Xander is in Africa and managed to accidentally fall into some mystical information... specifically about a certain vampire who Xander had thought dead. Now he just has to convince Spike to start living again.

Warnings: magical, mystery tour here. There is branding, but not what you're expecting, and not squicky (I hope)

Roleplaying, not Living

by Litgal

Part One

"This iz a bad idea," the guide said as he stood in front of Xander, blocking him from the gathering ceremony.

"Oh, I'm the master of bad ideas," Xander assured him.

"You have no idea how bad this will hurt," he said as he moved to block Xander again. Xander sighed and looked at Nolizwe.

"Hey, I appreciate the whole attempt to protect me from myself, but if this is what they require for me to take the
slayers, I'm okay with it."

"Manhood ceremonies... not something... you are prepared for," Nolizwe said as he reached the edge of his English vocabulary. The man had endless words for describing demons or big game, but these more subtle cultural words would slide right past him. However, Xander had been around long enough to know that manhood ceremony probably included enduring something pretty painful. He was actually looking forward to it. Pain would mean feeling something, and it'd been a long time since he felt anything.

"My friend, pain is also my friend. My other friend. The friend you don't want hanging around and who is always stealing your French fries when you aren't looking and putting a 'kick me' sign on your back, but a friend anyway," Xander answered as he detoured around Nolizwe. Just like he expected, the flurry of unfamiliar words left the guide dazed and confused. That left Xander free to reach the dusty village center where a half dozen elders waited in a half circle around the village shaman.

Given the number of tattoos and scars the others wore, Xander had a pretty good idea of what it would take for
these men to accept him as a member of the tribe and let him take the two slayers back to England for training.

"Okay, I'm ready," Xander said as he stepped over the circle of white stones. The animal skin loin cloth made him feel like an extra from a bad Tarzan movie, especially considering the elders were wearing khakis and jeans, but then Xander was old friends with both humiliation and pain. And if he was an extra from a Tarzan movie, then the shaman with his body paint and piercings and animal claw necklace was one of the stars.

The shaman gestured to the ground, and Xander sat cross legged in front of him, and shift as he felt his cock shift under the way too small cloth.

"You seek to be a member of the tribe, but to be part of the tribe, the spirits must meet you and approve your heart," one of the elders said seriously.

"Hey, no problem. My heart is way better than my aim or my driving," Xander assured him. The elder traded a confused look with another man, and Xander silently ordered his mouth to just stay shut. The shaman chuckled.
"We shall see," he said, and Xander blinked in surprise. That old faker. For three weeks of negotiations, he'd claimed he didn't speak English. The shaman caught Xander's expression and smiled so wide, Xander could count the missing teeth.

Another gesture and two young men came carrying a metal pot on a long pole. They set it next to the shaman, but even from several feet away, Xander could feel the heat pouring from it. "You must spirit walk and ask the ones who walked before to help judge your heart," the old shaman said as he used a heavy cloth to pull a rod of metal from the pot. The elders shifted; one started a beat on a drum that the others picked up with chanting and rattles. The sun sank under the horizon, and the orange glow that crept around the edges of the world took on a strange life of its own.

"Why do you come?" the shaman asked. As he sank the rod of metal deep into the pot, burning sparks flew out. A thick, pungent smoke drifted through the circle, and Xander looked over to see a young man dropping green branches onto a fire.

"To get slayers. We'll train them and then bring them home," Xander answered. He'd pretty much been trying
that line for three weeks, so he wasn't surprised when it didn't work.

"Why are you here? What do you seek?" the shaman demanded.

"To help the slayers," Xander insisted. This time the shaman nodded and pulled the glowing metal rod out of the pot.

"To help them, you must ask the spirits. Ask them how you can best serve the slayers." The shaman stood, and Xander braced himself as the heat from the metal seemed to make the air wave. The shaman pressed the tip against Xander's skin, right in the middle of his chest, and for a second, the only thing that Xander could think was that it wasn't so bad. Okay, the smell of burning flesh wasn't good, but the pain seemed little more than a tickle. The shaman pulled back, and about three seconds later, Xander collapsed to the ground screaming as the agony struck him full force.

Smoke filled his lungs and made his eyes water, and Xander tried and failed to sit back up only to find his muscles too weak to manage it. When a painted face loomed near, Xander jerked back only to have an
inhumanly strong hand reach out and grab him. Aw shit. Xander was so not up for dealing with feral slayer today. The First Slayer tilted her head at him, studying him like a bug, and Xander had a pretty good idea of just how pathetic he must seem through her eyes.

The black paint around her eyes made her look vaguely skull-like, so when she thrust her face into his, he tried to scramble away only to have her hand hold him.

"How would you help? You are weak."

"No, no, I’m not," Xander immediately answered. That surprised her and she sat back without letting go of his arm. "And you're not supposed to be able to talk."

"It is your hallucination," she countered.

"Oh, okay, so we're talking hallucination and not, I don't know, weird spirit realm where you're going to kill me?" Xander asked hopefully.

"I have not decided," the slayer said as she leaned in again. "How would you help?"

Xander frowned. Maybe this was some sort of native
form of sodium pentothal. Maybe it wasn't the first slayer but the shaman asking.

"I can teach them about demons."

"All the demon they will meet in this place, they already know. They can feel the coxix crawling under the ground and the vampires stalking the night."

"I can teach them about others," Xander said. "And other slayers can teach them how to fight. If they have more skills, they're more likely to survive."

"Why must they leave? Why send you? You are weak." The first slayer let him go, and Xander scooted back a foot, not that it would do him any good if this was the first slayer.

"I know how to survive when everyone around you is stronger. The slayers today, they aren't as strong as you. The demons are stronger."

"Then they deserve to die."

"No, they don't," Xander insisted as he moved forward. "We always fight something that's stronger. But we win
anyway. I won. I stopped Willow when she was so much stronger than me that she could have killed me with one finger. It isn't about being strong, it's about being right."

"Then why was I created?" the slayer asked as she stood up and spread her arms.

That left Xander silent for a second. "Because men were afraid. Because they didn't want to have to fight something stronger, and so instead they stole your life. But I can't just let these slayers die because the men who made you were too afraid to fight their own battles." The first slayer looked at him, and then vanished into smoke and Xander found himself face to face with the shaman who was holding him up. Xander looked around and all the elders were still in place. The music pounded into his head, and his chest burned like a son of a bitch. It burned and it smelled.

"You have taken the first step. Will you become a man and face the other spirits waiting for you or will you go home?" the shaman asked.

"If I go home, can I take the slayers with me?" Xander asked. No way was he walking away without the slayers, not after that.
"The tribal spirits have not yet met you and judged your heart. Another pushed into your visions first," the shaman said seriously.

"Yeah, the first slayer is like that. Shove into your dreams and spirit kill you first, ask questions later," Xander shrugged. The motion brought new fire to his chest and Xander gasped in pain. By the time the red cloud blurring his vision cleared, Xander could see the shaman looking at him with some confusion. "I met her once before," Xander admitted. And if I have to face more spirits, bring 'em on," Xander said with a whole lot more confidence than he felt. His legs were trembling and his stomach would have embarrassed him by sending dinner all over everyone if he hadn't been fasting for the day.

The shaman nodded and helped Xander to his knees before he went back and pulled the metal rod out of the pot of embers. Xander thought this one was worse because he knew the agony that was about to come. He had to fight an instinctive urge to pull away that second before the hot metal touched his skin an inch below the first, and both circles instantly burned so hot that Xander could breathe. The shaman pulled the metal away, and Xander fell forward onto his hands. He tried to keep
himself above the smoke, but his arms trembled and then collapsed as Xander went face first into the dirt, the smoke billowing up on either side of him.

"You really are a shadow. Look at you. Pathetic. Xan, xan the one-eyed loser man," a voice sang, and Xander didn't have to open his eyes to identify this one.

"Jesse."

"Wrong."

Xander opened his eyes and found himself nose to nose with a green-faced demon with dozens of little horns sprouting out of its face where a human would have eyebrows and a beard. With a yelp, Xander sprang back.

"I had a body. I had one. You took it from me," the demon snarled as he grabbed Xander with clawed hands. "You sent me back."

"Jesse's body," Xander breathed as he realized what he was looking at. And he was so about to get eviscerated. He wondered if dying in the spirit world would give him a heart attack or something in the real world.
"Now, now. No need for rudeness. Especially not when rudeness is accompanied by blood. Messy stuff blood."

Xander closed his eyes and tried visualizing himself out of his hell.

"Oh, this isn't hell," Mayor Wilkins informed him. "Hell is much less pleasant. Not that I plan to stay there forever, of course. There will be a doorway one day, and I will make a point to look you up." Xander opened his eyes and found himself looking into Mayor Wilkins' smiling face. "You are such a little fish in such a wide ocean. However did you manage to undo so many of my plans?" The mayor tsked as he turned his back. The Jesse demon shook Xander so hard that his head felt ready to flop off.

"Hey, I was just the sidekick. Why don't you go haunt someone else's pain and drug induced nightmares, only no, don't. No haunting nightmares for either of you, go rot back in hell where you're supposed to be."

