with the Chosen One.

Somewhere...but not where Xander lay beside Spike, propped up on pillows as they talked and squabbled, kissed and fucked, and then did it all over again.

Not there.

**The End**