The Jesse demon growled, and then Xander's body exploded in pain. Xander looked down to see a long claw sunk deep into the second burn mark, blood sluggishly trickling down from it.
"Oh really?" Wilkins asked in that same friendly voice. "Who got the weapon to blow up the Judge? That would be you." Wilkins poked a finger in Xander's direction. "Who stopped those idiot zombies on the night they were supposed to blow up the slayer and that ridiculous vampire? You. Who set the explosives that blew me up? Oh yes, you had help from that pretentious librarian that time."

"Kitten sees through the cracks. Every picture has cracks, only he pokes and pokes until the cracks grow like fire," another familiar voice said.

"It's just old home week for psychos," Xander said sadly as he continued to watch his blood trickle out of his body.

"You're not properly dead. You being here is a breach of protocol," the mayor informed her primly. Drusilla just danced into the picture, and suddenly the featureless white room became the main hall in Angelus' mansion.

"Pet the kitty and he'll put claws in you, which you will only think a scratch." Drusilla spun several times and ended up right next to Xander. "Time for the knight to go questing," she said as she planted a kiss on his cheek, and
then Xander was gasping as smoke and dust filled his nose. The shaman's hands were on his shoulders pulling him up, and Xander's fingers went to his two burns. Neither was bleeding, but just touching them set a new fire through his whole body, and Xander was left cursing brilliantly. He no longer cared what the tribesman thought about his manners.

"Don't tell me, the evil brigade pushed in and the tribal spirits didn't get to judge my heart," Xander just about growled as he pushed himself back up to his knees. The shaman looked at him with clear distress. "Let's just do this. Sooner or later your guys have got to show up," Xander said as he gestured toward the pot of embers.

"Young one," the shaman started.

"Oh no. I’m pissed now. No way are those three keeping me from doing the whole heart judging thing. I helped kill them—well two of them—fair and square, and they are not screwing me up now. Either tell me that I can take the two slayers for training or get going with the branding iron." Xander gave the shaman his best impression of a Willow resolve face. After a second, the shaman traded looks with the other elders. Only then did Xander realize that the music had stopped. The man on
the drums picked up the rhythm and the others followed as the shaman moved into to brand the third circle on Xander's chest.

Knowing the pain was coming didn't make it any easier, but Xander rode through the waves and let himself fall back into the smoke this time. Blinking his eyes open, he found himself in Sunnydale. "Well shit on a shingle. I'm guessing the tribal elders aren't here, so whoever is going to come out and threaten me, bring it on," Xander told the silent night. Footsteps came down the street, and Xander didn't even bother turning his head. Anya's face poked into his field of vision, and Xander stopped breathing.

"Ahn?" Xander sat up and reached out for her, and she took his hands in hers. "Oh god, Ahn. Is this real?"

"Real would be the wrong word. The right word exists in a couple of demon languages, but you're bad with demon languages so I'm not going to bother trying to teach them to you," she said bluntly. It was all the answer Xander needed. He gathered Anya to his chest and hugged her, ignoring the pain.

"Anya. Oh god, I should have protected you better. I'm so
"For what?"

"For letting you die." Xander pulled back and looked at Anya's face, waiting to see the disappointment and anger. Instead she rolled her eyes at him.

"You always gave good orgasms, but you are not logical. I was moral, so I was going to die."

"But not like that, not so young," Xander protested about three seconds before his brain reminded him that he didn't want Anya mad at him. She just smiled.

"But dying like that means I have another chance. I'm in balance, good and evil, so I can go back and try again. And I lived for over a thousand years, Xander, so whether I died at thirty or sixty was really not significant. I've slept through thirty years before, although D'Hoffryn was not amused. I know I'm making this harder for you," she sighed as she reached out and fingered the third brand. The pain stabbed through Xander, but he didn't stop her. "I just had to see you. I can feel your guilt, only you don't have anything to feel guilty about."
"I've screwed up a lot of stuff, Anya. You don't know."

"Oh please," Anya sniffed, and for a second, she sounded a lot like Cordelia. "You screwed up? I gave my soul to hell and cursed men's dicks to make them shrivel. I think I win on the screwing up front. And yeah, you made some bad decisions, but you are in serious danger of turning into Angel."

"What? Am not!" Xander protested.

"Are too!"

"So am not. I do not brood."

Anya nodded slowly and gave him an expression that made it pretty clear she didn't believe him. "And what are you doing in Africa."

"Not brooding. I'm doing good work, helping Buffy."

Anya's fingers trailed down Xander's stomach and ended at the top of his loin cloth where she got a very familiar expression. Xander groaned and started to harden just like the good little Pavlovian dog he was. "White faces stand out in Africa, but instead of sending an African
“Well, yeah,” Xander said, and maybe it was Anya's fingers slipping under his loincloth, but he suddenly had trouble understanding the logic of that.

“What assignment had you asked for?” Anya whispered as she ran fingers over the head of his cock. Xander grabbed her shoulder and let his eyes fall closed in lust. That lasted until she poked his third burn.

“Oh!”

“Focus. What assignment did you ask for?”

“Okay, so I asked him to send me to Antarctica or to check to see whether we could set up a council house on the space station, and Andrew was weirdly excited about the idea of slayers in space,” Xander admitted.

Anya reached down and kissed the third burn reverently before she stood up and looked him in the eye. "Stop being such a moron," she suggested, and then Sunnydale turned to fog and Xander found himself lying on the ground in the village with a hard on that made his cock peak out from under his loincloth. Groaning with
humiliation, Xander moved his hands down to cover himself, but the shaman seemed more interested in Xander's chest. Old fingers moved to the third burn, and when Xander looked down, he realized it had healed to a scar already. The shaman looked at him in shock.

"Um, does that work in place of meeting with the tribal ancestors?" Xander asked hopefully. It took the shaman several seconds to answer.

"No."

Xander sighed. "Right then, back to the burning pain. And guys," Xander said as he looked up at the sky, "I love you, I really do, and I realize I've been doing a little too much brooding lately, but I promise to work on it if you will just not come pushing into my spirit walks here. I'm trying to get a job done, and you're not making it easy for me."

The tribal music stumbled, and for a second, the elders were all on a different pattern before they could get themselves back in sync. Xander nodded and pushed himself up to his knees as he gestured toward the pot of embers.

"We should stop," the shaman said quietly.
"Not unless you're going to let me take the slayers."

"You have not been judged worthy."

"Then we keep going," Xander said firmly. The shaman opened his mouth, but Xander was already shaking his head. "You promised me that I would be able to complete the ceremony and prove my worth. So get on with the branding."

This time the shaman moved slower as he got the rod. Xander sat on his butt and put his hands behind him to brace himself. The blinding pain made him scream this time, and he was pretty sure he passed out. Waking up in chains was new, but not unexpected, weirdly. Another green-faced demon had him, so this was going to be another vampire encounter.

The demon had a branding iron of his own, and he pressed it to Xander's chest overlapping the fourth burn mark. Xander screamed, and the demon chuckled in a low voice. "Suffer, boy," he hissed.

"Aw fuck. Spike, nice to see you. You're looking horny." Xander closed his eyes and called himself an idiot the minute that word was out of his mouth, but the Spike
demon just chuckled again.

"It's not the sex for them, you know. They're beasts," a quiet voice offered. "They feed on blood and power, and as long as they can get both, they don't have any other desires."

"Yeah, right, except for the ending the world kind," Xander said as he turned his head to the new voice. "Spike?" he asked, but that was not looking like Spike. That was looking like a really nerdy version of Spike with curly hair and glasses.

"William," the other man corrected him. "And if the demon tries to end the world, then it's because the human memories have told him that ending the world is powerful."

"And your demon is not about ending the world?" Xander asked as he looked over at the green vampire demon that was reheating the hot poker.

"Not so much. He learned about power through me, I'm afraid."

"Which means?" Xander asked as he pulled on the chains
that held him to the wall. A book appeared in William's hands and he looked down at it sadly.

"Love."

"Okay, I’m missing the connection," Xander said. The demon was happily stirring his own pot of embers and making sparks fly.

"Love is power. He did everything to keep Drusilla because to keep love means to be powerful. He hates Angelus because Angelus left him, but he wants him too, because to earn back that love would make him powerful." At the name Angelus, the demon turned and growled at both of them, showing his teeth.

"And this is about love?" Xander asked as he pulled at the chains again.

"Yes," William nodded. "You have love. He wants loves."

"The jolly green giant is jealous of me?" Xander demanded incredulously.

"You lit his cigarette. You said kind words that made him think that he might be part of that strong love you have
with the others. He thought he could have love that never strays. Willow tried to end the world, and you still loved her. Giles left you alone to deal with the pain, and you still love him. He wants love that he doesn't have to earn over and over. He died hoping to prove his love. And now he's alone. We're alone."

"In hell," Xander said softly, and even he had to admit that sucked. As much as he'd been suspicious of Spike, the vampire had stood by them time and time again, and Xander had started to think of him as a friend. A friend who you didn't totally trust, but a friend.


"What?"

"The amulet took us back to L.A. We nearly died again trying to fight Angel's war and earn his love. Everyone except Angel and Spike died, and now we're lost. We can't bring ourselves to love Angel because he caused so many deaths... deaths that never should have happened. We can't go back to Buffy because we saw her with the Immortal."

"Don't mention that because I'm still squicked at that
one," Xander said with a grimace. William ducked his head and smiled shyly.

"We're stuck without any love, without any connection, and the beast is starting to hunt for the power he needs."

"Hunt as in you're losing control? I don't want to have to hunt Spike down. I really don't," Xander said with his voice shaky. This was coming too much, too fast. Spike was alive and alone and hurting, and part of Xander wanted to reach out to that, but if Spike was hunting again, he couldn't just let the vampire kill.

"Don't hunt us, find us," William said as he moved close and let his finger trail over the fourth burn. The caress followed the same trail down over Xander's belly that Anya had used. And then William was caressing his cock.

"I don't... I can't..." Xander stammered as he pulled on the shackles.

"You even asked Willow to gay you up, you can," William said confidently. And then Xander spotted the vampire demon coming close with the branding iron.

"With a vampire, no, really can't. I mean, could you stop
your alter ego there?" Xander asked as he watched the branding iron come closer. All he could do was squirm, but then William was kneeling in front of him, his hands on Xander's hips.

"I don't control the beast, but I can love you, and he can feel possessive about you and feed from your love," William pointed out.

"Not feeling the love," Xander yelped.

"Yes, you do. He died for you. He wants love and loyalty more than he wants blood, so let me help you through this," William said as he pulled the loin cloth to the side. Xander was more than a little embarrassed when his hard cock slipped free, but then William took it into his mouth, and Xander's big brain sent all the blood south. Or maybe that was Xander's little brain... either way, Xander's whole existence narrowed down to just his cock as that warm mouth worked him.

A hot flare burned down his stomach and into his cock, and Xander jerked as the heat made the whole world turn into a Technicolor streak. He was panting, writhing in pleasure even as the smell of burnt skin told him he should feel pain. He didn't, though. He felt heat, he felt a
tightness in his stomach and his cock—a tightness that made the rest of the world seem like a pale imitation of life. With a scream, Xander came so hard that the world started fading to black, and the last thing he felt was lips touching his fourth scar.

Xander woke up dizzy and the sound of the drums and the rattle hurt like a knife through the brain. It took a few seconds for him to put all the pieces of reality back into place. There was the shaman kneeling beside him. Aw shit. There was his own semen staining his leg. Yep, if there were a way to humiliate himself, Xander could pretty much find it.

"I really need better friends, ones that don't keep sticking their astral projection butts in where they aren't wanted," Xander said wearily, but he had to admit that he wouldn't have sent that vision away if he could have. If Spike was back and alone, Buffy should have gone and gotten him. Yeah, the bleached wonder was a pain in the ass, but he was one of their pains in the ass. "Okay, I can do this," Xander said as he unsteadily shoved himself up and nearly toppled over the other direction. The shaman was there holding his shoulders.

"We should stop."
"Can I have the slayers?"

"You have not been judged."

"Then I'm saying 'no' to the stoppage," Xander said firmly. He'd feel a lot better about it if the world didn't keep fading out to black and white. It was probably hypoglycemia. He definitely needed about two liters of soda to bring his sugar back up. Reaching down, Xander fingered the fourth scar. Like the third one, it was already healed, but it had doubled in size, the white puckered skin spreading out to nearly an inch.

"Young one," the shaman sighed, but Xander shook his head. "I'm not stopping."

"Young one," the shaman tried again as he grabbed Xander's hand and brought it up to his chest, sliding it below the dozens of necklaces until Xander could feel a small round scar. "One. Two." The shaman slid Xander's hand down to touch the second scar. "Three. Four. Five." Xander blinked at the evidence that the shaman had gone through this same rite. At least that meant they weren't making fun of the white guy.
"Hurts, doesn't it?" Xander asked. "But I'm not stopping until the tribal elders have judged, and I don't care if I look like a connect the dots puzzle."

The shaman shook his head and reached up to touch Xander's cheek. "The fifth voyage is dangerous."

"Dangerous like OD'ing on hallucinogenic smoke?" Xander asked as he eyed the smoke around him with some suspicion.

"The fifth voyage makes one a shaman, opens a door which cannot be closed."

Okay, that made Xander stop and think. "Open a door to hell or a door a demon can use to crawl into your dreams and kill you?" Xander asked. The very fact that the shaman had to stop and think about it made Xander worry a little.

"Maybe," he finally admitted. "Have your spirit guides not spoken to you of the final trial?" he asked as he looked at the four marks already on Xander's chest.

"These are not spirit guides. In fact, in one case, these are evil doers of the first degree," Xander said as he
pointed toward scar number two.

"We may learn from good and evil, both provide a light by which to judge our own actions. But only you can know if you should take the fifth journey."

"And if I don't, you won't let the slayers go with me," Xander guessed.

"You have not been judged."

"I'm really starting to hate that phrase." Xander reached up and poked at his first scar, hating how much the damn thing ached and itched. When the first slayer appeared across the fire, Xander screamed like a little girl and jumped to his feet.

"If you think the weak can defeat the strong," she said with a tilt of her head, but then she didn't finish her statement. Instead she looked at him again and gave a dismissive snort. "I think you will die in the judging." She vanished, and Xander was left with only the tribesman. Weirdly, they weren't even looking at him like he was weird. Xander felt weird.

"Okay, my spirit guide seems to think I'm going to get my
"ass kicked," Xander said.

The shaman looked at him with relief. "But I'm not good with taking advice. You should ask my friends. I really suck at listening when people tell me I'm going to fail. So fifth voyage, here we come." Xander sat down and really tried to ignore the drying semen that made his leg itch. Unfortunately, the very memory of William's blowjob and the heat from the demon's brand pushing him into something so all-consuming... Xander started getting hard again before the shaman had even gotten back with the brand.

The fifth brand set Xander's whole world on fire, and he collapsed back before the shaman could pull the brand away. The pain went on and on as Xander writhed on the ground and choked on the smoke that thickened in his throat.

"He would steal our daughters," an unfamiliar voice accused him, and Xander tried to speak in his own defense, but the smoke choked him, and he kicked his legs in desperation as death crept in on him.

"He is a good man."
"He is part of the shadow men. They steal our daughters."

"The shadow men are gone, killed by the evil they hid from."

"His path is unclear."

"He would try to do right."

The voices rose up until Xander felt like he was inside a megaphone.

"He would hurt our daughters."

Ignoring his instinctive need to hold onto what little oxygen he had, Xander gasped out the word, "NO!" All the voices fell silent and Xander was left to suffocate alone.

"Would you truly return our daughters?" a woman's voice asked.

Xander nodded his head, and the smoke thickened until the weight of it pushed down on him. "Yes, yes," Xander wheezed, and the weight of the smoke eased.
"Would you protect them?" An old man was asking, his face like a fun house mirror distortion inside the smoke.

"Yes."

"Judge his heart."

"Judge his heart. Judge his heart."

"Judge his heart. Judge his heart. Judge his heart. Judge his heart." The words from hundreds of voices, young and old, male and female, filled the gray void that Xander had fallen into.

His mouth gaping open as he struggled to breath, Xander didn't have the strength to fight when some invisible force lifted him. His arms and legs and head dangled down and his heart pounded furiously. Xander had a feeling like someone had attached a rope to his heart and now he was dangling from it, only from the way the smoke was pushing in, he wasn't coming out on the good side of the judgment.

Xander could only dangle there slowly losing consciousness. The pounding in his head echoed against the inside of his skull, and Xander realized he was dying. He'd never see Willow or Buffy again, he'd never try to stop brooding like he'd promised Ahn, he'd never find Spike. He was going to die in Africa alone. Xander could feel his eye heat with tears as the gray around him started to fade.

The chants of "kill him" slowly faded, but Xander was so dizzy that he couldn't make out the words. And then the smoke started to thin, and Xander could pull air into his starved lungs. "He is judged worthy," the voices chanted. Right now, Xander didn't care how they judged him as long as he got oxygen again. He gulped the air and felt his sore muscles start to tremble as they came back to life. The pins and needles grew to an agony that surpassed even the burning in his chest.

"He is worthy," a voice boomed so loud that Xander whimpered as it echoed in his head. "His guides shall choose his prize."

Xander felt hands run across his body, sending cold chills through him as the world darkened even more. Then red streaks began to appear, and the sound of drums in the
distance made his bones ache. Part of him wanted to get as far from those drums as he could.

"Xander, don't be so thick," Anya said in that exasperated tone of hers. "I know you've listened to Giles drone on enough to know that drums are used to help you find your body again." Xander looked over and Anya was backlit with firelight, her blonde hair shining.

"I miss you, you know," he said to her softly.

"I know," she answered as she raised her hand to his third scar. "The spirit realm is all about truth. Here is where we can't hide behind all the lies we tell ourselves. I pushed you when I knew you needed someone other than me. You need someone who will obsess about you as much as you obsess about them. I was too worried about being human in general."

"Ahn, it wasn't your fault."

"Not all," she said quickly. "You were just as big of a moron trusting a demon instead of talking to someone, but that's you," she shrugged. "And if you're not careful, you are so going to turn into Angel. So get your ass back to that body of yours and make some better choices."
She gave Xander a push, and then she vanished into smoke. Xander started walking toward the drums, his head pounding harder with each step until he thought his brain might explode out his ears, but in the end, he woke up with his head in the shaman's lap.

"Welcome home, young shaman," the old man said with a smile.

"My hurts hurt," Xander groaned as he reached up to scrub his face. His fingers first noticed the embarrassing lack of an eye patch. He hated for people to see his scar. But then when he went to cover his scar from the shaman, he nearly poked his eye out... his missing eye... which wasn't missing anymore.

The shaman chuckled at the look on Xander's face. "Being a shaman always requires a sacrifice and offers a prize."

"Well, this is going to be interesting to explain," Xander sighed as he struggled to sit up. The fifth scar had landed not far above his belly button, and where the others were white, it had a faint reddish tinge to it. Xander reached out and fingered the scar and felt a shiver
though his body. The other four scars were healed as well, although the fourth remained twice the size of the others, and the second one had a red spot in the very center.

"Will you stay and learn some shamanic rituals before you take the slayers to England?" the old man asked. It was on the tip of Xander's tongue to say no, to say that he had a friend who could teach him and then he had a burning desire to get to L.A. He looked over at the shaman.

"Can we do the cliffs notes version... and that would be the short and fast version for those who didn't grow up in the American high school system learning to cheat. I just really have somewhere that I have to be."

"Not England," the shaman guessed.

"No. No, I left someone behind who I shouldn't have," Xander said as he touched his fourth scar.

"Spirit guides are the souls of the dead," the shaman said with a frown as he watched Xander's fingers.

"Yeah, but some people who are dead are still walking
around," Xander pointed out. The shaman opened his eyes so comically wide that Xander almost expected them to pop out.

"You are indeed a unique shaman," he said with a tilt of his head. Four days, and I will teach you only the most vital of the lore. Then you will have to seek a teacher after this quest of yours because being a shaman means not only greater power but greater vulnerability."

"Deal," Xander said as he started mentally calculating the time required to get trained, drop the slayers off in England and get to L.A. His fourth scar itched, and Xander scratched it. "I'm coming Spike. Just hold on."

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**Part Two**

Xander stood in front of the cheap mirror in his L.A. motel and stared at his naked body. He didn't know himself anymore. He was leaner than he had been since high school, and frankly he needed to put a little of the
muscle back on. Sitting on his ass didn't keep him fit the way construction had. Maybe he'd get back into construction, he thought as he considered himself.

But what he really wanted to look at were the five scars neatly trailing down his chest. The first was centered between his nipples and they continued down to the last one a couple of inches above his belly button. If Xander had thought the African ceremony was hocus pocus and hallucinogenic smoke, Willow's reaction had pretty much nixed that. He still hurt in his heart over the things she had said. Yes, he had opened himself up to magic, and him and magic were definitely unmixy, but at the time... Xander sighed. He had to believe it was the right decision. Ahn wouldn't have lied. And as much as Xander refused to say it out loud, William wouldn't have lied.

Xander started by touching his first scar. He smiled at the faint hints of disdain that flowed back at him. "Yeah, yeah," he told his invisible friend. She might not think he was any great shakes, but he was here. He'd survived Armageddons and hellmouths and angry witches crying and telling him he was an idiot. Only Willow used nicer words. Looking in the mirror, Xander squinted the old eye shut and looked in the reflection with his new eye. He could barely see the first slayer in the shadow
considering him with a tilted head.

"Nothing disparaging to say?" he asked. She winked out of existence.

Xander chuckled and looked back at his own reflection. He considered skipping the second scar, but the shaman, Kymani, had warned him that spiritual advisors were chosen by the universe, and ignoring them was big with the stupid. So, Xander ran his fingers over the scar. Jesse's demon flashed in the mirror and vanished, but the mayor appeared so real that Xander was tempted to turn and look for him in the room.

"Well, really, I don't think that's proper attire for a meeting." Wilkins said as he made a point of looking at the ceiling.

"Kymani said that clothing could give a false illusion of protection, and I had to face the spirit world naked. Actually, he suggested a ceremonial body paint put on by six sacred warriors, but I'm out of sacred warriors and body paint, so I'm improvising," Xander shrugged.

"I suppose we must all suffer through," Wilkins said as he turned his back on Xander and looked at the room. "This
is really quiet unacceptable. You will never be taken seriously as a mystical power if you cannot establish a certain aura of authority, and this mess is simply not authoritative," Wilkins said as he frowned at the mess Xander had left in the hotel.

"Why would I want to be taken seriously?" Xander asked. That made Wilkins turn and look at him.

"We all want to be taken seriously," he said very slowly and carefully.

"Pretty kitty keeps climbing in my dreams. Bad kitty. Bad, bad kitty. Mummy will have to take away the milk." Drusilla pranced into Xander's mirror.

"Yes, and I'm sure we are all terribly concerned with his milk," Wilkins sighed as though greatly put upon.

"I hear you calling, pretty. So loud in my head." Dru put her hand to her temple and rocked her head in a circle.

"You don't have to come if you don't want to, Dru," Xander said as he looked at her mystical reflection. Dru came up behind him and rested a ghostly chin on his shoulder.
"You're looking for my Spike."

"Yeah," Xander agreed.

Drusilla got a confused expression on her face. "My prince left me. Too many times calling the sheep and now he's gone and retrieved his effluent fire. He'd burn me all up, now," she said sadly. "But if he's upset, he always goes to water. He'd look out over the dark waves and read poetry to me." Dru put both her hands to her head and backed away with a cry of pain, and then she was gone.

"Someone truly should put her down," Wilkins said softly.


"I tried to make the world better. And yes, you may object to my methods, but she is simply insane. And worse, she creates chaos everywhere she goes." And with an angry huff, Wilkins was gone. Xander couldn't say he was sorry. His fingers trailed down to the third scar. He had no more than touched it when ghost hands came
round him, trailing over his nipples and running down to his cock.

"I wish we could have orgasm. I miss orgasms," Anya announced.

"Hey, Ahn."

She pressed a faint, cool kiss on the back of his neck, and Xander could feel himself respond to her. "It's good to know I can still turn a man on," Ahn said with a laugh as she reached around and touched his cock. "But I don't know how to help you on this one."

"Dru said he'd be by the water, and I'm figuring a bar," Xander said.

"So, you're checking every waterfront bar in L.A.?"

"Well, that or trying to get him to tell me where he is," Xander pointed out. Anya stopped and looked at him.

"Tell you? You mean, he's one of your spirit guides?"

"He's two of them, actually, the vampire demon and the human part of Spike both," Xander answered.
"Xander," Anya said slowly, "I've been around for a millennia, and I've never known of someone having a spirit guide who's still alive."

"He's not alive. I figure him and Dru get a special pass since they're technically dead."

Anya was already shaking her head. "Dru got dusted in Mexico. She's really dead. Are you sure that Spike hasn't been dusted?"

"No," Xander said with a near panic gathering in his guts.

"Xander," Anya said sadly.

"No! He said he's in L.A., and he is," Xander said sharply. Anya blinked out of existence. "Shit. Anya? Ahn? Come on, please?" Xander called. The room behind him was empty. With a sigh, Xander moved his fingers to the fourth mark.

William immediately appeared draped over the bed, and the demon paced the room angrily.

"Sod off," William said in a voice that was way more
Spike than William. The demon growled.

"Hey, Spike, buddy, pal, where the hell are you?" Xander asked the reflection. It was weird looking at Spike in the mirror, but the man pushed himself up onto his elbows and used the reflection to glare back at Xander.

"Oh bloody hell, why do my dreams have to turn me into this fop?" Spike asked as he got off the bed and stalked toward the mirror. Shoving the demon to one side, Spike pulled off the William glasses and threw them to one side before trying to push his curls back with his hands.

"Hard day?" Xander asked.

"Like you lot bloody care," Spike snorted.

"I do care. I only found out you were alive when I went back to England and beat the truth out of Andrew." Xander shrugged. "Only there was less beating than there was threatening to use his comic book collection for kindling."

Spike looked at him in confusion. "Why do you care?" he asked, and the cockney accent fell away.
For a second, Xander thought about that one. "Because you died for us."

"I died for Buffy," Spike corrected him.

"Yeah, I get that. I'm not sure it makes me a good person, but I pretty much fight just for the people I love."

Spike looked at him with some confusion, and Xander pulled the man over, his form feeling like tissue paper under his hands, like he could rip right through Spike if he wasn't careful. The demon growled, but Xander held Spike in front of him with his arms around Spike's stomach. Spike rested his hands on Xander's arms as he looked at himself.

"What do you see?" Xander asked.

"A bloody failure," Spike immediately answered.

"I see a man willing to die for love. I see someone who gives all his loyalty and never seems to get any in return." Xander had thought a lot about this since his last vision, and every word was true. The demon came up behind Xander and snuffed at his shoulder.
"Better watch out there, mate, you're about to get bit," Spike pointed out wearily.

"Yeah, I know," Xander answered. "But he isn’t all you have in you. Back before the soul, all you had was the beast and the beast's memory of love. But now you have you in there, too. I should have seen that."

"Why, you never liked the poof," Spike pointed out, and again, his voice had gone soft.

"That's because he's an asshole. You're actually a lot of fun when I'm not busy being scared of you. You risked everything for Dawn, for Buffy. You were a good friend, and no one treated you like they should have." Xander didn't know how to convince Spike of that, but he sure knew what Spike had done last time they'd met in the spirit world. Reaching down, Xander slowly unbuttoned Spike's jeans.

"What do you see in the mirror?" Xander asked.

"A sorry sod who has to have jerk off dreams about soddin' Xander Harris to get himself off," Spike sighed. The demon behind Xander growled.
"Last time you said you were jealous because I knew how to love without conditions."

"I said he was jealous," Spike said with a thumb in the demon's direction.

"Okay, I'm new with this guy on guy stuff. Any chance we can save the guy on demon stuff for another delusion?" Xander asked as he slowly worked his hand inside Spike's pants and found what he was looking for. "Watch us," Xander whispered in Spike's ear as he worked his hand up and down Spike's hardening cock. "Just watch us."

Xander slowly slipped Spike's cock out and fingered the head of it, feeling the moisture gather. He played with the head until Spike groaned, and then Xander slipped his hand back into Spike's jeans and explored the shape of his balls and the curled hair hidden there.

"Fuck, Harris. Have some pity here," Spike begged, and Xander fisted Spike's cock and started pumping it.

"Watch us," Xander repeated, and Spike's blue eyes came open and looked at the mirror. Xander watched as he pumped Spike's cock faster and faster. Spike clawed at his arms, his breath coming faster and faster, and over both their shoulders, the demon growled.
"Fuck, I'm coming," Spike cried as he thrust forward with his hips. Xander cried out himself when sharp teeth sank into his shoulder and then he started coming. The demon reached around and pulled both of them tight against his own body, and Xander was squished in the middle, which was probably good because it was about the only thing holding him up after his orgasm. Damn, he hadn't expected that.

"Now I know I'm fucking dreaming. You're bleeding and you aren't even complaining," Spike said as he leaned his head back into Xander's shoulder.

"Where are you, Spike?"

"Around, mate."

"Give me a place, a name, Spike."

Spike rolled his head to the side and frowned at Xander for a second. "I'm goin' round the bloody bend here, aren't I?"

"Tell me where you are," Xander repeated softly. The demon growled, and Xander had the feeling the beast
was on his side this time.

"Around. Sleeping wherever I can flop. Been spending time at the Ditchdigger and the Golden Drunk."

"I'll find you, Spike," Xander promised. Spike looked at him strangely. "I'm either too drunk or not drunk enough," Spike sighed, and then Xander collapsed to the floor as both the human and demon versions of Spike vanished in a blink.

~*~*~*~*~

Xander pushed into the dark bar. A demon got up as though to challenge him, and then got one good smell and backed off. Yep, demon repellant—one more benefit to being a shaman. Xander was just hoping that it didn't repel all demons.

When he looked around, Xander didn't see Spike, but his scar was itching like mad so Xander walked farther into the bar.

"What can I get you?" the bartender asked. Out of Xander's right eye, the guy looked like a most demons.
Out of Xander's brand new left eye, he was covered in ghostly spikes all over his face.

"A vampire," Xander started, and the bartender cut him off.

"This isn't a suckhouse, get lost."

"Hey, I do not want to get bitten. I go out of my way to avoid getting bitten, in fact," Xander hurried to say. "I'm looking for a particular vampire. Bleached hair, leather coat, English accent and way too much attitude," Xander hurried to say. The bartender looked at him and poked a thumb toward the back. Xander followed his gesture into a backroom dominated by a pool table. Spike was leaning against the pool table with a stick in hand.

He looked over in clear surprise.

"Spike," Xander breathed in relief.

"Moron," Spike returned the greeting.

"Shit, Spike, can't you at least give me a second before starting the crap."
"Nope."

Right, why exactly had Xander thought this was going to be easy? "Hey, I know, let's pretend we don't know each other. No past, no mutually annoying insults, just two guys in a bar," Xander said hopefully. Spike might be needy and friendly in vision, but in real life the man was still all prickles and attitude.

"I don't drink with losers," Spike said with a snort. But then he paused for a second. "Unless the losers are buying, that is," he said as he crossed his arms and looked at Xander meaningfully.

"Right, I can do that," Xander said as he reversed direction to go buy a Jack Daniels and a bottle of beer. With ammunition in hand, Xander headed back into the pool room.

"So, come here often?" Xander asked as he handed over the double of whiskey. Spike threw the drink back in one gulp and then looked at Xander like he was a moron.

"'Bout every night. Why? You lookin' for something regular? Regular costs more."
"Regular... what?" Xander gripped his beer and just stared at Spike in confusion.

Spike ran his tongue along the inside of his lip and stalked toward Xander, all predator. "I pick who gets to hire me. I don't like how you smell, and you're outta here. You bug me after I tell you to sod off, and you get to be dinner," Spike warned as he took a deep breath near Xander's neck. Xander could feel his cock harden at the tone, but then Xander had the benefit of already being in a sexual relationship with spirit Spike, so inappropriate hardening was obviously a side effect of knowing how good Spike's mouth felt on his cock.

Suddenly Xander was pinned against the wall, impossibly strong hands holding him immobile as Xander could only gasp for air that had been driven from him when he hit the wall.

"What the fuck are you?"

"What?"

"If I have to ask again, I'm adding you to the menu now," Spike warned, and Xander froze as he realized that Spike meant it. Shit, the vampire was hunting again. Not really
the time to figure it out, though.

"I'm Xander."

"Xander's not a shaman."

"Oh... that," Xander said softly. Spike's eyebrows went up. And then Spike's hands were doing inappropriate touching that was making Xander's little head get even harder. Xander found himself stripped of his shirt and pinned back against the wall in no time.

"Um, there was a ceremony and a shaman and some really funky smoke," Xander admitted as Spike ran his hands over the scars.

"So, a shaman comes wandering into a bar looking for a fuck. There's a punchline in that," Spike said as he backed off a step and threw Xander his shirt.

"Looking for a what?" Xander squeaked. Spike smirked.

"I'm the best, pet. You can't beat a master vampire when you want both a demon and someone with control over a demon. But even if I weren't known as the best fuck for hire, there's the fact that you smell so horny you're
about to go off already," Spike said as his smirk grew.

"Do you talk to all the strangers who come up to you this way?" Xander asked.

"Hell, yeah, pet. It's part of the service. You hire me, and you get a full on demon."

"Hire you? You want me to hire you?" Xander had so totally lost control of this situation somewhere along the way.

"Stranger walks in here looking for me, he's either trying to hire me or kill me. Which category are you in, mate?"

"With those two choices, I guess I'm trying to hire you," Xander said. Spike's smirk turned to a leer.

"I'm going to pound you so hard you're going to be talking to those spirits of yours, shaman," Spike said as he closed in on Xander again, but this time instead of slamming Xander into the wall, he ran his hands possessively over Xander's chest and shoulders. Using a thumb and finger, he pinched Xander's nipple and then reached down and cupped Xander's genitals.
"I'm not sure you're going to make it to my place," Spike said with some humor in his voice. And Spike had Xander's pants open before Xander could even form words much less words that would discuss the inappropriateness of getting stripped in the middle of a demon bar. But Spike didn't strip him, he just shoved Xander's pants down to his thighs and knelt down. "This should keep you in line until we can get somewhere," Spike said as he snapped a leather cock ring around the base of Xander's erection. Xander reached for it, but Spike knocked his hands away and quickly fastened Xander's pants back up, squishing Xander's erection while at the same time making it embarrassingly obvious where it strained against the material.

"I have a place where I take clients, so let's go. And if you don't have the cash on you now, you'd better find it when we're done or you're going to pay in blood, mate."

Xander started to answer, but Spike caught him by the wrist and started out of the bar, dragging Xander. Xander yelped as the cock ring caught the hairs around his balls and made him ache with a need to come, but he really couldn't do much but stumble behind Spike and pray that he got to come tonight before his cock fell off. Because he really, really needed to come.
Spike shoved him onto the back of a motorcycle before taking a terrifying drive along the docks to a warehouse with a half dozen demons standing around outside, and the vibrations of the motorcycle and the cock ring combined to nearly cripple Xander with lust.

"Spike, I'm not sure..." Xander started.

Spike twirled around and grabbed Xander by the throat. "Are you talking? Shaman or not, you're a human. You want to pay to get reminded that you're on the bottom of the food chain, well, I'm reminding you. You be a good boy, or you'll find out just how low on the food chain humans are around here."

Spike just held him for several seconds, and Xander waited silently, fear crawling into his guts and clawing at his chest making it hard for him to breathe. And now the cock ring was keeping him hard when his penis was definitely interested in shrinking. Slowly Spike let go, and Xander didn't say a word as Spike just stared at him. After a minute or so, Spike grabbed his wrist and started pulling him toward the building.

"Hey, Spike, haven't seen you in a while," a yellowish
demon called.

"Busy, mate."

"Not the way to keep clients happy."

Xander found himself dragged behind Spike as the vampire grabbed the yellow demon and shoved him against the side of the warehouse. "I fuck who I want when I want. If those fuckers want a tame demon, they can call you. If they want me, then they're there to serve me when I feel like using their holes and nothing else. Got it?" Spike snarled in full gameface.

"Yeah, yeah, got it," the other demon quickly agreed, and Spike tossed him to the side. And then Xander was getting dragged into a demon whorehouse, and this was bad like world-ending bad. This was... this was way more stupid than going and doing shamanic rites. This was likely-to-cause-death stupid, but Xander still followed silently as Spike dragged him through hallways.

Demons were everywhere, as were humans, most of them in chains or tightly tied. Xander could feel panic growing, and he raised his hand. He hovered over the first scar, but he wasn't sure the first slayer liked him
enough to give him any advice. He touched the third one, instead. Anya was so going to call him an idiot, just as soon as he found a reflective surface.

"On your knees," Spike ordered, and Xander dropped to his knees immediately. Reflection, reflection. Fuck, there wasn't anything reflective in the whole black-satin draped room where Spike had brought them.

"Two hundred and we play as long as I feel like meaning you'd better be fucking good or I'll get bored fast. Three hundred an hour if you want to set a time, and you set the time right fucking now. No backing out later. No safewords. You make me unhappy enough, and I'll eat you just for pissing me off. So, what's your budget?" Spike asked as he sprawled over a Victorian settee upholstered in black.

"Um, I don't—"

"Two hundred then. I'm not keeping you around after I'm bored. Strip," Spike ordered. Xander hesitated and Spike was there pulling clothes off so fast that Xander ended up on his back naked before he could say anything.

"Still hard," Spike said, and Xander wasn't sure if his tone
was mocking or approving of that fact.

"Only because of the cock ring," Xander pointed out, and that was the wrong thing to say, Spike grabbed him by the neck and pulled him up. Xander flailed as Spike pushed him back until his knees hit the huge bed, and then Xander was getting tossed back onto it. Looking up, he groaned as he saw the top of the four poster bed.

"Oh yeah, this is more like it," Anya said happily from the mirror. Popcorn appeared in her hand.

"Oh fuck," Xander groaned.

"That's the goal," Spike agreed as he flipped Xander over. "Hands up."

This had gone so far that Xander didn't even bother trying to reason with Spike, he just raised his hands and let Spike use heavy cuffs to tie him to the headboard. Hell, he even opened his legs without being ordered.

"He doesn't look particularly good," Anya offered. "But your ass is just as beautiful as always. If I were alive, I'd tell Spike to use a paddle on it. You always looked very good with a red ass," she cheerfully commented.
Xander gasped as a slick finger was pushed into him with no preparation.

"Bloody fucking hell. Are you a virgin?"

"No!" Xander said at the same time Anya offered an enthusiastic "Oh, yeah!"

"I'm not," Xander protested. "I've had sex with lots of women. Okay, not lots but there have been several."

"With men, you moron. Are you a virgin to having a cock stuffed up your arse?"

"Oh. Um, that. Yeah," Xander agreed.

"It's like deciding you're going to try scotch and starting with fifty year old Chivas Regal Royal Salute. I'm too bloody much for you. I'll get one of the others if you're that keen on getting your cherry popped."

"He's afraid," Anya offered. "Letting someone be first means you care about them, and he doesn't want to think you care about him. It's safer being alone because then you don’t get your heart broken. Men are such
"I want you. Only you," Xander quickly said.

"You don't want me. Got a vampire in me, don't I? It might pop out and start eating you," Spike warned.

"See?" Anya demanded. "See? Such a man. Feel threatened and your first response is to push everyone away."

"Okay," Xander answered Spike while really trying his best to ignore Anya. Yeah he was agreeing with her insights, but having her watch this with popcorn in hand was just slightly weird.

Xander's answer made Spike shut up. "Bloody hell. Who the fuck are you and what did you do to Harris?"

"Hey, we're role playing here. We are pretending to be two adults just looking to get something from each other," Xander hurried to say as he turned his head and watched Spike over his shoulder. "I'm role playing at being mature, and part of that is saying that I trust people who do the right thing most of the time. And yeah, you caught me off guard with the whole
prostitution gig, but I trust you."

Spike reached out and grabbed one of the posts of the bed. "Have ta say, mate, if you're trying to convince me to role play being strangers, you're doing a fine job. I don't think I've ever met you before."

"Nope. Time changes everyone. But right now, I'm starting to get horny again, and I'm chained to a bed, and I'm fairly sure someone offered to stuff my ass full of cock."

"Did not. Asked if it ever had been stuffed," Spike argued.

"Which implied that you were willing to do the stuffing," Xander countered.

"Prat."

"Whore."

"Well, yeah," Spike said with a shrug. "Which is why you're still bloody paying me two hundred when this is over."

"Oh goody," Anya said with a clap. "It's starting."
Xander groaned. Of course he had to call her for help. Xander was distracted by a slick finger sliding back into his ass. It felt strange. "Just relax, Harris. Are you sure about this? I could drive you back to the bar."

"Nope, I'm sure. Terrified, but sure," Xander insisted as firmly as he could. Spike's hands moved over his back almost tenderly, and Xander could feel the heat gathering in his cock as it started showing an interest in the proceedings.

Spike worked a second finger in, and Xander grunted at the uncomfortable stretching. Even working to try and relax, Xander couldn't. When Spike reached deeper, Xander pressed his forehead to the pillow and prayed he would be one of those guys who really like his prostate being played with. The second Spike found the right spot, Xander had his answer.

"Oh fuck," Xander cursed as he humped the satin sheet and groaned as the cock ring pulled out more hairs. But not even that annoying pain could stop him from rubbing against the sheets. The heat in his ass and the satin across his cock nearly sent him right over the edge, but then Spike pulled out, and physically lifted Xander's hips
so he couldn't touch anything but air.

"Spike, please," Xander gasped as he got his knees under him, and now he really felt vulnerable with his ass up in the air.

"I like the sound of that."

"Then please let me come. Please," Xander begged.

"After I've stuffed you full of cock," Spike promised. He climbed on the bed behind Xander, and then Xander felt Spike's cock start to push in.

It hurt. No two ways about it; that hurt. Xander breathed deep and tried to relax as his hole stretched way past where it should.

"Oh don't be a baby," Anya offered without much sympathy. "Women push babies out little tiny holes all the time."

Xander gasped in laughter, and suddenly Spike was all the way in, his cock pressing against Xander's prostate, and at least now there was pleasure and pain. Focusing on the pleasure, Xander just breathed as Spike slowly
rocked in and out until the pain started to fade. And then Spike reached around and grabbed Xander's cock, and Xander gave a wordless cry and arched his back.

Spike's thrusts grew longer and harder and now Xander gasped with each movement, his body tightening as it moved toward orgasm. If he didn't have on the damn cock ring, he would have come already. Xander started whining with need as Spike pounded harder and harder, and then a sharp pain in Xander's neck turned his whole body into one open nerve that Spike was stroking and thrusting into and tasting all at once. Spike snapped the cock ring off and Xander jerked and started coming so hard that the world got kinda fuzzy. He found himself stomach down in a good sized wet spot, Spike still draped over his back.

"Oh, that's good," Xander sighed as lay there boneless.

"Bloody hell, never expected to hear you say that," Spike answered. Xander realized the vampire was still dressed. It seemed wrong somehow.

"I'll take you back to your hotel. Whatever kink you have what needs scratched, you come to me," Spike warned. And if you're trying to avoid the slayer, don't let too
many demons get a good sniff of you. Word of a new shaman will go wandering back to Rupes eventually."

Spike got up off the bed and buttoned up his jeans.

"Spike," Xander said with a frown.

"Nope. You only paid for time until I was bored. I'm bored." Spike walked around and unbuckled the straps around Xander's wrists.

"He's stupid past most male stupidity, and he's ruining a perfect post-coital moment here. Men never know how to handle that moment after sex, but he's worse than most. Xander, do something, he's trying to push you away because he doesn't want to get hurt when you walk away."

"I know that," Xander hissed.

"Glad to know that you know I’m bored," Spike said, but he was frowning at Xander as though Xander were being particularly stupid.

"Look, Spike, maybe we can talk," Xander said, wincing a little as he stood.
"I don't get paid to talk."

"Hey, then it's perfect, I can talk and you can listen," Xander pointed out. Next thing he knew, he was pinned face down on the bed, and Spike was pressing his thumb into Xander's jaw.

Xander opened his mouth to complain, and Spike shoved a large gag deep into his mouth. Xander reached up to pull it out, but human strength couldn't compete, and so Spike easily buckled the gag and then slipped a lock into place and Xander couldn't stop him.

"Right then, get dressed, and write out which hotel you're staying at," Spike said as he stood up. Xander sat on the bed and glared as Spike pulled a pen and a small pad of paper out of one of the pockets of his duster and tossed them on the bed next to Xander. Xander could only sigh through his nose.

"Men are such idiots. He is really afraid you're going to say something supportive and loving and screw up the whole angry, depressed theme he has going. He should look into therapy. I read this Vogue article on depression, and he meets every one of their signs."
Xander tipped his head back and looked up at the mirror. Anya had a sympathetic look on her face, but Xander wasn't sure if she was feeling sorry for him or for Spike, and right now, it didn't look like he was going to get a chance to ask her. With one last sigh through his nose, Xander got up and started collecting his clothes.

**Part Three**

Xander felt guilty using his shamanic powers to talk to the split Spike, but he was so not doing good getting to the real one. Spike had fucked him, and then disappeared. Oh, the bartenders would always say that Spike had just been there or some demon would claim to have talked to him not more than five minutes earlier, but Xander couldn't find him anywhere. He'd even considered trying to hire someone to Dom him suspecting that Spike would show up in a minute, but then there was the chance Spike wouldn't, and Xander was not into being Dommed by just anyone, thank you very much.
So, instead he waited until daylight on the third day after his meeting with Spike and he called on his fourth scar.

"Bloody hell," Spike breathed as he appeared on Xander's bed. "I thought I got you out of my system when I fucked you. 'Course, I'm still only half sure I did. There's the shaman thing and the two eyes. I figure there's a good chance you're some sort of demon. You the First?" Spike asked as he tilted his head up and stared at Xander.

"Nope, I’m just Xander," he shrugged. "Got the eye back when I did the shamanic rites. Willow was really angry. She cried and talked about me being inconsiderate what with the trying to get myself killed."

"Not surprised about that. Most blokes that try for shamanic powers end up grease spots. Of course, you're so bloody stubborn I shouldn't be surprised you just refused to die."

"Is this a dream?" Xander asked as he watched Spike in the mirror.

"Let's see. I can bloody see myself in the mirror, my demon's hanging out over there growling, and I look like
that pathetic fop, William. Yeah, I'm assuming this is a dream."

"Why are you avoiding me?" Xander asked.

"This is too bloody Freudian, even for me."

"Seriously, Spike. You can even gag me if it makes you happy, you know, if I'm talking too much."

"You always talk too much," Spike snorted.

"Explain this. Explain why I can't help you when you're obviously in need of help," Xander asked. Spike lunged up from the bed, and Xander had never seen him look so angry. Normally when Spike was that angry, he went into gameface.

"I don't fucking need you!" he just about roared. "Go haunt someone else's fucking dreams, Harris."

"Tell me that you're okay, and I will!" Xander yelled back. And then the demon was there, growling as he grabbed Xander and shoved him into the mirror so hard that Xander heard a crack.
"I can't have you," the demon growled.

"Why not?"

"I'm a beast."

"I got that. Why can't you have me?" Xander asked again.

"A beast is owned or owns. It's all a beast knows. No one owns me. I own no one."

"Spike, is that the problem?" Xander asked, ignoring the fact that the demon was still squishing him against the mirror.

"I'm afraid so," a soft voice answered.

"William," Xander said. The man walked around to the side where Xander could see him.

"Yes. Spike is the personality the beast and I share; the bridge between us. He's feeling closer to the demon right now, I'm afraid," William offered apologetically.

"Why can't he let me in? Why is he so afraid of me?" Xander asked the man. William glanced at the beast with
sympathy in his eyes.

"He really did want the slayer. She could own him, control the beast part of him and then he didn't have to worry about his urge to own everyone who did not own him. Buffy owned him, and he felt as though he owned the rest of you because you were hers. But it wasn't true. Buffy didn't own him, and so she thought nothing of what it would mean to walk away from him."

"She didn't walk away from him," Xander argued.

"He called her after Angel's fight. She asked him if Angel had survived, and then she told him that she had to go. He's lost. And he tries to get his needs with the men and women who look for a demon to dominate them, but they aren't actually looking to be owned."

"Whoa, you mean he wants to put a collar on someone like in that warehouse? He wants to keep them like that?" Xander demanded with a whole lot of creepy in his guts. Okay, so he'd enjoyed the game they'd played, and he wouldn't mind getting tied to a bed every once in.... okay, he wouldn't mind that a lot, but no way did he want to live his life on his knees.
"If he were only the beast, yes, that's what he would do. But we're more now," William pointed out. "He felt like he owned Dawn. Owning was about loving and protecting her. Owning was about being worthy of love back." William came forward and put his hand on the demon's arm, stroking it. "He's so alone because no one wants him enough to make him come back... no one who's strong enough to force him to anyway. And he doesn't trust himself to own someone else."

William pulled the demon back so it released Xander and Xander backed up and stared at the cracked image.

"Maybe this is a bad idea. The beast is more agitated than ever," William said as he reached up and rested his palm against the demon's chest.

"Okay, I’m guessing Spike needs a whole lot of kinky sex," Xander said slowly. William turned an amused look toward him.

"That is not the important part."

"Then tell me what is," Xander asked.

William considered him for several minutes. "He needs
someone to protect. He needs someone who will argue with him, but when he puts his foot down, who will follow his orders. He needs someone who trusts him completely and loves him."

"I can do that," Xander said seriously.

William's body shimmered, and then the hand came up and ripped the glasses off.

"Prat. He's dead for a hundred years and he still can't figure out he doesn't need these," Spike said as he threw the glasses to the side.

"I can do that," Xander said softly.

Spike closed his eyes for a second. "I appreciate the offer, mate, but I'm not pet shopping."

"No way. Nope, not offering to be a pet," Xander quickly said as he held up both hands. "I'm offering you exactly what I offered Buffy, only with more sex, I'm assuming because I actually really enjoyed sex with you, and Buffy was never one for having sex with me."

"Slow down, Harris. What the hell are you talking
"Spike, I know I’m a follower. I'm banging around Africa because I feel lost. Giles has all the watcher duties. Willow is off learning how to be a white witch without blowing up the world. Buffy is off having a life. I don't have anyone left to follow, not without turning into Andrew, and if I ever become Andrew chasing after people who don't want me, I really, really hope someone just hits me really hard in the back of the head."

"What are you talking about?"

"Spike, this isn't a dream," Xander said as he looked down at his scars. "My shamanic rites, I connected with you. This really is me. That's how I found you. I never knew that Andrew showed up here or that you called Buffy because I would have been on the first plane out here. And yeah, I still think you're a pain in the ass, and I can now say that in more ways than one," Xander said with a wry smile as he remembered waking up the day after his first round of butt sex. "I wouldn't have left you. And if you're looking for a follower, then I'm looking for a leader."

"No," Spike said as he shook his head.
"What? Is there something wrong with me?"

"Not that, you prat. This can't be real. You don't trust me."

"You know I'm a shaman now, right?"

Spike frowned. "Maybe."

"Fine. Here's how it's going. I found that demon place down on 12th. I'm heading down there."

"Bloody hell, no. That place is dangerous."

"Oh yeah, I think I got that vibe. But here's the deal. I'm walking in there, telling them that my master sent me and ordered me strapped into a chair, and that you're going to do whatever you're going to do when you get there. Tattooing, piercing, branding, I'm up for it, and I trust you, Spike."

"You wouldn't."

"I would because I trust you to come and get me. And if you don't come today because you think this is some sort
of dream, I am so very, very screwed. At that point, I hope you eventually check it out and track down whichever demon enslaved and/or ate me."

Xander turned away from the mirror and looked at the empty room. Behind him, he could hear Spike yelling. "You bloody moron. You don't go near that place, you hear me? Harris? Are you listening to me?"

Xander grabbed his coat and walked out. Night was falling soon, and if Spike believed him, he'd be coming. Xander needed to go through with this if he wanted Spike to understand just how deep Xander's trust went. Xander had touched Spike in the spirit realm. He understood Spike's heart, and he was judging it worthy.

Xander was one foot inside the door of the Painted Lady salon when he started having second thoughts. He trusted Spike, but the demons in this place, he wasn't trusting. Trying to make himself as small as possible, Xander edged to the counter. The man behind it had a shadow form of a demon overlaid across a human form, so Xander knew that he looked human to everyone else. Xander swallowed when a shadow tentacle reached out for him.
"What do you want human?" the demon asked, so Xander was guessing that this guy had already figured out Xander was a shaman.

"My master ordered me here," he said softly as he tried to keep his heart from exploding. The shadow tentacles became solid ones, and one shoved Xander's back, trapping him against the counter.

"I don't see a collar."

"I haven't earned one," Xander said as he tried to swallow and found he didn't have enough spit in his mouth to manage it. He was an idiot. Willow was right; he was trying to get himself killed. And this... this was not going to be a pretty death.

"Who's your master?"

"Spike—William the Bloody," Xander answered.

One of the other demons gave a snort. "The whore."

"He's a master vampire. His credit's good, and if it isn't, we'll have a shaman for sale," the owner shrugged with four of his tentacles. "What does your master want to do
to you?" he asked Xander.

Xander shook his head. "I don't know."

"What? You're just supposed to kneel on my floor until he shows up?"

"He wanted me restrained somewhere," Xander hurried to say before he could chicken out. If he tried kneeling, he was so going to run for it sooner or later.

"I hope your master has the cash because that costs extra," the man said as his tentacle went around Xander's wrists and started pulling him toward the back. Xander yelped as one tentacle slid under his clothes, but no one paid him any attention, and by the time they reached a room with a chair that looked like a demented dentist used it, Xander's clothes had been ripped off.

"Oh god," Xander breathed.

"Mouthy thing," the owner complained as several tentacles shoved Xander into the chair. "He want you plugged?"

"What?" Xander yelped.
"Better safe than sorry," the demon huffed, and Xander opened his mouth to say that no, no Spike had said absolutely nothing about plugging him. Unfortunately, the minute he opened his mouth, a gag was shoved in and buckled tightly. A second later, a slick plug was shoved up his ass, and Xander screamed behind his gag. The demon spread his legs and buckled them to the leg braces so that Xander was spread wide open, and then he pulled Xander's wrists up over his head. Bending Xander's elbows around a brace obviously designed for it, the demon strapped Xander's wrists firmly with a wide leather strap.

"Be good," the owner offered with a slap to Xander's cheek, and then he left the room, pushing the curtain wide open so anyone passing by could see Xander. Xander squirmed and pulled on both his ankles and his wrists, but they were both secure. Oh yeah, he wasn't getting out of this without help, and with his hands tied, he wasn't even going to be able to reach the spirit world. Stupid, stupid stupid.

Xander lay there sweating until the plastic was hot and uncomfortable, and he found whole new levels of fear every time a demon walked by his cubicle and looked in.
If Spike didn't show up soon, Xander was so very, very screwed. Potentially screwed with tentacles.

"Blood hell, look what I have here," a familiar voice commented, and Xander sighed in relief as Spike appeared in the open door to the cubicle. "So I'm assuming that either all that rot about you being a shaman is true or I've developed psychic powers after a hundred years of hanging around Dru." Spike pulled the curtain shut behind him.

Xander held up one finger.

"One what?" Spike asked. "I'd take your gag out, only you have to know there are consequences for doing something this stupid."

Xander nodded that he understood that perfectly well. And as long as the consequences were being given out by Spike and not tentacle guy, he'd live with it.

"Wait, were you holding up a one to mean the first part was true—that you're a shaman who's been mucking about in my dreams?" Spike asked.

Xander nodded again.
"I've been known for having some bloody stupid plans, but this one beats the hell out of any of my stupidity," Spike pointed out as he ran a hand down Xander's bound leg. Xander nodded.

"Right then, we need to get some things worked out. Are you doing this because you need this or because you think I need it?"

Xander thought about that for a second and held up three fingers.

"No third option pet. You have to tell me which is the bigger motivation for you. You need this or I do, why did you let a demon strap you down like a two-bit whore?"

Xander thought about that, about the feeling of hopelessness he'd felt in Africa. He'd actually been looking forward to pain because he'd wanted to feel something. He held up one finger. Spike raised an eyebrow at him.

"So, you didn't tell the chits where you were going, you lied to them, or you told them you were coming to find me and they couldn't give a toss," Spike said. Xander
grimaced and held up two fingers.

"William shouldn't have told you all that rot about what we feel. He shouldn't have told you that I needed this," Spike said as he circled the chair. "You think you understand what it means, but you bloody don't."

Xander just watched. "If you lied to me and went running off, I'd be buying one of those harnesses you see on the kiddies at the mall, and keeping you on a leash until you learned better. Bloody hell, I can't do this."

Spike reached down and unhooked the gag, pulling it out before he reached for Xander's wrists.

"Don't," Xander said softly. "Not yet."

"Not yet?" Spike raised an eyebrow.

"Look, I'm not exactly in a position to argue here," Xander said as he looked at his own body strapped down on the chair. "But at least listen to me."

"Talk fast," Spike said.

"I'll accept whatever decision you make as long as you
agree you'll listen to me. And if that means that after we talk here, you send me back to England, then I'll accept that too."

"You'll stop popping into my dreams," Spike just about growled.

"Um, I kinda can't," Xander said apologetically, and the thunderous expression on Spike's face made him wish he weren't tied down. "I have five spiritual links. If I ignore one, the spirits attached to that link will gain more and more power over me. It's the universe's way of making sure I don't ignore whoever they decided to hook me up with. I mean, I have Wilkins behind door number two, and I have to call him up and let him go on and on about how I should clean my room and dress nicer," Xander pointed out.

"Wilkins?" Both Spike's eyebrows went up.

"Yep. So I'll still have to call on the connection or else you'll end up having way more power over me than you do right now. And right now, I'm thinking most of the power is so totally yours," Xander pointed out.

Spike sighed and threw the gag at the counter. "Bloody
hell, you just had to go and muck with the mojo, didn't you?"

"Hey, no one around to keep me in line," Xander pointed out with a smile. The look Spike gave him back was not even the least amused.

"I have enough of William in me to respect you, what you've done. I have enough of William to try to avoid doing things in public like forcing you to your knees. I'll even listen to whatever harebrained ideas you come up with, although based on your track record, I'm almost guaranteeing that I'm not going to go along with any of them. However, I'm a demon Xander."

"I got that," Xander nodded. "And I trust you to be the demon that takes care of me."

"And if I said that I was going to give you a piercing, right now, no chance for you to back out?"

"I think my chance to back out ended when tentacle guy strapped me down," Xander pointed out. "Probably it ended the second I walked through the door."

"So what if I told you that I'm going to gag you and not
give you a choice about where I pierce you?" Spike asked, and Xander understood the challenge perfectly.

"Do it, Spike," Xander said. Spike frowned at him for a second and then went and got the gag.

"Not bluffing mate."

"Neither am I. If you want, I can sing King Henry the Eighth until you gag me out of..." Xander was cut off as Spike pushed the gag in and strapped it around his head. Xander just lay his head back and relaxed.

"I might give you a piercing right down here," Spike said as he ran his finger on the skin between Xander's asshole and his balls. "I can't believe you let them plug you. You really are a moron sometimes, Harris," Spike said, but this time, he almost sounded like he might actually like Xander. Of course, gagged, Xander couldn't exactly point out that he hadn't actually given permission.

"I could pierce your balls. Every time you came, you'd feel that piercing tighten and pull. Your cockhead would be another good place for a ring. Can do a lot with a pierced cock."
Xander just lay back and waited. No matter what Spike pierced, it couldn't be as bad as the branding had been.

"I might pierce your ankles, slip a ring behind this tendon." Spike grabbed the back of Xander's ankle right above the heel. "It would mean that you could walk, but you'd have to do it carefully to avoid pain. And running would be right out."

Spike sighed. "And you aren't even smelling of fear at all. Either you're off the deep end or somewhere along the line you've decided that you trust me." Xander held up a two.

"Not sure I trust myself this much, mate," Spike pointed out as he went over to the counter and picked up a long needle. Xander closed his eyes. Yeah, he trusted Spike, but he didn't want to see that monster going through him. Spike rattled around some more, and Xander just laid patient. It was easy to be patient when totally strapped down and gagged.

Something wet touched his balls, and Xander's eyes flew open to find Spike licking his balls. Xander tilted his head in confusion, and Spike stood up. "It helps with healing and pain, close your eyes, pet, or I'll get you a blindfold."
Xander closed his eyes and let his head fall back.

Spike started up again, and Xander couldn't help squirming a little as his cock started hardening. Spike finally gave up on licking the balls, and a mouth swallowed Xander's cock without warning. Xander screamed behind his gag and tried to thrash, but with his legs strapped so wide, all he could do was squirm as Spike slid up and down on his cock. Xander arched his neck and gasped for air through his nose as Spike slid all the way down and then swallowed, and Xander came so hard that he couldn't get enough air.

Spike was there pulling the gag out and whispering for Xander to breathe as Xander's body shuddered through the aftershocks of his orgasm.

"Oh shit. That's good. You can so pierce me anywhere you want after that," Xander said sleepily.

"I already did, pet. You do get lost in your lust, don't you?"

"You did?" Xander raised his head and saw a ring going through the skin just at the place where his cock came out of his body. "You did."
"That's not all," Spike said as he raised Xander's flaccid cock. A second ring dangled from the underside of the slit. "The third one's back here behind your balls," Spike said as he reached back. He flicked something, and Xander flinched at the little jab of pain.

"Vampire saliva helps, but we'll need to let those heal before we do anything too adventurous with them," Spike said. "You know, just for coming down here, I'm half tempted to tell the owner to give you a pet special, a good grooming and dehairing and an internal cleaning that you will not enjoy at all," Spike threatened.

"I kinda deserve it if that's what you want to do," Xander agreed. He was a good ninety percent sure that Spike didn't mean it, but even if he did, Xander was starting to think that things far worse than a grooming could have happened to him, so he probably did deserve it.

"This attitude isn't going to last," Spike pointed out.

"Then you can have fun reminding me what I signed up for," Xander countered.

Spike just rolled his eyes and reached down to pull the
ankle straps free. "Let's just get you some new clothes and head home, pet."

Xander just smiled as he felt the fourth scar on his chest warm pleasantly. They'd figure it all out. Sometimes the universe knew what they needed more than they did, so they'd figure it all out just fine.

The End